



THE Hans India



We will move court again to resist voter deletions: Didi
West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday hit out at the BJP and the Election Commission over voter deletions during the SIR exercise and said her party will move a court again to resist the removal of electors from the rolls. **P10**

Together, let us empower our Nari Shakti!
In the coming days, India will be immersed in a festive season, with celebrations taking place across the length and breadth of the nation. The people of Assam will mark Rangali Bihu while Odisha will celebrate Maha Bishuba Pana Sankranti. **P6**

Centre lining up Rs 2.5-L-Cr guarantee scheme for MSMEs
The government is considering a Rs 2.5 lakh crore credit guarantee scheme to support businesses, particularly MSMEs, hit by the ongoing West Asia crisis, sources said. **P11**

Atlee unveils 'RAAKA', Allu Arjun roars
In a blockbuster announcement that has set the Indian film industry abuzz, Icon Star Allu Arjun, acclaimed director Atlee, and entertainment giant Sun Pictures, led by Kalanithi Maran, have unveiled the much-anticipated title of their mammoth project. **P12**

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WINDOWS

Priyank Kharge backs AICC chief's 'snake' remark

BENGALURU: Karnataka Minister Priyank Kharge on Wednesday defended his father and AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge's "poisonous snake" remark against the BJP and RSS. He also hit out at Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, calling him "frustrated" and accusing him of "caste privilege" over his remarks on Mallikarjun Kharge.

"What has he (Mallikarjun Kharge) said? He said one must act if one encounters a poisonous snake. If you find a poisonous snake, will you feed it milk and nurture it, or will you drive it away?" Kharge asked in response to a question. Speaking to reporters, he said, "Who is sowing the seeds of communal poison in our society? Why? Should we save and nurture such ideologies and principles? No. That is what he (Mallikarjun Kharge) has said. We have been saying this for a long time, not just now."

Termining the RSS ideology and principles detrimental to the country's and society's progress, the minister said their perspective does not accommodate the Constitution, minorities, backward classes, Adivasis, Dalits, or even women. "They believe in Manusmriti; we follow the Constitution," he said. Questioning what one would do upon encountering a poisonous snake, Kharge said, "Will you call a conservationist? They would take it and release it in the forest. If you don't find a conservationist, what will you do? What do people in villages do? If an ideology is not good for the progress of the country, it should not be adopted."

At an election rally in Assam's Sribhumi district on Monday, citing the Quran, Mallikarjun Kharge said that if a poisonous snake passes in front of someone offering namaz, the person should stop the prayer and kill the snake. "I would say that breaking the namaz does not matter. The RSS and the BJP are that poisonous snake. If you don't kill this snake, you will not survive," he said.

Calling Sarma "frustrated" over his remarks against the AICC chief, Priyank said Mallikarjun Kharge has been in politics for about 50 years, and that neither the BJP nor the Prime Minister has answers to the questions he raises in Parliament and outside.

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IRREGULAR by MANJUL

Polls will be fear-free, violence-free, intimidation-free... shall I also add voter-free?

Ceasefire sealed, civilization 'saved'

DUBAI/TEHRAN

IRAN, the United States and Israel reached a tentative, two-week ceasefire Wednesday in the war that tore across the Middle East and disrupted the global energy market, with US President Donald Trump pulling back from his threats to destroy Iranian "civilization." But questions emerged over what appeared to be dueling proposals to halt the fighting, with Iran insisting it would control and charge ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz as well as enrich uranium. Trump initially said Iran proposed a "workable" 10-point plan that could help end the war he launched with Israel on Feb. 28. But he later called the plan fraudulent without elaborating. Trump has said ending Iran's nuclear program entirely was a key point of the war. Israel backed the US ceasefire with Iran but Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Wednesday it doesn't cover fighting against Hezbollah in Lebanon, which continued through the morning. That

US, Israel and Iran agree to a 2-week ceasefire as Trump pulls back on his threats; Trump says moment could mark new 'Golden Age' for Mideast; Democrats call for removal of Trump; push back from some Republicans too; Trump warns of 50% tariffs on nation supplying arms to Iran; Iran confirms participation in Pak-hosted peace talks with US

contradicted comments from Pakistan, a key mediator that said talks over cementing a peace plan would begin as soon as Friday in Islamabad. Pakistan also said the ceasefire began immediately, while Iran launched attacks on Gulf Arab states and Israel soon after.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian has confirmed Tehran's participation in Pakistan-facilitated peace talks with the US in Islamabad, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said on Wednesday. The talks will



be held on Friday. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said passage through the strait would be allowed under Iranian military management. It wasn't clear whether that meant Iran would completely loosen its chokehold on the waterway

Trump in a social media post declared the ceasefire agreement a "big day for World Peace" and that the US "will be helping with the traffic buildup in the Strait of Hormuz." "There will be lots of positive action!" Trump predicted in his

post. "Big money will be made. Iran can start the reconstruction process. We'll be loading up with supplies of all kinds, and just hangin' around" in order to make sure that everything goes well. I feel confident that it will." Trump's message on his Truth Social website signals Washington's concern about Iran maintaining its chokehold over the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf, through which 20% of all oil and natural gas passes in peacetime.

Trump's threats of wiping out the "whole civilisation" in Iran drew strong condemnation from Democrat leaders, who called for his "immediate removal" and a push back from some Republicans who hoped and prayed that the remarks were "bluster".

US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth on Wednesday claimed that Tehran begged for a truce.

Trump warned that any nation providing military weapons to Iran will face an immediate 50 percent tariff on all goods exported to the United States.

Will 'dig up' uranium buried in Iran: Trump

DUBAI: President Donald Trump said Wednesday that the United States would cooperate with Iran to excavate and remove enriched uranium buried during joint US-Israeli strikes last summer.

In a social media post, he emphasized that there would be no further uranium enrichment and claimed the material has remained untouched since the June attacks.

Iran claimed a 'historic victory' after the US agreed to a two-week ceasefire.

Foreign Affairs Expert Robinder Sachdev said that Trump's warning on Iran that its entire civilisation "will die" if a deal was not made raised the stakes for



the US President to take severe steps against the Islamic Regime, which pressured him to take a step back and lead to the ceasefire deal.

Maria Zakharova, Russia's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, says the United States and Israel

launched 'a one-track aggressive unprovoked attack' on Iran on February 28, which led to a "crushing defeat".

"Our country, from the very beginning, in its first statements, said that it was necessary to immediately stop this aggression, that

Iran declared victory by waging asymmetric war; US-Israel suffered 'crushing defeat' in Iran, Russia's Foreign Ministry; 'Trump's statements on Iran pressured him to step back'

there was no military solution to this situation or any attempt to establish order in the region," she said on Sputnik radio.

'Caring for Indians my responsibility'

No gas, fuel paucity; saw 95% online LPG bookings: Govt

NEW DELHI

ABDUL Majid Hakeem Ilahi, Representative of Iran's Supreme Leader in India, on Wednesday said that when the conflict intensified, Iran also worked closely with the Indian embassy in Tehran to support students and visitors.

Ilahi, in a conversation with ANI, said that taking care of Indian brothers and sisters is his responsibility. "When this conflict intensified, I worked to ensure about 3,000 students from Tehran and other cities, mostly in medical sciences,



were moved to safe accommodations. We also worked closely with the Indian embassy in Tehran to support students and visitors. About 400 visitors were provided with accommodation and meals before I supported their travel to Armenia and then back to India. Taking care of our Indian brothers and sisters is my responsibility," he said.

The Indian Ministry of

Petroleum said that there is sufficient availability of liquefied petroleum gas and other fuels such as petrol and diesel despite tensions in West Asia

About 95 percent bookings of LPG cylinders are being made online and 91 percent of the refill deliveries are ensured through the delivery authentication code, which reflects that there was no diversion in deliveries.

LDF eyes hat-trick

Assam to vote in high-stakes polls on Thursday; BJP aims hat-trick, Congress eyes wrestling power; 9.50 lakh voters to decide fate of 294 candidates in Pandy; all arrangements in place

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala is all set for a crucial Assembly election on Thursday, with 2.71 crore voters poised to cast their franchise in a decisive contest that will test the ruling LDF's bid for a third consecutive term, the opposition UDF's comeback prospects, and the NDA's push to open its account in the state. After nearly a month of intense campaigning, the southern state will go to the polls in a single phase, with voting to be held from 7 am to 6 pm across all 140 constituencies where 883 candidates are in the fray. The electorate comprises 1.32 crore men, 1.39 crore women and 273 transgender persons, along with over 2.42 lakh overseas voters, underlining the scale of the electoral exercise, according to Election Commission figures. The contest, though triangular, is rooted in Kerala's traditionally bipolar political landscape, where power has largely alternated between the LDF and the UDF. The high-stakes elections to the 126-member Assam assembly will

POLITICKLE by MANJUL



be held on Thursday, with most seats slated to witness a direct contest between the BJP-led NDA and the opposition coalition helmed by the Congress. The BJP is eyeing a third straight term in power in these elections, while the Congress is looking to wrest the state, from

where it was ousted in 2016. Around 9.50 lakh voters will decide the electoral fate of 294 candidates in the Assembly elections in Puducherry on April 9 and all arrangements have been made for smooth conduct of polls, CEO P Jawahar said here on Wednesday.

Seven gang-rape schoolgirl in Bareilly

BAREILLY: A 16-year-old girl was allegedly raped by seven people in a cafe here in the Bhojipura area, police said on Wednesday. On April 2, the girl was on her way to school when she was forced by one of the accused to ride on his bike to the cafe, where other people were already present. Deputy Superintendent of Police (North) Mukesh Chandra Mishra said the student was allegedly threatened with the circulation of a video of an earlier sexual assault. According to an FIR lodged at Bhojipura Police Station, the accused were identified as Asad Haider alias Karan, Chand, restaurant owner Saifi, Samir Ahmad, Banti, and two unnamed persons.

Mishra said that on March 19, Asad had taken the girl to a room above the 'Saifi Cafe' and sexually assaulted her, filming the act in the process. He allegedly threatened to circulate the clip on social media if she told anyone.

The DSP said that on April 2, the girl was on her way to school to collect her mark sheet when Chand stopped her and warned that if she did not meet Asad, he would post the video online.

He took the girl to the cafe where she was raped by the accused. The girl came home with the help of a passerby in a state of distress. Mishra said she hid the incident from her family for two days out of fear, and spoke up only after relatives noticed her deteriorating condition.



Court grants divorce to rape convict Narayan Sai's wife

INDORE: An Indore family court has granted a divorce decree to the wife of Narayan Sai, rape convict and jailed son of self-proclaimed godman Asaram, and ordered him to pay her a permanent maintenance of Rs 2 crore within three months, the woman's lawyer has said. Narayan Sai is lodged in a jail in Surat district of Gujarat after being sentenced to life imprisonment in a rape case.

The court's order of April 2 dissolves his 18-year-old marriage, Anuragchandra Goyal, the lawyer representing Narayan Sai's Indore-based wife, Janaki Harpalani, told reporters on Tuesday. Goyal said his client had filed a divorce petition in the local family court in 2018, alleging mental cruelty and other charges against her husband, and seeking a lump sum maintenance of Rs 5 crore.

State sees drop in groundwater use, surge in recharge capacity

2025 report

► According to the report, overall groundwater extraction has reduced from 68.44 per cent in 2024 to 66.49 per cent in 2025, indicating more responsible and sustainable usage patterns across the state

BENGALURU: Karnataka has recorded a significant decline in groundwater usage alongside a notable increase in annual recharge capacity, reflecting the impact of sustained water conservation efforts and good rainfall, Minister N S Boseraju said on Wednesday.

Releasing the 2025 Groundwater Assessment Report at Vikas Soudha, he said the gains are the result of good rainfall, focused policy interventions, and large-scale water conservation initiatives implemented over the past two

years under the leadership of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar.

According to the report, overall groundwater extraction has reduced from 68.44 per cent in 2024 to 66.49 per cent in 2025, indicating more

responsible and sustainable usage patterns across the state. At the same time, annual groundwater recharge capacity has increased from 18.74 billion cubic metres (BCM) in 2024 to 19.28 BCM in 2025, while annual extractable groundwater resources

rose from 16.88 BCM to 17.41 BCM, the minister's office said in a statement.

"This simultaneous reduction in usage and increase in recharge reflects our government's commitment to long-term water sustainability," the Minor Irrigation, Science and Technology Minister said. The improvement has been driven largely by the expansion of water conservation structures (WCS) across the state. Recharge through such structures increased by 29.11 per cent, from 0.81 BCM to 1.04

BCM within a year, the report stated.

Notably, the number of water conservation works has risen sharply from 3.15 lakh in 2024 to 3.94 lakh in 2025, strengthening the state's groundwater recharge ecosystem. The report indicates improvement in groundwater status across 11 taluks, with several regions moving to safer categories.

Highlighting these changes, the minister pointed out that Chamarajanagar taluk has improved from "over-exploited"

to "critical". Similarly, taluks including Athani, Channappana, Molakalmuru, Ranabennur, Savanur, and Shiggaon have successfully transitioned from "semi-critical" to "safe" status.

Domestic groundwater extraction has also declined by 0.58 per cent, dropping from 1,21,731 hectare - metres (ham) in 2024 to 1,21,023 ham in 2025. Officials attribute this to increased reliance on surface water under the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM).

Boseraju said that ini-

tiatives such as lake rejuvenation, year-round water supply through treated and surface water, sustained public awareness campaigns, and good rainfall have played a key role in reducing over-extraction and enhancing recharge.

"Instead of depending solely on the 120-day monsoon, we are ensuring water availability throughout all 365 days through scientific management. This has strengthened long-term water security for both farmers and urban residents," he said.