

CM Revanth Reddy Accuses Centre of Blocking US Visit

Discriminating against Telangana



Hyderabad, Aug 24 (GNS): Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy on Monday accused the BJP-led government at the Centre of discriminating against Telangana by denying him political clearance to visit the United States, saying the decision was an insult to the four crore people of the state and an attempt to block its development.

Revanth Reddy, who returned to the city earlier in the day, questioned how the Centre could dictate terms to a democratically elected Chief Minister and alleged that the decision reflected "Gujarat supremacy" and was against the principles of cooperative federalism.

Addressing a press conference here, Revanth Reddy said Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel

had been permitted to visit the US during the same period as his proposed tour to attract investments, while approval for his own visit had been denied.

"Why am I being stopped from going abroad even as the Gujarat Chief Minister was allowed to do so?" Revanth Reddy asked. He said Patel had toured the US for eight days and participated in programmes under the Vibrant Gujarat initiative.

"Why did they give permission to him and not to the Telangana CM?" Revanth Reddy asked, alleging that the Centre and Prime Minister Narendra Modi were repeatedly displaying an "anti-Telangana ideology" and conspiring to divert investments from Telangana to Gujarat.

The Chief Minister al-

leged that Modi was acting "as a Gujarati, not as the Prime Minister of India" and accused him of functioning like a "brand ambassador for Gujarat". "What is the political angle behind denying me permission? It's simple. Modi is BJP; Revanth Reddy is Congress. Modi is Gujarat; Revanth is Telangana. Is this the political angle behind denying permission?" he asked.

He also pointed out that the Prime Minister had travelled to several countries and that the Gujarat Chief Minister had undertaken numerous foreign visits. "How can Modi or the Centre dictate terms to the Telangana CM?" he asked, stressing that the denial was not directed merely at him but amounted to disrespect towards the people of Telangana.

Mamata Banerjee targets BJP govt over Annapurna Yojana protests

Kolkata, Aug 24 (GNS): Former Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday targeted the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in West Bengal following women's protests across the state over alleged delay in disbursement of monthly allowance under the Annapurna Bhandar financial assistance scheme.

In a Facebook live, Banerjee alleged that the state government was slashing the number of beneficiaries on the pretext of ineligibility. She said she would try to make alternative arrangements for those women deprived of the scheme.

"We had launched the



Lakshmir Bhandar scheme to make women financially self sufficient. However, the BJP is considering religion and race to provide Annapurna Bhandar money. It is violating its pre poll promise of providing Annapurna Yojana money to all women and is now cheating them,"

Banerjee said.

She added, "Women in the state have to walk on the streets crying for the Annapurna Yojana. We used to give Lakshmir Bhandar to about 2 crore 42 lakh mothers and sisters. We even gave money in March before the Assembly elections. However, after the elections, about 75 per cent of women have stopped getting the allowance. If we do a complete survey, we will know the details. There were no conditions imposed at the time of the promise. But now when you go to apply, it is said that you have not fulfilled the eligibility criteria.

Students are the future of the largest democracy in the world: Gyanesh Kumar

New Delhi, Aug 24 (UNI)The Election Commission of India (ECI) organised the second regional conference on "Electoral Literacy Clubs (ELC 2.0) and ECINET" in Lucknow today. The conference focuses on strengthening electoral literacy and democratic awareness among young citizens through educational institutions.

Addressing the participants comprising students and teachers from schools and colleges across Uttar Pradesh, describing stu-

dents as the future of the nation, CEC Gyanesh Kumar said the ELCs are imperative to carry forth the knowledge and the understanding of electoral processes and enrich democracy.

CEC Gyanesh Kumar stated how elections in India are held strictly as per the constitution of India, law and instructions issued by ECI and is conducted transparently under the concurrent audit of political parties, candidates or their representatives at



all stages. He underlined the need for students and young electors to familiarise students and young electors with India's electoral system, democratic

values, electoral registration, polling and counting processes, and the role and functioning of the Election Commission of India.

Emphasising the importance of engaging young citizens, CEC Shri Gyanesh Kumar stated that their trust and informed participation in the electoral process is an investment in the future of democracy.

ELC 2.0, with the tagline, "Learn Democracy. Lead Democracy.", reinforces the objective of encouraging

young and first-time voters not only to understand democracy but also to participate meaningfully and contribute to its progress.

Earlier in the day Shri Gyanesh Kumar visited his alma mater, Colvin Taluqdar's College and interacted with the teachers and students at the school. Tomorrow, the second day of the visit, CEC Shri Gyanesh Kumar will hold an interaction with Booth Level Officers (BLOs) of Uttar Pradesh.

ELC 2.0 reimagines Elec-

toral Literacy Clubs as structured, visible and digitally enabled platforms across schools, colleges and universities. The initiative envisages continuous, year-round activities to promote electoral literacy among young citizens and electoral awareness within their families, educational institutions and communities. ELC 2.0 will leverage the extensive ECINET digital platform which provides all election related services from roll to poll at the click of a button.

NEET PROTESTS: SC panel to prioritise sexual assault complaints by women

New Delhi, Aug 24 (GNS): The Supreme Court on Monday said the High-Powered Enquiry Committee set up to examine allegations of police violence during the NEET protests has been asked to take up, on priority, complaints of sexual assault faced by women protesters. The court said the panel had been requested to immediately submit an interim report on the issue. The clarification came when senior advocate Shobha Gupta urged the court to take suo motu cognisance of allegations of sexual assault and molestation of women during the July 20 protest at Jantar Mantar. She also asked the court to create a mechanism through which alleged victims could directly send their complaints for examination.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana said the



issue was already before the committee. The CJ said the High-Powered Enquiry Committee would take up on priority the complaints of sexual assault faced by protesters. Referring to the order passed last week, he said, "the committee has been requested to examine it on a priority basis, and immediately submit an interim report".

Justice Bagchi also pointed out that an independent writ petition had been filed on the same cause and the committee had been asked to examine the issue. In

The Supreme Court asked its enquiry panel to prioritise sexual assault complaints from women at the NEET protest. It has also sought an immediate interim report, sharpening scrutiny of alleged police excesses.

her submissions, Gupta referred to reports and accounts of alleged assaults that were circulated widely on social media and said the allegations included a lathi being jabbed into a woman's buttocks.

"I am beseeching the court to take suo motu cognisance of these instances," she said. Gupta urged that the alleged sexual assault cases be dealt with separately and on priority. She suggested that the court could appoint a district judge or designate another authority so that alleged victims could send complaints directly.

"I request that the sexual assault cases be taken up separately and that the court constitute, maybe not a committee, but appoint a district judge or designate someone so that the girls can actually send their complaints directly and those sexual assault cases can be taken up on a priority basis," she said.

Gupta said her specific concern was how the high-powered committee would receive complaints from alleged victims. "There should be an order providing an email ID and designating an officer to whom the complaints can be sent, and it should be given publicity," she submitted, saying such a mechanism would ensure that the allegations reached the committee.

On August 20, the top court formed a five-member high-powered committee headed by former

British virgin islands premier meets FM Sitharaman

New Delhi: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman met British Virgin Islands' Premier and Finance Minister Natalio D. Wheatley here on Monday. Wheatley is leading a delegation of financial services experts to India and is visiting New Delhi, GIFT City, Mumbai, and Bengaluru. He informed Finance Minister Sitharaman that the aim of the visit is to expand the engagement of the British Virgin Islands in India, particularly in the areas of financial services, FinTech, digital transformation, trade, investment promotion, and capacity building.

She outlined that India offers a large and rapidly expanding market for financial services and investment and welcomed the possibility for engagement with the British Virgin Islands in the areas of mutual interest.

Wheatley is leading a 12-member delegation to India for the first-ever Virgin Islands (VI)-India Trade Mission from August 24 to 31. Before leaving for India, Premier Wheatley told the media in the British Virgin Islands that India has the biggest population in the world and is home to multi-million and billion-dollar tech companies.



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Principle

AMITABH KANT

Multiple shocks over the past five years have brought increased global volatility and uncertainty. 2025 has been marked by geopolitical fragmentation, trade uncertainty, supply chain realignments, and a battle for technological supremacy. Amidst this unsettled global environment, India's macroeconomic stability stands out. Growth came in at 8.2% in the latest quarter, surpassing even the most optimistic estimates. Inflation is low, and the fiscal deficit manageable. In the backdrop of multiple external shocks, India's policy has consistently been to strengthen domestic economic resilience.

The bedrock for any stable economy is domestic demand. For the millions of India's households, tax policy plays an important role in stimulating consumption. India has seen both direct and indirect tax reforms this year. In February, the Budget put more money in people's hands by effectively making salaries up to Rs. 12 lakh tax-free. The complex Income-tax Act of 1961 has been simplified by the Income Tax Act, 2025. Then, in September, reforms to the Goods and Services Tax (GST) introduced a two-slab structure and simplified governance. Consumer sentiment has soared, with festive-period sales reaching Rs. 6 trillion. Importantly, these moves are not revenue losses. By spurring consumption and growth, tax collections stand to be higher in coming years, reflecting their impact on

India's Economy in 2025



price elasticity of demand. Domestic consumption constitutes 55-60% of our economy. As consumption increases, so does capacity utilisation. As production reaches capacity, it triggers a fresh wave of investment in the economy, which, in turn, generates its own multiplier effects.

Consumer demand will be only sustainable if supported by durable income growth, which reforms to labour laws will ensure. By consolidating 29 fragmented laws into four modern codes, India's labour framework is more transparent for businesses and more secure for workers. The focus is on fair wages, stronger industrial relations, social security, and workforce safety. These laws will ensure that our growing 640 million-strong workforce prospers and drives India's growth story forward.

As household incomes rise, they have a choice between higher consumption or savings, or both. As formal employment rises, contributions to provident,

pension, and insurance funds will increase. Importantly, globally, such funds are an essential source of capital in domestic capital markets, as they invest in debt and equity in companies, projects, or government bonds. Allowing 100% FDI in insurance will deepen India's capital markets, enhance competition and the quality of service. Raising FDI limits in insurance is both a financial sector reform and an enabler of social security.

Along with a stimulus to investment through demand, the investment climate has also eased considerably this year. The GST reforms were not just rate rationalisations; they have also significantly eased the registration and compliance process. There has been a 90% reduction in registration time from 30 to 3 days for small firms. The Securities Markets Code will strengthen governance of India's capital markets, enhance consumer protection, and reduce the compliance burden. In-

dependent regulators are also facilitating growth. The RBI, for instance, has consolidated 9,000+ circulars into less than 250. Similarly, the IRDAI has constituted a committee to suggest regulatory reforms in the insurance sector. Environmental and building codes have also undergone reforms, moving to a risk-based system of compliance rather than a uniform one. For instance, moving away from a uniform 33% green cover will free up 1.2 lakh hectares of industrial land. Units located in industrial parks with comprehensive environmental clearances will no longer require separate clearances. A newly created 'white category' of industries, will reduce compliance costs for low-risk sectors, while freeing up pollution control board resources for higher-polluting, higher-risk sectors.

The Jan Vishwas reforms decriminalised over 200 minor offences and scrapped hundreds of outdated laws. Furthermore,

many state governments have also come together to decriminalise over 1000 offences. States have also instituted reforms in land, environmental clearances, and construction, allowing faster project clearances. The next step of Jan Vishwas is now in the offing. These moves represent an important signal: that India is moving towards a trust-based economy, rather than a control-based one.

Despite the surrounding volatility and uncertainty, trade will remain crucial to our growth aspirations. In the Monsoon Session, the Parliament modernised India's maritime governance by replacing the Acts of 1908, 1925, and 1958. With these reforms, India's maritime governance framework aligns with global standards. Reducing documentary requirements and strengthening governance will lower logistics costs, enhancing India's competitiveness. Second, the removal of over 200 quality control orders (QCOs) has lifted a significant burden off MSMEs and exporters. At the same time, we have also opened new markets for our exporters through trade deals with the UK, New Zealand, and Oman, as well as the operationalisation of the agreement with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA).

Jobs and exports come from scaled firms. For too long, policy encouraged firms to stay small. Staying small meant that firms were unable to reap the benefits of economies of scale. Now, for the second time in five years, MSME thresholds have been revised upwards.

Aravallis, like old parents, can't be abandoned

Now that the warring factions have returned to their tents at the sounding of the retreat by the honourable Supreme Court's (SC) order of December 29, it is time to dispassionately dissect the battle of the Aravallis.

Has the design of vested interests of turning a mountain into a molehill been defeated or have the saviours of the Aravallis succeeded in making a mountain of a molehill? Will the SC holding its own November 20 order in abeyance stop the alleged destructive mining that has been the bane of these mountains or are the crusaders fighting a lost cause?

Before we dig deep (pun unintended), let it be acknowledged that the goddess of Justice, hitherto blindfolded, has demonstrated that it can both 'see' and 'hear' when it is under vehement, largely justified, attack. The SC found itself in the eye of the storm as people believed it turned a blind eye to environment protection, and cleared the way for the Thar desert sands to travel to the national capital, which is unable to carry the burden of its own smog and mortifying air quality.

It may not serve much purpose to ask if the SC reviewed its earlier order in a fit of contrition or it played to the galleries, or if its unprecedented and uncharacteristic concern for public outcry is an apology without remorse? Cynics might argue that the honourable judges want to be seen running with the hare, having failed to hunt with the hounds.

Even if its suo motu review is seen by many as a judicious move to defuse political tension, the material question is whether it can pave the way for a sensible resolution to a knotty problem. The euphoria of temporary triumph shouldn't cloud the larger concern for legal consistency and judicial fairness.

The Aravallis are geologically categorised as 'residual' mountains, their diminishing caused by millions of years of differential erosion due to the constant flow of water and untrammelled blows of winds.

They are among the oldest mountains in the world, giving India the distinction of being home to the oldest and the youngest, the Himalayas, called the 'fold' mountains. The folds are the result of the upward thrust of colliding tectonic plates, while the residual character is due to their gradual losing of height and denudation. Both are distinct geographical features illustrating natural phenomena that can become catastrophic by anthropogenic activities. The Aravallis have seen withering in the face of natural forces. Man, as a vital instrument of Nature, need not hasten that process.

There is an old saying, "If the mountain will not come to Mahomet, then Mahomet must go to the mountain." In modern times, he has been going to the mountain too often, not to worship it, but to bring back with him its riches, the minerals, severely wounding its ecology in the process and upsetting its natural rhythm. The Aravalli hills and range, spread over Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi, contain important metallic/industrial minerals such as copper, zinc, lead, silver, tungsten, rock phosphate, gypsum, mica, asbestos and bauxite, and building materials like marble, granite, sandstone and limestone. While there is a complete ban on mining in Delhi and a minuscule portion is mined in Haryana, the bulk of the extractive mining takes place in Rajasthan.

While the locals revere the mountains and depend on them for their livelihood, mining contractors and governments have found different, sometimes devious, ways of exploiting them through deficient policies and efficient technologies. In the bargain, they provide material so essentially needed for infrastructure development and economic growth.

Landforms are created by Nature; their taxonomy is manmade; so are the definitions and delineations. The issue of defining the forest and the Aravallis has lingered because of its inherent complexity. In this case, the SC perhaps grappled with the question of how a sustainable mining plan could be made without first identifying the areas in which it could be permitted and was seemingly persuaded by pragmatism induced by a moral anaesthesia while passing its controversial order. The concerns outlined by the SC now, in its December 29 order, are valid. They echo those voiced by the protesters. It is, however, bothersome why they were not kept in view while announcing the November 20 order. How could the court accept a definition without understanding its impact on the ground, both in terms of the extent of actual area covered by the definition and the effect of the permitted activities on the environment?

It would now be critical to prepare models of possible scenarios before arriving at a workable definition for regulating activities in the mountainous range without violating its ecological integrity. If the recommendations on height, slope and distance made by the Forest Survey of India (FSI) in its 2010 report seem too restrictive, let the FSI itself suggest viable alternatives. If there are none, we must learn to live with those restrictions and pay the price of preserving our heritage.

Those with surplus capital, not knowing how to use it imaginatively, find it easy to use it for converting public resources into private goods. It is the duty of the government and regulators to ensure that such public resources are used judiciously for the creation of public goods that lead to public welfare.

The popular outrage at the continuing depredation of Nature got aggravated by the perceived fallibility of the very institutions responsible for protecting public interest and human rights. People expect constitutional institutions to go out of the way to protect them against the might of the vested interests that people can't fight. That is the message, and that possibly will obviate the need for them to 'explain' or defend their judgments through the media. The judges have a right to defend themselves but they have a more fundamental duty to appear fair and just.

The admitted ambiguities in the SC's earlier orders, or the acknowledgment of an error by 'competent' judges in the Unnao rape case, might project the highest judiciary in an introspective mood. However, that doesn't behave its exalted calling and belies popular expectation based on its past stellar record as a saviour of the environment.

Those who work to protect the environment and nurture ecology need a divine sense of altruism because the earth or the trees are incapable of expressing gratitude in words that humans easily understand. They show their benevolence and bounty in ways that sustain life, not please egos.

The Aravallis are not merely a chain of hills to be measured by their height, slope or geographical classification. They form a crucial ecological barrier, influencing ground-water recharge, biodiversity, soil stability and the climate of the regions around them. Any legal or administrative framework that treats them only as parcels of land available for regulated extraction risks overlooking the interconnected ecological services they provide. The challenge, therefore, is to find a balance between development and conservation without allowing either extreme to dominate the debate. Mining and infrastructure are necessary for economic growth and employment, but their benefits cannot justify irreversible damage to natural systems. A transparent assessment of ecological costs, cumulative impacts and the carrying capacity of each region should precede any decision to permit mining.

There is also a pressing need for stronger enforcement. Laws and court orders have little meaning if illegal mining continues through weak monitoring, inadequate penalties or administrative loopholes. Modern satellite imagery, drones, GIS mapping and independent environmental audits can help authorities identify violations and ensure that permitted mining remains within clearly defined limits.

The controversy should also encourage greater public participation in decisions concerning ecological resources. Local communities, environmental experts, geologists, mining authorities and governments must have a meaningful role in determining what can be exploited and what must remain untouched.

The case for consensus politics in 2026

R JAGANNATHAN

After more than a quarter century of confrontational politics, the deteriorating security and economic environment around India calls for more consensual politics. When external challenges to India pose serious threats, it is important to close ranks internally. More so when internal political, economic and social challenges are also multiplying. The BJP has had two terms of majority rule, and even this time, despite being reduced to 240 seats from 303 in the 2024 General Election, it has re-consolidated political power by winning many Assembly elections after June 2024. However, it has not moved significantly towards building consensus on crucial issues. 2026 is the ideal year in which to begin this process as most of the state Assembly elections due this year — Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal — will not have a significant impact on its predominance.

Internally, we face huge economic and political challenges. They include the coming Census and delimitation of parliamentary constituencies, the need to reduce communal antagonisms, legislating economic reforms (especially in agriculture) to speed up growth with jobs, ensuring a fairer distribution of tax and other resources between rich and poor states and



dousing down regional, linguistic and other animosities.

The rise and rise of the BJP, first with the Vajpayee-led coalition, and since 2014, under Narendra Modi, is making political consensus harder as parties seeking to regain relevance feel compelled to oppose everything the government does.

The fact that Parliament seldom functions in a democratic manner, with the government repeatedly having to push through important legislation without much discussion, is indicative of fraying political tempers and increasing confrontations over everything. This cannot be good for the country against the backdrop of the challenges we face externally and internally, both economically and geopolitically.

In its third term, the BJP has occasionally tried to use a bit more of consensus — we have seen some contentious Bills

(like Waqf Amendments, for example) being sent to joint parliamentary panels — but its decisive victories in Haryana, Maharashtra, Delhi and Bihar now give it less reason to build consensus on contentious issues. More so since the NDA's position in the Rajya Sabha is more favourable to the government than before.

However, this would be short-sighted on the part of the BJP. It does not mean everything has to be done by consensus — the Budget and some economic policies, for example, can be exceptions — but in most other cases, the government should seek as wide a consensus as possible so that there is less internal heartburn. An internal consensus is not going to be easy when caste- and community-based polarisations are a reality, with the minorities broadly backing opposition parties and significant chunks of Hindus shifting towards the BJP

after 2014. But this is precisely why the BJP has to look beyond mere electoral gains.

It has to begin discussions with major opposition parties on everything — from electoral and economic reforms to delimitation of constituencies and sharing of resources between the Centre, states and local bodies. The last is particularly important as our cities, which ought to be drivers of growth and jobs, are poorly governed and disempowered. Air and water quality, garbage management and traffic congestion are only some of the problems cities are yet to find effective solutions to. This happens because state-level politicians use urban wealth to accumulate personal riches and build up electoral muscle, starving cities of resources for effective governance. These are not problems that can be solved only through finance commission de-

volutions, which, anyway, tend to be influenced by Union government priorities. So which areas need immediate consensus-building? First, we must lower the communal temperature without implicitly assuming that it is the majority community that must make all the compromises. Genuine communal amity cannot be built on one-sided concessions and this is why there is growing beligerence among some Hindu organisations to rake up more mandir-masjid issues. We need Hindus and Muslims, and later Hindus and Christians, to work out compromises they can live with without having to worry about violence and polarisation. Issues like conversions, cow slaughter, mob lynchings, greater Muslim representation in Parliament and mandir-masjid conflicts need dialogue and give-and-take solutions. A history and reconciliation commission — which can put our conflicted past out of today's political discourse — has been suggested by many people. It is long overdue.

Second, we need to give states and the latter, in turn, must give local bodies, more financial and other powers. Citizens are most impacted by local decisions on garbage, potable water supplies and delivery of other civic services and not those taken in New Delhi or state capitals.

ATF price cut by steep 7 pc; commercial LPG rate up 111 per cylinder

New Delhi, Aug 24 (GNS): Amid reports of a Rs 111 increase in the price of commercial LPG cylinders, the Government on Thursday said that commercial LPG prices are market-determined and directly linked to international benchmarks. Any revision in commercial LPG prices reflects changes in global LPG prices and related costs, while domestic LPG prices for household consumers remain unchanged, Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas said. The ministry said that India imports around 60 per cent of its total LPG requirement.

As a result, domestic LPG pricing is linked to international prices, with Saudi Contract Price (CP) acting as

the global benchmark. "Accordingly, revisions in commercial LPG prices reflect movements in global LPG prices and associated costs. The prices of domestic LPG remains unchanged," the ministry added.

While the average Saudi CP increased by about 21 per cent from \$ 385 per metric tonne in July 2023 to \$ 466 per metric tonne in November 2025, domestic LPG prices in India were actually reduced by around 22 per cent during the same period. The price came down from Rs 1103 in August 2023 to Rs 853 in November 2025. To protect household consumers, the effective price of a 14.2 kg domestic LPG cylinder, which

costs around Rs 950, is being provided at Rs 853 for non-PMUY consumers in Delhi. For beneficiaries under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY), the effective price is even lower at Rs 553.

This marks a reduction of nearly 39 per cent for PMUY consumers, compared to Rs 903 in August 2023, highlighting the Government's focus on ensuring continued access to clean cooking fuel for economically weaker sections. There has been no change in these prices.

For the financial year 2025-26, the Government has approved the continuation of a targeted subsidy of Rs 300 per domestic LPG cylinder for PMUY beneficiaries, cover-

ing up to nine refills per year. An expenditure of Rs 12,000 crore has been approved for this purpose reinforcing the commitment to affordable clean energy for households.

Despite a rise in international LPG prices during 2024-25, the increased cost was not passed on to domestic consumers. This resulted in losses of about Rs 40,000 crore for Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs). The government said the pricing mechanism for commercial LPG remains closely tied to international market conditions, particularly the Saudi Contract Price, and any increase is therefore a reflection of higher global input costs rather than a change.

India's economy to grow stronger in 2026, exports to rise on FTAs: Industry

New Delhi, Aug 24 (GNS): Industry leaders on Thursday said they believe that India's economic position will strengthen further in 2026, with exports expected to gain momentum due to free trade agreements signed with key countries. They also said that free trade agreements signed with countries such as Oman, New Zealand and the UK in recent months are expected to give a strong boost to India's exports.

Speaking to IANS, All Gujarat Textile Federation president Ashok Jirawala said India reaching the fourth spot globally is a matter of pride. "This achievement has been possible due to a stable government and supportive pol-

icies," he said. He added that the government has taken several positive steps for the textile sector in recent years, including better availability of quality yarn, which has helped the industry grow.

"The free trade agreements signed in 2025 have opened new opportunities for exporters. He expressed confidence that these agreements will lead to a sharp rise in exports in the coming years," Jirawala said. Southern Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Nikhil Madrasai said the new year has brought renewed hope for the country. "India has now moved ahead of Japan in terms of economic size and is aiming to become the world's

third-largest economy by 2028," he said. "To achieve this goal, India must significantly increase exports and build alternative global trade arrangements instead of depending heavily on the US," he mentioned. India Bullion and Jewellers Association Gujarat state head Nainesh Pachchigar said the gems and jewellery sector plays a key role in India's export growth.

He said India exports jewellery and gems worth around \$7.8 million every day. "The industry is working to scale this up further, and the recently signed free trade agreements are expected to provide additional momentum," Pachchigar stated. Industry representatives said the ex-

pansion of India's trade partnerships could help exporters diversify their markets and reduce dependence on a limited number of major destinations. Greater access to international markets is expected to create fresh opportunities for sectors such as textiles, engineering goods, gems and jewellery, pharmaceuticals and processed products.

Textile industry leaders believe the sector is particularly well placed to benefit from improved market access. They said competitive production costs, improving quality standards and better availability of raw materials could help Indian textile manufacturers increase their global market share.

Pan masala, tobacco products to attract up to 40 Pc GST, says Govt

New Delhi, Aug 24 (GNS): The union government has announced higher taxes on Pan Masala and tobacco products, effective from February 1, attracting a GST of up to 40 per cent, according to a notification issued by the Ministry of Finance.

The revised rates of Goods and Services Tax (GST) on tobacco products are in line with the National Security Cess Act for Health Protection, 2025 Bill, passed during the Winter Session of Parliament.

The Act proposes levying a cess on goods based on the machinery installed for manufacturing or the process undertaken to manu-

facture them. The revenue generated from this cess will be deposited into the Consolidated Fund of India and will help the government meet expenditures related to national security and public health. Initially, the cess has been applied to pan masala, though the government may notify the imposition of the cess on other goods as well, if required. According to another notification, bids will attract 18 per cent GST from February 1. Pan masala; unmanufactured tobacco and its waste; cigarettes, cheroots, cigarillos and cigars made of tobacco or tobacco substitutes. ; other manu-

factured tobacco and tobacco substitutes; tobacco products meant for consumption without combustion; and tobacco and nicotine substitutes meant for consumption without combustion will attract 40 per cent GST. The notification on the new rates has been issued on the recommendation of the GST Council.

The revised tax structure is aimed at strengthening government revenues while supporting public health and national security-related expenditure. The higher levy is expected to increase the tax burden on manufacturers and consumers of tobacco and related products.

Record deliveries on New Year's Eve despite strike calls: Deepinder Goyal

New Delhi, Aug 24 (GNS): Food delivery and quick commerce platforms Zomato and Blinkit achieved record delivery numbers on New Year's Eve, despite calls for strikes circulating over the past few days, its co-founder and CEO Deepinder Goyal said on Thursday. Goyal said that both platforms continued operations smoothly with the support of local authorities.

In a post on social media platform X, Goyal said that support from local law enforcement helped control a small number of miscreants, allowing delivery operations to run without major disruption.

"More than 4.5 lakh delivery partners across Zomato and Blinkit delivered over 75 lakh orders in a single day, marking an all-time high. These orders were delivered to more than 63 lakh customers across the country," Goyal mentioned.

Goyal clarified that the record deliveries were completed without any special or additional incentives for delivery partners.

He said that while New Year's Eve usually sees higher incentives compared to regular days, this year was no different from previous New Year's Eve operations. He expressed gratitude to local authori-

ties and on-ground teams for their quick coordination and effective enforcement, which helped ensure smooth functioning during a busy period. Goyal also thanked delivery partners who continued working despite facing intimidation, saying their commitment reflected a choice towards honest work and progress.

Addressing concerns around the gig economy, Goyal said that a system would not continue to attract and retain such a large workforce if it were fundamentally unfair. He cautioned people against being influenced by narratives pushed.

Sensex, Nifty end flat on 1st trading day of 2026

Mumbai, Aug 24 (GNS): Indian equity markets ended the first trading session of the calendar year 2026 on a flat note, as investors stayed cautious in the absence of strong domestic or global triggers. At the close of trade, the Sensex slipped marginally by 32 points, or 0.04 per cent, to settle at 85,188.6. The Nifty, meanwhile, edged higher by 16.95 points, or 0.06 per cent, to close at 26,146.55.

"For the Nifty, 26,000-26,050 continues to act as an immediate support zone; as long as this area holds, the short-term bias remains constructive," an analyst said. On the upside, 26,250-26,300 stands out as a crucial supply zone. A decisive and sustained breakout above this band could open the path toward 26,400-26,500, market watchers stated.

Selling pressure was seen in select heavyweight stocks on the BSE, with ITC, Bajaj Finance, Asian Paints and BEL ending the session among the top losers. On the other hand, shares of NTPC, Eternal, Larsen & Toubro, Power Grid and Mahindra & Mahindra supported the market and closed higher. The broader markets showed a mixed trend. The Nifty Midcap 100 index gained 0.44 per cent, while the NSE Smallcap 100 slipped slightly by 0.05 per cent.

On the sectoral front, FMCG stocks witnessed sharp selling. The Nifty FMCG index fell 3.17 per cent, making it the worst-performing sector of the

day. The decline was mainly driven by a nearly 10 per cent fall in ITC shares, as investors reacted to concerns over the government's decision to impose additional taxes on tobacco products from February 1. In contrast, the auto sector outperformed the broader market. The Nifty Auto index rose more than 1 per cent after several automobile manufacturers reported their sales numbers for December 2025. Other sectors such as IT, metal, banking and realty also ended the session in positive territory. Analysts said that the markets remained range-bound on the first day of the new year, with gains in some sectors offset by weakness in FMCG stocks, keeping the benchmark indices largely unchanged.

Trading activity remained cautious as investors assessed the outlook for corporate earnings, global cues and domestic policy developments. Market participants said the absence of a strong trigger kept investors selective, resulting in limited movement in the benchmark indices.

The weakness in FMCG stocks weighed on overall sentiment, with investors particularly concerned about the impact of higher tobacco taxes on companies with significant exposure to the segment. The sharp decline in ITC shares was a major drag on the sector during the session.

Meanwhile, gains in automobile stocks provided support to the broader market.

GAIL Gas cuts domestic PNG and CNG costs across authorised areas

New Delhi, Aug 24 (GNS): GAIL Gas Limited on Thursday announced to reduce the cost of domestic Piped Natural Gas (PNG) and Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) by Rs 1 per SCM (Standard Cubic Meter) and Rs 1 per kg respectively, across all its authorised areas in the country.

The price cut comes into effect from January 1 in GAIL Gas Geographical Areas (GAs) in Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Odisha.

"The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) continue to implement progressive policy

measures that are fostering a favourable and financially sustainable ecosystem for the growth of the CNG and domestic PNG market in India," said GAIL Gas Chief Executive Officer.

"The recent revision of the Unified Tariff by PNGRB, from January 1, 2026, including the applicability of Zone-1 tariff to City Gas Distribution (CGD) entities for CNG and domestic PNG segments, is set to significantly reduce the transportation cost of natural gas, the GAIL Gas executive added.

The decision to reduce prices is in line with the Government of India's vision of a gas-based economy and to further encourage the adoption of clean fuels. GAIL Gas

Limited is a wholly owned subsidiary of Maharatna PSU GAIL (India) Limited and is implementing City Gas Distribution networks in 16 Geographical Areas (GAs). Meanwhile, GAIL (India) Limited, the country's largest natural gas company, reported a consolidated performance marked by steady revenue growth and improved profitability in the second quarter of FY 2025-26.

According to a recent Crisil report, city gas distribution (CGD) companies in India are projected to clock an operating profit of Rs 7.2-7.5 per standard cubic metre (scm) this fiscal -- up 8-12 per cent compared with the second half of last fiscal when margins dropped.

because of a sudden and steep decline in gas allocation under the administered price mechanism (APM) for the compressed natural gas (CNG) segment.

Consequently, distributors had to take recourse to the spot gas market for supply, which exerted upward pressure on cost. The companies have, thereafter, transitioned to contracted supplies, which is expected to burnish margins. GAIL Gas said the reduction has been made possible by lower transportation costs following the revised unified tariff structure introduced by the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB). The move is expected to provide relief to consumers and support

First Vande Bharat sleeper train to start running between Guwahati and Howrah in Jan

New Delhi, Aug 24 (GNS): Union Minister for Railways Ashwini Vaishnaw announced on Thursday that the first-ever Vande Bharat sleeper train will operate between Guwahati in Assam and Howrah in West Bengal.

He stated that the complete trial, testing, and certification of the Vande Bharat Sleeper Train have been completed. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will flag off the first Vande Bharat Sleeper Train on this route this month.

The Minister said that this development represents a significant milestone for Indian Railways, the nation, and its rail passengers. He also mentioned that 2026 will be a year of major reforms for Indian Railways, with several passenger-centric initiatives set to be introduced.

The districts that will benefit from the launch of the Vande Bharat Sleeper Train include Kamrup Metropolitan and Bongaigaon in Assam and Coochbehar, Jalpaiguri, Maldah, Murshidabad, Purba Bardhaman, Hooghly, and Howrah in West Bengal.

The train will have 16 coaches, including 11 three-tier AC coaches, 4 two-tier AC coaches, and 1 first-class AC coach, with a total capacity of around 823 passengers. The semi-high-speed train has a design speed of up to 180 kmph. It is fitted with ergonomically designed berths

that have improved cushioning, automatic doors with vestibules for smooth movement and CCTVs in all coaches.

Vaishnaw further stated that a completely newly designed bogie with new suspension has been developed. The design parameters have been taken to a new level. Its interiors and ladders feature an ergonomic design, with special parameters implemented throughout for safety and security.

The Vande Bharat Sleeper Train will offer a comfortable, safe, and high-quality travel experience for overnight journeys. The timetable of the Vande Bharat Sleeper Train will be planned in such a way that it departs from its origin in the evening and reaches its destination early the next morning.

Passengers on the Vande Bharat Sleeper Train will enjoy region-specific culinary offerings during their journey. The train originating from Guwahati will feature authentic Assamese cuisine, while the train starting from Kolkata will serve traditional Bengali delicacies, ensuring a delightful and culturally rich dining experience on board. The train is also fitted with the modern KAVACH safety device and has an emergency talk-back unit for communication between the passenger and train manager or loco pilot in case of emergency.

KP Group signs MoU with Botswana Govt for \$4 billion renewable energy projects

New Delhi, Aug 24 (GNS): KP Group, an Indian renewable energy company, has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Government of the Republic of Botswana to work together on large renewable energy projects, including power generation, energy storage and transmission infrastructure.

Under the agreement, KP Group and the Government of the Republic of Botswana will jointly develop renewable energy and related infrastructure projects with an estimated investment of around \$4 billion.

The projects are expected to add nearly 5 gigawatts of renewable energy capacity in the country. The partnership will also focus

on building and strengthening high-voltage transmission networks within Botswana. In addition, regional power interconnections will be developed to improve electricity reliability and enhance energy security across the region. The collaboration supports Botswana's goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2030 and is seen as an important step in KP Group's expansion into international markets. Botswana's Minister of Minerals and Energy, Bogolo Joy Kenewendo, said the partnership would help speed up the deployment of clean energy in the country while creating long-term economic and environmental benefits. "The partnership

would help speed up the deployment of clean energy in the country while creating long-term economic and environmental benefits," Kenewendo added. Dr. Faruk G. Patel, the founding promoter of KP Group, said the MoU reflects a shared vision between the two sides to tap Botswana's renewable energy potential and make a meaningful contribution to its journey towards net-zero emissions. "The MoU reflects a shared vision between the two sides to tap Botswana's renewable energy potential and make a meaningful contribution to its journey towards net-zero emissions," Patel said. The agreement marks a key milestone for

both partners, combining India's renewable energy expertise with Botswana's clean energy ambitions to build a more sustainable power future. In addition to power generation, the proposed projects will also include the development of advanced energy storage systems to ensure grid stability and uninterrupted power supply. These systems are expected to play a crucial role in managing the intermittency of renewable energy sources such as solar and wind, thereby enhancing overall efficiency and reliability of Botswana's power infrastructure.

The collaboration is also likely to generate significant employment opportunities and promote skill develop-

ment in the renewable energy sector. Local workforce participation, technology transfer, and capacity building will form key components of the partnership, helping Botswana strengthen its domestic expertise while supporting inclusive economic growth.

Officials said the MoU lays the foundation for long-term cooperation between India and Botswana in the clean energy domain. By combining investment, technology, and policy support, the partnership is expected to contribute to regional energy integration in Southern Africa and serve as a model for cross-border renewable energy collaboration. The proposed investment is expected to strengthen

Botswana's electricity infrastructure by combining renewable generation with modern transmission and storage systems. The integrated approach could help address power shortages and provide a more reliable electricity supply as demand increases.

Solar and wind energy are likely to form an important part of the planned capacity addition, with storage systems helping balance fluctuations in renewable generation. Such infrastructure can improve grid stability and reduce dependence on conventional power sources.

The partnership could also create new opportunities for Indian companies in Botswana's growing clean-energy market.

Uttam Reddy Opens AI Legal Services Hub in Hyderabad

Hyderabad, Aug 24 (GNS) Irrigation and Civil Supplies Minister N. Uttam Kumar Reddy on Monday inaugurated the Hyderabad office of Kaveti International AI Firm, an initiative aimed at combining international legal expertise with Artificial Intelligence-enabled services to improve access to cross-border legal assistance.

Speaking on the occasion, Uttam Kumar Reddy welcomed the establishment of the international legal services initiative in Hyderabad and said the growing application of Artificial Intelligence across professional sectors was opening up enormous opportunities, while also creating a need for responsible, ethical and transparent use of emerging technologies. He said Hyderabad, with its strong technology ecosystem, highly skilled professionals and global connectivity, was ideally positioned to become an important centre for AI-driven professional and legal services. Initiatives connecting Telangana with interna-



tional expertise would further strengthen the State's global profile, he said.

The Minister congratulated Dr. Srinivas Rao Kaveti, Founder and Managing Attorney of Kaveti Law Firm, New York, and Founder of Kaveti International AI Firm, for bringing the initiative to Hyderabad. Dr. Kaveti is a Telangana-origin international lawyer with over 35 years of cross-border legal practice covering India, the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and the UAE.

The new centre proposes to function as an International Legal Access Hub, enabling individuals, businesses, NRIs and investors

in India to connect with lawyers and legal professionals practising in different international jurisdictions. Visiting international professionals are also proposed to hold consultations and strategy sessions in Hyderabad.

The firm's practice areas span several jurisdictions. Its stated services in the United States include immigration, family law, civil litigation, international divorces, corporate and criminal law. In the United Kingdom, it lists immigration, family law and civil litigation, while services relating to the UAE include workers' compensation, employment issues and contractual matters.

Medak Set for Critical Care Block Launch

Health Minister reviews medical infrastructure

Hyderabad, Aug 24 (GNS) Telangana Health, Medical and Family Welfare Minister Damodar Rajanarasimha on Monday conducted a surprise inspection of the newly constructed Critical Care Block at the Government General Hospital (GGH) in Medak district. He was accompanied by Medak MLA Dr. Mynampally Rohit.

Following the inspection, the Minister chaired a review meeting with GGH Superintendent Dr. Sunitha Devi, Medical College Principal Dr. Nitin Kabra, District Medical and Health Officer (DMHO) Dr. Gnaneshwar, District Coordinator of Hospital Services (DCHS) Dr. Shiva Dayal, and other health officials to

assess the preparations for commissioning the facility.

The meeting was also attended by TPCC President Bomma Mahesh Kumar Goud and former MLA Mynampally Hanumantha Rao. The Minister reviewed the availability of human resources, medical equipment, infrastructure and IHFMS services required to operationalise the Critical Care Block. He directed officials to attend a high-level review meeting at the State Secretariat in Hyderabad on August 25 to expedite the arrangements and ensure the facility is opened at the earliest.

Damodar Rajanarasimha also reviewed measures to strengthen healthcare services in Medak district.



Commissioner GHMC Inspects SIR Notice Distribution



Hyderabad, Aug 24 (GNS) RV Karman, Commissioner, GHMC, inspected the ongoing distribution of Special Intensive Revision (SIR) Notices at CIB Quarters, AC Guards, Polling Station No. 1, Nampally Assembly Constituency, and reviewed the progress of the field-level exercise.

During the inspection, the Commissioner interacted with the BLOs, BLO Supervisor, AERO and ERO and issued necessary instructions to ensure that the SIR notices are distributed systematically to electors. The field officials were directed to explain the purpose of the notices clearly to voters and assist them in completing the required process. The Commissioner

also interacted with local residents and explained the importance of the SIR exercise. He informed them that electors should carefully verify the details mentioned in the notice and submit the required documents and information within the prescribed timeline. Voters were advised to approach the concerned BLO for any clarification or assistance regarding submission of forms and supporting documents.

The Commissioner stressed that the election staff should maintain proper coordination and address public queries promptly and make every effort to facilitate eligible citizens in completing the SIR process smoothly.

Banker's wife dies by suicide in KPHB Colony

Hyderabad, Aug 24 (GNS) A 32-year-old woman died allegedly by suicide by jumping off the apartment building in KPHB Colony on Monday, August 24. The deceased, identified as Sheethal, was suffering from depression, the Deccan Chronicle reported. Sheethal was from Kannur in Kerala.

KPHB Sub-Inspector Shashidhar said the deceased had married Sonu Purushothaman, a deputy manager at State Bank of India (SBI), six years ago. They lived in Panchvati

Apartments along with their four-year-old daughter and Purushothaman's parents. Sheethal reportedly went up the terrace staircase around 4 pm and sat there for some time before climbing onto the terrace and jumping into the compound below. She sustained multiple injuries and died on the spot. The KPHB police reached the scene and launched an inquiry. On speaking with her husband and her brother back home, the police learnt that Sheethal was on medical treatment for severe depression.

INDIAN DEMOCRACY

The question is not only about voting

But about people's rights and development

By Irfan Jamiawala
Social Worker

Writer and Journalist

India is widely described as the world's largest democracy. Hundreds of millions of citizens participate in elections, choose their representatives, and have constitutional rights. Governments change through elections, and democratic institutions operate across the country. But one fundamental question remains: Does holding elections automatically make a democracy strong and successful?

Social worker, writer and journalist Irfan Jamiawala raises a deeper question: democracy should not be measured only by the right to vote. We must also ask whether ordinary citizens have meaningful participation in decision-making, equal opportunities, social justice and the freedom to question those in power.

India and Different Models of Democracy

India follows primarily a representative democratic system. Citizens elect representatives to Parliament, state legislatures and local bodies. These representatives then participate in lawmaking and governance.

Switzerland provides a different democratic model, with particularly strong mechanisms of direct citizen participation. Citizens can influence important public decisions through referendums and popular initiatives.

This difference raises an important question:

If people are the real foundation of democracy, should their role be limited mainly to voting once every few years?

For Irfan Jamiawala, this is not simply a question about one political party or one government. It is a question about the quality and depth of democracy itself.

What Is a Full Democracy and What Is a Flawed Democracy?

Democratic systems around the world are evaluated through several factors, including the quality of elections, political rights, civil liberties, government functioning, political participation and the strength of democratic institutions.

Some countries are considered to have very



high-quality democratic systems, while others have elections and democratic institutions but also face significant weaknesses.

A flawed democracy does not mean that democracy has disappeared. It means that although democratic structures exist, important weaknesses may affect the functioning and quality of the democratic system.

The Questions India Must Ask

India has elections, Parliament, political parties, an independent constitutional framework and a judicial system. But the deeper question is whether the benefits of democracy reach every section of society equally.

Does the voice of a poor citizen carry the same political weight as the voice of a wealthy and influential citizen?

Do ordinary people have equal opportunities to enter politics?

Are women, Dalits, tribal communities, backward communities and minorities adequately represented in decision-making?

And above all:

Is democracy merely a mechanism for choosing governments, or should it also be an instrument for achieving social justice?

According to the questions raised by Irfan Jamiawala, the success of democracy should not be measured only by how

many representatives reach Parliament or state assemblies. It should also be measured by how much democracy actually improves the everyday life of an ordinary citizen.

What Can India Learn from Switzerland?

India and Switzerland are very different countries. Their populations, geography, social structures and political histories are not comparable in a simple way.

Therefore, India cannot simply copy the Swiss system.

However, India can learn an important principle from Switzerland:

Continuous citizen participation.

If local governments, Gram Sabhas and municipal institutions are strengthened, government decisions become more transparent, and citizens receive more opportunities to participate in public decision-making, Indian democracy can become deeper and more participatory.

Is Strong Democracy the Key to Development?

Democracy alone does not automatically make a country developed.

Development also requires quality education, healthcare, employment, infrastructure, rule of law, scientific thinking, economic opportunity and effective action against corruption.

Welcare India national excellence awards 2026 held in Hyderabad



Hyderabad, Aug 24 (GNS) Hyderabad, August 23, 2026: The Welcare India National Excellence Awards 2026 were successfully organised in Hyderabad by the Welcare India Social Welfare Foundation, bringing together more than 300 dignitaries, social workers, healthcare professionals, educators, entrepreneurs, journalists, community leaders and awardees.

The prestigious event honoured individuals and organisations for their contributions to journalism, social service, healthcare, education, women empowerment, youth development, entrepreneurship and community welfare.

Among those recognised at the event were TJRA President Mohd. Mustafa Ali,

Chairman Syed Mubeen, Mohd. Ismail, Baba, Alamar, Syed Rafif Hyder Razvi, Noor Uddin Ali Abeid and Faizuddin, along with members of their team. They received awards for their contributions to journalism and for giving voice to public issues.

Advocate Mir Qurram Ali, who attended the programme as the Guest of Honour, congratulated the award recipients and appreciated their efforts in serving society and highlighting issues concerning the public.

The ceremony featured award presentations, keynote addresses and interactions with distinguished guests. The organisers said the awards were intended not only to recognise

achievements but also to encourage individuals and organisations to continue their work for the welfare and development of society. Speaking on the occasion, Syed Taher Hussain, Founder and Director of Welcare India Social Welfare Foundation, said that the objective of the awards was to recognise meaningful work, inspire others and promote a culture of service and excellence.

The event concluded with the organisers expressing gratitude to the dignitaries, awardees, jury members, sponsors, media partners, volunteers and participants for their support in making the programme a successful celebration of excellence and social service

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