

TTD announces first-of-its-kind insurance cover for devotees

- Board approves a ₹2 lakh insurance for devotees who die of natural causes in Tirumala
- Compensation for devotees who die in accidents goes up from ₹3 lakh to ₹10 lakh

PRADEEP VENNELAKANTI
 TIRUMALA

THE TTD trust board has announced that it will introduce a first-of-its-kind initiative in the country by approving a Rs 2 lakh insurance cover for the families of devotees who succumb to natural causes during their stay in Tirumala.

The scheme will be implemented in association with the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), providing financial assistance to the families of pilgrims who die of natural causes in Tirumala. Under the scheme, the TTD will pay the insurance premium, ensuring a Rs 2 lakh benefit for the family of a devotee who dies of natural causes while in Tirumala. The temple body already extends accident insurance assistance to the kin of devotees killed in road accidents on the Alipiri-Tirumala route in specified cases.

The decision was taken at the TTD trust board meeting held at Annamaiah Bhavan in Tirumala on Wednesday under the chairmanship of BR Naidu. TTD Executive Officer M Ravichandra and other senior officials attended the meeting.

Explaining the board decisions after the meeting, the Chairman and EO said the measures were aimed at strengthen-



ing pilgrim welfare, improving employee benefits and advancing environmental initiatives.

The board also enhanced the insurance compensation for devotees who die in accidents from Rs 3 lakh to Rs 10 lakh. It approved medical facilities under the Employees Health Fund (EHF) for employees covered by the Contributory Pension Scheme (CPS) and Modified Contributory Scheme (MCS), bringing them on par with those covered under the Old Pension Scheme (OPS). Salary revisions for employees belonging to 48 categories were also approved.

In a move aimed at promoting sustainable waste management, the board approved a proposal to convert food waste generated at the Annaprasadam complex, canteens and hotels into bio-gas. Indian Oil Corporation Limited

(IOCL) has offered to undertake the conversion using a water hydrolysis process. The TTD approved handing over the operation of the biogas plant to GPS Renewables at a cost of Rs 2.80 crore.

With the anticipated rush during peak periods, the TTD has also sent proposals to the government seeking approval for 400 additional outsourcing posts to accelerate laddu production. The board sanctioned Rs 1.60 crore for three years towards transportation charges for additional sanitation personnel deployed in Tirumala.

The board further approved gold plating works for the Padma Peetham of Goddess Padmavathi at Sri Kalyana Venkateswara Swamy temple in Narayanavanam. It also sanctioned Rs 17.05 crore for gold plating the Dwajasthambam and Bali Peetham at the Sri Padmavathi Ammavari Temple in Chennai. The licence period of the TTD building in Tirupati allotted to the Telugu and Sanskrit Academies was extended by three years, from November 2, 2026, to November 1, 2029.

Additional EO Ch Venkaiah Chowdary, JEOS Dr A Sarath and Prabhala Gopinath, CVSO KV Murali Krishna and TTD board members were present at the meeting.

cases, effective hearing mechanisms, proactive disclosure under Section 4, digitalisation and capacity building of Public Information Officers and First Appellate Authorities.

Discussions will also address preventing misuse of RTI without restricting legitimate citizen access and strengthening the independence and effectiveness of Information Commissions. Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy will attend a dinner interaction with the Central Chief Information Commissioner and State Chief Information Commissioners on September 10.

Dhoolpet's Ganesh craft hub faces a readymade challenge

MM FAROOQUI
 HYDERABAD



PREPARATIONS are in full swing ahead of the 11-day Ganesh Chaturthi festivities, which is starting from September 14. As preparations for the festival gather momentum across Hyderabad, the city's idol markets are witnessing a major shift towards readymade Ganesh idols, with a significant number being brought in from Maharashtra and other nearby districts. Even Dhoolpet, which is traditionally regarded as Hyderabad's hub of idol makers and skilled artisans, is now increasingly selling readymade idols instead of manufacturing them locally.

Unlike in the past, artisans, who used to spend several days crafting the idols for the Ganesh Festival, are now procuring the readymade idols from other states to earn more money effortlessly.

Ganesh idols from other states have sprouted up in every nook and corner of the city, as these local artisans, who have been crafting the idols for many decades are now selling idols transported from Sholapur, Pune, Nashik, Malegaon and

several smaller towns and villages in Maharashtra.

According to the idol-making community, nearly 90 per cent of the Ganesh idols currently available in the market are being transported from Maharashtra. Telangana Idol Makers Welfare Association Vice president Kailash Singh Hazari, an artisan, said that orders for making idols from locals have gone down from the last few years. "Earlier, we artisans used to craft idols and

sell them during the festival. But now, if an artisan makes an idol without receiving an order from people in the city, we face huge losses," said Kailash Singh. He added, "We are facing huge losses after spending lakhs of rupees on making the idols." In Dhoolpet, only a handful of people are now making Ganesh idols based on specific customer orders. Most of the idols are being brought from outside and sold here," said Ram Murthy, another artisan.

ED raids K'taka minister

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Investigators are examining whether Jarkiholi allegedly used his influence to facilitate the licences and whether funds generated through the alleged irregularities were subsequently transferred or invested abroad.

During the earlier investigation into the raids conducted on Manjunath's prop-

erties, the agency reportedly detected cash, gold and foreign currency, with about Rs 3 crore in suspected illegal foreign funds also coming under scrutiny.

Karnataka Chief Minister D K Shivakumar termed the ED searches on properties linked to the minister as "politically motivated". He also questioned the timing of the searches, which came a day

before the Congress government led by him completes 100 days in office.

Asserting that he would stand by Jarkiholi, who he said had done no wrong, the CM said he had cautioned all his ministers and party legislators about possible action by Central agencies against them. He claimed that his government and the party were being "targeted".

Govt-staff JAC talks fructify; stir move dropped

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Discussions were held between the government and JAC on the abolition of the CPS and reintroduction of the old pension scheme for all employees.

A clarity on the release of pending DAs to the government employees would come only after a meeting with the government. The government has assured that it would examine and resolve the financial and non-financial issues raised by employee and teacher unions. Lachi Reddy said that the employees' JAC would continue the dialogue with the government until their demands are met. Welcoming the government's prompt move to hold talks with the employees, the JAC leaders said that they would also continue their united struggle until their legitimate demands are met. Special Chief Secretary (Services) Benhur Mahesh Dutt Ekka said that in view of the Council and Assembly sessions, a meeting with JAC and members of the other employees' associations would be held from Sept 18 to discuss the demand for the release of DAs and other bills in a phased manner. The state govt has already informed the employees unions about the financial challenges faced by the govt in the context of releasing funds and clearing pending bills of the retired employees.

'Al could kill us all by end of decade'

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"At OpenAI, many have not deeply internalized the civilizational stakes. At Anthropic, the stakes are well-understood," he claimed. He added that Anthropic, despite understanding the dangers, is "locked in a race to get there first - they believe no one else will act responsibly, so they must do it themselves, despite the risk."

Hyd to host national conclave on RTI reforms

HANS NEWS SERVICE
 HYDERABAD

THE Telangana Information Commission (TGIC) will organise a two-day National Conference on 'Operational Uniformity in Implementation of RTI: Challenges and Solutions' at the Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI), Hyderabad, on September

10 and 11. Sponsored by the National Federation of Information Commissioners in India (NFICI) and organised in collaboration with ASCI, the conference will bring together Chief Information Commissioners, Information Commissioners, legal experts, policymakers and senior administrators from across the country. Around 20 State

Chief Information Commissioners are likely to participate. Governor Shiv Prathap Shukla will be the chief guest at the inaugural session and deliver the keynote address. The conference will focus on strengthening implementation of the Right to Information Act, 2005, with emphasis on uniform procedures, reducing pendency, timely disposal of

Iran captures US sub after attack on 5 oil tankers

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The submersible vehicle is equipped with the world's most modern subsurface vehicle technology, it said, and released a video of the captured vehicle.

In a separate statement, the IIRC also claimed that its air defence systems had shot down an MQ-9 Reaper drone over the Strait of Hormuz, Sepah News reported.

Following the IIRC's announcement, the US military also released a statement saying one of its underwater drones "malfunctioned" over a day earlier during a survey of regional waters, without mentioning whether the device was the one seized by Iran. "It was surveying regional waters in support of ongoing operations. The defective drone was an older model that neither collected sensitive data nor carried any classified sonar or radar equipment," a Pentagon spokesperson said. The US military is investing heavily in unmanned naval systems, including underwater and surface vessels, as it seeks cheaper ways to monitor vast areas of ocean, gather intelligence, and track adversary ships and submarines without putting sailors at risk.

Ghatkesar-Kazipet multitracking project gets Centre's nod

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The Secunderabad (Ghatkesar)- Kazipet multitracking project is aimed at increasing rail capacity on one of Telangana's important and heavily utilised corridors. The works are planned to be completed by 2029-30. The additional railway capacity is expected to ease congestion, improve train operations, and enhance the reliability of passenger and freight services in the State. The corridor is also important for the movement of commodities, including coal, cement, iron and steel,

containers, automobiles, foodgrains, petroleum products, and fertilisers.

The project is part of a larger railway capacity-enhancement programme covering 17 districts across Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Together, the five approved projects will add about 540 km to the existing Indian Railways network.

In Telangana, the multitracking works are expected to strengthen connectivity towards the northern parts of the state and improve the movement of people

and goods between the Hyderabad-Secunderabad region and Kazipet.

The new projects have been planned under the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan, with emphasis on multimodal connectivity and logistics efficiency.

According to SCR authorities, the improved railway network is also expected to benefit connectivity to important tourist and religious destinations in Telangana, including Yadagirigutta, Bhongir Fort, Surendrapuri and Swarnagiri Temple.

India, US trade pact to be signed soon: Commerce Secy

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There are a few things which both sides are discussing, but it will be signed at an appropriate time," he told reporters here. He explained that India, which operates on most-favoured-nation (MFN) tariffs, has greater flexibility in offering preferential access, while the US is currently operating with executive tariffs. "From the Indian side, because we are operating on MFN (most favoured nation) tariffs, it is easier to do so. From their

(US) side, they are operating on executive tariffs. So, they are building an architecture, which will create those differentials and create a preferential market access. So, at an opportune time, we should be able to sign," he said. Agarwal added that bilateral trade between India and the US was continuing to grow.

Goyal has recently said that details of the Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) would be announced once Washington offers India preferential terms compared

with its competitors.

In trade terminology, an MFN tariff refers to the standard import duty imposed by a country on goods from another country in the absence of a trade agreement providing lower tariffs.

The US has imposed an additional 10 per cent import duty over and above its MFN tariff on several countries, including India, under a Section 301 probe concerning forced labour. The additional duty came into effect on July 24.

Extra 'F' in CNR Rao's name triggers SIR notice

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His entry in the previous electoral roll reads "Prof. CNR Rao," while the current one has it as "Proff. C.N.R. Rao," adding an extra "f" to the title. This week, the ECI withdrew a notice issued to Padma Shri awardee Harekala Hajabba regarding a discrepancy in his name found during the SIR in Karnataka. Hajabba was asked to appear at a gram panchayat on September 11 with original documents, and an accountant was to be present during the verification. His name in the 2002 electoral roll and subsequent records differed from the full name he provided during the SIR enumeration.

Hajabba said officials visited his residence after the notice became public and took it back, telling him they would examine the matter and get back to him. His documents since 2004 carried his name as Harekal Hajabba.

The discrepancy arose because his name appeared as only Hajabba in the 2002 electoral roll, while his subsequent records identify him as Harekala Hajabba. His Aadhaar card, ration card, passport, and voter ID carry the name Harekala Hajabba.

The same name also appears in documents relating to his Padma Shri and other awards. Hajabba, a fruit seller turned education campaigner from Newpadapu in Mangaluru, became nationally known after using savings from selling oranges to establish a primary school in his native village. He received the Padma Shri, India's fourth-highest civilian award, in 2020 for his contribution to education.

Over 4.381 million notices are expected to be issued as part of the SIR, which began in Karnataka on June 30, to voters whose names fall under the "no mapping" and "anomalies" categories. The disposal of claims and objections will continue until October 22. The final electoral roll is scheduled for publication on October 27.

Union Cabinet okays Rs 20,804-crore railway projects across 9 states

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Five projects worth around Rs 10,021 crore have been approved across Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The projects will add around 540 km to the railway network and cover 17 districts, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said.

The projects include the third and fourth lines between Arakonam and Renigunta, third and fourth lines between Whitefield and Bangarapet, doubling of the Hosur-Omalur section, doubling of the Salem-Karur-Dindigul section, and 110 km of multitracking between Secunderabad (Ghatkesar) and Kazipet. The projects are expected to improve connectivity to around 2,121 villages with a combined population of about 52 lakh. The government said they will also strengthen connectivity to destinations including Tirupati, Kolar Gold Fields, Mettur Dam, the Kodaikanal Hills and Sathyamangalam Wildlife Sanctuary.

The southern projects are expected to support incremental freight movement of around 47 million tonne per annum (MTPA). The government estimates that they could reduce oil imports by about 80 million litres and carbon dioxide emissions by around 420 million kg.

The remaining three projects, worth Rs 10,783 crore, will be implemented across West Bengal, Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. They comprise the fourth line between Kharagpur and Jharsuguda (Bagdehi), the fourth line between Katni and Pendra Road, and the third line between Bilaspur (Uslapur) and Pendra Road.

These projects will add around 656 km to the railway network and cover 14 districts. They are expected to improve connectivity to around 4,790 villages with a combined population of nearly 56 lakh, while also easing congestion and improving line capacity.

The additional infrastructure is expected to strengthen connectivity to tourist destinations including Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, Amarkantak Temple, Achanakmar Tiger Reserve and Ratanpur Mahamaya Temple. The routes are also important freight corridors for commodities such as coal, cement, iron and steel. The three projects are expected to enable incremental freight movement of around 27 MTPA. They could also reduce oil imports by around 120 million litres and carbon dioxide emissions by about 620 million kg, according to the government.

22 BRS MLAs suspended

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This community has no power. Are we in a civilized society or barbaric society? Nobody is afraid of your challenges and threats. How long will you live with such attitude?" the Deputy CM asked.

Legislative Affairs Minister D Sridhar Babu said that the party does not endorse the comments (made against KCR) and also their comments on Rahul Gandhi. He said, "No one will want anyone's death. KCR should be good and live for 100 years and should be in the Opposition. Our party will not seek anybody's death. How can anyone take up 'shuddhikarana'? What era are we living in? Need time to run

Assembly. It is not proper to threaten the Speaker.

With the pandemonium continuing in the House, the Speaker suspended the 22 BRS members after Sridhar Babu moved the motion. The members suspended for the remainder of the session are: Anil Jadhav, T Harish Rao, G Jagadish Reddy, G Kamalakara, P Kaushik Reddy, Madhavaram Krishna Rao, Kova Lakshmi, Manik Rao, Chinta Prabhakar, Kotha Prabhakar, Vemula Prashanth Reddy, Marri Rajashekar, Palla Rajeshwar Reddy, P Sabita Indra Reddy, K Sanjay, T Srinivas Yadav, D Sudheer Reddy, V Sunitha Lakshma Reddy, KT Rama Rao, Kaleru Venkatesh, Vijeyudu and KP Vivekanand.

BRS plans statewide protests

BRS leaders are planning to take up state-wide protests against their suspension from the Assembly for the entire monsoon session. According to sources, the party leaders, including MLAs and MLCs, have been asked to come to the residence of KT Rama Rao on Thursday for a breakfast meeting. The party leaders will decide on the future course of action.

A senior leader of the party said that the leadership was upset that the MLAs were suspended without any reason. The party leaders would take up burning of effigies of the government and Chief Minister during their protests.

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The Chief Minister said the investigation would cover the sequence of events beginning with a meeting allegedly held at a farmhouse on September 6, followed by the alleged verbal attack on the Speaker and the reported 'shuddhikaran' (purification) ritual at Erravalli. The Chief Minister announced that Hyderabad Joint Commissioner Vijay Kumar will probe the alleged incidents of untouchability. "We will legally punish everyone who insulted Dalits. We will conduct a comprehensive inquiry into the series of events, starting from the meeting held at the farmhouse," Revanth Reddy said.

Revanth Reddy said Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar, who belongs to the Dalit com-

munity, was subjected to objectionable verbal abuse. He questioned how anyone could insult a mother, irrespective of political differences, and asserted that the government would not tolerate caste discrimination or oppression. He said political parties had advised those responsible to apologise to the Speaker and correct their remarks. According to the Chief Minister, the alleged remarks hurt the sentiments of the Dalit community, prompting members to stage a protest by beating dappus (traditional drums).

Revanth Reddy said the protesters had gone to the site to register their opposition and demand an apology and claimed they neither attacked nor verbally abused anyone.

The Chief Minister alleged that BRS chief and former Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao (KCR), instead of apologising, ordered another act, referring to the reported shuddhikaran ritual at the farmhouse. He also referred to a social media post by BRS leader Sandhya Rao, who allegedly stated that the ritual was conducted at KCR's behest.

"It is not the ground that needs purification; the deep-seated malice and prejudice in their minds need to be cleansed," Revanth Reddy said, stressing the need to eradicate caste-based prejudice and untouchability.

Revanth Reddy alleged that KCR had summoned BRS MLAs and MLCs to his Erravalli farmhouse ahead of the

Assembly session and claimed that the meeting was part of a plan to obstruct the proceedings. He said the Assembly had been convened to discuss public issues, including matters concerning '22A' lands, and alleged that the opposition sought to prevent such discussions because of their potential political impact.

The Chief Minister warned that those responsible for the alleged conspiracy would face legal action. "Courts may grant bail, but society will not," he remarked.

The Chief Minister ordered an inquiry also into the alleged harassment of women during a protest near the Assembly. Details of alleged attacks on personnel performing their duties would also be

collected, he said.

Revanth Reddy said the investigation would cover both those who allegedly issued instructions and those who carried them out. Criminal cases would be registered against those found responsible and strict action would follow, he said. The Chief Minister compared the Telangana developments with an incident in Uttarakhand, recalling that a complaint had earlier been submitted to the President condemning that incident. He alleged that some individuals in Telangana entered the Assembly premises and attacked employees on duty. He pointed out that the remarks in question against the Speaker and his mother had been widely condemned.