



# THE SOUTH INDIA TIMES

Essence of the South

NATIONAL DAILY NEWSPAPER

www.thesouthindiatimes.com

/thesouthindiatimes.yahoo.in

TO BOOK YOUR ADS CALL

99484 80279, 73307 78889

## 5 out of 318 Telangana BC students score above 90 pc

Hyderabad (TSIT): As many as 318 Backwards Class (BC) Gurukul students appeared for the 2026 Joint Entrance Examination - Mains (JEE Mains), out of which five students scored above 90 percentile and 28 students scored above 80 percentile.



2026 JEE MAINS

## Stephen Colbert says CBS spiked interview with emocrat over FCC fears



WORLD NEWS

## INDIA DEFEAT NETHERLANDS BY 17 RUNS IN T20 WORLD



T20 WORLD CUP

### IN BRIFS

#### Salim Khan suffering from minimal brain hemorrhage

Mumbai (TSIT): Veteran screenwriter Salim Khan of Salim-Javed duo has suffered a minimal brain hemorrhage, doctor Jaleel Parkar, who is looking after his case, has informed. The doctor shared that minimal brain hemorrhage does not require surgery. Earlier, there were discussions around his discharge but now a decision will be taken once he feels better. A Digital Subtraction Angiography was performed on Salim Khan. He is currently on a ventilator, and has been kept in the ICU. Yesterday, he was admitted by family doctor Chopra. His blood pressure was also high so the medical professionals put him on a ventilator for backup as safety. Now he is doing better, recovery is slow due to old age.

#### BRS leader Balka Suman arrested for attacking Congress minister's convoy

Hyderabad (TSIT): Former MLA and Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) leader Balka Suman was arrested on Wednesday, February 18, for allegedly attacking Minister Vivek Venkatswamy's convoy in Mancherla district the previous day. He has reportedly been sent to a 14-day judicial remand. BRS cadres reportedly pelted stones at the minister when he was enroute to attend the election of the municipal chairperson of Kyathanpally along with his son, MP G Vamsi Krishna, and other Congress leaders on Tuesday. A police constable and a Congress worker reportedly suffered injuries in the attack. A case was registered against Suman for allegedly behaving rudely with the police and for trying to prevent them from discharging their duties. Tension prevailed at Suman's residence on Wednesday, when police arrived to make the arrest, as his supporters gathered there in large numbers and resisted the attempt by police.

## HYDERABAD AIMS TO BECOME INDIA'S FIRST NET-ZERO CITY BY 2034: CM REVANTH

HYDERABAD TSIT BUREAU:

CM Revanth Reddy said green energy will power the next phase of economic and urban transformation in Telangana and reaffirmed the State's commitment to achieving net-zero targets through sustainable policies and clean infrastructure. He was speaking at the Mumbai Climate Week Conference organized by the Maharashtra Government at the Jio Convention Centre, Bandra Kurla Complex. The Chief Minister stated that Telangana is actively shifting from coal and conventional fuels toward solar and other renewable sources. He noted that the State provides free electricity to more than 30 lakh agricultural pump sets and nearly 50 lakh households, and future energy expansion will be increasingly green-based.

Revanth Reddy announced that Hyderabad is targeted to become a Net-Zero City by 2034 and will be the first Indian city to undertake a comprehensive carbon footprint audit. He said industries will be gradually



moved out of the core urban zone as part of planned, climate-sensitive urban restructuring. Explaining the State's strategic growth framework, the CM highlighted the CURE-PURE-RARE zoning model: CURE (Core Urban Region Economy): Innovation, services, and clean mobility within the Outer Ring Road and Regional Ring Road; PURE (Peri Urban Region Economy): Large green manufacturing hub between ORR and Regional Ring Road; RARE (Rural & Agriculture Region Economy): Agriculture

and resource-driven growth. He said the PURE belt will be developed as a major green manufacturing destination and positioned as a global "China+1" alternative for investors, powered by renewable energy.

Sharing power sector projections, the CM said Telangana's average daily demand stands at about 16,610 MW, with peak demand expected to cross 19,000 MW this year and reach 34,000 MW by 2034. Nearly 25 percent of the State's power already comes from green sources. Highlighting clean mobility initiatives, he said EV taxes have been removed in core urban areas, over 2 lakh auto-rickshaws are being retrofitted, more than 3,500 RTC buses are being converted to electric, and Hyderabad Metro is planned to expand beyond 200 km. Environmental programmes such as Musi River rejuvenation, lake protection, and dedicated ecological enforcement through HYDRAA are also underway.

## PM Modi, Croatia PM discuss ways to add momentum to bilateral ties

The Croatian leader also said his visit is taking place in the context of the AI Impact Summit-2026, during which his delegation will discuss the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in shaping today's world

NEW DELHI (TSIT) Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday (February 18, 2026) had a "fruitful" meeting with his Croatian counterpart Andrej Plenkovic and discussed ways to add momentum to bilateral ties in areas such as technology, innovation, shipbuilding and blue economy, officials said. Mr. Modi also expressed gratitude to Mr. Plenkovic for his personal support for the India-European Union free trade agreement (FTA), which will bring "unprecedented progress" for people in India and Europe.

"Held fruitful discussions with the Prime Minister of Croatia, Mr Andrej Plenkovic. We discussed how to add momentum to our bilateral partnership in areas such as technology, innovation, shipbuilding, blue economy and boosting connectivity through the IMEEC corridor," Mr. Modi said in a post on X. Mr. Plenkovic said that in



the first 11 months of 2025, trade exchange increased by 10%, and Croatia saw further opportunities for cooperation in logistics and maritime transport, digital transformation, defence and security, and in other areas. "It was a pleasure to meet again with the Prime Minister of India in New Delhi, following his visit to Zagreb last year. We are building excellent political relations

with India, the world's most populous country," he posted on X. Mr. Plenkovic also said they reflected on Croatia's priorities as Chair of the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) and the EUMED9 group. The 3SI is a political and economic forum launched in 2015-2016 by Croatia and Poland, focusing on 13 EU member states between the Baltic, Adriatic, and Black Seas.

## Galgotias University apologises for 'confusion' at AI summit, says representative 'ill-informed'

Says there was no institutional intent to misrepresent the innovation



New Delhi (TSIT) Private university Galgotias on Wednesday apologised for "confusion" after a controversy arose over the display of a made-in-China robotic dog as its own innovation during the India AI Impact Summit and said one of its representatives manning the pavilion was "ill-informed". The controversy erupted after Neha Singh, a

professor of communications at the University, on Tuesday showed to DD News a robotic dog Orion, saying it "has been developed by the Centre of Excellence at Galgotias University". As the video went viral, social media users highlighted that the robot was actually a Unitree Go2, manufactured by China's Unitree Robotics and

commonly used in research and education worldwide. As the episode snowballed into a controversy, the university was asked to vacate the stall at the AI summit. "We wish to apologise for the confusion created at the recent AI summit. One of our representatives manning the pavilion was ill-informed," a university spokesperson said. "She was not aware of the technical origins of the product and, in her enthusiasm for being on camera, gave factually incorrect information even though she was not authorised to speak to the press. There was no institutional intent to misrepresent the innovation," the spokesperson added. Earlier on Wednesday, IT Secretary S Krishnan said the government does not want any exhibitor to showcase items that are not their own. "We do not want such exhibits to continue," he said, after organisers asked Galgotias University to vacate its stall.

## CM Stalin tables high-level panel report on Union-State relations, pushes for greater state autonomy

CHENNAI (TSIT): Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Wednesday tabled Part I of the report of the High-Level Committee on Union-State Relations in the state Assembly, reiterating the DMK government's long-standing demand for enhanced state autonomy and a stronger federal structure. The committee, chaired by retired Supreme Court judge Justice Kurian Joseph, with

former bureaucrats K. Ashok Vardhan Shetty and M. Naganathan as members, submitted its report to the Chief Minister on Monday. Presenting it in the House, Stalin described the moment as a significant step in redefining Centre-State ties. "Today is the day we take the initiative to amend the Constitution to ensure that state governments are vested with all necessary powers.

## Prez Murmu Steers Int'nal Fleet Review in Vizag

Visakhapatnam (TSIT): In a grand display of maritime diplomacy, President Droupadi Murmu reviewed the International Fleet Review (IFR) 2026 in Visakhapatnam today, with navies from over 70 countries participating. The event transformed the Bay of Bengal into a symbol of global cooperation under the theme "United Through Oceans." Addressing international sailors and commanders, the President emphasized that the gathering of diverse fleets reflects mutual trust and shared maritime traditions. She stressed that collective naval resolve is essential to overcome modern challenges. President Murmu anchored India's maritime approach in the philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' ('The World is One Family'), stating that global security is built through partnerships. She elaborated that the Fleet Review



advances India's MAHASAGAR vision—Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth across Regions—aiming for a secure maritime commons for all. The President lauded the Indian Navy for its dual role as a credible deterrent and a first responder dur-

ing humanitarian crises, offering assistance with "compassion and competence." She extended appreciation to foreign naval officers, expressing confidence that the bonds reaffirmed today would ensure oceans remain gateways for global growth and well-being.

## Tamil Nadu native enters Washington DC Mayor race

Washington (TSIT): Rini Sampath, a 31-year-old government contractor born in Tamil Nadu, on Wednesday announced her candidacy in the Democratic primary for Mayor of Washington, DC, pledging to "fix the basics" and restore confidence in city governance. Sampath, who immigrated to the United States at age seven and has lived in the US capital for more than a decade, launched her campaign with a sharp critique of the city's political establishment and a focus on infrastructure and essential services. "As Mayor, my priority will be to make sure our city lives up to its basic commitments to our residents: Fill the potholes. Stop the catastrophic wastewater spill in the Potomac.



### OUR DEEPEST CONDOLENCES



"Ilayavallal" Dr. K. Sridharan  
Chairman

Kalasalangam & Anand Group of Institutions

With profound grief and sorrow, we announce the sad demise of our beloved Chairman who was called to eternal rest on 18.02.2026 at 4.10 AM.

Last rites at 52, Sreeman Srinivasa Road Alwarpet, Chennai-18 on 19-02-2026 at 3.00 PM

Cremation at Besant Nagar on 19-02-2026 at 5.00 PM

Family Members, Relatives & Friends

## Congress slams govt over AI Summit, alleges 'Chinese products showcased as Indian'



New Delhi (TSIT) The Congress on Wednesday sharply criticised the Narendra Modi government over the ongoing AI summit, alleging that the event had turned into a "disorganised PR spectacle" and accusing

the Centre of misrepresenting foreign technology as Indian innovation.

In a post on X, Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi said the summit had failed to leverage India's strengths in talent and data. "Instead of

leveraging India's talent and data, the AI summit is a disorganised PR spectacle — Indian data up for sale, Chinese products showcased," Gandhi wrote.

Echoing his remarks, the Congress issued a strongly worded statement alleging that Chinese robots were being displayed at the summit as domestic innovations. "The Modi government has made a laughing stock of India globally, with regard to AI. In the ongoing AI summit, Chinese robots are being displayed as our own. The Chinese media has mocked us. This is truly embarrassing for India," the party said.

## Special Revision in Assam aimed at including eligible voters: CEC

Guwahati, Feb 18: Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar on Wednesday said the objective behind conducting the Special Revision (SR) of electoral rolls in poll-bound Assam was to include eligible voters and exclude ineligible ones.

Addressing a press conference in Guwahati, Kumar said that while 12 states underwent a Special Intensive Revision, the Election Commission of India carried out only a Special Revision in Assam, keeping in mind that the National Register of Citizens (NRC) exercise is in its final stage.

Responding to allegations by opposition parties regarding manipulation of



the voters' list, the CEC said any eligible voter whose name was omitted has two options for inclusion. "One is to fill out Form-6. If the person is still found ineligible, he or she can file an appeal before the District Magistrate. I am happy to inform you that only 500 appeals have been received across districts so far. This means our BLOs, AEROs and EROs have done a good job," Kumar said.

## SC overturns Allahabad HC ruling in child sexual assault case, calls for judicial sensitivity



New Delhi, Feb 18: The Supreme Court of India has set aside a controversial order of the Allahabad High Court which had held that grabbing a minor survivor's breasts, breaking the string of her pyjamas and attempting to drag her under a culvert did not amount to rape or attempted rape. Coming down strongly on the High Court's reasoning, a bench led by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, along with Justices Joymalya Bagchi and N V Anjaria, observed that adjudication in cases involving sexual offences requires not only sound legal reasoning but also empathy and sensitivity.

"We cannot agree with the finding of the High Court that the allegations only amount to preparation, but not an attempt, towards the commission of the offence of rape," the apex court said in its judgment delivered on February 10, 2026.

The controversy stemmed from a March 17, 2025 order of the Allahabad High Court modifying a trial court's summoning order against two accused, Pawan and Akash. The prosecution alleged that the accused grabbed the breasts of an 11-year-old girl, broke the string of her lower garment and tried to drag her beneath a culvert before passers-by intervened. The trial court had found sufficient grounds to proceed for attempted rape under Section 376 of the IPC and Section 18 of the Protection

of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) Act. However, the High Court altered the charges to Section 354-B of the IPC (assault with intent to disrobe) and Sections 9/10 of the POCSO Act (aggravated sexual assault), holding that there was no clear evidence of intent to commit rape.

Justice Ram Manohar Narayan Mishra of the High Court had observed that the accused fled the scene after being caught and that no further act was attributed to them to establish a determined intent to commit rape.

The Supreme Court subsequently took suo motu cognisance of the High Court's order and stayed its implementation on March 26, 2025.

In its final verdict, while declining to frame immediate guidelines for judges, the apex court underscored the urgent need to foster compassion and sensitivity in the judicial approach to cases involving sexual offences and other vulnerable litigants.

Justice Kant observed, stressing that judicial decisions must reflect "compassion, humanity, and understanding."

The court directed the National Judicial Academy (NJA) in Bhopal to constitute a committee of experts to prepare a report and draft comprehensive guidelines on handling cases involving sexual offences and vulnerable victims, complainants or witnesses. The committee has been asked to submit its report preferably within three months. The court further directed that the proposed guidelines must be framed in simple language, take into account India's linguistic diversity and be accessible to laypersons. Emphasising that justice in sexual offence cases must extend beyond strict legal interpretation, the Supreme Court reiterated that courts must remain sensitive to the specific vulnerabilities faced by victims to ensure "complete justice."

## RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat urges Hindu families to have at least three children

New Delhi, Feb 18: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat on Tuesday appealed to Hindu families to have at least three children, stating that while there is "no threat", vigilance and social awareness are necessary.

Speaking at a social harmony event held at Saraswati Shishu Mandir, Bhagwat cited views that societies with an average fertility rate below three may face decline in the future. He urged newly married couples to be made aware of this concern and said families should consider having at least three children.

Emphasising the institution of marriage, Bhagwat said its true purpose is to "carry forward creation" and not merely the fulfil-



ment of personal desires.

The RSS chief also stressed the need for unity and empowerment

within Hindu society. "There is a need to unite and empower Hindus. There is no threat to us

but vigilance is necessary," he said. Expressing concern over what he described as a "declining Hindu population", Bhagwat stated that religious conversions carried out through inducement or coercion should be stopped.

He further called for action against infiltrators, stating that once identified, such individuals should be "detected, deleted and deported." Highlighting the role of women, Bhagwat described "matrushakti" (women power) as the foundation of the household. He said women should not be considered weak and should be trained in self-defence. He added that Indian tradition accords women a revered place in society and values nurturing qualities over physical appearance.

## 14 married women in Dumka found availing widow pension fraudulently



Dumka, Feb 18: A recent social audit in Jharkhand's Dumka district has revealed that 14 married women had been fraudulently receiving widow pensions for the past 10 years by falsely declaring their husbands dead. The irregularity came to light during a social audit in Ranishwar Block, where officials found that the women had been availing benefits under the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Vidhya Pension Yojana despite their husbands being alive.

Block Development Officer Rajesh Kumar Sinha said the matter surfaced during an audit at Kadma village under Mohalbana Panchayat in Ranishwar Block.

"During the social audit at Kadma village, we were shocked to find that women whose husbands are still alive have been taking benefits under the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Vidhya Pension Yojana for the last 10 years," he said. According to the BDO, six of the women were found living adjacent to each other in Kadma village, while the remaining eight were identified in other villages of the block. Physical verification of six women has been completed so far.

The women reportedly revealed that two middle-

men had facilitated the approval of their applications after collecting substantial sums of money. They were allegedly told they would receive Rs 1,000 per month under the scheme but would have to pay half the amount to the middlemen every month.

Rajesh Kumar Sinha said action was initiated immediately after the fraud was detected. The six women whose verification has been completed have been issued notices directing them to deposit Rs 99,800 each, the amount allegedly withdrawn fraudulently since 2016, along with applicable interest to the treasury. He added that the remaining eight women are being physically verified, and if found guilty, similar recovery notices will be issued to them.

The two middlemen accused of orchestrating the fraud will also be investigated and appropriate action taken, the BDO said. The administration has stated that strict monitoring will be ensured to prevent misuse of social security benefits and to ensure that assistance reaches only eligible beneficiaries. The social audit is being conducted in various panchayats under the directions of Deputy Commissioner Abhijeet Sinha.

## Kerala medical college doctors intensify strike; elective surgeries to be halted

Thiruvananthapuram, Feb 18: The indefinite strike by medical college doctors in Kerala entered its third day on Wednesday, with the agitation set to intensify further. From Thursday, doctors will stay away from all elective surgical procedures, escalating their protest over unresolved pay revision arrears. Emergency surgeries and procedures, labour rooms, intensive care units (ICUs), post-mortem services and emergency laboratory diagnostics have been exempted from the boycott. However, the suspension of elective surgeries is expected to severely disrupt patient care, lead-



ing to a backlog of cases and prolonged waiting periods at medical college hospitals (MCHs) in the coming days. Outpatient (OP) clinics at MCHs are currently being managed by senior and junior residents along with house surgeons, in the absence of senior faculty members. Patient

care has reportedly been affected, as trainees are unable to take independent treatment decisions. The doctors, under the banner of the Kerala Government Medical College Teachers' Association (KGMCTA), have been on a non-cooperation strike since July 1. They decided to intensify

their protest after multiple rounds of discussions with the government failed to resolve their pay revision demands. On Wednesday, remarks by Health Minister Veena George — stating that doctors should have avoided the "unnecessary" OP boycott and the hardships caused to the public — triggered widespread resentment within the medical fraternity. Her statement that doctors proceeded with the strike despite the Finance Minister's clarification regarding legal obstacles in disbursing pay revision arrears has been strongly contested by the association.

## Five HDFC Bank employees arrested in financial fraud case in Shopian

Srinagar, Feb 18: Five employees of HDFC Bank have been arrested in connection with an alleged large-scale financial fraud in Jammu and Kashmir's Shopian district.

The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the Crime Branch conducted searches in Shopian and Budgam districts on Wednesday as part of the ongoing investigation, an official spokesperson said.

The arrested employees have been identified as Adil Ayoub Ganai, Irfan Majeed Zargar, Mubashir Hussain Sheikh, Zaid Manzoor and Javid Ahmad Bhat.

"Searches are currently under way at multiple locations in Shopian and Budgam to gather materi-



al evidence in the case," the spokesperson said, adding that a written complaint had brought the alleged fraud at the bank branch to light.

Authorities, however, have not yet disclosed details regarding the nature of the alleged financial irregularities or the modus operandi adopted by the accused.

Further investigation is in progress.

## Clash erupts in Bathinda as farmers' march to DAC turns violent

Bathinda, Feb 18: A protest by farmers at Jeond in Bathinda turned violent on Wednesday after clashes broke out between demonstrators and police as the farmers attempted to march towards the District Administrative Complex (DAC). Several farmers were injured when police lobbed tear gas shells to disperse the crowd. Both sides reportedly pelted stones and bricks at each other before police intensified action with repeated use of tear gas.

Police had set up checkpoints on key roads leading into the city. Several farmers were reportedly detained or placed under house arrest at different locations as the operation began on Tuesday night. A few farmers, including women, were also detained from Jeond village.

Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Bathinda, Jyoti Yadav, claimed that a mob had gathered on rooftops of some houses and hurled stones at police personnel. She said police used mild force and tear

gas shells to disperse the crowd. However, a protesting farmer alleged that police resorted to tear gas and stone pelting without provocation. He said holding a protest is a democratic right and accused police of raiding residences of farmer leaders to detain them ahead of the protest call. The protest was organised by the Bharatiya Kisan Union (Ekta Ugrahan), which had announced an indefinite agitation outside the DAC demanding the release of its two activists, Shagandeep Singh Jeond and Baldev Singh Chauke. The two were arrested during a protest last year and have been lodged in Bathinda jail since April. Despite heavy police deployment, some farmers from the Jaito block in Faridkot district managed to reach the DAC in the afternoon but were

immediately detained. Meanwhile, a court granted bail to Shagandeep and Baldev on Wednesday. Earlier, on February 6, farmers had attempted to march towards Bathinda from Jeond village but were stopped near Rampura Phul on the

Chandigarh-Bathinda highway, where police used tear gas to disperse them. Many protesters were taken into custody from Bathinda and nearby districts. Following their unconditional release, the union had temporarily suspended its protest. The farmers

are demanding cancellation of five FIRs registered against more than 2,000 farmers for alleged lawlessness during the February 6 protest. They had issued an ultimatum seeking release of the two activists and withdrawal of cases by February 14.



Regional Office: Netaji Marg, Nr. Mithakhali Six Roads, Ellisbridge, Ahmedabad-6. Phone: +91-79-26421671-75

### SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

NOTICE is hereby given under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, the Authorized Officer issued demand notice to the borrower(s) on the date mentioned against the account stated hereinafter calling upon them to repay the amount within 60 days from the date of receipt of said notice. The borrower(s) having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular the borrower(s) that the undersigned has taken the symbolic possession of the property described herein below under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said Rules on the date mentioned against the account. The borrower(s) in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealing with the property will be subject to the charge of the Bank for the amounts, interest, costs and charges thereon. The borrowers'/mortgagors' attention is invited to the provisions of sub-section (8) of Section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

Name of borrower(s), Guarantor & Loan Account No.	Description of the property mortgaged (Secured Asset)	Date of Demand Notice	Date of Symbolic Possession Notice	O/s Amount as on date of Demand Notice
Mr. Balan Kasi Mrs. Inoka Balan 90001073702798	All That Piece Or Parcel Of Free Hold Land And Hereditaments And Premises Residential Flat Admeasuring About 2059.00 Sq. Ft. Situated At Final Plot No.-26, Survey No.-22 2D5 22 2D5A1A, Block/Buidling No.-22/2D5A1A, Floor No 1, Building/Society Name -Bharat Green City Avenue, Street No./Name- Pappakuruchi Village, City- Tiruchirappalli, State: Tamil Nadu, Pincode: 620014 Owned By Mr Balan Kasi Along With Construction Standing, Both Present And Future And Register The Charge By Registration Of Memorandum Of Entry At The Office Of The Sub-Register, and The Said Property is Bounded As Under: On Or Towards North: Plot No.25, On Or Towards East: 3rd Party Vacant Land, On Or Towards South: Plot No.27, On Or Towards West: 23 Feet Wide Lagoon Road	July 30, 2025	February 13, 2026	Rs.69,23,773.79

Place: Tamilnadu  
Date: February 19, 2026

Authorised Officer  
Bandhan Bank Limited



# EDITORIAL

## THE US IS MULTITASKING 2 VERY DIFFERENT PEACE DEALS

The US opened two sets of major peace negotiations in Geneva on Tuesday, in what's best described as a form of diplomatic speed dating. The one with Iran broke up after less than four hours, as the two sides left to draw up competing draft agreements. The talks on ending Russia's war in Ukraine were only getting started and will continue Wednesday. That should come as no surprise, if only because it's a lot harder to stop a war than to avoid starting one.

That's something both the US and Iran have strong motivations to do. For leaders of the Islamic Republic, a collapse of negotiations would invite a military contest with Israel and potentially two US carrier strike groups. They might survive that, but could never hope to win. For the US, military action is also less than appealing, because after reducing Iran's nuclear facilities to rubble last year, a win this time would require regime change. And that's not only historically unlikely without putting boots on the ground, it could also produce politically toxic blowback in the leadup to November's midterm elections.

Iran is, of course, unhappy to be negotiating under the threat of attack. Its announcement of a partial closure of the Strait of Hormuz for military exercises, just as the talks began on Tuesday, was an attempt to level the playing field. But for all his bombast, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei knows the weakness of his position. Khamenei can ill-afford a repeat of Iran's humiliating defeat in last year's 12-day war with Israel and the US. He might feel obliged this time to follow through on his last-throw-of-the-dice threats, such as hobbling world oil markets (and his own primary revenue source) by blocking the Strait of Hormuz to tanker traffic, or attacking US military bases and Gulf allies. But the more the conflict escalates, the greater the US and Israeli response and the higher the risk of regime collapse. So Iran is now following Russia's playbook - and that of pretty much every country that has business with Washington these days - by offering Trump commercial incentives to take a deal Khamenei can accept. Iranian officials have made it broadly clear what that is, even if they're tactful enough to put it differently: Something similar to the 2015 nuclear agreement that Trump abrogated in 2018.

There's little cost to Khamenei in agreeing to a lengthy suspension of his uranium enrichment program, together with limits and verification inspections, because US and Israeli bombs already froze it. With a nation in turmoil over plummeting living standards, Tehran's deeply unpopular leaders need US sanctions eased far more than they need a rebuilt uranium enrichment program that, at the best of times, was a huge net drain on resources.

With Iran hawks in Israel and Washington champing at the bit for regime change, that may not be enough for Trump, so nothing is certain. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel has made it clear that the only deal he thinks worth making would also eliminate Tehran's arsenal of missiles capable of reaching Israel and force an end to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' support for Iranian proxies across the region, from Hezbollah in Lebanon to the Houthis of Yemen.

From Iran's point of view, that would leave it unable to respond to all should Israel attack again, and would involve an inspection regime far more intrusive of IRGC military dispositions than anything a nuclear deal would require. It would amount to surrender, which Khamenei certainly deserves but won't accept. A win for Trump on Iran's nuclear threat, by contrast, is there for the taking.

And yet it's the Moscow-Kyiv talks Trump told reporters would be easy to resolve ahead of Geneva, warning that "Ukraine better come to the table, fast." It's a misapprehension the US president has labored under since he said he could end the war in 24 hours, well over a year ago. Kyiv has been at the table for a long time. It's Moscow that insists on terms that further its war aims and leave the gate open to restarting the war at a later date, against an opponent that would emerge weakened by the terms of the settlement. The more Trump has become involved in driving this peace process, the more brutal Russia's invasion has become. Putin hasn't hidden his intent. His officials have been signaling his inflexibility. He has sent his former culture minister and history-propagandist-in-chief, Vladimir Medinsky, to head the delegation in Geneva again, after being absent for two more pragmatic sessions.

## India's Northeast Has A New Problem - 'Jamaat' Surge Along Bangladesh Border



The 13th Bangladesh Jatiya Sangsad election of 2026 has produced two simultaneous political messages. First, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has won and will form the government. Second, and strategically more consequential for the region, the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (Jamaat) has registered an unprecedented surge. Jamaat secured 68 seats and 31.76% of the vote, contesting 223 out of 300 constituencies. Its previous best was in 1991, when it won 18 seats with around 12% of the vote. Even more striking is the broader right-wing Islamist vote share, which has climbed to roughly 38% - far above the earlier ceiling of about 15%. This is not merely an electoral fluctuation; it is a structural shift in Bangladesh's political demography. Jamaat's registration was cancelled by Bangladesh's Supreme Court in 2013, and it could not contest elections in 2014, 2018, and 2024. However, some Jamaat leaders contested the 2018 election under the BNP party symbol, in a tacit understanding. Whether deliberate or incidental, the transitional period when Mohammed Yunus helmed the interim government in Bangladesh helped create space for Jamaat's organisational consolidation and electoral preparation, aided by the vacuum created by the Awami League's ban from contesting the election. The 2026 verdict, therefore, reflects not just campaign momentum but also the gradual normalisation

of a party that had once been politically marginalised. For India, the correct lens is neither alarm nor indifference. The BNP is in power. Yet, the Jamaat's emergence as a major parliamentary force will shape the political tone, policy debates and street mobilisation in Bangladesh over the next five years. The Border Geography Geography adds a security dimension to India's concerns. Most of Jamaat's victories have come from the north-west and south-west regions adjoining Indian states such as West Bengal, Assam and Meghalaya. In Indian border districts like Khulna, Rongpur and Rajshahi, Jamaat completely dominated the election result. This does not automatically translate into instability. Border management and intelligence cooperation between India and Bangladesh have improved significantly in recent years. However, political representation matters. When border constituencies are dominated by a party historically sceptical of India, New Delhi's security calculus inevitably adjusts. The memory of the 2004 Chittagong arms haul remains relevant. Ten truckloads of arms were seized, allegedly destined for the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) in India. Among those later convicted by Bangladeshi courts was Motiur Rahman Nizami, then Jamaat's Ameer (Chief) and a cabinet minister in the BNP-led government. Nizami and ULFA chief Paresh Barua (in absentia) were sen-

tenced to life imprisonment with others. It is a different matter that Nizami was prosecuted in 2016 after Bangladesh's International Crime Tribunal found him guilty for his role in masterminding the Demra Massacre of May 13, 1971, in which 800-900 unarmed Hindu civilians were killed. The arms trafficking episode with direct association of high-profile figures underscored how cross-border insurgent linkages can complicate bilateral ties. While today's leadership distances itself from militancy, the precedent explains why Indian agencies will watch border developments closely. A Capital Breakthrough One of the most underappreciated aspects of the result is Jamaat's breakthrough in the political capital. For the first time, the party has won seats in the Dhaka metropolitan area. Out of 20 seats in Dhaka, it has secured six. In symbolic and practical terms, this matters enormously. Dhaka is not just an electoral cluster; it is the centre of administrative authority, media influence, and ideological contestation. A stronger parliamentary presence from the capital gives Jamaat additional visibility, bargaining power, and narrative control. For India, this suggests that Jamaat's rise is no longer confined to peripheral districts. It now has a foothold in the heart of Bangladesh's power structure. Jamaat And The Ideological Question Jamaat's past continues to shape perceptions. During the 1971 Liberation War, ele-

ments within the party collaborated with the Pakistani Army and supported the Rajakar militia. Subsequent war crimes trials cemented its controversial legacy. Cut to 2026, the party is seeking to moderate its public posture. It expressed support for minority rights and stepped back from explicit calls for establishing a Sharia-based state. It even fielded a Hindu candidate in the recently concluded polls, though unsuccessfully. Yet, the outfit's core ideological positions remain unchanged. Full membership (rukun) is constitutionally restricted to Muslims, effectively excluding non-Muslims from leadership and policy-making roles. The party fielded no women candidates. Its Ameer publicly reiterated that women should not occupy leadership positions within Jamaat, citing religious doctrine. In the run-up to the election, he said to Al Jazeera, "On the question of women, Jamaat's position is neither confused nor apologetic - it's principled. We do not think women should come into leadership. In Jamaat, it is impossible. Allah did not permit it." Allegations Of Extremist Links Bangladeshi security assessments over the years have reported ideological overlaps between Jamaat, its student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir, and extremist organisations such as Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-B). Jamaat has consistently denied such institutional links. However, investigations have pointed to similarities in recruitment pipelines and messaging ecosystems. For India, the issue is operational rather than rhetorical. Any weakening of Bangladesh's internal counter-extremism vigilance could have spillover effects in India's North-East, where insurgencies have declined but not entirely disappeared. BNP in Power, Jamaat in Ascent Here, it is important to reiterate that Jamaat has not won the election - the BNP has. The government in Dhaka will be led by a party with its own strategic calculus and diplomatic priorities. However, the former's strengthened parliamentary presence introduces a new dynamic. As a powerful opposition or coalition influencer, it may adopt a sharper positioning to expand its base. One tactic could be to take a pronounced anti-India line.

## INDIA'S AI IMPACT GOES BEYOND THE US-CHINA BINARY

As New Delhi hosts the India-AI Impact Summit, the significance extends far beyond a packed Bharat Mandapam and a high-profile guest list. For the first time, a major global AI summit is being held in the Global South, after earlier editions in the United Kingdom, South Korea and France. The venue change is not merely symbolic. Instead, it signals an emerging reality: India's voice is increasingly shaping the rules and the relationships that will define the next era of technology, and the world seems eager to hear what the country has to say. For years, global technology governance has been framed as a binary choice. The United States represents a corporate-led model: rapid innovation driven by private platforms, proprietary ecosystems, and regulation that is often fragmented or reactive. China, by contrast, represents a state-led model: strategic industrial policy, tightly coupled technology and governance systems, and the export of digital infrastructure through bilateral and multilateral arrangements that often bundle technology with geopolitical influence. As competition between these two models intensifies, many countries, particularly in the Global South, have found both options unsatisfying. The American model promises innovation but often leaves governments dependent on a handful of global firms with limited accountability. The Chinese model offers scale and speed, but at the cost of deep strategic dependence, opaque governance, and reduced policy autonomy over data and digital infrastructure. Increasingly, the search is on for a path that allows sovereign nations to access modern digital systems that serve citizens at scale, without locking governments into vendor monopolies or long-term geopolitical alignments that they cannot easily exit. India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi is increasingly presenting itself as this option: a credible third way that emphasises public value, interoperable infrastructure, and practical governance over ideology. Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) sits at the centre of this pitch. Over the past decade, systems such as Aadhaar for digital identi-

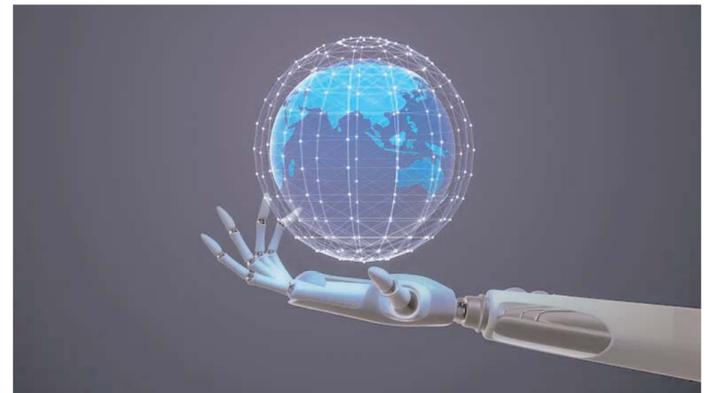


ty, UPI (Unified Payments Interface) for real-time payments, and ONDC (Open Network for Digital Commerce) for marketplaces have demonstrated that large-scale digital systems can be built as public goods rather than proprietary platforms. These systems now form the backbone of service delivery, financial inclusion, and governance for over a billion people. Crucially, this has meant that they have also proven to be exportable. Over the past two years, India has signed formal cooperation agreements on DPI with more than twenty countries across Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. Several African nations are among the fastest adopters. Countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, and Lesotho are working with India to replicate components of the India Stack for digital identity, payments, health systems, and public administration. India's payment infrastructure has also quietly gone global, with UPI now available in multiple countries, including the United Arab Emirates, Singapore, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Qatar, and France. Digital document and data-exchange platforms are travelling as well. Countries such as Cuba, Kenya, the UAE, and Laos have signed agreements to adopt or adapt India's DigiLocker framework, allowing citizens to store and verify official documents digitally. Education platforms like DIKSHA and governance tools such

as e-Office and e-Courts are also being shared through India Stack Global, a government-backed initiative that makes India's DPI components available for replication rather than resale. What is more striking is that this interest is no longer confined to developing economies. The European Union, which was once among the sharpest critics of India's digital identity and data practices, is increasingly engaging with Indian DPI concepts as it grapples with its own concerns about technological sovereignty. While Europe's regulatory standards remain distinct, the shift itself is telling: India's experience is no longer seen merely as an outlier, but as a reference point in a broader global conversation about how digital infrastructure should be built and governed. Taken together, these examples reveal why India's third way in technology is gaining traction. It is not exporting any particular ideology, nor does it seek to assert dominance. What it does offer instead is architecture - an open, interoperable digital framework that allows countries to modernise while retaining control over their own systems. The AI Impact Summit itself reflects this positioning. Consider the summit's guiding idea: Sarvajan Hitaya, Sarvajan Sukhaya, meaning welfare for all, happiness for all. Through this lens, India is deliberately pushing global AI diplomacy away from abstract declarations and toward measurable deployment.

## WHY AI IS ALSO A STORY ABOUT ENERGY

India's artificial intelligence ambitions are entering a decisive phase. The Union Budget's 21-year tax holiday for data centres, followed by the India-US agreement to expand cooperation in advanced technologies such as graphics processing units (GPUs), sends a clear signal. India intends to host a larger share of the world's AI infrastructure, not merely consume it. As the India AI Summit approaches, this moment invites a broader reflection. AI is often discussed in terms of talent, algorithms, and compute capacity. Increasingly, however, it is also an energy story. Watching the debate unfold from Washington, DC, it is striking how quickly AI has moved from being a technological conversation to one framed in the language of power plants, grid capacity, and fuel security. Beneath the excitement lies a simple truth: AI runs on electricity. It depends on power supply, cooling systems, and grid reliability, and the way countries plan these foundations will determine the sustainability and competitiveness of their AI ecosystems. That shift is already visible globally. In several advanced economies, rapid growth in data centres is reshaping power system planning as electricity demand from the sector climbs sharply. The consequences are becoming clearer: rising costs for consumers, greater reliance on fossil fuels in some on-site deployments, and growing competition with other electrification priorities such as housing and transport. In



Ireland, where data centres account for roughly a fifth of national electricity use, regulators have tightened grid connection rules and required new facilities to provide on-site generation or storage. In parts of the United States, surging data-centre demand is driving gigawatts of new capacity, with some operators turning to integrated projects that combine data centres with dedicated gas plants to guarantee reliability. Singapore temporarily paused new data-centre approvals after the sector's rapid expansion, and the Netherlands has curtailed hyperscale projects amid concerns over grid constraints and renewable power allocation. These developments are less about policy missteps and more about the sheer speed of AI-driven demand. GPU-intensive workloads are significantly more power-intensive than traditional cloud services and are designed to operate on uninterrupted, high-quality electricity with

multiple layers of backup. Ensuring reliability at this scale is a genuine challenge, even for advanced grids. At the same time, rapid solutions adopted today can shape energy systems for decades. It is against this backdrop that India's position stands out. Over the past decade, the country has undertaken one of the most ambitious energy transformations in the world. Electricity access has expanded to more than 230 million people. Installed power capacity has crossed 500 GW. India is now the world's fourth-largest renewable energy market, with renewable capacity more than tripling since 2014 and non-fossil sources accounting for over half of total installed capacity. Record annual additions and major investments in interstate transmission corridors are strengthening the system's ability to integrate large volumes of clean power. These achievements have undermined India's

economic growth and digital expansion. They also offer a foundation for the next phase - one that will be more energy-intensive as AI adoption scales. At the same time, AI-driven data centres introduce distinct system demands. Their electricity use is concentrated and continuous, often near urban centres. Cooling requirements intensify during periods of heat stress, when grids are already under pressure. What matters is not only annual generation capacity, but whether clean and reliable power is available at the precise hours it is needed. This is where policy alignment becomes critical. The long-term tax incentive for data centres should be seen as a strategic enabler. It offers investors certainty while creating space for thoughtful system design. Aligning AI infrastructure growth with energy planning from the outset can allow India to avoid the carbon-intensive detours now visible elsewhere.

# India, Canada may finalise terms of reference for FTA talks next month

New Delhi: India and Canada are expected to finalise terms of reference for initiating talks for a free trade agreement (FTA) during the visit of Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney to India next month, an official said. The terms of reference (ToR) outline the scope and modalities of a proposed trade pact. The two countries were earlier negotiating a trade pact but it was paused by Canada in 2023. Now they have decided to resume talks from the beginning as a lot has changed on the global trade front during these two years. The official said that the two sides are engaged in finalising the ToR for a mutually beneficial trade agreement. "It is likely to be finalised during the visit of the Canada's prime minister," the official added. Both sides have appointed their chief negotiators for the trade pact negotiations. Joint Secretary in Department of Commerce Brij Mohan Mishra is the chief negotiator from the Indian side. Bruce Christie is Canada's chief negotiator. India's exports to Canada rose 9.8 per cent to USD 4.22 billion in 2024-25 from USD 3.84 billion in 2023-24. Imports, how-



ever, declined 2.33 per cent to USD 4.44 billion in the last fiscal year from USD 4.55 billion in 2023-24. Bilateral trade in goods and services stood at USD 18.38 billion in 2023. There are about 2.9 million Indian diaspora and over 4,27,000 Indian students in Canada. The two countries were earlier negotiating a trade pact but it was paused by Canada in 2023. Now they have decided to resume talks from the begin-

ning as a lot has changed on the global trade front during these two years. The official said that the two sides are engaged in finalising the ToR for a mutually beneficial trade agreement. "It is likely to be finalised during the visit of the Canada's prime minister," the official added. Both sides have appointed their chief negotiators for the trade pact negotiations. Joint Secretary in Department of

Commerce Brij Mohan Mishra is the chief negotiator from the Indian side. Bruce Christie is Canada's chief negotiator. India's exports to Canada rose 9.8 per cent to USD 4.22 billion in 2024-25 from USD 3.84 billion in 2023-24. Imports, however, declined 2.33 per cent to USD 4.44 billion in the last fiscal year from USD 4.55 billion in 2023-24. Bilateral trade in goods and services stood at USD 18.38 billion in

2023. The terms of reference (ToR) outline the scope and modalities of a proposed trade pact. The two countries were earlier negotiating a trade pact but it was paused by Canada in 2023. Now they have decided to resume talks from the beginning as a lot has changed on the global trade front during these two years. The official said that the two sides are engaged in finalising the ToR for a mutually beneficial trade agreement. "It is likely to be finalised during the visit of the Canada's prime minister," the official added. Both sides have appointed their chief negotiators for the trade pact negotiations. Joint Secretary in Department of Commerce Brij Mohan Mishra is the chief negotiator from the Indian side. Bruce Christie is Canada's chief negotiator. India's exports to Canada rose 9.8 per cent to USD 4.22 billion in 2024-25 from USD 3.84 billion in 2023-24. Imports, however, declined 2.33 per cent to USD 4.44 billion in the last fiscal year from USD 4.55 billion in 2023-24. Bilateral trade in goods and services stood at USD 18.38 billion in 2023. There are about 2.9 million Indian diaspora and over 4,27,000 Indian students in Canada.

# MobiKwik turns PAT profitable in Q3 FY26; Delivers strong upswing of INR 593 Mn YoY

Hyderabad, February 2026: One MobiKwik Systems Ltd. (MobiKwik) (NSE: MOBIK-WIK / BSE: 544305), India's largest digital wallet, today announced its earnings results (standalone and consolidated) for the quarter ended December 31, 2025. The Company reported a profitable quarter, underpinned by strong execution across its Payments and Financial Services businesses. This marks a significant inflection point as MobiKwik transitions to profitability while continuing to scale its platform & strengthens its role in enabling digital financial access across Bharat. All amounts are in INR Mn. The company delivered a strong operating quarter in Q3FY26 through sharp cost control & healthy margin expansion. Operational discipline led to a INR 576 Mn EBITDA swing on YoY basis, delivering PAT profitability. Headline Results for the Quarter Ended December 31, 2025 Consolidated Financials Total income remained steady at INR 2,972 Mn, reflecting a balanced growth profile. Contribution profit increased 76% YoY (34% QoQ) to INR 1,288 Mn, underscoring continued focus on cost efficiency. Fixed Costs as a % of Total Income reduced to 38% in Q3FY26



from 42% Q3FY25 EBITDA for Q3 FY26 stood at INR 150 Mn, marking a profitable quarter with a sequential improvement of INR 576 Mn YoY (INR 214 Mn QoQ). Payments The Company's core payments business continued to deliver strong growth with improving unit economics and high operating leverage. Consistently ranked as the #1 PPI Wallet in India. Ranked amongst Top 5 Fastest Growing UPI Apps [1] in India's UPI Ecosystem, achieving 3.2x YoY growth in UPI transactions. Payments GMV hit an all-time high of 481 billion, growing at 63% YoY (11% QoQ), marking a record high for the 12th quarter in a row. User base grew to 186.6 Mn and merchant base expanded to 4.79 Mn. Best-in-class Net payments processing margin of 17 bps, reflecting improved monetisation beyond UPI. Consequently, gross margin for the payments business reached an all-time high of 37%, reflecting a 125% YoY expansion (36% QoQ). #7th largest Customer Operating Unit [3] in the BBPS ecosystem. Financial Services Business makes a turnaround, delivering High-Quality Revenue on the back of enhanced credit quality and collection efficiency. ZIP EMI GMV grew 126% YoY (12% QoQ), reflecting renewed momentum in the lending business. ZIP EMI GMV reached an all-time high of INR 9,000 Mn, surpassing previous peak levels and marking a full recovery from the interim slowdown. Financial services Gross Profit at INR 372 Mn, up by 405% YoY (45% QoQ). Net FS Margin Quadrupled YoY from 1.05% in Q3FY25 to 4.13% in Q3FY26, owing to improvement in credit quality. The improvement across these metrics reflects a complete recovery in the Lending business.

# Can't say when I'll return to India, Vijay Mallya tells Bombay High Court

Mumbai: Fugitive businessman Vijay Mallya, facing multiple cases of fraud and money laundering, told the Bombay High Court on Wednesday, February 18, that he cannot say when he will return to India as he is legally barred from leaving the UK. In a statement submitted through his counsel Amit Desai to the high court, Mallya said he did not have an active passport after it was revoked and hence, he cannot give a definite date of return to India. The statement was submitted after a bench of Chief Justice Shree Chandrashekhar and Justice Gautam Ankhad made it clear last week that it would not hear Mallya's plea against the order declaring a fugitive economic offender until he returns to India. The court had then asked the former liquor to clarify whether or not he intended to return to India. Mallya, based in the United Kingdom since 2016, has filed two petitions in the HC — one challenging an order declaring him a fugi-



tive economic offender and the other questioning the constitutional validity of the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act. The 70-year-old liquor baron is accused of defaulting on multiple loan repayments of several thousand crores and facing money laundering charges. The businessman, in his statement to HC, said he cannot give a definite date for his return as he does not have his Indian passport, which was revoked by the government in 2016, and also because there are orders of courts in England and Wales that prohibit him

from leaving the country. "Mallya is not permitted to leave or attempt to leave England and Wales or apply for or be in possession of any international travel document. In any event, the petitioner is unable to precisely state when he will return to India," Desai read out the statement in the court. The senior counsel reiterated that Mallya's presence was not required in the country for the court to hear his pleas against the fugitive tag and the provisions of the Act. "If he (Mallya) were to appear in India, then all these pro-

ceedings would be rendered irrelevant as the statute says that once the offender appears in the concerned court of law, then all these orders would be set aside," Desai told the court. The bench directed the Union government to file its reply to Mallya's statement and posted the matter for further hearing next month. Mallya was declared a Fugitive Economic Offender in January 2019 by a special court hearing cases under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The businessman left India in March 2016.

# Ramadan in Dubai 2026: The Ultimate Guide to the Best Iftar Experiences

18th February 2026: Ramadan is one of the most evocative times to experience Dubai. As the holy month unfolds from 19 February to 19 March 2026, the city adopts a gentler rhythm - days are calm and reflective, while evenings come alive with food, lights and a strong sense of community. For visitors, Ramadan in Dubai offers a rare opportunity to witness age-old traditions while enjoying some of the city's most memorable culinary experiences, many of which are exclusive to this time of year. For Indian travellers in particular, the experience resonates through shared values of hospitality, storytelling, and communal dining. From elegant hotel venues and atmospheric Ramadan tents to open-air desert settings, Dubai offers a diverse range of iftar experiences available exclusively during the holy month, making Ramadan 2026 an ideal time to explore the city through its culinary and cultural offerings. The Best Places for Iftar in Dubai: Asateer Tent, Atlantis The



Palm: A staple of Dubai's Ramadan calendar, the Asateer Tent at Atlantis, The Palm is renowned for its sheer scale and variety. Designed like an opulent Arabian majlis, the space is illuminated with chandeliers and lanterns, creating a festive yet traditional atmosphere. The iftar buffet spans multiple cuisines, featuring classic Middle Eastern dishes such as lamb ozu, chicken mandi, mezze platters, lentil soup and freshly baked Arabic breads, alongside Indian curries, Asian stir-fries and

international favourites. "A dedicated dessert section showcases kunafa, umm ali, baklava and dates stuffed with nuts, complemented by traditional Ramadan beverages like qamardeen and jellab. Ramadan Nights by Armani, Armani Hotel Dubai: Set beneath the towering Burj Khalifa, Armani/Pavilion offers a refined, intimate iftar experience with uninterrupted views of the Downtown skyline. The open-air venue is transformed for Ramadan with soft lighting, neutral

tones and elegant table settings. The menu blends Middle Eastern flavours with contemporary global cuisine, featuring dishes such as slow-cooked lamb, grilled seafood, fragrant rice dishes, fresh salads and artisanal desserts. The experience is unhurried, making it perfect for those looking to savour both food and ambience. Al Hadheerah, Bab Al Shams Desert Resort: For a truly immersive Ramadan experience, Al Hadheerah at Bab Al Shams offers iftar in a traditional desert setting.

# Historic trade deals put India on global stage - but challenges remain

From a trade perspective, 2026 would probably go down in history books as an epochal year for India. March has not even begun and Delhi has concluded the "mother of all trade deals" with the European Union and also what's now being termed the "father of all trade deals" with the United States - even though grave concerns remain about the asymmetric nature of the interim agreement which, many say, is stacked heavily in favour of the US. Nonetheless, the pact is India's 10th free trade agreement (FTA) since 2014, signalling a sharp pivot from its protectionist stance that previously forced negotiations with several countries to languish for decades. Fresh off the back of these new pacts, India has now also agreed to start talks for a deal with the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) bloc, accounting for 15% of its global trade. While directionally positive, these deals are hardly a silver bullet for faster exports growth and



won't substitute for deeper trade reform, say experts. "The success of any FTA lies in how it is utilised, and India has historically exhibited a low utilisation rate of only about 25%, in contrast to a level of 70%-80% among developed economies," Smedha Dasgupta of the Economist Intelligence Unit told the BBC. That's because for many Indian exporters, especially small companies, the burden of paperwork, audit risks and a lack of understanding of FTA provisions often outweigh tariff benefits. History shows that this has been the case.

According to consultancy EY, between 2017 and 2022 India's exports to its FTA partners rose by 31%, while imports from those countries surged by 82% - a gap it described as an "alarming failure" to fully leverage preferential market access. After a government review, however, agreements signed since 2023 with countries such as Australia and the United Arab Emirates have shown stronger export growth, which EY attributes to improved trade infrastructure and faster dispute resolution mechanisms. But much more needs to happen.

# No impediments to India producing next AI champion: Sundar Pichai

New Delhi: Google CEO Sundar Pichai on Wednesday, February 18, said India is already witnessing the kind of transformation that can produce the next world-leading AI major from within, asserting that the ecosystem has evolved significantly and the country is producing "extraordinary" homegrown companies. Pichai lauded high developer energy and thriving entrepreneurship ecosystem in India. Responding to a question on what needs to change for the "next Sundar" to stay back (in India) and build a world-leading company from here, Pichai, currently in India to attend the India AI Impact Summit, said the shift is already underway. He pointed to the rise of homegrown startups such as Flipkart and Oyo as evidence that "India has been producing extraordinary companies" that are scaling successfully. "I mean, it's already changed. India is producing extraordinary companies, right? You know, when you look at companies like Flipkart, Oyo, etc, these are all companies homegrown here, and they're doing



really well," Pichai said. He added that the developer energy in the country, particularly in hubs like Bengaluru, is second to none, and described the entrepreneurship ecosystem as "thriving". Pichai also highlighted recent progress in artificial intelligence, noting that companies like Sarvam have begun developing local AI models, signalling that advanced innovation is taking root domestically. He said he does not see any impediments to India building globally competitive AI firms, adding that the country is positioned well.

"You know, even recently, the work Sarvam has done developing local AI models, certainly what you're talking about is actually happening. And, you know, I just don't see any impediments to that, and I think it is very, very well positioned," Pichai said. Responding to a question on what needs to change for the "next Sundar" to stay back (in India) and build a world-leading company from here, Pichai, currently in India to attend the India AI Impact Summit, said the shift is already underway. He pointed to the rise

of homegrown startups such as Flipkart and Oyo as evidence that "India has been producing extraordinary companies" that are scaling successfully. "I mean, it's already changed. India is producing extraordinary companies, right? You know, when you look at companies like Flipkart, Oyo, etc, these are all companies homegrown here, and they're doing really well," Pichai said. He added that the developer energy in the country, particularly in hubs like Bengaluru, is second to none, and described the entrepreneurship ecosystem as "thriving". Pichai also highlighted recent progress in artificial intelligence, noting that companies like Sarvam have begun developing local AI models, signalling that advanced innovation is taking root domestically. He said he does not see any impediments to India building globally competitive AI firms, adding that the country is positioned well. "You know, even recently, the work Sarvam has done developing local AI models, certainly what you're talking about is actually happening.

# AUSTRALIA BANS CITIZEN TRYING TO RETURN FROM IS CAMP IN SYRIA

Australia has barred a citizen linked to the Islamic State (IS) group from the country for up to two years. The person is among the group of 34 Australian women and children who tried to head home after being released from a Syrian camp earlier this week, only to be turned back by Syrian authorities for "technical reasons". The ban was issued "on advice from security agencies". Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke said on Wednesday, adding that the other 33 people do not meet "required legal thresholds" to be banned. Canberra has refused to repatriate the group, believed to be made up of the wives, widows and children of IS fighters. There are 23 children among them. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese stressed that these families will not receive government support to come back to the



country. "You make your bed, you lie in it," he told a press conference on Wednesday. "These are people who chose to go overseas to align themselves with... a brutal, reactionary ideology that seeks to undermine and destroy our way of life." However legal experts have warned

the government has an obligation to allow citizens the right of return, and, responding to reports the group had valid Australian passports, Albanese said his government would not "breach Australian law". This group in the al-Roj camp in northern Syria is among dozens of

Australians who have been held in camps and prisons across the country since 2019, when IS was driven from its final foothold in Syria. Opposition politicians have raised security concerns about the possibility of these Australians' return. "How can only one member of this group be

deemed a risk and the rest somehow okay?" Liberal Party Senator Jonno Dunning said on Tuesday, offering to help amend laws to bar more of the group. The al-Roj camp is home to more than 2,000 others from 40 different nationalities, mainly women and children.

Among them is thought to be Shamima Begum, who was stripped of her British citizenship in 2019 on national security grounds. Speaking to ABC, the camp's director Hakmiyeh Ibrahim made an appeal to all countries that have citizens held in limbo there: "Take your citizens, take these children and women". The children especially are growing up surrounded by "dangerous ideas and ideologies" in the camp, she said. "The more time passes, the more complicated the situation becomes." Several of these camps have made headlines as the women and children living in them are severely malnourished and lack access to basic resources. Several other foreign governments - including France, the Netherlands, and the UK - have also refused to repatriate most of their citizens still held in Syria.

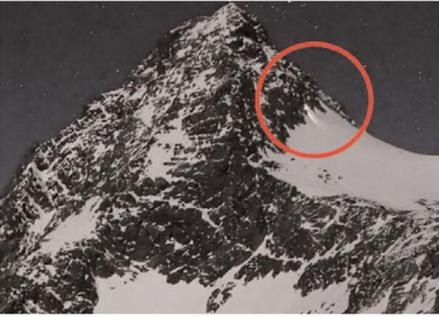
## Stephen Colbert says CBS spiked interview with Democrat over FCC fears



US late-night host Stephen Colbert has accused his network of refusing to broadcast an interview with a Democratic politician over fears of retaliation by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). CBS, the network which hosts the programme, denies that it "prohibited" the interview from being aired, saying it gave only "legal guidance". On Monday night's show, Colbert said that CBS would not show his interview with Texas lawmaker James Talarico out of concerns about a response from the FCC, which has new guidance on equal airtime for political candidates. "We were told in no uncertain

terms by our network's lawyers, who called us directly, that we could not have him on the broadcast," he said. "Then, then I was told in some uncertain terms that not only could I not have him on, I could not mention me not having him on. And because my network clearly doesn't want us to talk about this," Colbert, host of The Late Show, went on to explain that new FCC guidance on the "equal time" rule - which requires certain TV and radio broadcasters to give equal time to rival political candidates - could have created legal trouble for the network, according to CBS lawyers.

## Climber on trial for leaving girlfriend to die on Austria's highest mountain



More than a year after a 33-year-old woman froze to death on Austria's highest mountain, her boyfriend goes on trial on Thursday accused of gross negligent manslaughter. Kerstin G died of hypothermia on a mountain climbing trip to the Grossglockner that went horribly wrong. Her boyfriend is accused of leaving her unprotected and exhausted close to the summit in stormy conditions in the early hours of 19 January 2025, while he went to get help. The trial has sparked interest and debate, not just in Austria but in mountain climbing communities far beyond its borders. Prosecutors say that, as the more experienced climber, the man on trial was "the responsible guide for the tour" and failed to turn back or call for support in time to help his girlfriend. Identified by Austrian media as Thomas P, he denies the charges and his lawyer, Kurt Jelinek, has described the woman's death as "a tragic accident." The tragedy unfolded after the couple began their climb of the 3,796m (12,460ft) Grossglockner. Prosecutors

accuse Thomas P of making mistakes from the outset and have published a list of nine errors. At stake is the question of when personal judgement and risk-taking become a matter of criminal liability. If the climber is found guilty it could mean "a paradigm shift for mountain sports", says Austria's Der Standard newspaper. Key to the case is the charge by state prosecutors in Innsbruck that he was to be considered the "responsible guide for the tour", as "unlike his girlfriend [he was] already very experienced in high-altitude Alpine tours and had planned the tour". They said he attempted the trip even though his girlfriend had "never undertaken an Alpine tour of this length, difficulty, and altitude, and despite the challenging winter conditions". They also allege he started out two hours too late and had failed to take "enough emergency bivouac equipment". He also "allowed his girlfriend to use... snowboard soft boots, equipment that is not suitable for a high-altitude tour in mixed terrain", say prosecutors.

## SUSPECT IN RHODE ISLAND ICE HOCKEY SHOOTING KILLED EX-WIFE AND SON

Two victims shot dead at a high school ice hockey game in Rhode Island have been identified as the suspect's ex-wife and son, police said on Tuesday. Robert Dorgan - who police said also went by the names Roberta Esposito and Roberta Dorgan - was found dead inside the Dennis M Lynch Arena in Pawtucket on Monday, apparently from a self-inflicted gunshot wound after what authorities said was a targeted attack. Dorgan's ex-wife, Rhonda Dorgan, and adult son, Aidan Dorgan, died. Rhonda's mother and father along with a family friend were injured. All three were in a critical condition at hospital. Police have not given a motive, but said it appeared to be a

family dispute. Video of the incident showed shots fired while players were on the rink, sparking panic as the teams scrambled to leave the arena, which is located a few miles from the state capital of Providence. Asked at a news conference on Tuesday if the shooting followed a confrontation, Pawtucket Police Chief Tina Goncalves said no. She said two guns recovered from the scene - a Glock 10mm pistol and a SIG Sauer P226 - were legally owned. Goncalves told reporters a bystander "stepped in and interjected" and "that's probably what led to a swift end of this tragic event". Court documents show that Rhonda Dorgan filed for divorce from Robert Dorgan, 56, in February 2020.

## I would scream in my sleep: Women from Syria's Alawite minority tell of kidnap and rape

Ramia was preparing for a family picnic, on a warm summer day in her village in Latakia province in western Syria, when a white car drove up, she said. Three armed men got out, saying they were government security forces, and dragged her into the vehicle, the teenager, whose name has been changed for her safety and to protect her identity, told the BBC World Service. The men beat her, she said, hitting her harder when she started crying and screaming. "One of them asked if I was Sunni or Alawite. When I said Alawite, they began insulting the sect," she added. Ramia is one of dozens of women reported kidnapped since the fall of the dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad in December 2024. The Syrian Feminist Lobby



(SFL), an advocacy group for women's rights, says it has recorded reports - from families, media and other sources - of more than 80 women who have gone missing. It says it has confirmed 26 of those cases to be kidnappings. Nearly all those reported missing are members of the Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shia Islam that makes up about 10% of Syria's population and to

which the ousted president belongs. Two Alawite women and the families of three others have shared details of abduction and assault with the BBC. All their names have been changed for reasons of privacy and safety. All of them said the interim government's General Security Service - which is responsible for policing - had failed to investigate fully. One says

its officers mocked her when she reported her ordeal. The interior ministry's spokesman said in November that it had investigated 42 alleged kidnappings, and found all but one were "false". When contacted by the BBC, it said it had no further comment. However, a security source told the BBC that kidnappings had occurred, including some involving members of the security service, who he said had been dismissed. The kidnappings and disappearances recorded by the SFL span a period from February 2025 to early December. This is both before and after March, when more than 1,400 people, mostly Alawite civilians, were killed in sectarian violence in the western coastal regions.

## RESCUERS SEARCH FOR NINE MISSING SKIERS AFTER CALIFORNIA AVALANCHE

Nine backcountry skiers are missing following an avalanche in California's Lake Tahoe region on Tuesday, authorities say. Six others have been rescued after they became stranded, the Nevada County Sheriff's Office said. The avalanche was reported about 11:30 PST (19:30 GMT) in the Castle Peak area near the town of Truckee, according to officials. Weather conditions remain dangerous, with a high chance of further avalanches. "Highly skilled rescue ski teams" have deployed from two nearby ski resorts, the sheriff said. The six known survivors have been "directed to shelter in place as best they can in the condi-



tions," the sheriff added. Officials initially reported that a group of 16 people in total - four guides and 12 clients - were involved, though that number was later lowered to 15. "The six initially reported skiers who survived the avalanche have

been successfully rescued this evening," the sheriff's office wrote on Facebook late on Tuesday night. Two of the six rescued skiers were taken to hospital, it said. Experts from the nearby Boreal Mountain Ski Resort and the Alder Creek

Adventure Center are also attempting to reach the site. An earlier statement posted by the sheriff's office said 46 emergency responders had joined the rescue efforts. The Sierra Avalanche Center wrote in a forecast: "Large avalanches are expected to occur [on] Tuesday, Tuesday night, and into at least early Wednesday morning across backcountry terrain." The avalanche centre listed the danger rating as "high" - a four out of five on the rating scale. "Travel in, near, or below avalanche terrain is not recommended today. A widespread natural avalanche cycle is expected over the next 24 hours," the centre said.

## US says 'meaningful progress' made as Ukraine talks enter second day



US special envoy Steve Witkoff said talks between Ukraine and Russia had "brought about meaningful progress" to end the war, as both sides prepared for a second day of negotiations in Geneva on Wednesday. However, hopes of a breakthrough remain low, with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky saying it "was not fair" that US President Donald Trump keeps asking his country to compromise, adding that "peace wouldn't be achieved if victory is handed to Russia". US President Donald Trump has recently suggested it is up to Ukraine to ensure talks in Switzerland are successful, without mentioning Russia. The Kremlin has not wavered from its maximalist demands for Ukrainian territory. "President Trump's success in bringing both sides of this war together has brought about meaningful progress, and we are proud to work under his leadership to stop the killing in this terrible conflict," Witkoff wrote on X after the first day of talks. Zelensky has repeatedly said his country is being asked to make disproportionate compromises

es compared to Russia. Russia occupies roughly 20% of Ukraine, including large parts of the eastern Donbas region. The Kremlin wants Ukraine to hand over the rest of the region, which Ukraine has ruled out. Ukraine says robust security guarantees from the West - including the US - must come before any settlement with Russia can be agreed. Zelensky told the Axios website on Tuesday it was "not fair" that Trump kept calling on Ukraine to broker a deal, adding: "I hope it is just his tactics and not the decision." In a statement on social media on Tuesday evening, top Ukrainian negotiator Umerov said the first day of talks focused on "practical issues and the mechanics of possible solutions". In a video address shortly afterwards, Zelensky said Ukraine was ready to refrain from carrying out strikes, as proposed by the US to both Kyiv and Moscow. "We don't need war," he said, stressing that Ukrainians were "defending our state, our independence". "We are also ready to quickly move towards a worthy agreement to end the war."

## PERU'S CONGRESS OUSTS PRESIDENT AFTER FOUR MONTHS IN OFFICE

Peru's Congress has ousted interim President José Jeri just four months after he took office for failing to disclose meetings with Chinese businessmen. The scandal unfolded last month after videos emerged of Jeri meeting several times outside his official schedule with businessman Zhihua Yang, who was under government scrutiny. Jeri had previously apologised for the meetings, but denied any wrongdoing and accused his rivals of a public smear campaign. His removal from office makes him the third consecutive president to be ousted, after he replaced former leader Dina Boluarte, who was impeached in October last year. Jeri was Peru's seventh president

since 2016 amid a tumultuous political landscape that has seen a succession of leaders leave the post under contentious circumstances. He was not elected by the Peruvian people, but - as head of Congress - was sworn in as president after his predecessor, Dina Boluarte, was impeached in October 2025. While lawmakers had set a date to discuss impeaching Jeri, in the end they opted for a different parliamentary procedure called censure, which only required a simple majority to pass rather than the super majority needed for an impeachment. Later on Wednesday, Congress will name a new interim president who will serve only for a few months - until a new



president is chosen by the people in a general election this April. Jeri had come under fire following a series of controversies dubbed "Chifa-gate" - after a local name for Chinese-Peruvian fusion food and the restaurants which serve it. Security camera footage of Jeri's meet-

ings with Yang, who owns several businesses and was granted a state concession for an energy project, was first reported by local media. In one of the videos, Jeri could be seen wearing a hooded top during a late-night visit at one of Yang's restaurants. Also present at one of the

meetings was another Chinese citizen who was under house arrest while being investigated for alleged links to an illegal timber network. Peruvian law requires presidents to document their official activities, but Jeri did not record those meetings. Jeri faced further criticism after it emerged that state contracts had been awarded to a number of women following late-night meetings they had with him in the presidential palace. Ruth Luque, one of the lawmakers who backed the censure measure, said she wanted a leader who would put public interest and security first. "We ask to end this agony so we can truly create the transition citizens are

hoping for," she said, according to Reuters news agency. "Not a transition with hidden interests, influence-peddling, secret meetings and hooded figures. We don't want that sort of transition." Pressure had been mounting for Jeri to resign in the wake of the scandals as he faced a corruption investigation launched by the attorney general and his approval ratings plummeted. His removal marks another chapter of instability for Peru, which is due to hold a general election in April, after which power will be transferred to a new president. Jeri's predecessor Boluarte was impeached following a tenure that was plagued by protest, scandals and a surge in gang violence.



# THE OLYMPIC FAVOURITE WHO COULD HAVE COMPETED FOR GB

Emily Harrop says she was born with bindings on her feet and poles in her hands. On Thursday, she could have a Winter Olympic medal around her neck. As a three-time world champion in ski mountaineering, the 28-year-old is a hot favourite to be on the Milan-Cortina podium as the sport makes its Olympic debut. And yet, in a parallel world, it could have been the red, white and blue of the union jack flying in her honour, and not that of the French flag. Born in the French Alps to an English mother and father, she was initially an alpine skier and was downhill British champion in 2015 - but choosing her allegiance was never given much thought. "My dad wanted me to go with the Brits," Harrop told BBC World Service's More Than The Score podcast. "I've grown up in France and all my coaches, all my training partners, it's all been through the French system. It was hard for me to turn my



back on all that." Harrop only took up ski mountaineering - or skimo for short - as a 20-year-old after injuries veered the course of her career away from alpine skiing. "In skimo, when I started at least, the British team didn't really exist and they weren't actually competing on the World Cup," she said. "So the question [of allegiance] didn't really get

asked." And Harrop has never looked back. She goes into the Olympics as a three-time world champion in the mixed relay and team events, with silver and bronze individual medals also to her name. She has twice won the Pierra Menta - "the Tour de France of the skimo world" - and has four overall World Cup titles. But what actually is ski mountaineering? What

is ski mountaineering? In 2021, ski mountaineering was added to the Olympic programme for the Milan-Cortina 2026 Games and will take place in the resort of Bormio in the Dolomites, though there are no athletes competing in the sport for Team GB. The sport "blends endurance, technical skill, and alpine adventure", according to its governing

body Three medal events will be contested - men's and women's sprint, and the mixed relay. The sprint events consist of both an ascent and descent, with athletes sprinting uphill with skins on their skis to provide traction. They then remove the skis, placing them in their backpack, and continue climbing on foot, before a further uphill section on skis. Once they reach the top of the course, they remove the skins, and ski downhill to the finish line. The average duration of a race is about three minutes. In the mixed relay, each team consists of one male and one female athlete. On the course, there are two ascents on skis plus sections on foot, and two descents. "It is a brutal sport," said Harrop. "It's probably one of the hardest ones you have out there." Harrop was brought up watching British TV and has been told, by French people, that her British blood has given her "more optimism".

## Pacquiao to face Provodnikov in exhibition in April



Veteran Manny Pacquiao will face former light-welterweight world champion Ruslan Provodnikov in an exhibition on 18 April. Pacquiao, 47, ended a four-year stint of retirement in July when losing by majority draw against WBC welterweight champion Mario Barrios. The eight-weight world champion called for a rematch after that defeat but has since switched his direction of travel and will compete in an exhibition bout. Pacquiao and

Provodnikov, who retired in 2016, will fight in a 10-round exhibition at Thomas and Mack Center in Las Vegas. "I carry the Philippines with me every time I fight," Pacquiao said. "The support from my country and from fans around the world continues to inspire me. I'm coming back to give them a great fight - and I'm ready." "Returning to Las Vegas means so much to me." Pacquiao has a professional record of 62 wins, eight losses and three draws and is

unbeaten across three previous exhibitions - winning two and drawing one. In July - before facing Barrios after overturning his decision to retire - Pacquiao told BBC Sport that he intended to make an extended return to boxing. The Filipino was inducted into the boxing Hall of Fame in 2025. Russia's Provodnikov, 42, competed at light-welterweight and welterweight during his professional career - winning 25 and losing five.

## 1st Time In History: Australia Suffer Embarrassing Low After T20 World Cup 2026 Exit

Australia suffered an embarrassing low after the Mitchell Marsh-led side crashed out of the T20 World Cup 2026 with one group stage match still remaining. Australia won just one of their three matches, and their fate was sealed when the game between Ireland and Zimbabwe was washed out on Tuesday. As a result, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe booked their spots in the Super 8s, while Australia's remaining game against Oman became a "dead rubber." Australia won their opening game against Ireland but suffered back-to-back defeats against Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka. This marks the first time



Australia has failed to reach the T20 World Cup semifinals three times in a row. Since winning the T20 World Cup in 2021, Australia was knocked out in the Super 12 stage in 2022 and crashed out in the Super 8s in 2024 following a shock defeat against Afghanistan. Earlier,

Mitchell Marsh admitted his side was devastated and left relying on other results after Australia slumped to an eight-wicket defeat against Sri Lanka in a crucial clash of the T20 World Cup 2026 at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy on Monday. Marsh felt

that 182 was a competitive target at the halfway mark but conceded that Australia had fallen short despite a blazing start. "I thought it was a competitive total at the halfway mark. We probably left ourselves a few short after the start we had. It is disappointing. Well played to Sri Lanka. They outplayed us tonight," he said. Australia were cruising at 110/2 before losing momentum dramatically in the latter stages. "We know that at our best, we can make big scores. We just lost our way towards the back-end. Couldn't get the partnership going. Sri Lanka bowled really well towards the back-end.

## "These People Will Kill Me": What Imran Khan Told Sisters On Mohsin Naqvi

The jailed Pakistan cricket legend and former Prime Minister, Imran Khan, is reportedly facing serious health issues. The situation has escalated to the point where several former international cricket captains including Sunil Gavaskar, Kapil Dev, Greg Chappell, and Clive Lloyd have submitted a joint appeal to the Pakistan government, urging fair treatment for the country's cricketing icon. While international voices rally to support Khan, his sisters have alleged that Mohsin Naqvi, the Chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board and the country's Interior Minister, is threatening them. 'Threat' From



Moshin Naqvi Imran Khan's sisters, Dr Uzma Khan and Aleema Khan, claimed that Mohsin Naqvi and Asim Munir, Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, are plotting a conspiracy to kill the cricket great. The sisters stated that Khan himself informed them of a plot

against his life during a recent meeting. "These people will kill me; they have made a plan to kill me," Uzma said during a press conference, narrating the conversation she had with her brother. Aleema Khan also highlighted concerns regarding the deteriorating condition

of her brother's eye, claiming that he is being denied access to his trusted medical team. "Mohsin Naqvi is threatening us; they have tasted blood," Aleema stated. "If anything happens to Imran Khan or to us, mark my words, we will not spare anyone's future generations either." Uzma and Aleema requested that Khan be examined by his personal physicians, Dr. Asim and Dr. Faisal, but this request was denied. "The government rejected the specialists recommended by our doctors, so they were provided with alternative names," the sisters explained. "We then put forward our cousin Nausherwan Burki's name to represent the family.

## NAKAI, 17, TOPS WOMEN'S SHORT PROGRAM AS JAPAN DOMINATE



Japan dominated the short program in the women's figure skating at Milan-Cortina 2026 with their athletes occupying three of the top four places following the short program. Ami Nakai, 17, stormed to the top of the leaderboard with a season-best score of 78.71. She is followed by three-time world champion Kaori Sakamoto, while compatriot Mone Chiba - who won bronze at last year's worlds - is in fourth. They took advantage of errors by the fancied Americans, with reigning world champion Alysa Liu third and Amber Glenn well down the field. Liu, with her immediately recognisable halo hair and lip piercing, took the roof off the arena as her routine was acclaimed by spectators ranging from team-mate Ilia Malinin to rap icon Snoop Dogg. However, she lost points on her triple lutz for landing on the quarter - not fully completing the rotation, instead returning to the ice 90 degrees short. American champion Glenn meanwhile suffered a disaster as she missed her triple loop - meaning it was scored

as an invalid element, thus scoring zero points for that element. Glenn, 26, burst into tears as she exited the rink. She is 13th in the standings and knows her medal hopes are over. Adelia Petrosian, the Russian champion competing as an Individual Neutral Athlete (AIN), is in fifth place. Team GB's Kristen Spours - in her final event before injury-enforced retirement - finished 29th. The Woking-born skater misses out on the free skate, with the top 24 progressing to the medals decider on Thursday evening. So far, none of the AIN representatives, who come from countries which have been banned from competing at the 2026 Olympics, have won a medal. The most likely candidate to change that is 18-year-old Petrosian, the Russian national champion. The teenager is under the tutelage of controversial Eteri Tutberidze - the coach of Kamila Valieva at the last Olympics, and whose involvement with the Georgia figure skating team helped win the country's first ever Winter Olympic medal with pairs silver last night.



F1 pre-season testing: Problems for Aston Martin as Stroll brings out red flag

## Ishan Kishan To Marry Aditi Hundia? Mother Reacts To 'Girlfriend' Revelation

Indian cricket team wicket-keeper batter Ishan Kishan grabbed the headlines with a brilliant match-winning knock against Pakistan in the T20 World Cup 2026. The left-handed opener slammed 77 off just 40 deliveries to guide India to a comprehensive victory in the match. The knock earned him praise from both fans as well as experts and even his family members expressed their thoughts on his performance. While the focus was completely on cricket, his grandfather's comments about his relationship with model Aditi Hundia sparked rumours of a possible wedding in the near future. However, his mother Suchitra Devi denied the rumours and said that this is time for him to concentrate on the game. "It's not about marriage, it is time



for him to play cricket. He's not old enough to talk about marriage. Grandpa is getting a little old. Old people are always a little excited. Something or the other keeps coming up on social media. He said all this based on what he saw on social media," she told IANS. Earlier, Kishan's grandfather, Anurag Pandey, confirmed that his grandson is currently dating model Aditi Hundia. He

even said that he has no issues if they want to get married. "Whoever Ishan chooses to marry, I fully accept. We are ready to accept whoever Ishan Kishan wants to marry. Aditi is his girlfriend. She is a model. One should accept what makes children happy," he told ANI. Kishan, following his stunning performance against Pakistan, said his Player-of-the-match award belongs to

all Indian fans and the whole team, not just him. Kishan said he kept it simple and treated the game against Pakistan as just another game, watching the ball and playing his shots after assessing the wicket and target. He felt no panic and credited his teammates with confidence, but added that his job isn't done and that he wants to move on to the next match. Ishan's dream run in T20s continued as he breezed through the Pakistan spin play, slamming his second successive T20 World Cup fifty and guiding a clinical India to a 61-run win at Colombo on Sunday, while also pulling off some fantastic work behind the stumps, including a stumping to remove a dangerous Usman Khan, who was slowly counter-attacking against Indian bowlers.

## ALCARAZ WINS FIRST MATCH SINCE MELBOURNE TRIUMPH



Carlos Alcaraz says he was glad to get through some "difficult moments" against Arthur Rinderknech as he won his first match since triumphing at last month's Australian Open. Top seed Alcaraz had to save two set points in the second set but won 6-4 7-6 (7-5) against the unseeded Frenchman in the first round of the Qatar Open in Doha. It was seventh-time Grand Slam winner Alcaraz's first match since beating Novak Djokovic in Melbourne to become the youngest male player to achieve the career Grand Slam. "It was really difficult," said the Spaniard. "Arthur is a really dangerous player. Nobody wants to play against him in the first round, I'm happy with the level. I'm happy that I got through difficult moments in the match." Alcaraz, 22, started well and broke to go 3-2 up, before comfortably seeing out the rest of the set to take it 6-4 with a deft volley at the net. World number 30

Rinderknech improved from there, earning two set points at 6-5, but Alcaraz, helped by his 28 winners in the match, saved them before coming out on top in the tie-break. He sealed victory with a forehand down the line and sets up a second-round tie against France's Valentin Royer, who beat countryman Pierre-Hugues Herbert 6-0 6-3. Victory was Alcaraz's 150th at tour level on hard courts and extended his flawless start to the 2026 season to 8-0. Dubai Championships sees more withdrawals The second round of the Dubai Tennis Championships was hit by fitness issues again as four players, including fifth seed Mirra Andreeva, advanced because of player withdrawals. Andreeva went through when opponent Daria Kasatkina pulled out before the tie, while ninth seed Belinda Bencic was also handed a walkover when Sara Bejlek withdrew prior to the match.

## “I BELIEVE ‘HEY BALWANTH’ WILL BECOME THE BIGGEST COMMERCIAL BLOCKBUSTER HIT OF MY CAREER”: SUHAS

The successful duo Bunny Vasu and Vamsi Nandipati, who recently delivered blockbuster films like Little Hearts, Raju Weds Rambhai, and Isha, are now bringing a full-length out-and-out entertainer titled “Hey Balwanth” (title changed from Hey Bhagwan) under the banners of Nandipati Entertainments and Bunny Vasu Works.

The film stars Suhas, Shivani Nagaram, senior actor Naresh, and anchor Sravanthi in key roles. Directed by Gopi Achara, the film is produced by B. Narendra Reddy under the Trishul Visionary Studios banner. The movie is set to release on February 20.

Ahead of the release, a “Not A Title” event related to the film was held grandly in Hyderabad. Hero Sundeep Kishan attended the event as the chief guest.

**Sundeep Kishan said:** “I am happy to attend this event. Vamsi Nandipati’s name has been heard in the industry for some time now. I like his confidence. I like Suhas a lot. I have watched all his films. He is a hero who believes in stories and works very sincerely. Even after the title change, everyone calls this a Suhas film. With this movie, Suhas will once again win the hearts of the audience. When I watched the teaser, it looked very interesting. The way the film was promoted is good. I strongly believe this movie will definitely be a success.”



nately be a success.”

**Hero Suhas said:**

“My thanks to hero Sundeep Kishan who always encourages me. The entire team worked very hard for this film. My co-artists put in a lot of effort. This film will feel like a musical night with music director Vivek Sagar’s music. The producer made this film without compromising anywhere. The entire shoot happened in a very positive atmosphere. I had heard about Vamsi Nandipati earlier, but through this film I understood him better. With good planning, he created strong buzz for the film. Director Gopi fulfilled his dream with this movie and worked very hard to make a good film. Shivani and Sudarshan both acted superbly.

I got a break in my career with the film Majili. Good offers started coming. Around that time, I got an offer to act with a big heroine in a film where my role had close scenes with the heroine. Someone questioned why I was called to the set. But later I acted with Keerthy Suresh in Uppu Kappurambu. That was a great moment for me. If someone talks down about you, just smile and move on. Anyone can achieve anything. I strongly believe ‘Hey Balwanth’ will bring me a big hit.”

**Shivani Nagaram said:**

“When the title changed, we were all tense. But Bhagwan became Balwanth. This is a movie everyone will enjoy. People will laugh a lot. It has entertainment, emotion, everything. This film is special for our entire team. There is no doubt this will be a blockbuster. This is a special film for me with Suhas. I told him during Ambajipeta movie that we should do many films together and I should be part of every blockbuster of his. So this film will definitely be a blockbuster.”

**Vamsi Nandipati said:** “Even if dates or titles change, the impact our movie creates on February 20 will not change. This film has love, entertainment, and emotion — which everyone will like. It also has a father-son emotional track. This is a wholesome entertainer. When audiences leave the theatre, their hearts will feel heavy with emotion. Such films connect with real life. This movie will be worth the money people spend. It is a

paisa-vasool film and will provide 100% entertainment. On this occasion, I am giving an advance for director Gopi’s second film in front of all of you. That shows my confidence in ‘Hey Balwanth’.”

**Producer B. Narendra Reddy said:**

“This is the first film from our banner. After listening to twenty stories, we liked Gopi’s story. We completed shooting quickly. After Vamsi Nandipati joined the project, I felt relaxed. The artists and technicians supported us greatly.”

**Director Gopi Achara said:**

“We changed ‘Hey Bhagwan’ slightly to ‘Hey Balwanth’. Only the title changed — not the content or entertainment. I believe I utilized the opportunity given by Suhas well. Even though he is very busy, he supported this film a lot. Producer Narendra Reddy had great passion for cinema. He was involved in everything and never compromised on budget. This film will definitely become a blockbuster.”

The event was attended by lyric writer K.K., editor Viplav, DOP Mahireddy, writer Mithun, actor Harshavardhan, music director Vivek Sagar, director Sandeep Raj, producer Dheeraj Mogilineni, actors Divya, Vidya, producer and Chai Bisket founder Anurag Reddy, actor Sudarshan, actress Sravanthi Chokkarapu, Lavanya Reddy, and others.

## GSR Movie Makers “Amma... Naaku Aa Abbayi Kaavali” Songs Recording Completed!!

Under the musical direction of sensational composer Sai Karthik, the film’s director Shivala Prabhakar has penned the lyrics for the songs. Produced by noted businesswoman G. Shailaja Reddy under the banner of GSR Movie Makers, the triangular love story “Amma... Naaku Aa Abbayi Kaavali” introduces Pawan Mahaveer as the hero. Directed by Sivala Prabhakar, this unique romantic entertainer has already completed song recordings even before the commencement of regular shooting, spreading musical excitement. Suhana stars opposite Pawan Mahaveer, while the second heroine will be revealed soon!!

Under Sai Karthik’s musical direction, lyrics written by director Sivala Prabhakar have been rendered by renowned singers Chitra, Harini, Brinda, Arun, Sai Charan, and Krishna Chaitanya.

The film was grandly launched at Saradhi Studios, Hyderabad, in the presence of several distinguished guests.

Regular shooting is scheduled to begin on the 19th of this month at the famous pilgrimage location Pattisima near Rajahmundry, after which the team will move to Vizag and Araku for further schedules!! Speaking on the occasion, producer G. Shailaja Reddy said:



“Our director Sivala Prabhakar is handling this project with great dedication, almost like a sacred mission. The songs composed under Sai Karthik’s direction and written by Prabhakar have come out wonderfully. I believe debut hero Pawan Mahaveer has a bright future ahead.”

## Logan Paul’s rare Pokémon card sells for Rs 150 crore at auction

Hyderabad: Logan Paul, a social media star and professional wrestler, made history by selling his rare Pikachu Illustrator Pokémon card for Rs. 149.5 Crore at an auction. This sale set a new world record for the most expensive trading card ever sold at auction.

**Bidding Process and Auction Details**

The auction lasted 42 days, with many bidders trying to win the card. The winner was A J



Scaramucci, a venture capitalist and the son of former White House communications director Anthony

Scaramucci. After the auction, Logan Paul personally handed the card to AJ Scaramucci, marking a special moment. A Guinness World Records official, Sarah Casson, was present to confirm that the final bid was the highest ever paid for a trading card at auction, setting a new world record.

## KING OF ENTERTAINMENT SREE VISHNU’S VISHNU VINYASAM TEASER OFFERS LAUGHTER-PACKED EXPERIENCE

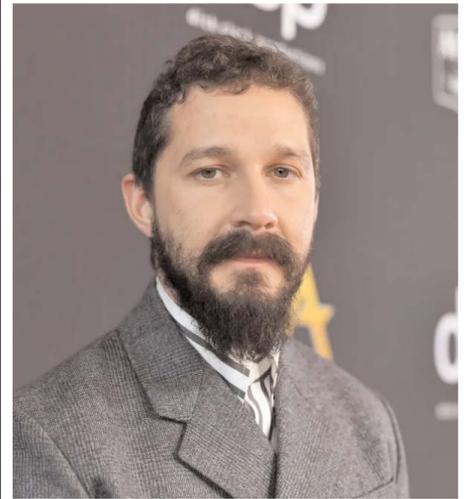
King of Entertainment Sree Vishnu returns with yet another hilarious entertainer. His upcoming film, Vishnu Vinyasam, marks the directorial debut of Yadunaath Maruthi Rao and is all set to hit theatres on the 28th of this month. The film stars Nayana Sarika opposite Sree Vishnu and is produced by Sumanth Naidu G under the Sree Subrahmanyeswara Cinemas banner. With the release fast approaching, the makers have now dropped an entertaining teaser. Vishnu is obsessed with horoscopes, while his father worships money. He checks vastu before making even the smallest decision. In the middle of this chaos, he falls in love, but the girl is even more unpredictable than he is. One



moment she’s deeply affectionate, the next she asks him to search for a groom for her. This strange dynamic sets the stage for a fresh,

quirky love story. The teaser opens cleverly with a “Use Headphones” warning and a playful emoji, instantly promising a fun ride.

## Shia LaBeouf Posts ‘Free Me’ After Arrest at Mardi Gras



Shia LaBeouf wrote “Free me” on his X account Wednesday morning, one day after his arrest over an alleged physical altercation during Mardi Gras in New Orleans.

The “Transformers” actor was involved in an incident early Tuesday outside a bar in the French Quarter, during which he allegedly assaulted two men. According to a statement from the New Orleans Police Department shared with Variety, LaBeouf was “reportedly causing a disturbance and becoming increasingly aggressive” at a business on Royal Street. “Once removed from the building, the victim reported being struck by LaBeouf, who used his closed fists on the victim several times,” the department said. After briefly leaving, LaBeouf returned and acted “even more aggressive,” Police added. “Multiple people attempted to hold him down — he was eventually let up in hopes that he would leave — but he reportedly again struck the same victim with closed fists to the vic-

tim’s upper body.” The statement noted that LaBeouf allegedly assaulted another individual by “punching him in the nose.” LaBeouf is facing two charges of simple battery. He was released from jail in New Orleans on Tuesday, and a pretrial hearing is scheduled for March 19. LaBeouf has had a history of erratic behavior and prior legal issues, including a lawsuit filed against him by musician FKA Twigs, who accused him of sexual battery, assault and infliction of emotional distress. The lawsuit was settled in July of last year. In an earlier incident, LaBeouf was ordered by a court to attend rehab after his 2017 arrest in Georgia on charges of public intoxication and disorderly conduct. In 2025, LaBeouf appeared in Leo Lewis O’Neil’s documentary “Slauson Rec,” which followed the actor as he leads an experimental theater company. The film, which screened at the Cannes Film Festival, shows LaBeouf berating actors and crew members, instigating a fistfight and engaging in other aggressive behavior.

## Alia Bhatt among presenters at 79th BAFTA Film Awards



New Delhi:

Bollywood star Alia Bhatt is set to present an award at the 79th edition of the BAFTA Awards, the British Academy announced on Tuesday. The awards ceremony, officially called the EE BAFTA Film Awards, aims to celebrate excellence in international cinema. It is set to take place on February 22 at London’s Royal Festival Hall. The 32-year-old actor is part of a star-studded lineup of guest presenters which also includes Alicia Vikander, Bryan Cranston, Cillian Murphy, Delroy Lindo, Emily Watson, Ethan Hawke, Gillian Anderson, Glenn Close, Hannah Waddingham, Monica Bellucci, Rege-Jean Page, Riz

Ahmed, and Stellan Skargard. Besides Bhatt, filmmaker Lakshmi Priya Devi, whose Manipuri-language film

“Boong” has been nominated in the best children’s and family film category, will also attend the ceremony. “Boong”, which narrates the story of a young boy named Boong (Gugun Kipgen), from the valley of Manipur, who plans

to surprise his mother with a gift, is backed by actor-producer Farhan Akhtar and Ritesh Sidhwani through their banner Excel Entertainment.

In the category, the film will compete against Disney hits “Lilo & Stitch” and “Zootopia 2” as well as animated science fantasy film “Arco”. She will be one of the presenters at the 2026

British Academy Film Awards (BAFTAs), one of the most respected honours in international cinema, as reported by news agency ANI. In addition to Bhatt, the highly anticipated awards gala has also announced renowned A-listers as presenters, including Bryan Cranston, Cillian Murphy, Ethan Hawke, Kate Hudson and Michael B. Jordan, among many others. For those unaware, the Hearts of Stone actress has also made special appearances at several international events, strengthening her position as a prominent Indian voice in global cinema. The BAFTAs 2026 will bring together an exceptional mix of presenters and nominees from across the world.

