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PM Modi quite unapologetic in advancing India's national interest : Ex-Australian PM Scott Morrison



Sydney : Former Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has lauded the leadership skills of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, calling him "quite unapologetic" about maintaining his freedom of manoeuvre. Speaking virtually during the Indo-Mediterranean Dialogues, the former Australian PM emphasised that India under PM Modi's leadership prioritises advancing its national interest. "He'll pick up the phone, and he'll talk to whoever he wants to. He'll go to whichever country he needs to, to advance India's national interest," said Morrison. He also praised External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar as an "able lieutenant" who had been "incredibly industrious" in implementing that approach. Morrison, who served as the Australian Prime Minister from 2018 to 2022, had previously met PM Modi in Melbourne in July this year. Morrison also asserted that India will be indispensable to the future strategic balance of the Indo-Pacific, stating that New Delhi's engagement is what gives the Quad its distinct character and fundamentally sets it apart from other regional groupings. The former

Australian Prime Minister discussed the rapidly changing security architecture stretching from West Asia and the Indian Ocean to the Pacific, highlighting the growing strategic importance of India alongside the emergence of the new Mecca Defence Pact, China's expanding regional influence, and the future of the Quad and AUKUS. Morrison emphasised that the international order is becoming increasingly distributed, creating space for new powers and new minilateral groupings where India will be one of the principal beneficiaries.

Independence Day 2026: AP CM hoists national flag in Amaravati



From Our Staff Reporter Amaravati, Aug., 15 : The coalition government of Andhra Pradesh headed by Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu is conducting grand celebrations of the Independence Day in Amaravati, capital of Andhra Pradesh for the very first time. The event commenced at the Parade Grounds in Rayapudi, under the theme 'Swarnandhra-2047'. Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu was present at the event and hoisted the National Flag. The Chief Minister's convoy reached the parade ground in Seed Access Road with police motorcycle escorts and was received by DGP Harish Kumar Gupta and senior officials and heaved the national flag. He also laid floral tributes at the foot of the National Flag. The Chief Minister was given a guard of honour by the police forces and took a close look at the preparedness of units like the Andhra Pradesh State Police (APSP). Police contingent, NCC cadets, CRPF marched past him. Speaking while addressing the gathering, CM Chandrababu said that freedom was not attained on a particular day, and through the efforts of a single leader, but through decades of struggle and movements, and through the sacrifices of great leaders and martyrs. The chief minister said that he takes pride in freedom fighters like Alluri Sitarama Raju and Pingali Venkayya representing the region. He urged the younger generation to think and do something special for the country since the citizens have created history, saying "My Country is My Responsibility". He said that his dream is to see the country as well as Andhra Pradesh as the number one state by 2047, and for that people have to work hard for the next 25 years. He said whatever efforts are being made to build the 'Swarnandhra' have to be channeled towards building a 'Viksit

Bharat'. He said the people of Andhra Pradesh have given a massive mandate to the TDP in the 2024 elections and have shown their trust in him. He said that his government is taking the state from the trajectory of destruction to development and growth, saying that with the Centre's support, the state has entered a new phase of development. He said that building the 'Swarnandhra-2047' is the mission and mantra of the government, which is working on a 10-point agenda. He said apart from announcing their vision and mission, the government has chalked out a comprehensive action plan for achieving their goals. He said that his government is committed to transforming every village and district in the state and that decentralization of development is their policy. The chief minister said that Visakhapatnam, Amaravati, and Tirupati will emerge as economic powerhouses.

'Dimaagi Naxal' Jibe To Women's Quota

PM Modi's I-Day Speech Sparks Fresh BJP-Opposition Clash

New Delhi: Opposition parties on Saturday criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his "dimaagi Naxal" remark, saying he should not have used his Independence Day speech for politics, and claimed his pitch on 33 per cent women's reservation in legislatures displayed the ruling BJP's "hypocrisy" after not implementing the quota in the 2024 general elections. Senior BJP leaders, however, hailed the prime minister's speech as a roadmap for achieving the goal of a developed nation, with Union Home Minister Amit Shah terming it a resolve for indigenous development, prosperity and self-reliance. BJP chief Nitin Nabin said the 'Saptdharma' (seven streams of strength) listed by Modi will become new foundations of India's development journey. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said that PM Modi's resolve "is firm and clear: reform with conviction, empower the youth, strengthen our nation and make India a global power-house". In his 13th consecutive address on the 80th Independence Day, the prime minister urged political parties to rise above differences to help secure 33 per cent reservation for women in legislatures, called upon the youth to take the lead in building a developed India and warned against being misled by "dimaagi Naxals".



The day also saw a row over leaders of opposition in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha - Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge -- not attending the official Independence Day event at the Red Fort. The BJP also

attacked the Congress over its former president Sonia Gandhi's alleged objection to the full rendition of 'Vande Mataram' during the Independence Day event at the Congress office. On the other hand, the Congress

took a swipe at PM Modi over the sequencing of his tri-coloured pocket squares, saying it seems he is celebrating the Independence Day of Ireland instead of India's. Attacking PM Modi for his 'dimaagi Naxal' remark, leaders of several opposition parties said it was intended to stigmatise his opponents and those questioning the government, with the Congress terming it a "sure sign of desperation".

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge alleged that the prime minister was claiming credit for all that the Congress has done and warned that "he may bring the national flag down one day". He also accused the prime minister of speaking lies from the Red Fort, as he targeted him on the issues of Ram temple donations "theft" and police action against students. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the prime minister first attacked his opponents as "urban Naxals" and is now calling them "dimaagi Naxals". "First he called his opponents 'urban naxals'. Now he calls them 'dimaagi naxals'. It is a sure sign of his desperation."

One Year of Stree Shakti Scheme : CM Chandrababu Travels by Bus with Women

From Our Staff Reporter Amaravati, Aug., 15 : The Stree Shakti free bus travel scheme, launched with great importance by the coalition government, completed one year today. The government launched the 'Stree Shakti' scheme on August 15 last year to promote the economic empowerment of women. To mark the occasion, programmes were organised across the state under the theme "One Year of Stree Shakti - Doubled Self-Respect." Chief Minister Chandrababu participated in the programme and travelled by bus with women from the Parade Grounds in the capital. He also interacted directly with women who had come from different districts. The Chief Minister travelled with the women by bus from the Parade

Grounds via Seed Axis Road to the CM's Camp Office. He enquired about the implementation and impact of the Stree Shakti scheme and asked about the financial and family circumstances of the women. During his interaction with a woman farmer, the Chief Minister advised her to make full use of the welfare schemes provided by the government. He also spoke to a woman who sells fish. She said that the Stree Shakti scheme was helping her save Rs.4,000 per month. The Chief Minister enquired about her health condition. The woman said she had diabetes and was using the benefits received through government schemes to purchase medicines. The Chief Minister advised her to adopt healthier habits to prevent illness. He said that main-



taining good health would also help families save money otherwise spent on medicines. A Muslim woman from Nandyal said the Stree Shakti scheme was helping her save Rs.1,500 per month. She said she was benefiting from a total of four government schemes, including Stree Shakti. A young woman said the scheme was particularly

useful for female students. A woman handloom weaver from the erstwhile Anantapur district said that, along with the Stree Shakti scheme, the Nethanna Sevalo scheme was helping her increase her income. She said she was able to travel free of cost under Stree Shakti to purchase raw materials and market her woven sarees at shops. Earlier, only her hus-

band would travel outside the home for business, she said, adding that she can now also travel and contribute to expanding their business. CM Chandrababu told the women that he was conducting such interactions to understand the living conditions of poor and middle-class people and families across Andhra Pradesh.

National Flag Symbolises Freedom and Reflects Self-Respect: CM Chandrababu

From Our Staff Reporter Amaravati, Aug., 15 : Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu described the national flag as a symbol of freedom and a reflection of self-respect. He said the national flag represents our unity and serves as a guide for the future. As part of the 80th Independence Day celebrations, he hoisted the Tricolour in the capital Amaravati on Saturday. Speaking on the occasion, CM Chandrababu Naidu said independence did not come easily, overnight, or through the struggle of a single individual. It was achieved through decades of struggle and movements

led by several generations. He recalled that it came through the sacrifices of many great leaders and the lives laid down by countless freedom fighters. He said Telugu land had also made its own significant contribution to the freedom struggle. He said Alluri Sitarama Raju and Pingali Venkayya were a matter of pride for the Telugu people. He urged the youth to think about what they could do for the nation. He called upon people to move forward with the spirit of "My country, my responsibility." He expressed the aspiration to make the country and Andhra Pradesh number one by 2047. He said the next 20 years must be

dedicated to hard work to achieve this goal. Every effort made for Swarna Andhra should become part of the Viksit Bharat mission, he said. CM Chandrababu noted that the challenges and crises facing the state had changed over time. He expressed anguish that the previous rulers had pushed Andhra Pradesh into destruction for five years and alleged that an anarchic style of governance prevailed during that period. He said that in the 2024 elections, people placed their trust in the alliance and gave it a resounding victory. He stated that the government was now moving from de-

struction towards development. He said Andhra Pradesh had received a new lease of life with the support of the Centre. He asserted that the government was working towards the Swarna Andhra-2047 goal. He explained that the government was moving forward with a 10-point agenda and had prepared an action plan rather than merely setting goals. He expressed his desire for every village and every district to develop. He said decentralisation of development was the government's policy. CM Chandrababu explained that Visakhapatnam, Amaravati and Tirupati were being developed as economic regions.

He said the Stree Shakti scheme was being implemented in five categories of buses—Express, Ultra Pallevelugu, Pallevelugu, Metro Express and City Ordinary—providing free bus travel for women. He said women from various sections had made a record 87 crore free journeys so far. Around 24 lakh women are travelling free by bus every day, he said. He stated that the scheme was being implemented in 7,631 of the 9,978 APSRTC buses, covering 76% of the total APSRTC fleet. Before the introduction of Stree Shakti, women accounted for 40% of bus travel, while their share has increased to 62% after the scheme was implemented. CM Chandrababu said the implementation of Stree Shakti had also resulted in a significant reduction in road accidents.

EDITORIAL

Vande Mataram for Creating Divisions?

The makers of the Constitution, who laid the foundations for the Indian Republic, believed that the country could succeed only by recognising and respecting both “unity in diversity” and “diversity within unity” and by extending equal respect to all. They defined India as a Union of States. Therefore, instead of imposing a single viewpoint on everyone, there must be space for and respect for differing opinions within a framework that is acceptable to all. However, there is criticism that the present Central Government is setting aside the spirit of federalism and forcibly imposing its decisions. One example is the famous national song Vande Mataram, written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. The song inspired many people during the freedom struggle. The Centre’s decision to make its singing mandatory at all official and national events may be welcomed. But the directive to sing all six stanzas of the song in full has become controversial. The first two stanzas contain words such as sujalam, suphalam, malayaja sheetalam, which are inspirational to every citizen and have not attracted objections. However, the subsequent stanzas contain praise of Hindu deities such as Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati, leading Muslim members to raise objections as early as October 1937. The Congress Working Committee discussed the issue extensively in the presence of Mahatma Gandhi. At the time, there were concerns that the issue could create divisions in the united freedom movement that was being conducted beyond caste and religion. Therefore, those stanzas were withdrawn in practice, and Vande Mataram came to be sung with the remaining stanzas. Although the country was partitioned on religious lines at that time, India subsequently moved forward as a secular, democratic republic. Despite the many internal factors that could have led to further divisions, the leadership of independent India acted carefully and avoided allowing those differences to deepen. It worked tirelessly to build bridges of friendship between different sections of society. Many great leaders who displayed immense courage, sacrifice and determination in breaking the chains of slavery and driving out the British wanted India to belong to every Indian as a birthright. Accordingly, they were able to unite people across caste, religion and social groups and lead them forward on a common path. At the same time, they chose slogans and symbols that respected the diversity of the people.

Although national leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and J.B. Kripalani had many differences of opinion, they did not accept policies that could divide the people. Respecting people’s emotions is one thing; using those emotions to satisfy them or for political gain is another. Democracy does not mean imposing the majority’s decision forcibly on the minority. If that is attempted, the country risks moving away from the principles of democracy. Democracy means respecting differing opinions within a broad constitutional framework and ensuring that people with different views enjoy the same rights as the majority. Attempts to disturb this balance are dangerous steps that could shake the foundations of the Indian Republic. The national flag and the national anthem are both national symbols protected by the Constitution. However, unlike the national anthem, the national song does not enjoy the same constitutional protection. Disrespecting the version of the national song adopted by the Constituent Assembly is considered unlawful. But attempting to extend that protection to every stanza of the song and equate it with other constitutionally protected national symbols could lead to resistance. The government’s directive requiring every citizen to compulsorily sing all six stanzas, including the explicitly religious verses, is therefore becoming a matter of debate. In such circumstances, if a Muslim bureaucrat, a Christian student or a Buddhist citizen is compelled to sing verses praising Goddess Durga or Saraswati, is that practically feasible? Would it not seriously hurt their conscience? Anticipating such situations, the makers of our Constitution incorporated Article 25, which provides protection from such undesirable circumstances. They created a constitutional system capable of bringing diverse civilisations together and moving them forward. True patriotism does not mean that every citizen must pray in exactly the same manner. In this context, the Bijoe Emmanuel case, decided by the Supreme Court in 1986 concerning three students who were expelled from a school in Kerala for not singing the national anthem, is worth recalling. The Supreme Court made it clear that even if the students did not sing the national anthem, it was important that they stood respectfully. Against this backdrop, should we not seek paths that unite people rather than policies that create divisions?

Attack On Sukhbir Badal: Time To Heal, Time To Rethink Panthak Politics

A sacred Sikh space in the Deccan has become the setting for a question Punjab can no longer avoid. What happens when religious identity, grievance and violence begin appearing too closely together?

The motive behind the attack on Sukhbir Singh Badal remains under investigation. But the incident raises questions about the direction of Sikh public discourse. I was in Nanded in June, walking through a city where Sikh history feels inseparable from the cultural world around it.

Takht Sachkhand Sri Hazur Sahib is a holy centre of enormous importance, associated with Guru Gobind Singh's final days in 1708 and the continuing Sikh presence in the Deccan.

That experience challenged the neat categories through which many of us in Delhi have understood Sikhi.

Sikhs in the Deccan have absorbed the cultural landscape around them without surrendering their own identity.

Then, back in London, came the news that Sukhbir Singh Badal had been attacked inside a gurdwara in Nanded by Jaspal Singh, identified by police as a Nihang.

Badal reportedly suffered a penetrating wound to his hand and underwent surgery.

A Faith That Leaves Room For Mercy

The question is larger than Badal.

He carries political baggage. The sacrilege incidents of 2015, during the Akali-BJP government, caused a wound that cannot be dismissed in religious life.

The controversies around the handling of those cases and the religious pardon granted to Sirsa Dera chief Ram Rahim by the then Jatheadar of the Akal Takht for an earlier instance of blasphemy, followed by its revocation, remain embedded in Sikh memory.

Badal later sought Panthak and religious forgiveness for wrongdoings committed during his years in power.

Sikhi gives considerable space to confession, correction and forgiveness.

Gurbani places daya at the heart of the Sikh moral imagi-



nation.

“Make compassion the cotton, contentment the thread, modesty the knot and truth the twist.”

— Guru Nanak, Ang 471, Sri Guru Granth Sahib

The Guru turns daya into the material from which the sacred thread of the soul is made. Compassion is foundational.

Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru, describes the Divine as: “The Supreme Being is the treasure of mercy, compassionate and forgiving.”

So what should religious wrongdoing produce?

A demand for accountability, repentance and justice.

The answer cannot be presumed to be violence. And in Nanded, with the motive still unknown, it would be irresponsible to presume that it was.

The Nihangs And A Damaging Headline

There is another uncomfortable part of this story.

The Nihang order has a long and important place in Sikh history, associated with martial service, protection of Sikh institutions and distinctive traditions.

In recent years, however, Nihangs have repeatedly entered public headlines for the wrong reasons.

In England, the murder of 18-year-old Henry Nowak by

Vickrum Digwa became entangled in public discussion about Sikh identity, the kirpan and the convicted attacker's association with Nihang traditions. Sikh organisations condemned the murder. The case also generated wider hostility and misinformation around Sikhs in Britain this year.

Now Nanded brings the Nihang identity back into headlines, this time through an attack on the head of the Shiromani Akali Dal inside a gurdwara.

This recurring association with acts of violence in public discourse should concern the Sikh community.

A tradition known for the kirpan, a symbol whose name is traditionally linked to kirpa, or grace, cannot allow a sword used as an attacking weapon to become its most visible public language.

Looking Beyond The Panthak Space

Badal is at his strongest when he acts as a public figure for Punjab in all its diversity.

Last year, when floods ravaged the state, he was on the ground.

During the farmers' agitation, he stood beside farmers.

The SGPC, controlled by the Shiromani Akali Dal, has repeatedly been among the first Sikh institutions to mobilise during

major crises.

That is useful public leadership.

He becomes vulnerable when he overreaches into Panthak theatre.

His embrace of the Satluj movie to appease hardline sections brought old questions rushing back: senior police appointments under the Akali-BJP governments, the 2015 sacrilege cases, the Dera pardon and the political decisions surrounding it.

The Panthak space once occupied by the Badal-led Shiromani Akali Dal is increasingly being contested by Amritpal Singh's Waris Punjab De.

Badal would rather serve Punjab better by concentrating on debt, jobs, agriculture, education, healthcare and investment.

Like Uddhav Thackeray, Akhilesh Yadav, Arvind Kejriwal and Rahul Gandhi, he should have registered his presence at Gen Z protests at Jantar Mantar. The SGPC, after all, itself runs medical and higher educational institutions. The stakes are common. Young Punjabis asking for opportunity and a future are speaking directly to the institutions that claim to represent their aspirations. That is where the political contest will ultimately be

decided.

A Larger Sikh Question

During colonial rule, Sikh author Kahn Singh Nabha (1861-1938) wrote 'Hum Hindu Nahin' to assert Sikh distinctiveness.

Today, perhaps Sikhs need another question. Hum Abrahmic Bhi Nahin.

The point is not theological rivalry. It is a warning against importing a politics of religious offence in which perceived wrongdoing invites personal retaliation, public punishment or vigilante justice.

Sikhi has its own moral vocabulary.

Daya. Khimaa. Santokh. Seva. Kirpa. Bakhshish.

In June, Nanded gave me a glimpse of a Sikh tradition spacious enough to absorb cultural diversities without losing its identity.

Two months later, the attack on Badal presents a very different image from the same sacred landscape.

The motive may eventually explain the attacker's actions. The larger significance lies in how the incident enters Sikh public discourse, especially at a time when violence, religious offence and retribution are increasingly appearing in the same conversation. Nanded, in that sense, offers both the contrast and the context.

79 Years On, India's Enduring Answer To Those Who Had Predicted Its Collapse

As the tricolour unfurls against the August sky to mark our seventy-ninth Independence Day, the sight unfailingly evokes a profound mix of reverence and contemplation. Seventy-nine years in the lifespan of an ancient civilisation is a mere heartbeat; yet, in the annals of modern nation-building, India's journey stands as a singular, audacious triumph of human hope over historic cynicism.

When our founding fathers and mothers stood in that historic Midnight Hour on August 14-15, 1947, they hailed, in Nehru's immortal words, a “tryst with destiny”; but over the next decade and a half, many western commentators were swift to forecast the imminent collapse of our fledgling republic. India, they argued, was merely a geographical notion, a chaotic, bewildering aggregation of languages, ethnicities, castes, and creeds lacking the unifying singular identity of the classic European nation-state. We were “no more a single country than the Equator”, Churchill barked. What those sceptics failed to grasp was that India's unity was never intended to be forged through uniformity, but was rooted instead in a far grander philosophy: the celebration of difference.

Our Many Truths

For decades, we have used the word tolerance to describe our societal ethos, but tolerance, as Swami Vivekananda so powerfully reminded the world at Chicago in 1893, is an inadequate virtue. To tolerate someone else's faith, culture, or way of life carries a faint, patronising whiff of condescension: it implies that you possess the absolute truth, but magnanimously permit another to exist in their error. India's traditional genius lies not in tolerance, but in acceptance. Our civilisation has historically operated on the conviction that truth is a prism with many facets - Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vedanti, or "Truth is one, but the wise call it by many names". We are not a melting pot in the American image, where diverse ingredients are blended down into a homogenous broth. India is a rich, varied thali, a selection of distinct dishes served in separate bowls, each retaining its unique aroma, texture, and flavour, yet coming together on a single platter to create a harmonious, unforgettable feast.

To be an Indian is not to subscribe to a single religion, speak a single tongue, or worship a single doctrine, but to share a common narrative

of belonging, codified in a magnificent Constitution that guarantees liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith, and worship to every citizen, regardless of their background or stature. India instinctively understands that in a vast and varied civilisation functioning as a democracy under the rule of law, you don't really need to agree all the time, except on the ground rules of how to disagree. That is our secret: we have achieved consensus on how to flourish without consensus.

India has often been described as a palimpsest, a canvas upon which successive layers of thought, culture, and migration have been written, without ever fully erasing what lay beneath. This historical depth gives us our extraordinary resilience, yet pluralism cannot be treated merely as a passive inheritance to be praised in ceremonial speeches. It is a vital, daily dynamic that must be actively nurtured and defended. A vibrant democracy cannot survive on past glory alone, and the true strength of our institutions lies in their capacity to absorb the soaring aspirations of our youth.

Future, Not The Past

Today, with more than half

of our population under thirty, the young do not view independence solely as freedom from foreign rule, but as the freedom to achieve. They seek freedom from poverty, bureaucratic inertia, administrative failure and social discrimination, alongside the freedom to innovate, dissent, dream, and shape their own destinies in an increasingly complex global order, while demanding accountability from those who govern them. This makes it all the more vital that our democratic machinery remains responsive and dynamic, and that we listen to the young, especially "Gen-Z", who in the next general elections will be the largest single voting cohort.

Our young people are rightly impatient for progress, understanding that genuine development cannot occur in an atmosphere of communal friction, political polarisation, or majoritarian triumphalism. Economic dynamism and social harmony are not mutually exclusive pursuits, but twin pillars of national greatness. A society divided against itself spends its energy squabbling over the past rather than conquering the future.

The Indian Experiment Endures

As we celebrate this

milestone, we must reaffirm our commitment to the fundamental principles that birthed our republic. Patriotism is not about demanding conformity or questioning the nationalism or loyalty of those who see things differently; true patriotism is inclusive, welcoming, and confident enough to embrace criticism in the service of progress.

Let us celebrate India not despite its diversity, but precisely because of it. Let us pledge to safeguard the institutions that protect our freedoms - our independent judiciary, our free press, our robust parliamentary traditions, our vigorous civil society, and the sacred equality and fraternity guaranteed by our Constitution. Let us celebrate the fact that the Indian experiment remains one of the most magnificent undertakings in human history: a billion and a half people, of every conceivable background, attempting to forge a shared future through peaceful, democratic means. As the tricolour flutters in the breeze today, let us resolve to keep its promise bright. Let it fly proudly as a beacon of liberty, pluralism, and boundless opportunity for generations yet to come.

Affordable Electric Bus Services to New Airport

Visakhapatnam, Pen Power, August 15: Two newly introduced electric buses to Alluri Sitarama Raju International Airport were launched on Saturday by Revenue, Stamps and Registration Minister Anagani Satya Prasad and Visakhapatnam MP Sri Bharat, following the Independence Day celebrations.

Officials said a total of 20 electric buses will operate to the airport—10 from Gajuwaka via NAD-Maddilapalem Highway and another 10 through key locations including the railway station, bus station and IT Park. Hourly services will be available from Gajuwaka and the airport.

The fare has been fixed at Rs.300 from the RTC Com-



plex and Rs.400 from Gajuwaka. The minister and MP urged passengers to make use of the affordable and eco-friendly service.

District Collector Abhishikt Kishore, Police Commissioner Shankhabrata Bagchi, Joint Collector

Vidyadhari and senior officials travelled on an electric bus from Police Grounds to RK Beach after the launch.

National Flag Honoured at Independence Day Celebrations

- Grand 80th Independence Day Celebrations at Visakhapatnam Collectorate



Visakhapatnam, Pen Power, August 15: The 80th Independence Day celebrations were held grandly at the Visakhapatnam

Collectorate on Saturday. District Collector M. Abhishikt Kishore unfurled the national flag and paid his respects, extending In-

dependence Day greetings to the people of the district.

The Collector also paid floral tributes to Mahatma Gandhi at his statue on the

Collectorate premises. Joint Collector Gobbilla Vidyadhari and RDO Dileep Chakravarthy also paid their respects. Chocolates were distributed to children.

DR O M. Visweswara Naidu, SDC Madhusudan Rao, DSO Bhaskar Rao, AO B.V. Rani, section superintendents and Collectorate staff participated in the celebrations.

Independence Day celebrations were also held at the Collector's Camp Office and Officers' Club, where the national flag was unfurled and greetings were extended to officials, employees and staff.

Pawan Kalyan Inaugurates Central Craft Wood Bank at Dhavaleswaram



Rajamahendravaram, Pen Power, August 15: Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan inaugurated the Central Craft Wood Bank established by the

Forest Department at Dhavaleswaram on Saturday. He also virtually launched six major Craft Wood Bank clusters across Andhra Pradesh. The initia-

tive aims to address the shortage of raw wood faced by traditional artisans and benefit around 5,000 artisan families across the state. The Rajamahendravaram

Wood Bank currently has 30 cubic metres of wood, with officials assuring adequate supply for the next five years. Pawan Kalyan, along with his wife Anna Konidela, visited the handicraft stalls, interacted with artisans and purchased several traditional artworks. He also scanned QR codes on the products and wood logs to learn about the artisans, manufacturing process and source and details of the timber. MLCs Somu Veerraju, MLAs Gorantla Butchaiah Chowdary, Bathula Balaramakrishna and Adireddy Srinivas, along with senior Forest Department officials and other dignitaries, attended the programme.

Markapuram Shines in Tricolour Glory

Markapuram, Pen Power, August 15: The 80th Independence Day celebrations were held grandly at the SVKP College premises in Markapuram, which was decorated in the colours of the national flag.

District Collector M. Vijaya Sunitha hoisted the national flag and received the guard of honour. Joint Collector P. Srinivasulu, MLAs Kandula Narayana Reddy and Mukku Ugra Narasimha Reddy, OSD Navajyothi Mishra, DFO Abdul Rauf and other officials attended the celebrations. Students from various schools and cultural academies presented patriotic dances, songs and plays highlighting national unity, which captivated the audience. The Collector congratulated and presented prizes to students who excelled in the cultural programmes.

Government departments also displayed tableaux showcasing development and welfare initiatives in ar-



ease including natural farming, healthcare, rural development, social welfare, electricity and municipal administration. Collector Vijaya Sunitha explained the government's welfare and development programmes and called upon the youth to contribute to nation-building with discipline and dedication.

Let Us Move Towards Swarna Andhra with the Spirit of Independence: Collector Harendhir Prasad

Kakinada, Pen Power, August 15: Kakinada District Collector M.N. Harendhir Prasad called upon people to work together beyond caste and religion to achieve the overall development of the state and build a "Swarna Andhra."

Addressing the 80th Independence Day celebrations at the Kakinada Collectorate, the Collector said the sacrifices of freedom fighters should inspire everyone to uphold constitutional values, equality and social justice. He urged citizens to contribute to the government's development and welfare initiatives and help achieve the targeted 15% growth rate.



The Collector, along with Joint Collector Apoorva Bharat and Trainee Collector Priya, unfurled the 100-foot national flag and paid floral tributes to Mahatma

Gandhi. He later hoisted the national flag at the Collectorate and received the police guard of honour.

He called upon everyone to collectively make

Kakinada district and Andhra Pradesh leaders in development and welfare. District-level officials and Collectorate staff participated in the celebrations.

Pragati Engineering College Celebrates 80th Independence Day



Gandepalli, Pen Power, August 15: The 80th Independence Day was celebrated at Pragati Engineering College, Surampalem, on Saturday. The programme began with students singing Vande Mataram. College Chairman Dr. Paruchuri Krishna Rao

hoisted the national flag, followed by the national anthem. NCC, NSS and various student clubs conducted a parade. Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Krishna Rao congratulated the students and staff and highlighted India's rich cultural heritage, peace and

humanitarian values. He urged the youth to draw inspiration from freedom fighters and contribute to the country's progress. Long-serving staff members were honoured and given cash incentives for completing 10 and 15 years of service. Students who excelled

academically were also presented with prizes. Director Management M.V. Haranath Babu, Vice-President M. Satish, Director-Academics Dr. K. Satyanarayana, Principal Dr. G. Naresh, heads of departments, faculty, staff and students attended the celebrations.

East Godavari Independence Day Celebrations Held in Rajamahendravaram

Rajamahendravaram, Pen Power, August 15: The 80th Independence Day celebrations at the district level were held grandly at the Arts College grounds in Rajamahendravaram on Saturday. State Tourism, Culture and Cinematography Minister Kandula Durgesh hoisted the national flag in the presence of District Collector Keerthi Chekuri. Addressing the gathering, the Minister said East Godavari was progressing towards the goals of Swarna Andhra Pradesh and Viksit Bharat. He recalled the significant role played by the district in the freedom movement and paid tribute to the sacrifices of freedom fighters. He highlighted progress in agriculture, education, healthcare, welfare, housing, infrastructure, women's empowerment and tourism. He said several welfare schemes were benefiting lakhs of people across the district. The celebrations featured a ceremonial parade by police and NCC personnel, colourful departmental tableaux, cultural performances by school students and exhibition stalls showcasing various government schemes. Awards were presented to outstanding tableaux and cultural performances. As many as 561 government officials and staff were honoured for their distinguished services. District SP D. Narasimha Kishore, Joint Collector J. Megha Swaroop, Municipal Commissioner Rahul Meena, MLA Gorantla Chowdary and other officials and public representatives participated in the celebrations.



Let Us Move Towards Greater Development with the Inspiration of Great Leaders: Collector Lakshmeesh

Vijayawada, Pen Power, August 15: NTR District Collector Dr. G. Lakshmeesh called upon everyone to work collectively to make the district a leader in development, welfare and public service. Addressing the 80th Independence Day celebrations at the Collectorate on Saturday, he hoisted the national flag and paid floral tributes to Mahatma Gandhi. He said the sacrifices of freedom fighters should inspire everyone to contribute to nation-building. The Collector urged all departments to work in coordination towards the Viksit Bharat-2047 and Swarna Andhra-2047 visions, with focus on education, healthcare, agriculture, industrial development, infrastructure, women's empowerment and employment opportunities for youth. He called upon citizens to protect the unity, integrity and sovereignty of the country and work together for a developed India.



Five Kota Village Officials Honoured for Distinguished Services

Rampa Chodavaram, Pen Power, August 15: Five officials from Kota village were honoured with awards and certificates of appreciation for their distinguished services in various government departments on the occasion of the 80th Independence Day. The awards were presented by AP ST Commission Chairman Bojji Reddy, Polavaram District Collector Dinesh Kumar, MLA Miriyala Sirisha Devi, and other dignitaries. The awardees are K. Laxmana Rao, Agriculture Officer, Rampa Chodavaram; Karukodi Lavan Reddy, ABF, NITI Aayog; G. Dinesh Kumar, Panchayat Development Officer & PMU, Polavaram Collectorate; G. Soujanya, Village Horticulture Officer, Musurumilli; and G. Lavanya, Woman Police, CVAP Unit, Rampa Chodavaram. The recognition of five officials from the same village at the district level was widely appreciated and described as a matter of pride for the people of Kota village.



Grand Independence Day Celebrations Held in Kakinada



Kakinada, Pen Power, August 15: The 80th Independence Day celebrations were held grandly at the Kakinada District Police Parade Ground. State Deputy Chief Minister Konidela Pawan Kalyan attended as the chief guest, unfurled the national flag and addressed the people on the occasion. The celebrations featured a police dog show, government welfare and development scheme tableaux, and cultural performances by students. Prizes and mementos were presented to the winners and performers. Appreciation certificates were also given to 242 officers and staff for their outstanding services to the district. District Collector M.N. Harendhir Prasad, SP G. Bindu Madhav, MPs, MLAs, MLCs, senior officials, public representatives and the public attended the celebrations. The programme concluded with Vande Mataram and the National Anthem.

Aditya University Celebrates 80th Independence Day

Gandepalli, Pen Power, August 15: The 80th Independence Day was celebrated grandly at Aditya University, Surampalem, in Gandepalli mandal on Saturday. The programme began with Vande Mataram, followed by the hoisting of the national flag by University Pro-Chancellor Dr. Nallamilli Satish Reddy. University officials recalled the sacrifices of freedom fighters and their contribution to India's independence. Patriotic songs and cultural performances by students attracted the audience. NCC cadets and university security personnel presented the ceremonial salute. Senior university officials, faculty and students participated in the celebrations. Sweets were distributed to students and staff after the programme.



Discipline, Impartiality Essential in Police Duties: SP Bindu Madhav

Kakinada, Pen Power, August 15: Kakinada District SP G. Bindu Madhav called upon police personnel to discharge their duties with patriotism, discipline, integrity, honesty and impartiality. Speaking at the 80th Independence Day celebrations held at the District Police Office, the SP unfurled the national flag and paid tribute to freedom fighters and martyrs. She stressed that protecting public safety, maintaining law and order and preventing crime should be treated as a commitment to national service. She urged police personnel to confront crime fearlessly, implement the law effectively and deal with the public in a respectful and friendly manner. The SP also called upon everyone to contribute to building a strong, safe and developed India. Later, she conveyed Independence Day greetings to police personnel and distributed sweets. Senior police officers and staff attended the programme.

Great Leaders' Sacrifices Inspire Future Generations



Rajamahendravaram, Pen Power, August 15: District Collector Keerthi Chekuri said the lives and sacrifices of great leaders who fought for the nation continue to inspire the present generation. The Collector hoisted the national flag at the 80th Independence Day celebrations held at the Collectorate on Saturday and paid floral tributes to Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Speaking on the occasion, she highlighted the significant participation of women in India's freedom struggle and said the Indian Constitution stands as a global model. She also said India has preserved its unity in diversity and emerged as one of the world's strong and developing nations over the past 80 years. Joint Collector Y. Megha Swaroop, Assistant Collector K. Aditya Sharma, DRO S. Bhaskar Reddy and other officials attended the programme.

SP D. Narasimha Kishore Hoists National Flag

Rajamahendravaram, Pen Power, August 15: The 80th Independence Day was celebrated at the East Godavari District SP Camp Office on Saturday. District SP D. Narasimha Kishore hoisted the national flag and paid his respects. The SP extended Independence Day greetings to the people of the district and police personnel and distributed sweets to the staff. He called upon everyone to remember the sacrifices of freedom fighters and work with dedication for the nation's development and public welfare. He urged police personnel to remain committed to maintaining public safety and law and order and to provide better services to people. The SP also appealed to everyone to contribute towards strengthening the country's unity, integrity and brotherhood.



Healthier Andhra Pradesh Is the Goal

Rajamahendravaram, Pen Power, August 15: The government has introduced advanced Thalli Bidda Express vehicles to ensure that pregnant women and new mothers face no difficulties before or after delivery, Tourism and Culture Minister Kandula Durgesh said. Minister Durgesh, along with MP Daggubati Purandeswari, launched the vehicles at the Government Hospital premises on Saturday. The Minister said the initiative aims to encourage institutional deliveries and reduce maternal and infant mortality rates. The vehicles will provide free transportation for pregnant women for antenatal check-ups, high-risk pregnancies, severe anaemia treatment and post-delivery transportation to their homes. The AC vehicles are equipped with six airbags, GPS tracking, an SOS but-



ton and 102 call-centre connectivity. Pregnant women and new mothers can avail themselves of the free service by calling 102, he said.

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'Dialogue between me and students; who are they'

CJI objects to BCI's now withdrawn circular barring NALSAR enrolment



New Delhi : The Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant objected to the Bar Council of India's (BCI) circulars against NALSAR University of Law students over their objections to his proposed participation as chief guest at the university's convocation. The CJI questioned the BCI's authority to intervene in what he described as a dialogue between him and the students. "BCI has nothing to do with this. We are with you. Students have written a letter to me. It's a dialogue between students and me. Who are they to unnecessarily issue a circular?" the CJI said. The remarks came as the bench of CJI Surya Kant, Justices Joymalya Bagechi and V Mohana was hearing a plea

filed by NALSAR students challenging the two BCI circulars issued. The Court issued notice to the BCI and sought its response to the plea. The plea challenges the BCI's initial direction to State Bar Councils not to enrol any NALSAR student graduating in 2026 until further orders. The BCI had also sought a report from the NALSAR Vice-Chancellor on the campaign concerning the CJI's proposed participation as chief guest at the convocation and details of persons allegedly involved in organising or mobilising it. The BCI subsequently withdrew the enrolment direction within hours, saying its deliberations showed that the vast majority of the 2026 graduates were inno-

cent and had not intended to participate in any move to disrespect the CJI. It retained the possibility of further action based on the Vice-Chancellor's report. The CJI said students should be permitted to raise their voice lawfully, even if their views were considered incorrect. "When I was in college, I was even actively involved in students' activities. Sometimes, even if they are saying the wrong thing, if they are lawfully raising their voice, it must be allowed", the CJI said. The Supreme Court, in its order, noted that the offending circular had been withdrawn and directed the BCI to file its counter within two weeks. The Court also ordered that no action be taken against any NALSAR student in respect of the subject letters in the meantime. "The offending circular has been withdrawn. Let counter be filed within two weeks. Meanwhile, no action shall be taken against any student of NALSAR with respect to the subject letters", the Court said. After passing the order, the CJI said institutions should respond to criticism with a broad mind, particularly when students were at the

beginning of their careers. "We should be large-hearted. Even if somebody makes a statement which is wrong to us...let it be wrong", he said. The CJI also, in a lighter vein, asked the students to complete their enrolment process and join the Supreme Court Bar, saying they could be empanelled for legal aid cases if there is a threat to their careers. "You tell all the students to get a license at the earliest. Join the Supreme Court Bar. You tell them to do it immediately. We will empanel them for legal aid cases. It will be a befitting answer to all those who are impeding their career", the CJI remarked. At around midnight yesterday, BCI Chairman Manan Kumar Mishra announced on X that the proceedings against the 2026 NALSAR batch had been dropped altogether. He said the decision was taken after considering representations and reactions from senior advocates, members of the Bar, law students and public-spirited citizens, and after being satisfied that the batch had no role in any disturbance or movement. The BCI, he said, would take no further action in the matter.

NIA arrests UAE-based key accused in VHP Leader Vikas Prabhakar murder case

New Delhi : The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has arrested another key accused who allegedly operated from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and acted as a link between Germany-based handlers of the proscribed Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) and firearm suppliers and other associates in India in connection with the targeted killing of Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader Vikas Prabhakar in Punjab's Nangal in 2024. The accused, Manveer Ram alias Ashu, was detained by immigration authorities at Amritsar International Airport on Thursday based on a Look Out Circular (LOC) issued by the NIA. He was subsequently arrested by the agency and is likely to be produced before the Special NIA Court for further proceedings.

According to the NIA, investigators have established that Manveer Ram was recruited to arrange firearms for executing the killing. He allegedly operated from the UAE and served as a crucial link between Germany-based handlers and firearm suppliers and other associates in India.



The agency said Manveer's role was to facilitate contact between the foreign-based conspirators and their operatives in India, thereby assisting in the execution of the targeted killing. The case, registered as RC-06/2024/NIA/DLI, relates to the killing of Vikas Prabhakar, a local VHP leader in Nangal. The NIA took over the investigation on May 9, 2024, and has so far filed a chargesheet along with two supplementary chargesheets.

As per the NIA investigation, the conspiracy to eliminate Prabhakar was allegedly hatched by Germany-based handlers of the proscribed BKI, identified as Harjit Singh alias Laddi and Kulbeer Singh alias Sidhu. Prabhakar was shot dead at his confectionery shop at around 4.30 pm on April 13, 2024, by two unidentified assailants in Punjab's Rupnagar district. He was the Nangal president of the VHP. The NIA had arrested accused Dharinder Kumar alias Kunal in August 2024 in coordination with the Delhi Police Special Cell in Punjab's Ludhiana. The agency alleged that Kunal had procured illegal arms and ammunition from Madhya Pradesh and supplied them to the ground shooters on the

directions of foreign-based Khalistani terrorist Harwinder Kumar alias Sonu. The alleged shooters, Mandeep Kumar alias Mangli and Surinder Kumar alias Rika, both residents of Punjab's SBS Nagar, were arrested on April 16, 2024. The NIA said its investigation into the larger conspiracy and the roles of other persons involved is continuing. A hunt is also underway for two absconding BKI operatives, Harjit Singh alias Laddi and Kulbeer Singh alias Sidhu, with a cash reward of Rs 10 lakh each announced for information leading to their arrest.

"PM prioritises fake image over country's security"

Rahul Gandhi, Kharge question alleged increased Chinese activity in Arunachal

New Delhi : Congress MP Rahul Gandhi on Friday raised concern over reports that China has stopped Indian Army patrols at several places in Arunachal Pradesh and questioned the Centre's response. Congress MP said the reported development was "extremely alarming" and questioned the silence of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He alleged that instead of stopping China, the Modi government was putting pressure on the media to suppress the news. In a post on X, the Congress MP said, "China has stopped our army from patrolling in several places in Arunachal Pradesh - this is extremely alarming. But even more alarming is the silence emanating from Rajnath Singh ji, Amit Shah ji, and Narendra Modi ji. Instead of stopping China, the Modi government is putting pressure on the media to suppress this news." Gandhi also referred to Prime Min-

ister Modi's statement after the Galwan clash, alleging that the statement that China had not taken any Indian Army patrols had caused damage to the country. He further alleged that the government was continuing efforts to protect the Prime Minister's image instead of focusing on the country's security.

"The country still remembers that statement by the Prime Minister after Galwan, in which he caused immense damage to India by saying that China has not taken even an inch of our land. Even today, the same operation to save his image continues - and a Prime Minister who prioritises his fake image over the country's security is extremely dangerous for the nation," the post read. Further, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge also raised concerns over reports of increased Chinese activity in Arunachal Pradesh and questioned the Centre over alleged changes in Indian Army patrolling and access to ar-



as along the border.

Kharge asked whether the People's Liberation Army (PLA) had expanded its presence near Taksing and whether India had lost regular access to Shera-5, a designated Patrolling Point. "After Galwan, now Arunachal Pradesh? Disturbing reports suggest that China is attempting to push further into areas in Arunachal Pradesh, an inalienable part of our nation. This demands immediate answers from the Modi Govt. Has the PLA expanded its presence near Taksing and has India lost regular access to Shera-5, a designated Patrolling Point? Why is Indian patrolling reportedly limited during winter in this sensitive sector while the PLA maintains a year round presence? Why are traditional grazing and hunting grounds becoming inaccessible to local communities?"

Kharge wrote in a post on X. He also questioned why Indian patrolling was reportedly limited during winter in the sensitive sector while the PLA maintained a year-round presence, and asked whether traditional grazing and hunting grounds had become inaccessible to local communities. He also criticised the Centre over the 2020 Galwan clash and alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had given China a "clean chit". "Has the pre-May 2020 status quo ante in Eastern Ladakh been fully restored? The BJP is culpable in hiding facts about situation on the ground and taking Parliament into confidence whether India retains full access to all areas and Patrolling Points it accessed prior to May 2020. Let us not forget that after 20 of our brave soldiers made the supreme sacrifice in Galwan in 2020, none less than PM Modi gave China a "CLEAN CHIT", emboldening their transgressions! That record inspires no confidence. The Prime Minister, Defence Minister and Home Minister must answer the nation. We have complete faith in the courage and capability of the Indian Armed Forces. India stands firmly behind our soldiers and united against any Chinese aggression," the post read.

Union Minister JP Nadda stable, under observation at AIIMS Delhi after uneasiness

New Delhi : Union Health and Family Welfare Minister JP Nadda is currently stable and has been admitted to the Department of Cardiology at AIIMS, Delhi, for observation after he was evaluated for uneasiness with tests, including a coronary angiography. According to the press release issued by AIIMS, Nadda was evaluated for uneasiness on the evening of August 13 and underwent tests including a coronary angiography. "Shri JP Nadda, Hon'ble Minister of Health and Family Welfare, was evaluated for uneasiness with tests including a coronary angiography on the evening of 13th August 2026. He is currently stable and admitted for observation in the Dept of Cardiology," AIIMS said in the press release.



Tear Gas, Water Cannons Used On Qaumi Insaaf Morcha Protesters In Chandigarh; Punjab Bandh Called On August 21

Chandigarh Police fired tear gas shells and used water cannons to disperse protesters who tried to breach barricades during a march towards Punjab Governor Gulab Chand Kataria's residence, demanding the release of Sikh prisoners. The protesters included supporters of the Qaumi Insaaf Morcha, which has been campaigning for the release of Sikh prisoners, including Jagtar Singh Hawara, who is serving a life sentence for the 1995 assassination of then Punjab Chief Minister Beant Singh. The confrontation underlined how the long-running issue of Sikh prisoners continues to remain a flashpoint in Punjab. Some protesters attempted to remove barricades and barbed wire, while others tried to pull down the barricades with a tractor as they sought to proceed towards the Punjab Governor's residence at Lok Bhavan in Chandigarh. Police fired several rounds of tear gas and used water cannons to disperse the protesters as the situation turned tense. Tear gas shells were also dropped on the protesters using a drone.

Amid the protest, the Qaumi Insaaf Morcha called for a Punjab Bandh on August 21 to press for the release of Sikh prisoners and urged people to support the shutdown. The bandh call signals that the agitation is set to extend beyond Saturday's confrontation in Chandigarh. Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar) president Simranjit Singh Mann was detained by

Chandigarh Police when he and two others tried to reach the Punjab Governor's residence. Mann, who was seen with bandages on his head, reached a barricade and sat down before police took him away in a vehicle, PTI reports. Police had put in place tight security at the Chandigarh-Mohali borders to prevent protesters from reaching Lok Bhavan. Multi-layer barricades topped with barbed wire were erected, while anti-riot vehicles and a heavy police force, including Rapid Action Force personnel, were deployed. All border points between Chandigarh and Mohali were sealed, while tipper trucks were stationed at several locations as part of the security arrangements.

Director General of Police Sagar Preet Hooda, Deputy Commissioner Nishant Kumar Yadav and Chandigarh Senior Superintendent of Police Kanwardeep Kaur supervised the security arrangements. Kaur was seen appealing to the protesters to maintain peace, but they remained adamant about proceeding towards the Punjab Governor's residence. In a video that surfaced on Friday, Hawara, who is lodged in a Delhi jail, appealed to the Sikh community, particularly the youth, to ensure that the march organised by the Qaumi Insaaf Morcha was conducted peacefully. SAD (Punjab) leader Parminder Singh Dhindsa also sought the release of Sikh prisoners. "Keeping in



mind the sentiments of the entire 'Qaum', Sikh prisoners should be released," Dhindsa said. "Today's gathering reflects the sentiments of people," he added. "Are Sikhs not residents of this country? Is Punjab not part of India? If you consider Punjab part of India, and if you also consider the Constitution is equal for all, then Sikhs should also be given equal rights," he said. Later, Qaumi Insaaf Morcha leaders told reporters that police had used tear gas shells and water cannons on protesters when they reached the barricades. "We will continue to fight our battle for releasing Bandi Singhs in a peaceful manner," one of the morcha leaders said. The leaders also demanded that Hawara be granted parole to meet his ailing mother. The Qaumi Insaaf Morcha had called for the march towards the Punjab Governor's residence to seek the release of "Bandi Singhs", or Sikh prisoners. The morcha claims that several Sikh pris-

oners remain incarcerated in different jails despite completing their sentences.

Who Are The 'Bandi Singhs'?

Besides Hawara, the morcha has been demanding the release of Balwant Singh Rajoana and Devinderpal Singh Bhullar. Rajoana is a convict in the 1995 assassination of Beant Singh, while Bhullar is serving a sentence in connection with the 1993 Delhi bomb blast case. The term "Bandi Singhs" refers to Sikh prisoners convicted for their involvement in militancy during the Punjab insurgency of the 1990s. The Qaumi Insaaf Morcha has been laying siege along Sector 52-53 in Chandigarh and YPS Chowk in Mohali since Jan 7, 2023, as part of its campaign for the release of Sikh prisoners. Several Sikh bodies and political outfits, including the Shiromani Akali Dal (Waris Punjab De), SAD (Punjab) and Nihang organisations, have extended support to the Qaumi Insaaf Morcha.

'Uncle Please Save Us': Minor's Dial 112 Call Helps Aligarh Police Bust Alleged Interstate Human Trafficking Network, Rescue 3 Girls



Aligarh: "Uncle, please save me. I am being held captive here." A minor girl's desperate call to Dial 112 from Maur village in Aligarh's Tappal area led police to an alleged interstate human trafficking network and the rescue of three girls. The 15-year-old had managed to unlock the pattern lock on the mobile phone of a woman in the household and used it to contact the police. She also shared her location with the emergency response team.

Police Launch Rescue Operation

The call on August 7 prompted Khair Circle Officer Abhishek Patel and the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit to launch an operation. Police reached the house and rescued the girl. During the subsequent investigation, two more minor girls were traced and rescued. Police have arrested five people, including alleged gang leader Babita alias Chachi of Prayagraj. The other accused are Sukharam alias Mahavir of Gonda, Vinod Jat of Maur village, and Gonda resi-

dents Bablu and Om Pal Singh. According to police, the gang allegedly targeted economically vulnerable and abandoned girls from Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Rajasthan by promising them education and a better future. They were allegedly brought to Aligarh and sold for Rs 70,000 to Rs 1 lakh to people who were unable to find marriage partners. Police are also investigating whether some of the girls were subsequently taken to Delhi-NCR and forced to work as domestic help.

Girl Allegedly Sold For Marriage

The case came to light after the 15-year-old was allegedly abandoned at Aligarh railway station by a young man with whom she had travelled from Chhattisgarh around four months ago. Her family had registered a case against the man in Chhattisgarh. Police said Babita spotted the girl at the station, offered her food and assured her of help. She allegedly took the girl into her care and later, through Sukharam alias

Mahavir, sold her to Vinod Jat of Maur village. According to police, Vinod forced the girl to marry his son. She was allegedly beaten and harassed at the house. She eventually found an opportunity to use the mobile phone of the family's daughter-in-law, unlocked it and called Dial 112. The girl's call gave police a precise lead to the house where she was allegedly being held. The police team reached the location and rescued her.

Two More Girls Rescued

During questioning and further investigation, police found that two other minor girls were allegedly connected with the network. Both were subsequently rescued. Police said Sukharam, who was living in the area under a concealed identity, originally belonged to Deeg in Rajasthan. Babita and Sukharam have been described by police as key members of the alleged network. Vinod Jat, Bablu and Om Pal Singh are accused of purchasing minor girls in the name of mar-

riage, police said.

Accused Sent To Jail

SP Rural Manish Kumar Mishra said cases had been registered against the accused under provisions relating to human trafficking, rape of a minor, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act. All five accused have been sent to jail, police said.

Probe Into Wider Network

Investigators are now trying to trace the families of the rescued girls and determine how extensive the network was. Police are examining how many girls were brought to Aligarh from other states, how many were allegedly sold and whether the accused had links to people operating in Delhi-NCR. The investigation is no longer limited to the five arrests. Police are also trying to establish the role of other people who may have helped transport, sell or accommodate the girls. For the investigators, the minor's phone call has provided the crucial first break into a suspected network that may have operated across several states.

5 Army Personnel Missing, 4 Labourers Killed As Flash Floods, Landslides Hit Arunachal Pradesh

Itanagar: Five Army personnel reportedly went missing after a flash flood swept away two shelters at an Army camp in Arunachal Pradesh's Dibang Valley district, while four people were killed in a landslide at a road construction site in Upper Subansiri district, officials said. Officials of the State Emergency Operations Centre said that both incidents occurred following heavy rainfall. In Dibang Valley, a flash flood swept away two shelters of the 5th Grenadier at Pasu Pani Army Camp. Seven personnel were washed away, of whom two were rescued, while five remain missing. Two search and rescue teams of the 5th Grenadier have been deployed, while personnel of the 58th Battalion of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), 62 RCC of the General Reserve Engineer Force, Arunachal Pradesh Police and local volunteers have joined the operation. A team of State Disaster Response Force

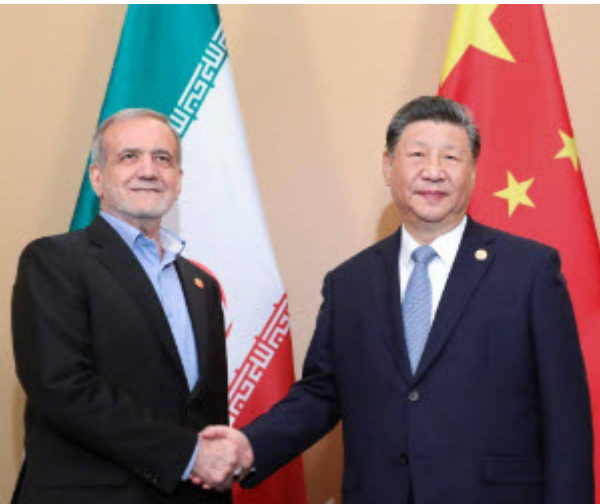


(SDRF) from Pasighat is also being sent to Anini to assist in the search and rescue operation. In Upper Subansiri district, four people were killed after a major landslide struck the Keojaring-Byaching road construction site, burying several workers under the debris. The deceased have been identified as Tadu Baki, Taji Rai, Markosh Basumatari and Babul Ali. The body of Ali has been recovered, the

district disaster management officer said. Personnel from Nacho Police Station have been deployed for the search and recovery operation, while Fire and Emergency Services teams from Daporijo and the State Disaster Response Force are being mobilised to assist in the operation. Further, the SDRF team will move from Ziro to Daporijo tomorrow and thereafter proceed to Nacho. The team will report to the OC, Nacho,

and will be assisted by a local guide from Daporijo during the search and recovery operation. All concerned agencies are being coordinated for the safe and effective conduct of the search and rescue operation. The twin incidents come amid heavy rainfall in parts of Arunachal Pradesh, triggering flash floods and landslides and posing challenges to rescue and relief operations in several remote areas.

Iran escalation puts China's Gulf strategy under serious strain



China's carefully constructed Gulf strategy is facing one of its toughest tests as Iran's confrontation with the United States disrupts energy flows, threatens Arab partners and exposes the limits of Beijing's influence over Tehran. The immediate pressure point is the Strait of Hormuz, where shipping traffic remains sharply below normal levels after months of conflict. Fresh attacks on two vessels operated by Abu Dhabi National Oil Company have intensified concerns over the security of a waterway that carries a large share of Gulf energy exports. The

UAE has blamed Iran for the attacks, which caused limited damage and no reported casualties. Tehran has maintained that it retains significant control over navigation through Hormuz, while Washington has threatened further measures aimed at isolating Iran and constraining its oil exports.

For Beijing, the confrontation cuts across several strategic interests at once. China is Iran's largest trading partner and overwhelmingly the biggest destination for Iranian crude. At the same time, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and other Gulf states have become far more im-

portant to China as sources of energy, investment opportunities and markets for technology and infrastructure. China imported about 1.4 million barrels a day of Iranian crude in 2025, equivalent to roughly 12 per cent of its total crude imports. Much of the trade has operated outside official customs reporting because of sanctions, with cargoes frequently relabelled or transferred through intermediaries. Yet the commercial weight of the Arab Gulf is considerably larger. Two-way trade between China and Saudi Arabia reached about \$108 billion in 2025, with a similar figure recorded for the UAE. China's trade with Iran was much smaller even after estimates of undeclared oil shipments were included. That imbalance explains Beijing's reluctance to allow its partnership with Tehran to damage relations with Gulf capitals. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have become central to China's Middle East economic ambitions, spanning petrochemicals, renewable energy, artificial intelligence, logistics, electric vehicles and infrastructure. Energy exposure is equally

important. About half of China's crude imports originate in the Middle East, while a substantial share of its liquefied natural gas comes from Qatar, the UAE and Oman. Roughly 45 to 50 per cent of China's imported crude normally moves through Hormuz.

China has buffers against an extended oil disruption. Large state and commercial stockpiles, diversified suppliers and increased domestic production provide Beijing with greater protection than many other Asian importers. Estimates earlier this year suggested China held around 1.4 billion barrels in storage, while additional Iranian crude remained in floating and bonded storage. Its dependence on Gulf gas is harder to manage. Qatar supplied more than a quarter of China's LNG imports last year, leaving Beijing with fewer short-term alternatives if shipments are interrupted. Replacing seaborne gas requires either higher-priced cargoes from elsewhere, greater domestic consumption restraint or additional pipeline imports. The crisis is therefore strengthening China's

long-standing drive to reduce vulnerability to maritime chokepoints. Domestic oil output reached about 4.3 million barrels a day last year, while Beijing has accelerated renewable power, energy storage and pipeline gas projects.

Diplomatically, however, the challenge is more immediate. Gulf governments have been pressing China to use its economic relationship with Iran to encourage restraint and support negotiations. Foreign Minister Wang Yi and China's regional envoy Zhai Jun have maintained intensive contacts across the region as Beijing promotes a ceasefire. Expectations were raised by China's role in brokering the 2023 Saudi-Iran rapprochement, an agreement that appeared to demonstrate Beijing's ability to translate economic influence into diplomatic leverage. The continuing Hormuz disruption has complicated that image. China has avoided publicly confronting Iran over threats to shipping and has concentrated instead on calls for de-escalation, sovereignty and negotiation. Beijing has also resisted

taking steps that could suggest alignment with Washington. That approach protects China's relationship with Tehran but risks disappointing Gulf governments that increasingly view secure shipping as a test of Beijing's strategic credibility. China can offer investment, technology and diplomatic access, but the conflict has shown that its ability to alter Iran's calculations remains uncertain. Beijing also has wider geopolitical considerations. Iran provides discounted energy and represents an important partner in institutions such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. China has opposed efforts to isolate Tehran completely while avoiding formal defence commitments that could draw it directly into regional conflict. Oil prices have added urgency to the dilemma. Brent crude climbed above \$88 a barrel on Friday as fears of prolonged supply restrictions returned. Reduced Hormuz traffic, attacks on commercial vessels and uncertainty surrounding ceasefire efforts have kept a substantial geopolitical premium embedded in energy markets.

Arunachal patrol row sharpens China border dispute



Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi has stepped up pressure on the government over allegations that Chinese troops have prevented Army patrols from reaching traditional points in Arunachal Pradesh, turning a localised border dispute into a fresh political confrontation over the handling of China. Gandhi said on Friday that the Army had been stopped from patrolling at several locations and described the development as "extremely alarming". He questioned the silence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Home Minister Amit Shah, while accusing the government of attempting to suppress discussion of the issue. The government and defence authorities have rejected reports of fresh Chinese encroachment.

The controversy centres largely on Taksing in Upper Subansiri district, a remote frontier region where competing perceptions of the Line of Actual Control have long made patrol encounters sensitive. A fact-finding committee constituted by the People's Party of Arunachal has alleged that People's Liberation Army personnel have denied access to important patrolling points and expanded their presence around traditional grazing and hunting areas. The committee, headed by former minister Kahfa Bengia, visited Taksing on July 10. Its findings added political weight to concerns already circulating among residents and local organisations about Chinese activity close to the frontier. A residents' body had separately warned local authorities that Chinese personnel were occupying new locations in border areas. Reports of a patrol confrontation have further fuelled the dispute. Army patrols from the two countries were reported to have come face to face near Taksing in late July. The encounter was said to have occurred about 2.5 km inside territory controlled by India. Chinese personnel subsequently withdrew, but were reported to have returned in early August and erected temporary tents. Defence authorities have described reports of new tensions and encroachment as unsubstantiated and uncorroborated. Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu has also dismissed claims of a fresh incursion. He has maintained that the Army remains in control and is safeguarding the state's territorial integrity. His assurances, however, have not ended political debate within Arunachal Pradesh, where border communities remain

particularly sensitive to changes in traditional access routes. The All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union sent a delegation to Taksing on Thursday amid growing concern over the allegations. The move underlined the extent to which the issue has moved beyond national party politics and become a subject of scrutiny among organisations within the state.

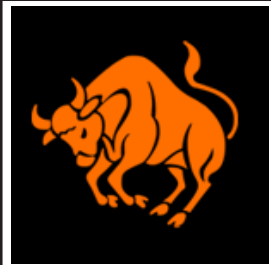
Gandhi has linked the latest dispute to Modi's statement following the deadly Galwan Valley confrontation in 2020 that nobody had entered or occupied territory on India's side. Gandhi has repeatedly challenged that position, arguing that restrictions on traditional patrol routes undermine assurances that territorial access remains unchanged. Twenty soldiers were killed in the Galwan clash, along with four Chinese troops acknowledged by Beijing. The argument carries additional political resonance because Home Minister Amit Shah said during the 2024 election campaign that China had been unable to encroach upon even a single inch of territory under the Modi government. Opposition parties have increasingly used reports of patrol restrictions to question such assertions. The dispute also arrives during a delicate improvement in relations between New Delhi and Beijing. The two sides reached a patrolling arrangement in October 2024 that helped end their prolonged military standoff in eastern Ladakh. Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping subsequently resumed formal engagement, while diplomatic and military mechanisms were tasked with stabilising the frontier. New Delhi has nevertheless stressed that conditions along the border will determine the broader relationship. The Ministry of External Affairs said this week that border matters were treated with the utmost seriousness and that peace and tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control remained essential. Beijing has characterised the border situation as generally stable and said diplomatic and military communication would continue. Arunachal Pradesh remains another source of persistent friction. China claims the state as part of what it calls "Zangnan", while New Delhi maintains that Arunachal Pradesh is an integral and inalienable part of the country. The dispute intensified again this week after Beijing objected to New Delhi assigning standard names to 27 geographical locations in the state, promp

Today's Horoscope



Aries

Tooth ache or stomach upset may create some problems for you. Take a physician's advice to get relief immediately. Any of your chronic diseases may bother you today, due to which you may have to go to the hospital and spend a lot of money. Spending time with children will be important. Those who stay away from their lover can miss them deeply today. Because of this, you can talk to your beloved on the phone for hours during the night. Tact will be required while handling colleagues. Someone from your past is likely to contact you and make it a memorable day. Today, you will experience that the love of your partner forgets you about the pains of life. Remedy :- Keep water in a Copper vessel near bedside at night, and next morning, pour this water at the root of a nearest tree, for excellent health benefits.



Taurus

Your energy level will be high. There is a possibility of money loss today, hence you are required to remain alert while making transactions or signing any document. Enjoy a peaceful and quiet day with family members-If people approach you with problems- Ignore them and don't let this bother your mind. Some difference may crop up with your darling-You will have difficulty trying to make your mate understand your position. Your partner will be hard to deal with. While spending free time with your spouse tonight, you will realize how important it is to give them more time. Work pressure had been hampering your married life since long. But today, all the grievances will be vanished. Remedy :- For enhanced financial condition, plant a banana tree, tend to it and worship it.



Gemini

A beneficial day and you may be able to find relief from a prolong illness. An old friend can ask you for financial help today. However, your assistance can weaken your financial conditions. Children need to concentrate on studies and plan for the future. You are likely to be dazzled by some natural beauty today. You will make beneficial career changes if you present yourself in a professional manner. You should try to understand the things in the right manner, otherwise you'll waste your free time just thinking about such scenarios continuously. Today, you will realize that all the vows taken on your marriage were true. Your spouse is your soulmate. Remedy :- Financial life will become better by using green vehicles.



Cancer

Misusing personal relations to fulfil your expectations would annoy your wife. You will possess a considerable amount of money today, and with it there will be peace of mind. You will also make important contacts through friends. The ecstasy of entire universe is held between the two who are in love. Yes, you are the lucky one. You need to focus on your way of working to get good results at the workplace, otherwise your negative image can get created in the eyes of your boss. Today, you will be able to spend time with your lover and put forward your feelings in front of him/her. Today, your partner might take you in the realm of a different world of love and sensations. Remedy :- Wear Green Coloured clothes



Leo

Your mind will be disturbed with recent events. Meditation and yoga will prove to be beneficial for spiritual as well as physical gains. At the beginning of the day, you may suffer from any financial loss, which can spoil the whole day. Try to be reasonable especially with people who love and care for you. Exciting day of romance- Plan something special for the evening and try to make it as romantic as possible. Great day to implement new projects and plans. You have spare time today for socializing and follow up with things that you love doing the most. Your partner might do something fabulous unintentionally, which will be really unforgettable. Remedy :- For a good financial life, keep green stones in flower pots, keep plants in green bottles, and also have green tiles in bathroom.



Virgo

If possible try to avoid long journey as you are too weak to travel and this could put further weaken you. Today, you are likely to attain benefits from the help of your brother or sister. Think before sharing your confidential information with your spouse. If possible, try to avoid as she might reveal it to someone else. Be careful your romantic partner may flatter you- don't leave me alone in this lonely world. Bold steps and decisions would bring favourable rewards. The natives of this zodiac sign would like to spend more time alone than meeting people today. Today, your free time can be spent by cleaning the house. Your spouse will be full of energy and love today. Remedy :- Include use of white clothes in your daily wear for good health.



Libra

Work pressure might bring some stress and tension today. 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. A better understanding with your spouse brings in happiness-peace and prosperity at home. Your work will take a backseat- as you find comfort-pleasure and extreme ecstasy in the arms of your beloved. You will be in a strong position to put together a team and work toward a collective goal. Today, you would like to do all the things that you used to love during your childhood. Romantic songs, aromatic candles, good food, and some drinks; the day is all about this with your spouse. Remedy :- Distribute sweets and savouries made of ground yellow chana dal to needy people for amazing health benefits.



Scorpio

Astrological guidance by a friend will encourage you to improve your health. Try to control your spending- and buy only the essential items today. Good time to get involved into activities that include youngsters. Erratic behaviour of your darling might make your mood upset. This is an excellent time for developing professional contacts in other countries. Good day for some recreation and entertainment. Rude behavior of your spouse might take a toll on you today. Remedy :- Offer seven almonds and seven grains of black grams in Shani temple and build a strong love life.



Sagittarius

Outings-parties and pleasure jaunts will keep you in good mood today. Money can be required anytime, so plan your finances and start saving now as much as possible. Let family tension not divert your attention. Bad times give us much more. You will be in a loving mood- so be sure to make special plans for you and your beloved. New assignments undertaken would fall short of expectations. Travel and educational pursuits will enhance your awareness. Those who say that marriage is all about sex, they lie. Because today, you will know what true love is. Remedy :- For enhanced career/work life/business, brush your teeth with herbal-based toothpaste such as neem and babool.



Capricorn

Your frank and fearless views could hurt the vanity of your friend. It's another high-energy day and unexpected gains are foreseen. You will upset your spouse if you spend money on things that you don't immediately require. Beloved will be in a romantic mood. Daydreaming will bring your downfall- Do not count on others to do your work. You need to remember that god helps those who help themselves. Today, you will fall in love with your spouse again. Remedy :- Maintain harmony and balance in the family by switching on a white-light zero watt bulb in the Northwest direction.



Aquarius

Health will be perfect today. If you were about to take a loan and had been engaged in this work for a long time, then today is your lucky day. Domestic work keeps you busy most of the time. Love will show positive vibes Good day for businessmen. A sudden trip undertaken for business purpose will yield positive results. Today, you can think of spending your free time carrying out religious work. During this time, do not get into unnecessary conflicts. Today, you will forget all the hardships of your life with the love of your spouse. Remedy :- For enhancing positive experiences in the family, offer 28 drops of mustard oil near Peepal or banyan tree or in a pot filled with mud at home.



Pisces

Cheer up as good time ahead and you will have additional energy. You may get into a fight with your spouse today over money-related matters. However, you will fix everything with your calm attitude. A wonderful day to enjoy the company of guests. Plan something special with your relatives. They would also appreciate it. A good communication or a message from your beloved or spouse will enhance your morale today. Added knowledge that you acquire today would give you an edge when dealing with peers. Amidst your busy life, you will get enough time for yourself today and be able to do your favorite things. Marriage had never been so wonderful before than today. Remedy :- Accept rice and silver from your mother and keep it in your home to improve your financial condition.

Satwik-Chirag embrace home challenge, target better medal at World Championships

New Delhi: A recurring shoulder injury has been “frustrating” for Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and at times “irritating” for partner Chirag Shetty, but the Indian pair will stick to their “aggressive and explosive” brand of badminton as they target a better medal at their first World Championships on home soil. Satwik has been managing the shoulder problem for the last few years, making it difficult to maintain momentum after a good tournament. The duo had won the Singapore Open Super 750, their first title in two years, but subsequent flare-ups forced mid-match retirements and withdrawals at both the Indonesia Open and the Japan Open. “It is always tough with the shoulder injury. I have been managing it for the last few years. It is on and off all the time. Sometimes I feel good and sometimes I feel not so good. It is frustrating. Obviously, you have the momentum and you want to continue,” Satwik told PTI. “If you play a good tournament and then again you are off, it is irritating for your partner as well. It is not easy, but we are used to it. We know how to handle this situation. We have to respect the body as well.” The injury, however, has not prompted the pair to alter their style. “Our game style is the same. We didn’t change so much. It will be aggressive and explosive. That is what we played when we started and we will stick to that only,” Satwik said.

Satwik and Chirag are among the top five pairs to watch in a men’s doubles draw that has traditionally been wide open. No pair has dominated the event for long, with six different combinations from five countries winning the last six editions. “Doubles has evolved over the years. It is much faster, a lot of flat exchanges and long rallies, and every pair in this tournament is quite strong,” Chirag said. “In men’s doubles you can’t say



that this pair will go on to win the title. So I won’t say there is a favourite. It is an open competition. Every pair is capable of winning a medal.” The opening exchanges could prove decisive, with both Satwik and Chirag placing particular emphasis on the first four strokes of a rally. For Chirag, the focus on the opening exchanges has already produced results. “We need to be really focused on our first couple of strokes once the rally starts. I think we can manage the rallies, but the first four strokes will definitely be important. No matter if you’re serving or receiving, it becomes quite crucial,” he said. “Even at the Singapore Open, I think that worked really well for us. We had some really good insights from the coaching chair. Yeah, I think even for this World Champs, they just asked us to keep it simple and take it one match at a time.” Satwik echoed that approach. “We have been working with Tan coach for quite some time. We just needed that small break. We have been training the same way for some time. It is not new things. The tactics will be the same,” he said. “His point was very much open and clear: just take one at a time. Don’t think

too much and don’t take so much expectation. Of course, we want to do well, but still take one match at a time. “As we are coming back from the injury, it will be tough to adjust, so just find that momentum and try to play as deep as possible.” World No. 1s Kim Won Ho and Seo Seung Jae had carried their dominance from 2025 into the opening part of this season, but have looked more vulnerable since the Thomas Cup Finals in May, opening the door for challengers including Fajar Alfian and Muhammad Shohibul Fikri, Goh Sze Fei and Nur Izzuddin, and the Indian pair.

“I think Fajar and Fikri, Goh and Nur, they are quite good at the first four strokes. They are kind of little short guys. They have very quick rackets. They have good skills on the racket. So they are very good at reading the shuttle, understanding and catching those four strokes. Then they put you in a very under-pressure situation. “So it is not an easy thing playing against them. It is not easy to play against them. So it is always tricky to play against them. But once you get adjusted to their game style, I think you will feel a little bit

more comfortable. “Apart from that, they don’t make you feel very comfortable on court. You have to play a little bit in an uncomfortable situation. So it is always a tough battle against both the players.”

The home setting, though, is something Satwik is keen to embrace rather than treat as an additional burden. “It is fun and challenging, exciting. There is no pressure. Everyone says pressure is privilege. We love taking the challenge. Hopefully, we will handle it in a positive way. Hopefully, people will come in good numbers and see how badminton is growing,” he said. For Satwik, the occasion also carries a deeply personal connection. He was at the 2009 World Championships in Hyderabad, where his brother was volunteering and his father was working as a line umpire. Satwik recalled watching the men’s doubles final and playing with the racket that was thrown into the crowd by the winner and retrieved by his father. “I have very good memories from 2009... Now I am playing back in India at the World Championships. It is quite a long journey from a small town to here, so it is a great thing to remember.”

Pratika Rawal pulls out of Warwickshire stint following maiden T20I call-up



Birmingham: Top-order batter Pratika Rawal will miss her planned domestic stint with Warwickshire in the One-Day Cup in England after earning a maiden T20I call-up to India’s squad for the upcoming ACC Women’s Asia Cup. Pratika was

named by the Amita Sharma-led Women’s Selection Committee as a replacement for star batter Jemimah Rodrigues, who has been ruled out of both the Asia Cup in the UAE and the Asian Games in Japan due to a high-grade right hamstring tear. The

maiden T20I call-up Pratika, 25, who was scheduled to join Warwickshire on August 19 for the remainder of the season, will no longer travel to Edgbaston. Warwickshire women’s head coach Ali Maiden expressed disappointment at losing Pratika’s services, while wishing her success on national duty. “We were really looking forward to welcoming Pratika into our squad for the remainder of the season, and we’re incredibly disappointed to lose her. That being said, we’ve still got a lot to play for in the remaining weeks of the season, and we’re confident in the squad we have at our disposal. Playing for your country is the ultimate honour, and we wish Pratika well in the Asia Cup,” he said in a statement.

Pratika, a member of India’s 2025 Women’s ODI World Cup-winning side, will now leave for Dubai with the Harmanpreet Kaur-led side ahead of their tournament opener against Thailand on August 30. Pratika is yet to be capped in T20Is, but she has featured in 27 ODIs and amassed 1189 runs. She made a fifty on her Test debut against Australia at Perth earlier this year. India will also face Hong Kong and China on September 3, before the marquee clash against arch-rivals Pakistan takes place on September 5. All matches of the tournament will be played at the Dubai International Stadium, as the UAE plays host to the tournament for the first time. The semi-finals will be held on September 10 and 11, with the final to be played on September 13.

Saina Nehwal calls for better funding, coaching and support systems for athletes



Mumbai: Former world No. 1 shuttler and Olympics medallist Saina Nehwal on Saturday said featuring among top nations in medals tally would be the real metric of calling India a “sporting nation”, amid the push to host global competitions here. Saina said

while the scenario has changed in sports, especially for women in the country, there still is a lot to be done. “We are trying (to host) Olympics or big tournaments but I think one thing we have to make sure is that we are in top of the medal tally as well and

that is when we can call ourselves a sporting nation,” Nehwal said during an inter-collegiate festival ‘Malhar’, hosted by the St Xavier’s College. Saina said female sportspersons in the country have realised their potential and there has been a huge change in the last decade or so. “Somewhere women are realizing that we are capable, we can do well,” Nehwal said. “Last 15-20 years, I can see huge change in sports especially because I keep looking at matches and I keep seeing that, especially lot of girls from Haryana, they are doing extremely well in sports and wrestling, boxing, badminton is coming up.” “I just want it to happen throughout the

country so that we can be called as sporting nation in the future,” she said. Nehwal exhorted for a system where young athletes across sports get adequate financial backing right from the beginning. “It’s not about men or women, it’s about giving your best because in sports it’s not very easy to earn money. You feel, what’s going to happen in sports? Unless you reach in top 15 or top 20, you won’t even get good sponsorships (or) good funding,” Saina said. “It’s not like cricket... still you have to improve a lot more but if you are consistent, if you are performing well, of course you will get all kind of sponsorships but not many players are like so talented.”

Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium ready for BWF World Championships



Hyderabad: With less than 48 hours left for the BWF World Championships 2026 to kick off, the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium is all decked up to witness world badminton’s biggest extravaganza, and the venue has already received a thumbs-up from the Chinese contingent, which trained there along with all the other top teams. The BWF World Championships are returning to Indian shores after a gap of 17 years, with the world’s best players looking forward to getting their hands on the coveted title.

Unlike the India Open, where competition usually starts, World Championships action begins, with matches in the top half of the men’s and women’s singles draws taking place on the opening day.

“I think the stadium has changed a lot, that’s very good. I just finished my training. I feel like there was a little bit of wind on the court, so we need to get used to the conditions,” said Chinese world No. 3 Wang Zhi Yi, who is likely to face former world champion PV Sindhu in the pre-quarterfinals. The players who practised at the main hall on Saturday mentioned that there was a slight side drift on all the courts, and their focus was to understand the conditions and make adjustments. The players had expressed a few concerns about the stadium during the India Open earlier this year, which was treated as a test event for the World Championships. The Badminton Association of India and the Sports Authority of

India, which owns the stadium, got into action soon after, and over Rs 20 crore was spent on refurbishing the venue.

Apart from Wang Zhi Yi, Chinese hopes of ending their 15-year gold-medal drought in women’s singles will rest on 2020 Olympic gold medallist Chen Yufei and world No. 5 Han Yue. Speaking after the team practice, Chen said, “The conditions are quite good compared to the last time we played here. I am getting used to the weather, but apart from that, I am just focused on giving my best in the tournament.” The Badminton Association of India has also set up a players’ lounge with round-the-clock food availability and even a sanitary-pad machine for women players.

Kelly Fisher, Gareth Potts win Heyball world titles in Pune



Pune: Dominant British cueists Kelly Fisher and Gareth Potts came up with a brilliant display to retain their titles at the \$400,000 Apex Sports 3rd Heyball World Championships in Pune. While Fisher fended off a late fightback from challenger Waratthanun Sukritthanes of Thailand in a thrilling shootout for the women’s crown, Potts outclassed the hitherto unbeaten Jordan Shepherd 7-4 in the men’s final. Fisher, a cue sports legend, clinched the shootout 5-3 after a 5-5 tie in regulation during Saturday’s race-to-6 title clash at the Rajan Khinvasara Billiards and

Snooker Academy, located inside the Jairaj Sports & Convention Centre. Fisher gifted herself an early birthday present. The British cueist, who turns 48 in ten days, was in top form from the get-go. She capitalised on Sukritthanes’ errors to run up a quick 3-0 lead and seemed to be running away with the title. Fisher regrouped in the shootout, potting all five of her attempts to her rival’s three to take home the winner’s cheque of \$30,000.

Later, Potts, who came through the losers’ bracket following a loss to Tobias Bongers, was in a different zone altogether. Fortunately for him,

Shepherd, who ousted fancied Jack Whelan in the semi-finals, failed to get going in the all-important clash. Defending champion Potts, a four-time World Pool champion, called the shots from the beginning. After being tied 3-3, he shifted gears to leave his rival, who was coming off an International Heyball Open triumph earlier this month, gasping in his wake. Late on Friday, the Indian challenge ended with the defeats of Laxman Rawat and Varsha Sanjeev. While Rawat, playing his fourth match of the day, lost 2-7 to Whelan, Varsha gave women’s second seed Wendy Jans a fright before falling 3-6.

Dr Talimeren Ao Junior Girls’ NFC 2026-27 dates announced

Hyderabad: The 2026-27 season of the Dr Talimeren Ao Junior Girls’ National Football Championship will be held from September 10 to October

Group Stage Draw of Dr Talimeren Ao Junior Girls’ NFC 2026-27 Tier 1:

Group A: Manipur, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala
Group B: West Bengal, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan
Group C: Delhi, Gujarat, Bihar, Jharkhand
Group D: Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka



Group Stage Draw of Dr Talimeren Ao Junior Girls’ NFC 2026-27 Tier 2:

Group A: Chandigarh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Tripura, Sports Authority of India
Group B: Telangana, Goa, Andaman & Nicobar, Pondicherry, Arunachal Pradesh
Group C: Meghalaya, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Nagaland
Group D: Mizoram, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Himachal Pradesh

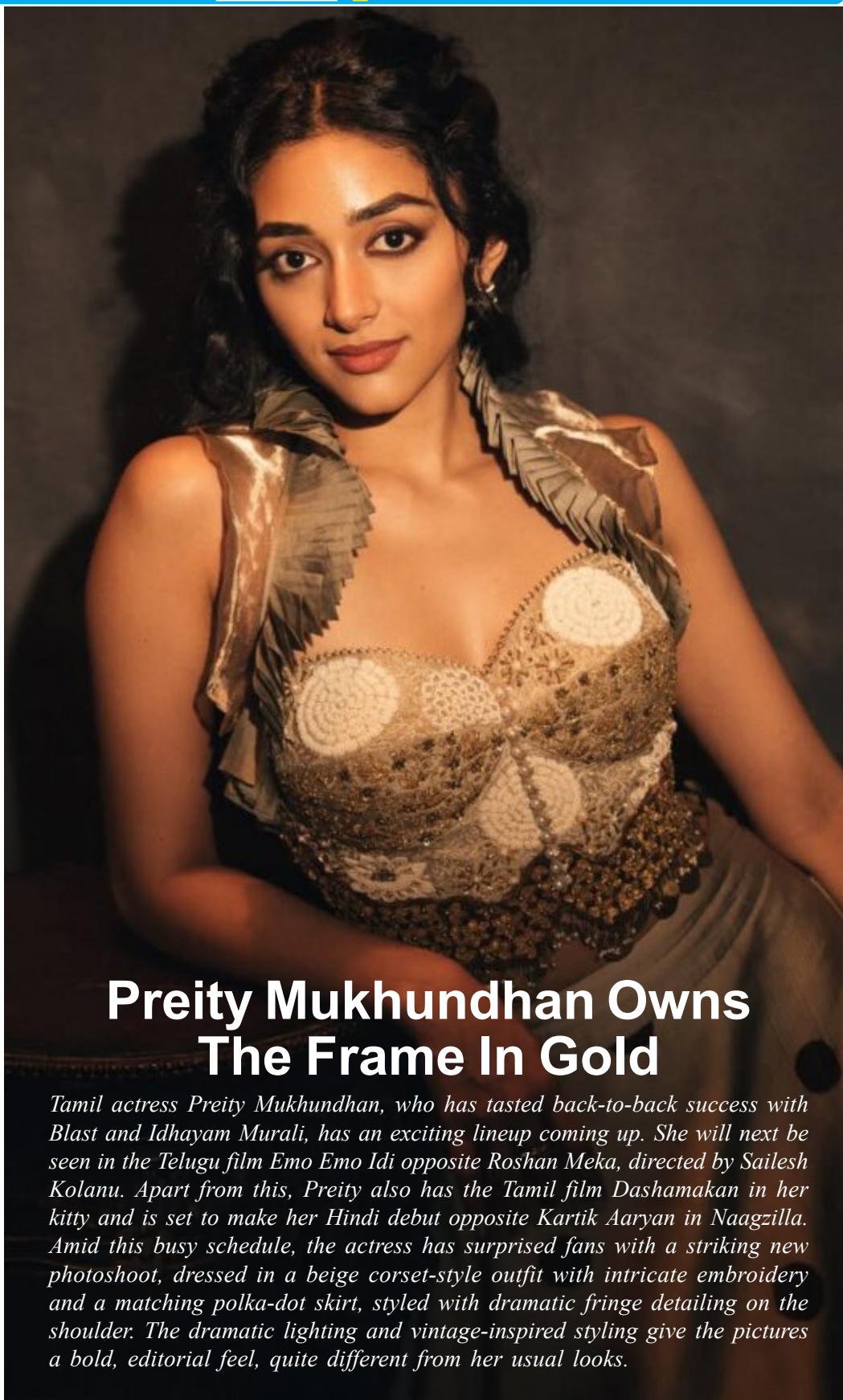
7, 2026. Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh, will host Tier 1 for the third straight season from September 10 to 25, while Tier 2 will be held at the RK Ashram Ground in Narainpur, Chhattisgarh, from September 15 to October 7. Tier 1 will feature 15 teams divided into three groups of four and one group of three. Tier 2 consists of 18 teams split into two groups of five and two groups of four. The group winners will progress to the semi-finals. Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, promoted from Tier 2 at the end of last season, will compete in Tier 1 in 2026-27, replacing Goa and Arunachal Pradesh, who were relegated and will compete in Tier 2 this season. Manipur are the defending champions, having defeated West Bengal 9-0 in last year’s final in Anantapur.

Fauzi Independence Gift Is Absolute Blast



Rebel Star Prabhas' first look from the craziest Pan India project Fauzi, directed by Hanu Raghavapudi on Mythri Movie Makers, has become nationwide sensation. The actor indeed changed his instagram DP for the first time after 7 years to Fauzi poster. Meanwhile, the makers have paid a powerful Independence Day tribute through a special poster.

Prabhas is seen in a blood-stained, battle-scarred avatar, walking barefoot through a street in Hyderabad, as we can spot Charminar behind him. His battered clothing with two different guns in his two hands suggests a character who has endured the brutality of war. The old man behind him, dressed in traditional attire and carrying a stick, walks ahead of him, while burning structures and debris create a grim atmosphere around them. The makers have accompanied the poster with a thought-provoking statement: "Saluting the spirit of every Fauzi who fought for our tomorrow." Through these words, the makers appear to connect the title Fauzi with the spirit of fighters who stood firm in difficult circumstances and sacrificed for the future. Fauzi marks an ambitious period drama featuring Prabhas in a distinctive setting. Prabhas' mysterious appearance, the war-ravaged surroundings and the historical backdrop collectively create an atmosphere that feels both raw and epic. Fauzi is gearing up for a grand theatrical release on December 3.



Preity Mukhundhan Owns The Frame In Gold

Tamil actress Preity Mukhundhan, who has tasted back-to-back success with Blast and Idhayam Murali, has an exciting lineup coming up. She will next be seen in the Telugu film Emo Emo Idi opposite Roshan Meka, directed by Sailesh Kolanu. Apart from this, Preity also has the Tamil film Dashamakan in her kitty and is set to make her Hindi debut opposite Kartik Aaryan in Naagzilla. Amid this busy schedule, the actress has surprised fans with a striking new photoshoot, dressed in a beige corset-style outfit with intricate embroidery and a matching polka-dot skirt, styled with dramatic fringe detailing on the shoulder. The dramatic lighting and vintage-inspired styling give the pictures a bold, editorial feel, quite different from her usual looks.

SDT's Sambarala Yeti Gattu Joins Sankranthi Race

It is now a wrap for Sambarala Yeti Gattu. Sai Durgha Tej's much-anticipated Pan-India project has completed its entire shooting phase, bringing the lengthy production journey to a close. The team has wasted no time moving into the next stage, with post-production activities currently advancing at a fast pace. The film comes from Primeshow Entertainment, the production banner of K Niranjan Reddy and Chaitanya Reddy, and is helmed by newcomer Rohith KP. The makers have also declared that the movie being crafted on a massive scale will hit the screens during Sankranthi 202 on January 12. This shows the confidence the makers have in the movie, given the sankranthi will witness several other big ticket movies gracing the cinemas. Sai Durgha Tej appears in one of his most ferocious avatars in the poster. With a blood-stained appearance, thick beard, untamed hair and a weapon in hand, the actor is seen moving forward through a location en-



gulfed in fire. The dramatic flames and smoke-filled backdrop give the poster a larger-than-life action feel. The project is another unique attempt by SDT to explore a distinctive character while combining performance-ori-

ented moments with action and mass appeal. The film's early promotional material has already offered a glimpse into its scale. The response to the Asura Aagamanaglimpse in particular has helped build cu-

riosity. The cast includes Aishwarya Lekshmi, Jagapathi Babu, Sai Kumar, Srikanth and Ananya Nagalla in important roles. A leading Bollywood actor is also part of the project in a crucial character.

Part 1 Was a Disaster, Part 2 Is Heading Towards Blockbuster!

Emraan Hashmi's Awarapan 2 is turning out to be one of the biggest surprises at the box office this year. Despite receiving mixed reviews from critics, the film has opened strongly and is now heading towards super-hit status. Interestingly, the first Awarapan was a box-office failure. However, the film slowly gained a cult following through its songs, emotional story, and Emraan Hashmi's performance, which helped it earn a loyal fan base over time. According to trade estimates, the film has been made on a budget of less than Rs 50 crore by Vishesh Films. In a remarkable start, it reportedly recovered nearly half of its budget on the very first day. Trade



circles are expecting First Weekend collections to touch the Rs 50 crore mark, which would put the film on a strong path. If the current trend continues, Awarapan 2 could recover its entire budget within its first weekend itself, which is huge.

Another surprising aspect is its performance in South Indian cities, especially Hyderabad. Despite facing competition from Vishwanath & Sons, the film is attracting strong occupancy. All eyes are now on its first weekend box office numbers.

Mamitha As Maddy: The New-Gen Hasini

It is already known that heroines often get limited screen time in big-hero films. Be it Srinidhi Shetty in the KGF films, Shruti Haasan's role in Salaar, Alia Bhatt's role in RRR, or even the severe backlash that came for Janhvi Kapoor's role in Peddi, they all had one thing in common that is heroines getting less important roles. Rashmika Mandanna was one of the few actresses who got some memorable episodes in Pushpa, which worked in her favour. Even then, it was Allu Arjun's dominance all over. At a time like this, when female characters are often given less importance, getting a role that offers both performance scope and almost equal screen space with the hero is a big opportunity for any actress. Mamitha Baiju seems to have got exactly that chance with Vishwanath And Sons. Mamitha plays Maddy, a young medical student who enters the life of Suriya (Sanjay Vishwanath) while taking care of his ailing child. She brings a fresh and innocent feel to the role, which makes the relationship and emotional moments work better. This brings back memories of Bommarilla and the character of Hasini, played by Genelia D'Souza. Hasini's innocent, care-free and slightly irritating nature became one of the biggest highlights of the film. In fact, many young audiences remembered Hasini more than Siddharth's character. The dialogues "Anthe



Na?...Inkem Kavalali" and "Veelayithe Nalugu Matalu..Kudirithe Cup Coffee?" became quite popular and went viral among the youth. Mamitha's character in Vishwanath And Sons may not reach the level of Hasini, but in terms of screen presence and importance, she has certainly got a special role. Mamitha was also part of Vijay's Jana Nayagan, where she played an important character. However, the film's negative result did not give her much benefit. The film managed a decent run in Tamil Nadu mainly because of Vijay's image but received a poor response in other markets. VAS, however, delivers the much-needed relief for Mamitha Baiju.

Directed by Venky Atluri, the family entertainer is getting a better response in the Telugu states than in Tamil Nadu. The film could now give Mamitha a much-needed boost in Telugu cinema. With Mamitha's stunning performance and strong screen presence, more Telugu offers could be on the way. Mamitha plays a character who develops a special bond with a young boy while also having several fun moments with Suriya and Radhika Sarathkumar. She has made the most of the role with a lively performance. After her introduction, it is difficult to find many scenes in the film without Mamitha. Her character has become an important part of the story.



Shivathmika Rajashekar's Sage Crop Top Steals Show

Shivathmika Rajashekar, who won hearts last year with her performances in Bomb and Aaromale, is back in the spotlight with a fresh set of pictures. The actress shared her latest photoshoot on social media, and it did not take long for fans to shower her with likes and comments. In the new pictures, Shivathmika is seen striking relaxed poses by a window, dressed in a soft sage-green crop top paired with flowy black pants. Her wavy, tousled hair and dewy, minimal makeup keep the look effortless, while the soft daylight streaming in gives the frame a warm, candid feel. Shivathmika currently has no film releases lined up, but she continues to stay connected with her fans through regular fashion posts and photoshoots online.