



THE Hans India



WOMENIA
Ananya Panday on tackling exam pressure: 'They are a small part of a much bigger journey'
 The collaboration came to life with a special on-ground activity led by Ananya Panday, along with Nick's beloved characters Chikoo and Bunty. **P8**

TOGETHER
Together, let us empower our Nari Shakti!
 On the 16th of April, Parliament will be convened to discuss and pass an important bill that advances women's reservation. To describe this merely as a legislative exercise would be an injustice. It is a reflection of aspirations of crores of women across India. **P6**

2nd phase of Ratna Bhandar inventory begins
 The current phase focuses on the Bahar Ratna Bhandar, where festival ornaments and jewellery are stored. Justice Rath said this inventory includes the famous 'Suna Bhesa' (golden attire) ornaments used on the chariots and four other occasions. **P5**

Botcha flags Rs 20,500 cr debt gap, seeks Govt's intervention
 Satyanarayana said the response given by the principal finance secretary to a 'starred' question in the February 2026 session understated the actual borrowings, omitting 'key' components. **P4**

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Constitutional morality not a ground to decide essential religious practices: Centre

NEW DELHI: Constitutional morality can never be a ground for judicial review to decide essential religious practices and beliefs in a religion, the Centre told the Supreme Court on Wednesday while stressing that two previous verdicts on decriminalisation of consensual gay sex and adultery provisions based on this doctrine were "not a good law". A nine-judge Constitution bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant was told by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta that constitutional morality is a "vague and subjective doctrine", and the judgements based on it coupled with the views of foreign legal experts and precedents cannot be a basis to test the correctness of religious beliefs in the country. Mehta submitted before the bench that the wrongly applied concept of constitutional morality by this court in some of the judgements later became the basis for deciding the 2018 Sabarimala case, permitting women of all age groups to enter the hilltop shrine in Kerala through the presiding deity Lord Ayappa is a Naishitika Brahmachari (perennial celibate).

FRAGILE CEASEFIRE TAKES EFFECT

TEHRAN/WASHINGTON

IRAN, the United States and Israel agreed to a two-week ceasefire in an 11th-hour deal that headed off US President Donald Trump's threat to unleash a bombing campaign to destroy Iranian civilization. But hours after the announcement, Iran and Gulf Arab countries reported new attacks on Wednesday.

It was not clear if the strikes would scuttle the deal, which US Vice President JD Vance called "fragile." Even before the new attacks, much about the agreement was unclear as the sides presented vastly different visions of the terms.

Iran said the deal would allow it to formalize its new practice of charging ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial transit lane for oil. But the details were not clear, nor was it known whether vessels would feel safe using the channel or whether ship traffic had resumed. It also was unclear whether any other country agreed to this condition.

Pakistan, which helped to mediate the deal, said talks would begin in Islamabad on Friday and fighting would pause also in Lebanon, where Israel has launched a ground invasion against the Iran-

US and Iran prepare for talks in Pak from tomorrow Much remains unclear and some attacks continue Oil prices plunge and shares jump on ceasefire plan

ISRAEL STRIKES LEBANON

Iran threatens to exit truce deal

TEHRAN: Iran has reportedly told mediators that talks with US conditional and threatened to withdraw from the truce deal if the attacks on Lebanon continue. It has reportedly told the mediators that it will participate in talks in Pakistan only if the current ceasefire includes Lebanon.

backed Hezbollah militant group. Israel said it would not, and strikes hit Beirut on Wednesday.

The fate of Iran's missile and nuclear programs — the elimination of which were major objectives for the US and Israel in going to war — also remained unclear. Trump said the US would work with Iran to remove buried enriched uranium, though Iran did not confirm that.

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MOJTABA HELPED CUT TRUCE DEAL

TEHRAN: A defiant Iran and the most powerful nation in the world, the US, fighting for over a month, agreed to a ceasefire 90 minutes before Trump's "wiping out a whole civilization" threat was to end.

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Market cheers ceasefire

Sensex zooms 2,946 pts

MUMBAI: Indian stock markets extended their rally for the fifth straight session, with both the Nifty and the Sensex posting strong gains. The positive momentum came amid easing global tensions and steady

domestic policy signals. The Nifty closed 3.78 per cent higher, gaining 873.70 points to end at 23,997.35. Meanwhile, the Sensex surged 3.95 per cent, rising 2,946.32 points to settle at 77,562.90.

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India welcomes US-Iran truce

NEW DELHI: India on Wednesday welcomed the temporary ceasefire between the United States and Iran announced by both sides and expressed hope in unimpeded freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz.

"We welcome the ceasefire reached and hope that it will lead to a lasting peace in West Asia. As we have continuously advocated earlier, deescalation, dialogue and diplomacy are essential to bring an early end to the ongoing conflict," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement.



US V-P Vance, Ghalibaf to lead US-Iran talks

WASHINGTON/TEHRAN

UNITED STATES Vice President JD Vance and Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf have been chosen to lead their countries' delegations in the peace negotiations in Islamabad on Friday, the Iranian semi-official news agency ISNA reported on Wednesday. The report also claimed that Iran's 10-point peace proposal framework, which US President Donald Trump previously claimed to be a "workable basis on which to negotiate," entails both Tehran's nuclear program and regional security, as well as lifting primary and secondary sanctions from Iran. Meanwhile, Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said earlier that he had invited the American and Iranian delegations to hold talks in Islamabad this Friday, after they reached a two-week ceasefire agreement. **Cont'd on Page 7**

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HC quashes EC notification for Ponda bypoll

PANAJI: The Bombay High Court on Wednesday quashed the Election Commission of India's notification for the byelection to Ponda assembly seat in Goa a day ahead of polling, citing violation of the Representation of the People Act as the legislature's term is set to expire in less than a year. Thursday's election was thus cancelled even though postal ballots had already been cast, as the high court also refused to stay its judgement. While the ruling BJP termed the decision as shocking, the Congress accused it of conniving with the ECI to get the election cancelled by delaying the notification, and said it would file an appeal in the Supreme Court. A division bench of Justices Valmiki Menezes and Amit S Jamsandekar of the Goa bench of the High Court declared the March 16, 2026 notification "arbitrary".

IRREGULAR by MANJUL

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



Cabinet clears 12% hike in fertiliser subsidy

NEW DELHI: The Union government on Wednesday approved 12 per cent hike in subsidy for Phosphatic and Potassic (P&K) fertilisers for Kharif 2026 season to Rs 41,534 crore in order to insulate farmers from rising global prices amid the West Asia conflict. The subsidy for P&K fertilisers for Kharif 2025 season was Rs 37,216 crore. The decision, taken at a Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, fixed subsidy rates effective April 1 to September 30, 2026. For Kharif 2026, the government has set subsidy for nitrogen at Rs 47.32 per kg (up from Rs 43.02 per kg in rabi 2025-26), phosphate at Rs 52.76 per kg against Rs 47.96 per kg, and sulphur at Rs 3.16 per kg against Rs 2.87 per kg. The potash subsidy has been held steady at Rs 2.38 per kg. Subsidy is extended across 28 grades of P&K fertilisers under the Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) scheme, in force since April 2010.

Central govt offices in Amaravati Centre readies ₹2,534-cr Central Secretariat project

HANS NEWS SERVICE AMARAVATI

- ▶ PIB clears Rs 1,299 cr Central Secretariat in Amaravati
- ▶ Cabinet Secretariat nod key to fast-track execution
- ▶ 22.53 acres allocated for central govt infrastructure

THE Central government is moving ahead with major infrastructure development in Amaravati, with projects worth Rs 2,534 crore poised for roll-out, signalling a significant administrative build-out in the state capital.

A Public Investment Board (PIB) memorandum has been prepared for the construction of a Common Central Secretariat (CCS) at a cost of Rs 1,299.08 crore and government residential accommodation projects worth Rs 1,234.91 crore. The proposals now await a crucial clearance from the Cabinet Secretariat, which is



expected to unlock the next phase of approvals. Officials indicated that the Andhra Pradesh government has already submitted the Gazette notification formally recognizing Amaravati as the capital to the Cabinet Secretariat.

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POLITICKLE by MANJUL

 @MANJUL0000



All set for polls in Assam, Kerala, Puducherry

NEW DELHI: Campaigning ended in Kerala, Assam and Puducherry, with voting set on Thursday for 296 seats. Officials received EVMs and other materials ahead of voting. Tamil Nadu votes on April 23, West Bengal on April 23 and 29 in two phases.

Polling will cover 140 seats in Kerala, 126 in Assam and 30 in Puducherry, with counting scheduled for May 4. A total of 1,849 candidates are in the fray, with key contests shaped by sharp political exchanges, development narratives and leadership face-offs.

In Kerala, the fight is primarily between the CPI(M)-led LDF, Congress-led UDF and BJP-led NDA, with top leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan leading campaigns.

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CM bats for EV bus shift, expansion of AP highways

Dual strategy to cut transport costs, boost economy

- ▶ Calls for steps to optimise transport fuel costs
- ▶ Charging infra, battery systems to be scaled
- ▶ Rs 24,502 crore highway works targeted this year
- ▶ Port connectivity, Pushkaram road upgrades prioritised



Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu at a review on R&B department in the Secretariat on Wednesday

HANS NEWS SERVICE AMARAVATI

CHIEF Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu on Wednesday outlined a dual strategy of expanding electric mobility and accelerating highway development to lower transport costs and boost economic activity across Andhra Pradesh.

Reviewing roads and highways at the Secretariat, the Chief Minister said affordable and efficient public transport hinges on scaling up electric buses. Adoption of clean energy will reduce operational costs and directly

benefit commuters, he stated. Pointing out that the State has already reduced electricity procurement costs by about Re 1 per unit through efficient solar power management, he called for similar optimisation in transport fuel costs. With EV bus operating costs currently around Rs 72 per km, the Chief Minister directed officials to examine models to bring down expenses, focusing on charging infrastructure expansion and battery standardisation. While recommending a gradual transition of all bus categories to air-conditioned electric buses, he mooted e-cycles as a complementary mass mobil-

ity option. On the infrastructure front, the Chief Minister stressed robust and continuous road maintenance. Of the State's 45,433 km road network, about 10,238 km requires annual upkeep. He ordered immediate repair of potholes and adoption of global best practices, while assuring adequate funding for Roads & Buildings Department's works. Highlighting region-specific challenges, Naidu called for tailored construction approaches, particularly in black cotton soil areas of the Godavari districts, recommending hybrid road models such as BT and white-topping. **Continued on Page 7**

ISRO sets 3 uncrewed missions ahead of Gaganyaan

HANS NEWS SERVICE BENGALURU

INDIAN Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Chairman V Narayanan on Wednesday said that three uncrewed missions are scheduled before the India's first human space venture Gaganyaan.

Talking to reporters after the inaugural session of the International Conference on Spacecraft Mission Operations, Narayanan said: "Based on the guidelines, direction and the announcement made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, we are working on the Gaganyaan programme." "Before going

for the crewed mission, three uncrewed missions are targeted. So right now, we are working on the first uncrewed mission. All activities are going on well," he added.

The space agency chief further said that the time frame and everything else about the missions will be announced at an appropriate time. Underlining the importance of Spacecraft Mission Operations, Narayanan said, "Mission operation is an important activity in any space mission. The launch vehicle has to work for hardly 20-25 minutes. This mission operation activity has to continue for a long



time. When we talk about a communication satellite with a 15-year operation, continuously, this operation has to be done."

Narayanan also cited the example of the Mars Orbiter

mission. "For example, our Mars Orbiter mission, almost 300 days, this operation had to be done to make the mission successful," he said. He highlighted that in human spaceflight missions,

too, the mission operations are very critical, like any other important mission. Elaborating on the challenges, he said: "Challenges mean it is the first time you are going to accomplish this

mission. We have to do the human rating of the launch vehicle. Then a lot of new developments, including crew escape system, environmental control safety system, interfacing the human being along with the machine and software (are to be done).

About the event, the ISRO chief said: "Here the entire discussion is going to be on the mission operations, including all the new technologies. Around 400 papers are going to be presented and discussed. It will be highly useful for the students, start-up companies and also the engineers who are working in this area."

India withdraws bid to host climate summit

NEW DELHI: India has withdrawn its offer to host the United Nations annual climate Conference Of the Parties (COP33) in 2028, sources said on Wednesday. During his address at COP28 in Dubai in 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had proposed India as the host country for COP33. Sources informed that the decision has been officially communicated to the concerned that India is withdrawing its bid to host COP33. There was no response from the Environment Ministry on the development. A questionnaire sent to the COP headquarters in Bonn also did not elicit a response.