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 Modi kick-starts Ben-Betwa project



WORLD | PAGE 09
 Russia bombs Ukrainian energy infra on Christmas
 Launches 78 air, ground and sea-launched missiles, 106 Shahed and other drones



SPORT | PAGE 10
 India look to break deadlock at MCG; focus on Rohit, Kohli

In a nutshell

21 killed in Mozambique strife
MAPUTO: Violence that engulfed Mozambique after the country's highest court confirmed ruling Frelimo party presidential candidate Daniel Chapo as the winner of disputed October 9 elections killed at least 21 people, including two police officers, authorities said. Mozambique Interior Minister Pascoal Ronda said a wave of violence and looting was sparked by the court's announcement a day earlier. **AP**

Man tries to set himself ablaze

NEW DELHI: A man in his early 30s tried to immolate himself near the new Parliament building on Wednesday afternoon, an official of the Delhi Fire Service said. A call regarding the incident was received around 3.35 pm and a fire tender was pressed into service. The security personnel deployed near Parliament rushed the man identified as Jitendra, a resident of UP, to the Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital. **PTI**

BPCL to build unit in Andhra

NEW DELHI: Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) has picked Andhra Pradesh for setting up a new oil refinery-cum-petrochemical complex, which may be the last greenfield project in India which has detailed a very ambitious energy transition plan to net zero emissions. In a stock exchange filing, BPCL said its board "accorded its approval to commence pre project activities". **BUSINESS PAGE 8**

Tributes paid to Vajpayee

NEW DELHI: President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi were among the dignitaries who joined a prayer ceremony at Sadaiv Atal, the memorial of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, on Wednesday to pay tributes to him on his birth centenary. Union Ministers, including Amit Shah and JP Nadda, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge besides BJP allies Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, also paid homage to the BJP stalwart. **PTI**

CHICKEN RATES IN HYDERABAD

Farm.....	Rs. 103
Retail live.....	Rs. 125
With skin.....	Rs. 181
Skinless.....	Rs. 206
Egg Rates (12 eggs).....	Rs. 82

Azerbaijan plane crashes, 38 dead

29 survive; weather forces Embraer 190 to change its planned course



Wreckage of Azerbaijan Airlines Embraer 190 near the airport of Aktai in Kazakhstan. — Photo: AP

AP MOSCOW
 An Azerbaijani airliner with 67 people onboard crashed on Wednesday near the Kazakhstani city of Aktai, killing 38 people and leaving 29 survivors.

Deputy Prime Minister Kanat Bozumbaev disclosed the figures while meeting with Azerbaijani officials. The Embraer 190 was en route from the Azerbaijani capital of Baku to the Russian city of Grozny in the North Caucasus when it was diverted and attempted an emergency landing 3 km from Aktai, Azerbaijan Airlines said.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said it was too soon to speculate on the reasons behind the crash, but

said the weather had forced the plane to change from its planned course. "The information provided to me is that the plane changed its course between Baku and Grozny due to worsening weather conditions and headed to Aktai airport, where it crashed upon landing," he said.

Russia's civil aviation authority, Rosaviatsia, said preliminary information showed that the pilots diverted to Aktai after a bird strike led to an emergency on board. According to Kazakh officials, those aboard the plane included 42 Azerbaijani citizens, 16 Russian nationals, six Kazakhs and three Kyrgyzstan nationals. Azerbaijan's prosecutor general's office previously said 32 of the 67 people on board survived the crash, but told journalists that the number wasn't final.

Mobile phone footage circulating online appeared to show the aircraft making a steep descent before smashing into the ground in a fireball. Other footage showed part of its fuselage ripped away from the wings and the rest of the aircraft, lying upside in the grass. The footage corresponded to the plane's colours and its registration number. Some of the videos posted on social media showed survivors dragging fellow passengers away from the wreckage.

Flight-tracking data from FlightRadar24.com showed the aircraft making what appeared to be a figure-eight once nearing the airport in Aktai. **(SEE PAGE 2)**

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TG faces double blow due to Centre's bias, State's apathy

Injustice continues in release of grants-in-aid and CSS funds

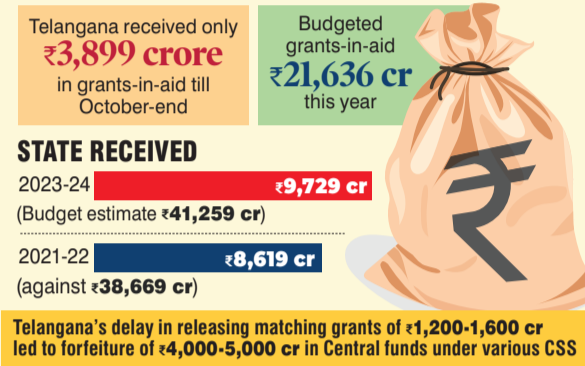
STATE BUREAU Hyderabad

Telangana's development trajectory faces a major setback due to the Centre's alleged partisan approach in release of grants-in-aid and the State government's apathy in releasing matching grants under Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS). The State has received a mere Rs 3,899 crore in grants-in-aid from the Centre until October-end, a stark shortfall against the budgeted Rs 21,636 crore.

This trend of reduced allocations has persisted over the years, with Telangana receiving Rs 9,729 crore in 2023-24 against a Budget estimate of Rs 41,259 crore and just Rs 8,619 crore in 2021-22 against Rs 38,669 crore. States governed by BJP or its allies reportedly fare better in allocations, raising con-

Stark shortfall

THE TREND OF REDUCED ALLOCATIONS HAS PERSISTED OVER THE YEARS. HERE'S A LOOK AT THE NUMBERS



cerns about bias in fund disbursement. Compounding the crisis, Telangana's delay in releasing matching grants of Rs 1,200 crore-Rs 1,600 crore may cause the State to forfeit Rs 4,000-5,000 crore in Central funds under various CSS, which are report-

edly set to lapse by the month-end. The key CSS grants require the State to contribute 20-50 per cent of the funds for their implementation.

The Centre has rejected requests for deadline extensions, leaving Telan-

gana's development projects at risk. Under the CSS, Telangana received only Rs 5,387 crore in 2022-23 and Rs 6,158 crore in 2023-24 under the BRS regime from the Centre.

However, the Congress government has pegged allocations amounting to Rs 15,168 crore during the current fiscal. Though the Centre released its share, the State government is yet to release matching grants.

Sources indicate that the Centre's stance remains firm, requiring the State to contribute its share in matching grants to receive funds.

With dwindling tax revenue and mounting fiscal pressures, Telangana's inability to secure crucial funds could further strain its finances and slow infrastructure and welfare initiatives.

Gunfight breaks out in Manipur fringe village

IMPHAL

A gunfight broke out between two armed groups in Manipur's Imphal East district on Wednesday morning, police said.

Armed men fired from the hilltops of Kangpokpi district, targeting the Sinam Kom village. Armed 'village volunteers' deployed at the foothills retaliated, leading to the gunfight, they said. Additional security forces were deployed in the area following the incident, they

added. No injuries were reported so far, police said.

On Tuesday night, a gunfight broke out between armed men and security forces at Thamnappokpi and nearby Uyok Ching in Imphal East, police said. More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups in Manipur since May last year.

Meanwhile, Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh said the State, which

has been in the grip of ethnic violence since May last year, needs immediate peace and appealed to two communities to reach an understanding. Speaking at a Good Governance Day programme at the state BJP headquarters here, he asserted that the saffron party can save the State as it believes in living together.

"Those who have been trying to divide the State are asking what the government is doing... they are hungry for power," Singh said. **PTI**

Pushpa 2 team gives Rs 2 cr to stampede victim's kin

CITY BUREAU Hyderabad

The team of *Pushpa 2: The Rule* on Wednesday announced a financial assistance of Rs 2 crore to the family of Sritej, who is undergoing treatment at a private hospital after sustaining injuries in a stampede at Sandhya theatre on December 4 during the movie's premier show.

Film producer Allu Arvind, father of actor Allu Arjun, who played the lead character of Pushpa, along with director Sukumar, went to KIMS hospital and enquired about the boy's condition with his father and doctors.

Of the Rs 2 crore, Allu Arjun gave Rs 1 crore, while filmmakers Mythri Movies and director Sukumar gave Rs 50 lakh each. Interacting with the media later, they said the boy was recovering and taken off ventilator support. The cheques for Rs 2 crore were given to Telangana Film Development Corporation chairman Dil Raju, who was also present at the hospital.

Dil Raju said members of the Telugu film industry would meet Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Thursday at 10 am. The child suffered injuries during the stampede at the theatre, while his mother Revathi died in the incident on December 4. Police registered a case and arrested Allu Arjun and others.

Another tribal student dies

STATE BUREAU Kurnam Bheem Asifabad

A Class VII girl student died of fever and stomachache at Jaduguda village on Wednesday. This is the third such incident reported within a month.

Sources said Athram Parvathi (12) breathed her last at her home soon after returning from a hospital in Utanoor Mandal centre. She was studying at a government school, run by the Tribal Welfare Department at Rashimetta village in Jainoor Mandal.

Her family said Parvathi, however, was not attending classes and not staying in the hostel since August. She is the only daughter of Bheemrao, a farmer.

On December 21, Venkat Laxmi (19), a D Ed student

Athram Parvathi (12), who had fever and stomachache, breathed her last at home after returning from hospital

of a college in Asifabad died at the hostel after complaining of difficulty in breathing the previous day. She underwent treatment at a government hospital in Asifabad town. She hailed from Andugulaguda village in Bejjur Mandal.

In another incident, Choudari Shailaja, a Class IX student of Ashram school in Wankidi, was hospitalised due to food poisoning on October 31. She died at NIMS.

CELEBRATING BIRTH OF JESUS



People gather at St Mary's Basilica in Secunderabad on Christmas Day.

Clouds, drizzle add to Xmas joy

CITY BUREAU Hyderabad

Cloudy skies, occasional micro-drizzle and the sun trying its best to peep out of the clouds! The weather added to the joy of the ongoing Christmas and year-end season.

Through Wednesday, skies were overcast with several parts witnessing anywhere from 2.8 mm to 1 mm of light showers while the minimum temperatures remained around 20 degrees C, according to the data from automatic weather stations of Telangana Develop-

ment Planning Society (TSDPS). Interestingly, the minimum and maximum temperatures today remained almost the same and hovered between 20 and 22 degrees C.

Uppal received 2.8 mm rainfall, followed by 2 mm in Hayathnagar and Sithaphalmandi-Marredpally.

In districts, the rainfall in several parts of Warangal district ranged from 10.5-9 mm, followed by 7.3 mm at Mulugu. In its forecast, the India Meteorological Department (IMD)-Hyderabad said similar weather conditions, in addition to a possible fall in temperatures, could continue till Decem-

ber 27. "Light to moderate rain or thundershowers are very likely to occur at isolated places over Telangana. Mist or hazy conditions very likely to prevail during morning hours at isolated pockets in a few districts of Telangana. Minimum temperatures are likely to be above normal by 2 degrees C and 4 degrees C during the next three days," the IMD forecast for Telangana said.

Amateur enthusiast T Balaji (Telangana Weatherman) said it is rare to see such widespread rains on Christmas Day. **(SEE PAGE 2)**

Telugu student falls into frozen US lake, dies

STATE BUREAU Hyderabad

A 26-year-old Telugu student, Abhishek Singhakolli, from Tenali in Andhra Pradesh lost his life on Sunday after falling through ice on a partially frozen lake in northern Arizona in the United States.

The student was one of three individuals who fell through the ice at Woods Canyon Lake. While two of them escaped the frigid water, Abhishek remained missing. **(SEE PAGE 2)**

Anna University student molested, biryani seller held

CHENNAI

An Anna University girl student was allegedly sexually assaulted and a 37-year old man, who sells biryani on the pavement, has been arrested for the crime, police said on Wednesday.

The victim, a student of the varsity's College of Engineering, Guindy, in her complaint said while she was speaking to her male friend on December 23 at about 8 pm, behind a building on the college campus,

they were intimidated by an unknown person, who sexually assaulted her. She lodged the complaint with the Kotturpuram All Women's Police Station and a case was duly registered and a probe was on, a Greater Chennai city police statement said.

"During investigation, based on scientific evidence, Gnanasekaran of Kottur (a neighbourhood near the college) has been arrested for this crime. The suspect has given a confes-

sional statement. He is doing business by running a biryani shop on the pavement," police said.

Further, the police said they were probing whether he had been involved in other crimes. "On the university campus, CCTV cameras have been installed and security officials have been appointed." Police said appropriate action will be taken to enhance security for the students following consultations with university officials. **(SEE PAGE 2)**