

Emotional bond pushes NRIs into local body elections back home in Telangana

Jeddah: Driven by a strong emotional attachment to their roots, several NRIs have returned to their native villages in Telangana to contest in the gram panchayat elections beginning Thursday, while others have flown home to support family members in the fray.

Many villages in the State mobilise a significant share of their own development funds through village development committees, often powered by contributions from NRIs, while caste groups also influence these committees. Sarpanches therefore must work closely with VDCs.

Dubai based NRI Gaddam Srinivas Reddy quit his lucrative job to contest as Sarpanch of his native Bandapalli in Chandurti mandal of Rajanna Sircilla district. Determined to lead the village, he resigned a couple of months ago to start groundwork for the polls.

Another Dubai NRI, Bandi Rajaram, hailing from Komanpalli in Armoor mandal of Nizamabad district, recalled losing his previous contest by just seven votes. "Last time I was defeated by merely seven votes and after losing the elections I came to Dubai to work and was keen to contest again this time, but dropped the idea as it was reserved for women," he said.

Panchita Dharmaraju Yadav, who

had a stable job in Qatar, returned to Sirikonda in Dharmapuri mandal of Jagtial district to contest for the top village post.

Gaddam Ramesh Reddy of Ankapur in Armoor mandal came back from Georgia, US, to file his nomination. However, his papers were rejected. "I was in possession of a voter card and my name was in the list, based on that I came and filed the nomination but found only after scrutiny that my name was deleted from the electoral rolls," he told Telangana Today.

Another American NRI, Kanjarla Chandrashekhar, is contesting for Sarpanch in his native Chinna Shankarampet of Medak district.

Kola Narsaiah, working in Israel and a former Sarpanch of Pachalanadukuda in Armoor mandal, returned to contest again despite having remained in Israel even during the conflict there. Elections back home made him rush to India without hesitation.

Former Saudi Arabia NRI Togari Lakshmipathi is confident of securing victory for his wife Rajamani in Dammanapeat of Medipalli mandal in Jagtial district, as the seat is reserved for women. While working in the oil and gas sector abroad, he contributed to village development.



Another former oil and gas employee, Engula Lachaiah, is contesting from Mothkuraopeat in Bheemaram mandal of the same district.

Some have returned not to contest but to support. Kotagiri Naveen, an

NRI from Bahrain and native of Hasakottur in Kammarpalli mandal of Nizamabad district, said, "I am camping in my village not to contest elections but to campaign for right candidates."

Over 2000 police personnel deployed for first phase gram panchayat polls in Warangal



Warangal: Commissioner of Police Sunpreet Singh informed that over 2,000 police personnel were being deployed for the peaceful conduct of the first phase of gram panchayat elections under Warangal Police Commissionerate on Thursday.

The security force includes three DCPs, five additional DCPs, 13 ACPs, 28 inspectors, 122 SIs, 412 ASIs or head constables, 1,154 constables, 285 Home Guards, along with personnel from the District Guards and the bomb disposal department.

A special striking force has been appointed under the supervision of an additional DCP level officer during the election, and an ACP level officer would be in charge of each mandal where elections would be held, the CP said.

By conducting intensive checks in the villages, the police have seized Rs 6.04 lakh cash, Rs 10.69 lakh worth of liquor bottles in 120 cases, 322 litres of gudumba worth Rs 1.19 lakh in 46 cases and ganja worth Rs 1 lakh in various areas.

In addition to seizing as many as 156 licensed guns, 2,205 persons, rowdy sheeters and suspicious individuals have been bound over in 384 cases in view of their involvement in clashes during previous elections, the CP noted.

Sunpreet Singh, along with officials, visited the ballot paper distribution centre set up at Chilpur mandal headquarters in Jangaon district on Wednesday to inspect the arrangements.

Skill development surge: TG inks 9 MoUs worth Rs 72 cr

Bharat Future City: On the second day of the Telangana Rising Global Summit at Bharat Future City, the Department of Employment and Training entered into nine Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with leading national and international companies. These



partnerships, valued at Rs 72 crore, aim to strengthen skill development and enhance employment opportunities across key sectors.

The agreements were formalised in the presence of Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, Labour & Employment Minister Dr G Vivek Venkatswamy, Principal Secretary LETF Dana Kishore, Employment Department DD Raja, and other officials. The agreements were entered with Furniture & Fittings Skill Council, Indo Euro Synchronization, Object One Information Systems Ltd, Hytech Automation Ltd, Marconi Technologies Ltd, KUKA Robotics Ltd, VI Microsystems Pvt Ltd, Appolo MedSkills, and Tata Technologies Ltd. Minister Vivek said that these collaborations are expected to contribute significantly to advanced skill training, capacity building, and industry-ready workforce development in Telangana.



Rollback demand: Students' Protection Forum protests JNTU-H fee hikes

Hyderabad: The Students' Protection Forum has appealed to the Telangana State Higher Education Council and the government to immediately reduce the recently increased examination fees and withdraw all hikes imposed in the examination department of Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University, Hyderabad (JNTU-H).

The Forum submitted a petition to the Telangana State Chief Secretary and the Chairman of the Higher Education Council, urging them to reverse the decision to charge a processing fee of Rs 2,000 for grace marks, provisional certificates (PC), and consolidated marks memos (CMM).

Student leader Rahul Naik, speaking on the occasion, criticised the university's approach, stating that the steep rise in fees is pushing poor and disadvantaged students away from higher education. He highlighted that the sudden increase in examination fees from Rs 765 to Rs 1,500 has become a heavy financial burden. Similarly, online service charges, which were Rs 500 earlier, have now been raised to Rs 1,500 a move he alleged was leading the university towards commercialisation.

Naik further condemned the hike in transcript fees from Rs 40 to Rs 60 and translation fees from Rs 60 to Rs 100, calling them unjustified. He pointed out

BRS thanks Tony Blair, Subba Rao for speaking 'truth' at Global Summit

Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) has thanked former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair and former Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Duvvuri Subba Rao for acknowledging the tremendous growth of Telangana under its 10-year rule.



Citing the speeches of Blair and Subba Rao at the concluding session of Telangana Rising Global Summit on Tuesday night, the opposition party said they spoke the truth in the presence of Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, who has been spreading hate against former

Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhara Rao (KCR). BRS working president K.T. Rama Rao took to 'X' on Wednesday to post the video clips of the speeches.

"No amount of false propaganda can hide true progress for long! In 2014," Rama Rao posted along with the clip of Tony Blair's speech.

"Telangana began its journey carrying the aspirations of 3.5 crore people A decade later, the State's GDP has tripled, and its per capita income is now among the highest in India Listen to former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair speak about the re-

markable progress Telangana has achieved over the last 10 years under the leadership of KCR garu," wrote KTR, as Rama Rao is popularly known.

KTR, through another post, thanked Subba Rao for acknowledging Telangana's growth story since 2014. "Truth has a way of asserting itself Thank you Duvvuri Garu, Former RBI Governor for acknowledging the brilliant growth story of Telangana since 2014. Leadership of KCR Garu in achieving statehood and leading the state to glory cannot be undermined by petty politics," he said.

"Truth doesn't shout, it simply appears, and every lie collapses. And today, the truth is crystal clear. The fact that Telangana's GSDP tripled within a decade, as acknowledged by Former Britain PM Tony Blair, and the reality that Telangana was India's fastest-growing economy, as affirmed by Former RBI Governor Dr. Duvvuri Subbarao, have shattered every lie propagated by Revanth Reddy and the Congress," posted another top BRS leader and former minister T. Harish Rao.

"No amount of PR, rhetoric, or manufactured narratives can hide what Telangana achieved under KCR's leadership," he added.

"Telangana progressed well in the last 10 years under KCR! - Duvvuri Subbarao speaking at Telangana Global Summit. While Revanth Reddy and Congress continue to spread blatant lies about KCR's rule, noted economists like ex-RBI Governor Duvvuri Subbarao garu understand the truth," reads a post from the BRS handle.

Komatireddy touts Hyd'bad as global entertainment hub

Hyderabad: Telangana will lead the creative transformation with ambition, innovation and collaboration, adding that the Global Summit 2025 will mark the beginning of a new era of international partnerships in entertainment and media, state Roads, Buildings and Cinematography Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy said while addressing delegates at the Global Summit 2025 in Hyderabad on Tuesday. Speaking on the theme "The Creative Century: India's Soft Power & The Future of Entertainment", the Minister highlighted the rapid rise of Hyderabad as a global entertainment hub. Calling the future of entertainment a convergence of cinema, OTT, gaming, esports, virtual production, creator economy and immersive digital storytelling, the Minister noted that technology will transform content creation but human-centred storytelling will remain the soul of entertainment. Inviting global studios, streaming platforms, gaming companies and investors, he positioned Hyderabad as the gateway to the Indian entertainment market, and India as the gateway to the world.

that grace marks, which were previously processed free of charge under university rules, are now being levied at Rs 2,000, causing panic among students. The Forum demanded that the government roll back the examination fee to Rs 765, reduce online service charges to Rs 500, restore transcript fees to Rs 60, and withdraw the Rs 2,000 processing fee for grace marks and certificates.

They warned that failure to act would lead to large-scale student agitations and legal action in the High Court. Students Durga Prasad, Aditya, Sujay, and others joined the protest, reinforcing the call for immediate intervention.

Apollo Hospitals to Power a Healthcare Transformation in Telangana

Hyderabad: At the Telangana Rising Summit, Apollo Hospitals announced a bold vision to build a healthier, stronger and future-ready Telangana, backed by a ₹1,700+ Crore investment over the next three years. This commitment focuses on medical innovation, digital healthcare access, talent development and community empowerment.

Apollo is set to introduce Proton Therapy – the first in the Telugu states, positioning Telangana as a world-class destination for advanced cancer treatment and global medical tourism.

The Group is also expanding its diagnostics footprint with a 40,000 sq.ft fully automated Global Reference Lab featuring advanced genetic & molecular testing, precision medicine and AI-driven biomarker discovery—fueling breakthroughs in human performance, preventive health and longevity.

Apollo Health City houses one of India's largest Biobanks, preserving biological samples that power tomorrow's cures. Additionally, Apollo Medical College continues to produce next-generation clinical leaders through globally benchmarked academic programs.

With 24,000+ direct jobs created across Telangana, Apollo is one of the state's largest private healthcare employers—strengthened by 3,875 women employed, 2,153 women empowered through livelihood and training programs, and 4,678 youth hired year-on-year across the healthcare ecosystem. Through the Total Health model, Apollo has impacted 2,62,749 lives annually, supporting underserved families with dignity and access.



Under Telemedicine & Mobile Medical Units, Apollo has delivered care to 32,808 beneficiaries and 14,244 remote consultations, enabling equitable access to healthcare even in remote communities.

With a strong last-mile presence of 1,000+ Apollo Pharmacies, Apollo ensures uninterrupted access to medicines. 1 in 5 people who require medicine in Hyderabad shop at Apollo Pharmacy, reinforcing it as one of the most trusted healthcare destinations in the region. Supported by ₹2,000 Crores annual pharma distribution, Apollo serves 370 hospitals, 287 clinics and over 7,800 pharmacies statewide.

Where healthcare meets technology and innovation meets compassion, Apollo is building global standards in Telangana — to heal today and lead tomorrow.



Anirudh Reddy sweeps streets at dawn

Mahabubnagar (Jadcherla): In a dramatic move that caught the town by surprise, Jadcherla MLA J Anirudh Reddy walked alone, without any police escort, gunmen, or municipal officials, through the dark streets, here, at 5 am conducting a secret inspection of sanitation conditions.

During the inspection, he interacted with sanitation workers sweeping the roads. A woman worker explained that the municipality had not provided proper broomsticks, forcing them to buy their own. To understand their difficulty, the MLA took the broom from her hands and swept a portion of the road himself.

Another worker complained that salaries for the current month had not been released. When Sanitary Supervisor Naresh arrived at the spot, the MLA directed him to immediately provide suitable broomsticks to all workers and resolve salary-related issues without delay.

Observing that several vacant plots across the town were filled with garbage and causing foul odours, Anirudh Reddy ordered municipal officials to issue notices to all such property owners. He instructed that owners be given time to clean their plots, failing which the municipality should step in, clean the areas, and

impose penalties on those responsible.

Dressed in a simple T-shirt, the MLA's unexpected presence in the town's lanes reminded residents of old tales where kings ventured out in disguise to understand people's problems first-hand.

Starting his walk from the Gandhi statue area, Anirudh Reddy made his way through the old bus stand, the surroundings of Kota Maisamma temple, narrow lanes of the old bazaar, and later towards Boorreddipally Anjaneyaswamy Temple, finally reaching Netaji Chowrasta. Most people did not recognise him in the dim dawn light, but as word spread, several locals began following him, astonished to see their MLA walking without protocol.

Despite the MLA spending nearly three hours examining various parts of the town, neither the police nor the municipal commissioner appeared during the visit. However, councillors, local Congress leaders, and a large number of residents later gathered around him, sharing their concerns directly. Concluding his unusual inspection, the MLA stopped at Netaji Chowrasta and had tea with locals.

Officers told to prevent maternal deaths, medical

Ongole: Prakasam district collector P Raja Babu has instructed medical authorities to provide timely healthcare services to prevent maternal deaths.

During a Maternal Death Review (MDR) Committee meeting held at the collectorate in Ongole on Tuesday, the officials reviewed maternal fatalities in

the district. The review revealed three maternal deaths over the past six months. The Collector inquired into the causes, consulted government medical officers, and examined details of hospital facilities and staffing. He emphasised that no mother should die during childbirth and directed officials to maintain vigilance from conception through de-

livery.

Raja Babu ordered regular monthly examinations, timely provision of medicines and nutritional supplements, and appropriate medical guidance for pregnant women. He urged doctors to utilise modern medical facilities and their expertise to save lives, advising prompt

referrals to higher facilities when necessary.

DMHO Dr Venkateswara Rao, DIO Dr Kamalasri, GGH Ongole Gynaecology HOD Dr Sandhya Rani, and representatives from private hospitals participated in the meeting.



MP stresses on industrial parks in State

Nellore: MP Vemireddy Prabhakar has asked the Central Government to inform him about the steps being taken to increase the number of industrial parks in the State.

In the Lok Sabha on Tuesday, he asked for details of the proposed, under construction and operational industrial parks in Andhra Pradesh.



Women must progress to higher levels in society: Sailaja

Kurnool: Women must progress to higher levels in society through their own strength, confidence and talent, and should become role models for the younger generation, asserted State Women's Commission Chairperson Dr Rayapati Sailaja. She emphasised that women must believe in their capabilities and move forward with determination, stating that self-reliance forms the foundation for a successful and dignified life. The government is taking comprehensive measures to ensure women's safety, education and employment opportunities, she added.

Dr Sailaja visited Shakti Sadan, located near Suryabhavan temple in Kurnool, on Tuesday and interacted with the residents of the women's shelter. She reviewed their living conditions and instructed officials to ensure timely legal counselling and psychological support to those in need.

The Chairperson thoroughly examined the management records including daily registers, attendance sheets, movement registers and other documentation, and offered suggestions for improving basic amenities. She also inspected the kitchen, dormitories, handloom section, tailoring units and various training divisions within the facility.

She reviewed the implementation of the Jan-Dhan financial assistance programme and verified whether the monthly deposit of Rs.500 be-

ing credited by the government was accurately reaching beneficiaries.

She directed staff to maintain updated account records and ensure transparency in financial processes. Speaking on the occasion, Dr Sailaja noted that courage, education and livelihood opportunities are the three essential pillars of women's development. Women should step forward with confidence and shape their own future through skill development and financial independence, she said.

Appreciating success stories emerging from the shelter, the Chairperson praised several women who have secured employment in various departments. She highlighted that four of the residents have joined the Police Department, four have secured jobs in the nursing sector, and some have been placed in the ICDS wing.

Describing them as inspiring examples of modern empowerment, she expressed happiness that several young women are preparing for DSC and other competitive examinations. Representatives of the NGO requested land allocation for the construction of a permanent building for Shakti Sadan, and Dr Sailaja assured that the matter would be placed before concerned authorities for favourable consideration. ICDS Project Director Vijaya, Shakti Educational Society Secretary Vijaya Raju and other officials were present.

PVKK Institute students exhibit talent in sports

Anantapur: The students of PVKK Institute of Technology, Anantapur are once again making the college proud by showing their talent in the field of sports.

PVKK - MCA first year student K M Umar has proved his talent at the South India level and has received

special recognition. Umar received praise from everyone for his excellent performance in the South Zone Basketball tournament & selections organised at RGM Engineering College, Nandyal on December 3, 2025 and was selected for the South Zone

team.

With this selection, Umar has become eligible to participate in the National-Level Basketball Championship to be held at SRM University, Tamil Nadu on December 24, 2025. The college management expressed

its hope that he will bring good name to the state and the college by participating in this prestigious tournament. Umar's performance in the South Zone level selections is a testament to his hard work and commitment to the sport. College students, friends and

Medicover Hospitals remove Rs 2 coin stuck in child's throat

Kurnool: Doctors at Medicover Hospitals Successfully Remove Rs 2 coin stuck in a child's throat.

A distressing incident occurred when a young girl, Lasya, accidentally swallowed a Rs 2 coin while playing at school. The coin slipped into her throat and became lodged, causing severe discomfort and immediate concern. Her parents acted quickly and rushed her to Medicover Hospitals, Kurnool for emergency care.

Upon evaluation, Dr. Abdul Samad (Gastroenterologist) identified it as a critical situation. Using endoscopy, he successfully removed the coin without the need for surgery, ensuring the child's safety. He stated that timely arrival at the hospital helped prevent a major complication and that the coin was carefully retrieved through endoscopic intervention.

One of the notable



aspects of this case is that Medicover Hospitals provided the entire treatment at a very affordable cost, ensuring accessible emergency care for all sections of society. Throughout the procedure, the child's condition was closely monitored by Dr. Sindhura (Pediatrician & Neonatologist) and Dr. Y. Ganesh (Pediatric Intensivist & Neonatologist), whose coordination played a key role in the child's quick recovery.

Cluster Head Maheshwar Reddy stated, Providing emergency treatment at reasonable and accessible prices is our responsibility. No patient should delay treatment due to financial concerns.

The parents expressed heartfelt gratitude to the entire medical team, especially Dr Abdul Samad and the Paediatric Department, for saving their child with prompt and efficient care.

Vaccine crisis in Hyderabad: Low adult vaccination threatens lives of seniors

Hyderabad: It is quite shocking, but a recent survey has indicated that only 4 percent of adults over 50 years of age in Hyderabad have received adult vaccines. There is a severe lack of knowledge among individuals of this age group over the utilisation of such adult vaccines, which would go a long way in reducing morbidity and mortality, the study said.

The survey conducted by the Association of Physicians of India (API), which was led by a senior endocrinologist from Hyderabad, Dr Bipin Sethi, said that only 53 per cent of the aging adults were aware of the effectiveness of adult vaccines in preventing serious illness.

There is a lack of knowledge regarding the existence of such vaccine shots, as a significant 73 per cent of adults and 74 per cent of their caregivers reported not being aware that vaccines exclusively for adults are even available. This awareness gap extends to healthcare workers also, with only 12 per cent of caregivers having administered adult vaccines to their parents or in-laws.

Strict security, drone monitoring planned for Vaikunta Ekadasi

Tirupati: Keeping in view of the upcoming Vaikunta Ekadasi festival, a high-level coordination meeting was held on Tuesday at Annamayya Bhavan in Tirumala to review police preparedness and TTD arrangements.

The meeting focused on crowd management, security measures, traffic control, peacekeeping, and essential services for pilgrims expected to arrive in large numbers.

The review meeting was jointly conducted by Tirupati District SP L Subba Rayudu and TTD Vigilance & Security Officer KV Murali Krishna. Senior officers from multiple departments attended the session.

Speaking at the meeting, the SP directed officials to identify in advance the areas where heavy crowds are expected during Vaikunta Ekadasi.

He stressed the need for proper deployment of monitoring staff, queue-line management



teams, and traffic control units.

He also instructed officials to pay special attention to laddu distribution centres to ensure orderly movement, discipline, and enhanced safety measures.

The SP asked all departments to provide continuous announcements through public-address systems at key locations such as the bus stand, railway station, Srinivasam complex, Alipiri, and luggage counters to guide devo-

tees effectively. Officials briefed him on the ongoing security arrangements, including access-control checks and regular bomb-squad inspections. The SP suggested strengthening these measures wherever needed.

He issued a stern warning that strict legal action would be taken against jeep drivers, agents, or middlemen who illegally offer tokens or mislead and cheat devotees. He said cases would be filed firmly against such offenders

To ensure round-the-clock monitoring of crowds, the SP instructed officials to link drones to the Command Control Centre and deploy joint police-TTD teams to keep a close watch on queue-line areas as per guidelines. Additional SPs Ramakrishna, Ramakrishna Chari, Srinivasulu, Kulasekhar, Srinivas Rao along with other officers along with DSPs Venkata Narayana, Prasad, Vijay Sekhar and Chandrasekhar along with other officers participated in the meeting.

Make Guntur ganja-free district: IG

Nellore: Guntur Range Inspector General (IG) Sarvasresta Tripathi on Tuesday directed the police officials to initiate steps for dismantling the Ganja network in the district. The IG along with Superintendent of Police Ajitha Vejendla inspected the Vedayapalem, Nellore Rural, Podalakur, Rapur police stations on Tuesday. On this occasion, he inspected the maps and has enquired main crime areas at their respective police stations.

The IG directed the police to take stern action against ganja smugglers and consumers by booking the cases.

He also ordered them to identify the black spots on national and state highways in the interest of preventing road accidents and create awareness to the drivers over the issue.

While expressing displeasure over number cases related to grave and property offenses the IG ordered them to intensify the investigation, recover the stolen properties and hand over to the victims.

The IG spoke with the complainants and enquired about their grievances, ordering the police to solve the cases as early as possible.



ASI spends 26 plus crores on monuments in Himachal, experts express concerns over its efficacy

In response to a recent Right to Information (RTI) inquiry, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) disclosed an allocation of Rs 26.92 crore dedicated to the preservation and restoration of 40 protected monuments in Himachal Pradesh. Notable landmarks covered by this allocation include the Rock Cave Cut Temple Masrur in Kangra, Hidimba Devi Temple in Mandi, and Kangra Fort.

However, experts, such as Professor Renu Thakur from Panjab University and archaeological expert K Asif Khan in Chamba, express reservations about the efficacy of ASI's expenditure. They stress the necessity for active involvement of local communities and a more expansive coverage of monuments. Thakur particularly emphasizes the urgency to extend efforts beyond infrastructure development, urging ASI to involve local residents, especially youths and women, in heritage preservation. Khan adds his perspective, highlighting that attention is often focused on well-preserved monuments while around 69 historical temples are in need of conservation. He underscores the importance of expanding ASI's scope and improving coordination with temple trusts. The ASI disclosed that it generated revenue of Rs 3.53 crore by selling tickets for two ticketed monuments—Kangra Fort and Rock Cave Cut Temple Masrur—between 2013 and September 2023. Over the past 11 years, these monuments attracted a total of 11.05 lakh visitors, including 19,646 foreigners from SARRC and BIMSTEC countries.

Notably, the highest restoration expenditure of Rs 8.90 crore occurred in the fiscal year 2022-23, emphasizing a significant commitment to preserving the rich historical heritage of the region. Conversely, the financial year 2016-17 saw the lowest spending at Rs 1.06 crore, while the COVID-19-affected year 2020-21 witnessed an allocation of Rs 1.24 crore for restoration efforts. District-wise, Chamba boasts the highest number of protected monuments at 13, followed by Kangra with 11. Kullu, Mandi, Lahul Spiti, Hamirpur, Shimla, and Sirmour each host a varying number of ASI monuments, managed by the ASI's Shimla Circle.

The ASI, Shimla Circle, clarified that the revenue collected over the years, approximately Rs 3.53 crores, was derived not only from ticket sales but also from license fees for filming at the monuments and organizing cultural events. Interestingly, visitors are only required to pay fees for entry to Kangra Fort and Rock Cave Cut Temple Masrur, while the other 38 monuments are accessible without charge. Detailing the revenue breakdown, the reply from the Shimla Circle office specified that Rs 3.36 crore came from ticket sales for the two ticketed monuments, while fees for cultural events and filming contributed Rs 2.05 lakh and Rs 14.75 lakh, respectively. The highest ticket sales were reported in 2019-20 at Rs 55.54 lakh, experiencing a drop to Rs 15.11 lakh during the lockdown-impacted year of 2020-21. As of 2023-24, ticket sales have reached Rs 27.10 lakh. Additional information from ASI indicates that among the 40 monu-

ments surveyed, two belong to the British era, 31 are Hindu temples, three are Buddhist monuments (comprising two monasteries and one stupa), and four are palaces that were once part of princely estates. Notable British-era monuments include Lord Elgin's Tomb in Dharamshala, Kangra, and the Vice Regal Lodge in Shimla. An ASI official from Shimla, speaking on condition of anonymity, states, "Most protected temples in Chamba, Kangra, Kullu, etc., are managed by independent trusts or state government-controlled trusts. ASI doesn't have jurisdiction over offerings received in these temples, focusing solely on conservation. Governing trusts are restricted from altering the inner and outer structures of these monuments. Ticketing is applicable only to the Rock-cut Cave temple in Nagara style and Kangra fort. Maintenance expenses cover basic amenities and parking at these sites."

When contacted, Superintendent Archaeologist in Shimla, Tsering Phunchok, informed The Indian Express, "Expenditure and revenue are distinct aspects. Collected fees are deposited in the government treasury, and the allocated budget for conservation varies based on needs. Most protected monuments are situated in remote areas of Himachal Pradesh. For instance, popular destinations like Shimla and Kullu-Manali have only six protected monuments, with five in Kullu district and just one in Shimla. Our staff is assigned to all these monuments." Professor Renu Thakur from the Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture & Archaeology at Panjab University emphasizes that ASI's efforts are insufficient, advocating for the active involvement of local communities in monument preservation, particularly in states like Himachal Pradesh. She asserts, "We still have a long way to go to truly preserve our archaeological heritage in Himachal. While working extensively on monuments like the Rock Cave Cut temple in Masrur, I witnessed the deterioration of the ancient pond nearby, with visitors climbing rocks, taking selfies, and littering. Mere construction of parking spaces and ticketing booths isn't adequate. ASI should engage local communities, especially for the Rock Cave Cut temple in Masrur, as a means to generate revenue. Authorities should involve locals, including youths and women, and provide training on heritage preservation." Professor Renu Thakur, who authored an essay on the Masrur temple for the Punjab History Congress, highlights, "In Northern India, there are only two rock-cut temples, one in Himachal Pradesh and another in Madhya Pradesh. People should be mindful of these monuments when visiting such sites."

Other experts argue that ASI is allocating funds to already preserved monuments, neglecting others in need. Archaeological expert K Asif Khan in Chamba remarks, "Certainly, well-preserved monuments like the Lakshmi Narayan temple exist, but approximately 69 other historical temples still require preservation. Many of these monuments are in remote areas, contributing to their good condition. However, ASI should broaden its scope, incorporating more monuments. Improved co-



The ASI, Shimla Circle, clarified that the revenue collected over the years, approximately Rs 3.53 crores, was derived not only from ticket sales but also from license fees for filming at the monuments and organizing cultural events

ordination between temple trusts and ASI is essential." Khan, an advocate for heritage preservation, emphasizes the need for collaboration between the Geological Survey of India and ASI to slow down the receding heritage in Chamba. Preserving Heritage: Nagara Style Temples in Himachal Pradesh Like the Nagara style Lord Ram Temple in Ayodhya, Himachal Pradesh boasts several centuries-old Nagara style temples under the protection of the Archaeology Survey of India (ASI). Rock Cut-Temple Masrur, Kangra

An extraordinary monolithic rock-cut temple in the Nagara style at Masrur in the Kangra district stands as the sole exemplar of rock-cut architecture in Northern India. Resembling the prehistoric Elephanta Caves near Mumbai, this 8th-century temple, under ASI's protection, draws historians and architects for study. Despite being a tourist attraction, concerns arise about its preservation, with experts suggesting the need for broader community engagement. With approximately 3.06 lakh visitors in the last six years, this ticketed monument, located 480km from Delhi and 260km from Chandigarh, raises questions about the comprehensive impact of allocated funds.

A Nagara style temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, constructed in the 13th century, stands under ASI's custodianship. Run by a committee under the Kangra district administration, the temple holds inscriptions revealing its historical significance. Mythologically linked to Ravana and Lord

Shiva, Baijnath Temple witnesses a surge in devotees during the Shivratri festival, highlighting its cultural importance. Hidimba Devi Temple, Manali The iconic Hidimba Devi Temple in Manali, made in Pagoda style, holds mythological significance connected to the demon goddess Hidimba. While a renowned tourist spot, experts emphasize the need for preservation and maintenance. ASI's recent tender of Rs 45.41 lakh for the temple's outer wooden parikrama and floor area underscores ongoing efforts.

Laxmi Narayan Temple, Chamba Constructed in the 10th century, the Laxmi Narayan Temple in Chamba is a complex of six temples dedicated to Lord Shiva and Vishnu. Linked to local climatic conditions, the temple's unique features, including a metallic image of Garuda, showcase its historical and cultural importance. Under ASI's protection, it remains one of the 13 monuments in the district, with a trust managing day-to-day affairs. Laxmi Narayan Temple Constructed in the 10th century, the Laxmi Narayan Temple in Chamba is a complex of six temples dedicated to Lord Shiva and Vishnu. (Express Photo) Built in the 11th or 12th century in Kashtkuni style, Mirkula (Markula) Temple in Lahul's Udaipur subdivision holds intricate deodar-wood carvings depicting scenes from Ramayana and Mahabharata. While revered by locals, plans for renovating the temple's boundary wall indicate the ongoing efforts needed for its preservation under ASI's guardianship.

What is needed from a Governor is reticence

The Tamil Nadu Governor, R.N. Ravi, has recently been in the news for the wrong reason. Instead of confining himself to his role which requires that Governors steer clear of controversies, especially those unconnected with their constitutional duties, Mr. Ravi has waded into the minefield of interpretation of historical events which led to India's Independence. Even a Governor with a background of historical studies should avoid this. But Mr. Ravi was a student of physics who joined the Indian Police Service and spent long years in the Intelligence Bureau (IB). He has obviously felt that he had the expertise to publicly express his opinions on an important period of Indian history. There has been no indication from Mr. Ravi that he has made a detailed study of India's national movement which, under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership, aimed at the comprehensive transformation of a feudal, largely obscurantist and hierarchical society along with the achievement of freedom from British colonialism. All the great leaders of the national movement played their part in this noble enterprise. In any event, it is intrinsically wrong for any constitutional authority to play up the role of some and denigrate that of others. The Governor's view

Mr. Ravi has been reported as saying that the Quit India movement made little impact on the British decision to leave India. Instead, it was insecurity felt by the British at Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose forming the Azad Hind Government and its army (INA) and in 1946 by the Naval Mutiny and the Air Force Rebellion. Apparently, Mr. Ravi formed this view from his reading of IB files of the relevant period. He has also cited a conversation between British Prime Minister Clement Attlee and an acting Governor of Bengal in which Mr. Attlee said that the impact of 'non-cooperation' was minimal but that the British left because they felt 'insecure' after the 'Naval Revolt and the Air Force Rebellion'. A clarification

Under criticism for his assertions and views, Mr. Ravi clarified that he had the 'highest respect' for Mahatma Gandhi. At the same time, he reiterated his views on the departure of the British from India. There is no doubt that the loyalty of Indian soldiers in the British Indian armed forces was a principal pillar of their rule in India. If not for the Indian soldiers who served in the armies of the East India Company, the British could not have conquered India. Most historians of the national movement also acknowledge that the INA and the naval mutiny shook British confidence in the loyalty of the Indian members of their army in India. And, obviously, after the Second World War, circumstances created by the national movement, Britain's economic weakening and the international situation simply did not permit them to even think of undertaking armed action to retain their rule in India.

Hence, Mr. Ravi was right in praising Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's great contribution in achieving Independence. This is almost universally acknowledged. Despite the great ideological differences in leaders of the freedom movement none of them ever denigrated Netaji or the INA. Had that been so, would it have been possible for so many of the lawyers among them to come together to defend the three officers — Prem Kumar Sehgal, Gurbaksh Singh

Dhillon and Shah Nawaz Khan — at their court martial at the Red Fort in 1945-46? The great lawyer, Bhulabhai Desai, led the defence which included Tej Bahadur Sapru, Jawaharlal Nehru and Kailas Nath Katju. This writer would be forgiven for making a personal reference. As Katju's grandson and Sapru's great-grandson, he knows full well the enormous admiration that Netaji evoked in them. It would not be out of place to quote from Katju's unpublished biography of the impact of the INA trial. He writes that because of them "The excitement in the country was intense and indescribable". He goes on to note, "I am firmly of the opinion that just as the murders in Jallianwala Bagh in 1919 laid the foundation stone of our national struggle, similarly the Indian National Army trials were the definite cause of the withdrawal of the British rule in India in August 1947. The British discovered for themselves that it was impossible for them to continue..." The last word

It is obvious that Mr. Ravi feels that Netaji was not given due recognition for



his contribution to the country's Independence by the Congress party because of Jawaharlal Nehru and his successors, and that this lapse has now been corrected. It is Mr. Ravi's right to feel so. What is not open to him while holding the office of Gov-

ernor is to make his views public. Governors are also not expected to make comparisons, however indirectly, of the impact of the actions of different leaders of the national movement. What is needed from Governors is reticence. As a former civil servant, Mr. Ravi should certainly know this.

DDA demolishes mosque in Mehrauli, cites drive against encroachments



The religious structure was believed to have been constructed over 500 years ago; cleric says no prior notice served; officials say Delhi government's Religious Committee consulted before action

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) on Tuesday carried out an "unannounced" demolition of a mosque in Mehrauli believed to have been constructed over 500 years ago, with officials citing the action as part of the agency's drive against encroachments. Mosque cleric Md. Zakir Hussain alleged that the authorities did not serve prior notice and that they were told to vacate the mosque as early as 5.30 a.m. by a group of officials. A madrasa was also being run from the mosque premises, where 15 of the 22 students of the theo-

logical school were staying.

Seminary tutor Md. Javed alleged, "They snatched our phones and asked us to step aside without even letting us pick up any of our belongings." He also alleged that they were not even allowed to collect the children's books or the little money they had saved for them. The children were shifted to a nearby madrasa, he said. Commenting on the action, a senior DDA official said the demolition was carried out following the Ridge Management Board's decision to remove all kinds of

encroachment around Sanjay Van, a reserved forest in the southern part of the Ridge, an extension of the Aravali forest range in the national capital. The spot on the mosque's premises where the graves of Sufi saints are located.

The Akhundji Mosque, which was being maintained by the Waqf Board, was situated at a spot between Sanjay Van and the Mehrauli Eidgah. Panel looked into issue. The DDA official said a panel, including the District Magistrate (South Delhi), DCP (South), and DDA's Director of Horticulture (North West), was formed to look into the issue of illegal structures. "The panel found various illegal structures, including religious places, in the area. It suggested that all such structures be removed," said the official.

He added that the decision was taken following consultation with the Delhi government's Religious Committee on Saturday. The demolition was carried out by the DDA's Horticulture Department, he said. The mosque cleric said the officials immediately loaded the rubble on trucks and took it away. Heritage walker Asif Khan Dehlvi said the architecture and inner walls of the religious structure suggested that it was constructed during the Delhi Sultanate period, which lasted from 1206 to 1526 AD. Graves of Sufi saints

According to Mr. Dehlvi, the premises housed the graves of many Sufi saints, including that of Sheikh Jalaluddin. It has been a permanent part of the lives of those living nearby, he said. Usama, an architect who used to visit the mosque frequently, also said that the mosque was integral to the lives of the Muslim community in the area for a long time. They have been left dejected, he added.

Ground Zero | Along the Indian-Myanmar border, living in a limbo

Soon after the Tatmadaw, or Myanmar's military, seized power in a coup d'etat in February 2021 by displacing the National League for Democracy (NLD)-led government, Sumi, 18, fled the country. She crossed the border into India and finally secured a job in Treasury Square, the administrative hub of Aizawl, Mizoram's capital. Sumi was not too worried about leaving her home in Tedim, the second largest town in Myanmar's Chin State, for Aizawl, covering 255 kilometres over five days by public transport. "She knew she would be among her own people in this foreign land that is much safer and more peaceful than ours," says Margaret Ngaihi, Sumi's family acquaintance.

Sumi became Margaret's apprentice. Margaret, too, had left Tedim about 40 years ago to work at the house of L.R. Sailo, a former director of Mizoram's Information and Public Relations Department at Treasury Square. Margaret says Sumi, from the Chin community, did not take long to settle down at the house of Sailo, a Mizo.

Margaret had left Tedim under similar circumstances in the 1980s. Myanmar, then called Burma, was under the military dictatorship of Ne Win. The Free Movement Regime (FMR) which promotes local trade and allows residents along the 1,643 km-long India-Myanmar border to move up to 16 km into each other's territory without travel documents, was not in place then; the agreement between India and Myanmar was implemented only in 2018. She married a Mizo and they had two sons. "The Chins and Mizos belong to the same ethnic stock. They were inhabiting Zogam (the land of the Zo people) for ages before the British divided our homeland in the 1800s. Marriages and other social interactions between people on either side of the international border are quite common in these parts. It is also not unusual for children in Myanmar to study in Mizoram," says Sailo. Zogam comprises present-day Mizoram, the Chin State of Myanmar, and areas beyond.

Margaret has occasionally visited her relatives in Tedim. "The civil war has been forcing our people to hunt for jobs abroad. The younger lot in Myanmar prefer Malaysia, which is where Sumi lives now, but we cannot think of a better place than Mizoram, the land of our own people," Margaret says. Mizoram currently shelters about 35,000 people displaced from Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Manipur. She is not aware of the geopolitics in the region, specifically about Manipur's insistence on fencing the India-Myanmar border to block the entry of refugee-seekers from the civil war-torn country. In January, Home Minister Amit Shah announced that the Centre would fence the entire border to restrict free movement into India. But discussions in the neighbourhood on the fencing have made her understand that it might not be easy for her people to travel across the border as easily as she and Sumi did, four decades apart. In January, Sangthankima, 63, a social worker who runs Mizoram's largest orphanage, Thutak Nunpuitute Team, was

awarded the Padma Shri by the Indian government. While he is happy about the recognition, he is now worried. He faces the prospect of losing easy access to the orphanage and rehabilitation centre run by his charitable organisation at Tahan, in the Sagaing Division of Myanmar. The centre at Tahan houses about 100 orphans and is the smallest of his five centres. The other centres are in Champhai, Kolasib, Aizawl, and Lunglei — all in Mizoram. Waiting for calm

Not everyone eyes Mizoram for a living. Unlike Margaret and Sumi, Julali, who is in her late 20s, was working as a nurse at a 200-bed government-run hospital in Falam, the former headquarters of Myanmar's Chin State. She joined the Civil Disobedience Movement after the military coup in 2021. She was forced to quit her job and be on the run until she reached Zokhawthar, a border town in Mizoram, in the autumn of 2022. Two of her pro-democracy colleagues at the Falam hospital also made it to Zokhawthar. Julali, a nurse from a Myanmar government-run hospital in Falam, yearns to go back home. The door of the Lailun Medical Centre in Zokhawthar faces the road that brought Julali from Falam to Khawmawi, Myanmar's border town connected to Zokhawthar by a 30-metre steel bridge across the Tiau river.

Julali, a nurse from a Myanmar government-run hospital in Falam, yearns to go back home. The door of the Lailun Medical Centre in Zokhawthar faces the road that brought Julali from Falam to Khawmawi, Myanmar's border town connected to Zokhawthar by a 30-metre steel bridge across the Tiau river. | Photo Credit: Rahul Karmakar The three of them were entrusted with running the makeshift Lailun Medical Centre in Zokhawthar, referred to as the 'refugee clinic' by the Mizo people. The centre primarily treats sick or injured Myanmar nationals who have been displaced. It is located about 110 km from their hospital at Falam, which had the highest concentration of Myanmar nationals displaced by the civil war, which is being fought between armed civilian groups called the People's Defence Forces (PDF), which are allied to the self-declared National Unity Government in exile, and the Buddhist-dominated military.

The Lailun Medical Centre was set up by the Myanmar-based Institute of Chin Affairs with help from community-based organisations such as the Young Mizo Association and church bodies. The Mizos, the dominant community in Mizoram, are ethnically related to the Chins of Myanmar, the Kuki-Zos of Manipur, and the Kuki-Chins of Bangladesh. The door of the medical centre faces the road that brought Julali from Falam to Khawmawi, Myanmar's border town, which is connected to Zokhawthar by a 30-metre steel bridge across the Tiau River. Once the passage for formal trade between India and Myanmar, the bridge has been closed to traffic since the COVID-19 pandemic but residents are allowed to walk across up to a certain point on either side of the border.



The PDF and its associated groups have taken control of much of Chin State over the past few months forcing more than 500 Myanmar soldiers to flee to India from where they have been evacuated to Mandalay and other Myanmar military bases. Thanks to intuition, and knowledge of the history of the conflict, Julali knows that it could be months before she can return to Falam. "Thankfully, the fighting cannot get any closer than this (800-900 metres beyond the Tiau river). We can only go back when the fighting stops completely, and I am not sure if it will be anytime soon although I hear the junta (military) is losing ground," Julali says. She yearns to work again at the Falam hospital in a peaceful atmosphere. Her co-workers at the hospital are currently divided unequally into pro-democracy and pro-junta groups. Her biggest worry is India's move to fence the border and end the FMR, which might not let her take refuge in Mizoram if things at home go wrong again. "We cannot stay here forever. Our country has been caught in one conflict or the other, and we may have to seek refuge in India again after we go back home," she says.

Large swathes of India's present-day Northeast were under the reign of Burmese king Bagyidaw until he lost the first of the three Anglo-Burmese Wars in 1826 and signed the Treaty of Yandaboo. This led to the demarcation of the territories of British-ruled India and Burma, similar to the current alignment of the border between the two countries. The invisible border through hills and jungles hardly made a difference for "separated" locals, belonging to the same ethnic stock and dependent on each other for local trade, farming, and social events. India's independence in 1947 and Burma's in 1948 did not impact the movement of people across the porous border much, except during military operations against Northeast-based extremist outfits that have been using Myanmar as a haven. The visits across the border became more frequent when the two countries

agreed in 2018 to implement the FMR. India suspended the FMR in September 2022, given the continued escalation of the refugee crisis after the military coup in Myanmar. While some 2,000 Myanmar nationals, mostly the Chin people, took refuge in Manipur, the number of displaced people who entered Mizoram touched the 40,000-mark within a year of the coup. The number dropped to about 33,000 by the end of October last year and increased again less than a month later after the civil war reached the Mizoram border.

"The number fluctuates as the Myanmar nationals living close to the border with India come and go depending on gunfights or bombings from the air. The Champhai district is currently sheltering 12,432 Myanmar nationals," says V.L. Hruaimawia, the Mizoram government-appointed liaison officer for the District-Level Committee on Myanmar Refugees. Almost half the refugees in the district are in Zokhawthar and adjoining villages. Among them is Mawihlengkim, a primary school teacher from Lumbang near Falam. She is among the earliest inmates of Bethel Camp, the largest of the three in and around Zokhawthar housing 503 people.

"We were four teachers at a government-run school teaching all subjects to about 30 students from nursery to Class 4. The other teachers who joined the Civil Disobedience Movement and the students are hopefully safe wherever they are," she says, insisting that life in Myanmar was not so uncertain before the Tatmadaw overthrew the NLD-led government in February 2021. She arrived in Zokhawthar with her three children on the back of a mini-truck almost two years ago. "Do they have any chance of growing up and studying in the land of our ancestors," she asks. Two of her children are among the 20 from the refugee camp enrolled at the Zokhawthar Government Primary School, about 1.5 km away. The school has 420 students and only 60 of them are locals.