

# Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman may soon fly fighter planes again



Agency  
New Delhi April 20,

There's a "good chance" of Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman returning to a fighter cockpit soon but the final clearance will be given by the Bengaluru-based Institute of Aerospace Medicine (IAM) where the 35-year-old will undergo a series of tests in the coming weeks, two Indian Air Force officials with direct knowledge of the matter said on the condition of anonymity. Varthaman created military aviation history by shooting down a Pakistani F-16 during a dogfight with the Pakistan Air Force over the Line of Control on February 27, seconds before his own MiG-21 Bison was hit by a missile forcing him to eject. Experts have hailed it as the first ever kill of an F-16 by a MiG-21 Bison, fighter jets of two different generations. He

could be recommended for a Vir Chakra, India's third-highest war-time gallantry award, HT learns. The aerial skirmish took place a day after Indian Mirage 2000s struck targets in Pakistan's Balakot in response to the Pulwama suicide attack in which 40 Central Reserve Police Force men were killed on February 14. Varthaman was in Delhi last week for a medical review at the Air Force Central Medical Establishment, the same facility where he was first brought to on March 1 after his repatriation from Pakistan where he spent almost 60 hours in custody. The medical establishment is a specialist facility where aircrews from the three services are assessed for flying fitness. Doctors at the Army Hospital (Research and Referral) have also been involved in his medical

assessment and treatment. He was diagnosed with injuries to his spine and rib. "In such ejection cases, specialists usually assess a pilot's health for up to 12 weeks before they clear him for flying again. So we will know about Abhinandan by May-end. But going by the current health indicators and the officer's determination to return to fighter flying, we hope to see him in a g-suit soon," said the first official. Varthaman has now returned to his unit in Srinagar — the air force's No.51 squadron, which is also known as 'Sword Arms', said the second official. In mid March, Varthaman went on four-week medical leave and took complete bed rest at his home base. He is likely to be assigned "light ground duties" before moving to the IAM for the final clearance for fighter

flying, the second official added. Varthaman's wife Squadron Leader Tanvi Marwah (retd) and their seven-year-old son Tavish are with him in Srinagar. "The 12-week timeline for assessing a pilot's health after an ejection is not cast in stone. Pilots can also be given a grace period to recover fully. We have a tie up with the United States Air Force and if required, we can seek their opinion too," said Air Marshal Pawan Kapoor, who retired as Director General Medical Services (Air) in December 2017. Senior IAF officials, who did not want to be named, said Varthaman could be recommended for a Vir Chakra for bringing the PAF F-16 down. "As the action happened on the other side of the LoC, he could be awarded the war-time gallantry award. The government will have to take that call, whether he gets a Vir Chakra or a Shaurya Chakra," one of the officials said. The Vir Chakra and Shaurya Chakra are the country's third-highest war-time and peacetime gallantry awards, respectively. The Mirage 2000 pilots, who carried out the Balakot strikes, could be recommended for the Vayu Sena Medal for gallantry, another official said, asking not to be identified. On April 8, the IAF released radar images for the first time to rebut Pakistan's claim that it hadn't lost a US-manufactured F-16 fighter jet in the February 27 dogfight.

# Asian Weightlifting C'ship: Mirabai Chanu to spearhead India's campaign

Agency  
New Delhi April 20,

Former World Champion, Mirabai Chanu will spearhead India's challenge at the Asian Weightlifting Championship, 2019 that begins at Ningbo, China today. Chanu will be competing in the 49kg category from 48kg following the International Weightlifting Federation's rejig of weight categories. She has made a strong comeback after having suffered a lower-back injury that kept her out of action for nearly nine months. She will have potent competitors. Among male weightlifters, India's hopes will be on Jeremy Lalrinnunga, the gold medalist at the Youth Olympic Games. Commonwealth Games



champion, Sathish Sivalingam has pulled out owing to performance troubles. Other Indians participating include Vikas Thakur, the silver medalist at the Commonwealth Games, and Ajay Singh, the bronze medalist at the Asian Youth Championship and the Junior

Weightlifting Championship. Ajay had finished fifth in the 77kg category at the Asian Games in 2018. Nine days of competition will be played out at Ningbo Younger Gymnasium from today onwards. Medals will be won across 20 categories, 10 for men and 10 for women.

# 'Congress wasted time, had no intention of having alliance': AAP's Manish Sisodia

Agency  
New Delhi April 20,

The Aam Aadmi Party on Saturday blamed the Congress for not having an alliance on 18 Lok Sabha seats of Delhi, Haryana and Chandigarh. Senior party leader and Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said the Congress "wasted time" in the name

of discussion over alliance against the Bharatiya Janata Party-led ruling coalition in the Lok Sabha elections. "The Congress was doing timepass, it had no intention of having an alliance in Haryana," said Sisodia explaining why seat-sharing talks between the Congress, the AAP and the Jannayak Janta Party (JJP) of Dushyant Chautala.

Sisodia said, "The sole reason for us to go for an alliance with the Congress was to defeat the Modi-Shah pair in the election and not to fight over which party contests how many seats in these 18 Lok Sabha constituencies. But the Congress backtracked from the last agreed seat-sharing arrangement for Haryana."

This came after AAP's announcement on Friday that it had accepted one of Congress's proposals for an alliance formula to share seats in the Lok Sabha elections indicating revival of their on-again, off-again discussions for electoral pact that began more than four months ago. Sisodia said the three parties had agreed for the Congress's proposal for a 7:2:1 seat-sharing arrangement in Haryana. The Congress was to contest seven seats, the JJP two and the AAP one. "But after we agreed on this, the Congress retreated from the arrangement again," Sisodia said at a press conference signaling that the tri-lateral alliance talks may be over and the AAP-JJP will field their candidates at all 10 Lok Sabha seats in Haryana. Delhi has seven Lok Sabha seats while Chandigarh has one parliamentary constituency.

# Indian man extradited to US from Singapore for multi-million dollar call centre scam

Agency  
New Delhi April 20,

An Indian has been extradited to the US from Singapore to face charges of his involvement in a multi-million dollar India-based call centre scam that targeted Americans. Hitesh Madhubhai Patel, 42, of Ahmedabad is scheduled to be arraigned Friday before a US magistrate judge in federal court in Houston. The indictment, which was unsealed in October 2016, charged Patel and 60 other individuals and entities with general conspiracy, wire fraud conspiracy and money laundering conspiracy. The US Justice Department said that the massive India-based telephone impersonation fraud and money laundering conspiracy defrauded thousands of US residents out of hundreds of millions of dollars. Assistant Attorney General Brian Benczkowski of the Justice Department's Criminal Division said Patel operated a call centre that allegedly preyed upon vulnerable US citizens as part of a massive fraud scheme. "This extradition once again demonstrates the Department's unwavering commitment to disrupt and dismantle the India-based call centre scam industry and to work with our foreign partners to hold accountable those who perpetrate schemes that defraud our citizens," he said. US Attorney Ryan Patrick of the Southern District of Texas said large complex international cases like these

often take years to bring in foreign-based defendants, applauding America's global partners in helping bring this case closer to a conclusion". The Justice Department said that Singapore authorities apprehended Patel at the request of the US following a provisional arrest warrant in September last year, after he flew from India to Singapore. The Singaporean Minister for Law issued a warrant on March 25, 2019 for Patel to be delivered into custody of the United States. The indictment alleges that Patel operated the HGlobal call center conglomerate and participated in a complex fraudulent scheme involving a network of call centers based in Ahmedabad. Using information obtained from data brokers and other sources, India-based conspirators allegedly called potential victims while impersonating officials from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) or US Citizenship and Immigration Services. According to the indictment, the call centre conspirators then threatened victims with arrest, imprisonment, fines or deportation if they did not pay taxes or penalties to the government. When victims agreed to pay, the call centers used a network of US-based conspirators to quickly liquidate and launder the extorted funds through the use of stored value cards or via wire transfers. As alleged in the indictment, the stored value cards were often registered by the scammers using misappropriated personal



identifying information of thousands of identity theft victims, and conspirators collected the wire transfers by using fake names and fraudulent identifications. The call centre conspirators also defrauded victims through other schemes, including via offering fake short-term loans or grants. The indictment alleges that the conspirators would then request a good-faith deposit to show the victims' ability to pay back the loan or a fee to process the grant. The victims of the alleged scam never received any money after making the requested payment. A total of 24 domestic defendants associated with this transnational criminal scheme have previously been convicted and sentenced to terms of imprisonment of up to 20 years in the Southern District of Texas, District of Arizona and Northern District of Georgia. The defendants were also ordered to pay millions of dollars in victim restitution and money judgments and to forfeit seized assets. Some defendants were ordered to be deported based on their illegal

immigration status, with another defendant having his US citizenship revoked due to a separate conviction for immigration fraud. The remaining India-based defendants have yet to be arraigned in this case. Executive Associate Director Derek Benner of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE)

Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) said Patel's extradition should serve as a strong deterrent to anyone considering taking part in similar scams and hoped it provides a sense of justice for the victims as well. Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) Russell George said since 2013, the IRS impersonation scam has been on a relentless path, claiming more than 15,000 victims who have collectively suffered over USD 75 million in losses. "TIGTA's investigations, often conducted with other Federal agencies, have identified 140 scammers, including Patel, who have preyed upon taxpayers. Today's extradition and

arrangement are proof that TIGTA and its law enforcement partners will be equally relentless in rooting out individuals who fraudulently identify themselves as IRS employees in order to extort money from taxpayers," George said. Special Agent in Charge David Green of DHS-OIG Houston, Texas Field Office said the owners, managers and employees of overseas call centers who target US residents should know that the US pursuit of justice for victims of their scams does not stop at the water's edge. "We will continue to work with our international partners to identify these fraudsters, track them down and hold them accountable for their crimes," Green said.

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