

- Minister Farooq orders smooth arrangements for Haj 2026, with 2,000 pilgrims including 352 from Vijayawada
- State to construct modern Haj House in Vijayawada; each pilgrim from the centre to receive Rs 1 lakh assistance.
- Special buses, medical teams, security, and full facilities mandated for hassle-free pilgrimage

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
VIJAYAWADA

MINISTER for law and minority welfare NMD Farooq directed officials to make comprehensive and hassle-free arrangements for Haj 2026, as around 2,000 pilgrims from the state are set to undertake the sacred pilgrimage. Of these, 352 pilgrims will depart from the Vijayawada embarkation centre on April 18 and 19.

# AP TO BUILD HAJ HOUSE, AID PILGRIMS WITH RS 1 L EACH

minister emphasised that all necessary steps must be taken to ensure a smooth experience. He recalled that during the TDP government in undivided Andhra Pradesh, a Haj House with full facilities was constructed in Hyderabad, and later, an embarkation centre was sanctioned with the efforts of then Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

After state bifurcation, AP pilgrims had to depend on other states for embarkation, he said, adding that the Vijayawada embarkation centre was secured again due to the efforts of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu. The minister expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union minority affairs



Minister for law and minority welfare NMD Farooq holds a review on Haj pilgrimage arrangements at Gannavaram on Thursday

minister Kiren Rijju, and civil aviation minister K Ram Mohan Naidu.

He further announced that the state government has decided to construct a

Haj House in Vijayawada with all modern amenities. The government is also providing financial assistance of Rs 1 lakh to each pilgrim departing from Vijayawada.

The minister instructed officials to ensure special arrangements at the Haj camp, including clear guidance on travel procedures, timely visa processing, dedicated

airport counters, separate lounges, and prayer facilities. He called for additional staff deployment, seamless luggage handling, and coordination with the Haj Committee.

Special AC buses will be arranged to transport pilgrims from the camp to the airport. Medical teams, free vaccinations, and ambulance services will be made available. He also stressed strict security measures, traffic management on National Highway-16, and vigilance against cyber fraud.

Adequate drinking water, sanitation, uninterrupted power supply, CCTV surveillance, fire safety measures, and daily media updates were also mandated to ensure the successful conduct of Haj 2026.

# Three teenage girls drown while taking selfies

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PADERU (ASR DISTRICT)

A tragic incident claimed the lives of three teenage girls in Alluri Sitarama Raju district on Thursday after they accidentally slipped into a waterfall while attempting to take selfies.

The incident occurred near a waterfall close to Mulagummi village in Ananthagiri mandal. Another girl who fell into the water along with them is reported to be in critical condition.

According to police, the deceased have been identified as Trisha (17), Ratna Kumari (16), and Pavitra (16), all residents of Jumbavala village in Hukumpeta mandal. The girls had recently appeared for their Intermediate examinations

and had gone to visit the waterfall along with their friend Anjali.

While standing at the edge of the waterfall and taking selfies, the four reportedly lost their balance and fell into the water. Trisha, Ratna Kumari and Pavitra died on the spot.

Anjali, who sustained serious injuries in the incident, was rescued by locals and shifted to a hospital in Lungaparti. Doctors said her condition remains critical. Police rushed to the spot and launched rescue operations. The bodies were shifted for post-mortem examination, and a case has been registered, and an investigation is underway. The deaths of the three girls have cast a pall of gloom over their native village.

# Lokesh asks officials to prepare guidelines

Continued from P1

The Minister made it clear that strict action would be taken against individuals posting derogatory or abusive content, particularly targeting women. He also directed officials to study global best practices, specifically from countries like Australia, Singapore, and Denmark, in safeguarding children in the digital space.

As part of a broader strategy, Lokesh announced large-scale awareness initiatives. Students will be educated on the effects of social media during "No Bag Day," while parents and children will be sensitized through biannual Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings. Awareness programs will also extend to women in Self-Help Groups, focusing on online safety.

A key proposal discussed was the introduction of "Age Tokens," potentially integrated with DigiLocker, to enable reliable age verification on digital platforms. Lokesh directed officials to examine its feasibility and incorporate findings into a comprehensive report, including aspects requiring central government intervention.

Social media representatives present at the meeting outlined existing safety mechanisms and grievance redressal systems, assuring full cooperation with the state government's initiatives.

Additionally, the Minister ordered immediate steps to appoint an Adjudicating Officer under Section 46 of the IT Act to strengthen enforcement mechanisms in cyber-related issues.

# WILL AMARAVATI DENT HYDERABAD REALTY?

Continued from P1

"If the investors in Hyderabad shift to AP, Telangana state will face a big jolt, particularly in terms of revenue generation from the property registrations," an official said.

Officials of the Registration & Stamps Department also concede that growth in real estate has not gained traction in the last three years due to various factors, including HYDRABAD impact, economic slowdown, and certain political reasons.

Now, the AP government is drawing big plans to promote Amaravati as a destination for investments. Major realty companies which had announced high rise projects in Hyderabad may shift some of them to the neighbouring state if the Andhra government announces, in the coming days, comparatively better incentives to promote construction. Officials warned: "It may not be an easy task to convince real estate developers to stay in Hyderabad and develop their ventures at this critical juncture."

The state government would do well to hold a meeting with representatives of the realty soon to discuss the issues involved in the context of planned investments in the city, they added.

# Indigenous Quantum facility launch on April 14

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It may be recalled that with the initiative of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, Quantum journey started in April last year.

Giving details to the media on the launch of Quantum Computers testing facility centre here on Thursday, PS Pradyumna, secretary to Chief Minister stated that it's a dream come true for people of Andhra Pradesh, with the initiative of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu for the first time in the country indigenous Quantum Computing testing facility is going to be launched on April 14. He said the Chief Minister insisted on bringing indigenous hardware component manufacturing ecosystem in Amaravati to promote Quantum technology. The SRM University contributed in this direction and made it accessible to students. The secretary said people enjoyed the fruits of computer technology for more than three decades and now it is time to switch over to AI and Quantum technology. He said the Chief Minister stressed the need for updating skills of youngsters as per the requirements of emerging quantum technology and following his call lakhs of students got enrolled for skill training programme. In IIT-Chennai itself 2.5 lakh students enrolled for skill training programme.

SRM-AP Vice-Chancellor Ch Satish Kumar and Quantum technology experts were present.

# Students denied entry at JEE Mains exam centre

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
GUNTUR

TENSION prevailed at Oxford College in Guntur on Thursday as parents of students staged a protest alleging serious irregularities in JEE Mains hall-ticket issue by the college management.

According to parents, students who went to appear for the exam on Wednesday were denied entry at the examination centre after their hall-tickets were identified as fake. Several students were seen in tears,

claiming they were not allowed to write the exam.

Students expressed deep distress, stating that their two years of hard work and future prospects have been severely affected.

Police reached Oxford College to control the situation.

Parents said around 40 students who attended the NEET exam and nearly 15 students who appeared for JEE Mains were affected due to the issue.

They alleged that the exam centre was allotted at Indira Priyadarshini Engineering

College in Guntur, and the management had allegedly created fake hall-tickets using the same Aadhaar number for multiple students.

Parents demanded strict action against the college management, stating that their children's future has been jeopardised.

Guntur RDO N Srinivasa Rao said 15 students were not allowed to write the NEET exam. The RDO and police officials are holding discussions with the college management till late in the night.

# Land resurvey 2.0 will be over by March 2027: CM

Continued from P1

He also stated that 1.37 lakh acres of service inam lands are being removed from the prohibited 22A list, with more land to be freed in phases.

Naidu highlighted that corrections to land records can now be made at village and ward secretariats, while auto-mutation and simplified registration processes are being introduced. Farmers will receive pattadar passbooks at their doorstep following property transfers and concessional registration charges have been announced for inheritance cases, he added.

On the irrigation front, the Chief Minister assured that the Polavaram Project will be completed before the Godavari Pushkarams and dedi-

cated to the nation, ensuring water security for the Krishna delta. The diaphragm wall has been reconstructed with Central assistance, he added.

Reaffirming the state government's stance, Naidu said the Centre has legally designated Amaravati as the state capital, while criticising opposition demands for alternative proposals. He remarked that law will take its course in legal matters, including those concerning Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy.

The Chief Minister directed officials to improve services in hostels, rice distribution, paddy procurement, and mid-day meal schemes. He said free sand is being provided despite revenue loss to benefit the public and urged citizens to avoid land

disputes and maintain harmony.

Naidu noted that global economic challenges, including conflicts in West Asia, are impacting markets, and the government is focusing on strengthening supply chains and boosting exports. Plans are also underway to develop Suryalanka Beach as a major tourist destination.

Naidu reiterated the government's commitment to welfare, including free bus travel for women under the "Stree Shakti" initiative and support for 33 per cent reservation for women in legislatures. Ministers including Anagani Satya Prasad, K. Partha Sarathy, Gottipati Ravi Kumar, and MP T. Krishna Prasad were present at the event.

# US ready for next conquest: Trump

Continued from P1

"All US ships, aircraft, and military personnel... will remain in place in, and around, Iran, until such time as the REAL AGREEMENT reached is fully complied with," Trump wrote on Truth Social. "If for any reason it is not...the 'Shootin' Starts', bigger, and better, and stronger than anyone has ever seen before." Trump reiterated that it was agreed that Iran will not develop nuclear weapons, and the Strait of Hormuz will be open and safe for commercial shipping. "In the meantime our great Military is Loading Up and Resting, looking forward, actually, to its next Conquest," Trump added. He ended the post, which was published near midnight, with a declaration: "AMERICA IS BACK!"

The statement came a day after Washington and Tehran agreed to a two-week ceasefire brokered by Pakistan, which halted six weeks of fighting and sparked a brief relief rally in global markets amid growing optimism that energy flows may resume in the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran said safe passage through the strait would be possible but subject to coordination with its armed forces. But much remained unclear in the ceasefire agreement, with the US and Iran appearing far apart in demands. Tehran had rejected the 15-point proposal from Washington and reportedly presented a 10-point plan of its own to end the conflict, including an end to Israeli strikes against Hezbollah in Lebanon and the lifting of all sanctions.

# Heavy turnout marks high-stakes voting day in Assam, Kerala and Puducherry

Continued from P1

"All necessary steps have been taken to facilitate smooth voting and ensure transparency," an Election Commission official said, adding that special provisions were made for senior citizens, persons with disabilities and first-time voters.

The elections come after an intense campaign that concluded earlier this week, with political parties making

last-minute appeals to voters.

The results will be declared on May 4 along with outcomes from West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, where polling is being held in multiple phases.

In Assam, the contest is largely bipolar, with the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance seeking a third consecutive term under Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. The Congress-

led opposition, spearheaded by Gaurav Gogoi, is aiming to return to power after ten years, while regional players such as the All India United Democratic Front, Rajiv Dal and Assam Jatiya Parishad are expected to influence outcomes in several seats. The state has over 2.5 crore voters and 722 candidates contesting across more than 31,000 polling stations.

# Will continue to strike Hezbollah wherever necessary: Netanyahu

TEL AVIV: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says Israel "will continue to strike Hezbollah wherever necessary" after the IDF announced it had assassinated Ali Yusuf Harshi, the secretary of Hezbollah leader Naim Qassem. "Our message is clear: whoever acts against Israeli civilians will be targeted. We will continue to strike Hezbollah wherever necessary, until we restore full security to the residents of the north," Netanyahu writes in a Hebrew-language post on X. In addition to assassinating Harashi, "the IDF struck a series of terror infrastructures in southern Lebanon: crossing points used to transfer thousands of weapons, rockets and launchers, as well as weapons depots, launch sites, and Hezbollah command centers," Netanyahu adds, sharing IDF footage of the attacks.

# Indian team to visit US this month to ink deal

NEW DELHI: United States Ambassador to India Sergio Gora said on Thursday that an Indian delegation will be heading to Washington later this month as part of talks on a trade deal between India and the US. Taking to X, the US envoy stated that he held a "highly productive" meeting with trade representative Jamieson Greer on how to advance President Donald Trump's trade priorities in South and Central Asia. "The United States and India have previously agreed to a trade deal, and we look forward to welcoming an Indian delegation to Washington later this month," he added.

# Modi, Mamata trade barbs at election rallies in Bengal

Continued from P1

He alleged that Mamata Banerjee's TMC has only inflicted 'nirmamta' (cruelty) on Bengal, while the BJP has developed Asansol despite obstacles posed by the ruling party. The PM also highlighted a downward trend in the state's economy and its contribution to national gross domestic product (GDP). He said, "Bengal's contribution to the national GDP has slid to mere five per cent from 12 per cent earlier." However, he said, a regime change would ensure that West Bengal scales new heights.

"Investment has taken flight from the once-thriving industrial belt of Asansol. Only the BJP's double-engine can rectify it," he added, noting that the Centre has allocated Rs 45,000 crore for the revival of the industries in

Asansol. In another rally in Haldia, PM Modi said that it is essential to remove the TMC's 'Niram sarkar' to usher 'Viksit Bengal'. He also announced "six Modi guarantees" for the people. The TMC supremo, meanwhile, accused the BJP of deleting names of more than 90 lakh people from the voter lists to grab power in the state, asserting that her party will win the upcoming Assembly polls.

Speaking at a public rally in North 24 Paraganas' Minakhan, Banerjee said that TMC would approach the court to ensure that all the deleted names are reinstated in the electoral rolls, referring to the special intensive revision exercise in the state. "You deleted names of over 90 lakh people to grab power in Bengal, but we will win," she said.

# 15 ships a day

TEHRAN

SHIPPING traffic at the Strait of Hormuz remained at a virtual standstill amid Iranian regulation, despite the ceasefire, on Thursday, with little movement. Several reports said Iran will allow no more than 15 vessels to pass per day, with Iran's deputy minister earlier saying that ships will need to obtain consent from the military. One oil product tanker and five separate dry bulk carriers reportedly sailed through the Strait of Hormuz in the past 24 hours on Thursday, Reuters reported. Two Iranian-flagged tankers also sailed through Hormuz. Iran will allow no more than 15 vessels per day to pass through the Hormuz under the ceasefire agreement, Russia's TASS news agency reported, citing Iranian official sources.

# US-Iran truce strains amid Lebanon strikes

Continued from P1

Following a massive wave of Israeli strikes that killed at least 254 people and injured over 1,100 across Lebanon, Tehran declared that it views the ongoing bombardment as a direct breach of the spirit of the ceasefire.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi stated that Washington must now choose between a comprehensive ceasefire or continued war by proxy, warning that the current status is unsustainable.

The instability has immediate consequences for global energy security. In response to what it terms an Israeli violation of the ceasefire, the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has maintained a closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a vital artery for global oil shipments.

Shipping executives remain in a state of high alert as they attempt to navigate the uncertainty, while oil prices have reacted sharply to the supply risk. Brent crude futures rose 2.1% to \$96.75 a barrel, and West Texas Intermediate surged 2.6% to \$96.89, reflecting market anxiety over the potential for long-term supply chain disruptions.

Despite the deteriorating situation, US and Iranian delegations are still scheduled to meet in Islamabad this weekend to finalize the terms of the truce. However, the diplomatic path forward is fraught with obstacles.

President Donald Trump has issued a stern warning, stating that US military assets will remain in place around Iran until a real, fully compliant agreement is established.

# Trump seeks Europe's help on Hormuz

WASHINGTON: United States President Donald Trump has stepped up pressure on his European allies to commit military forces in the Strait of Hormuz, ahead of talks with Iran on Friday. This comes even as the White House is considering the withdrawal of US troops out of NATO countries. According to two diplomats, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte has informed European leaders that the US President is expecting concrete commitments for Hormuz regarding the deployment of warships or other military capabilities from Europe in the next few days. This was followed by Trump's post on Truth Social, wherein he stated that NATO would not "understand anything" without pressure upon them.

# Iran publishes chart showing sea mines in Hormuz

DUBAI: Semiofficial news agencies in Iran published a chart Thursday suggesting the country's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard put sea mines into the Strait of Hormuz during the war, in a message that may be intended to pressure the US as uncertainty hangs over a days-old two-week ceasefire and further negotiations are expected in Pakistan. The shaky ceasefire has been largely holding between the US, Israel and Iran, although Tehran and Washington have offered vastly different explanations of the initial terms. Israel insists the agreement does not apply to their war against Hezbollah militants in Lebanon and has escalated deadly strikes there, leading Iran to claim it is violating the deal. Meanwhile, Iran said it had

won agreement that it would control the Strait of Hormuz, charge tolls and enrich uranium - while Trump said the deal called for the strait to be reopened and Iran to hand over its uranium stockpile. The chart of the Strait of Hormuz was released by the ISNA news agency, as well as Tasnim, which is believed to be close to the Guard.

They showed a large circle marked "danger zone" in Farsi over the Traffic Separation Scheme, which was the route ships take through the strait, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which 20 per cent of all oil and natural gas traded once passed. The chart suggested ships travel further north through waters closer to Iran's mainland near Larak Island, a route that some ships were observed taking during the war.