

## KTR promises legal fight if funds to BRS-led gram panchayats are blocked

Rajanna-Sircilla: BRS working president KT Rama Rao on Monday asserted that nobody could stop Finance Commission funds and other constitutionally assured allocations to gram panchayats.

Stating that he had learnt that some Congress MLAs were allegedly threatening newly elected BRS sarpanches with denial of funds to their respective gram panchayats if they did not join the ruling party, Rama Rao said sarpanches should be aware of their rights. Neither Prime Minister Narendra Modi nor Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy nor MLAs could stop Finance Commission funds, as these were earmarked in the Constitution. Gram panchayats would directly receive 70 percent of Finance Commission funds, followed by Mandal Parishads with 20 percent and Zilla Parishads with 10 percent.

Moreover, even the State government could not take decisions on the implementation of schemes without resolutions passed by gram panchayats. It was mandatory to display the beneficiaries' list in gram panchayats before implementing any scheme, he said.

If there was any instance of funds being stalled to gram panchayats represented by BRS sarpanches, the party would take steps to ensure the release of funds by raising the issue in the Assembly, Council and Parliament, he assured.

So, sarpanches need not worry, Rama Rao said while felicitating newly elected BRS sarpanches, deputy sarpanches and ward members from Vemulawada and Sircilla segments at a programme held in Sircilla on Monday.

He said there was a possibility of the Congress government attempting to stop funds to gram panchayats by implicating BRS sarpanches in cases and added that the party would set up a legal cell in every district to extend legal assistance to such sarpanches. If any BRS public representative was put in trouble by the Congress, they should approach party leaders, Rama Rao advised, and asked party leaders to fight on their behalf by filing cases in court, stating that it was the responsibility of the party to protect them.

Commenting on Revanth Reddy's campaign in gram panchayat elections in the name of Vijayotsavams, he said he had never seen a Chief Minister campaign for gram panchayat polls. Despite the Chief Minister's campaign and warnings by ruling party MLAs about denial of welfare schemes, Congress candidates were not elected and BRS won up to 80 percent of seats in some areas in the gram panchayat polls, he said.

The Congress government had faced opposition from the public within a span of two years as no welfare scheme was being implemented properly, he said. Newly elected sarpanches, deputy sarpanches and ward members would work for only two years under the Congress government as Assembly elections were due in two years. They would work the remaining three years under a BRS government, he said.

Rama Rao also informed that a workshop would be conducted for newly elected ZPTCs, MPTCs, sarpanches, deputy sarpanches and ward members after the completion of ZPTC and MPTC elections to educate them on the Panchayat Raj Act.

## VOICE-4 empowers 2,500 marginalised girls with life, leadership skills

Hyderabad: A Hyderabad-based voluntary organisation, VOICE-4 Girls, through a series of training workshops, has empowered close to 2,500 girl students, hailing from marginalised backgrounds, from social welfare educational institutions, with life and leadership skills to make informed choices on safety, rights and future planning.

Through the 'Her Voice' programme, the organisation has been conducting engaging activities in a fun-filled learning approach at Telangana Social Welfare Residential Junior College (TGSWRSJC) (G) Chevella, Hyderabad City Guide

The programme has proven to be a transformative experience for 69 girls, fostering a noticeable increase in developing their own agency. Sakhi Peer Leadership is the final phase of the programme, VOICE-4 Girls in a press release said.







## Telangana BJP hails Nitin Nabin's elevation as national working president

Hyderabad: Senior leaders of the Telangana BJP on Sunday extended their congratulations to Nitin Nabin on his appointment as the National Working President of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The announcement has been widely welcomed across party ranks, with leaders expressing confidence in his ability to strengthen the organisation and take it to new heights.

Taking to the social media platform X, State BJP President N Ramachender Rao wrote: "Heartfelt congratulations to @NitinNabin. Wishing you a focused, effective, and impactful tenure in service of the organisation and the nation." Rao added that under Nabin's guidance, the BJP will "certainly scale new heights" and further reinforce its commitment to national service.

Union Minister G Kishan Reddy also lauded Nabin's elevation, describing it as a recognition of his "relentless hard work and commitment." Reddy highlighted Nabin's proven track record, noting his roles as National General Secretary of BJP Yuva Morcha (BJYM), State President of BJYM in Bihar, and party in-charge for Chhattisgarh, where he discharged responsibilities with "dedication, discipline, and notable success." He expressed confidence that Nabin will "take the party to newer heights under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP National President J P Nadda, and other senior leaders."

Rajya Sabha MP K Laxman joined in congratulating Nabin, wishing him success in his new role and expressing hope that his leadership will further energise the party's organisational strength.

## Inter-district T-20 teams' selections from Thursday

Karimnagar: The Karimnagar District Cricket Association (KDCA), under the Hyderabad Cricket Association (HCA), will host selection trials for the Telangana Inter-District T-20 League at the District Cricket Ground in Alugunoor. The event is being held in the memory late Union Minister G Venkataswamy. Teams will be picked from Karimnagar, Jagtial, Sircilla, and Peddapalli on December 18 and 19. Trials will kick off on December 18 at 8 am for Karimnagar players, followed by Jagtial at 1 pm. On December 19, Sircilla trials start at 8 am, with Peddapalli at 1 pm. Eligibility covers players born between September 1, 1995, and September 1, 2009. In a statement on Saturday, the organisers said, "Aspiring cricketers must bring their own kit, birth certificate, Aadhaar card (original and xerox), and two photographs."



## UNESCO Ambassador Vishal V. Sharma Visits Ramappa Temple to Review Conservation Works

Ambassador & Permanent Representative of India to UNESCO came from Paris and visited the World Heritage Site Rudreswara Ramappa Temple in Palampet village, Mulugu District (Telangana) on 14th December 2025 to take stock of the preservation & conservation efforts of the Archaeological Survey of India and the state government.

Ambassador Sharma was Chairman of the prestigious World Heritage Committee of UNESCO for the 46th session. He is the first Indian to have held this prestigious position. Recently, he also Chaired the 20th session of the Intergovernmental Committee for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage held at the

Red Fort in Delhi, where Deepavali was inscribed on UNESCO's ICH list.

It was under Ambassador Sharma's leadership that the Ramappa Temple was also inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2021. While on a visit to Hyderabad for the INCOIS (Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services) programme, he also visited Mulugu district to take stock of the preservation efforts. He was accompanied by the following officers from the ASI, Dr. H.R. Desai, DySA, Mr. Krishna Chaitanya, DyASE, Dr. Rohini Pande Ambekar, ASA M. Mallesh Golconda Fort incharge and from INCOIS Mr. Nagoji Rao, Sr. Executive.

## MBNR registers impressive turnout in GP polls

Mahabubnagar: The district witnessed a strong democratic response in the second phase of Gram Panchayat elections, recording an impressive 86.62 per cent voter turnout.

According to official data released on Sunday, polling was conducted peacefully from 7 am to 1 pm for the election of Sarpanches and Ward Members in Gram Panchayats across six mandals — Hanwada, Chinna Chintakunta, Devarakadra, Koilkonda, Koukuntla and Midjil. A total of 1,85,034 voters were registered in these mandals, of whom 1,60,284 exercised their franchise.



Election officials stated that polling progressed steadily throughout the day. By 1 pm, voter turnout had reached 79.22 per cent, and after the completion of polling procedures, the final turnout climbed to 86.62 per cent. Significantly, this figure surpassed the 83.04

per cent turnout recorded during the first phase, indicating a noticeable increase in voter enthusiasm in the second phase.

Women voters played a crucial role in boosting the turnout. Of the 93,540 registered women voters, 80,209 cast their votes, while

80,075 out of 91,490 male voters exercised their voting rights, underscoring balanced participation across genders. Among the six mandals, Midjil mandal recorded the highest voter turnout at 89.27 per cent, showcasing exceptional public engagement.



## Kadiki villagers boycott elections

Adilabad: While the second phase of Gram Panchayat elections in Adilabad district concluded smoothly on Sunday, residents of Kadiki village, under Ganeshpur Panchayat in Bela Mandal, boycotted the polls.

The villagers expressed anger stating that their village lacks even basic road facilities, forcing them



to suffer daily hardships. Despite repeated promises from officials and public representatives, none of their problems have been resolved, and no development has reached their village. Women who boycotted the vote staged a sit-in protest at the polling centre. Out of nearly 103 votes in the hamlet, only three were cast, while around 100 villagers refrained from exercising their franchise.

Meanwhile, District Collector Rajarshi Shah and SP Akhil Mahajan made elaborate security arrangements to ensure the elections were conducted without incident.

## All-India Invitation Football tournament begins in Vizag

Visakhapatnam: The DRM Cup All India Invitation Football Tournament kicked off here on Sunday amid great enthusiasm at Waltair football stadium organised by the East Coast Railway Sports Association (ECORSA) Waltair Division. The event will continue till December 21.

Divisional Railway Manager and ECoRSA president, Lalit Bohra, inaugurated the tournament in the august presence of president, ECoR Women's Welfare Organisation Jyotsna Bohra, ADRMs E Santharam, and K Rama Rao.

Addressing the gathering, Bohra announced that Waltair Division will host regular football tournaments at a grand scale, calling this an ideal time to launch such initiatives. He highlighted the timely coincidence of a world-renowned footballer's ongoing tour in India to promote the sport, crediting ECoRSA's proactive efforts in organising the prestigious event.

Speaking on the occasion, sports officer Haranath mentioned that Waltair Division paid efforts and assured future collaborations to host more events at the stadium, nurturing young talent from villages across the region.

Matches will be held day and night under floodlights at the stadium. About 14 teams from various states and organisations are taking part in the event. The inaugural match was held between Telangana and Bondamunda. President of Andhra Pradesh Football Association Kotagiri Sreedhar, general secretary N. Usha, and other dignitaries and ECoRSA members were present.



## Last rites performed with police honours for service dog Lucy

Gadwal: The Jogulamba Gadwal District Police paid tributes to police dog Lucy, who passed away on Sunday morning after rendering distinguished service to the department as an Explosive Detector Dog (EDD).

Lucy, born on November 25, 2015, underwent nine months of specialized training at the Integrated Intelligence Training Academy (IITA), Moinabad, and was inducted into police service in 2016. She was later allotted to Jogulamba Gadwal district, where she served the Bomb Squad with dedication and excellence.

During her service, Lucy participated in over 250 Chief Minister-level security duties, inspections of sensitive and crowded areas, and bomb detection

operations across the district and the state. She played a crucial role in detecting dynamites in the Ananthapuram area of Jogulamba Gadwal district, thereby averting a major potential threat.

For her performance, Lucy was awarded two Brown Medals and one Gold Medal, earning recognition and pride for the police department. Officials stated that due to the department's quality care and maintenance, Lucy served actively for nearly nine years.

On the directions of District Superintendent of Police T Srinivasa Rao, last rites were performed with full police honours. RSI Chandrakant, Dog Handler Ravi Kumar, and Dog Squad personnel attended the ceremony, paid floral tributes, and offered a ceremonial salute as a mark of respect.

## GP polls: Balanced voter engagement in Suryapet

Suryapet: The Gram Panchayat elections in Suryapet district witnessed an impressive voter turnout. Male turnout stood at 89.84 percent, while women recorded an almost equal participation at 89.29 percent, underlining balanced voter engagement across genders.

By 9 am, 59,196 voters had exercised their franchise, accounting for 25.18 percent turnout. By 1 pm, polling touched 2,04,056 votes, translating to 86.78 percent turnout, indicating brisk voting across mandals.

According to the final polling statement, the district has a total electorate of 2,35,137 voters, including 1,14,803 men, 1,20,326 women, and eight voters in the others category.

At the close of polling, a total of 2,10,576 votes were cast, registering an overall turnout of 89.55 percent.

Among mandals, Chilkur recorded one of the highest turnouts at 91.99 percent, followed closely by Ananthagiri at 91.02 percent and Penpahad at 90.95 percent. Kodad mandal reported 90.04 percent turnout, while Huzurnagar at 88.78 percent and Nadigudem at 89.20 percent also saw strong participation.

Even the comparatively lower turnout mandals crossed the 88 percent mark, reflecting district-wide voting enthusiasm.

Election officials noted that polling remained largely peaceful, with voters turning up in large numbers from early morning hours.





# Potti Sriramulu's sacrifice immortal in Andhra statehood movement: Minister NMD Farooq

Nandyal: State Minister for Law and Minority Welfare NMD Farooq on Monday said that the sacrifice of Amarajeevi Potti Sriramulu, who waged a prolonged struggle with an unwavering resolve for a separate state for Telugu people, remains immortal in history. The Minister, along with District Collector G. Rajakumari, paid floral tributes to the statue of Potti Sriramulu at Sanjeevanagar Gate in Nandyal on the occasion of his death anniversary.

Addressing the occasion Minister Farooq recalled that Potti Sriramulu laid down his life to fulfil the aspirations of Telugu people for a separate state. He said Sriramulu's selfless service, patriotism and supreme sacrifice continue to inspire generations. The Minister noted that Sriramulu's martyrdom was not only pivotal to the formation of Andhra State but also marked the beginning of linguistic reorganisation of states in the country. He described Sriramulu as the first person in Indian history to sacrifice his life for a linguistic cause.

The Minister further stated that it was due to



Sriramulu's historic fast and sacrifice that the Union Government responded, leading to the formation of Andhra State in 1953 as the first linguistic state in India. This landmark development, he said, inspired similar movements across the nation and paved the way for the reorganisation of states. He urged people to never forget Sriramulu's sacrifice made to protect the Telugu language, culture and self-respect, and called upon all sections to work responsibly towards the State's development in line with his ideals.

District Collector G. Raja Kumari said Potti

Sriramulu embodied the values of non-violence, service, truth and social justice, and laid down his life through an indefinite fast for the cause of statehood. She stated that his sacrifice occupies a permanent place in the history of the Telugu states and should be etched in golden letters. Calling

upon citizens to imbibe his spirit of sacrifice, the Collector appealed to all to work collectively for achieving higher goals and contribute to the overall development of the State. Municipal Commissioner Seshanna, Tahsildar Srivani and other officials and leaders were present at the programme.

## Over 4.25 lakh devotees complete Bhavani Deeksha

Vijayawada: Over 4.25 lakh devotees have successfully completed their Bhavani Deeksha and had Darshan of Goddess Sri Kanaka Durga at Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam atop Indrakeeladri in Vijayawada since December 11.

With the final day of Deeksha Viramana scheduled for December 15, the NTR district administration anticipates the total count will likely exceed the projected 6-7 lakh devotees. The Bhavani Deeksha relinquishment will culminate at Old Yagasala with Poornahuthi on Monday.

Endowments Department Commissioner K Ramachandra Mohan visited the temple on Sunday and reviewed ongoing facilities along with temple officials and engineering staff. He inspected queue lines, interacted with pilgrims, and distributed buttermilk and refreshments.

Speaking to the media, the Commissioner said that the smooth and orderly conduct of the Deeksha Viramana programme reflects the effectiveness of elaborate arrangements made by the department. He said that in strict compliance with government instructions, the Endowments Department implemented a well-planned system ensuring devotees faced no inconvenience. Hassle-free Darshan, uninterrupted Annaprasadam distribution, and adequate supply of Laddu Prasadam were maintained throughout.

Ramachandra Mohan stated the action plan was designed following the successful Dasara festival model, with strong inter-departmental coordination. He emphasised that even if lakhs of devotees arrive, the department is fully prepared to ensure every Bhavani devotee completes the ritual with complete satisfaction.

## GVMC bags three coveted PRSI National Awards – 2025

Visakhapatnam: In a significant development, Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) bagged three coveted PRSI National Awards – 2025 at the 47th All India Public Relations conference held in Dehradun on Sunday. The top national-level awards were achieved by GVMC with the support of the people of Visakhapatnam, public representatives, and Council Members.

Organised by the Public Relations Society of India (PRSI), GVMC Commissioner Ketan Garg informed that the event was held under the theme 'Empowering Growth, Preserving Roots – The PR Vision for 2047' at Dehradun, Uttarakhand and the conference was inaugurated by Chief Minister of Uttarakhand Pushkar Singh Dhami.

The awards were presented on December 14 (Sunday) by Speaker of the Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly Ritu Khanduri Bhushan, former Chief Minister of Uttarakhand Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank, and PRSI national president Ajit Pathak.

The GVMC Commissioner said that the national recognition was achieved for the corporation's public welfare initiatives implemented with the continuous support, participation and encouragement of the people of Visakhapatnam, public representatives, and Council Members.

The corporation received first prize in the Best



Use of Social Media in a Corporate Campaign for the effective use of social media in GVMC's corporate-level campaigns to disseminate information on city services, governance initiatives and public awareness programs to citizens. The Commissioner stated that these awards stand as a recognition to GVMC's people-centric initiatives carried out with active public participation. He further affirmed that GVMC remains committed to strengthening communication with citizens and continuously improving the quality of services in the future.

The awards were received on behalf of GVMC by Additional Commissioner D.V. Ramana Murthy and public relations officer N. Nageswara Rao.

## AP wins National Energy Conservation Award-2025

Vijayawada: On the occasion of National Energy Conservation Day, President of India Droupadi Murmu presented the prestigious National Energy Conservation Award-2025 to the Andhra Pradesh State Energy Conservation Mission (APSECM) at a ceremony held at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi, on Sunday.

The award was received by APSPDCL Chairman and Managing Director L Siva Sankar on behalf of the State government, marking a significant achievement for the State in the field of energy efficiency and sustainable development. The State has secured first prize in the State Designated Agency (SDA) category under Group II, emerging as the best-performing State in its group. The recognition reflects the State's consistent efforts in promoting energy conservation across various sectors, including industry, agriculture, urban infrastructure, and public utilities.





## ‘Vizag Navy Marathon 2025’ attracts over 17,000 runners

Visakhapatnam: The Beach Road in Visakhapatnam sprang to life on Sunday morning as over 17,000 runners took part enthusiastically in ‘Vizag Navy Marathon 2025.’ The 10th edition of ‘Vizag Navy Marathon’ showcased sporting spirit as runners from across the city and 17 foreign countries participated in the annual prestigious event.

The full marathon (42-km) was flagged off by Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Naval Command (ENC) Vice Admiral Sanjay Bhalla, president of NWWA (Eastern Region) Priya Bhalla flagged off the half marathon and the Sankalp Run, reinforcing the spirit of purpose, unity and community engagement. District collector MN Harendhira Prasad and City Commissioner of Police Shankhabrata Bagchi commenced the 10-km and 5-km runs respectively.

Encouraging the runners, the Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, ENC, conveyed his wishes to the best performers, runners and organisers and expressed gratitude to the district administration, city police and volunteer organisations for their support and involvement in making the event a resounding success.

## Police pay tributes to Amarajeevi Potti Sriramulu

Nandyal: The death anniversary of Amarajeevi Potti Sriramulu was observed with due reverence at the Nandyal District Police Office on Monday. District Superintendent of Police Sunil Sheoran, led the programme and offered floral tributes to the portrait of the great freedom fighter, remembering his historic sacrifice for the formation of Andhra State. Speaking on the occasion, the SP recalled that Potti Sriramulu, born on March 16, 1901, in Pattipadu village of Nellore district, led a life of simplicity, discipline, and dedication. After completing his engineering studies and serving in the Railways at Madras, he gave up his job to follow Mahatma Gandhi’s ideals and actively participated in the freedom movement.

An army of Flag Officers, GVMC Commissioner Ketan Garg, senior were present. With prize money exceeding Rs 10 lakh, the marathon brought together athletes and fitness enthusiasts from across India and abroad. This edition introduced new and enhanced features, including attractive discounts for runners and an improved package of deliverables. In addition, participants were provided with insurance cover, ensuring safety and well-being throughout the event.

## Operation AAHT leads to rescue of 11 minors, four held

Tirupati: A routine inspection at Tirupati Railway Station turned into a major rescue operation on Saturday when railway security personnel saved 11 minor children believed to be victims of human trafficking.

The Railway Protection Force (RPF), along with the Government Railway Police (GRP), intercepted the Hazrat Nizamuddin–Thiruvananthapuram Central Express during its stop at Platform No 4 around 2.40 pm. The search was part of ‘Operation Action Against Human Trafficking’ (AAHT), a special campaign aimed at preventing the illegal movement of children through the rail network.

During checks in the general and sleeper coaches, officials noticed a group of children travelling alone. The minors, all under the age of 18, were found to be from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh and were heading towards places like Katpadi and Erode. Their responses during questioning raised red flags, as none of them were accompanied by parents or legal guardians.

Further interaction revealed that the children were being taken by intermediaries for labour-related work. Acting swiftly, the joint team removed the minors from the train and shifted them to the RPF post at Tirupati for safety and further inquiry.

Four men suspected of escorting the children were also detained. They were identified as Ajay

## Vega Jewellers’ grand festive offers

Vijayawada: South India’s trusted luxury jewellery brand, Vega Jewellers, is set to launch its much-awaited ‘Grand Offers of the Season’ from Monday (December 15) across all its branches. The festive offers feature an exclusive collection of gold, diamond, and polki jewellery, blending traditional craftsmanship with contemporary designs to enhance festive and wedding celebrations.

As part of the grand launch, popular actress Rithika Nayak will visit Vega Jewellers showroom in Vijayawada to unveil festive offers. Vega Jewellers invited customers to visit its showrooms in



Vijayawada, Hyderabad, Kakinada, and Eluru and be part of the festive celebrations.

Under the special festive scheme, customers can avail a flat 50 per cent off on wastage on gold jewellery, diamond jewellery starting at just Rs 49,999 per carat, and polki jewellery with no making charges and no wastage.

Speaking on the occasion, the management of Vega Jewellers said the brand stands for trust, value, and timeless elegance, and festive offers, along with the celebrity unveiling, aim to make the season more memorable for customers.



Kumar from Bihar’s Supaul district, Shivdesh from Kaushambi in Uttar Pradesh, Mahesh Prasad Kol from Satna in Madhya Pradesh, and Ritesh Kumar Singh from Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh. After completing the required procedures, the rescued children were produced before the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) of Tirupati district. The committee directed that the minors be placed at the Boys Home in Mangalam, Tirupati, where they will receive care and protection. The suspected agents were handed over to the GRP, Tirupati, for further investigation. Officials said efforts are underway to determine whether a larger trafficking network is involved. Railway authorities stated that surveillance and checks under Operation AAHT will be stepped up in the coming days to curb child trafficking and prevent the exploitation of minors under the pretext of employment.



# Aviation professionalism which India must draw from

The aviation accident, on Tuesday, January 2, 2024, where a Japan Airlines (JAL) Airbus A350 aircraft collided with a Japanese Coast Guard Bombardier Dash 8 aircraft at Tokyo's Haneda airport while landing, in which all 379 passengers on the JAL plane escaped but with five fatalities on the smaller aircraft, is a perfect example of this. There was a notice to airmen issued for Haneda indicating that the stop bar, a set of red lights that come on at taxi holding point for that runway, was not available. The Coast Guard plane was cleared to the holding point, which was acknowledged by the pilot to Air Traffic Control (ATC). The ATC tape transcript also shows the JAL flight being cleared to land, which was acknowledged by the pilots. The investigation report will indicate what made the Coast Guard pilot enter the runway. Did he miss the notice to airmen? Did he not hear the ATC issue landing clearance to the JAL aircraft? The investigation report will identify these and we can expect the preliminary report in a fortnight, unlike accident reports in India which take months and years.

Aircraft manufacturers are required to demonstrate that an aircraft, in maximum density configuration, can be completely evacuated within 90 seconds using only half the total number of emergency exits. The world witnessed the highest quality of discipline and crew training, which saved 379 people in the fiery accident. It was an amazing display of orderly evacuation from the burning wreckage that the JAL cabin crew executed. All passengers followed the safety instructions and left the aircraft without carrying their hand bags or crowding around after coming down the aircraft evacuation slides. Only three exits were available for evacuation. The cabin public address system was not working and the crew used megaphone and voice announcements for the evacuation.

On August 2, 2005, Air France flight, AF 358, from Paris, France, to Toronto overshoot the runway while landing in heavy rain and caught fire. All 309 passengers were evacuated safely, though 11 received injuries. Images of the evacuation showed several passengers leaving the burning aircraft with their hand luggage. Similar action by passengers on an Emirates flight (EK 521) from Thiruvananthapuram to Dubai, on August 3, 2016, that crashed while landing, showed a complete lack of discipline on the part of passengers who were grabbing their hand luggage, thus delaying the evacuation. The aviation world should learn a lot from the absolutely high professional standards in JAL's training of its crew. Air passengers worldwide should also realise that pre-flight emergency procedure instructions should be followed seriously.

The Japanese authorities have already made the ATC transcripts public. Contrast this with what would have been several months of silence and secrecy in India. Take the case of an extreme hard landing done by the crew of an Air India

Airbus flight from Kochi to Dubai on December 20, 2023. The news surfaced only after a tracking site showed the aircraft flying to Mumbai on December 27 at an altitude of 9,000 ft instead of the normal 31,000-plus ft. Eventually, the news was that the flight had made a 3.5g landing at Dubai and was on ground for more than a week. To put that in simple language, 'g' is acceleration due to gravity. If an aircraft does a 1g landing, the weight on the wheels equals the weight of the aircraft. A 3.5g landing means the weight on the wheels of the aircraft at touchdown is 3.5 times its landing weight for that flight. Landing gears are not designed for such an impact and the resultant damage to crucial aircraft parts can be serious. The plane was permitted to depart as an unpressurised flight and was allowed just one take off and one landing. Did the captain report the hard landing in the aircraft tech log? Did he file the flight safety report within 24 hours, a mandatory requirement by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA)? What action did Air India take upon learning of the very hard landing? Why did it take more than 10 days to report this serious event? Was there an attempt to hush up this serious accident?

A disturbing fact is the failure of the Air India management to act proactively on a report by the instructor who trained the captain. He was a copilot on the airline's Boeing 777 fleet and was brought to the Airbus A320 fleet for his first command. The minimum hours on type that is required for first command were bypassed. Let me quote from the letter that the instructor had sent to the Chief of Training, Operations and also Safety of Air India. "Sir, they are facing difficulties in exercises which require manual flying skills and raw data flying and had to be recommended for corrective training twice. This I feel can be attributed to their lack of experience in the same, as they both are from the B777 fleet. "God forbid if there is an incident/accident involving one of these pilots from the [airline's] 777/787 fleet, many questions will be raised, and we will not have any reasonable answers."

It was a case of shooting the messenger and the instructor pilot was sacked from Air India. Today, the airline has several questions to answer. The DGCA and Air India should look at the accidents caused by confusion of flying different types of aircraft, especially when fatigue and stress are involved. One can go back to October 12, 1976, when an Indian Airlines Caravelle flight from Bombay to Madras (IC 171) crashed shortly after take-off at Bombay and while attempting an emergency landing, killing all 95 passengers on board. The pilots had endorsements on their licences to fly the Boeing and the Caravelle. The switch positions for certain functions worked differently in each aircraft, which was highlighted in the court inquiry. In the Indian Airlines Airbus crash at Bangalore, on February 14, 1990, where there were 92 fatalities, the pilots were fresh from conversion training for the air-



craft.

In the TAM Airlines Airbus crash in Sao Paulo, on July 17, 2007, this was the fourth sector of the day. Even though the flight was within duty time, one cannot discount the fatigue factor for the crew. The ATC calls on the wet runway condition were more in line with Boeing terminology. The aircraft also had one thrust reverser unserviceable. One of the pilots had flown previously on Boeing aircraft. The thrust lever action on a Boeing where the reverse thrust lever in the cockpit is wire locked is different from that on an Airbus. All on board the flight literally burnt to death.

In the Asiana crash in San Francisco, on July 6, 2013, the captain had flown previously on Airbus aircraft. On final approach for landing, he was lulled into thinking that the auto thrust would respond like in the Airbus he was so used to, forgetting that he was on a different aircraft. Focus on standards. Air India has had a long history of covering up serious incidents and accidents with the blessings of the DGCA. The hard landing accident at Dubai should serve

as a wake-up call for the airline. The airline has just inducted a new aircraft, the Airbus A350, and the criterion for the crew selected to fly it should be based on very high standards and not on seniority. While the first lot of captains are Airbus experienced, the second lot being sent for conversion are from the Boeing fleet. Both the DGCA and Air India should insist on a hard copy of the simulator proficiency check report/certification of the pilots training on this aircraft. Merely stating that safety is paramount when so many incidents are being swept under the carpet will not improve the reputation of the airline. India can claim to be among the fastest growing aviation markets but where do we stand on the passenger safety count? The Air India management needs to do some soul searching when it comes to operations, training and safety. India and its airlines have much to learn from the Japan Airlines incident. Captain A. (Mohan) Ranganathan is a former airline instructor pilot and aviation safety adviser. He is also a former member of the Civil Aviation Safety Advisory Council (CASAC), India

## After Android, Microsoft has launched its AI-powered Copilot app for Apple iOS and iPadOS users.

San Francisco: After Android, Microsoft has launched its AI-powered Copilot app for Apple iOS and iPadOS users. Both versions of the Copilot app (formerly Bing chat) are now available to download from the Apple App Store.

The app works similarly to OpenAI's ChatGPT mobile app. "Improve your productivity with Copilot your AI-powered chat assistant. Copilot is a pioneering chat assistant from Microsoft powered by the latest OpenAI models, GPT-4 and DALL-E 3,"

according to the app description.

Unlike the free version of ChatGPT which runs GPT-3.5, Copilot lets you access GPT-4, the latest large language model (LLM) from OpenAI, for free. The Copilot app on iOS allows access to chatbot capabilities, image generation through DALL-E 3, and the ability to draft text for emails and documents. "These advanced AI technologies provide fast, complex, and precise responses, as well as the ability to create breathtaking visuals from simple text descriptions.



# What is Humboldt's enigma and what does it mean for India? | Explained

Explorers and naturalists have been asking this question for centuries. Many have also been curious why some areas are more biodiverse than others. One of them was Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) – a polymath who recorded observations on various natural phenomena across the fields known today as geography, geology, meteorology, and biology. Once, when exploring South America, he recorded the distribution of plants on a mountain. He also noted how climates were similar across various mountains in different parts of the world – but where specific features occurred on a mountain varied with elevation. From his various studies, Humboldt suggested there was a relationship between temperature, altitude, and humidity on one hand and the occurrence patterns of species – or their biodiversity – on the other. His example of choice was the Chimborazo mountain in Ecuador, which has today become an important illustration of mountain diversity. Two centuries later, a group of biogeographers – scientists who explore the relationship of diversity with geography – used modern tools to take another look at the drivers of biodiversity. Based on their findings, they proposed their own version of the link between biodiversity and mountains and called it Humboldt's enigma.

## What is Humboldt's enigma?

The world's tropical areas receive more energy from the Sun because of the earth's angle of inclination. So the tropics have greater primary productivity, which then facilitates greater diversity: more ecological niches become available, creating more complex ecosystems and greater biological diversity. The proponents of Humboldt's enigma have held that the earth's tropical areas by themselves don't contain all the biodiverse regions, that many areas outside the tropics are highly biodiverse. These places are mountains. Indeed, while we expect diversity to decrease away from the tropics, mountains have been an important exception. This is the essence of Humboldt's enigma. But scientific evidence has been hard to acquire, requiring the use of complex analytical methods and large datasets of various taxonomic groups – and even then remains an incomplete exercise. A simple way to think of Humboldt's enigma in India is to consider the biodiversity in our tropical areas, south of the Tropic of Cancer passing through Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. These areas are supposed to be the most diverse in the country. The Western Ghats plus Sri Lanka biodiversity hotspot lies in this zone. However, the eastern Himalaya are much more diverse. Some scientists have even suggested this part of the mountain range is the second-most diverse area of perching birds in the world. For river birds, the eastern Himalaya may be the most diverse. To understand how this might be possible, let's turn to the modern understanding of Humboldt's enigma.

## What drives biodiversity?

The history of the earth, its geography, and the climate are the main drivers of mountain diversity. And different

biodiversity at different locations is the result of changes in how these factors have intermingled over time and space. We know mountains host two processes that generate biodiversity. First: geological processes, like uplifts, result in new habitats where new species arise, so the habitats are 'cradles'. Second: species on some climatologically stable mountains persist there for a long time, so these spots are 'museums' that accumulate many such species over time. Coastal tropical sky islands (mountains surrounded by lowlands), like the Shola Sky Islands in the Western Ghats, are a good example. Here, old lineages have persisted on the mountain tops as climates and habitats fluctuated around them in the lower elevations. This is the reason some of the oldest bird species in the Western Ghats, such as the Sholicola and the Montecincla, are housed on the Shola Sky Islands. Sometimes, the same mountain can be both cradle for some species and museum for others, depending on the species' ecologies. The northern Andes range – including Chimborazo – is considered the most biodiverse place in the world. If we start from the foothills of the Andes and climb, we're going to encounter different temperatures and rainfall levels that support everything from tropical evergreen biomes in the lower elevation to the alpine and tundra biomes near the top. Such a large variation over short distances supports the immense biodiversity found in mountain regions – and worldwide. Another critical force in biodiversity formation is geology. The foundations on which mountains are erected often differ from those on which low-elevation regions rest. Scientists have found that the more heterogeneous the geological composition of mountains is, the more biodiverse they are. Around the world, all mountains with high biodiversity have high geological heterogeneity as well, especially in the tropics. Even in tropical regions, where we expect higher biodiversity, some mountains with a lower variety of rocks are relatively less biodiverse. We also know plants are influenced by the type of soil, which depends on the type of rocks in that area. So high geological heterogeneity often produces unique habitat patches on mountains within similar climate regimes, and promotes diversification.

Against this backdrop, what drives biodiversity in the eastern Himalaya? Climate dissimilarity is still one crucial factor, something Humboldt also indicated based on his observations of the Chimborazo and understood to be a paradigm. Researchers have also found some groups of birds to have evolved elsewhere and dispersed to the Himalaya, resulting in higher diversity there.

## What do we still not know?

Multiple factors drive diversification and the Humboldt's enigma in different parts of the world. Then again, scientists have also advanced more than a hundred different hypotheses on how diversity varies in different parts of the world, and they contend with the enigma in different ways. This article simply presents the big picture. An important limitation of scientists'



attempts to explain biodiversity patterns is the lack of fine data on where species occur. For now, birds are the best-described group around the world, and their diversity patterns suggest mountains play a defining role. We need more research. In India in particular, several areas are understudied. We can't expect to understand a place's true biodiversity unless we also use modern tools like genetics. For example, why don't the Eastern Ghats have any endemic passerine birds? The most likely answer is that scientists haven't studied them for more than a century, especially with modern tools. Some national programmes are trying to address these

gaps, including the National Mission on Himalayan Studies, the National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem, and the National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Wellbeing. They need to be strengthened, bolstered by the will to support basic research on diversity. Humboldt's enigma is perhaps one of many puzzles of mountain biodiversity – and our backyards are excellent places to study them, to find answers to global problems of climate and landscape change. V.V. Robin is an associate professor studying bird ecology using genetics and bioacoustics, and Naman Goyal is a PhD student working on the diversification patterns of birds – both at IISER Tirupati.

## Valve's new guidelines mandates AI Transparency for Steam games

Valve has unveiled new regulations governing the publication of AI-infused games on its 'Steam' platform. The company, in a recent blog post, outlined the changes aimed at bolstering transparency and safeguarding users against potential risks associated with AI-generated content. Developers are now required to disclose whether their games use AI, specifically pinpointing instances where pre-generated content, such as art, code, or sound, is created with AI assistance.

The disclosure extends to live AI-generated content during gameplay, prompting developers to detail safety measures preventing the creation of illegal or infringing material. Valve's move is a response to complaints from developers who faced rejections due to AI-generated assets allegedly relying on copyrighted material. The company emphasized its commitment to not impede AI integration but rather to align its review policies with evolving copyright laws. To enhance user awareness, Steam store pages will now indicate if a game contains AI, allowing consumers to make informed choices. Additionally, users can report any encounters with illegal AI-generated content within the



Valve outlined the changes aimed at bolstering transparency and safeguarding users against potential risks associated with AI-generated content.

game. While some developers champion AI for its utility in testing, concepting, and cost-efficient game development, concerns persist within the industry about its potential to replace human creatives. Valve's blog post implies an adaptive approach, acknowledging the evolving landscape of AI technology and legal frameworks, signaling a commitment to revisiting these rules as needed.



# Israeli Supreme Court's historic verdict against Netanyahu's judicial overhaul law | Explained

The story so far: Israel's Supreme Court on January 1 struck down a law limiting its own powers — a momentous step that threatens to reopen the fissures in Israeli society that preceded the country's ongoing war against Hamas. The controversial legislation passed by Israeli lawmakers on July 24, 2023 prevents judges from striking down government decisions on the ground that they are 'unreasonable.' The Court's 8-7 ruling for the first time struck down an amendment to the country's quasi-constitutional "Basic Laws" by underscoring that it would deal a "severe and unprecedented blow to the core characteristics of the State of Israel as a democratic state." The revoked law was part of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's divisive judicial overhaul plan that sparked months of mass protests and triggered one of the deepest political upheavals in Israel's 75 years. Thousands of Israeli army reservists, who constitute the backbone of the military, also threatened to stop reporting for service as a mark of protest. However, they subsequently set aside the vow with the onset of war.

The decision, however, did not come as a total surprise — a draft of the ruling was leaked to the media during the last week of December. Reacting to the leak, Minister of Justice Yariv Levin claimed that the "citizens of Israel expect the Supreme Court not to publish during a war a ruling that is controversial even among its judges." Echoing similar sentiments, the speaker of the Knesset, Amir Ohana, added that "a time of war is certainly not the time to establish a first precedent of its kind in the history of the country." The timing of the verdict was also crucial as a delay of a few weeks might have produced a different outcome. The recent retirement of two justices, Chief Justice Esther Hayut and Justice Justice Anat Baron, imposed a deadline of mid-January to pronounce the ruling, after which they would have been ineligible to participate in it. "It's a small and fragile majority. Two of those justices are no longer presiding in the court — and today's court would likely have a majority take the opposite view," law professor Yedidia Z. Stern, who was involved in talks to broker a compromise on the judicial overhaul, told a news portal. The 'reasonableness' doctrine in the absence of a written constitution, the country's Basic Laws serve as an informal constitution, governing core constitutional ethos such as the creation and role of state institutions, relations between state authorities, and the protection of some civil rights.

The power to review the legality or 'reasonability' of laws is analogous to the power of judicial review vested with Indian courts. There is no law defining judicial review powers; the grounds for judicial intervention in administrative affairs have been promulgated through court rulings. One such legal standard is the 'reasonableness doctrine' or the standard of extreme unreasonableness, derived from the Wednesbury unreasonableness principle in English common law. A decision is deemed unreasonable if a court rules that it was made without considering all relevant factors or without giving relevant

weight to each factor, or by giving irrelevant factors too much weight— even if they do not violate any particular law or contradict other administrative rulings. Notably, the judiciary cannot revoke government decisions simply because they disagree with them. Under the doctrine, such revocation is permissible only in cases in which the balance between the various considerations that were made is unreasonable to an extreme. Explained | What is the 'reasonableness' doctrine at the heart of Israel's judicial overhaul? In January last year, the Supreme Court invoked this doctrine and ordered Prime Minister Netanyahu to dismiss his key ally, Shas leader Aryeh Deri from his cabinet, on the grounds that his recent criminal conviction for tax offenses, and a resultant suspended jail sentence which was yet to expire, made his appointment 'unreasonable in the extreme.' This prompted the government to set in motion a plan to limit judicial review over executive actions. What does the verdict say? In a majority ruling (supported by twelve of the fifteen justices), the Court held that it has the power to judicially review Basic Laws and interfere in exceptional cases where the Knesset exceeds its constituent powers. In addition, eight of the justices struck down the amendment to the Basic Law: The Judiciary through which the Knesset proposed to revoke judicial review of the reasonableness of executive decisions. The seven dissenting judges, however, saw overreach in the decision, saying that the doctrine of reasonableness "undermines basic democratic principles including the separation of powers." The majority, led by departing Chief Justice Esther Hayut, underscored that the reasonableness standard was a crucial tool to protect against arbitrary government overreach, particularly in Israel, which lacks a formal constitution. She underscored that the newly enacted law "does the most severe harm possible to the principle of the separation of powers and the principle of the rule of law," which constitutes "a severe blow to two of the most explicit characteristics of Israel as a democratic state."

While cautioning about the extreme ease with which a Basic Law can be amended (with a simple majority in the Knesset), the Chief Justice asserted that judicial review is critical in "defending the individual and the public interest." "In rare cases in which the beating heart of the Israeli form of constitution is harmed, this court is authorized to declare the invalidation of a Basic Law that has in some way exceeded the Knesset's authority." Chief Justice Esther Hayut Revoking the doctrine "harms several cornerstones of jurisprudence and democracy: the rule of law, the right of due process, the separation of powers," said Justice Amit Yitzhak Amit, another member of the court's liberal wing. He pointed out that "given the heavy democratic deficit in Israel," such a revocation has much "greater weight here than in other countries."

Although Justice Alex Stein, a conservative judge, concurred with the majority that the Court had the right to curb the unbridled powers of the Knesset to pass Basic Laws, he emphasised that it was not



The decision, however, did not come as a total surprise — a draft of the ruling was leaked to the media during the last week of December

obligated to strike down the impugned law. He added that revocation of the doctrine "violates no constitutional norm." In an opinion for the minority, Justice David Mintz underscored that judicial review of even regular legislation was "not based on strong foundations" and as such there was "for sure no authority allowing for the court to deliberate on the validity of a Basic Law" or to strike one down. "Annuling a Basic Law based on an amorphous doctrine and an undefined formula carries a heavy price from a democratic point of view, certainly when it comes to an issue about which the Court itself is in an 'institutional conflict of interest,'" he wrote. Justice Yael Wilner observed that the doctrine of "existing interpretation" should be used to interpret the law more narrowly and allow for review only in cases where an administrative decision is extremely unreasonable. Pointing out that there exist alternative grounds for judicial review such as proportionality, arbitrariness, and discrimination, she asserted that the amendment "does not seriously harm the democratic identity of the State of Israel." How have Israeli politicians reacted to the ruling?

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party said that the Supreme Court's decision was "in opposition to the nation's desire for unity, especially in a time of war." They slammed the judges for ruling on the issue when Israeli soldiers are "fighting and endangering themselves in battle." Israel's justice minister and architect of the law Yariv Levin accused the judges of "taking into their hands all the authorities that are supposed to be divided between the three branches of government in a democracy." He added that the ruling was "the opposite of the spirit of unity required these days for the success of our fighters on the front." However, opposition leader Yair Lapid welcomed the verdict and said on social media platform X that the apex court had "faithfully fulfilled its role in protecting the citizens of Israel." "If the Israeli government again starts the quarrel over the Supreme Court then they have learned nothing," he said. "They didn't learn anything on October 7, they didn't learn

anything from 87 days of war for our home." Benny Gantz, a member of Israel's war cabinet, said that the Court's decision "must be respected" and political disputes postponed until after the war. Although initially opposed to the overhaul, he subsequently joined an emergency wartime unity government with Mr. Netanyahu. Shikma Bressler, one of the organisers involved in last year's large-scale protests against the law also hailed the Court's ruling, saying in a video statement that the top Court had for the moment removed "the sword of dictatorship from around our necks". Editorial | Blow to Netanyahu: On Israeli Supreme Court's verdict and limiting the judiciary's powers

What happens next? Prime Minister Netanyahu has so far not issued any personal response to the ruling and had repeatedly refused to state whether he would respect the Court's decision when asked in the months leading up to the pronouncement. Justice Minister Yariv Levin, however, said that the ruling would not "stay our hand," indicating a potential standoff between the right-wing government and the judiciary. However, considering the ongoing war with Hamas and the need to maintain national unity, any immediate countermove against the decision seems unlikely. Across the Israeli political divide, both proponents and opponents of Mr. Netanyahu's judicial overhaul plan have stressed the need to avoid any domestic turmoil. In normal times, the decision may have led to a constitutional crisis or worse. "If we didn't have the (Hamas) war, we would have had an internal war and we've avoided that," Reuven Hazan, professor of political science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, told CNN. "But this precedential verdict also raises another and no less critical aspect: the importance, after the war, of reinforcing the constitutional rules of the game, placing checks and balances on political power, and better defining the relations between the branches of the state," wrote Suzie Navot, an expert in constitutional law and vice president of the Israel Democracy Institute, an independent research group.