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Divine connection: Modi at Maha Kumbh



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US to take over war-ravaged Gaza Strip: Trump
Says all Palestinians living in region should leave and be placed in other countries in Middle East



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Spotlight on Rohit, Kohli as India face England

In a nutshell

Deported Indians land in Amritsar
AMRITSAR: A US military aircraft carrying 104 illegal immigrants from various States landed here on Wednesday, the first such batch of Indians deported by the Trump government as part of a crackdown it resolved to carry out when it was sworn in last month. Of the deportees, 33 each are from Haryana and Gujarat, 30 from Punjab, three each from Maharashtra and UP, and two from Chandigarh. **NATION PAGE 7**

India potential AI leader: Altman
NEW DELHI: Two years after his dismissive stance on India's AI potential raised eyebrows here, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman gave a ringing endorsement to Artificial Intelligence momentum in the country — and billed India as an important market not just for the new-age technology itself but for the ChatGPT creator as well. Altman shared the dais with IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw. **BUSINESS PAGE 8**

Rupee falls 36 p, hits all-time low
MUMBAI: The rupee plunged 36 paise to close at an all-time low of 87.43 against the US dollar on Wednesday, as global trade war concerns fueled risk aversion. Forex traders said the rupee is trading with a negative bias over global trade war as market participants mulled the impact of tariffs being imposed by US and China. Rate cut concerns by the RBI dented investor sentiments. **PTI**

Congress gamble on BC reservations backfires

BC leaders want govt to implement 42% quota in upcoming local body polls

PS DILEEP
HYDERABAD

The Congress government's attempt to gain political advantage with BC reservations ahead of local body elections has backfired.

Instead of strengthening its support among BC communities, the poorly executed plan has triggered fierce internal dissent, severe public backlash and raked up serious credibility concerns, leaving Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy's administration struggling for damage control.

With no major achievements to showcase in its one-year tenure, the Congress had sought to make BC reservations and SC categorisation its key poll strategy for the local body polls. The plan was not just for Telangana as the party aimed to use it as a model for national politics, with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi even citing the Telangana caste survey in Parliament on Monday.

"It was crucial for the party's national strategy to present a statement on the caste survey in Telangana, especially since Karnataka's report has been stalled for seven years. The Karnataka leadership itself is divided on making it public," a senior Congress leader admitted. However, the move backfired in Telangana, where BC leaders are now demanding that the government implement a 42 per cent reservation in the up-



BC leaders burning Congress government's caste census survey report in Nalgonda on Wednesday.

coming local body polls. Revanth Reddy's admission in the Assembly, that increasing BC reservations requires a constitutional amendment, has also exposed the Congress's strategy to shift the blame onto the BJP-led Centre. The party also tried to corner the BRS for failing to implement higher BC quotas during its tenure. But, instead of consolidating support, the Congress's move has only deepened divisions within the party and alienated key voter groups.

Caste census controversy
The caste census, projected as the foundation for the Congress' reservation promises, has lost credibility even among party leaders. **(SEE PAGE 2)**

KTR demands apology from Rahul

STATE BUREAU
Hyderabad

BRS working president KT Rama Rao has charged the Congress with backstabbing Backward Classes (BCs) in Telangana by conducting a flawed caste census and demanded that Congress Lok Sabha leader Rahul Gandhi apologise for misleading Parliament about its completion.

He slammed the Congress for manipulating BC population data and failing to fulfill its promise of 42 per cent reservation in local

SLAMS CONGRESS FOR MANIPULATING BC POPULATION DATA, FAILING TO FULFIL PROMISE OF 42% RESERVATION IN LOCAL BODY POLLS

body elections. In a strongly worded letter to Congress Lok Sabha leader Rahul Gandhi, Rama Rao criticised that the Congress government deliberately reduced BC numbers to deny them their rightful share in reservations. **(SEE PAGE 2)**

Rs 160-cr expense on caste survey raises eyebrows

HYDERABAD: The Congress government's Rs 160-crore expenditure on the Social, Economic, Employment, Education, Political, and Caste Survey-2024 has sparked controversy, with BC leaders and Opposition questioning the huge spending.

The survey, conducted primarily by local government employees, has raised doubts about the necessity of such high costs. Adding to the concerns, data entry operators responsible for uploading the survey findings have not been paid their salaries for four months, forcing them to protest for their salaries.

Critics argue that while the State claims to empower marginalised communities, it has failed to ensure fair treatment of its own workforce.

The controversy deepens with comparisons to Karnataka's Socio-Economic and Education Survey in 2014, which also cost the exact Rs 160 crore, but remained unpublished due to internal disagreements within the Congress. The situation in Telangana raises concerns that this survey, too, could meet a similar fate. Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy said they cannot divulge complete findings, citing privacy.

BJP set for big comeback in Delhi?



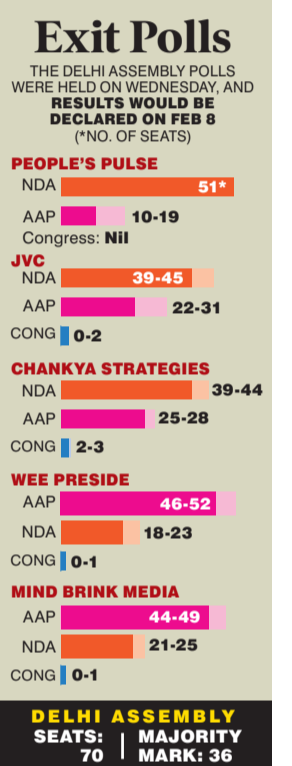
Madhu, a Pakistani Hindu refugee, after voting for the first time in the Delhi Assembly elections, at Majnu Ka Tilla. — Photo: PTI

NEW DELHI

Several exit polls on Wednesday predicted a victory for the BJP over the ruling AAP in the Delhi Assembly polls, while the Congress was projected to make no significant gains from last elections.

Two exit polls, however, predicted a victory for the Aam Admi Party (AAP), and as many showed a close contest between them, with an edge for the BJP. The Election Commission will announce the official results after the counting of on February 8.

Exit polls are projections made by election survey agencies based on interviews of voters as they come out after casting their votes. These may vary widely from the actual results. In the 2020 Delhi polls, most exit polls got their predictions wrong. Among the exit polls that predicted a BJP victory, the People's Pulse showed the NDA was likely to get 51 to 60 seats, while the AAP may get 10-19 seats. The Congress, it claimed, will not be



able to open its account. There are 1.55 crore voters in Delhi, of which nearly 58 per cent exercised their franchise till 5 pm. **AGENCIES**

Techie jumps to death

HYDERABAD: A software employee died by suicide in his house at Suraram Colony in Jeedimetla late on Sunday. Financial problems are suspected to be the reason for the suicide. Tej Swaroop Reddy (32), a native of Chittoor district in Andhra Pradesh was working for a software firm in Hitec City. He was residing with his wife Nagalaxmi and two children in a rented house in Krishamma Laxmi Nagar Colony in Suraram. As per available information, Tej Swaroop hanged from the ceiling fan in the bedroom in the absence of his family members. The Suraram police have launched an investigation.

'Debt paid multiple times'

BENGALURU: Fugitive businessman Vijay Mallya on Wednesday claimed before the Karnataka High Court that the Rs 6,200-crore debt he owes to banks has been recovered "multiple times over", and sought a statement, detailing the amounts recovered from him, United Breweries Holdings Limited (UBHL, now in liquidation) and other certificate debtors. The HC issued a notice to banks in response to the petition filed by Mallya on February 3. Justice R Devdas directed the banks to respond by February 13. As an interim relief, the petition also sought a stay on any further asset sales by banks under the amended recovery certificate until clarity is provided on the full settlement of the debt. Senior advocate Sajjan Poovayya, representing Mallya, argued that the winding-up order against Kingfisher Airlines and its holding company, UBHL, had been upheld at all judicial levels, including the SC. Poovayya contended that the debts had already been recovered. **(REPORT PAGE 7)**

Three of family killed in wall collapse

CITY BUREAU
Hyderabad

Three people died and another person was injured, when a huge portion of a retaining mud wall collapsed on them at a construction site at LB Nagar on Wednesday. The victims were identified as K Veeriah (52), Ramu (22) and Vasu (19), all from the same family and natives of Sitaramapuram thanda in Khammam district. Another worker Dasarath was injured in the incident.

The incident occurred when the workers with the help of earth excavators were digging up the ground to construct the basement for an upcoming hotel. According to the police, the workers were on the basement area just adjacent to the mud wall, when the wall, which had allegedly become weak, suddenly collapsed on them.



Rescue workers at the site where a huge portion of a retaining mud wall collapsed in LB Nagar, Hyderabad.

"One worker had seen stones and the mud wall collapsing and moved from there. By the time he could alert the victims and the lat-

ter could escape, a huge portion of it collapsed. They were buried to death," said an official. On being alerted by the workers, the LB

Nagar police along with the Fire Department and NDRF personnel rushed to the spot and took up rescue operation with the help of work-

ers and earth excavator. After about an hour of efforts, the bodies were retrieved from under the debris. A case was registered.

TTD cracks whip on 18 non-Hindu employees

STATE BUREAU
Hyderabad

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) has cracked the whip on some of its employees, who while being on its rolls were actively practising non-Hindu religions.

The TTD Board has identified 18 such employees and barred them from participating in any religious functions of the TTD until further orders, according to a memo issued by TTD Executive Officer J Syamala Rao.

Through the memo, the EO asked the Chief Engineer of TTD, Deputy EO (HR) to verify the postings (of the employees) and "ensure that they are not to be posted in (i) Tirumala (ii) any temple (iii) any religious programme related works post. **(SEE PAGE 2)**

FinMin officials told not to use AI tools

NEW DELHI

The Finance Ministry has directed its officers not to download or use AI tools and apps such as ChatGPT and DeepSeek in office computers and devices, saying they pose confidentiality risks to data and documents.

In a communication last month to all its departments, the Ministry said AI tools/AI apps in office devices may be strictly avoided. "It has been determined that AI tools and AI apps (such as ChatGPT, DeepSeek etc) in the office



computers and devices pose risks for confidentiality of Govt, data and documents," Department of Expenditure under the ministry said in a note on January 29.

The move comes at a time when countries like Australia and Italy have

shielded their official systems from Chinese DeepSeek over privacy and data safety concerns.

Currently, Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, which has developed artificial intelligence chatbot ChatGPT is on a whirlwind tour to India.

He is meeting top government officials, industry captains and participated in a fireside chat on Wednesday morning. DeepSeek's latest AI offering has drawn global attention for its low-cost model — at just \$6 million against global average of billions of dollars. Further, DeepSeek's R1 used a fraction of compute power as compared to established AI models like ChatGPT.

DeepSeek overtook ChatGPT as the top-ranked free app on Apple's Appstore, as the US tech industry watched in disbelief. **PTI**

US will take over Gaza: Trump

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON

In a surprising announcement, President Donald Trump said the US "will take over" the war-ravaged Gaza Strip, "own it" and undertake economic development there that will create "unlimited numbers of jobs and housing". He made these remarks on Tuesday during a joint press conference in the White House with visiting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu standing beside him. **(REPORTS PAGE 9)**

Midnight drama over dumpyard

STATE BUREAU
Sangareddy

Despite strong opposition from locals, the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) officials began building a dumpyard at Pyara Nagar in Gummadala mandal.

Fearing protests, the GHMC authorities took up the construction on Tuesday midnight, stirring controversy. Following information, several local BRS and Congress leaders rushed to the spot to stop the works. However, the police took them into custody



BRS MLA Sunita Laxmareddy and others protesting against the proposed dumpyard at Gummadiala on Wednesday.

and shifted them to police stations. The incident triggered tension many from

Pyara Nagar and Nallavally villages arrived at the spot to stop the works. **(SEE PAGE 2)**