

Air pollution cutting life expectancy, productivity and quality of life in Delhi: Experts

New Delhi: Air pollution is no longer just an environmental concern; it is steadily shortening life expectancy, reducing productivity and quality of life, said health experts here on Thursday, even as the national capital has been witnessing deteriorating air quality for over a month.

Visuals from different parts of Delhi and the NCR showed sharply reduced visibility as dense smog engulfed roads, residential areas, and public spaces, affecting daily movement and raising health concerns among residents. Delhi recorded an Air Quality Index (AQI) of 356, as per data from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

The experts noted that prolonged exposure to air pollution is eroding India's economic growth while triggering a sharp rise in serious health conditions such as stroke, cardiovascular disease, res-

piratory illness, and neurological disorders.

This is placing a growing strain on healthcare systems — ultimately weakening India's long-term development potential. "Prolonged exposure does not just shorten life expectancy; it increases the number of years lived with disability. In highly polluted cities, people may survive longer but with chronic illness that reduces productivity, quality of life, and economic contribution," said Rajesh Bhushan, Former Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

"Addressing air pollution, therefore, requires coordinated action across healthcare systems, urban planning, and public awareness, with a much stronger focus on preventive and primary healthcare," he added at an event organised by the Illness to Wellness Foundation.

Delhi-based pulmonologist Dr G C Khilnani described air pollution as a "man-made public health emergency" that is likely to have a widespread impact on respiratory and cardiovascular health.

"The most dangerous effects of air pollution are often invisible — ultra-fine particles penetrate deep into the lungs, enter the bloodstream, and damage multiple organs without early warning signs," he said.

Neurologist Dr Daljit Singh noted that pollution affects brain blood circulation and significantly increases the risk of both ischemic and haemorrhagic strokes.

"We are now observing clear seasonal spikes in stroke admissions during high-pollution months, indicating that pollution is emerging as an independent risk factor. Beyond stroke, air pollution

is also associated with neurological conditions such as Alzheimer's disease, dementia, and Parkinson's disease, making this a growing neurological challenge that must be urgently addressed," Singh added.

Dr Harsh Mahajan, Mentor — FICCI Health Sector, stated that air pollution has become a silent risk factor aggravating nearly every disease category. "It disproportionately affects the poor, children, and outdoor workers, even though they contribute the least to the problem. The dangerous myth is that technology alone will solve this crisis. What we lack is urgency and accountability," said Mahajan.

The experts emphasised the need for long-term commitment, strong enforcement, and informed public participation to ensure healthier lives and a more resilient economy.

Parliamentary panel on Bills to remove PM, CMs gets extension till Budget Session 2026

New Delhi: The Parliamentary committee examining Bills to remove the Prime Minister and Chief Ministers was granted an extension on Thursday to submit its report by the last week of the Budget Session next year.

Joint Parliamentary Committee Chair Aparajita Sarangi moved a resolution in Lok Sabha seeking time to sub-

mit its report "up to the first day of the last week of the Budget Session, 2026".

A voice vote passed the resolution. The Budget Session usually ends in the first week of April. The term of the committee, which had so far met only once, was coming to an end shortly.

The joint committee on the Con-

stitution (130th Amendment) Bill, the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, and the Government of Union Territories (Amendment) Bill had earlier this month decided to invite the political parties that boycotted the panel.

Several opposition parties have

stayed away from the committee, contending that the Bills violate the fundamental principle of law of a person being presumed innocent until proven guilty, and resort to automatic sacking of a prime minister, chief ministers, and ministers if they fail to get bail within a month of arrest in serious criminal matters.

GP poll result a resounding slap on Oppn's face: TPCC

Hyderabad: TPCC President and MLC Mahesh Kumar Goud expressed delight that the Congress party's dominance continued in the third phase of the panchayat election results. The results of the first, second and third phases of the sarpanch elections reflect the favourable atmosphere created at the rural level by the government's public welfare programmes. This verdict given by the people will serve as a guiding principle for the strengthening of Congress in Telangana, he said.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, Mahesh Kumar Goud said that the villages have once again crowned the

Congress party. This verdict given by the people is a testament to the performance of the Congress government.

The resounding victory of Congress-backed candidates in the majority of sarpanch seats across the state in the third phase of elections is a clear reflection of the confidence that rural voters have placed in the Congress government's administration. The results of the third phase of the Panchayat elections have become a slap in the face for the opposition parties. Mahesh Kumar Goud said this verdict, which reflects the aspirations of the people,

has once again proven the satisfaction of the rural population with the Congress government's administration.

The TPCC chief said that the people have embraced the slogan of "welfare, social justice and development," and the resounding victory of Congress candidates in the sarpanch elections is a clear indication of this. The large-scale support for Congress from minorities, Dalits, tribals, women, farmers and youth indicates a new direction in the village governance system. Social justice was clearly reflected in the panchayat elections.

The TPCC President commented



that the way rural people are making decisions based on development and welfare is ushering in a new political culture in Telangana. This victory has increased the party's responsibility, and the Congress government is committed to accelerating rural development.



Congress clinches victory in Telangana panchayat elections, wins big in Jukkal

The Indian National Congress (INC) has achieved a historic landslide victory in the recent gram panchayat elections by winning over 75 per cent of villages. The three phases of elections were completed where Congress gets better results. Meanwhile, Jukkal Assembly constituency, securing 126 out of 164 panchayats, which represents a commanding 77% of the total.

On the other side, the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) won 30 panchayats, making up 18% of the results, while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won 4 panchayats, accounting for 2.5%. Independent candidates also secured 4 panchayats, equating to 2.5%.

This overwhelming mandate showcases the significant trust and confidence the people of Jukkal place in the INC, emphasising the party's robust organisational presence at the village level and its capability to convert public support into electoral triumph.

The results serve as a clear endorsement of the party's vision and reflect the steadfast leadership of local MLA Laxmi Kantha Rao Thota, whose commitment to the constituency's development has resonated strongly with the electorate. This remarkable victory not only highlights the INC's dominance in Jukkal but also sets a solid foundation for future electoral aspirations in the region.

Seethakka commends staff for smooth conduct of GP polls

Hyderabad: Minister for Panchayat Raj Seethakka on Wednesday praised the staff of her department for successfully, smoothly and peacefully conducting the gram panchayat elections.

The minister said it is a matter of pride for Telangana that these crucial elections, which strengthen democracy at the village level, were completed in a peaceful atmosphere without any untoward incidents. She extended special appreciation to State Election Commissioner Rani Kumudini for her continuous monitoring, transparency and commitment during the conduct of the elections. Similarly, she acknowledged G Srujana, Commissioner of the Panchayat Raj and Rural Development Department, for efficiently handling key responsibilities as the election authority.

Severe cold wave hits Telangana, temperatures to fall

The intensity of the cold is on the rise across Telangana, with nighttime temperatures now plummeting to single digits. The Meteorological Department has issued warnings that the cold wave is expected to intensify further over the next two to three days. Dry weather conditions are anticipated to prevail in

tures include 7.3 degrees Celsius in Kohir, Sangareddy district, and readings in various locations as follows: Patancheru 8.2, Adilabad 9.2, Rajendranagar 10, Bhadrachalam 15, Dundigal 13.9, Hanumakonda 12, Hyderabad 13.7, Khammam 15, Mahbubnagar 17, Medak 10.2, Nalgonda 13.4, Nizamabad 13.6, and Ramagundam 12.6 degrees Celsius.

In the agency areas, frigid winds typically begin blowing as early as 4 or 5 PM, with temperatures remaining low even after 10 AM. The local tribal communities are feeling the acute effects of the cold, while motorists are facing significant challenges due to dense fog.

The Meteorological Department has warned that the cold snap will persist until 21st of this month and advises the public to take precautions for the next three days. The cold



the state during this period.

The cold is particularly harsh in the agency areas, where temperatures in many regions have fallen to single digits. The lowest temperature recorded was 5.4 degrees Celsius in Ginnedhari village, Tiryani mandal of Asifabad district. Other notable tempera-

wave is similarly affecting neighbouring Andhra Pradesh, particularly in its agency regions, where dense fog is also causing difficulties for drivers. Locations such as Araku, Dumbriguda, G. Madugula, Munchingiputtu, Chintapalli, and Minumuluru are experiencing the lowest temperatures in the state.

Three held in multi-state crypto trading fraud linked to Chinese national

Hyderabad: The Hyderabad Cybercrime police apprehended a 21-year-old man from Mumbai, involved in cheating the people on the pretext of online trading and defrauded the victim to the tune of Rs 32 lakh. The accused has direct contact with the Chinese national in the fraud.

the Chinese national.

Accordingly, an amount of approximately Rs 50 lakh was converted into USDT through their wallet IDs and crypto dealers and subsequently transferred to the wallets provided by the Chinese national, said V Aravind Babu, DCP, Cyber Crimes.

The DCP said that in this case, the victim from Hyderabad was redirected to WhatsApp and was automatically added to a group titled 'Aditya Birla Stock Elite Group 678', where a woman introducing herself as Aiyana Joseph claimed to be a trade advisor. She persuaded him to invest and shared links to download a trading application.

"After installing the app, the victim was instructed to submit KYC details and bank information. He was later added to another WhatsApp group named 'Aditya Birla High Net Worth IPO Exclusive Membership Group', where members were advised to invest in specific stocks and IPOs, with a promise of high returns and a demand for 20% commission on profits.

The accused provided multiple bank accounts for depositing funds and the app falsely indicated that the victim had received IPO allotments and earned substantial profits. When the victim refused to deposit an additional Rs 1 crore, the application stopped functioning on January 23. Realizing he had been cheated, the victim reported the matter to the National Cyber Crime Helpline 1930 and filed a written complaint at the Cyber Crime Police Station," said Aravind Babu.

In total, the victim transferred Rs 32 lakh to the bank accounts provided by the fraudsters. Following the complaint, a case was registered U sec 66(C), 66(D) of IT Act & Sec 318(4), 319(2), 336(3), 338, and 340(2) of the BNS. During the course investigation, accused persons were arrested.



Police arrested Ansari Mohammed Umar Murad. Police earlier arrested Rishi Thushar Arothe Vikranth (30), a cricket coach, and Inamdar Vinayaka Rajendar Nikhil (25) both from Vadodara, Gujarat.

The accused were involved in a total of 12 cases across the country, each one case in Haryana, Kerala, Jammu & Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, two cases in Karnataka and Telangana and three cases in Maharashtra. According to Cyber Crime police, Umar has good knowledge of cryptocurrency trading. He was in direct contact with a Chinese national and regularly communicated with him through Telegram. As per the instructions of the Chinese national, he, along with Rishi and Nikhil, used to convert the cheated amounts from Indian rupees into USDT and transfer the same to the wallet addresses provided by

Police open fire in air to control sarpanch poll clashes

Hyderabad: Police fired in the air at Paidipalli village in Velgaturu mandal of Jagtial district on Wednesday after tensions escalated between supporters of BRS and BJP-backed candidates during the sarpanch elections.

The clash erupted when BJP candidate Mamatha demanded a recount after BRS candidate Gangula Manga was declared the winner. As the situation turned



violent, police fired warning shots in the air to disperse the mob and bring the situation under control. The BJP candidate alleged irregularities in the counting process. During the unrest, miscreants pelted stones at police vehicles, damaging them, and one policeman sustained injuries.

Meanwhile, in Panthangi and Dandumalkapuram villages of Choutuppal mandal in Yadadri district, police resorted to lathi-charge to quell clashes between rival party supporters. In Panthangi, tensions flared between Congress and BJP activists, prompting police action. In Dandumalkapuram, Congress and BRS workers clashed, leading to stone-pelting from both sides. Police intervened and restored order by using force.

Police maintained that the situations in all affected villages were brought under control and additional forces were deployed to prevent further incidents.

TG BIE introduces UV fibres, QR codes in intermediate certificates

Hyderabad: What looks like a regular intermediate pass certificate will now hide a complex web of protection, including UV fluorescent fibres that are invisible to naked eyes.

In addition to the hologram and watermark, the Telangana Board of Intermediate Education (TG BIE) is giving a major upgrade to security features of the intermediate pass certificate cum memorandum of marks, which will be awarded from this academic year.

One of the major upgrades being incorporated in the certificate is ultraviolet fluorescent security fibres, which are tiny and coloured synthetic fibres that are mixed into the paper. These fluorescent fibres glow only when they are exposed to the UV lamp. Hyderabad Local Events

"It has been decided to enhance the security features of the intermediate pass certificate cum memorandum of marks certificate from 18 to 25 from this academic year. Certificates awarded to students will now come with UV fibres, making them tamper-proof," TG BIE sources told 'Telangana Today'. As against the regular black and white photo, the memorandum of marks certificate will come printed with a colour passport-size photograph of the student concerned. This will enable easy identification of the candidate. As reported in these columns, the TG BIE is making its certificate water, tear and tamper-proof. "A special paper covered with a thin layer of plastic cover will be used for printing certificates.

Teenmaar Mallanna moves HC seeking transfer of criminal cases

Hyderabad: On Wednesday, Chinthapandu Naveen Kumar (Teenmaar Mallanna), MLC representing the Warangal, Nalgonda and Khammam constituencies, filed a writ before the HC seeking a direction to the consolidate and transfer to special

through which he analyses the performance of the government, discusses policy decisions with eminent personalities, and offers opinions aimed at improving governance.

According to him, several criminal cases have been registered against him in the course of his journalistic activities, which, he claims, are a consequence of his critical analysis and public commentary.

Mallanna pointed out that in compliance with the SC directions the government had issued GOs 6 and 183 constituting two special courts--special sessions court at Nampally--for trial of cases relating to MPs and MLAs, and a Special Judicial First Class Magistrate Court for Excise cases at Manoranjan Complex, to deal with criminal cases involving elected representatives.



courts all criminal cases registered against him and pending in various courts across the State. The petition is expected to come up for hearing before a single judge bench soon.

Mallanna sought directions to the Principal Secretaries (Law and Home), the DGP, and other authorities, to transfer all criminal cases registered against him in different police stations to the special courts constituted for adjudicating cases involving legislators. He contended that the multiplicity of cases has compelled him to attend courts in different districts, causing serious hardship.

The petitioner stated that he is not affiliated with any political party and is a journalist by profession. He runs a YouTube channel titled "Q News,"

The petitioner submitted that he had made a formal representation to the government seeking transfer of all criminal cases registered against him to the special courts so that they could be clubbed together and heard at a single forum, enabling him to effectively participate in the proceedings without the burden of attending multiple courts across the State. However, his request was rejected by authorities as "not maintainable" on the ground that the special courts constituted under the GOs were meant exclusively for MPs and MLAs.

Aggrieved by the rejection, Mallanna approached the HC seeking directions to the government to transfer, consolidate and cause withdrawal of all criminal cases registered against him to the special courts.

BC JAC urges Centre to approve 42% reservation bill

Telangana Backward Classes Joint Action Committee (BC JAC) chairman Jajula Srinivas Goud has urged the Union Government to approve the 42 per cent BC reservations Bill passed by the Telangana State Assembly.

A delegation of BC JAC leaders met Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Virendra Kumar in Parliament on Tuesday, under the leadership of BRS MP Vaddiraju Ravichandra, and submitted a memorandum outlining five key demands

Goud said the reservations bill was the result of sustained BC struggles, leading to the establishment of a 'Dedicated Commission' and the conduct of a comprehensive caste census in Telangana. He noted that the Assembly unanimously passed the Bill with support from BJP, BRS, CPI, MIM and TJS parties. He said that the Supreme Court's 50 per cent cap on reservations was obstruct-

ing implementation and urged the Centre to amend the Constitution to provide legal validity to the 42 per cent BC quota.

Speaking on the occasion, BRS MP Vaddiraju Ravichandra said BCs have been facing severe injustice in education, employment and political representation despite being a major population group in Telangana. He said a 'private bill' had already been introduced in Parliament seeking approval for the BC reservations law.

Responding to the delegation, Union Minister Virendra Kumar said the Centre was not opposed to BC reservations, but was examining the matter carefully in light of the Indira Sawhney judgment. He added that the government plans to conduct a caste census along with the national population census from next year, and assured the leaders that he would discuss the issue with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Semi-Christmas celebrations held at Puttaparthi Collectorate

Puttaparthi: Semi-Christmas celebrations were held in a grand manner at the Sri Sathya Sai District Collectorate, Puttaparthi, on Tuesday. The programme was organised by the District Minority Welfare Department at the PGRS Hall of the Collectorate.

MLA Palle Sindhura Reddy said it was heartening that the government was officially celebrating festivals of all religions, reflecting its commitment to inclusive governance. He recalled his personal experiences of celebrating Christmas and visiting Jerusalem, and emphasised that Jesus Christ's teachings



The event was attended as chief guests by Joint Collector M. Maurya Bharadwaj, Puttaparthi MLA Palle Sindhura Reddy, and former Minister Palle Raghunatha Reddy, along with several corporation chairpersons, pastors, and members of the Christian community.

The celebrations began with the cutting of a Christmas cake by the dignitaries. Addressing the gathering, Joint Collector Maurya Bharadwaj said the State government was organising Semi-Christmas and New Year celebrations with great enthusiasm. He called upon people to remember the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, and to practise values such as love, compassion, forgiveness and kindness in their daily lives. He extended Christmas and New Year greetings on behalf of the district administration.

on peace, family values and social harmony should guide society.

Former Minister Palle Raghunatha Reddy described Jesus Christ as a great reformer who preached love, forgiveness and humanity. He stated that the government was giving priority to Christian welfare and assured support for infrastructure development of churches and educational initiatives.

As part of the programme, pastors spoke about the message of Christ, followed by candle-lighting and the singing of Christmas hymns.

District Minority Welfare Officer Rama Subba Reddy, corporation chairpersons, pastors, Christian brothers and sisters, and their families were present.

One nation, one policy, major overhaul for organ donation

Hyderabad: Organ donation and transplantation across the country are undergoing a major overhaul with the implementation of 'One Nation, One Policy', aimed at cutting down organ wastage and curbing the practice of transplant tourism, where wealthy patients move to specific states with easier rules to jump ahead of local organ waitlists. Hyderabad Local Events

As part of this initiative, State organ donation bodies, including Telangana's Jeevandan, are being integrated into the National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO). The NOTTO, under the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, is now a single regulatory umbrella for the entire country.

A significant development that took place after NOTTO becoming a centralised body is the removal of domicile requirements. Earlier, States like Telangana and Tamilnadu required patients to be permanent residents to join their deceased donor regis-

tries. Now, any citizen can register for a donor organ in any State of their choice, creating a national pool for patients.

To stop the practice of patients registering at multiple Indian States, a practice popularly known as double dipping, the entire registration process is now centralised. Hyderabad City Guide

Patients are now assigned a unique NOTTO-ID, which is now mandatory for all transplants including living-related and deceased brain dead organ donation. Senior officials from the State-run Jeevandan, which is also now part of the NOTTO, pointed out that such a centralized registration process enables real-time tracking of an organ from retrieval to the moment of transplant. Such a system ensures the process of transplantation is transparent and follows a single national priority list rather than different state-level rules.

CPI calls for success of centenary celebrations

Anantapur: The CPI has called upon the public to ensure the grand success of its centenary celebrations scheduled to be held on January 18 in Khammam, Telangana.

As part of the campaign, centenary celebration pamphlets were released at the CPI district office, Neelam Rajasekhara Reddy Bhavan, in Anantapur on Wednesday.

The pamphlets were released by CPI district secretary P. Narayanaswamy, in the presence of assistant district secretaries Mallikarjuna Raja Reddy and other party leaders.

Addressing the gathering, Narayanaswamy said the CPI, which played a significant role in India's freedom struggle, was founded on December 26, 1925, in Kanpur, even before Independence. As the party completes 100 years, a massive public meet-



ing is being organised at Khammam with lakhs of people expected to attend. He appealed to people from Anantapur district to participate in large numbers.

He alleged that the BJP-led Union government was functioning in contradiction to the ideals of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and accused it of attempting to weaken the Constitution. He further claimed that public sector institutions were being privatised for the benefit of corporate houses, while the interests of common people were being ignored.

Narayanaswamy criticised the Centre over unemployment, economic inequality and electoral practices, and demanded the restoration of ballot paper elections. He also alleged that the State government had failed to question anti-people policies of the Union government.

Andhra CM defends PPP model for new medical colleges

Amaravati: Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Wednesday defended the decision to develop medical colleges under the Public Private Partnership mode, saying it will ensure efficient services.

Speaking at the fifth collectors conference at the secretariat here, the Chief Minister addressed the politically sensitive issue of developing 10 medical colleges under the PPP model, a move vehemently opposed by the YS Jagan Mohan Reddy-led YSRCP.

SVIMS to emerge as top South India hospital, says TTD chief Naidu

Tirupati: TTD Trust Board Chairman BR Naidu said that Sri Venkateswara Institute of Medical Sciences (SVIMS) is being developed into one of the best hospitals in South India as per the directions of Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu. He inaugurated Central Medical Godown and additional floors constructed for patient attendants at SVIMS campus on Wednesday.

Speaking to the media, the Chairman said a three-storey Central Medical Godown was built at a cost of Rs 10.65 crore with a total area of 37,000 square feet. He explained that the facility houses medical stores, general stores, cold storage units, offices and a conference hall, which will help in better management of medical supplies. He also said that additional second and third floors were constructed on the patient attendants' rest house at a cost of Rs 4.4 crore to accommodate around 300 attendants. The facility has been provided with free food and accommodation, along with toilets and lifts, to ease the burden on those accompanying patients. SVIMS Director cum Vice-Chancellor Dr RV Kumar briefed the Chairman on the facilities created in both buildings. The Chairman said that renovation works are currently underway in the main SVIMS building and, once completed, all laboratories

will be brought under one roof through a Central Laboratory system. Dr RV Kumar recalled that hostel build-



ings with 150 rooms for SVIMS university students were inaugurated last year. In the second phase, Central Medical Godown and additional floors for patient attendants have now been completed. He said that with TTD support, plans are underway to soon bring staff quarters, a central kitchen, 350 additional beds, five operation theatres, five ICUs and an advanced cancer care centre building into operation.

TTD Board members Sadasiva Rao, Santharam and Naresh Kumar, JEO V Veerabrahmam, BIRRD Director Dr G Jagadeesh, Chief Engineer TV Satyanarayana, other leaders, and senior officials and staff of TTD and SVIMS were present at the programme.

Narsimhudu to represent AP in Santosh Trophy

Kurnool: Narasimhudu, a talented footballer from Kurnool district, has been selected to represent the Andhra Pradesh State team in the prestigious National Santosh Trophy Football Championship.

The championship matches are scheduled to be held from December 18 to 22 at the RDT Grounds in Anantapur. Kurnool District Football Association Secretary Y. Srinivasulu announced the selection and expressed happiness over a district player earning a place in the State squad for this national-level tournament.

Speaking on the occasion on Wednesday, officials stated that Narasimhudu's selection reflects his consistent performance and dedication to the sport. The Santosh Trophy, one of India's most respected football tournaments, provides a significant platform for players to showcase their skills at the national level. Representing Andhra Pradesh in such a competitive event is considered a major achievement for both the player and Kurnool district football. During a felicitation programme organised to honour the player, Kurnool District Football Association President Mupparav Shekhar described Narasimhudu's selection as a moment of pride for the district. He expressed confidence that the player would deliver an impressive performance and bring laurels to the state. Secretary Y Srinivasulu and district vice-president Vijay Kumar also congratulated Narasimhudu, while extending special appreciation to coach Bablu Srinivasulu for his guidance and role in shaping the player's success.

AP CM Chandrababu Honoured as 'Business Reformer of the Year'

Chandrababu Naidu, the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, has been bestowed with the prestigious 'Business Reformer of the Year' award, as announced by the prominent English media organisation, the Economic Times.

Nara Lokesh, Minister of Andhra Pradesh and Naidu's son, shared the news on the social media platform X, expressing pride in the accolade for both the state and their family. He noted that the jury commended Naidu for his bold approach to implementing reforms.

"This award for Chandrababu is a matter of pride for the state. It is also very prestigious for our family. The jury praised Chandrababu for boldly carrying forward the reforms. This award is a testament to his commitment to reforms, speed, and confidence in governance. Chandrababu's leadership in the state's development is setting an example nationwide. The Chief Minister is an inspiration for attracting investments and implementing reform-oriented governance," Lokesh remarked.

This recognition further underscores Naidu's commitment to progressive governance and his efforts to enhance the investment climate in Andhra Pradesh.

Commissioner issues red notices to tax defaulters



Kurnool: Municipal Commissioner P. Viswanath has directed officials to issue red notices to tax evaders and long-pending defaulters to accelerate municipal revenue collections in the city. Chairing a teleconference with revenue, nodal and administrative staff on Wednesday, the Commissioner reviewed the status of arrears, with a special focus on the top 20 chronic defaulters. He instructed officials to ensure coordinated efforts to recover pending dues before the end of the month and to clearly explain the impor-

tance of municipal taxes to the public.

The Commissioner made it clear that municipal services will be disconnected if defaulters fail to respond even after receiving red notices. He stressed that attention should not be limited to property tax alone, but should also cover drinking water connection charges, trade licence arrears and other municipal dues. Daily monitoring of ward-wise collections was mandated, and officials were warned that no laxity would be tolerated in achieving revenue targets.

In a parallel review, Commissioner Viswanath assessed the progress of development works worth Rs.25 crore being undertaken across the city's 52 wards. Of this, Rs.23 crore is being executed from general funds, Rs.1.50 crore from the 15th Finance Commission grants and Rs 60 lakh from NCAP funds. He instructed engineering officials to ensure that all works are completed strictly within the stipulated timelines.

Emphasising quality, speed and effective supervision, the Commissioner directed officials to exert necessary pressure on contractors wherever delays were noticed and to take corrective steps.

69,000 international student enrolments in 2025

Increasing numbers of international students chose to study in New Zealand in 2023, according to full year enrolment data released today. The latest figures show that there were 69,135 international student enrolments* with New Zealand education providers in 2023. This represents a 67 per cent increase compared to the full year in 2022 and 60 per cent of annual enrolments in 2019. "Over 69,000 enrolments from international students all over the world is good news for our education sector and positive for our communities," said Dr Linda Sissons, Acting Chief Executive of Education New Zealand Manapou ki te Ao. "It confirms that New Zealand is an attractive place to study, offering a quality learning experience inside and outside the classroom in a safe, welcoming environment."

"New Zealand is a small country and for many students, rubbing shoulders with people from other cultures gives them a greater understanding of the issues facing our complex world. In this time of fragile geopolitics, the melting pot of campus life can help build greater understanding and tolerance." The university subsector saw the strongest recovery with 29,065 students, representing 86 per cent of 2019 enrolments. Universities and schools are New Zealand's two largest subsectors for international students. International student enrolments have grown compared to 2022

in all subsectors except wananga. English Language Schools saw the greatest percentage increase in international enrolments, lifting by 511 per cent from 1,565 to 9,570.

As with all New Zealand's competitors in the international education sector, China is the largest source market for international students at 35 per cent. India is second largest at 17 per cent, Japan at 10 per cent, South Korea at five per cent and Thailand at four per cent. Of the other source countries, no other country represented more than four per cent of total enrolments. "Enabling a thriving and globally connected New Zealand through world-class international education is a government priority. We are actively diversifying our recruitment efforts to reach international students in a broad range of countries," Dr Sissons said. More information on enrolment numbers can be found here. Note: * One individual may enrol more than once About Education New Zealand (ENZ) <https://www.enz.govt.nz/> Education New Zealand Manapou ki te Ao (ENZ) is the government agency dedicated to helping Aotearoa New Zealand realise the social, cultural, and economic benefits of international education. Our role is to promote New Zealand as a high-quality education destination offering excellent education and students experiences and to encourage New



Zealand students to study overseas. With approximately 110 staff in 16 locations around the world, ENZ works closely with New Zealand's diverse education sector which includes schools, English language providers, Private Training Establishments,

Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (Te Pukenga), and universities. Internationally, we work with a range of education stakeholders, including government agencies and education providers to identify and encourage sustainable growth opportunities for New Zealand's education sector.

European Union accuses Facebook owner Meta of breaking digital rules with paid ad-free option



European Union regulators accused social media company Meta Platforms on Monday of breaching the bloc's new digital competition rulebook by forcing Facebook and Instagram users to choose between seeing ads or paying to avoid them. Meta began giving European users the option in November of paying for ad-free versions of Facebook and Instagram as a way to comply with the continent's strict data privacy rules.

Users can pay at least 10 euros

(\$10.75) a month to avoid being targeted by ads based on their personal data. The U.S. tech giant rolled out the option after the European Union's top court ruled Meta must first get consent before showing ads to users, in a decision that threatened its business model of tailoring ads based on individual users' online interests and digital activity. The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, said preliminary findings of its investigation show that Meta's "pay or consent" advertising model was in

breach of the 27-nation bloc's Digital Markets Act.

Meta's model doesn't allow users to exercise their right to "freely consent" to allowing their personal data from its various services, including Facebook, Instagram, Marketplace, WhatsApp, and Messenger, to be combined to target them with personalised online ads, the commission said. Meta's model also doesn't give users the option of a service that's less personalised but still equivalent to its social networks, it said.

"Subscription for no ads follows the direction of the highest court in Europe and complies with the DMA," Meta said in a statement. "We look forward to further constructive dialogue with the European Commission to bring this investigation to a close." The commission had opened its investigation shortly after the rulebook, also known as the DMA, took effect in March. It's a sweeping set of regulations aimed at preventing tech "gatekeepers" from cornering digital markets under threat of heavy financial penalties. One of the DMA's goals is to rein in the power of Big Tech companies that have collected vast amounts of personal data on their users, giving them an edge on rivals competing in online ad or social media services. The commission indicated that in order for Meta to comply, it

would like to see an option that doesn't rely on a user's full personal information being shared for advertising. "The DMA is there to give back to the users the power to decide how their data is used and ensure innovative companies can compete on equal footing with tech giants on data access," European Commissioner Thierry Breton, who oversees the bloc's digital policy, said in a statement. Meta now has a chance to respond to the commission, which must wrap up its investigation by March 2025. The company could face fines worth 10% of its annual global revenues, which could run into the billions of euros. Under the Digital Markets Act, Meta is classed as one of seven online gatekeepers while Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Messenger and its online ad business are among two dozen "core platform services" that need the highest level of scrutiny. Monday's decision is the latest in flurry of regulatory activity by Brussels targeting Big Tech companies. The EU leveled its first charges under the DMA a week ago, accusing Apple of preventing app makers from pointing users to cheaper options outside its App Store. It also recently charged Microsoft with violating the bloc's antitrust laws by bundling its Teams messaging and videoconferencing app with its widely used Office business software.

How Julian Assange walked out of U.S. court as a free man

The story so far: In a dramatic conclusion to an extradition saga that lasted more than a decade, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange on June 26 pleaded guilty to violating espionage law, allowing him to walk free to return to his home in Australia, as part of a landmark deal with U.S. Justice Department. Mr. Assange, who founded the whistleblower media group WikiLeaks in 2006, released classified documents relating to the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2010, among several others. He was sentenced to the five years he had already served in a British prison while fighting to avoid extradition to the U.S. Mr. Assange had left the British prison on June 24 to appear before a U.S. federal court in the Mariana Islands, a U.S. commonwealth in the Western Pacific.

Born in 1971 in Townsville, Australia, Julian Assange studied mathematics and physics at the University of Melbourne but dropped out before completing his degree. In 2006, he launched WikiLeaks, which publishes large datasets of "censored or otherwise restricted official materials involving war, spying and corruption." The website first grabbed global attention in 2010 when it published a cache of around half a million sensitive military files on Iraq and Afghanistan, including a classified video from 2007 that showed an Apache helicopter firing indiscriminately, killing a dozen people, including two Reuters correspondents in Baghdad. Around 250,000 secret diplomatic cables from U.S. embassies were also released. The leaks caused ripples across the globe, with the U.S. government launching an inquiry into one of the largest security breaches in its military history.

In September 2010, Mr. Assange fled to Britain after an investigation was launched into alleged sex crimes by him, based on the accusations of two Swedish WikiLeaks volunteers. The British police arrested him two months later. The WikiLeaks founder, however, denied the charges and claimed that the case was a pretext to extradite him to the U.S. He subsequently filed multiple pleas against extradition to Sweden but relief evaded him. In June 2012, shortly after the UK Supreme Court rejected his final challenge against extradition to Sweden, Mr. Assange went to the Ecuadorean embassy in London seeking asylum. While the Swedish prosecutors dropped their investigation in 2017, the British police maintained that Mr. Assange would be arrested. He remained in the embassy for seven years. While Julian Assange's lawyers argued that he had exposed U.S. wrongdoing in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. government said his actions were beyond those of a journalist gathering information and had put lives at risk. Meanwhile, former intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning, who had accessed the U.S. Department of Defense database and uploaded classified files onto a WikiLeaks dropbox, spent seven years in prison before then President Barack Obama commuted the remainder of her 35-year sentence. The U.S. administration said it won't pursue criminal charges against Mr. Assange or WikiLeaks. The extradition

saga

In 2016, ahead of the U.S. presidential election, the spotlight was back on the website after it released thousands of emails belonging to John Podesta, the aide of Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. As per prosecutors, Russian intelligence operatives had stolen the emails and used the anti-secrecy website to improve Donald Trump's chances of victory. The new Trump administration, which held a different view, charged the WikiLeaks founder with collaboration in a conspiracy. A U.S. court later indicted Mr. Assange on 17 additional charges related to the violation of the Espionage Act of 1917. As pressure mounted, the Ecuadorian government revoked his asylum in 2019 and Mr. Assange was arrested and jailed for breaching bail conditions in London's high-security Belmarsh Prison. The U.K. approved Mr. Assange's extradition in 2022. However, he won the right to appeal the verdict in a final legal bid to stop his extradition. His legal team claimed the case was politically motivated and an assault on the freedom of speech. The U.S. President's remarks that his administration was "considering" a request from Australia to drop its prosecution was a ray of hope for Mr. Assange's family.

On June 26, Julian Assange walked out of the Belmarsh Prison where he spent the last five years to appear before a federal court in the Northern Mariana Islands—to secure his freedom as part of a plea deal with the U.S. "Julian Assange is free. He left Belmarsh maximum security prison on



the morning of 24 June, after having spent 1901 days there. He was granted bail by the High Court in London..." tweeted WikiLeaks.

What's the deal? Under the deal, Julian Assange admitted guilt to a single criminal count of conspiring to obtain and disclose classified documents during the hearing that took place on June 26 in a district court in Saipan. Mr. Assange said in court that though he believed the Espionage Act contradicted the First Amendment, he accepted the consequences of soliciting classified information from sources for

publication, AP reported. The judge approved his plea, sentenced him to the five years he had already spent in the U.K. fighting extradition, pronouncing him a "free man." Julian Assange landed in the Australian capital Canberra on June 26. His wife Stella Assange and their two children have been in Australia awaiting his release. While it is not yet clear what Mr. Assange's plans are, his lawyer Barry Pollack has said, "WikiLeaks' work will continue and Mr. Assange, I have no doubt, will be a continuing force for freedom of speech and transparency in government."

Amazon joins exclusive club, crossing \$2 trillion in stock market value for the first time

Amazon joined the exclusive \$2 trillion club Wednesday after Wall Street investors pushed the value of the e-commerce giant's stock past that threshold. Shares in Amazon.com Inc. finished the day up almost 4%, giving the Seattle-based company a stock market valuation of \$2.01 trillion. Its stock has gained 52% in the past 12 months, partly driven by enthusiasm for the company's investments in artificial intelligence.

Amazon now joins Google's parent Alphabet, software behemoth Microsoft, iPhone maker Apple and chip maker Nvidia among companies with valuations of at least \$2 trillion. Last week, Nvidia hit \$3 trillion and briefly became the most valuable company on Wall Street. Nvidia's chips are used to power many AI applications and its valuation has soared as a result.

Amazon has also been making big investments in AI as global interest has grown in the technology. Most of the focus has been on business-focused products, including AI models and a chatbot called Q, which Amazon makes available to businesses that use its cloud computing unit AWS. "A big part of the valuation boost has



been cloud and AI," said Wedbush tech analyst Dan Ives. "Amazon is going to be a major player in the AI revolution."

In April, Amazon CEO Andy Jassy said that AI capabilities have reaccelerated AWS' growth and that it was on pace for \$100 billion in annual revenue. The unit's growth slowed last year as companies cut down on costs amid high inflation. Amazon has also invested \$4 billion in the San Francisco-based AI company Anthropic to de-

velop so-called foundation models that underpin generative AI systems. In addition, Amazon makes and designs its own AI chips. Outside of its cloud business, Amazon has cut costs significantly since late 2022, laying off more than 27,000 corporate employees across several divisions. It reported revenue and profits for the first quarter of the year, aided by growth in AWS as well as its core retail business and advertising.

The Post Office Act, 2023 and concerns about privacy infringement

This transformative legislation can potentially revamp the functioning of India Post, the state-owned postal service, but at the same time raises concerns related to the violation of individual privacy. The present Act repealed the 125-year-old Indian Post Office Act, 1898 ("1898 Act"), which was introduced during the colonial period. The provisions and concerns

Section 9 of the Act, 2023 allows the Union government to, by notification, empower any officer to "intercept, open or detain any item" in the interest of state security, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, emergency, public safety, or contravention of other laws. This provision gives unbridled powers to government authorities, leading to concerns about potential misuse and infringement of individual privacy. The change from "public emergency" to just "emergency" in the present Act compared to the 1898 Act might seem like a minor difference but it has significant legal implications. In the 1898 Act, the term has a higher legal threshold as it implies a more serious situation that threatens national security or public safety on a large scale. However, in the new act, the term is much broader and less defined: It could be interpreted to encompass a wider range of situations, potentially including less serious events. The Supreme Court in the *Hukam Chand vs Union of India* (1976) observed that the term 'public emergency' is not explicitly defined in the statute but its scope is inferred from the context of the section. The phrase 'occurrence of any public emergency' is connected with 'public safety,' wherein, these two phrases appear to take colour from each other and concern issues like the sovereignty and integrity of India, state security, foreign relations, public order, and preventing incitement to offences. The authority must form an opinion on the occurrence of a 'public emergency' considering these factors to take appropriate action.

The Supreme Court in *The Communist Party of India (Marxist), Maharashtra Unit and Another vs Commissioner Of Police, Greater Bombay and Another* (1994), while relying on the above-mentioned judicial pronouncement, held that the above decision of the top court would squarely apply to the interpretation of Section 26 of the 1878 Act. Similarly, the expression "in the interest of public safety or tranquillity" will take its colour from the expression "occurrence of public emergency." The resort can also be had to the doctrine of 'nec tunc a sociis' (knowing with the association), which says that when two or more words which are susceptible of analogous meaning are coupled together, they are understood to be used in their cognate sense. Under this doctrine, the meaning of questionable or doubtful words may be ascertained by reference to the other words or phrases associated with it. In another case, the Supreme Court in *PUCI vs Union of India* (1996) observed that a just and fair procedure must exist to regulate the power of interception. In the absence of any procedure, it would not be possible to safeguard the citizen's rights enshrined under Article 19(1)(a) as well as Article 21 of the Constitution of India.



Not only this, but Section 10 of the new act exempts the Post Office and its officer from "any liability by reason of any loss, misdelivery, delay, or damage in course of any service provided by the Post Office," except such liability as may be prescribed. This section further limits the accountability of the postal service, leaving citizens with limited recourse in case of grievances. In the case of *Dr Ravi Agarwal v. Speed Post, Rajasthan University*, (2019), the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC) observed that the person who sent a speed post is a consumer under the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 as he had paid the charges for the same. Section 6 of the Act, 1898 will not give immunity to the department or the employee if an employee is found delinquent in his duty if an inquiry is done, whereas in the present case, the department has not conducted any inquiry though it was possible to conduct such an inquiry as the complaint was received when the records were not weeded out. Also, Section 6 of the 1898 Act specifies that its exemption does not apply when the Central Government has explicitly undertaken liability. In the case of speed post, the government assumes responsibility for timely delivery and refunds if items are not delivered, misdelivered, or delayed. Therefore, this section does not apply to issues related to the deficiency in the delivery of speed post articles. As per Section 7(2) of the Act, 2023, "If any person refuses or neglects to pay the charges referred to in subsection (1), such amount shall be recoverable as if it were an arrear of land revenue due from him." Despite the government's claims of improving citizen-centric services, the present Act appears to grant the Post Office broad powers to recover dues from users, even when the quality of service remains questionable.

India Post's challenges are not lim-

ited to the draconian provisions of the Act, but also the lack of a clear regulatory framework to ensure fair competition, consumer protection, and data privacy in the evolving postal and courier services industry (Janakiraman, 2006). The Supreme Court in *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) & Anr. vs Union of India & Ors.* (2017) observed that the right to communication is a part of the right to privacy and thus, it is protected under Article 21 of the Constitution. As highlighted by Bhandari and Sane in a paper titled "Towards a Privacy Framework for India in the Age of the Internet" (2016): "Concerns of privacy also exist in the private sector, with the advent of big data rendering obsolete many of the traditional methods of de-identification. These concerns assume an increased importance in light of the outsourcing industry in India, which makes it all the more important for

companies to adopt privacy policies that focus on the security of the personal data." In conclusion, while the present Act aims to modernise India Post, the absence of robust safeguards and the retention of draconian provisions from the colonial era raise significant concerns. The lack of safeguards in the new Act could enable the government to conduct mass surveillance of citizens and undermine the right to privacy. The lack of specific criteria for invoking powers allows for subjective interpretations by authorities, potentially leading to misuse. Consequently, citizens may be discouraged from using the postal system for fear of their communications being intercepted. Further, the Act does not specify procedures for interception or notification to the sender if their item is detained and lacks clear mechanisms to hold authorities accountable for misuse of these powers.

Leopard scare continues in Shamshabad

Hyderabad: Three days after locals first suspected that a leopard was on the move in their locality in Ghansmiyaguda of Shamshabad mandal, the area is still in the grip of fear. The situation has prompted officials to set up cages and camera traps to confirm the presence of a leopard.

The latest episode of a leopard in Shamshabad, after one was captured from the premises of the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport last month, began on Sunday when a few dogs and a calf were attacked by a wild animal. Villagers presumed it to be a leopard attack but Forest officials said it could be a hyena or a large dog breed. With the villagers expressing

their concerns, Forest officials had increased patrolling, especially during night in the area. Yet, there was no sign of any pug mark and scat of a leopard. Apart from intensifying patrolling, the Forest officials have now set up two cages and installed camera traps at different locations in the area.

It has been two days but no images were captured in the cameras so far, a forest official said, adding that patrolling would continue in the area for the next few days. Earlier, people in the Shamshabad area were living in fear after a leopard strayed into the International airport premises.