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14 killed in Kolkata hotel blaze; probe ordered



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New US policy terminates foreign students' legal status

Lays out grounds on which their visas can be revoked



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Chahal's hat-trick sets up win for Punjab Kings

In a nutshell

**Hindu leader gets bail in B'desh**

**DHAKA:** A Bench of Bangladesh High Court on Wednesday ordered release of Hindu leader Chinmoy Krishna Das on bail, five months after he was arrested on a charge of defaming the country's national flag, court officials said. "The two-judge bench declared absolute its earlier rule asking authorities why he should not be granted bail," an official of the High Court said. The bench granted the bail after the final hearing on their previous rule. **WORLD PAGE 9**

**US economy shrinks 0.3%**

**WASHINGTON:** The US economy shrank 0.3% from January through March, first drop in three years. It was slowed by a surge in imports as companies in the United States tried to bring in foreign goods before President Donald Trump imposed massive tariffs. The January-March expansion was the slowest in almost three years and was down from 2.4% in the last three months of 2024. Imports shaved 5 percentage points off first-quarter growth. **AP**

## Centre to conduct caste-based census

**Slams Opposition for using caste survey as 'political tool'**

PTI  
NEW DELHI

In a major decision, the Centre on Wednesday announced that caste enumeration will be included in the next census exercise in a "transparent" manner and slammed the opposition parties for using caste survey as a "political tool".

The Congress and other opposition parties have been vociferously demanding a nationwide caste census, making it a major election issue, and some states like Bihar, Telangana and Karnataka have conducted such surveys. The government's decision comes ahead of Assembly elections in Bihar, where several parties including some BJP allies have been coming out in support of the caste census.

Announcing the decision taken by the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the census comes under the purview of the Centre, but some states



Enumerator staff collects information from residents for a caste-based census in Bihar. — File Photo

have done caste enumeration in the name of surveys "non-transparently" which has created doubts in the society. Noting that caste was not included in all census operations conducted since Independence, Vaishnaw alleged that the Congress governments have always opposed caste census and the party had used the issue as a political tool. "Considering

all these facts and to ensure that the social fabric is not disturbed by politics, caste enumeration should be transparently included in the Census instead of surveys," he said, adding that this will strengthen the social and economic structure of our society while the nation continues to progress.

The Minister alleged that the states ruled by opposi-

tion parties have done caste surveys for political reasons and emphasised that the Modi government has resolved to transparently include caste enumeration in the forthcoming pan-India census exercise. The opposition I.N.D.I.A bloc had made caste census a major poll plank in the recent elections, with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi promising representation to people based on their population. "Better late than never," Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said in a post on X, reacting to the government announcement.

He said the party had raised the issue in its resolution on social justice, which was passed in Ahmedabad on April 9, and also shared on April 16, 2023, letter of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge to Modi in which he had demanded that the decennial census be carried out and a comprehensive caste census be made a part of it.

## Revanth's fancy for AP officials under fire

**Picks Sreenivasa Raju as his Principal Secretary**

STATE BUREAU  
Hyderabad

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy has once again appointed a retired Andhra Pradesh cadre officer to a key post in the Telangana government.

The latest appointment of KS Sreenivasa Raju, a retired IAS officer from Andhra Pradesh, as Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister, has reignited the debate on Andhra dominance in Telangana administration ever since the Congress came to power.

The appointment has drawn severe criticism over the Revanth Reddy administration's growing preference for Andhra Pradesh-based officials and political functionaries in key Telangana administrative roles, despite the State's bifurcation over a decade ago. Sreenivasa Raju, who earlier

**Appointment draws severe criticism over the Revanth Reddy administration's growing preference for AP-based officials**

served in Andhra Pradesh in various capacities including as Joint Executive Officer of TTD and retired from the Andhra cadre, was brought into the Telangana government last July as a government advisor on Infrastructure and Projects.

But following the State government's decision to discontinue the services of retired officers, he is learnt to have been accommodated in the Chief Minister's Office and will continue to hold the position for next two years. This is not an isolated instance. An alarming

trend has emerged under Revanth Reddy's tenure, with those said to be close to the Andhra Pradesh government or having roots in TDP, occupying influential posts in the Telangana government.

Anila Vavilla was appointed Vice-Chairman and MD of TGREDCO; former AP Chief Secretary Adityanath Das is now advisor on irrigation; Ayyadevara Prasanna Kumar is serving as Assembly advisor; and Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar, former AP Election Commissioner, is also a government advisor.

Even more striking, a former TDP leader from Andhra Pradesh has been appointed to the Telangana Public Service Commission, raising serious questions about the government's intent and commitment to Telangana's identity and autonomy. **(SEE PAGE 2)**

## India warns Pak against unprovoked firing

NEW DELHI

India has warned Pakistan against its unprovoked firings along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir as the Directors General of Military Operations (DGMOs) of the two armies spoke on the hotline amid the escalating tensions over the Pahalgam terror attack.

Pakistan has been resorting to firings on the Indian side of the LoC since Friday night in violation of a ceasefire understanding and the Indian Army responded to them "appropriately", according to military sources. The DGMOs held the conversation on Tuesday. The Pakistan military has been warned against the unprovoked firings, people familiar with the DGMO talks said.

The sources, however, described the exchanges over the hotline as "routine", saying it was a weekly conversation between the DGMOs that is held every Tuesday. The Indian DGMO strongly took up the matter of ceasefire violations by the Pakistan military, the sources said. The sources said Pakistan military resorted to "unprovoked firings" using small arms. **PTI**



A Pakistani national, married to an Indian citizen, prepares to leave for Pakistan without her husband from the Attari-Wagah border on Wednesday. — Photo: AP

**PAKISTAN FEARS INDIA MAY ATTACK ANYTIME**

**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan on Wednesday claimed it has "credible intelligence" that India is planning military action against it in the next 24-36 hours and warned New Delhi that there would be consequences. The statement came hours after Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday told the top defence brass that the armed forces have "complete operational freedom" to decide on the mode, targets and timing of India's response to the Pahalgam terror attack, government sources said. Tensions have risen between the two countries after the Pahalgam terror attack last week that killed 26 people. **PTI**

**US URGES DE-ESCALATION**

**NEW YORK/WASHINGTON:** Amid rising tensions between India and Pakistan, the US has called on both countries "not to escalate" the conflict. Secretary of State Marco Rubio will speak to their Foreign Ministers "as early as today or tomorrow". US State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce said Washington is reaching out to India and Pakistan "regarding the Kashmir situation" and telling "them not to escalate the situation." Responding to a question on Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif's comments that Pakistan has "been doing this dirty work for US", Bruce added "...we're monitoring the developments across the board." **PTI**

## India shuts airspace for Pak airlines

NEW DELHI

India on Wednesday banned Pakistan airlines from using its airspace amid escalating tensions with the neighbouring country in the wake of the Pahalgam terror attack.

Sources said a NOTAM (Notice to Airmen) has been issued that bars Pakistan airlines from using the Indian airspace. The development comes a week after Pakistan barred Indian carriers from using its airspace.

Meanwhile, Pakistan on Wednesday said it has nothing to do with the Pahalgam terror attack and threatened a strong response if it is "provoked", amid rising tensions with India. Addressing a press conference alongside Army spokesman Lt Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry and Foreign Office spokesperson Shafqat Ali Khan, Dar demanded an independent and transparent probe by neutral investigators in the attack. **PTI**

**(REPORTS PAGE 7)**

## Op Karregutta: Security forces take control of Dhobey hills

STATE BUREAU  
Kothagudem

In a significant development in Operation Karregutta, security forces have taken control of Dhobey hills near Karregutta in Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh.

It might be noted that Chhattisgarh's Bastar Fighters, District Reserve Guard, CoBRA and CRPF forces have launched a major offensive as part of Operation Kagar against Maoists on the information that the naxals took shelter on Karregutta hills on Telangana-Chhattisgarh borders. On the ninth day of the anti-



A jawan waves the Tricolour atop Dhobey hills in Bijapur, Chhattisgarh.

naxal operation on Wednesday an Indian Air Force helicopter landed on Dhobey hills where it was planned to

establish a base camp for the security forces. Video clips of a helicopter landing on the hills and security personnel waving Indian flags in a celebration akin to capturing a foreign territory were released by the Chhattisgarh Police. Senior officials were said to have reached the spot to take stock of the situation.

Security forces reportedly gained control of Nee-lam Saray hills near Karregutta a few days ago. It is said that top Maoists such as Hidma, who leads PLGA battalion No. 1, was among those who took shelter on Karregutta. **(SEE PAGE 2)**

## Girls outshine boys in SSC exams again!

CITY BUREAU  
Hyderabad

Girls have once again outperformed boys in the SSC Public Examinations 2025 results declared on Wednesday. A total of 2,46,029 girls took the exams and 2,31,911 (94.26 per cent) passed, whereas 2,50,345 boys registered a pass percentage of 91.32, which was 2.94 per cent less than girls.

This year, students were awarded both marks and grades. They were given subject-wise internal, external and total marks, along with subject-wise re-

sult and final result as pass or fail. Overall, 4,96,374 regular students recorded a pass percentage of 92.78.

As for private candidates, the pass percentage stood at 57.22 out of 10,733 candidates. The percentage of passes secured by boys was 55.14, while girls achieved 61.7 per cent under private category. This year, 4,629 schools secured 100 per cent passes and none of the students in two schools under private management could clear the exams. At 99.29, Mahabubabad had the highest pass percentage, Vikarabad was least. **(REPORTS PAGE 2)**

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