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previous YSRCP government, he alleged that the state had been “looted” during its tenure and that Andhra Pradesh had suffered significant damage over the past five years. He further claimed that the previous government had deliberately neglected Kuppam and accused it of staging “dramas” regarding the supply of Handri-Neeva waters to the constituency.

EDITORIAL

Will Aayaram interfere with Gayaram?

It is well known that the recent defection of some MLAs and MPs in the states of West Bengal and Maharashtra has created a political crisis. After the Trinamool Congress suffered a crushing defeat in the assembly elections, about 60 TMC MLAs and 20 MPs raised the flag of rebellion. Expelled leader Ritabrata Banerjee was elected as their leader by 60 TMC MLAs. In the Lok Sabha, TMC MPs, led by Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar, broke away from the party and merged with the Nationalist Citizens Party of India. It is noteworthy that the BJP has announced support for these rebels. Similarly, in Maharashtra, MPs and MLAs defected from the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) to the Eknath Shinde faction.

This was a major setback for the Thackeray camp, which the Shinde faction described as 'Operation Tiger'. Looking at these developments, it is clear to what extent the leaders are committed to democratic values ??and how much they are weakening the democratic system. It reminds us of Sumati Shataka's saying, 'A pond full of rafts will bring ten thousand frogs'. The phenomenon of these defections is not limited to any one state. The same trend is continuing across the country. These defections are also causing the collapse of governments that were in power until then. A total of 542 defections took place from 1952 to 1967, and it is noteworthy that between March 1967 and February 1968, about 438 MLAs defected from parties. In 1967, a MLA named Gayalal defected from parties three times in a single day, giving rise to the infamy of Aayaram Gayaram.

To prevent these defections, a committee headed by YB Chavan made some recommendations for the formulation of a suitable law. The committee recommended that a public representative who changes from one party to another, i.e. a defector, should not be appointed to the post of minister, speaker or any other position that receives financial benefits from the government for a period of one year, until he is re-elected. It suggested that defections are against democracy and strict action should be taken to prevent such people from getting any positions. With this, in 1985, through the 52nd amendment to the Constitution, Parliament finally included the anti-defection law in the 10th schedule of the Constitution. However, after that, the large-scale change of parties led to the disintegration of parties through pre-planned conspiracies. By making it legal for 1/3 of the MLAs of a party to defect, the provision served as a license to change parties, topple the government, and to come to power themselves. Earlier, according to the 10th Schedule, Paragraph 3 of the Constitution, if 1/3 of the MLAs of a party defected at once, they were not considered illegal defectors. By circumventing this exemption, parties were changed for selfish purposes. Eventually, the government was also toppled. To prevent this and to make this law more effective, in 2003, this Paragraph 3 was repealed by the 91st Constitutional Amendment and the limit was increased from 1/3 to 2/3 (two-thirds). However, the scourge of defections could not be eradicated. Congress MP Manish Tewari introduced private member bills in the Lok Sabha in 2010, 2021, and 2025. The 10th Schedule (Anti-Defection Act) of the Constitution has been proposed to be amended. According to these proposals, the party whip limit should be reduced. According to the current law, if an MP votes against the instructions of his party or abstains from voting, he will have to lose his membership. To prevent this from happening, this private bill seeks the freedom of MPs to vote independently and according to their conscience on ordinary laws except for important matters related to the survival of the government (for example, no-confidence motion, trust vote, money bill). The bill proposes that a member should automatically lose his party membership immediately after he defected. If the MP is disqualified, the MP can appeal to the Speaker/Chairman within 15 days. The bill makes it clear that the appeal should be resolved within 60 days. The real purpose of this proposal is to free the member from the 'slavery' of party orders. The situation continues to remain silent as the scenes of the worst weakening of the democratic system are happening before our eyes. The party membership and positions of the defectors must be cancelled immediately without any exceptions. To this end, Parliament should immediately implement a strict law with a single sentence. Only then will a trusting bond be established between the representatives of the people and the people who voted for them. At the same time, the members will also have the opportunity to question the mistakes of the leaders without any doubt, while following the party rules and regulations.

Congress At Akal Takht: A New Chapter But Not Historical Closure

For decades, references to the Indian National Congress from the platform of Akal Takht have largely been linked to the pain of June and November 1984. Against this historical background, the collective appearance of Punjab Congress MLAs on June 29 appeared to open a new chapter. They shared the venue with representatives of the Aam Aadmi Party, the Shiromani Akali Dal and other political and religious leaders during proceedings on the Jaagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar (Amendment) Act, 2026. The Akal Takht had objected to certain provisions and asked the Punjab government to make corrective amendments within one month. Leader of the Opposition Partap Singh Bajwa was given ample time to present the Congress party's position, while Jathedar Giani Kuldeep Singh Gargaj also invited Pargat Singh to speak. Although non-Sikh ministers had only been asked to submit written explanations, non-Sikh MLAs were not called. But Congress legislators Aruna Chaudhary from Dinanagar and Naresh Puri from Sujanpur also arrived at the Secretariat. They were not turned away and were allowed to participate in the proceedings. Congress legislators were also invited to partake in langar alongside other Sikh religious and political leaders present at the gathering. The focus remained firmly on legislative accountability rather than personal appearance or religious observance.

The Human Weight Of The Occasion

The seriousness of the moment was visible even before the proceedings began. I met senior Congress MLA Tripat

Rajinder Singh Bajwa, who represents Fatehgarh Churian, shortly before he was to appear before the Jathedar. He seemed visibly perturbed by the controversy that had followed the legislators' support for the law. The weight of the occasion, as well as the historical baggage carried by his party, appeared evident on his face. When I asked him about the legislation, he said, at that moment, he had come only to present himself unconditionally before the Akal Takht. He would answer political and media questions after fulfilling what he regarded as his immediate and foremost duty. The second example was Rana Gurjeet Singh, the Congress MLA from Kapurthala. He arrived at the gurdwara complex with his beard open. This was noticeable because he is usually seen in public as a formally dressed politician, with his beard tied and moustache carefully styled.

When I asked him about it, he said it had not been consciously planned. While leaving home, his only thought was to reach the Guru's place at the earliest. Whether by emotion, instinct or destiny, he had arrived in that form. These may seem like small personal observations, but they captured the atmosphere. The legislators did not appear to be attending an ordinary political meeting. Many seemed conscious that they were entering a sacred institutional space carrying the burden of history, community expectations and personal accountability.

The Burden Of 1984

Its pertinent to mentioned that the military operation at the Sri Darbar Sahib complex in June 1984, during Indira Gandhi's government, and the



anti-Sikh violence that followed her assassination in November remain deeply embedded in Sikh memory. No serious examination of the Congress's relationship with Sikh institutions can avoid 1984. In June that year, the Indira Gandhi government ordered Operation Blue Star inside the Sri Darbar Sahib complex. The military action caused heavy loss of life and severe damage, including to the Akal Takht. The government described it as necessary to remove armed militants, but for Sikhs worldwide, the army's entry into their holiest shrine remains a profound and unresolved wound. The pain deepened after Indira Gandhi's assassination on October 31, 1984. Organised anti-Sikh violence followed in Delhi and other parts of India. Thousands were killed, homes and businesses were destroyed, and many survivors waited decades for justice. The Justice Nanavati Commission recorded testimonies alleging the involvement of some local Con-

gress leaders and workers in inciting or assisting mobs. Official figures placed before Parliament recorded 2,146 Sikh deaths in Delhi alone. This history explains why the Shiromani Akali Dal, the SGPC and other Sikh organisations continue to invoke the Congress record. For many Sikhs, it is a question of justice and accountability, not merely politics. Yet, 1984 has also been used electorally. Its political use does not make the pain less real, but neither should that pain become a permanent political weapon.

Rahul Gandhi's Sewa

Rahul Gandhi's extended visit to Sri Darbar in October 2023 must be viewed against this difficult background. The visit was presented as personal and spiritual rather than political. He washed utensils, served langar, peeled vegetables and performed seva at the footwear section. Senior Congress leaders were largely kept away from accompanying him. The visit appeared to generate some goodwill towards Rahul Gandhi personally. It communicated humility and

avoided the usual political spectacle of slogans, speeches and large entourages even media too. The Congress later won seven of Punjab's 13 Lok Sabha seats in the 2024 parliamentary election. It would, however, be an exaggeration to attribute that result primarily to Rahul Gandhi's sewa. Electoral outcomes were also influenced by candidate selection, farmers' concerns, anti-incumbency, dissatisfaction with the state government and the decline of the traditional Akali political base. His visit may have softened some perceptions, but personal gestures cannot substitute for institutional accountability. Another symbolic moment followed Dr Manmohan Singh's death in December 2024, when Shiromani Akali Dal leaders visited the Congress headquarters in New Delhi to pay tribute. They stressed that the visit was solely to honour the former prime minister. Even so, their presence there was significant, showing that personal respect and shared Punjab sentiment can sometimes rise above longstanding political hostility.

The Story Of Congress And Its Never-Ending Obsession With 'Committees'

Committee Raj continues in the Congress but not everyone is happy with jumbo panels and duplication of work. After much deliberations, the Congress announced poll panels for election-bound Punjab, triggering both astonishment and disquiet. Instead of changing the PCC chief, the grand old party decided, in its great wisdom, to have a campaign committee chief and an Election Management and Coordination head, in addition to Punjab Congress party president and a Congress Legislature Party [CLP] leader. It is baffling how Vijay Inder Singla, who is heading the single-member Election Management and Coordination panel, would share the workload with state PCC chief Amrinder Raja Warring. Singla continues to be joint treasurer of the AICC.

Manish Tewari's Disappointment

Senior Congress leader and Chandigarh member of parliament Manish Tewari is sulking. His grudge is manifold. Apparently, he was not consulted when a panel headed by Ajay Maken toured Punjab to speak to various stakeholders. Well-placed sources say AICC general secretary in charge of Punjab, Bhupesh Baghel, has also not spoken to Tewari for months. So, when Tewari used microblogging platform X to vent his frustration, saying, "Wish I had an antidote for the insecurities of individuals and institutions!", it is evident that he had someone bigger in mind than Maken or Baghel.

Much like Shashi Tharoor, Tewari differs with the Congress leadership on nuanced foreign policy issues. But inherently, he remains a die-hard Congressman seeped in Nehruvian ideology. If Rahul Gandhi, Mallikarjun Kharge, KC Venugopal and others care to read his edit page articles

and columns, they would notice his deep anxiety and opposition to the 'Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram' culture of defections. Describing Paragraph 4 in the Tenth Schedule as a weapon of mass defection, Tewari added, "In light of the grotesque emasculation of democracy that is today on display, the time has come for Parliament to pass a single-line anti-defection law that any member who voluntarily gives up membership of a political party to which he belongs, or who defies the whip (in matters of confidence and no-confidence motions, adjournment motions, financial business, and money Bills) should forthwith cease to be a member of the House." It is evident that Tewari himself is not going anywhere.

A Confused Campaign In Punjab

At another level, the Congress's Punjab drive appears bereft of ideas. The BJP may not have a chief ministerial face in the state, but the Congress camp has a crowd. Former Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi thinks he is numero uno in the race for the post of Chief Minister if the grand old party wins Punjab. But at least half a dozen party leaders in the state, including Pratap Bajwa and Amrinder Raja Warring, harbour similar wishes, counting on Rahul Kharge-Venugopal to fulfil their dream. Just today, a total of 67 Congress leaders participated in the meeting called by Channi amidst growing uncertainty over the post of Punjab Congress President.

In 2020, the Congress had dished out a 'dad's army' running into 17 panels, accommodating anyone and everyone in Delhi Pradesh Election Committee, Campaign Committee, Manifesto Committee, Publicity Committee, Election Man-



agement Committee and Media Co-ordination Committee. There were 607 members - yes, 607 - figuring in these committees. The composition of these panels was deprived of any organisational hierarchy, age, political stature and other parameters of parliamentary democracy.

The present-day Congress works on a mantra that says loud and clear - when in doubt, set up a committee.

Venugopal, considered to be Rahul Gandhi's eyes and ears and a man of all seasons, would be aware that reports of panels set up to study poll debacles in Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh [polls were held in December 2023] have not been discussed in the Congress Working Committee. There has been no follow-up action either.

Committees have been a quick fix solution for the Congress for decades now. In May 2022, Sonia Gandhi who was interim president of the party, had set up a high-profiled Empowered Action Group [EAG] to deal with the Congress's fu-

ture political challenges. There is no record of EAG holding any deliberations till date.

Old Habits

Kharge and Rahul Gandhi are also in possession of several other reports gathering dust at the party headquarters. They include the report on organisational polls by Ram Niwas Mirdha, Manmohan Singh's report on party funds, the PA Sangma and Sam Pitroda reports on modernising the organisation and Pranab Mukherjee's report on organisational affairs. The list also includes documents prepared by the AICC's department of policy and planning (DIPCO) and the Future Challenges Group that had Rahul Gandhi as a member. Then there are three reports submitted by AK Antony on various poll debacles between 2014 to 2019.

In a nutshell, almost all of these panels and committees have recommended sweeping changes in the organisation but intrinsic compulsions have so far prevented any concrete action. For example, both Mirdha and Antony had emphasised the

need for "democratic" organisational elections after discovering that the party had polled fewer votes in many states where the number of primary members was higher. This situation holds true for the Congress in Tamil Nadu, Andhra, Odisha and few other states even now.

Many years ago, a party panel headed by Pranab Mukherjee, the then Foreign Minister, had called for scrapping Congress committees at block, city and district levels and recommended replacing them with units at polling booths and Assembly and parliamentary constituencies. The logic was to make the Congress more "election-friendly" and eliminate the tendency of district Congress committees being at loggerheads with candidates contesting polls. But the leadership is still weighing the pros and cons of the suggestion. In 1849, French writer Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr had written, "plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose", that is, the more things change, the more they stay the same. The Congress is a living testimony of it.

Revolutionary Hero Alluri Sitarama Raju Should Be Remembered Forever: Collector K. Dinesh Kumar



Rampachodavaram, July 4 (Pen Power): Polavaram District Collector K. Dinesh Kumar said that every Indian has the responsibility to remember revolutionary freedom fighter Alluri Sitarama Raju, who fought against British rule and sacrificed his life for the country's independence. On the occasion of the 130th birth anniversary of Alluri Sitarama Raju, a tribute programme was held at the ITDA Conference Hall in Rampachodavaram on Saturday. Collector K. Dinesh Kumar, Chintoor ITDA Project Officer Shubham Nokwal, DFO Shivakumar Gangal, and Ravindranath Reddy paid floral tributes to the portrait of the legendary freedom fighter. Addressing the gathering, the Collector said that Alluri Sitarama Raju united the tribal people and led the freedom movement against

the British Empire. He recalled that attacks were carried out on police stations in Rampachodavaram, Krishnadevipeta, Addateegala and Rajavommangi, where weapons were seized to challenge British rule. He said that despite the British possessing advanced weapons, Alluri Sitarama Raju courageously fought against them with his extraordinary bravery and strategic leadership, along with the support of tribal communities. He never fought for personal gain but dedicated his life to the welfare of tribal people, earning the enduring title of "Manyam Veerudu" (Hero of the Forests). Born on July 4, 1897, Alluri Sitarama Raju attained martyrdom at the hands of the British on May 7, 1924. Though his life was short, his patriotism, courage and sacrifice remain immortal in Indian history, the Collector said. He further stated that naming a district after Alluri Sitarama Raju stands as a fitting tribute to the legendary freedom fighter and serves as a reminder of his invaluable contribution to the nation.

Among those present were District Revenue Officer P. Ambedkar, APO General DNV Ramana, Sub-DFOs J.V. Subba Reddy and Ravindra Rao, DRDA PD Dr. Dasari Ratnakar Rao, DEO G. Sriram Murthy, ICDS PD K. Uma, District Horticulture Officer Devadanam, PHO Narendra Kumar, Executive Engineers and officials from various departments, who also paid floral tributes to the portrait of Alluri Sitarama Raju.

Measures Being Taken to Promote Economic Empowerment of Women Through Bamboo Products: Collector K. Dinesh Kumar

Rampachodavaram, July 4 (Pen Power): Polavaram District Collector K. Dinesh Kumar said that necessary measures are being taken to enable women in the district to achieve economic empowerment through bamboo-based products. The Collector chaired a meeting at the ITDA Conference Hall in Rampachodavaram on Saturday with DRDA officials, Sub-DFOs, Forest Range Officers and representatives of ISB to discuss the promotion and development of bamboo products.

Addressing the meeting, the Collector said that efforts are being made to encourage women self-help group members to take up bamboo-based enterprises and improve their economic status. He reviewed the number of Van Samrakshana Samithis (VSSs) functioning in the district, the villages in which they operate, their annual income and the utilisation of those funds for developmental activities.

He also stressed that resolutions for the development of 'Aranya Sri' should be passed mandatorily in Gram Sabha meetings. The Collector said that the Central Government is providing Rs. 15 lakh to each Community Forest Rights (CFR) Committee for tribal development. These funds would be utilised for developmental works in the villages after carrying out plantation activities in the lands allocated under government guidelines. The Collector directed officials to create awareness in various villages of the district regarding bamboo cultivation and bamboo-based



products. He also instructed them to prepare and submit CFR Action Plans. He said that steps are being taken to ensure that bamboo products manufactured by tribal women are linked to markets, thereby providing sustainable livelihood opportunities. A processing unit for forest produce has already been established at Devarapalli village, he added. The Collector called upon DRDA officials to encourage tribal women to take up bamboo-based activities so that they can achieve economic progress and improve their livelihoods.

Among those present were Sub-DFOs Subba Reddy and Ravindranath, DRDA Project Director Dr. Dasari Ratnakar Rao, DPM Durgaprasad, Forest Range Officers G.V. Nanaji and Azad, ISB representatives Hemanth and Pasangi, and ROFR Coordinator G. Anand, among others.

Collector Reviews SIR Drive, Warns Against Delays in Achieving Targets Encourages Citizens to Use 'Book a Call with BLO' Digital Service

Anakapalli (Narsipatnam), Pen Power, July 4: Anakapalli District Collector and District Election Officer Vijaya Krishnan on Saturday directed officials to ensure the successful completion of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls within the stipulated timeframe, warning that negligence or failure to achieve assigned targets would invite disciplinary action. The Collector, accompanied by Joint Collector Shaurya Man Patel and Narsipatnam Revenue Divisional Officer V. Ramana, inspected the implementation of the ongoing voter revision programme at Balighattam village in Narsipatnam mandal. Reviewing the field-level progress, Vijaya Krishnan emphasized that the Special Intensive Revision is being conducted on a priority basis across the district and instructed officials not to lag behind in meeting the prescribed targets. She advised them to seek the support of mandal-level officers wherever necessary to ensure 100 percent completion of the voter verification and revision process within the deadline. The Collector cautioned that strict action would be taken against officials who fail to perform their responsibilities or fall behind in achieving the targets.

Citizens Urged to Use 'Book a Call with BLO' Facility
Highlighting the Election Commission's digital initiatives, the District Election Officer appealed to citizens to make use of the "Book a Call with BLO" facility available through the ECINET mobile application and the voters.eci.gov.in portal. She explained that once a voter books a call, the concerned Booth Level Officer (BLO) will contact the applicant within 48 hours and provide the re-



quired assistance regarding voter registration and related services. The Collector encouraged all eligible citizens to enroll themselves as voters during the ongoing Special Intensive Revision. She also urged existing voters to utilize the facility for corrections or updates in their electoral records, including changes in name, age, address, and other personal details.

Officials and staff associated with the election revision programme participated in the inspection.

EC Reviews Voter Registration Challenges in Tribal Areas of ASR District

Special Focus on Transparent Electoral Roll Revision Under SIR-2026

Paderu, Pen Power, July 4: The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Saturday reviewed the progress of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR)-2026 of electoral rolls in Alluri Sitarama Raju (ASR) district, with a special focus on the unique challenges involved in voter registration across the district's tribal and remote areas. Principal Secretary of the Election Commission of India S.B. Joshi chaired a high-level review meeting at the District Collectorate, where District Collector T. Nishanthi presented a comprehensive PowerPoint presentation outlining the status of electoral roll revision and the measures being taken to ensure a transparent and inclusive voter registration process. During the meeting, the Collector highlighted the geographical and socio-economic challenges that complicate electoral roll revision in the district. These include low literacy and digital literacy among tribal communities, poor mobile and internet connectivity in interior villages, difficult hilly terrain, inadequate transportation, scattered habitations with small populations, language barriers, and the prevalence of identical names, which often makes voter identification more challenging. Officials informed the Commission that the deployment of Booth Level Officers (BLOs) has been completed across all polling stations in the district. A total of 306 BLOs and 33 BLO Supervisors have been deployed in the Araku Valley (ST) Assembly constituency, while 318 BLOs and 24 BLO Supervisors are working in the Paderu (ST) Assembly constituency. Overall, 624 BLOs and 57 Supervisors are engaged in carrying out the revision process across the district.



The Collector said the district administration has adopted a comprehensive action plan to ensure that the electoral rolls are prepared in a transparent, accurate, and error-free manner. Regular coordination meetings are being held with recognised political parties, and special emphasis is being placed on appointing Booth Level Agents (BLAs) to strengthen monitoring and coordination at the polling station level. The review also covered the preparedness and training of election personnel, house-to-house verification by BLOs, rationalisation of polling stations, publication of draft electoral rolls, disposal of claims and objections, and the publication of the final electoral roll. Joint Collector Tirumani Sri Pooja, ITDA Project Officer Aditya Varma, District Revenue Officer M.V.S. Lokeshwara Rao, RDO Bhujanga Rao, and officials from the Collectorate and Election Department attended the review meeting.

Minister Dola Sri Bala Veeranjanya Swamy Highlights Development, Welfare Agenda at Kandukur AMC Oath Ceremony



Kandukur, Prakasam District, Pen Power July 4 : Andhra Pradesh Minister for Social Welfare, Dr. Dola Sri Bala Veeranjanya Swamy, said the state government under Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu is pursuing development and welfare with equal priority, describing them as the "two eyes" of governance. The Minister was speaking on Saturday after attending the oath-taking ceremony of the newly appointed Agricultural Market Committee (AMC) Chairman at Kandukur, along with public representatives from the erstwhile Prakasam district. Addressing the gathering, Dr. Swamy alleged that the previous YSRCP government had weakened the state's financial position during its five-year tenure. He said the present

government, led by Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, is focused on creating wealth, accelerating development, and implementing welfare programmes across the state. He stated that the coalition government is fulfilling its election promises, including the implementation of the Super Six welfare commitments. Referring to employment initiatives, the Minister said the government had completed recruitment of 16,000 teachers through the Mega DSC and accused the YSRCP of spreading misinformation regarding irregularities in the recruitment process. The Minister also said the government aims to create 20 lakh employment opportunities, adding that Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu and Minister Nara Lokesh are attracting investments and industries by engaging with national and international investors.

Commenting on the state capital issue, Dr. Swamy criticised former Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, alleging inconsistency in his statements regarding the capital. He asserted that Amaravati had been approved as the capital of Andhra Pradesh through parliamentary approval and a Central Government Gazette notification.

The Minister further noted that the government's commitment to the people was reflected in fulfilling its promise of restoring Kandukur to Prakasam district after the district reorganisation.

He appealed to the people to continue supporting the coalition government to ensure sustained development and welfare in Andhra Pradesh.

Three BLOs Suspended for Negligence in Electoral Roll Revision Duty

Anakapalli, Pen Power, July 4: District Collector Vijaya Krishnan has ordered the suspension of three Booth Level Officers (BLOs) for negligence in the discharge of their duties during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls. The suspension orders were issued on Saturday following the identification of serious lapses in the execution of their official responsibilities.

The suspended officials are:

Smt. B. Vyduryam, Panchayat Secretary & BLO, Polling Station No. 224, Pydipala, Makavarapalem Mandal.

Sri P. Appalachari, Panchayat Secretary & BLO, Polling Station No. 257, Koduru, Makavarapalem Mandal.

Sri V. Rambabu, Panchayat Secretary & BLO, Polling Station No. 244, Rachapalli, Makavarapalem Mandal.

According to the official orders, the District Collector exercised the powers vested under Sub-Rule (1) of Rule 8 of the Andhra Pradesh Civil Services (Classification, Control and Appeal) Rules, 1991, after it was found that the officials had failed to perform their duties properly during the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls and had acted in violation of the prescribed rules and procedures.

Collector Vijaya Krishnan stated that negligence, dereliction of duty, and violations of guidelines in the electoral roll revision process would not be tolerated under



any circumstances. She emphasized that all officials engaged in the revision exercise must carry out their responsibilities with utmost sincerity and accountability to ensure a free, fair, and transparent electoral process.

The District Administration reiterated its commitment to maintaining the integrity of the electoral roll revision process and warned that strict action would be taken against any official found neglecting assigned duties.

Legal Services Camp for Children Held in Kandukur to Promote Legal Awareness



Kandukur, Pen Power, July 4: As part of the calendar activities of the State Legal Services Authority, following the guidelines of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), a "New Legal Services Camp" was organized for children at the premises of the Janardhana Swamy Temple in Kandukur on Saturday. Inaugurating the innovative legal awareness camp, District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) Chairperson and Principal District Judge A. Satyanand said that courts are committed to protecting the rights of children as guaranteed under law. He stated that the District Legal Services Authority and Mandal Legal Services Committees provide free legal advice and legal aid to all eligible beneficiaries who require legal assistance. The Principal District Judge emphasized that such programmes help create legal awareness among children from an early age, enabling



them to understand their rights and responsibilities and grow into responsible citizens. Speaking on the occasion, Sub-Collector Himavanshi said the Revenue Department is extending all necessary support to the Legal Services Authority and is actively promoting legal awareness programmes conducted by the institution among the public. DLSA In-charge Secretary and Senior Civil Judge C.H.V. Ramakrishna also participated in the programme. Other dignitaries present included Senior Civil Judge K.K.V. Bulli Krishna of Kandukur Court, Kandukur DSP Balasubramanyam, Junior Civil Judges Durga Kalyani and Annapurna, Bar Association President Sridhar Naidu, and students from various schools in Kandukur town. Government departments also set up information stalls at the venue to educate children and the public about various welfare schemes and legal services.

Alluri Sitarama Raju Jayanti Celebrated with Grandeur in ASR District



Paderu, Pen Power, July 4: The birth anniversary of legendary freedom fighter and tribal icon Alluri Sitarama Raju was celebrated with great enthusiasm at the Collectorate in Alluri Sitarama Raju (ASR) district on Saturday. District Collector T. Nishanthi led the celebrations by paying floral tributes to the statue and portrait of the revolutionary leader. Addressing the gathering, the Collector described Alluri Sitarama Raju as a fearless patriot who dedicated his life to India's freedom struggle and the protection of tribal rights. She said his courage, ideals, and self-

less service continue to inspire generations and called upon the youth to follow his values and contribute towards the development of society. Former MLA Giddi Eswari, who attended the programme as the chief guest, said Alluri Sitarama Raju's heroic resistance against British rule and his unwavering commitment to safeguarding tribal communities would forever remain a proud chapter in India's freedom movement. She noted that despite being born into a privileged family, he devoted his life to the welfare of tribal people and sacrificed everything for the nation. She further stated that the Andhra Pradesh Government remains committed to the welfare and development of tribal regions. Appreciating the coordinated efforts of the district administration in ensuring effective public service delivery, she thanked District Collector T. Nishanthi and other officials for inviting her to participate in the Jayanti celebrations. District Revenue Officer M.V.S. Lokeshwara Rao, APC Chairman Venkata Ramana, former MPP Borra Vijaya Rani, public representatives, government officials, Collectorate staff, and several local dignitaries were present on the occasion.

Visakhapatnam Hosts Grand Opening of ASMITA South Zone Canoeing & Kayaking Championship 2026



P. Sreekanth, Bureau chief, Pen Power Visakhapatnam, July 4 : The ASMITA South Zone Canoeing & Kayaking Championship–2026 commenced on a grand note on Saturday at the Gambheeram Gedda Reservoir in Visakhapatnam, bringing together talented paddlers from across the country. Member of Parliament M. Sribharat inaugurated the championship as the chief guest. The inaugural ceremony was attended by Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh (SAAP) Chairman Animini Ravi Naidu, SAAP Directors Raja M.D. and Bucchi Raju, District Sports Development Officer (DSDO) June, Andhra Pradesh Canoeing & Kayaking Association President B. Balaram Naidu, and other dignitaries. The event began with the ceremonial lighting of the lamp, followed by the athletes' parade and oath-taking ceremony. The dignitaries interacted with participants representing various states and extended their best wishes for the championship. Addressing the gathering, MP M. Sribharat encouraged the athletes to excel in the competition, while SAAP Chairman Animini Ravi Naidu reaffirmed the Andhra Pradesh government's commitment to promoting water sports and providing all necessary support for their development.

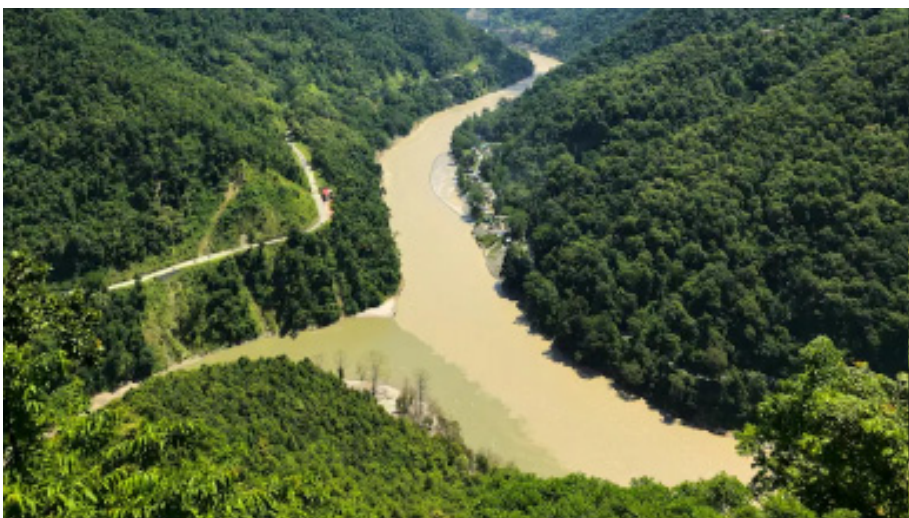
Day-One Results – Kayaking 1000 Metres
K4 Category



Gold: Karnataka
Silver: Telangana
Bronze: Kerala
K2 Category
Gold: Odisha
Silver: Madhya Pradesh
Bronze: Andhra Pradesh
K1 Category
Gold: Karnataka
Silver: Odisha
Bronze: Telangana
The winners were felicitated by the chief guests during the inaugural ceremony.
Speaking on the occasion, Andhra Pradesh Canoeing & Kayaking Association President B. Balaram Naidu said that competitions in the 500-metre and 200-metre events, along with other categories, are progressing with great enthusiasm. He noted that around 350 technical officials, coaches, managers, and athletes from across India are participating in the championship, making it a prestigious sporting event for Visakhapatnam. The championship is expected to showcase the growing popularity of canoeing and kayaking while providing a competitive platform for emerging talent from different states.

'Will Factor All Related Developments': India Keeps Watch On Teesta Issue

India on Friday said its development assistance for projects in Bangladesh is based on a "mutually agreed roadmap" and New Delhi will factor "all related developments" in its overall approach to the Teesta river-related project. The comments by Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal came in response to a query on the Teesta issue in the context of Dhaka and Beijing discussing the Teesta River Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project (TRCMRP) during Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's recent visit to China. China's involvement in the Teesta river management can potentially complicate New Delhi-Dhaka ties for its strategic significance. Asked how India viewed this, Jaiswal said, "India's development assistance for projects in Bangladesh is based on a mutually agreed roadmap which is regularly reviewed. Our views on the Teesta river project have been previously conveyed to the Bangladeshi side. We will factor all related developments in our overall approach to the Teesta issue." The Teesta river flows from the eastern Himalayas through Sikkim and West Bengal before entering Bangladesh, where it is a key source of irrigation and livelihood for millions of people. The Teesta river



basin is located near India's sensitive Siliguri Corridor, a 22-km narrow strip of land that connects the mainland with the northeastern states. Asked about New Delhi's reaction to reports about Bangladesh's strategically located Mongla Port and its plans to buy fighter jets from China, Jaiswal said, "We pay attention to all these issues and take whatever appropriate steps we deem necessary." Bangladesh Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman had said on June 27 that relations between Dhaka and Beijing had reached their "highest level" after PM Tarique Rahman's visit to China. According to him, "significant progress" was made on the TRCMRP, with China pledging its support and both sides agreeing to expedite the project's feasibility study. The two countries had also agreed to ex-

pedite the implementation of the Mongla Port Modernisation and Expansion Project and the Chinese Economic and Industrial Zone Development Project in Chattogram, the minister had said. In response to another query related to consular services in Australia, Kuwait and the UAE, Jaiswal said, "Our missions in concerned countries, that is in Australia, Kuwait and the UAE, continue to offer... limited consular services." The operations of the outsourcing agencies in these countries supporting consular services rendered by Indian missions "have been kept on hold as the matter is presently sub judice. We await directions from the honourable high court" on this matter, he said. Asked about reports that UNESCO has asked Pakistan to reverse the "re-

constructions" that "undermined the integrity" of two historical sites in Taxila, a World Heritage Site, Jaiswal said, "Cultural heritage... especially those recognised by UNESCO, don't belong to any one person or country. It belongs to the entire world. And as such, it's our responsibility to protect and preserve our heritage and move forward." According to reports in Pakistani media, the cultural arm of the UN has warned that it would "delist" Taxila from the UNESCO World Heritage List if the said actions were not reversed. Located in the Rawalpindi district of Pakistan's Punjab province, Taxila is a vast site that includes a Mesolithic cave and the archaeological remains of four early settlement sites, Buddhist monasteries, and a mosque and a madrasa.

Kidnapped Infant Sold For Rs 1.5 Lakh Rescued In Hyderabad, 5 Arrested

Hyderabad: Cyberabad Police have rescued a one-month-old baby girl and arrested five members of an interstate child trafficking racket within three days of her kidnapping from outside a railway station. The infant was kidnapped around 2 am on June 30 while her mother, 25-year-old Malan Bourav Shantha Bai, a circus worker from Karnataka's Bidar district, was asleep on the pavement outside the Lingampally Railway Station with members of her circus troupe. She woke up to the baby's cries and saw two men fleeing in an autorickshaw with the child. Despite chasing them, she could not stop the kidnappers. Based on

her complaint, police registered a case under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the Juvenile Justice Act. "Three special teams were formed, and investigators examined hundreds of CCTV cameras across Cyberabad, Hyderabad and Malkajgiri, tracked the suspects' movements and cracked the case within 72 hours," said Cyberabad Commissioner of Police M Ramesh. Police arrested Mohammed Zuber of Vikarabad and Mohammed Irfan, an autorickshaw driver with a previous theft case, for carrying out the kidnapping. The investigation revealed that the duo had conspired to kidnap a newborn in ex-

change for money after being approached by Saadequa Maqsood alias Naziya, a resident of Neredmet. "The conspiracy began when Rehnuma Ali, a 30-year-old woman from Kolkata who had no children, allegedly sought to procure a baby illegally," said Ramesh. According to investigators, she reportedly approached her aunt Nimmi Jahan Ali alias Seema Ali, who lives in Hyderabad. Seema then contacted her friend Naziya, who in turn enlisted her fiancé #233; Zuber to arrange a newborn for payment. While scouting for a target, Zuber and Irfan allegedly spotted the complainant sleeping with her infant outside Lingampally Railway

Station. "In the early hours of June 30, they hired an autorickshaw belonging to an acquaintance, reached the spot and allegedly snatched the one-month-old girl from her mother's lap before taking her to Naziya's house," said the investigators. Police said Rehnuma Ali flew from Kolkata to Hyderabad on July 1, accompanied by her aunt, to take custody of the kidnapped infant. During the investigation, officers found that Rs 1.5 lakh had been transferred online to Zuber as payment for the illegal sale of the baby. Before the accused could leave Hyderabad with the child, police tracked them down, arrested all five accused and rescued the infant safely.

Engine Damage To Excess Water Use: Centre Busts 10 Myths On E20 Petrol

The government on Friday issued a detailed rebuttal to what it described as misinformation circulating on social media about the country's E20 ethanol blending programme, rejecting claims ranging from excessive water consumption and engine damage to insurance invalidation and environmental harm. In a 10-point clarification, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas said the programme, under which petrol contains up to 20 per cent ethanol, is supported by scientific studies, international experience and regulatory safeguards. Rejecting claims that producing one litre of ethanol consumes 10,000 litres of water, the ministry said only surplus rice, cleared after meeting national food security requirements, is diverted for ethanol production. It added that ethanol distilleries consume about 3-5 litres of processed water per litre of ethanol and increasingly operate Zero Liquid Discharge systems to recycle water. The ministry also said maize, which now accounts for more than 40 per cent of ethanol supplied under the programme, requires significantly lower irrigation than paddy and is being promoted through higher minimum support prices. The government also dismissed assertions that E20 is an untested fuel, noting that ethanol-blended fuels have been used internationally for decades. It cited countries, including the United States, Brazil, Canada, Thailand, Japan and several European nations, as having adopted ethanol blending at varying levels. Addressing concerns over vehicle per-



formance, the ministry said Automotive Research Association of India (ARAI)-led trials covering about 40,000 kilometres in passenger cars and 20,000 kilometres in two-wheelers found no significant adverse impact on drivability or fuel efficiency, with only "marginal" changes in mileage. It added that vehicles calibrated for E20 could benefit from ethanol's higher octane rating. On allegations that E20 damages engines or corrodes components, the ministry cited studies conducted by ARAI in collaboration with Indian Oil Corporation, the Indian Institute of Petroleum and the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers. The studies found no issues relating to drivability or compatibility of metal and plastic components, although certain rubber parts in older vehicles may require earlier replacement. The ministry also rejected claims that the use of E20 fuel could void vehicle warranties or insurance coverage, saying automobile manufacturers and insurers have clarified that vehicles designed or approved for E20 remain covered under applicable war-

ranty and insurance terms. Responding to viral social media posts suggesting ants and bees are attracted to E20 fuel because it contains sugar, the ministry said fuel-grade ethanol undergoes distillation that removes residual sugars and contains denaturants that repel insects. It also said petrol's hydrocarbon odour dominates the blended fuel. The government further denied claims that it had described the E20 programme as an "experiment" before the Supreme Court, saying the court proceedings related to contractual provisions governing ethanol procurement rather than the merits of the blending programme. It cited a clarification issued by the Office of the Attorney General stating that media reports suggesting otherwise were inaccurate. The ministry also dismissed claims that E20 allows water to enter vehicle fuel tanks, saying modern vehicles and fuel retail infrastructure are equipped with safeguards to prevent water ingress. It similarly described viral videos purporting to show sugarcane juice being mixed into petrol as fabri-

cated, saying fuel ethanol is manufactured through industrial processes and blended according to prescribed quality specifications. On environmental concerns, the government said ethanol plants require statutory environmental clearances, must comply with groundwater regulations and are required to operate Zero Liquid Discharge systems. It added that the programme has contributed to foreign exchange savings of more than Rs 1.9 lakh crore, expedited payments exceeding Rs 1.6 lakh crore to farmers, reduced carbon dioxide emissions by around 930 lakh metric tonnes and displaced over 310 lakh metric tonnes of crude oil imports since 2014-15. India achieved its target of 20 per cent ethanol blending in petrol in December 2025, ahead of schedule, after blending levels rose from about 1.5 per cent in 2013-14, according to the ministry. It said installed ethanol production capacity has reached about 2,000 crore litres, with procurement projected to exceed 1,200 crore litres during the 2025-26 ethanol supply year.

After Ram Temple, Badrinath Hit By Donation Theft Claims, Probe Ordered

Dehradun: Amid allegations of embezzlement of Ram temple donations in Ayodhya, the Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee (BKTC) on Friday ordered an inquiry into similar allegations concerning offerings at Badrinath Dham. BKTC President Hemant Dwivedi said the temple committee has taken the allegations circulating on social media seriously and has ordered the formation of an inquiry committee to investigate the matter. Explanations have also been sought from the employees concerned. On Friday, an organisation called the Bhairav Sena alleged financial irregularities at Badrinath Dham. It also demanded a fair investigation into an alleged financial misappropriation case linked to the personal assistant of the Temple Committee Chairman. Dwivedi, however, refuted claims on social media identifying a specific employee as his 'personal secretary.' He clarified that the individual is not his personal secretary but a regular government em-



ployee of the BKTC, and that he has previously worked as a personal assistant with three former Chairmen of the Temple Committee. Dwivedi assured that after the investigation is completed, if any employee is found guilty, strict and effective action will be taken against them as per rules. Meanwhile, Shri Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee Chief Executive Officer Sohan Singh Rangad said that following the social media allegations, CCTV footage from the Badrinath Temple premises was reviewed.

"The available footage does not have the required clarity. However, given the seriousness and sensitivity of the issue, the BKTC Chairman has been apprised of the entire matter," he said. The CEO added that in compliance with the Chairman's instructions, explanations are being sought from the concerned employees. A proposal to form an internal inquiry committee has also been sent to the Chairman for a fair and detailed investigation. "Once the committee is formed, it will conduct a detailed probe based on all facts,

available evidence, and statements of the parties concerned, and submit its report," he said. He added that if any adverse facts or irregularities come to light during the investigation, necessary statutory and departmental action will be taken against the guilty in accordance with the Shri Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee Act, 1939 and the Employee Conduct Rules. The CEO cautioned that since the matter is linked to the faith of millions of devotees, people should refrain from making unsubstantiated or misleading allegations.

Mumbai On Red Alert As Weather Agency Warns Of Extremely Heavy Rainfall

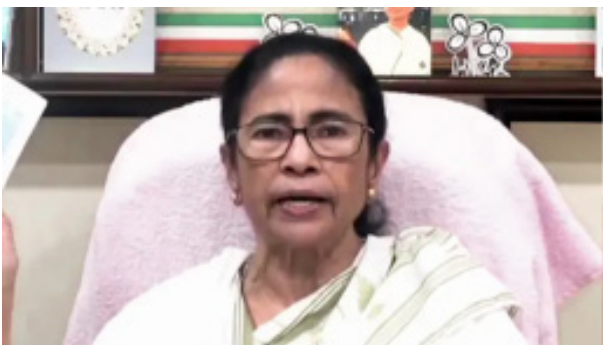
The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has sounded a red alert for Mumbai on Saturday, forecasting heavy to very heavy rainfall across the city and suburbs, with the possibility of extremely heavy showers and gusty winds reaching 60 kmph in isolated areas. Civic officials said that while the metropolis recorded over 100 mm of rain in several parts over the last 24 hours, public transport remains operational. Commuters, however, have reported delays in the suburban local train

network throughout the day. In its latest district-wise forecast, the IMD sounded a red alert for Mumbai, predicting heavy to very heavy rainfall at a few places and extremely heavy rainfall at isolated locations over the weekend. Despite the late arrival of monsoons, the country's financial capital has been witnessing heavy rainfall since the beginning of this week. Several parts of Mumbai received more than 100 mm of rainfall during the 24 hours ending at 8:00 am on Saturday. As per the data shared

by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), in the western suburbs, Bandra (H West ward office) recorded the highest rainfall at 150.6 mm, followed by Supari Tank, Bandra (146 mm) and Pali Chimbai, Bandra (143.2 mm). In the island city, Parel received 141.8 mm, followed by Matunga-Dadar with 135.2 mm, Fort with 120.8 mm, Wadala with 118.3 mm and Lower Parel with 118 mm. Downpour lashed the eastern suburbs as well, with Vikhroli logging 143 mm, followed by

Ghatkopar at 136.4 mm, Mankhurd at 134.2 mm, Chembur at 127.6 mm, and Maharashtra Nagar in Mankhurd at 124 mm. The island city recorded an average rainfall of 99 mm, the eastern suburbs 98 mm and the western suburbs 94 mm in the last 24 hours. High tides are expected at 2.50 pm with a height of 4.26 metres on Saturday and at 2.52 am on Sunday with a height of 3.60 metres, while the low tide is scheduled at 8.56 pm on Saturday at 1.66 metres and at 8.22 am on Sunday at 1.28 metres.

'Kill Me To Stop Me': Defiant Mamata Banerjee Calls Trinamool Rebels Traitors



Kolkata: Despite absorbing blow after blow following Trinamool Congress's debacle in the West Bengal Assembly elections, Mamata Banerjee remains defiant. After most of the party's 80 MLAs formed a faction under Ritabrata Banerjee and its Lok Sabha MPs created a third bloc, kicking off the who's-the-real-Trinamool Congress jostling, she has dared her political opponents, saying they would have to "kill" her to "stop" her. Banerjee called the rebels "traitors". However, in her trademark style, she said the Trinamool's symbol would remain with the bloc loyal to her,

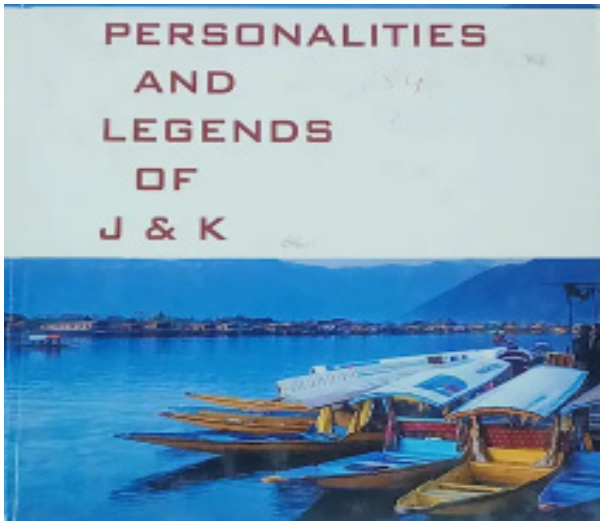
indicating that the rebels might face a protracted legal battle. "The party symbol won't go anywhere. If you want to stop me, you need to kill me," she said. The Trinamool Congress chief was dealt a fresh jolt on Saturday when Chandrima Bhattacharya, the party's Bengal chief and one of the few bigwigs still loyal to her, resigned. The MLA followed her colleagues into the faction spear-headed by Ritabrata Banerjee, the Leader of the Opposition in the assembly, whose supporters wrested control of the party's office in Kolkata on Friday. "Chandrima Bhattacharya has

resigned today. She had already informed me of the actual situation - that she would resign - because her son had previously joined hands with an anti-Trinamool faction," she said. The former chief minister, however, vowed she would never join the rebels, rejecting the latter's offer of an advisory role. "That is something she is free to do, but I will not join hands with them," she said. She claimed that the rebels had parted ways because of pressure. "But I will not bow down before the BJP, and my party will not bow down before any pressure," she added. Banerjee also addressed the issue of rebels taking control of the Trinamool office. "To those who went to the Trinamool Congress office yesterday and locked it up, I say this: we had rented that office. It was leased to us until October 2027. An individual may leave the party, but the institution itself does not cease to exist. It is the

party's property. I cannot simply take it over. No one can forcibly seize the property of 'Ma, Mati, Manush'," she said. The former chief minister -- who uprooted the Left from power after over three decades in 2011, effectively creating a political vacuum later utilised by the BJP -- said her party's ideology is firmly against the ruling party. "The symbol was given by me. I was the signatory for your nominations in the 2026 elections. How did you turn traitor within two months of the election? It should have some limit. You are with the BJP right now, which can't go on like this, as the Trinamool's ideology is anti-BJP," she said. She said that after Chandrima's exit, she has taken charge of the party on both the national and state levels. She also announced that the party office at her house would serve as the main Trinamool office.

The exodus in the Trinamool Congress began after the party and Banerjee's loss in the Bengal polls. The dissenting MLAs questioned her leadership style but indicated that their exit was more a referendum on her nephew, Abhishek Banerjee's role in the party: Over 60 MLAs, over 20 Lok Sabha MPs and at least 3 Rajya Sabha MPs have announced their separation from the Banerjee-led outfit. Bhattacharya announced her resignation barely weeks after she was appointed the chief of the party's Bengal unit. In her separation letter, she said she will always have the highest regard for Mamata Banerjee. She, however, blamed a lack of trust for her decision. "Where there is no faith, where there is no trust, it is not possible to work. That is why we resigned," she said. The Election Commission has asked the rival factions of the Trinamool Congress to submit their claims and counterclaims by 5.30 pm on July 6.

J&K School Book Calls Terrorists "Great Personalities", Alleges Civil Group



Jammu: The Omar Abdullah government in Jammu and Kashmir is facing a fierce backlash after a book allegedly distributed in government school libraries glorified separatist leaders and convicted terrorists as great personalities and legends. Instead of teaching patriotism, classrooms are being used to glorify those who waged war to break India. The book projects separatists and terrorists like Maqbool Bhat, Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Masarat Alam and Hurriyat leader Mirwaiz Umar Farooq as role models. BJP leader and Leader of Opposition in the assembly Sunil Sharma described the episode as "academic jihad" unleashed to pollute young minds. "We want Omar Abdullah to sack his Education Minister Sakina Itoo and arrest all those people behind pushing and recommending this controversial book in school libraries,"

Sunil Sharma said. Reacting to the controversy, Omar Abdullah said he has not read the book. He said he has not even seen the book. The civil society organisation Jammu and Kashmir People's Forum. Which had first flagged the issue, called the book the biggest betrayal towards martyrs' families and demanded an immediate ban and criminal action. "By glorifying terrorists like Maqbool Bhat and others - who have hands soaked in blood - they have rubbed salt on the wounds of family members of martyrs who sacrificed their life while fighting against Pakistan sponsored terrorism all these years," said Deepak Kapoor, member of JK Peoples Forum. The book, cleared under Samagra Shiksha, turns history on its head by celebrating anti-national figures as role models. The controversy centres on 'Great Per-

sonalities and Legends of J&K (Series 4)', edited by Hilal Ahmed and Santosh Meena. The JKPF alleged the book was procured by the state government for the 2025-26 academic session, stamped with the Samagra Shiksha logo, and sent to school libraries across the Union Territory. There is a chapter titled "Shahid Maqbool Bhat" which describes a terrorist like Bhat in glorifying terms as a "revolutionary" and "Shaheed-e-Azam". Maqbool Bhat was a convicted terrorist and murderer. He was sentenced to death in a murder case and hanged in Tihar Jail on February 11, 1984, after the Supreme Court upheld his conviction. The JKPF has raised serious questions about the vetting process under the New Education Policy framework. It asked how an expert committee linked to Samagra Shiksha approved a book that contained "misleading and objectionable references to the Indian state and security forces", and glorified individuals with anti-national roles. "This is nothing more shocking, shameful and obnoxious. Our children are being taught to call separatists and terror convicts as legends," said Abhijeet Jasrotia, BJP spokesperson. The JKPF has asked Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha to personally intervene and order a time-bound probe into how the book entered the public education system.

Mamata Banerjee Made Her Party State President A Month Ago, Now She's With Rebels



On June 3, Mamata Banerjee elevated Chandrima Bhattacharya to the post of Trinamool Congress' West Bengal president. She replaced Subrata Bakshi after the party's debacle in the Assembly elections. Mamata Banerjee had dissolved all party committees and restructured the organisation on June 3 fol-

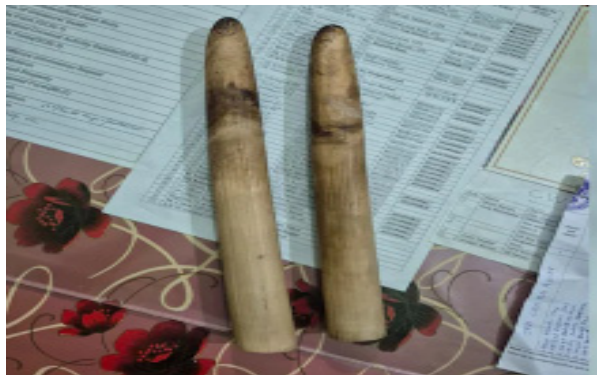
lowing the electoral setback against the BJP. Just a month later, Chandrima Bhattacharya was seen sitting and smiling with the rebel camp in the Leader of Opposition's chamber in the Bengal Assembly. "Where there is no faith, where there is no trust, it is not possible to work. That is why we resigned," she

said after resigning from her posts. Soon after sending her resignation letter from all party posts, Bhattacharya walked into the room of rebel leader Ritabrata Banerjee, who had started the mutiny against Mamata Banerjee and is now the Leader of Opposition in the Assembly. In her resignation letter on Saturday, Bhattacharya said she was quitting all party posts and also stepping down as the Trinamool Congress' authorised person before the Election Commission of India. Mamata Banerjee is fighting to retain her party's name and symbol and has petitioned the poll panel against the rebels' claim of being the "real" Trinamool. Bhattacharya was long known as one of Mamata Banerjee's closest aides and

held several important portfolios in the Trinamool government, including finance, health, and panchayat and rural development. Bhattacharya's switch came weeks after another Mamata Banerjee confidante, Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar, led the rebellion of party MPs against the TMC chief. Dastidar was removed as Chief Whip of the Trinamool Congress in the Lok Sabha by Mamata Banerjee in mid-May after the election results, and Kalyan Banerjee was assigned the role, which miffed Dastidar. Bhattacharya's move is similar to that of party MP Sayoni Ghosh, who also joined the rebel camp within days of being reinstated as chief of the Trinamool Congress' youth wing by Mamata Banerjee. The

Jadavpur MP was then removed from her position and replaced with Arnab Banerjee, a youth leader. In a stinging retort to Bhattacharya's move, Mamata Banerjee camp MLA Kunal Ghosh asked why she did not resign "when she enjoyed plum portfolios given by Mamata Banerjee during her government". The Trinamool Congress is facing an existential crisis as it has been hit by a stunning rebellion within its ranks since the Assembly election debacle. While a majority of its 80 MLAs have broken away and formed a separate group led by Ritabrata Banerjee, 20 of the party's MPs have also revolted and declared support for the NDA after merging with a little-known party, NCPI.

2 Elephant Tusks, 133 Illegally Sawn Sal Timber Seized In Assam, 2 Arrested



Kokrajhar: A coordinated operation by police and the Forest Department in Assam's Kokrajhar district has led to the arrest of two persons for the illegal possession of two elephant tusks, while a subsequent raid resulted in the seizure of a large quantity of illegally processed Sal timber. According to officials, the operation was launched after intelligence inputs suggested the movement of wildlife contraband in the district. A police team, led by the Deputy Superintendent of Police (Border) along with personnel from Kachugaon Police Station, carried out a late-night raid and detained two suspects identified as

Satoan Narzary, 30, a resident of Gossaigaon, and Ripan Basumatary, 42, a resident of Kachugaon Bazar. During the operation, authorities recovered and seized two elephant tusks. During initial questioning, investigators were informed that the tusks had allegedly changed hands for Rs 12,000. One of the accused also claimed that the tusks were collected after an elephant had died naturally inside a forest. Officials said these claims are being thoroughly verified as part of the ongoing investigation. Acting on fresh leads that emerged during the investigation, the Assam Forest Department, assisted by the Sashastra Seema Bal

(SSB) and local police, later conducted another search operation at the residence of one of the arrested persons in Kachugaon village. The search led to the seizure of 133 pieces of illegally sawn Sal timber, measuring approximately 1.818 cubic metres. Forest officials immediately took possession of the timber and initiated legal proceedings under the relevant forest laws. "The recovered timber has been taken into departmental custody, and further investigation is underway to ascertain its source and intended destination," an official said. Authorities suspect the case could have links to a broader network involved in wildlife offences and illegal timber trade in the region. Investigators are examining whether additional individuals are connected to the activities and are working to trace the complete supply chain behind both the elephant tusks and the seized timber. The investigation remains in progress, with police and forest officials jointly pursuing further leads.

Indian Army Peacekeepers Get UN Medals For Service In Conflict-Hit DR Congo



India's long-standing contribution to United Nations peacekeeping operations received another significant endorsement as 651 Indian Army personnel serving under the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) were awarded the prestigious United Nations Medal during a ceremonial Medal Parade held at Permanent Operating Base Sake in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo on Friday. The ceremony brought together senior MONUSCO officials, representatives from the Force Headquarters, military commanders, and other distinguished guests to honour the professionalism, dedi-

cation, and operational excellence displayed by the Indian contingent while serving in one of the United Nations' most challenging peacekeeping theatres. The United Nations Medal is awarded to peacekeepers who complete a qualifying period of service under UN missions and have demonstrated exemplary commitment to the organisation's mandate. For the Indian soldiers deployed in eastern DR Congo, the recognition reflects months of dedicated service in a region marked by persistent armed conflict, insecurity, and humanitarian crises. Operating under difficult and often dangerous conditions, the Indian peacekeepers have played a vital role in protecting civilians threatened

by armed groups, supporting local security efforts, facilitating humanitarian assistance, and contributing to the implementation of the UN mandate. Their responsibilities have ranged from conducting patrols and securing vulnerable areas to assisting displaced populations and ensuring safe conditions for humanitarian agencies to carry out relief operations. Eastern DR Congo remains one of the most volatile regions in Africa, with multiple armed groups operating across the area despite sustained international efforts to restore stability. Peacekeepers deployed under MONUSCO regularly work in high-risk environments where maintaining security while safeguarding civilian

lives requires exceptional discipline, professionalism, and operational readiness. The recognition of the Indian contingent underscores the Indian Army's reputation as one of the most dependable and respected contributors to United Nations peacekeeping missions. Over the decades, India has consistently ranked among the leading troop-contributing countries to UN operations, deploying thousands of military personnel, military observers, and medical teams to conflict zones across the world. Indian peacekeepers have earned international acclaim for their courage, impartiality, and humanitarian approach while serving in diverse and often hostile environments.

The Medal Parade at Sake highlighted not only the operational achievements of the battalion but also the spirit of service that has become synonymous with Indian peacekeeping. Senior UN officials commended the contingent for maintaining the highest standards of professionalism while carrying out complex missions under demanding circumstances. The award also serves as recognition of the sacrifices made by Indian soldiers who operate far from home in support of international peace and stability. For India, participation in UN peacekeeping remains an important pillar of its commitment to global peace and security. The country has contributed to nearly every major UN peacekeeping mission since the organisation's early years, reflecting its belief that collective international efforts are essential to resolving conflicts and protecting vulnerable populations. The ceremony concluded on a solemn and inspiring note as the Indian peacekeepers reaffirmed their pledge to uphold the highest standards of professionalism, integrity, and selfless service while continuing to serve under the United Nations' Blue Flag.

100 Days, 185 Cases: 122 Tonnes of Adulterated Food Seized In Hyderabad

Hyderabad: In one of the biggest crackdowns on food adulteration in the city, the Hyderabad Food Adulteration Surveillance Team (H-FAST) has registered 185 cases and seized nearly 122 tonnes of unsafe and adulterated food in its first 100 days of operation. The special unit, launched on March 19 under the Hyderabad City Police, has been carrying out raids across the city along with the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC), Food Safety and Veterinary departments. The largest number of cases was registered in Rajendranagar at 55, followed by Golconda (44), Secunderabad (35), Charminar (21), Shamshabad (13), Jubilee Hills (12) and Khairatabad

(5). The raids led to the seizure of 27 tonnes of adulterated ginger-garlic paste, over 25 tonnes of chemically ripened fruits, more than 30 tonnes of discarded chicken waste, 15 tonnes of substandard chicken and meat, over 9 tonnes of stale pickles, 4 tonnes of adulterated khoya, 3.9 tonnes of fake tea powder, 3.2 tonnes of adulterated cream, 2.7 tonnes of substandard dry fruits and dates, 2.5 tonnes of adulterated curd, 1.5 tonnes of synthetic paneer and 120 kg of unhygienic fried chicken from fast-food outlets. Police also handed over 247 cases to the GHMC Food Safety Officers for further legal action. These include cases against paneer units, water plants, bakeries, fast-food centres, hostels, meat shops and quick-

commerce platforms, as well as 90 cases registered based on public complaints. Highlighting the health hazards of food adulteration, Hyderabad Police Commissioner VC Sajjanar said, "Food adulteration is not a minor violation. We consider it an offence equivalent to attempted murder. We will not hesitate to invoke the Preventive Detention (PD) Act against those involved in this mafia." Sajjanar said the commissioner's office is receiving around 15 public complaints every day and appealed to people to report suspected food adulteration by calling Dial 100 or the H-FAST helpline - 8712661212. He assured that the identity of informants will be kept confidential.

Global Network Used Chat Groups To Drug, Rape Women In 9 Countries, Busted



A major international police operation has uncovered organised groups where offenders allegedly planned, encouraged and shared drug-facilitated sexual assaults on their partners, authorities said on Thursday. The investigation, involving authorities from seven countries, has revealed how online chat groups were being used to exchange advice on drugging victims, avoiding detection and circulating videos and images of the abuse. Most of the victims were women who were allegedly sedated before being raped or sexually assaulted, according to Europol and Britain's National Crime Agency (NCA). **Victims Often Had No Idea They Were Assaulted** The investigation found

that many victims were unaware they had been attacked until police contacted them. According to the NCA, the alleged offenders were often people the victims knew and trusted. In some cases, multiple connected offenders were involved in the abuse. Police from Germany and the UK launched the joint investigation with support from law enforcement agencies in the United States, Brazil, Canada, France, Hungary, the Netherlands and Spain. The operation, called Project Medusa, began in April to tackle what investigators described as a growing and increasingly organised form of sexual violence. **More Than 150 Suspects And Victims Identified** Since the operation be-

gan, investigators have identified more than 150 offenders and victims, opened over 270 new investigative leads and arrested 57 people. Authorities, however, believe the real number of victims is much higher because many cases are never reported. "Drug-facilitated sexual assault is no longer isolated behaviour but increasingly organised, conducted via coordinated networks and enabled by digital platforms, requiring a more sophisticated operational response," said Nigel Leary, deputy director at the NCA. **Encrypted Groups Helped Offenders Plan Assaults** Europol said offenders used encrypted messaging apps, private forums and closed chat groups to com-

municate with one another. According to investigators, members exchanged information about which drugs to use, how to administer them without being detected and how to avoid police attention. They also allegedly shared photos and videos of the assaults. The agency said perpetrators sought to "objectify and dehumanise" their victims, with some abuse continuing for years.

Cases Across Europe Highlight The Pattern

The investigation comes after several high-profile convictions linked to drug-facilitated sexual assault. In France, Dominique Pelicot was sentenced to 20 years in prison in 2024 for repeatedly drugging his wife, Gisele, and inviting dozens of strangers to rape her while she was unconscious. Fifty other men were also convicted in the case, which sparked widespread debate about gender-based violence. In Germany, a man identified as Fernando P. was sentenced last year to eight years and six months after being found guilty of drugging and raping his unconscious wife over several years while recording and sharing videos of the abuse online. Earlier this year, Zhenhao Zou received a life sentence with a minimum term of 24

years after being convicted of raping 10 women in the UK and China. Prosecutors said he used WeChat and dating apps to contact women before luring them to his apartments, where they were drugged and assaulted. In April, Polish authorities also arrested a man linked to an investigation into an online Telegram group where users allegedly exchanged advice on drugging and raping partners.

Police Urge Victims To Come Forward

Siobhan Blake, the UK's Crown Prosecution Service lead for rape and serious sexual offences, described the abuse as "some of the most horrifying I have seen in my career". "Victims are being subject to horrendous sexual offending in their own homes in an ultimate breach of trust," she said. Police stressed that victims can be of any age, background or ability and urged anyone who believes they may have been targeted in a drug-facilitated sexual assault to report it. Investigators say Project Medusa is the first operation of its kind and hope international cooperation will help expose a form of abuse that often remains hidden behind closed doors and in private online spaces.

Israel Wanted To Kill Top Iranian Negotiators. How US Saved Them



Washington: The United States has reportedly asked its allies in the Middle East to warn Iran about a possible Israeli plot to assassinate negotiators Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf and Abbas Araghchi during the delicate ceasefire talks, which began in early April. According to a New York Times report, Washington was concerned that an Israeli effort to kill Iran's foreign minister and Parliament speaker would doom the negotiations to reach an interim peace deal and lead to renewed fighting in the Gulf region. Killing senior Iranian leadership had been part of Israel's strategy from the start of the war on February 28. From Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, to Ali Larijani, Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, over 50 Iranian leaders have been killed by Israeli forces in recent years. But, according to the American media report, authorities in the US believed that during the intense phase of the war, Araghchi and Ghalibaf could have been legitimate targets for Israel, which was intent on toppling Iran's hard-line government. They were fearful that an Israeli assassination of these two particular Iranian officials would derail any effort towards peace in Iran. Araghchi and Ghalibaf have been the key officials negotiating with various countries in the region to reach a framework agreement with the US that sought to open the Strait of Hormuz and set the outline for follow-on talks on Tehran's nuclear program.

The Israeli Strategy Since the start of the war, Israeli strikes have been targeting Iranian leadership based in part on US intelligence. While US strikes focused on Iran's navy and missile forces, Israel has been prioritising targeting the leadership in the early phase of the war, intent on killing as many high-ranking officials as it could. That Israeli strategy included killing potentially more pragmatic leaders that the Donald Trump administration in the US had hoped to negotiate with, such as Iran's top national security official at the time, Larijani, and former Iranian foreign minister Kamal Kharazi. Both men were part of Iran's negotiation team when they were killed in Israeli airstrikes.

When Israel Tried To Kill Araghchi and Ghalibaf

In March, the Wall Street Journal reported that Araghchi and Ghalibaf were on an Israeli target list, but Israel temporarily removed them after the United States' request following the resumption of the truce talks. The NYT reported that the Trump administration learned around that time that at least Ghalibaf was on an Israeli targeting list and asked Israel to refrain. The Israeli Parliament speaker was reportedly nearly killed in both the 12-day war in June 2025 and again

in this year's conflict, when Israel targeted a secret meeting of senior government officials in a bunker under a mountain. At both times, Ghalibaf was rescued from under the rubble, according to three senior Iranian officials. In April, after the Islamabad meeting, Mohsen Zanganeh, a lawmaker, told local media Ghalibaf, Araghchi, and other members of the negotiating team had "put their lives on the line knowing the grave security risks, and this is called a real sacrifice, not political manoeuvring." During the negotiations, Iran also took heightened precautions aimed at making it more difficult for Israel to strike at senior officials. When Ghalibaf and Araghchi travelled to Pakistan to meet US Vice President JD Vance, Iranians sought guarantees from Washington, through Pakistani and Qatari intermediaries, that Israel would not carry out any covert operations targeting the Iranian delegation, the officials said. Following this, Pakistani fighter jets escorted the Iranian airplanes carrying a delegation of more than 70 people from the border of Iran to Islamabad and back again when the session was over. But on the way back to Tehran, an Israeli security threat reportedly emerged. Mahdi Mohammadi, a senior adviser who was part of the delegation to Islamabad, said in a social media post at the time that the negotiators' plane had to make an emergency landing in the city of Mashhad, Iran's closest airport to the Pakistani border, and the Iranian delegation travelled some eight hours by land back to Tehran after an Israeli threat. But since then, both senior Iranian officials have continued to travel. In late May, Ghalibaf and Araghchi flew to Qatar for talks and then travelled to Switzerland in June for a second in-person meeting with Vance and the American delegation. Araghchi also travelled to India during the BRICS Foreign Ministers' summit.

Difference In US And Israeli Aims In Iran Team Trump's caution around the possible Israeli kill plot shows how the American and Israeli aims in the war they started together diverged radically in the latter part of the operations. While the United States wanted a truce, Israel wanted to prolong the fighting, fearing that the theocratic regime in Iran had become even more hard-line and Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps had only consolidated its control over the country. The Israelis reportedly saw the ceasefire in Iran as a disaster because it did not fulfill their war aims of forcing regime change, destroying Iran's proxy forces, and seriously damaging its missile program. Israeli officials were also fearful that the peace deal would put billions of dollars into Iran, allowing it to quickly rebuild after the war and without meaningfully restricting its nuclear ambitions.

Thousands Attend Khamenei's Funeral, Iranian Leaders Break Down At Farewell

Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi broke down during the farewell ceremony for former Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Tehran on Friday, according to Fars News, as mourning ceremonies began for the late leader, who was killed in US-Israeli strikes on February 28 this year.

According to Fars News, Tehran Governor Mohammad Sadegh Motamadian said, "We will have the highest level of security and safety at the farewell and send-off ceremony for the martyred Leader." "Exactly at 6 a.m. tomorrow, the doors of Tehran's Prayer Grounds will open; there will be no opening before 6." "People should plan to arrive at the Prayer Grounds starting from this hour." Fars News also reported that Baghdad will shut down for the funeral procession of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution following an announcement by Baghdad Governor Atwan Al-Atwani. Minister of State for External Affairs (MoS) Pabitra Margherita and Bihar Governor Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Syed Ata Hasnain represented India at the funeral ceremony on Friday. The Embassy of Iran in India, in a post on X, said, "Indian Dignitaries Pay Tribute to the Martyred Leader of Iran, His Eminence Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei." The image shared by the embassy featured People's Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti, Congress leader Salman Khurshid, who heads the party's foreign affairs department, along with several others. According to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Deputy Chairman of Russia's Security Council, Dmitry Medvedev, arrived to attend the funeral ceremonies. In a post on X, the Ministry said, "On July 3, Deputy Chairman of Russia's Security Council @MedvedevRussiaE arrived in Tehran to attend the farewell ceremony for Iran's late Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei." According to Press TV, top Iranian officials, heads of state, foreign dignitaries and high-ranking delegations from across the world attended the solemn ceremony at Tehran's Grand Mosalla to pay tribute to Ayatollah Khamenei. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Ghalibaf, Judiciary Chief Gholam-Hossein Mohseni Eje'i and Chairman of the Expediency Council Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani were among the senior Iranian leaders present. According to Press TV, foreign dignitaries included Turkmenistan's chairman of the People's Council, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, Iraqi President Nizar Amadi, Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Tajikistan's President Emomali Rahmon, Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Army Chief General Asim Munir, and Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani. Parliament speakers from Iraq, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Uzbekistan, Belarus and Kyrgyzstan, foreign ministers of Nicaragua, Congo and Burkina Faso, the president of Egypt's Senate, the secretary general of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement and Oman's parliament speaker also attended.

Male Disguise, Remote-Controlled Bomb, Snake Tattoo: Inside Monaco Bomb Attack

A 39-year-old woman has been identified as the main suspect in the Monaco parcel bombing case in which a Ukrainian tycoon and two of his family members with links to Russia were targeted. According to local authorities, she disguised herself as a man. On the night of the attack, the three victims were coming back home from dinner at a seaside restaurant when the bomb exploded at the entrance of their building. The bomb was planted earlier, and the suspect checked when the victims were close enough before detonating the bomb.

Who Is Anastasiia Berezovska?

The suspect, Anastasiia Berezovska, has a tattoo of possibly a snake on her right arm from the shoulder to the elbow. It says she was born in Ukraine, has dark hair, and speaks German. Although the suspect was initially identified as a heavily built person appearing to be male, wearing a

dark long-sleeved top, light-coloured shorts and a black bucket hat, a review of the CCTV footage of the previous days and testimony from a witness indicated that the woman was disguised as a man. After the attack the suspect had fled to France and then driven to Italy in a car which had German registration and was rented only for the operation. A woman had followed the same route as the suspect and showed similar behaviour, which led prosecutors to deduce that she could be the accused. Interpol, the international police organisation, has issued a red notice seeking her arrest. She is wanted in Monaco for attempting murder, placing an explosive device in a public place with criminal intent, and criminal conspiracy. Two photos included in the Interpol wanted notice for Berezovska show a woman wearing a white T-shirt with dark stripes, one of them in a street where she's hold-



ing what appears to be some sort of electronic device, trailing a cable, in her left hand.

Ukrainian Tycoon's Russian Links

The victim, Vadym Yermolaiev, renounced his Ukrainian citizenship nearly a decade ago, and he was targeted by Ukrainian sanctions in 2023 for ties to Russia. His partner and child were also hurt. One of the victims is still in a life-threatening condition, prosecutors said Friday. The deputy

prosecutor in Monaco said that because the bomb was detonated from a distance, using a remote control, there could be more than one perpetrator. Two men were arrested in Monaco but were released due to lack of evidence. The attack shocked the country on the Mediterranean coast, one of the world's smallest sovereign states known for its high concentration of wealthy residents. Monaco's Prince Albert II described it as "an odious act" and said all pub-

lic services were mobilised to ensure security. This was the first bomb assassination attempt ever recorded on Monaco's highly safe and surveilled streets. Monaco is half the size of Central Park and has 556 police officers and 1,387 CCTV cameras monitoring the area. Ukraine is believed to have carried out attacks and targeted killings of Russian figures in the course of the war, although those attacks have largely been confined to Ukrainian or Russian territory.

Iran Is Preparing Thousands Of Graves As Millions Gather For Khamenei Funeral



Even as Iran projects calm during the funeral ceremonies for Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, authorities are preparing for the grim possibility of a disaster that could leave thousands dead. According to German newspaper Die Welt, Iranian officials have drawn up emergency plans anticipating anywhere between 1,500 and 3,000 fatalities during the days-long funeral processions, which are expected to attract millions of mourners.

Thousands Of Graves

Prepared

The report says officials have created a dedicated unit to deal with potential deaths and missing persons, while thousands of fresh graves have been readied at Tehran's Beheshti-e Zahra cemetery. A Tehran municipality employee, whose identity was concealed for security reasons, told the newspaper that the preparations were real. "The prepared graves really exist," she was quoted as saying. "Those responsible were told that up to 3,000 dead

would be okay. With such a large crowd and this extreme heat, no one knows what will happen." Khamenei's funeral began in Tehran on Saturday and will continue through the holy city of Qom before moving to the Iraqi cities of Najaf and Karbala. The ceremonies are expected to conclude in Mashhad on Thursday, where he will be buried.

A City On High Alert

The funeral has triggered one of the biggest security and logistical operations Iran has undertaken in years. According to Die Welt, authorities have planned movement restrictions across Tehran, thousands of buses to transport mourners, temporary kitchens to feed crowds, and schools and mosques converted into accommodation for visitors. The scale of these preparations reflects fears that enormous crowds, combined with soaring tempera-

tures, could quickly turn dangerous.

Iran Has Seen Funeral Tragedies Before

In 2020, at least 56 people were killed and over 200 injured in a stampede during the funeral of IRGC commander Qasem Soleimani in Kerman. Decades earlier, the 1989 funeral of Ruhollah Khomeini also descended into chaos, leaving at least eight people dead and hundreds more injured.

Why Authorities Fear An Attack

Beyond the risk of crowd crushes, Iranian officials are also preparing for possible security threats. Ahead of the funeral, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) warned against any attempts to target Iran during the ceremonies. The warning came after Israel's Defence Minister Israel Katz, reportedly said that Iran's supreme

leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, was "marked for death". With millions of mourners and senior Iranian leaders expected to attend, any attack could have devastating consequences. Security personnel form a human chain as a preventive measure to control the crowds gathering at the Grand Mosalla to pay their final respects to Iran's former Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei at the start of his funeral ceremonies in Tehran. Security personnel form a human chain as a preventive measure to control the crowds gathering at the Grand Mosalla to pay their final respects to Iran's former Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei at the start of his funeral ceremonies in Tehran. Security personnel form a human chain as a preventive measure to control the crowds gathering at the Grand Mosalla to pay their final respects to Iran's former Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei at the start of his funeral ceremonies in Tehran. Security personnel form a human chain as a preventive measure to control the crowds gathering at the Grand Mosalla to pay their final respects to Iran's former Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei at the start of his funeral ceremonies in Tehran.

Vaibhav Sooryavanshi Era Is Here, Surpasses Sachin Tendulkar To Be India's Youngest Debutant. Full List Here



The wait is over. Vaibhav Sooryavanshi has made his debut for India at the age of 15 years and 99 days, making him the youngest debutant in senior cricket - men's or women's. Before Sooryavanshi, Shafali Verma was the youngest player (15 years and 239 days) to represent India. In men's cricket, Sachin Tendulkar (16 years and 205 days) held that record. Sooryavanshi now holds that historic distinction. The anticipation had been building from the time Sooryavanshi was named in the squads for the Ireland and England series. He was not given an opportunity in the two India-Ireland T20Is that the Shreyas Iyer-led team lost. India then persisted with the proven opening combination of Sanju Samson and Abhishek Sharma in the first T20I against England as well. That stance divided the cricketing world. Samson's failure in all three innings only strengthened Sooryavanshi's case. Ultimately, captain Shreyas Iyer and coach Gautam Gambhir took the big call. The debut cap was handed to Vaibhav Sooryavanshi by Tilak Verma ahead of the 2nd India vs England T20I in

Manchester. With that, a new chapter began in Indian cricket.

Youngest Debutants For India (men's)

Vaibhav Sooryavanshi vs Ireland (15 years, 99 days), vs England (July 4, 2026)

Sachin Tendulkar vs Pakistan (16 years, 205 days), vs Pakistan (Nov 15, 1989)

Piyush Chawla vs England (17 years, 75 days), vs England (Mar 9, 2006)

Laxman Sivaramakrishnan vs West Indies (17 years, 118 days), vs West Indies (Apr 28, 1983)

Parthiv Patel vs England (17 years, 152 days) vs England (Aug 8, 2002)

Maninder Singh vs Pakistan (17 years, 193 days) vs Pakistan (Dec 23, 1982)

THE FULLLIST:
YOUNGEST INDIAN DEBUTANT (MALE): Vaibhav Sooryavanshi (15 years, 99 days)

YOUNGEST INDIAN DEBUTANT (FEMALE): Shafali Verma (15 years, 239 days)

YOUNGEST TEST DEBUTANT (MALE): Hasan Raza of Pakistan (14 years and 227 days)

YOUNGEST INTERNA-

TIONAL DEBUTANT OVER-ALL: Marian Gherasim of Romania in T20Is (14 years, 16 days)

Shreyas Iyer, India captain, highlighted at the toss that they expected big things from Sooryavanshi. "Absolutely... you've seen him in the last few months, the way he's been batting. Not really. I feel that he completely deserves to be in the squad. He's someone who doesn't take pressure at all. Has an unflinching nature. He's very well aware of what's going to come in these coming matches. The way he bats in the nets and takes on the bowlers, shows what kind of player he is," Iyer said.

Sooryavanshi's Journey
Sooryavanshi earned his maiden national call-up following a sensational IPL 2026 campaign with Rajasthan Royals, where he amassed 776 runs at a staggering strike rate of 237.30, including a century and five fifties. His explosive season saw him finish as the tournament's leading run-scorer while smashing a record 72 sixes. The youngster also swept multiple post-season honours, including the Orange Cap, Most Valuable Player,

Emerging Player, Super Striker and Super Sixes awards. In the recent tri-nation in Sri Lanka, featuring SLA and Afghanistan A, Sooryavanshi made 211 runs in five innings at an average of 42.20, with a strike rate of almost 201, with the best score of 94, his solitary fifty coming in the final. He also smacked the fastest List A cricket fifty in 11 balls against Sri Lanka A. In eight first-class matches, Sooryavanshi has scored 207 runs at an average of 17.25, with just one fifty in 12 innings and a best score of 93. His Youth Tests record is better, with 331 runs in six matches and 10 innings at an average of 33.10, with two centuries and a fifty, with a best score of 113. In List-A, he has made 564 runs in 13 matches and innings at an average of 43.38 and a strike rate of 176.80, with a century and two fifties and a best score of 190. He is India's top run-getter in youth ODIs, with 1,412 runs in 25 matches and innings at an average of 56.48, with a strike rate of 165.72, four centuries and seven fifties and a best score of 175. His first U19 WC appearance this year saw him win the title and top score with 439 runs in seven matches and innings at an average of 62.71 and a strike rate of 169.49, with a century and three fifties, with a best score of 175. He also smashed a whopping 30 sixes, the highest by a batter in the tournament's history. In 34 T20S and innings, he has made 1,477 runs at an average of 44.75, a strike rate of 220.44, with four centuries and six fifties. So far in his IPL career, Sooryavanshi has scored 1,028 runs in 23 matches and innings at an average of 44.69 and a strike rate of 228.95, with two centuries and six fifties and a best score of 103. He has smashed 96 sixes.

Matthew Hayden's Reality Check For Youngsters Wanting To Follow Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's Footsteps



Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's 'devil-may-care' approach to batting looks magical, but other teenagers trying to ape the boy wonder should ponder whether that template is sustainable, Australian legend Matthew Hayden cautioned. The 15-year-old Sooryavanshi, whose much-awaited international debut has become a national talking point, has galloped into the collective consciousness of the cricketing universe with his attack-at-all-costs style, which has already created a new order in T20 cricket. When Hayden, who recently saw Sooryavanshi perform in the IPL while sitting in the Gujarat Titans dugout, was asked whether Shubman Gill's classical batsmanship and the Bihar lad's pyrotechnics could co-exist in T20s, he offered an interesting take. "We are talking about two very unique personalities. Can both (Gill's and Sooryavanshi's) styles exist? Absolutely. They already do. The challenge for any youngster watching someone like Vaibhav Sooryavanshi is whether that style can be sustained over a long period," Hayden, owner of 15,000-plus international runs and 40 centuries, told PTI in an exclusive interaction. For Hayden, Gill has already shown that his style of batting certainly has the recipe for success at the international level. "Shubman

Gill has already shown that it can be done with consistency at the international level, and for me, international cricket remains the premium standard. "Just as we see footballers like Lionel Messi represent both club and country successfully, there is room for different approaches in cricket," Hayden explained. Hayden, who has been a coach and a respected cricket commentator, said that each and every player should search within to find a way to go about their job in their own individual style. "I strongly believe in helping players find their own inner warrior. Sooryavanshi and Shubman Gill are completely different personalities with different backgrounds and different journeys. "That's the beauty of cricket. It's a skill-based game, and every player arrives with unique technical strengths and experiences," Hayden summed up succinctly. Hayden then

cited an example from his playing days. As a southpaw, he admired his contemporary Brian Lara but knew that there was no point in trying to copy the Trinidadian's style. "I grew up admiring Brian Lara, but I wasn't Brian Lara. I wasn't West Indian either. I grew up in regional Queensland, where sport was central to everyday life. "I developed my own game based on my instincts, and that eventually allowed me to become one of the best players in the world." For Hayden, it is important for every player to find his own identity, which makes them unique. "Sport is full of unique personalities. There will never be another Jonah Lomu (the rugby great), another Lionel Messi or another Kelly Slater (surfer). "As coaches, our job is to discover those players, nurture their individuality and make sure their development is sustainable," Hayden put it aptly

Sanju Samson Reveals Father's Life-Changing Decision: "My Name Wasn't There"



The Delhi & District Cricket Association has long carried the reputation of "crushing dreams" of deserving talents and they almost did that with Sanju Samson before his father, an erstwhile cop with Delhi Police decided to shift base to his home state Kerala. The rest as they say is history. The exceptionally gifted Samson by sheer weight of his white ball runs made it to the Indian T20 team and earlier this year was the biggest hero of the T20 World Cup triumph. However Samson mentioned how the heartbreak in Delhi became a turning point for him and his family. "Back in school, I used

to see friends wear the DDCA jacket and talk about playing for the state cricket team of Delhi. That motivated me," Samson told 'JioStar'. "I wanted to represent Delhi too. I went for trials, attended state camps, and scored runs. Two or three times I made it to the camp but never got a breakthrough into the state team. The competition was tough. However his father Viswanath took a split-second decision that proved to be life-changing for the Samson household. "Then one day, the team list was announced after my trials had ended. My name was not there. We returned home in si-

lence. As soon as we reached home, my father told my mother, 'We will have to move to Kerala. We are shifting.', "he recalled. "My mother said, 'The kids are only in 6th standard. Let them complete 10th.' My father said, 'No, we have to go now. Pack your things. I am booking tickets in three days.' He took that decision instantly." "I remember, we all boarded the train. Then we reached Kerala and I started playing for Kerala. That is how my cricket journey for the Kerala State Team began," said the man, who made his Ranji Trophy debut weeks before his 17th birthday.

BCCI Reacts To Criticism Of Gautam Gambhir, Shreyas Iyer Over Stance On Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's Debut

BCCI vice-president Rajeev Shukla has shared his views on the debate surrounding teenager Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, amid the ongoing tour of England. Many expected the 15-year-old to make his India debut in the 1st T20I against England on Wednesday, but the management decided to stick with the tried and tested opening combination of Abhishek Sharma and Sanju Samson. The delay in Sooryavanshi's debut has led to strong criticism of the team management, including head coach Gautam Gambhir and captain Shreyas Iyer, who had also benched the batting sensation for the two-match series against Ireland last month. Reacting to the debate, the BCCI vice-president defended the team management, while criticising the unnecessary remarks that have been made against the head coach and the captain. "We are also of the view that he is a very talented player, and he showcased that during the IPL. I have



seen several comments against the team management and the coaches, but I want to make it very clear that the coach and captain will take the final decision. They are looking at the situation, and whenever the right opportunity arises, they will definitely give him his chance," Shukla told Times Now. Shukla suggested that while Sooryavanshi's time will come sooner rather than later, that decision should be left entirely to the team management. "So, such decisions should be left to the wisdom of the team management.

I don't know why such unnecessary comments are being made about it," he added. Sooryavanshi was fast-tracked into the national T20I side after a spectacular IPL 2026 season, where he finished with the Player of the Tournament honours for his 776 runs in 16 innings, scored at 237.30. The national selectors said he had forced their hand with his outrageous talent and performances, but the team management has not been as quick to put him into the first XI during their shock series defeat to Ireland.

Gautam Gambhir Sent Blunt Message On How To Manage Vaibhav Sooryavanshi: "Tell Him He Won't Play"



The wait for Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's senior India debut continues. While the 15-year-old has been included in the India squads for the T20Is against Ireland and England, he hasn't managed to break into the playing XI of a side that recently won the T20 World Cup 2026. Whether Sooryavanshi should play is a topic that has split opinions

among experts and fans alike. However, former India wicket-keeper batter Parthiv Patel stated that clear communication from the team management to Sooryavanshi is more important. Parthiv said that it is important for the Team India coaching staff, which is led by Gautam Gambhir, to send the correct message to Sooryavanshi. "I feel that at

some point in this series (against England), Vaibhav Sooryavanshi will definitely get an opportunity. But at this point in time, communication is something which is very important. You know, when you are part of a coaching staff, you have to make sure that you are giving away the right signals to a batter," Parthiv said, speaking on Star Sports,

as quoted by Sportskeeda. "Even if you are not going to make him play, you have to tell him that fact. He's a 15-year-old kid. You have to speak to him carefully. You have to teach him a little patience," he added. Sooryavanshi currently finds himself behind Abhishek Sharma, Sanju Samson and Ishan Kishan in the pecking order, who all played crucial roles in India's T20 World Cup 2026 triumph. "Talking about Sanju Samson, he was the Player of the Series in the World Cup. You have Ishan Kishan, who is batting at No. 3 and is the No. 1 ICC-ranked player. No. 2 is Abhishek Sharma. At this point in time, there is no place, and you have to communicate that really well to Vaibhav Sooryavanshi," Parthiv further said. India suffered a shock 0-2 T20I series loss to Ireland, during which Sooryavanshi did not play. The first T20I between India and England was abandoned midway due to rain.

Start Time For England's Round Of 16 Match vs Mexico Changed? Report Makes Big Revelation

The World Cup match between Mexico and England on Sunday will remain at the original scheduled time despite concerns about a potential afternoon thunderstorm. FIFA had been looking at the possibility of starting the round of 16 game at the Azteca Stadium earlier than the scheduled 6 p.m. local time (8 p.m. EDT), a person with knowledge of the situation told The Associated Press. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly. But a Mexican federation official told the AP that after deliberation FIFA decided the match would remain unchanged. That person also spoke on condition of anonymity because they were

not authorized to comment publicly. Among the reasons for exploring the change was because of possible disruption caused by flooding. Mexico coach Javier Aguirre criticized the proposed change earlier Friday. "It's a kick in the gut; now we must change everything. It's not that all the work goes down the drain — though it's close — because you're having to scrap six hours of scheduled planning. I don't like it at all," Aguirre told Radio Formula. "Obviously, we'll abide by what FIFA says, but neither my players nor I are happy about it." Rescheduling the match also could have affected England's preparations. The

Three Lions are scheduled to arrive late Friday and will hold their Saturday training session at the grounds of UNAM Pumas in the southern part of the capital, leaving them with significantly less time to acclimate to Mexico City's high elevation. The Azteca Stadium sits at more than 7,300 feet (2,200 meters) above sea level. For elite athletes to perform at their peak at high altitude, a period of adaption is required to reduce fatigue caused by lower atmospheric pressure and reduced oxygen availability, experts say. Sports scientists generally recommend an extended acclimation period of at least two weeks,



or the "fly-in, fly-out" method of arriving as close to game time as possible before acute symptoms set in. England coach Thomas Tuchel has already spoken about the difficulties his team faces in Mexico City. "My understanding is that we cannot adapt to the altitude. That is just a huge advantage that Mexico will have," Tuchel said this week. "It just takes too much time." The game will be Mexico City's fifth and final match of this year's World Cup.

Akkineni Nagarjuna completes 40 years as a leading actor



May 23 remains a landmark date in Akkineni Nagarjuna's cinematic journey. On this day, the actor completed 40 years as a lead hero in Telugu cinema. Nagarjuna made his debut as a leading man with the 1986 romantic action drama "Vikram," directed by V. Madhusudhana Rao and produced under the Annapurna Studios banner. Interestingly, the same date became even more memorable years later. On May 23, 2014, Nagarjuna delivered one of the most emotional and celebrated films of his career with "Manam," which also marked the final screen appearance of his father, legendary actor ANR. The film featured three generations of the Akkineni family, including Naga Chaitanya, and went on to become a classic. Marking the occasion, Nagarjuna shared an emotional note reflecting on the significance of May 23 in his life and career. Over the past four decades, Nagarjuna has continuously reinvented himself to stay relevant across generations. From redefining intense storytelling with "Siva" and romance with "Geethanjali" to delivering memorable entertainers like "Hello Brother," "Manmadhudu," "Annamayya," and "Bangaraju," he built a unique legacy as both a star and trendsetter. The actor is currently gearing up for his landmark 100th film (#King100).

40 years of Nagarjuna: A look at his best films

As he completes 40 years as a lead actor, here's a look at some of the best and most influential films in his career.

Siva (1989) – The film that changed Telugu cinema's visual style and established Nagarjuna as a powerful performer. It was directed by Ram Gopal Varma.

Geethanjali (1989) – Mani Ratnam's romantic classic remains one of Nagarjuna's most loved films.

Hello Brother (1994) – A blockbuster comedy entertainer showcasing Nagarjuna in a dual role.

Criminal (1995) – Stylish thriller directed by Mahesh Bhatt with memorable music by M.M. Keeravani.

Ninne Pelladatha (1996) – A trendsetting family romance that became a cult favorite among family audiences.

Annamayya (1997) – One of the defining performances of his career portraying saint Annamacharya.

Manmadhudu (2002) – Nagarjuna's iconic romantic-comedy role that earned him the title King of Romance.

Santosham (2002) – Emotional family entertainer that connected strongly with audiences.

Mass (2004) – Stylish mass-action entertainer that showcased his versatility.

Sri Ramadasu (2006) – Another acclaimed devotional role that won critical appreciation.

King (2008) – A complete commercial entertainer blending action, comedy, and style.

Manam (2014) – An emotional multi-generational drama featuring ANR, Nagarjuna, and Naga Chaitanya together.

Soggade Chinni Nayana (2016) – A blockbuster family entertainer where Nagarjuna's Bangaraju character became hugely popular.

Oopiri (2016) – Critically acclaimed emotional drama directed by Vamshi Paidipally. Film interviews Nagarjuna's biggest strength has always been his ability to evolve with changing times while maintaining his unique charm and screen presence. Even after 40 years, he continues to remain relevant.

Keerthy Suresh dismisses remake rumors on Anil Ravipudi's film



Chay Akkineni at telangana gaddar film awards funtion



Satyadev on 'Rao Bahadur': Mahesh Babu's reaction, makeup challenges and more

Director Venkatesh Maha's "Rao Bahadur" stars Satyadev in the title role. The film has already generated significant buzz ahead of its July 3 release. In a conversation with the media, Satyadev opens up about the film, the challenges he faced while portraying the character, and the appreciation he received from Mahesh Babu. Make-Up & Cosmetics

That confidence came only after watching the film. Even before we began shooting, we had decided on the tagline, "A Telugu film like never before."

After watching the completed film, Mahesh Babu used the exact same words. Several filmmakers who have seen it have echoed the same opinion. It's not a promotional line; it's a belief that comes after experiencing the film.

What genre does "Rao Bahadur" belong to? Film release calendar

At its core, it's a psychological drama with elements of magical realism and dark comedy. Magical realism is about presenting metaphors visually. Some moments may even feel like horror. For instance, you



may have noticed the roots chasing someone in the teaser. When audiences watch the film, the meaning behind such visuals will become very clear.

Did you know from the beginning that your role would require such an extensive makeover?

Absolutely. I knew this film would demand at least 300 percent more effort than my usual projects. I also knew it involved heavy prosthetic makeup. I've always admired actors like Kamal Haasan, Suriya and Vikram for taking on such physically demanding

roles, and it had been my dream to do something similar.

When "Rao Bahadur" came my way, I embraced it wholeheartedly. More than the physical makeover, what mattered was the mental preparation. Every day, I was ready to spend nearly 16 hours on set. It took almost five hours to apply my makeup and another one-and-a-half hours to remove it, but I genuinely enjoyed the process. Make-Up & Cosmetics

Would you call this the most challenging role of your career?

Without a doubt. Until now, I used to look at my career as before and after "Jyothi Lakshmi." I believe people will now talk about my journey as before and after "Rao Bahadur." Movies

The character Ramappa has no reference point in Indian cinema. He's a completely unpredictable and eccentric personality. In fact, after this film, I think Ramappa himself will become the reference for similar characters. I became so immersed in the role that it felt like the character had taken over me.

Nayanthara opts for action over glamour in big movies

Nayanthara may be known as the 'Lady Superstar,' but her career choices in recent years reflect a clear shift in priorities. Rather than taking up glamorous roles or headlining women-centric films, the actress has been picking character-driven parts alongside senior stars. Film interviews She is currently starring opposite Chiranjeevi, Nandamuri Balakrishna, and Salman Khan in their respective projects. While all three actors belong to an older generation, Nayanthara's focus appears to be on substantial roles rather than conventional commercial pairings. The recently released "Ladies, Ladies" promotional video from Yash's "Toxic" further under-



lines that approach. While Kiara Advani, Rukmini Vasanth, Tara Sutaria, and Huma Qureshi are seen in glamorous looks and romantic moments, Nayanthara stands out for a different reason. Movies

She is featured only in action-packed sequences, with no romantic or glamorous shots in the video. According to industry sources, this reflects a conscious choice by the actress.