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CM REVANTH EXTENDS RAMZAN GREETINGS TO MUSLIMS

Hyderabad TSIT: Telangana Chief Minister A.Revanth Reddy extended heartfelt greetings to Muslim brothers and sisters on the occasion of Ramzan (Eid-ul-Fitr), conveying his best wishes for peace, prosperity and happiness. In his message, the Chief Minister expressed hope

that the festival would be celebrated with joy and enthusiasm along with family members, relatives and friends. He described Ramzan as a symbol of secularism and communal harmony, highlighting its importance in promoting unity among people of different faiths. Chief Minister noted that the holy month of Ramzan, during which the Qur'an was revealed, holds great spiritual significance. He said the strict fasting (Roza), disciplined prayers, and charitable acts such as Zakat and Fitrta practiced by Muslims serve as an inspiration for all humanity. Emphasising Telangana's rich cultural fabric, A.Revanth Reddy stated that the State stands as a symbol of "Ganga-Jamuna Tehzeeb" and reiterated that the government is committed to the welfare and empowerment of Muslim minorities. He prayed for the continued prosperity of Telangana and wished that all people live together in peace, harmony and happiness, seeking blessings of Almighty Allah for the well-being of every citizen.

Washington, March 20 : President Donald Trump said Friday that Iran's navy was now "at the bottom of the sea" as he opened a White House event honouring the Navy Midshipmen with an extended defence of US military action against Tehran. Speaking at the Commander-in-Chief's Trophy presentation in the East Room, Trump began his remarks with a sweeping claim about the ongoing conflict. "We're doing extremely well in Iran," he said, adding that "they had a Navy two weeks ago, they have no Navy anymore, it's all at the bottom of the sea, 58 ships knocked down in two days." He asserted that US forces faced little resistance. "It's not even a contest," Trump said, adding, "We have the greatest navy anywhere in the world. It's not even close." Trump again stressed that preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons remained central to US policy. "We're not going to let them have nuclear weapons because if they had them, they'd use them, and we're not going to let that happen," he said. "It should have been done a long time ago by other Presidents."

The president described the scale of military operations as unprecedented, saying Iranian capabilities had been dismantled across domains. "Their Navy's gone, their air force is gone, their anti-aircraft is all gone, it's all gone, their radar is all gone," he said, adding that "their leaders are all gone."

Bhatti Presents Telangana Budget 2026-27 Emphasises Welfare and Growth

BY M.RAJANIKANTH
Hyderabad TSIT BUREAU: Telangana Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka on Friday presented the State Budget for 2026-27 in the Legislative Assembly, describing it as a people-centric budget aimed at welfare, inclusive development and long-term economic growth.

In his budget speech, Minister said the government is committed to social, economic and political justice for every citizen and is working with fiscal discipline while fulfilling promises made to the people. He said Telangana is moving ahead strongly despite financial pressures inherited from the previous regime.

Bhatti Vikramarka stated that Telangana's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) for 2025-26 stood at 17.82 lakh crore with a growth rate of 10.7 per cent, higher than the national average of 8 per cent. He also said the State's per capita income reached 4,18,931, which is significantly higher than the national average. The government has set a target of making



Telangana a \$1 trillion economy by 2034 and a \$3 trillion economy by 2047.

The Finance Minister said the budget gives top priority to farmers' welfare, women empowerment, youth employment, quality education, healthcare and infrastructure. He announced that the government will launch the Indiramma Family Life Insurance Scheme from June 2, 2026, providing life insurance cover of 5 lakh to 1.15 crore families across the State. Highlighting welfare measures, he said the free bus travel scheme for women is benefitting over 34 lakh passengers daily, while the 500 gas cylinder scheme and Gruha Jyothi free electricity scheme are providing major relief to families. The government is also expanding support to self-help groups and women entrepreneurs through the Mahila

Shakti Mission.

In the agriculture sector, Bhatti Vikramarka said the government is continuing Rythu Bharosa support, incentives for fine variety paddy and horticulture expansion. He added that agriculture and farmer welfare have been allocated 23,179 crore in the budget. Minister also announced major initiatives in education, including Young India Integrated Residential Schools, a breakfast scheme for students from pre-primary to intermediate level, and extension of mid-day meals to junior college students. The education sector received an allocation of Rs.26,674 crore. For the health sector, the government proposed strengthening hospitals, expanding bed capacity, setting up new medical colleges and issuing digital health cards to citizens. A total of 13,679 crore has been allocated for medical and health services. On infrastructure, the Minister highlighted Bharat Future City, Musi rejuvenation, Metro Rail expansion and large-scale urban development works in Hyderabad and other towns.

Telangana Budget 2026-27 New Welfare and Development Schemes Announced

Hyderabad TSIT BUREAU: Telangana Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka unveiled a series of new welfare, education, health and employment schemes in the 2026-27 State Budget, reinforcing the government's commitment to inclusive development and social security.

The highlight of the budget is the launch of the Indiramma Family Life Insurance Scheme from June 2, 2026, which will provide Rs.5 lakh life insurance coverage to 1.15 crore families across the State. The scheme has been allocated Rs.4,000 crore. In a major boost to social welfare, the government will sanction 2 lakh new pensions under the Cheyutha scheme, with a total allocation of Rs.14,861 crore. Focusing on education reforms, the government announced the establishment of Telangana Public Schools by upgrading select government institutions with modern infrastructure, digital facilities and transport systems. Additionally, a breakfast scheme will be



introduced for students from pre-primary to intermediate level, alongside the extension of the midday meal scheme to junior college students. Allocations of Rs.500 crore, Rs.800 crore, and Rs.100 crore have been made respectively. In the healthcare sector, a cashless health protection scheme will be implemented for employees, pensioners and their dependents, covering 23.51 lakh beneficiaries through the Rajiv Aarogyasri Trust. The scheme will provide treatment for 1,998 diseases in both government and empanelled private hospitals using digital health cards. The government also introduced a comprehensive Employees' Accident

Insurance Scheme, offering Rs.1.2 crore compensation in case of accidental death, along with additional insurance benefits. A combined allocation of Rs.1,056 crore has been proposed for health and insurance initiatives. To enhance global employment opportunities, the government will launch the CM Overseas Employment Program, providing skill training, language support, visa assistance and job placements in sectors such as healthcare, hospitality, construction and logistics. Further, trainees in ATCs will receive a monthly scholarship of Rs.2,000, with an allocation of Rs.80 crore to support skill development.

India confirms death of Indian national in Riyadh amid West Asia conflict



Riyadh, March 20 (TSIT): India on Friday confirmed the death of an Indian national on March 18 in Riyadh due to the ongoing West Asia conflict. The Indian Embassy in Saudi Arabia stated that it remains in touch with the family and local

authorities and assured all possible assistance. "The Embassy of India expresses its deepest condolences on the tragic demise of an Indian national in Riyadh due to recent events on March 18th. The Embassy is in touch with the family and local authorities. We remain committed to extending all possible assistance in this matter," Indian Embassy in Saudi Arabia posted on X.

India sends medical aid to Afghanistan after Pakistan's brutal airstrikes on Kabul



New Delhi, March 20 (TSIT): India on Friday delivered a 2.5-tonne consignment of emergency medicines, medical disposables, kits and equipment to Afghanistan to support the medical treatment of those injured in Pakistan's recent attack on hospital in Kabul. Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal stated that India will continue to provide humanitarian support to Afghanistan in this difficult time. "To support the medical treatment and swift recovery of those injured in the heinous attack on 16 March, India delivers a 2.5-tonne consignment of emergency medicines, medical disposables, kits and equipment to Kabul. India stands in solidarity with the Afghan people and will continue to extend all possible humanitarian support in this difficult hour."

US-NATO rift widens as Trump calls allies 'cowards'

New York, March 20 : The rift between US President Donald Trump and NATO deepened on Friday as he called members of the pact "cowards" and warned that he would "remember" their refusal to help open the Strait of Hormuz. "Without the USA, NATO IS A PAPER TIGER," he wrote on Truth Social. He said NATO allies complain about high oil prices but refuse to help open the Strait of Hormuz, which he described as a simple military manoeuvre and the single reason for high prices.



Trump's stance threatens to unravel NATO, the bulwark of collective Western defence since World War II. He has vacillated on the roles of allies while hurling insults. On Tuesday, he declared, "We don't need any help, actually," but also sought assistance, at least in the form of minesweepers to keep the strait navigable. As the Iran war spiralled beyond expectations, Tehran put a chokehold on the strait, about 40 kilometres wide, through which 20 per cent of the

world's energy passes, creating a global shortage of oil and gas. Energy prices have risen worldwide, including in the US, hitting Trump's affordability agenda.

Trump called for NATO help to secure the strait after entering the war, aligned with Israel and without consulting allies, initially refusing Britain's offer to send aircraft carriers. European allies have described the Iran conflict as a war of choice, not a

defensive operation. France's President Emmanuel Macron said, "We are not party to the conflict and therefore France will never take part in operations to open or liberate the Strait of Hormuz in the current context." On Tuesday, Trump said, "The United States has been informed by most of our NATO 'Allies' that they don't want to get involved with our Military Operation against the Terrorist

Regime of Iran."

The US pays a proportionately higher share of NATO's \$3.3 billion budget, contributing 16 per cent.

Trump has long complained that NATO does not do its part in joint defence and has demanded that members raise defence spending to 5 per cent of GDP. Except for Spain, NATO members have agreed to the target. Besides plunging into the Iran conflict without consulting allies, NATO members see the war as not involving them militarily, as their primary concern is Europe's security, endangered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Trump, however, is focused on priorities in the Middle East and Latin America, even as he has threatened to invade NATO members Canada and Denmark to seize Greenland. He has criticised Europe's defence of Ukraine and repeatedly accused Kyiv of failing to make a deal with Russia to end the war, now in its fourth year.

Andhra CM seeks report on crop losses due to unseasonal rains



Amaravati, (TSIT) : Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, on Friday, directed officials to prepare comprehensive estimates within two days regarding the crop damage caused across the state by strong winds, unseasonal rains, and thunderstorms. The Chief Minister held a video conference from his camp

office with district collectors and senior officials. Officials briefed Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu that crop damage has occurred in 12 mandals across 12 districts. They said maize crop over 4,840 hectares, paddy over 1,534 hectares and black gram over 310 hectares were damaged, adding that the loss is estimated at

Rs 40 crore. The Chief Minister was told that rains also impacted horticultural crops on 1,301 hectares in 48 mandals across nine districts. Crops such as banana, papaya, chili, vegetables, mango, orange, and lemon were damaged, with the estimated loss valued at Rs 23 crore. Based on the estimates compiled so far, officials have calculated the total combined loss for all crops at Rs 63 crore. According to India Meteorological Department (IMD) at Amaravati, there will be widespread rain until March 22 in the state, and thereafter isolated rainfall is expected.

Sri Lanka denies landing permission to US warplanes, reaffirms neutrality amid regional tensions

Colombo (TSIT) Sri Lanka refused permission for two US warplanes to land at Mattala International Airport in the island's south-east early this month, President Anura Kumara Dissanayake told Parliament on Friday. According to Dissanayake, the aircraft, coming from Djibouti, requested landing on March 4 and March 8, but both requests were denied. "We want to maintain our neutrality despite many pressures. We won't give in. The West Asia war poses challeng-



es but we will do everything possible to remain neutral," Daily Mirror quoted him as saying in the parliament. "They wanted to bring in two warplanes armed with eight anti-ship missiles, and we said no," the president added. The statement comes a day after Dissanayake met with Sergio Gor, the US Special Envoy for

South and Central Asia. The leaders discussed safeguarding vital sea lanes, securing ports, reinforcing trade and commercial ties, and advancing a "free, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific," according to a joint statement.

The announcement follows escalating regional tensions. On March 4, the US torpedoed the Iranian frigate Iris Dena off Galle, Sri Lanka's southern coast, killing 84 sailors and rescuing 32. The vessel had been returning from Visakhapatnam, India, after a naval fleet review.

IRGC spokesperson killed in US-Israeli strikes

Tehran (TSIT) Ali Mohammad Naini, spokesperson for Iran's Revolutionary Guards, was killed in early Friday US-Israeli airstrikes, the IRGC said, minutes after he was quoted outlining continued missile production despite the ongoing war. The strike follows a series of targeted operations against Iran's top brass since the death of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on February 28. Earlier, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) confirmed the killing of Esmail Khatib, Iran's intelligence minister, who was involved in the crackdown on the 2022-2023 Mahsa Amini protests and operations against Israelis and Americans abroad.

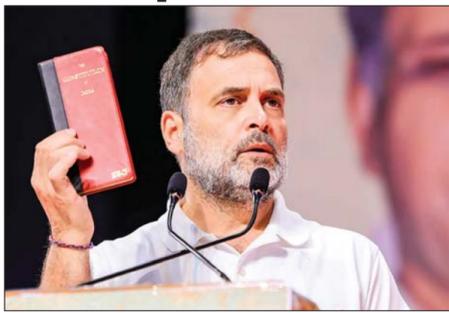
People of Kerala ready for change: Rahul Gandhi; pitches for UDF govt

NEW DELHI: People of Kerala are ready for change, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said on Friday, as he pitched for a UDF government in the state.

"Team UDF is Team Kerala," he said in a post on X.

"Each candidate reflects the voice, the aspirations and the trust of the people of Kerala. This is a collective of experienced leaders and young change-makers - a strong team of men and women who understand the intricacies of the constituencies they represent," Gandhi said in his post.

"For me, Kerala is home and the people of Kerala are family. I owe a great debt to the people for everything they have taught me and for the love



and warmth they have embraced me with - I will always be your partner," the former Wayanad MP said.

"The message from Kerala is clear - the people are ready for change, they seek a government that listens, understands, and de-

livers with honesty.

"Along with the coming UDF government, I will do everything to help build a better future for this beautiful state," the leader of opposition in Lok Sabha said.

"Kerala will win. UDF will lead," he said, pitching

for the United Democratic Front in Kerala.

Gandhi's message came a day after the Congress released its list of 92 candidates for the April 9 assembly election in the state.

Determined to take on the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF), the Congress on Thursday banked on its state leadership to see it through, deciding against fielding any of its MPs.

The party braved internal pressures by banking on its Kerala leadership rather than sending parliamentarians to fight the polls.

The Congress is contesting 92 seats, leaving others for its allies in the UDF and some independents.

The Congress has been out of power in the southern state for a decade.

Edu Min to organise Bharat Innovates deep-tech pre-summit on Mar 21-22

NEW DELHI: The Ministry of Education is organising a two-day pre-summit of Bharat Innovates Deep-Tech from Saturday, according to officials.

Union Minister of Education Dharmendra Pradhan will address the summit during a special session. The two-day national showcase at IIT Bombay will feature around 137 promising deep-tech startups selected from more than 3,000 applications received from across the country.

The Bharat Innovates initiative was announced by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi at the inauguration of the India-France Year of Innovation.

A flagship programme of the Ministry of Education, it operates under the strategic guidance of the principal scientific adviser to the government of India.

The programme is conceived as a global accelerator for Indian deep-tech, building enduring bridges between India's higher education innovation ecosystem (startups, labs and research parks) and global stakeholders including corporates, investors, incubators, universities and governments.

"The Bharat Innovates Deep-Tech Pre-Summit will showcase innovations across 13 critical technology domains, including advanced computing, health-



care and MedTech, space and defence, energy and sustainability, semiconductors, biotechnology, smart cities and mobility, blue economy, next-gen communications, agri and food technologies, advanced materials, manufacturing and industry 4.0 and disaster

management," an official statement said.

"These innovations, nurtured within India's premier institutions such as IITs, IISc and leading research ecosystems represent the next generation of globally competitive technologies emerging from India's academic backbone. The event will serve as the national selection and launchpad for India's global innovation delegation.

"Through curated pitch sessions, investor engagements and industry partnerships, the event will accelerate the journey of Indian startups from Technology Readiness Levels (TRL 3-9) to global deployment and scale," it added.

Delhi HC quashes look-out circulars against NDTV founders Prannoy, Radhika

NEW DELHI: The Delhi High Court on Friday quashed look-out circulars (LOCs) issued against NDTV founders Prannoy Roy and Radhika Roy in 2021 following a case lodged against them by the CBI, saying they cannot be subjected to an indefinite restriction on their right to travel abroad.

Asserting that the right to travel abroad is an integral part of the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution, Justice Sachin Datta held that the continued operation of the LOCs against the petitioners is an unjustified curtailment of their fundamental right, which cannot be sustained in law.

Justice Datta observed that the investigation against the couple was pending for more than five years, during which the petitioners never attempted to evade the process of law, and that a chargesheet had not even been filed yet.

The judge also noted that the petitioners have not been summoned for investigation for several years and there are no allegations of non-cooperation.

"In the absence of any material demonstrating either non-cooperation, flight risk or any concrete prejudice to the investigation, the continued operation of the

LOCs cannot be justified merely on unsubstantiated grounds of 'economic inter-



est" or "larger public interest", the court said.

"The impugned LOC is hereby quashed," it ordered.

The court nonetheless directed the petitioners to furnish an undertaking affirming that they would appear before the investigating authority when required and render full cooperation in any ongoing proceeding.

It also asked the couple to assure that they would provide all material or documents requested by the investigating agency, as may be available within their power or possession.

The Roys filed petitions in 2021 challenging the LOCs opened against them at the behest of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) pursuant to the lodging of two FIRs in 2017 and 2019.

registered on a complaint from an individual, Sanjay Dutt, of Quantum Securities

Limited over alleged irregularities in the repayment of a loan offered by the ICICI Bank to RRPR Holdings Private Limited linked to the Roys, resulting in a purported loss of Rs 48 crore to the bank. The CBI, however, filed a closure report in the case in 2024.

The 2019 FIR was registered against the NDTV founders over allegations of violation of FDI norms. The CBI had said the LOC issued against the petitioners pursuant to the 2019 case was valid. In the 46-page judgment, the court observed that the material on record did not indicate any attempt by the petitioners to evade the investigation or abscond, and they continued to participate in the legal proceedings.

It also noted that while the petition was pending, petitioners were allowed to travel abroad on several occasions and they consistently returned to India.

Alvida Jumma held in Sambhal Jama Masjid amid tight security

SAMBHAL: A large number of Muslims offered prayers at Shahi Jama Masjid here for Alvida Jumma, or farewell prayers, amid tight security arrangements.

Alvida Jumma prayers are observed on the last Friday of Ramzan, marking a significant emotional and spiritual farewell to the holy month.

Additional Superintendent of Police Kuldeep Singh said the prayers successfully concluded at several mosques, including Sambhal's Shahi Jama Masjid, and comprehensive police security arrangements involving all the station house officers were put in place.

Police personnel will be deployed for Saturday's Eid celebrations as well, he said.

Prosecution conclude arguments during charge hearing in Zubeen Garg death case

GUWAHATI: The prosecution on Friday completed its arguments during charge framing before a local court here in the Zubeen Garg death case, the deceased singer's wife said.

Talking to reporters after attending the hearing, Garima Saikia Garg said, "On the second day of the hearing of charge framing, the prosecution completed its arguments. The defence lawyer of one of the accused, Amrit Praba Mahanta, placed half of his arguments."

Amrit Praba's lawyer will conclude his arguments on the next date of hearing, when the other defence lawyers will also make their arguments, she added.

The Kamrup Metropolitan District and Sessions Court, which is hearing the case, has set the next date of hearing on March 30.

The 52-year-old singer died while swimming in the

sea on September 19 last year in Singapore, where he had gone to attend the fourth North East India Festival (NEIF).

Acting on a request from the state government, the Gauhati High Court has ordered for setting up of an exclusive fast-track sessions court to conduct day-to-day trial proceedings in the case, nominating District Judge of Baksa, Sharmila Bhuyan, to preside over it.

Till the exclusive court becomes operational, the current one hearing it will conduct the hearing on a daily basis, the High Court had said.

A Special Investigation Team (SIT) of Assam Police's CID had probed the death of the singer and filed its charge sheet before a local court here in December.

A five-member special public prosecutors' team had been appointed earlier by the government for the

case.

NEIF chief organiser Shyamkanu Mahanta, the singer's manager Siddharth Sharma, and his two band members, Shekhar Jyoti Goswami and Amrit Praba Mahanta, are facing murder charges, while his cousin and suspended Assam Police DSP Sandipan Garg is charged with culpable homicide not amounting to murder.

Garg's two PSOs, Nandeswar Bora and Prabir Baishya, are also in jail, charged with criminal conspiracy and criminal breach of trust by misappropriating funds or property entrusted to them.

A separate enquiry is also underway by local authorities in Singapore, with a coroner's court recently ruling out foul play and stating that Garg was severely intoxicated and had drowned off Lazarus Island after declining a life jacket.

Husband has to equally participate in household chores as he is not marrying a maid: Apex Court

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Friday said a husband has to equally participate in household chores like cooking, cleaning and washing as he is not marrying a maid but a life partner.

The observations came from a bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta which was hearing a petition filed by a man challenging an order of the Karnataka High Court.

The high court had set aside a trial court order granting divorce to the man on the ground of cruelty.

During the hearing before the apex court, the counsel appearing for the man said the mediation between the parties had failed.

He said the marriage between the parties took place in May 2017 and since 2019, the couple is separated.

"I (man) want a divorce. The trial court granted a divorce on the ground of cruelty," the counsel said.

The bench asked what the cruelty was as alleged in the matter.

The counsel appearing for the man said the woman had indulged in improper behaviour and was not cooking food.

"You have to equally participate in all these. Cooking, cleaning, washing, everything. Today's times are different," Justice Nath observed, adding the high court was right that it might not be a ground for cruelty.

"You are not marrying a maid. You are marrying a life partner," Justice Mehta observed. The bench was told that both of them were working in a government school. "Call both parties physically. We would like to speak to them," the bench said. It posted the matter for hearing on April 27 and asked both parties to remain present before it.

Mamata making 'desperate' claims ahead of polls, says Bengal BJP chief

KOLKATA: West Bengal BJP chief Samik Bhattacharya on Friday said Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's allegations that the saffron party is bringing in outsiders to foment trouble across the state reflect her "desperation" ahead of the assembly elections.

Addressing a press conference at the state BJP headquarters, the Rajya Sabha MP said, "Going by the logic put forward by the TMC supremo, it raises questions about the failure of police to keep vigil and monitor the entry of elements allegedly carrying arms and ammunition to create law and order problems."

"Actually, Mamata Banerjee, being a seasoned politician, knows her party will not be in power after the assembly polls. Hence, she is manufacturing this narrative and making provocative statements," he said.

Releasing the candidate list on March 17, Banerjee alleged that some officials from outside the state had been brought in to assist the BJP in the electoral process.

"They have brought in scores of people from outside the state to help the BJP. If you come across such outsiders in your locality, do

inform," she had said while addressing her party workers.

Bhattacharya alleged that the TMC would blame the BJP and the Election Commission, "an independent body", if any incident takes place to suit its agenda.

He also alleged that TMC workers had attacked BJP workers and journalists in the past.

"When Mamata Banerjee makes such comments, she should explain how many FIRs were registered in cases of attacks on BJP workers and journalists, and how many of the accused were arrested. None," he said.

Asserting that the BJP-led Centre does not intend to topple any democratically elected government, Bhattacharya said, "We are not Congress. We do not have the DNA to topple a democratically elected government."

Responding to allegations by Banerjee and her party leaders that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had threatened action against TMC leaders, he said, "Modiji had said that those named in FIRs for attacks on BJP workers in the 2021 post-poll violence would be prosecuted as per law."

Rain in parts of Punjab, Haryana; temperatures hover below normal

CHANDIGARH: Rain lashed parts of Punjab and Haryana on Friday, with temperatures hovering below normal limits.

For the second consecutive day, rain lashed Chandigarh throughout the day, and the showers led to a sharp drop in mercury here. The maximum here dropped to 18.8 degrees Celsius, ten notches below normal, according to the Met.

Ambala, Panchkula, Narnaul, Rohtak, Mohali, Patiala, and Rupnagar were among the other places which received rain in the two states.

On Thursday too, rain lashed many places in Punjab and Haryana, leading to a sharp drop in temperatures. The maximum temperature on Friday again registered a sharp drop.

In Punjab, Amritsar recorded a maximum of 23.7 degrees Celsius, four notches below normal. Ludhiana recorded a high of 21.6 degrees, seven degrees below normal.

Patiala recorded a maximum of 20.3 degrees Celsius, nine notches below normal.

In Haryana, Ambala recorded a high of 18.5 degrees Celsius, ten degrees below normal limits.

Illegal opium cultivation unearthed, one detained; fourth case in state in 15 days

RAIGARH: Illegal cultivation of opium on around one acre of land was unearthed in a village in Chhattisgarh's Raigarh district, marking the fourth such case in the state in the past 15 days, officials said on Friday.

The illegal cultivation was found along a river in Amaghat village under the Tamnar police station area, a police official said. Acting on a tip-off, a police team reached the spot, seized the opium crop, and detained one person, identified as Marshal Sanga (40), in this connection, he said.

The accused is a native of Khunti district in neighbouring Jharkhand and is married to Sushma Khalkho from the Tamnar area, he said.

For the past few years, he had been living at his in-laws' place. Under the pretext of cultivating watermelon, cucumber and vegetables, he had taken farmland on lease from local farmers and was secretly growing opium, he

said. Further investigation into the matter is underway, he said.

On March 6, police unearthed illegal opium cultivation on around 5.62 acres of land at a farmhouse in Samoda village in Durg district. A local BJP leader, Vinayak Tamrakar, along with Vikas Vishnoi and Manish Thakur, was arrested under relevant provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act and arrested in connection with the case.

Authorities seized opium plants weighing 62,424.4 kg, estimated to be worth around Rs 8 crore, from the farm. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) later suspended Tamrakar, a functionary from the party's Kisan Morcha unit after the matter came to light. In another case, police detected illegal opium cultivation on about 3.67 acres of land in Tripuri Ghosradand village in Balrampur-Ramanujan district on March 10. Seven persons

were arrested in connection with the case and opium plants weighing 4,344.569 kg, estimated to be worth around Rs 4.75 crore, were seized in the case. In a separate action in Turreepani (Khajuri) village under the Korandha police station limits in same Balrampur-Ramanujan district on March 12, a joint team of the revenue, police and forest departments busted illegal opium cultivation on about 1.47 acres of land. Around 18 quintals and 83 kg of opium plants, valued at approximately Rs 2 crore, were seized and two persons were arrested under provisions of the NDPS Act.

Following these cases, Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai had said illegal cultivation of narcotics would not be tolerated under any circumstances and instructed all departments to carry out a thorough investigation and ensure stringent action against those involved.

Punjab to add 100 Aam Aadmi Clinics this month, 400 more planned: Mann

CHANDIGARH: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Friday listed several health sector initiatives his government has taken, announcing that 100 more 'Aam Aadmi Clinics' will become operational this month, with 400 more to follow.

Mann said previous governments had neglected the health sector, but it has been a key focus sector for the AAP government.

The CM at a news conference here said that tendering for medical colleges at Kapurthala and Hoshiarpur has been done.

"All formalities have been completed. For a medical college in Malerkotla, land has been purchased, and on Eid, I will visit Malerkotla and will gift it to the people," he said.

The Punjab CM said his government started Mukh Mantri Sehat Yojana under which cashless medical treatment of up to Rs 10 lakh will be provided to every family.

About the Aam Aadmi Clinics, Mann said that 883 are operational, in which various kinds of tests and

medicines are free, and 100 more will be dedicated on March 28 and 400 more clinics are being set up, he said.

The CM said the number of people visiting the OPD in the Aam Aadmi Clinics has crossed five crore, indicating people's trust in them.

About the Mukh Mantri Sehat Yojana, Mann said 25 lakh beneficiaries have been registered under the scheme so far and 1.60 lakh people have availed treatment.

To run the scheme smoothly, in the current fiscal, a provision of Rs 1,200 crore has been kept while Rs 2,000 crore has been earmarked for 'Mukh Mantri Sehat Yojna' for 2026-27, he said.

"As against this, the Centre has earmarked Rs 9,300 crore for the Ayushman Bharat scheme. For over three crore people in our state, we have provided Rs 2,000 crore under the Mukh Mantri Sehat Yojana," he said.

Mann alleged that several conditions under the Ayushman Bharat scheme limit the number of benefi-



ciaries.

The chief minister was accompanied by state Health Minister Dr Balbir Singh.

The Punjab government scheme offers cashless treatment of up to Rs 10 lakh per family per annum, with

no income cap, in the government and private hospitals empanelled across the state.

Mann said detailed brochures regarding the Mukh Mantri Sehat scheme will be available in Aam Aadmi Clinics soon.

DYCM DK SHIVAKUMAR INAUGURATES DR AKTHER HUSSAIN'S 'VEDIC INSPIRATIONS' ART EXPO

Bengaluru, Mar 19: Bengaluru-based artist Dr Akther Hussain's solo art exhibition, 'Vedic Inspirations', was inaugurated by deputy chief minister D K Shivakumar at Chitra Kala Parishad in the city recently.

Speaker U T Khader, chief minister's additional secretary Anjum Parvez, and film actress Ramya graced the occasion as guests of honour.

Renowned artist Dr Akther Hussain showcased his latest collection in this solo exhibition, highlighting a



unique blend of traditional Vedic themes with contemporary artistic expression, offering visitors a rich cultural and visual experience. Art enthusiasts, students, and the general public attended and explored the world of Vedic art through Dr Hussain's creative vision.

The exhibition was a grand success, receiving wide appreciation from visitors and dignitaries alike.

Fourth annual 'Seva Hejje' by Yuvashakti Sevapatha on Mar 22 in Mangaluru



Mangaluru, Mar 20: The fourth annual programme "Seva Hejje" organised by Yuvashakti Sevapatha will be held on March 22 at Urva Shri Mariyamma Sabhabhavana in Mangaluru under the aegis of Team Sanatan Mangaluru.

The programme will commence at 9:30 am with a blood donation camp. In the evening, a series of events have been scheduled

as part of the annual celebration. At 4 pm, a devotional music programme will be presented by Keerthan Naik Madur and his team.

From 5:30 pm onwards, financial assistance will be distributed to more than 20 underprivileged families. The event will also feature felicitation of social workers, recognition of service organisations, and awards for assisted organisa-

tions. As part of the cultural segment, a grand performance titled "Appe Bhrumari" will be staged by over 40 talented artists from Neelashree Kalavidaru, Vamadapadavu, showcasing the rich cultural traditions of Tulunadu through dance and storytelling.

The organisers have extended a warm invitation to the public to attend the programme.

Mangaluru: Neuronova Physical Rehabilitation Center inaugurated at Kadri



Mangaluru, Mar 20: Neuronova Physical Rehabilitation Center was inaugurated with much enthusiasm at Bolvar Enclave, Kadri Kambala Road, here on Friday, March 20. The centre was formally inaugurated by Dr U T Ifthikar Fareed, chairman of the Karnataka State Allied and Healthcare Council and syndi-

cate member of RGHUS. Addressing the gathering, he expressed happiness at being part of the inauguration and noted that such a facility is much needed in the area. He appreciated the initiative taken by the team and wished that the centre would serve the community with quality rehabilitation services.

Member of the Karnataka Legislative Council, Kishor Kumar Puttur, attended the programme as the chief guest. In his address, he lauded the efforts behind establishing the centre and conveyed his best wishes for its success, stating that such healthcare initiatives contribute positively to society.

Dr Varun Shetty, paediatric orthopaedic surgeon and guest of honour, also spoke on the occasion. He highlighted the importance of timely rehabilitation and appreciated the efforts taken to bring advanced care facilities closer to the people.

The programme was further enlivened by a charming performance by baby Dithya, who rendered a small song and received warm appreciation from the audience.

Other dignitaries present also shared their thoughts, expressing happiness and extending their support to the initiative. They conveyed confidence that the centre would emerge as a trusted destination for rehabilitation and wellness in the region.

Neuronova Physical Rehabilitation Center offers specialised services including stroke rehabilitation, neuro rehabilitation, and pelvic floor rehabilitation, along with expert consultation facilities. Both in-person and online consultations are available for the convenience of patients.

The inauguration ceremony witnessed the presence of well-wishers, medical professionals, and local residents, making it a memorable and successful event.

Ration kits distributed on the occasion of Ugadi and Ramzan in Padmanabhanagar



Bengaluru: In Banashankari ward of Padmanabhanagar assembly constituency, under the leadership of Chand Pasha and KPCC coordinator Dr. Sanjay Gowda, ration kits were distributed to 2,000 families of the ward on the occasion of Ugadi and Ramzan.

Along with gifts distributed to ASHA workers and Anganwadi workers, kits were also distributed to construction workers. Former MP LR Shivaramgowda, BMTCC President YS Aaradhya, Congress leaders MV Prasad Babu, KPCC General Secretary in charge of Padmanabhanagar Madan Patel, 2023 candidates Raghunath Naidu, KPCC

Street Vendors State President Rangaswamy, Social Media District President V Girish Kumar, DCC Vice President Mahadev, Former Ward

President Kandakumar, Banashankari Block Former SC Section President Manjunath, Banashankari Block Women's Congress President Malashree, Karisandra Ward Women's Congress President Kantamma, District Vice President of Labor Department Ramamurthy, Social Media State Secretary Raj Vishwakarma, Wasim, and others were present.

SOWMYA REDDY APPRECIATES THE WORK OF LEADER RAGHUNATH NAIDU, WHO HELPS THE POOR WITHOUT ANY DESIRES



Bengaluru: Karnataka State Mahila Congress President Sowmya Reddy appreciated the work of Padmanabhanagar Congress leader Raghunath Naidu, who is distributing ration kits without considering the caste and religion of the poor on all festivals without any desires. Speaking after distributing 5000 ration kits to Muslims on the occasion of Ramzan festival in Banashankari of Padmanabhanagar assembly constituency, she advised that when women get the opportunity and work without hesitation, power will come to their senses one day. Congress leader from Padmanabhanagar assembly constituency, V. Raghunath Naidu said that charity is not permanent, it is the power we have done that will save us. Instead of helping out of the desire for power, we should understand the pain and suffering of the common man and come forward to help him. Congress leaders Madan Patil, K. Mahadeva, Mohammed Akbar, Umar Hali, Daulat Ashif, Naveen Kumar, along with Congress leaders, activists and beneficiaries from the constituency were present.

INSTALL INFORMATION BOARDS WITH COMPLETE DETAILS AT DEVELOPMENT WORK SITES - D. S. RAMESH



Bengaluru: Commissioner of Bengaluru East City Corporation D. S. Ramesh conducted a field inspection in areas including Horamavu Agara, Banjara Layout, Kalkere Layout, Babusapalya, and Challakere surroundings to review road and infrastructure development works, railway underpass works, lake development, waste management, and footpath encroachments. During the inspection, the Commissioner interacted with representatives of Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) and local residents, and directed officials to take immediate action to resolve the issues raised.

Inspected Locations
Babusapa Railway Underpass (RUB)

The Babusaheb Palya RUB work has been delayed due to land disputes between private parties and the Railway Department. The Commissioner instructed railway officials to ensure that there are no legal stay orders and to immediately resume and complete the pending works at the earliest.
Horamavu Agara Lake

A maintenance tender has already been issued for Horamavu Agara Lake. Officials were directed to take up cleaning and maintenance works at the earliest. Local residents requested facilities such as toilets, benches, walkways, lawns, and other amenities. Officials were instructed to prepare estimates for these works and allocate necessary funds in the next budget.

Agara Lake Road Inspection
Agara Lake Road, being a low-lying area, faces frequent waterlogging during monsoons. To address this, road level improvement works have been taken up.

to bitumen shortage, asphaltting work has been delayed. The Commissioner directed officials to complete asphaltting immediately after hot mix supply is available.
Banjara Layout Main Road
Due to uneven road levels and silted drains, rainwater does not flow properly into drains, causing water stagnation on the road during monsoons. Officials were instructed to immediately undertake desilting of side drains.

Indriya, Aditya Birla Jewellery strengthens presence in Karnataka with fourth store in Bangalore



Bangalore : Indriya, Aditya Birla Jewellery, continues its steady national growth with the launch of its new store in Bangalore, located on Dickenson Road. Marking the brand's fourth store in the city, the opening further strengthens Indriya's presence in Karnataka and reflects the brand's ongoing expansion across key metropolitan markets in India. Bangalore is recognised for its vibrant retail landscape and strong demand for contemporary as well as traditional jewellery. Dickenson Road, located in a prominent retail district of the city, is known for its bustling commercial activity and accessibility, making it an ideal setting for Indriya to bring its signature jewellery experience closer to customers seeking distinctive and thoughtfully designed pieces. The store showcases more than 32,000 thoughtfully curated designs in gold, polki, and diamond across bridal, festive, contemporary, and everyday jewellery collections. Enhancing the in-store experience are dedicated spaces such as an exclusive bridal lounge and a specialised kaarigari room, offering customers a closer look at the craftsmanship and artistry behind each creation. Designed to reflect Indriya's design-led philosophy, the store brings together refined interiors with a seamless and immersive jewellery retail experience. With this launch, Indriya continues to strengthen its presence across India. The brand operates stores across major cities including Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Pune, Bangalore, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Patna, Indore, and Lucknow, alongside a steadily expanding footprint in emerging urban markets—further reinforcing its position as a fast-growing national jewellery brand backed by the Aditya Birla Group.

NAVI FINSERV **Navi Finserv Limited**
Registered Office: 2nd Floor, Vaishnavi Tech Square, Ibbalur Village, Begur Hobli, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560102, E: help@navi.com | T: +91 81475 44555 | www.navi.com/finserv | CIN: U65923KA2012PLC062537

POSSESSION NOTICE (For Immovable Property)
Whereas, The undersigned is the Authorised Officer of Navi Finserv Limited, 2nd Floor, Vaishnavi Tech Square, Survey No. 14/2 of Ibbalur Village, Taluk, Bagalur, Begur, Bangalore, Karnataka - 560102. Under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the power conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a Demand Notice dated 26/03/2025 calling upon the Borrowers / Guarantors Mr. Saranya Kumar S. Tenge, Mrs. Uma S. Tenge, and Mrs. Prasanna Kumar Kohir. #2-1235/10/2, Sedam Road, Gubbi Colony Gouri, Shankar Temple, M.B. Nagar Gulbarga-585105, to repay the amount mentioned in the said notice, being Rs. 25,16,615/- (Rupees Twenty-Five Lacs Sixteen Thousand Six Hundred Fifteen only), together with future interest thereon at the contractual rate of interest along with cost and charges within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

Due to the failure of the Borrowers and Guarantors to regularize the account, which remains a Non-Performing Asset (NPA) with an outstanding balance of Rs. 24,67,935/- (Rupees Twenty-four lakhs sixty-seven thousand nine hundred and thirty-five only) as of March 19, 2026, notice is hereby issued to the parties involved and the general public. The undersigned has taken possession of the property described below, exercising powers conferred under Section 13(4) of the Act, read with Rule 8 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, effective this 19th day of March, 2026.

The Borrower in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property, and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of Navi Finserv Limited, 2nd Floor, Survey No. 14/2 of Ibbalur Village, Vaishnavi Tech Square, Begur Hobli, Bengaluru, Bengaluru Urban, Karnataka, 560102.

The Borrower's attention is invited to provisions of Sub-Section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available to redeem the secured assets.

Notice is hereby given of the retraction of the Possession Notice dated May 27, 2025. This current issuance shall be deemed the definitive notice for all legal intents and purposes.

- Schedule Property -
Property Wherein Building is Constructed: Site No. 441, Size 6x9' Mtrs, formed by the Gulbarga Development Authority in Sy. No. 21/2 of Hirapur MSK Mill Residential Development Scheme, Kalaburagi, bounded as under: East: Plot No. 440, West: Plot No. 442, North: Plot No. 420, South: 7.5-Meter-Wide Road.

Date: 21-03-2026
Place: Bengaluru

AUTHORISED OFFICER
NAVI FINSERV LIMITED

PRUDENT ARC LIMITED Registered & Corporate Office: 611, D Mall, Plot No. A-1, Netaji Subhash Nagar, Pitampura, New Delhi-110034.
Tel: +91-11-45320000 | Email: info@prudentarc.com | CIN: U74900DL2011PLC225445

APPENDIX IV POSSESSION NOTICE
(Under The Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Securities Interest Act, 2002 read with the proviso to Rule 8 (1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002)
(For Immovable Property)

Whereas, The Authorized Officer of the Prudent ARC Limited (Prudent Trust - 139/26) under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (SARFAESI Act) and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 3 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rule, 2002 issued demand Notice dated 22/11/2025 calling upon the Borrower/ Guarantors, ASHPAK MAHOMED BISHWAS (Borrower) (Loan A/c: HCFGKSK0000102605); (2) ALTAIF MAHMADAHUSEIN MULLA (Co-Borrower); (3) ASMA MULLA (Co-Borrower); (4) ASHPAK MULLA (Co-Borrower); (5) RIYAZ MULLA (Co-Borrower); to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being Rs. 20,80,485.00/- (Rupees Twenty Lakh Eighty Thousand Four Hundred Eighty-Five Only) as on 22/11/2025 with further interest at the contractual rate and costs, charges and expenses incurred thereon etc. within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

UGRO Capital Limited (Assignor Bank) pursuant to Assignment Agreement dated 31/12/2025 executed between UGRO Capital Limited (Assignor) and Prudent ARC Limited (Prudent Trust - 144/26) (Assignee) having assigned the debts pertaining to "Personal Guarantor" along with the underlying security interest including guarantees created thereon in favor of Prudent ARC Limited (Prudent Trust - 144/26) (Assignee) being the "Secured Creditor", under the provisions of Section 5 of the Act.

The borrower/guarantors having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the Authorized Officer of Prudent ARC Limited (Prudent Trust - 123/25) has taken possession of the properties described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under SARFAESI Act read with rule of the Security Interest Enforcement Rules, 2002 on this 16.03.2026. The Borrower/Personal Guarantors in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of Prudent ARC Limited for an amount of Rs. 20,80,485.00/- (Rupees Twenty Lakh Eighty Thousand Four Hundred Eighty-Five Only) as on 22/11/2025 plus further interest at contractual rate applicable from 22/11/2025 together with costs, charges and expenses incurred. However, you have failed to repay the entire amount due to Prudent ARC Limited, being the "Secured Creditor", in accordance with the notice issued under Section 13(2) of the SARFAESI Act, 2002 dated 20.11.2025. The balance amount, including further interest, penal interest, and other applicable charges as per the terms of the loan account, remains recoverable from you from the date of the said notice until the date of full and final payment.

The Personal Guarantor's attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

SCHEDULE-I
DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES

Property 1: All That Piece And Parcel The Property Bearing Gram Panchayat Nallanatti Property Bearing No. 444 Measuring 22.6 X 36 Sq Feet Situated At Nallanatti Ta Gokak Dist: Belagavi Within Limit of The Gram Panchayat Nallanatti And Within Jurisdictions of Sub-Register Gokak Boundaries of The Mortgaged Property 444 Property- East: Road, West: Road, North: Road, South: Asma Ashpaq Mulla

Property 2: All That Piece And Parcel The Property Bearing Gram Panchayat Nallanatti Property Bearing No. 445 Measuring 22.6 X 36 Sq Feet Situated At Nallanatti Ta Gokak Dist: Belagavi Within Limit of The Gram Panchayat Nallanatti And Within Jurisdictions of Sub-Register Gokak Boundaries of The Mortgaged Property 445 Property- East: Road, West: Road, North: Babulal Rehman Mulla, South: 1) Altif 2) Riyaz Father Mohammad Husein Nerli

Date: 16-03-2026
Place: Belagavi (Karnataka)

Sd/-Authorized Officer
Prudent ARC Limited (Prudent Trust - 123/25)

EDITORIAL

How Far Can India Really Avoid Other People's Wars?

"We started this war due to pressure..."

This is how the world got pushed into yet another forever war, impacting everyone in some measure. While the US counterterrorism chief, Joe Kent, holds Israel responsible for the war waged on Iran in his resignation letter, at this stage, it's almost pointless to assign accountability. The ongoing Iran-Israel-US war has quickly acquired the familiar logic of a forever war, where battle victories do not open any credible pathway to political closure. For India, the significance of this war lies less in its battlefield dynamics and more in what it reveals about the costs of entanglement and the discipline required to avoid it.

The conflict's most immediate global consequence has been the disruption of energy flows through the Strait of Hormuz, a chokepoint through which roughly 20% of global petroleum - and nearly half of India's crude imports - transit. Even partial disruption has been enough to send oil prices sharply higher, with knock-on effects across currencies, inflation, and trade balances. India's vulnerability here is structural: it imports over 80% of its crude, with nearly half sourced from West Asia.

The economic shock is already visible, and India's concerns aren't just existing on macro levels. The rupee has fallen to record lows, pressured by a surge in crude prices and capital outflows, while Brent crude has climbed close to \$100 per barrel after rising roughly 40% since the conflict intensified. Every \$10 increase in oil prices significantly widens India's current account deficit and feeds directly into inflation, eroding domestic demand and fiscal stability. The crisis around the supply disruption of the cooking gas is already making its heat felt. While India could stay largely unaffected during the other ongoing forever war, the Russia-Ukraine conflict - this one has reached home. Faced with supply uncertainty, New Delhi has moved with quiet urgency: ramping up purchases of discounted Russian crude - reportedly 30 million barrels in a single week - after Washington "allowed" flexibility. Iran sits astride India's access routes to Central Asia and remains relevant to its connectivity ambitions. Despite extensive strikes and infrastructure damage, Iran retains the capacity to retaliate and disrupt global energy markets. India is also the BRICS chair currently, with Iran and the Gulf countries being the grouping's members. So far, New Delhi has been able to assert its strategic autonomy. India maintains deepening ties with the United States and Israel in technology and defence, yet it has not joined any military or sanctions coalition against Iran. India knows from the neighbourhood experience that participation in a conflict with no defined end state offers little strategic upside and considerable economic risk.

For India, the implications for participating in other countries' forever wars in any capacity are stark. Direct involvement in such conflicts would not only strain resources but also import instability into an economy still consolidating its growth trajectory. Unlike Cold War-era alliances, today's conflicts offer fewer guarantees and higher spillover risks. India is acutely sensitive to external shocks at the moment. The current crisis has already forced adjustments in domestic policy like curbs on gas supplies to industry, prioritisation of domestic fuel consumption, and contingency planning for prolonged disruptions. So far so good. Can this strategic autonomy endure? As the Iran conflict expands, pressures will mount from all directions. The Gulf countries, Iran, and Israel would ask India for a show of solidarity. The US anyway wields the tariffs and sanctions whip. New Delhi will have to build capabilities in order to maintain its autonomy in such a scenario. But this capacity building has reputational risks, too.

The Russia-China Axis That Has Made Iran So Difficult For Trump

Earlier this month, Donald Trump described the United States and Israel's ongoing war with Iran as a "little excursion" that he said would finish pretty quickly. "We took a little excursion because we felt we had to do that to get rid of some evil," Trump told Republican lawmakers in Florida. But the war has already gone into its third week, with Iran appearing to be setting its tone, course and even duration.

There is no doubt that Iran has suffered significant losses. Its Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was assassinated, along with over 40 senior officials, on the first day of the war. The National Security Advisor, Ali Larjani, was killed on Monday, and the Intelligence Minister, Ismail Khatib, a day later, in Israel's policy of decapitating Iran's regime with the aim of inciting an uprising. Khamenei's son and the new Supreme Leader, Mojtaba, has not been seen in public since his appointment amid reports that he has been seriously injured. Relentless American and Israeli attacks have destroyed a large part, if not most, of Iran's military infrastructure. Israel has also inflicted major damage on Iran's oil and gas facilities in an attempt to cripple its economy. Iran is undeterred. But these setbacks have not deterred Iran, which has escalated the war with attacks not only on Israel and US diplomatic and military installations but also on civilian targets across the Gulf, including airports, hotels, and energy infrastructure. Trump now says he is surprised by Iran's retaliation, despite his military commanders' warning him beforehand of the exact scenario. On Tuesday,



Trump's top counterterrorism official, Joe Kent, resigned over the war, urging the president to "reverse course." He claimed that Trump "started this war due to pressure from Israel and its powerful American lobby." The Russia And China Hand If you look at their public statements, Moscow and Beijing have only provided diplomatic support to Iran, condemned the invasion and the killing of its head of state, the Supreme Leader Khamenei. They have also called for de-escalation and even criticised Iran for attacking Gulf countries. But their support for Tehran runs much deeper. US media have been reporting that Russia has been providing intelligence to Iran about military targets. Last week, Trump said that Russian President Vladimir Putin might be helping Iran "a bit". But Iran's successful hitting of US military bases and energy infrastructure in the Gulf suggests that Russian help is much more than what Trump described

as "a bit". Russia is reported to have provided Iran with the precise locations of US warships and aircraft operating in the Middle East. Russia's Kanopus-V satellite gives Iran round-the-clock images of American assets and other targets in the region. An important target reportedly provided by Moscow to Tehran was the precise location of a US military base in Kuwait, after which an Iranian drone killed six American soldiers. Moscow is attempting to replicate what the US has done over the past four years in the Ukraine conflict. The Ukrainian military has successfully targeted precise Russian positions and killed thousands of its soldiers after intelligence provided by the United States. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told a US broadcaster, MS NOW, on Sunday that both Russia and China are helping Iran militarily. "We have had close cooperation in the past, which still continues, and that includes military cooper-

ation as well," said Araghchi. **The Chinese Military Assistance** China's military support for Iran is also significant, although more discreet, as it seeks to keep good relations with other Gulf states. Over the past decade, Beijing has enhanced its collaboration with Iran in missile technology, satellite and space programmes, intelligence exchange, cybersecurity, and electronic warfare. In the days leading up to the current war, several reports indicated that China was engaged in direct arms sales to Iran of offensive drones. It finalised a deal to sell supersonic anti-ship cruise missiles to Iran, though the two sides had not agreed on a delivery date. Some reports say the missiles were delivered, though they have not been confirmed. During the first week of the war, two state-owned Iranian vessels left China's Gaolan Port for Iran and are believed to be transporting sodium perchlorate, a key precursor used in solid rocket fuel for

missiles, according to the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission. In 2021, China granted Iran full military access to its BeiDou satellite navigation system, according to the commission that monitors Chinese activities and reports to the US Congress. It is not clear, however, the extent to which Iran uses BeiDou.

Cyber Warfare and Oil Beijing has also helped Iran in developing its cyberwar capabilities, which could pose a serious threat to Israel and the United States. Israel has been aware of that and has managed to infiltrate some of the Iranian networks and kill dozens of cyber experts and other scientists. But it is not possible to destroy Iran's entire cyber network. China, Iran's biggest trading partner, which purchases over 80% of Iran's oil, has also helped Iran bypass US sanctions and supplied dual-use equipment, similar to its sales to Russia, to support its conflict with Ukraine. China is the first country in the current conflict whose oil tankers Iran has allowed to pass through the Strait of Hormuz.

Long-term Partnerships Moscow has been Iran's defence partners for over 30 years. Russia started selling its Soviet-era defence and civil nuclear technologies in the 1990s to Iran, which needed to rebuild its defence and economy after the devastating Iran-Iraq war between 1980 and 1988. Russia sold aircraft and air defence systems, though in 2010, it decided not to deliver the S-300 long-range air defence system after US pressure.

Three 'Fatal' Assumptions That Have Derailed Trump's Iran War

The unending war against Iran is now being seen as a turning point in world order. How did the US get it so wrong? The US made three big assumptions before pulling the trigger on February 28. First, the US believed the world balance of power, while past its unipolar prime, was still favourable, with its main great-power competitors either distracted in other conflicts (Russia in Ukraine) or absorbed in domestic and regional matters (China in East Asia). The ease with which Venezuela fell reinforced the belief in US omnipotence. The window of opportunity to smother an isolated Iran was wide open. Where A 'Blitzkrieg' Operation Fell Short Second, the massive use of strategic bombing was seen as sufficient to topple Iran. This was in line with the classic US doctrine of decapitation of a target state's leadership and its command and control nodes. Indeed, this idea of a decisive battle where a blitzkrieg operation shocks an adversary to quickly back down or capitulate has long been part of the western mythology of warfighting. Domestic societal pressures against land wars and enduring logistical constraints along with the appeal of shock and awe bombing campaigns has profoundly shaped US strategic culture since the Second World War. Third, the US estimated that its formidable allied network provided it with unique advantages to bear the burden of a brief but intensive war. The US could shuffle around resources and military equipment from other theatres to shore up the war effort in West Asia. America's regional allies were also seen as assets with several dispersed bases



across multiple locations to execute an operational campaign that could overwhelm Iran and complicate its responses. On all three assumptions, the US miscalculation has been laid bare. Iran was not alone and its strategic partnerships have helped accelerate its military preparedness after the 12-day war in June 2025. While strategic bombing has yielded tactical successes, it has failed to dislodge the political system, vital institutions and the underlying resolve of the Iranian people. The Paradox Of US's Allied Networks Second, the US allied network has actually proven to be a burden rather than an advantage in such a conflict of choice. As Trump himself admitted, the US was shocked at the intensity and effectiveness of Iran's response in striking US bases across the Persian Gulf and West Asia, which were critical staging grounds for the offensive and defensive operations. According to satellite imagery, 25 locations were struck across seven US bases in five countries, including vital early warning radars, logistical buildings, hangars and fuel storage containers. The vulnerability of US regional allies and their critical infrastruc-

ture to Iranian reprisals has further introduced an element of mutually assured destruction that cannot be defied even by hardliners in the US. This is why Trump quickly backed down after an Israeli strike on Iran's South Pars gas field invited a swift counter response by Iran on energy facilities in the Gulf. Iran's resilience stems from the logic, efficiency and technological achievements of its military doctrine. Iran was judged from the lens of NATO and US force structures that were developed around a vastly different set of geostrategic objectives - to project power and transport military resources across vast inter-continental distances, and reliance on expensive platforms and weapon systems that function as a network. As an independent state with fewer national resources, Iran developed a military doctrine dedicated for its core geopolitical requirements. Iran chose 'deterrence by punishment', that is, use of weaponry that can strike back at the source of threats. This was built on a massive - and invulnerable to aerial bombing - stockpile of missiles and drones built over decades, including highly advanced variants

that can easily pierce the complex US-Israeli missile defense shields across the region. Iran has publicly declared this doctrine and even demonstrated its efficacy, albeit in a limited fashion during the 12-day war in 2025. Is The US Now Trapped? Despite an intensive bombing spree, the US has failed to meaningfully degrade Iran's military power or undermine its political cohesion. The ultimatums and maximalist war aims by the White House and Pentagon in the opening phase now seem too ridiculous to even consider three weeks into this war. Presently, the US is more engaged with dealing with the blowback and repercussions of this war including declining support inside America, the spectre of global economic instability, systemic shock to energy markets and allied sectors, and the logistical grind of a long military campaign that can no longer be safely waged from the exposed front line bases in West Asia or from Iran's maritime periphery. Who Will Have The Last Say? Credible reports, including those publicly confirmed by Iran's Foreign Minister, suggest the US has sought a ceasefire on multiple occasions.

Dhurandhar, And The Enduring Ghosts Of Kashmir Valley

It is tempting to see Dhurandhar: The Revenge as Aditya Dhar's own story. That of a Kashmiri Pandit who loses everything when his family is turfed out of its homeland. He loses his home, his love for his country, and his belief that the state will stand up for him. That is the arc that Jaskirat Singh Rang's story follows in the prequel/sequel to the wildly popular Dhurandhar released last year. A boy whose father and grandfather were in the army and who wanted to follow suit until a land dispute causes a rival family in the village to torture his father, rape his sisters. The search for justice takes the family to every court in the country before Jaskirat decides to take matters into his own hands, and it leads to him becoming Hamza Ali Mazari, a killing machine let loose on Pakistan by the Indian intelligence system. The land dispute may well be a metaphor for Kashmir, forever caught in a tussle between India and Pakistan. And the end, without giving too much away, could well be what the homeland is to the Kashmiri Pandit now, a state he or she can dream of but never return to. The land has changed forever and so has the tiny community exiled from it. As much as Jaskirat is a stranger to his home in Pathankot now, so is the Pandit to the Valley where he once thrived. The War That Never Ended Yes, Dhurandhar: The Revenge is a paean to the Narendra Modi government and makes a hero of National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, played by R Madhavan as Ajay Sanyal, but it is a deeply personal and deeply felt story of the thousand cuts that Pakistan has dealt to India, of which the exile of Kashmiri Pandits has been the most devastating consequence. It is also a story of the relentless war waged by Pakistan



against India, not all of Pakistan but the terrorists it harbours, and the agenda it upholds. Where Dhurandhar, the first part was all about Hamza Ali Mazari's infiltration into the Baloch gang of Lyari, Karachi, the second part is the back story. What turned Jaskirat Singh Rang into Hamza, a one man demolition squad who wipes out the fountainhead of terror in Pakistan. It is a fantasy India desperately needs at this point and who better than Aditya Dhar to give it to the people and more importantly to the state, battered as it is in the new world disorder, trying to find its place among countries that were its friends and trying to keep the new friends it thought it had made.

Nazr, Sabr Hosla. Eendhan. Badla. Courage. Fuel. Revenge. That is the tagline that recurs throughout the movie, and it is one that carries forward the motto Sanyal gives to Hamza in the first part: Nazr and Sabr, vigilance and patience. Dhar gives a logical explanation for every act of the Modi government, from demonetisation in 2016 to the encounter that killed gangster Atiq Ahmed in 2023. The enemy here is clearly Pakistan, and the assets it

harbours in India, with the chief architect of the strategy revealed to be Bade Saab, which frankly was not a surprise reveal. It is a man who has almost singlehandedly inflicted damage on India since 1992. The Pakistanis here are intent on administering violence on India, and in the provocative words of Major Iqbal, a particularly despicable character played by Arjun Rampal, doing much more: making the infidels accept the inevitability of another faith, and turning its women into sex slaves. The 1971 war comes up repeatedly in Major Iqbal's conversations with his hateful father, in a stellar performance by Suvinder Vicky, who is a stand-in for the horrors visited upon East Pakistan by the Pakistani army, especially on its people. It also has echoes of the slogans that accompanied the exodus of the Pandits from the Valley: Raliv, Galiv, ya Chaliv (Convert, Die or Leave). **A Fantasy, After All** Dhar's filmmaking is clever. One doesn't know whether he actually believes in the Doval doctrine of Nazr and Sabr, but he does a good job of interpreting it, destroying every enemy that has ever damaged India, from the IC814 hijack to the 26/11 attack to the 2012 Pune bombings and the 2013 Hyderabad blasts. Hamza cuts a swathe through the terror network in Pakistan which leaves us scratching our heads as to who was responsible for the Pahalagam massacre. But then, at the end of the day, Dhar is weaving a fantasy for us of a strong state, one that famously ghar main ghusega aur maarega bhi. In a telling confession from Hamza, he makes it clear that his war is not against Pakistan but the monsters who lead it into a war against India and its own people who are inconvenient to them. The film is long, and sometimes tests one's patience, especially in the excessive use of violence. I have yet to see a movie where so many heads and limbs are severed with such varied objects, from axes to shop shutters to meat hooks to oil barrels. The soundtrack as usual is very clever, stretching from Boney M's Rasputin to the Bombay Rockers' Ari Ari, which traces its roots to the Punjabi folk song Baari Barsi to Turchi Topiwala from the 1969 film Tridev to Tamma tamma loge from another 1969 film, Thanedar, whose star Sanjay Dutt plays the watchful SP Aslam and who in real life.

India's young are more educated than ever. So why are so many jobless?

India's youth story is a study in contradictions - of abundance and scarcity, promise and drift. As the British economist Joan Robinson once quipped, whatever "you can rightly say about India, the opposite is also true". Few studies illustrate that paradox more crisply than the latest State of Working India report by Azim Premji University. Start with the headline number: 367 million young people between the ages of 15 and 29 - the largest youth population in the world, and making up a third of India's working-age population. Of them, 263 million are not in education and constitute the potential workforce. It is an enviable demographic bulge, the kind that powered East Asia's economic miracles. Yet, beneath this statistical bounty lies more troubling arithmetic. There is, at first glance, reason for optimism. Over four decades, the country has transformed its educational landscape, the report finds. Enrolment in high school and colleges has surged, broadly keeping pace with India's development levels. Gender gaps have narrowed. Caste barriers, though far from erased, have reduced. Between 2007 and 2017, the



share of students from the poorest households enrolled in higher education rose from 8% to 17%. A far more educated and connected generation is entering the labour market. Young workers are moving out of agriculture faster than older cohorts over the long term, finding opportunities in manufacturing and services. On paper, this looks like the making of a classic demographic dividend. "Never before have so many young Indians been as educated and as connected," the report says. The bad news: the transition from education to employment remains stubbornly broken. Graduate

unemployment in an increasingly challenging labour market is strikingly high. The last half decade has not generated salaried jobs in adequate numbers, the report finds. Nearly 40% of graduates aged 15-25 - and 20% of those aged 25-29 - are jobless, far higher than among the less educated, the report finds. Only a small share secure stable, salaried jobs within a year. Part of this reflects how labour markets evolve over a life cycle. As Rosa Abraham, economist and lead author of the report, told me: "When you're young, you wait - and report unemployment." Track the same cohort over

time and joblessness falls; by their late 20s, many are working, says Abraham. Early joblessness, she argues, reflects an "aspiration-availability mismatch" combined with the ability to wait. Over time, "you mellow, build networks and take what you can", often in the private sector. This is not a new problem. In 1969, British economist Mark Blaug published a book called The Causes of Graduate Unemployment in India, tracing a gap between education and jobs that had been evident since the 1950s. And between 1983 and 2023, graduate unemployment remained stubbornly high at around 35-

40%. What has changed is the scale. India now produces about five million graduates a year - but since 2004-05, barely 2.8 million annually have found jobs, with even fewer securing salaried work. The broader labour market tells a similarly mixed story. In the two years after the pandemic, India added 83 million jobs, lifting total employment from 490 million to 572 million, with gains for both men and women, the report finds. Yet nearly half were in agriculture - dominated by women and typically marked by low productivity and disguised unemployment. In other words, the economy has been creating work, but not the kind that transforms livelihoods. Women's employment is rising - but here, too, the picture is split. At one end, a small but growing cohort of educated and skilled women is entering salaried roles in IT, automobile manufacturing and business services. The shift is especially pronounced in states such as Tamil Nadu and Gujarat, says Abraham. At the other, far larger end, most of the increase is in self-employment and unpaid or home-based work, often within households or family enterprises.

GOLD RISES RS 1,914 TO RS 1.46 LAKH/10G



New Delhi: Gold prices jumped by Rs 1,914 to Rs 1.46 lakh per 10 grams in futures trade on Friday, March 20, tracking firm global trends amid easing geopolitical tensions in West Asia. On the Multi Commodity Exchange, the yellow metal for April delivery increased by Rs 1,914, or 1.32 per cent, to Rs 1,46,868 per 10 grams. Analysts said the recovery in gold prices was supported by improving market sentiment following signs of easing tensions in West Asia. The recovery in gold prices was supported by easing geopolitical concerns, as recent statements from the US and Israel indicated a reduced risk of further disruptions to critical Middle Eastern energy infrastruc-

ture, Renisha Chainani, Head of Research at Augmont, said. She added that the sentiment improved after indications that the US may ease sanctions on Iranian oil, potentially boosting global supply and reducing immediate risk premium in commodity markets. Globally, gold futures for the April contract on the Comex rose USD 62.2, or 1.35 per cent, to USD 4,667.9 per ounce in New York. "Gold prices steadied in Friday's trade but, remained on track for their worst weekly decline in six years, as the ongoing US-Israel conflict with Iran lifted inflation expectations and reduced bets on near-term interest rate cuts," Manav Modi, Analyst -

Commodities, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said. Chainani further said signals from Israel indicating restraint on further strikes targeting Iranian energy assets have helped stabilise risk perception, thereby reducing immediate safe-haven demand for precious metals. Modi added that the US Federal Reserve's hawkish stance in keeping interest rates steady capped the upside in the yellow metal prices, even as global cues remained supportive. Meanwhile, a strong US dollar and elevated Treasury bond yields continued to weigh on bullion prices, as investors positioned for tighter financial conditions amid inflation risks.

Premium petrol gets costlier by Rs 2, no change in regular petrol

New Delhi: Oil marketing companies on Friday, March 20, increased the price of premium petrol by around Rs 2 per litre, amid rising global crude prices triggered by escalating tensions in West Asia. State-run oil marketing companies, including Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited and Indian Oil Corporation Limited, have raised the prices of their premium petrol variants by about Rs 2.09 to Rs 2.35 per litre. With this revision, the price of branded fuels such as Power petrol and XP95 has increased from around Rs 111.68 per litre to nearly Rs 113.77 per litre. However, there has been no change in the prices of regular petrol and diesel, providing some relief to the general public amid rising fuel concerns. The hike in premium petrol prices comes at a time when global crude oil markets are witnessing sharp volatility due to geopolitical tensions in West Asia. On March 19, oil prices



surged more than 4 per cent after attacks on key energy infrastructure in the region. Brent crude futures rose to around \$111.78 per barrel, while US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) climbed to nearly \$99.57 per barrel. The spike followed Israel's strike on Iran's South Pars gas field, the world's largest, and Iran's reported retaliation targeting Qatar's Ras Laffan industrial city, a

major global gas hub. The escalating conflict has raised concerns over global energy security, with experts warning that disruptions in the Gulf region could impact oil supply chains worldwide. For India, which imports nearly 90 per cent of its crude oil needs, such developments have direct implications on fuel pricing. While companies have so far kept regular fuel prices unchanged, the increase

in premium petrol reflects the pressure from rising global crude rates. Industry observers said that if tensions continue and oil prices remain elevated, domestic fuel prices could see further adjustments in the coming weeks. With this revision, the price of branded fuels such as Power petrol and XP95 has increased from around Rs 111.68 per litre to nearly Rs 113.77 per litre.

HDFC AMC under its CSR Initiative supports Advanced Radiotherapy Unit

Vrindavan, March 20, 2026: HDFC Asset Management Company Limited (HDFC AMC), Investment Manager to HDFC Mutual Fund (HDFC MF), one of India's leading mutual fund houses, has supported the establishment of a Radiotherapy Unit in the new Oncology Block at Ramakrishna Charitable Hospital, Vrindavan as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative, strengthening access to advanced cancer treatment for patients across North India. The new Oncology Block was inaugurated today by the Hon'ble President of India, Smt. Droupadi Murmu, marking a significant milestone in expanding access to advanced cancer care. HDFC AMC has supported the procurement and installation of advanced radiotherapy equipment, enabling high-precision radiation therapy that targets cancer cells while minimising damage to surrounding healthy tissue. The facility is expected to benefit patients primarily from Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, and Rajasthan, providing access to specialised cancer treat-



ment for those who may otherwise face challenges due to cost or limited availability of advanced healthcare infrastructure. Speaking on the initiative, Mr. Navneet Munot, Managing Director & CEO, HDFC Asset Management Company, said "Access to quality healthcare is fundamental to advancing inclusive development in India. We are honoured to support the creation of advanced radiotherapy infrastructure at Ramakrishna Charitable Hospital,

Vrindavan. At HDFC AMC, we believe institutions must play a meaningful role in nation-building by serving communities with care and responsibility. This initiative reflects our continued commitment to strengthening cancer care and helping reduce the financial and emotional burden on families. We are also deeply grateful to the Hon'ble President Smt. Droupadi Murmu for gracing the inauguration and encouraging such impactful initiatives."

Established in 2017, the Oncology Department at Ramakrishna Charitable Hospital has emerged as an important centre for cancer treatment, serving patients from a 400 km radius across neighbouring regions. The department offers a wide range of advanced procedures and treatments including commando surgeries, reconstructive surgeries, Whipple procedures, free flaps, wide excisions, chemotherapy, immunotherapy, and hormone therapy. Since its inception, the department has provided care to over 45,000 outpatients and more than 12,000 inpatients, including fully free treatment for destitute patients in need of critical medical support. The hospital is now expanding its capabilities through the new Oncology Block, which will house advanced facilities including two radiotherapy bunkers, a brachytherapy bunker, a CT simulator, OPD rooms, a day-care unit, tumour board facilities, nurses' stations, conference rooms, and allied infrastructure designed to support comprehensive cancer care.

Shri Krishna Kumar Thakur takes charge as Director (Personnel), NMDC

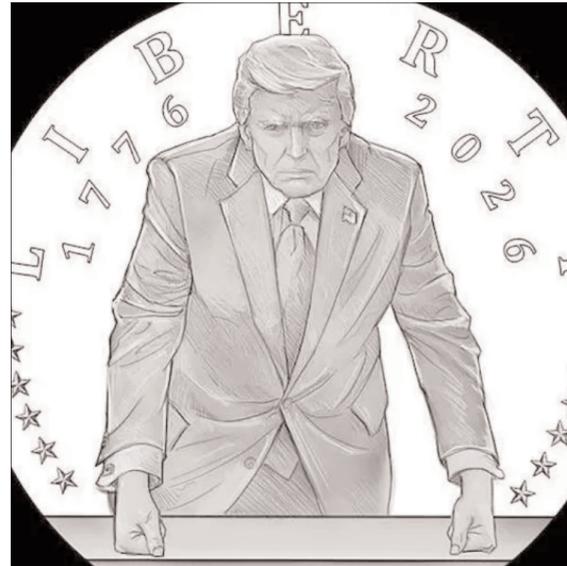
Hyderabad, 20th March 2026: Shri Krishna Kumar Thakur, a 1998 batch officer of the Indian Railway Personnel Service (IRPS), has assumed charge as Director (Personnel) at NMDC Limited, India's largest iron ore producer, on Thursday. In his two-and-a-half decades of service with Indian Railways and CPSUs, Shri Thakur brings extensive experience in human resource management and administration. He has handled key HR functions across major railway divisions including Solapur, Bhopal and Mumbai, and has led large-scale recruitment as Chairman, Railway Recruitment Cell, Western Railway, overseeing induction of around 12,000 employees. His leadership has been instrumental in handling large-scale recruitments, managing complex industrial relations, and introducing progressive HR initiatives aimed at enhancing productivity and employee welfare. During his tenure with RITES, he was associated with an international train operations project in Saudi Arabia. He has also headed the HR function at Konkan Railway Corporation Limited (KRCL), where he played a key role in streamlining HR policies and procedures. Prior to joining NMDC, as Director (HR) at BHEL, Shri Thakur spearheaded several initiatives in HR, Law and HSE, including restructuring of functions, policy reforms, introduction



of a uniform incentive scheme, and multi-skilling initiatives to enhance workforce capability and retention. He introduced standard guidelines for labour sheds to enable faster mobilization and retention of workmen. An alumnus of Tilka Manjhi University, Bhagalpur, he holds a postgraduate degree in Literature and a PGDM in Human Resources from Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). His experience in HR across Indian Railways and large CPSEs will be instrumental in strengthening NMDC's people-centric ecosystem while aligning employee growth with organizational goals.

TRUMP 24-KARAT GOLD COIN APPROVED BY HAND-PICKED FEDERAL PANEL

A commemorative gold coin bearing the image of US President Donald Trump has been approved by a federal arts commission. The 24-karat gold coin is intended to mark America's 250th birthday this 4 July and portrays Trump with his fists pressed against a desk. After a presentation by the US Mint, the US Commission of Fine Arts voted unanimously to approve the design, despite questions over its legality. Federal law does not allow a living president to appear on US currency. But the coin is being issued in accordance with Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent's authority and discretion to mint and issue proof gold coins. Bessent is expected to order the coin to be struck once the US Mint produces final dimensions. The commission's vice-chairman, James McCreery, said: "I motion to approve this [coin] as presented, and with the strong encouragement that you make it as large as possible, all the way to three inches in diameter." For comparison, a US quarter dollar is less than an inch wide. Trump last year fired the Commission of Fine Arts' members, replacing them with allies. A Democratic congressman from New York, Ritchie Torres, last year proposed a bill titled Trump (The



Restrict Ugly Money Portraits) Act, to bar presidents from issuing currency bearing their own likeness. It has not passed. The US Mint did not respond to a request for comment from the

BBC. Until now, Calvin Coolidge is the only other US president to have featured on a coin in his lifetime. There are, however, questions regarding the legality of this coin.

Federal law does not allow a living president to appear on US currency, and a bipartisan panel has previously rejected the idea of Trump's figure being on a coin. Additionally, a Democratic congressman from New York, Ritchie Torres, proposed a bill last year titled Trump (The Restrict Ugly Money Portraits) Act, to bar presidents from issuing currency bearing their own likeness. The bill has not passed, and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent is expected to order the coin to be struck once the US Mint produces final dimensions. Megan Sullivan, the acting chief of the office of design management at US Mint, said the Treasury Secretary has authority to authorize the minting and issuance of certain coins. US Treasurer Brandon Beach said in a statement: "As we approach our 250th birthday, we are thrilled to prepare coins that represent the enduring spirit of our country and democracy, and there is no profile more emblematic for the front of such coins than that of our serving President, Donald J. Trump." Critics have been vocal about the news, with many decriing what seems to be an out of touch move from Trump, especially considering current events.

Trump calls Nato allies 'cowards', saying it would be 'easy' for them to help open Strait of Hormuz

The Strait of Hormuz is a key trade artery through which around 20% of the world's oil passes. Since the beginning of the US-Israel war with Iran, numerous ships have been reported to have come under attack in the area. Iran's new supreme leader said last week that Iran should keep using the "lever of blocking" the Strait. About 3,000 or so ships usually sail through the corridor each month. In 2025, about 20 million barrels of oil passed through the strait per day. It is deep enough for the world's biggest crude oil tankers, and is used by the major oil and gas producers in the Middle East - and their customers. Currently, around 20,000 seafarers are stranded in the Gulf west of the strait, the UN's International Maritime Organisation (IMO) has reported, following Iranian threats to attack ships. We've just heard from US President Donald Trump, who has called Nato allies "cowards"

and said it would be "easy" for them to allow ships to safely pass through the Strait of Hormuz. Here's his post on Truth Social in full: "Without the U.S.A., NATO IS A PAPER TIGER! They didn't want to join the fight to stop a Nuclear Powered Iran. "Now that fight is Militarily WON, with very little danger for them, they complain about the high oil prices they are forced to pay, but don't want to help open the Strait of Hormuz, a simple military maneuver that is the single reason for the high oil prices. "So easy for them to do, with so little risk. COWARDS, and we will REMEMBER!" More now from the BBC interview with the head of the International Energy Agency (IEA) - who says the "single most important solution" to the oil and gas crisis is reopening the Strait of Hormuz. Even if that happens, he warns, "the damage to energy infrastructure" is likely to reduce the flow of gas and oil from the



Gulf compared to before the war began. It will take "months and months" for energy operations to return "to where they were", he says. "This will have repercussions for the economy, especially emerging and developing countries, whose economies are much more fragile and the currencies are weaker". Birol says it's difficult to give a full assessment of the damage to energy infrastructure so far, "but the reports we are getting indicate that there may be medium to heavy damage on the energy facilities, which are extremely important for the global energy markets and for the global economy". The head of the International Energy Agency (IEA) tells the BBC governments need to "be more vocal" about cutting energy usage, as the world faces the "greatest global energy security challenge in history". Fatih Birol

references a report released today by the IEA, detailing advice on reducing demand for oil in businesses and households - for example by reducing motorway speed limits and working from home where possible. Birol says the incentive for people to take action was financial - "high petrol prices, high energy prices". "It will be good for the pockets of the businesses and also for the consumers, for the citizens, because it is going to help their own economies". The IEA was created in the aftermath of the 1970s oil shock and a critical part of its role is to ensure there are sufficient supplies for the global economy. But the challenge posed by the US-Israeli war with Iran is "much bigger", he says. "It is also bigger than the natural gas price shock we have experienced after the Russia's invasion of Ukraine", with "major problems" facing fertilisers and petrochemicals, as well as oil and gas. "I believe the world

has not yet well understood the depth of the energy security challenge we are facing today." Governments need "to be more vocal but it's only one part of the job that they have to do", he says. "The other part is how we can increase the homegrown energy such as renewables, such as nuclear power." An Iranian man has been arrested with a woman after trying to enter the Faslane naval base, home to the UK's nuclear-armed submarines. Police Scotland said a 34-year-old man and a 31-year-old woman were arrested at HM Naval Base Clyde at about 17:00 on Thursday. A force spokesperson said inquiries were ongoing. The Royal Navy said the suspects "unsuccessfully attempted" to enter the base, near Helensburgh, Argyll and Bute. A spokesperson added: "As the matter is subject to an ongoing investigation, we will not comment further." The woman's nationality is unknown.

MEXICAN TEEN DIES WHILE BEING HELD IN US IMMIGRATION CUSTODY



A 19-year-old Mexican man has died while being held in detention by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the agency has confirmed. Royer Perez-Jimenez was found "unconscious and unresponsive" on Monday at the Glades County Detention Center in Florida, according to a statement from ICE. "He died of a presumed suicide; however, the official cause of his death remains under investigation," the statement adds. According to US media, Perez-Jimenez is the youngest prisoner to die in ICE custody since Donald Trump returned to office and launched a nationwide immigration crackdown. Perez-Jimenez was found in his cell at 02:34 (07:34 GMT) on 16 March, according to ICE, which added that prison staff "immediately" began life-saving efforts. The statement says he was arrested in January and charged with fraud for impersonation and misdemeanour resisting an officer. Officials say he had illegally entered the US at an unknown date. When he was admitted to the jail, he "denied any behavioral health issues or concerns and answered 'no' to all suicide screening questions," ICE says.

NORWAY'S CROWN PRINCESS BREAKS SILENCE, CLAIMING SHE WAS 'MANIPULATED AND DECEIVED' BY EPSTEIN



Norway's Crown Princess Mette-Marit has told national TV that she wishes she had never met late US sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, breaking seven weeks of silence after the extent of her contacts with him emerged. "I feel so manipulated, and when you are manipulated, you don't realise it from the start," Mette-Marit said in a 20-minute interview in which she was often on the verge of tears. Seven weeks ago, Norwegians discovered that the crown princess had exchanged hundreds of emails with the disgraced Epstein between 2011 and 2014, and stayed in his Florida house when he was not there. "It is incredibly important for me to take responsibility for not checking his background more carefully," she said. "And to take responsibility for being so manipulated and deceived as I was." She has already apologised and admitted to "poor judgement", after the close nature of her links to Epstein came to light when millions of Epstein files were released by the US justice department at the end of January. "Of course I wish I had never met him," the princess told public broadcaster NRK,

stressing that it was Epstein's victims who deserved justice for the great abuse they had suffered. She said she felt great anger they had not yet received it. Her decision to speak publicly comes after intense scrutiny and pressure to explain herself, including from Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store. The crown princess gave little away during the conversation, and some of her responses come across as defensive. In 2011, three years after Epstein had been jailed for soliciting underage sex, she wrote: "Googled u after last email. Agree didn't look too good." Sitting alongside her husband, Crown Prince Haakon, during the interview, Mette-Marit maintained she "didn't know he was a sex offender or a predator", even though the reporter pointed out that a Wikipedia article on Epstein at the time had made clear he was a convicted abuser. "I can't remember this; it was 15 years ago." She admitted to being too trusting of Epstein, but when asked why neither the palace nor the foreign ministry knew about her links to him, she said he was a "private contact" and she did not tell everyone about her private contacts.

Bachelorette's new season pulled after Taylor Frankie Paul abuse allegations

The new season of dating show The Bachelorette has been cancelled following domestic violence allegations against this season's star, ABC has said. The network said it "made the decision to not move forward with the new season" after footage of Taylor Frankie Paul emerged on Thursday appearing to show her in an altercation with her ex-partner Dakota Mortensen in 2023. Paul, a TikTok influencer who also stars in Hulu's Secret Lives of Mormon Wives, was arrested in relation to the incident in 2023. She pleaded guilty to aggravated assault, US media report. Paul's spokesperson said she is prioritising her family's safety and



"preparing to own and share her story". In a statement, Mortensen, the father of Paul's third child, said he is "focusing on our son and his safety". A spokesperson for Disney, which owns ABC, said it made the decision to pull the season "in light of the newly released video just surfaced today", referring to the footage, which was published by TMZ.

Russia, China and the US – the global winners and losers of the Iran war

From soaring heating oil bills for homes in Yorkshire to bill-saving school closures in Pakistan, the financial fallout from the war in the Middle East is already being keenly felt. It is increasingly clear that the impact of Tehran's retaliation, designed to trigger economic disruption and damage, may not be fleeting. Moreover, it's very uneven. Alongside a hefty catalogue of those who risk being hard hit, there are some who are benefiting. So who are they? For all the efforts to pursue renewable energy, we remain hugely reliant on oil and gas. Plentiful reserves tend to promise great riches, hence crude has been labelled "black gold". When prices rise, producers are typically quids in, while users are out of pocket. But this is not



your usual oil price shock. The Middle East remains the heart of supply, the Strait of Hormuz its main artery. The impact of a de facto blockage and attacks on energy infrastructure in the region has hit Gulf producers like Qatar and Saudi Arabia hard, as Tehran targets America's allies. As customers seek alternative sources, it's the likes of Norway and Canada

who may gain. After Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, and when many countries sought to move away from relying on Russian gas, Norway was able to ramp up production and take advantage. Meanwhile, Canada's Energy Minister Tim Hodgson has been quick to position his nation as "a stable, reliable, predictable, value-based producer of energy", but there are questions about how much it can raise production. Instead, it's Russia that could be the biggest winner. As Washington relaxes the rules to ease the global supply crunch, Russia's crude oil sales to India have jumped by 50%. Some estimates say that Moscow could earn up to \$5bn (£3.7bn) more by the end of March, and could be on track for its biggest year of fuel-related revenues since 2022. America risks handing Moscow a hefty windfall at the expense of Gulf nations. There are other potential gainers too. As some countries ramp up their use of coal, it is a tantalising opportunity for big exporters such as Indonesia, as the price of that fuel also rises.

TRUMP MAKES PEARL HARBOR REMARK IN MEETING WITH JAPAN'S PM

A key moment of Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's official visit to the US was President Donald Trump's comment on a piece of shared history - Pearl Harbor. Asked by a Japanese journalist why the US had not warned its allies it was going to strike Iran on 28 February, Trump referenced the 1941 Japanese attack on US soil. "Who knows better about surprise than Japan? Why didn't you tell me about Pearl Harbor?," Trump said as the prime minister appeared to be opening her eyes wide and taking a deep breath. The Pearl Harbor attack led to the US joining World War Two,



and the US later dropped two atomic bombs on Japan. The countries became close allies in later years after the war ended. Trump's remark appeared to draw some laughter from journalists and others present in the room in the White House, while

Takaichi's reaction seemed to reflect some of the unease that surrounds the issue. Mineko Tokito, a senior reporter from Japanese newspaper Yomiuri Shimbun, was in the Oval Office at the time and said the PM's discomfort was "clear". "Prime

Minister Takaichi visceraly reacted, her eyes widening and her smile disappearing as she leaned back, drawing her hands in, clearly taken aback by the sudden mention of Pearl Harbor," she said. Yuta Nakamura, a 33-year-old engineer, told Reuters news agency that Takaichi had been put in "a very difficult situation" and praised the PM for "avoiding upsetting Trump". Tokio Washino, a retiree, said: "Given the historical context of Japan having done that, and with Donald Trump bringing it up as an example, it makes me feel a bit uneasy as a Japanese citizen."

Hungary's Orbán accused of disloyalty and blackmail over Ukraine loan veto



European Union leaders have accused Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán of disloyalty and blackmail after he blocked a 90bn (£77bn) loan for Ukraine. "No oil = no money," Orbán said in a post on X after Thursday's summit in Brussels during which he refused to lift his veto, citing a feud over a damaged pipeline that transports Russian oil to Hungary. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said Orbán's actions amounted to "a gross act of disloyalty", while European Council head António Costa described them as tantamount to "blackmail". Orbán - who has maintained close ties with Russia since it launched its full-scale invasion in Ukraine in 2022 - has made hostility towards Ukraine a key issue ahead of elections on 12 April. Hungary depends on Russian energy and Orbán has accused Ukraine of disrupting these energy supplies by failing to repair a Soviet-era pipeline, called Druzhba, which carries Russian oil to Hungary and Slovakia through Ukraine. Kyiv says the pipeline was damaged in January by Russian air strikes, that its repair will last for weeks -

but also that restoring the flow of oil would be equivalent to lifting sanctions on Moscow. While the pipeline remains out of use, Orbán has blocked the release of EU funds to Ukraine - despite approving the decision at an earlier meeting. The gathering of EU leaders on Thursday, which went late into the night, ended with many expressing statements of thinly-veiled fury at Orbán's actions. "Colleagues who have been members of the European Council far longer than I have were deeply angered by what happened today," Germany's Merz told reporters during a news conference in the early hours of Friday. "It is a gross act of disloyalty within the European Union," he said. "I am firmly convinced that it will leave deep marks." France's President Emmanuel Macron called the meeting's outcome "unprecedented", adding that the loan's release must be "implemented without delay". Council President and chairman of the talks Costa added to the chorus of discontent, describing Hungary's actions as "completely unacceptable". "Nobody can blackmail the European institutions.



Australia PM heckled at Sydney mosque Ramadan event

Several injured as turbulence hits Delta flight into Sydney



Several people have been injured after a Delta Airlines flight from Los Angeles to Sydney was hit by turbulence on Friday morning. Delta Flight 41 "encountered brief turbulence" as it landed at Sydney Airport, an airline spokesperson told the BBC. Four flight attendants were injured, and no passengers were hurt, the airline said. The New South Wales Ambulance Service said it assessed five patients in total, and took three to hos-

pital with minor injuries that included back pain and headaches. The patients' ages ranged from their 30s to 70s. It is the latest incident of planes being hit by turbulence, with experts saying climate change is a major factor. There were 245 passengers and 15 crew members on the Airbus A350, the Delta spokesperson said, adding that the plane landed "safely and normally" at Sydney Airport at 06:48 local time on Friday (19:48 GMT on Thursday).



FIFA RULES WOMEN'S TEAMS MUST HAVE FEMALE COACHES

Every team in Fifa's women's football tournaments must include at least one female head coach or assistant coach following the introduction of new regulations.

The requirements will come into effect during the under-17s and under-20s Women's World Cup and Women's Champions Cup competitions this year. The decision was made at the Fifa Council on Thursday, and discussed the long-term strategy of female representation in coaching. Under the new ruling, at least two staff members on the bench of every team at matches must be female, with one in an assistant coach or head coach role. The rule applies to all youth and senior tournaments, including clubs and national teams. At the 2023 Women's World Cup, 12 of the 32 head coaches were female, including



England manager Sarina Wiegman. "There are simply not enough women in coaching today. We must do more to accelerate change by creating clearer pathways, expanding opportunities, and increasing the visibility for women on our sidelines," said Fifa's chief football officer Jill Ellis. "The new Fifa regulations,

combined with targeted development programmes, mark an important investment in the current and future generation of female coaches." Fifa hopes these new regulations will see a rapid increase in female representation, including at the 2027 Women's World Cup in Brazil. Among some of the most high-profile

female coaches is London-born Emma Hayes, who is joined by assistant Denise Reddy at the United States. In 2024, Hayes told BBC Sport that a lack of female coaches in English football is "a massive issue" and urged the game's administrators to "come up with more creative ways" to address it. Other female English

coaches at international level include Gemma Grainger at Norway, Casey Stoney at Canada and Carla Ward at the Republic of Ireland. Canadian Rhian Wilkinson led Wales to their first major tournament at Euro 2025 last summer, while Dutchwoman Wiegman has guided England to back-to-back European titles and has been named the Fifa best women's coach of the year on four occasions.

Wiegman was the only female coach in the quarter-final stage of the 2023 Women's World Cup. Speaking at that time, she said: "Of course what we hope is to get more female coaches at the top level and that the balance gets better than it is right now. "Males are welcome too but if the balance is better than hopefully that will inspire more women to get involved in coaching."

KKR Captain Ajinkya Rahane Delivers Big Statement On 'Pressure' After Lowest IPL Finish In 16 Years

Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) head into the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2026 season desperate to bounce back after recording their joint-lowest finish in the previous campaign. In 2025, under the leadership of Ajinkya Rahane, KKR slumped to an 8th-place finish, falling well short of the playoffs. Now 37, Rahane has been retained as skipper for a second season by the three-time champions, and opened up on the pressure of leading the side off the back of its unsuccessful 2025 season. "Every year, there are different challenges as a player and also as captain. What I've learnt is to be positive, each and every time. Really grateful to the franchise that they've given me this responsibility to lead the team," said Rahane in response to a question by NDTV, in an exclusive interaction facilitated by JioStar. "Taking everything in my stride. When there are challenges, you always look at opportunities. My mindset has always been like that in my career - when I see chal-



lenges or difficulties, I try to look at them in a positive way, as a player and also as a captain," he added. Rahane led the scoring charts in IPL 2025, making 390 runs. However, KKR won only five out of their 14 games, albeit two were abandoned due to rain. It was the team's lowest finish in 16 years (since the 2009 season). KKR has been presented with headaches concerning their bowling attack in the lead-up to IPL 2026. Their lead Indian pacer Harshit Rana has already been ruled out of the season due to a knee injury. Further, Sri Lanka

pacer Matheesha Pathirana, bought for Rs 18 crore, is yet to receive a No Objection Certificate (NOC) after suffering a hamstring injury during the T20 World Cup 2026. KKR also released Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman following a BCCI directive amid diplomatic tension between India and Bangladesh. It is also to be seen where Rahane bats in IPL 2026. Rahane mostly batted at No. 3 in the 2025 campaign, but could choose to partner either of New Zealand's Finn Allen or Tim Seifert at the top of the order this time around.

Ex-India Star Quits Commentary, Blames BCCI For 'Colour Discrimination'. Internet Left Divided

Former India cricketer Laxman Sivaramakrishnan announced his retirement from the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) commentary panel on Friday. Not only did Sivaramakrishnan refer to a lack of opportunities as a driving force behind his decision, he also accused the BCCI of "colour discrimination". Sivaramakrishnan said that he had not received opportunities to conduct toss and presentation ceremonies, and implied that discrimination could've played a part in it. Fans were left divided by Sivaramakrishnan's explosive announcement, and legendary India spinner Ravichandran Ashwin also reacted to it. "I am retiring from commentary for BCCI," Sivaramakrishnan wrote on



his 'X' handle. Sivaramakrishnan stated that he had been usurped for certain roles by "newcomers" in the industry. "If I have not been used for TOSSES and PRESENTATION for 23 years and new comers come in to do pitch report, tosses, presentations even when (Ravi) Shastri was coaching,

what do you think could be the reason," he posted. The former leg-spinner, who played nine Tests and 16 ODIs for India during the 1980s, then accused the BCCI of colour discrimination in a response to a fan. Ravichandran Ashwin expressed disappointment at Sivaramakrishnan's sudden

decision. "Oh no! Why not this IPL?" wrote Ashwin, quoting Sivaramakrishnan's announcement. Fans appeared to have been left divided by Sivaramakrishnan's comments. Sivaramakrishnan began his commentary career in the year 2000. He also served as a player representative on the ICC Cricket Committee. Although he went wicket-less in this first Test match, he later became famous for his match-winning 12-wicket haul against England in 1984. Sivaramakrishnan was also a key player in India's victorious 1985 Benson & Hedges World Championship triumph in Australia under the great Sunil Gavaskar's captaincy.

Indian Open Polo Championship: Jaipur Optiemus Achievers Edge Jindal Panther 9-6 In Rain-Hit Exhibition Match

On a breezy, rain-kissed evening at the iconic Jaipur Polo Grounds, nearly 1,000 spectators braved intermittent showers to witness an entertaining exhibition clash between Jindal Panther and Jaipur Optiemus Achievers. The stands featured an eclectic mix of attendees, including prominent politicians and enthusiastic students from Maharaja Agrasen Medical College, adding to the vibrant atmosphere. Jaipur Optiemus Achievers made an emphatic start to the contest, with Alejo Aramburu and Sawai Padmanabh Singh striking twice each in the opening chukker. Jindal Panther responded through Juan Gris Zavaleta and Ramiro Zavaleta, who found the net once apiece, but the



Achievers still held a 4-2 advantage at the end of the first chukker. The second chukker saw the Achievers tighten their grip on the game as Aramburu added another goal to extend the lead to 5-2, capitalising on strong teamwork and precision play. Jindal Panther showed renewed intent in the third chukker, with Juan

Gris Zavaleta and Naveen Jindal scoring a goal each to narrow the deficit to 5-4. However, the Achievers quickly regained control, as Sawai Padmanabh Singh and Pratap Singh Kanota struck crucial goals to restore a comfortable cushion, ending the first half at 7-4. Following the break, Jaipur Optiemus Achievers continued their

dominance. Sawai Padmanabh Singh showcased his class with two more goals in the fourth chukker, while Juan Gris Zavaleta managed to add one for Jindal Panther, taking the score to 9-5. Persistent rain began to affect play, and the fifth chukker ultimately proved to be the final one. Despite the challenging conditions, Naveen Jindal scored the lone goal of the chukker for Jindal Panther. However, it wasn't enough to overturn the deficit as Jaipur - Optiemus Achievers sealed a 9-6 victory in a thrilling, weather-interrupted encounter. The match not only delivered high-quality polo but also highlighted the sport's growing appeal, with fans turning up in large numbers despite the unpredictable weather.

O'SULLIVAN MAKES HIGHEST-EVER BREAK WITH HISTORIC 153

Ronnie O'Sullivan has created more snooker history by making the sport's highest-ever professional break with a 153 at the World Open in Yushan. Seven-time world champion O'Sullivan set the new record in the opening frame of his quarter-final with Welshman Ryan Day to pave the way for a dominant 5-0 victory. The 50-year-old left Day in a snooker at the start of the frame and the Welshman's failure to escape gifted O'Sullivan a free ball. He potted the green as an extra red before adding his opening black and then reeling off 15 reds, 13 further blacks and two pinks before clearing the final six colours to reach 153. It breaks the previous record for the highest professional break - a 148 set



by Scotland's Jamie Burnett at the UK Championship qualifiers in 2004. "Just want to say a big shoutout to all the people who have been messaging me, congratulating me on the 153," O'Sullivan said in a video posted on X. "It was a pretty cool moment, really happy to do it. Thank you to everyone out there that has supported me." The maximum

break in snooker is a 147 - achieved in a single frame by potting all 15 reds with 15 blacks followed by all six colours in sequence. However, the highest possible break is 155. This can be done when a player is awarded a free ball, pots the free ball as an extra red, then the black and then goes on to pot the 15 reds with blacks, plus the colours.

HAS ROSENIOR MADE HIS GOAL-KEEPING PROBLEM WORSE?

There has been increased scrutiny of Chelsea head coach Liam Rosenior, with his decision not to name a first-choice goalkeeper chief among the criticism he now faces. Before the Englishman's appointment in January, Robert Sanchez had been former boss Enzo Maresca's undisputed first choice for almost his entire 18-month tenure. However, Sanchez has been in rotation with understudy Filip Jorgensen since his poor display in a 2-1 defeat at Arsenal. The promoted Dane, 23, produced a steady performance in a win at Aston Villa, but a sloppy pass in his second outing led to Paris St-Germain's third goal as Chelsea's Champions League hopes collapsed in a 5-2 defeat at Parc des Princes.



Since then, Jorgensen has suffered a groin issue, prompting Sanchez's return and resulting in five goalkeeper changes across six matches. The situation has repeatedly raised questions over whether rotating goalkeepers is helpful - while a range of other issues have emerged under Rosenior. These include selecting Mamadou Sarr, whose early

error in Wednesday's 3-0 second-leg defeat by PSG proved costly, out of position at right-back. Meanwhile, the management of the captain-led pre-kick-off huddle in the 1-0 home loss to Newcastle drew ridicule and frustrated officials, and Rosenior's side have appeared increasingly open defensively during their run of three straight defeats.

IGA SWIATEK STUNNED IN 2ND ROUND OF MIAMI OPEN; CARLOS ALCARAZ TO FACE BRAZILIAN TALENT JOAO FONSECA



Iga Swiatek crashed out of the Miami Open second round Thursday as 50th-ranked fellow Pole Magda Linette fought back for a 1-6, 7-5, 6-3 victory over the six-time Grand Slam champion. Reigning Wimbledon champion Swiatek, who won the Miami Open in 2022, suffered her first opening loss at a tournament since the 2021 WTA Finals. It's just the latest disappointment for Swiatek, who was eliminated in the quarter-finals at the Australian Open and in the WTA 1000 events in Doha and Indian Wells. Although she was seeded second in the elite combined ATP and WTA hardcourt tournament in Miami, Swiatek dropped this week to third in the world as Indian Wells finalist Elena Rybakina moved up behind top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka. Swiatek's compatriot Linette had to dig deep after Swiatek - who won their last encounter 6-1, 6-1 - raced through the opening set in 33 minutes. But she stuck to her guns and Swiatek double-faulted to give Linette two break points in the 12th game of the second set, Linette forcing a third set with a return

winner. "I just had to go for a little bit more," Linette told Tennis Channel. "I had to start hitting a little bit faster, too, to push her a little bit more back, not give her space. "But I think it all started with serving a bit better," she added. Swiatek didn't go meekly, saving a pair of match points on her own serve in the eighth game of the third and two more as Linette served for the match, before Linette sealed the win as Swiatek sent a backhand wide. "She actually gets really good on those break points down, match points down," Linette said. "She starts swinging. I just knew I had to stay strong on my serve." Linette advanced to a third-round matchup against 20-year-old Alexandra Eala of the Philippines, a 6-7 (6/8), 6-3, 6-3 winner over Germany's Laura Siegemund. "It really was close," said Eala, a surprise semi-finalist last year who needed three hours and 20 minutes to close out the victory. "It was demanding, physically and mentally. But that was one of my goals last year after the tournament, to improve physically, and here I am fresh as a flower."

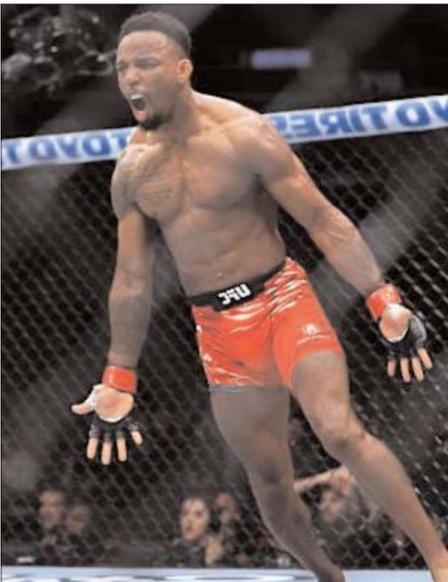
Is matchmaking fair? Murphy's long road to UFC title contender

The moment everything clicked for Lerone Murphy was when he was not given a title shot by the UFC. On a nine-fight win streak in the promotion, the Briton's stunning spinning elbow knockout of Aaron Pico in August put him in pole position to be the next challenger for Alexander Volkanovski's featherweight title. Murphy called for his shot, while Volkanovski agreed the 34-year-old deserved it. Instead, the UFC went in a different direction, with Volkanovski having to defend his belt in a rematch against Diego Lopes in February, who he had beaten 10 months prior. The

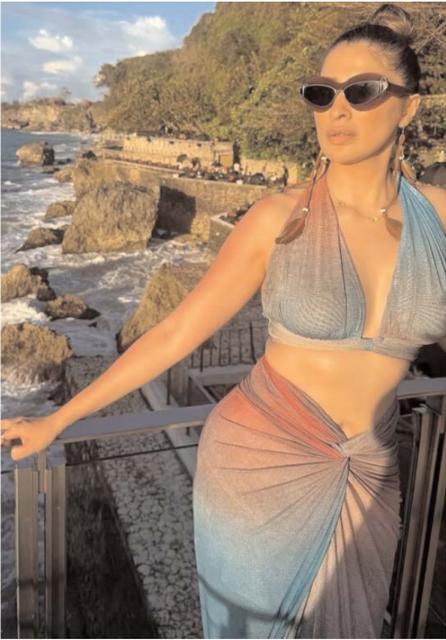
decision was an eye-opener for UFC London headliner Murphy. Despite an unbeaten start to his 18-fight career and going viral with the knockout of Pico, he had been overlooked. Murphy chuckles wryly before adopting a more serious tone as he explains why he missed out. "It kind of woke me up to a lot of things, but I understand it," Murphy tells BBC Sport. "You have to understand it's an entertainment business. It shouldn't be that way but it is that way." Instead Murphy has been pitted against Russian Movsar Evloev at UFC London on Saturday, in what on paper looks like a

number-one contender fight. Even before a punch is thrown, Murphy's title credentials are being questioned by rival fighter Jean Silva, who claims he will be given the next shot at Volkanovski because he is more exciting. As Murphy's battle to secure his title shot goes on, BBC Sport spoke to fighters on the card about the UFC's potentially evolving matchmaking policy and why top contenders sometime get overlooked. The UFC is a rankings-based organisation where the higher-ranked fighters are seen as the more deserving of title shots. Murphy is ranked third at

featherweight, with Evloev first, so why did second-ranked Lopes get chosen to fight Volkanovski again after previously suffering defeat? The answer may lie in MMA existing as a sport, but the UFC being a multi-billion pound business that has grown rapidly in the past 10 years. Businesses make money and the UFC does that by getting fans to pay to watch the fights it stages, and more importantly, its fighters. It recently signed a £5.7bn broadcast deal with Paramount. The more attention a fighter can generate, the more people watch. This is where Murphy may have suffered.



RAAI LAXMI FLAUNTS GLAMOROUS TWO PIECE BEACH STYLE



Raai Laxmi, the Kannada actress who has appeared in many Telugu films and special songs alongside top stars like Megastar Chiranjeevi, Pawan Kalyan, and Ravi Teja, has been away from regular acting for some time now. She remains active and connected on social media, often sharing glimpses of her life and style. Raai Laxmi, popularly known as Lakshmi Raai, turned heads with her radiant beach photos from Bali, Indonesia. Dressed in a striking yellow sequined bikini paired with a wide-

brimmed straw hat and mirrored sunglasses, the actress radiated pure summer energy. "Just me & the Sunshine #BaliGlow," she captioned the sizzling images, capturing golden-hour vibes against turquoise waters and sandy shores. The glamorous looks showcased her confident style and fit physique, quickly winning fans' hearts. Born on May 5, 1989, in Bangalore, Raai Laxmi began as a model before making her acting debut in 2005 with the Tamil film Karka Kasadara. She quickly expanded across South Indian cinema.

'SNAKE DANCE' FROM "RAKASA" UNLEASHES A NO-RULES, HIGH-ENERGY DANCE ANTHEM

Shifting gears from melody to full-blown madness, Rakasa amps up its musical campaign with the release of its latest video song, "Snake Dance." Designed as a high-energy, crowd-driven number, the track embraces chaos, rhythm, and raw fun, presenting a completely uninhibited dance experience. Composed and arranged by Anudeep Dev, the song is positioned as a mass-friendly anthem that thrives on instant connect and repeat value. At its core, "Snake Dance" thrives on a refreshingly self-aware idea, celebrating the fact that not everyone fits into structured dance styles. Instead of perfection, the song leans into spontaneity, turning the

absence of "proper steps" into its biggest strength. Lyricist Raghuram builds this concept with humour and relatability, giving the track a playful, conversational tone that resonates with group energy. The vocals by Benny Dayal, Maneesha Pandrangi, Ritesh G Rao, Lakshmi Meghana, and Vinayak add layers of vibrancy, driving the song's infectious momentum. With its instantly memorable hook "Snake Snake Snake Dance / Full Body Shake Shake Dance", the track is tailored for easy recall, audience participation, and strong digital shareability. With this latest release, Rakasa continues to establish itself as an audio-positive album with a clear range



of moods. The first single "Rapappa" struck an energetic chord, crossing 1.2 mil-

lion views on YouTube, while the romantic second single "Padhe Padhe" added emotional depth, moving past 1.1 million views. Complementing this, the film's promotional assets have also drawn strong attention, with the title glimpse crossing 1.9 million views and the teaser surpassing 2.9 million views. With "Snake Dance" now entering the mix, the album expands into a massy, high-energy space, strengthening its overall appeal. Headlined by Sangeeth Sobhan, who continues to gain strong traction among younger audiences with films like MAD and MAD Square, Rakasa pairs him with Nayan Sarika in a narrative that blends romance,

humour, and fantasy elements. The film features a notable supporting cast including Vennela Kishore, Brahmaji, Tanikella Bharani, Ashish Vidyarthi, and Getup Srinu. The project is written and directed by Manasa Sharma, known for her work on Oka Chinna Family Story and Bench Life. On the technical front, Anudeep Dev anchors the film's musical identity with a soundtrack that balances variety and recall value. Cinematography is handled by Raju Edurolo, with editing by Anwar Ali. The film is produced by Niharika Konidela under Pink Elephant Pictures in association with Zee Studios, with Umesh Kumar Bansal backing the project.

DHURANDHAR 2 REACHES PAKISTAN DESPITE BAN



Raashi Khanna recently seen in Ustaad Bhagat Singh starring Pawan Kalyan

RAASHII KHANNA SERVES BOLD BOSS LADY VIBES

and Sreeleela. However, her role did not receive much appreciation, as it had very limited scope. The supporting cast overall felt underutilised, and Raashi Khanna's character, in particular, seemed unnecessary and lacked proper closure, making her presence less impactful in the film. Meanwhile, she is now gearing up for her next big project, Farzi 2, alongside Shahid Kapoor. The series is created and directed by the acclaimed duo Raj Nidimoru and Krishna DK. With the success of the first season, expecta-

tions are quite high, and the new season is expected to premiere on Amazon Prime Video in late 2026. At the same time, Raashi Khanna has been turning heads with her latest photoshoot. She shared stunning pictures where she is seen in a sharp pinstripe suit paired with a matching shirt and tie, giving a bold and powerful look. The oversized blazer, sleek styling, and statement glasses add a modern boss-lady vibe, while her confident pose and minimal makeup enhance the overall elegance.

HAPPY RAJ IS A FILM WITH A BEAUTIFUL MESSAGE ALONG WITH FUN AND ENTERTAINMENT.

I hope everyone will watch it in theaters with their families on March 27th: GV Prakash Kumar at the trailer launch event



Star composer-hero GV Prakash Kumar's upcoming movie 'Happy Raj'. Maria Raja Elanchezian, who worked as an assistant director to hero-director Pradeep

Ranganathan, directed the film. Jaiwardha produced it under the banner Beyond Pictures. Mad fame Sri Gowri Priya played the heroine. The film is already creating positive buzz, and the

first single released recently has received a wonderful response. The film will be grandly released in Telugu states on March 27 through Mythri Movie Distributors

LLP. On this occasion, the makers organized a trailer launch event. Directors Shiva Nirvana and Venky Atluri attended the event. At the trailer launch event, hero Jeevi Prakash Kumar said, "Hello everyone. I am very happy that Venky garu and Shiva garu are coming to this event. Thank you so much to Ravi Teja garu who launched the Telugu trailer of this film on social media. Mythri Movie Makers saw this film. They liked it very much. I am very happy that this film is being released by Mythri Movie

Maker Mythri Movies. Thank you to our producers. This film has all the fun commercial elements. It also has a beautiful message. After watching the film, this story will touch your hearts. A very special film. You will all enjoy watching it a lot. Father is the biggest hero in all of our lives. After watching this film, you will celebrate your father. It will last for a long time. This film will be released on March 27. I definitely want everyone to watch it. Director Shiva Nirvana said, "Greetings to everyone. I like Jeevi garu's music more than anything. Finally, I got to work with him for the film Irumudi. The music work is going so well. It is very surprising that he is coming to his event

as a hero with me as the music director. He does music for a film and even acts with his life. He has done almost 20 films as a hero. Now Happy Raj is coming to the Telugu audience with this film. I sincerely wish him more reach. Every youthful entertainer from Tamil is doing amazingly in Telugu. Wherever there is a good film, Mythri Movie Distributors is bringing it to the Telugu audience. Gowri Priya garu has been doing many amazing roles in recent times. I wish this film to do amazingly. Director Venky Atluri said, "Hello everyone. I felt very happy after watching the trailer of this film. I wish the happiness in the title to reach the audience as well."

Hrithik Creates Mess While Krrish 4 Stays Missing!

Bollywood star Hrithik Roshan has sparked fresh conversations with his latest move, not as an actor, but as a producer. The actor has teamed up with Amazon Prime Video for a new comedy film titled Mess, directed by Rajesh A Krishnan. The film marks Hrithik's second collaboration with the streaming giant after Storm, and will be backed by his home banner HRX Films. Unlike his earlier intense projects, Mess is said to be a quirky comedy revolving around a group of robbers who find themselves trapped in a bizarre situation during a home invasion gone wrong. However, this announcement has once again raised a big question among fans, what is happening with Krrish 4? For the longest time, Bollywood media reported that the superhero film was facing budget

constraints, delaying its progress. But Hrithik's recent choices tell a different story. The actor is not only actively producing multiple projects but has also been making significant personal investments, indicating that finances may not be a major hurdle. This contrast has left fans surprised and curious. Is Hrithik consciously prioritizing new-age content over revisiting his iconic superhero franchise? Or is Krrish 4 still in the pipeline, waiting for the right moment? For now, Mess signals Hrithik's growing interest in content-driven cinema.



DHURANDHAR GIRL'S BOLD NEW LOOK



NEHA SHETTY SERVES HOT ETHNIC LOOKS THIS UGADI SEASON



Neha Shetty, the Kannada beauty, has been trying to land a big break in films, but success has been slow. Even though she has good acting skills and stunning screen presence, she has mostly been seen in cameo roles in Tollywood. In Tamil as well, her entry started with a small appearance rather than a full-fledged role. Despite the limited opportunities, Neha continues to stay visible and hopeful for a strong comeback. In her

latest pictures, Neha Shetty looks absolutely gorgeous as she celebrates Ugadi in a traditional style. She is seen wearing a rich red saree with golden detailing, which gives a festive and elegant vibe. The saree drapes beautifully, highlighting her graceful look, while her matching blouse adds a classic touch. Her soft curls, minimal makeup, and traditional jewelry perfectly complete the look.