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In a nutshell

India, Pakistan hold flag meeting

JAMMU: India and Pakistan held a flag meeting along the LoC in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district on Friday, in an effort to de-escalate tension after several recent incidents of cross-border firing and an IED attack, official sources said. The brigade commander-level flag meeting took place in Chakkan-Da-Bagh crossing point, with both sides stressing the need to maintain peace. P71

Language row intensifies

NEW DELHI/CHENNAI: The language row involving the BJP-led Central government and the ruling DMK in Tamil Nadu intensified on Friday with Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan asking the southern State to rise above politics, while the regional party hit back saying it won't budge from its two-language policy. NATION PAGE 7

Kash Director is FBI Director

NEW YORK: New FBI Director Kash Patel has vowed to "rebuild" trust in the bureau as he becomes the first Indian-American to lead the country's premier law enforcement agency after being confirmed by the US Senate. The Republican-led Senate narrowly voted to confirm 44-year-old Patel on Thursday. The Senate voted 51 to 49 to confirm Patel. WORLD PAGE 9

Ryots hit by new curbs on water drawals

Officials seize pumpsets used for lifting water from canals

STATE BUREAU
 HYDERABAD

Farmers under the SRSP ayacut, as well as parts of the Nagarjuna Sagar Left Canal network, are facing severe water scarcity, and the new curbs put in place to regulate the supplies are hurting them more.

Authorities have begun to seize the pumpsets and motors used for drawing of water from irrigation canals leading to an uproar among the farmers in different districts, as standing crops are bound to wither away due to non-availability of water.

The tail-end farmers, who either received no supply or only partial supply, are accustomed to drawing water using motors from ponds and canals nearby. With the promised water supplies under the canal system failing to materialise, farmers have resorted to using their pumpsets to save their crops.

The Rabi paddy is currently in a crucial flowering stage, a time when it requires more water. Failing to provide the necessary wetting will result in con-



Dismantled pumpsets in an SRSP canal. Tail-end farmers, who either receive no supply or only partial supply, are accustomed to drawing water using motors from ponds and canals nearby.

siderable yield losses. The farmers have been struggling as water supplies from major and medium projects are dwindling, prompting them to use available sources. However, irrigation officials, during a recent State-level review on Rabi, have made this a serious issue. The authorities have reportedly sought the sup-

port of police and revenue departments to regulate water supply. As part of the initiative, pumpsets and motors used by farmers to draw water from canals and distributaries are being removed. In some places, they have been seized, triggering an outcry among the farming community.

Farmers under the SRSP stage II ayacut in Mahabubnagar district have been questioning the new curbs. Farmers in Mannegudem and Rayigudem village pointed out that contractors involved in illegal sand quarrying in streams and drying up canals can get away with their practices. (SEE PAGE 2)

Govt goes back on 'free LRS' promise

Decides to collect charges for regularising unauthorised layouts, offers 25% rebate to those who pay before March 31

STATE BUREAU
 Hyderabad

After having promised people that Layout Regularisation Scheme (LRS) would be implemented for free, the Congress government has now decided to go ahead with the collection of charges for regularising unauthorised layouts under the scheme.

In the run up to Assembly elections in the State, the Congress leaders had assured the people that after coming to power, LRS would be implemented for free. In October 2020, the then CLP leader Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka had slammed the then TRS government for collecting the LRS fee.

He even called the move a bankrupt idea of the government to fill its empty coffers and had asked the people not

Aims to collect Rs 50,000 cr, but is betraying people after promising to regularise land for free, says Bandi

to pay the regularisation fee. Similarly, the then TPCC president N Uttam Kumar Reddy had asked people not to apply for LRS and assured to regularise the plots for free after Congress comes to power.

On October 9, 2020, the then TPCC president had said it was most inhuman scheme to fleece people. "Congress will go to the people with NO LRS- NO TRS slogan," Uttam Kumar Reddy had said then.

In sharp contrast to the assurances given in the past, the Congress government is now asking the LRS applicants to pay the fee and is even offering 25 per cent rebate to those, who pay the fee before March 31 this year. Around 25.44 lakh applications were filed under the LRS across the State.

Officials said, under 4.13 lakh were filed under different municipal corporations, 10.54 lakh from municipalities and 10.76 lakh from Pan-

chayats. For open plots and non-layout, applicants paid Rs.1000. Similarly, for large layouts Rs.10,000 was paid by the applicants.

Since last February, the government has directed the officials to expedite the LRS processing. However, the Bharat Rashtra Samithi has been demanding the Congress government to fulfill electoral promise and implement the LRS scheme for free.

When the scheme was launched by BRS government in the past, the Congress leaders had demanded that regularisation should be done for free, former Minister T Harish Rao had said. Taking a 'U' turn, now the Congress government was directing the applicants to pay regularisation fee, he had remarked.

Likewise, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Bandi Sanjay said the Congress was betraying the people by collecting LRS fee. The Congress government aims to collect Rs 50,000 crore through Layout Regularisation Scheme (LRS). But it was betraying the people after having promised to regularise the lands for free during the Assembly elections, the Union Minister said during his visit to Peddapalli on Friday.

Congress, BJP trade barbs over USAID row

NEW DELHI

A political row erupted on Friday after a media report claimed \$21 million aid by USAID was meant for Bangladesh and not India, with the Congress demanding an apology from the BJP and the ruling party accusing Rahul Gandhi of colluding with foreign forces to weaken India.

The Congress alleged that the BJP's narrative was aimed at diverting attention from its own use of foreign funds to "destabilise" past governments led by it. It also demanded the government come out with a white paper on the USAID funding as well as funding by other such agencies in India.

The BJP dismissed as "cover up" the media report that the \$21 million fund was for Bangladesh and not India and called Rahul Gandhi a

The information put out by the US administration regarding certain US activities and funding are deeply troubling...

— RANDHIR JAISWAL, MEA SPOKESPERSON

"traitor". Both parties held press conferences to accuse each other of weakening the governments in India by using foreign funds.

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, meanwhile, termed the USAID funding as "deeply troubling" that has led to concerns over foreign interference in India's internal affairs. Asked about

the issue at the weekly MEA briefing, he said relevant departments and authorities are looking into the information put out by the American administration regarding certain US activities and funding.

"We have seen information that has been put out by the US administration regarding certain US activities and funding. These are obviously very deeply troubling," Jaiswal said. "Facts show all may have jumped the gun. That \$21 million ... was sanctioned in 2022 for Bangladesh, not India," the Indian Express report said, citing documents.

US President Donald Trump claimed the \$21 million funding to India for "voter turnout" was a "kick-back" scheme, as he continued to attack the previous Biden administration over the now cancelled aid. P71



'Entire journey was an escapade'

Actor Arjun Kapoor talks about *Mere Husband Ki Biwi*

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ED slaps Rs 3.44 crore penalty on BBC WS India

NEW DELHI: The Enforcement Directorate has levied a penalty of more than Rs 3.44 crore on BBC World Service India for alleged contravention of foreign direct investment (FDI) regulations, agency officials said on Friday. The federal probe agency also fined three of its directors with more than Rs 1.14 crore each as it issued an adjudication order against the British broadcaster under the Foreign Exchange Management Act. The adjudication proceedings were initiated after a show-cause notice was issued on August 4, 2023, to BBC WS India, its three directors, and the finance head for various "contraventions". BBC WS India "did not" reduce their FDI to 26 per cent, and kept it at 100 per cent in "gross violation". P71

Class X boy shot dead by classmate in Bihar

SASARAM: A boy was shot dead, while another suffered injuries following a clash between two groups of students in Bihar's Rohtas district on Friday. The Class X student, Amit Kumar, succumbed to injuries, and his classmate has been detained for the crime, police said. "An altercation took place between two groups of students inside an exam centre in Sasaram. When Amit and another student, Sanjiv Kumar, were returning home in an autorickshaw, they were stopped by one of their classmates who allegedly shot at them and fled," he said. P71

Banjara hotel raided for unpaid property tax

CITY BUREAU
 Hyderabad

For failing to clear property taxes, popular star hotel in Banjara Hills has reportedly been seized by the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC).

According to information available, Banjara hotel in the upscale Banjara Hills was seized by the civic authorities as tax dues amounting to Rs 1.40 crore were allegedly not paid.

For the accumulating tax dues, the municipal corporation is said to have issued several notices. With the hotel management failing to clear the taxes, the move to seize the hotel was said to have been taken. More details are awaited.

Low pupil-teacher ratio rings the alarm bell in Telangana schools

YUVRAJ AKULA
 Hyderabad

The low pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) is ringing alarm bells in schools across Telangana. As per the norms of the Right to Education 2009 Act, the PTR should be 30:1 at primary level and 35:1 at the upper primary level, the current ratio reflects a different situation.

As per the recent Telangana Statistical Abstract released by the Telangana Development Planning Society, Planning Department, the PTR at the primary level is 21:1, while it is 16:1 at the upper primary level. As for high schools, the PTR is 22:1 as against the norm of 30:1. At the primary level, 22 districts have a PTR of less than or equal to the State average, while same is the situation



The northern lights appear over homes in Nuuk, Greenland, on Monday. — Photo: AP

NEW DSC NOTIFICATION FOR FRESH HIRING UNLIKELY

HYDERABAD: With schools recording lower PTR than the prescribed norms and fewer enrollments, the District Selection Committee (DSC) notification for fresh teachers' recruitment in government and local body schools is unlikely to be notified any time soon.

Despite the Telangana government assuring to notify 6,000 teacher vacancies, there are concerns that the recruitment drive may not materialise as teachers are already more in number while the schools are witnessing a drop in enrolment every year. As many as 11,062 teacher vacancies have already been recruited, taking the total teacher count in government and local body schools to 1.13 lakh. In addition, the Education Department recently issued orders appointing 1,382 candidates belonging to DSC 2008 as teachers.

for upper primary level in 21 districts and 23 districts at the high school level.

These figures are largely attributed to a significant drop in school enrolments

over the years. According to officials, the enrolment in the government schools dropped by 2 lakh during this academic year and in the last 10 years, enrolments

came down by around 9 lakh, leaving more teachers and fewer students. Another reason, according to teachers, is the imbalance of teacher strength in schools as per the enrolment. They say some schools with 60 enrolments have four-five teachers, while schools with high enrolment are understaffed leading to an imbalance of the PTR.

Some educators contended that lower PTR helps teachers focus better on each student. "The government needs to regulate teachers as per the strength in schools. In the last 10 years, nearly eight lakh students moved from public to private schools. This has also resulted in low PTR," said Chava Ravi, president of Telangana United Teachers' Federation.

KRMB emergency meet postponed to Monday

STATE BUREAU
 Hyderabad

The Krishna River Management Board (KRMB) has postponed its special emergency meeting to February 24. The meeting, scheduled to be held on Friday, was put off following a request from AP officials. The KRMB has sent a special communication to both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana seeking their mandatory participation in the rescheduled meeting.

Meanwhile, in response to the postponement of the meeting, the Telangana government has demanded that Andhra Pradesh halt all water withdrawals from the joint projects of the Srisailem and Nagarjuna Sagar forthwith. (SEE PAGE 2)

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