

Banke Bihari panel to bar 'arbitrary movement' of private security personnel on temple premises

MATHURA: VIPs visiting the revered Banke Bihari temple in Vrindavan will no longer be accompanied by their private security personnel during darshan to check arbitrary movement on the temple premises.

The decision was taken Thursday during a meeting presided over by a former high court judge, the chairperson of the Banke Bihari management committee constituted by the Supreme Court, the district information office said in a statement, adding that the decision will be implemented shortly.

According to the decision reached in the presence of ex-officio members -- Chairperson Ashok Kumar, former District Judge Mukesh Mishra, District Judge Vikas Kumar, District Magistrate and Secretary Chandra Prakash Singh, and Mathura-Vrindavan Municipal Commissioner Jagraves -- besides representatives of various 'sevayat' groups, instructions have been issued to the temple management to curb the arbitrary behaviour of private security personnel.

It was decided that new regulations regarding this matter would



be formulated and implemented in the near future.

During the meeting, discussions were held on various issues including removal of encroachments from the temple's platform, expediting the registration process for buildings and commercial establishments for the temple corridor project, ensuring smooth operation of temple accounts, managing service arrangements for Nidhivan (a sacred forested sanctuary managed by the temple), and renewing the contract for the security agency

guarding the temple for the upcoming financial year.

To address the issue of food adulteration in items sold around the temple, the committee directed officials from the food safety department to conduct continuous raids, take strict action, and curb malpractices.

Displeasure was expressed regarding the sale of adulterated 'pedas' (milk-based sweets) intended as 'prasad' (offering to the deity), the statement said.

The discussions revealed that

the 'mava' used in manufacture of these adulterated 'pedas' is being sourced in large quantities from cities in neighbouring Rajasthan. Measures were requested to put a stop to this.

To resolve traffic congestion caused by proliferation of e-rickshaws in the narrow lanes (Kunj Galis) of Vrindavan, the transport department was instructed to launch a campaign to issue challans and initiate vehicle seizure proceedings.

Additionally, other issues related to temple management were also deliberated upon. CCTV cameras installed within the temple complex and its vicinity are to be upgraded and equipped with high-definition and artificial intelligence technology. Discussions were also held regarding the management of crowds and the provision of amenities for devotees visiting during the festival of 'Akshay Tritiya'.

Special emphasis was laid on ensuring that devotees face no inconvenience either on the temple premises or the surrounding lanes, and that water bottles are distributed to them during the summer season, the statement added.

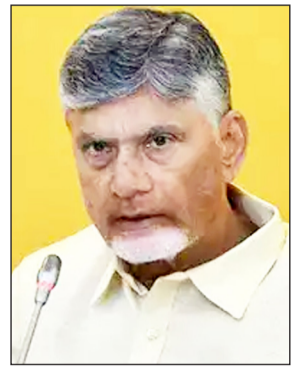
Andhra CM Naidu sets target of 10 lakh PNG connections in six months

AMARAVATI: Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Friday set a target of providing 10 lakh PNG connections within the next six months, amid cooking gas supply constraints linked to the Israel-US-Iran conflict.

Reviewing domestic gas supply, the CM directed oil companies and officials to promote Piped Natural Gas as a preferred alternative to liquefied natural gas (LNG), which is largely imported.

"He set a target of providing 1 million (10 lakh) PNG connections within the next six months, directing officials to ensure there is no delay in achieving this goal," a press release quoting Naidu said.

The CM called for awareness among beneficiaries of the Deepam scheme, a state welfare programme that provides three free cooking gas cylinders per year, on the benefits of switching to



PNG.

He noted that beneficiaries who opt for PNG would continue to receive subsidies under the Deepam scheme, and directed that orders to this effect be issued immediately, the release said.

Naidu stressed the need to clearly inform beneficiaries that they can retain Deepam scheme benefits even after migrating to PNG connections.

Following a review of

measures taken by oil companies to expand PNG connections, officials informed him that the domestic gas situation is expected to normalise soon.

During a review of delays in the Srikakulam-Kakinada natural gas pipeline project, the CM sought an explanation from officials.

Upon being informed that certain decisions were pending at the central government level, Naidu spoke with Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Hardeep Singh Puri, urging him to expedite the project.

Officials also informed the CM that the tendering process for the pipeline project had already been completed.

The union minister responded positively and assured that the matter would be reviewed soon and necessary action taken to accelerate the project, the press release added.

'Punjab govt should announce crop insurance scheme during Apr 13 special Assembly session'

CHANDIGARH: Punjab BJP president Sunil Jakhar on Friday said the state government should announce the implementation of a crop insurance scheme for farmers during the special Vidhan Sabha session scheduled for April 13.

Jakhar said he has also written a letter to Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann in this regard.

He said that although the Centre has already implemented a crop insurance scheme, the Punjab government has not notified it.

By doing so, the chief minister is committing a major injustice toward farmers, Jakhar alleged.

He said that farmers in Punjab are currently facing severe natural calamities.

"Unseasonal rains and hailstorms have caused large-scale crop damage.

Earlier, floods in 2023 and 2025 also led to massive destruction, and even now many farmers have not received compensation because no crop insurance scheme is in place in Punjab. Even today, farmers remain worried about how their losses due to such disasters will be compensated," the BJP leader said.

He reminded the chief minister that three years ago, it was announced that the Punjab government would introduce its own agricultural insurance scheme in place of the central government's Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana.

"However, despite three years having passed and farmers suffering losses worth thousands of crores, the scheme is still awaited," he said.

Jakhar said that since

the Punjab government has called a special Assembly session on April 13, Mann should fulfil his promise and, without delay, announce Punjab's own crop insurance scheme during this session so that farmers can be compensated during natural disasters.

The AAP government has convened a special session of the Punjab Vidhan Sabha on April 13 to amend the Jagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar Act, 2008, for stricter punishment against sacrilege of Guru Granth Sahib and other religious texts.

He further advised that if the state government's financial condition is weak, it should immediately implement the central government's crop insurance scheme, which is already operational in other states

and has proven beneficial for farmers.

The BJP leader alleged that every section of society is unhappy with the current government; with farmers not receiving compensation, traders and industrialists not getting a peaceful environment, and poor law and order along with drug issues have created fear among the people.

Jakhar also said that thousands of government employees and pensioners in Punjab are facing financial hardship because the state government has not provided the due increase in Dearness Allowance (DA).

He pointed out that while the central government and neighbouring states are giving 58 per cent DA, Punjab is providing only 42 per cent.

Kharge flags delimitation, women quota timing

NEW DELHI: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday raised concerns over the proposed delimitation exercise and the timing of a special Parliament session on the women's reservation Bill, calling for wider consultations.

Addressing a meeting of the Congress Working Committee, Kharge said the proposed delimitation could have "serious consequences" and requires detailed discussion.

He said the special session of Parliament scheduled from April 16 to 18 to consider constitutional amendments related to women's reservation raises concerns, alleging that the timing could influence upcoming Assembly elections.

Kanhaiya hits out at Centre, flags threats to democracy

JALNA: Congress leader Kanhaiya Kumar has slammed the BJP-led Central government, accusing it of weakening democratic institutions, and stated that power has become concentrated in the hands of a few, reducing citizens to mere members of a crowd.

Kumar lamented that leaders across party lines pay symbolic tributes to Dr B R Ambedkar but fail to follow his teachings.

The Congress leader was speaking on the topic "Indian democracy and its challenges" at Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar lecture series in Maharashtra's Jalna on Thursday, to mark the Dalit icon's 135th birth anniversary.

He alleged that electoral processes are being manipulated by money power, with voters being influenced before elections and elected representatives being "purchased" afterwards.

Referring to the ideas of Dr B. R. Ambedkar, he stressed that political democracy cannot survive without social and economic democracy.

He said that the current situation in the country reflects Ambedkar's warnings, alleging that public assets are being handed over to a select group of industrialists.

"Today, only those with money can contest and win elections, while the common man is left behind," the

Opposition party leader said, adding that citizens have become part of a crowd and have been stripped of their identity.

Issues like polarisation and hatred are deliberately used during elections to garner votes, he claimed, and accused the ruling party of spreading false narratives and diverting public attention from real issues by creating artificial problems and encouraging social divisions.

The National Students Union of India (NSUI) in-charge criticised leaders across party lines for paying symbolic tributes to Ambedkar while failing to follow his teachings.

The country is being run with the

power of lathis and guns, he claimed, alleging that the government is deepening social divisions based on caste and religion.

Kumar also alleged that dissent is being suppressed, with those raising their voices against the government being labelled as anti-national.

"The real power does not lie with the visible faces of governance, but with those controlling the system from behind," he claimed.

Kumar called for the creation of an egalitarian society based on Ambedkar's ideology, and urged people to unite around the principles of equality to safeguard democracy and the Constitution.

Mizo students Org call for stricter ILP enforcement

AIZAWL: Mizoram's influential student organisation, the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP), has called for stronger enforcement and tightening of the Inner Line Permit (ILP) system in the state, citing growing concerns over the increasing entry of non-locals without valid permits, a student leader said on Friday.

The demand was a central pillar of the resolutions passed during the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP)'s federal council meeting, the organisation's highest decision-making body, held in Aizawl on Friday, according to MZP general secretary Lalmingsanga Chhangte. He said that the council unanimously resolved to push the state government for a more stringent and advanced ILP system to curb illegal influx of non-tribal people from outside.

Addressing the council, MZP president C Lalremruata emphasised that protecting the ILP system is not just a policy issue but a collective responsibility as it serves as a safeguard for the identity, security, and future of the indigenous people of Mizoram.

He said that the recent rise in the alleged unauthorised

entry of outsiders (non-tribal) poses a serious challenge.

Lalremruata urged the MZP leaders across all branches to intensify ground-level monitoring and utilise the ILP system more effectively to ensure the state's security.

He emphasised the need for stricter monitoring, more effective implementation, and wider public awareness regarding the ILP mechanism.

The student leader also expressed concern regarding identity issues among 'Zofa' (ethnic Mizos) living in different parts of the country and the world. "While the MZP remains committed to the unity of all Zofa and embraces all our sisters and brothers, it discourages superficial association or the use of the Mizo nomenclature solely for personal gain," he said.

Apart from ILP, the council also discussed a wide range of issues and adopted several resolutions urging the state government to take proactive measures to address the shortage of teachers and ensure rationalisation, to promote Mizo code of ethics (Zo nun zemawi) in educational institutions.

Delhi Govt to study transplanted trees, bring in new machines to improve survival rates

NEW DELHI: Amid concerns over the low survival of transplanted trees, the Delhi government has commissioned a scientific study to understand survival trends and planned to import advanced tree transplanter machines from abroad to make the process more effective.

Officials said the Forest Research Institute, Dehradun has been asked to conduct a study within three months. "These steps are being taken to make changes in the Delhi Tree Transplantation Policy 2020 based on scientific evidence," they said.

The move follows concerns over low survival rates of transplanted trees, with a previous report by the Forest Research Institute estimating an overall survival rate of 35.45 per cent, with significant variation across species.

Forest department data also showed that of the 1,357 trees transplanted between 2019 and 2022, 578 survived, translating to a survival rate of 42.5 per cent.

Delhi Environment and Forest Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa told PTI, "We are taking steps

to make the tree transplantation process in Delhi more effective and better. We are conducting this study to understand why transplantation has faced persistent challenges over the years.

"The findings will help us adopt a more scientific approach based on field evidence and expert inputs, and make the city greener," he said. The minister further said that a new Expression of Interest has been floated that will also help in bringing advanced tree transplanter machines from abroad to the national capital that can improve survival rates and help the process.

A senior official aware of the matter said the institute had sought a year to complete the study but that they have been asked to submit the report within three months "so that necessary changes can be made and further loss of transplanted trees can be prevented".

Speaking about the new machinery, officials said that existing methods use backhoe loaders that often damage roots and cause transplant shock.

"These machines have been used in Gujarat and can uproot medium-sized trees. The proposed study will help assess their effectiveness in Delhi conditions," officials said.

The Forest Research Institute report noted that survival rates remain below expectations and vary widely, prompting a review of existing practices which officials said need greater standardisation and scientific inputs.

According to a minutes of a meeting of the Delhi forest department with empanelled agencies held in January noted that agencies were not consistently following permissions issued by Tree Officers or adhering to approved Tree Preservation Plans and timelines. The meeting also stressed the need for stronger oversight, including inspection of transplantation sites by Tree Officers and directions to improve survival outcomes.

Officials further suggested developing a system to capture detailed data on each transplanted tree, including species, girth and survival rates, to guide future pol-



icy decisions.

Consultations with the empanelled agencies highlighted that factors such as species, age, girth and size play a critical role in determining survival, reinforcing the need for a more scientific and standardised transplantation process.

The meeting identified species-specific trends. Trees such as peepal, bargad, gular, pilkhan, ar-

jun, semal, amaltas, sahanjan, gulmohar, peltophorum and alstonia showed relatively higher survival and can be transplanted up to a girth of 350 cm.

Ficus species were found to have the best survival performance among transplanted trees, and officials noted that their branches could also be used for plantation through vegetative propagation where feasible.

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