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Satyendar Jain arrest Deja Vu for AAP ahead of Punjab Polls

New Delhi: For Satyendar Jain, the timing of his latest arrest carries a strong sense of deja vu. The former Delhi minister and AAP's Punjab co-incharge has once again been arrested months before an election in a state where he has been given a key organisational responsibility. In 2022, Jain was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate while handling AAP's campaign in Himachal Pradesh. Four years later, he has been arrested by the Delhi government's Anti-Corruption Branch in an alleged Delhi Jal Board tendering case, just months before Punjab goes to polls. Jain made the Punjab connection explicit. After his arrest, he said, "This is done because the Punjab election is coming up... this is politics". AAP has quickly sought to turn the arrest into an electoral issue.



tions because it feared an AAP victory. Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann too alleged that the "only plausible reason" for the action was Jain's role in Punjab. The BJP, however, has rejected AAP's political vendetta charge and has sought to frame the arrest as a corruption investigation. BJP leaders have argued that the Anti-Corruption Branch acted after establishing an alleged money trail in the Delhi Jal Board case. Delhi BJP chief Harsh Malhotra described Jain's arrest as the "beginning of the fruits" of alleged corrupt activities involving AAP leaders. The Congress, meanwhile, has

continued to attack the AAP leadership over allegations of corruption and the record of the previous Delhi government. The latest arrest has not emerged as a major separate campaign issue for the Punjab Congress. The Akali Dal, too, has so far not made Jain's arrest a central part of its Punjab political messaging. For AAP, however, the bigger concern is not simply the legal case against Jain but the potential impact on its election machinery. Jain was brought into the Punjab structure alongside Manish Sisodia and was expected to play a role in the party's organisational and electoral preparations.

100 Groups Back RSS Chief Visit, Urge Canada to Reject Calls For Blocking It

New Delhi: More than 100 Canadian organisations and civil liberties groups have written to Prime Minister Mark Carney and senior federal ministers in support of RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's proposed visit to Canada, urging the government to ensure that any decision on his entry is based on evidence and due process rather than political pressure. The letter, addressed to Carney, Public Safety Minister Gary Anandasangaree, Immigration Minister Lena Metlege Diab and Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand, comes amid calls from NDP MPs Jenny Kwan and

Heather McPherson, along with other organisations, for Bhagwat to be prevented from entering Canada and declared inadmissible. The signatories said Bhagwat's proposed visit was of "considerable interest" to Canada's Hindu community, which the letter says includes more than a million Canadians of Hindu heritage. They described the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, or RSS, as a major Indian organisation known for community service, social initiatives, cultural activities and public discourse. The groups strongly objected to the campaign seeking to block

Bhagwat's entry, arguing that allegations made against him must be supported by credible evidence. "Serious allegations require credible evidence," the letter stated, while challenging claims that Bhagwat has a history of hate speech, advocated violence against religious minorities, engaged in targeted intimidation or maintained links with criminal or listed terrorist organisations". These are exceptionally serious allegations," the organisations said, adding that such claims should not be treated as established fact without "clear, credible and independently verifiable evidence." The let-



ter asked Canadian authorities to identify the evidence behind the allegations and says that if credible evidence exists, it should be assessed through the appropriate legal and governmental processes. The signatories also rejected concerns that Bhagwat's presence

could lead to social disorder or pose a threat to public safety. They asked what specific incidents demonstrated that Bhagwat or the RSS had caused social disorder in Canada and what concrete information indicated that his visit would create a public safety threat.

30-Year Legal Battle For Rs 20 Bribe: Top Court Acquits 2 Government Staffers

New Delhi: The court stated that the conviction cannot be sustained solely based on the recovery of Rs 20 without it being proven that they had demanded a bribe. A legal battle over an alleged bribe of Rs 20 has ended after three decades, with the Supreme Court setting aside the conviction of two Gujarat government employees. A bench comprising Justices Ujjal Bhuyan and Atul S

Chandurkar acquitted a clerk and a peon, stating that the conviction cannot be sustained solely based on the recovery of Rs 20 without it being proven that they had demanded a bribe. The case dates back to February 1996. A student had approached the Bechari Gram Panchayat office in Anand district to obtain an income certificate to avail educational concessions. The prosecution had al-

leged that the clerk had demanded Rs 120 to issue the certificate – Rs 100 for himself and Rs 20 for the peon. Subsequently, the student lodged a complaint with the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), which then laid a trap and sent the student with marked notes of Rs 120. After receiving the certificate, the student had given Rs 20 to the peon. The raiding team recovered the same notes from the peon,

but Rs 100 was not found with the clerk. The Supreme Court also found inconsistencies in the prosecution's claims, noting that the student had given a different statement regarding the alleged demand in a separate matter. In that instance, he had stated that the accused had initially demanded Rs 200 and later reached a settlement at Rs 120, a claim that was not part of his testimony before the trial court.

The top court also considered it significant that the ACB had instructed the student to hand over the full Rs 120 if a demand was made. Despite this, he had given only Rs 20 to the peon. A doubt also emerged as to why the remaining amount was not paid despite the clerk being right next to the peon when he had paid him the alleged Rs 20 bribe. During cross-examination, the student also admitted that the peon himself had not demanded any bribe from him.

Massive Irregularities in Group-1 Exams During YSRCP Rule: CM

From Our Staff Reporter Amaravati, August 19: Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu alleged that large-scale irregularities took place in the conduct of Andhra Pradesh Public Service Commission (APPSC) Group-1 examinations during the previous YSRCP government. Speaking in the Andhra Pradesh Assembly, Chandrababu said the APPSC was constituted under Article 315 of the Constitution. He stated that Group-1 examinations are conducted to select officials for state services and that candidates work extremely hard to secure these jobs. He alleged that such examinations witnessed widespread irregularities during the previous government.

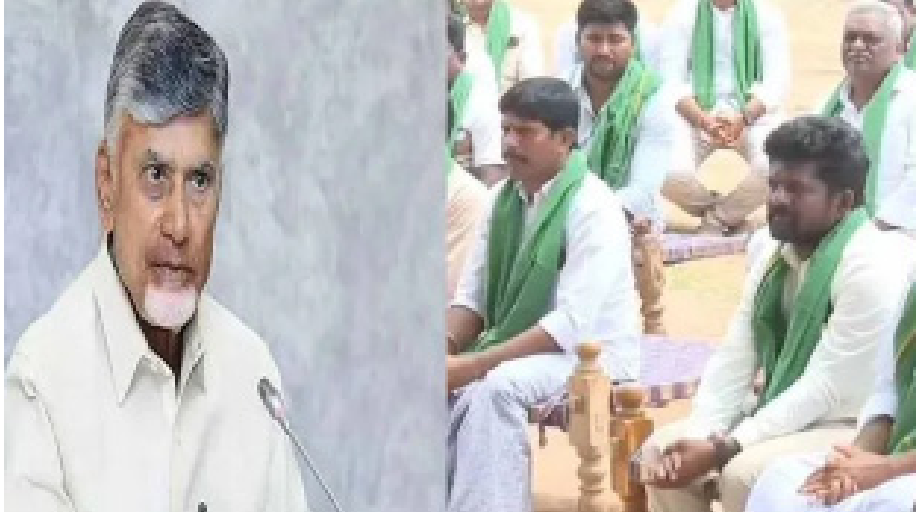
ity and that there is a responsibility to explain the facts to the people from there. He assured that a stringent system would be put in place in the APPSC to prevent such irregularities from recurring in the future. Chandrababu said he had repeatedly stated that the state witnessed destruction between 2019 and 2024. He criticised the previous rulers for eroding public confidence in various government systems. Chandrababu said that when the notification for Group-1 services was issued in 2018, 1.14 lakh candidates had applied, of whom 325 were shortlisted. He said answer scripts of Class 10 examinations are transported under tight security and police escort, and therefore, even greater security should be ensured for examinations conducted to select officials who will administer the

state. However, he alleged that the previous government ignored the prescribed rules. Chandrababu said the High Court had directed that the Group-1 answer scripts be evaluated manually instead of through the digital system. Despite this, he alleged that affidavits were filed in a manner that misled the court. He said that even after the court orders, work orders worth Rs.1.19 crore were issued for evaluation at Hi-Land. He further alleged that interviews were conducted and appointments were made despite court directions. The Chief Minister criticised the APPSC for assigning evaluation responsibilities to private individuals in violation of its rules. Chandrababu alleged that the examination papers written by Group-1 aspirants were evaluated by electricians, drivers, plumbers and security guards.

CM Chandrababu Provided All Facilities: Velugonda Project Displaced Families

From Our Staff Reporter Amaravati, August 19: The displaced families of the Velugonda Project said that Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu had provided them with all necessary facilities. They said they would never forget the assistance extended by the coalition government. Expressing happiness that their 30-year-old dream had finally been fulfilled, they said they never thought the project would be completed during their lifetime. They became emotional, saying they were extremely happy to see a project they had once thought they would never live to witness. Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu handed over compensation cheques to the displaced families of the Velugonda Project. The project-affected families met the Chief Minister in his chamber at the Assembly on Wednesday.

day. On the occasion, he handed over compensation cheques worth ₹200 crore to them. The displaced families subsequently expressed their gratitude. **“Displaced Families Are as Important as Project Works”:** Minister Nimmala AP Water Resources Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu said the coalition government had completed the Velugonda Project works in a systematic manner. He described it as the “eighth wonder of the world” that Y.S. Jagan had dedicated an incomplete Velugonda Project to the nation. He recalled that then Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan had not paid even a single rupee towards the Rs.900 crore compensation due to the displaced families. He made it clear that just as completing the Velugonda Project was important, the displaced families were equally important



to the government. He said that of the seven colonies constructed for the displaced families, 100% of the basic infrastructure had been completed in four. The remaining works in the other three colonies would be completed on a war footing, Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu said. **“Remaining Rs.400 Crore Compensation Will Be Paid Soon”:** Minister Dola

Welfare Minister Dola Sree Bala Veeranjanya Swamy said the remaining ₹400 crore compensation to the Velugonda Project displaced families would be paid soon. He said water would be released into Nallamala Sagar this August itself. He strongly criticised the “axe party” for allegedly cheating the Velugonda displaced families. He said the credit for dedicating an incomplete

project to the nation went to the leader of that party, referring to Y.S. Jagan. He recalled that, as promised earlier, the government had announced Markapur district. He also pointed out that Chandrababu, who had laid the foundation stone for the Velugonda Project, was now inaugurating it again. Minister Dola appealed to the displaced families to vacate their villages.

CM CHANDRABABU TURNS PHOTOJOURNALIST



From Our Staff Reporter Amaravati, August 19: On the occasion of World Photography Day, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu turned photojournalist. The Chief Minister brought all the photojournalists together and took a group photograph. Picking up a camera, he said he would take the picture himself. Photojour-

nalists met Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu at the Assembly premises on Wednesday as part of World Photography Day celebrations. On the occasion, he extended his greetings to all photojournalists. **“It Is a Great Honour to Meet Photographers,” Says CM** The Chief Minister congratulated photographers

for documenting history and preserving memories. He extended his wishes to photographers who transform human experiences into remarkable images. He said he considered it a great honour to meet media and professional photographers. He appreciated their dedication, creativity and relentless efforts. The Chief Minister said



photographers give a voice through their images to many untold stories. He explained that every photograph preserves a cherished moment in time for future generations. Chandrababu extended his greetings to photographers across the world and expressed his desire for them to capture more timeless moments that provide information and inspiration to people. He shared these remarks in a post on X.

Vijay Sai Reddy Makes Key Announcement on Formation of Political Party

From Our Staff Reporter Tirupati, August 19: Former MP V. Vijaya Sai Reddy visited Lord Venkateswara at Tirumala and offered prayers. After seeking the blessings of the deity, he made several key remarks. Vijaya Sai Reddy said he had decided to launch a political party to strongly raise people's problems and their voices in the legislative bodies. He said he visited Lord Venkateswara to seek blessings in this regard. Vijaya Sai Reddy revealed that he would

soon make a key announcement regarding the formation of the political party. He said he would announce his political plan from Vijayawada later this month. He stated that his political course of action would be formulated in line with the aspirations of the people. He said he would provide clarity in Vijayawada on the formation of the new political party, its objectives and its future course of action. He also said he

prayed to Lord Venkateswara for



abundant rainfall so

that the state and the country would remain free from drought conditions. He said he prayed for the happiness, prosperity and well-being of all people. Vijaya Sai Reddy's latest remarks have generated considerable interest in Andhra Pradesh politics. Political circles have begun discussing the political plan he is expected to announce. His Vijayawada announcement is likely to provide greater clarity on the party's name, policies, political objectives and future course of action.

EDITORIAL

Winds of Opposition Against the Lotus!

The recent loss of two BJP strongholds in different states and the party's narrow victory in Manjalpur in Gujarat, the home state of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, indicate that winds of opposition may be blowing against the ruling BJP across the country. The results came amid intense protests by students over the NEET question-paper leak, along with demonstrations organised by the newly formed "Cockroach Party" (CJP) in Delhi, Patna and various other states, and calls for the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. These developments have not gone down well with the BJP leadership. Congress and other Opposition parties have demanded that the government reveal who ordered the lathi-charge and crackdown on protesting students. Amid repeated disruptions and protests, both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha were adjourned several times. Parliament witnessed little productive business, while several Bills were passed by voice vote without detailed discussion before the Houses were adjourned. The Rajya Sabha, however, passed the Mines and Minerals (Amendment) Bill. The unexpected verdict delivered by 3.7 lakh voters across northern, eastern and western states during Narendra Modi's 12 years as Prime Minister is a strong warning to the ruling BJP. These results are not merely limited to the respective constituencies but are also indicative of the anti-government sentiment emerging across the country. The anti-NEET protests and by-election results have made it increasingly clear that upper-caste voters, the middle classes and educated urban voters, who had been strong supporters of the BJP for the past 12 years, are gradually moving away from the party. The BJP's defeat in Bankipur, an urban constituency in Bihar that had been a party stronghold since 1995, was a major blow to the BJP leadership. Angry over the lack of basic infrastructure, poor civic amenities and the alleged neglect of the ruling establishment, urban voters delivered a stunning verdict.

Despite tall claims, the governments of Bihar and India have failed to create adequate employment and livelihood opportunities, leading to growing frustration among unemployed youth. Government failures in conducting examinations such as NEET and repeated paper leaks have left many students feeling that their hard work is futile, with some even taking their own lives. Attempts by governments to suppress students and youth, instead of boosting their confidence, are proving counterproductive. Nitin Nabin, who represented Bankipur, resigned from the seat after becoming BJP national president. This provided an opportunity for Prashant Kishor, founder of the Jan Suraj Party and an election strategist who has worked for various political parties in several states, to enter the contest. He reportedly won the support of voters through his speeches and emerged victorious. The growing shift of Yadav and Muslim voters, traditionally associated with the Opposition RJD, towards the AIMIM has weakened the party's prospects. Prashant Kishor, a Brahmin, was able to turn this situation to his advantage. People are reportedly viewing as a betrayal the decision to remove Nitish Kumar from the chief minister's post within months after being assured before the elections that he would continue as Bihar CM.

The Bankipur result shows that voters may support an alternative leadership if it can provide better governance, education and development. It is also being viewed as a setback for the BJP after it had won 202 of the 243 Assembly seats in Bihar in the general elections held nine months ago under Nitish Kumar's leadership. Many people are now demanding that Modi apply to himself the same age-related principle he used to sideline Nitish and other leaders. The BJP, once largely confined to upper-caste support, has been attempting to expand its influence among BCs and Dalits, but has still not succeeded fully. Although Modi identifies himself as a BC, efforts to attract these communities have not produced the desired results. Within the BJP, virtually all affairs are being handled by the Prime Minister's Office in a highly centralised manner. Although the Centre controls state governments and the party organisation, hardly anyone dares to question this concentration of power. Even senior leaders of the Sangh Parivar may be uncomfortable with the centralisation of authority, but they have refrained from openly speaking against it. During the anti-NEET protests, their response has largely been to say that the protesting youth are "our own people" and should be engaged in dialogue, without taking any significant corrective action.

The Congress victory in the Datia constituency in Madhya Pradesh has provided some relief to the party. The defeat is being attributed to dissatisfaction and violent incidents following the BJP's decision not to give a ticket to former Madhya Pradesh Home Minister and influential local leader Narottam Mishra. Meanwhile, the BJP leadership received some relief from its victory in the Manjalpur by-election in Gujarat, the home state of Modi and Amit Shah. However, it is noteworthy that the party's vote share fell from 76% previously to 67%. In reality, the BJP's decline began with the last Lok Sabha elections. After loudly claiming that it would certainly win 400 seats, the party contested 411 seats but was reduced to just 240. The Modi government is surviving with the support of Chandrababu Naidu's Telugu Desam Party with 16 seats and Nitish Kumar's JD(U) with 12 seats, which are providing crucial political support. The student and youth movements for their future, along with the protests by the "Cockroach Party," are causing concern within the Modi camp, which had believed itself to be invincible after electoral victories in Bihar and West Bengal. The Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand Assembly elections scheduled for next year will be a major challenge for the BJP leadership. That is why the BJP has again allied with the Shiromani Akali Dal in Punjab and allegedly split the Aam Aadmi Party's parliamentary group there, bringing the Raghav Chadha faction into the BJP. In Bengal, the Trinamool Congress parliamentary group has allegedly been split and merged with the Tripura party. Meanwhile, unemployment and inflation have intensified across the country, while rising prices and the increasing cost of living have made people's lives difficult. The government is attempting to carry on with half-hearted measures instead of addressing these fundamental problems.

6 Years After A Dramatic Break-Up, Are BJP-Akali Dal Set To Join Hands Again?

The corridors of power in the capital are abuzz about the 'gharwasi' of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SDA) into the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) fold before the Punjab elections next year. Sukhbir Badal and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting a few days ago has fuelled speculation. The two parties ran a successful coalition in Punjab for almost 25 years, winning the 1997, 2007, and 2012 elections. It was a natural alliance representing the majority Sikh (SAD) and minority Hindu (BJP) population, respectively. Sikhs account for 58% of Punjab's population, and Hindus 38%. However, the controversial farm bills in 2019 led to a strain in the relationship, as farmers, particularly from Punjab, opposed the law. The SAD, fearing a loss of support from its key Jat Sikh vote, exited the alliance in September 2020. The SAD had urged the BJP-led central government not to bring the bills to Parliament till "all reservations" expressed by farmers were "duly addressed". But when the Centre did not pay heed, Harsimrat Kaur Badal resigned from the Union Cabinet in protest against the bills.

Punjab's Unique Situation
The duality of the Sikh community - a minority in India but a majority in Punjab - is a continuing source of political conflict and tension between Sikh-majority Punjab and Hindu-majority India. Resentment towards the Centre, especially after the Golden Temple incident in 1984, hasn't waned fully. Regionalism is integral to Sikh culture; Punjabis don't want their fate to be remote-controlled by Delhi. Post-split, however, both the BJP and the SAD have suffered electoral setbacks.

The 2017 Vidhan Sabha Verdict

From 15 seats in 2017, when it had contested in an alliance, the SAD collapsed to just three in 2022 as a lone player. The BJP also dropped from three to

two seats in an election that was swept by AAP, which ended up bagging 80% of the seats. Vote share numbers tell a similar story. While SAD fell sharply from 25.2% to 18.5%, a loss of 6.7 percentage points, the BJP actually gained slightly, from 5.4% to 6.7%, a climb of 1.3 percentage points. The SAD bore the brunt of the split as it lost its core Jat Sikh and panthic Sikh votes, while the BJP's standalone vote share held up better than its seat count would suggest. The BJP consolidated Hindu support significantly. Its Hindu Upper caste vote jumped from 7% in 2017 to 20% in 2022, in elections it contested alone. The Hindu OBC vote also climbed from 6% to 16%, while the Hindu SC vote showed a moderate rise from 9% to 10%. The SAD, on the other hand, lost not only Jat Sikh support, which fell from 38% to 26% votes, but also Dalit Sikh backing, whose vote share dropped to a mere 18% from 35%.

Similar But Sharper Patterns In Lok Sabha

While the SAD managed to hold on to just one of the two seats it had won in 2019, the BJP lost both its constituencies in a five-cornered contest. The SAD vote share dropped steeply from 27.5% to 13.5% - twice the Vidhan Sabha erosion as it lost further panthic support to Independents, later rechristened as Akali Dal (Waris Punjab De). On the other hand, the BJP's vote share surged from 9.6% to 18.7%. This is explained by the "national character" of Lok Sabha polls, anti-incumbency against the AAP government, and the consolidation of Hindu voters behind the BJP - even if the saffron party's seat count didn't reflect these shifts. Hindu upper caste support jumped from 20% in 2022 to 56% in 2024. In terms of assembly segments, while the BJP led in 23 seats (21 more than in 2022), the SAD led in nine (six over 2022). In total, they led in 32 segments,



leading to calls for patching up and forming an alliance for the 2027 state polls.

What If The Two Had Remained Allied?

In the 2022 Vidhan Sabha elections, had there been a 100% vote transfer, the SAD-BJP combine would have won 16 seats against the actual combined tally of five. AAP would still have dominated the elections, winning around 86 of the 117 seats. The alliance wouldn't have changed the overall outcome, but it would have certainly eaten into the AAP-Congress numbers slightly. Even at 50% vote transfer, the alliance would have won nine seats, a gain of four. In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, with a 100% vote transfer, the SAD-BJP combine would have won six out of 13 seats, a gain of five. They would have emerged as the single largest alliance, gaining largely at the cost of Congress. Even at just 50% vote transfer, the alliance would have won five seats against the one it actually won.

Is An Alliance Practical Now?

The 2020 split hurt the SAD

far more than the BJP in vote share terms, in both state and national elections. The BJP's Hindu-consolidation strategy paid off in terms of vote share - even if it failed to turn into seat gains - as Punjab's Hindu population is a minority. Rejoining forces would have mathematically recaptured many lost seats, particularly in 2024, though AAP's continued strength, especially in 2022, means an alliance wouldn't have changed who governs the state. The SAD, to be fair, is facing an existential crisis today. A section of party old-timers have expressed a lack of confidence in Sukhbir Badal's leadership, claiming he is no match to his late father, Prakash Singh Badal. Led by Giani Harpreet Singh, the former Jathedar of the Akal Takht, the group says it aims to restore traditional Akali values under the banner of SAD (Sudhar Lehar). Amritpal Singh, the independent candidate who won from the Khadoor Sahib Lok Sabha constituency in Punjab, securing his seat while being in jail under the National Security Act, has formed Akali Dal (Waris Punjab De) and is eye-

ing the panthic vote base that's now disillusioned with the SAD. On the other hand, the BJP, despite bringing ex-Chief Minister Amarinder Singh's party into the NDA fold, is still seen as a predominantly Hindu-favouring party. The mistrust caused by the farm bills - primarily Sikhs - has not faded. While there is some discontent with the AAP government over the handling of floods, the non-resolution of farm issues, and the drug menace, the split in opposition vote has helped the party win bypolls even with a vote share of under 40%. To exploit anti-incumbency, the BJP and the SAD need to join hands, as separately, they might find it difficult to win. However, a section in the BJP feels that the party is unlikely to benefit from the alliance as Sikh votes of the SAD may not transfer to the saffron party, while its Hindu votes would accrue to it. Also, amidst rising competition, there are now doubts about SAD's hold on Jat Sikh and Panthic votes. While the arithmetic adds up for an alliance, the chemistry doesn't make a very strong case yet.

Why The Congress-Samajwadi 'Merger' Fantasy Could Be Opposition's Biggest Self-Goal

Political Delhi has a weakness for grand solutions. When alliance talks are tedious, seat-sharing becomes rancorous, and local leaders refuse to yield, a merger can appear seductively simple. Why negotiate every election if two parties can simply become one?

That is precisely why the suggestion that the Congress and the Samajwadi Party (SP) should merge deserves scrutiny. The argument is that Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav are increasingly occupying the same terrain of caste justice, representation, and inclusive politics, and that a merger could turn this convergence into a new national political formation. It is an interesting proposition. But it also solves the wrong problem.

The challenge before Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav is not that their parties are insufficiently alike. It is that they must cooperate without destroying the differences that make each useful. In politics, two plus two is not necessarily four. Votes carry memory, caste, class, community, local loyalties, ideological inheritance, and, importantly, the ambitions of party workers. A merger may look like a consolidation from Delhi. In Uttar Pradesh, it could become subtraction.

Parties Are Constituencies, Not Containers

The case for a merger rests substantially on the argument that the Congress and the SP are moving towards the same social terrain: caste justice, representation, minorities, Dalits, and backward classes. There is truth in the observation, but the conclusion does not follow. Political convergence is not

political sameness. The Congress in Uttar Pradesh was historically an umbrella formation. At its strongest, it brought together a coalition of Brahmins, Dalits, and Muslims, alongside other groups, under a broad national platform. That old social compact eventually came apart under the pressures of Mandal, Mandir, and the rise of parties representing more sharply defined social constituencies.

The Samajwadi Party grew out of a very different political genealogy - the socialist tradition associated with Ram Manohar Lohia, backward-caste assertion, and a pronounced streak of political and organisational independence. The party itself describes Lohia as its "guiding light" and defines its ideological inheritance in explicitly socialist terms. Its traditional social architecture has also been different: Yadavs, sections of other backward communities, and Muslims formed its core, even as Akhilesh now attempts to widen that coalition substantially. The fact that the Congress and the SP today seek Dalit, OBC, and minority votes does not mean that they command the same voters, or that those voters see them as interchangeable.

Even the 'Muslim vote', so casually spoken of in political shorthand, is no single transferable bloc. Ashraf and Pasmanda communities, biradari networks, class, locality, and the standing of individual candidates, all influence political preferences.

There is another constituency that political arithmetic habitually forgets: the aspirant.

Every district has leaders who have spent years building a claim to a ticket, an organisational post, or a local following. Merge two organisations and one may not get twice the energy. One may get twice the number of claimants for half the available political space. Rebellion, sabotage, and migration are not academic possibilities in Indian elections, but daily mechanics of party politics.

UP Has Tested This Already

There is no need to conduct this experiment in a laboratory. Uttar Pradesh has supplied enough evidence. In 2017, the SP and the Congress fought the Assembly election together amid enormous publicity around the Rahul-Akhilesh partnership and the catchy promise that Uttar Pradesh liked their coming together. The electorate proved considerably less sentimental. The SP won 47 seats and the Congress seven, while the BJP swept 312.

That election demonstrated an elementary truth: leadership chemistry does not automatically produce cadre chemistry. A friendly photograph at the top does not guarantee vote transfer at the booth. The 2019 mahagathbandhan between the SP and the Bahujan Samaj Party supplied another warning. On paper, their previous vote shares promised formidable arithmetic. In practice, those votes did not transfer mechanically; the alliance finished with 15 seats. Ironically, the argument in favour of a Congress-SP merger itself acknowledges this inconvenient fact.

Then came 2024, and that result should lead to precisely

the opposite conclusion. The Congress-SP arrangement worked because it was an alliance of recognisable political entities, not an act of political self-liquidation. The SP won 37 Lok Sabha seats, and the Congress six; together, the INDIA grouping took 43 of Uttar Pradesh's 80 seats. Both retained their symbols, leadership structures, cadres, and political personalities while preventing destructive competition across most of the State.

Why should the success of a coalition be converted into an argument for abolishing coalition partners?

The lesson of 2024 was simpler and more useful: intelligent seat-sharing, a resonant common campaign, and disciplined accommodation can make distinct social coalitions complementary. The political genius lay in addition without erasure.

The Janata Warning

Indian politics has seen a much grander merger in the name of defeating a dominant leader. In 1977, the Congress (Organisation), Bharatiya Lok Dal, Bharatiya Jana Sangh, and socialist streams surrendered their separate identities to come together as the Janata Party after the Emergency. Anti-Indira sentiment and the extraordinary public reaction to the Emergency gave the formation a historic victory and India its first non-Congress government at the Centre.

But what was powerful enough to win an election proved inadequate to manufacture a durable political identity. Old ideological disputes resurfaced. Leadership rivalries sharpened. The tensions between the socialist and erst-

while Jana Sangh components became impossible to paper over. Morarji Desai's government collapsed in 1979, barely halfway through its mandate.

The lesson is not that Opposition unity is futile. It is considerably subtler: a negative common denominator can be a campaign instrument; it cannot, by itself, become an organisational philosophy. 'Defeat Modi' cannot be the constitution of a new political party any more than 'Defeat Indira' could hold Janata together.

A Congress-SP merger would immediately raise questions that an alliance instead can negotiate without creating an existential crisis. Who controls the Uttar Pradesh organisation? Who selects candidates? What happens when the Congress's national calculations clash with the SP's provincial imperatives? Does the Congress abandon its long-term ambition to rebuild independently in India's largest State? Does the SP trade the autonomy that gives Akhilesh Yadav his political weight for a place within a national hierarchy? These are not minor details to be worked out after a merger. They are the merger. There is an even larger proposition in the merger thesis that deserves challenge: that bringing the Congress and the Samajwadi Party together could lay the foundation for a broad 'biparty' system more suitable for India. India's regional parties are not merely debris left behind by the fragmentation of the old Congress system. They are expressions of federalism, caste mobility, regional aspiration, and the democratisation of political power. Groups such as the Samajwadi Party grew precisely because social groups wanted a political voice more direct than the old catch-all Congress structure could provide.

Pushkara Lift Irrigation Works to Be Accelerated



Rampachodavaram, Pen Power, August 19: Polavaram District Collector K. Dinesh Kumar directed officials to expedite the water diversion works of the Pushkara Lift Irrigation Scheme to the Left Canal under the Polavaram

Project. On Wednesday, the Collector inspected the water diversion canal and pipeline works at Nelakota in Devipatnam Mandal along with Hydel Power Department engineers. He reviewed the condition of the pipelines supplying water to the Left Canal and enquired about the progress of the works. The Collector instructed officials to complete the Pushkara Lift Irrigation works within the stipulated deadline while maintaining quality standards. He directed them to immediately bring any pipeline-related issues to his notice and strictly follow safety norms during the works. He also asked officials to submit regular progress reports and maintain continuous coordination with the concerned departments. OSD Javali, Tahsildar K. Satyanarayana, Hydel Project officials, Krishna, DE Srinivasa Rao, engineers and others accompanied the Collector.

Local Body Elections to Be Conducted Systematically

BAPATLA, PEN POWER, AUGUST 19:

State Election Commissioner Anil Chandra Puneeth directed officials to ensure fool-proof preparations for the upcoming local body elections, including proper management of the electoral roll process. During a video conference with district election officials, he reviewed preparations for Panchayat, Zilla Parishad, Mandal Parishad and other local body elections. Officials were instructed to arrange polling stations, verify ballot boxes, identify sensitive and highly sensitive booths, ensure security, arrange election staff and materials, and provide necessary training.

District Collector Dr. Vinod Kumar V. said the ballot boxes were ready. He informed that court cases related to Chirala and Vetapalem had been resolved, while a verdict regarding Bapatla was awaited. He also stressed the need to train MPDOs on election procedures.



Photography is a Wonderful Art: Collector Dr. Lakshmeesh

Vijayawada, Pen Power, August 19: NTR District

Collector Dr. G. Lakshmeesh said photography is a wonderful art that captures a moment forever and conveys emotions, events and history to future generations. Speaking at a World Photography Day programme held at the Collectorate, he paid floral tributes to Louis Daguerre and highlighted the important role of photography and photojournalists in reflecting society, culture, development and public aspirations.

A total of 221 photographs were submitted for district-level competitions in various categories, with 27 best photographs selected by the jury. The Collector presented cash prizes, certificates and mementos to the winners.



An exhibition of award-winning photographs and a collection of rare cameras by senior photographer Potluri Prasad were special attractions.

Complete Civil Works Under Various Grants at the Earliest: Collector

Kakinada, August 19 (Pen Power): District Collector M.N. Harendhir Prasad directed

15th Finance Commission funds within the stipulated deadline. He also reviewed works under CSR, NABARD, MPLADS, National Health Mission, District Mineral Fund and hospital development funds.

He instructed officials to set specific deadlines for every project and complete them accordingly. Civil works in government hospitals, CHCs and PHCs should be expedited to improve healthcare facilities. The Collector also directed officials to speed up sanitation works, begin development works under KAUDA by month-end, and complete National Health Mission works within the deadline.



engineers of various departments to speed up civil works taken up under different grants and make the facilities available to the public at the earliest. Reviewing the progress of works at the Collectorate, the Collector directed officials to complete Village Clinics under

No More Delay in Resolving EMRS School Issues



Paderu, August 19 (Pen Power): Alluri Sitharama Raju District Collector T. Nishanthi directed officials to resolve identified issues in Ekalavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) within fixed timelines, with special focus on drinking water facilities. During a district-level review meeting, the Collector reviewed infrastructure, sanitation, drainage, roads, school buildings, student health and academic performance. She ordered that all drinking water-related problems be resolved by August 31 and pending infrastruc-

ture works be completed within the stipulated deadlines.

She also directed officials to improve Class 10 results by selecting 60 meritorious students through examinations and providing special academic training at Dumbriguda.

The Collector stressed that officials should focus not merely on identifying problems but on resolving them within specific timelines, ensuring quality education, better infrastructure, safety and health facilities for EMRS students.

Focus on Increasing Green Cover in Kakinada District

Kakinada, August 19 (Pen Power): District Collec-



tor M.N. Harendhir Prasad directed officials to speed up the Great Green Wall, Urban Forests and Palm Grove projects aimed at protecting the environment and increasing green cover in the district. During a review meeting at the Collectorate, the Collector discussed the progress of the projects and directed officials to

expedite the Great Green Wall along the coastline to

help prevent coastal erosion, reduce the impact of cyclones and protect biodiversity.

He also called for expanding palm plantations in coastal areas and completing Urban Forest works at the identified locations to provide residents with a

pollution-free and pleasant environment.

The Collector further instructed officials to identify suitable land for the National Integrated Complex and ensure that all projects are completed within the stipulated timelines through inter-departmental coordination.

Collector Venkateswar Inspects Verification of Voter Objections

Tirupati, Pen Power, August 19: Tirupati District Collector S. Venkateswar conducted a field inspection on Wednesday to review the verification of objections and petitions received on the electoral rolls under the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) in Ozili mandal. The Collector inspected the verification process at Graddagunta village under the Sullurupeta Assembly constituency and reviewed the action taken on voter list corrections. He directed officials to examine all objections and petitions thoroughly and resolve them impartially as per rules.

He stressed that the revision process should be transparent and ensure inclusion of all eligible voters while taking appropriate action on ineligible entries. RDO V. Devendra Reddy, Ozili Tahsildar and other officials participated.



Skill Development Aligned with Industry Needs



Gandepalli, Pen Power, August 19: Pragati University has launched industry-oriented skill development programmes to equip students with modern technology and skills matching current industry requirements. Government-certified AI-3D Printing programmes, GPU Programming Specialization Internship and NASSCOM FutureSkills Prime assessment programmes have been introduced for students. Principal Dr. G. Naresh said collaboration

between industries and educational institutions is crucial for improving students' employment opportunities. He encouraged students to develop practical and technology-based skills beyond academic qualifications.

Faculty members and representatives from CSC India participated in the programme and provided students with insights into emerging technologies, skill development and industry expectations.

District Administration Ready for Local Body Elections



GUNTUR, PEN POWER, AUGUST 19: District Collector C.M. Sai Kanth Varma said advance preparations have been initiated for the conduct of local body elections in the district. During a video conference with State Election Commissioner Anil Chandra Puneetha, the Collector said the district has four urban local bodies and preparations for ballot boxes

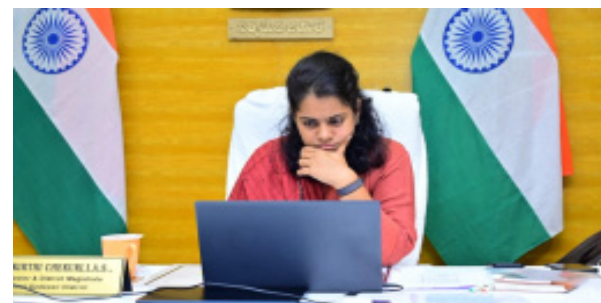
and other election material are underway. After the meeting, the Collector directed officials to update voter lists, inspect polling stations, identify and train master trainers, and prepare an election activity schedule. Officials were also instructed to focus on sensitive and highly sensitive polling stations and security arrangements.

Beware of Fake Investment Apps: SP Sunil Shoran

Nandyal, August 19 (Pen Power): Nandyal District SP Sunil Shoran cautioned people against fake investment and task-based apps promising to double or multiply money within a short period. He advised the public to be wary of investment offers received through WhatsApp, Telegram and other social media platforms. Fraudsters often gain trust by initially allowing small withdrawals and later inducing victims to invest large amounts, followed by demands for additional payments in the name of taxes or fees. The SP warned against downloading unknown apps, APK files or links and sharing OTPs, UPI PINs, ATM PINs or CVV details. Victims of cyber fraud should immediately call 1930 and preserve transaction details, chats, phone numbers and screenshots. He urged people to verify the credibility and legality of any investment platform before investing money.



Special Hours for Receiving and Resolving Public Grievances



Rajamahendravaram, August 19 (Pen Power): District Collector Keerthi Chekuri has directed staff of all departments working at

Swarna Gram and Swarna Ward offices to remain available from 3 PM to 5 PM on every working day to receive and address public grievances. She said the dedicated hours were introduced as per government directions to ensure that people can directly approach officials regarding government services, welfare schemes and local issues. The Collector instructed staff to receive petitions during the designated hours and take prompt action for their resolution. She also directed department officials to regularly monitor implementation of the orders.

Cybersecurity Awareness in the AI Era

Gandepalli, Pen Power (Surampalem), August 19: An expert lecture on cybersecurity in the era of Artificial Intelligence was organized by the AI & ML Department of Aditya University, Surampalem. Information Protection Manager Ramakrishna Chaitanya Emani, who attended as the resource person, explained the growing importance of cybersecurity in the rapidly developing digital and AI environment. He said AI can be misused by cybercriminals, but the same technology can also help detect and prevent cyberattacks at an early stage. He advised students to enhance their cybersecurity awareness and use modern technology responsibly. University officials, faculty members and students attended the programme.



Eligible Voters Must Be Included in Electoral Roll

Bapatla, August 19 (Pen Power): District Collector Dr. V. Vinod Kumar inspected the hearing process being conducted as part of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls in Chirala. The Collector visited the Chirala Mandal Parishad office and Polling Station No. 49 at NTR Nagar and reviewed the process being carried out by BLOs. He directed officials to ensure that every eligible voter is included in the electoral roll. He instructed BLOs to carefully verify documents submitted by voters during the hearing and forward them to AEROs through the BLO login. The Collector also interacted with voters and assured eligible applicants that necessary steps would be taken to include their names in the electoral roll.



Panchayat Elections: Officials Directed to Make Robust Arrangements

Paderu, Pen Power, August 19: State Election Commission officials directed district collectors to make foolproof arrangements for the upcoming local body elections and ensure a transparent election process. In a video conference, officials reviewed pre-election preparations, polling, counting, voter segregation, polling centres, staff deployment, election materials and training. Collector T. Nishanthi, Joint Collector Tirumani Sri Pooja, ITDA PO Aditya Varma and other officials participated.



Speed Up Aadhaar Enrolment and Updates: Collector Kritika Shukla

Narasaraopet, August 19 (Pen Power): District Collector Kritika Shukla directed officials to ensure that every child at Anganwadi centres has an Aadhaar card and that mandatory biometric updates are completed at the prescribed ages. Addressing the district-level Aadhaar Monitoring Committee meeting, she instructed officials to identify children without Aadhaar and conduct special enrolment camps in coordination with DLDOs. She also directed officials to complete pending Aadhaar enrolment and updates in Narasaraopet, Piduguralla, Dachepalli, Gurazala and Bollapalli mandals within a month. The Collector stressed that biometric updates for children aged 5-7 years and 15-17 years should be completed on priority. She also instructed officials to organise an Aadhaar camp at the Collectorate on every fourth Saturday.



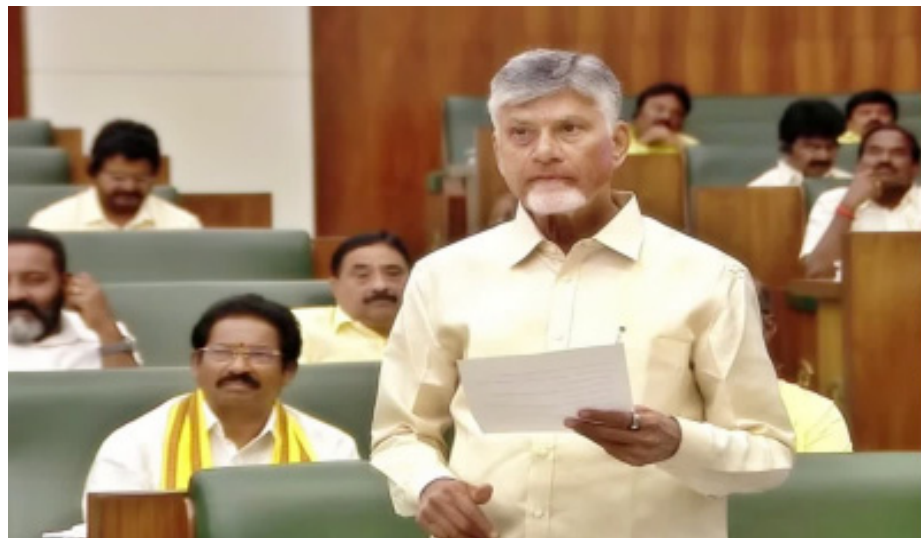
District Administration Ready for Local Body Elections



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ballot boxes and other election material are underway. After the meeting, the Collector directed officials to update voter lists, inspect polling stations, identify and train master trainers, and prepare an election activity schedule. Officials were also instructed to focus on sensitive and highly sensitive polling stations and security arrangements.

CM Chandrababu Slams YSRCP for Criticising DSC Without Attending Assembly



From Our Staff Reporter Amaravati, August 19: Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu made strong comments over YSRCP members boycotting the Assembly and Legislative Council. He said there was no precedent in the country's history for boycotting an Assembly, which he described as a temple of democracy. He said discussions on public issues in the Assembly carry value and recognition. Speaking to the media during an in-

formal interaction in the Assembly lobby on Wednesday, Chandrababu said that whatever YSRCP members speak while sitting outside would have no significance.

"I Have Never Seen Anything Like This in My Political Career": Chandrababu

The Chief Minister stressed that the Assembly holds the highest position in a democratic system. He said he had never seen an entire political party boycott such a plat-

form during his political career. Referring to 1978, he recalled that N. Venkaiah Naidu and S. Jaipal Reddy had strongly raised issues in the Assembly. He said that even when N.T. Rama Rao did not attend the Assembly for some time between 1989 and 1994, they continued to attend on behalf of the party and fight for the people. He added that between 2019 and 2024, even when he challenged the government and walked out, their MLAs continued

their fight until the final day. **"Does the Leader of the Axe Party Need Politics?"**

Chandrababu said the fight taken up by their representatives in the Assembly over public issues had made everyone think. He said people elect representatives with the expectation that they will fight for their problems in the Assembly. He questioned whether the leader of the "axe party," which he accused of belittling democracy, had any place in politics. He alleged that YSRCP members were staying away from the Assembly to cover up the Group-1 irregularities while criticising the DSC from outside.

The Chief Minister asserted that his government had restored the BC reservations that had been cut by the "axe party." He said all sections of society had welcomed the historic decision taken by his government. Chandrababu criticised the leader of the "axe party," saying that people neither believed nor cared about his alleged falsehoods.

The World Is Looking Towards Andhra Pradesh!

Amaravati, August 19: Minister Nara Lokesh announced that Andhra Pradesh has climbed from 9th to 2nd position among Indian states attracting new investments in just 24 months. He shared this information on Twitter on Tuesday. "It is a matter of pride that under the leadership of visionary leader and Chief Minister Chandrababu, the state is rapidly emerging as an industrial powerhouse. A clear vision, transparent governance and speed of doing business are the pillars of the state's progress. Investors from across the world are coming forward. Now, the entire world is looking towards Andhra Pradesh," Lokesh said.

Minister Lokesh Hits Back at Criticism Over Data Centres in Visakhapatnam

From Our Staff Reporter Amaravati, August 19: Andhra Pradesh Education and IT Minister Nara Lokesh strongly countered criticism by YSRCP leaders over data centres in Visakhapatnam. Minister Lokesh responded in the Assembly to questions raised by Jana Sena MLA Nagamadhavi regarding the data centres. He said misinformation was being spread about the water consumption of data centres. He emphasised that data centres are crucial for an AI-driven digital economy. He said Google's investment has increased the interest of other IT companies in Visakhapatnam. He revealed that if the data centre ecosystem reaches 6.5 GW, it would require around 3 TMC of water annually. **"Water Meant for City's Needs Will Not Be Diverted to Data Centres"**



Minister Lokesh said water consumption by data centres would further decline with the adoption of new cooling technologies. He explained that the water supplied to data centres would come from the industrial allocation of Polavaram water. He made it clear that water allocated for the drinking and other needs of Visakhapatnam city residents would not be diverted

to data centres. He said steps were being taken to make gravity-based water supply from Polavaram to Visakhapatnam city available within 18 months. He added that dedicated pipelines would be established for data centres. He revealed that compared with a 1 GW thermal power plant, a data centre requires only about one-tenth as much water.

Rammohan Naidu Announces Drone Incentives, BVLOS Certification



Kurnool : Union Minister for Civil Aviation Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu outlined the Government of India's commitment to advancing the next phase of reforms for India's rapidly growing drone sector, including enabling BVLOS certification by the end of 2026 and introducing a new financial incentive scheme to strengthen domestic manufacturing of drones and critical components. Speaking at the AP Drone Industry CEO's Round Table, jointly hosted by the Drone Federation India (DFI) and the Government of Andhra Pradesh at Orvakal Drone City, the Minister said the regulatory framework must evolve alongside the industry to enable innovation while maintaining the highest standards of safety and security.

The CEO round table brought together 150+ leading companies from the drone, counter-drone and component ecosystem, alongside senior representatives from the Government of India, Government

of Andhra Pradesh, Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), academia and research institutions. According to the release, Naidu said, "By the end of this year, we will have a refined certification framework with enablement of BVLOS certification. As the industry moves into its next phase of growth, the regulatory framework must evolve with it, enabling innovation while maintaining the highest standards of safety and security."

He further highlighted the Ministry's work on a new financial incentive scheme aimed at strengthening domestic drone and critical component manufacturing and supporting the industry in scaling its capabilities. The round table focused on the next phase of reforms needed to take India's drone ecosystem from foundational growth to large-scale deployment and global competitiveness. Key areas of discussion included Beyond Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS) operations, certification, testing and sandboxing, UAS Traf-

fic Management (UTM), airspace access, government-led adoption and strengthening India's domestic component ecosystem. President, Drone Federation India, Smit Shah, said, "A lot of good work has been done over the last few years. The Government of India and State Governments have played a great role in establishing an industry that barely existed a decade ago. We now have the foundations of a strong Indian drone ecosystem. The next push has to be about scale." He added, "The next wave of reforms must enable Indian companies to manufacture at greater scale, deploy advanced BVLOS operations, access world-class testing infrastructure, build critical components domestically and compete in global markets."

A key focus of the discussions was the enablement of BVLOS operations, which are expected to unlock large-scale applications across logistics, healthcare, infrastructure, agriculture and other sectors. Industry leaders called for a predictable, risk-based certification framework, dedicated flight-testing environments and clear operating protocols to enable the transition from experimental operations to commercially scalable drone networks. Participants also called for strengthening India's testing and certification ecosystem through dedicated testing sites and flight-testing corridors, common laboratory facilities and greater utilisation of

infrastructure available with government institutions, technical institutes and research organisations. The discussions further highlighted the need for specialised testing capabilities spanning both civil and defence applications, alongside stronger UTM and live-tracking capabilities and more efficient mechanisms for drone operations in restricted and red zones.

Government-led adoption emerged as another key priority, with industry representatives emphasising the role of government departments in creating demand through wider deployment of drone-based solutions. Participants also highlighted the need to build a stronger domestic component ecosystem across critical technologies through deeper collaboration between industry, academia, research institutions and government. The round table also discussed strengthening India's position as a global drone manufacturing and technology hub through improved ease of doing business, streamlined regulatory processes and stronger export and trade promotion mechanisms. The discussions assume particular significance for Orvakal Drone City, a 600-acre purpose-built ecosystem being developed to bring together drone manufacturing, R&D, testing, logistics and supporting infrastructure. The initiative is envisaged as an integrated environment where companies can develop, test and scale next-generation drone technologies.

Tamil Nadu Government announces 365-Day maternity leave for women employees for third child

Chennai : The Tamil Nadu government, led by Chief Minister Vijay, announced a series of welfare measures, including extending 365 days of maternity leave for women state government employees for a third child and enhanced benefits for MLAs. According to the announcement, women working in the state government will now be entitled to 365 days of maternity leave for the first two children. However, opposing the announcement, DMK spokesperson TKS Elangovan said that Tamil Nadu was the first state to follow family planning and encouraged couples to have not more than two children. "Tamil Nadu is the first state to follow family planning in a restricted sense. That is why we stopped at two children. It is better to have only two children in a family, which will help the family and enable the parents to bring up their children," the DMK leaders said.

Saying that the current TVK-led state government might be abandoning family planning, he added, "But if they are having a third child, it means they are abandoning the family planning programme. I don't understand the meaning of this. This government does not want family planning. That is the only thing I can infer from this." Additionally, the state government also announced that cars will be provided to all MLAs at government expense. The monthly vehicle allowance for every MLA has been increased to Rs 75,000, while the assistant



allowance has been fixed at Rs 25,000 per month. Further, the government has decided to enhance health insurance coverage for MLAs under the government scheme from Rs 5 lakh to Rs 25 lakh. Meanwhile, the Tamil Nadu government has announced a series of major measures under Rule 110, covering milk procurement prices, medical education, healthcare infrastructure, and insurance coverage.

The government has announced an increase in the milk procurement price from Rs.38 to Rs.41 per litre. The announcement states that, as a result of the increase, the government will incur an additional expenditure of Rs.30 crore per month and Rs.360 crore per year. In the healthcare and medical education sector, the government has announced Rs.351 crore for increasing student admission capacity in gov-

ernment medical colleges. A total of 6,098 additional seats will be created for developing healthcare professionals, including 660 B.Sc. Nursing seats, 1,925 additional seats in nursing colleges and schools, 2,778 seats across 12 paramedical courses, and 735 additional seats in medical courses. The announcement also states that seven new government nursing colleges will be established. In Perambalur, a 400-bed world-class multi-speciality hospital will be established at an estimated cost of Rs.300 crore. The facility is intended to provide advanced medical treatment and healthcare services. Another major announcement concerns the Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme. The annual limit for medical treatment is proposed to be increased from Rs.5 lakh to Rs.25 lakh, according to the announce-

CJP's Ashutosh Ranka Challenges Rajasthan Minister to Showcase Top Schools



New Delhi : Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) co-convenor Ashutosh Ranka on Wednesday challenged Rajasthan Education Minister Madan Dilawar to showcase his ten finest educational campuses during his tenure and emphasized that he will visit those schools, with his entire team, following his return from Bengal. Ashutosh Ranka, in a post on X, re-

quested the Rajasthan education minister to verify the magnificent educational institutions during his tenure, as he will be visiting them in the next few days. He wrote, "I'm returning to Jaipur after spending three days in Bengal. In the next few days, I'll visit schools in Rajasthan with the entire team. Madan Dilawar ji - I have an offer for you. Tell me the 10 most magnificent

schools built during your tenure. My team and I will visit those as well. You must have at least 10 such schools to show, right?" Earlier this week, on Monday, Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) co-convenor Ashutosh Ranka challenged Rajasthan Education Minister Madan Dilawar following an official circular restricting external visitors from entering government schools. Rebuffing potential police action, Ranka declared that ongoing inspections of dilapidated school infrastructure across the state would continue unabated.

In a post on X, Ranka targeted Education Minister Madan Dilawar and said, "Madan Dilawar ji, either fix all the dilapidated schools in Rajasthan, or go ahead and file an FIR against us in advance. You can even arrest us in advance. It's your

government, your police. But we won't stop inspecting the schools until all schools in Rajasthan are fixed." The confrontation follows an urgent circular issued by Lalit Kumar, Director of Secondary Education, Bikaner, Rajasthan (dated August 16, 2026). Citing the doctrine of "In Loco Parentis", Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, the Supreme Court's KS Puttaswamy privacy judgment, and the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) guidelines, the order restricts entry into government educational institutions. External individuals are barred from school premises without explicit prior authorisation from the Principal or Head of Institute, except for authorised government officials executing official duties. Mandatory entry in visitor registers before entering school grounds.

Odisha floods: CM Mohan Majhi announces Rs 1,000 crore relief package for six districts

Bhubaneswar : Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi announced a Rs 1,000-crore relief package for six flood-hit districts, as heavy rainfall triggered fresh flooding in northern Odisha, affecting over nine lakh people across Balasore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar and Kendrapara. Under the special package for flood-hit areas, farmers whose crops suffered damage in non-irrigated areas will be provided Rs 8,500 per hectare, while those in irrigated areas will receive Rs 17,000 per hectare. Assistance for damage to perennial crops has been fixed at Rs 22,500 per hectare. Special financial assistance will be transferred through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to the bank accounts of affected farmers for the purchase of paddy and non-paddy seeds. Affected farmers will also be provided

free vegetable mini-kits, along with a 75% subsidy for post-flood pest and disease management. Damaged irrigation projects will be restored and repaired on a war footing. Compensation will be provided for livestock losses, while assistance will be extended to fishermen and farmers for the restoration of damaged boats, fishing nets and ponds. Short-term Kharif crop loans of willing farmers will be converted into medium-term loans.

Artisans and weavers affected by the floods will receive Rs 5,000 for damaged tools and equipment, and another Rs 5,000 for loss of raw materials or finished products. Temporary repairs of roads and other infrastructure will be undertaken immediately, with funds for permanent reconstruction to be provided after a detailed damage assessment. Distribution of



cooked food, dry food and relief rice will continue in all affected areas until the situation returns to normal. Financial assistance will also be provided to affected families for the purchase of essential clothing, utensils and household articles. CM Majhi on Tuesday said authorities are intensifying evacuation, rescue and relief operations amid continuing rainfall and rising river levels across the six districts. He has also visited several of the flood affected

area to assess the situation on the ground. According to IMD reports on August 15, 429 villages across 52 blocks had been affected by floodwater, while 79 rescue teams were deployed. The Central Water Commission has warned of flash-flood risks in parts of Odisha, while the IMD has forecast further heavy rainfall and issued an alert for 11 districts. Authorities continue to monitor vulnerable areas and coordinate evacuation, relief distribution and medical preparedness.

Rajdhani Express halted in Hojai to allow safe crossing of elephant herd through railway track



Hojai : A Rajdhani Express was halted in Assam's Hojai district so that a herd of wild elephants could cross the railway tracks safely. According to officials, strict vigilance and prompt alert action by forest staff and coordination by the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) helped save the lives of

the elephants in Hojai district. As per reports, forest staff spotted an elephant herd near the railway track as they tried to cross at the Hawaipur area near Lanka in Hojai district, with the Down Rajdhani Express approaching. Alert action by the forest staff, the loco-pilot and the Lumding

Railway Control Room ensured the elephant herd crossed safely and the train resumed its journey. Sharing the heartwarming video on social media, Assam Forest Minister Jayanta MallaBarua wrote on X, "An unexpected halt on the tracks, but only for our adorable giants to pass by. This morning,

the Down Rajdhani Express was stopped at Km 167/8 as an elephant herd crossed the tracks at Hawaipur under Lanka Range, Nagaon South Division, Hojai." "Alert action by our @assamforest staff, the loco-pilot and Lumding Railway Control Room ensured the herd crossed safely and the train resumed its journey. Another day, another safe crossing!" he added. "Every day, our dedicated forest personnel remain watchful, quietly ensuring the safety of our wildlife. These may be silent stories, but each safe crossing is a story worth telling," the Minister further said.

Lebanon: Over 8,50,000 displaced return amid lack of services, widespread disruption

Geneva : Amid continued tensions in West Asia, a report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has observed that about 8,50,000 displaced persons have returned to areas of origin; however, the crisis remains far from over as humanitarian agencies remain underfunded, thereby posing challenges to restoring livelihoods and rehabilitating infrastructure. In a post on X on Tuesday, the UNHCR underlined that, despite declared ceasefire arrangements, fresh Israeli airstrikes in south Lebanon over the weekend triggered a new wave of displacement, with hundreds of families fleeing northward in search of safety. These movements add to an already protracted displacement crisis, in-

creasing uncertainty for communities attempting to make their way home. "Around 860,000 people are reported to have returned to their areas of origin, while some 360,000 people remain displaced, including at least 22,000 people living in collective shelters. Others report living with relatives or in overcrowded rented apartments," UNHCR said.

There were more than 1 million people displaced inside Lebanon during the peak of the conflict. Many families remain unable to return to their homes due to extensive debris, insecurity, lack of access to their communities, and widespread damage to infrastructure, resulting in strained or non-functioning health, water and electricity services. The



organisation has highlighted how humanitarian agencies are also facing severe resource shortages, limiting their ability to assist displaced people and those attempting to return. "The revised Lebanon inter-agency Flash Appeal of \$639.9 million is only 48 per cent funded. The inter-agency appeal includes some \$94.2 million for UNHCR relief efforts. Overall, UNHCR's Lebanon operation is only 24 per cent funded

against total requirements of US\$472.3 million for 2026," the post said. Noting how many people undertake repeated "go-and-see" visits before deciding whether return is safe or feasible, while others continue to move between areas of displacement and origin, the UNHCR said that as a result, the distinction between those who have returned and those who remain displaced has become increasingly blurred.

NLEP Workshop Strengthens Leprosy Control Measures

New Delhi, August, 19 (PIB): The two-day National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP) Review-cum-Capacity Building Workshop commenced today in Indore, Madhya Pradesh. Organised by the Central Leprosy Division (CLD), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the workshop aims to strengthen programme implementation, enhance technical capacities and accelerate focused action towards achieving Interruption of Transmission (IoT) of leprosy. The workshop brought together more than 70 participants, including the Additional Director General, Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS); Deputy Director General (Leprosy); officials of the Central Leprosy Division; representatives from RLTRI Raipur and Aska Institute; State Leprosy Officers; Chief Medical and Health Officers; District Leprosy Officers from all 51 districts of Madhya Pradesh; District Consultants; technical development partners; and a representative of APAL. The deliberations focused on reviewing the epidemio-



logical situation, assessing programme performance, identifying implementation gaps and sharing field-level experiences and best practices. Particular emphasis was placed on strengthening early case detection, contact tracing, timely initiation and completion of treatment, prevention of disabilities and intensified surveillance as key components of the last-mile strategy for interrupting leprosy transmission. The workshop commenced with a welcome address by the State Lep-

rosy Officer, Madhya Pradesh, followed by a Special Address by the Additional Director General, DGHS. The first day of the workshop featured technical sessions focusing on the epidemiological scenario of leprosy in Madhya Pradesh, focused strategies under NLEP, improving the quality and outcomes of the Leprosy Case Detection Campaign (LCDC), and strengthening Retrospective and Reverse Contact Tracing. The session led by Dr. Sunil V. Gitte, Deputy Di-

rector General (Leprosy), highlighted the importance of leveraging programme data to identify priority districts and areas requiring intensified surveillance and targeted interventions. Particular emphasis was laid on implementing focused strategies to bring the prevalence rate below 1 per 10,000 population, while strengthening early case detection, contact tracing, timely treatment and disability prevention as part of the last-mile efforts towards interruption

of transmission.

Dr. Rashmi Shukla, National Programme Officer, WHO, led a technical session on “Improving the Quality and Outcomes of Leprosy Case Detection Campaign (LCDC)”, focusing on enhancing the quality of campaign implementation and improving the effectiveness of case detection activities. Another technical session, conducted by Dr. Sandeep Jogdand, RLTRI Raipur, focused on “Retrospective and Reverse Contact Tracing”. The session provided technical orientation on strengthening contact-tracing approaches to identify potentially missed or undiagnosed cases and to better understand transmission dynamics within affected communities.

The technical deliberations were followed by a brainstorming and experience-sharing session with District Leprosy Officers from across Madhya Pradesh. Districts including Alirajpur, Anuppur, Barwani, Burhanpur and Dhar shared their respective field experiences, highlighting programme perfor-

mance, operational challenges, priority areas and district-level actions being undertaken to strengthen early case detection, timely treatment and prevention of disability. The experience-sharing session also facilitated peer learning among district teams and provided an opportunity to identify practical and replicable approaches for strengthening implementation. The Vice-President of APAL shared experiences and practical insights on strengthening early case detection and community-level action, underscoring the importance of incorporating the perspectives of persons affected by leprosy and enhancing community engagement in programme implementation. The two-day workshop will continue on 20 August 2026, with further deliberations and capacity-building sessions aimed at consolidating district-level strategies, strengthening programme implementation and accelerating focused interventions towards the national goal of Interruption of Leprosy Transmission.

Raksha Mantri to hold bilateral talks with his Japanese counterpart in New Delhi to further deepen defence cooperation

New Delhi, August, 19 (PIB): Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh will hold a bilateral meeting with the Defence Minister of Japan Mr Shinjiro Koizumi in New Delhi on August 20, 2026. The meeting is expected to further strengthen bilateral defence relations, enhance strategic trust and cooperation, promote stability & security in the Indo-Pacific region and identify new areas of collaboration. The two Ministers will exchange views on deeper maritime security cooperation and closer defence equipment and technology collaboration under the ‘Make-in-India’ framework, following Japan’s revision of the Three Principles on Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology. The meeting provides an opportunity to build a roadmap for further advancing bilateral defence and security cooperation. On his maiden visit to India, Mr Shinjiro Koizumi visited the Western Naval Command in Mumbai on August 19, 2026, where he held discussions with the Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Krishna Swaminathan and Flag Officer Commanding in Chief, Western Naval Command Vice Admiral Sanjay Vatsayan. The delegation was briefed on the roles & responsibilities and operational capabilities of the Indian Navy. Upon his arrival, the visiting dignitary inspected a Guard of Honour at the Western Naval Command. He, earlier, laid a wreath at the Gaurav Stambh at the Naval Dockyard. He also paid a visit to the indigenous ship INS Chennai. India and Japan share a common vision of building a free, open, resilient and prosperous Indo-Pacific region. The two-day visit of the Japanese Defence Minister underscores the growing momentum in bilateral defence cooperation and reflects the commitment of both sides to further expand the partnership. The visit comes weeks after Japanese Prime Minister Ms Sanae Takaichi was in Delhi for the Annual Summit with Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi where both sides agreed to deepen defence and security cooperation.

Cabinet Clears Rs.3,591-Crore NH-22 Four-Laning Project in Bihar

New Delhi, August, 19 (PIB): The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, has approved the Upgradation of the Muzaffarpur-Sitamarhi-Sonbarsa Section of NH-22 to four-lane Standard in Bihar. The project will be developed on Hybrid Annuity Mode (HAM) at a total capital cost of Rs.3590.73 crore with a total length of 82.578 km. The proposed project holds significant strategic and economic relevance due to its integration with Bihar’s expanding National Highway network. It acts as a key feeder corridor connecting the India–Nepal border at Sonbarsa with economic centers like Muzaffarpur at NH-27 (East–West Corridor). The project will significantly reduce congestion in densely populated areas of Muzaffarpur, Muksudpur, Runni Saidpur, Thumma, Dumra, Bhutahi, and Sonbarsa. The project is expected to enable faster and safer movement of passengers and freight, improve travel efficiency and strengthen regional connectivity. It has been designed for a speed of 100 kmph with an average speed of 80 kmph, having no at-grade median openings, ensuring fast and safe travel. Planned in accordance with the principles of the PM GatiShakti National Master Plan, the project will enhance multimodal integration by improving connectivity to key economic, social and logistics nodes, including industrial areas and major railway stations. Improved connectivity will facilitate efficient movement of goods and agricultural supply chains, support regional economic growth, and provide better access to important cultural and religious destinations such as the Buddhist Circuit and historic Janaki Punaura Dham Temple, Sitamarhi. The Muzaffarpur–Sitamarhi–Sonbarsa stretch of NH-22 holds significant strategic and economic relevance, ensuring seamless linkage to the national freight grid. It is in synergy with existing corridors such as NH-31 and NH-122 enhances connectivity to industrial zones like Barauni and riverine logistics hubs along the Ganga It also enhances cross-border passenger and cargo movement via the nearby Land Port at Bhihamore. In addition, the project has provision for seven Major Bridges (including a 340m long major bridge over the perennial Bagmati River), three Railway Over Bridges (ROBs), and two Flyovers (1170m & 270m) to maintain cross movement of the traffic and ensure safe, high-speed travel. The project will increase average travel speeds, reduce travel time, and improve overall road safety, fuel efficiency, and vehicle operating costs, thereby enhancing regional mobility and socio-economic development. The project provides seamless connectivity to key economic, social, and logistics nodes across Bihar. Additionally, the upgraded corridor will enhance connectivity to five PM Gati-Shakti Economic Nodes (four Industrial Estates and one Mega Food park), four Social Nodes (Baba Garibnath Temple, Mata Janki Temple, Punaura Dham, Muzaffarpur & Sitamarhi aspirational Districts), and two Logistic Nodes (Muzaffarpur & Sitamarhi Railway Stations), thereby facilitating faster movement of goods and passengers across the region.

NHRC, India takes suo motu cognizance of the reported physical assault on two men from Manipur in Munirka area of Delhi

- Reportedly, one of the victims with serious head injuries has been put on a ventilator at a hospital - The Commission issues a notice to the Delhi Police Commissioner, calling for a detailed report on the matter within two weeks
New Delhi, August, 19 (PIB): The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India has taken suo motu cognizance of a media report that two men from Manipur were assaulted by two persons in the Munirka area of Delhi. Reportedly, one of the victims sustained serious head injuries and has been put on a ventilator at a hospital. The Commission has observed that the contents of the news report, if true, raise serious issues of violation of human rights. Therefore, it has issued a notice to the Delhi Police Commissioner, calling for a detailed report on the matter within two weeks. The report is expected to include the investigation and the health status of the injured. According to the media report, carried on 14th August 2026, a dispute over a minor issue led to the attack on the victims.

Today's Horoscope



Aries

Find the solace in the company of children. The therapeutic powers of children not only those of your own family but even the off-springs of others can give you solace and calm your anxiety. Today, you can take your family members out for a get-together and spend a lot of money on them. Unexpected good news later in the day brings happiness and cheers for the entire family. Today chances of meeting someone who would appeal to your heart would be very strong. Today, you will not feel like working in the office. You will face a dilemma, which won't allow you to concentrate on your work. Today, you can come back from office and get indulged in some of your favourite hobbies. This will calm you down. Today, you will get to spend the best evening of your life with your spouse. **Remedy :-** Health will be wonderful by regularly watering a tamarind tree.



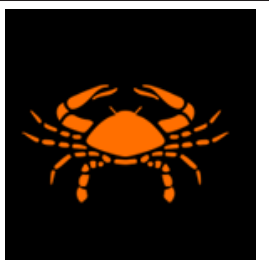
Taurus

Your personality will act like a perfume today. By spending money on essential household items, you will definitely face financial distress today, but this will save you from many future troubles. Time spent with relatives will be to your advantage. Spell of love is all set to bind you this day. Just feel the bliss. Do not enter into any joint venture- as partners will try to take advantage of you. Communication will be your strong point today. Your marriage will see a wonderful phase during this day. **Remedy :-** Donate battery-run toys and dolls to poor and needy children.



Gemini

Friends will introduce you to somebody special who would have a remarkable influence on your thoughts. Improvement in finances will make it convenient for you to make important purchases. Overall a beneficial day but someone you think you can trust will let you down. Love is synonymous to worshipping God; it is very spiritual as well as religious. You will know this today. Do not come under pressure of others when making important business decisions. Resist associating with people that will harm your reputation. The series of disagreements will take its toll and you will find it very difficult reconcile with your spouse. **Remedy :-** To experience continued growth in business/career, minimize, and if possible avoid, the use of black leather shoes.



Cancer

Hectic work schedule may make you short-tempered. New moneymaking opportunities will be lucrative. You will be torn in many different directions if you try to take care of everyone's demands. Interference of others will cause frictions. Journey undertaken for the job prospects would yield positive results. You need to keep your composure and express yourself during interview. You need to remember that god helps those who help themselves. You might feel awkward about an action of your spouse. But later you will realize it happened for good. **Remedy :-** Always keep a yellow piece of cloth in your pocket/wallet/near you for health body and mind. Yellow colour is a great mood enhancer.



Leo

You are likely to impress people around you with your positive outlook and confidence. Those who were going through financial crisis for a long time can attain money from anywhere today, which will eliminate several life problems in an instant. Do not neglect your social life. Take some time from your busy schedule and go out to attend the party with your family. It will not only relieve your pressure but also remove your hesitation. Have you ever smelled chocolate with ginger and roses? Your love life is going to taste like that today. Your work may get suddenly checked thoroughly at the workplace. **Remedy :-** Store water in a red or maroon coloured glass bottle and let it absorb Sun's rays. Then mix this water with your bathing water and have bath for active professional life



Virgo

Your hope will bloom like a rich delicate fragrant and dazzling flower. You know the importance of money very well, which is why the money you save today will be useful in the future and get out of any major difficulty. Festive atmosphere at home would ease your tension. Make sure you also participate in this and not remain like a silent spectator. Even your precious gifts/presents might not bring in the cheerful moments, because it could be discarded by your lover. You should put in your best efforts to reap excellent reward today. Natives of this zodiac sign need to understand themselves a bit better today. **Remedy :-** For a happy and contented love life, present your lover with blue coloured or hued flowers such as orchids, iris, hyacinths, etc.



Libra

Health will be fine despite some mental pressures. You may witness tremendous profit in business today. You can give new heights to your business today. Today you will benefit-as family members will respond to you in a positive manner. The ecstasy of entire universe is held between the two who are in love. Yes, you are the lucky one. Good day for traders and businessmen as they would benefit from growing demand. Today, you would like to do all the things that you used to love during your childhood. Love making is at its best when you can feel the emotional bond with your life-partner. **Remedy :-** Donate Barley equivalent to your weight in any goshala or cowshed and maintain great health.



Scorpio

Your charming behaviour will attract attention. Today, you will understand the importance of money and how unnecessarily spending it can negatively affect your future. Some of you are likely to purchase jewelry or a home appliance. Likely to be rewarded for fair and generous love. Others might demand too much of your time- Before you make any commitment towards them make sure that your work is not affected and also they are not taking advantage of your kindness and generosity. It is good for you to keep up with time, but at the same time, it is important to understand the importance of family and spend as much time as you can with them. The day might become one of the best days of your married life. **Remedy :-** Reciting (Om Namoh Bhagavate Vasudevayaa) 28 or 108 times will be good for professional life.



Sagittarius

Some people might feel that you are too old to learn something new-but that is far from the truth- you will easily learn new things because of your sharp and active mind. Today, you can learn the skill of accumulating and saving money and put it to the right use. Unexpected gifts and presents from relatives and friends. Sharing food with beloved in candlelight. Added knowledge that you acquire today would give you an edge when dealing with peers. You can watch any web series on your mobile in free time today. The day might become one of the best days of your married life. **Remedy :-** For enhanced health, distribute white scented-sweets to poor and needy children, especially young girls.



Capricorn

If possible try to avoid long journey as you are too weak to travel and this could put further weaken you. It should be well understood that in the hour of grief, your accumulated wealth will only help you tackle the situation. Hence, start saving from today and avoid excessive spending. Good time to get involved into activities that include youngsters. Beloved will be in a romantic mood. Your work will be appreciated at work. Efforts made to improve your looks and personality will turn out to your satisfaction. Your spouse will be full of energy and love today. **Remedy :-** Wear a bangle made up of bronze/brass for maintaining good health.



Aquarius

Health remains good. Certain important work will come to a halt due to bleak financial position. People you live with will not be very happy with you- regardless of what you do to please them. You may fall in love at first sight. Controversies or office politics; you will rule on everything today. Travel undertaken for business purpose will prove to be beneficial in the long run. You and your spouse might get a wonderful news today. **Remedy :-** Enrich your financial life by donating pure cotton clothes and namkeens to economically backward section of the society.



Pisces

Outdoor sports will attract you- Meditation and yoga will bring gains. Money position improves as delayed payments are recovered. The family's situation won't be normal as you think. Today, there is a possibility of an argument or dispute within the family. Hence, control yourself in such a case. Don't lose heart- failures are quite natural they are the beauty of life. Today you have a tendency to set your objectives much higher than you generally do- Do not get disappointed if results don't come as per your expectation. Choose your words with care when interacting with important people. Your married life will get stressed today due to lack of daily needs' fulfillment. It could be about anything like food, cleaning, other household works, etc. **Remedy :-** Maintain bliss and happiness in your love life by having food without salt once a day.

Piyush Goyal Heads to Singapore for India-Singapore Trade Talks

New Delhi: Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Shri Piyush Goyal, is visiting Singapore from 19-21 August 2026 as part of continued high-level engagement under the India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable (ISMR) framework. An Indian business delegation comprising around 70 senior business leaders from diverse sectors is visiting Singapore alongside Shri Piyush Goyal to strengthen India-Singapore economic and commercial ties. The delegation includes representatives from technology, software and AI, manufacturing and engineering, infrastructure and sustainability, financial services and FinTech, healthcare and life sciences, food and agriculture, logistics, maritime and trade, and professional services. The delegation will undertake B2B, G2B and institutional engagements, including interactions with leading Centres of Excellence (COEs) and visits to skilling institutions in Singapore. The engagements will focus on partnerships, investment, market access, technology collaboration and talent development. The visit is being organised on the sidelines of the India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable and India-Singapore Business

Roundtable meetings. During the visit, Shri Piyush Goyal will participate in the 4th India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable (ISMR) on 20 August 2026. The ISMR serves as the apex ministerial mechanism for advancing the India-Singapore Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP). The Roundtable will be held alongside the 4th India-Singapore Business Roundtable (ISBR), followed by an MoU signing ceremony and a lunch hosted by the Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore for all ISMR and ISBR delegates. The Minister will participate in the Roundtable alongside Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman, Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs; Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Union Minister for External Affairs; and Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw, Union Minister for Railways, Information and Broadcasting, and Electronics and Information Technology. The Ministers will engage with their Singaporean counterparts and other senior Singaporean leadership during the visit. Piyush Goyal will also call on Mr Lawrence Wong, Prime Minister of Singapore, at the Istana. On the sidelines, Shri Goyal will hold a series of Government-to-Business

(G2B) engagements with senior representatives from the Global Finance & Technology Network, YPO Global, Milken Institute, Keppel Infrastructure, Temasek Holdings and IHH Healthcare, as well as the Singapore Business Federation (SBF) Chairman-led delegation, Turner & Townsend and STT GDC. These engagements will be followed by a Family Office Roundtable. The Minister will jointly visit an APEDA-FairPrice initiative at City Square Mall along with Singapore's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Trade & Industry, Ms Gan Siow Huang. The initiative aims to promote Indian agri-food exports and strengthen their presence in Singapore's retail market, reflecting deepening agri-trade linkages between the two countries. Piyush Goyal will also participate in the India-Singapore Business Forum organised by FICCI at the INSEAD Asia Campus, where he will take part in a fireside chat on "India in the New Global Growth Equation: Growth and Opportunity for Businesses in Asia and the World," followed by a networking dinner with the Indian and Singaporean business community. The visit will conclude with a keynote

Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue 2027 Begins with Viksit Bharat Quiz

New Delhi: The Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue (VBLYD) 2027 has commenced with the launch of the Viksit Bharat Quiz, opening a nationwide opportunity for young Indians to participate in a structured, merit-based journey of leadership, innovation and nation-building, culminating in the National Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue in New Delhi and an opportunity for selected youth to present their ideas before the Prime Minister.

VBLYD 2027 is aligned with the vision of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to create one lakh young leaders from non-political backgrounds, providing talented young Indians without a family background in politics with opportunities to enter public life, contribute ideas and participate in the nation-building process. The initiative seeks to identify, nurture and provide a national platform to young people who aspire to contribute to Viksit Bharat @2047. Through a transparent, merit-based and multi-stage process, participants will progress from the digital quiz to the Essay Challenge, District Championships and State/UT-level VBLYD before reaching the National VBLYD.

Viksit Bharat Quiz Opens Nationwide Participation

The Viksit Bharat Quiz, the first stage of the flagship Viksit Bharat Challenge Track, is being conducted on the MY Bharat portal from August 17 to September 30, 2026.

Open to young Indians in the 15-29 years age group, the quiz will be conducted digitally in multiple languages, enabling youth from across the country to participate.

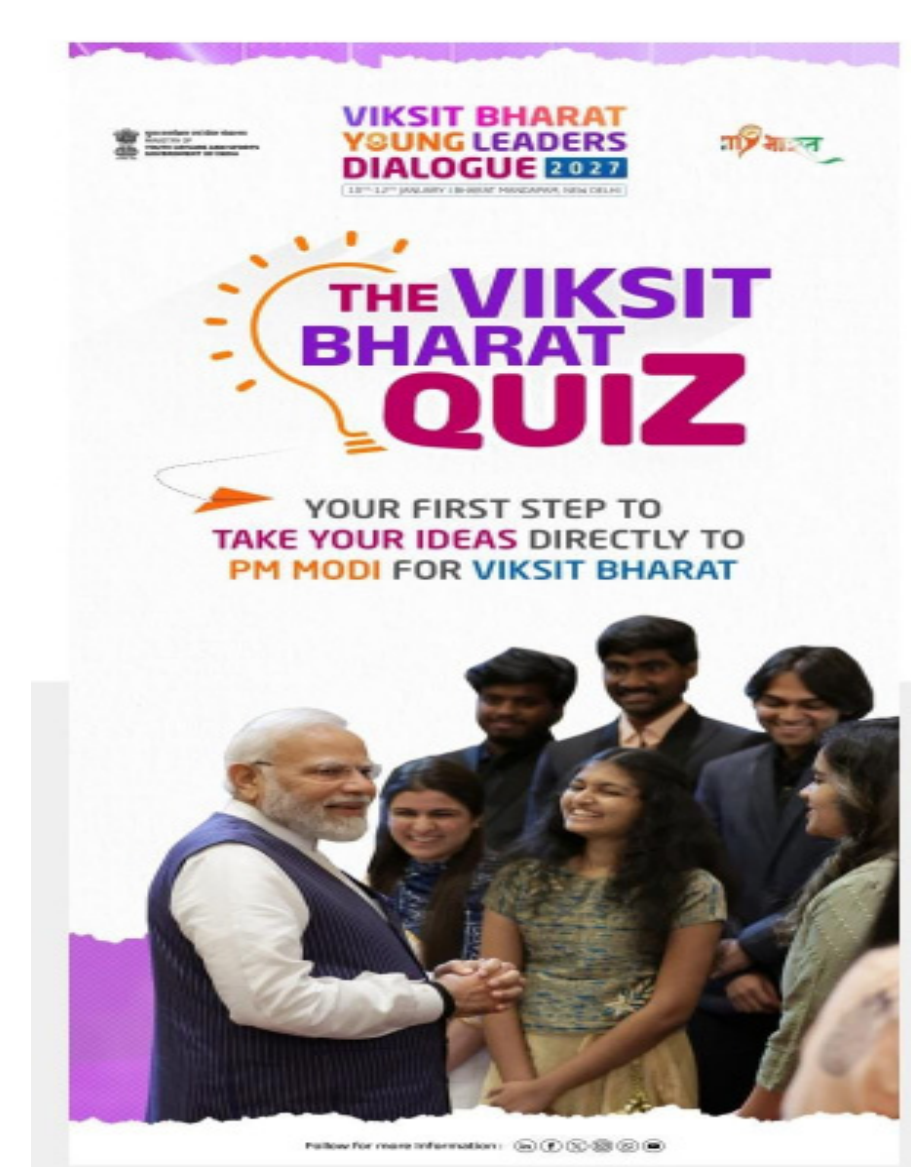
The top 10 per cent of quiz participants, subject to a maximum of four lakh participants, will qualify for the next stage — the Viksit Bharat Essay Challenge. Shortlisted participants will be required to submit a 500-word essay on the designated Viksit Bharat theme through the MY Bharat portal.

From Quiz to District and State Championships

The Viksit Bharat Challenge will follow a five-stage pathway:

Viksit Bharat Quiz? Essay Challenge? District Championship? State/UT VBLYD? National VBLYD

At the District Championship, the top 50 essays



from each district will be shortlisted for an in-person presentation round. The top two presenters from each district will qualify for the State VBLYD. District Championships are scheduled to be held from November 10 to 16, 2026.

The State/UT VBLYD, scheduled from November 17 to December 7, 2026, will bring together the different VBLYD tracks at the State/UT level. District-level selectees will present their ideas before a jury, with State teams for the National Round being constituted on the basis of their performance.

Six Tracks to Showcase Youth Talent, Leadership and Innovation

VBLYD 2027 will provide multiple pathways for young Indians through six major tracks:

Viksit Bharat Challenge: The flagship track enabling youth to articulate innovative ideas and solutions for Viksit Bharat @2047 through the Quiz, Essay Challenge and presentation-based selection process.

Cultural Track: Competitions across Folk Dance, Folk Song, Painting, Declamation and Poetry Writing, providing young people a platform to showcase India's diverse cultural heritage and creative expression.

Design for Bharat: A national design challenge focused on developing user-centric solutions to real-world developmental challenges.

Hack for Social Cause: A technology-driven innovation challenge inviting scalable digital solutions to social and developmental challenges.

Youth Entrepreneurs Challenge: A new track for VBLYD 2027 inviting young entrepreneurs to present startup pitches and business plans aligned with national development priorities.

Youth Parliament: Integrated into VBLYD 2027, with its national finalists participating in the National VBLYD.

10-Region Framework to Address India's Development Priorities

The Viksit Bharat Challenge will adopt a 10-region framework, with region-specific themes reflecting diverse developmental priorities and India's journey towards Viksit Bharat @2047.

The themes will cover areas including future governance, climate security, demographic dividend, sustainable industrialisation, connectivity, manufacturing, tribal leadership, innovation, frontier technology and the blue economy.

The framework will

enable young people from different parts of the country to identify region-specific challenges, develop innovative solutions and contribute ideas that can inform India's development journey.

National Dialogue to Provide Opportunity to Present Ideas Before Prime Minister

The journey will culminate in the National Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue in New Delhi from January 10 to 12, 2027.

Selected State and UT contingents across all six tracks will participate in the National event. Under the Viksit Bharat Challenge, regional teams will present their ideas before domain experts, Secretaries and Union Ministers, with the regional finalists getting an opportunity to present before the Prime Minister.

VBLYD 2027 will thus create a grassroots-to-national pathway for youth leadership — beginning with the Viksit Bharat Quiz, progressing through the Essay Challenge, District and State/UT-level championships, and culminating in a national platform where selected young leaders can engage with policymakers and present their ideas for the future of India.

TDB-DST Supports OrthoGraft Pvt. Ltd., Vadodara, Gujarat for Commercialization of Advanced Tissue-Derived Biological Dressings for Wound Care



New Delhi: Turning advances in tissue engineering into clinically relevant solutions for difficult-to-heal wounds, the Technology Development Board (TDB), Department of Science & Technology (DST), Government of India, has extended financial assistance to M/s OrthoGraft Pvt. Ltd. Vadodara, Gujarat for the project titled "Production Set-up for Advanced Tissue Derived Biological Dressings."

Through TDB's support, the company will establish manufacturing capabilities for indigenous biological dressings intended for clinical wound-care applications, including chronic wounds, diabetic foot ulcers and burns.

OrthoGraft is a DPIIT-recognised medical device startup engaged in developing tissue substitutes for clinical reconstruction and functional repair. The company is developing proprietary technologies for processing viable human tissue into shelf-stable tissue substitutes while retaining key biological and structural characteristics of the native tissue that are relevant to the wound-healing process.

An important aspect of the technology is its approach towards transforming suitable biomedical tissue material into high-value, clinically relevant biological dressings. The project combines tissue engineering, biomaterials science and specialized processing to develop advanced wound-care products with potential application in the management of chronic and hard-to-heal wounds.

With TDB assistance, OrthoGraft will strengthen its production infrastructure at the Savli Technology Business Incubator, Government of Gujarat, Vadodara, where the company has leased a bio-incubation facility. The location provides access to biotechnology R&D infrastructure required for medical device development and translation. The company has also obtained requisite licences from CDSCO for manufacture of medical devices for testing purposes and is exploring collaborations with tertiary-care hospitals and medical institutions for further development and clinical translation of the technology.

The company has developed multidisciplinary know-how in tissue processing and tissue substitutes and currently holds two granted US patents. It is also working with institutions of national importance, including IIT Ropar, and multispecialty hospitals towards development and translation of its technology platform. OrthoGraft has previously participated as an industry startup partner in Govern-

ments of India-supported multi-institutional R&D and commercialization projects.

Speaking on the occasion, Shri Rajesh Kumar Pathak, Secretary, TDB, stated, "Advanced biomaterials and tissue-engineered products represent an important frontier for India's medical technology ecosystem. TDB's support to OrthoGraft is aimed at enabling an Indian startup to translate its tissue-processing know-how into commercially manufacturable wound-care products. Such technologies can strengthen indigenous capabilities in advanced healthcare materials while

creating pathways for Indian innovations to compete in global markets."

Expressing gratitude for TDB's support, the leadership of OrthoGraft Pvt. Ltd. stated that the assistance will help the company establish dedicated production capabilities and accelerate the translation of its proprietary tissue-processing platform into clinically relevant products. The company aims to build an indigenous portfolio of advanced tissue substitutes and contribute towards making high-quality biological wound-care solutions more widely available.

India Hosts Eighth BRICS Youth Energy Summit 2026 under its BRICS Chairship

New Delhi: India hosted the Eighth BRICS Youth Energy Summit 2026 virtually on 17 August 2026 under its BRICS Chairship. The Summit brought together more than 100 participants, including young energy professionals from academia, government institutions, and the energy ministries of the BRICS Member Countries. Representatives of the BRICS Youth Energy Agency (BRICS YEA), as well as international organizations including Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL), the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and the International Energy Agency (IRENA), also participated in the Summit.

India's BRICS Chairship in 2026 is guided by the overarching theme "Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability (BRICS)". Within the Energy Track, India has adopted the theme "???????? ?????" (Energy for All), reflecting its commitment to advancing universal, affordable and inclusive energy access across BRICS. The Summit placed youth at the centre of BRICS energy cooperation, recognizing their role as drivers of innovation, entrepreneurship, technological advancement and international cooperation.

The discussions also emphasized the importance of strengthening collaboration among young professionals, academia, government institutions and industry across BRICS countries.

The deliberations underscored the importance of translating youth engagement into practical outcomes through joint research, technology demonstrations, knowledge exchange and capacity-building initiatives. Under the three priority areas of (i) Energy Security and Sustainability, (ii) Energy Access and Equity, and (iii) Technology and Innovation, more than 20 youth

panelists shared country perspectives and experiences on important topics, including diversification of the energy mix, resilient energy supply chains, energy access and innovative financing, new and emerging technologies, and digitalization of energy systems.

The discussions reflected broad convergence on the need for resilient and diversified energy systems, affordable and inclusive energy access, and innovative and affordable financing to advance clean energy deployment. Technological innovation and digitalization, supported by reliable energy

data, interoperability, cyber security and skilled human resources, were identified as important enablers of efficient, flexible and resilient energy systems.

Youth representatives from India highlighted key national initiatives and achievements in energy security, energy access, clean energy deployment and power-sector reforms, including the PM-KUSUM, PM Surya Ghar, SHANTI Act, Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS), and the India Energy Stack (IES). They also shared India's experience in diversifying the energy mix, strengthening distribu-

tion infrastructure and advancing decentralized renewable energy and digitalization, while highlighting the BRICS Digital Centre of Excellence (DCoE) on Smart Grids and Energy Storage as a platform for knowledge exchange, capacity building and collaboration on smart grids, storage and grid resilience. The Eighth BRICS Youth Energy Summit 2026 reaffirmed the pivotal role of BRICS youth in advancing energy cooperation and shaping solutions for a secure, sustainable, inclusive and future-ready energy sector, in keeping with the vision of "Energy for All".

Yami Gautam's 'Nayyi Navelli' to Clash with 'Jailer 2', 'Prahaar'



Yami Gautam, who impressed one and all with her fantastic performance in Haq last year, is all set to be back on the big screens with a movie titled Nayyi Navelli. The makers on Wednesday took to Instagram to share the motion poster of the film and announce its release date. Nayyi Navelli, which is directed by Balaji Mohan, is all set to release on October 16, 2026, which is the Dussehra weekend. However, the movie won't be getting a solo release.

Yami Gautam Vs Rajinikanth Vs Rajkumar Rao

During the Dussehra weekend, two more biggies are slated to hit the big screens: Rajinikanth-starrer Jailer 2 (October 15) and Rajkumar Rao-starrer Prahaar: The Ujjwal Nikam Story. Jailer 2 is originally a Tamil film, but it will be dubbed and released in Hindi. The Hindi-dubbed version of Jailer (2023) had failed to make a mark at the box office and reportedly collected only Rs. 5.35



crore. So, maybe the Yami Gautam-starrer, which is a Hindi film, might not face tough competition from Jailer 2. However, a lot depends on the sequel's pre-release buzz because reportedly Bollywood actors like Vidya Balan, Hrithik Roshan, and Jackie Shroff are also a part of the Tamil movie. Meanwhile, Prahaar: The Ujjwal Nikam Story is a film that would solely depend on the reviews and word of mouth. Also, it doesn't look like a festive movie, so Nayyi Navelli might have an

upper hand due to the genre. All three movies are still two months away from the release. So, let's wait and watch whether the clash will happen or it will be averted.

Prahaar: The Ujjwal Nikam Story release date

Prahaar: The Ujjwal Nikam Story was slated to release in August this year, but it was postponed to October 2026. The movie, which is directed by Avinash Arun, also stars Wamiqa Gabbi in the lead role.

Deepika Padukone To Join Ranbir And Alia In Brahmastra 2?

Ranbir Kapoor is set to return to the world of Brahmastra, with the second part of the franchise to become his next major project after Ramayana. According to Bollywood media, director Ayan Mukerji and his team are currently working on the script of Brahmastra 2. Ranbir is expected to complete the shooting of Ramayana Part 2 by January 2027. After a short break, he will begin shooting for Brahmastra 2 in April 2027. Yet another highlight of this film is that Ayan Mukerji is in talks with Deepika Padukone for the role of Amruta. Discussions are currently underway with Deepika, and the sequel is expected to be much bigger than the first part. Ranbir will be seen in the roles of both Shiva and Dev, while Alia Bhatt will also return as Isha.



Mirai Joins the Elite League in Japan



Japan has emerged as a strong overseas market for Telugu cinema, and Teja Sajja's Mirai is now making its presence felt even before its release. The film has entered the Top 10 Indian films in Japan for Day-1 advance bookings, joining an interesting list of Telugu titles that have made a mark

in the market, including RRR, Baahubali 2, Pushpa 2, Devar and Salaar.

Mirai has also moved ahead of Dhurandhar 2 in the current rankings and is closing in on Salman Khan's Tiger Zinda Hai. With two more days left for bookings, the film could climb further. With its fantasy world,

Indian mythology and large-scale visuals, Mirai is bringing a different flavour to the Japanese market. If the current momentum continues, the Teja Sajja starrer could add another notable chapter to Telugu cinema's growing Japan success story. Teja Sajja seems to be steadily expand-

ing his market with every film. After HanuMan built a strong audience base, Mirai is now taking things a step further with a huge start and impressive numbers even before release. HanuMan which also released in Japan collected 1cr but Mirai opened up big and getting huge numbers and tractions.

2026 Cincinnati Open: Sabalenka, Andreeva and Gauff advance to fourth round



Cincinnati: Aryna Sabalenka needed just 54 minutes to see off Wang Xinyu 6-1, 6-3 to ease into the fourth round of the Cincinnati Open. With a win, Sabalenka has now reached the Round of 16 or better at 45 WTA 1000 events in her career. Her effort in Cincinnati pulls her ahead of Karolina Pliskova for most among active players. She now owns 50 career wins at WTA 1000 events as World No. 1. Sabalenka is one of three players to do that since the format's introduction in 2009, along with Serena Williams (104) and Iga Swiatek (58). Meanwhile, No. 5 seed Mirra

Andreiev advanced to the fourth round of the Cincinnati Open in two contrasting sets, converting her fourth match point to quell a stern challenge from No. 32 seed Janice Tjen 6-1, 7-6(5) in 1 hour and 42 minutes. Andreeva, a quarterfinalist in Cincinnati in her only previous appearance at the tournament in 2024, has now won consecutive matches for the first time since capturing her first Grand Slam title at Roland Garros in June. She'll next face No. 10 seed Marta Kostyuk for the fourth time this year. Kostyuk leads their head-to-head 2-1, though Andreeva

won their most recent meeting in the Roland Garros semifinals. Elsewhere, No. 4 seed and 2023 champion Coco Gauff also secured her spot in the fourth round of the 2026 Cincinnati Open, courtesy of a 6-1, 7-6(3) win over fellow American Ann Li. Gauff is now into her 36th career WTA 1000 fourth round, including six this season. Only Aryna Sabalenka (44), Karolina Pliskova (44), Elina Svitolina (43), Iga Swiatek (38) and Jessica Pegula (38) have more among active players competing in Cincinnati singles. She will next face Marie Bouzkova, who beats Iva Jovic.

Global Chess League Season 4 tickets go on sale for Bengaluru matches



Hyderabad: The Global Chess League (GCL), a joint initiative between Tech Mahindra and FIDE, has opened ticket sales for Season 4 on BookMyShow, with Bengaluru set to host six global franchises from September 5 to 13. Icons, established champions, elite superstars, and the next generation of chess talent will converge on the city for another season of rapid, team-based action, with one place at the board still waiting to be claimed: the fans. Defending champions Alpine APL Pipers return with Magnus Carlsen leading their title defence, while PBG Alaskan Knights bring together Indian chess great Viswanathan Anand and Arjun Erigaisi. Ganges Grandmasters pair Ian Nepomniachtchi with returning

star Levon Aronian, while Fyers American Gambits are led by 2026 Candidates winner Javokhir Sindarov and Season 2 MVP Nihal Sarin. With the stars ready to make their moves, GCL is inviting fans to make theirs and take their place alongside the action. Early Bird tickets start at Rs 349, giving fans access to one match and the Festival Arena, while the Rs 2,999 Premium ticket covers all four matches of the day, along with access to the Festival Arena and Premium Lounge. With GCL's "Most Important Seat Is Empty" message putting the focus on the fan, the live experience will extend beyond the boards, with the Festival Arena offering live screenings, commentary, fan experiences, and food on a first-come, first-served basis. Gourav

Rakshit, Commissioner, Global Chess League, said: "GCL is built to be experienced live, and Bengaluru will give fans a chance to get much closer to the action. From the rapid intensity on the boards to the Festival Arena, we want fans to feel part of every move, every shift in momentum, and every big moment of the league." Anil Makhija, COO - Live Entertainment & Venues, BookMyShow: "Global Chess League brings together some of the biggest names in chess in a format built for a live audience. Over the last decade, India has firmly established itself as a global chess powerhouse, building on Viswanathan Anand's legacy and the rise of a new generation led by Gukesh Dommaraju."

PV Sindhu reveals Virat Kohli advice that changed her perspective during tough phase

New Delhi: PV Sindhu has revealed how Virat Kohli's simple advice during one of the toughest phases of her career helped change her perspective, with the Indian badminton star saying the Indian cricketer reminded her of the importance of simply turning up and trusting her preparation. Sindhu, who is currently competing at the BWF World Championships in New Delhi, recalled her conversation with Kohli while speaking on the RCB podcast. The two-time Olympic medalist said she had approached Kohli at a time when she felt that 'nothing is happening', but his response was straightforward. "He is like my brother, I must say, because I remember when I was at my lowest. I think I met him and I said, you know, nothing is happening. He just said, Just show up, it is okay, just go out there and just show



up," Sindhu said. The advice struck a chord with Sindhu, who said Kohli encouraged her to focus on competing, rather than being consumed by the results. "He asked me to show up, anywhere and for anything, and just play my game. What would happen? You are not going to lose anything; you know what you are, how you have trained, and show the world who you are. So I think it hit me, and I think that

conversation completely changed my perspective," she added. The 31-year-old also revealed that she remains in touch with Kohli and shares her achievements with him. "Whenever I win, I just share my happiness, saying that you know I have won this or that, and recently I met him, so it is always so good to meet, you know, a person who has achieved so much and to get a few of those inputs from him," Sindhu said.