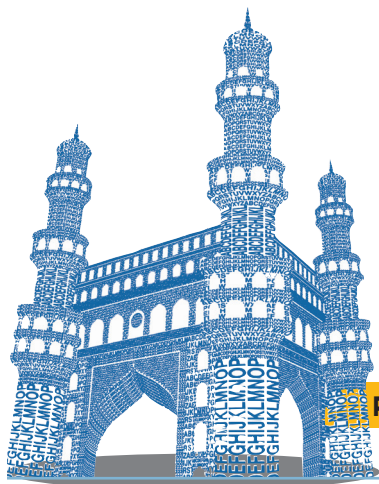




HYDERABAD HEADLINES

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The Grandeur of Bonalu Jathara

OPINION 06

Rakul Lauds Tollywood, Slams B-wood



BOX-OFFICE 12

Cabinet Orders SET on DHARANI Approves El Niño Relief Measures

HYDERABAD, JULY 17

The State Cabinet, at its 36th meeting chaired by Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, approved a series of major decisions, including a comprehensive Special Enquiry Team (SET) probe into alleged irregularities in the Dharani land records portal, a statewide emergency action plan to tackle the impact of El Niño-induced drought conditions, and key legislative reforms aimed at strengthening local governance and promoting social inclusion.

Following the Cabinet meeting, Ministers Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy, Jupally Krishna Rao, Ponnamp Prabhakar, and Adhuri Laxman Kumar addressed the media and outlined the government's decisions.

Comprehensive SET Probe into Dharani Portal

Taking a firm stand against alleged land record irregulari-

The SET has full authority to uncover every irregularity in the Dharani Portal. At the same time, our priority is to protect drinking water, support farmers, and ensure uninterrupted power during the El Niño crisis while keeping public welfare at the heart of governance. — CM Revanth Reddy



ties, the Cabinet approved the constitution of a Special Enquiry Team (SET) to conduct a comprehensive inquiry into the functioning of the Dharani Portal.

The investigation will cover the entire lifecycle of the portal,

beginning with its conceptualization, tendering process, implementation, and subsequent operations, while also examining allegations of corruption and administrative lapses.

The SET has been directed to **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2 >**

Semicon 2.0 to Boost India's Chip Ambitions

Telangana received ₹ 724 crore under Semicon 1.0 for Electronics Manufacturing Clusters: Kishan Reddy



New Delhi, July 17: Union Minister for Coal and Mines G. Kishan Reddy on Friday described the Union Cabinet's approval of the Semicon 2.0 programme as a landmark step towards making India a global semiconductor hub, saying the initiative would create significant opportunities for the youth of Telangana, particularly in Hyderabad.

The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the Semicon 2.0 programme with an outlay of ₹1.27 lakh crore over 12 years to strengthen India's semiconductor

Hyderabad already has a strong ecosystem in IT, pharmaceuticals, defence and electronics design, making Telangana well placed to attract semiconductor fabrication units, assembly and testing facilities, design centres and research institutions.

ecosystem and reduce dependence on global supply chains. The Cabinet also cleared the Mobile Phone Manufacturing Scheme (MPMS) with an allocation of ₹62,500 crore, taking the combined investment under the two initiatives to nearly ₹1.9 lakh crore.

Kishan Reddy said the programmes would accelerate India's journey towards self-reliance in electronics manufacturing while positioning the country as a global destination for semiconductor design and production.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2 >

Modi Unveils India's First Hydrogen Train



JIND (HARYANA), JULY 17\

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday flagged off India's first hydrogen fuel-powered passenger train from Jind, marking a significant milestone in the country's transition towards clean energy and sustainable rail transport. The launch places India among a select group of nations developing hydrogen-powered railway technology and positions Haryana as the country's first hub for green rail innovation. The Prime Minister also inaugurated and laid the foundation stones for nine development projects worth ₹14,721 crore, spanning railways, highways, healthcare and cultural infrastructure.

Hydrogen Train Signals New Era of Clean Mobility

The hydrogen-powered passenger train operates using fuel cells that convert hydrogen into electricity, emitting only water vapour. The project is aimed at reducing carbon emis-

sions while promoting environmentally friendly public transport and strengthening India's clean energy ambitions. Prime Minister Modi said the initiative reflects India's growing technological capability and commitment to building a modern, sustainable and self-reliant transport network.

India Joins Select Nations in Hydrogen Rail Technology

Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw described the launch as a historic achievement for Indian Railways, saying India has now joined the league of a few countries that have developed the complete technological ecosystem for hydrogen-powered trains.

He said the hydrogen production plant established in Jind generates clean hydrogen through the electrolysis of water without producing harmful emissions, making it a key step towards green mobility and environmental conservation.

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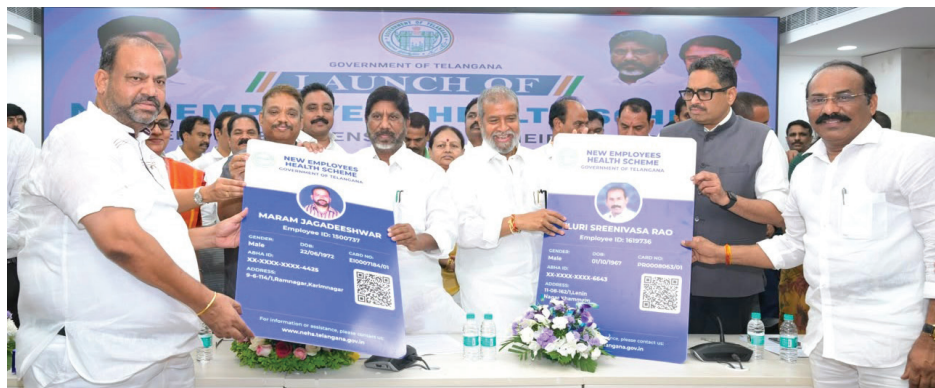
Modi Opens Hi-Tech City Railway Station

Hyderabad, July 17: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday virtually inaugurated the redeveloped Hi-Tech City railway station in Hyderabad as part of the inauguration of 75 Amrit Bharat railway stations across 20 states under the Amrit Bharat Scheme. Earlier in the day, Narendra Modi flagged off India's first hydrogen-powered train between Jind and Sonapat from Jind in Haryana. The PM stated that Jind and Haryana have permanently etched their names in the pages of history. Besides being completely

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2 >

New Employees Health Scheme LAUNCHED FOR STATE STAFF

Cashless treatment for 8 lakh employees and pensioners 1,816 procedures covered under CGHS rates



HYDERABAD, JULY 17

The State government on Friday launched the New Employees Health Scheme (NEHS), offering comprehensive cashless medical treatment to around 8 lakh government employees and pensioners, along with nearly 29.8 lakh dependent family members. Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka, along

with Health Minister Damodar Rajanarasimha, formally launched the scheme at the State Secretariat and distributed health cards to employees.

Speaking on the occasion, Bhatti Vikramarka said the scheme was introduced to provide government employees with a dependable and worry-free healthcare security system. He noted that many employees and their

families had fallen into debt due to rising medical expenses, and the new initiative was designed to ensure access to quality healthcare without financial burden.

The Deputy Chief Minister said the scheme reflects the government's commitment to employee welfare under the leadership of Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2 >

HC Gives Nod to BRS Yuva Sadassu

Hyderabad, July 17 (NSS): The Telangana High Court on Friday permitted the BRS party to hold its "Yuva Sangrama Sadassu" (Youth Struggle Conference) at Saroornagar stadium here on Saturday, July 18, subject to specified conditions. The BRS had applied for permission on June 30, but the police denied approval citing law and order concerns and intelligence inputs. Challenging the decision, the party's legal cell approached the High Court, alleging that the Congress government had deliberately obstructed the event. After hearing both sides, the court allowed the meeting with certain conditions.

The conference is aimed at highlighting **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2 >**

NAC Skill Development Centre to be Established in Manthani

₹20 Crore Sanctioned for Construction of Centre

Minister Sridhar Babu Thanks Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy

Hyderabad, July 17: The Telangana Government has approved the establishment of a National Academy of Construction (NAC) Skill Development Centre in Manthani, Peddapalli district, and sanctioned ₹20 crore for the construction of the centre's building.

The administrative orders were issued on Friday by Vikas

Raj, Special Chief Secretary, Transport, Roads & Buildings (TR&B) Department.

The NAC Skill Development Centre is expected to play a significant role in creating a highly skilled workforce to meet the evolving demands of the construction industry. The centre will provide skill training of international standards, equipping youth with the latest technologies and modern construction practices.

The centre will offer both short-term and long-term training programmes, enabling trainees to pursue self-employment opportunities as well as secure placements in leading national and interna-



tional companies.

Expressing his happiness over the establishment of the prestigious NAC Skill Development Centre in Manthani, Telangana Minister for IT and Industries, Duddilla Sridhar Babu, thanked Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy and Minister for Roads & Buildings Komatireddy Venkat Reddy for approving the project.

The Minister said the centre would serve as a hub for quality skill development for the youth of North Telangana, enhancing their employability and opening up opportunities in the construction sector across India and abroad.

CEMENTING DREAMS WITH SUPERIOR STRENGTH.

GERMAN TECHNOLOGY ROBOTIC QUALITY CONTROL TAMPER PROOF PACKING

3 TIMES BETTER



Modi Unveils India's First...

➤FROM PAGE 1
Railways Undergo Major Transformation

Highlighting the transformation of Indian Railways over the past decade, Vaishnav said the introduction of Vande Bharat and Amrit Bharat trains, station redevelopment, track modernisation and the launch of hydrogen trains demonstrate the government's focus on creating a world-class railway system.

He added that railway infrastructure investment in Haryana has risen sharply, with projects worth nearly ₹18,000 crore currently under implementation. Under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme, 34 railway stations across the state are being upgraded with modern passenger amenities.

Major Infrastructure Projects Inaugurated

Alongside the hydrogen train launch, Prime Minister Modi dedicated the Haryana section of the Delhi-Jammu-Katra Expressway to the nation and inaugurated the Ambala-Kala Amb and Jind-Gohana National Highways. He also inaugurated

the Kurukshetra Elevated Railway Track to ease urban traffic congestion.

Healthcare and Heritage Receive Boost

The Prime Minister inaugurated two government medical colleges at Bhiwani and Koriawas (Narnaul), which are expected to expand medical education, increase MBBS seats and improve access to advanced healthcare across the region.

He also laid the foundation stone for a Sikh Museum at Kurukshetra. The museum will showcase Sikh history, the teachings of the Gurus, their valour and sacrifices, and the community's contribution to India's civilisational heritage through modern technology.

Step Towards Sustainable Future

The launch of India's first hydrogen passenger train is expected to pave the way for wider adoption of hydrogen-powered rail technology across the country, reinforcing India's commitment to clean energy, technological innovation and sustainable transportation.

Singareni Steps Up to Fuel Telangana's Power Needs

HYDERABAD, JULY 17

To ensure uninterrupted power generation across Telangana, the Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL) is supplying adequate coal to all thermal power stations in the State. In view of the prevailing El Niño conditions, which have significantly increased electricity demand, SCCL Chairman & Managing Director Dr. Buddhaprakash Jyoti, has directed officials to accord the highest priority to coal transportation and further enhance supplies to thermal power plants.

A coordination meeting through video conference was held on Friday between SCCL CMD Dr. Buddhaprakash Jyoti, and TGGENCO CMD Dr. Harish, along with senior officials of both organisations, to review the current power demand, coal production, transportation and other related issues.

Addressing the meeting, Bud-



dhaprakash Jyoti, said that the rising electricity demand under the prevailing El Niño conditions requires close coordination between SCCL and TGGENCO to ensure adequate coal stocks at all thermal power stations in the State.

He stated that special officers would be designated to closely monitor uninterrupted coal transportation and resolve operational issues on a priority basis.

Officials of SCCL's marketing department informed the CMD that around 72% of the coal produced

by SCCL is presently being supplied to TGGENCO thermal power stations, NTPC Ramagundam and the Singareni Thermal Power Plant. However, considering the increasing power demand and keeping the State's interests foremost, the CMD directed that greater priority be given to meeting the coal requirements of Telangana's thermal power stations and, if necessary, coal earmarked for supply to other States may be suitably reallocated.

The CMD further instructed officials of both organisations to

continuously review the coal requirements of power stations and maintain close coordination on coal production, transportation, railway rake availability and road transport logistics to ensure seamless fuel supply.

He also directed General Managers of all SCCL Areas to take all necessary measures to prevent any disruption to coal production in opencast mines during the monsoon season. He stressed that coal production should not decline under any circumstances and that quality standards must be maintained without compromise.

Speaking during the video conference, TGGENCO CMD Harish reviewed the coal stock position at TGGENCO thermal power stations and emphasised that local senior officials should proactively resolve transportation bottlenecks to ensure uninterrupted coal movement.

TSCMFC Invites Beneficiaries



HYDERABAD, JULY 17

The Telangana State Christian Minorities Finance Corporation (TSC-MFC), under the Minorities welfare department, has invited online applications from eligible Christian minority beneficiaries for the Economic Support Scheme 2026-27.

Managing Director P Sabitha said eligible applicants can register online from July 19 to 31 upto 5 pm. The scheme covers assistance for sewing machines, petty business units, E-bikes, e-scooters and motorbikes.

Applicants for Sewing Machine and Petty Business units should be between 21 and 55 years of age, while applicants for E-Bike, E-Scooter and Motor Bike units should be 21 to 50 years old.

Eligible families should have an annual income of less than Rs.2 lakh in urban areas and Rs.1.5 lakh in rural areas.

Applications can be submitted online through the website - tsobmms.cgg.gov.in. Further information is available from the Telangana State Christian Minorities Finance Corporation. Applicants may also contact 040-23391067 for assistance.

Modi Opens Hi-Tech City Railway Station

➤FROM PAGE 1
emission-free, India's Hydrogen Train stands as a remarkably successful testament to "Make in India", he noted. The station has been modernized with a new station building, improved waiting halls, lifts, escalators, Divyangjan-friendly facilities, digital signages and other passenger amenities at a cost of Rs.35.61 crore.

A parallel inauguration ceremony was held at Hi-Tech City Railway Station, attended by MLC A.V.N. Reddy, South Central Railway General Manager Sanjay Kumar Srivastava, Secunderabad DRM R Gopalakrishnan and other railway officials. Addressing the gathering, A.V.N. Reddy said

the Centre has undertaken railway development projects worth over Rs.40,000 crore in Telangana and emphasized that the Union Government is strengthening connectivity through major investments in rail infrastructure.

SCR General Manager Sanjay Kumar Srivastava said Hi-Tech City is among the 75 redeveloped stations inaugurated nationwide and highlighted that redevelopment work at other Amrit stations in Telangana is progressing on schedule.

The event also featured prize distribution for essay, drawing, painting and selfie competitions organised to mark the station's

transformation, along with cultural performances.

BJP Telangana President N Ramchander Rao, who attended the Hyderabad event as chief guest, claimed that the Narendra Modi-led government has brought transformational changes to Indian Railways. He stated that Telangana's annual railway allocation has increased from Rs.500 crore before 2014 to Rs.4,900 crore as on date, and noted that 41 railway stations in the state are being modernized. He also said five Vande Bharat trains are currently operating from Hyderabad and that plans are underway for future high-speed and bullet train corridors.



CONTINUATION FROM PAGE 1

CABINET ORDERS SET ON DHARANI

➤FROM PAGE 1
undertake a retrospective scrutiny of nearly six years of transactions, covering the period from the launch of the Dharani Portal on October 29, 2020, to the present. The investigation will examine all suspicious land registrations, mutations (changes in land records), ownership transfers, and transactions involving agricultural lands, assigned lands, and government lands. The inquiry will also identify procedural violations, fraudulent activities, and any misuse of the digital land administration system.

Cabinet Clears Emergency El Niño and Drought Action Plan

Expressing serious concern over the prevailing climatic conditions, the Cabinet noted that no part of Telangana has received normal rainfall, with the state currently recording a 30 to 35 per cent rainfall deficit, raising fears of severe drought conditions. To address the emerging crisis, the Cabinet approved a comprehensive emergency response plan aimed at safeguarding drink-



ing water supplies, supporting farmers, and strengthening district-level preparedness.

Drinking Water to Receive Top Priority

The Cabinet directed that all available water stored in major reservoirs, irrigation projects, and water bodies across the state should be utilized primarily for drinking water needs, giving priority to human consumption over irrigation wherever necessary to prevent a drinking water crisis.

Advisory for Farmers and Agriculture Support

Farmers and water-right holders have been advised to shift to-

wards Irrigated Dry (ID) crops, which require comparatively less water. To assist farmers with scientific guidance, crop planning, and drought management, the government has launched a dedicated agriculture-led toll-free helpline operating from Praja Bhavan.

Toll-Free Helpline: 1-800-123-7157

Working Hours: Daily from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM

District Administrations on High Alert

The Cabinet instructed all District Collectors to remain on high alert throughout the drought pe-

riod. Officials have been directed to respond immediately to drinking water complaints, closely monitor water availability, coordinate relief measures, and ensure uninterrupted power supply across domestic, agricultural, and industrial sectors.

Central Assistance to be Sought

Recognizing the scale of the crisis, the State Government will formally write to the Central Government seeking immediate financial assistance. The Cabinet also decided to request the Centre to deploy a special central assess-

ment team to evaluate crop losses, water shortages, and the overall impact of drought conditions across Telangana.

District-Level Review Meetings on July 20

The Cabinet decided that on July 20, District In-charge Ministers, along with senior IAS officers, scientists, agriculture experts, and public representatives, will conduct district-level review meetings to assess local conditions, identify crop damage, and formulate district-specific mitigation strategies.

Simultaneously, State Planning Board Vice Chairman G. Chinna Reddy will lead an expert committee tasked with preparing a comprehensive report on the overall impact of El Niño and drought on Telangana's agriculture sector and recommending long-term policy measures.

Cabinet Approves Key Legislative and Social Welfare Reforms

Alongside the drought response and land reforms, the Cabinet also approved significant amendments to state legislation

aimed at improving governance, financial management, and social inclusion.

Transgender Representation in Municipal Governance

In a landmark step toward inclusive governance, the Cabinet approved amendments to the Telangana Municipalities Act, 2019, enabling transgender persons to be nominated as co-opted members in Municipal Corporations. The decision is intended to ensure greater representation of the transgender community in urban local governance and policy-making.

Gram Panchayat Financial Reforms

The Cabinet also approved amendments to the Telangana Panchayat Raj Act, 2018, allowing Gram Panchayats to securely deposit and manage their institutional funds in Nationalized Banks, Cooperative Banks, and Post Offices. The move is expected to improve financial flexibility, enhance transparency, and strengthen fund management at the village level.

Semicon 2.0 to Boost India's Chip Ambitions

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Highlighting the Centre's achievements under the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, the Union Minister said electronics manufacturing had grown from ₹1.9 lakh crore in 2014-15 to ₹13 lakh crore in 2025-26, while electronics exports increased from ₹38,000 crore to ₹3.3 lakh crore during the same period. Mobile phone manufacturing rose to ₹5.45 lakh crore, and exports touched ₹2 lakh crore, making the sector one of India's leading export industries. He said India has also drastically reduced its dependence on imported mobile phones, with 99.2 per cent of mobile phones sold in the country now being manufactured domestically.

Referring to the achievements under Semicon 1.0, Kishan Reddy said 68,000 students across 315 universities were trained in semiconductor design using advanced Electronic Design Automation (EDA) tools. In Telangana, 27 institutions, including IIT Hyderabad, IIIT Hyderabad, University of Hyderabad, NIT Warangal, JNTU Hyderabad, BITS Hyderabad and Osmania University, participated in the programme.

The Minister said 105 startups across the country are already engaged in semiconductor chip design, developing products for satellite communications, drones, surveillance systems, IoT devices, artificial intelligence hardware, telecom equipment and smart meters.

He also highlighted the Centre's support for Telangana's electronics manufacturing ecosystem. Under Semicon 1.0, the Centre sanctioned ₹724 crore for Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMCs), including projects at E-City/Fab City, Maheshwaram, Hyderabad and Divitipalli in Mahabubnagar district.

According to Kishan Reddy, Semicon 2.0 will focus on chip design, semiconductor equipment and materials, fabrication plants, ATMP and OSAT facilities, advanced research and development, and talent development. India's first silicon fabrication plant is expected to become operational by 2028.

He said Hyderabad already possesses a strong ecosystem in information technology, pharmaceuticals, defence, electronics design and innovation, making Telangana well positioned to attract semiconductor fabrication units, assembly and testing facilities, design centres and research institutions.

The Union Minister urged the Telangana government to fully leverage the opportunities created under Semicon 2.0 and the new Mobile Phone Manufacturing Scheme to attract fresh investments into the State.

The MPMS, to be implemented from 2026-27 to 2030-31, aims to expand domestic mobile phone manufacturing, strengthen the supply chain, increase local value addition and promote Indian brands globally. The scheme provides incentives ranging from 2.25 to 5 per cent for manufacturing, with additional incentives for domestic component sourcing and research and development.

Kishan Reddy said the scheme is expected to facilitate mobile phone production worth ₹39 lakh crore over the next five years and generate around 60,000 direct jobs. He noted that India's mobile manufacturing sector already provides employment to nearly 25 lakh people.

New Employees Health Scheme LAUNCHED FOR STATE STAFF

➤FROM PAGE 1
He said the decision was taken from a humanitarian perspective after extensive consultations with employee representatives. Bhatti Vikramarka said a Cabinet Sub-Committee, constituted by the Chief Minister, examined the issues faced by employees and framed the policy for the new health scheme. The committee, chaired by the Deputy Chief Minister, included Ministers Duddilla Sridhar Babu, Ponnamp Prabhakar, and Seethakka.

Under the scheme, beneficiaries will receive cashless inpatient treatment at 886 empanelled private hospitals across the State. A total of 1,816 medical and surgical procedures will be covered based on Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS) package rates.

To ensure transparency and effective implementation, the government has established

a dedicated trust with equal representation from government officials and employee associations. The Deputy Chief Minister also announced that the government is clearing nearly ₹10,000 crore in pending medical reimbursement bills accumulated over the previous administration. He said around ₹2,000 crore is being released every month to settle the pending claims and added that he personally reviews the progress every fortnight to ensure timely clearance.

Criticising the previous government, Bhatti Vikramarka alleged that employees' demands for improved health security had remained undressed despite repeated protests and statewide agitations over the past decade.

Highlighting the government's broader healthcare initiatives, he said the Rajiv Aarogya health insurance

coverage has been enhanced from ₹5 lakh to ₹10 lakh, while free corporate healthcare is being extended to 1.06 crore eligible families across the State.

He urged government employees to work with greater dedication and serve as a bridge between the government and the public by supporting the implementation of welfare programmes, including the supply of fine-quality rice to poor families, free bus travel for women, free electricity for farmers, and 200 units of free power for eligible households.

Chief Secretary Sanjay Jaju, Health Principal Secretary Dr. Christina Z. Chongthu, Education Secretary Yogita Rana, Special Chief Secretary (GAD) Ben Hur Mahesh Dutt Ekka, Finance Principal Secretary Sandeep Kumar Sultania, and representatives of various employee associations attended the launch ceremony.

HC Gives Nod to BRS Yuva Sadassu

➤FROM PAGE 1
the Congress government's alleged failure to implement key promises made under its "Youth Declaration", including the Mega DSC recruitment drive, filling government job vacancies and providing unemployment allowances.

The venue carries political significance as the Congress had unveiled its Youth Declaration at the same Saroornagar Stadium before the Assembly elections in the presence of Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi.

BRS working president K.T. Rama Rao is scheduled to address the gathering and outline the party's future course of action on youth and employment issues. Following the High Court's order, BRS leaders appealed to students and unemployed youth from across Telangana to participate in large numbers, saying the verdict had boosted the morale of party workers.

KTR hails HC nod for Yuva Sangrama Sadassu

Hyderabad, July 17 : BRS working president KT Rama Rao intensified his criticism of the current Congress administration, alleging that the Revanth Reddy-led government is attempting to silence the concerns of unemployed young people.

KT Rama Rao on Friday expressed his satisfaction with the High Court's decision to permit the party's Yuva Sangrama Sadassu at Saroornagar Stadium, stating that the government's efforts to block the gathering had been unsuccessful, as the High Court affirmed the party's democratic right to convene the youth meeting.

He asserted that despite the obstacles presented by the Congress government, the BRS would persist in advocating for issues relevant to unemployed youth and students. He encouraged students and individuals seeking employment to attend the event in large numbers to hold the ruling Congress accountable for its unfulfilled promises made under the Youth Declaration.

Separately, BRS general secretary, R.S. Praveen Kumar, indicated that the party respects the court's ruling and is committed to ensuring a peaceful convention. He strongly objected to the arguments

presented by the state government's representatives in court, which characterised the BRS as a threat to law and order.

Praveen Kumar also criticised the government for what he described as a violation of democratic principles, despite its claims of upholding the Constitution.

The BRS leader drew a parallel to the Congress's own pre-election rallies, questioning the current refusal to grant permission for an opposition event. He added that volunteers would be assigned to facilitate the smooth execution of the event and minimise any traffic disruptions.



One Vision... One Mission of Service... Plastic-Free Husnabad: Steel Bank Completes One Successful Year



- **An environmental revolution through 276 women's self-help groups**
- **A permanent alternative to plastic: The Steel Bank movement is successfully expanding from villages to hotels.**
- **One year of the Steel Bank initiative: A major step toward a greener Husnabad through public participation, says Minister Ponnam Prabhakar.**

HUSNABAD

State Transport and BC Welfare Minister Ponnam Prabhakar announced that the Steel Bank initiative, launched with the three key objectives of environmental protection, public health, and creating plastic-free villages, has successfully completed one year.

He said the innovative program, which began with the vision of mak-

ing Husnabad plastic-free, has now evolved into a people's movement.

Continuing the service legacy of the late Ponnam Sathaiah, the initiative was launched in his memory under the Ponnam Sathaiah Charitable Trust using the Minister's personal funds. The program was inaugurated on July 17 last year by Telangana Governor Jishnu Dev Varma, and has since become a symbol of environmental awareness across villages.

Rather than merely banning plastic, the initiative was designed to provide a permanent and practical alternative by establishing Steel Banks through village women's self-help groups.

The Minister said that 276 Steel Bank sets were distributed free of cost to 276 village-level women's federations across all mandals of the Husnabad Assembly constituency. Each set contains 13 types of stainless steel utensils, with capacities of 300, 400, or 500 utensils, depending on the needs of each village.

The initiative directly benefits 80,633 women belonging to 7,376 self-

help groups. More than ₹2.54 crore of personal funds were spent on the project, reflecting a strong commitment to public service.

The Minister noted that steel utensils are now widely used in weddings, community feasts, village meetings, religious functions, and other public events instead of disposable plastic utensils. As a result, plastic waste has reduced significantly and villages have become much cleaner.

To reduce plastic use in commercial establishments as well, the government distributed 33,900 stainless steel glasses free of cost to 319 hotels across the constituency, providing a lasting alternative to single-use plastic cups.

Ponnam Prabhakar praised the women's self-help groups for efficiently managing the Steel Banks and playing a key role in protecting the environment. He said the initiative has increased public responsibility, reduced plastic consumption, and encouraged cleaner and healthier lifestyles.

Alongside the Steel Bank initiative, several environmental improvement

projects have also been undertaken across the constituency, including large-scale tree plantation, lake restoration, and beautification of public spaces. Development works around Yellamma Cheruvu, Palle Cheruvu, Kotha Cheruvu, Trishool Junction, the Gandhi Statue, the "I Love Husnabad" landmark, yoga-themed road dividers, and Elkathurthi Junction have become examples of cleanliness and greenery.

The Minister emphasized that development is not limited to constructing roads and buildings, but also involves creating lasting social and environmental change. He reaffirmed the government's commitment to advancing the vision of a Plastic-Free Husnabad through active public participation and providing future generations with a cleaner, greener, and healthier constituency.

"The Steel Bank initiative is a people's movement that begins with plastic-free villages, extends to plastic-free hotels, and ultimately aims for a plastic-free Telangana," Minister Ponnam Prabhakar said.

Representatives of the women's self-help groups stated that the Steel Bank initiative, launched under the leadership of Minister Ponnam Prabhakar through the Ponnam Sathaiah Charitable Trust, has brought remarkable change to village life.

They explained that weddings, community events, charitable meals, and village meetings once relied heavily on disposable plastic utensils. Today, these occasions largely use the stainless steel utensils provided through the Steel Banks, significantly reducing plastic waste and improving village cleanliness.

They also said the initiative has raised widespread awareness about the importance of plastic-free villages. Entrusting the management of the Steel Banks to women's self-help groups reflects the confidence placed in them. The groups now provide utensils whenever required, maintain them responsibly, and ensure the successful operation of the program.



Road Safety Should Be the Primary Goal

■ **Director Abhilash Bisht, IPS, Urges Newly Appointed RTOs**

HYDERABAD

Director of the RBVRR Telangana Police Academy, Abhilash Bisht, IPS, emphasized that strengthening road safety requires special focus on three key areas: technology-based enforcement, effective implementation, and public awareness. She was speaking as the chief guest at the valedictory ceremony of a two-month induction training program conducted for three Regional Transport Officers (RTOs) of the Telangana Transport Department. The training was held at the academy from May 18, 2026, to July 17, 2026.

The event was also attended by C. Ramesh, Additional Commissioner of the Telangana Transport Department, as the guest of honor. Director Abhilash Bisht presented certificates to the three officers who completed the training: D. Jagadish, P. Bhushi Reddy, and Chai Sai Charan.

Addressing the gathering, Director Abhilash Bisht said that every decision made in a uniformed service has a direct impact on public safety and human lives. She advised the

newly appointed officers to carry out their duties with a thorough understanding of the law, procedures, the Motor Vehicles Act, and the relevant rules.

She noted that one person loses their life in a road accident every three minutes in India, highlighting that the responsibility for preventing road accidents lies not only with the police but also with the Transport Department. While 90 percent of accidents are unintentional, many can be prevented through effective vehicle inspections, proper issuance of fitness certificates, and maintaining high standards in the process of granting driving licences.

She further stressed that road accidents can be significantly reduced by focusing on the three pillars of Education, Engineering, and Enforcement, while making smart use of technology. She expressed confidence that the training received at the academy would help the officers deliver more responsible and efficient public service in the future.

Additional Commissioner C. Ramesh said that the academy's earlier training programs for 92 Assistant Motor Vehicle Inspectors (AMVIs) and a second batch of 15 AMVIs had proved highly beneficial in field operations and strengthened coordi-

nation with the police department. He added that the three newly trained RTOs had gained a comprehensive understanding of the Motor Vehicles Act, legal provisions, and enforcement procedures, and thanked the academy for its efforts.

The three RTOs who completed the training said that the induction program had strengthened their sense of public service, leadership qualities, discipline, and commitment to serving the public. They particularly appreciated the outdoor training and physical fitness sessions, which they said boosted their confidence.

During the ceremony, Course Coordinator Vema Srinivasa Reddy presented an overview of the two-month training program. Outdoor AD Rambabu thanked all the officers and staff who contributed to the successful conduct of the training.

The event was attended by Deputy Directors Dr. Chetana, IPS, Kavitha, Venkateswarlu, Sriramamurthy, and K.R.K. Prasad; Assistant Directors Vema Srinivasa Reddy, Yarlagadda Rambabu, and Vemula Srinivasa Rao; RTO Raghunath Goud; MVI Sheetal; DSP Rama Rao; RI B. Krishna Ramakrishna; and other officials from the academy and the Transport Department.



Healthcare, education spending is investment in state's future: Bhatti

HYDERABAD

Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka stated that government expenditure on healthcare and education should not be seen merely as free welfare, but as a long-term investment in human resources that will enhance the State's Gross Domestic Product.

Under the aegis of the Insurance Medical Services (IMS) department, the Deputy Chief Minister, along with Labour Minister Gaddam Vivek Venkatswamy, distributed appointment letters to 247 newly selected nursing officers at Sevalal Bhavan, Hyderabad on Friday.

Speaking on the occasion, the Deputy Chief Minister expressed concern that during the previous decade, workers' rights and minimum wages were severely neglected. Bhatti Vikramarka recalled that, as a former opposition leader, he had consistently raised the issue of minimum wage revision in every Assembly budget session, but the then government failed to respond adequately.

He appreciated Labour Minister Vivek Venkatswamy for taking special initiative upon assuming office and successfully issuing long-pending orders on minimum wage revisions. Bhatti Vikramarka also assured that, based on the Minister's request, provisions would be made to release ₹30

crore through a green channel to ensure uninterrupted supply of medicines in ESI hospitals for the poor.

He stated that the government aims to transform ESI hospitals to provide quality healthcare services to workers and their families. As part of this, advanced dialysis units, CT scan facilities, burns wards, and cardiac care centres are being rapidly established, while existing infrastructure is being modernised.

To further strengthen the healthcare sector, Bhatti Vikramarka announced that shortages of doctors and paramedical staff will be addressed. In the coming days, the government will fill additional posts including 120 Civil Assistant Surgeons, 6 Dental Civil Surgeons, 99 Pharmacists, 34 Lab Technicians, 54 ANMs, and other paramedical staff.

The Deputy Chief Minister said the government is taking war-footing measures to make super-specialty healthcare services accessible to all citizens.

"Construction of multi super-specialty hospitals in Sanathnagar ESI, LB Nagar, Alwal, and Warangal is being accelerated with monthly fund releases. Expansion works of NIMS are also being given top priority. The State is being developed into one with the highest average bed capacity in the country, with around 44,029 beds.

Bandi Sanjay escapes unhurt as convoy meets with minor accident

HYDERABAD

Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Bandi Sanjay escaped unhurt after a minor accident involving his convoy in Rajanna Sircilla district on Friday. The incident occurred while the convoy was travelling from Haridasnagar in Yellareddy-pet mandal to Gambhiraopet, when the vehicles collided with one another. Although a few vehicles suffered minor front and rear damage, no injuries were reported, and the convoy continued its journey. Earlier in the day, Bandi Sanjay laid the foundation stone for the Rs.105-crore restoration of Kargil Cheruvu in Sircilla. Addressing the gathering, he alleged that development funds were being diverted to meet salary and electricity expenses and warned that misuse of Finance Commission grants would not be tolerated. He said the Centre could consider transferring funds directly to gram panchayat accounts if the situation did not improve and added that he would take up the issue with the Union government.

From High-Profile Heist to Police Academy Case Study

- **Karimnagar CP to Present PMJ Jewellery Robbery Investigation to DSP Trainees**
- **A Rare Recognition for Karimnagar Policing**

KARIMNAGAR

The sensational PMJ Jewellers robbery case, which shook Karimnagar city and attracted statewide attention, has now been selected as a case study for Deputy Superintendents of Police (DSPs) undergoing training at the Telangana Police Academy. The decision to include the investigation as a training module reflects the professionalism and effectiveness with which Karimnagar Police cracked one of the state's most challenging robbery cases.

On May 3, five armed assailants stormed the PMJ Jewellers showroom in the heart of Karimnagar city during broad daylight and escaped with approximately 161 tolas of gold ornaments and diamond jewellery weighing around 112 carats. The daring robbery, executed in a busy commercial area within minutes, posed a major challenge to the police.

The investigation became even more difficult as the accused avoided conventional communication methods. Instead of using regular phone calls, they relied on an encrypted messag-



ing application where messages disappeared shortly after being viewed, leaving almost no digital trail for investigators.

Recognising the gravity of the crime, Police Commissioner Gous Alam constituted 16 special teams comprising around 130 police personnel. For nearly two months, the teams carried out an extensive manhunt across five states. Investigators meticulously analysed thousands of CCTV recordings, vehicle movements, travel patterns, technical evidence and human intelligence before successfully tracing the suspects. Eventually, eight accused were arrested, leading to the successful detection of the case.

The investigation is now being show-

cased as an example of modern policing and scientific investigation. Following the directions of the Director General of Police (DGP), Commissioner Gous Alam will deliver a detailed presentation at the Telangana Police Academy on July 18 for DSP trainees. The presentation will include audio-visual material, photographs and a step-by-step explanation of the investigation. Two Assistant Commissioners of Police (ACPs) and three Circle Inspectors (CIs) who were part of the investigation will also participate.

Police officials believe the case offers valuable lessons in handling organised crime through technology-driven investigation, inter-state coordination, intelligence gathering, evidence anal-

ysis and effective teamwork. As crime becomes increasingly sophisticated with the use of encrypted communication and digital tools, such practical case studies are expected to strengthen the investigative skills of young police officers.

The PMJ Jewellers robbery investigation is no longer just a successful crime detection story. It has emerged as a model of professional policing and scientific investigation. Its inclusion in the Telangana Police Academy's training programme is widely seen as a significant recognition of the investigative capabilities of the Karimnagar Police Commissionerate and a valuable learning resource for the next generation of police leadership.

Reconstruct Telangana's history, says Chinna Reddy; hails Turrebaz Khan's legacy

HYDERABAD

State Planning Board Vice-Chairman G. Chinna Reddy on Friday stressed the need to reconstruct Telangana's history and called for corporate CSR support to document the state's historical and political journey.

Addressing a seminar titled "Storming the British Residency" at Chakali Ailamma Women's University, Koti, Chinna Reddy paid tribute to freedom fighter Turrebaz Khan, recalling his July 17, 1857 attack on the British Residency alongside Maulvi Alauddin, describing it as the Deccan's response to the Sepoy Revolt.

He noted that Maulvi Alauddin was the first freedom fighter from Telangana to be impris-

oned in the Andaman Cellular Jail. On this occasion, Chinna Reddy unveiled the book "Telangana Statehood Movement - Years of Crisis", authored by former TSPSC member T. Vivek and historian Dr. K. Padma. He said the book fills crucial gaps in documenting the Telangana statehood movement between 2009 and 2014 and would help preserve the state's history for future generations.

The seminar was attended by Telangana Studies Director Capt. (Dr.) L. Pandu Ranga Reddy, Women's University Vice-Chancellor Surya Dhanujaya, historians Dr. K. Padma, Dr. P. Aruna, Prof. Adapa Satyanarayana, and former MP R. Surender Reddy, who was felicitated during the event.

Chandrababu Naidu seeks Centre's support to reduce shrimp feed costs

AMARAVATI, JULY 17

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Friday urged the Union government to adopt policy measures to stabilise the prices of raw materials used in shrimp feed production, highlighting that the sharp increase in input costs is severely affecting aqua farmers and seafood exports. During a meeting with Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman at his official residence, the Chief Minister said the aquaculture sector provides livelihoods to lakhs of farmers, workers, processing units, exporters, hatcheries, feed manufacturers and several allied industries. Even a minor disruption in feed availability has a direct impact on aqua farmers' livelihoods and export performance, he noted. Referring to representations made by the Shrimp Feed Manufacturers Association, the Chief Minister said shrimp feed prices increased significantly between January and April this year, pushing production costs up by more than 20 per cent. The cost of producing one tonne of shrimp feed has gone up by Rs 25,000. According to an official release, the Chief Minister requested the Centre to promote the domestic market for shrimp and aquaculture products, encourage Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), strengthen market linkages, support branding, processing and retail integration and establish an institutional framework to protect the sector from fluctuations in global demand.

SIT to Submit Interim Ram Temple Donation Report

LUCKNOW: The SIT probing the alleged embezzlement of donations at the Ram temple may submit an interim report to the Supreme Court on July 20 in compliance with the apex court's directions, sources said on Friday. Sources said the Special Investigation Team may seek more time from the Uttar Pradesh government to finalise its investigation into the alleged financial irregularities related to donations received by the Shri Ram Janambhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust. The development comes days after the Supreme Court, while hearing petitions seeking a fair and time-bound probe into the alleged embezzlement of donations, directed the SIT to submit a status report on its investigation.

Police question journalist, seize phone in alleged TVK MLA bribery case

Chennai Police seized the journalist's mobile phone for forensic analysis in connection with the alleged Rs 35-crore bribery attempt involving a TVK MLA, saying investigators found he had exchanged electronic communications with the arrested accused. Chennai Police have questioned a senior journalist with a Tamil news channel and seized his mobile phone for forensic analysis as part of an investigation into an alleged attempt to bribe a ruling Tamilaga Vetttri Kazhagam (TVK) MLA to vote against the government during a proposed no-confidence motion against the Assembly Speaker. The action follows a complaint by Uthangarai MLA N Elaiyaraja, who claimed that he was offered Rs 35 crore to vote against the ruling dispensation. Police said the journalist, identified as Vijayan, senior news editor at Puthiya Thalaimurai Television, was examined over two days after investigators found he had exchanged "objectionable electronic communications" with

BJP Opposes CM Constituency Airport, Favours Tumakuru

The political tussle over the proposed second international airport for Bengaluru intensified on Friday, with Karnataka BJP president BY Vijayendra writing an open letter to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah opposing reports that the project could come up in Kanakapura and urging the government to instead consider Tumakuru. In the letter, Vijayendra argued that the location of Karnataka's next international airport would shape the state's economic trajectory for decades and should be guided by the larger goal of balanced regional development rather than political considerations. While welcoming the government's plan to build a second airport to ease pressure on Kempegowda International Airport, the BJP leader questioned reports suggesting that Kanakapura -- Siddaramaiah's Assembly constituency -- was being considered for the project. "The location of Karnataka's next international

airport is not merely a decision about land, infrastructure or air connectivity. It is a decision about which regions will receive new industries, investments, employment opportunities and urban growth," Vijayendra said. He argued that another major infrastructure project close to Bengaluru would only worsen the city's existing challenges, including traffic congestion, population pressure, water shortages and environmental stress. Instead, Vijayendra proposed Tumakuru as a more suitable location, saying it was strategically positioned, well connected by road and rail, and had the potential to become an industrial hub serving central and north Karnataka. According to him, locating the airport in Tumakuru would help attract investment, generate employment and reduce the state's heavy dependence on Bengaluru as its primary growth engine. The BJP leader cited examples from states such as Tamil



Nadu and Maharashtra, saying they had successfully developed multiple urban and industrial centres instead of concentrating growth around a single city. Karnataka, he said, had failed to unlock the potential of cities such as Hubballi-Dharwad, Ballari, Kalaburagi, Davanagere, Shivamogga and Tumakuru, forcing people to migrate to Bengaluru for jobs and education. Drawing parallels with past infrastructure decisions, Vijayendra said the benefits of Kempe-

gowda International Airport had remained concentrated around Bengaluru. Had the airport been built in the Tumakuru region, he argued, it could have accelerated industrial growth across central and north Karnataka while easing pressure on the capital. He also questioned the suitability of Kanakapura, saying its location on the southern edge of the state would benefit only a limited region. He further flagged environmental concerns, citing the proximity of Bannerghatta National Park, reserve forests and fertile agricultural land. Vijayendra also demanded greater transparency in the decision-making process, saying there was growing public suspicion that large infrastructure projects were being influenced by real estate interests. "The government must ensure every major decision reflects the interests of the entire state, not the interests of a particular constituency or those who stand to gain from

rising land values," he wrote. Referring to Siddaramaiah's position as Chief Minister, the BJP leader said the project should not be perceived as favouring the CM's own constituency and urged the government to place the proposal before the Legislature for wider consultation. He also pointed out that Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar had publicly backed the idea of locating the airport along Tumakuru Road, claiming this showed there was no consensus even within the ruling Congress government. Vijayendra called for consultations with legislators, technical experts, environmental specialists and affected communities before a final decision is taken, warning that a unilateral move could trigger opposition even from Congress MLAs and become another contentious issue similar to the abandoned Bidadi township project.

Village development key to Viksit Bharat: Tripura CM

AGARTALA, JULY 17

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Friday said that bringing positive changes in people's lives is the true benchmark of development and stressed that sustained efforts must be made to improve the socio-economic conditions of all sections of society. He also said nearly 80 per cent of the state's

Panchayats have emerged as national front-runners in various performance parameters, reflecting Tripura's growing prominence in grassroots governance. The Chief Minister made the remarks while inaugurating the state-based Panchayat Awards 2026-27 programme at Gram Swaraj Bhavan in AD Nagar. Saha said Tripura has earned national recognition

for its outstanding work in the Panchayat sector and credited the Panchayati Raj Department for its sustained efforts. "We have been honoured at the national level for our achievements in the Panchayat sector. The Panchayat Department is working in the right direction, and people have immense trust and confidence in the Panchayati Raj institutions," he said. He

emphasised that strengthening Panchayats is essential for the development of both the state and the country. "Nearly 75 per cent of Tripura's geographical area is rural, and around 75 per cent of the state's population resides in villages and Panchayat areas. Therefore, their development is crucial. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has consistently emphasised the need to make

Panchayats self-reliant and technologically empowered. As the Prime Minister has repeatedly said, a developed India by 2047 cannot be achieved without the development of villages," Saha said. Describing villages as the foundation of development, he said previous governments had focused largely on urban-centric growth while neglecting rural areas.

Andhra Pradesh finally receives Waqf records from Telangana

AMARAVATI, JULY 17

The Telangana State Waqf Board has officially handed over records relating to Waqf properties in Andhra Pradesh to the Andhra Pradesh State Waqf Board. This has resolved the issue pending since the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh in 2014. Andhra Pradesh Waqf Board Chairman Abdul Aziz said on Friday that Telangana Waqf Board handed over a vast collection of documents, including 3,503 files, 4,050 reports of the Survey Commissioner, two official gazette volumes, and other highly valuable historical records. He stated that this was not merely a transfer of records but a historic milestone, as Andhra



Pradesh has regained possession of crucial evidence essential for safeguarding Waqf property rights. Following the bifurcation of the combined Andhra Pradesh in 2014, key records, files, survey forms, district-wise gazettes, copies of Board resolutions and other vital documents pertaining

to the Andhra Pradesh Waqf Board had remained under the jurisdiction of the Telangana Waqf Board. Although the Waqf Act, 1995, along with the bifurcation guidelines formulated by the Central Government, mandated the transfer of all records, asset details and

associated funds relevant to Andhra Pradesh to the Andhra Pradesh Waqf Board, the process had failed to gain momentum over the last several years. Abdul Aziz noted that the unavailability of these records following the state bifurcation had hampered several critical functions, including the protection of Waqf properties, the determination of ownership rights, the removal of encroachments, and the handling of legal matters. He stated that after assuming the office, he had taken the responsibility of resolving this issue. He held multiple meetings with the Telangana State Waqf Board Chairman and senior officials, ultimately achieving this goal through persistent follow-up.

He mentioned that the Telangana Waqf Board owe Rs 55 crore to Andhra Pradesh, and these funds are expected to be released soon. Abdul Aziz noted that these records would strengthen the legal recognition of Waqf properties, the protection of rights, the handling of legal cases, and future administrative operations. Highlighting that a decade-long issue has finally been resolved and acknowledging the crucial support provided by Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu and Ministers Nara Lokesh and N.M.D. Farooq, he expressed special gratitude to the Telangana State government, the Telangana State Waqf Board Chairman, officials, and all those who contributed to this process.

Changes in the pattern of Train Services

CHENNAI, JULY 17:

Due to LandSlide in Sella Section of Mumbai Division between Thakurvadi -- Monkey Hill Stations, the following changes have been made in the pattern of train services:

I. Cancellation of Train Services:
Train No. 22157 Mumbai CST -- Dr MGR Chennai Central Superfast Mail scheduled to leave Mumbai CST at 22.52 hrs from 18th to 24th July, 2026 is fully cancelled
Train No. 22158 Dr MGR Chennai Central -- Mumbai CST Express scheduled to leave Dr MGR Chennai Central at 06.35 hrs from 18th to 24th July, 2026 is fully cancelled

II. Diversion of Train Services:
Train No. 20919 Dr MGR Chennai Central -- Ekta Nagar Superfast Express scheduled to leave Dr MGR Chennai Central at 15.50 hrs on 17th July, 2026 will be diverted to run via Daund, Manmad, Jalgaon, Paldhi and Surat

Train No. 09420 Tiruchchirappalli -- Ahmedabad Special scheduled to leave Tiruchchirappalli at 05.45 hrs on 19th July, 2026 will be diverted to run via Daund, Manmad, Jalgaon, Paldhi and Surat
Train No. 22102 Madurai -- Lokmanya Tilak Terminus Superfast Express scheduled to leave Madurai at 16.00 hrs on 17th July, 2026 will be diverted

to run via Daund, Manmad, Igatpuri and Kalyan
Train No. 11018 Karaiikal -- Lokmanya Tilak Express scheduled to leave Karaikal at 14.20 hrs on 20th July, 2026 will be diverted to run via Daund, Manmad, Igatpuri and Kalyan

Train No. 20920 Ekta Nagar -- Dr MGR Chennai Central Express scheduled to leave Ekta Nagar at 09.00 hrs on 22nd July, 2026 will be diverted to run via Surat, Paldhi, Manmad, Daund and Solapur
Train No. 09419 Ahmedabad -- Tiruchchirappalli Special scheduled to leave Ahmedabad at 09.30 hrs on 23rd July, 2026 will be diverted to run via Surat, Paldhi, Manmad, Daund and Solapur

Train No. 22101 Lokmanya Tilak Terminus -- Madurai Express scheduled to leave Lokmanya Tilak Terminus at 13.15 hrs on 22nd July, 2026 will be diverted to run via Kalyan, Manmad, Daund and Solapur

Train No. 11017 Lokmanya Tilak Terminus -- Karaikal Express scheduled to leave Lokmanya Tilak Terminus at 13.15 hrs on 18th July, 2026 will be diverted to run via Kalyan, Manmad, Daund and Solapur

Train No. 16613 Rajkot - Coimbatore Express scheduled to leave Rajkot at 05.30 hrs on 19th July, 2026 will be diverted to run via Surat, Paldhi, Manmad, Daund and Solapur.

Bihar: 158 arrested in district-wise crackdown; liquor, drugs, weapons seized

PATNA, JULY 17

In a major operation to strengthen law and order, curb crime and enforce Bihar's prohibition law, the Patna Police conducted a district-wide special drive on July 16 under the direction of Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Kartikeya K. Sharma. The intensive operation resulted in the arrest of 158 accused, who have since been jailed. The coordinated raids were carried out simultaneously across several police station areas, including Maner, Ramkrishna Nagar, Agamkuan, Fatuha, Pachmahla, Malsalami and Bikram. According to the SSP, those arrested were wanted in a range of serious criminal cases, including two murder cases, 21 attempted murder cases, one case involving an attack on a police team, 22 liquor smuggling cases and offences under the SC/ST Act. As part of the crackdown on the illegal liquor trade, police seized 2,438.05 litres of illicit liquor, including 1,726.05 litres of Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) and 712 litres of country-made liquor. The operation also led to the recovery of 377 grams of cannabis (ganja), 11 grams of smack (heroin), seven vehicles allegedly used for smug-



gling, nine mobile phones and Rs 15,010 in cash. Police also recovered two firearms, four live cartridges, one magazine and three spent cartridges during searches conducted at various locations. In addition to the arrests and seizures, the operation focused on executing pending court orders. Police successfully executed 164 warrants, including 56 bailable warrants, 94 non-bailable warrants and 14 property attachment warrants, targeting long-absconding accused persons. SSP Kartikeya K. Sharma said the special drive is part of the Patna Police's continued efforts to maintain public order, curb organised crime and ensure strict enforcement of the state's prohibition law. He emphasised that similar operations will continue in the coming days and appealed to citizens to promptly inform the police about criminal activities or illegal liquor operations in their localities so that timely action can be taken.

Induction of LHB Coaches in Express Trains

CHENNAI, JULY 17:

To enhance safety and ensure a comfortable journey for passengers, the existing Conventional rake of the following trains will be converted into LHB (Linke-Hofmann-Busch) Coaches as detailed below:

1. Train No. 16791/16792 Tuticorin -- Palakkad -- Tuticorin Palaruvi Express will run with LHB Coaches Ex. Tuticorin with effect from 20th July, 2026 and Ex. Palakkad with effect from 21st July, 2026

Consequent to the conversion into LHB coaches, the composition for the above train services will be revised 1- AC Three Tier Coach, 2- Sleeper Class Coaches, 8- General Second Class Coaches, 1- Second Class Coach (Divyangjan Friendly) & 1- Luggage cum Brake Van

5- Sleeper Class Coaches, 10- General Second Class Coaches, 1- Second Class Coach (Divyangjan Friendly) & 1- Luggage cum Brake Van
2. Similarly, Train No. 16327/16328 Madurai -- Guruvayur -- Madurai Express will run with LHB Coaches Ex. Madurai with effect from 26th July, 2026 and Ex. Guruvayur with effect from 27th July, 2026

Consequent to the conversion into LHB coaches, the composition of the above train services will be revised 1- AC Three Tier Coach, 2- Sleeper Class Coaches, 8- General Second Class Coaches, 1- Second Class Coach (Divyangjan Friendly) & 1- Luggage cum Brake Van



EDITORIAL

The Cost of Complacency:
Why India’s Cities
Keep Burning

Every few months, a familiar, tragic script plays out across India. A spark jumps from a faulty air conditioner, a short circuit occurs in a cluttered basement, or an illegal cylinder explodes in a makeshift kitchen. Within minutes, a structure is engulfed. Lives are lost, families are devastated, and public outrage peaks. The media demands accountability, politicians promise high-level inquiries and ex-gratia compensation, and municipal bodies launch temporary “crackdown” drives. Then, the news cycle moves on. The ash settles, the collective memory fades, and the structural vulnerabilities remain, waiting for the next spark. From coaching centers and neonatal hospitals to gaming zones and high-rise apartments, India’s recurring fire accidents are no longer unpredictable tragedies. They are a systemic failure born of institutional apathy, regulatory evasion, and a deeply entrenched culture of safety complacency. The numbers paint a grim picture. According to data from the National Crime Records Bureau and various state fire departments, thousands of fire-related deaths occur annually in India. While industrial mishaps are frequent, the most alarming spike is happening in commercial and residential spaces within rapidly urbanizing cities. Urban centers are expanding at a break-neck pace, but this growth is wildly outstripping the capacity—and the will—of regulatory enforcement. At the heart of the crisis lies a blatant disregard for the National Building Code (NBC) of India, which outlines stringent fire safety guidelines. In reality, obtaining a Fire No Objection Certificate (NOC) is frequently treated as a bureaucratic checkbox to be bypassed through corruption or political leverage rather than a sacred commitment to human life. Buildings are routinely altered after getting clearances. Basements meant for parking are illegally converted into commercial warehouses full of combustibles; emergency exits are locked to prevent theft; and standard fire-retardant materials are swapped for cheap, toxic plastics. Furthermore, our cities are structurally choking. High-density neighborhoods, particularly in older commercial hubs, feature webbed overhead wiring, narrow alleyways, and illegally extended storefronts. When a fire breaks out, first responders face logistical nightmares. Mammoth fire tenders cannot navigate the tight lanes, and vital minutes are lost trying to access water hydrants that are either broken or buried under garbage. However, blaming corrupt officials and poor urban planning only covers half the problem. As a society, India lacks a foundational “safety culture.” We build multi-story structures without functional smoke detectors. We park cars in front of clearly marked fire exits. We ignore the basic necessity of conducting regular fire drills, and we look the other way when commercial establishments operate without basic suppression systems like sprinklers or extinguishers. Safety is viewed as an expensive luxury or an unnecessary hassle rather than a non-negotiable right. Turning the tide requires moving past reactive governance. First, municipal corporations must face strict legal liability; if a building operates illegally without a fire NOC, the local enforcement officers must be held criminally accountable alongside the property owner. Second, third-party safety audits must be institutionalized, removing the monopoly of understaffed government departments and introducing transparent, digital tracking of compliance. Finally, fire safety education must be normalized in schools, colleges, and workplaces. Citizens must be empowered to recognize hazards and demand safety. We cannot afford to keep buying peace with compensation checks. Every single fire accident in India is a stark reminder that when we compromise on safety regulations to cut costs or speed up construction, we are gambling with human lives. It is time to treat fire safety not as an afterthought, but as a critical metric of civil dignity and national progress. Our cities are growing upward and outward; it is time they grew safer, too.

THE MANY NAMES OF LOVE

“How do you remain so untroubled?” they ask. I smile. Not because life has been gentle, but because whenever it forgot me, love remembered. Before I knew hunger, someone had already become bread. Before I knew fear, someone had already become shelter. Before I understood loneliness, someone had already become home. Before I learned hope, someone had already begun dreaming on my behalf. The world measured my worth by what I achieved. They measured my wounds by what they could heal. The world asked, “What have you become?” They asked, “Have you eaten?” Nothing in philosophy, nothing in scripture, nothing in history, has ever spoken more profoundly of love. For years, I mistook them for four different lives. Time corrected me. They were never four. They were the same river, arriving through different seasons... the same flame, borrowing different lamps... the same prayer, finding different voices. As Mother,



love gave me life. As Elder Sister, love taught me courage. As Wife, love chose to walk beside me. As Daughter, love entrusted me with tomorrow. Everything else changed my age, my dreams, my failures, my victories, even the man I became. Only love remained faithful enough to become whoever I needed at every turn of my life. Perhaps God never sent four different women. Perhaps He kept sending the same love, again and again, until I finally learned its only true name. Woman.

...: Dr. Peruka Raju ...
National Poet
7810032847



OPINION

| Mandela Day (18 July)

HOW GANDHI’S SPIRIT UNITES
MANDELA AND MARTIN LUTHER KING

The winter mist enveloped Delhi as anti-apartheid icon Martin Luther King Jr. arrived at Rajghat on 10 February 1959 to pay homage to his inspiration, Mahatma Gandhi. Thirty-one years later, on 18 October 1990, another champion of the cause of blacks, Nelson Mandela, visited the same sacred site. Though the two leaders never met in their lifetimes, India’s capital became a common spiritual ground where both drew deep inspiration from Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violence, truth, and human dignity.

Champion of civil rights Martin Luther King Jr. first set foot in the city in 1959. Nelson Mandela arrived in 1990, shortly after spending 27 gruelling years in prison. Delhi welcomed both Black leaders with open arms, warmth, and deep respect. They participated in public programmes, engaged with Indian leaders, and paid solemn homage at Rajghat, the Samadhi of their shared inspiration, Mahatma Gandhi.

Mandela’s first visit on 15 October 1990 was nothing short of triumphant. Nelson Mandela also visited Gandhi Smriti, the sacred site where Mahatma Gandhi spent his last days and was assassinated. Deeply moved, Mandela walked through the quiet rooms and gardens, reflecting on the man whose philosophy had shaped his own struggle against apartheid. He described the visit as a spiritual pilgrimage, drawing fresh strength from Gandhi’s message of truth, non-violence, and forgiveness. Standing there, Mandela paid heartfelt homage to the guiding light of his life.

He returned in 1995 and again in 2001 to receive the International Gandhi Peace Prize. These visits reinforced the deep historical friendship between India and South Africa and injected fresh momentum into bilateral cooperation in trade, education, technology, healthcare, and culture. Delhi received him each time like a returning hero. Its streets, echoing with memories of India’s own freedom struggle, felt familiar to a man who had sacrificed decades for dignity and justice.



As the world marks Nelson Mandela International Day on 18 July, Delhi stands as the only capital city to have welcomed two of history’s greatest champions of racial justice—Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr. Though they never met, both made pilgrimages to Rajghat, drawing inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi’s ideals of truth, non-violence, and human dignity. Their visits transformed the Indian capital into a shared symbol of hope, equality, and the universal struggle for freedom.

The author had the privilege of covering Mandela’s historic 1990 visit and witnessed firsthand how his calm, dignified presence moved thousands. His quiet strength and infectious smile bridged cultures effortlessly.

On 10 February 1959, Martin Luther King Jr. arrived in Delhi accompanied by his wife, Coretta Scott King. As one of the first prominent African-American leaders to visit independent India, King’s journey was a pilgrimage. At Rajghat, visibly moved to tears while placing a wreath, he told reporters: “To other countries I may go as a tourist, but to India I come as a pilgrim.” The couple received a heartfelt welcome from Gandhian leaders and government officials. King met Prime Minister Jawaharlar Nehru and Vice President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, an encounter he later described as meeting the founding fathers of a nation in a single day. He addressed students and citizens on the transformative power of non-violent resistance, drawing powerful

parallels between India’s independence movement and the American civil rights struggle. The Kings stayed at the Janpath Hotel (whose building now houses the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts). King’s Indian tour continued, but he returned to Delhi before departing on 18 March 1959, carrying renewed inspiration.

“King’s time in Delhi was short but profound. It linked the struggles of Black Americans with India’s own fight against injustice and colonial oppression,” noted peace activist Kaatsu Saan, who is part of the All Faith Prayer at the Rajghat for over half-century.

Both leaders found in Delhi something rare and special. A living testament to the power of ideas over force. Mandela’s visits in 1990, 1995, and 2001 celebrated hard-won victory after decades of imprisonment and exile. King’s 1959 arrival came at the height of his rising influence, when he was already a global icon of moral courage. Delhi, with its layered history of empires, invasions,

resilience, and rebirth, became a shared chapter in their extraordinary stories. The capital listened attentively to their voices and amplified their dreams of equality and justice back to the world.

Mandela’s remarkable ability to forgive after 27 years of hardship and King’s steadfast commitment to peaceful marches despite constant threats offer timeless lessons. Their examples, deeply rooted in Delhi’s soil through Gandhi, continue to guide contemporary fights for racial justice, social equity, and human rights across the globe.

As another 18 July arrives, it is fitting to reflect on how two great men discovered inspiration, solidarity, and friendship in India’s capital. Mandela’s warm receptions and King’s thoughtful pilgrimage wove bright new threads into Delhi’s rich historical tapestry. Their legacies of hope, dignity, non-violence, and unity remain alive in the city’s landmarks, institutions, and collective memory.

Their visits remind us that freedom’s call echoes across time, borders, and generations. In a world still grappling with inequality and division, Delhi stands proud as a witness to these luminous chapters of history.

In essence, Delhi did more than host these leaders; it embraced their spirits, absorbed their wisdom, and now carries forward their light for future generations to follow. Through its streets, memorials, and living institutions, the capital continues to remind the world that the pursuit of equality is a shared human journey that Gandhi ignited and Mandela and King carried forward with unmatched grace and determination.



VIVEK SHUKLA

HYDERABAD IN DEVOTIONAL FERVOR:
THE GRANDEUR OF BONALU JATHARA



As soon as the month of Ashada arrives, the “City of Pearls”—Hyderabad—starts glowing. Every street in the city is filled with the vibrant colors of turmeric, vermilion, and the fragrance of flowers. The rhythmic beats of drums, the performances of Shiva Shakthis, and the energetic dances of Pothurajus collectively make the city of Hyderabad pulsate with the call of the ‘Mother Goddess’ (Amma). The ‘Bonalu’ festival, which stands as a symbol of Telangana’s culture and self-respect, has today gained global recognition. It stands not just as a festival, but as a platform for social bonding and traditions.

Ashada Month - The Arrival of the Mother
According to Telugu traditions, the month of Ashada is considered the most beloved time for the Mother Goddess. According to mythological tales, it is believed that the Mother Goddess visits her parental home during this time. Welcoming the Mother and offering ‘Bonam’ with devotion is the custom. ‘Bonam’ literally means ‘meal’. Rice cooked in a new earthen pot, mixed with jaggery and milk, is offered to the Mother Goddess. This is not merely an offering; it is a gesture of gratitude presented to the Goddess.

Historical Background - The Healer of All Ailments
There is a strong historical background behind the Bonalu festival. In the middle of the 18th century, when epidemics like cholera were rampant in Hyderabad, people prayed to the Mother Goddess to save their lives. It is the belief of the people that offering Bonam to the Goddess

during that time helped in curbing the diseases. Since then, this practice has transformed into a tradition and has now expanded into a massive Jathara (fair). Starting from the Golconda Fort, these festivities follow a chain-like process, extending to places like Lal Darwaza and the Ujjaini Mahakali Temple.

A Blend of Traditions - Dances and Sounds
The most attractive elements of the Bonalu Jathara are the performances of the Pothurajus. Considered the brother and protector of the Mother Goddess, their dances, performed in tune with the beats of the drums, fill the devotees with enthusiasm. Furthermore, thousands of devotees wait for the Shiva Shakthis to get possessed and listen to the ‘Bhavishyavani’ (prophecy) they deliver while channeling the Goddess. The sight of women, drenched in devotion and glowing with turmeric and vermilion, carrying Bonams on their heads and arriving at the temple, is a feast for the eyes.

Modern Hyderabad - The Form of the Festival
As urbanization increases, the form of the Bonalu festival is also evolving. The celebrations, which were once confined to small neighborhoods, have now expanded to the IT corridors. It is noteworthy that employees of multinational companies are also participating in these festivities. With colorful electric lights, massive decorative arches, and cultural programs, every intersection in the city radiates a festive atmosphere. This is not just a spiritual event but a social platform that unites people from various walks of life.

The Message of Unity - Bonalu
The greatest message given by the Bonalu festival is ‘Unity’. People, regardless of caste or religion, become one in front of the Mother Goddess. From the Old City to the new parts of Hyderabad, the act of helping each other and sharing meals in every street highlights the greatness of Telangana’s culture. This is not just a festival to fulfill vows; it is a grand sacrifice that gives self-confidence and joy to every individual in society.

In conclusion, Hyderabad Bonalu is not just a custom; it is the heartbeat of a region. Even as the city rushes towards modernity, this Jathara stands as a living testament to how much people cherish their roots and traditions. Hoping that the city’s people remain prosperous with the blessings of the Mother Goddess, the Bonalu Jathara is touching the skies with devotion this year as well.

The Bonalu Jathara is not just a religious celebration; it is a reflection of Telangana’s culture, lifestyle, and social unity. Among the many aspects of the Bonalu festival, the ‘decoration of the Bonams that women carry on their heads with great devotion and artistic flair’ is the element I like the most.

There are a few reasons for this:
Spirit of Offering: The process of cooking rice with milk and jaggery in a new pot, decorating it with neem leaves, turmeric, and vermilion, lighting a lamp, and offering it to the Mother Goddess is filled with a sense of pure devotion and surrender that feels truly magnificent.

Artistry: The way the Bonam pots are decorated is a wonderful folk art. Every pot appears to be a masterpiece. The colors of turmeric and vermilion, the greenery of the neem leaves, and the glowing lamp—all these reflect our traditional beauty on one hand and devotion on the other.

Social Unity: Seeing the procession move through the streets with Bonams on their heads, in tune with the drum beats, clearly shows how people of a region unite while worshipping the same Mother and blend into the same culture.

Behind every Bonam lies an individual’s vow, a family’s faith, and a society’s cultural heritage. That is why the sight of offering the Bonam feels more appealing to me than any other aspect of the Jathara.



DR. CHITYALA RAVINDER
7798891795



Madhya Pradesh's Natural Beauty, History and Heritage: CM Dr. Mohan Yadav

DR.BHUPENDRA VIKAL

Bhopal , July 17 : Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav said that Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's inspiring remark, "MP Ajab Hai, Sabse Gajab Hai," vividly reflects Madhya Pradesh's natural beauty, rich history and vibrant cultural heritage. He said the remark continues to inspire the state to take tourism to new heights. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav stated, addressing FAITH Conclave 2026, the country's premier annual event for the tourism and hospitality sector, in New Delhi, that Prime Minister Shri Modi's governance philosophy of 'What he says, He delivers' has firmly established India on the global tourism map. He added that the Prime Minister's mantra of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas' forms the cornerstone of the government's policies, ensuring that the benefits of development reach every section of society. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav, speaking at the special session on 'Madhya Pradesh: The Heart of Incredible India', reaffirmed the state government's commitment to making Madhya Pradesh a leading tourism and investment destination. He invited national and international investors, tour opera-

tors and tourism stakeholders to invest in the state and forge new partnerships. **More Than 13 Crore Tourists Visited Madhya Pradesh in the Past Year** Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that Madhya Pradesh, the Heart of Incredible India, is the sacred land of Baba Mahakal. He described the state as more than just a geographical entity, calling it a unique canvas of rich cultural heritage, magnificent forts and vibrant forests. He said the state government is committed to developing all sites associated with Lord Shri Ram and Lord Shri Krishna as major pilgrimage destinations, ushering in a new chapter in religious tourism. He added that more than 13 crore tourists visited Madhya Pradesh over the past year, significantly strengthening the state's economy. **Simhashta-2028 to Showcase a Grand and Divine Experience** Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that the state government is undertaking large-scale infrastructure development worth nearly ₹30,000 crore to ensure that Simhashta-2028 is organised on a grand and divine scale. He said preparations for one of the world's largest religious gatherings are progressing rapidly under



a comprehensive development plan. Nearly 30 kilometres of riverfront ghats are being developed to ensure that every devotee visiting Simhashta has the opportunity to take a holy dip in the sacred waters of the Kshipra. **Shri Mahakal Lok Has Significantly Boosted Tourist Footfall in Ujjain** Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that Madhya Pradesh is home to two of the twelve Jyotirlingas of Lord Shiva. He noted that Shri Mahakaleshwar Temple in Ujjain, the country's only south-facing Jyotirlinga, is globally renowned for its spiritual significance and divine grandeur. The world-famous Bhasma Aarti, performed every morning, offers devotees a unique spiritual experience. He informed that nearly 8 crore devotees have visited Shri Mahakal Lok in Ujjain within

Investment and Global Partnerships During the conclave, Secretary, Tourism Department, and Managing Director of the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, Dr. Ilaiyaraja T., along with Managing Director of the Madhya Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation, Shri Dileep Kumar Yadav, held important meetings with national and international tour operators and industry representatives. The discussions focused on attracting private investment, expanding air connectivity, strengthening tourism infrastructure and enhancing the global visibility of Madhya Pradesh's tourism destinations. **Madhya Pradesh's Tourism Model Wins National Appreciation** At the conclave, states including Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Uttarakhand showcased their tourism models and investment opportunities. On this multi-state platform, Madhya Pradesh's innovations in wildlife tourism, heritage homestays, spiritual circuits and rural tourism emerged as major attractions and received appreciation from industry leaders. The two-day FAITH Conclave 2026 provided an important platform for promoting inter-state collabora-

tion, exploring new tourism investment opportunities and strengthening India's tourism ecosystem. Madhya Pradesh's impactful participation effectively showcased the state's rich cultural heritage, natural beauty and vast investment potential before the national and international tourism industry. The conclave was attended by Shri Pasang Dorjee Sona, Arunachal Pradesh's Minister for Tourism, Education, Rural Works, Parliamentary Affairs and Libraries; Shri Kandula Durgesh, Andhra Pradesh's Minister for Tourism, Culture and Cinematography; Shri Hari Kishore, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India; Shri Puneet Chhatwal, Chairman of the Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism and Hospitality (FAITH); Shri Ajeet Bajaj, President of the Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI); Shri Nakul Anand, Patron of FAITH; Shri Ved Khanna, Chairman of the Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI); Shri Ravi Gosain, President of the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO); Shri Rajiv Mehra, Secretary General of FAITH; and presidents and representatives of all 11 member associations affiliated with FAITH.

Concern Raised Over Large-Scale Tree Felling in the Name of Development

Environmentalist Shanti Thakur Calls for a Balance Between Infrastructure and Nature Conservation
BY SUNIL THAPLIYAL

Barkot, Uttarakashi uttarakhand: Environmentalists have expressed serious concern over the large-scale felling of trees for road widening and other infrastructure projects in Uttarakhand, stating that development should not come at the cost of the state's fragile ecology. Addressing mediapersons in Barkot on Friday, social worker and "Glacier Lady" Shanti Thakur said that while the government promotes environmental conservation through campaigns such as World Environment Day and Harela, thousands of trees are simultaneously being marked for felling in the name of development. She described this as a contradiction between policy and practice. Thakur also extended her support to Ladakh-based environmental activist Sonam Wangchuk, describing him as a dedicated voice for the protection of the Himalayan ecosystem and national interest. She urged the government to engage in meaningful dialogue and seriously consider the environmental concerns raised by him. At the same time, she appealed to Wangchuk to consider suspending his agitation in the larger public interest if constructive discussions begin. Expressing concern over extensive mining activities in the Himalayan region, Thakur said that indiscrim-



inate extraction of valuable mineral resources—often referred to as the "white gold" of the mountains—poses a serious threat to ecological balance. She warned that continued destruction of forests and natural resources would adversely affect biodiversity, water sources, local climate and the fragile Himalayan ecosystem, further aggravating the impacts of climate change and rising temperatures. She clarified that environmentalists are not opposed to development, but advocate scientific, sustainable and need-based development. According to her, road infrastructure can be improved through planned and environmentally responsible widening, ensuring better connectivity while minimizing ecological damage. Thakur urged the government to strike a proper balance between development and environmental conservation so that Uttarakhand's rich natural heritage is preserved for future generations. Among those present were Sandeep Chauhan, Anuradha Chauhan, Kalpana Thakur and Kamal Singh Chauhan, along with several environmental activists.



Arunachal cabinet clears Rs 7,834 crore package, major reforms

ITANAGAR, JULY 17

The Arunachal Pradesh Cabinet, chaired by Chief Minister Pema Khandu, on Friday approved a Rs 7,834-crore development package, along with governance, education, infrastructure, and employment reforms aimed at improving the ease of living, ease of doing business, and public service delivery in the state. A senior official of the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said investments were cleared for four flagship Chief Minister's Comprehensive Schemes for 2026-29. An outlay of Rs 2,334 crore was approved for Phase-II of the Chief Minister's Comprehensive State Road Development Plan (CMCSRDP) to improve connectivity in district headquarters, sub-divisional headquarters and the Capital Complex. Officials were directed to complete pending projects under Phase-I by March 2027. The Cabinet sanctioned Rs 2,000 crore for the Chief Minister's Comprehensive State Rural Road Development Programme (CMCSRDDP) to provide all-weather connectivity to habitations not covered under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY). Another Rs 2,000 crore was approved under the Chief Minister's Comprehensive State Pow-

er Development Programme (CMCSPDP) to modernise power infrastructure and reduce Aggregate Technical and Commercial (AT&C) losses to 18 per cent by March 2029. Rs 1,500 crore was cleared for Phase-II of Mission Shikshit Arunachal (2026-29) to bridge school infrastructure gaps, strengthen teacher training, enhance digital monitoring and improve learning outcomes. The cumulative Rs 7,834 crore investment aims to converge Central and State schemes to address critical infrastructure and education gaps, representing one of the biggest packages by the Pema Khandu government in recent years. The Cabinet rolled out the AI-powered e-HRMS 2.0 (Manav Sampada) platform to digitise the entire lifecycle of government employees, from recruitment to retirement, and directed all departments to adopt it expeditiously. Among other decisions, the Cabinet approved the Chief Minister's Frontier Sainik School Scholarship Scheme to support students in notified Sainik Schools and the Rashtriya Indian Military College, Dehradun. It also cleared an Indian Army-led mentorship programme to help Arunachal youths prepare for admission to military institutions and pursue careers in the armed forces.

Gujarat cops bust mule account racket; 3 held for carrying out frauds worth Rs 2.86 cr in 18 states

GANDHINAGAR: Three persons were arrested for allegedly creating fake firms and opening multiple 'mule accounts' to facilitate cyber frauds worth more than Rs 2.86 crore across 18 states, Gujarat police officials said on Friday. Ahmedabad residents Nikunj Kumar Rajubhai Patel, Dixit Jagdishbhai Patel and Sumit Vishnubhai Soni were arrested by Cyber Centre of Excellence, Gandhinagar, under 'Operation Mule

Hunt 2.0', a statewide drive against organised cybercrime networks and mule account operators, the officials said. "The accused created two bogus firms, 'Travelflux Private Limited' and 'Travocrest Private Limited', opened a total of 12 bank accounts, and obtained around 60 mule bank account kits and SIM cards linked to the registered mobile numbers of those accounts," said Superintendent of Police Rajdeep Singh Zala.

Modi Inaugurates and Dedicates 75 Amrit Stations to the Nation

Three Amrit Stations of NFR also Inaugurated

MALIGAON, 17 JULY, 2026

The Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, today on 17th July 2026, virtually inaugurated the redeveloped Majbatin Rangiya Division (Assam), Jalpaiguri Road in Alipurduar Division (West Bengal) and Haldibari in Katihar Division (West Bengal), marking a momentous occasion for the states and the Northeast region. This event stands out as a landmark in the national rollout of the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS), as the three stations becomes a part of the 75 stations inaugurated nationwide today. The three Amrit stations have been dedicated to the nation at a cumulative redevelopment cost of approximately Rs. 71 crore. The PM also flagged-off India's first hydrogen-powered train between Jind and Sonapat. Themed as the "NaMo Green Rail," this hydrogen train marks a major milestone in India's drive toward clean, sustainable transportation. At Majbat Railway Station, the inaugural programme was graced by the Hon'ble



Governor of Assam, Shri Lakshman Prasad Acharya, Hon'ble Minister for Welfare of Bodoland and Transport, Govt. of Assam, Shri Charan Boro, Hon'ble Minister for Animal Husbandry & Veterinary, Fisheries, Smt. Nilima Devi and Hon'ble Member of Legislative Assembly (Tangla), Shri Bikan Chandra Deka. The General Manager of NFR, Shri Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, along with other senior railway officials was also present on behalf of the zone. At Jalpaiguri Road Railway Station, the inaugural function was graced by Dr. Sukanta Majumdar, Hon'ble Union Minister of States for Education & Ministry of Development of North

Eastern Region, Shri Arjun Singh, Minister of Labour & Transport, West Bengal, Shri Nagendra Ray, Hon'ble Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha) and Dr. Jayanta Kumar Roy, Hon'ble Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) of Jalpaiguri along with senior officers of Alipurduar Division of NFR. Similarly, at Haldibari Railway Station, the ceremony was attended by Dr. Jayanta Kumar Roy, Hon'ble Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) of Jalpaiguri, along with senior officials of Katihar Division and NFR, marking another significant milestone in the modernization of railway infrastructure across the region.

The redevelopment of Majbat, Jalpaiguri Road and Haldibari railway stations are expected to significantly enhance passenger convenience while acting as a catalyst for the socio-economic development of the surrounding regions. Equipped with modern station buildings and amenities including Divyangjan-friendly facilities, the stations now offer a safer, more comfortable and accessible travel experience. Beyond improving commuter convenience, the modernized stations are expected to strengthen regional connectivity, promote tourism and trade, and support the long-term economic growth of the areas they serve.

It's Still in Our Hands to Combat Poverty and Inequality

(On the occasion of "International Day of Nelson Mandela" on 18 July)

Nelson Mandela was a South African anti-apartheid revolutionary, political leader, and philanthropist, served as the first Black President from 1994 to 1999, widely recognised for his commitment to democracy, human rights, and reconciliation. He was born on 18 July 1918 in Mvezo, a small village in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. He came from a royal Thembu family and was given the name 'Rolihlahla', means "pulling the branch of a tree" or "troublemaker". He was first in his family to attend the school where his teacher gave him the English name "Nelson". He studied at Ford Hare University and later at the University of Witwatersrand, and was a student and political leader and anti-apartheid activist.

International Nelson Mandela Day-2026: Mandela's birthday is celebrated as "International Nelson Mandela Day" on July 18, aimed to encourage to engage in activities of social service, protecting environment, supporting education, healthcare, nutrition drives, peace-building workshops, or volunteering for local initiatives. On this day citizens are asked to volunteer at least 67-minutes service projects that benefit the communities, representing 67 years of his fighting against justice.. Mandela was often been compared to Mahatma Gandhi, in their commitment to non-violence and social justice. His life demonstrates that compassion, determination, and courage can bring about meaningful change. Mandela

Day offers a chance to reflect, act, and uphold the spirit of unity that Nelson Mandela stood for. **27 Years of Long Imprisonment :** Nelson Mandela was the co-founder of African National Congress (ANC) Youth League in 1944 and became a leading voice against racial segregation in 1950s. Initially committed to non-violent protests, later co-founded armed wing of ANC in response to state violence. In 1962, Mandela was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment and spent 27 long years in jail, became a global symbol of resistance and resilience. He was released in 1990 and played a key role in negotiating the end of apartheid. In 1994, he was elected as The President of South Africa

through the country's first democratic election. **Theme of International Day of Nelson Mandela-2025:** Nelson Mandela was a prolific writer, penned autobiography titled "Long Walk to Freedom" which vividly depicted his childhood, political awakening, years in prison, and path to leadership as President. The theme of 2026 International Day of Nelson Mandela is "It's Still in Our Hands to Combat Poverty and Inequality", to address persistent poverty and systemic inequality, justice, and human dignity. Mandela's extraordinary life showed how one person can transform oppression, struggle, and subjugation into reconciliation, social justice, freedom, human rights, and unity.

President Murmu begins landmark 3-nation tour to Moldova, North Macedonia, Romania

President Droupadi Murmu will be on the three-nation tour from July 19 to 25 for talks and outreach. The tour is meant to widen India's eastern Europe partnerships in trade, technology, tourism and strategic engagement.



The Ministry of External Affairs said on Friday that President Droupadi Murmu will pay state visits to Moldova, North Macedonia and Romania from July 19 to 25, with the trip aimed at strengthening ties across areas such as trade, technology, tourism and people-to-people exchanges. The MEA said the three-nation tour also complements India's broader engagement with Europe and its strategic partnership with the European Union. Briefing reporters, MEA Secretary (West) Sibi George said, "The three-nation visit is of considerable historic significance, as it marks the first-ever bilateral visits by an Indian president to the Republic of Moldova and the Republic of North Macedonia." Murmu's visit to Romania will be the first state visit by an Indian president to that country in more than three decades, with the previous such visit having taken place in 1994. George said, "The three-nation visit reflects India's growing engagement with central and eastern Europe, and reaffirms our commitment to strengthening our partnerships with the countries in the region. It also complements India's broader engagement with Europe and

the strategic partnership with the European Union," adding that it would strengthen collaboration in the "three Ts – trade, technology and tourism". Murmu will visit Moldova on July 20 at the invitation of President Maia Sandu, in what will be the first-ever visit by an Indian president to the country. During the visit, she will hold one-to-one and delegation-level talks with Sandu, and will also meet the Moldovan prime minister and the President of the Parliament of Moldova, Igor Grosu. She is also scheduled to interact with members of the Moldova-India Parliamentary Friendship Group, address a business forum and meet members of the Indian community. The Moldovan president will host a banquet dinner in her honour. Speaking about ties with Moldova, George said, "India and Moldova enjoy warm and friendly relations, based on mutual respect, democratic values and cooperation in multilateral fora, though economic engagement is yet to realise its full potential." He said Moldova strongly condemned the Pahalgam terror attack in April 2025 and expressed strong support to India in its fight against terrorism.

Bus fire: Bomb squad, forensic teams sent to ascertain cause of blaze

JAMMU: A bomb disposal and the district forensic mobile unit on Friday collected samples from the passenger bus that caught fire on the Jammu-Srinagar national highway in Ramban district, as police launched a detailed investigation into the cause of the incident, officials said. The BDS and forensic teams, equipped

with technical equipments, reached the site near Karool and carried out a thorough examination of the gutted vehicle, they said. The teams screened the wheels, front portion and interior of the fire-damaged bus and collected various samples for forensic analysis to determine the exact cause of the blaze, officials said.



China row won't derail Xi trip: Navarro

WASHINGTON

Senior White House adviser Peter Navarro on Friday indicated that allegations of Chinese interference in the 2020 US presidential election would not automatically alter the Trump administration's broader engagement with Beijing, saying election security and US-China policy should be treated as "separate lanes" even as he defended President Donald Trump's push for tighter election safeguards.

In an interaction with reporters at the White House a day after Trump unveiled declassified material that he said exposed vulnerabilities in the 2020 election, Navarro asked whether the allegations against Beijing could prompt changes to US trade policy, and replied: "I think they're separate lanes."

"China has already, predictably, denied everything, which you would expect," he said. "The story, this isn't a sto-



ry about China. It's about the American refusal at the political level to safeguard our election system, and that happened because there are nefarious actors domestically who wanted that 2020 election to go in a different way than the voters did."

Navarro nevertheless argued that material released

by the Trump administration should raise fresh concerns about China's activities before the 2020 election.

He alleged that China had accessed voter-related data and metadata in the run-up to the election, saying such actions, if undertaken, demonstrated "mal intent in terms of

what you might do with that election." "That should raise really deep concerns among the American people," he said.

Navarro also claimed newly declassified documents showed divisions within the US intelligence community over whether China was attempting to influence the election.

According to Navarro, those differences were not fully conveyed to the President through intelligence briefings.

"We have revelations based on documents that have been released, that show that there was division among the intelligence community about whether or not the Chinese were influencing the election or were trying to steal the election or not," he said. When a reporter asked why China should not face consequences if it attempted to interfere in a US election, Navarro declined to discuss possible punitive measures.

"That's a serious matter. It's not what I'm going to be talking about today," he said. Instead, he argued that the immediate priority should be strengthening domestic election safeguards. "I think the focus needs to be on the fact that there's holes in our election system that can and will be exploited by bad actors, both foreign and domestic."

Navarro used the briefing to promote President Trump's proposed Save America Act, describing it as legislation requiring voter identification, proof of citizenship and tighter controls on absentee ballots.

"That's why the Save America Act is critical," he said. "It's the most reasonable bill in the world. It's ID check. You can bring in an ID. Check whether you're a citizen."

Reporters also asked whether the latest allegations against Beijing should affect Trump's plans to host Chinese President Xi Jinping at the White House during an expected visit later this year. Navarro declined to weigh in. "Above my paygrade," he said. He instead returned to the administration's central message that the declassified material was intended "to help the American people understand the vulnerabilities in our election system." "The Save America Act is the key to saving that," he added.



UN human rights office raises serious concerns about deadly unrest in PoK

GENEVA

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on Friday raised serious concern about infringements on the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) amid escalating unrest in the occupied territory that has left dozens of people dead and injured.

In a statement issued, Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Jeremy Laurence, said that "the criminalisation of a civil society organisation and imposition of strict limitations on gatherings raise serious concerns about infringements on the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. Detained JAAC leaders must have access to legal representation and their families. Their rights to due process and fair trial must be fully guaranteed."

According to the statement, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Turk, has called for calm and urged prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into all deaths

that have occurred due to the unrest, both amongst protesters and members of security forces.

The spokesperson noted that dozens of civilians, including law enforcement personnel, have reportedly been killed since June as tensions mounted ahead of the July 27 election in PoK.

Expressing grave concerns over Pakistani authorities' response to the protest, the UN human rights office said, "The Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) - a movement behind the protests comprising traders, transporters, students, lawyers, activists and others - has been banned under anti-terrorism laws for allegedly threatening public order and security. Some of the group's leaders have subsequently been arrested."

The statement noted that the restrictions on internet access in the region were disproportionately undermining the right to freedom of expression, including freedom to seek, receive and share information at a time of heightened tensions. He urged the Pakistani authorities to ensure full internet access throughout the territory.

Panama's Foreign Minister to visit India on July 19

NEW DELHI

Javier Eduardo Martinez-Acha Vasquez, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Panama, will be undertaking an official visit to India from July 19-23, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced on Friday. According to the MEA, the Foreign Minister of Panama will arrive in India on Sunday and will hold meetings with Piyush Goyal, Minister for Commerce and Industry, at the New Parliament Building and External Affairs Minister (EAM) S Jaishankar at Hyderabad House on Monday.

After attending some programmes in Delhi on Tuesday, he will also hold a meeting with Sarbananda Sonowal, Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, at Transport Bhavan on Wednesday.

Bangladesh Gen Z protest erupts over exam crisis, 'farm chicken' remark by Education Minister

DHAKA

Bangladesh has been gripped by a fresh wave of student protests, with Gen Z returning to the streets in Dhaka and other cities to press for education reforms less than five months after the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) government came to power, a report has stated.

The tensions emerged amid worsening weather conditions during the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) and equivalent examinations. The exams, which commenced on July 2 and involved nearly 1.3 million candidates, were disrupted by torrential rain during the second week of July. The heavy downpours caused widespread flooding in the Chittagong region and

severe waterlogging in major cities, including Dhaka and Chittagong.

As floods wreaked havoc in several parts of Bangladesh, the Ministry of Education suspended examinations in five districts under the Chittagong Education Board. The move to keep exams on schedule in other education boards, however, sparked outrage among students, according to a report in an online magazine, The Diplomat.

"While the flooding was worst in Chittagong, the weather was also hostile in other places, including Comilla. Examinees had to reach their centres by wading through knee-deep water, getting drenched, and facing storms and rain. Many students were forced to take



exams while sick or without proper preparation and peace of mind. In such a disastrous situation, it is natural for anger to brew among students and their parents," the report detailed, Bangladesh Education Minister A N M Ehsanul Hoque Milon further intensified students' anger after an audio recording of his phone conversation with the parent

of a female examinee went viral on social media.

In the clip, Milon was heard apparently saying, "In a meeting, someone was saying that if my daughter gets a little wet, she gets a fever. I said that these are farm chickens. If they get a little wet, they get a fever." The remark, particularly the reference to "farm chickens," triggered wide-

spread anger among students, the report noted. Citing local media reports, The Diplomat mentioned that students staged protests in at least 13 districts across Bangladesh, including Dhaka, Chittagong, and Comilla, blocking roads, surrounding education boards, and holding rallies.

In Dhaka, the protestors also took to the streets, raising sarcastic slogans such as "Who are you? Who are we? Farm chicken!" while blocking key intersections in the capital. Amid mounting protests, Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman met Education Minister Milon in an emergency meeting at the Parliament building on July 14. Following the meeting, Milon apologised in Parliament for his comments.

Bangladesh's Future Workforce Shaped by Madrasas: Report

DHAKA

Bangladesh cannot achieve its goal of becoming an upper-middle-income, investment-driven economy while keeping education sector out of the national development strategy, a report has detailed citing various analysts.

Recently, Bangladesh's Education Minister ANM Ehsanul Hoque Milon said that around 70 lakh students are currently enrolled in nearly 25,000 Qawmi madrasas in the country. Furthermore, around 14 lakh students study in more than 9,000 Alia madrasas, while significant number of children study in Ebtedayi institutions, implying that a significant portion of Bangladesh's future workforce is being shaped through the madrasa education system, a report in Dhaka's 'Daily Sun' mentioned.

Analysts have raised questions on whether these students are being adequately prepared for a future in which Bangladesh wants to transform itself into an industrial, technology-driven, and service-oriented economy. Bangladesh government has aimed to make the country a regional hub for manufacturing, technology, and services by reducing its reliance on the readymade garment sector and attracting investments in electronics, pharmaceuticals, information technology, logistics, agro-processing, and other high-value industries.

According to the report in Daily Sun, analysts have said that these ambitious plans are not enough to attract foreign investments as investors want to see whether the country has enough skilled engineers, technicians, programmers, electricians, machine operators,



quality control professionals, and digitally competent workers. They also analyse soft skills like communication, teamwork, problem-solving ability, and adaptability to new technologies before investing in any country.

ANM Ehsanul Hoque Milon told the leading Bangladesh daily that there is still no comprehensive national policy for creating market-oriented

skills in Qawmi madrasas. Max Tunon, Country Director of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Bangladesh said that the principal challenge in Bangladesh is not simply training more people but making the education system as per labour market demands.

"According to analysts, Bangladesh cannot achieve its ambition of becoming an upper-mid-

dle-income, investment-driven economy while leaving one of its largest education sectors outside the national development strategy. The country needs an education system in which a madrasa graduate can confidently pursue careers in factories, software companies, banks, hospitals, government institutions, or engineering firms," the Daily Sun report detailed.

Earlier in June, a report claimed that Bangladesh's graduate unemployment rate is reported to be three times higher, at 13.5 per cent in 2024, than the overall rate of unemployment. Youth unemployment (age 15-29 years) is about 10 per cent, more than double the overall unemployment rate at under five per cent. More alarming is that about 30 per cent of youth are categorised as not in education, employment, or training (NEET), according to an article

in Dhaka-based 'The Daily Star'.

Jobless economic growth is much more an economic policy problem than an education and training problem. About a dozen major projects on skill development and employment creation have been undertaken in Bangladesh in the last two decades, some of which were funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank.

These projects have expanded training opportunities and contributed to building the institutional support structure. Yet, complaints of mismatch and volume of graduate unemployment have not abated. Rough estimates based on Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics data indicate that 22 lakh youth enter the job market every year, but any kind of new jobs available are only about 14 lakh, leaving more than a third of new job-seekers unemployed, the report states.

Historic cargo service between Kolkata and Nepal's Biratnagar begins

KATHMANDU

A first-ever rail cargo service between Kolkata and Biratnagar, an eastern city in Nepal, officially began on Friday, marking a major milestone in facilitating imports from third countries under the Nepal-India Transit Treaty.

The inaugural freight train departed from Kolkata Port on Friday carrying 40 high-capacity containers bound for the Biratnagar Customs Yard, the Consulate General of Nepal in Kolkata said in a press statement.

The inaugural service was jointly flagged off by Nepal's Consul General in Kolkata, Jhakka Prasad Acharya, along with officials from Kolkata Customs, Kolkata Port and the Container Corporation of India Limited (CONCOR).

Trump official Peter Navarro urges election overhaul

WASHINGTON

Senior White House trade adviser Peter Navarro on Friday defended President Donald Trump's renewed focus on election integrity, arguing that newly declassified material had strengthened public concerns about vulnerabilities in the US electoral system and underscored the need for Congress to pass the proposed Save America Act.

A day after Trump's nationally televised address, Navarro told reporters at the White House that the administration's objective was not to relitigate the 2020 presidential election but to strengthen safeguards for future polls.

"That's not what last night was about. What last night was about is protecting future elections," Navarro said. He argued that the newly released material had prompted Americans to reassess the integrity of the 2020 election, asking whether "the probability that that elec-



tion was stolen" had risen "because of what came out."

Navarro outlined what he described as four major issues emerging from the declassified documents. He first alleged that China had accessed US voter-related data before the 2020 election, saying such activity should raise "deep concerns among the American people." He argued that obtaining voter information and metadata suggested "mal intent" even though Beijing had denied the allegations.

He also criticised what he described as divisions within

the US intelligence community over China's alleged election activities. Referring to documents released by the administration, Navarro said they showed disagreements that were not reflected in presidential intelligence briefings.

"There was one very chilling comment," he said, referring to "an FBI agent, who bragged about running a shadow government... to keep key intelligence off the desk of the president."

Navarro further claimed the documents showed that voting machines were "vulnerable to being used to sway elections" and that such activity "may well be undetectable when that kind of nefarious activity takes place."

He also pointed to what he said were nearly 300,000 illegal voters identified by the Department of Homeland Security in a limited number of states. He argued that even relatively small numbers could influence closely contested elections.

IAF's IL-78 carries out mid-air refuelling of Australia-bound Rafales in Indonesia

JAKARTA

An IL-78 air-to-air refueller of the Indian Air Force (IAF) on Friday operated from Juanda airport in Indonesia, to carry out mid-air refuelling of IAF Rafale fighter aircraft transiting Indonesian airspace, to participate in Exercise Pitch Black in Australia's Darwin.

"Strengthening India-Indonesia partnerships, an IL-78 Air-to-Air Refueller of the Indian Air Force (IAF) operated from Juanda airport, Surabaya, to carry out mid-air refuelling of IAF Rafale fighter a/c transiting Indonesian airspace, to participate in Exercise Pitch Black in Darwin, Australia," the Indian Embassy in Jakarta wrote on X.

"Embassy and Air Warriors of India thank and appreciate the assistance and opportunity extended by the Government of the Repub-



lic of Indonesia in allowing Indian military platforms to operate from Indonesia," it added. India's Rafale fighter jets and a C-17 transport aircraft arrived in Australia on Friday to participate in the Royal Australian Air Force's (RAAF) premier multinational air combat exercise, Pitch Black 2026, marking another step in expanding defence cooperation between the two countries.

Announcing the arrival of the Indian Air Force (IAF) contingent, the High Commission of India in Canber-

ra said in a post on X, "The High Commission of India is proud to welcome the Indian Air Force contingent of four Rafale and two C17 aircraft along with over 120 Air Warriors to Darwin to participate in the Royal Australian Air Force's premier air combat exercise Pitch Black 2026."

The diplomatic mission added that the deployment reflects India's commitment to strengthening military partnerships and enhancing operational coordination with friendly nations.

"Over the next three

weeks, our Air Warriors will fly alongside counterparts from participating nations towards enhancing interoperability, sharpening combat flying skills, strengthening relationships, and building everlasting bonds," the High Commission said.

Earlier this month, in a special gesture, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's plane was escorted by Indonesian Air Force jets during his arrival and departure from the Indonesian airspace. Deepening defence ties further, India and Indonesia signed an agreement for the supply of BrahMos missiles to the Indonesian military during PM Modi's Jakarta visit. Indonesia is also set to import India's indigenously developed Astra air-to-air missiles. India is also likely to provide Indonesia with additional batteries of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile.



Sensex and Nifty surged on Friday as IT stocks, Reliance Industries and private banks led buying. The S&P BSE Sensex was up 953.76 points, or 1.24%, at 78,140.63 around 3:07 pm, after touching an intraday high of 78,282.55.

Benchmark stock market indices rallied sharply on Friday, with the Sensex surging nearly 1,000 points and the Nifty gaining over 1%, driven by a strong rally in IT stocks, buying in index heavyweights such as Reliance Industries and banking stocks, and the absence of a major spike in crude oil prices despite continuing US-Iran tensions. The S&P BSE Sensex was up 953.76 points, or 1.24%, at 78,140.63 around 3:07 pm, after touching an intraday high of 78,282.55. The NSE Nifty50 climbed 259.10 points, or 1.08%, to 24,331.85, after hitting a high of 24,367.30. The rally was largely led by heavy-weight stocks, while the broader market failed to participate to the same extent. The Nifty 100 gained 0.88%, Nifty 200 rose 0.64% and Nifty 500 advanced 0.46%. In contrast, the Nifty Midcap 100 fell 0.34%, while the Nifty Smallcap 100 declined 0.20%. India VIX, the market's fear gauge, rose nearly 2% to 13.14, indicating that some caution persisted despite the sharp rise in benchmark indices. Here are three major reasons behind the sharp rally on Dalal Street today.

IT STOCKS SURGE AFTER TECH TECH MAHINDRA RESULTS
The biggest boost to the market came from IT stocks after Tech Mahindra's better-than-expected June-quarter performance lifted sentiment across the sector. The Nifty IT index jumped nearly 2% to trade above 29,280, emerging as one of the top-per-

forming sectoral indices. Tech Mahindra led the IT rally, surging nearly 5% after its results. TCS jumped over 3%, Persistent Systems gained around 2.5%, HCLTech advanced nearly 2.5%, Mphasis rose over 1.7% and Infosys gained around 1.5%. OFSS also traded higher. The rally in IT stocks was significant for the benchmark indices, with Tech Mahindra and TCS among the top Sensex gainers. Tech Mahindra was up 4.73% and TCS gained 3.08%, while Infosys advanced 1.74% and HCLTech rose 1.37%.

The buying followed Tech Mahindra's stronger-than-expected June-quarter performance. The company reported consolidated revenue of Rs 15,711.9 crore, up 4.2% sequentially and ahead of expectations of Rs 15,486 crore. Its EBIT rose 8.6% sequentially to Rs 2,264 crore, while the EBIT margin expanded 60 basis points to 14.4% from 13.8% in the previous quarter. The company also reported new deal wins of \$1.078 billion, up 33.3% year-on-year. Axis Securities said Tech Mahindra remains focused on GenAI opportunities, including autonomous networks and network optimisation for telecom companies. Its Conmiva business is also leveraging AI to reduce customer churn and increase average revenue per user. The brokerage remains optimistic about the company's prospects for healthy revenue growth

MONEY MATTERS

Sensex Soars Nearly 1,000 Points; 3 Key Drivers



and margin expansion over the long term. It maintained a 'Buy' rating on Tech Mahindra and raised its target price marginally to Rs 1,735 per share from Rs 1,730. The results appeared to provide a positive read-through for the broader IT sector, triggering buying across major software exporters.

RIL, BANKING HEAVYWEIGHTS ADD TO RALLY

The second major driver was strong buying in heavy-weight stocks, particularly Reliance Industries and private sector banks. Reliance Industries jumped 2.37% ahead of its June-quarter earnings announcement after market hours. The rise in the index heavyweight provided significant support to both the Sensex and Nifty. Sentiment around the Reliance group was also supported by Jio Financial Services' June-quarter performance, adding to optimism

ahead of RIL's results. Banking and financial stocks also rallied ahead of another set of major earnings. Kotak Mahindra Bank was among the biggest Sensex gainers, surging 3.41%. Bajaj Finance gained 1.90%, Axis Bank rose 1.86%, ICICI Bank climbed 1.49%, HDFC Bank advanced 1.35% and SBI gained 1.32%.

The Nifty Private Bank index gained 2.05%, while Nifty Financial Services rose 1.14%. The Nifty Financial Services Ex-Bank index also traded 0.44% higher. Dr. VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Investments Limited, said major corporate earnings could determine the market's direction in the coming sessions. "The big results from RIL today after market hours, and the results of the private banking majors on Saturday can have an impact on the market next week. Private sector banks are expected to

report good numbers," he said. The buying was not restricted to IT and financial stocks. Nifty Realty gained 1.45%, Auto advanced 1.30%, Oil & Gas rose 0.83% and FMCG added 0.81%.

Among other Sensex heavyweights, Hindustan Unilever gained 2.28%, Mahindra & Mahindra rose 1.95%, Power Grid advanced 1.01% and Larsen & Toubro gained nearly 1%. However, the rally was not broad-based across all sectors. Nifty Pharma declined 1.37%, Nifty Healthcare fell 1.24%, Nifty 500 Healthcare lost 1.18% and Nifty Metal slipped 0.49%. **NO MAJOR OIL PRICE SPIKE DESPITE US-IRAN TENSIONS**
The third factor supporting sentiment was the relatively contained movement in crude oil prices despite continued tensions between the US and Iran. Brent crude was trading at \$85.58 per barrel, up 1.60%, while WTI crude gained 1.84% to \$80.40. While crude prices remained elevated and moved higher during the session, the absence of a much sharper spike despite the ongoing geopolitical tensions offered some relief to domestic investors. Crude oil prices are particularly important for Indian markets as the country is one of the world's biggest oil importers. A sharp and sustained rise in crude can increase India's import bill, add to inflationary pressures and put further pressure on the rupee. However, geopolitical



REC to Set Up 20 Smart Classrooms in West Bengal Schools

GURUGRAM:

REC Limited, a Maharatna CPSE under the Ministry of Power and a leading NBFC, has signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) with Career Forum for the implementation of a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) project titled "Establishment of 20 Smart Classrooms in Government Schools of Alipurduar, West Bengal." The MoA was signed on July 14, 2026 by Shri Arun Kumar Tyagi, Executive Director (CSR), REC Limited, and Shri Anant Chauhan, Chairman, Career Forum, in the presence of Shri L. B. Nautiyal, HoD (CSR), REC Limited, along with other senior officials of REC Limited. Under this CSR initiative, 20 Smart Class-

rooms will be established in Government schools across the Alipurduar district of West Bengal. The project is expected to benefit more than 1,500 students by providing access to technology-enabled, interactive learning tools that foster greater classroom engagement and improve learning outcomes. The initiative is aimed at strengthening digital education infrastructure in rural and tribal areas of West Bengal by integrating modern teaching technologies into government schools. It reflects REC Limited's continued commitment to bridging the digital divide, promoting inclusive education, and empowering students with access to quality, technology-driven learning opportunities.

SEBI warns firms against 'Boss Scam' cyber fraud targeting CEOs

MUMBAI, JULY 17

Capital markets regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) on Friday cautioned listed companies and regulated entities against an emerging cyber fraud known as the "Boss Scam", in which cybercriminals impersonate chief executive officers (CEOs), managing directors (MDs) or other senior officials to trick employees into transferring funds. The advisory comes after the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) flagged a rise in CEO and MD impersonation frauds targeting organisations through email, WhatsApp, Microsoft Teams and other social media platforms. According to SEBI, fraudsters pose as senior executives and send urgent messages or make calls instructing finance or accounts personnel to transfer money to specified bank accounts. "Fraudsters are targeting CEO or high ranking official via email or WhatsApp by impersonating them. The communication through email/WhatsApp/Microsoft Teams/other social media platforms with their subordinates or counterparts, directs them to



carry out instructions given to them resulting in transfer of funds to fraudsters," SEBI said in its advisory. In some cases, cybercriminals use artificial intelligence-based tools such as voice cloning and deepfake video calls to make the impersonation appear authentic. The regulator also warned about another modus operandi in which fraudsters send a compressed ZIP file containing malicious software. Once opened on a Windows device, the malware can hijack an active WhatsApp Web session, enabling cybercriminals to access the victim's account and send fraudulent payment instructions to finance teams. SEBI said fraudsters may also manipulate contact lists on compromised devices by saving their own phone numbers under the names of CEOs or managing directors, making fraudulent calls or messages appear genuine.

Jio Platforms net profit rises 9.2 pc to Rs 7,764 cr in Q1

NEW DELHI: (Jul 17) Jio Platforms on Friday reported a 9.2 per cent increase in profit after tax to Rs 7,764 crore in the first quarter ended June 2026, driven by sustained gains in subscriber market share, ARPU and sale of digital services. Jio Platforms (JPL), which houses digital and telecom businesses, had posted profit after tax (PAT) of Rs 7,110 crore a year ago. "The Digital Services business continued its growth momentum during the quarter. Jio's performance across mobility, home broadband and enterprise services remained strong, driving healthy earnings growth of 15 per cent Y-o-Y," Reliance Industries Limited Chairman and Managing Director, Mukesh Ambani said in a statement.

EPFO plans universal PF for self-employed, gig and unorganised workers

If implemented, the proposed scheme could significantly expand India's social security system by giving millions of self-employed individuals and workers in the unorganised sector an opportunity to save for retirement through a trusted and structured provident fund mechanism. For years, the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) has largely been linked to salaried jobs in the organised sector. But what if you're a freelancer, a gig worker, a shop owner or someone who works for yourself? You may soon be able to save for retirement through the same system. The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) is working on a framework that could allow self-employed individuals, gig workers, people employed in the unorganised sector and workers in exempted establishments to voluntarily contribute to a universal provident fund scheme, reported The Times of India. If



the proposal goes ahead, millions who are currently outside the EPF network could finally get access to a structured retirement savings plan. The proposal is still in its early stages, but if it gets the green light, it could bring social security benefits to millions of workers who are currently outside the EPF system. **WHO COULD BENEFIT?**
At present, EPF mainly covers employees working in establishments with 20 or more workers. This leaves a large section of In-

dia's workforce outside the social security system. The proposed scheme aims to include self-employed professionals, freelancers and consultants, gig workers, including delivery partners and cab drivers, workers in the unorganised sector, and employees of exempted establishments who are not part of the regular EPFO framework. The idea is to give these workers an opportunity to build retirement savings through a voluntary provident fund account.

FLEXIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS
Unlike the existing EPF system, where employers and employees make monthly contributions, the proposed scheme is expected to offer much greater flexibility. Subscribers may be able to contribute as often as they like, daily, monthly or even once a year, depending on their income and financial situation. This could make the scheme more practical for people whose earnings are irregular, such as freelancers or gig workers. **TAX BENEFITS**
The accumulation phase of the proposed scheme is expected to work on lines similar to the existing EPF model. According to officials, annual contributions of up to Rs 2.5 lakh could enjoy full tax exemption. The interest earned on these contributions is also expected to remain tax-free, similar to the present EPF rules. This means subscribers could

build a retirement corpus while also benefiting from tax savings. **ENTIRELY SELF-FUNDED**
Unlike the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan Yojana, where the Central government contributes half of the pension contribution, the proposed EPFO scheme will not receive any financial support from the government, mentioned the report. Subscribers will build their retirement corpus entirely through their own contributions. **WORK ON THE FRAMEWORK HAS BEGUN**
Although the government has not yet formally approved the proposal, EPFO has already floated a tender to develop the IT infrastructure needed to support the scheme. The proposal also fits with the implementation of the new labour codes, under which online platforms such as food delivery companies and taxi aggregators have been asked to register their workers.

Mangalya Shopping Mall Expands Footprint: Grand Opening of 32nd Store

HYDERABAD, JULY 17, 2026:

Mangalya Shopping Mall, a trailblazer in the retail textile industry, celebrated a significant milestone today with the grand inauguration of its 32nd branch in Dilsukhnagar, Hyderabad. Since its inception in Warangal in 2012, the brand has been synonymous with quality, affordability, and trendsetting fashion across Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka. The grand opening ceremony was graced by popular film actress Meenakshi Chaudhary, who served as the Chief Guest. Amidst a large gathering of enthusiastic fans and customers, she lit the ceremonial lamp and inaugurated the new store. Following the ribbon-cutting ceremony, she explored the diverse collections and interacted warmly with her fans. Speaking at



the event, Meenakshi Chaudhary stated, "I am confident that the people of Dilsukhnagar will extend their support to Mangalya Shopping Mall. With their blessings, this branch is set to achieve great success." The Directors of Mangalya Shopping Mall—Pulluru Narasimha Murthy, Kasam Namashivaya, Kasam Mallikarjun, Kasam Kedarinath, Kasam Shiva Prasad, and Pulluru Arun Kumar—shared their vision for the brand:

- Customer-Centric Value: "Our success lies in providing high-quality clothing for every segment and occasion at affordable prices."
- Modern Heritage: "By integrating our own handloom products with contemporary market trends, we remain at the forefront of the textile industry."

The new store offers a comprehensive family shopping experience, featuring the latest fashion collections for men, women, and children.

Future Expansion Plans
Addressing the media regarding future growth, the directors announced plans to launch 10 new projects across Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka in the near future. They also revealed plans to expand their footprint into Tamil Nadu. Aiming to be the premier retail destination on a pan-India scale, the directors cordially invited all families to visit the new Dilsukhnagar store to experience a new standard in retail.

Maruti Challenges Landmark E20 Ruling, Blames Contaminated Fuel

Maruti Suzuki has said it will challenge a consumer court order directing the carmaker to replace a customer's Grand Vitara in what has emerged as India's first legal ruling involving alleged vehicle damage linked to E20 petrol.



The country's largest carmaker has disputed the finding, saying the Grand Vitara involved in the case was already compatible with E20 petrol and that there was evidence of contamination in the fuel collected from the customer's vehicle. The response comes after the District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, directed Maruti Suzuki to replace the customer's vehicle with a new E20-compatible car. The ruling has attracted attention amid a wider debate over India's shift

to petrol blended with 20% ethanol. "The car in this case was an E20 compatible car, fully equipped to handle E20 fuel and so disclosed in the owner's manual. There is evidence of contamination in the fuel collected from the customer's vehicle. Several other relevant facts have also not been reflected in the order," Maruti Suzuki said in a statement. The company said it would take the "necessary steps" to challenge the order before an appropriate higher forum in accordance with the law.

WHAT IS THE E20 CASE ABOUT?

The dispute involves a customer who approached the consumer commission alleging that E20 petrol had caused problems with a Maruti Suzuki Grand Vitara Strong Hybrid. The consumer court directed Maruti Suzuki to provide the customer with a replacement Grand Vitara or pay Rs 20 lakh in damages. The case is being closely watched as the first known legal ruling in India concerning alleged vehicle damage from E20 petrol. Other reports on the consumer commission's order said the carmaker and dealer were directed to take back the vehicle and provide a new E20-compatible car of the same model. If the replacement was not completed within the stipulated period, the order provided for a refund of the vehicle cost and registration charges.

MARUTI SAYS E20 WAS

NOT THE PROBLEM

Maruti Suzuki's defence, however, challenges the central premise of the dispute. The company maintains that the vehicle was already designed to run on E20 petrol and that this compatibility was clearly mentioned in the owner's manual. More importantly, Maruti has pointed to what it says was evidence of contamination in the fuel taken from the vehicle. This means the two sides differ on a crucial question: whether the problems experienced by the customer were linked to E20 petrol itself or to the quality of the fuel used in the vehicle. Maruti also claimed that "several other relevant facts" were not reflected in the consumer commission's order, although its statement did not provide further details on those facts. Maruti Suzuki has made it clear that the consumer commission's ruling may not be the final word in the matter.





India's Real Estate Market in 2026

A Market Rebounding with Confidence

After facing disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic, India's property market has witnessed a remarkable recovery. Home sales have consistently remained strong across major metropolitan cities, while commercial real estate has benefited from the return of employees to offices and expanding Global Capability Centres (GCCs). Developers have become more disciplined, launching projects only after securing approvals and ensuring adequate financing. Buyers are also more informed than ever before, comparing projects online, verifying approvals, and preferring reputed developers. The result is a healthier market characterised by stronger demand, better regulation, and improved accountability.

Residential Housing Continues to Lead

The residential segment remains the largest contributor to India's real estate industry. Demand has been particularly strong in cities such as Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Pune, Chennai, Mumbai, Delhi-NCR, Ahmedabad, and Kolkata.

Several factors are driving home purchases:

- Rising household incomes
- Stable employment in IT, manufacturing, banking, and services
- Improved mortgage availability
- Growing preference for home ownership
- Nuclear family structures
- Better lifestyle aspirations

Luxury housing has emerged as one of the fastest-growing segments. High-net-worth individuals, NRIs, entrepreneurs, and professionals are increasingly investing in premium apartments and villas offering smart home technology, clubhouses, wellness facilities, and sustainable features. Meanwhile, affordable housing continues to receive policy support, although rising land prices and construction costs have slowed supply in several cities.

Infrastructure Is Driving Property Growth

Infrastructure has become one of the biggest catalysts for real estate appreciation. Projects such as expressways, metro rail networks, regional rapid transit systems, new airports, industrial corridors, and

logistics parks are reshaping urban development. Cities are expanding beyond traditional centres as improved connectivity allows buyers to consider suburban locations. Areas located near metro stations, ring roads, expressways, and upcoming airports are witnessing significant appreciation in land values. Infrastructure-led growth has particularly benefited states including Telangana, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh.

Commercial Real Estate Regains Momentum

India remains one of the world's most attractive office markets. Global companies continue expanding operations through Global Capability Centres (GCCs), technology hubs, financial services, engineering centres, and research facilities. Bengaluru continues to dominate office leasing, followed by Hyderabad, Pune, Chennai, Mumbai, and Delhi-NCR.

Modern office spaces now focus on:

- Flexible workspaces
 - Energy-efficient buildings
 - Smart security systems
 - Green certifications
 - Employee wellness
 - Hybrid workplace designs
- Although remote work remains common in some industries, companies increasingly prefer collaborative office environments, supporting steady demand for Grade-A office space.

Warehousing and Logistics Witness Rapid Expansion

India's logistics sector has transformed significantly following the implementation of GST and the rapid growth of e-commerce. Major online retailers, manufacturing companies, third-party logistics providers, and FMCG firms continue investing heavily in large warehouses across strategic locations.

Demand is strongest around:

- Delhi-NCR
- Mumbai Metropolitan Region
- Bengaluru
- Hyderabad
- Chennai
- Pune
- Ahmedabad

The government's focus on multimodal logistics parks and freight corridors is expected to further strengthen this segment.

Growth with Challenges

India's real estate sector has emerged as one of the country's strongest economic pillars. Contributing nearly 7% to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the industry is expected to account for around 13% of GDP by 2030. Housing, commercial offices, retail spaces, industrial parks, warehouses, and data centres

Data Centres Create a New Asset Class

India's digital economy is driving enormous demand for data centres. Cloud computing, artificial intelligence, digital banking, streaming platforms, e-commerce, and government digitisation initiatives require secure data storage infrastructure. Cities like Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Noida, and Pune have become preferred destinations for data centre investments due to reliable connectivity and power availability. Global investors view India's data centre market as one of the fastest-growing in Asia.

Rise of Tier-II and Tier-III Cities

Smaller cities are becoming major real estate destinations. Improved highways, better internet connectivity, expanding educational institutions, industrial investments, and remote work have encouraged families and professionals to settle beyond metropolitan areas. Cities such as Visakhapatnam, Coimbatore, Indore, Lucknow, Bhubaneswar, Nagpur, Surat, Jaipur, Kochi, and Vijayawada are attracting significant residential and commercial investments. Lower property prices and improving infrastructure make these cities attractive for first-time buyers and investors.

Technology Is Transforming Real Estate

Conclusion

India's real estate sector stands at a pivotal moment. Strong economic growth, rapid urbanisation, expanding infrastructure, and supportive government policies have created a favourable environment for long-term development. Residential housing, commercial offices, logistics parks, warehouses, and data centres are all contributing to the sector's momentum. However, sustained success will depend on balancing growth with affordability, transparency, and sustainable urban

planning. Developers, governments, financial institutions, and investors must work together to create cities that are not only economically vibrant but also inclusive and environmentally responsible.

If these challenges are addressed effectively, India's real estate market has the potential to become one of the largest and most dynamic in the world over the next decade, providing millions of homes, generating employment, attracting investment, and driving the country's economic transformation.

Technology has fundamentally changed the way Indians buy and sell property.

Today's buyers can:

- Take virtual property tours
- Compare prices online
- Verify legal approvals
- Check neighbourhood reviews
- Calculate EMIs instantly
- Complete digital documentation

Artificial Intelligence is helping developers understand buyer preferences, while drones, Building Information Modelling (BIM), and construction automation are improving project execution. PropTech companies are simplifying transactions and improving transparency across the sector.

Sustainability Gains Importance

Environmental sustainability has become a major focus for developers.

Modern projects increasingly incorporate:

- Solar power
- Rainwater harvesting
- Waste management systems
- Electric vehicle charging stations
- Energy-efficient lighting
- Green landscaping
- Water recycling

Buyers are showing greater interest in environmentally responsible homes due to lower maintenance costs and healthier living environments.

Green-certified buildings also attract higher rental demand from multinational companies.

Government Policies Supporting Growth

Government initiatives continue to support long-term expansion.

Key reforms include:

- RERA improving transparency
- PM Awas Yojana encouraging affordable housing
- Smart Cities Mission
- Digital land records
- Metro rail expansion
- Industrial corridors
- Infrastructure spending
- Housing finance support

These measures have improved investor confidence while making the sector more organised.

Challenges Facing the Sector

Despite robust growth, several issues continue to affect India's real estate market.

Affordability Concerns

Property prices have risen significantly across major cities. Combined with higher interest rates and inflation, many middle-income buyers are finding home ownership increasingly difficult. Developers also face rising input costs for cement, steel, labour, and land.

Delayed Project Approvals

Obtaining approvals from multiple government departments often delays project launches. Faster single-window clearance systems could significantly improve project timelines and reduce costs.

Land Acquisition Issues

Land acquisition remains one of the industry's biggest challenges. Disputed ownership, fragmented land records, litigation, and high acquisition costs continue to delay major projects. Digitisation of land records is expected to improve transparency over time.

Urban Infrastructure Pressure Rapid Urbanisation has increased pressure on:

- Roads
- Water supply
- Sewage systems
- Public transport
- Schools
- Healthcare facilities
- Without adequate planning, rapid real estate expansion could strain city infrastructure.

Investment Trends

Both domestic and foreign investors remain optimistic

about India's property market.

Institutional investors are actively funding:

- Office buildings
- Warehouses
- Data centres
- Residential projects
- Mixed-use developments

Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) have also gained popularity, allowing retail investors to participate in commercial real estate without purchasing physical property. NRIs continue investing heavily in Indian residential markets, particularly in cities offering strong rental yields and long-term appreciation.

Telangana: A Real Estate Success Story

Telangana, especially Hyderabad, has become one of India's strongest real estate markets. The city's IT ecosystem, expanding metro network, Outer Ring Road, airport connectivity, pharmaceutical industry, and Global Capability Centres have created sustained housing demand. Neighbourhoods around Financial District, Gachibowli, Kokapet, Narsingi, Telapur, and Kompally have witnessed rapid appreciation. Government initiatives supporting industrial growth and infrastructure development continue attracting domestic and international investors.

The Outlook for the Next Decade

Industry experts believe India's real estate market is entering a long-term growth cycle. Urbanisation is expected to accelerate, with millions of people migrating to cities over the next decade. Rising incomes, expanding employment opportunities, improved infrastructure, and technological innovation are likely to sustain demand across residential, commercial, industrial, and logistics segments. Smart cities, transit-oriented development, mixed-use projects, and sustainable construction practices will define the future of urban development. Artificial Intelligence, digital property registration, blockchain-based land records, and smart building technologies are expected to improve transparency and operational efficiency. At the same time, policymakers must address affordability, simplify approvals, strengthen urban planning, and ensure adequate infrastructure to support future growth.



Goa Challengers equal biggest win with Delhi demolition; Ayhika stars as Kolkata beat Ahmedabad

UTT Season 7 Ayhika hands Sofia Polcanova first defeat as Kolkata beat Ahmedabad



PANAJI (GOA): Asian Games medalist Ayhika Mukherjee became the first player to defeat Sofia Polcanova in a Season 7 match of the Ultimate Table Tennis (UTT) as HVR Kolkata ThunderBlades registered their second win of the campaign with a 9-6 victory over Ahmedabad APL Pipers at the Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Indoor Stadium in Taleigao near Panaji on Friday. Ayhika's impressive triumph over the Austrian star capped another strong all-around display from Kolkata, who climbed further into playoff contention.

Swiss Open Cerundolo sinks Ruud, top seed Bublik out on day of upsets in Gstaad



GSTAAD (SWITZERLAND): On an eventful day at the Swiss Open 2026 at Gstaad, the top three seeds failed to survive Friday's action as top seed Alexander Bublik, Casper Ruud, and Valentin Vacherot all suffered defeat in the ATP 250 event being played on clay in this Swiss town. Quentin Halys overcame Bublik in three sets while Juan Manuel Cerundolo stunned Norwegian Casper Ruud, the second seed in the event. Cerundolo, who rallied from two sets and a double break down to stun the physically struggling World No. 1 Jannik Sinner at Roland Garros in May, rediscovered his penchant for a hard-earned upset by downing Ruud 3-6, 7-5, 6-2. The second-seeded Ruud led 4-2 in the second set, but was unable to prevent Cerundolo from completing.

PANAJI (GOA),

Two-time champions Dempo Goa Challengers recorded a commanding 12-3 victory over Dabang Delhi TTC in Ultimate Table Tennis (UTT) Season 7 on Friday, equalling the biggest margin of victory in the five-match format and strengthening their grip at the top of the standings at the Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Indoor Stadium in Taleigao near Panaji.

Earlier in the day, Ayhika Mukherjee became the first player to defeat Sofia Polcanova this season as HVR Kolkata ThunderBlades registered a crucial 9-6 victory over Ahmedabad APL Pipers to boost their playoff hopes.

Goa's victory was built on absolute domination throughout, with Alvaro Robles, Abhinandh PB, Syndrelda Das, and Bernadette Szocs all winning their respective singles matches. Robles and Das also combined to hand Sathiyam Gnanasekaran and Maria Xiao their second successive Mixed Doubles defeat. Kolkata, meanwhile, recovered from an early deficit through a decisive mixed doubles win, a clinical Eduard Ionescu performance, and Ayhika's landmark comeback against Polcanova.

Unbeaten ahead of the tie, Goa set the tone immediately as Robles swept aside Sathiyam in straight games before Syndrelda edged fellow teenager Divyanshi Bhowmick in a high-quality contest between two of the league's and the country's brightest young prospects. Robles and Syndrelda then combined superbly in the mixed doubles, overpowering the normally formidable pairing of Sathiyam and



Xiao across the opening two games to stretch Goa's advantage.

Abhinandh continued his remarkable unbeaten run with another commanding straight-games victory, this time over Youssef Abdelaziz, before reigning MVP Bernadette completed the rout by defeating Xiao. Abhinandh picked up the ChatGPT Match IQ Player of the Tie, the Indian Player of the Tie, and the Bisleri Shot of the Tie awards, while Robles was named the Foreign Player of the Tie.

Staged under the aegis of the Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI), the UTT features 42 players from around the world, including 14 Olympians, while continuing to strengthen the Indian table tennis ecosystem through elite competition and year-round development initiatives.

In the day's first tie, Ahmedabad

made the brighter start as Adrien Rassenfosse edged Ankur Bhattacharjee in a dramatic contest, winning the final two games on Golden Point, before Manika Batra overcame Zeng Jian in another three-game battle to hand the Pipers an early advantage.

Kolkata responded emphatically. Ankur and Ayhika dominated the mixed doubles before Ionescu levelled the tie with a commanding straight-games victory over Payas Jain. Ayhika then completed a memorable comeback, recovering after losing the opening game to become the first player to defeat Polcanova this season and seal Kolkata's second victory of the campaign. Ionescu was named both the ChatGPT Match IQ Player and Foreign Player of the Tie, while Ayhika claimed Indian Player of the Tie honours.

Manika earned the Bisleri Shot of the Tie. Earlier, UTT Juniors, Butterfly UTT's grassroots competition running alongside Season 7, saw Dabang Delhi TTC defeat PBG Pune Jaguars 6-3 to seal their place in the semifinals. The result confirmed the final four lineup, with Delhi joining UP Prometheans, U Mumba TT, and Dempo Goa Challengers in the knockout stage.

Final score:
HVR Kolkata ThunderBlades 9-6 Ahmedabad APL Pipers
Ankur Bhattacharjee lost to Adrien Rassenfosse 1-2 (11-10, 10-11, 10-11)
Zeng Jian lost to Manika Batra 1-2 (7-11, 11-6, 10-11)
Ankur Bhattacharjee/Ayhika Mukherjee bt. Payas Jain/Sofia Polcanova 2-1 (11-9, 11-3, 4-11).



Laporta keeps the pressure on Atletico over possible Alvarez transfer

MADRID

FC Barcelona president Joan Laporta continues to insist the club wants to sign Argentina international forward Julian Alvarez from Atletico Madrid.

Speaking on radio station Cadena Ser early on Friday morning, Laporta said Barcelona have made Atletico "a very significant offer", but he also tried to pressure Atletico by saying the offer would not remain on the table indefinitely. "If they're willing to accept it, fantastic, but it won't be open-ended. We have to make a decision. Whether we maintain the offer or not depends on how these last two weeks of July unfold," he added.

Atletico maintain a firm public stance against bowing to what they view as an illegal approach for Alvarez from Barcelona, especially after the player himself commented in June that he wanted to leave, reports Xinhua.

"I try to be an honest person. I spoke with people at the club, and I think the best thing for everyone is a transfer," Alvarez told a press conference on June

22, with Laporta using those words as leverage.

"The player has spoken out, and that's why the matter is still open. It's clear he wants a change of scenery, and we're ready to welcome him. We'll see how it all unfolds," explained the Barcelona president, who insisted the club had other options. "If the Julian deal doesn't materialize, we have alternatives," said Laporta. Atletico are angry at the tactics Barcelona have used to try to influence Alvarez and have repeatedly highlighted that the forward has a contract until 2030 and a release clause of 500 million euros.

Real Madrid recently had a 150-million-euro bid for Alvarez publicly rejected by Atletico, but the forward is thought to want a move to FC Barcelona. The 26-year-old has scored 49 goals in 106 appearances for Atletico, but has endured two seasons in which the club has failed to win a title, finishing fourth in La Liga last season, as well as losing the Champions League semifinal to Arsenal and the Copa del Rey final to Real Sociedad.

Shafali, Jemimah prepared to take over India T20I captaincy, says Mithali Raj

NEW DELHI

Former India captain Mithali Raj on Friday has backed youngsters Shafali Verma and Jemimah Rodrigues as future leaders of the national side in the shortest format, stating that both cricketers are 'truly prepared' to take over the mantle from Harmanpreet Kaur.

Mithali's comments come after India suffered group-stage exits in two consecutive editions of the T20 World Cup under Harmanpreet's leadership. Harmanpreet, 37, led India to an unforgettable ODI World Cup title win on home soil last year. But under her leadership in T20Is since 2018, India are yet to win a T20 World Cup.

As of now, Harmanpreet is set to lead India in the Asian Games in Japan in September-October and is expected to captain them in the



Women's Asia Cup in August-September. Responding to a fan on social media platform 'X' who questioned her advocacy for Shafali over current India vice-captain Smriti Mandhana, Mithali clarified that her vision was aimed at the long-term future of the team. "That's a fair question.

This isn't about Smriti's ability to lead, and I have no doubt about that, which is why I've mentioned that's she's well suited to captain India in the longer formats," Mithali wrote on 'X'.

Detailing her rationale behind endorsing Shafali, who has been a mainstay in the national side for

seven years and captained India to its first U19 World Cup trophy in 2023, Mithali explained, "My thought on Shafali is more about looking ahead. She's still young, has one of the best strike rates, can bowl and has been in the T20 setup since 2019; leadership is developed not on the shelf but on the field.

Speaking about Jemimah, who led Delhi Capitals to being runners-up in WPL 2026, Mithali added, "Likewise, Jemimah, she is a part of every International T20 league. And it's true she didn't have a good World Cup but that can happen to any player.

"She is a team player, selfless and an excellent player of spin; she also saves 20-25 runs every game with her fielding which often goes unnoticed. So according to me both are truly prepared."

Chennai Grand Masters 2026: Firouzja beat Gukesh to extend lead after second round

CHENNAI

French Grandmaster (GM) Alireza Firouzja eked out yet another gruelling victory to register his second straight win in the fourth edition of the Chennai Grand Masters 2026, India's most prestigious classical chess tournament, at the Westin Hotel in Chennai on Friday. Firouzja, who had defeated GM M Pranesh with black pieces on the opening day, got the better of world champion Dommaraju Gukesh after 69 moves to take his tally to two points after two rounds.

Organised by MGD1, the tournament witnesses eight grandmasters face off in a double-round robin format and offers a prize purse of Rs 75,00,000 and valuable FIDE Circuit points. After Deepraj Mukherjee, General Manager of Westin Chennai Velachery, made the ceremonial first move in the game between Firouzja and Gukesh, the Frenchman opted for a Ruy Lopez opening with white. It looked like Gukesh could hold out against the French GM in a knight-pawn ending, but a pawn sacrifice by Firouzja opened the door for a clinical win.

M Pranesh, who had lost his opening round with white, did not take any chances with black pieces against GM Dmitry Andreikin and settled for a draw by repeating in just 18 moves. GM Arjun Erigaisi also played it safe against GM Nodirbek Abdusattorov with black pieces, and the Uzbek signed the peace treaty after 43 moves. GM Nihal Sarin also held Hans Niemann to a draw after a marathon 132-move game in which he thwarted all the moves of his US opponent to gain the upper hand. Earlier, Firouzja registered the sole win of the opening day against Indian GM M Pranesh in the fourth edition of the Chennai Grand Masters 2026, India's most prestigious classical chess tournament.

15th Major Dhyan Chand Inter School Cross Country Championship will be held at Noida Stadium on August 31

S. N. Verma

NOIDA

The Association for Sports and Cultural Advancement (SSCA) has announced an annual inter-school cross-country championship on National Sports Day. This time the championship will be held on August 31 at the Noida Stadium. Teams from any school in Delhi-NCR can participate in this competition. Entry of individual players will not be accepted. This information was given by the president of the society, Subhash Agarwal.

The speaker said that a special general meeting of the society was called to discuss various issues at the SSCA Public Library running at the Nithari Community Centre. In which the date of the 15th Major Dhyan Chand Inter School Cross Country Championship was also discussed. Since Raksha Bandhan on August 28 (Friday) and August 29 (Saturday) will be holidays in schools this time. Therefore, all members unanimously set the date of August 31 for the competition.

Ashok Saini, vice president and sports in-charge of the organisation, said that the competition will be held in both boys and girls categories. There



will be a race of about 4 km for boys and 2 km for girls. The top 10-10 players in both categories will be honoured by giving special certificates and medals. While the top 3-3 schools will be given the winner trophy. Apart from this, cash prizes will

also be given to 1-1 champion players who come in the first position in both categories.

Vimalesh Sharma, convener and founding member of the society, said that the organisation has been working continuously for the last 15 years to promote sports activities in the city. Inter School Cross Country Champion is organised at Noida Stadium on National Sports Day, Inter School Drawing Competition on 3rd December on National Disay and Inter School Folk Dance Competition (Noida Basant Festival) in the first week of February on Basant Panchami.

He said that all these competitions are completely free, in which all children are honoured by giving certificates, snacks and trophies to participate. Founder members of the organisation Professor MMA Baig, Santosh Sharma, Treasurer Narendra Kuchhal, Secretary Devendra Kumar and Member Dr. Nimesh Kumar were also present on the occasion.

BCCI, Windies Cricket, Harbhajan, Ishant, Rahane pay tributes to Sir Garry Sobers

MUMBAI

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), West Indies Cricket, England Cricket, former India cricketers Harbhajan Singh, Ishant Sharma, and Ajinkya Rahane led the cricket fraternity in paying tributes to Sir Garfield Sobers, the cricket icon who passed away on Friday.

Sobers, widely regarded as the greatest all-rounder the game has ever produced, leaves behind an unmatched legacy built on remarkable achievements with both bat and ball. The West Indies icon will always be remembered as the first player to hit six sixes in a single over in first-class cricket. He accomplished this feat in 1968 at St Helen's Ground in Swansea while playing for Nottinghamshire against Glamorgan. In a post on X, the Indian cricket board said: "The BCCI mourns the passing of Sir Garfield Sobers, a true icon of the game and one of cricket's greatest-ever all-rounders.

"His extraordinary achievements, lasting influence on Caribbean cricket, and immeasurable contribution to the global game have left an enduring legacy that will continue to inspire generations. Our heartfelt condolences



es to his family, friends, and the global cricketing fraternity. May his soul rest in peace." The BCCI said in its post that was accompanied by a video showing Sobers meeting Indian players, including former captains Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli.

"A great innings has come to an end. In our hearts, now and forever, Sir Garfield Sobers," Windies Cricket, the official handle of the West Indies Cricket, wrote in an Insta story on their official Instagram handle. Born in Barbados, Sobers made his first-class debut at just 16 in 1953. The following year, he earned a West Indies Test cap. His rise to greatness was quick. In 1958, against Pakistan, he scored an unbeaten 365, setting a new world record for the highest individual Test score.

‘Why has it come this far?’ – Ashwin demands clarity for Rohit and Kohli ahead of 2027 ODI WC



NEW DELHI

Former India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin has strongly questioned the team management and national selectors over the prolonged uncertainty on future of veteran batters Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, and has demanded immediate clarity for the duo ahead of the 2027 ODI World Cup.

IANS had reported that the Ajit Agarkar-led selection committee were unlikely to pick Rohit in the ODI format after the third and final game of the series, currently tied at 1-1, at Lord's in London on

Sunday.

Ashwin also stated that if the decision-makers had already resolved to move past the legendary pair for the upcoming mega event in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia, the roadmap should have been explicitly communicated to them immediately after India's Champions Trophy triumph in March 2025.

"Yashasvi Jaiswal is pushing hard from behind. But if, as a selector, coach, captain or whoever the decision-maker is - if you've already decided in your mind that these players are not going to the 2027 World Cup, and you

don't want them... then that should have been communicated immediately after the Champions Trophy. I know it's a double-edged sword," Ashwin said on his YouTube show Ash Ki Baat.

Acknowledging that being phased out is never easy for any cricketer, Ashwin stated that transparent communication remains vital to prevent senior players from feeling unwanted in the dressing room. "If you go and tell players that you want to move on from them, no player will feel good about it. Even if the selectors or the coach had come to me in Australia and said, 'We

want to move past you. We're done with you.' "I would also have felt bad. I'd think, 'One bad series... is that enough? Every player is allowed one poor series.' That's how every player would feel. But once it's done, you can at least say, 'Okay... the communication was clear,'" he observed.

Questioning the timing of the current uncertainty, Ashwin expressed bewilderment over why the situation has been allowed to linger with less than a year left for the global event's commencement.

"Maybe it has already happened in Rohit's case. Maybe it has happened in Virat's case. Virat has been excellent. Rohit has been more than decent. So why have we allowed this to drag on until August 2026... ..when there are only 10-12 months left before the 2027 World Cup in South Africa? Why has it come this far? That's my only question. "If either of those two players doesn't feel wanted, two things will happen. First, they cannot perform at their best. Second, they will start feeling low about themselves for simply being there. Think about it once. "If you're in a house where people don't want you to stay, can you really live comfortably in that house? We're going to South Africa in September-October. Do we need Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma? If you ask me, I would want that experience," concluded Ashwin.



Rakul Lauds Tollywood, Slams Bollywood

Actress Rakul Preet Singh has made some striking observations about the contrasting work cultures of the Telugu and Hindi film industries. While showering praise on Tollywood for its spirit of unity and mutual encouragement, she expressed disappointment over what she described as insecurity and jealousy within Bollywood. Speaking in a recent interview, Rakul reflected on her journey in cinema, which began in the Telugu film industry. She credited Tollywood for playing a crucial role in shaping her career and highlighted the supportive environment that exists among actors and filmmakers. "People in the Telugu film industry openly support each other's films. It's common to see actors launching trailers, attending pre-release events, and promoting the work of their colleagues. Despite professional competition, everyone genuinely celebrates each other's success," Rakul said. Drawing a comparison with Bollywood, the actress remarked that such camaraderie is rarely seen in the Hindi film industry. According to her, insecurity and professional jealousy often prevent artists from extending support to one another. She also claimed that some individuals even resort to negative PR campaigns to damage the reputation of others. Rakul believes Bollywood can become stronger if it adopts the collaborative culture that has become a hallmark of the Telugu film industry. "The Telugu industry is built on unity and goodwill. If the Hindi film industry embraces these values, it will only grow stronger," she said. This is not the first time Rakul has spoken highly of Tollywood. In the past,

she has praised leading stars like Mahesh Babu and Allu Arjun

for their humility, discipline, and professionalism. She has repeatedly acknowledged that her experiences in the South Indian film industry laid the foundation for her successful career and that the immense love from Telugu audiences has played a significant role in her growth. Her latest comments have sparked widespread discussion on social media. Many Telugu cinema fans have welcomed her remarks and appreciated the gratitude she continues to show toward the industry that gave her some of the biggest opportunities of her career. Netizens have praised Rakul for recognizing Tollywood's collaborative spirit and for openly expressing respect toward the people and culture that helped shape her journey in films.



Kamal Haasan Celebrates Bharathiraja

Actor, producer and parliamentarian Kamal Haasan has penned an emotional post recalling his friendship with one of Tamil cinema's iconic directors Bharathirajaa on the occasion of the latter's birthday on Friday. Taking to his X timeline, Kamal Haasan, who has worked with Bharathirajaa on a number of films, wrote in Tamil, "Indru nam piranthanaal Vaazhthukalai yaerka anbu nanbar Bharathirajaa nammidaiyae illaiyenninum, avar padaipukkal irrukindra-na. Avar paratiya natpai ennenjam negizhndu ninaivu-koorugiradhu. (Today, our dear friend Bharathirajaa is not among us to accept our birthday wishes. However, his creations are there. My heart fondly remembers our friendship which he celebrated.)"

For the unaware, legendary director Bharthiraja passed away on June 10 this year, a month before his birthday on July 17. The Padma Shri Award winner, who was considered to be a trendsetter in Tamil and Indian cinema, had been battling health issues for sometime. Known for showcasing the rural Tamil lifestyle with flair on screen with his movies, many of which dealt with societal problems, Bharathirajaa, whose opening lines 'En Iniya Tamil Makkale...' are popular in Tamil Nadu to this day, was known for his brilliant direction and his ability to spot



new talent. The ace director, who has won six National Awards, won the Tamil Nadu government's state award for best direction for his very first film, '16 Vayathinile', which featured Kamal Haasan, Rajinikanth and Sridevi in the lead. Born to Periya Mayathevar and Meenakshi Ammal alias Karuthammal on July 17, 1941 in Alli Nagaram in Theni district, Bharathirajaa was originally named Chinnasamy. The director, who has directed around 44 films in his illustrious career, has delivered several cult classics including the Sivaji Ganesan-starrer 'Mudhal Mariyadhai', 'Mann Vasana', 'Pudhumai Penn', 'Vedham Pudhithu', 'Kizhaku Cheemaiyile', 'Karuthamma' and 'Naadodi Thendral'. Apart from directing, Bharathirajaa was also a brilliant actor. He made his debut as an actor in Kallukkul Eeram and then went on to act in a number of movies including Nizhalgal, Dhaavani Kanavugal, Idhayam, Aayudha Ezhuthu, Rettai Suzhi, Pandiya Naadu, Seethakaadhi, Maanaadu, Eeswaran, and Thiruchitrambalam.

Kiran Abbavaram's KA13 BTS: A Taste Of Joyful Ride



Kiran Abbavaram, first time is wearing multiple creative hats, leading the film not only as its protagonist but also as its story writer, screenplay writer, and director. Backed by Joy Films, the project is produced by Sudhakar Chaganti, with Suresh Yerra as co-producer. Devika Bhat is the leading lady. Mounted on an unprecedented scale for a Kiran Abbavaram film, the entertainer has already made an impact with its announcement poster. On the occasion of the actor's birth-

day, the team unveiled an exclusive making video from the first schedule, which has now been completed. Rather than simply showcasing behind-the-scenes footage, the video captures the enthusiasm, laughter, and strong bonding that define the atmosphere on set. One of its biggest highlights is Kiran Abbavaram's all-round involvement in the filmmaking process. Whether interacting with actors, discussing visuals with technicians, checking monitor outputs, or stepping in front of the camera for his performance, he appears deeply invested in every stage of production. The visuals further indicate that the film is being crafted as a complete entertainer, blending humor, emotions, energetic sequences, and commercial elements into a refreshing narrative. The video offers a glimpse of the joyful ride the film has in store for audiences. The project features cinematography by Viswas Daniel, music by Bheems Ceciroleo, production design by Sudheer Macharla, and editing by Santhosh Naidu. With a grand scale, a passionate creative vision, and Kiran Abbavaram taking charge like never before, the film has rapidly become one of the most eagerly awaited upcoming entertainers.



Pallaburusu Glimpse: Another Interesting Nativity Film

Annapurna Studios and EPIC Studios have joined hands for Pallaburusu, a rural family entertainer that places emotions and relationships at the heart of its storytelling. Starring Sudhakar Reddy and Muralidhar Goud, the film is written and directed by Uday Chauhan and is gearing up for its theatrical release on August 14. Giving audiences their first taste of the film, the makers released first look and a title glimpse that unveils the name Pallaburusu. The poster poses several intriguing questions. Why are two men sitting on opposite ends of an oversized toothbrush? What connects them to the courthouse standing behind them? And what role do the flying legal papers and stacks of money play in the story? The glimpse wins hearts through its simple yet emotionally rich presentation. Set in the vibrant villages, the video introduces Sudhakar Reddy and Muralidhar Goud as a father-son duo whose effortless camaraderie becomes the emotional backbone of the glimpse. Their scenes are filled with warmth, innocence, and understated hatred. The title glimpse also hints that Pallaburusu is much more than a conventional rural drama. Alongside amusing moments, it subtly promises a story packed with emotions, family values, and a refreshing narrative rooted in native culture. The earthy atmosphere and authentic village setting further enhance the film's appeal. With visuals captured by



cinematographer Vinod K Bangari, music composed by Pawan CH, and production design by Kshitij Jeevan Randhir, the film carries a distinct rustic identity. The mak-

ers have also confirmed that the teaser will be released shortly, raising expectations for what appears to be a celebration of family, tradition, and rural life.

Varun Tej's Korean Kanakaraju to drop a massy banger

Varun Tej is gearing up to enthrall audiences with his upcoming horror-comedy Korean Kanakaraju, and the excitement is building up rapidly. To delight the masses and music lovers, the film's team is releasing a brand new track called Raasa Gummadi. This highly energetic song has been officially scheduled to be out on July 19th. Daksha Nagarkar is set to appear in the special song and it is set to be a massy banger. Varun Tej's look and his dance moves will be talk of the town state makers. Slated for 7th August release, the movie is gaining huge momentum with each promotional material hitting out of the park. Merlapaka Gandhi is directing the film with prestigious UV Creations producing it on a huge scale. Varun Tej in two distinctive roles and get-ups, is set to create a massive intrigue and excitement with this mass number.

Fauzi Effect: #NBK111 Plans Getting Changed

Earlier, we already knew that next Sankranti, the 2027 January, is blocked by the likes of Chiranjeevi's next being directed by KS Bobby and Venkatesh's next that has Anil Ravipudi directing it. With those biggies already laying hands on the much hyped holiday season, the likes of Nandamuri Balakrishna's next are thinking about hitting cinemas in December itself, a good season that gave him blockbusters earlier. However, those plans are now changing. While #NBK111 was supposedly planning a first week of December release, Prabhas' Fauzi suddenly came into the picture, as the makers of the film announced December 3rd as the release date the other day. Now that #NBK111 is produced by Peddhi fame Vriddhi Cinemas, whose good friends Mythri Movie Makers are carving out Fauzi, it's likely that Balayya's film will get another good date. And that would be Sankranti 2027, many trade pundits assume. Though Nagarjuna Akkineni is also thinking about locking the Sankranti date, for his supposed sequel of Soggade Chinna Nayana and Bangarraju, that film was called off. While his 100th film will stand in the Sankranti race or not is yet to be known, somehow #NBK111 might emerge as a Sankranti contender, is the talk. Anyway, until these films get wrapped and censored, no clarity stays in the Sankranti race, while #VenkyAnil is the only confirmed movie so far, because everyone knows Anil Ravipudi's timing, planning, execution and release capabilities.

