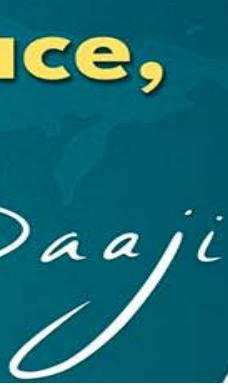




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INBRIEF

**Gold inches up,
silver crosses
Rs 2 lakh mark**

NEW DELHI : Gold and silver prices showed mixed trends on Thursday, with gold recording a marginal rise in the domestic spot market, while silver surged past the Rs 2 lakh per kilogram level.

Data from the India Bullion Jewellers Association (IBJA) showed that the price of 24-karat gold increased by Rs 157 to Rs 1,32,474 per 10 grams.

Similarly, 22-karat gold edged higher to Rs 1,21,346 per 10 grams, while 18-karat gold was priced at Rs 99,356 per 10 grams.

Silver prices witnessed a sharper uptick compared to gold. The precious metal climbed by Rs 1,479 to Rs 2,01,120 per kilogram, crossing the Rs 2 lakh milestone in the domestic market.

**TDP defends
renaming of MNREGA**

AMARAVATI: Telugu Desam Party (TDP) defended renaming MNREGA as VB-G RAM G, saying it reflects new economic realities. TDP MP Lalu Sri Krishna Devarayulu said that rural employment programmes have existed since 1969 in multiple forms and iterations, long before MNREGA was introduced in 2005.

He was speaking in Lok Sabha during the discussion on Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeekika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Bill, 2025, which seeks to repeal the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005. The TDP parliamentary party leader said that over the decades, schemes such as the Rural Employment Programme, Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, and Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana eventually culminated in MNREGA.

**Mehbooba Mufti
objects to BSF land
allotment**

SRINAGAR (TSIT): PDP president Mehbooba Mufti on Thursday asked Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah to reconsider allotting "fertile" land to the BSF for setting up a security camp in Pulwama district. "This is fertile land located in the middle of the village. It should not be given to the BSF for establishing a camp as the livelihoods of many people are attached to this land," Mufti told reporters after visiting Pochal village in Pulwama.

The former chief minister was accompanied by the party's Pulwama MLA, Waheed Para. "Omar Abdullah is the chief minister, and he should intervene to protect the interests of the people. The BSF can be given infertile land," Mufti said, adding that she will also raise the issue with the defence minister.

Revanth challenges KCR to debate Krishna-Godavari water sharing



HYDERABAD (TSIT): Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy on Thursday dared BRS president and former Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao (KCR) to face a public debate on the alleged injustice done to Telangana in the sharing and utilisation of Krishna and Godavari river waters during the 10-year BRS rule.

Addressing a press conference at his residence, the Chief Minister said the Congress government was ready to convene a special session of the Telangana Legislative Assembly at any time to discuss water-sharing issues and place evidence on the floor of the House to prove how the previous government had compromised Telangana's rightful share.

"I am directly chal-

CM Revanth challenged former CM KCR to a public debate over alleged water-sharing injustices, defended Congress's governance and welfare achievements, accused the BJP of undermining MGNREGS, and expressed confidence in retaining power with a two-thirds majority in the next Telangana Assembly elections.

lenging KCR to write a letter in his capacity as Leader of the Opposition. We are prepared for a special Assembly session and an open discussion on who committed injustice to Telangana in Krishna and Godavari waters," Revanth Reddy said, accusing the former Chief Minister of betraying the State's interests.

Chief Minister said the Congress defeated KCR when he was active in politics, and now he was no longer playing an active role. He asserted that the People's Government would

expose the alleged failures of the previous regime with facts and records. Revanth Reddy also stated that the government was ready to discuss the proposal for 42 per cent reservations for Backward Classes in a democratic manner in the Assembly and move forward accordingly.

Referring to the changes proposed by the Centre to the rural employment scheme, the Chief Minister alleged that the BJP-led Union Government was conspiring to weaken the Mahatma Gandhi

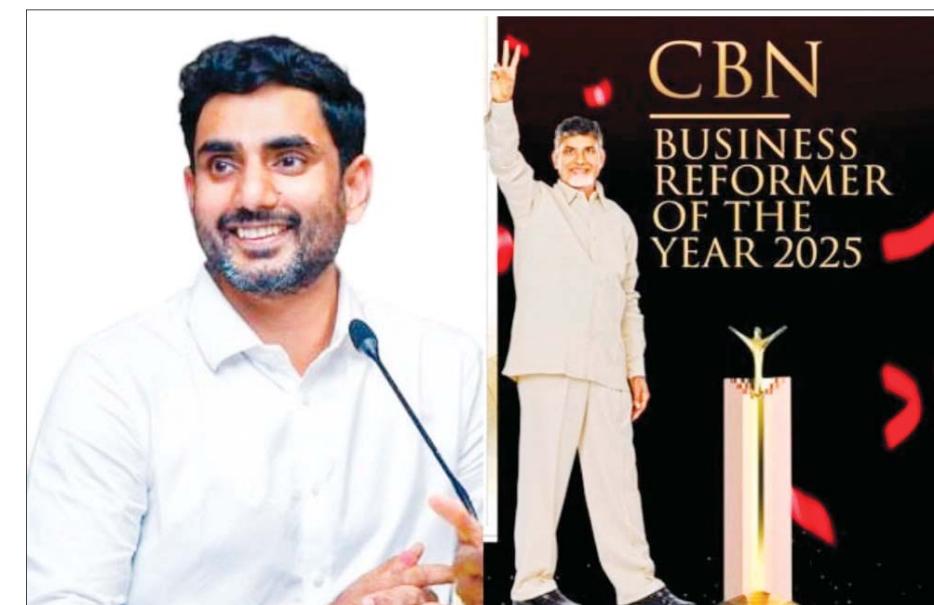
Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). He said the Congress alone would safeguard the democratic spirit and welfare orientation of the country.

Expressing confidence that the Congress would retain power with a two-thirds majority in the next Assembly elections, Revanth Reddy said the mandate in the recent Gram Panchayat elections reflected the performance of the People's Government.

He stated that Congress won 7,527 panchayats and Congress rebels won in 808, together accounting for victories in 8,335 panchayats, or about 66 per cent of the total 12,702. The BRS and BJP together secured 33 per cent, while the Left parties won about one per cent.

CM Naidu honoured with 'Business Reformer of the Year' award

Minister Nara Lokesh expresses delight; award announced by The Economic Times



AMARAVATI (TSIT): Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has been conferred with the prestigious 'Business Reformer of the Year' award by leading business daily The Economic Times, marking a significant national recognition of his reform-oriented governance. The announcement was made by State IT and Human Resources Development Minister Nara Lokesh through a post on X (formerly Twitter).

Expressing happiness over the honour, Lokesh described the award as a moment of pride not just for their fam-

ily but for the entire state of Andhra Pradesh. "Very few leaders have steered India's reform journey with such clarity, courage and consistency," he said in his post.

Lokesh noted that the award stands as a testimony to the confidence reposed in Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's reforms and the pace of his governance. Observers see the honour as a major national-level acknowledgment of the Chief Minister's vision and the wide-ranging reforms implemented under his leadership.

202 Indians recruited into Russian Army: Centre in RS



ernment also confirmed that 26 Indians have lost their lives in the conflict, while seven are reported missing as per information shared by the Russian side. Of the deceased, the mortal remains of 10 Indian nationals have been repatriated to India, while two were cremated locally in Russia with assistance from the Indian Mission.

The Ministry has provided assistance in repatriation of mortal remains of 10 deceased Indian nationals to India, and local cremation of two deceased Indian nationals," the MoS said. "DNA samples of family members of 18 Indians, who were reported dead or missing, have been shared with the Russian authorities in an effort to help establish the identity of some of the deceased Indian nationals," he added.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) remains in continuous engagement with Russian authorities to ensure their safety, well-being and early return, he added. The gov-

'Op Sindoor showcased India's swift, high-impact air power': Rajnath



NEW DELHI (TSIT): Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday said India's ability to conduct swift, high-impact and short-duration military operations was clearly demonstrated during Operation Sindoor, asserting that the Indian Air Force (IAF) has emerged as a technically advanced, operationally agile and strategically confident force.

Addressing the Air Force Commanders' Conclave in New Delhi, the Defence Minister praised the IAF for the courage, speed and precision with which it destroyed terror camps during the operation and for effectively handling what he termed Pakistan's "irresponsible reaction" following the strikes. Highlighting the growing public trust in the Armed Forces, par-

ticularly India's air defence capabilities, the Defence Minister said the calm response of citizens during attempted Pakistani attacks on Indian installations reflected confidence in the country's operational preparedness.

"Usually, when enemy attacks, people hide. This time, people continued with their daily routines," he said. Emphasising the need to constantly assess an adversary's offensive and defensive capabilities, Singh urged IAF commanders to draw lessons from Operation Sindoor and adaptability.

and remain vigilant to future challenges.

Referring to recent global conflicts, including the Russia-Ukraine war, the Israel-Hamas conflict, the Balakot air strikes and Operation Sindoor, Singh said air power has become a decisive force in modern warfare.

"Air power gives any leadership the capability to deliver a clear strategic message to the adversary that every step will be taken to uphold national interests. Through speed, reach, and precision, air power has become an effective tool for aligning the nation's objectives with military means," he said. The Defence Minister reiterated the government's commitment to strengthening India's security apparatus, noting that 21st-century warfare is increasingly driven by technology, ideas and adaptability.

Telangana Congress protests against NDA in National Herald case



HYDERABAD (TSIT): Telangana Congress on Thursday held protests at several places in the state against the NDA government's alleged vendetta politics in the National Herald case. State Congress president B Mahesh Kumar Goud and AICC incharge of party affairs in Telangana Meenakshi Natarajan and scores of party workers sought to march to the BJP office here from Gandhi Bhavan, the state Congress headquarters. However, they were prevented by police from taking out the rally. Speaking to reporters, Goud alleged that the NDA government at the Centre is troubling Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi by filing false cases. The chargesheet filed by the ED was rejected by the court, he said. The Congress would take the harassment against the Gandhis to the people, he said. The protest against the NDA government was held at Karimnagar, Sangareddy town and other places.

Telangana panchayat polls: Congress wins over 53% of Sarpanch posts



HYDERABAD (TSIT): The ruling Congress party has emerged as the clear winner in the Telangana Gram Panchayat elections, securing over 53 per cent of the total Sarpanch posts across the State. Elections were held in three phases, with the Congress maintaining its dominance in the final phase conducted on Wednesday.

Out of 4,159 Gram Panchayats notified in the third phase, Congress-backed

candidates won 2,246 Sarpanch posts. The Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) put up a strong fight to secure 1,163 posts, while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) lagged far behind with just 246 seats. Independents and others won 491 posts in this phase. Overall, out of 12,727 Gram Panchayats notified by the State Election Commission (SEC) across all three phases, Congress-backed candidates won 6,822 Sarpanch posts (53.60 per cent). BRS stood second with 3,519 posts (27.64 per cent), BJP secured 703 posts (5.52 per cent), and Independents and others won 1,634 posts (12.99 per cent). With several Independents expected to extend support, the Congress claimed victory in nearly two-thirds of the Sarpanch seats.

Karnataka Assembly passes hate speech bill amid strong opposition



BELAGAVI (TSIT): Amid strong opposition, the Karnataka Assembly, on Thursday, passed the Hate Speech and Hate Crimes (Prevention) Bill, the first such law in the country. The Bill has a provision for a jail term up to seven years and a fine upto Rs 1 lakh.

The bill, cleared by the cabinet on December 4, was presented in the House by Home Minister

or circulated in words either spoken or written or by signs or by visible representations or through electronic communication or otherwise, in public view, with an intention to cause injury, disharmony or feelings of enmity or hatred or ill-will against person alive or dead, class or group of persons or community, to meet any prejudicial interest, is hate speech.

EDITORIAL

What Vijay's First Rally In Tamil Nadu Post-Karur Stampede Really Means

"Shall I take a selfie with Erode?" This expression of interest was articulated by actor-turned-politician Vijay at the end of his speech at a public meeting in Erode. Under normal circumstances, it would mean nothing more than an attempt to pamper his fans fawning over him. But in Erode, it meant a sigh of relief that the lessons of Karur had been learnt, both by his party, the Tamilaga Vettir Kazhagam (TVK), and its supporters. In September, 41 people died in a stampede at the TVK public meeting venue in Karur. Vijay came under attack for the manner in which the meeting had been conducted there, and his abrupt and immediate departure to Chennai. The party's political campaign schedule went into cold storage. In Erode, even though the police ensured that the TVK followed 80-plus conditions before allowing it to conduct the meeting, it was not surprising that Vijay still told the 35,000-strong crowd that had thronged the Vijaymangalam toll plaza venue in Perundurai, "You have come here safely, go home safely. Your safety is most important to me."

The Vijay Of His Films

That the post-Karur Vijay was more vigilant was obvious when, during his speech, an activist climbed atop a makeshift structure. Vijay cajoled him to come down, and when the person complied, Vijay thanked him with a flying kiss. While the charm offensive remains Vijay's most potent weapon, it is obvious that the newest politician on the block has realised that he needs to replicate what he does in his films - the good-hearted hero with the right dose of mother-sister-brother sentiment, concerned about everyone's well-being. Vijay's political pitch suggested nothing much has changed post-Karur. If anything, the name-calling has gone a notch higher. Vijay described the 2026 electoral battle as one between "theeyal sakthi" (evil force) DMK and "thooya sakthi" (pure force) TVK. His focus was hyperlocal as he went about dissing the DMK over matters of governance and issues like irrigation, turmeric farming and the power situation.

Erode As A Stop

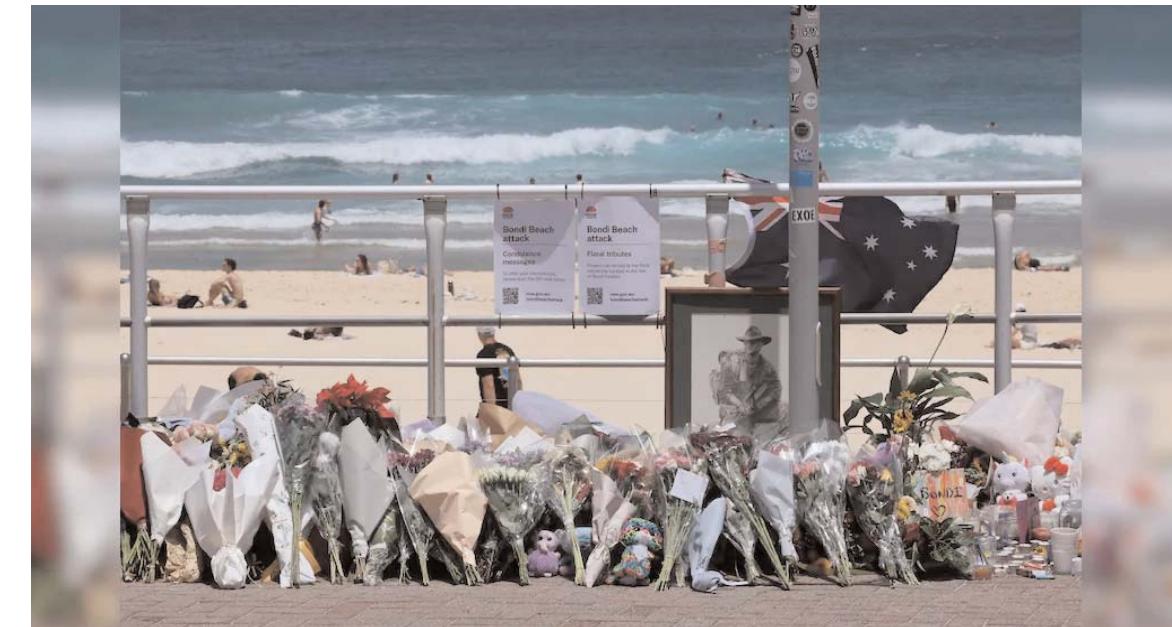
But what was more significant was the choice of Erode as the first meeting post-Karur. Erode was Periyar's janmabhoomi, and it allowed Vijay to hyphenate his name to the list of people who are followers of the Dravidian ideologue. His mention of CN Annadurai and MG Ramachandran was significant as it meant telling the AIADMK leaders that they are not the only claimants to their political legacy. More importantly, it allowed recent entrant KA Sengottaiyan to showcase his organisational capabilities. Sengottaiyan was unceremoniously shown the door by AIADMK supremo Edappadi Palaniswami for advocating the party's unification with the likes of O Panneerselvam and TTV Dhinakaran. Now that he has switched over to the TVK, Sengottaiyan has a score to settle. Sengottaiyan has been an MLA nine times and served as a minister in MGR, J Jayalalithaa and EPS governments, and is not a political lightweight by any stretch of imagination. So, if Erode were a film starring Vijay, Sengottaiyan was the brain and the muscle behind the production. Mission Erode was bulk-order political messaging, aided suitably by geography. Erode is a half-hour drive from Gobichettipalayam assembly constituency, which Sengottaiyan has represented since 1980. More importantly, it takes approximately the same time to reach Edappadi in the neighbouring Salem district, represented by EPS.

Editorial

VIJAYAWADA
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2025

4

After Bondi Beach Attack, Some Hard Questions For The Muslim World



The Bondi Beach massacre, said to be the deadliest attack in Australia since 1996, has shaken the country to its core and no doubt horrified Jewish communities across the Western world. Policymakers are scrambling for answers. Families are grieving. Alarmingly, Australia's sense of safety has been punctured. But this tragedy must also serve as a wake-up call for the ummah, the global Muslim community. It beggars belief. How did two men - a 50-year-old father and his 24-year-old son, with no apparent connection to the Arab-Israeli conflict in the faraway Middle East - carry out an attack that killed 15 innocent Jewish civilians celebrating Hanukkah? There is no doubt this was a pre-meditated assault on families gathered for a peaceful, joyous festival. For God's Sake, Look Inward Yet, instead of widespread introspection, much of the immediate online and WhatsApp chatter in parts of the Muslim world turned to finding excuses or explaining away the dastardly act. They ranged from Gaza to Netanyahu to Western hypocrisy. Indeed, the usual deflections. The gunmen's precise motives are still unclear. The surviving suspect, 24-year-old Naveed Akram, now lies in a hospital bed under heavy guard. The other suspect, Naveed's father, Sajid Akram, was killed during the attack. Police have declared the attack a terrorist incident. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has said early assessments suggest it may have been inspired by Islamic State ideology. Whatever the claimed grievances - even in the face of the unquestionable horrors in Gaza - the Bondi Beach killings cannot be justified. No faith permits such violence. No moral code should defend it. My submission is simple. We must confront the anger, denial and victimhood narratives that create a permissive environment in which extremists begin to believe their violence is righteous. Injustice cannot be fought with more injustice. There is no denying this was antisemitism. This was hate. And if we are to be

honest, painfully honest, this moment demands more than grief and outrage; it demands introspection, especially within the wider Muslim world. Victimhood Meets Denial When the Christchurch mosque massacre happened in New Zealand in 2019, I called it an act of pure, unfiltered hate. I was applauded in my community. A white supremacist, who was an Aussie citizen, had murdered 51 Muslims at prayer. The outrage was unanimous. That day, solidarity worked. But on Sunday, when a Muslim father-son duo killed 15 unarmed Jewish civilians in Australia, I called it what it was - a hate crime, which was indefensible. But the reaction was very different. I was told I was "timid", "too soft", even a "pacifist". Some asked me why I wasn't focusing on Gaza or Kashmir instead. As if anger elsewhere could explain bloodshed on an Australian beach. This reluctance to look inward and this instinct to explain away the actions of the perpetrators is not strength. It is shortsightedness. During my only trip to Israel a few years ago, many Palestinians were pleasantly surprised that the Muslims in the non-Arab world had so much concern for them. Of course, this was before the beginning of the current ongoing war in Gaza.

And yet, I believe justice for Palestinians, both in Gaza and the West Bank, cannot be achieved by murdering Jews in Sydney. Anger over Kashmir cannot justify planting bombs in Delhi. It does not give the moral license to anyone to kill innocent civilians anywhere in the world. Yet, annoyingly, the justifications begin almost instantly. Some quoted the New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman's well-known warning that Israel's war might fuel global antisemitism. Yes, the context matters. But context is not consent. Anger at Netanyahu's government does not explain why a father and son in Sydney picked up weapons and walked towards people who had come to celebrate a festival by the sea. The Bigger Failure - And Not Just Ours There is another uncomfortable truth. Western policymakers must also confront their own blind spots. Naveed Akram, the young suspect, was charged with 59 offences, including 15 counts of murder and one of committing a terrorist act. Punishing individuals is necessary. It is the demand of the law. But is it sufficient? Naveed Akram may spend the rest of his life behind bars and perhaps never be out on parole. But think about it, did the father-son duo not walk to the beach that

evening prepared to die? Suicide bombers in Iraq, lone wolves in Europe, militants in India, none of them acted under the illusion that they would survive. The 10 gunmen who descended upon Mumbai on November 26, 2008, were fully armed. They knew they were on a suicide mission. But they had orders to kill, create mayhem and spread fear. They did it for 60 hours. The lone survivor was hanged to death. Has that stopped terror attacks? You cannot deter a person who believes death is a promotion. The Strange Pull Of Radicalism And this is where the real question for policymakers, and for all of us, begins. Punishment after an act of terror is the easy part; prevention is the hard, necessary work. How do we understand the inner drift of an otherwise ordinary man towards radical certainty? How do we disrupt the slow, corrosive accumulation of grievance, real or imagined, before it hardens into the kind of ideological fury that turns strangers into targets? This is not a Muslim problem alone, nor should it ever be framed that way. Every community has produced its own extremists. Myanmar's Buddhist mobs. India's Hindu lynch groups or individuals. Sikh militants in Punjab in the 1980s. Europe's white supremacists.

India's Aviation Model Is Cracking Under Its Own Weight



When Indian airlines placed orders for over 1,350 new aircraft in 2023 and 2024 alone, the numbers captured both promise and peril. India is now the world's third-largest domestic-only aviation market (globally it ranks fifth when including all passenger traffic), handling approximately 161 million domestic passengers in 2024 and accounting for 4.2% of global air traffic. Yet, public confidence in air travel has never been more fragile. The Air India Flight 171 crash on June 12 this year, which killed 241 of the 242 people on board (230 passengers and 12 crew) and 19 people on the ground, and the cascading IndiGo flight cancellations in December are not isolated mishaps. They are stress signals from a system stretched to its limits. The crash marked the first fatal accident involving a Boeing 787 Dreamliner since the aircraft entered commercial service in 2011, a fact that underscores the gravity of the incident for global aviation safety. The two incidents reflect different failure modes, one under accident investigation, the other an operational-planning breakdown. But both expose how growth is outrunning institutional capacity. The immediate response to such events often focuses on individual fault, like pilots, crew, or airline management. But that framing obscures the deeper structural challenge. India's aviation ecosystem has expanded faster than its regulatory, infrastructural, and human-capital foundations. The Regulatory Architecture The Directorate General of Civil Aviation's (DGCA) Flight Duty Time Limitations (FDTL) mandate precise constraints on pilot duty hours to combat fatigue-related safety risks. Announced in January 2024 and implemented in two phases, these regulations represent India's alignment with international norms. When the FAA implemented its regulations in 2014, American carriers adjusted proactively. Delta Air Lines began planning well in advance, conducted comprehensive modelling of crew utilisation patterns, and expanded its pilot workforce. American Airlines faced a scheduling crisis in December 2017 when a comput-

er glitch granted vacation to thousands of pilots simultaneously, potentially leaving over 15,000 flights without crews between December 17 and 31. But the management implemented 150% premium pay incentives and engaged in union negotiations regarding compensation and scheduling compliance. Within 72 hours, the airline secured crew coverage for substantially all affected flights. European airlines faced similar challenges when an EASA regulation took full effect in February 2016. The Lufthansa Group established a dedicated transition team comprising operations planners, crew scheduling specialists, pilot union representatives, and legal compliance officers. Ryanair, too, despite its low-cost model emphasising maximum aircraft utilisation, increased pilot staffing and made modest schedule adjustments. Gulf carriers operating under similarly stringent duty time regulations maintain substantially higher pilot-to-aircraft ratios specifically to absorb FDTL restrictions. Emirates, with its all-widebody fleet of approximately 261 aircraft and nearly 4,600 pilots, operates with flexibility to cover extensive crew rest requirements for long-haul operations, absorb disruptions, and maintain service during peak demand periods. Singapore Airlines operates ultra-long-haul flights exceeding 19 hours, utilising an augmented flight crew and enabling in-flight rest

rotations in dedicated crew rest compartments. Making Of An Avoidable Crisis Against this, IndiGo's December 2025 operational collapse reveals a series of strategic failures extending over multiple years. Its ratio of approximately 14 pilots per aircraft represented only 70% of typical full-service carrier staffing and fell below even other low-cost carriers. From fiscal 2022 through fiscal 2024, IndiGo matched pilot growth almost exactly to aircraft acquisition, increasing pilots by 33% while expanding its fleet by 33%. This kind of expansion maintained the lean ratio without building any buffer for the known FDTL Phase 2 implementation. In stark contrast, Air India more than doubled its pilot complement. This means that there was a 127% increase, vastly exceeding its 32% fleet growth, thereby reflecting Tata Group's strategic preparation for FDTL compliance. Internal analysis suggested that FDTL Phase 2 compliance would require IndiGo to increase its pilot workforce by approximately 20-25% to maintain the existing schedule capacity. With 5,038 pilots as of fiscal 2024, this implies a need for roughly 1,000 to 1,250 additional pilots by November 2025. Yet, IndiGo's actual hiring remained insufficient. Even more problematically, IndiGo increased its winter 2025-2026 schedule by approximately 6% despite knowing it faced crew shortfalls estimated at 10-15% under Phase 2 rules.

Good vs Evil: Will Vijay's Tamil Nadu Election Pitch Succeed?



The first major takeaway from actor-politician and Tamilaga Vettir Kazhagam (TVK) chief Vijay's Erode rally is unmistakable: the animosity between the TVK and the ruling DMK has only intensified. The DMK's sharp attacks on Vijay - particularly its attempts to hold him and his party responsible for the tragic stampede in Karur on September 27 - appear to have hardened his political posture. Vijay's response has been to turn this into an open and bitter rivalry. Invoking the late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa, Vijay justified the fierce language she once used against the DMK. Declaring the DMK an "evil force" and positioning the TVK as the "pure force", he delivered the message with the flourish of a cinematic monologue - equal parts vehemence and vengeance. By framing the upcoming election as a battle between good and evil, Vijay is deliberately reviving memories of the Jayalalithaa-Karunaihdi rivalry - an intense, deeply personal feud that defined Tamil Nadu politics until they died in 2016 and 2018. Crucially, Vijay is attempting to rewrite the state's political script: no longer DMK versus AIADMK, but DMK versus TVK. Vijay's use of Periyar's name, accusing the DMK of exploiting the state in the name of the Dravidian icon, underlines the ferocity of the rivalry he is building. Periyar remains the DMK's most powerful ideological symbol, and attacking the party on this front is a calculated provocation, especially in Erode, which is Periyar's birthplace. This emotionally charged DMK-versus-TVK narrative does not just threaten the ruling party. It poses an equally serious challenge to the AIADMK. Vijay's rise risks cutting into the AIADMK's traditional vote base, spelling trouble for Edappadi K Palaniswami (EPS), whose leadership has failed to deliver an electoral victory since Jayalalithaa's death in 2017. The party has lost the 2019 (Lok Sabha), 2021 (Assembly), and 2024 (Lok Sabha) elections, and the erosion shows. What worsens matters for the AIADMK is the entry of KA Sengottaiyan into the TVK. The nine-time AIADMK MLA, now

head of TVK's coordination committee, knows the party and EPS intimately. More importantly, he hails from the "Kongu" region in western Tamil Nadu - EPS's last major bastion. Sengottaiyan's presence represents a direct strategic threat. Interestingly, Vijay's attack on the BJP was relatively muted, especially when compared to his sharp criticism of the DMK. The AIADMK, too, was largely ignored as a political force - embarrassingly for the opposition party, given the rally was held in a region traditionally loyal to the AIADMK. Vijay's declaration that more leaders like Sengottaiyan would soon join TVK should make the AIADMK wary. Yet for all its drama, Vijay's speech offered little in the way of concrete political substance. There was no clarity on alliances, no roadmap to address agrarian distress or corruption beyond rhetorical references. The only policy position he clarified was that he was not opposed to welfare measures or so-called freebies. While he avoided personal attacks on Chief Minister MK Stalin, the speech leaned heavily on emotion, spectacle, and symbolism - hallmarks of Vijay's appeal, especially among his fans. And that fan base remains formidable. Despite the Karur tragedy, there was no visible drop in turnout or enthusiasm at Erode. The emotional fervour was as intense as ever. Notably, none of the families of the 41 victims who died in the stampede

Rupee trades in narrow range against US dollar in early trade

Mumbai: The rupee traded in a narrow range against the US dollar in early trade on Thursday as the support from fresh foreign fund inflows was negated by trade deal uncertainty and risk-off sentiment. Forex traders said lack of progress in the India-US trade negotiations and strong dollar demand from corporates and importers weighed on the local unit, even as Brent crude prices hovering near USD 60 per barrel supported investor sentiment. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 90.35 against the US dollar, then gained some ground and touched 90.32 against the US dollar. In initial trade it also touched 90.38 against the American currency. On Wednesday, the rupee recovered 55 paise from its all-time low level to close at 90.38 against the greenback. "The PSUs banks were the sellers of dollars on Wednesday on behalf of the RBI. The intervention amount could have been as high as USD 6 billion," said Anil Kumar Bhansali, Head of Treasury and Executive Director Finrex Treasury Advisors



LLP. "We expect the range of 90 to 91.00 on Thursday with 90.25 as support and 90.75 as resistance," Bhansali added. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.05 per cent higher at 98.41. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading higher by 0.67 per cent at USD 60.08 per barrel in futures trade. On the domestic equity market front, the 30-share benchmark index Sensex was trading 114.06 points lower at

84,445.59, while the Nifty was down 41.10 points at 25,777.45. Foreign Institutional Investors purchased equities worth Rs 1,171.71 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. The rupee recovered 55 paise from its all-time low level to close at 90.38 (provisional) against the US dollar after a volatile trade on Wednesday, amid suspected aggressive central bank intervention. Analysts said the rupee's recent fall against the US dollar was primarily driven by external factors, not domestic eco-

nomic weakness, and the high volatility in the forex market is expected to persist amid shifting economic and geopolitical cues. The lack of progress in the US-India trade negotiations and extended selling by foreign portfolio investors have weighed on the sentiment, while Brent crude oil prices hovering near USD 60 per barrel supported the domestic unit at lower levels. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 91.05 against the US dollar, then recovered some lost ground

to touch an intra-day high of 89.96, registering a 97 paise gain from its previous close. At the end of trade on Wednesday, the rupee was quoted at 90.38 (provisional), up 55 paise over its last close. On Tuesday, the rupee tanked below 91 per dollar, hitting a low of 91.14. It finally settled at an all-time low of 90.93 against the American currency. "The Indian rupee appreciated after a five-day losing streak, bolstered by suspected aggressive intervention from the central bank," Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst, HDFC Securities, said. Parmar further added that high volatility is expected to persist in the forex market amid shifting economic and geopolitical headlines. "Technically, USD/INR has immediate resistance at 90.60 and support at 89.70," he said. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.42 per cent higher at 98.56. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading 2.09 per cent higher at USD 60.16 per barrel in futures trade.

Silver slips from record highs on profit booking; gold prices ease

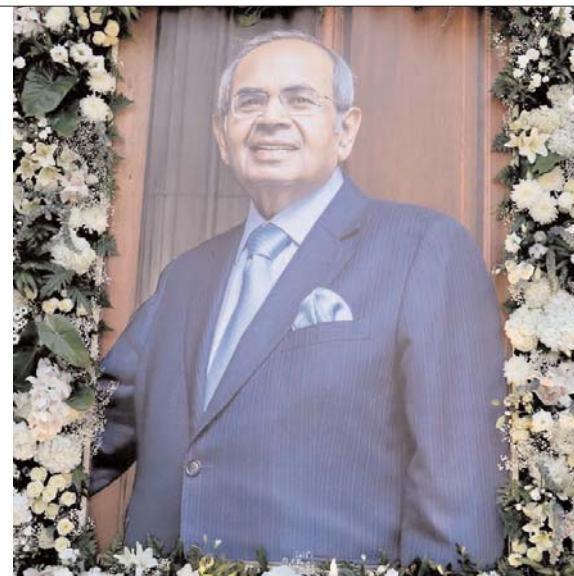


Silver prices retreated from the record levels on Thursday, declining by Rs 751 to Rs 2,06,684 per kg in the futures trade, as traders booked profits amid weak global cues. On the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), silver futures for March 2026 delivery fell by USD 1.18, or 1.76 per cent, to USD 65.72 per ounce. Gold futures for March 2026 delivery depreciated by Rs 751, or 0.36 per cent, to Rs 2,06,684 per kg. Silver prices had zoomed by Rs 10,078, or 5.10 per cent, to hit a record high of Rs 2,07,833 per kg in the previous session. Gold prices also eased, with the February contract of the metal falling by Rs 580, or 0.43 per cent, to Rs 1,34,314 per 10 grams. Analysts said

precious metals retreated due to weak global cues. In international markets, Comex gold futures for February delivery dropped by USD 12.6, or 0.29 per cent, to USD 4,361.3 per ounce. Silver futures for March 2026 delivery fell by USD 1.18, or 1.76 per cent, to USD 65.72 per ounce. "Gold has made its biggest jump since the 1979 oil crisis in 2025, with prices doubling in the last two years and silver has crossed all barriers, posting gains of more than 120 per cent and breaking USD 65 as well," Manav Modi, Commodities Analyst at Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said.

"Backwardation in silver rises once again, difference in spot and futures rose once again to 50-60 cents, suggesting supply tightness and speculative buying driving prices at such a high pace," Modi added. The white metal on Wednesday scaled a fresh peak of USD 67.18 per ounce. "Silver made history by closing at an all-time record high, reaffirming that it's far more than just a runner-up to gold," Vijay Kuppa, Chief Executive Officer, InCred Money, said. He added that investors are no longer viewing silver only through the lens of jewellery or industrial use.

The Hinduja Family & Friends Hold a Prayer Meeting for GP Hinduja



December 2025: A Prayer Meeting was organised in Mumbai to honour the memory of Gopichand P Hinduja, late Chairman of the Hinduja Group, who recently passed away. The Prayer Meeting was attended by Captains of the India Inc, friends from the Political world cutting across party lines, members of the diplomatic corps, and several leading film personalities.

Glowing tributes were paid to Shri GP Hinduja about his multi-faceted personality by Spiritual Leaders like Chidanand Saraswati of Parmarth Niketan, close associates, etc. Notable singers like Anuradha Paudwal, Nitin Mukesh, and Mohit Lalwani sang GP Hinduja's favourite bhajans and songs picturised on his dear friend, the late Raj Kapoor.

BP NAMES NEW BOSS AS CURRENT CEO LEAVES AFTER LESS THAN TWO YEARS



BP has appointed a new chief executive, making Meg O'Neill the first woman to run a major global oil firm. The London-based energy giant said its current boss Murray Auchincloss would step down less than two years after he replaced Bernard Looney, who was found to have committed "serious misconduct" in failing to disclose relationships with colleagues. Under Ms O'Neill, who currently runs Australian oil and gas firm Woodside Energy, BP is expected to continue its recent strategy of moving away from renewables to refocus on its core oil and gas business. Ms O'Neill said she looks forward to helping BP "do our part to meet the world's energy needs". Ms O'Neill's surprise appointment comes only three months after BP appointed a new chairman, Albert Manifold. In February, the energy giant said it would shift its strategy following pressure from some investors who were frustrated that its profits and share price had lagged behind rivals. Rivals Shell

and Norwegian company Equinor have also scaled back plans to invest in green energy and US President Donald Trump's call to "drill baby drill" has encouraged firms to invest in fossil fuels. Energy consultant and former Shell executive Robin Mills told the BBC's Today programme that the "surprise" appointment of Ms O'Neill was about refocusing on its core oil and gas businesses. "The new chairman... has really decided to put his stamp on things," he said. "I think the announcement that's been put here made it very clear that he felt Murray [Auchincloss] had done a decent job, but not enough and more was needed and some new leadership, some new blood."

PRICE INCREASES IN THE US EASE UNEXPECTEDLY IN NOVEMBER

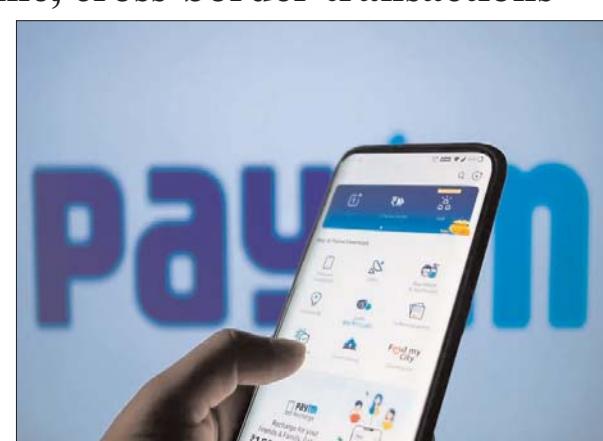


Price increases in the US eased in recent months, as costs for items including hotels, milk and some kinds of clothing fell. The latest figures from the Labor Department showed prices rose 2.7% over the 12 months to November. That pace was down from 3% in September and lower than many analysts had expected, potentially bolstering the case for the US central bank to continue cutting interest rates. The signs of cooling inflation came as frustration over years of rising prices has raised pressure on US President Donald Trump to deliver on his promises of relief. The consumer price index (CPI) report had been delayed by the US government shutdown, which also prevented collection of some data. Art Hogan, chief market strategist at B. Riley Wealth, said the report reflected discounts offered by retailers in November, as the holiday shopping season swung into gear. But he noted that without the October data it was difficult to draw too many definitive conclusions about wider trends. "All told this is

a positive report, that comes with an asterisk," he said. "Subsequent CPI's will likely smooth out the statistical errors that might have been present in today's report." The report showed an unusual slowdown in the price increases for rents and other housing costs, which are weighted heavily in US inflation calculations and have been a key point of concern for many households. But Bernard Yaros, lead economist at Oxford Economics, cautioned that the easing might "be more noise than signal due to the disruptions from the shutdown". Inflation in the US has been ticking up in recent months, fuelled in part by price rises for items, such as toys, appliances and furniture, that were affected by the wave of tariffs. Trump announced earlier this year. He has since rolled back some of those plans, including most recently announcing exemptions from tariffs for high-profile consumer food staples like bananas and coffee. The White House has blamed frustrations on the jump in prices that Trump inherited when he entered office, while arguing that any further rise in prices associated with tariffs would be a one-time move. But analysts have been concerned about price pressures spreading into other areas, especially as Trump's crackdown on immigration tightens the supply of workers in sectors such as farming, hospitality and construction. In a prime time address on Wednesday, Trump claimed that inflation had "stopped". He called on the Federal Reserve to deliver relief in the form of lower borrowing costs, promising to name a new person to lead the US central bank "who believes in lower interest rates by a lot". Some analysts said Thursday's report could help convince the Fed that further cuts would be appropriate, even though inflation, despite the president's claims, remains above the 2% rate considered healthy.

"Today it got to see inflation moving in the right direction," said Ellen Zentner, chief economic strategist for Morgan Stanley Wealth Management. "Inflation may still be above target, but today's data made the opening for additional rate cuts just a little wider."

RBI clears Paytm arm PPSL as payment aggregator for offline, cross-border transactions



New Delhi: Fintech firm One97 Communications on Thursday said its subsidiary Paytm Payments Services Limited (PPSL) has received authorisation from the Reserve Bank of India to operate as a Payment Aggregator for physical (offline) payments and cross-border transactions. The approval is in addition to the authorisation for Online Payment Aggregation already granted by the central bank to PPSL last month. "Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on December 17, 2025 has authorised Paytm Payments Services Limited (PPSL), a wholly-owned subsidiary of One 97 Communications Limited, to operate as a Payment Aggregator for Physical (offline) payments and Cross-Border transactions (both inward and outward), in addition to the online Payment Aggregator authorisation already granted by RBI on November 26, 2025, under the Payment and

Settlement Systems Act, 2007," Paytm said in a regulatory filing. With the new license, PPSL now holds Payment Aggregator authorisations across online, offline, and cross-border segments use cases, enabling end-to-end payment aggregation services for merchants. In November 2020, PPSL applied for a license with the RBI to operate as a payment aggregator under the guidelines on Regulation of Payment Aggregators and Payment

NOT CONCERNED ABOUT RUPEE AT ALL: ECONOMIC ADVISORY COUNCIL TO PM



New Delhi: Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) member Sanjeev Sanyal on Thursday said he is not concerned about the rupee at all, arguing that even China and Japan witnessed exchange rate weaknesses during their high growth phases. Speaking at 'Times Network's India Economic Conclave 2025', Sanyal said since the 90s, the rupee has mostly been allowed to find its own level, but the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) uses its reserves to intervene in either direction to stop excessive volatility. "I am not concerned about the rupee at all... Let me say that the rupee and its current weakness should not be necessarily conflated with some economic worry, because historically, if you go over time, you will see that economies that are in their high growth phase very often go through a phase of exchange rate

weakness," he said. The rupee sank to a fresh record low, breaching the 91-dollar mark for the first time on Tuesday. "So when you go back to, for example, when the Japanese economy was growing very, very fast, their exchange rate was kept quite weak. The Chinese had that in the 90s and 2000s till they began to allow the yuan to strengthen. "So in itself, it (weakening of rupee) does not mean anything, as long as it is not generating domestic inflation, which clearly, it is not," Sanyal argued. Since April 2, 2025, when the US announced sweeping tariff hikes across economies, the Indian rupee (INR) has depreciated 5.7 per cent against USD (most amongst the major economies), notwithstanding sporadic phases of appreciation owing to optimism over the US-India trade deal. Responding to a

Highlights

■ Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) member Sanjeev Sanyal on Thursday said he is not concerned about the rupee at all, arguing that even China and Japan witnessed exchange rate weaknesses during their high growth phases.

has not escalated anything. "We have been careful not to do that. But at the same time, we have not bent down," he said, adding that China and India are now only two countries that have not really bent down to the US pressure. India and the US are "very close" to finalising the framework for their proposed bilateral trade agreement. The two countries are holding two parallel negotiations — one on a framework trade deal to address the high tariffs and another on a comprehensive bilateral trade agreement (BTA). These talks are important as the Trump administration has imposed steep 50 per cent tariffs on Indian goods entering American markets. The outcomes will also have a positive influence on the trajectory of the rupee, which has depreciated to lifetime lows lately and also breached the psychologically important 90-to-a-dollar mark.

Zelensky gives stark warning as EU leaders start crunch talks on Russia's frozen assets

Volodymyr Zelensky is urging European Union leaders gathered at a crunch summit in Brussels to loan billions of euros in frozen Russian money to fund Ukraine's military and economic needs. Most of Russia's 210bn (£185bn; \$245bn) worth of assets in the EU are held by Belgium-based organisation Euroclear, and so far Belgium and some other members of the bloc have said they are opposed to using the cash as a "reparations loan". Russia has warned the EU not to use its money, but without a boost in funding Ukraine's finances are set to run dry in a matter of months. "I hope we will be able to get a positive decision," Zelensky told reporters. "Without this there will be a big problem for Ukraine." The Brussels summit comes at a pivotal moment in the war and Russia has filed a lawsuit against Euroclear in a



Moscow court in a bid to get its money back. One European government official described being "cautiously optimistic, not overly optimistic" that a deal would be agreed. European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said "we will not leave the summit without a solution". All eyes are on Belgian Prime Minister Bart De Wever, who told the Belgian parliament on Thursday: "I haven't yet seen any text that would persuade me to change Belgium's position". US President Donald Trump has said a deal is closer than ever to end the war - which began with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. US and Russian officials are due to meet in Miami this weekend for further talks on a peace plan, a White House official told the AFP news agency. It is thought Kremlin envoy Kirill Dmitriev will talk to Trump

envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner. Ukrainian officials are also heading to the US, and President Volodymyr Zelensky, who is in Brussels, told reporters that Kyiv needed the money, either to support its army if the war continued, or to direct the funding entirely for recovery. Russia has not yet responded to the latest peace proposals, but the Kremlin has stressed that plans for a

European-led multinational force for Ukraine supported by the US would not be acceptable. President Vladimir Putin made his feelings towards Europe clear on Wednesday, when he said the continent was in a state of "total degradation" and that "European piglets" - a derogatory description of Ukraine's European allies - were hoping to profit from Russia's collapse. The European Commission - the

EU's executive arm - has proposed loaning Kyiv about 90bn (£97bn) over the next two years - out of the 210bn of Russian assets sitting in Europe. That is about two-thirds of the 137bn that Kyiv is thought to need to get through 2026 and 2027. Until now the EU has handed Ukraine the interest generated by the cash but not the cash itself. "This is a crunch time for Ukraine to keep fighting for the next year," a Finnish government official told the BBC. "There are of course peace negotiations but this gives Ukraine leverage to say 'we're not desperate and we have the funds to continue fighting'." The head of the European Commission says it will also ramp up the cost of war for Russia. Russia's frozen assets are not the only option on the table for EU leaders. Another idea, backed by Belgium, is based on the EU borrowing the money on the international

markets, using the EU budget as a guarantee. However, that would require a unanimous vote and Hungary's Viktor Orban has made it clear he will not allow any more EU money to help Ukraine. For Ukraine, the hours ahead are significant and EU leaders have been keen to stress the momentous nature of the loan decision. "We know the urgency. It is acute. We all feel it. We all see it," Ursula von der Leyen told the European Parliament.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz has played a leading role in pushing for the Russian assets to be used, telling the Bundestag on the eve of the summit it was about sending a "clear signal" to Moscow that continuing the war was pointless. EU officials are confident they have a sound legal basis to use the frozen Russian assets, but so far the Belgian prime minister remains unconvinced.

**PETER ARNETT,
PULITZER-WINNING WAR
REPORTER, DIES AGED 91**



Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and war correspondent Peter Arnett has died at the age of 91, US media has reported. Arnett won the international reporting prize in 1996 for his Vietnam War coverage at the Associated Press (AP). But he was also well known for his work at CNN, having become a household name while reporting on the first Gulf War. His career spanned decades and covered several conflicts in countries including Iraq, Vietnam and El Salvador. The New Zealand-born journalist died on Wednesday surrounded by family and friends in California, his son told reporters. He was receiving

hospice care for prostate cancer. Arnett first worked for AP as a wire-service correspondent in Vietnam, from 1962 until the war's end in 1975, often accompanying troops on missions. At a talk in 2013, he recalled the moment he witnessed a soldier being shot in Vietnam as he paused to read a map. "As the colonel peered at it, I heard four loud shots as bullets tore through the map and into his chest, few inches from my face," Arnett told the American Library Association. "He sank to the ground at my feet." The journalist left AP in 1981 to join US outlet CNN, where he later became known for his work on the first Gulf War.

Australian PM announces crackdown on hate speech after Bondi shooting



Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese says his government will crack down on hate speech following Sunday's deadly shooting at Bondi Beach that targeted a Jewish festival. Fifteen people were killed when two gunmen opened fire at an event to mark the first day of Hanukkah. New laws will target "those who spread hate, division and radicalisation", Albanese told reporters in Canberra. The home affairs minister will also be given new powers to cancel or refuse visas for those who spread hate and a new taskforce will be set up to ensure the education system "prevents, tackles and properly responds to antisemitism". The new laws will also include penalties for preachers and leaders who promote violence, a new federal offence of "aggravated hate speech", and the introduction of "hate" as an aggravating factor in sentencing crimes for online threats and harassment. "Every Jewish Australian has the right

to feel safe, valued and respected for the contribution that they make to our great nation," Albanese said. "The terrorists, inspired by ISIS... sought to turn Australians against each other. Australians have responded to that act of hatred with love and sympathy for those in mourning." Tensions have been high in the country since the shooting, with police detaining seven men in southwest Sydney on Thursday after receiving a tip that a "violent act was possibly being planned", New South Wales Police said in a statement. Police said they did not identify "any connection" to their investigation into Sunday's attack in Bondi. Two cars were "intercepted" at George Street, police said. In videos shared by local media sites, armed officers appeared to detain people on the street just hours after Albanese made his speech. Antisemitism envoy Jillian Segal, who also spoke at the press conference.

Don't let Matilda's death fuel anger, say family of Bondi victim, 10, at funeral



The family of the Bondi shooting's youngest victim, Matilda, urged the community not to let her death fuel anger, as they said a final goodbye to the 10-year-old on Thursday. Matilda was among 15 people who were shot dead when two gunmen opened fire on an event marking the start of Hanukkah at Sydney's Bondi Beach on Sunday. Speaking to the BBC at Matilda's funeral, her aunt Lina Chernykh

said the Jewish community is right to want more action to stamp out antisemitism - she does too. But she said Matilda was a joyous child who spread love everywhere she went, and urged the community to do the same in her honour. "Take your anger and... just spread happiness and love and memory for my lovely niece," Ms Chernykh said. "I hope maybe she's an angel now. Maybe she [will] send some good vibes to the world." Jewish community leaders have in recent days suggested the tragedy was an inevitable result of Australia struggling to address rising antisemitism. The attack on Sunday was the country's deadliest incident since 1996, when a gunman killed 35 people during the Port Arthur massacre.

FRENCH 'DOCTOR DEATH' WHO POISONED PATIENTS JAILED FOR LIFE



A former anaesthetist has been jailed for life for intentionally poisoning 30 patients, 12 of them fatally. Frédéric Péchier, 53, was convicted Friday at the end of a four-month trial in the eastern city of Besançon. In one of France's biggest ever medical malpractice cases, Péchier was found to have introduced chemicals like potassium chloride or adrenaline into the infusion bags of patients. His youngest victim, a four-year-old child, survived two cardiac arrests during a routine tonsil surgery in 2016. The oldest victim was 89. "You are Doctor Death, a poisoner, a murderer. You bring shame on all doctors," said prosecutors last week. "You have turned this clinic into a graveyard." The chemicals

Péchier added triggered cardiac arrest or haemorrhaging in patients, which required emergency intervention in the operating theatre. This was often provided by Péchier himself, who was then able to pose as the patient's saviour. But in 12 cases he was unable to intervene, or it was too late, and the patient died. The prosecution argued that Péchier acted in order to discredit fellow anaesthetists against whom he bore a grudge. In most of the operations, he was not the primary anaesthetist. It was alleged he came in early to the clinic to tamper with the infusion bags. Then, when things went wrong, he was able to step in after diagnosing the problem and ordering an antidote. Péchier was first placed under investigation

eight years ago, when he was suspected of poisoning patients at two clinics in Besançon between 2008 and 2017. The alert was raised in 2017 after a surfeit of potassium chloride was found in the infusion bag of a woman who had a heart attack while being operated on for a back complaint. Investigators found a pattern of "serious adverse events" at the Saint-Vincent private clinic in Besançon. While the national average for fatal heart attacks under anaesthetic was 1 in 100,000, at the clinic it was more than six times that. And in most cases nationally, an explanation for the heart attack was subsequently found, whereas at Saint-Vincent the cause remained a mystery.

THAILAND BOMBS NEAR CAMBODIA'S POIPET BORDER CROSSING



Thailand says it has bombed a "logistics centre" near the Cambodian town of Poipet, known for being a major casino hub and the biggest land crossing between the two countries. The bombings come as renewed border clashes show no sign of abating. Cambodia's defence ministry said Thai forces dropped two bombs, while the Thai side said that they targeted a facility storing rocket systems. The renewed fighting this month has killed at least 21 people in Thailand and 17 in Cambodia, while displacing around 800,000, officials say. In a statement, the Cambodian defence ministry said Thai forces dropped two bombs in the

area of Poipet municipality at around 11:00 am (0400 GMT) Thursday. Shortly after, Thai Air Force spokesman Air Marshal Jackkritt Thammavichai said that the Thai military had attacked the centre outside Poipet that had been used to store BM-21 rockets and that no civilians were harmed. BM-21 rockets are weapons that are typically fired in volleys from the back of an armoured vehicle. The bombings appear to be the first on Poipet, which is known for casinos popular with Thai gamblers and its international border checkpoint. On Tuesday, Thailand said Tuesday that between 5,000

and 6,000 Thai nationals remained stranded in Poipet after Cambodia closed its land border crossings between the two countries. Cambodia's interior ministry said the border closures were a "necessary measure" to reduce risks to civilians, adding that air travel remained an option for those seeking to leave. The century-old border dispute between the South East Asian neighbours dramatically escalated on 24 July with a Cambodian rocket barrage into Thailand, followed by Thai air strikes. That set off five days of intense fighting, which left dozens of soldiers and civilians dead.

DAN BONGINO STEPPING DOWN AS FBI DEPUTY DIRECTOR



Dan Bongino has said he will leave his role as the FBI's deputy director in January. In a post on X, he thanked President Donald Trump, as well as the director of the FBI and the US attorney general "for the opportunity to serve with purpose". Bongino did not say in his post why he was stepping down. Earlier on Wednesday, Trump said the former podcast host "did a great job" in office, and "wants to go back to his show". Bongino, who was appointed to the role by Trump in February, built a large following through his podcast and other media appearances. He was previously a New York City police officer and a US Secret Service agent assigned to protect Barack Obama, the former president. Bongino, a staunch Trump ally, was considered a surprise pick for the role - which had previously been held by career agents - because he had no prior experience with the agency. The FBI Agents Association, which represents around 14,000 current and former agents, had opposed his appointment to the position. Announcing his decision to step down in Wednesday's social media post, Bongino wrote: "I will be leaving my position with the FBI in January. I want to thank President Trump, AG [Pam] Bondi, and Director [Kash] Patel for the opportunity to serve with purpose. "Most importantly, I want to thank you, my fellow Americans, for the privilege to serve you. God bless America, and all those who defend her." Before joining the agency, Bongino had echoed disinformation and conspiracy theories about Trump's false claim that he won the 2020 election, and about the 6 January 2021 pipe bomb investigation. Bongino had previously called the pipe bomb case an "inside job". After taking office he pushed to make the investigation, which Attorney General Bondi said had "languished".

TRUMP ANNOUNCES 'WARRIOR DIVIDEND' FOR TROOPS AS HE DEFENDS ECONOMIC RECORD



would only get better. He claimed prices were falling, at a time when polls show that many Americans are unhappy about the cost of housing, childcare and healthcare. Democrats were critical of the speech. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said the president's words "showed he lives in a bubble completely disconnected from the reality everyday Americans are seeing and feeling". Schumer added: "People are feeling squeezed harder and harder every day and tonight Donald Trump took a victory lap." In the brief, 18-minute address, Trump said the "warrior dividend", which totals \$2.57bn (£1.9bn), would be distributed "in honour of our nation's founding in 1776". Trump

added that the funds were drawn from his sweeping tariffs, as well as the "One Big, Beautiful Bill" that he signed into law on 4 July. "Nobody deserves it more than our military," he said. The president offered little new information in the speech, and some of his assertions were either exaggerated or unfounded. Much of Trump's address focused on his economic record and the administration's efforts to bring down prices - which he blamed on former US President Joe Biden and the Democrats. Trump mentioned the former president seven times. "Now, under our leadership, they [prices] are all coming down and coming down fast," he said.

Democrat politicians also sent the cost of groceries soaring, but we are solving that too." While fuel and egg prices have indeed fallen, many other food items are more expensive. Economic data from September shows the US inflation rate hit 3% for the first time since January, while consumer confidence fell to its lowest level since April due to concerns over the cost of living, jobs and the wider economy. Trump has previously acknowledged that concerns over rising prices have contributed to a lacklustre performance for candidates from his Republican Party during elections held in November - with the Democrats having success in Virginia, New Jersey and

New York City, as well as more recently in Miami and Georgia. He has also acknowledged that incumbent presidents and their parties often fare poorly in midterm elections, which will take place next year. The White House has since been wrestling with how to address voter concerns about the economy, while at the same time pushing back on repeated Democratic criticism over rising prices. The political dilemma faced by the Trump administration has been highlighted by recent polling. One poll, from Politico, showed that about half of overall voters - and 4 in 10 people who voted for Trump in 2024 - felt the cost of living was the worst it has been in their lives.



"MS DHONI WILL MOVE ON":

CSK Head Coach Stephen Fleming's 'At Some Point' Remark At IPL 2026 Auction Creates Buzz

Chennai Super Kings head coach Stephen Fleming was quite honest while talking about the side's decision of trading Ravindra Jadeja for Sanju Samson. He admitted that the move was executed in order to keep the franchise prepared when MS Dhoni leaves. Notably, the legendary wicketkeeper-batter has guided CSK to a record-equalling five Indian Premier League titles. Given Dhoni is at the fag end of his career, CSK need a replacement to fill his shoes in the upcoming years. The trade was a big call from the franchise as it also included England's Sam Curran. The all-rounder too headed to Rajasthan Royals along with Ravindra Jadeja for Samson as part of the deal. "For us, the opportunity was there. We felt we were still a little bit light in our opening batting. And we were also looking at the fact that at some point, MS will move on," Fleming said at the IPL 2026 auction. "Sanju is an



international-quality player, and he fills that role very well. "So it's succession planning, but also about refreshing the group and looking at what Chennai will look like in six years, not just two." CSK are shifting from their mindset of preferring experience over everything. The franchise that was once known as the

hub for veteran cricketers is now moving towards roping in more and more youngsters. The change was seen midway through IPL 2025 when CSK included the likes of uncapped players Ayush Mhatre and Urvil Patel. Even during the auction on December 16 this year, the franchise splurged a huge

sum of Rs 14.2 crore each for uncapped players Prashant Veer and Kartik Sharma. "As the game has evolved, we might have been a little bit slow to evolve with it. Only halfway through the (2025) tournament we had a big shift and you saw with the players we got in as reserves, there was a shift in what we needed to do," Fleming said. Mhatre, Urvil, Veer and Kartik represent a new generation of players who have grown up training to meet T20s demands, and are as likely to catch IPL scouts' eyes in local T20 leagues as they are to come through the traditional route of age-group and domestic cricket. Fleming said these "T20 babies" played in a way that was all about expressing their skills, where earlier generations may have second-guessed themselves looking to assess the match situation. "I just wonder if we're now seeing the product of T20 coming to the fore," Fleming said. "We witnessed at the start of last year, and certainly the year before that my view used to be that experience was going to win, but now you have this fearless athlete that's been brought up on T20 cricket and has a skillset that's mouthwatering, and they just have no fear about what environment they need to exhibit these skills."

Yashasvi Jaiswal Suffers 'Food Poisoning', Loses Over 2 Kg Weight In Two Days: Report

Talented India batter Yashasvi Jaiswal had a big health scare on Tuesday and had to be rushed to a hospital. The left-handed opener experienced severe stomach cramps after a Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy match between Mumbai and Rajasthan in Pune. Jaiswal had to be admitted to Aditya Birla Hospital with acute gastroenteritis. The 23-year-old batter scored 15 off 16 balls as Mumbai chased down the target of 217. A report has now claimed that Jaiswal "ate something" in the hotel where he was staying, which resulted in the complication. "It is food poisoning. He ate something in the



Pune hotel, which has led to this. There was pain, but his condition is much better after timely medication. He has lost over 2 kg already in the last two days, and the doctors have asked him to rest for at least the next 7-10 days," TOI quoted a source as saying. Jaiswal

might have to miss the first few rounds of matches in the domestic one-dayer Vijay Hazare Trophy, which starts on December 24. "It will be tough and go for the first few matches for him to turn up for the Vijay Hazare Trophy. There are ODIs vs New Zealand after

that too, and he is likely to be in the squad for that series," the source added. Jaiswal had been suffering from stomach cramps throughout the SMAT game, and his condition worsened after the match. At the hospital, he underwent an ultrasound and a CT scan and received proper medical attention. He was later advised to continue his medication and take adequate rest. Talking about the match, Ajinkya Rahane's unbeaten 72 and Sarfaraz Khan's brutal 22-ball 73 powered Mumbai to a three-wicket victory over Rajasthan in their Super League Group B clash of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy.

ECUADOR DEFENDER PINEIDA KILLED IN SHOOTING



Ecuador defender Mario Pineida has died at the age of 33 after being shot in Guayaquil. Local media reported that Pineida was shot on Wednesday by two people on motorbikes who opened fire on him, his mother and another woman outside a shop in the north of the city. Ecuador's interior ministry said it has sent a special police unit to investigate. Guayaquil has become a hotspot for gang violence and drug trafficking, with 1,900 murders recorded between January and September - the highest in Ecuador. Three second-tier footballers were killed in September and a local

KKR'S RS 9.2 CRORE BUY TO MISS PART OF IPL 2026? REPORT MAKES BIG CLAIM

Bangladesh cricket team fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman will not be available for a portion of the IPL 2026 season, according to a report by India Today. He was bought by KKR for Rs 9.2 crore in the IPL 2026 auction alongside Sri Lanka's Matheesha Pathirana who came for Rs 18 crore. The report quoted sources from the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and stated that Mustafizur will miss the matches between April 16 and 23. The IPL 2026 schedule is all set to clash with Bangladesh's home ODI and T20I series against New Zealand. IPL 2026 will reportedly run from March



26 to May 31 and although Mustafizur is not a regular in Bangladesh's ODI side, he features prominently in their T20I matches. The report further claimed that he will be issued a partial No

Objection Certificate (NOC) from the cricket board that will exempt him from the ODI series and as a result, he will return to India after just playing the T20I series. Kolkata Knight Riders

(KKR) made a strong statement at the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2026 mini-auction, led by the marquee signings Cameron Green, Matheesha Pathirana and Mustafizur Rahman. They also added depth with Finn Allen, Rachin Ravindra and returning players Tim Seifert and Rahul Tripathi. Backed by a clear focus on emerging Indian talent, KKR's buys reflected balance, quality and long-term planning, as per a release. The side went all out for Australian batter Green, winning a bidding battle against the Chennai Super Kings to secure him for Rs 25.20 crore.

MATVEI SAFONOV HERO AS PSG BEAT FLAMENGO IN INTERCONTINENTAL CUP

Back-up goalkeeper Matvei Safonov saved four penalties as Paris Saint-Germain edged out Brazilians Flamengo 2-1 in a shoot-out to win the FIFA Intercontinental Cup final in Qatar on Wednesday. PSG led through Khvicha Kvaratskhelia before Jorginho's spot-kick levelled for Flamengo as the game finished 1-1 after extra time. Copa Libertadores winners Flamengo defeated Mexicans Cruz Azul and African champions Pyramids last week to earn the right to face PSG and pushed the European champions all the way with a dogged display. But Luis Enrique's men, who received a bye to the final, were indebted to Safonov and followed in the footsteps of Real Madrid who lifted the inaugural title last year. "I think this year is impossible to



repeat for Paris Saint-Germain. It's an unforgettable year," said Luis Enrique. "Six trophies, not bad. We must keep going. It's our mentality to keep winning and keep making history. That's what we want." PSG thought they had taken the lead in the ninth minute when Fabian Ruiz cleverly hooked the ball into an empty net after Flamengo goalkeeper

Agustin Rossi miskicked a clearance while trying to prevent a corner. But the goal was ruled out by VAR because Rossi had narrowly failed to stop the ball from going out of play. But PSG did break the deadlock eight minutes before half-time courtesy of another Rossi error. The Argentinian turned Desire Doué's low cross, which looked to be too strong for

ICC Takes Big Call After Alex Carey 'Snicko' Controversy Hits Ashes 3rd Test

England

had a review reinstated following a major controversy over 'Snicko technology' during Day 1 of the third Ashes Test against Australia. Controversy erupted when the Australia batter survived an early chance in the innings when he flashed at a delivery from Josh Tongue in the 63rd over. Wicket-keeper Jamie Smith completed the catch behind the stumps and he was confident in his appeal along with other England fielders. However, umpire Ahsan Raza turned it down and England quickly went for a review. There was a spike shown on the 'Snickometer' but it appeared 2-3 frames before the ball passed the bat. The third umpire was not convinced and he ruled in Australia's favour while explaining that the ball had "gone well under" the bat. "There's a clear gap, no spike." What England did next However, the England team management was not convinced by the decision and according to ESPNcricinfo, head coach

ESPNCricinfo, head coach

Brendon McCullum and team manager Wayne Bentely held talks with the match referee Jeff Crowe after the end of play on Day 1. The England Cricket Board (ECB) also requested the International Cricket Council (ICC) to review their systems. Even Carey, who went on to score 106, admitted that he thought that he had hit the ball. "I felt something when it went past," Carey said. "In the moment you just trust the process, but it did feel like one of those where the players knew more than the screen was showing."



Apology from 'Snicko' operator BBG Sports, the supplier of the 'Snicko technology', suggested that an operator had "selected the incorrect stump mic for audio processing" and took "full responsibility for the error". The apology also resulted in England bowling coach David Saker expressing his doubts about the technology. "We shouldn't be talking about this after a day's play, it should just be better than that," Saker said. "In this day and age, you'd think the technology is good enough to pick things up like that."

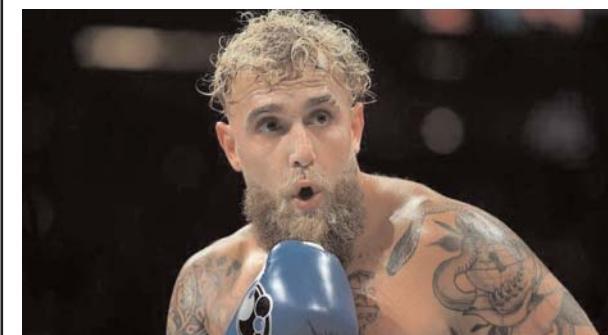
Ishan Kishan Surpasses MS Dhoni, Equals Abhishek Sharma After 45-Ball 100 In Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy Final

Ishan Kishan was in fiery form for Jharkhand against Haryana in the final of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy - the national T20 tournament. The wicketkeeper-batter, who is the captain of Jharkhand, slammed 101 off just 49 balls (10x6s, 6x4s). This was Kishan's fifth century in SMAT in 62 innings, equalling Abhishek Sharma. Kishan hit 33 sixes in SMAT 2025 - the most by a designated wicketkeeper-captain in any T20 tournament (international or domestic franchise). Earlier, MS Dhoni (30 sixes, IPL 2018) and Nicholas Pooran (30, ILT20 2023-24) held the record. Kishan's century is bound to be noticed by the BCCI selectors. Kishan, who last played for India against Australia in a T20I in 2023, has been play-



ing for India A in recent times. However, as far as T20Is go, Sanju Samson and Jitesh Sharma are above him in the pecking order. Kishan made a compelling case for a T20I recall with a belligerent hundred to power Jharkhand to their maiden

A 'NOVICE' WHO CAN 'PUNCH A BIT' - HOW GOOD IS PAUL?



Jake Paul has spent years demanding to be recognised as a "real" boxer. He has called out the likes of Saul 'Canelo' Alvarez, while at the same time picking opponents ranging from retired MMA fighters and faded champions to reality TV personalities and even a grandfather. But on Friday in Miami, that sideshow collides with boxing's top tier as Paul faces two-time heavyweight world champion and Olympic gold medalist Anthony Joshua. Some give Paul, the Disney-actor-turned-YouTuber-turned-boxer, credit for daring. Others question his sanity. Almost nobody gives him a chance. "I worry about Jake's health," trainer Joe Gallagher tells BBC Sport. Former world champion and Team GB coach Richie Woodhall says Joshua is the "hardest puncher" he has ever had on the pads. Liverpool's two-division champion Natasha Jonas calls the whole event simply "wild". That tension with boxing's old guard irritates Paul. In

Grand Swearing-in Ceremony of Smt. V. V. Sumalatha Devi as President of the Telugu Film and TV Dancers and Dance Directors Association (TFTDDA)

Popular Choreographer Jani Master's wife Smt. V. V. Sumalatha Devi was elected as the President of the Telugu Film and TV Dancers and Dance Directors Association (TFTDDA). In this regard, the swearing-in ceremony was grandly held in Hyderabad on Thursday. Srisailam Yadav and Jubilee Hills MLA Naveen Yadav attended the event as chief guests. At the event... *Jubilee Hills MLA Naveen Yadav said... "I am happy that for the first time, a woman has been elected as the president of this union. I believe that Sumalatha's victory will bring a new dimension to the union. Jani Master has earned fame and recognition across the country. Jani Master, who rose from humble beginnings to great heights, and his wife Sumalatha were elected based on the trust placed in them. I will always be indebted to the film workers who treat my family as their own. I will always stand by this union." *Smt. V. V. Sumalatha Devi said... "My thanks to everyone who contributed to this victory and to everyone who voted. I assure



you that I will resolve every problem within the union." *Speaking, Srisailam Yadav said... "Congratulations to Sumalatha Devi, who won the elections. There are some minor issues in the union. Let's resolve them among ourselves. Filing cases outside will only make us look bad. Let's all move forward together. My best wishes to everyone who won in these elections." *Speaking, prominent producer C. Kalyan said... "Srisailam Yadav

was the first to donate money to this organization. He was always at the forefront whenever the film industry faced any difficulties. His son Naveen is a great person. Srisailam's wife provided financial assistance to many female artists and dancers. Many tried to pull Jani down, but now he has risen to great heights. Sumalatha's victory will bring good days to this union. On our behalf, we will also provide all kinds of support and cooperation to

of the union will get a plot of land. My wish is that when a member of our union retires, we should plan to give them approximately ten to fifteen lakhs at that time." "I am praying to God that this wish will be fulfilled," he said. K. Srinivasa Rao took oath as General Secretary, P. Chiranjeevi Kumar as Treasurer, K. Suresh and M. Raju as Vice Presidents, K. Kiran Kumar and A. Ramu as Joint Secretaries, U. Shiva Krishna as Executive Secretary, and K. Satish Goud, K. Sridevi, P. Suresh, S. Vedant, Manohar, L. Krishna, B. Suman, R. Bose, and S. Shruti as committee members. The event was attended by Telugu Film Chamber President Bharat Bhushan, Telugu Film Chamber General Secretary K.L. Damodar Prasad, Rangareddy District Joint Commissioner of Labour Shyam Sundar Reddy, Telugu Film Federation President Anil Kumar Vallabhaneni, Telugu Film Federation General Secretary Ammiraju, Telugu Film Federation Treasurer G. Bheemudu (Srikanth), and others.

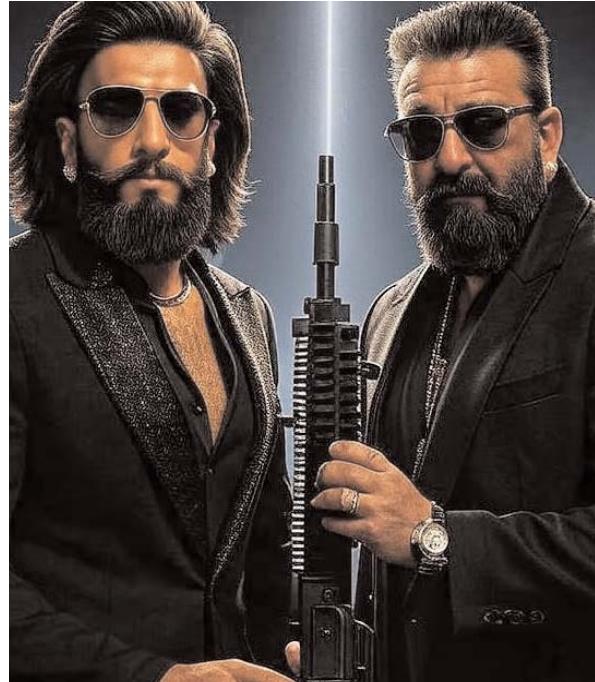
The sound of Shambala can be truly enjoyed only in a theatre: Music director Sricharan Pakala



Starring versatile actor Aadi Saikumar in the lead, Shambala is produced by Rajashekhar Annabhimoju and Mahidhar Reddy under the Shining Pictures banner, and directed by Ugandhar Muni. The film features Archana Iyer, Swasika, Ravi Varma, Madhunandan, and Shiva Karthik in key roles. Music is composed by Sricharan Pakala. The film is set for a grand theatrical release on December 25. As part of the promotions, music director Sricharan Pakala interacted with the media and shared insights about the film. Excerpts from his interaction: Shambala has multiple themes. I began working on the film the very next day after the director narrated the story. Director Ugandhar Muni has a strong understanding of sound, and his entire direction team is extremely passionate and particular about every detail. I have worked on many thrillers, but composing for a scientific and mythological thriller like Shambala was a completely new experience. Everyone has access

to the usual set of instruments, but I always try to create something new and distinctive in terms of sound. For films like this, which need to keep audiences on the edge of their seats, the sound has to be extraordinary. Through sound, we often need to mislead the audience intentionally as part of the narrative. The four songs that appear within the story are outstanding. I grew up listening to mythological stories, and it feels special to compose music for a story rooted in that genre. For this film, I used a wide variety of instruments and even employed some custom

DHURANDHAR BANNED IN PAKISTAN, MOVIE SEES 2 MILLION DOWNLOADS IN 12 DAYS



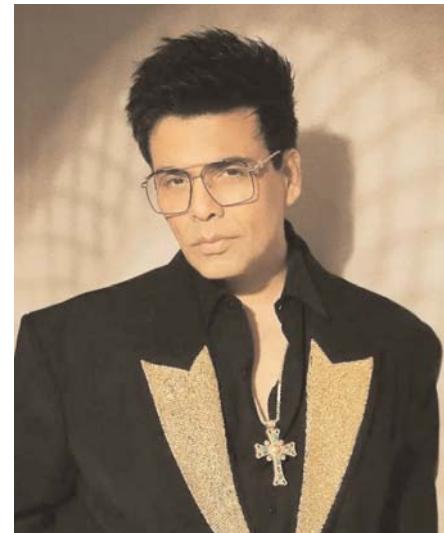
New Delhi: The ban on Dhurandhar by Pakistan and some Gulf nations has not affected its run at the box office. The movie is showing no signs of slowing down, but the ISI has a major problem back in Pakistan. The movie, which deals with the 1999 Kandahar hijacking, Mumbai 26/11 attacks and also the Lyari gang wars, has not gone down well with the Pakistan establishment, and all attempts have been made to block it. However, the ISI has completely lost control over the digital space and attempts at a blackout have failed miserably. At least 2 million illegal downloads of the film have been reported in Pakistan in just two weeks.

It has gone on to become the most pirated movie in Pakistan, beating 2.0 and Raees. The ban in Pakistan may have cost the movie makers Rs 50-60 crore, but the message about Pakistan being a complete terror state has been sent across Pakistan. Although it makes no difference to the Pakistanis about what their country is, it is a psychological win for India, which has managed to spread the message despite the movie being banned. The Pakistanis are particularly upset about the portrayal of Lyari. The establishment is so desperate to counter this narrative that it has decided to fast-track a film about Lyari showing the place in a good light. "Indian movie

Dhurandhar is yet another example of negative propaganda by the Indian film industry against Pakistan, especially targeting Lyari. Lyari is not violence - it is culture, peace, talent, and resilience. Next month, Mera Lyari will release, showing the true face of Lyari: peace, prosperity, and pride. #MeraLyari," Sindh's Senior Provincial Minister for Information, Sharjeel Inam Memon said on X. The ISI, despite monitoring the Internet relating to the movie, has completely failed to take control. Torrents and piracy links are all over the internet, which are being used to download the movie. The Dark Web experts in the country are using the

servers in Sri Lanka, Nepal and Malaysia to ensure that the Pakistanis are able to download the film illegally and watch it. The Pakistanis are downloading the movie through Telegram channels, underground streams and also the VPN. The very fact that it has gone on to become the most pirated film to date only shows that the ISI has failed to control the situation, and all attempts to blackout the movie have fallen flat. Officials say that this surge in the number of downloads indicates the curiosity that the people in Pakistan have about the movie. While some may not agree with the narrative of the film, many are appreciative of the acting in the movie.

Karan Johar opens up about handling online trolls targeting him and his family



they are. What I should feel, therefore, is nothing but pity. Second, I also feel important. You should either be loved or hated. What you should never face is indifference. Imagine when no one talks about you. That is far worse. I never want to face indifference." The ace filmmaker further mentioned, "There is a famous song that says, 'kuch to log kahenge, logon ka kaam hai kehna', and I agree with that as well. But I look at it in a very simple way. When someone says the most ridiculous things about me, insults or humiliates me, I feel only one thing, and I say this sincerely. I only feel pity." "I think to myself, poor fellow, poor lady. They must be extremely unhappy to waste so much energy on negativity. There may be reasons for their unhappiness, and I genuinely feel bad for that. So, the next time criticism comes your way and it is not valid, and it does not come from a well-meaning place, you know what to do.

Vijay Deverakonda and Dilraju's "SVC 59" Director's Note from Ravi Kiran Kola introduces the Character - Flawed, angry, wounded



Star hero Vijay Deverakonda is starring in an exciting new film under the prestigious banner of Sri Venkateswara Creations. This project is being produced by successful producers Dil Raju and Shirish. Directed by the talented Ravi Kiran Kola, who gained acclaim for his debut film Raja Vaaru Rani Gaaru, the movie promises to be a gripping experience. The makers announced the film's title

glimpse release date with an interesting promo. In the promo, director Ravi Kiran Kola said, "I've been waiting for a long time to tell this story about a man. I found him in my memory. He is very personal, and I've watched him and grown up seeing him. He is not perfect, but he is real. Flawed, angry, wounded - and more than I hated him, I loved him. This story had to be told. You will meet him." This

simple glimpse explains the character of the protagonist, and the appearance of Vijay Deverakonda's hand at the end raises intrigue about the film. The film's glimpse is releasing on December 22nd at 07:29 PM. Set against the backdrop of a rural action drama, this ambitious film is being planned as a massive pan-India project. The regular shoot is expected to commence soon.

Kriti Sanon Opens Up About Filming Cocktail 2 With Shahid Kapoor And Rashmika Mandanna: "I Had A Blast"



After Tere Ishq Mein, Kriti Sanon is now setting her sights on her next project. The actress will next be seen in Homi Adajania's Cocktail 2. The film is a spiritual sequel to the director's iconic 2012 film Cocktail and also features Shahid Kapoor and Rashmika Mandanna in lead roles. In an interview with Zoom, Kriti Sanon revealed that she was looking for a film that wasn't as heavy as her recent release. "I think Cocktail 2 just happened at the right time. I was craving for it. I wanted to go into that really young, urban, fun space of a rom-com," the actress said. "Yes, it's a sequel, but it's more of a vibe sequel, I feel. The story is completely different, the characters are completely different, and their backstories are completely different. So everything is different, except for the vibe of Cocktail. And of course, Maddock Films and Homi Adajania. So that remains as is," she added. Kriti Sanon further revealed that two major schedules of the film have already been completed, and the third schedule will begin soon in Mumbai. The actress mentioned, "I think I'm looking so different from what I have ever looked, which I'm very excited about and it's also very fresh." Drawing parallels between her film and its prequel, Kriti Sanon said, "When you watch Cocktail 1, something about it still feels today. It doesn't make you feel like it's what, 12 years old or something, you know? And you still feel like it's today's film. And I think that's how even this film is. It's very refreshing, the visuals are stunning and it's got a take on modern equations and relationships. Very relevant to what it speaks about. And I've had a blast shooting with Shahid and Rashmika, and of course, Homi is mad, so his craziness kind of keeps us all going for a fun ride."

Cocktail 2 marks Kriti's second collaboration with Shahid Kapoor after Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Ujha Jiya. The film is expected to be released by the end of 2026.