

Rahul Gandhi invites citizens to share air pollution impact stories on 'Awaaz Bharat Ki'



NEW DELHI (TSIT): Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Sunday urged citizens across the country to share their personal stories on how air pollution is affecting their health and the well-being of their loved ones through a portal titled 'Awaaz Bharat Ki'.

'Awaaz Bharat Ki' is an initiative launched by Rahul Gandhi to offer a direct platform for people to convey their thoughts, suggestions and concerns to his office, according to details available on its official website. In a post on X, Gandhi highlighted the human and economic cost of worsening air quality, saying, "We are paying a heavy price for air pollution with our health and with our economy. Crores of ordinary Indians bear this burden every day." Underlining the urgency of addressing the issue,

he said that the most vulnerable sections of society are suffering the worst consequences.

"Children and the elderly suffer the most. Livelihoods, especially of construction workers and daily wage earners, are severely impacted. This crisis cannot be forgotten until next winter. The first step towards change is to raise our voices," Gandhi said. Calling on people to participate, he added, "Share your story of how air pollution has affected you or your loved ones at Awaaz Bharat Ki. Your voice matters, and it is my duty to raise it." The appeal comes at a time when New Delhi and several surrounding cities have been grappling with severe pollution levels over the past few months, leading to serious respiratory and other health-related problems among residents. Dense smog and persistently high pollution levels have made it increasingly difficult for people, particularly children and the elderly, to

step outdoors. Over the past few months, schools in the national capital have also been forced to shift to online classes on multiple occasions due to the Air Quality Index plunging into the 'severe' category.

In December last year, residents of Delhi staged protests against rising pollution levels and demanded a concrete action plan to tackle the crisis. More than a hundred protesters, including students, activists and concerned citizens, gathered at Jantar Mantar, urging both the State and Central governments to take immediate steps to curb deteriorating air quality in the national capital. The Congress party, during the Winter Session of Parliament last year, repeatedly raised the issue of air pollution in both Houses. The party leaders also held protests, carrying placards and demanding accountability from the ruling dispensation over the worsening environmental and public health situation.

Kerala CM Vijayan slams Centre, calls for unity on Republic Day



Thiruvananthapuram (GNS): Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Monday, January 26, targeted the Centre, saying the spirit of the Constitution and democratic values were facing unprecedented challenges, and called for unity to defend secularism and federalism on the occasion of Republic Day Extending Republic Day greetings, Vijayan said in a Facebook post that the day renewed the proud memories of India becoming a sovereign, democratic republic, even as conscious attempts were being made to undermine the principles of secularism and federalism enshrined in the Constitution. He said the Constitution was not merely a legal document, but the soul of the idea of India that celebrates diversity and guarantees equal justice.

The chief minister said the occasion called for vigilance against forces attempt-

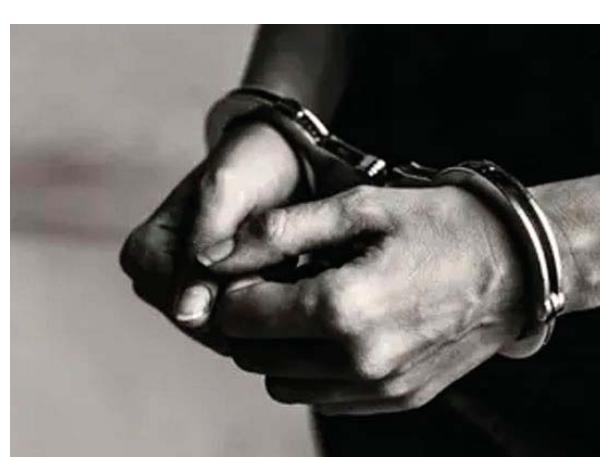
ing to weaken the vision of "unity in diversity" and impose a monolithic ideology.

"The federal concept of a strong Centre with empowered states is facing serious challenges. We should stand together against policies that aim to weaken federalism by curtailing the financial powers of states and turning constitutional institutions into political tools," he said.

Vijayan said Kerala's alternative development models based on decentralisation of power and people's participation provided strength to the struggle to protect constitutional values. Calling for renewed commitment to secularism and democracy, he said the politics of division must be countered with love and fraternity.

"Let us move forward together in this struggle to protect India—for a New Kerala and a progressive India," he said.

Bihar teacher arrested for raising pro-Pakistan slogans during Republic Day ceremony



Patna, Jan 26: In a shocking incident from Supaul district, Bihar, a government school teacher was arrested for allegedly raising slogans in support of Pakistan's first Governor-General, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, during the Republic Day flag-hoisting ceremony. The event took place at Abhuwar High School under Kishanganj block as part of the 77th Republic Day celebrations. The accused, Mohammad Mansoor Alam, reportedly chanted "Long Live Mr Jinnah" during the ceremony, which was captured on a mobile phone. The video quickly went viral on social media, sparking outrage among residents and the school community. Teachers, students, and attendees immediately objected to the

remarks. Following the incident, the school headmaster filed a formal complaint with the local police. Students later confirmed in their statements that the teacher had urged children to chant slogans such as "Long Live Mr

Jinnah" alongside phrases like "Long Live revered Bapu" and "Long live Bhagat Singh, Inquilab Zindabad." Students also alleged that the teacher had made comments glorifying Pakistan, claiming "paradise lies in Pakistan."

Acting on the complaint and evidence, Supaul police arrested Alam. Superintendent of Police Sharath R.S. stated, "The accused has been arrested based on the complaint and evidence. Such activities during a national festival are extremely serious. Strict legal action will be taken as per the law." He added that a thorough investigation is ongoing to examine all aspects of the incident.

The incident has triggered widespread anger among locals and school authorities, with many calling it an insult to the national spirit of Republic Day and demanding strict action. Police have assured the public that the matter will be handled firmly and without leniency.

ED attaches fresh PACL assets worth over Rs 1,986 crore

NEW DELHI: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday said it has attached fresh properties worth over Rs 1,986 crore as part of its money laundering investigation against Chandigarh-based PACL (Pearls Group), accused of orchestrating a Rs 48,000 crore Ponzi scheme.

The latest action has taken the total value of assets attached so far in the case to Rs 7,589 crore.

In a statement, the agency said it has provisionally attached 37 immovable properties, located in Punjab's Ludhiana and Jaipur in Rajasthan, valued at Rs 1,986.48 crore, under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

A part of the alleged illicit funds generated from this fraud was used for the acquisition of these 37 assets, it said. The ED probe stems from a CBI case

against PACL Ltd, its late promoter Nirmal Singh Bhangoo and some others.

Bhangoo died in August 2024. The accused entities and individuals of PACL operated an "illegal" collective investment scheme, fraudulently mobilising over Rs 60,000 crore from lakhs of investors across India under the guise of sale and development of agricultural land, as per the ED. Investors were induced to invest through cash down payment and instalment payment plans and were made to sign "misleading" documents, including agreements, powers of attorney, and other instruments, it said. "In the majority of cases, no land was ever delivered, and approximately Rs 48,000 crore remains unpaid to investors," the agency said. Three charge sheets have been filed by the ED till now as part of this case registered in 2016.



Reliance stays away from Russian oil, public sector firms lap it up



2026, with others (RIL, MRPL, HMEL) staying out as of now," he said. Indian refiners are currently sourcing Russian crude through a mix of channels, but the trend for most buyers has shifted toward newer non-sanctioned intermediaries rather than clean, direct liftings from the major Russian producers.

Direct deliveries linked to Rosneft and Lukoil are still taking place, but they are increasingly concentrated with Naryara, which has continued lifting Russian barrels given its different risk posture and Russian linkage,

while other Indian refiners are more selectively buying through non-sanctioned trading entities

that have emerged over the last 2-3 months to keep flows moving in a more compliance-friendly structure (for example Alghaf marine, rusexport, etc and other newly active intermediaries), he added.

Close to 60 per cent of India's Russian imports in January went to state-run refiners IOC and BPCL, and the rest to Naryara Energy.

In January, Rosneft supplied 130,000 bpd oil to India while Lukoil shipped 103,000 bpd.

Unsanctioned Surgutneftegas and RusExport shipped the bulk of oil, Kpler data showed.

A Reliance spokesperson had earlier this month

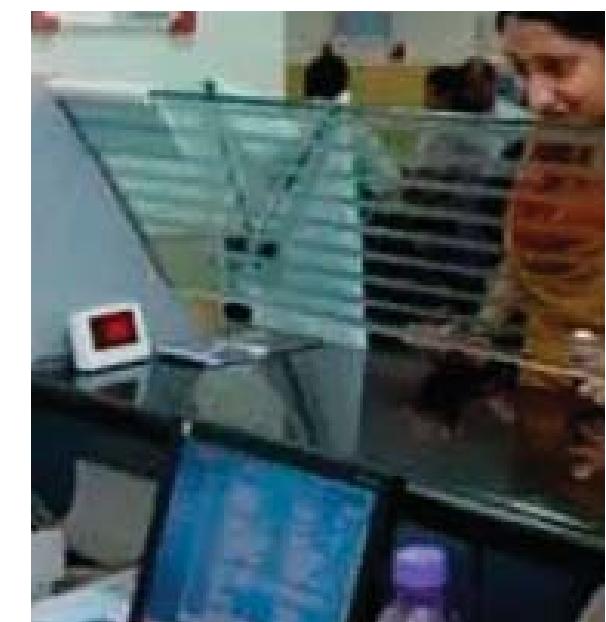
stated that the company did not receive a single Russian cargo in January, while its purchases in December were half those in November.

HMEL perhaps stopped purchases of Russian crude oil because of the potential impact on the global operations of Mittal Group.

HMEL averaged 153,000 bpd of Russian oil imports in 2025.

Banks to go on nationwide strike on Jan 27, Unions seek 5-day work week

Chandrasekhar said, "This movement is not against customers, but for a sustainable, humane, and efficient banking system. A rested banker serves the nation better. A balanced workforce strengthens financial stability. 5-Day banking is not a luxury; it is an economic and human necessity." Services such as cash deposits, withdrawals, cheque clearances, and administrative work are expected to be hit at branches of public sector banks (PSBs), including State Bank of



India (SBI), Punjab National Bank (PNB), and Bank of Baroda.

However, operations at major private sector lenders like HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, and Axis Bank are expected to remain largely unaffected as their employees are not part of the unions that will be going on strike. Digital banking services, including UPI and internet banking, will continue to function, though ATM cash availability could face localised issues due to logistical delays.

Several public sector lenders, including banking giant SBI have informed stock exchanges about the potential impact. "We advise that while the bank has made necessary arrangements to ensure normal functioning in its branches and offices on the day of strike, it is likely that work in the bank may be impacted by the strike," SBI said in a regulatory filing on Friday. The unions are demanding the declaration of all Saturdays as holidays, a key point that was reportedly agreed upon during the 12th Bipartite Settlement signed with the Indian Banks' Association (IBA) in March 2024 but is awaiting government notification. Currently, banks remain open on the first, third, and fifth Saturdays of every month.

Uttarakhand temples to restrict entry to Hindus only, BKTC confirms



Dehradun, Jan 26: The Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee (BKTC) announced that entry to the sacred Badrinath and Kedarnath temples, part of the revered Char Dham circuit, will soon be restricted exclusively to Hindus. This move will apply to all temples managed by the committee, the BKTC said.

BKTC president Hemant Dwivedi confirmed that non-Hindus will no longer be allowed to enter any temple under the committee's jurisdiction. He added that a formal proposal to enforce the restriction will be presented to the temple committee board in its upcoming

meeting. Badrinath temple is scheduled to reopen on April 23 after a six-month winter closure, while the reopening date for Kedarnath will be

reopen on April 19, coinciding with Akshaya Tritiya. The announcement comes amid ongoing debates in Uttarakhand over limiting non-Hindu access at major religious sites. Earlier this month, posters declaring Haridwar's Har ki Pauri as "off-limits for non-Hindus" sparked controversy. The posters, installed by the Shri Ganga Sabha, labeled the area as a "Hindu zone" and carried the message, "Non-Hindus Prohibited Entry Zone." The Sabha, however, said the aim was to raise awareness about legal rules and prevent disputes, not to discriminate.

CM Stalin: 2026 polls another Aryan-Dravidian battlefield



CHENNAI: Framing the forthcoming Assembly election as a renewed Aryan-Dravidian ideological battle, Chief Minister and DMK president MK Stalin on Sunday said the coming polls would determine whether Tamil language, culture and political autonomy would be protected or subjected to Delhi's domination.

Addressing a public meeting in Kanchipuram to mark Language Martyrs'

Day, Stalin declared that the electoral contest would be another battlefield of the Aryan-Dravidian struggle, aimed at defeating forces that, he alleged, were seeking to erode Tamil identity through political power and policy intervention.

Sharpening his attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP-led NDA, the Chief Minister accused the Union government of attempting to impose

Hindi and undermine federal principles through the National Education Policy (NEP) and the proposed three-language formula. He alleged that the Centre was using financial pressure to force compliance, pointing to the withholding of Rs 3,548 crore due to Tamil Nadu under education-related schemes. "Hindi imposition could not be done directly, so it is now being pushed through schools and universities using the

NEP," Stalin said, taking a swipe at Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan for "lecturing Tamil Nadu on language".

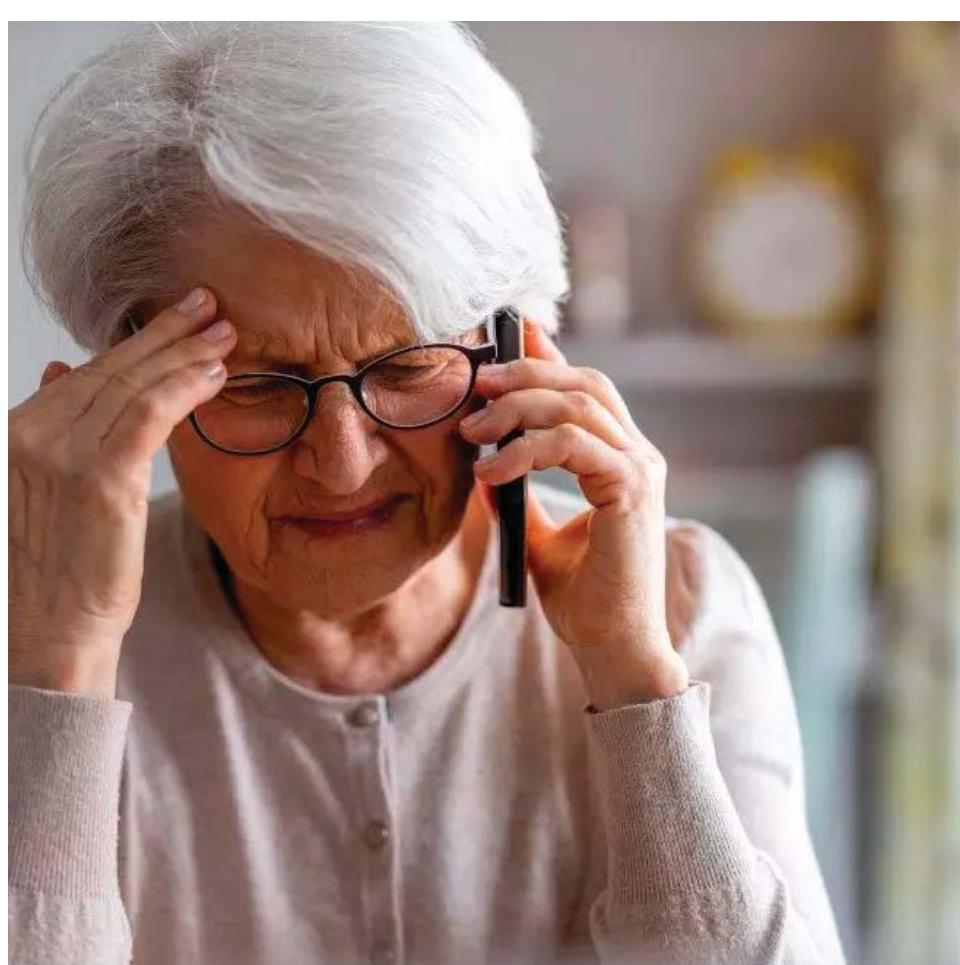
Mocking Modi's double-engine government pitch, Stalin said the model had failed elsewhere and would never succeed in Tamil Nadu. "This 'dabba engine' will not run here," said the DMK president.

He accused the BJP of trying to use the AIADMK to gain a foothold in the State, and added that AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami had faced repeated electoral defeats since 2019.

Referring to Modi's recent visit, Stalin said the Prime Minister avoided questions on pending central funds, delimitation of parliamentary constituencies, major infrastructure projects and disaster relief. "There were no answers, only election rhetoric," he said.

Tamil Nadu has already achieved significant progress in economic growth, education, healthcare and social development, said Stalin, stating that it did not need governance lessons from the Centre.

5-8 million Indians suffering from Alzheimer's



Bengaluru: The number of people suffering from Alzheimer's in India is estimated to be between 5.3 million and 8.2 million, healthcare experts said.

World Alzheimer's Day was observed on Thursday to raise awareness and educate people around the globe about Alzheimer's and dementia. It is a chronic disease where brain and memory cells slowly start to lose thinking and the ability to carry out simplest tasks. The brain cells themselves degenerate and die, destroying memory and other important functions.

This year's theme for Alzheimer's Day is 'Never too early, Never too late', which focuses on identifying the factors that cause this disease and taking steps to reduce and prevent dementia. Organizations gather on this day so that they can better understand about this condition and

generate more funds for research.

According to Ch Vijay, Consultant Neurologist, KIMS Icon, Vizag, Alzheimer's disease usually occurs for people who are in their mid 60s, where their brain

tween 5.3 million to 8.2 million. Because of the usage of curcumin, a powerful anti-oxidant that possess anti-inflammatory properties which helps fight the disease, Indians have substantially managed the increase of Alzheimer's but since 2005, it has grown more than dementia," he said. P. Sravanthi, Consultant Neurologist, SLG Hospitals, said, "There are many myths surrounding Alzheimer's disease. It does not always happen to older people, most people get this disease in their 60's but it is a chronic disease where there is a decline in thinking and the ability to carry out simplest tasks.

"About 5 per cent of people in their 30s, 40s and 50s get this disease as an early sign. Another myth about this disease is that it is not always an inevitable part of aging, it can take away someone's ability to eat, think and

talk and more. The medications that help with Alzheimer's disease do not help with permanent cure of the disease as there is no current way to stop or slow the ailment. Medications might help with thinking, language, memory, skills and some behavioural problems."

Talking about the tools that help doctors diagnose this disease, Subhangi Thakur Hameer, Consultant Neurologist, Amor Hospital, said that there are no specific blood tests available in India to determine Alzheimer's disease.

Performing clinical assessment and a PET scan, CT or an MRI can help diagnose Alzheimer's. Administrative psychological evaluation to determine whether the person is going through any symptoms such as depression or other related conditions that contribute to the person's symptoms. People with these memory problems should return to the doctor every 6-12 months.

According to Shraddha Sanghani, Consultant, Internal Medicine, Century Hospital, Alzheimer's can be caused due to the abnormal build-up of proteins in and around brain cells. Deposits of protein such as amyloid form plaques around the brain cells. Another protein is called tau, which forms tangles within brain cells. "Seeking support when needed, taking regular breaks, eating healthy foods, joining a caregiver's support group are methods which can help aging Alzheimer's patients. It is really important to have self-care practices in place which can be suggested by the doctor," Sanghani said. Lifestyle factors also account for Alzheimer's disease. People with low social engagement, sleep, physical activity and nutritious diet have the possibility of getting Alzheimer's disease. If people stay healthy, the factors might reduce, but not permanently cure.

Commit to nation first, make India self-reliant developed Bharat by 2047: TN Governor

CHENNAI: Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi on Monday urged the people to commit themselves to a pledge of "nation first" and called for efforts to "unleash our enterprise" and make a self-reliant developed Bharat by 2047.

Greeting the people on Republic Day, the Governor said this historic occasion brought to memory a profound sense of gratitude to countless freedom fighters who sacrificed and suffered for the freedom of the country.

"We also pay our heartfelt homage to the members of the Constituent Assembly, who gave us a profoundly powerful and resilient Constitution to guide and run the affairs



of the Republic to serve the people of Bharat," Ravi said in his message.

Stating that the country has reasons to be proud of our robust democracy, he said democracy was "our living heritage" and ran "in our DNA and is reflected in the day-to-day life of our people since thousands of years."

The renowned Uttaramerur inscriptions stood as a glorious testament to Bharat's ancient and sophisticated traditions of participatory self-governance, he claimed.

Tamil Nadu, the Governor said, has been a key beneficiary of many central projects, including the current railway bud-

get allocation of Rs 6,626 crore, modernising over 80 stations and enhancing regional connectivity through Vande Bharat trains.

"Together, these multi-modal developments are enhancing mobility, facilitating trade, generating employment, and improving access to goods and opportunities, strengthening Tamil Nadu's economy and the quality of life of its people," he said.

Recent years witnessed a vibrant resurgence of our rich Tamil heritage. Tamil was finding new voices and hearts across Bharat, as students at universities outside the state were eagerly taking up Tamil language courses.

No pressure on Vijay, NDA govt certain in Tamil Nadu, says BJP

CHENNAI: BJP state president Nainar Nagenthiran on Monday asserted that the saffron party had no need to exert any pressure on actor-politician Vijay, while expressing confidence that the NDA would form the government in Tamil Nadu. Speaking to reporters in Tirunelveli on Republic Day, Nainar Nagenthiran said the massive public meeting organised in Madurantakam for Prime Minister Narendra Modi had spontaneously



turned into a mega conference, drawing an estimated five lakh participants. He said clarity on the possible

entry of the DMK and the Ramadoss-led PMK into the NDA would emerge within a week. "The NDA is expand-

AI, blood biomarker spots long Covid patients with 96% accuracy



Bengaluru: Scientists have, for the first time, identified specific blood biomarkers that can accurately identify patients with long Covid. In the research, published in the journal Nature, they used an artificial intelligence based algorithm and showed that long Covid patients have clear differences in immune and hormonal function from patients without the condition.

"These findings are important -- they can inform more sensitive testing for long Covid patients and personalised treatments for long Covid that have, until now, not had a proven scientific rationale," said principal investigator David Putrino, Professor at Icahn Mount Sinai.

"This work is so exciting because it is one of the first to show us clear, measurable differences in blood biomarkers of people with long Covid compared with people who recovered fully from an acute infection and a group of people who have never been infected with SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes Covid-19).

"This is a decisive step forward in the development of

valid and reliable blood testing protocols for long Covid," Putrino said. The team analysed a total of 271 patients between January 2021 and June 2022 using machine learning-based algorithm.

They were divided into three groups: those with no prior SARS-CoV-2 infection; those who had fully recovered from a clinically confirmed case of Covid-19; those with active long Covid symptoms for at least four months or more after confirmed Covid-19 infection (median time of long-term symptoms was 12 months since the acute infection).

Overall, the algorithm was able to differentiate between people with and without long Covid with 96 per cent accuracy and detect the condition based on distinctive features detected in the blood of participants in the long Covid group, the researchers said.

Some of the most pronounced differences between the long Covid group and the two control groups were related to immune and hormonal dysfunction. This was characterised by biomarkers

indicating abnormal T cell activity, reactivation of multiple latent viruses (including the Epstein-Barr virus and other herpesviruses) and significant reductions in cortisol levels.

"These findings show us that people with long Covid are living with a disease process that is observable using the blood testing protocols laid out in the study, but also varies from patient to patient depending on their specific medical history," Dr. Putrino said.

"This means that physicians must listen to their patients and perform a wide variety of physiological and lab tests, while adopting a highly personalised approach to the medical management of long Covid. There is no 'silver bullet' for treating long Covid, because it is an illness that infiltrates complex systems such as the immune and hormonal regulation. Complex illnesses require complex treatment solutions and we need more rapid research to better understand long Covid and discover new and promising therapies," Dr. Putrino said.

Editorial

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2025

ECI's duty to the Republic

Republic Day homilies this year sound distinctly ironic in the context of all that's being done by the Election Commission of India (ECI) to enervate India's democracy. In a message to citizens on National Voters' Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi described voting as "a sacred constitutional right" and voters as the "bhagya vidhata" (deciders of destiny) of India. That sentiment simply does not square with the ECI's arbitrary and ongoing disenfranchisement of millions of voters, even as the republic enters its 77th year. The irony is complete when you consider that National Voters Day commemorates the founding of the ECI on January 25, 1950, one day prior to the birth of the republic. How macabre that one of the near twins is presiding over the eclipse of the other.

The ongoing special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls has become an instrument of exclusion of citizens from the republic, which is directly opposite to the ECI's self-professed mandate of leaving no voter behind. So far, approximately 7.24 crore voters' names have been deleted from the rolls, provisionally or finally, across 13 states and union territories. That's about 13.2% of the pre-SIR voter population in these jurisdictions and 7.3% of India's total of 99.1 crore electors.

This hasty overhaul, with deadlines ranging from January 26 to February 7, is likely to translate into a political upheaval when elections are held in these states. We have already seen what it can do in Bihar. There, 65 lakh voters' names were deleted after the slapdash SIR exercise, representing 8.3% of the pre-SIR total electorate of 7.89 crore. This led to an astoundingly one-sided verdict in the subsequent elections, with the two main parties in the ruling coalition each achieving a win percentage above 85%. Disregarding the outcry from the opposition, voters and both-level officials alike, ECI has pressed on with the SIR in 12 more jurisdictions. Provisional deletions have been steep there as well, with Uttar Pradesh having the highest (2.89 crore), followed by Tamil Nadu (97.38 lakh), West Bengal (58.2 lakh), Madhya Pradesh (42.7 lakh), and Kerala (24.08 lakh).

With elections due in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Kerala in a few months, the large-scale and debatable deletions have created a situation ripe with suspicion regarding the role of the commission. Any attempt by the BJP to vitiate the atmosphere there with polarising rhetoric risks turning them into tinder boxes. It would be wise, therefore, for the ECI to conduct the remaining part of the SIR process with due deliberation and fairness. Unrest in these vital and identity-proud states will do the republic no good. Apart from the partisanship of the ECI, well-documented in elections past, the SIR suffers from a systemic bias against poor, rural and migrant voters. They are more likely than other categories of voters to not have the documents demanded by SIR or the resources to fetch them, such as birth certificates or proof of residence or legacy. As Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has said, this class bias is likely to express itself in the election verdict and thereon in governance itself.

Disregarding the outcry from the opposition, voters and both-level officials alike, ECI has pressed on with the SIR in 12 more jurisdictions.

RANDOM VIOLENCE

State terror has arrived for America

After the past three weeks of brutality in Minneapolis, it should no longer be possible to say that the Trump administration seeks merely to govern this nation. It seeks to reduce us all to a state of constant fear — a fear of violence from which some people may at a given moment be spared, but from which no one will ever be truly safe. That is our new national reality. State terror has arrived.

Since early January, when Immigration and Customs Enforcement expanded its operation in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, its officers have killed Renee Good, a white middle-class mother; menaced a pregnant immigration lawyer in her firm's parking lot; detained numerous US citizens, including one dragged out of his house in his underwear; smashed car windows and detained their occupants, including a US citizen on her way to a medical appointment at a traumatic brain injury center; set off crowd-control grenades and tear gas next to a car containing six children, including a 6-month-old; swept an airport, demanding papers and arresting more than a dozen workers; detained a 5-year-old; and killed another US citizen, Alex Jeffrey Pretti, an ICU nurse with no criminal record. It appears he was white. Agents had him on the ground, subdued, before they apparently fired at least 10 shots at point-blank range.

Confronted with a list like this, we look for details that might explain why these people were subjected to such treatment, details that might reassure us that we, by contrast, are not in danger. Good was married to a woman, and her wife spoke impertinently to an ICE officer. ChongLy Thao, dragged out of his house in his underwear, is an immigrant from Laos. The woman on her way to a medical appointment and the family with six children drove through areas where anti-ICE protests were taking place. The 5-year-old's family lacks permanent status. Little is known about Pretti, but his father said he participated in protests and may have been legally carrying a gun. We focus on these details not to justify ICE's actions, which are plainly brutal and unjustifiable, but to force the world to make sense and to calm our nerves. If we don't talk back, if we alter our routes to avoid protests, if we are lucky enough to be white, straight, natural-born Americans — or, if we are not, but we stay quiet — we will be safe. Conversely, we can choose to speak up and take a risk. Either way, we tell ourselves that if consequences are predictable, we have agency.

BUT THAT'S NOT HOW STATE TERROR WORKS.

In the 1990s, when I spoke with people



in the former Soviet Union about their families' experiences of Stalinist terror, I was struck by how much people seemed to know about what had led to arrests or executions. Neighbors had informed on them, or colleagues had named them under duress. These stories were passed down through generations. How could they know so much? They couldn't. People crafted narra-

police arrested most of the senior staff at the newspaper where my grandfather was a deputy editor, he waited for the knock on his door. When it didn't come, night after night, he became so distressed that he checked himself into a mental institution. That may have saved him. Or it may be that the secret police had already filled their arrest quota.

The Trump administration's recent deployment of ICE brutality in Minneapolis signals a shift from governance to state terror. By utilising random violence and arrest quotas, the regime ensures no citizen is safe

tives from suspicions and hints to satisfy a desperate need for explanation.

Lydia Chukovskaya's short novel Sofia Petrovna captures this process. The protagonist, loyal to Stalin, loses her mind trying to make sense of her son's arrest. My own family history contains a corollary. After the secret

When the KGB archives briefly opened in the 1990s, it became clear that quotas ruled the system. Local units had to arrest a set number of citizens to designate enemies of the people. Sweeping up colleagues, friends, and relatives was often a matter of convenience. Fundamentally, the terror was

random. That is how state terror works.

Randomness distinguishes a regime based on terror from one that is merely repressive. Even in brutally repressive systems, one knows where the boundaries lie. Open protest leads to arrest; private conversation does not. Writing subversive essays gets you arrested; quietly passing them on probably does not. A terror regime deploys violence precisely to reinforce the message that anyone can be subjected to it.

When we think of terror regimes of the past, it's tempting to imagine a methodical plan, an extermination to-do list. This is how many people read Martin Niemöller's poem "First They Came." In reality, people living under those regimes never knew which group would be designated an enemy next. In Niemöller's day, terror was carried out by secret police and paramilitary forces such as the SA. In 1934, Adolf Hitler ordered the arrest and execution of the SA's own leadership, demonstrating that no one was immune. Stalin carried out similar purges. Terror was not the end goal, but nothing that followed would have been possible without it. The toolbox is not particularly varied. President Donald Trump is using all the instruments: reported ICE arrest quotas; paramilitary forces drunk on their own brutality; the spectacle of random violence in city streets; and postmortem vilification of victims. It's natural that our brains struggle to find logic in what we're seeing. There is a logic, and it has a name.

The case for a new Red Sea security architecture

Recent events in Yemen, Sudan and Somalia have underscored the need for the nations overlooking the Red Sea to coordinate more closely to end these conflicts. These three cases represent examples where local problems have gradually entangled regional and international players with differing interests. Other disputes also affect this region and require coordination among the littoral states, including the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Egyptian-Ethiopian dispute over sharing the Nile and the more recent Ethiopian quest for sea access.

While restoring peace and security should be the primary goal of this coordination, promoting trade, investment and development and protecting the marine environment should also be part of a new and robust security architecture to safeguard the Red Sea region.

International trade and trade among the littoral states have been severely affected by these conflicts. The international community should be concerned about the economic effects of these simmering conflicts on trade. For millennia, the Red Sea has been a vital corridor for trade, connecting three continents — Asia, Africa and Europe. In normal times, this route handles 12 percent to 15 percent of international maritime trade and about 30 percent of global container traffic, according to the World Shipping Council. In 2023, the Suez Canal recorded 26,434 vessel transits, including 5,847 container ships, averaging about 16 container vessels daily.

The Houthi started attacking

ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden in October 2023. There have been about 120 such attacks since then. As a result, trade has diverted from the Red Sea to the longer and more expensive route around Africa. In 2025, the trade volume through the Bab Al-Mandab Strait declined to about 35 percent of 2023 levels, while Suez Canal traffic was about 41 percent compared to 2023. Large ships (7,500 tonnes and up) now largely avoid both passageways altogether. Container ship traffic through the Suez Canal is at about 6 percent of what it was in 2023 and only nine ships transited Bab Al-Mandab during 2025.

The Red Sea is also a vital route for oil and liquefied natural gas, the insecurity of which threatens supplies for Europe and other regions. Before the crisis, about 9.2 million barrels per day of crude oil and refined petroleum products passed through the Red Sea, according to US Energy Information Administration figures. This volume represented about 12 percent of total global sea-borne traded oil before 2023, when Houthi attacks started.

While Yemen has turned a new page with the restoration of government authority over areas overlooking Bab Al-Mandab and the Gulf of Aden, large parts of the country's Red Sea coast remain under Houthi control. Somaliland's unilateral quest for independence has taken a bad turn as it has entangled outside players, such as Israel. The war in Sudan also took a turn for the worse in 2025, affecting the security of the whole region.

For millennia, the Red Sea has



been a vital corridor for trade, connecting three continents — Asia, Africa and Europe.

Trade and security are both at risk when security for underwater fiber optic cables is breached because they are essential for data transmission between Africa, Europe and Asia.

Similarly for environmental hazards, Houthi attacks on oil tankers create risks of major ecological disasters in the region.

Terrorism remains a serious threat, with the Houthi and Al-Shabab joining forces to destabilize the region. Human trafficking,

illegal migration and drugs remain perennial threats as well.

The region is highly militarized, with numerous foreign bases in Djibouti, for example. The US has its largest African base there and the primary base for its Africa Command. China has its first overseas military

base there and France has its largest base abroad. Japan, Italy, Germany, the UK and others also maintain a military presence in the country.

In addition, the US launched its Prosperity Guardian operation in the southern Red Sea and the EU has its Operation Atalanta along the Somali coast and Aspides near Bab Al-Mandab. The Bahrain-based Combined Maritime Forces has dispatched a Red Sea task force as well. Turkiye is also enhancing its military presence in the region.

While these efforts from outside the region are welcome, there is an urgent need to coordinate the efforts of local players, not only on security issues but on a more comprehensive agenda that also includes diplomacy, economic integration, environmental protection and fighting illicit trade. All these issues argue for closer coordination among Red Sea and Gulf of Aden littoral states. Saudi Arabia is probably the country that is best placed to play the coordinating role, as it has the longest coast along the Red Sea and has deep historical ties with all countries overlooking both these bodies of water. Having the largest regional economy, it has an abiding interest in restoring stability and security in this region. It has committed enormous funds to promoting trade and tourism along its Red Sea coast and islands as part of its drive to diversify its economy under Vision 2030. The country is preparing to host Expo 2030, Fifa World Cup 2034 and other major events in the near future, which also call for keeping this region safe and secure.

Ta.MA.Sha Veg Café celebrates Republic Day with special initiative for children

Hyderabad, January 26, 2026: Marking India's 77th Republic Day, Ta.MA.Sha Veg Café celebrated the occasion with a heartfelt social initiative dedicated to children in Hyderabad, reflecting the spirit of unity, care, and community service.

The initiative was led by Founder Mr. Mahender Vyas and Co-Founder Mr. A.K. Solanki, in collaboration with NextGen Hope & Kalyan Sanstha, under the guidance of its Founder and Chairperson Ms. Aarohi Rawat. The programme aimed to create a joyful and meaningful



experience for children through fun-filled activities, learning opportunities, and nourishment.

As part of the celebration, children participated in interactive games and were introduced to Pickleball, a rapidly grow-

ing global sport, encouraging physical fitness and healthy lifestyle habits. The event also featured nutritious Asian vegetarian meals curated by Ta.MA.Sha Veg Café, highlighting the brand's commitment to mindful eating

and wellness.

Adding to the joy, each child was gifted school bags and notebooks as a symbol of encouragement, education, and hope for a brighter future.

Speaking on the occasion, the founders stated that giving back to society is a core value of the brand and reaffirmed their commitment to community welfare through such meaningful initiatives.

Through this Republic Day initiative, Ta.MA.Sha Veg Café reinforces its values of compassion, sustainability, and conscious living, extending its impact beyond food to create positive change in the community.

Nuvama Delivers Steady 9M FY26 Performance; Wealth Business Records Strong Double-Digit Growth

Mumbai: Nuvama Wealth Management Limited (NSE, BSE: NUVAMA), one of India's leading wealth management firms, reported a resilient financial performance for the quarter and nine months ended 31 December 2025, driven by strong momentum in its wealth businesses and steady client engagement. For 9M FY26, Nuvama reported a consolidated operating Profit After Tax (PAT) of Rs.780 crore, marking a 7% year-on-year growth. Consolidated revenues rose 8% YoY to Rs.2,297 crore, while operating profit before tax increased 6% YoY to Rs.1,035 crore, reflecting the strength of its diversified business platform. During Q3 FY26, revenues

stood at Rs.755 crore, up 4% YoY, while operating PAT increased 4% YoY to Rs.262 crore. Profit after tax for the quarter was marginally impacted by a one-time statutory adjustment related to new labour codes. The Wealth Management business remained the key growth engine. Revenues grew 21% YoY to Rs.1,245 crore in 9M FY26, while profit before tax rose 23% YoY to Rs.427 crore. Client assets stood at Rs.3.29 lakh crore at the end of Q3, registering 6% YoY growth. Both Nuvama Wealth and Nuvama Private reported strong net flows, supported by higher participation in managed products, lending momentum, and annuity-style ARR revenues. The Asset

Management business continued to scale, with management fees growing 30% YoY in 9M FY26. Assets under management reached Rs.12,605 crore, while the Commercial Real Estate strategy AUM grew 72% YoY to approximately Rs.3,000 crore. The company also received in-principle approval to sponsor a mutual fund and plans to launch schemes in the coming year, subject to regulatory clearances. Asset Services revenues grew 7% QoQ in Q3, aided by improved client engagement and market share gains across domestic and international segments. While Capital Markets revenues declined 21% YoY, the Fixed Income business remained stable, support-

ed by strong FPI flows and rising domestic participation. Commenting on the performance, Ashish Kehair, MD & CEO, Nuvama Group, said the company's organically scaled, diversified platform has enhanced resilience and positioned it for growth across market cycles. He highlighted strong profit growth in wealth businesses, meaningful expansion in asset management, and early signs of recovery in capital markets volumes. Overall, Nuvama's 9M FY26 performance underscores the strength of its integrated business model, disciplined execution, and continued focus on scaling client-centric wealth and investment platforms..

SBI Hyderabad LHO Celebrates 77th Republic Day with '150 Years of Vande Mataram' Theme

Hyderabad: State Bank of India, Local Head Office (LHO), Hyderabad, celebrated the 77th Republic Day with patriotic fervour, adopting the theme "150 Years of Vande Mataram." Shri S. Radhakrishnan, Chief General Manager, SBI Hyderabad Circle, unfurled the National Flag at the Northern Lawns of the LHO premises.

Addressing the gathering, Shri S. Radhakrishnan conveyed his Republic Day greetings and called upon the LHO team to draw inspiration from the Prime Minister's vision of excellence, emphasizing that "excellence is a habit." He stated that the Local Head Office sets the benchmark for the entire circle and urged all branches, ATMs and Customer Service Points (CSPs) to consistently deliver a superior customer experience in line with SBI's global reputation as the Best Consumer Bank. He noted that this cultural shift is crucial to achieving the Chairman's strategic goal



of increasing SBI's market share by one percent in every district across Telangana.

The CGM stressed the importance of operational efficiency and zero tolerance for infrastructure downtime, stating that malfunctioning facilities such as ATMs, air condi-

tions and passbook printers directly impact staff productivity. He advocated aggressive migration of routine transactions to alternate channels such as CSPs, contact centres, YONO and Internet Banking, highlighting that the circle operates over 6,000 CSPs

and ATMs compared to 1,200 branches. He set an ambitious target of 95-98 percent ATM uptime and directed branches to ensure CSPs function effectively and generate sustainable business.

Concluding his address, Shri S. Radhakrishnan underscored the need for "360-degree professionalism" and strong ethical standards. He emphasized mutual respect within the "SBI Family" and urged employees to adopt a vigilant approach towards fraud prevention, following a "see something, say something" principle.

The celebrations were attended by General Managers, senior executives, staff members and their families. The programme concluded with vibrant cultural performances by staff members, felicitation of employees' children for excellence in academics, sports and arts, and honouring Bank Armed Guards for their exemplary service and commitment.

LIC Zonal Manager Puneet Kumar Unfurls National Flag on Republic Day

Hyderabad: Sri Puneet Kumar, Zonal Manager, Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), South Central Zone, unfurled the National Flag at the Zonal Office premises in Hyderabad, marking the 77th Republic Day celebrations.

Addressing employees and agents on the occasion, Sri Puneet Kumar reflected on India's journey since becoming a Republic and highlighted

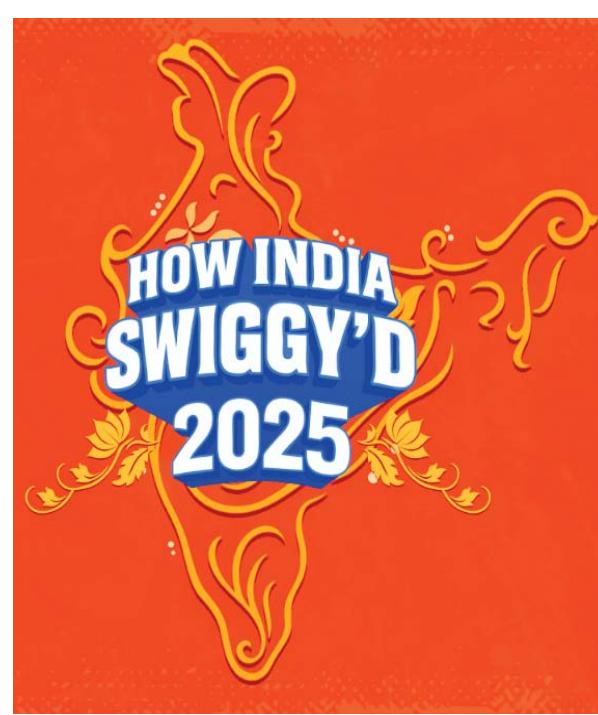
the importance of unity and rapid development for the nation. He stated that technological advancements in LIC have significantly improved customer service delivery, enabling policyholders to access services in minimal time.

While acknowledging the role of technology, he emphasized that the essence of human interaction remains vital and should not be overlooked. He urged LIC employees

and agents to work with honesty and dedication, stating that such commitment is essential for strengthening the nation.

Sri Puneet Kumar also noted that LIC is continuously developing new insurance and investment products to meet the evolving needs of customers. He called upon LICians to focus on three key principles — My LIC, My Country, and My Earth — and appealed to all to avoid the use of plas-

FROM CHICKEN BIRYANI TO IDLI: HOW VIJAYAWADA SWIGGY'D IN 2025



Vijayawada, January 2026: Known for its bold flavours and rich culinary heritage, Vijayawada showcased a vibrant mix of traditional and modern food preferences in 2025, according to the Vijayawada Edition of "How India Swiggy'd". From indulgent biryanis to simple breakfast staples, the city's food habits reflected both comfort and experimentation.

Chicken Biryani emerged as the undisputed favourite with 7.78 lakh orders, followed by Idli with 3.2 lakh orders and Veg Dosa with 2.7 lakh orders. Dessert lovers leaned towards classics, with Chocolate Cake and Apricot Cake topping the charts, while traditional sweets like Gulab Jamun, Kaju Barfi and Boondi Ladoo also featured among the top choices.

Breakfast orders remained light and traditional, led by Idli and Veg Dosa, while snack-time cravings between 3 pm and 7 pm saw Chicken Biryani dominating with nearly 218

orders every evening. Late-night orders grew by 47.7% year-on-year, once again led by Chicken Biryani, followed by burgers and fried chicken items.

The city also showed a growing appetite for regional cuisines, with Bengali cuisine emerging as the fastest-growing at over 35% YoY, followed by Punjabi cuisine. Affordable dining

orders every evening. Late-night orders grew by 47.7% year-on-year, once again led by Chicken Biryani, followed by burgers and fried chicken items.

Commenting on the trends, Sidharth Bhakoo, Chief Business Officer, Swiggy Food Marketplace, said that Vijayawada struck a fine balance between classic favourites and national trends, embracing food as an emotion across daily meals and celebrations.

Overall, Vijayawada's food story in 2025 reflected evolving tastes, convenience-driven choices, and an enduring love for iconic dishes, reinforcing the city's dynamic and flavour-rich culinary identity.

AP Grameena Bank Celebrates 77th Republic Day in Guntur

Guntur (TSIT): Andhra Pradesh Grameena Bank celebrated the 77th Republic Day with great pride and patriotic fervour at its Head Office premises in Brodipet, Guntur. The celebrations were attended by Head Office staff, Heads of Departments, the General Manager (HR), General Manager (IT), and Vigilance Incharge Mr. Harish Betha. The programme was graced by the presence of the Chairman of the Bank, Sri K. Pramod Kumar Reddy.

On the occasion, Chairman Sri K. Pramod Kumar Reddy unfurled the National Flag and addressed the gathering. In his speech, he highlighted the theme of this year's Republic Day and emphasized the enduring values enshrined in the Constitution, including unity, national integrity, and nation-building.

Concluding his address, Shri S. Radhakrishnan underscored the need for "360-degree professionalism" and strong ethical standards. He emphasized mutual respect within the "SBI Family" and urged employees to adopt a vigilant approach towards fraud prevention, following a "see something, say something" principle.

The celebrations were attended by General Managers, senior executives, staff members and their families. The programme concluded with vibrant cultural performances by staff members, felicitation of employees' children for excellence in academics, sports and arts, and honouring Bank Armed Guards for their exemplary service and commitment.



Vigilance Incharge Mr. Harish Betha also addressed the staff, stressing the importance of celebrating national and patriotic occasions at the workplace. He stated that as an organization owned by the Government of India, Andhra Pradesh Grameena Bank must set

an example by making such celebrations meaningful and inspiring, reflecting its commitment to national values. The event concluded with the collective singing of "Vande Mataram," filling the premises with a strong sense of patriotism and national pride.

NMDC Celebrates 77th Republic Day, Reaffirms Commitment to Responsible Mining

Hyderabad, January 26, 2026: India's largest iron ore producer and responsible miner, NMDC, celebrated the 77th Republic Day with patriotic fervour at its corporate office in Hyderabad and across its mining projects nationwide, reaffirming its commitment to sustainable mining and nation-building.

NMDC Chairman and Managing Director Shri Amitava Mukherjee unfurled the National Flag at the Head Office in the presence of senior management and employees. The celebrations were attended by Shri Vinay Kumar, Director (Technical); Shri Joydeep Dasgupta, Director (Production); Smt. G. Priyadarshini, Director (HR); Shri C. Neelakanta Reddy, CVO; and other senior officials and staff.

Addressing the gathering, Shri Amitava Mukherjee highlighted NMDC's growth journey rooted in responsibility and innovation. He stated that NMDC is emerging as a global benchmark in responsible mining and is set to contribute over 50 million tonnes in FY25 towards India's infrastructure development. He informed that as of December 2025, NMDC produced 36.9 million tonnes of iron ore, registering a 20 percent increase over the corresponding period last year. He also announced the



commencement of mining operations at the Tokisud North Coal Block in Jharkhand in January 2026, marking NMDC's entry into a new commodity and geography. He added that NMDC's people-centric culture earned it the prestigious Great Place to Work Certification.

As part of the celebrations, NMDC organised Republic Day Runs across its projects in Chhattisgarh and Karnataka, symbolising unity, fitness, and collective progress. The runs at the Bacheli and Kirandul projects were graced by NMDC Brand Ambassador and two-time World Champion boxer Ms. Nikhat Zareen, who inspired participants with her presence.

Further strengthening community engagement, NMDC, in association with The Hindu, organised chess competitions for students to encourage strategic thinking and sportsmanship. Employees' games were also conducted, and winners were felicitated during the ceremony. Republic Day celebrations across NMDC locations reflected the organisation's unwavering commitment to India's growth, sustainable mining practices, employee well-being, and an inclusive future, as NMDC continues to mine responsibly while powering the nation's progress.

German defense minister urges Trump to apologize for Afghanistan remarks



BERLIN: German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius has called on US President Donald Trump to apologize for remarks suggesting that America's NATO allies in Afghanistan avoided frontline service, joining a chorus of criticism from European politicians and army veterans.

Trump caused deep offense among US allies when he told Fox Business Network last week that the US had "never needed" the transatlantic alliance and accused allies of staying "a little off the front lines" in Afghanistan.

"It's just not right and it's disrespectful to talk about the dead of your allies in that way. They all stood there, at the side of the United States. To claim something else today is simply not true," he told a talk show on Germany's ARD public broadcaster late on Sunday. Thousands of German troops took part in NATO's Operation

Enduring Freedom and Resolute Support missions in Afghanistan and 59 were killed. The operations were launched following the Al-Qaeda attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. Pistorius said he would bring up the issue the next time he spoke

Pistorius said he would bring up the issue the next time he spoke with US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and he urged Trump to apologize

with US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and he urged Trump to apologize.

"That would be a sign of decency, respect and also insight," he said. His comments follow similar state-

ments from other European politicians including British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who called Trump's remarks "frankly appalling," in a departure from his usual avoidance of direct criticism of the US president. Trump on Saturday praised "brave" British soldiers, though he made no apology for his earlier comments and he did not mention the sacrifices of other NATO allies. Britain lost 457 service personnel in Afghanistan.

Trump administration officials have been critical of European countries for failing to meet NATO spending targets and for being too dependent on the US for their own defense. Pistorius, who has been leading a drive to rebuild Germany's armed forces, said Europe had to accept it could not depend on the

US as it had over the past 70 years but that the German military was on an "excellent path" to achieving its goals of being back up to strength by 2029.

JAKARTA: Indonesia has received three Rafale fighter jets from France in the first deliveries from a multi-billion-dollar defense deal between the two countries, a defense ministry official told Reuters on Monday, marking a major upgrade to the country's aging military hardware.

Jakarta, France's main arms client in Southeast Asia, has placed orders for as many as 42 Rafales, built by Dassault Aviation, as well as French frigates and submarines, as the archipelago steps up defense spending under President Prabowo Subianto, a former special forces commander. "The aircraft have been handed over and are ready for use by the Indonesian Air Force," Defense Ministry spokesperson Rico Ricardo Sirait said in

a message in response to a Reuters query — the first confirmation that Indonesia has possession of the advanced military aircraft after striking an \$8 billion deal with France in 2022 and expanding it last year. Sirait said the three aircraft arrived on Friday and were stationed at Roesmin Nurjadin Air Base in Pekanbaru, located on the western island of Sumatra. Three more jets are expected to arrive later this year, he added. Indonesia has been

one of the biggest players on the international fighter jet market as it looks to upgrade its aircraft, setting aside big budgets for defense spending. It has been considering a number of options alongside the Rafales, including China's J-10 fighter jets and US-made F-15EX jets. For the longer term, it has also signed a contract to buy 40 KAN fighter jets from Turkiye, a fifth-generation aircraft powered by General Electric F-110 engines that are also used in fourth-generation Lockheed Martin F-16 jets.

EU countries give final approval to Russian gas ban

BRUSSELS: European Union countries on Monday gave their final approval to the bloc's plan to ban Russian gas imports by late 2027, allowing it to pass into law. The policy makes legally-binding the EU's vow to cut ties with its former top gas supplier, nearly four years after Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Ministers from EU countries approved the law at a

meeting in Brussels on Monday, although Slovakia and Hungary voted against.

Hungary said it would take the case to the European Court of Justice. The ban was designed to be approved by a reinforced majority of countries, allowing it to overcome opposition from Hungary and Slovakia, who remain heavily reliant on Russian energy imports and want

to maintain close ties with Moscow. Under the agreement, the EU will halt Russian liquefied natural gas imports by the end of 2026 and pipeline gas by 30 September 2027.

The law allows that deadline to shift to November 1 2027, at the latest, if a country is struggling to fill its gas storage caverns with non-Russian supply ahead of the winter heating season.

Ex-Philippine leader Duterte to face ICC hearing Feb 23

THE HAGUE: Former Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte will face a hearing at the International Criminal Court next month, judges ruled on Monday, rejecting arguments that the 80-year-old was unfit to take part.

Duterte will face a so-called "confirmation of charges" hearing starting February 23, where judges decide whether the prosecution's allegations are strong enough to proceed to trial.

"Having regard to the relevant legal principles, the medical assessment of the independent experts... and all of the relevant circumstances of the case, the Chamber was satisfied that Mr. Duterte is



able effectively to exercise his procedural rights," the court said.

Duterte is "therefore fit to take part in the pre-trial proceedings," the ICC added. ICC prosecutors have charged Duterte with three counts of crimes against humanity, alleging his involvement in at least 76 murders as part of his "war on drugs."

The first count concerns his alleged involvement as a co-perpetrator in 19 murders carried out between 2013 and 2016 while Duterte was mayor of Davao City. The second count relates to 14 murders of so-called "High Value Targets" in 2016 and 2017 when Duterte was president. And the third charge is

about 43 murders committed during "clearance" operations of lower-level alleged drug users or pushers.

These took place across the Philippines between 2016 and 2018, the prosecution alleged.

In October, the court had already rejected a defense plea for early release, arguing he posed a flight risk and could be in a position to influence witnesses if freed.

Duterte was arrested in Manila on March 11, flown to the Netherlands that same night and has been held at the ICC's detention unit at Scheveningen Prison since. He followed his initial hearing by video link, appearing dazed and frail and barely speaking.

Only 4% women on ballot as Bangladesh prepares for post-Hasina vote



DHAKA: As Bangladesh prepares for the first election since the ouster of its long-serving ex-prime minister Sheikh Hasina, only 4 percent of the registered candidates are women, as more than half of the political parties did not field female candidates. The vote on Feb. 12 will bring in new leadership after an 18-month rule of the caretaker administration that took control following the student-led uprising that ended 15 years in power of Hasina's Awami League party.

Nearly 128 million Bangladeshis will head to the polls, but while more than 62 million of them are women, the percentage of female candidates in the race is incomparably lower, despite last year's consensus reached by political parties to have at least 5 percent women on their lists.

"We have not seen any independent women's political movement or institutional activities earlier, from where women could now participate in the election independently," Khan said. "Real political participation is different and difficult as well in this patriarchal society." According to the Election Commission, among 1,981 candidates only 81 are women, in a country that in its 54 years of independence had for 32 years been led by women prime ministers — Hasina and her late rival Khaleda Zia.

According to Dr. Rasheda Rawnak Khan from the Department of Anthropology at Dhaka University, women's political participation was neither reflected by the rule of Hasina nor Zia. "Bangladesh has had women rulers, not women's rule," Khan told Arab News. "The structure of party politics in Bangladesh is deeply patriarchal."

"In the student movement, women were recruited because they were useful, presentable for rallies and protests both on campus and in the field of political legitimacy. Women were kept at the forefront for exhibiting some sort of 'inclusive' images to the media and the people," Khan said. "To become a candidate in the general election, one needs to have a powerful mentor, money, muscle power, control over party people, activists, and locals. Within the male-dominated networks, it's very difficult for women to get all these things."

US' Gaza 'Master Plan' clashes with reality

A nyone who saw Jared Kushner's PowerPoint presentation in Davos last week without knowing the topic would have struggled to identify the territory to which he was referring. Many might have thought this was for North America, with shiny new office and residential blocks and a certain space-age or Hollywood sci-fi feel to the slides of the "Master Plan."

The vaulting ambition of the speaker may have impressed his father-in-law, US President Donald Trump, who is certainly familiar with the world of real estate. No doubt Trump, the freshly minted chairman of the Board of Peace, was the premier target of the messaging. It reflected much of what was released at the announcement of Trump's "Gaza riviera" plan last February, which envisaged the Strip being entirely emptied of Palestinians. Even this version treats Gaza as a tabula rasa to impose whatever architectural fantasies its authors can conjure up. It treats the enclave as being devoid of any culture,

tradition or history. Others have been more skeptical — and with good reason. First of all, Israel has not even adhered to the Oct. 10 ceasefire and is bombing and shelling with intensity. Second, the full entry of aid, as referenced in the Trump peace plan, has not yet been achieved. Third, the plan presumes the disarmament of Hamas, something that is far from imminent. Finally, no international stabilization force is on the horizon.

Those are the significant near-term impediments. Delivering this plan, at a time when the conflict still rages, will be nigh on impossible. Just clearing the 60 million tonnes of rubble, which is peppered with unexploded ordnance and a host of toxins, will take an age and cost a fortune.

One major element Kushner did not address was how the land would be acquired and whether owners would be com-



pensated. One major element Kushner did not address was how the land would be acquired and whether owners would be compensated. According to a 2015 study, about half of the land in Gaza is privately owned. Much of the land is unregistered because owners did not wish to pay tax. What is

clear is that the companies lining up to fill their coffers have no claim to the land at all. But progress also presumes the Israeli leadership will be comfortable with this. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is still smarting from the invitation that was extended to Turkiye and Qatar to join the

executive committee of the Board of Peace. Many members of Netanyahu's Cabinet and right-wing Knesset members have dreams of inhabiting these plush new riviera residences themselves.

Israel will have to consent as the occupying power. For starters, it will have to allow in all the construction materials and abandon its restrictive dual-use list. Throughout Kushner's presentation to world leaders and the business elite, it was clear that Palestinians have had no input into these plans — and not just because the Arabic on the slides was all wrong. He did not outline how the local Palestinians in Gaza would be won over by the project or where they would go during reconstruction. Kushner said Gaza would be run on free-market principles, as opposed to how Palestinians might wish to shape their economic future. It was clear that

Palestinians have had no input into these plans — and not just because the Arabic on the slides was all wrong.

Do Palestinians want tourism, given the beachfront is all labeled for coastal tourism? Who decided on the importance of data centers at this stage? And how many of the companies making a fortune out of this dreamworld will be Palestinian and how many will be rich businessmen with no link to Gaza at all?

The Palestinians in Gaza have spoken to largely see this as a sick joke. "Who is going to live in these villas and flashy apartments? Certainly not us Palestinians," sighed one woman. Another said: "What will stop Israel from bombing them again? Where will our security come from? We need that before rich houses." But there is also the issue of who will pay for it. The experts at the UN, those who actually have experience of such situations, calculate that post-war reconstruction will cost about \$70 billion. This is without the high-end infrastructure of Kushner's presentation. The

UAE has reportedly expressed an interest in funding the first planned community on the outskirts of Rafah in the south. Beyond that, it is not clear. More alarming is who might make money out of it. This is a war zone profiteering racket. US companies are lining up at the trough. This is all premised on the naive and ill-founded belief that the entirety of Gaza's problems can be resolved with bulldozers, cranes and cement. The plan has echoes of earlier economic roadmaps for peace, but even those were not so divorced from reality. At no stage did the presentation reference a viable peace process or even mention that Gaza would be the western segment of an independent state of Palestine. It did not address a single one of the underlying causes or drivers of this 100-year-plus conflict. On this occasion, the last word goes to French President Emmanuel Macron, who was reported as saying: "Peace is not a real estate transaction. You cannot build stability on the erasure of a people's history and the privatization of their tragedy."



India not far from hosting its first-ever Asian Winter Games: Ice skater Vishwaraj Jadeja

Leh (Ladakh), Jan 26 (UNI) Renowned Indian Ice skater Vishwaraj Rajen Jadeja overheard a conversation his coach Wim Nieuwenhuizen was having with someone in the Netherlands. That gentleman asked Wim, in Dutch, if Jadeja was talented. Wim replied: "No, he is not but is a Rajput. They don't give up no matter what." And that's exactly what Jadeja has done over the last 18 years he has spent in ice skating. Vishwaraj Jadeja has not given up! He has royal roots and comes from the Dhrol family - back in the day a small kingdom in the Jam Nagar district of Gujarat. His palace is now a school for women, where they need to pay just a nominal fee. Practically, free education as part of the family's

But just because Jadeja has royal roots, that does not mean he has grown up rich. Royalty was formally abolished in India in 1971 and a very large part of their privileges were withdrawn by the government, and Jadeja was born 14 years later. Despite a modest upbringing, Jadeja, now 40, never made money more important than anything else. He embraced his grandfather's advice to a tee: "Money comes and goes. Pursue some sport and excel at that. These things stay with you forever." Jadeja moved to Europe in the late noughties (2000-09) to seek a career in ice skating.



Today, he is the most decorated ice skater in the country.

Over the years, he has set multiple Indian records. Among his top accomplishments, he is officially the only one to have ice-skated five kilometres at an altitude of 4500m at Tso Moriri Lake. This happened in 2019. A year later he won three silvers and a bronze in the Winter World Masters Games held in Austria. Last year in the Asian Winter Games in Harbin (China), Jadeja led in a team event in which India finished fifth.

This past Sunday, what was the last day of the long-track ice-skating event of the 2026 Khelo India Games at the Gupukh's Pond in Leh (Ladakh), Jadeja finished eighth in the men's 1000m. "I never participated before because we didn't have safe ice tracks. But this one is good so I decided

to have a go," said Jadeja before finishing in the top-10. In his own words, he wasn't exactly there to win, he was there to show how far he, India and ice skating had come together.

Jadeja is an optimistic man and believes if the authorities in India get a little more serious about certain things, the country can host the Asian Winter Games in the next 10-12 years. "Some of the infrastructure has been built in the last few years, particularly after the concept of Khelo India came into being. We now have two Olympic-sized artificial ice rinks in India, in Leh and Dehradun, for short-track ice skating and ice hockey. There are good skiing places too. We just need a few long-track ice skating surfaces and I think we are good to go. "With the right infrastructure in place we can produce an Olympian real

quick and once that happens, we will be considered serious in the international arena. Also, we need to focus on the coach-athlete welfare. Ice skating is an elite sport and our athletes and coaches need to be given a lot of support, from the government and the corporates. I understand that in India, the government has other major pressing issues but I believe despite that we are not far from where we should be in ice skating," he said. Jadeja had an accident in 2017 and was going through a really low phase when a musician friend of his advised him to go to Leh (Ladakh) and try to find himself again.

GUWAHATI: Abhishek Sharma produced a breathtaking 14-ball fifty while skipper Suryakumar Yadav continued his sublime touch with another attacking half-century as India waltzed through the chase in just 10 overs to seal an eight-wicket win over New Zealand in the third T20I, sealing the five-match series 3-0 here on Sunday.

Chasing a modest 154, India turned the contest into a one-sided exhibition of power-hitting with Abhishek remaining unbeaten on a blistering 68 off 20 balls (7x4, 5x6) and Suryakumar smashing an equally fluent 57 not out off 26 deliveries (6x4, 3x6).

The duo stitched together an unbroken 102-run stand for the third wicket in just 40 balls to finish the game with 60 deliveries to spare. Earlier, wrist spinner Ravi Bishnoi marked his return with a superb spell alongside the seasoned duo of Jasprit Bumrah and Hardik Pandya as India strangled New Zealand with disciplined bowling to restrict them to an under-par 153/9.

Abhishek's assault was particularly stunning as the left-hander raced to a 14-ball fifty - the second fastest by an Indian in T20Is, just two balls slower than his mentor Yuvraj Singh - as he dismantled the New Zealand attack with fearless intent.

India, however, had an early hiccup as Sanju Samson's struggles at the top continued as he was dismissed for a golden duck. Matt Henry's first delivery brushing the thigh pad before crashing into the off-stump. Samson's scores in the series now read 10, 6 and 0, putting further pressure



CHASING A MODEST 154, INDIA TURNED THE CONTEST INTO A ONE-SIDED EXHIBITION OF POWER-HITTING WITH ABHISHEK REMAINING UNBEATEN ON A BLISTERING 68 OFF 20 BALLS (7X4, 5X6) AND SURYAKUMAR SMASHING AN EQUALY FLUENT 57 NOT OUT OFF 26 DELIVERIES (6X4, 3X6).

on his spot with Ishan Kishan making a strong case with his explosive batting. If that setback worried the hosts, Abhishek and Ishan quickly erased them.

Ishan, fresh from his match-winning 76 in Raipur, launched Henry for two sixes and a four in a single over, showcasing his imperious pull and lofted drives. Abhishek, who had fallen for a duck in the previous game, soon joined the carnage, dancing down the track to hammer Jacob Duffy and collecting 16 runs in an over.

India's powerplay score swelled to 94/2 - their second-best ever, just one short of the 95 they had posted

against England - effectively putting the result beyond doubt. Ishan fell for a brisk 28 off 13 balls. But there was no respite for New Zealand. Suryakumar slipped seamlessly into top gear, piercing gaps at will and improvising with his trademark scoops and flicks as Abhishek continued to clear the ropes with ease. The pair toyed with the field and bowlers alike, wrapping up the chase in ruthless fashion to underline India's dominance and secure an unassailable series lead.

Playing for India after nearly a year, Bishnoi, who came in for rested Varun Chakravarthy, grabbed the opportunity with both

hands, returning impressive figures of 2 for 18 while maintaining relentless control through the middle overs. India struck early inside the powerplay to put the visitors on the back foot reducing them to 36/3.

Hardik (2/23) set the tone in the opening over with a stunning backward-running catch to dismiss Devon Conway (1). He then struck in his next over as Rachin Ravindra (4) mistimed a short delivery and Bishnoi at deep square leg completed the formalities. Bumrah, introduced as second change, made an immediate impact and was again the pick of the bowling grabbing three for 17. Returning after being rested for the Raipur game, he knocked over Tim Seifert (12) with a full delivery that came in to uproot the off-stump. Bishnoi then bowled with precision, denying the batters any momentum. He prevented Glenn Phillips from reaching a deserved fifty, dismissing him for 48 with his figures reading 3-0-91 after operating in the fifth, eighth and 12th overs.

Serving it up, Carlos Alcaraz advances to the Australian Open quarterfinals

MELBOURNE: No sooner had Carlos Alcaraz advanced to the Australian Open quarterfinals with a win over Tommy Paul, than attention turned to his serve. The top-ranked Alcaraz, in Australia trying to complete a career Grand Slam at the age of 22, has been remodeling it a little bit.

It worked well for him on Sunday in a 7-6 (6), 6-4, 7-5 win over No. 19-seeded Paul. There were no double-faults, he got 70% of his first serves into play and won 79% of those points. He also won 68% of points on his second serve.

The retooled start of his service motion has a familiar look, and hasn't escaped the attention of Novak Djokovic. The 24-time major winner joked earlier in the tournament that he'd sent Alcaraz a message asking for a copyright fee.

Alcaraz was asked about it in an on-court TV interview with Rod Laver Arena, and played along, too.

"Yeah, I heard that. I have the contract over there but I haven't seen him yet!" the Spaniard said of his exchange with Djokovic. Expanding on the theme, he said when

videos of the service motion emerged in the pre-season he checked on his phone and had a message from Djokovic which, more-or-less said: "Alright, you have to pay!"

Alcaraz said the locker room jokes keep it fun. Seeking an unpreceded 25th Grand Slam title, Djokovic has been blocked in the last two years by Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner, who have split the eight titles evenly.

One missing element on Alcaraz's tennis CV is a trophy at Melbourne Park. He has never gone past the quarterfinals. He'll face either local favorite Alex de Minaur or No. 10 Alexander Bublik in the last eight this coming week. Paul reached the Australian Open semifinals in 2023, so had that in his favor going into the fourth-round match with Alcaraz. The pair were going shot for shot in the first-set tiebreaker when a medical episode paused their match for more than 14 minutes.

It was 3-3 when chair umpire Marija Cicak informed them that a spectator at Rod Laver Arena needed urgent medical attention.

KIWG 2026: Army retain ice-hockey gold; Haryana crowned overall champions



Leh (Ladakh), Jan. 26: The Indian Army showcased its vast experience to clinch a thrilling 3-2 victory over a spirited Chandigarh team and retain the men's ice-hockey gold medal at the Khelo India Winter Games (KIWG) 2026, held at the NDS Stadium on Republic Day. The match-winner came just three minutes before the final hooter, providing a dra-

matic end to the Ladakh leg of the Games.

While Army celebrated ice-hockey glory, Haryana emerged as the overall champions of the Ladakh phase of KIWG 2026, driven by four gold medals from their figure skating and ice-skating contingent. Hosts Ladakh finished a commendable second overall, edging Maharashtra and Telangana on the basis of silver medals won.

Aryna Sabalenka beats 19-year-old Mboko, faces 18-year-old Jovic in Australian Open quarterfinals

MELBOURNE: TikTok influencer and top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka is having to work her way through some rising teenager stars in her bid for a third Australian Open title in four years.

Sabalenka held off 19-year-old Vicky Mboko 6-1, 7-6 (1) at Rod Laver Arena on Sunday to advance to a quarterfinal match against 18-year-old Iva Jovic.

The 29-seeded Jovic overwhelmed Yulia Putintseva 6-0, 6-1 in 53 minutes at John Cain Arena, the so-called People's Court, and she secured a spot in the last eight of a Grand Slam for the first time.

Coco Gauff, who was still a teenager when she won her first major title in 2023, is back into the quarterfinals in Australia for the third straight year after a 6-1, 3-6, 6-3 win over No. 19 Karolina Muchova.



In a good omen for Gauff, her four previous wins over Muchova have been during runs to the title, including in the semifinals at the 2023 U.S. Open. In the opening men's match Sunday, No. 1-ranked Carlos Alcaraz continued his bid for a career Grand Slam at age 22 with a 7-6 (6), 6-4, 7-5 win over No. 19-seeded Tommy Paul to reach the quarterfinals for the third consecutive year in Australia.

He's never gone past the last eight at Melbourne Park, the only one of the four Grand Slam venues where he hasn't won the title. That's a statistic he's determined to rectify, to the point where he's reworking his serve to a look a little bit more in style like 10-time Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic.

Jovic has been getting some good advice from Djokovic, a 24-time major

winner, during the tournament. He said he's been happy to help an up-and-coming star with Serbian heritage. Jovic made it clear last year that she wanted a chance to play the World No. 1. Now she'll get the chance. Sabalenka, who has joked about waiting for a formal invitation to partner Djokovic in mixed doubles at a major, breezed through the first set in 31 minutes against Mboko but had some difficulty in the second.

Mboko saved match points and played well

momentum and forced a tiebreaker only for Sabalenka to dominate.

It was the 20th straight tiebreak victory for Sabalenka. "I try to not to think this is a tiebreak and play point by point," said Sabalenka, who won back-to-back titles in Australia in 2023 and 24 before losing last year's final to Madison Keys. "I guess that's the key to consistency."

Sabalenka said playing the morning match at Melbourne Park came with some challenges, including shadows and bright sun. "Don't get me wrong, I like to play the first match, but the tricky part, at some point the sun goes right into your serve point. It's kind of like tricky. You can break the serve," she said. "That's what actually happened. Two breaks that she got, it was on the side when I was facing the sun. Yeah, I didn't deal that good with

the serve. She did an incredible job serving on that side."

Jovic and Mboko were scheduled to play doubles together later Sunday on Kia Arena against fourth-seeded Elise Mertens and Zhang Shuai.

After her singles win when she broke Putintseva's serve six times and led 6-0, 4-0 before she dropped serve herself, Jovic said she'd just concentrate on her own game when she faced Sabalenka.

She saved two break points in the opening game of the match against Putintseva and was dominant throughout. She had her 31-year-old rival challenging herself during the changeovers and practicing shots trying to work out ways to get back into the match. When Jovic hit a crosscourt forehand winner to convert another break in the second set, Putintseva tossed her racket toward the ball.





“Rise of Gana” lyrical video song released from Sudigali Sudheer’s G.O.A.T (Goat)

Popular comedian Sudigali Sudheer is playing the lead in the upcoming film G.O.A.T (Goat), subtitled “Greatest Of All Times.” The film features Divya Bharathi as the heroine and is directed by Vedavyas. It is jointly produced by Mahateja Creations and Jaishnav Productions, with Chandrasekhar Reddy Mogulla as the producer. The movie is currently in post-production and is scheduled for release in February.

Recently, the teaser and songs from the film received an unexpected and overwhelming response. Now, the film unit has released the “Rise of Gana” lyrical video on Monday. The video song was unveiled at an event held at CMR Engineering College recently. The song, composed by Leon James, with lyrics by Kasarla Shyam, is expected to be a powerful mass number that highlights the hero’s characterization. The visuals and lyr-

ics are said to be highly appealing. Speaking on the occasion, the producer said that the film is being made on a grand scale without any compromise on budget and will be technically superior. He expressed confidence that this film will be a milestone in Sudigali Sudheer’s career and that every frame of the movie will be visually impressive, assuring that it will entertain audiences thoroughly.



Tollywood Stars Travel Based Adventurous Talk Show ‘Soul Trip’... Hero Vijay Datla Turns Host

Under Rizwan Entertainment presentation... a travel-based adventurous talk show featuring star heroes is set to begin... titled ‘Soul Trip’. This adventurous talk show will entertain audiences with our Tollywood star heroes. The hero and producer Vijay Datla—who has pre-

viously worked on films like Poster and Anveshi—is now completing Season 1 of this celebrity talk show under his own banner Gandabherundam Arts, and it will soon be released on a prominent OTT platform. On the occasion of Republic Day, the poster for the ‘Soul Trip’ talk show was released.

The Padma Shri Belongs to My Telugu Audience” – RAJENDRA PRASAD

The announcement of the Padma Awards on the occasion of India’s 77th Republic Day has brought a proud moment for Telugu cinema, with veteran actor Rajendra Prasad being conferred the prestigious Padma Shri by the Government of India. Born in Krishna district, Andhra Pradesh, Rajendra Prasad made his entry into Telugu cinema in 1977 with Sneham. Over a remarkable career spanning 48 years, he has portrayed an extraordinary range of characters, winning hearts across generations and earning the affectionate title Nata Kireeti. Expressing his heartfelt emotions after the announcement, Rajendra Prasad said the honour was a blessing from the people. He remarked: “This Padma Shri is my good fortune and the blessing of Telugu audiences. From the moment I heard the news, my heart was filled with happiness. I respectfully thank the Government of India for recognising an actor with such a great honour. I am also deeply grateful to the Andhra Pradesh Government and all elders who recommended my name. For me, this award truly belongs to the audience. For nearly five decades, they have embraced me not just as an actor, but as a member of their own family. The love with which they call me ‘our Rajendra Prasad’ is the greatest recognition of my life. The people of both Telugu states have always treated me like their own son, and I can never repay that affection. I congratulate all the distinguished personalities receiving Padma Awards this year and seek the continued blessings of my audience. As long as I live, I remain your Rajendra Prasad.” Rajendra Prasad’s Padma Shri honour celebrates not only his immense contribution to cinema but also the deep emotional bond he shares with Telugu audiences.



Manchu Manoj’s pan-India period film David Reddy unveils first-look posters



Rocking Star Manchu Manoj’s upcoming pan-India period action film David Reddy has created strong buzz with the release of its first-look posters on the occasion of Republic Day. Produced by Nallagangula Venkat Reddy and Bharat Motukuri under the banners Velvet Soul Motion Pictures and True Radix, the film is directed by Hanuma Reddy Yakkanti.

Set against the backdrop of the British era, David Reddy is being made on a large scale as an intense action-drama. The film stars Manchu Manoj in a powerful role, with Maria Ryaboshapka playing the female lead. It is being simultaneously produced in Telugu, Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam, and Kannada, aiming for a wide pan-India release.

The first-look posters showcase Manchu Manoj in two striking avatars titled “Ruthless” and “Brutal,” highlighting his intense screen presence and hinting at high-octane action sequences. His transformation, body language, and fierce expressions have impressed audiences and raised expectations, with many viewing the film as a strong comeback project for the actor.

Set between 1897 and 1920 during British colonial rule, David Reddy narrates the story of a warrior who rises against oppression and fights the brutal British regime. With the unveiling of the first-look posters, the film has generated considerable excitement, and the makers have announced that more updates will be revealed soon.

Bronze statue of Sirivennela Seetharama Sastry unveiled at Anakapalli

The bronze statue of legendary lyricist and Padma Shri awardee Sirivennela Seetharama Sastry was unveiled in a grand ceremony at Gandhinagar, Anakapalli, near the Sri Venkateswara Swamy Temple. The programme was organized by the TANA Literary Wing – TANA World Literary Forum, with support from the Government of Andhra Pradesh and the Anakapalli Sirivennela Kalapeetham. Former Minister and Anakapalli MLA Konathala Ramakrishna presided over the event, while renowned filmmaker and writer Trivikram Srinivas unveiled the statue in the presence of Sastry’s family members. A commemorative meeting titled Sirivennela Seetharama Sastry Mahotsava Sabha was later held at the Pentakota Convention Hall.

Speaking on the occasion, Konathala Ramakrishna recalled that Sirivennela Seetharama Sastry, who was born and brought up in Anakapalli, brought national and international recognition to his hometown through his literary excellence. He said the installation of the statue at Gandhinagar, where the poet spent his early years, was a moment of pride. He also announced that the Sirivennela Seetharama Sastry Kalapeetham would institute an annual award to honour literary excellence. Trivikram Srinivas said that Sirivennela Seetharama Sastry continues to live on through his timeless words and ideas, stressing the need to preserve the legacy of great personalities to inspire future generations. Former Minister Mandali Buddha Prasad highlighted Sastry’s immense contribution to Telugu cinema and literature, noting that his songs reflected deep human values and patriotism. TANA representative Thotakur Prasad recalled Sastry’s bold transition from a telecom career to cinema and his achievement of winning three consecutive Nandi Awards. Several dignitaries, public representatives, and members of Sirivennela Seetharama Sastry’s family attended the event. Later, Trivikram Srinivas and the poet’s family members were felicitated and accorded a traditional Purna Kumbha Swagatham by the Sri Nookambika Ammavari Devasthanam, followed by darshan, Vedic blessings, and the presentation of sacred prasadam.



Kaithi 2 will happen after Allu Arjun film: Lokesh Kanagaraj

Director Lokesh Kanagaraj on Monday (January 26) clarified that Kaithi 2 with actor Karthi will be his immediate next film after his upcoming project with Allu Arjun (AA23). He was speaking at a press meet convened in the city to quell rumours circulating on social media about his projects.

Why Kaithi 2 was delayed

Lokesh said the delay behind Kaithi 2 had nothing to do with his remuneration. He explained that when Coolie was releasing, he met Rajinikanth and Kamal Haasan, and was invited to direct their collaboration. “Rajini sir and Kamal sir collaborating after 46 years is rare. It was an honour to be called to direct. So I told the Kaithi 2 producers that I would return after completing this film,” he said.

Lokesh said he wrote a story for nearly one-and-a-half months, and both actors liked it. However, the collaboration did not materialise. “Both had just done back-to-back action films. Rajini sir’s immediate next is Jailer 2, an actioner. Kamal sir’s next with Anbariv is also action-heavy. They were looking to collaborate on a light-hearted film, which is not my strength,” he opened up. The Rajini-Kamal film is now set to be directed by Sibi Chakravarthy of Don fame, and is backed by Kamal Haasan along with R Mahendran under their Raaj Kamal Films International (RKFI) banner. How the In the meantime, with the Rajinikanth-Kamal



Haasan project no longer on the cards and the Kaithi 2 team having allotted its slot to another director, Lokesh said he decided to honour a long-standing commitment with Mythri Movie Makers during the gap. He also added that Allu Arjun was keen on collaborating for several years, which is how AA23 took off. “That is why Kaithi 2 was delayed, not because I asked for any salary hike,” Lokesh said, putting an end to rumours and speculation. Responding to a question about the Lokesh Cinematic Universe (LCU), Lokesh said the universe was not ending, mentioning it was a term coined by fans. “I will finish the Allu Arjun film, then Kaithi 2, Vikram 2 and Rolex (based on actor Surya’s character in Vikram). There is also Benz, which is part of the LCU. So the LCU is not closed. Those films will happen,” he said. Lokesh also said discussions with Aamir Khan are ongoing for a film collaboration.