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Iran recently allowed two Indian LPG tankers to pass through the strait and one of them returned to Mudra in Gujarat on Monday. Traffic through the Strait of Hormuz has ground to a near standstill since the beginning of the war in Iran on February 28.

Amit Shah won't lose sleep over Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Bengal is different

NEW DELHI: Next month's assembly elections in four states and a Union territory may turn out to be the last rodeo for several prominent leaders. Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) has a huge responsibility on his 80-year-old shoulders. A loss in this election would mean that the Left would not be in power in any state for the first time since 1977. This is not how Vijayan would like to be remembered. The problem is that even if the Left Democratic Front (LDF) beats a decade of anti-incumbency, Vijayan may not get a third term. His party has maintained that the next CM would be decided after the results—that is, if the LDF retains power.

Former Tamil Nadu CM EK Palaniswami of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) has had the better of his detractors and challengers within the party. This election is crucial for the 71-year-old and for a party struggling in the absence of the star power of MG Ramachandran or Jayalalithaa. The party lost the 2021 Assembly election. Another loss is likely to set off another round of impositions in the AIADMK, which the party may not recover from.

Puducherry CM N Rangaswamy

of the All India N.R. Congress (AINRC) also has high stakes in this election. It is also essentially a one-man party. A loss in this election—and the fact that Rangaswamy would be 80 by the next—would set the party on a slippery path.

You can trust Union Home Minister Amit Shah to keep in mind all these factors. Even as the Bharatiya Janata Party puts its best foot forward in the coming assembly polls, the party's chief strategist would know that it is a win-win situation for the BJP in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Puducherry. The AIADMK and the AINRC are the BJP's alliance partners. Shah would love to see the National Democratic Alliance form the government in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. He would also like to see the BJP expand its footprints in Kerala by building on its maiden Lok Sabha win in the southern state in 2024.

But Shah won't be losing his sleep over these two states and one UT. The fact is that even if the BJP ends up on the losing side, any gains it makes would still bolster the party's long-cherished goal of putting down regional parties that have stymied its expansion plans in several states.

Let's look at Tamil Nadu. If the



NDA wins, the BJP gets the chance to taste power in the Dravidian state for the first time, notwithstanding EPS's current reservation against sharing power. The BJP can build on it to expand its footprints. The MK Stalin-led Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) has been one of the trenchant critics of the NDA government at the Centre. It would be good riddance for the BJP.

And if the DMK-led government retains power, it would likely start the process of disintegration of the second big Dravidian party. Whatever space the AIADMK vacates in that scenario would be up for grabs

for the BJP, or so it would fancy.

In neighbouring Puducherry, N Rangaswamy has resisted the BJP's attempt to expand its presence. If the NDA retains power in Puducherry, the BJP would use it to consolidate and expand its presence in the UT. But if the NDA loses power and the AINRC's political base starts shrinking, the BJP would be there to fill that space.

With a 46 per cent Christian and Muslim population in Kerala, the BJP has struggled to expand in the state, with power alternating between the LDF and the Congress-led UDF.

Kejriwal moves SC seeking transfer of excise policy case from Delhi HC judge

NEW DELHI: Former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal has approached the Supreme Court challenging the decision of the Delhi High Court Chief Justice declining his request to transfer the excise policy case from Justice Swarna Kanta Sharma to another judge. The petition also challenges Justice Sharma's March 9 order which stayed a trial court direction seeking an inquiry against a CBI officer who investigated the case.

Kejriwal has invoked Article 32 of the Constitution to question the administrative decision taken by Delhi High Court Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya on March 13, rejecting his request for transfer of the matter from Justice Swarna Kanta Sharma. The High Court registry had informed Kejriwal that the case had been assigned to Justice Sharma in accordance with the existing roster and that any decision regarding recusal would have to be taken by the judge herself.

The Chief Justice Upadhyaya stated that he did not find sufficient grounds to order a transfer of the petition on the administrative side.

The dispute arises from proceedings relating to the Delhi excise policy case. A trial court on February 27



discharged Kejriwal and 22 others from the case. The Central Bureau of Investigation subsequently challenged that order before the Delhi High Court, where the matter is being heard by Justice Sharma.

On March 9, the High Court issued notice on the CBI's revision plea and stayed the trial court's direction ordering departmental proceedings against the CBI officer who had investigated the case.

In the same order, the High Court also asked the trial court to defer proceedings in the related Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) case and observed prima facie that some of the conclusions recorded by the trial court while granting discharge appeared erroneous.

In a letter addressed to the Chief Justice on March 11, Kejriwal expressed apprehension that the case may not receive a hearing marked by complete neutrality if it continues before the same judge. He pointed to the interim stay granted by the High Court and the direction affecting proceedings under the PMLA even though the Enforcement Directorate was not even a party before the court. According to Kejriwal, the nature of the relief granted at the threshold stage raised concerns about the fairness of the proceedings.

Kejriwal also stated that in cases of this magnitude, courts generally grant parties several weeks to file their responses, and that the manner in which the proceedings were conducted had strengthened his apprehension of bias. He further pointed out that the same judge had previously dealt with several matters arising from the excise policy controversy and had expressed detailed prima facie views on the facts of the case, some of which were later set aside by the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court is now expected to examine the challenge to the High Court Chief Justice's decision as well as the legality of the interim order passed in the excise policy case.

CM Rekha Gupta attends 'Phool Walon Ki Sair' ceremony at Delhi Secretariat

NEW DELHI: In a special ceremony held at the Delhi Secretariat on Monday to mark the historic "Phool Walon Ki Sair" festival, the premises came alive with the sound of the Shehnai, with the celebration symbolizing the national capital's rich culture and Ganga-Jamuni ethos.

During the event, members of Anjuman Sair-e-Gul Faroshan extended a traditional welcome to Chief Minister Rekha Gupta. Accompanied by the live shehnai music, they honoured the CM by presenting the customary floral fan, which is a long-standing tradition associated with the festival.

The melodies filled the environment with vibrancy, and the spirit of Delhi's cultural legacy and communal harmony was reflected all around. Delhi Cabinet Minister Kapil Mishra and several other dignitaries were also present on the occa-



sion. Speaking at the event, CM Gupta said, "Phool Walon Ki Sair is far more than just a festival, and represents a remarkable example of Delhi's shared cultural heritage and the spirit of harmony that defines the city."

According to Gupta, the tradition serves as a reminder that unity and brotherhood have always remained central to India's diverse cultural fabric.

She reiterated that the Delhi government is committed to preserving and promoting the capital's his-

torical traditions and cultural events.

Such celebrations, she noted, help connect younger generations with their cultural roots while strengthening mutual respect and social harmony.

Speaking on the occasion, Art, Culture, Language and Tourism Minister Kapil Mishra said the festival plays an important role in reinforcing the city's shared cultural legacy.

He described Phool Walon Ki Sair as a historic tradition that conveys a message of harmony, unity and brotherhood, which also gives an opportunity to the younger generation for experiencing Delhi's rich cultural heritage.

This year, 'Phool Walon Ki Sair 2026' is being organised from March 15 to March 21, during which a series of cultural, religious and social programmes are being held across the city.

BJP attacks Telangana CM over Iftar event, accuses Congress of minority appeasement

NEW DELHI: The BJP on Monday launched a sharp attack on Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy for participating in a state-sponsored Iftar gathering in Hyderabad, accusing the Congress of indulging in "minority appeasement" and advising it to rename itself the "Islamic National Caliphate".

BJP National Spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla said Reddy should call himself "the chief minister of Muslims".

The remarks came amid political exchanges over Reddy's participation in the Iftar event on Sunday, where he was seen with AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi.

"Revanth Reddy should call himself not the chief minister of Telangana but the chief minister of Muslims, and his party's name should be changed from INC — Indian National Congress — to Islamic National Caliphate," Poonawalla said.

Another national spokesperson of the BJP, Prem Shukla, called Reddy "Hazrat", accusing the Telangana chief minister of minority appeasement and "hurting" the sentiments of Hindus.

"Telangana CM 'Hazrat' Reddy participated in an Iftar party on Sunday and shared dates with AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi. This is the same Owaisi whom the Congress calls the BJP's B-team," Shukla said at a press conference.

The BJP spokesperson also targeted Congress leader Rahul Gandhi over the issue, asking him to

clarify whether it is his party's official position "to appease Muslims by insulting Hindu deities".

"Gandhi should answer whether it is the official policy of the Congress to hurt Hindu sentiments through chief ministers appointed by the party who repeatedly indulge in such acts."

"Is Reddy treading the party line? Hindus should understand that the Congress is intent on betraying them and content with Muslim appeasement," Shukla said at the BJP headquarters here.

Poonawalla alleged that the Congress has repeatedly made statements suggesting that Muslims have the first right over resources and that the party was now taking pride in Muslim reservation, which, he claimed, was against the views of B R Ambedkar.

"At times they say Congress equals Muslims; sometimes they say Muslims support them because they provide them security, and now they take pride in Muslim reservation, which is against Ambedkar's views," he said.

Claiming that the Congress is running a "vote-bank shop", Poonawalla accused it of engaging in what he described as "competitive appeasement politics" to outdo the AIM-IM.

"Sometimes they form alliances with Owaisi, and sometimes, to appear an even bigger 'bhaijaan' than Owaisi, they wear an even bigger cap of competitive appeasement politics," he said.

UK will work with allies on Strait of Hormuz plan: UK PM Starmer

LONDON: UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on Monday that Britain is working with allies on a plan to reopen the Strait of Hormuz but will not be drawn into the wider war.

Speaking at a press conference, Prime Minister Starmer said Britain is discussing with the US and allies in Europe and the Gulf the possibility of using mine-hunting drones that the UK has in the region.

But, he indicated that the UK is unlikely to dispatch a warship.

He spoke after US President Donald Trump said he had demanded that US allies send warships to open the key oil shipment route.

US President Trump said on Sunday that the USA is talking with seven nations on helping secure the Strait of Hormuz, urging countries dependent on Gulf oil to assist in protecting shipping in the narrow but strategic sea corridor. Starmer said Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper has been in the region in recent days. The UK PM said he had met Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney earlier this morning and will be meeting President Volodymyr Zelensky soon. "It's vital that we continue to focus on supporting Ukraine," he says, adding that the war in the Middle East cannot be allowed to become "a windfall for Putin".

Rajasthan CM hails tribal community's contribution, says will develop Beneshwar Dham

JAIPUR: Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma on Monday said the contribution of the tribal community to the state's development has been invaluable, and the government is committed to promoting employment for tribal youth and supporting traditional handicraft.

Addressing a public gathering on Tribal Pride Day at Beneshwar Dham in Dungarpur, Sharma said the tribal community is known for its rich traditions, distinct culture and close connection with nature, and has produced many heroes who sacrificed their lives for the country's freedom.

The chief minister said the state government would undertake the overall development and beautification of Beneshwar Dham, a major centre of faith for tribal communities, and a detailed project report was being prepared for the purpose, according to an official statement.

Referring to tribal heritage, Sharma said handicraft such as Pithora paintings, bamboo weaving, pottery and wood carving represent the pride and cultural identity of the tribal community, and the government aims to ensure artists receive proper recognition and value for their work.

He also highlighted var-

ious welfare measures for tribal communities, including increasing the monthly mess allowance in hostels from Rs 2,500 to Rs 3,250 and providing incentives for tribal students scoring above 80 per cent in classes 10 and 12, as well as those clearing CA and CS examinations.

The chief minister said 244 new Maa-Baadi centres (community-run primary education centres in remote tribal areas of Rajasthan) have been established, and tribal farmers have been provided free hybrid maize seeds and mini-kits. He added that 530 Van Dhan Vikas Kendras have been set up in eight districts, benefiting over 1.5 lakh women.

Sharma said the government would launch a special campaign to provide individual and community forest rights pattas to tribal residents living in forest areas and ensure their entry in revenue records to enable beneficiaries to access government schemes and bank loans.

He also announced that a tribal tourist circuit worth Rs 100 crore would be developed, linking major sites including Tripura Sundari Temple, Mangadh Dham, Beneshwar Dham, Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary, Rishabhdev Temple, Gautameshwar Temple and Matrikundiya.

Six chargesheeted for threatening witnesses in Puducherry BJP leader's assassination case

NEW DELHI: The NIA on Monday filed charges against six persons for allegedly threatening witnesses in a bid to subvert the trial into the assassination of Puducherry's BJP leader Senthil Kumaran.

The accused, identified as Nithyanantham alias Nithi, Siva Sankar, Vengatesh, Ezhumalai, Heram alias Karthi and Udhayakumar, have been chargesheeted before a special NIA court in Puducherry, an official statement said.

Four of these accused, namely Nithyanantham, Siva Sankar, Vengatesh and Ezhumalai, were chargesheeted earlier for their alleged role in the deadly attack on the BJP leader.

In the new chargesheet, the NIA has filed fresh charges against these four, and has also charged Karthi and Udhayakumar for allegedly unlawfully obtaining

witnesses' details and issuing threats to them, the NIA said in a statement.

Senthil, a local BJP leader, was ruthlessly murdered by six bike-borne assailants with explosives and lethal weapons in Villianur in Puducherry in March 2023, the probe agency said.

Local police had initially registered a case, which was subsequently taken over for investigation by the NIA.

According to NIA, investigations reveal that the four previously chargesheeted accused had conspired with the two others from the precincts of Central Prison Kalapet and Special Prison Yanam, Puducherry, to obtain certain confidential documents unlawfully.

In order to subvert and sabotage the trial, they had used these documents to identify the witnesses, including the protected witnesses, with the intent to

threaten them against depositing before the trial court, the NIA said.

Having discovered prime accused Nithi's modus operandi with respect to witness sabotage, NIA had requested the court to shift him from Central Prison Yanam to Special Prison Yanam.

The anti-terror agency had also arrested two of his accomplices and taken them in remand.

In September 2025, NIA conducted searches in the prisons and residences of the conduits and seized several incriminating material evidences relating to the conspiracy.

Investigations in the instant witness sabotage conspiracy case are continuing, and the NIA has appealed to all citizens to share any information in this regard, with the promise to keep their identity secret, the statement said.

New testing facility for maintenance of Kalvari-class submarines commissioned at Karwar

NEW DELHI: A first-of-its-kind facility that will enable testing, maintenance and servicing of critical pneumatic systems installed on Kalvari-class submarines has been commissioned at a technical workshop in Karnataka's Karwar, officials said on Monday.

Vice Admiral B Sivakumar, the Chief of Materiel (COM), Indian Navy, commissioned the "pneumatic RAM test facility" at Naval Group India Workshop at Karwar, according to an official statement.

The facility marks a "key milestone" in strengthening India's indigenous capabilities for the maintenance and sustenance of the Kalvari-class submarines of the Indian Navy.

"Until now, these pneumatic RAMs were required

to be sent to France for testing and servicing, resulting in longer turnaround timelines and higher logistical costs," it said.

The new facility, commissioned on March 13, will "enable testing, maintenance and servicing of critical pneumatic systems installed on Kalvari-class submarines, thereby enhancing the efficiency and reliability of maintenance operations," the statement said.

This maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) facility is only available in France, Brazil and India, it said.

Vice Admiral Sivakumar said, "The commissioning of this pneumatic RAM test facility in India is an important step towards strengthening indigenous maintenance capabilities for

our submarine fleet."

"Local availability of such specialised testing infrastructure will help reduce turnaround time, optimise costs, and further enhance the operational readiness of the Indian Navy's Kalvari-class submarines," he said.

The facility has been developed and manufactured in collaboration with Indian MSME partner, SEC Industries, reinforcing Naval Group's commitment to strengthening the domestic industrial ecosystem and supporting the government of India's vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat in the defence sector, it said.

The Kalvari-class submarines, built under the P75 program in collaboration between Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited



(MDL) and Naval Group, represent a major milestone in India's submarine capability and the long-standing strategic partnership between India and France in naval defence.

Naval Group is present in India through its 100 per cent subsidiary Naval Group India, it said.

Established in September 2008, Naval Group India's mission has been to support the indigenisation of equipment for Scorpene submarine, to develop the Indian defence ecosystem, as well as to develop design services in India with talented Indian engineers, the statement said.

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EDITORIAL

4 Leaders In Congress Are Vying For One Job - And None Is Ready To Step Aside

"All for one, and one for all" (Tous pour un, un pour tous), is the motto of the titular heroes of Alexandre Dumas's The Three Musketeers. Such comradeship is seldom associated with chief-ministerial aspirants in a political party, and least of all when it comes to Congress. The 'Three Musketeers' of the Congress state unit in Kerala - VD Satheesan, Ramesh Chennithala and KC Venugopal - once part of the Karunakaran faction before drifting apart, have closed ranks to make sure that they are on the same page going into the election. The unprecedented projection of unity, nevertheless, cannot mask the individual efforts undertaken by these leaders to assume the position of Kerala Chief Minister.

Satheesan In Prime Position

VD Satheesan has a natural edge as the incumbent leader of the opposition (LoP). Satheesan's performance against Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan - who's battling a two-term anti-incumbency - has been generally regarded as superior to his predecessor Ramesh Chennithala's. The very appointment in 2021 of Satheesan as LoP was controversial, as it was orchestrated by the central leadership overruling the show of hands of the party legislators. It was necessitated on account of Vijayan bucking the four-decade trend of alternating governments in the state. As a lone ranger, Satheesan never had a massive following within the party, and that situation remains more or less the same today. Moreover, Satheesan is also hobbled by the opposition to his leadership from Hindu community outfits such as the Nair Service Society (NSS) and the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam. Back in 2011, when Oommen Chandy formed the government with a wafer-thin majority, the NSS had overruled Satheesan's name in favour of VS Sivakumar as its Nair nominee in the Cabinet, and it remains a sore point in his relationship with the NSS. Satheesan attempted to mend his ties with the NSS in recent times, but that hasn't worked out. The SNDP Yogam of the Ezhava community has been antagonistic towards the Congress in general, and its leader, Vellappally Natesan, has been engaged in a war of words with Satheesan. The Nair and Ezhava communities make up more than a third of Kerala's population, and Satheesan's weak ties with these community outfits make it risky for the Congress to project him as a challenger to Vijayan. Satheesan himself is acutely aware of it, and he has been on a mission to get minority communities and the general public to back him instead. As chairman of the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF), Satheesan has taken ownership of the risky association with the Jamaat-e-Islami, thereby not letting ally Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) get besmirched by the unholy alliance. Satheesan's decision to criticise Vellappally Natesan at a recent event of the Samastha Kerala Jemiyathul Ulama was another action aimed at endearing himself to the supporters of the outfit. Satheesan has also been trying to enlist the support of various Christian denominations by making his presence felt at church events, and his gift of the gab and the knowledge of Bible verses have held him in good stead. But Satheesan still hasn't acquired a huge following within the wider Christian community - unlike Shashi Tharoor, for instance. Satheesan likens his outreach to different groups, including Pentecostal churches, to Pinarayi Vijayan's brand of social engineering. His detractors within Congress claim that Satheesan has also taken a leaf out of Vijayan's public relations tactics, including undergoing a hair transplant to cast himself in a new avatar.

Amateur 'Advisors', Ignored Generals: How Trump Shunned Protocol To Launch Iran War

A Council on Foreign Relations survey of US foreign policy ranked the 2003 Iraq invasion the worst decision in American foreign policy. Key reasons included ignoring intelligence warnings, sidelining professionals, launching the war without a credible endgame, and decision-making by a small group bypassing formal deliberation.

Two decades later, the United States again finds itself at war in the Middle East under circumstances echoing that earlier episode. The actors differ, and the geopolitical context has changed, yet the pattern of decision-making shows familiar weaknesses. Both conflicts reveal a tendency to marginalise professional advice, rely on a small circle of policymakers, and announce shifting objectives. The Iran conflict also reflects the growing influence of informal advisers and the diminished role of institutional review in the national security system.

A President Without Strategy

The starting point is the President Donald Trump offered several explanations in one day for why the United States entered conflict with Iran. At different moments, the stated objectives ranged from destroying Iran's nuclear programme, reopening the Strait of Hormuz, to preventing Iranian retaliation against Israel, and regime change. Each explanation pointed to a different strategic objective. Military campaigns require clear political goals because operations derive their logic from those aims. When objectives shift, strategic planning becomes difficult. The decision process



also raised questions. Final authorisation for strikes reportedly occurred during discussions at Mar-a-Lago rather than through deliberations organised through the National Security Council. General Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, warned against escalation, citing risks to American personnel and strained weapons stockpiles. Trump dismissed those warnings and authorised the strikes. Presidents weigh military advice alongside political considerations. When decisions occur outside the standard interagency process, policy depends more on individual judgment than institutional review.

An Unprepared Defence Secretary

Strategic direction from the President requires translation into operational planning at the Pentagon. The tenure of Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth has raised questions about that process. Hegseth entered office with-

out experience managing large defence institutions or supervising strategic planning. He declared that earlier strikes had "obliterated" Iran's nuclear programme, an assertion later challenged by independent assessments. After six American service members were killed in an Iranian attack, he accused journalists of exploiting their deaths to embarrass the administration. Before hostilities began, he abolished the Pentagon office responsible for tracking civilian casualties in American operations. The Secretary of Defence serves as the institutional link between presidential objectives and military execution and requires close coordination with the professional military.

The Primacy of Informal 'Advisors'

The weakening of formal decision channels has elevated informal advisers. Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, whose careers developed in real estate rather than diplo-

macy or national security, are leading Trump's Middle East policy. Less than two days before the strikes on Iran, the pair met Iran's Foreign Minister in Geneva under Omani mediation. Participants described the discussions as substantive, and further meetings were expected. The diplomatic channel ended soon afterwards, when Trump expressed dissatisfaction with the talks and authorised military action. Recordings obtained by the Arms Control Association suggested that Witkoff misunderstood key technical aspects of Iran's nuclear programme, including the purpose of the Tehran Research Reactor, a facility originally supplied by the United States for medical isotope production. After initial setbacks, Trump blamed the advice received from Kushner and Witkoff. Earlier administrations relied on institutional review by diplomats, technical experts, and intelligence analysts to identify such

errors before decisions reached the President.

Professional Advice Sidelined

Professional assessments from the intelligence community and the military that discouraged the campaign were ignored. A classified National Intelligence Council assessment concluded that a large-scale war with Iran would be unlikely to remove the country's government or fundamentally alter its strategic behaviour. Members of Congress who attended classified briefings later described the administration's strategy as confused and inconsistent. Military leaders warned about objective attainment, escalation risks and the strain on American resources. Technical nuclear expertise also carried limited influence. Specialists note that the Tehran Research Reactor cited in public debate mainly produces medical isotopes and does not indicate a weapons programme.

THE STORY OF BENGAL'S 'REAL' OUTSIDERS

In the maze of Indian parliamentary politics, the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) stands out for adopting a deliberate strategy. The party's recent slate of Rajya Sabha nominees - Supreme Court advocate Menaka Guruswamy, top cop Rajeev Kumar, singer-turned-politician Babul Supriyo, and Bengali actress Koel Mallick - highlights how Mamata Banerjee leverages the Upper House. The balance of gender parity, professional expertise, and outreach to marginalised communities signals a deliberate effort to move beyond identity politics. The lateral entry of professionals who are not career politicians stands out. Beyond her legal acumen, Menaka Guruswamy is an advocate for LGBTQ+ rights. Pushed to the margin by India's socio-legal system, LGBTQ+ groups across India, following her nomination, have posted a barrage of welcoming, even effusive, comments on social media pages, indicating a sense of vicarious empowerment. The nomination of former West Bengal Director General of Police Rajeev Kumar signals an effort to bring administrative and internal security expertise into the legislative fold. While Babul Supriyo brings to the table - in addition to his mellifluous voice - administrative knowledge of being a central minister, with Koel Mallick, TMC has continued the trend of bringing in prominent women from the cultural domain to the TMC arena. In the past, renowned names from Bengal's film industry, especially women, have been involved with the Trinamool, from Moon Moon Sen to Nusrat Jahan, Mimi Chakraborty to Satabdi Roy, and more. In the 2024 Rajya Sabha nominations, the inclusion of journalist



Sagarika Ghose and the renomination of Sushmita Dev underscored a focus on high-profile women's voices. This is reflected in their recent Rajya Sabha nominations as well. The continued presence of Mohammad Nadimul Haque (owner of an Urdu daily) ensures that the party has members capable of navigating minority sentiments effectively. Even so, it is not unusual for state party loyalists, seeking upward mobility through the central legislature, to feel upset about the presence of 'outsiders' in the nominee list. From Yusuf Pathan to Kirti Azad to Shatrughan Sinha, all are Trinamool members in the 18th Lok Sabha.

Bengal's History of Welcoming 'Outsiders' Bengal has always had a rich tradition of enabling 'outsiders', or non-Bangla speakers, including those making it to the Lok Sabha. Calcutta's position as the capital of British India until 1911 shaped its evolution into a major trading, industrial, and political centre. People from various states migrated there for livelihood and education, and over time, this movement helped the city evolve into a natural cauldron of cosmopolitan culture. For years, even

decades, Darjeeling and Asansol have elected non-Bengalis such as Jaswant Singh, Inderjit Khullar, and SS Ahluwalia. Even football star Bhaichung Bhutia, who lost to Ahluwalia, carried the outsider tag as he hailed from neighbouring Sikkim. Former Union Railways Minister Dinesh Trivedi, a Gujarati, won the Barrackpore seat as a Trinamool nominee till he fell out with Mamata Banerjee to join the BJP, and disappeared. Taking a few steps back, among the stalwarts of the 19th century who played a pivotal role in shaping the destiny of free India, the name of Dr BR Ambedkar shines like a beacon. Ambedkar was first elected to the Constituent Assembly from Bengal in July 1946, when an Interim Government was formed under Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru chose Ambedkar to be his law minister. Then, in 1969, a beleaguered VK Krishna Menon, India's former defence minister and a native of Kerala, was elected to the Lok Sabha as a Congress candidate from Medinipur. He was supported by the Communist-controlled United Front, a coalition of Left parties that ruled West Bengal at that time. In

1971, he shifted his constituency to Trivandrum, now Thiruvananthapuram. Jaswant Singh, who had served as the Union Defence and External Affairs Minister in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, reached Darjeeling in April 2009. He was escorted by a then-united Gorkha Janamukti Morcha (GJM) leadership. Singh filed his nomination for the Darjeeling Lok Sabha constituency, describing it as a big day in his life. "I feel humble. Filing the nomination with the support of the GJM is a big day for me," Singh had said after completing the nomination formalities at the district magistrate's office. The crowd shouted: "Jai Gorkha, Jai Jaswant." That the Gorkhaland statehood issue was never taken up or debated in the Lok Sabha is another story. This served the fact that the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) under the leadership of Subhash Ghisingh had won the parliamentary elections from Darjeeling in 1989. With GNLF pacified with limited autonomy and unlimited ropeway in terms of auditing the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) accounts, Indrajit Khullar, the GNLF MP, never raised the issue.

Bra-Burning, Tree Hugging Feminists and the Making of Myths



Sometimes a casual sensory experience may trigger memories that the mind had tucked deep within. Writer Julian Barnes has a term for this - IAM (Involuntary Autobiographical Memory); memories that the mind had not saved voluntarily, but just tucked away in some deep recess of the brain. The trigger to remember these forgotten stories can be anything from a certain smell, taste, a line in a report or even a visual of a fast-fading past. This columnist came across two such instances almost simultaneously. Come Women's Day on March 8 and the usual avalanche of misreporting and media-created myths about feminists is let loose. One such instance was a smirking reference to assertive and stubborn feminists' vocal push for equality. They were, as usual, labelled as 'those bra-burning types.' The second was an iconic black and white photograph of a group of women from Raini village who participated in the Chipko movement in Uttarakhand, hugging forest trees they wished to save from loggers' axes.

'The bra-burning feminists' This was a much reported incident from 1968 reported

in various New York papers. The bare bones of the story were that a bunch of feisty feminists took out a parade to condemn the beauty pageant culture popularised by the media and fashion designers. The women alleged that fashion parades that guzzled so much space in the media were no more than a presentation of women as eye candy for men who judged their rankings on the basis of their vital statistics on display in bikinis. Three women demonstrators were reported to have been incensed enough to burn their bras in a drum near the Chicago river. The mainstream media in the 60s and 70s expectedly smirked and termed such incendiary feminism as a passing fad. But the media image of undergarments burning in a drum became a sort of mascot for feminism baiters through the decades even as beauty pageants first began to wither and then became almost irrelevant. As I read the term 'bra-burning', it triggered a whole cascade of memories. I was in the US a year after the incident and by then it had been revealed that the whole story about women burning their garments in public was a man-made stunt, quite literally. A male disc jockey and his

architect friend had hired three women to create a juicy side story to discredit what they considered a perverse fad of women seeking attention in the name of liberation and thereby ruining an annual gala parade of beauties viewed all over by millions on telly. Chipko movement Let's now move to the photograph of tree huggers being waved in our faces to celebrate the dramatic gesture of poor rural women for saving the forests. Looking at it, one was reminded of how the 1975 report commissioned by the government of India on the status of women had startled the public with its grim findings about the socio-economic and political marginalisation of Indian women. Politically, it meshed well with an age that was promoting justified dissidence and debating the centuries-old colonisation of India in politics. By the 90s, the debate had also embraced larger questions about the lives of rural women and how gathering fuel and fodder for family cattle and fetching water from distant areas had kept them home-bound, depriving young girls of education. This was when the famous 1991 Chipko movement took shape in a remote village in

Uttarakhand under the initial leadership of a gutsy woman by the name of Gaura Devi. It started not with media reports that hardly reached that poor area but by real life experiences of men and women in one of the poorest regions in Uttarakhand. Women, who spent most of their waking hours collecting fuel and fodder from the forests around were suddenly being threatened by the arrival of bands of loggers who wanted to chop down the trees and sell the valuable timber. The women led non-violent rallies and Dharnas under Devi. This aging matriarch later told Chandi Prasad Bhatt, a male activist who later joined the movement, that her determination to stand up to the powerful lobby of timber sellers grew out of the visible decline of their fields and drying up of rivers around the area stretching from Joshimath to Malari. In March 1974, when Gaura Devi and her band of women chased away the loggers, there were no photographers present in the area. Many famous photographs with women actually hugging trees were organised and captured photographers who got the women to reenact the scene.

25,605 LPG distributorships in India, 17,677 in rural areas: Govt

New Delhi: The government on Monday, March 16, informed that there are 25,605 Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) distributorships in India (as of March 1, 2026), including 17,677 in rural areas, served by 214 LPG bottling plants of Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs). To improve LPG access in rural and remote areas, 8,037 distributorships were commissioned between April 2016 and February 2026, of which 7,444 (93 per cent) serve rural regions, said Suresh Gopi, Minister of State Petroleum and Natural Gas of India, replying to a question in the Rajya Sabha. “To enhance transparency and consumer empowerment, IVRS/SMS refill booking has been implemented nationwide, providing SMS alerts at key stages such as booking, cash memo generation, and delivery. Additionally, OMCs have introduced the Delivery Authentication Code (DAC), sent via SMS and shared with delivery personnel to ensure verified delivery,” the minister added. For ensuring affordable LPG prices to consumers, the government has paid a compensation of Rs 22,000 crore to OMCs in FY 2022-23 and has approved



another compensation of Rs 30,000 crore in FY 2025-26, said Gopi. The minister further stated that the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) was launched in May, 2016 with an objective to provide deposit free LPG connection to adult women from poor households across the country. “As on 01.03.2026, there were about 10.56 crore PMUY connections across the country,” he added. The retail selling price of a 14.2 kg domestic LPG cylinder is currently Rs 913 in Delhi. After a targeted subsidy of Rs 300/cylinder to PMUY consumers, the government is providing 14.2 kg LPG cylin-

ders at an effective price of Rs 613 per cylinder (in Delhi) to all eligible PMUY beneficiaries. India remains self-sufficient in the production of petrol and diesel and no imports of the fuels are required to meet domestic demand as all refineries across the country are operating at high capacity and maintaining adequate crude oil inventories, according to the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas. The government continues to prioritise the interests of domestic consumers and ensure uninterrupted LPG supply, particularly for households and priority sectors such as hospi-

itals and educational institutions, the ministry said in a statement. Commercial LPG cylinder distribution has begun in 29 states and Union Territories, while authorities have stepped up raids and surprise inspections across the country to curb hoarding and black-marketing amid heightened pressure on cooking gas supplies, a senior oil ministry official said on Saturday, March 14. Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, said panic booking continues to rise despite the fact that there are enough stocks available to meet domestic household

requirements of cooking gas LPG. India, she said, has adequate crude oil inventories, and domestic refineries are operating at full capacity, ensuring sufficient availability of petrol and diesel across the country. “There are no dry-out reports from any retail outlets. Our refineries are operating at full capacity, and sufficient petrol and diesel domestically and do not need to import,” she said. Sharma said domestic LPG supply is being prioritised even as the government continues to closely monitor the situation amid the prevailing geopolitical developments that hampered energy supplies from the Gulf countries. India imports 88 per cent of its crude oil needs, 50 per cent of its natural gas requirement and 60 per cent of its LPG demand. Before the US and Israel attacked Iran on February 28, and Tehran retaliated by hitting US bases in neighbouring countries as well as Israel, more than half of the crude oil requirement came from the Middle East countries, 30 per cent of gas from the region and 85-90 per cent of LPG.

QANTAS AGREES TO PAY \$74M OVER COVID-19 TRAVEL VOUCHER REFUNDS

Qantas Airways has agreed to pay A\$105m (£55m; \$74m) over claims that it should have issued cash refunds for cancelled flights during the Covid-19 pandemic. The class action lawsuit was made on behalf of passengers whose flights were cancelled by the carrier between 2020 and 2022 and received travel credits instead of cash. The settlement is almost double the amount that Qantas had expected to pay, according to its results published in February. The national flag carrier said on Friday that it has agreed to pay the sum "with no admission of liability". The settlement is subject to court approval and details of how customers can claim refunds will be made soon, said Echo Law, the legal firm leading the class action. The firm had alleged that Qantas breached its contracts with customers by failing to provide cash refunds for cancelled flights in a timely manner, and instead offered travel credits. The airline engaged in "misleading or deceptive conduct" over the rights of customers over their cancelled flights in violation of Australian law, Echo Law said. By doing so, Qantas "unlawfully benefited from



customers by holding for years a very significant amount of customer funds that ought to have been refunded," it added. Qantas said in its statement that in 2023 that it had removed the expiry date on flight credits issued during the pandemic so that customers could request a cash refund right away. The airline told investors in its half-year report that it expected to pay A\$55m to settle the case. Echo Law is leading a similar class action lawsuit against Australian budget carrier, Jetstar, over allegedly issuing customers travel credits that were worth less

than the refunds that customers were entitled to. "By acting in this way, Jetstar has enjoyed significant financial benefits at its customers' expense," said Echo Law. Qantas was fined a record A\$90m in August 2025 for illegally sacking more than 1,800 ground workers during the pandemic. The penalty was the largest ever imposed by an Australian court for violations of industrial relations laws. At the time, Qantas said it had agreed to pay the fine and that the ruling holds it accountable for actions that caused "real harm" to its employees.

Bajaj General Insurance launches ‘Eco Assure’ for Commercial Vehicles, enabling cost-efficient and reliable repair coverage

Visakhapatnam, March 2026: Bajaj General Insurance Limited (formerly known as Bajaj Allianz General Insurance Company Limited), one of India's leading private general insurers, today announced the launch of Eco Assure for Commercial Vehicles, a new add-on cover designed to help commercial vehicle owners manage repair costs more efficiently while ensuring their vehicles remain operational with minimal disruption. Commercial vehicles play a critical role in supporting logistics, supply chains and business mobility across India. However, rising repair costs, growing maintenance challenges, and commercial vehicle vulnerabilities, often make repairs expensive for vehicle owners and operators. Eco Assure has been developed to address these challenges by offering wider repair coverage, reliable repair options and enhanced protection benefits. The add-on is available in two options: Eco Assure Essential and Eco Assure Advantage, giving customers the flexibility to choose a plan that suits their needs. The key benefits of the Eco Repair cover are that it helps reduce repair costs by offering a 100% waiver on depreciation when reconditioned parts are used for repairs. In cases where new parts are opted for repair, it provides up to 25% depreciation waiver, depending on the plan selected. Eco Assure – for commercial vehicles, also eliminates the compulsory deductible at the time of claim, helping customers reduce immediate out-of-pocket expenses



es during repairs. The add-on further includes 100% coverage for paintwork and inbuilt protection for commonly damaged components such as lamps, bumpers, bonnet and side parts, ensuring broader coverage for routine repair scenarios. To support commercial vehicle owners during accidents or emergencies, Eco Assure provides overturning cover along with towing benefits. Eco Assure Essential offers Eco Repair cover along with towing support. The plan also includes inbuilt coverage for consumables expenses, key and lock replacement, and protection against rodent damage. Eco Assure Advantage builds on these benefits, with more comprehensive extensions. It provides retrieval assistance for vehicles strand-

ed in inaccessible or difficult locations, and further enhances protection with a dedicated cover for electric and hybrid systems, safeguarding owners against risks associated with both conventional and electric/hybrid vehicles. Additionally, it includes defence cost cover, offering financial assistance towards legal expenses when required. Importantly, all benefits under the add-on are applicable for repairs carried out at any workshop, ensuring flexibility and convenience for policyholders. Commenting on the launch, Dr. Tapan Singhel, MD & CEO, Bajaj General Insurance, said: “Commercial vehicles are the backbone of everyday India. They keep goods moving, power last mile deliveries and enable millions of people to commute every day through taxis, cabs and transport services. For commercial vehicle owners, every day off the road means lost time, lost income and added stress. With Eco Assure, we have introduced a solution that goes beyond just insurance protection. It helps make repairs more practical, more efficient and more sustainable by enabling the use of refurbished parts while covering common operational risks. This can also support quicker claim resolution, reduce downtime and help vehicles get back on the road faster. In turn, it strengthens resilience for vehicle owners and helps them get back to business with greater confidence and continuity.” The claims process under Eco Assure is designed to be simple and accessible.

Meta and TikTok let harmful content rise after evidence outrage drove engagement, say whistleblowers

Social media giants made decisions which allowed more harmful content on people's feeds, after internal research into their algorithms showed how outrage fuelled engagement, whistleblowers told the BBC. More than a dozen whistleblowers and insiders have laid bare how the companies took risks with safety on issues including violence, sexual blackmail and terrorism as they battled for users' attention. An engineer at Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram, described how he had been told by senior management to allow more "borderline" harmful content - which includes misogyny and conspiracy theories - in user's feeds to compete with TikTok. "They sort of told us that it's because the stock price is down," the engineer said. A TikTok employee gave the BBC rare access to the company's internal dashboards of user complaints - as well as other evidence of how staff had been instructed to prioritise several cases involving politicians over a series of reports of harmful posts featuring children. Decisions were being made



to "maintain a strong relationship" with political figures to avoid threats of regulation or bans, not because of the risks to users, the TikTok staffer said. The whistleblowers who spoke to the BBC documentary, Inside the Rage Machine, offer a close-up view of how the industry responded following the explosive growth of TikTok, whose highly engaging algorithm for recommending short videos upended social media, leaving rivals scrambling to catch up. A senior Meta researcher, Matt Motyl, said the company's competitor to TikTok, Instagram Reels, was launched in 2020 without sufficient safeguards. Internal

research shared with the BBC showed comments on Reels had significantly higher prevalence of bullying and harassment, hate speech, and violence or incitement than elsewhere on Instagram. The company invested in 700 staff to grow Reels, while safety teams were refused two specialist staff to deal with protecting children and 10 more to help with the integrity of elections, another former senior Meta employee said. Motyl gave the BBC dozens of what he described as "high-level research documents showing all sorts of harms to users on these platforms". Among them, was evidence that shows Facebook was aware

of problems caused by its algorithm. The algorithm offered content creators a "path that maximizes profits at the expense of their audience's wellbeing" and the "current set of financial incentives our algorithms create does not appear to be aligned with our mission" to bring the world closer together, according to one internal study. It said Facebook can "choose to be idle and keep feeding users fast-food, but that only works for so long". In response to the whistleblowers' claims, Meta said: "Any suggestion that we deliberately amplify harmful content for financial gain is wrong." TikTok said these were "fabricated claims" and the company invested in technology that prevented harmful content from ever being viewed. The algorithms are a "black box" whose internal workings are difficult to scrutinise, said Ruofan Ding, who worked as a machine-learning engineer building TikTok's recommendation engine from 2020 until 2024. It was hard to build systems like this that were completely safe, he said.

HCLTech announces expanded collaboration with Google Cloud to help accelerate Agentic AI adoption across industries

NOIDA, India, March 2026 — HCLTech, a leading global technology company, today announced the expansion of its strategic collaboration with Google Cloud to help accelerate enterprise adoption of Agentic AI. HCLTech will use Gemini Enterprise and Gemini models to build custom AI agents for global clients, while strengthening collaboration and security through Google Workspace, supporting their scalable, AI-driven transformation. As enterprises scale AI, HCLTech's Gemini-enabled offerings embed AI into systems, workflows and decision-making to unlock new market opportunities, introduce innovative capabilities and boost operational efficiency. Many of the agents HCLTech has developed are already available on the Google Cloud Marketplace. This expanded collaboration formalizes a structured program to accelerate clients' GenAI and Agentic AI adoption, cultivate Google Cloud

champions across HCLTech and support over 2,000 GenAI-led customer engagements.

Key focus areas include:

- **Solution Innovation:** Building unique offerings with Data and AI at its core, HCLTech's AI Force platform integrates with Google's Gemini family of models and Gemini Code Assist to transform software development and IT operations. Additional offerings include Unified Migrations, including Oracle, SAP and VMware transformation to Google Cloud and Security transformation.
- **Agentic CoE:** Growing its Center of Excellence to expand industry-specific agentic solutions. Advancing Agentic AI solutions, building on offerings such as Insight for manufacturing and Netsight for telecommunications.
- **Gemini Experience Zones:** Launching Physical AI innovation hubs at key global locations.

Talent Development: Expanding its Google Cloud-certified workforce from 12,000 to over 35,000 within three years.

“This strategic collaboration reinforces the strength of our partnership and shared vision with Google Cloud to help enterprises scale AI adoption in alignment with their business objectives,” said Vijay Guntur, CTO and Head of Ecosystems at HCLTech. “We are excited to bring our joint capabilities to life across industries, helping clients unlock new efficiencies, insights and growth.” “HCLTech is bringing Gemini Enterprise to more customers through its industry solutions,” said Kevin Ichhpurani, President, Global Ecosystem and Channels at Google Cloud. “With over 23,000 Google Cloud-trained experts and deep AI implementation expertise, HCLTech is delivering high-impact, production-ready AI agents to enterprises today.”

Swiggy and HDFC Bank Elevate Everyday and Travel Rewards with the Launch of Two New Co-branded Credit Cards

Bengaluru March 2026: Swiggy, India's pioneering on-demand convenience platform, and HDFC Bank, India's largest private sector bank, today announced the expansion of their co-branded credit card portfolio with the launch of two new variants: the Swiggy BLACK HDFC Bank Credit Card and the Swiggy Ornge HDFC Bank Credit Card. These new cards are designed to seamlessly integrate into the modern consumer's lifestyle, delivering exceptional value and maximizing rewards on high-frequency everyday spending, from food delivery and quick commerce to dining out, lifestyle shopping, and travel. Existing users of the Swiggy HDFC Bank Credit Card continue to enjoy strong cashback benefits across Swiggy and over 30+ leading online platforms like Cleartrip, Nykaa, Paytm Travel, Amazon, Flipkart, and Myntra.

A stronger rewards ecosystem



Building on the success of the inaugural 2023 launch, both new and existing card members will now have access to a robust suite of elevated travel and lifestyle benefits. This includes instant discounts and additional cashback on leading partner platforms, Cleartrip: Flat 19% off + 5% cashback on hotel bookings; Flat 6% off + 5% cashback on

flight bookings; and Flat 5% off + 5% cashback across all Nykaa apps. The variants amplify the cashback earning in the 5% category across various merchants, along with the Swiggy cashback. The Swiggy BLACK HDFC Bank Credit Card targets lifestyle spenders with 10% cashback on Swiggy, up to

5% on leading entertainment, travel, and e-commerce platforms, 1% cashback on other transactions, and a complimentary 3-month Swiggy One BLACK membership. For frequent everyday shoppers, the Swiggy Ornge HDFC Bank Credit Card delivers 5% cashback across Swiggy and a broad range of essential

online categories from travel to local cabs, 1% cashback on other transactions, and a 12-month Swiggy One membership. On the latest launch, Phani Kishan Addepalli - Chief Growth Officer and Co-Founder, Swiggy Ltd., said, “The Swiggy HDFC Bank Credit Card was launched two years ago to make everyday spending more rewarding and convenient. As consumers spend more across lifestyle categories, they're seeking payment solutions that deliver meaningful value. With the launch of the BLACK and Ornge cards, we're making our co-branded card more accessible and relevant- helping users unlock greater rewards across the Swiggy ecosystem, shopping, travel, and beyond.” Speaking about the new variants, Vidya Pradeep, Head - Credit and Debit Cards - Product and Portfolio, HDFC Bank said, “This expanded partnership with Swiggy reflects our focus on building differentiated, category-led propositions.

UK won't be drawn into 'wider war' and will work with allies on Strait of Hormuz plan, Starmer says

"De-escalate" is the new buzz word in a war which still seems to be escalating. Western leaders being ordered by US President Donald Trump to bring military support to America's war against Iran are emphasising the need to find another way out. UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer called de-escalation the most "simple and effective" way to combat the cost of living in the UK. France's President Emmanuel Macron said much the same when the US commander-in-chief asked for assistance to escort tankers through the Strait of Hormuz. India has managed to get two gas tankers through this crucial waterway through their own diplomacy with Tehran and is calling on others to do the same. But, for now, there mainly seems to be talks about talks. In his latest remarks, Trump said "we're talking to them," without giving any details. He added "I don't think they're ready. But they are getting pretty close." Iran's



Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has repeatedly denied any talks are taking place and, even more, insists they're not asking for them. But he did tell the Al-Araby Al-Jadeed news outlet that countries in the region were putting forward ideas and Iran was prepared "to study any proposals." The foreign minister of Oman, Badr Al-Busaidi, the traditional mediator, has again called for restoring "the political and diplomatic track" in a post on

X. For now Trump, Araghchi, and others on their teams keep talking at each other through their social media platforms. The Strait of Hormuz is the world's busiest oil shipping channel and about 20% of the world's oil passes through it. This equates to about 3,000 ships sailing through the strait every month. In 2025, an average of about 20 million barrels of oil passed through it every single day. This means that Iran's effective closure of

the strait has had a catastrophic impact on global supply chains and energy prices. The conflict has led to volatility in global oil prices and led the International Energy Agency authorising its "largest ever" release of 400 million barrels of oil reserves to offset to loss from the strait's closure. On Saturday, US President Trump urged the UK, along with China, France, Japan and South Korea, to send warships to the region to secure the ship-

ping route from Iranian attacks. Earlier today, UK PM Keir Starmer said he has had discussions with Trump about a plan to move oil through the area, but added it is "not a simple task". Strikes have continued on Iran today as the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) announced it was launching a "wide-scale" wave of strikes earlier this morning in Tehran, Shiraz and Tabriz. Photos show smoke and emergency workers looking through the rubble. Qatar says it has intercepted a second wave of missiles from Iran following an attack earlier this afternoon. The BBC's chief presenter, Maryam Moshiri, earlier reported hearing four explosions following the launch of Qatari air defences following this first attack. Qatar's Ministry of Defence says the second wave has been intercepted "successfully". Despite the tightened restrictions on internet use in Iran that we reported on earlier, BBC Verify has seen footage and photos from Tehran that

have been newly shared on social media today. One video shows a large smoke plume rising above an area of northern Tehran while another shows people looking on as smoke issues from a building which appears to have been completely destroyed in the same part of the city. We haven't been able to confirm if they're the same incident. A third photo shows a police building that was heavily damaged in north-east Tehran which is still smouldering from a reported strike. Earlier this morning the Israel Defense Forces said, external it had begun "a wide-scale wave of strikes" in the cities of Tehran, Shiraz and Tabriz. It's a relatively slow morning at the White House, with many staff members and journalists opting to stay home ahead of an expected storm later today. Among those who are in their offices today is Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt, who spoke to reporters for a few minutes outside the West Wing earlier this morning.

Whistleblower murder suspect is former elite officer, South African police say



A former member of an elite police unit has been charged with the murder of a whistleblower who testified at a major police corruption inquiry in South Africa. Matipandile Sotheni, 41, appeared in court accused of killing Marius van der Merwe in December last year. Sotheni is accused of shooting dead Van der Merwe in full view of his family in a case that caused national outrage. He has not commented on the charges. Van der Merwe, identified only as "Witness D" during his appearance at the inquiry, known as the Madlanga commission, had

implicated police officials in the torture and murder of a robbery suspect in his testimony. His testimony was seen as blowing the lid on the extent of police corruption at a local level in South Africa and led to the suspension of several of the officers he had named. The Madlanga commission was established by President Cyril Ramaphosa after a senior police officer alleged that organised crime groups had infiltrated the government. This led to the suspension of South Africa's Police Minister Senzo Mchunu, who has denied having any links to criminal gangs.

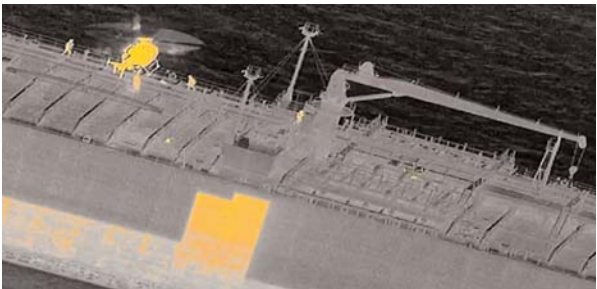
RUSSIA AGREES TO STOP USING KENYAN RECRUITS IN UKRAINE CONFLICT, KENYA SAYS



Kenya's foreign minister says Russia has agreed to stop deploying Kenyan nationals to fight in the war in Ukraine, after talks in Moscow. Sitting beside his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, Musalia Mudavadi said both sides had agreed that Kenyans would no longer be recruited through Russia's defence ministry. "They will no longer be eligible to be enlisted," he said. Lavrov did not comment on the deal and insisted that all foreign fighters had joined voluntarily "in full compliance with Russian law". A Kenyan intelligence report in February warned that more than 1,000 citizens had been recruited to fight for Russia in Ukraine. Some Kenyans have said they were lured to fight for Russia with promises of well-paid civilian jobs, only to find themselves forced into fighting in Ukraine. During his visit to Moscow, Mudavadi is also seeking the repatriation of Kenyans who wish to return home. He last month told the BBC that Kenyan authorities had closed more than 600 recruitment agencies suspected of duping Kenyans with promises of jobs overseas. Kenyan lawmakers

say rogue state officials have been working with human trafficking networks to recruit citizens to fight for Russia in Ukraine. So far 27 Kenyans who had been fighting in Russia have been repatriated, with authorities providing psychological care to address their trauma and "de-radicalise" them, Mudavadi said. It is not clear how many Kenyans have died fighting for Russian forces, and Russia has not formally addressed such reports. Relatives who have approached the Russian embassy in Nairobi for answers report being turned away. Public pressure has also grown. In February, families of Kenyans believed to be fighting in Ukraine held a protest outside parliament in Nairobi, calling for government action and the return of their relatives. During his visit to Moscow, Mudavadi also intends to negotiate an agreement allowing Kenyans easier access to the Russian job market. "We do not want for any reason our partnership with Russia to be defined from the lenses of the special operation [in Ukraine] agenda only," he said.

Sweden detains captain of Russian shadow fleet ship



A Swedish court has ordered the detention of the Russian captain of a ship suspected of sailing under a false flag as part of Moscow's shadow fleet. The man, who has not been named, appeared in court in Ystad after being arrested on Friday by the Swedish Prosecution Authority on suspicion of using forged documents. Members of the coast guard boarded the Sea Owl One in Swedish waters, where it was sailing under a

Comoran flag they thought may have been bogus. The 228m (748ft) tanker is on a list of vessels sanctioned by the EU. Moscow has relied on a network of tankers with obscure ownership or insurance to evade Western sanctions on its oil exports. The Sea Owl One had been travelling from Santos in Brazil to Primorsk on Russia's Baltic coast when it was intercepted, and was known to have transported oil between Russia and Brazil in recent years.

IRAN HITS KEY UAE OIL PORT AND DUBAI AIRPORT

The United Arab Emirates' (UAE) biggest port and oil storage facility, Fujairah, and Dubai's international airport have come under further drone attacks as Iran continues to target Gulf transport and oil infrastructure. Flights were temporarily suspended on Monday after a fire broke out near the airport after a "drone-related incident". A fire also raged after a drone attack on the strategically important port and industrial zone at Fujairah, one of the largest oil storage facilities in the region. And a rocket attack on a car killed a Palestinian national on the outskirts of the UAE capital, Abu Dhabi, the city's Media Office reported. The attack occurred in the Al Bahia area, it said. UAE air defence systems intercepted six ballistic



missiles and 21 drones on Monday, the Defence Ministry said. Iran has launched over 1,900 missiles and drones at the UAE since the war between the US and Israel, and Iran, began. Monday's drone strike was the third incident since the start of the war near Dubai's airport, which is the world's busiest for international pas-

sengers. Some flights were delayed, while others were cancelled altogether, in another hit to the UAE's image of safety and stability. The country's energy sector came under attack as a drone hit an oil storage tanker on Saturday, and another drone hit the oil facilities on Monday, causing a fire. Oil loading activities at the port were halted for a time

while damage assessments were carried out. UK won't be drawn into 'wider war' and will work with allies on Strait of Hormuz plan, Starmer says. Fujairah sits on the UAE's eastern coast, on the Gulf of Oman - rather than the Persian Gulf - and so vessels do not need to navigate the Strait of Hormuz to reach it. The location means the port plays a "crucial" role in "helping keep global supplies moving" when the Strait of Hormuz is blocked by Iran, Dubai-based Justin Harper, editor of CEO Middle East - who regularly speaks to Dubai's oil industry executives - told the BBC. "If tensions with Iran disrupt the chokepoint, the UAE can still export oil through Fujairah via pipelines from the oilfields in Abu Dhabi," he said.

FRENCH NATIONAL JAILED FOR 10 YEARS IN AZERBAIJAN FOR SPYING

A French national has been found guilty of spying on the military in Azerbaijan and sentenced to 10 years in a maximum security prison, state media report. Martin Ryan was accused in December 2023 of spying on behalf of Paris and collecting secret information about Baku's military co-operation with Turkey and Pakistan. He was also accused of helping recruit French-speaking Azerbaijanis to co-operate with French intelligence. Both France and Ryan have repeatedly denied the spying allegations. Ryan was put on trial alongside an Azerbaijani citizen, Azad Mamedli, who was sentenced to 12 years for treason, AFP news agency



reports. France previously described Ryan's detention as "arbitrary" and demanded his immediate release. During his trial, prosecutors alleged he had co-operated with employees of France's security services allegedly operating from the French embassy in Baku. Prosecutors said

Ryan had gathered information about Azerbaijan's relations with Turkey, Iran and Pakistan, as well as companies linked to Russia and China. Furthermore, Ryan was accused of recruiting Mamedli and arranging for him to meet French intelligence agents, who allegedly

tasked him with recruiting Azerbaijanis and Russians at a Moscow university where he studied. In Ryan's final statement to the court, he denied spying and said he had acted unknowingly. "I consider myself guilty only in that I should not have established contacts with some embassy employees, or that I should have shared information about them with the appropriate authorities," Ryan told the court. "I did not spy. I am not a spy, and during the court case I tried to prove this." France has argued that Ryan was caught in the cross-fire of diplomatic tensions, AFP notes. Relations between the two countries soured in recent years.

UKRAINE'S URGENT FIGHT ON THE FINANCIAL FRONTLINE



For Ukraine the financial frontline is perhaps the unseen battlefield in the war with Russia. Keeping the economy on a level footing isn't just about today, but central to the future that they've spent four years fighting for. "We don't want to be just a poor neighbour [to the EU]," says Ukraine's Finance Minister Sergii Marchenko. "We want to provide for Europe, something which they lack," he explains, in reference to the military expertise that the country has reluctantly gained since February 2022. Marchenko adds that the "very painful" experience his country has gained could help the rest of the continent defend itself. Membership of the EU is a top priority for Kyiv, so there is a lot of gratitude for the bloc's financial support, which is bringing the two closer together, and aiming to give Ukraine the advantage over Russia. A new 90bn (\$105bn; £79bn) loan from the EU will help cover the shortfall in Ukraine's budget over the next two years. It's been approved by the European Parliament,

and the first payment could be made in April. That loan is the biggest share of a \$136.5bn (£101bn) international support package, without which Marchenko says his country cannot survive after everything it's been through. "Our strong army depends on our strong economy, because all of our resources, which we mobilize internally, we channel... to defend our nation," he says. "We are grateful for the support of other nations to help us, but definitely Ukraine's taxpayers are doing the best help for our army." In December 2024, taxes in Ukraine were increased for the first time since the war began, including on personal incomes, small businesses and financial institutions. That's part of the reason why domestic sources are expected to bring \$67.5bn into government coffers this year, a 15% increase from a year earlier. However, the government's budget for 2026 includes spending plans worth about \$112bn, with about 60% of that going towards the army.



Ten killed in fire at India hospital intensive care unit

Far-left and far-right gains throw French mainstream parties into a quandary



The emerging strength of the far left and far right is creating awkward choices for mainstream parties after the first round of French mayoral elections. In many big towns and cities, Socialists and centre-right Republicans are tempted to make electoral pacts on their outside flanks in order to beat the opposition in next Sunday's run-off. But alliances with the National Rally (RN) on the far right or

France Unbowed (LFI) on the far left carry big risks as well as opportunities. Take Marseille. There, after round one, the incumbent Socialist Mayor, Benoit Payan, is only a whisker ahead of RN candidate Franck Allisio. But two other candidates have also qualified for round two, with lower scores: the Republicans' Martine Vassal and the LFI's Sébastien Delogu.

SABALENKA BATTLES TO INDIAN WELLS TITLE

Getting a puppy, getting engaged, saving championship point and winning a long-awaited Indian Wells title – it has been a week world number one Aryna Sabalenka will remember "for the rest of my life". In the latest chapter of what has already developed into an extraordinary rivalry, Sabalenka put the ghosts of January's Australian Open final defeat against Elena Rybakina to bed with a 3-6 6-3 7-6 (8-6) victory over the Kazakh. The players pushed each other to the limit under the blazing sun in California until Sabalenka edged the tie-break, including saving championship point with a thumping backhand winner. After securing victory with a service winner, Sabalenka celebrated by dunking her head in an ice cooler. "What a week. Getting a puppy, getting engaged and winning a title



- I will definitely remember it for the rest of my life," Belarusian Sabalenka said. "This is truly tennis paradise and I'm always happy to come here. Thank God I finally got this trophy. "This is everything, this is the dream." Sabalenka opted to take some time

away from competitive action after suffering Grand Slam heartbreak at the start of the year, and that decision appears to have paid off. She has put in some dominant performances across the past two weeks and stood up to serious pressure against an opponent she tends to struggle against. The 27-year-old had lost four of her previous five meetings with Rybakina in finals but dug deep to land her second trophy of the year. It is not just against Rybakina that Sabalenka has struggled, though, with six of her previous 10 finals appearances ending in defeat. Sabalenka's last two appearances in finals at Indian Wells also ended in defeat - losing to Rybakina in 2023 and Mirra Andreeva last year. After losing the opening set - the first she had dropped all tournament - Sabalenka could be

excused for thinking she was destined for another defeat, but the four-time Grand Slam singles champion showed incredible character to force her way back in proceedings. Sabalenka has been known for letting her frustration get in the way, but she channelled any frustrations in a positive manner to break twice in succession and save four break points before wrapping up the second set. That momentum continued into the decider and an early break appeared to be enough for Sabalenka when she had the chance to serve for the match. However, Rybakina struck back and then went on to save five break points of her own. In a match full of twists, the conclusion lived up to the billing, with Sabalenka holding firm in a superb tie-break to come out on top.

Akshay Kumar Asks For Abhishek Sharma's Autograph

Indian cricket team star batter Abhishek Sharma gifted Bollywood superstar Akshay Kumar the bat that he used during the T20 World Cup 2026. Abhishek slammed a brilliant 52 off 21 deliveries to guide his team to a record win against New Zealand in the final at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad. During the India Today Conclave, the duo shared a stage and Akshay requested Abhishek to give his autograph on a bat for him. However, the cricketer responded by saying that he will instead give him a bat that was used during the World Cup. Akshay thanked the cricketer instantly as they shared a hug. Earlier, Sanju Samson praised his opening partner Abhishek Sharma, describing their partnership as effortless and balanced. He highlighted their combination as "fire and fire", with both taking turns leading the attack. Samson noted the natural Kerala-



Punjabi friendship that underpins their understanding. Samson admired Sharma's bravery and composure, saying he enjoys both their on-field and off-field camaraderie. "We are not ice and fire, we are fire and fire. Sometimes he fires, sometimes I do. We have that kind of combination going. We have done this since 2024; we have a Kerala-Punjabi friendship in the middle. Everything comes pretty naturally to us, so we do not complicate it. He asks me, 'How is the ball coming?' I tell him that the

ball is coming normally, and hit it for a six. It is really simple with him. Abhishek is very brave and collected. I love his character. I really love the partnership with him on and off the field," Sanju Samson said at the India Today Conclave. Samson and Sharma slammed New Zealand bowlers all over the park in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup final, adding 98 runs for the opening partnership, giving India a majestic start in the powerplay. Their brilliant start propelled India to 255 runs in the final.

Suryakumar, Gambhir Differed On 1 Name In Indian T20 Team. India Captain Reveals 'Equation'

Suryakumar Yadav, Indian cricket team's T20 World Cup-winning captain, has highlighted his strong working relationship with coach Gautam Gambhir. In a podcast with news agency PTI, Yadav revealed that the duo was almost perfectly aligned when they first sat down to select the team after he was handed the reins and Gambhir took over as coach. "Out of 15 names we both suggested, 14 were common. That means the thinking was the same. When the goals are clear, there are no arguments, only discussions," he said. Despite their professional success, Suryakumar said their personal



dynamic remains unchanged. "I still call him 'Gauti bhai'. It is like a younger brother and elder brother relationship," he said. Known for his 360-degree strokeplay, Suryakumar described batting in T20 cricket as largely a reactive sport, with preparation

according to the situation," he said. He also traced the origins of his unconventional range of shots to childhood rubber-ball games in Mumbai, where uneven boundary sizes forced him to improvise. While his audacious strokeplay is often described as high risk, Suryakumar said he tries to stay on the right side of the fine line separating courage from recklessness. "There is a very thin line between being courageous and being reckless. I try to stay on the courageous side. But if the situation demands a high-risk shot, you have to take it. High rewards often require high-risk decisions," he explained.

KL Rahul Shares Emotional Moment With Sanju Samson As BCCI Honours India's T20 World Cup-winning Team

Sanju Samson's exploits were a major factor in fuelling India's recent T20 World Cup triumph. Speaking on the sidelines of the BCCI Naman Awards 2026 in the capital, Samson likened his performance during India's march to the title to a movie and said it was yet to sink in. "Not yet, I am still like, actually, when I get up in the morning I'm like 'has it really happened'. So honestly, that's the feeling," Samson said when asked about last Sunday's triumph. He added, "But I feel that in the coming years, with the quality of players we have in our country, this is going to be repeated. It's not going to be, okay, it has happened once in a while.



The amount of players who are coming up... definitely India is going to do this more and more often." Samson was named Player of the Tournament in the 2026 T20 World Cup after a historic campaign, scoring 321 runs at a strike rate of nearly 200 in just five innings to lead India to the title. During the awards

against the West Indies, the semi-final against England, and the final against New Zealand. Samson further said he had been dreaming of helping India win a World Cup. "Absolutely, I think you can only dream where you want to go, but you can't definitely ride the path towards it. So my life or my career has been one of the best examples. I definitely wanted to do this a couple of years ago. "I wanted to win a World Cup for my country, but it had its own plan, its own script. So... more like a movie. I enjoyed it," Samson said. The unassuming star from Kerala has been toiling for years to leave an impact on the game, and the T20 World Cup was his finest moment.

Kylian Mbappe, Jude Bellingham Included In Real Madrid Squad For Champions League 2nd Leg Against Manchester City

Kylian Mbappe is back in Real Madrid's squad for the second leg against Manchester City in the Champions League's round of 16 on Tuesday. The France striker hasn't played since Feb. 21 because of a knee problem. He has missed five matches in all competitions, including Madrid's 3-0 win over City in the first leg last week. Mbappe was selected in a 26-man squad announced by Madrid on Monday. Also included was England midfielder Jude Bellingham, who has been sidelined since Feb. 1 because of a thigh injury. Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa will conduct his pre-match news conference later Monday, when he might give an indication if Mbappe and



Bellingham are healthy enough to start at Etihad Stadium. How do you prepare to overturn a 3-0 deficit to the mighty Real Madrid in the Champions League? If you are Pep Guardiola, you give your players the day off. "The players are at home with their families today. And then

Spurs answer Tudor's call with show of fight in the face of crisis

Igor Tudor delivered a message of defiance amid Tottenham Hotspur's deepening crisis when he told his players before their visit to Liverpool: "You can stay and cry or you can fight". The smart money was on more tears after four straight losses under the Croatian saw an alarming drop towards relegation, along with a loss at Atletico Madrid in the Champions League last 16 first leg that was nothing short of a fiasco. Tudor came under heavy criticism, not just for replacing Antonin Kinsky after only 17 minutes following two mistakes in the 5-2 defeat, but for blanking the young keeper as he walked off. And yet here, against all odds and without 13 players



because of suspension and injuries, Spurs stood and fought every inch of the way at Anfield to earn a fully deserved point with a performance that may yet prove to be of wider significance as they fight against the drop into the Championship. Will it be enough to buy Tudor more time? We shall see. The

sense is he is not out of the woods yet, but at least Tudor can have the satisfaction of demonstrating he can get a reaction, at least once, from Spurs players who had previously looked down and out. At the heart of it all was Richardson, every touch jeered by Liverpool fans because of his previous Everton connections.

"No Emergency Situation": FIDE Breaks Silence On Cyprus Hosting Candidates Tournament Amid War Concerns



New Delhi: Not too far from the conflict-ridden Gulf region, there are concerns around Cyprus hosting the prestigious Candidates tournament this month but chess' world governing body FIDE has rejected a possible change of venues, saying there is nothing even "remotely dangerous" to warrant such a move. The Candidates, which will decide the challenger to the world championship crowns currently held by India's D Gukesh (men) and China's Ju Wenjun (women), is due to start on March 28. India's Koneru Humpy is reportedly considering withdrawing from the tournament due to security concerns. Earlier this month, a British air base in Cyprus endured a drone attack, raising fears that the conflict which started with the American and Israel bombing of Iran will engulf the island as well. Cyprus, the third largest island in the Mediterranean Sea, is situated south of Turkey and is a member of the European Union. "Our plans have not changed. We are in the final stages of preparing

(for) the Candidates Tournament. Of course, we are monitoring the situation. Cyprus is not too far from, let's say, the war zone or conflict zone, but at the same time, it is not directly involved in any way and is not in a state of war," FIDE CEO Emil Sutovsky told "Chessbase". "There is no emergency situation or anything like that. Of course, about 10 days ago there were some worrying news, but since then the situation has appeared quite calm. "But we are, of course, not just hoping that nothing will happen. We are constantly monitoring the situation and also staying in contact with the state authorities who are assisting us with everything related to the tournament," he added. In the Open section, R Praggnanandhaa is the lone Indian in fray, while World Cup winner Divya Deshmukh, Humpy and R Vaishali have qualified for the women's Candidates. Sutovsky expressed faith in the Cyprus government, saying it is well aware of the tournament's stature.

NOVAK DJOKOVIC WITHDRAWS FROM MIAMI OPEN

Novak Djokovic has withdrawn from the Miami Open with a right shoulder injury, organizers said Sunday. The 24-time Grand Slam champion reached the fourth round at Indian Wells this week, but the six-time Miami champion opted out of the second leg of the "Sunshine Double" -- where he fell to Jakub Mensik in last year's final. Indian Wells marked 38-year-old Djokovic's first tournament since he lost to Carlos Alcaraz in the Australian Open final. He played with a compression sleeve on his right arm,

telling Tennis Channel he was dealing with a forearm injury that was intermittently affecting his serve. "If I don't serve for five or six minutes then I feel like the first couple of serves of that game are a bit painful," Djokovic said. Health Priorities: The right shoulder has been a recurring issue for Djokovic throughout his career, and the medical team is reportedly focusing on a non-invasive rehabilitation program to avoid any mid-season surgery. Fan Reaction: Tournament Director James Blake expressed his regret, acknowledging that while

Djokovic's presence is always a highlight, the tournament still boasts a deep field of top-ten talent.

Rise of the Next Generation in South Florida

With the "Big Three" era effectively over and Djokovic sidelined, the Miami Open will serve as a critical proving ground for the ATP's rising stars. Carlos Alcaraz enters as the de facto favorite, looking to replicate the dominance he showed during his previous title run in Florida. Jannik Sinner, who has been the most consistent player on the tour in early 2026, also

stands to benefit from the open draw, as he seeks his first Masters 1000 title of the year. The lack of a dominant veteran figure has created one of the most unpredictable Miami draws in recent memory. Players like Holger Rune and Ben Shelton are expected to draw massive crowds as they attempt to capitalize on the vacuum left by the top seed. For the first time in years, the tournament is being marketed as a "new era" showcase, highlighting the athletic speed and aggressive baseline play that defines the younger generation of tennis professionals.



Suriya’s ‘Vishwanath & Sons’ Teaser Unveiled - Venky Atluri Promises a Powerful Emotional Drama



The teaser of Vishwanath & Sons starring Suriya has been released, offering a glimpse into the world of Sanjay Vishwanath. Directed by Venky Atluri and produced by Suryadevara Naga Vamsi, the film promises an emotional and engaging cinematic experience. The teaser introduces Sanjay Vishwanath, an international pistol shooter who continues to chase his dreams even in his 40s. Suriya appears in a layered role, portraying both fatherly warmth and emotional depth. His stylish presence and the impactful

dialogues penned by Venky Atluri bring back shades reminiscent of his iconic performances. Adding freshness to the narrative is Mamitha Baiju, who brings vibrant and charming energy to the film. The teaser hints at an unconventional love story involving a noticeable age gap. With Venky Atluri’s sensibility in storytelling, the film is expected to handle this aspect with depth and emotional maturity. The teaser also highlights the film’s strong technical craft. G. V. Prakash Kumar delivers a classy and powerful background score that elevates the visuals.

Grand ‘Ustaad Bhagat Singh’ Pre-Release Event Held

I hope ‘Ustaad Bhagat Singh’ achieves a success on the scale of ‘Gabbar Singh’,” says Power Star Pawan Kalyan. After the sensational success of Gabbar Singh, Power Star Pawan Kalyan has teamed up once again with Cult Captain Harish Shankar for the film Ustaad Bhagat Singh. The film is being produced on the banner of Mythri Movie Makers by Naveen Yerneni and Yalamanchili Ravi Shankar. The film stars Sreeleela and Raashii Khanna as the female leads. Music is composed by Devi Sri Prasad while the background score is by S. Thaman. The songs, teaser, and trailer released so far have impressed audiences and created huge expectations for the film. With expectations touching the sky, Ustaad Bhagat Singh is all



set to hit theatres on March 19, coinciding with Ugadi, promising to redefine mass entertainment. In this context, the film’s team held a grand pre-release event on Sunday evening at Police Grounds in

Hyderabad, attended by thousands of enthusiastic fans.

Pawan Kalyan’s Speech

Speaking at the event, Pawan Kalyan said:

“Greetings to all the fans who attended the Ustaad Bhagat Singh pre-release event and to those watching it live. I love cinema deeply. Cinema is what fed me and gave me recognition to serve

the people today. That is why I always wish my producers to prosper and my fans—who come with so much excitement for my films—to feel happy. I never focus on how much money a film collects; I only wish that the film should be good. I don’t see it as Telugu cinema or Tamil cinema—I see it as Indian cinema. It’s a proud moment that our Telugu film industry has reached the level of winning Oscars. For me, there is only one hero—Megastar Chiranjeevi. When I stand beside him, I forget that I am a hero myself. I am very happy that my brother Chiranjeevi watched the Ustaad Bhagat Singh trailer and tweeted about it. My thanks to Ram Charan as well for his tweet. Everyone works together hoping for a film’s success. But during that journey we

face many challenges. Completing a film despite those difficulties is not easy. This is the film I have done with Harish Shankar after Gabbar Singh. Initially we planned a different story, but later it changed. Then the pandemic happened. In between, I entered politics and took on public responsibilities. Despite all that, without affecting my duties, we completed this film in a very short time—within 40-45 days. I worked only about five to six hours a day. Harish planned the schedule brilliantly. Ustaad Bhagat Singh gave me the confidence that I can continue doing films. Mythri Movie Makers have delivered many successful films like Pushpa, Janatha Garage, and Srimanthudu. Their consistent success comes from their hard work.

KATE HUDSON’S JEWELLERY PRICE SHOCKS EVERYONE



The Oscars are always a night of glamour, fashion, and unforgettable red carpet moments. Celebrities arrive in stunning outfits, but every year, there is one look that captures everyone’s attention. At the 2026 Academy Awards, actress Kate Hudson created one such moment. Hudson arrived at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles looking absolutely radiant as she walked the red carpet. The actress was nominated for Best Actress for her role in the musical drama Song Sung Blue. While her outfit was breathtaking, it was her extraordinary jewellery that

truly stole the spotlight.

Kate Hudson’s Jewellery Price

Do you know how much the jewellery Kate Hudson wore costs? According to reports, the actress wore rare green diamond jewellery worth a staggering 35 million USD, which is approximately Rs. 318 crore. The centrepiece of her look was a magnificent necklace featuring more than 41 carats of rare green diamonds, created by luxury Italian jeweller Garatti. The statement piece instantly became one of the most talked-about accessories of the night.

Oscars 2026: Javier Bardem says ‘Free Palestine’ on stage with Priyanka Chopra



Sudigali Sudheer’s ‘G.O.A.T’ Gets U/A, Set for March 26 Release

Sudigali Sudheer’s ‘G.O.A.T’ Gets U/A Certificate, March 26 Release. Confirmed. The upcoming Telugu film G.O.A.T (Greatest Of All Times), starring popular comedian-turned-hero Sudigali Sudheer, has successfully completed its censor formalities and is gearing up for a worldwide theatrical release on March 26. The film features Divya Bharathi as the female lead and is directed by Vedavyas. It is being produced by Chandrasekhar Reddy Mogulla under the banners of Mahateja Creations and Jaishnav Productions. The film is

currently undergoing post-production work. According to the makers, the content released from the film so far has received a positive response from the audience, and the trailer will be released soon. The film has now completed the censor process and has been awarded a U/A certificate by the censor board. Speaking about the film, the producer said that the movie is being made on a grand scale without compromising on quality. He added that the film will be technically strong and is expected to become a milestone in Sudigali

Sudheer’s career. “Every frame of the film has come out beautifully. Along with being a complete commercial entertainer, the movie also carries a meaningful message that will make today’s youth think,” he said, expressing confidence that the film will entertain audiences of all sections. Apart from Sudigali Sudheer and Divya Bharathi, the film also features Sarvadaman Banerjee, Nithin Prasanna, Brahmaji, Prithvi Raj, Aadukalam Naren, Rajendran, Anand Ramraj, Chammak Chandra, Pammi Sai and Naveen Neni in important

roles. The film’s music is composed by Leon James, with background score by Mani Sharma. Cinematography is handled by Rasool Elore, while the editing is done by Vijay Muktavarapu. Rajeev Nair serves as the production designer. Samaira Reddy N is the co-producer and Prasoon Mandava is the creative producer. With its blend of commercial elements and a socially relevant message, G.O.A.T (Greatest Of All Times) is expected to entertain audiences when it hits theatres worldwide on March 26.



HRITHIK ROSHAN CALLED ACTORS DOING THEIR OWN STUNTS ‘STUPID AND SILLY’



Actor Hrithik Roshan, had once shared his firm thoughts on the concept of a few actors opting to perform their own stunts, during an old interview with Lehren TV. During the interaction, Hrithik, without mincing words, spoke about the risks involved in stunt sequences and explained why he believes actors should firmly rely on trained professionals instead of attempting dangerous action themselves. Speaking about it, Hrithik said, “I don’t believe in doing your stunts yourself. I think it is stupid. It should be banned.” He added, “The reason I say that is that it

should not be about an ego trip. You’re an actor, you’re creating a magical world, a fantasy world. And there are a lot of things that go into creating that fantasy. Even your makeup, your dialogues, your hair, your clothes, it’s all made to make the unreal look real.” “People are specialised in doing certain specific jobs to help you create that entire world bit by bit in different pieces.” “A stuntman’s job is to do stunts. He comes into that space, does his job, and creates one more piece of that big picture, and then you carry on. If you have an ego there, it’s like saying I will write my own dialogues.

“Ustaad Bhagat Singh is a family film... everyone will enjoy it... you will see vintage Power Star”: Actress Raashii Khanna



After the sensational success of Gabbar Singh, Power Star Pawan Kalyan and Cult Captain Harish Shankar have teamed up once again for the film Ustaad Bhagat Singh. The movie is being produced prestigiously under the banner of Mythri Movie Makers by Naveen Yerneni and Yalamanchili Ravi Shankar. The film stars Raashii Khanna and Sreeleela as the female leads. Music is composed by Devi Sri Prasad, while the background score is handled by S. Thaman. The songs, teaser, and trailer released so far have received a tremendous response and created huge expectations for the film. With expectations soaring high, Ustaad Bhagat Singh is set to release in theatres on March 19, coinciding with Ugadi. In this context, actress Raashii Khanna recently interacted with the media and shared several insights about the film.

How is life for you right now? How did you come on board for this project? My life is very busy right now. To be honest, the moment I heard that it was Pawan Kalyan Garu’s film, I immedi-

ately said yes with great excitement—even before listening to the story. Ever since I did my first film, I had heard a lot about his stardom and the phenomenon called Pawanism. From then on, I wished to act with him at least once. With Ustaad Bhagat Singh, that dream has come true.

What kind of role are you playing in this film? My character’s name is Shloka. She is a very modern girl. In this film, every character has importance, and my role also has a strong characterization. I have a mass song in the film. Since I love dancing, I really enjoyed shooting for that song.

How was your experience working with Pawan Kalyan? Pawan Garu is a very simple person. He is always seen reading books. There is an innocence about him that is hard to explain. On the first day itself, he asked me, “Did you always want to become an actress?” I told him that I actually wanted to become an IAS officer.

MICHAEL B JORDAN WINS BEST ACTOR FOR ‘SINNERS’, TAKING HOME HIS FIRST OSCAR

