

GOLD FALLS RS 7,000, SILVER DROPS OVER RS 20,000 AMID RISING WEST ASIA TENSIONS

Price of 24-carat gold (999 purity) dropped to Rs 1,47,889 per 10 grams, down from Rs 1,54,879 in the previous session – marking a sharp fall of Rs 6,990 in just one day.

Silver prices rate of 999 purity silver declined to Rs 2,29,873 per kilogram from Rs 2,49,907 per kilogram a day earlier, registering a steep fall of Rs 20,034 per kg.



ARE US AND ISRAEL IN LOCKSTEP IN IRAN WAR? DECIPHERING TRUMP'S POST AFTER GAS FIELD ATTACKS



WORLD | NEWS

LIONEL MESSI SCRIPTS HISTORY



SPORTS | NEWS

ECI ENABLES POSTAL VOTING FOR SENIORS, PWDS, AND SERVICE VOTERS

New Delhi, Mar 19: The Election Commission of India has issued directives enabling senior citizens, persons with disabilities (PwDs), service voters, and voters on election duty to cast their votes via postal ballots in the forthcoming Assembly elections across four states and one Union Territory. Under Section 60(c) of the

Representation of the People Act, 1951, electors above 85 years of age and PwDs flagged in the electoral rolls may exercise this facility. Postal ballots must reach the concerned Returning Officers by 8 a.m. on the counting day, May 4, 2026. Eligible voters can apply using Form-12 D, submitted to their RO through booth-level officers within five days of election notification. Polling teams will collect postal ballots directly from voters' homes according to schedules prepared by the respective ROs and shared with contesting candidates. Voters serving in essential services—including fire, health, electricity, traffic, ambulance, aviation, and government road transport corporations—can apply for postal ballots through their designated nodal officers. Media personnel authorised for poll day coverage are also entitled to postal voting as absentee voters.

BRUTAL KILLING SPARKS TENSION IN POLL-BOUND BENGAL

Kolkata, Mar 19: With the announcement of Assembly election dates in West Bengal, political activity has intensified across the state. The situation has become particularly volatile in Minakhan, located in North 24 Parganas district, where protests erupted following the release of candidate lists by the Trinamool Congress. Amid this heightened political climate, police on Thursday reported the recovery of a body believed to be that of a local Trinamool Congress worker. The discovery has further escalated tensions in the region. The deceased, identified as 38-year-old Moshir Kazi from Gangnia village under the Haroa Assembly constituency, was found in a severely mutilated condition. Residents alleged that he was an active party worker and suspect that he was murdered and his body dumped at the site.

TWO COUSINS ELECTROCUTED IN JAISALMER

Jaipur, Mar 19: A tragic accident in Jaisalmer claimed the lives of two young cousins after they came into contact with a live high-tension wire that had fallen onto a road during heavy rainfall and strong winds, officials reported. The incident occurred in the Sagar police station area on Wednesday night when an 11 kV power line snapped due to adverse weather conditions. Around 9 p.m., Vikram Singh (25) and Raju Singh (20) were riding a motorcycle to their fields. Poor visibility in the dark prevented them from noticing the live wire, resulting in fatal electrocution. Both died instantly.

CM Revanth Announces Single Window Policy for Film Production Presents Gaddar Film Awards



Hyderabad TSIT BUREAU: Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy announced that the Telangana government will soon introduce a single-window online policy to grant all necessary permissions for film production, making Hyderabad a more attractive destination for filmmakers.

Speaking at the Gaddar Film Awards presentation ceremony held in Hyderabad, the Chief Minister said the government is committed to transforming the city into a global hub for film production. He emphasized that Hyderabad is one of the safest cities in the world and assured investors of full support, especially in the backdrop of the current Middle East crisis.

Highlighting the growing global interest, the CM noted



that Netflix has already established its GCC centre in Hyderabad, signaling the arrival of international film production activity. He stated that countries like Japan, South Korea, and the United States would be invited to collaborate and invest, further expanding the film ecosystem in the state.

Revanth Reddy underlined that the government is encour-

aging the film industry on par with IT and Pharma sectors, aiming to make it a major contributor to the economy and employment generation.

The Chief Minister also presented the Gaddar Film Awards, instituted to promote and recognize emerging talent in the industry. Paying tribute to revolutionary balladeer Gaddar, he said the awards would inspire young artists and create opportunities for them to showcase their skills.

Recalling the contributions of stalwarts like N.T. Rama Rao (NTR), Akkineni Nageswara Rao (ANR), D. Ramanaidu, Krishna, and others, the CM said their efforts helped shift the Telugu film industry to Hyderabad. He also acknowledged Ramoji Rao for establishing Ramoji Film City and lauded leaders like Prabhakar Reddy and Dasari Narayana Rao for supporting film workers.

Reaffirming the government's commitment, the Chief Minister said it is his responsibility to nurture talent, support the industry, and position Hyderabad as a premier destination for global cinema.

PM Modi, French President Macron discuss West Asia situation, need for de-escalation

New Delhi (TSIT): Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to French President Emmanuel Macron on Thursday regarding the situation in West Asia and the urgent need for de-escalation and return to dialogue and diplomacy. In a post on X, PM Modi stated, "Spoke with my dear friend, President Emmanuel Macron, on the situation in West Asia and the urgent need for de-escalation, as well as a return to dialogue and diplomacy. We look forward to continuing our close coordination to advance peace and stability in the region and beyond."

The telephonic conversation between both leaders comes amid the ongoing conflict in West Asia, which erupted after the US-Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28, which killed Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and top military officials. In response, Iran launched drone and missile attacks targeting the US and Israeli facilities, regional capitals and allied forces in West Asia.

Over the past few days, PM Modi has also spoken with the leaders of Kuwait, UAE, Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Jordan,



Bahrain, Oman and Qatar as India remains in touch with the governments of the region as well as other key partners over the ongoing conflict in Iran and the Gulf region.

On Wednesday, PM Modi held a telephonic conversation with Kuwait Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah and discussed the evolving situation in West Asia and shared concerns over recent developments.

PM Modi reiterated India's condemnation of attacks on Kuwait's sovereignty and territorial integrity. He also thanked Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah for

continued support and ensuring the safety and well-being of the Indian community in Kuwait. "Spoke with HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Crown Prince of Kuwait and conveyed greetings on the upcoming festival of Eid. We exchanged views on the evolving situation in West Asia and shared concerns over recent developments. Reiterated India's condemnation of attacks on Kuwait's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Ensuring safe and free navigation through the Strait of Hormuz remains our foremost priority," PM Modi posted on X.

Iran strikes gulf energy sites, oil surges past \$119 as markets roil

New Delhi (TSIT) As Teheran hit oil infrastructure in Gulf nations on Thursday in retaliation to earlier Israeli strikes on Iran's South Pars gas field, energy markets went into an overdrive with the benchmark Brent crude prices jumped to over USD 119 a barrel before settling down to around USD 114 a barrel. The Indian basket or the average price at which India imports crude also shot up to USD 114.08 a barrel as against USD 69 a barrel last month, as desperate Indian buyers contracted purchase of crude from Russia's shadow fleet which lies in the Baltic and in the Indian Ocean which after selling at a discount for most months last year is now trading at a premium. "Our fears of oil prices shooting up to USD 130 are now almost a reality. Gas prices have also shot up considerably from about USD 11-12 earlier to USD 19 per metric million Btu," said Sandeep Johri, a commodities trader.

With oil on the boil, India's Rupee traded at a new low of Rs 93.25 at close of Thursday's trading against the dollar as



Indian importers faced with higher prices bought more dollars and as nervous foreign investors sold off stock bringing the Sensex down by 2,496.89 points.

Oil prices started shooting skywards after news spread early Thursday that Iran targeted energy infrastructure across the Gulf, including Qatar's Ras Laffan LNG facility and the Habshan gas facility and Bab field in the United Arab Emirates. These attacks were apparently in retaliation to Wednesday night's Israeli strikes on Iran's South Pars gas field. Qatar's state-owned energy company, QatarEnergy, confirmed that several of its liquefied natural gas (LNG) facilities were hit by missile attacks in the early hours of Thursday.

India buying LPG from US too in bid to plug gap in Middle East imports

New Delhi, March 19 (TSIT): Amid concerns over LPG shortage, the government on Thursday said that India is diversifying LPG procurement and buying liquefied petroleum gas from the US as well to plug the supply chain disruptions caused by the Middle East conflict. Addressing the daily briefing, Petroleum and Natural Gas Ministry's Joint Secretary, Marketing and Oil refinery, Sujata Sharma, said: "Due to the ongoing war, the situation remains a matter of concern. However, there is no dry-out reported at any LPG distributorship. Online bookings have further increased to 94 per cent..." Alongside this, about 83 per cent of refill deliveries are being carried out through delivery authentication codes. "There has been a decline in panic booking, and yesterday, approximately 57 lakh refill bookings were received. LPG cylinder delivery is proceeding normally," Sharma said. She further added that the crude oil situation and refinery operations remain normal in the

CM Revanth Reaffirms Commitment to Farmers' Welfare at Ugadi Celebrations

Hyderabad TSIT BUREAU: Chief Minister A.Revanth Reddy on Thursday reiterated that the Telangana Government is committed to transforming the farming community into the "King" of all professions by making agriculture a profitable and sustainable occupation.

Participating in the "Sri Parabhava Nama" Ugadi celebrations in Hyderabad, the Chief Minister announced that the new Telugu year has been dedicated to farmers' welfare. He emphasized that the government is taking proactive steps to strengthen agriculture and ensure prosperity for farmers across the state.

Highlighting key initiatives, the Chief Minister said that the Rythu Bharosa financial assistance will be released on March 22, with funds directly deposited into farmers' bank accounts. He noted that the government has already spent Rs.18,000 crore under the scheme to support the agricultural community.

Revanth Reddy also pointed out that Telangana farmers currently have the lowest



debt burden in the country, attributing this to the government's decision to waive farm loans up to Rs.2 lakh, providing significant relief to debt-ridden farmers. He added that nearly 70 percent of families in Telangana depend on agriculture, underscoring the sector's importance. Addressing longstanding land issues, the Chief Minister said the government has introduced Bhu Bharati to resolve land ownership problems, replacing

the earlier Dharani portal, which had caused hardships for farmers. Chief Minister further assured that the government remains highly vigilant against natural calamities and is taking necessary measures to safeguard farmers and their livelihoods.

On the occasion of Ugadi, Revanth Reddy prayed for peace, prosperity, and protection from natural disasters for the people of Telangana, reiterating the government's vision to position the state as

Mamata accuses EC of 'targeting' Bengal, calls actions 'undeclared emergency'

New Delhi/Kolkata, Mar 19 (TSIT) West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday launched a sharp attack on the Election Commission of India, alleging unprecedented interference and bias against the state ahead of upcoming elections. In a message posted on her WhatsApp channel, Banerjee claimed that the Commission had "singled out and targeted Bengal" in a manner that was "deeply alarming." She alleged that more than 50 senior officials, including the Chief Secretary, Home Secretary, Director General of Police and several top-ranking officers, had been "summarily and arbitrarily removed" even before the formal election notification. "This is not an administra-

tion action; rather, this is political interference of the highest order," she said.

The Chief Minister further described the developments as part of a broader pattern of institutional politicisation. "The systematic politicisation of institutions meant to remain impartial is a direct assault on the Constitution," Banerjee said, adding that the Commission's conduct reflected "a clear bias and an uncomfortable submission to political interests."

Her remarks come amid heightened political tensions in the state, with the ruling All India Trinamool Congress frequently accusing the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party of attempting to influence administrative processes in West Bengal. Banerjee also raised



concerns over the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, calling the process "deeply flawed" and alleging that it had contributed to public anxiety. She claimed that supplementary electoral rolls had not yet been published "in clear disregard of the Hon'ble Supreme Court's directions," leaving

citizens uncertain. "Why is the BJP so desperate? Why this relentless targeting of Bengal and its people?" she asked, accusing the party of attempting to force citizens "to stand in queues and prove their own citizenship" decades after independence. The Chief Minister also questioned what she described as contradic-

tions in the Commission's actions, alleging that officers removed from their posts were subsequently reassigned as election observers within hours. She cited instances where senior police officials in key urban centres such as Siliguri and Bidhannagar were appointed as observers without immediate replacements, which she said left "vital urban centres effectively headless."

"This is not governance. It reflects chaos, confusion and sheer incompetence being passed off as authority," Banerjee said. Escalating her criticism, Banerjee described the situation as "nothing short of an undeclared emergency and an unproclaimed form of president's rule," alleging a "deliberate design to seize control of

West Bengal through coercion and institutional manipulation." She also expressed solidarity with state government officials, saying they were being targeted "simply for serving the state with honesty and commitment." "Bengal has never bowed to intimidation and it never will," she asserted. "Bengal will fight, Bengal will resist and Bengal will decisively defeat every attempt to impose a divisive and destructive agenda on its soil." The Election Commission has not yet publicly responded to the allegations. The controversy adds to an already charged political atmosphere as the state moves closer to the next electoral cycle, with questions around administrative neutrality and electoral processes likely to remain at the forefront of the debate.

India's Rs 5 trillion gold hoard fuels boom in fast-growing gold loan market, draws global investors

New Delhi, March 19 : Indian households are sitting on an enormous reserve of gold, and that wealth is now quietly reshaping the country's lending market, a report has said. According to a

gold - around 90 per cent - still lies idle, it is increasingly being used as collateral to raise quick loans.

Gold-backed lending has emerged as one of the fastest-growing segments in India's retail credit

ened rules around unsecured lending in late 2023, limiting easy access to such credit for many borrowers.

As a result, more people are turning to gold loans. These loans are easier to

have surged significantly, increasing the value borrowers can unlock against their jewellery.

Data from the RBI shows that gold loans more than doubled in just one year, reaching Rs 4 trillion in January from Rs 1.75 trillion a year earlier.

This makes gold loans the fastest-growing retail credit category in India, after home and vehicle loans.

However, the actual size of the gold loan market is believed to be much larger. Experts estimate it to be around Rs 14 trillion, as RBI data does not fully capture lending by non-banking financial companies (NBFCs).

These NBFCs account for nearly half of the gold loan market. The rapid growth of gold loans is also drawing global attention. Private equity firm Bain Capital is planning to acquire up to a 41.7 per cent stake in Manappuram Finance, a deal recently approved by the RBI. Meanwhile, Japan's financial giant Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group has acquired a 20 per cent stake in Shriram Finance, which is also expanding its gold loan business.



report by Morgan Stanley, Indian households collectively own more than 34,000 tonnes of gold. Kotak Mahindra Bank estimates this stockpile to be worth nearly \$5 trillion. While most of this

space.

This comes at a time when other forms of consumer loans, especially unsecured personal loans, have slowed due to tighter regulations. The Reserve Bank of India had tight-

access, often require minimal paperwork, and can be disbursed quickly. At the same time, a sharp rise in global gold prices has made this option even more attractive.

Since 2024, gold prices

Govt warns consumers on cyber fraud linked to LPG bookings

New Delhi, March 19 : Instances of cyber fraud related to LPG bookings have been reported from some states as fraudsters are attempting to exploit the situation by sending malicious files such as "GAS BILL UPDATE APK" via messaging

statement said.

Meanwhile, the Centre has advised States and Union Territories to further strengthen administrative and logistical arrangements to ensure uninterrupted LPG distribution.

Instructions of the Centre are being communicated to all concerned authorities for immediate implementation. Citizens are advised to rely on official sources and avoid rumours. Consumers are requested to avoid panic bookings, use digital booking platforms, and avoid visiting LPG distributors, as home delivery continues. The government continues to prioritise uninterrupted LPG supply and PNG expansion, particularly for households and priority sectors such as hospitals and educational institutions.

The measures include enhanced refinery production, revised booking intervals of 25 days in urban areas and up to 45 days in rural areas, and prioritised allocation.

Alternative fuel options like kerosene and coal have been offered to ease pressure on LPG demand. The Ministry of Environment has already advised the State Pollution Control Board to permit the use of kerosene and coal as alternative fuel.

The Ministry of Coal has already issued an order to Coal India and Singareni Coaleries to allot higher quantities to states for distributing coal to small, medium, and other consumers. States have been advised to facilitate the new PNG connections for both domestic and commercial consumers. A proposal for a 10 per cent additional allocation of commercial LPG has been made to the states, facilitating and expediting the process, the statement added.



platforms such as WhatsApp to mislead consumers, according to an official statement issued on Thursday.

Users are advised not to download or install any suspicious files or applications received through messages, as these may enable unauthorised access to personal data and bank accounts. Citizens are urged to rely only on official platforms for LPG bookings, the

Authorities are ensuring close monitoring of LPG supply at the district level and facilitating smooth movement of LPG tankers and cylinders without disruption.

States and UTs have been advised to issue and widely disseminate public advisories to prevent panic buying, promote judicious use of LPG and ensure dissemination of accurate information.

Ahmedabad crime branch busts Rs 2.38 Crore fake currency racket

Ahmedabad/Surat, Mar 19: The Ahmedabad Crime Branch has dismantled a major counterfeit currency operation, seizing Rs 2.38 crore in fake Rs 500 notes and arresting seven people, including a woman, involved in producing and distributing the forged notes.

Acting on intelligence, officers intercepted a white Toyota Fortuner near Torrent Power, Amraiwadi on Wednesday night. Inside the vehicle, bundles of fake notes hidden in a black bag were discovered, and all occupants were taken into custody. The arrested have been identified as Mukesh Thummar, Ashok Mavani, Ramesh Bhalar, Divyesh Rana, Pradeep 'Guru' Jotangia (who runs a yoga foundation), Bharat Kakadiya from Surat, and a woman from Katargam. Investigation revealed



that the group had been manufacturing counterfeit currency at a Surat residential premises over the past four to six months. The site, disguised as a stationery unit, was equipped with printers, paper cut-

ting machines, and other equipment, producing high-quality notes that were difficult to distinguish from genuine currency. Following the arrests, a joint raid by Ahmedabad and Surat

Crime Branch teams recovered additional counterfeit notes, printing equipment, laptops, mobile phones, and security thread paper mimicking RBI markings. In Ahmedabad, 42,000 notes worth about Rs 2.10 crore were seized along with the vehicle and cash of Rs 1.2 lac, while Surat authorities recovered Rs 28 lakh in fake notes and equipment.

Authorities said the gang sourced specialized security thread paper from China via online platforms like Alibaba, with payments made using cryptocurrency. They also employed digital tools, including AI platforms such as ChatGPT and graphic design software, to refine the notes' appearance. The operation reportedly began with small-scale circulation in local shops before expanding to

larger volumes. Police estimate around Rs 10 lac of counterfeit currency may already have entered circulation. The group had intended to supply notes at a commission of 20-25%, transporting consignments from Surat to Ahmedabad using a vehicle with a government department plate to avoid suspicion.

Two suspects, including a contact with Chinese suppliers, remain at large. Officials are tracing interstate and international links, financial transactions connected to the Pradeep Yog Foundation, and properties associated with the accused.

All seized materials are being sent for forensic examination, and the Reserve Bank of India has been notified. A case has been registered at the DCB Police Station, with investigations ongoing.

Calcutta High Court denies bail to Sheikh Shahjahan in ED assault case

Kolkata, Mar 19: A single-judge bench of the Calcutta High Court on Thursday dismissed the bail plea of Sheikh Shahjahan, the suspended Trinamool Congress leader from Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas, who is a key accused in the January 2024 attack on Enforcement Directorate officials. The case stems from a violent incident in which officials of the Enforcement Directorate, along with personnel from the Central Armed Police Forces, were allegedly assaulted by Shahjahan's ????ers while attempting to carry out a raid at his residence. The operation was linked to an alleged multi-crore public distribution system (PDS) scam in the state.

Subsequently, Shahjahan also faced additional charges, including illegal land acquisition in Sandeshkhali, conver-



sion of agricultural land into fish farms using saline water, and serious allegations of sexual assault involving local women.

He was first taken into custody by the West Bengal Police before being handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigation, which is currently probing the case.

During the hearing before Justice Suvara Ghosh, counsel representing the CBI opposed the bail application, arguing that Shahjahan could influence witnesses and tamper with evidence if released. The agency further alleged that even while in custody, he had

attempted to intimidate key witnesses and orchestrate attacks through associates who remain at large.

Accepting these submissions, the court rejected the bail plea. However, it clarified that Shahjahan may file a fresh application in the future depending on the progress of the investigation and emergence of new evidence.

Following the initial incident, leaders of the Trinamool Congress, including Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, had initially defended him. However, after sustained protests led by women in Sandeshkhali throughout much of 2024, the party

NIA charges ninth accused in Gurugram club bombing case

New Delhi, Mar 19: The National Investigation Agency on Thursday filed a supplementary chargesheet against another accused in the 2024 Gurugram club bombing case, taking the total number of chargesheeted individuals to nine.

The ?????, identified as Ramdutt, has been linked to Canada-based designated terrorist Satinderjit Singh alias Goldy Brar. According to the agency, he maintained connections with Brar's close aide Rohit Godara and foreign-based gangster Randeep Malik.

The chargesheet was filed before the NIA Special Court in Panchkula under provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. Investigators described Ramdutt as a key facilitator within a larger terror network.

Probe findings indicate that he provided a safe hideout near the Chambal region to another accused involved in carrying out



the attacks. The bombings targeted the Warehouse Club and Human Club in Sector-29, Gurugram, on December 10, 2024.

The NIA had earlier chargesheeted Goldy Brar and seven others in 2025. In a subsequent development in December 2025, three more accused—Vijay, Ajit Sehrawat, and Vinay—were also chargesheeted under relevant laws, including the Explosive Substances Act and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

According to investiga-

tors, the case has exposed a wider conspiracy involving operatives working under the direction of handlers based abroad, with links to the banned outfit Babbar Khalsa International.

The agency, which took over the investigation shortly after the attacks, is continuing efforts to identify additional conspirators and track financial networks supporting the operation, as part of a broader crackdown on terror syndicates operating in the region.

Rail accidents drop nearly 90% as safety measures strengthen: Govt

New Delhi, Mar 19: Train accidents on Indian Railways have declined sharply over the past decade, with consequential accidents falling by nearly 90 per cent, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav informed Parliament.

In a written reply in the Lok Sabha, the minister said the number of such accidents has dropped from 135 in 2014-15 to just 14 in 2025-26 (up to February 28), highlighting a significant improvement in operational safety.

Data shared by the government showed that between 2004-05 and 2013-14, Indian Railways recorded 1,711 consequential accidents, resulting in 904 deaths and 3,155 injuries. This number reduced to 678 accidents during 2014-15 to 2023-24, with 748 fatalities and 2,087 injuries. In recent years, the trend has continued downward. In 2024-25, 31 accidents were reported, leading to 18 deaths and 92 injuries, while in 2025-26 so far, 14 accidents have resulted in 16 deaths and 28



injuries. The minister attributed this improvement to sustained investments and safety-focused initiatives,

including better track maintenance, modern signalling systems, and technological upgrades. Spending on safety

has seen a major increase, rising from Rs 39,200 crore in 2013-14 to Rs 1,17,693 crore in 2025-26, with a further allocation of Rs 1,20,389 crore planned for 2026-27.

To reduce human error, electronic interlocking systems have been installed at 6,665 stations, while over 10,153 level crossings are now equipped with interlocking. Additionally, track circuiting systems—used to detect train presence—have been implemented at 6,669 stations.

Vaishnav also highlighted the rollout of Kavach, an indigenous automatic train protection system adopted nationally in 2020. The latest version has already been deployed across 1,452 route kilometres, including high-density corridors like Delhi-Mumbai and Delhi-Howrah. He emphasised that continued focus on technology and infrastructure upgrades will further strengthen safety and help reduce accidents across the rail network.

D. K. Shivakumar Says No Legal Hurdles for UKP Phase-3; All-Party Meet Soon

Bengaluru : Stating that the legal counsels have confirmed that there were no legal hurdles for increasing the height of Alamatti dam, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar today said he would convene an all-party meeting in the state and take a decision to go ahead. Speaking to reporters at his Sadashivanagar residence, the DCM, who also holds the Irrigation portfolio, said, "I stayed in Delhi for two days and held a meeting with the state's MPs. As many as 24 MPs - including BJP, Congress, nominated and independent MPs - attended the meeting while JDS MPs did not. I briefed them on the status of many of the state's irrigation projects."



"Jagadish Shettar, Govind Karjol, Basavaraj Bommai and P C Mohan gave some suggestions. Somanna and Prahlad Joshi said they could not attend and would come another day. It has been decided to take an all-party delegation to meet the Prime Minister and the Jal Shakti Minister, and a consensus has been reached on this," he said.

"On this matter, our legal advisors Mohan Kataraki, retired Justice Nagamohan Das, and the Advocate General have shared a couple of important points. We will arrive at a decision on this shortly," he informed.

"I met the Civil Aviation Minister and brought to his notice disparity between Bengaluru and other cities regarding Premium FAR and building height regulations. I need to meet the Defence Minister soon for discussions as well. We have conveyed the problems of our state, and everyone has responded positively," he said.

When asked about the second airport, he said, "Minister M B Patil has submitted a proposal and the minister has also shared his opinion on it. It needs to be placed before the Cabinet and the pros and cons must be discussed. Land acquisition, finances, and other matters need to be deliberated. He has also conducted a study and submitted a report. The central aviation

authority has also reported on what kind of building height regulations exist in global cities. This will help us understand the standards followed elsewhere in the world. We will get that report and then take a decision."

'B' Form distribution as per High Command's decision:

"Jagadish Shettar, Govind Karjol, Basavaraj Bommai and P C Mohan gave some suggestions. Somanna and Prahlad Joshi said they could not attend and would come another day. It has been decided to take an all-party delegation to meet the Prime Minister and the Jal Shakti Minister, and a consensus has been reached on this," he said.

When asked who the Congress candidates for the by-election would be, he said, "Over the past two months, I have collected reports from all levels, right from the booth level. Our leaders' team has visited and given me their opinions. I have spoken with a few people myself. In two or three days, AICC secretaries

will be arriving. The Chief Minister and I have discussed what needs to be done in the two constituencies. I cannot say this publicly. The party must win, and keeping the party's interest in mind, the Chief Minister and I will put forward our views. The 'B' form will be distributed as per the High Command's decision."

Aspiring to become a minister is not wrong

When asked about demands for Cabinet reshuffle and consideration of new faces, he said, "What is wrong in aspiring to become a minister? The Chief Minister has said there will be a Cabinet reshuffle, hasn't he? Knowing that there is a vacancy after he said so, they are trying their luck."

Time will decide: When asked whether it would be a Cabinet reshuffle or a power-sharing arrangement, he said, "Time will decide."

When asked about reports of a separate meeting with Priyanka Gandhi, he said, "I am not going to discuss that. I will not say what I discussed with whom. Time will decide."

When asked about K C Venugopal's statement that the CM post is not vacant, he said, "Yes, he has said the post is not vacant. But he has also said the party and the MLAs will decide."

Veerashaiva Mahasabha president. Minorities are also important there. They have been extending support for a long time. Their proposal is also on the table. We need to sit with everyone and sort this out. Leaders who did not get a ticket in the last election have been given positions," he said.

When asked if there was clarity on who should get the ticket and who would win, he said, "Here, what the party and the workers say is more important than my personal opinion or survey reports."

When asked about late Ananthkumar's daughter Aishwarya's criticism that Karnataka is being made a cash cow for the Assam elections, he said, "I don't know who she is. We also have cows at home - has she seen them? We domesticate cows that have been gifted to us in our cow shed."

"Discussions were held with leaders regarding the Assam elections. A Zoom meeting will be held today as well. A campaign schedule will also be prepared," he said.

When asked about reports of a separate meeting with Priyanka Gandhi, he said, "I am not going to discuss that. I will not say what I discussed with whom. Time will decide."

When asked about reports of a separate meeting with Priyanka Gandhi, he said, "I am not going to discuss that. I will not say what I discussed with whom. Time will decide."

When asked about reports of a separate meeting with Priyanka Gandhi, he said, "I am not going to discuss that. I will not say what I discussed with whom. Time will decide."

Performer is Hindu, not Christian: Pambada community refutes allegations over Daiva ritual in Bolur

Mangaluru, Mar 18: Amid controversy surrounding a recent Daiva Nartana (spirit dance) ritual in Bolur, members of the Pambada community have strongly refuted allegations that the performer belonged to the Christian faith, asserting instead that he is a Hindu with valid caste credentials.

a press conference, Daiva performer Suraj Chippara clarified that the accusations made earlier by Dr Rathi during a media interaction on March 13 were baseless. "It was alleged that a person born to a Christian woman performed the ritual, which traditionally belongs to communities like Pambada and Panara. However, we possess official caste certificates proving that Sushanth Bangera, who performed the ritual, is a Hindu and belongs to the Pambada community," he stated. Responding to

claims regarding Sushanth's family background, community member Ganesh Pambada explained that while it is true that he had married a Christian woman, she had embraced Hindu customs and traditions after marriage. "Once a woman adopts the traditions and practices of her husband's religion, she becomes part of the community. Targeting her on these grounds is unjust," he said. He further added that their son, Sushanth, was born and raised following Hindu traditions, with all legal documents, including caste certification, duly in place.

Ganesh emphasized that the ritual conducted at the Jarandaya Daivasthana in Bolur was carried out with complete devotion and in accordance with traditional practices. "There has been no disrespect to the customs or dignity of the

Pambada community. The ritual was performed flawlessly, without any lapses, and brought no harm or inconvenience to anyone," he noted.

Highlighting his experience, Ganesh stated that he has been performing Daiva Nartana for over 31 years across several regions, including Kumble, Vittla, Koliyur, Manjeshwar, and Harekala. "I have always upheld the sanctity of the tradition and will continue to offer my services wherever devotees invite me," he said. Meanwhile, Sushanth Bangera expressed distress over the allegations, stating that being labelled as a Christian had caused him personal and professional harm. "These accusations have affected my reputation and made it difficult for me to perform. Those responsible must issue a public apology.

Illegal cattle slaughter racket busted in Kasaba Bengre; 9 cattle rescued, 205 kg

Mangaluru, Mar 19: In a major crackdown, Panambur police conducted a raid on an illegal cattle slaughter unit operating in Kasaba Bengre and seized nine live cattle along with 205 kg of meat meant for sale.

Acting on credible information about unlawful slaughter activities, police raided a shed located near Badria Juma Masjid in Kasaba Bengre, on the banks of the Phalguni river, behind a house

belonging to a person identified as Ahmed. It is learnt that a group of four to five individuals had been illegally slaughtering cattle at the spot.

During the operation, police rescued nine cattle that had been tied up for slaughter and confiscated 205 kg of processed meat along with equipment used for the illegal activity. The accused have been identified as Kabir alias Peth Kabir of Kasaba Bengre, Badru alias Badruddin of

Jokatte, and three others. All the accused fled the scene before the police arrived. A special team has been formed to trace and apprehend them, officials said.

The raid was carried out under the guidance of ACP Shrikant and PI Saleem Abbas, with PSI Shrikala and staff from Panambur police station leading the operation. A case has been registered at Panambur police station, and further investigation is underway.

Train services on Mangaluru-Subramanya route cancelled for 35 days

Mangaluru, Mar 19: Due to urgent track maintenance work scheduled within the South Western Railway limits, significant changes have been made to the passenger train services operating between Mangaluru and Subramanya. Passenger trains running between Mangaluru Central and Subramanya Road have been fully cancelled for a total of 35 days. Train no 56629 (Mangaluru - Subramanya Road

Passenger) and train no 56630 (Subramanya Road - Mangaluru Passenger) will remain cancelled from March 23 to April 14, and again from June 10 to June 21. Changes in express train schedules The department has also announced changes in the timings of several express trains during the month of April: Delayed

services: Yeshwantpur - Karwar (16515), Yeshwantpur - Mangaluru (16575), and Yeshwantpur - Mangaluru (16539) express trains will be delayed by approximately 20 minutes. Mangaluru - Subramanya passenger train (56229) will run with a delay of 55 minutes from April 21 to June 9.

Harnessing Biosorption: Turning Brewery Waste Into a Water Purification Powerhouse

A filter made from brewery waste yeast encapsulated in hydrogels can quickly absorb lead from contaminated water.



Breweries generate and discard thousands of tons of surplus yeast every year. Researchers from MIT and Georgia Tech have now come up with a way to repurpose that yeast for extracting lead from polluted water. Using a process known as biosorption, the yeast efficiently absorbs trace and larger amounts of lead and other heavy metals from water. The researchers have successfully packaged the yeast in hydrogel capsules, forming a filter that removes lead from water. These encapsulated yeast cells can easily be removed from the water, making it safe for consumption.

Effective and Sustainable Technology We have the hydrogel surrounding the free yeast that exists in the center, and this is porous enough to let water come in, interact with yeast as if they were freely moving in water, and then come out clean," says Patricia Stathatou. She is a former postdoc at the MIT Center for Bits and Atoms, who is now a

research scientist at Georgia Tech and an incoming assistant professor at Georgia Tech's School of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering. "The fact that the yeast themselves are bio-based, benign, and biodegradable is a significant advantage over traditional technologies."

The researchers envision that this process could be used to filter drinking water coming out of a faucet in homes, or scaled up to treat large quantities of water at treatment plants. MIT graduate student Devashish Gokhale and Stathatou are the lead authors of the study, which was published on May 15 in the journal RSC Sustainability. Patrick Doyle, the Robert T. Haslam Professor of Chemical Engineering at MIT, is the senior author of the paper, and Christos Athanasiou, an assistant professor of aerospace engineering at Georgia Tech and a former visiting scholar at MIT, is also an author.

The new study builds on work that Stathatou

and Athanasiou began in 2021, when Athanasiou was a visiting scholar at MIT's Center for Bits and Atoms. That year, they calculated that waste yeast discarded from a single brewery in Boston would be enough to treat the city's entire water supply.

Through biosorption, a process that is not fully understood, yeast cells can bind to and absorb heavy metal ions, even at challenging Athanasiou's original concentrations below 1 part per million. The MIT team found that this process could effectively decontaminate water with low concentrations of lead. However, one key obstacle remained, which was how to remove yeast from the water after they absorb the lead. In a serendipitous coincidence, Stathatou and Athanasiou happened to present their research at the AIChE Annual Meeting in Boston in 2021, where Gokhale, a student in Doyle's lab, was presenting his own research on using hydrogels to capture micropollutants in water. The two sets of researchers decided to join forces and explore whether the yeast-based strategy could be easier to scale up if the yeast were encapsulated in hydrogels developed by Gokhale and Doyle. "What we decided to do was make these hollow capsules - something like a multivitamin pill, but instead of filling them up with vitamins, we fill them up with yeast cells," Gokhale says. "These capsules are porous, so the water can go into the capsules and the yeast are able to bind all of that lead, but the yeast themselves can't escape into the water." The capsules are made from a polymer called polyethylene glycol (PEG), which is widely used in medical applications. To form the capsules, the researchers suspend freeze-dried yeast in water, then mix them with the polymer subunits. When UV light is shone on the mixture, the polymers link together to form

capsules with yeast trapped inside. Each capsule is about half a millimeter in diameter. Because the hydrogels are very thin and porous, water can easily pass through and encounter the yeast inside, while the yeast remain trapped. In this study, the researchers showed that the encapsulated yeast could remove trace lead from water just as rapidly as the unencapsulated yeast from Stathatou and Athanasiou's original 2021 study.

ICICI Home Finance Corporate Office: ICICI Home Finance Company Limited ICICI HFC Tower, Andheri - Kurla Road, Andheri (East), Mumbai - 400059, India
Branch Office: Shop No. 1316/C, 2nd floor, 9th Cross, 9th Main, Opp To Tirumalagiri Venkateswara Temple, J P Nagar, 2nd Phase Above Central Bank, Bangalore - 560078
[See proviso to rule 8(6)] Notice for sale of immovable assets
E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.
Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the Possession of which has been taken by the Authorized Officer of ICICI Home Finance Company Ltd., will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is", as per the brief particulars given hereunder:

Sr. No.	Name of Borrower(s)/ Co Borrowers/ Guarantors/ Legal Heirs, Loan Account No.	Details of the Secured asset(s) with known encumbrances, if any	Amount Outstanding	Reserve Price/ Earnest Money Deposit	Date and Time of Property Inspection	Date & Time of Auction	One Day Before Auction Date	SARFAESI Stage
(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)	(H)	(I)
1.	Ravikumar K M (Borrower) Sanjana Sony PJ (Co-Borrower) Loan No. LHBW00001588217 & LHBW00001588219	Survey No. 91, 92, 95/2, 97/P and 98, Ganga Block, Block No. 04, Valagerahalli Village, Kengeri Hobli, Bangalore South Taluk, Bangalore- 560060	Rs. 19,45,503/- March 13, 2026	Rs. 14,58,041/- Rs. 1,45,804/-	March 30, 2026 11:00 AM To 03:00 PM	April 06, 2026 02:00 PM To 05:00 PM	Before	Symbolic Possession

The online auction will be conducted on website (URL Link-https://BidDeal.in) of our auction agency ValueTrust Capital Services Private Limited. The Mortgages/notice are given a last chance to pay the total dues with further interest till April 04, 2026 before 05:00 PM else these secured assets will be sold as per above schedule. The Prospective Bidder(s) must submit the Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) RTGS/ Demand Draft (DD) (Refer Column E) at ICICI Home Finance Company Limited Branch Office Address mentioned on top of the article on or before April 04, 2026 before 04:00 PM. The Prospective Bidder(s) must also submit signed copy of Registration Form & Bid Terms and Conditions form at ICICI Home Finance Company Limited Branch Office Address mentioned on top of the article on or before April 04, 2026 before 05:00 PM. Earnest Money Deposit Demand Draft (DD) should be from a Nationalized/Scheduled Bank in favor of "ICICI Home Finance Company Ltd. - Auction" payable at the branch office address mentioned on top of the article.
For any further clarifications with regards to inspection, terms and conditions of the auction or submission of tenders, kindly contact ICICI Home Finance Company Limited on 9920807300.
The Authorized Officer reserves the right to reject any or all the bids without furnishing any further reasons.
For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please visit https://www.icicifhc.com/
Date: March 20, 2026
Place: Bangalore
Authorized Officer, "ICICI Home Finance Company Limited"
CIN Number- U65922MH1999PLC120106

Protium PROTIUM FINANCE LIMITED (Erstwhile Growth Source Financial Technologies Limited)
Registered & Corporate Office Address: 7th Floor, Block B2, Phase - I Nirilon Knowledge Park, Pahadi Village, Off. Western Express Highway, Cama Industrial Estate, Goregaon(E), Mumbai - 400065, Maharashtra.
POSSESSION NOTICE - (US 13(4) & as per Appendix IV read with rule 8(1) of the Security Interest Enforcement Rules, 2002)
WHEREAS, The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of the Protium Finance Limited (ERSTWHILE Growth Source Financial Technologies Ltd.) (hereinafter referred to as "Protium Finance Limited") under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets & Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (Act No. 54 of 2002) (SARFAESI Act) and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, issued a Demand Notice dated 02nd Jan 2026 calling upon the Borrowers DANAPPA SARVI S/O SHANKAR S/SARVI & SHRI DEVI D SARVI W/O DANAPPA SARVI S/O SHANKAR S/SARVI D/O SHANKAR S/SARVI, in respect of loan account bearing No. GS095EEL2218567 to repay the amount mentioned in the said notice being INR 36,26,294.91/- (Thirty Six Lakh Twenty Six Thousand Two Hundred Ninety Four Rupees and Ninety One Paise Only) as on 2nd Jan 2026 within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.
The borrowers having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under sub-section 4 of section 13 of the said Act read with rule 8 of the Security Interest Enforcement Rules, 2002 on this 17th day of March 2026.
The borrowers in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of Protium Finance Limited, for an amount of INR 36,26,294.91/- (Thirty Six Lakh Twenty Six Thousand Two Hundred Ninety Four Rupees and Ninety One Paise Only) as on 2nd Jan 2026 and further interest thereon, plus costs, charges, expenses incurred.
The Borrower's attention is invited to the provisions of sub-section (8) of Section 13 of the Act, in respect of the time available, to redeem the secured assets.
DESCRIPTION OF THE MORTGAGED PROPERTY - All That Piece And Parcel Of Property No.44-7-557-2580 I.e. Old No.44A/2580 In CTS No.2819A/2 Measuring 183 3/9 Sq Mtr With Building In Area Of 79 Sq Mtr Situated In Ward No.44, Krishanagar, Hubballi Town, Taluk, And Sub-Registrar Jurisdiction Of Hubballi (South) In Dharwad District, Which is Bounded As Under, East By: Railway Line, West By: Other Portion Of Property In CTS No.2819A, North By: Property In CTS No. 2822, South By: Property In CTS No.2818
Date: 17th March, 2026
Place: HUBLI, KARNATAKA
Sd/-, For Protium Finance Limited
Authorized Officer

EDITORIAL

The Day IAF Broke PAF's Back: 'The Sky Warriors: Operation Sindoor Unveiled'

In the high-octane world of aerial combat literature, Vishnu Som's book *The Sky Warriors: Operation Sindoor Unveiled* is a bone-rattling roar of an afterburner take-off. It offers a cockpit-eye view of Operation Sindoor - the 2025 Indian heavy-hammer response to Pakistan following the Pahalgam terrorist attack. *The Sky Warriors* is both a technical and operational post-game analysis of this high-intensity clash, delivering a narrative that is as much a white paper on modern SEAD (Suppression of Enemy Air Defence) as it is a gripping and sharply written combat chronicle. Som recounts the 2025 air war with definitive knowledge and insider accounts, deconstructing it with the precision of a Tom Clancy thriller. For tech enthusiasts, the book is a goldmine. You're not just reading about systems, you're inside them. We're talking BVR radar locks, BrahMos launch sequences, and the cold logic of S-400 engagement envelopes. But the real brilliance lies in his analysis of the escalation matrix. Som highlights an IAF that has matured into a multi-domain warfare machine - one that knows exactly when to exercise restraint and when to unleash decisive force. The standout revelation, however, is the strategic decapitation of the PAF. While the first-day dogfights following the IAF strikes on terrorist camps grabbed headlines, Som pulls back the curtain on the overwhelming kinetic response against Pakistan's air defence sites, airfields, and command-and-control (C2) centres. Using BrahMos-NG, SCALP, Harop, and other precision-attack munitions and drones, the IAF didn't just win a skirmish-it induced paralysis and altered the trajectory of this 88-hour war. Beyond the initial scramble of the first day, the PAF had little left to demonstrate, unlike in the wars of 1965 and 1971. Within 48 hours, it was rendered largely inconsequential. Pakistan's air defence lay in shambles, its fighter fleet was reduced to ineffective patrols, and the IAF's Integrated Air Defence Ground System (IADGS) stood as an impenetrable shield.

With runways cratered, assets destroyed both in the air and on the ground, and logistics and command nodes under severe pressure, Pakistan's DGMO ultimately sought a ceasefire, averting further irreversible degradation of PAF capabilities.

The air warriors, Som profiles, men and women in blue, going beyond the call of duty, embody a brand of quiet, lethal professionalism that should inspire national pride. The book highlights Cold Start precision and the sheer grit of pilots who stared down an escalation matrix and didn't blink. You feel the tension of pilots managing "Master Caution" alarms in hostile skies, the discipline of split-second decisions under strict Rules of Engagement (ROE), and the seamless coordination between cockpit and command centres. Som presents warfare at its most precise-and most human.

The Sky Warriors isn't just another military account. It is fast-paced, gripping, and deeply relevant in a world where air dominance defines geopolitical power. It's not just a record of conflict; it's a tribute to the technical and operational evolution of the Indian Air Force, which captures the new normal for India.

The Sky Warriors is an essential pick for casual readers and enthusiasts alike, a high-Mach dive into the present and future of air combat. If you want to understand how modern wars are truly won, or simply experience a narrative that never lets go, this book is a must-read.

The Curious Reason 2 Iran 'Proxies' Haven't Joined The War Against Israel

On March 16, the internet was abuzz with the footage of an Iranian-backed militia infiltrating the US Embassy in Baghdad, using a first-person view (FPV) drone for a reconnaissance mission. It was released by the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) and showed the drone - likely controlled via fibre-optic cable to bypass electronic jamming - flying unchallenged through the heavily fortified complex for nearly two minutes.

On its heels came another announcement by a group calling itself Kata'ib Hezbollah, demanding that every "foreign soldier" leave the country. Its security chief said, "Iraq's instability is due to the malicious American presence, and security will not be achieved until the last foreign soldier leaves Iraqi territory." The group, which Washington has designated as a "terrorist organisation", is part of the same umbrella organisation known as the PMF, or, as they call themselves, the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, which has been claiming daily attacks on US interests in Iraq and the region.

The Long Shadow War These incidents spotlight the role of the proxies that Iran has created, funded, and supported over the years to fight its shadow war with Israel and the US. These include Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and the more recent PMF or the AL Hashd-al Shabi in Iraq. There have been other groups such as Islamic Jihad in Gaza, and Shiite groups in Syria and in Lebanon, but they are now defunct or have become bit players. The PMF has a relatively recent history. These Shiite militia groups appeared as late as 2014, to



fight the Islamic State (ISIS) when the Iraqi army proved too inept, weak and corruption-riddled to do so, and Mosul, the second-largest Iraqi city, quickly fell to ISIS. Many of them, trained by the elite Quds force of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and thereafter closely aligned with Iran, won the real battle against the ISIS, which won them both authority and goodwill from the population. Later, they were absorbed into the Iraqi armed forces. However, those that remained closely aligned with Iran, like the Kata'ib Hezbollah, continue to be a law unto themselves, causing friction both within the umbrella movement as well as with the Iraqi state. These groups have always demanded the withdrawal of US troops from the country. Since the start of the US-Israel war on Iran, according to reports, airstrikes on Iran-aligned armed groups in Iraq, largely believed to be carried out by the US and Israel, have killed and wounded tens of

Iraqis. Meanwhile, US bases in Iraqi Kurdistan and the American embassy in Baghdad have sustained multiple drone and missile attacks. Amid repeated attacks on US interests in the country, Washington has ordered all of its nationals to immediately leave Iraq.

The Hezbollah's Assault

Similarly, Iran's other major proxy, the Hezbollah in Lebanon, has opened up a second front, targeting northern Israel. Israel, in turn, has also been bombing Hezbollah strongholds. In fact, Hezbollah has been Iran's most faithful proxy group, created in 1982 in Lebanon to fight Israel's presence in Lebanon, as well as, more covertly, preserve the Shia identity and rights in Lebanon's fragmented polity. What distinguishes Hezbollah is that it is a political party in Lebanon with seats in its parliament and also commands its own private army, which has proved its mettle, at least till now. In

2000, it was Hezbollah that forced an Israeli withdrawal from Southern Lebanon, which is a Shia stronghold. Similarly, in 2006, in the Israel-Hezbollah war, the militia was able to stop Israel from crossing over. Hezbollah also played a pivotal role in battling ISIS and other jihadist groups during the Syrian Civil War. When war broke out between Israel and Hamas in October 2023, Hezbollah opened up a second front targeting northern Israel. However, this time Israel retaliated aggressively, including through ground invasions, such that the group was significantly degraded and downsized and its senior leadership decapitated.

Nevertheless, the Hezbollah has joined in this time around, on behalf of Iran, saying it was avenging the killing of the erstwhile Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei. Israel, though, has inflicted heavy damages and casualties: more than 800 Lebanese are reported killed and a mil-

lion displaced in this round of conflict, according to Lebanese government estimates. Given the disproportionate balance of power and the damage inflicted, the Lebanese government has wanted to ban Hezbollah. Meanwhile, Israel is preparing a ground assault in Southern Lebanon.

The Hamas's Silence

The real surprise, however, has been the non-engagement by Iran's other two major proxies - Hamas and the Houthis. Hamas has not only been inactive - something understandable, given that Israel has crippled it, rendering it almost non-existent militarily - but it has even gone a step further and called upon Iran to refrain from attacking Gulf countries. This is possibly because Hamas is also heavily dependent on Qatar, which is sheltering many of the group's operatives on its territory and whose funding kept Hamas in control in Gaza till the war began in October 2023.

India Talks About Science, But Its Institutions Don't Support It

In 1976, the 42nd Amendment did something few constitutions have attempted. It made scientific temper a civic obligation. Article 51A(h) placed on every Indian citizen the duty to "develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform." The clause was quietly radical - not because it mandated knowledge, but because it framed a way of thinking as essential to democratic citizenship. Nearly fifty years on, that framing deserves serious examination, not as a tribute to constitutional foresight, but as a measure of how far institutional reality has drifted from it. The numbers are the obvious starting point. India's gross expenditure on research and development has remained stubbornly below 0.7% of GDP for over a decade. The global average stands at 1.8%. South Korea spends 4.9%. Even among middle-income economies, India is an outlier. The private sector, which typically drives R&D dynamism as economies mature, contributes only about 36% of India's total research expenditure - compared to 70-80% in China, the United States and Germany. This is not a talent gap. India produces more STEM graduates than almost any country on earth. It is a structural gap, rooted in how research institutions are governed and the incentives under which they operate. That governance problem runs deeper than budgets. Public research institutions function under tight regulatory control, with limited academic and financial autonomy. The contrast with Germany's Max Planck and Fraunhofer Institutes, which combine clear public mandates with significant operational independence,



is instructive. The Anusandhan National Research Foundation, operationalised in 2024 with considerable fanfare, has not yet resolved the persistent problem of research grant disbursement delays. Projects stall not because scientists are absent but because administrative systems are slow. The infrastructure for inquiry exists; the institutional conditions for it are often absent. The quality of research outputs compounds these concerns. India now ranks third globally in life sciences paper retractions, behind only China and the United States, a pattern that reflects the distorted incentives of an ecosystem that rewards publication volume over rigour. The National Institutional Ranking Framework has recently begun penalising universities with high retraction rates, which is a welcome corrective. But fixing the signal without changing the underlying incentive structure is unlikely to produce lasting improvement. What has received less attention is the constitutional dimension of this failure. Article 51A(h) places the duty of developing a scientific temper on citizens, but the constitutional logic implies a reciprocal obligation on the

state. A citizen cannot reasonably be expected to develop a spirit of inquiry in a university system that penalises questioning, or in a research environment where independent thought is structurally constrained. The duty the constitution assigns to individuals is only fulfillable if institutions make it possible. That precondition has not been consistently met. The non-justiciability of Fundamental Duties is a known feature of Indian constitutional design. Article 51A cannot be enforced through courts and no institution is formally accountable for its implementation. This produces a specific kind of policy vacuum: there is no body tasked with assessing the institutional conditions for scientific temper, no benchmarking framework, no periodic review of whether the state is creating the environment the clause demands. The contrast with Fundamental Rights, which carry justiciability, remedies and decades of jurisprudence best illustrates this asymmetry. The comparative picture offers some direction. Countries that have meaningfully narrowed their science-society gap, including Finland, South Korea and Taiwan, have done so primarily

through institutional investment rather than communication campaigns. Research autonomy, doctoral pipeline support, stable long-term funding and governance frameworks that insulate scientific institutions from short-cycle pressures: these are the common denominators. India's challenge is less a shortage of institutions than a shortage of institutional urgency, the sense that science governance is a first-order policy priority rather than a residual one. None of this requires locating blame. It requires locating the problem accurately. The science-society disconnect in India is not primarily a public awareness problem, solvable through outreach or curriculum reform. It is a governance problem - one of institutional design, incentive structures and accountability frameworks. Article 51A(h) named the aspiration in 1976. The work of building the institutional architecture capable of realising it remains, fifty years later, substantially unfinished. Ablaz Mohammed Schemnad is a researcher at Sobriety Press working on science communication and higher education policy. He holds postgraduate degrees from TISS Hyderabad and Sciences Po Lille.

No Partners, No Power? The Shrinking Circle Of Vijay's TVK

In politics, timing is everything. And in Tamil Nadu, timing without alliances is often nothing. By insisting that he will neither join an alliance nor play second fiddle - but only lead one - Vijay may well have missed the political bus even before his electoral journey truly began. The arithmetic is unforgiving. With the 2026 elections approaching, it is increasingly clear that no major party is willing to come under the banner of his Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK). The only theoretical pathway - poaching allies from the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam which has won 3 consecutive elections - was always a long shot. That window now appears firmly shut. What makes this more striking is the scale of the opportunity that slipped away. Vijay entered politics at the peak of his cinematic career, commanding a rare, almost unmatched following among youth and women. Not since MG Ramachandran, who won 3 successive elections, has a star carried such momentum into the political arena. That alone should have made him the nucleus of a formidable alliance. Instead, hesitation - and perhaps overconfidence - seems to have defined his early political moves. Rather than actively reaching out and stitching together a coalition, Vijay appeared to wait, expecting others to gravitate towards him. In Tamil Nadu's deeply networked alliance culture, that was a misreading of political reality. Ironically, he had the right pitch. TVK's promise of a "share in power" was a direct appeal to smaller parties long frustrated by the dominance of the two Dravidian majors - the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra



Kazhagam - both of which have consistently resisted coalition-style governance. This was Vijay's opening. Consider the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi. A vocal advocate of power-sharing, it could have been the first domino. But alliances are built on trust and initiative. For VCK, a long-time DMK ally, the risk of "blinking first" was too high. Vijay needed to make that move easier - he didn't. The Indian National Congress too briefly hovered around the idea of a new alignment. A Congress-TVK tie-up could have been transformative - giving TVK structure and Congress relevance in a state where it has long ceded ground. Instead,

Congress used the possibility of a new alliance as leverage, extracting a better deal from the DMK and moving on. Even the opposition All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, led by Edappadi K Palaniswami, briefly signalled interest. The optics - TVK flags at AIADMK events - hinted at a potential convergence. A tie-up could have echoed the successful AIADMK-Vijayakanth's DMDK experiment that once reshaped the opposition space. But that moment passed, as AIADMK recalibrated and revived ties with the BJP. Perhaps the most telling gap was the failure to engage with DMDK. With Premalatha Vijayakanth

now aligning with the DMK, even that door has closed. The result is stark. A party that could have been the fulcrum of a new political formation risks becoming a holding space for the politically displaced. The groundswell of support Vijay generated remains real - but in electoral politics, sentiment without structure rarely translates into seats. As nomination deadlines approach, Vijay's political instincts face their first real stress test. But the larger question lingers: in a state where alliances are everything, has Vijay already missed his moment? Or is the support for TVK exponentially growing, set to defy alliance arithmetic?

Rupee crashes 49 paise to record low of 92.89 against US dollar

Mumbai: The rupee slumped 49 paise to close at a record low of 92.89 against the US dollar on Wednesday, March 19, weighed down by a stronger greenback and sustained FII outflows. Elevated crude oil prices in global markets amid intensifying conflict in West Asia further dampened sentiments, forex traders said. At the inter-bank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 92.42 against the greenback and traded in the range of 92.41-92.89 before closing at its record low of 92.89, sharply down by 49 paise from its previous close. Earlier on Tuesday, the domestic hit its previous lowest intra-day level of 92.47 against the dollar before settling at an all-time low of 92.40. "The rupee hit a new low ahead of the major central banks meetings... as the Reserve Bank of India allowed the 92.50 level to be breached," Anil Kumar Bhansali, Head of Treasury and Executive Director, Finrex Treasury Advisors LLP, said. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.05 per cent higher at 99.62. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading flat at



USD 103.4 per barrel in futures trade. On the domestic equity market front, the Sensex settled higher by 633.29 points, or 0.83 per cent, to 76,704.13, while the Nifty also rose sharply by 196.65 points, or 0.83 per cent, to 23,777.80. Foreign institutional investors sold equities worth Rs 2,714.35 crore on a net basis on Wednesday, according to exchange data. At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 92.42 against the greenback and traded in the range of 92.41-92.89 before closing at its record low of 92.89, sharply down by 49 paise from its previous close. Earlier on Tuesday, the

domestic hit its previous lowest intra-day level of 92.47 against the dollar before settling at an all-time low of 92.40. "The rupee hit a new low ahead of the major central banks meetings... as the Reserve Bank of India allowed the 92.50 level to be breached," Anil Kumar Bhansali, Head of Treasury and Executive Director, Finrex Treasury Advisors LLP, said. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.05 per cent higher at 99.62. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading flat at USD 103.4 per barrel in

futures trade. On the domestic equity market front, the Sensex settled higher by 633.29 points, or 0.83 per cent, to 76,704.13, while the Nifty also rose sharply by 196.65 points, or 0.83 per cent, to 23,777.80. The Indian stock market has experienced a significant fall today, with both the Nifty 50 and Sensex showing a considerable decline. Investors and traders are closely watching the evolving global and domestic market conditions as they try to understand the reasons behind this Bearish market. In today's session, both indices opened with a gap down, reflecting negative views from the start. As trad-

ing continued, the market moved sideways. This led to a sharp intraday decline in both the Sensex and the Nifty, highlighting negative sentiment among market participants. Index Overview The equity benchmark indices declined on Thursday, as a combination of factors weighed on investor sentiment. The Nifty Index opened at 23,197.75, marking a gap-down opening from its previous close of 23,777.80, and fell by nearly 2.4 percent from the previous close. Meanwhile, the Sensex Index opened at 74,750.92, representing a gap-down from its previous close of 76,704.13, but has since declined by almost 2.5 percent from the previous close. Midcap and smallcap stocks also faced heavy losses, with the BSE 150 Midcap and BSE 250 Smallcap indices dropping 2% each. Overall, investors saw their wealth shrink by more than Rs. 7 lakh crore as the total market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies fell from Rs. 439 lakh crore to Rs. 432 lakh crore. Here are the reasons for the fall: Iran-US War Escalates The US-Iran conflict, which began on February 28, is intensifying instead of ending soon.

THE IRAN WAR IS CAUSING A GLOBAL ENERGY CRISIS



China has long braced for a Gulf oil supply shock - but the Iran war's disruption of a key global shipping route is now putting its resilience to the test. Energy shipments from the Middle East have been at a standstill following Iran's threats to attack vessels that pass through a critical trade waterway as retaliation against US-Israeli strikes. The blockade has led to a global oil shortage which has rocked Gulf-reliant Asian countries hard - with the Philippines mandating four-day work weeks to save fuel, and Indonesia seeking ways to avoid burning through reserves that will last just weeks. China, the world's largest buyer of oil, is also feeling the strain. But

the country sits in a better position than its neighbours, after years of statecraft that have prepared it for a global energy crisis. A test of China's energy network The world economy has been thrown into turbulence since the US and Israel launched strikes against Iran in late February. Since then, oil prices have at points soared to close to \$120 (£90) a barrel - pushed up by strikes on shipping and energy infrastructure and the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz, the world's busiest oil shipping channel. About a fifth of the world's oil passes through the strait - around 20 million barrels each day, according to estimates from the US Energy Information Administration (EIA). The shortage has left countries scrambling for alternative crude suppliers outside of the Gulf, while others are tapping into their own oil reserves. As the world's second-largest consumer of oil after the US, China uses an estimated 15 to 16 million barrels of oil daily, various market analysts told the BBC. The oil is mainly used for China's massive transportation network of cars, trucks and jets. And much of it comes from abroad. Gulf countries are a major source of the oil China ships in, with barrels from Saudi Arabia and Iran accounting for more than 10% of its imports each, according to the US Energy Information Administration (EIA).

Administration (EIA). The shortage has left countries scrambling for alternative crude suppliers outside of the Gulf, while others are tapping into their own oil reserves. As the world's second-largest consumer of oil after the US, China uses an estimated 15 to 16 million barrels of oil daily, various market analysts told the BBC. The oil is mainly used for China's massive transportation network of cars, trucks and jets. And much of it comes from abroad. Gulf countries are a major source of the oil China ships in, with barrels from Saudi Arabia and Iran accounting for more than 10% of its imports each, according to the US Energy Information Administration (EIA).

BMW to hike its vehicle prices in India by up to 2 pc from April 1

New Delhi: BMW Group India on Thursday, March 19, said it will increase vehicle prices by up to 2 per cent across its vehicle range with effect from April 1, in order to offset the impact of escalating logistics, material costs and depreciating rupee. The price increase will be applicable across the range for BMW and MINI vehicles, the German luxury carmaker said in a statement. "BMW Group India continues to create new benchmarks in the luxury automotive segment in the country, with strong demand and a record-breaking product portfolio. However, to offset escalating logistics and material costs alongside a depreciating rupee, we are implementing a price adjustment of up to 2 per cent across our range effective April 1, 2026," BMW Group India President and CEO Hardeep Singh Brar stated. This recalibration ensures the company continues to deliver the uncompromising performance, cutting-edge innovation, and world-class service



that customers expect, he added. Mercedes-Benz India and Audi India have already announced to increase vehicle prices from next month. The increase was to offset the impact of escalating logistics, material costs and depreciating rupee, the carmaker said. Automobile manufacturer BMW Group India announced on Thursday that it will implement a price hike of up to 2 per cent across its BMW and MINI ranges effective April

1, 2026. The company attributed the price hike as an offset measure to rising logistics and material costs and a depreciating rupee, according to the statement. "This recalibration ensures we continue to deliver the uncompromising performance, cutting-edge innovation, and world-class service that our customers expect," said Hardeep Singh Brar, President and CEO, BMW Group India. BMW Group India continues to create

new benchmarks in the luxury automotive segment in the country, with strong demand and a record-breaking product portfolio, he added. The company noted that BMW India Financial Services continues to offer customised financial plans, including "attractive monthly instalments, reduced rate of interest for selective models, assured buy-back options and flexible end-of-term opportunities among other benefits."

Bank of England 'ready to act' as it warns Iran war 'shock' will push up inflation

The Bank of England "stands ready to act" to keep interest rates at a level to control inflation, its governor Andrew Bailey has said. His comments came as the Bank announced it was leaving its key rate unchanged at 3.75%. Until the conflict in the Middle East began a rate cut had been expected. The Bank said prices would rise more quickly due to the "new shock to the economy" and now expects inflation to be close to 3.5% in March. All members of the rate-setting committee voted to hold rates and "assess how events unfold". They also discussed whether a rate rise could be needed, although Bailey suggested markets were "getting ahead" of themselves in assuming several rises this year. Before the US-Israel attack on Iran, economists had expected inflation and interest rates to fall further this year. Some had pencilled in a rate cut for March. But the committee decided to hold, in the first unanimous vote for four-and-a-half years. The conflict has pushed up the price of oil and gas sharply, with



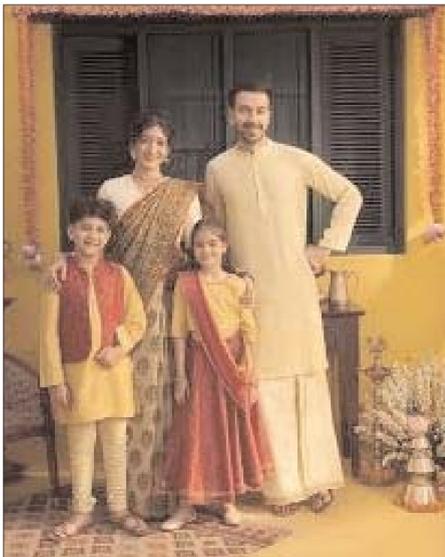
attacks on energy infrastructure in the last 24 hours adding further upward pressure. That has raised the prospect of another pick-up in inflation. "War in the Middle East has pushed up energy prices. You can already see that at the petrol pump and, if it lasts, it will feed into higher household energy bills later in the year," said Bailey. The only way to address higher energy prices was by restoring safe passage for shipping in the Gulf, he said. But he

emphasised the focus of the Bank's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) was on the wider knock-on impact on prices. "Whatever happens, our job is to make sure inflation gets back to its 2% target," said Bailey. Inflation in January stood at 3%. The language at recent meetings of the MPC has centred around a reduction in borrowing costs. At February's meeting members were split, with four backing a cut and five, including the Bank's govern-

nor, voting to hold rates steady. Notes from this meeting showed the debate has been turned on its head, with the committee all backing a hold in rates. They also discussed whether a rate rise could be required in the coming months, something which financial markets now think could be the next move. Following the Bank's latest decision and comments, traders are predicting there could be two hikes before the end of the year, taking rates to 4.25%.

Celebrate New Beginnings with Fabindia's Ugadi Collection

As the auspicious occasion of Ugadi marks a fresh start and a harvest of prosperity, Fabindia announced its exclusive Ugadi curation. Rooted in tradition and crafted for joyful beginnings, this curated range features festive looks for the entire family, including specially designed ensembles for men, women, and children that capture the spirit of the festival. The women's range includes elegantly hand-block printed saris, silk embroidered kurtas, and the timeless grace of Banarasi and Chikankari dupattas. For men, it offers a sophisticated variety of shirts and both short and long kurtas, complemented by artisanal Bandhgala jackets. Expanding the celebration to the youngest members of the family, the kids' wear line features silk blend hand-block printed jackets and long kurta-pyjama sets for boys, alongside vibrant hand-



block printed choli and lehenga sets for girls. The Ugadi collection is now available at Fabindia stores nationwide and online at

www.fabindia.com. This season, celebrate new beginnings with the authentic artisanal charm that defines the Fabindia experience.

HDFC BANK SAYS 'BAFFLED' AT CHAIRMAN'S ETHICS CONCERN THAT MADE HIM QUIT

New Delhi/Mumbai: HDFC Bank's non-executive chairman Atanu Chakraborty abruptly resigned, citing differences over "values and ethics" - a ground that the management of the country's second-largest lender said was baffling, as the former bureaucrat offered no specific instance despite repeated requests. Keki Mistry, a veteran of the HDFC Bank Group, was appointed as the interim chairman, following the resignation, said there may have been "relationship issues" between Chakraborty and the executive leadership, but found no "substantive" concerns behind the departure. Mistry emphasised that the bank's operations and governance remain stable. This is the first time that the part-time chairman of HDFC Bank left mid-way, raising concerns over its functioning. "Certain happenings and practices within the bank, that I have observed over the last two years, are not in congruence with my personal values and ethics. This is the basis of my aforementioned decision," he said in his resignation letter dated March 17. In a letter addressed to the Chairman of Governance, Nomination, Remuneration Committee (NRC) HK Bhanwala, Chakraborty said, "There are no



other material reasons for my resignation other than those stated above". In a late evening Wednesday filing, HDFC Bank said Chakraborty has on March 18, 2026, tendered his resignation as the Part-time Chairman and Independent Director of the Bank with immediate effect. It is to be noted that Chakraborty was appointed part-time chairman effective May 5, 2021, almost a year after retirement as Economic Affairs Secretary. His term was extended for another three years in 2024 till May 4, 2027. Chakraborty, a 1985 batch IAS officer of Gujarat cadre, retired as Secretary of the Department of Economic Affairs in April 2020. Prior to that, he was

Secretary of the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM). Both departments come under the Finance Ministry. Chakraborty became chairman during the reverse merger process of the bank with the parent entity HDFC Ltd, a leading mortgage firm in the country. The merger of HDFC Ltd with HDFC Bank became effective on July 1, 2023, creating a financial behemoth with a combined balance sheet of over Rs 18 lakh crore. Taking note of the exit, the RBI said there were no material concerns on record as regards the bank's conduct or governance. "HDFC Bank is a Domestically Systemically Important

Bank (D-SIB) with sound financials, a professionally run board and a competent management team. Basis our periodical assessment, there are no material concerns on record as regards its conduct or governance," the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said in a statement. The statement emphasised that the bank remains well-capitalised and its financial position remains satisfactory with sufficient liquidity. Shares of HDFC Bank dived over 5 per cent on Thursday following the exit of the bank's chairman. The blue-chip stock tumbled 5.13 per cent to settle at Rs 799.70 on the BSE, trimming some of its sharp early losses. During the day, it tanked 8.41 per cent to Rs 772 - its 52-week low. However, the finance ministry said the bank is a "strong institution with strong fundamentals". Financial Services Secretary M Nagaraju said the RBI has already issued a statement in this regard. "HDFC Bank is a strong institution with strong fundamentals," he said. Addressing reporters about the surprise move, HDFC Bank MD and CEO Sashidhar Jagdishan noted that a majority of the board members said they are "baffled" by Chakraborty's move because he did not offer any specific concerns that he is alluding to in the resignation letter.

Qatar calls energy plant strikes 'dangerous escalation' and says Iran must stop attacks

Turkish foreign minister Hakan Fidan continues, he says he thinks "Israel's attempts to white wash their own crimes" under the guise of this regional conflict should never be allowed. Fidan says the Iran war "should not distract the attention of the international community from Palestine and the tragedy in Gaza". He says that Israel "continues recklessly its ceasefire violations using the opportunity of this created chaos", adding that the situation on the ground maintains its gravity. Fidan also condemns Israel's attacks in Lebanon. "The only key to establishing true and sustainable security in the region is to establish a just and dignified peace with the Palestinian people", he says. Turkish foreign minister Hakan Fidan is up next at the news conference, he says his visit to Qatar is a show of solidarity. "We condemn and denounce the attacks that disregard the



lives of civilians and target civilian infrastructure", he says. "These attacks can never be legitimised", he adds. More now from Qatar's PM who highlights "the importance of an immediate stop" of Iranian attacks on the region and the need for de-escalation. He gives his thanks to Turkey for supporting the state of Qatar and stability and safety in the region. The Qatar-Turkey

news conference has just begun - you can watch live above. Our correspondent Frank Gardner is in the room: Israel and Iran are dragging the region into conflict, Qatar's PM Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani says. He adds the attack on Ras Laffan "a very dangerous escalation by the Iranians". Alarms have just gone off here in Qatar as we wait for this news conference with

Qatar's PM and Turkey's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan. This happens every time Iran launches a missile or drone in this direction. The conference seems to be still going ahead. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent says the US may waive sanctions on Iranian oil, as it looks for ways to keep energy prices in check. The move would affect about 140 million barrels of oil that are already on

the water, he suggests in a Fox Business interview. The world consumes roughly 100 million barrels per day. It adds to other US efforts to boost oil supplies, including the suspension of sanctions on Russian oil and the contribution of 172 million barrels of oil to a global release of oil reserves. Bessent has previously said the US is also allowing Iranian oil tankers through, despite the conflict. How much of an impact it will have on prices is unclear. Asked about concerns that the US is funding its enemies, Bessent says the US would be "using the Iranian barrels against the Iranians" to keep prices down for the next 10-14 days. Britain will "step up" defensive support for Gulf states after Iran attacked energy sites across the region, Defence Secretary John Healey says. He adds that Tehran's attacks overnight are a "serious escalation" which threaten to "further

destabilise the region". "We can see the impact here on the cost of living, the price of fuel, so it's important that we do everything we can with a lot of other countries that need to be involved in trying to reopen those straits", Healey tells PA news agency. The best way of taking the pressure off world oil prices, he says, is "to see a de-escalation and an end to the conflict". Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi says the attack on Qatar's Ras Laffan energy complex only employed a "FRACTION of our power". "The ONLY reason for restraint was respect for requested de-escalation," he writes on X. In an apparent threat to the US, Israel and Gulf nations, he goes on to say there will be "ZERO restraint" if Iranian infrastructure is struck again. He also says any end to the war "must address damage" to Iran's civilian sites. The jump in gas prices today comes as no surprise.

SOUTH AFRICANS SAY CRIMINAL GANGS ARE EXPLOITING THE WATER CRISIS



In the Johannesburg suburb of Greenside, a large group of protesters of all ages and backgrounds are waving placards and banging empty plastic bottles together. "We want water, we want water!" they chant. Northern Johannesburg is known for its lush leafy suburbs. But after years of intermittent water shortages in South Africa, residents say they are fed up. Some have had no running water for over a month. "Our pipes have been bone-dry with no water coming through at all," says Colin Regesky. "It's not very healthy because everyone can get sick with

no running water. And also according to the constitution it's our right to have water." Another protester, Jenny Gillies, has lived in the area for 40 years. "I am here today because it is an actual disgrace," she says. "We are reduced to begging and protesting for water." From 2022 to early 2024, Johannesburg, South Africa's economic hub, suffered crippling electricity shortages, which were managed via a process known as load shedding. Blackouts lasting up to eight hours a day severely disrupted the lives of ordinary South Africans and businesses.

DR Congo and Rwanda agree to ease tensions after talks in US



The Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda have agreed to take "concrete steps" to ease tensions amid a stalled peace process, after talks hosted by the US in Washington. Conflict in eastern DR Congo has continued despite the two countries signing a peace deal with US President Donald Trump last year. The pledge to ease tensions comes after the US earlier this month sanctioned the Rwandan Defence Forces and four senior officials and accused Rwanda of directly supporting the M23 rebel group, blaming it for escalating the conflict. A joint statement by DR Congo, Rwanda and the US says they have "agreed to a series of coordinated steps to de-escalate tensions and advance progress on the ground". They pledged to respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, while Rwanda would disengage its forces and lift "defensive measures... in defined areas in DR Congo's territory", the statement says. While DR Congo would intensify "time-bound" efforts to neutralise the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), an armed group that includes some Rwandan ethnic Hutus involved in the

1994 Rwandan genocide and remains active in eastern DR Congo. Rwanda describes the FDLR as a "genocidal militia" and says its continued existence in eastern DR Congo threatens its own territory. It has repeatedly denied supporting M23 despite overwhelming evidence, saying its military presence is a defensive measure against threats against its security by armed groups in DR Congo. Fighting has persisted in eastern DR Congo despite the US-brokered peace deal in December aimed at ending the long-running conflict. Days after the signing ceremony, the M23 entered the Congolese city of Uvira near the Burundi border in the biggest escalation of the conflict in months. It later pulled out under US pressure, although it still controls large parts of eastern DR Congo, including the region's two biggest cities, Goma and Bukavu. Earlier this month, while announcing the Rwandan sanctions, the US said that despite the M23's withdrawal, its continued presence near the Burundian border and Rwandan military support to them carried "the risk of escalating the conflict into a broader regional war".

Kevin Spacey and accusers settle before civil trial

Kevin Spacey has agreed an out-of-court settlement with three men who had sued the actor after accusing him of sexual assault. The civil cases had been due to go to trial at the High Court later this year, but those proceedings have now been frozen following the settlement. The men alleged that Spacey assaulted them between 2000 and 2013. The Oscar winner, 66, denies all allegations of wrongdoing. He was separately cleared of nine sexual offence charges at a criminal trial in 2023. Two of the men who accused the Oscar-winning star during the criminal trial also filed civil legal cases at the High Court. One man, known only as LNP, alleged that Spacey "deliberately assaulted" him on



about 12 occasions between 2000 and 2005. Another, referred to as GHI, says he met Spacey through a workshop at London's Old Vic theatre and claimed he "suffered psychiatric damage and financial loss" as a result of an assault in 2008. Spacey was artistic director of the Old Vic between 2004 and 2013. The third man, Ruari Cannon, has waived his right to anonymity.

Are US and Israel in lockstep in Iran war? Deciphering Trump's post after gas field attacks

US President Donald Trump has issued a typically strongly worded statement in the wake of attacks on a major gas field shared by Iran and Qatar on Wednesday. Israel hit Iran's South Pars - part of the world's largest natural gas field - and Tehran retaliated by striking an energy complex in Qatar. The attacks led to a spike in energy prices, and fuelled Trump's wrath. On his Truth Social media platform, Trump threatened Iran again and said he didn't know about Israel's plans for the attack. So what does the language used by the US president tell us about the course of the war and the extent to which the US and Israel are aligned on its strategy and goals? Let's break it down. The president says the US



"knew nothing about this particular attack". This flies in the face of multiple newspaper reports in Israel in the aftermath of the attack. The attack "was co-ordinated in advance with the United States and... agreed upon between Prime Minister [Benjamin] Netanyahu and US President Trump," the centrist paper Yedioth

Ahronoth reported. Right-wing paper Israel Hayom goes further, saying "President Trump discussed the upcoming Israeli strike in [Iran's coastal city of] Asaluyeh with leaders of three Persian Gulf states over the weekend". As is often the case with the president's assertions, it is not easy to know where the truth lies. His choice of

words to describe the Israeli attack is also telling. "Out of anger," he says, Israel "violently lashed out" against the gas field. This is the sort of language used to describe some of Iran's wilder retaliations - not a carefully considered military operation by a close ally. Is Trump suggesting that Israel acted unwisely? Israel will make "no more attacks" on gas field The president's use of capitals is notorious, but in this lengthy post, he resorts to all caps just once. "NO MORE ATTACKS WILL BE MADE BY ISRAEL" pertaining to this extremely important and valuable South Pars Field," he writes, "unless Iran unwisely decides to attack a very innocent, in this case Qatar."

CHAD WARNS SUDAN IT WILL RETALIATE AFTER DRONE STRIKE ON MOURNERS KILLS 17

Chad's president has ordered the military to retaliate against future attacks from Sudan following a drone attack that killed at least 17 people and injured several other people attending a funeral. Wearing military uniform, President Idris Mahamat Déby convened an emergency security meeting on Wednesday evening, where he ordered the military to be on high alert. He also ordered a "total closure" of the border with Sudan. He described the attack targeting the border town of Tiné as "outrageous and a blatant aggression" against Chad's territorial integrity. He said that it had hap-



pened despite warnings to the two sides battling each other in Sudan and a previous closure of the border. Last month, Chad closed its border with Sudan "until further notice" to stop repeated incursions by Sudanese armed groups. It however allowed "except-

tional exemptions" on humanitarian grounds, with prior authorisation from relevant authorities. Residents of Tiné said the victims of Wednesday's attack were mourners, with one quoted by the Reuters news agency as saying they had gathered at a house for

a funeral ceremony that involved reading the Koran. The attack drew condemnation from several quarters, including from the National Assembly and MPs from the ruling party. "The government bows with deep dismay to the memory of the victims and extends its deepest condolences to the bereaved families," a statement by the government spokesman said. The spokesman said Chad had now "strengthened the posture of its defence and security forces" and was ready to pursue its rights inside Sudanese territory "in strict compliance with the rules of international law".

Japan PM to hold 'difficult' talks with Trump as Iran conflict looms large



Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi is on her way to what she expects will be a "very difficult" meeting with US leader Donald Trump, days after his calls for allies to help secure the war-stricken Strait of Hormuz went largely unanswered. Takaichi told parliament hours before her departure that she would "do everything to maximise [Japan's] national interest". The three-day visit to Washington was a chance to talk trade and deepen the US-Japan alliance ahead of Trump's diplomatic trip to China, which has now been postponed because of the war. But now it is the topic of the war that will likely overshadow the meeting, which is shaping up to be a test of Takaichi's friendship with Trump. The trip was scheduled back in October, a week after Takaichi took office, when Tokyo rolled out the red carpet for Trump and the two leaders heaped compliments on each other, heralding a new "golden age" in bilateral ties. As of a few weeks ago, the upcoming meeting looked set to be a success, with Takaichi "fresh off a

dominant election victory and with a new round of investment projects in the US", Emma Chanlett-Avery, director for political and security affairs at the Asia Society Policy Institute, told the BBC. But while Takaichi "had intended to build on the warmth of her first meeting with Trump and press upon him Japan's concerns about Chinese aggression ahead of Trump's [then scheduled] meeting with Xi", recent events have complicated things, said Chanlett-Avery. Earlier this week, Trump posted on his Truth Social platform a call for some countries to help secure the vital strait. He had pointed to Japan's and other Asian economies' dependence on fuel from the Middle East as reason for them to get involved. "We get less than 1% of our oil from the [Strait of Hormuz] and some countries get much more... We want them to come and help us," he wrote. But after receiving a lukewarm response, he retracted his request, saying in a later post that the US did "NOT NEED THE HELP OF ANYONE!".



Three Palestinian women killed during Iranian missile attack

Cyprus leader calls for frank discussion on 'colonial' UK bases



The UK's two military bases on Cyprus are a "colonial consequence" on the island and talks on their status and future need to take place, Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides has told the BBC. "When the situation is over in the Middle East we are going to have an open and frank discussion with the British government," he said as he arrived for an EU leaders' summit in Brussels. Under the 1960 treaty establishing Cypriot independence from Britain, the UK

was given sovereignty of bases at Akrotiri and Dhekelia. However, RAF Akrotiri was targeted by drones this month shortly after the start of the US-Israeli war with Iran and the UK has faced some criticism for its response to the attack. The drones are thought to have been fired from Lebanon by Iranian-backed group Hezbollah and protesters have complained that the British bases on the island have made Cyprus a target.



BHA STRATEGY TO TACKLE 'CONSISTENT PATTERN' OF RACISM

People from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds have reported a "consistent pattern" of racism while working in horse racing, according to research commissioned by the sport's governing body. The British Horseracing Authority (BHA) has launched a new equality, diversity and inclusion strategy to tackle issues faced by underrepresented groups in the sport. The new strategy draws from research into the experiences of women, LGBTQ+ individuals and ethnically and culturally diverse employees. "The strategy outlines a vision for a sport where everyone feels respected, valued and able to fulfil their potential," the BHA said. "It is based on evidence and the experiences of racing's workforce, many of whom have positive experiences, but not all." The BHA's research into underrepresented groups in racing highlighted "negative experiences, barriers to progression (which are often hidden), inconsistent support, and



a lack of trust in reporting systems". A study which focused on the Urban Equestrian Academy - a social enterprise aimed at providing people from inner-city and diverse backgrounds access to horses and equestrian - found that all 20 participants had reported experiencing racism. In the same study, all participants said that race had impacted their career progression. One

participant shared that they had thought about suicide "on a few occasions because of the way I was treated". Meanwhile, 40% (67) of respondents in a separate survey said they had experienced, witnessed, or had reported to them inappropriate or poor behaviour because of ethnicity or cultural background. Some reported verbal abuse including aggressive racist language

such as "dirty refugee" and "better off if you had been bombed". The new strategy also identified a significant underrepresentation in female jockeys, with only 25% of jockeys being women despite them making up 70% of racing school students and 50% of racing staff. Women also receive just 9% of rides and only 3% in top-tier races. "The strategy is rooted in evidence and shaped

by the lived experiences of people working in racing today, and we offer a huge thank you to those who have taken the time and shown the courage to share these with us," the BHA's head of diversity and inclusion, Rose Grissell, said. "Many have positive experiences, but not everyone does, and acknowledging that is an important step in supporting positive progress. "Our aim is to make inclusion part of everyday practice, not an optional extra." The BHA's new equality, diversity and inclusion strategy includes the following proposals: Strengthen leadership and accountability Build equitable practices to address bias and barriers Improve education and awareness to act inclusively Better support and celebrate an inclusive culture Engage new audiences and make the sport more accessible BHA chief executive Brant Dunshea said the new strategy was about ensuring the "long-term health and success" of horse racing.

Sakshi's Heartfelt Birthday Post For MS Dhoni's 'Strength': "Pure Inspiration"

Former India captain MS Dhoni's wife, Sakshi, on Wednesday took to Instagram to share a heartfelt birthday post for her father-in-law, Pan Singh Dhoni. Sakshi credited her father-in-law for being the strength behind her husband's success. Dhoni has often credited his parents for his achievements. Sakshi shared a picture of Pan Singh Dhoni on her Instagram story, in which he can be seen feeding a piece of cake to a boy. She also shared a heartfelt caption, describing Pan Singh's journey as nothing short of inspirational. "From a young boy who left his village alone with courage... to building a legacy that the whole nation respects - your journey is pure inspiration. The strength behind my Man's success and because of you he is what he is today. We love you. Happy Birthday," posted Sakshi. Recently, South African batting legend AB de Villiers suggested that Dhoni must bat at number

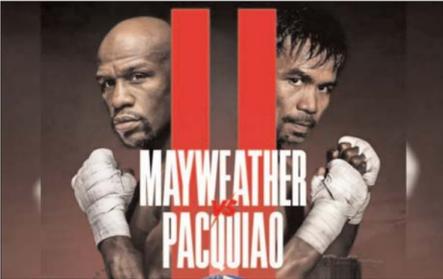


six or above for CSK in IPL 2026. His remarks came in to bat in the lower order last season to provide late bursts. "It's very tricky and not straightforward. Brands are built over years, and CSK have built this empire over many years with this MS Dhoni figure that's always been there. When you mention CSK, you immediately think of Dhoni," de Villiers told JioHotstar. "I feel that in the last few years, his role has purely been about keeping that brand as strong as possible. That's why I don't see

a role for him batting at eight or nine and not really doing enough, like last season," he added. The 44-year-old Dhoni is at the fag end of his career, but de Villiers feels he still has the potential to make an impact with the bat. "We know he can be impactful with the bat, but if he's batting that low and not captaining, it feels like he's almost just making up for a spot for the wrong reasons. There's still a place for him, but he needs to bat higher, at least at six, maybe even at five or four at times," said the South Africa great.

FLOYD MAYWEATHER TO FIGHT MANNY PACQUIAO IN LAS VEGAS IN SEPTEMBER

Floyd Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao will meet in a long-awaited rematch of the highest-grossing clash in boxing history this September at the Sphere in Las Vegas, Netflix announced Monday. The bout between two of boxing's biggest names - who famously fought a blockbuster clash in 2015, and are now both in their late forties - comes days after Mayweather announced he is coming out of retirement. It will be broadcast live September 19 on Netflix, as the global streaming platform increasingly moves into live sports with glitzy one-off events. "Floyd and I gave the world what remains the biggest fight in boxing history. The fans



have waited long enough - they deserve this rematch," said Pacquiao, 47, in a joint statement. Mayweather beat fellow welterweight Pacquiao in their money-spinning 2015 "Fight of the Century," which generated a record 4.6 million pay-per-view buys but largely failed to live up to the hype.

Mayweather is believed to have earned an estimated \$300 million from the unanimous points victory over the Filipino icon, which remains the most lucrative fight in history and generated more than \$600 million revenue. Former multi-weight world champion Mayweather retired from

boxing in 2017, unbeaten in 50 bouts, though he has continued to fight in exhibitions since, including an upcoming clash this spring with Mike Tyson. Pacquiao, also a multiple world champion, retired for a four-year period from 2021 in which he unsuccessfully ran for the Philippine presidency. He came out of retirement last year. Rumors of a Mayweather-Pacquiao rematch have circulated for years, and speculation soared following Mayweather's announcement last week that he would return to the professional arena this year. "I already fought and beat Manny once. This time will be the same result," said Mayweather, in the statement.

BCCI Receives Huge Request From Ajit Agarkar After India's T20 World Cup Triumph

Indian cricket team chief selector Ajit Agarkar has requested the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to extend his tenure till the 2027 ODI World Cup, according to Times of India. Agarkar's contract was extended by a year just before IPL 2025 as a reward for India winning the 2025 Champions Trophy and 2024 T20 World Cup. The report claimed that discussions are underway regarding his request but nothing concrete has emerged as of now. Another former Indian cricket team player from the West Zone was reportedly the front-runner to succeed Agarkar but nothing has developed on that front as well. The request is believed to be well-timed as it came



just after the T20 World Cup 2026 triumph. Back in 2020-21, when the top selector's post had opened up, it was Chetan Sharma who had pipped him despite Agarkar being an applicant. When the opportunity finally came his way in mid-2023, he inherited a responsibility to rebuild trust in a selection process

that is constantly under public glare. In the broader history of India's selection committees, particularly in the years following the influential tenures of Dilip Vengsarkar and Krishnamachari Srikkanth, Agarkar has arguably been among the most talked-about chairman. That attention

has come not merely from the position he holds but from the nature of decisions he has been willing to take. Over the past three years, the Indian team has played four ICC finals (2023 ODI World Cup, 2024 T20 World Cup, 2025 Champions Trophy, 2026 T20 World Cup), winning two and losing one. It could be three wins overall if India wins on Sunday against New Zealand in the T20 World Cup final. While the players and support staff rightfully command the spotlight for performances on the field, the selectors' role in shaping squads for global tournaments cannot be overlooked. Agarkar's tenure has been marked by calls that demanded conviction that could withstand criticism.

Dinesh Karthik Welcomes 3rd Child With Dipika Pallikal, Reveals Name

Former India wicketkeeper-batter Dinesh Karthik and squash star Dipika Pallikal have announced the arrival of their baby girl, Raaha Pallikal Karthik, marking a heartwarming expansion of their family. The couple shared the news in a social media announcement that expressed their gratitude and joy as they introduced their baby girl as the younger sister of their twin sons, Kabir and Zian. "With blessings in our hearts and gratitude beyond words, we joyfully welcome our precious girl into this world. Kabir and Zian are thrilled to introduce their baby sister, Raaha Pallikal Karthik. Love, Dipika & Dinesh" The couple tied the knot on



August 25, 2015 in traditional Hindu and Christian ceremonies and welcomed their twins in 2021. Karthik, a former Indian international cricketer, enjoyed a distinguished career behind the stumps and with the bat before transitioning into coaching and commentary roles following his retirement from competitive play. Over

more than two decades, he featured in Tests, ODIs, and T20 Internationals, and later served as a mentor and batting coach for Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the Indian Premier League (IPL). Dipika, meanwhile, etched her name in Indian squash history as the first Indian woman to break into the world's top-10 rankings.

Hearts manager McInnes rejects talk of regret

Manager Derek McInnes is refusing to talk about the fear of regret because he is convinced Heart of Midlothian will "have a special end to the season". Hearts' 1-0 defeat at Kilmarnock last weekend sparked questions about the long-time leaders' ability to claim the Scottish Premiership despite still being two points clear of Celtic at the top. McInnes, though, remains confident and hopes the return of key duo Cammy Devlin and Lawrence Shankland ensures Hearts are the team that "catches fire between now and the end of the season". Devlin and Shankland have been missing since January with ankle and hamstring injuries respectively but both are back in full training and are set to be



involved against Dundee on Saturday. "I don't want to talk about regrets because it's as if it's going to end up in disappointment," said McInnes. "I fully believe we are going to have a special end to the season and I'm totally committed to that. I see it, I think we can do it, I think we can be really strong right through the line. I want the players to play with confidence and not think about that, just go

and try and make the most of the opportunity that's there for us." McInnes admits he is tempted to start Devlin and Shankland against Dundee but will discuss their progress with Hearts' medical team to avoid potentially losing the players again to injury. "It was a significant blow when both lads went out of the team. With them coming back in, the players will get a boost and I think the support will get a boost," he said. "Lawrence, for me, was the best striker in the league up until he went out of the team and Cammy was arguably the best midfielder in the league, so it's good to have both boys back at such a crucial time. "Watching them training this week has been great, it looks as if they've not been away."

LIONEL MESSI SCRIPTS HISTORY



Argentine superstar Lionel Messi bagged the 900th goal of his glittering career on Wednesday but could not prevent Inter Miami from crashing out of the CONCACAF Champions Cup on away goals after a 1-1 draw with Nashville. Messi, 38, scored his milestone goal after just seven minutes to put Miami 1-0 up in the second leg of their last-16 clash in the regional club competition. But Nashville's Cristian Espinoza lashed in a 74th-minute equalizer to make it 1-1 on aggregate, and after holding Miami at bay for the remainder of the game, the visitors from Tennessee advanced to the quarter-finals on the away goals rule. Miami's exit was a bittersweet ending to what had promised to be a night of celebration after Messi's early opener in what was

the club's final game at their Chase Stadium home in Fort Lauderdale. Messi's strike took the Argentine's tally to 81 goals for the MLS champions following his move to Florida in 2023. The eight-time Ballon D'Or winner previously scored 672 goals for Spanish giants Barcelona, 32 for France's Paris Saint-Germain, and a further 115 international goals for Argentina. Goal number 900 came some 21 years after Messi's first goal in senior football, when he scored for Barcelona in a 2-0 win over Albacete in 2005 as a fresh-faced 17-year-old. Messi, widely regarded as the greatest player in football history, still has some way to go before he catches his great rival Cristiano Ronaldo, the 41-year-old Portuguese superstar who is on 965 career goals.

Erling Haaland Invests In Norway Chess' Newly Launched Tour

Football superstar Erling Haaland has become a strategic investor in Norway Chess and its newly launched Total Chess World Championship Tour (TCWCT). Norway Chess has taken a major step with the launch of TCWCT, which has been approved by the International Chess Federation (FIDE) for a minimum of 16 years. Together with Norwegian business leader Morten Borge, the Manchester City striker has established the company Chess Mates, which will be a significant owner of Norway Chess. "Chess is an incredible game. It sharpens your

mind, and there are clear similarities to football. You have to think quickly, trust your instincts, and think several moves ahead. Strategy and planning are everything", Haaland said in a media release. "I'm investing in Norway Chess because I believe the new Total Chess World Championship Tour can turn chess into an even bigger sport for spectators around the world. The team behind Norway Chess has already done an impressive job growing the event, and joining the project was too exciting to pass up," Haaland added. TCWCT will comprise four

tournaments each year, hosted by four different cities, and will crown a combined world champion across three disciplines - Fast Classic, Rapid, and Blitz chess. A pilot tournament is planned for autumn 2026, followed by a full championship season in 2027. Each season will consist of four events, and a minimum annual prize pool of USD 2.7 million. "We expect the new championship to become one of the most prestigious events in the global chess calendar. The fact that Erling is joining us as an investor says a great deal about the commercial potential of this tour," Kjell

Madland, CEO of Norway Chess said. Eze himself took home \$20,000 in May last year when he won the PogChamps amateur chess tournament. Haaland's manager Pep Guardiola and rival Mohamed Salah have both also said that they play. "I'm investing in Norway Chess because I believe the new Total Chess World Championship Tour can turn chess into an even bigger sport for spectators around the world," Haaland said. "The team behind Norway Chess has already done an impressive job growing the event, and joining the project was too exciting to pass up."



UGADI SPECIAL: Shiva Rajkumar's Fierce Look As Gummadi Narsaiah, Regular Shoot commences soon



Director Parameshwar Hirvale is set to bring the inspiring life of former MLA Gummadi Narsaiah to the big screen. Known for his unwavering fight for the poor and his iconic habit of riding a bicycle to the Assembly, Narsaiah's remarkable journey is now being retold through a biopic titled Gummadi Narsaiah. The film features Karunada Chakravarthi Dr. Shiva Rajkumar in the lead role and is produced by N. Suresh Reddy under the Pravallika Arts Creations banner. On the occasion of Ugadi, the makers unveiled an intense and powerful poster showcasing a commanding portrayal of Dr. Shiva Rajkumar as the revolutionary leader Gummadi Narsaiah. With firm determination in his expression, fiery eyes, and a backdrop filled with red

flags symbolizing decades of people's struggles, the poster promises a hard-hitting, politically charged biographical drama. The project, which was formally launched earlier, is now all set to go on floors. Even before the official commencement, the first-look poster, motion poster, and early promotional material generated strong excitement. Shiva Rajkumar's striking transformation into Gummadi Narsaiah has received widespread praise, raising expectations across the country and making this biopic one of the most awaited films in the making. The technical team includes Satish Mutyala handling cinematography, Suresh Bobbili providing the music, and Satya Giduturi managing the editing. More details about the project will be announced soon.

"USTAAD BHAGAT SINGH RECEIVED A RESPONSE BEYOND OUR EXPECTATIONS" – TEAM AT SUCCESS PRESS MEET

The Ustaad storm has begun worldwide. After the sensational success of Gabbar Singh, Power Star Pawan Kalyan and Cult Captain Harish Shankar have reunited for Ustaad Bhagat Singh. Produced grandly under the banner of Mythri Movie Makers by Naveen Yerneni and Yalamanchili Ravi Shankar, the film released today (March 19) as an Ugadi festive treat. Right from the first show, the film has been receiving phenomenal response across all regions and all sections of audiences worldwide. Fans are thrilled with the way Pawan Kalyan has been presented by Harish Shankar. Not just fans, even general audiences are appreciating the film. Notably, the film has several



moments that strongly connect with family audiences, making it appealing across all demographics. With such overwhelming response pouring in, the team held a success press meet to express their happiness and gratitude to the audience. Harish Shankar's Speech

Director Harish Shankar said: "First of all, I thank the media. Since this is a mass entertainer, I thought it might take some time for positive talk to come from overseas. But I'm very happy that from the very

first show, the film has received positive talk across all regions. We designed this film to appeal to all sections of the audience. Many people who watched the film are surprised, saying they didn't expect so much content in it. From day one, I said I'm

making a commercial entertainer and that I would present vintage Pawan Kalyan Garu—and we delivered that. Even though it is a commercial film, we have included some meaningful elements. Notably, we touched upon the topic of illegal immigrants, which hasn't been explored much in Telugu cinema.

Every character in the film has importance, and all characters have come out very well. Audiences are connecting with each one of them. Fans have been calling me and saying, 'Anna, the film is excellent.' The use of the Tholi Prema song in the second half is being loved by fans.

For a film packed with so many elements, Thaman delivered an outstanding

background score in a very short time. This film is the result of the collective effort of our entire team."

Producer Naveen Yerneni's Speech

Producer Naveen Yerneni said:

"We are receiving an incredible response everywhere—be it Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, or the United States—from the very first show. We watched the film with audiences at Vimal Theatre, and throughout the screening, people were thoroughly enjoying it. The theatre atmosphere felt like a festival. With every show, both the talk and collections are increasing. The response is beyond what we expected, and we are extremely happy."



Aadi Sai Kumar's Fierce, Action-packed Avatar From Ego Raja Co-starring Sathish, Directed By Guru Saravanan, Produced By G. Suresh of SGS Productions Unveiled

Producer G. Suresh of SGS Productions is bankrolling an exciting new bilingual project that brings together two dynamic performers—Aadi Sai Kumar and the actor Sathish, under the direction of filmmaker Guru Saravanan. Titled Ego Raja, the film is being crafted as a Telugu-Tamil bilingual, promising a potent mix of action, emotion, and mass appeal. On the auspicious occasion of Ugadi, the makers unveiled a striking new poster featuring Aadi Sai Kumar in a fierce, action-packed avatar. Donning a lungi and exuding raw inten-

sity, he is seen smoking a cigarette while locking a steely gaze on his adversaries, signaling high-voltage drama ahead. Director Guru Saravanan, a former associate of Veteran filmmaker K. S. Ravikumar, made his debut with the critically appreciated Koogale Kuttappa, produced by Ravikumar himself. With Ego Raja, his third directorial venture, Saravanan is aiming for his most ambitious project yet. Featuring dual protagonists and a storyline driven by intensity, the film is expected to showcase his evolved filmmaking sensibili-

ties. Aadi Sai Kumar, fresh off the blockbuster success of Shambhala, makes his Tamil debut with this film. Sathish, known for transitioning from notable supporting roles to leading films like Conjuring Kannappan and Sattam En Kaiyil, takes on a high-octane action role, continuing his streak of performance-driven choices. Supported by a top-tier technical team, Manoj Paramahansa handling cinematography, Ghibran composing the music, and Durairaj managing art, the shoot is in full swing.

MATKA KING UNVEILED AT PRIME VIDEO PRESENTS EVENT IN MUMBAI



RANVEER CREATES HISTORY WITH DHURANDHAR 2

Ranveer Singh's much-awaited film Dhurandhar: The Revenge has taken a flying start at the box office, even before the Eid weekend begins. The spy thriller has already created history by setting a new record on BookMyShow, showing massive audience demand across the country.

RECORD-BREAKING BOOKMYSHOW PERFORMANCE
The film sold over 109,000 tickets in a single hour on BookMyShow, beating the previous record held by Pushpa 2: The Rule, which had around 107,650 tickets per hour. This achievement is even more impressive because the numbers are only from Hindi bookings, without any contribution from dubbed versions. This makes Dhurandhar 2 the fastest-selling Indian film in terms of hourly ticket sales, highlighting the urgency and excitement among moviegoers.

MASSIVE ADVANCE BOOKINGS AND PRE-SALES
The film has recorded exceptional advance bookings, crossing 1.5 million tickets before release. It also sold more than 500,000 tickets for paid previews alone. For the opening weekend, worldwide pre-sales are estimated to be over Rs 260 crore gross. In India, advance bookings have reached around Rs 160 crore, with nearly Rs 100 crore coming from day one itself. Overseas markets have also shown strong demand, contributing over Rs 100 crore.

STRONG BUZZ AND POSITIVE WORD-OF-MOUTH
Directed by Aditya Dhar, the sequel has received positive reactions from both critics and audiences. The combination of high-octane action, a gripping spy storyline, and Ranveer Singh's star power is attracting viewers

across metro cities as well as smaller towns. The success of the first film, which earned around Rs 1,350 crore worldwide, has further boosted expectations for the sequel.

EID WEEKEND EXPECTED TO BOOST COLLECTIONS
Trade experts believe the film's performance is even more remarkable as it released during the pre-Ramzan period, which is usually slow for theatres. With Eid approaching, collections are expected to grow significantly over Saturday and Sunday as family audiences step in.

ON TRACK FOR HISTORIC BOX OFFICE RUN
With record-breaking advance bookings and strong opening day trends, Dhurandhar: The Revenge is now aiming to become one of the highest-grossing Indian films of all time. The current momentum suggests that this could be one of the biggest opening weekends ever for Hindi cinema in 2026. The Revenge continues from where the first part ended. After the death of Rehman Dakait, the power struggle in Lyari intensifies. At the centre is Hamza Ali Mazari, originally Jaskirat Singh Ranghi, played by Ranveer Singh. The film dives deep into Jaskirat's painful past, showing how personal tragedy pushed him into becoming a covert Indian agent. As Hamza rises within Pakistan's underworld, he manipulates gangs, eliminates terror networks, and moves closer to completing his mission, all while risking his identity and life.

WHAT WORKS
The biggest strength of the film is Ranveer Singh. He delivers a powerful performance filled with rage, pain, and intensity. Whether in emotional scenes or

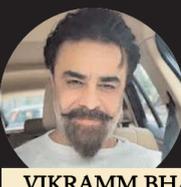
ACTOR / ACTRESS STATEMENTS ON DHURANDHAR 2

“I feel this film is intense and very close to reality. Playing my role really pushed me emotionally.”



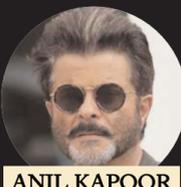
VIVEK SINHA

“I truly believe Dhurandhar 2 is a defining film. The story and characters are on another level.”



VIKRAM BHAMBRI

“I really wanted to be part of this film, but I had prior commitments. It's my loss.”



ANIL KAPOOR

brutal action moments, he dominates every frame. Director Aditya Dhar once again creates a gripping cinematic world. Despite the long runtime, the film keeps you engaged with strong drama, twists, and high-stakes action. The second half, especially the pre-climax and climax, stands out with whistle-worthy moments. Arjun Rampal as Major Iqbal is a fierce antagonist and brings menace to the screen. R. Madhavan adds depth as the mastermind

behind the mission, while Sanjay Dutt leaves an impact despite limited screen time. Technically, the film shines with solid cinematography, large-scale action, and an engaging background score.

WHAT DOESN'T WORK
The film's length is a challenge. At nearly four hours, a few portions in the second half feel stretched. Some sequences could have been trimmed for a tighter narrative. The political commentary is

more direct this time and may not appeal to everyone. Also, the absence of a strong villain like the first part slightly reduces the tension in parts. The music, while decent, does not match the impact of the first film.

VERDICT
Dhurandhar: The Revenge is a larger, louder, and more intense sequel that delivers where it matters most. It may not fully match the freshness of the first part, but it compensates with scale, emotion, and powerful performances. If you enjoy action-packed spy dramas with strong patriotic themes, this is a theatrical experience worth watching. Telugu star Allu Arjun, who was among the first to watch the second part of director Aditya Dhar's eagerly awaited action thriller 'Dhurandhar 2', has showered praises on it, calling it an Indian story (with) International swag. Taking to his X timeline to express his thoughts on the second instalment of the film, which hits screens on Thursday, Allu Arjun wrote, "Just Watched #Dhurandhar2. Patriotism with swag! A film that will make every patriot proud. Many clap-trapping moments. BLAST!" He then went on to congratulate the entire Dhurandhar team. He wrote, "Congratulations to the entire team. Fine performances by @ActorMadhavan garu & all actors. Technical brilliance."

