

PM MODI EXTENDS HOLI GREETINGS, HIGHLIGHTS SPIRIT OF JOY



US SUBMARINE SINKS IRANIAN WARSHIP IN FIRST TORPEDO STRIKE SINCE WORLD WAR II

Washington, March 4 (TSIT) A United States submarine has sunk an Iranian naval warship with a torpedo strike, marking the first time since World War II that an enemy vessel has been destroyed in this manner, Pete Hegseth said on Wednesday.

NEW ZEALAND BEAT SOUTH AFRICA BY 9 WICKETS TO ENTER T20 WORLD CUP FINAL



T20 WORLD CUP

IN BRIFS

5 killed in car-truck collision in AP

Amaravati (TSIT): Five members of a family were killed when a car in which they were travelling rammed into a truck in Andhra Pradesh's Chittoor district on Wednesday, police said.



from behind. All five occupants of the car died on the spot. The deceased, residents of the Rajaji Nagar area in Bengaluru, were on their way to Tirumala for darshan. The truck was heading to Kurnool after unloading cement at Palamaneru.

CM Revanth Reddy Meets Amit Shah, Seeks More IPS Officers for Telangana

New Delhi (TSIT): Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy met Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi on Wednesday to discuss internal security and strengthening the state's police system.



FILE PHOTO

The Chief Minister briefed him on measures taken to maintain law and order, highlighting the role of the Telangana Cyber Security Bureau and the Eagle Force in tackling cybercrime and ensuring security.

Emphasizing the city's rapid growth, Revanth Reddy sought an increase in IPS cadre strength for Telangana. He also

appreciated the Union Home Minister about Maoist surrenders, stating that 591 cadres laid down arms in the last two years and were being rehabilitated. The Chief Minister requested greater Central support for development in backward regions to ensure lasting peace and stability.

US sub sinks Iranian navy vessel near Sri Lanka, war edges closer to Indian waters

New Delhi (TSIT) US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth on Wednesday confirmed that a US submarine fired a torpedo and has sunk Iranian Navy vessel IRIS Dena west of Sri Lanka. In a way the Iran and US-Israel conflict has reached close to Indian coast.



Already, fearing Iranian missile strikes, several US warships has moved eastward towards India. These ships are in international waters. The Iranian ship, hit today, was returning after participating in the international fleet review and exercise Milan hosted by India at Vishakhapatnam.

The Iranian ship went down with almost 140 sailors on board missing. The Sri Lankan Navy, acting on a distress call rescued 32 of the Iranian sailors.

Hegseth confirmed the act by the US forces saying the ship was hit in the Indian Ocean, saying "an Iranian warship that thought it was safe in international waters... Instead it was sunk by a tor-

pedo". Hegseth did not name the Iranian ship that was attacked. But earlier the Sri Lankan navy reported the distress call from IRIS Dena when it was some 40 kms west of Galle, located on the southwestern part of the Island country.

On February 16, the Iranian had sailed into the port of Visakhapatnam where Seventy-four nations participated. Warships from Australia, Japan, South Korea, Russia, and dozens of others were anchored alongside the now sunk Iranian vessel. The ship's commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani held talks with India's Chief of Naval Staff on strengthening

maritime security cooperation. The theme was "United through Oceans."

Notably the US Navy was supposed to send the guided-missile destroyer USS Pinckney to the exercise Milan, how the ship was diverted to Singapore on Feb 15. US did not field its warship in Milan which had ships from Russia and Iran. The exercise ended February 25. Three days later, on February 28, the United States and Israel launched Operation Epic Fury.

The IRIS Dena was transiting home. This morning at 5:08 a.m. local time, the IRIS Dena issued a distress call. Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath informed parliament that two navy vessels and an aircraft were deployed. Thirty crew members were rescued and admitted to Karapitiya Hospital in Galle. The Straits Times reported 32 critically wounded survivors. Reuters, reported 101 missing and 78 wounded. The Sri Lankan Navy spokesman said the operation was conducted in line with the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue.

Uttam Directs Fast-Track Safety Works for Singur Dam



Hyderabad (TSIT): Telangana Irrigation Minister N. Uttam Kumar Reddy has directed officials to complete safety works at Singur Dam on a war footing, stressing that the dam's safety is a top priority for the government.

Along with Health Minister Damodar Raja Narasimha and Minister Vivek Venkataswamy, he reviewed the dam, which serves as a key drinking water source for Hyderabad. The ministers instructed officials to implement safety measures as per National Dam Safety Authority norms and to appoint a technical committee to oversee works. The State Dam Safety Review Panel had earlier warned of serious structural issues, including cracks in the earthen bund, and called for urgent repairs. Officials were also directed to complete canal lining works by June 26 and expedite DPRs for the Peddareddy Lift Irrigation Scheme, with its foundation stone to be laid by Ugadi.

BARAMATI PLANE CRASH: ROHIT PAWAR ALLEGES ATTEMPTS TO SHIELD VSR VENTURES

MUMBAI (TSIT): NCP (SP) MLA Rohit Pawar on Wednesday alleged that someone was trying to save VSR Ventures in connection with the plane crash that killed Maharashtra deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar, and claimed that the AAIIB preliminary probe vindicated the doubts earlier raised by him. He also accused VSR company of indulging in several grave lapses in the past. The Learjet 45 aircraft, operated by VSR Ventures, crashed near the Baramati air strip in Pune district on January 28, killing Pawar and four others. In its 22-page preliminary report on the VSR Venture's Learjet plane crash, the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) said the visibility at the time of the crash was below the required level. It also flagged about fading marks on the runway and presence of loose gravels on the runway surface.

PM MODI WELCOMES ALEXANDER STUBB, says visit to boost India-Finland ties

New Delhi (TSIT) Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday welcomed Finland's President Alexander Stubb to India, expressing confidence that the visit would elevate bilateral relations to "new heights" and strengthen cooperation across sectors. In a post on X, Modi wrote, "Welcome to India, President Alexander Stubb. I fully agree with you, your visit will take India-Finland relations to new heights. I eagerly look forward to our meeting tomorrow and to your keynote address at the Raisina Dialogue 2026."



President Stubb is on an official visit to India, during which he is scheduled

to hold talks with the Prime Minister and deliver the keynote address at the upcoming edition of the Raisina Dialogue, India's flagship conference on geopolitics and geoeconomics. The annual event, organised in New Delhi, brings together global leaders, policymakers and experts to deliberate on pressing international issues. India and Finland share warm and friendly relations, underpinned by cooperation in areas such as trade, technology, renewable energy, education and innovation. Finnish companies have a notable presence in India, particularly in clean technologies, telecommunications and sustainable solutions, while Indian IT firms are active in the Nordic nation.

US dismisses China, Russia calls on Iran war

Washington (TSIT): The United States on Wednesday brushed aside calls from China and Russia for an end to hostilities in the ongoing war with Iran, saying the conflict is focused solely on Tehran's nuclear ambitions and military capabilities. Speaking at a Pentagon press briefing, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth said the United States is not engaging with Beijing or Moscow on the issue and that they are not central to the current conflict.



"I don't have a message for them, and they're not really a factor here," Hegseth said when asked about Russia and China calling for an immediate end to hostilities. "Our issue is not with them. It's with the nuclear ambitions of Iran," he said. The remarks came as the U.S. military continued its fourth day of operations under Operation Epic Fury, a large-scale campaign targeting Iran's missile systems, naval assets, and military infrastructure. U.S. officials say the campaign was launched

after intelligence assessments concluded that Tehran was not negotiating in good faith over its nuclear programme. "The evidence in front of us since the 12-day war was that Iran had no intention of actually negotiating a nuclear deal that truly meant they did not have a pathway to a nuclear bomb," Hegseth said. He said Washington believes Iran has continued to pursue nuclear weapons capabilities while maintaining a large missile arsenal. "They have thousands

of missiles pointed at us," he said. According to the Pentagon, the military campaign is designed to eliminate Iran's ability to threaten U.S. forces, regional partners and international shipping lanes. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Air Force General Dan Caine said the operation has already struck thousands of targets inside Iran. "To date, we've hit over 2,000 targets," Caine said. He said the campaign has also sharply reduced Iranian missile launches. "Iran's theatre ballistic

missile shots fired are down 86 per cent from the first day of fighting," he said. U.S. officials say the operation is focused on dismantling Iran's ability to project power beyond its borders. "The operation was launched with clear military objectives designed to dismantle Iran's ability to project power outside of its borders both today and in the future," Caine said. The Pentagon also said several Middle Eastern countries are helping defend against Iranian missile and drone attacks, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Jordan.

Despite the early battlefield gains, U.S. officials warned that the war remains in its early stages. "We're 100 hours in. It's still very early," Caine said. Tensions between Washington and Tehran have escalated sharply in recent months, with the United States accusing Iran of pursuing nuclear weapons and supporting attacks against American forces and allies in the region.

CM Stalin slams BJP over use of Hindi names in Union Govt offices building

CHENNAI (TSIT): Chief Minister and DMK president MK Stalin on Wednesday criticised the BJP-led Union government on using Hindi names for public offices and facilities, alleging that it amounted to the imposition of Hindi. Referring to the naming of "Kartavya Dwar" at the zonal office of the Railways in Tiruchirappalli, Stalin said the Union government's attempts at Hindi imposition had crossed limits. He pointed out that even when displayed in English and Tamil, the words were essentially Hindi.



WE MUST TEACH A BEFITTING LESSON TO THOSE WHO ATTEMPT TO IMPOSE HINDI AND UNDERMINE THE SELF-RESPECT OF TAMIL PEOPLE. THE UNION GOVERNMENT SHOULD REMOVE SUCH NAMES AND RESTORE PROPER TAMIL NAMES IN ITS OFFICES IN THE STATE.

-MK STALIN, CHIEF MINISTER OF TAMIL NADU

The Chief Minister termed the move "shameful" and cited examples where names of departments had been changed to Hindi. He said the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation had been referred to as "Bhavishya Nidhi Bhavan", while the Department of Water Resources had been renamed as "Jal Shakti".

Stalin alleged that such steps reflected the "arrogance" of the Bharatiya Janata Party and hurt the self-respect of Tamils. We must teach a befitting lesson to those who attempt to impose Hindi and undermine the self-respect of

Tamil people. The Union government should remove such names and restore proper Tamil names in its offices in the State, Warning the Union government, Stalin said that unless the demand was addressed.

US downs over 20 vessels, oil tanker traffic dips

New Delhi (TSIT) Explosions were heard in Iran's capital city Tehran, on Wednesday, March 4, as its war with the US and Israel entered a fifth day following earlier strikes on an Iranian nuclear site and retaliatory strikes by the Islamic Republic across the Gulf region. Iranian state television reported explosions around Tehran at dawn. Meanwhile, Israel said its air defences were activated due to incoming missile fire from Iran. Five days into a war that US President Donald Trump suggested would last several weeks or longer, 1,045 people have been killed in Iran, including some whom Trump said he had considered as possible future leaders of the country.



A LITTLE SHEPARD BOY TRIES TO CLIMB AN UNEXPLODED PROJECTILE THAT LANDED IN AN OPEN FIELD IN EASTERN SYRIA.

First bust of Mahatma Gandhi unveiled in US's Montana state

Seattle, March 4 : A bust of Mahatma Gandhi was installed at the prestigious Mike Mansfield Center of the University of Montana in Missoula, according to a statement by the Indian Consulate in Seattle.



Montana Governor Greg Gianforte, along with the Consul General of India in Seattle, jointly unveiled the bust of the Mahatma in a gathering that was attended by leading officials from the state, including faculty and students of the University of Montana, as well as members of

the Montana World Affairs Council. Addressing the gathering, Governor Gianforte thanked the Consul for presenting the bust of Mahatma as a gift from the Indian government to the US state.

Acknowledging the strengthening ties between India and Montana, he praised the ideals of nonviolence that Mahatma Gandhi espoused as much-needed values in the world order today.

UAE INTERCEPTS THREE BALLISTIC MISSILES, OVER 120 DRONES

Abu Dhabi: The UAE's Ministry of Defence on Wednesday said that its air defence systems successfully intercepted three ballistic missiles and detected 129 drones, of which 121 were intercepted while eight fell within the country. The ministry stated that since the start of the Iranian attack, 189 ballistic missiles launched towards the UAE have been detected, with 175 missiles destroyed, 13 falling into the sea and one missile landing within the territory of the state. According to the statement released by the UAE's Ministry of Defence on X, 941 Iranian drones have been detected, of which 876 were intercepted, while 65 fell within the country. Eight cruise missiles were also detected and destroyed.

Nitin Nabin from Bihar, Rahul Sinha from Bengal: BJP's 1st list of 9 candidates for RS

NEW DELHI: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Tuesday released its list of nine names, including its national president Nitin Nabin, for the biennial elections to the Council of States, Rajya Sabha.

The party has announced the names of Nitin Nabin and Shivesh Kumar from Bihar, Terash Gowalla and Jogen Mohan from Assam, Laxmi Verma from Chhattisgarh, Sanjay Bhatia from Haryana, Manmohan Samal and Sujeet Kumar from Odisha and Rahul Sinha from West Bengal.

Earlier, on February 18, the Election Commission of India (ECI) declared the schedule for the biennial elections to the Council of States, Rajya Sabha, to fill 37 seats falling vacant from 10 states.

According to the Commission, polling will be conducted on March 16 between 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., and the counting of votes will take place the same day at 5:00 p.m.

The terms of 37 members of the Council of States, elected from 10 states, are set to conclude in April 2026.

In view of the impending vacancies, the Commission



has laid out a detailed timetable for the electoral process.

The notification for the elections will be issued on February 26. The last date for filing nominations has been fixed as March 5, while scrutiny of nomination papers will be undertaken on March 6.

Candidates will have the option to withdraw their nominations until March 9.

The Commission has specified that only inte-

grated violet sketch pens of pre-determined specifications, supplied by the Returning Officer, will be allowed for marking preferences on ballot papers.

It clarified that no other writing instrument will be permitted for the purpose.

To ensure that the elections are conducted in a transparent and impartial manner, observers will be deployed to oversee the entire process.

The members whose

terms are ending represent Maharashtra, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Telangana.

The Commission stressed the need for strict compliance with all election-related guidelines and emphasised that the entire process would be completed within the prescribed timeline to safeguard the integrity of the Rajya Sabha elections.

Flights from Dubai and Abu Dhabi to India Resume

DUBAI: Flight operations from Dubai and Abu Dhabi to India resumed last night. In a major relief to thousands of Indians stranded in the UAE due to conflict in the West Asian region, flights to Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru took off after days of suspension.

Dubai Media Office said in a social media post that the Dubai Airports confirmed a limited resumption of flight operations last evening, with a small number of flights permitted to operate from Dubai International (DXB) and Dubai World Central - Al Maktoum International (DWC). Travellers have been advised not to proceed to DXB or DWC unless they have been contacted directly by their airline with a confirmed departure time.

Election Commission published final voter list of West Bengal

KOLKATA: In compliance with the Supreme Court's directives, the Election Commission has published the final voter list of West Bengal, following the Special Intensive Revision. According to the list, the total number of voters stands at 6 crore 44 lakh 52 thousand 609. Additionally, the list notes that the names of 60 lakh 6 thousand 675 voters are under adjudication.

Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Kumar Agarwal said that at the time of the draft publication, the total number of voters was 7 crore 8 lakh 16 thousand 630. Through additions and deletions during the Special Intensive Revision, another 5 lakh 46 thousand 53 names have been removed from the final list. In the draft list itself, more than 58 lakh 20 thousand names were excluded. Altogether, 63



lakh 66 thousand 952 names have been removed from the state's voter list so far. The Chief Electoral Officer said after hearings, the Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) and Assistant Electoral Registration Officers (AEROs) scrutinised all documents and removed the names of the concerned voters. However, if any name is mistakenly deleted, there is a process to reinstate it. Concerned voters can submit claims and objections

within the next 15 days. The final list has been displayed at all polling stations and is available at the offices of the EROs and AEROs for public access. Copies have already been provided to recognised political parties. Additionally, voters can check their names in the list using their EPIC number through the websites of the Election Commission and the CEO of the state, as well as via the ECI Net app.

Ammy Virk expresses emotional distress as wife, daughter stranded in UAE

PUNJAB: Punjabi singer-actor Ammy Virk on Monday expressed emotional distress as his wife and six-year-old daughter are stranded in the United Arab Emirates amid escalating tension there after the Israel-US attack on Iran. Following this, the Aam Aadmi Party's Punjab general secretary Baltej Pannu contacted Virk and assured that Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann is personally monitoring the matter.

In an Instagram post, the 'Nikka Zaildar' actor said it is "impossible not to feel emotional and tense."

"The situation in the UAE has been weighing heavily on my heart. My wife and my six-year-old daughter are there, and as a husband and father, it's impossible not to feel emotional and tense during times like this," Virk said in the post.

"Papa, I will hide under my bed if something happens. I'm a strong girl, Papa don't worry" is not what a father wants to hear. Every news update feels personal. No matter how strong we try to be in public life, at the end of the day, we are family people," wrote the Punjabi actor, who also featured in Bollywood movies such as '83' and 'Bad Newz'.

Virk prayed for the safety of those

stranded in the affected countries. "I know there are so many other families going through the same fear and anxiety. My prayers are not just for my loved ones, but for every single person affected," he wrote.

Virk also acknowledged and appreciated efforts of the UAE government.

"From what I'm being told, they are working tirelessly to ensure that people remain safe and supported during this time. For that, I am truly grateful. Let's continue to pray for the peace, stability and well-being of everyone there. May this phase pass soon, and may all families feel secure and protected," he wrote.

Following Virk's post, AAP general secretary Baltej Pannu contacted the Punjabi actor over phone and inquired about the whereabouts of his family in the UAE.

Pannu assured Virk that the Punjab government stands firmly with them in this time of crisis.

Mann will soon take up the matter with the Central government and make every possible political and diplomatic effort to ensure the safety of Virk's family, he said.

The AAP leader said the government is making all efforts to ensure the safety of its citizens stranded

abroad.

Expressing concerns over the ongoing crisis in the Gulf countries, he said, "We pray to God for the war to end soon and for peace to be restored." He said the Punjab government is committed to the safety of its citizens and will work with the Centre to find an immediate resolution to the matter.

Several people from Punjab, especially tourists, are stranded in the affected countries.

A newly wed couple from Sardoolgarh in Punjab's Mansa was also stuck in Dubai. His family back home appealed to the Centre to help evacuate them as early as possible.

Several international flights have been cancelled in view of the escalating Middle-East conflict. As a result, several Indians are stranded in Dubai and Sharjah. Chief Minister Mann on Monday announced a round-the-clock helpline number to assist Punjabis stranded in the affected countries, assuring them all possible help.

Punjab NRI Affairs minister Dr Ravjot Singh on Sunday wrote to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, seeking an urgent meeting regarding the evacuation of stranded people in the affected countries.

How Bengal SIR may have put BJP's Matua vote-bank at risk

NEW DELHI: The publication of the final voter rolls in West Bengal after the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) has introduced a new layer of political uncertainty in parts of the state that once appeared electorally secure for the BJP. A close examination of the legislative assembly segments recording the highest numbers of deletions or names placed under scrutiny reveals a pattern with significant political implications.

Among the 10 assembly constituencies with the highest figures of deletions, nine were won by the BJP in the 2021 assembly polls: Dabgram-Fulbari (16,491), Bagda (15,303), Santipur (8,048), Bangaon Uttar (7,926), Ranaghat Dakshin (7,126), Ranaghat Uttar Purba (6,404), Ranaghat Uttar Paschim (6,704), Chakdah (5,864) and Sili-guri (5,240).

These seats had formed a crucial part of the BJP's breakthrough in southern Bengal and the Nadia-North 24 Parganas belt. Only Habra (5,587) was retained by the Trinamool Congress (TMC), with Jyotipriya Mullick emerging victorious.

Since then, the BJP's hold over this cluster had already weakened. Bagda and Santipur were lost

to the TMC in subsequent by-elections while Mukut Mani Adhikari, who won Ranaghat Dakshin on a BJP ticket, crossed over to the ruling party.

Despite these reverses, the region has continued to be viewed as a BJP stronghold, reinforced by its performance in the parliamentary polls in 2024. In that election, the BJP secured effective leads in almost all of these assembly segments, including Habra. This showing appeared to stabilise concerns arising from the post-2021 defections and by-election losses. This very apparent stability now stands in contrast to the uncertainty created by the final voter list.

The political sensitivity of the SIR exercise lies in the social composition of these constituencies. At least seven of the 10 assembly segments are dominated by or heavily influenced by the Matua community, which over the past decade has emerged as one of the BJP's most dependable vote-banks in Bengal. The party's rise in this belt since 2014 has been closely linked to Matua consolidation, shaped by promises of citizenship, legal recognition and cultural inclusion.

Administrative scrutiny of voter rolls, however,

has reopened longstanding anxieties within the community. Matua households are often characterised by inter-district mobility, legacy documentation gaps and refugee histories that predate consistent electoral registration. These factors make them disproportionately vulnerable to deletions, objections and verification-related exclusions during roll revisions.

In constituencies such as Bagda, Bangaon Uttar, the three Ranaghat segments and Chakdah, even a limited disruption in Matua voter participation could carry outsized political consequences. BJP victories in 2021 in several of these seats were not landslides but rested on near-total consolidation of Matua votes. The party lacks a secondary social coalition of comparable strength in these areas, making any erosion within this base electorally costly.

Recognising the growing unease, leader of the Opposition Suwendu Adhikari attempted to reassure the Matua community. On March 1, Adhikari stated that Matua voters had no reason to fear deletion from the electoral rolls. He urged those without formal citizenship documentation to apply under the Citizenship

Amendment Act (CAA), arguing that citizenship would naturally resolve questions surrounding voter eligibility.

Adhikari said that around 91,000 applications had already been received under the CAA and claimed that, barring a few hundred cases, nearly all would be cleared. Once citizenship was granted, he said, the applicants would automatically become eligible for voting rights. The remarks were aimed at calming anxieties but also underscored the extent to which the BJP's political strategy in this belt remains tied to citizenship-related assurances.

For the TMC, the unfolding situation presents a strategic opening. With deeper control over local administrative networks and stronger booth-level organisation, the ruling party is better positioned to navigate voter verification processes and convert administrative uncertainty into political messaging. The Trinamool's ability to retain Habra and reclaim Bagda and Santipur after 2021 has already demonstrated the value of organisational depth in moments of electoral flux.

Beyond numbers, the SIR process poses a narrative challenge for the BJP.

Heatwave continues in AP, Telangana with ising Temperatures and dry weather

TELANGANA: The Telugu states Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are experiencing intense heat, with daytime temperatures rising significantly. Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are currently recording temperatures around 34 degrees Celsius. The Meteorological Department has indicated that temperatures are likely to increase further in the coming days. In addition, there is a possibility of almost dry weather with fog appearing at one or two locations, according to the Amaravati Meteorological Centre.

A trough extending from North Odisha to South Chhattisgarh and Vidarbha at a height of 0.9 km above mean sea level is influencing the weather. Yesterday, a north-south wind disturbance from northwest Tamil Nadu to Marathwada, which extended from surface circulation over the Gulf of Mannar and neighbouring regions to Tamil Nadu and interior Karnataka, has now spread further. In North Coast Andhra



Pradesh and Yanam, north-westerly winds are prevailing, while South Coast Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema are experiencing south/southwesterly winds in the lower troposphere. The weather forecast for the next three days indicates dry conditions across the state, with fog expected at one or two places on Tues-

day. Similar dry weather is predicted for Wednesday and Thursday, with fog possibly occurring at a few locations.

In Telangana, the Hyderabad Meteorological Centre has stated that a north-south wind disturbance persists, extending from the Gulf of Mannar to interior Karnataka and

Marathwada at 0.9 km altitude. Another trough from North Odisha to South Chhattisgarh and Vidarbha is also present. The forecast for Telangana indicates dry weather over the next three days, with maximum temperatures expected to rise gradually by two to three degrees in some areas during this period.

BJP awaits Delhi nod on Shillong LS bypoll candidate, says Hek

DELHI: Senior BJP leader and Pynthorunkhrah legislator AL Hek on Tuesday said any decision to contest the Shillong Lok Sabha byelection rests with the central leadership, and the state unit would "follow whatever the central leadership is giving us instruction."

"We will be informed about the byelection," Hek told reporters when asked whether the Meghalaya BJP would press Delhi to fight the seat. He confirmed internal talks were under way.

"From the party point of view, we are also discussing this to set up or not to set up the candidate for the Shillong MP byelection. We have so many candi-

dates but now we have not decided on whether to contest."

He said the state chief would soon convene a meeting.

"Very soon we will sit. We have informed to the respected president of BJP Meghalaya to call a meeting to discuss about this byelection."

Asked about backing the NPP, Hek ruled out support for another party and said, "If we have to contest we will have our own candidate. We will not be supporting any candidate (of other political parties)."

"We will go whatever the central leadership will give the instruction but BJP Meghalaya will contest on our own," he added.

BJP names Vinod Tawde as Rajya Sabha candidate from Maharashtra

MUMBAI: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has announced that its National General Secretary, Vinod Tawde, will contest the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections from Maharashtra. Tawde, who currently serves as the BJP in-charge for Bihar, is set to vie for one of the seven seats in Maharashtra, whose Rajya Sabha terms are set to expire in April.

Earlier, the BJP announced a total of nine candidates for the Rajya Sabha polls across various states.

From Bihar, the party has fielded National President Nitin Nabin and Shivesh Kumar. In Assam, Terash Gowalla and Jogen Mohan have been nominated, while

Laxmi Verma will contest from Chhattisgarh. Haryana's candidate is Sanjay Bhatia. In Odisha, the party has nominated State unit chief Manmohan Samal along with Sujeet Kumar. The Rajya Sabha elections are scheduled to be held on March 16.

Vinod Tawde is a prominent Indian politician from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and a long-time member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Beginning his political journey as a full-time worker of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), Tawde has played an active role in strengthening the BJP's organisational structure.

Man gets life term in 2021 murder case

KURNOOL: The Principal District Court, Kurnool, on Monday awarded life imprisonment to the accused in a murder case registered in February 2021. Delivering the verdict, Principal District Judge Kabarathi held the accused guilty of murdering Vaddypati Venkateswarlu of Shareen Nagar, Kurnool city, and of attempting to murder his wife, the complainant in the case. The prosecution stated that the accused, Daggupati Raju of Indireswaram village in Atmakur mandal, Nandyal district, committed the crime due to personal animosity. Raju suspected that the complainant and her husband were responsible for his wife leaving him, allegedly due to an extramarital relationship. The dispute further escalated when the deceased refused to lend Rs 2 lakh from the money obtained by selling his agricultural land. Acting on this grudge, the accused attacked Venkateswarlu with a knife at his residence, killing him on the spot, and also assaulted the complainant to kill her.

Following the incident, a case was registered at Kurnool IV Town police station for murder and attempt to murder. After a detailed investigation, accused Raju was arrested and a charge sheet was filed. The case was closely monitored by Kurnool SP Vikrant Patil. On finding the charges proved beyond doubt, the court sentenced the accused to life imprisonment for murder and three years' imprisonment for attempt to murder.

IndiGo operates 4 repatriation flights to Jeddah; plans another flight to Muscat

NEW DELHI: IndiGo on Tuesday operated four repatriation flights to Jeddah and plans to have another flight to Muscat later in the day to bring back passengers stranded due to the Middle East conflict.

There are also plans to operate repatriation flights to cities in the UAE on March 4, depending on the local situation and required necessary approvals, the airline said in a statement. After suspending flights to the Middle East and Europe due to the ongoing situation, IndiGo said it would start reinstating select flights to Muscat (Oman), Jeddah, Madinah (Saudi Arabia) and Athens (Greece). The airline would operate a total of 26 flights to and from these four destinations. "For all other stations, IndiGo is closely monitoring the situation and working with the relevant authorities for local slots and permits to progressively restore its operational schedule," it said. Regarding the repatriation flights for March 3, the airline said four such flights are now enroute to Jeddah and one is expected to be operated to/from Muscat, later in the day.

Exemplary Act by Waltair Division Ticket Checking Staff: Minor Rescued



THE SOUTHWINDIA TIMES, VISAKHAPATNAM: The ticket checking staff of Waltair Division have earned widespread appreciation for their prompt and responsible action in ensuring the safety of a minor boy traveling alone. On March 03, 2026, while performing his duties on Train No. 17015, N. Mohan Raju, Chief Ticket Inspector-II, noticed a young boy traveling without a guardian on Berth No. 49 of the S-2 coach. Recognizing the potential risk, Sri Mohan Raju immediately alerted the Waltair Commercial Control. Through swift coordination, the boy was deboarded at Vizianagaram station and handed over to the Child Helpline in the presence of RPF officials for further care. Divisional Railway Manager Shri Lalit Bohra and Senior DCM K. Pavan Kumar commended the team for their alertness and sensitivity. This compassionate intervention has been hailed by all quarters as a testament to the railway's commitment to passenger safety.

GRAND CHAKRASNAMAM OF SRI LAKSHMI NARASIMHA SWAMY ANNUAL BRAHMOTSAVAMS CONCLUDE WITH DHWAJAVAROHANAM



Tirupati: The sacred Chakrasnamam was performed with religious fervour on Wednesday as part of the annual Brahmotsavams of Tarigonda Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy Temple. The rituals began with Vasanthotsavam at 7:00 a.m. Later at 10:00 a.m., Snapana Tirumanjanam was conducted, followed by the grand Chakrasnamam. The deity was ceremonially offered holy bath (abhishekam) with milk, curd, honey, coconut water, turmeric and sandalwood paste. Amidst chanting of Vedic hymns, the priests performed the Chakrasnamam as per Agama traditions. In the evening, Tiruchi Utsavam will be observed at 7:00 p.m., followed by Dhwaजारohanam at 8:00 p.m., marking the conclusion of the annual Brahmotsavams. Several officials, priests and a large number of devotees participated in the event.

GRAND RATHOTSAVAM OF SRI KALYANA VENKATARAMANA SWAMY ANNUAL BRAHMOTSAVAMS CONCLUDE WITH DHWAJAVAROHANAM



Tirupati: As part of the annual Brahmotsavams of Punganur Sri Kalyana Venkataramana Swamy Temple, the grand Rathotsavam was conducted with religious fervour on Wednesday morning. At 5:00 a.m., in Meshalagnam, the Lord mounted the temple chariot. Later at 9:00 a.m., Sri Kalyana Venkataramana Swamy blessed devotees from atop the beautifully decorated ratham. Amid the sounds of traditional mangala vadyams, devotional bhajans and kolatam performances, the chariot procession was taken out ceremoniously along the temple Mada streets.

ALTM CREDO HOME FINANCE PRIVATE LTD DEMAND NOTICE

Under Section 13(2) of the Securitization And Reconstruction Of Financial Assets And Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002, read with Rule 3(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002. The undersigned is the authorized officer of Altum Credo Home Finance Pvt. Ltd. (ACHFL) Under Securitization And Reconstruction of Financial Assets And Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002 (The said Act). In exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(2) of the said Act with Rule 3(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, the authorized officer has issued demand notices under 13(2) of the said Act, calling upon the borrower(s) [The said borrower(s)], to repay the amounts mentioned in the respective demand notices issued to them that are also given below. In connection with above, notice is hereby given, once again, to the said borrower(s) to pay to Altum Credo Home Finance Pvt. Ltd. (ACHFL), within sixty days from the publication of this notice, the amounts indicated herein below, together with further interest as detailed in the said demand notice(s), from the date(s) mentioned below till the date of payment and/or realization, payable under the loan agreement read with other documents/writings, if any, executed by the said borrower(s). As Security for due repayment of the loan, the following assets have been mortgaged to Altum Credo Home Finance Pvt. Ltd. (ACHFL) by the said borrower(s) respectively.

Table with columns: Name of the Borrower(s)/Co-Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) Loan Account Number, Demand Notice Date and Amount With NPA Date, Description Of Secured Assets (Immovable Property).

Place : Bapla, Palnadu, Andhra Pradesh Sd/- Date : 05.03.2026 Authorized Officer Altum Credo Home Finance Pvt. Ltd. (ACHFL)

AP TOURISM ATTRACTED RS 19,693 CR. INVESTMENTS: TOURISM MINISTER

Vijayawada, Mar 4 (UNI) Andhra Pradesh Minister for Tourism Development Kandula Durgesh has said that the government has aimed to transform AP State as an international tourist centre by 2047.

Making a statement in the Legislative Assembly at Amaravati, near here on Wednesday, the Tourism Minister recalled tourism was accorded industry status which ensured exemption in the GST, stamp duty and providing of capital subsidies.

"Andhra Pradesh has secured investments worth Rs 19,693 crore through 117 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) signed over the past 20 months. Out of these, 27 projects have received approvals from the State Investment Promotion Board (SIPB), paving the way for employment opportunities for 1,22,637 youths. Officials stated that projects worth 6,681 crore are currently under rapid implementation across the state."



The Tourism Minister made it clear. "Key areas such as Thotlakonda, Bavikonda, NagarjunaKonda, and Ghantasala are being promoted as Buddhist tourism circuits. Additionally, helicopter-based tourist services will soon be launched from Srisailam, enhancing access to major destinations," he highlighted. Minister Durgesh mentioned that the government introduced a comprehensive film tourism policy and is taking concrete steps to promote filmmaking in AP and offering free permits for film

shoots, which help bring tourist destinations into the spotlight and increase their popularity.

"Small-budget films registered in Andhra Pradesh are eligible for a 9% GST exemption, while films with a budget of up to Rs 1 crore receive a cash subsidy of Rs 10 lakh per year," the Minister revealed. Under the new film policy, initiatives include film tourism promotion, a single-window clearance system, he said, adding that rationalization of ticket pricing, aiming to streamline processes and encourage investment in cinematography.

So far, the state has secured Rs 428 crore in Central grants and implemented eight major tourism projects under schemes like Shashi, PRASAD, Swadeshi Darshan, and CBDD, covering destinations such as Akhanda Godavari, Gandikota, Suryalanka Beach, Ahobilam, Annavaram, Simhachalam, and Borra Caves, he said.



JWALA VEERABHADRASWAMY POOJA HELD IN SRISAILAM

Table with columns: S.No, Name of the item, Tender Period, EMD Amount Rs., Download Starting and Ending Date.



TTD BOARD MEMBER SHANTARAM EXPRESSED HIS HAPPINESS THAT HE WAS HAPPY TO PROVIDE VIP DARSHAN TO HIS FELLOW NAYI BRAHMINS WITH THE COOPERATION OF THE TIRUMALA TIRUPATI DEVASTHANAMS BOARD CHAIRMAN AND GOVERNING BODY MEMBERS.

The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of M/s BAJAJ Finance Limited, hereby gives the following notice to the Borrower(s) or Co-Borrower(s) who have failed to discharge their liability i.e. defaulted in the repayment of principal as well as the interest and other charges accrued there on for some of the loan(s)/Account(s) against the property advanced to them by BAJAJ Finance Limited and as consequence the loan(s) have become Non-Performing Assets (NPA's). According to the provisions issued to them under section 13(2) of Securitization of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and rules there on their last known addresses, however the same have been returned un-served/un-delivered, as such the Borrower(s)/Co-Borrower(s) are hereby intimated/informed by way of this publication notice to clear their outstanding dues under the loan facilities availed by them from time to time.

Table with columns: Demand Notice Under Section 13(2) of Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, Loan Account No./Name of the Borrower(s)/Guarantor(s) & Addresses, Description of Secured Immovable Property, Demand Notice Date and Amount.

HINDUJA HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED Public Notice For E-Auction Cum Sale (Appendix - IV A) (Rule 8(6))

Registered office at 27-A, Developed Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai - 600 032, Tamil Nadu. E-mail : auction@hindujahousingfinance.com

Public Notice For E-Auction Cum Sale (Appendix - IV A) (Rule 8(6)) Sale of Immovable property mortgaged to Hinduja Housing Finance Limited (HHF) having its Corporate Office at 167-169, 2ND Floor, Little Mount, Saidapet, Chennai - 600 015, and Regional Office at: Hinduja Housing Finance Limited - Door No. #54-16-3/1, 3rd Floor, Central Excise Colony, Rd.No.1, Near Loyala College Main gate, Vijayawada - 520008 under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (hereinafter "Act").

1. Ms. Kumari Ragala, W/o.suresh...borrower Date Of Possession: 26-07-2025 Reserve Price: Rs. 16,51,500/- Total Outstanding As On Date (04-03-2026) Rs. 1,65,150/-

1. Mrs. Lavanya Battula, W/o. Srinu... Borrower Date Of Possession: 14-05-2025 Reserve Price: Rs. 12,85,987/- Total Outstanding As On Date (04-03-2026) Rs. 5,42,315/-

1. Mr. Parvathi Kathi... Borrower 2. Mr. Rajesh Kumar Kothi, Co-Borrower. R/o. Door No. 7-96, TTI Colony, Desaipet Vetapalem, Vetapalem MD, Vetapalem Village, Chirala Sub Division, Andhra Pradesh - 523187. Demand Notice Date & Amount: 18-03-2025 Reserve Price: Rs. 7,43,223/- Earnest Money Deposit (EMD): Rs. 1,31,870/- Total Outstanding As On Date (04-03-2026) Rs. 7,95,611/-

1. Mr. Sivanarayana Chintala... Borrower 2. Mrs. Mary Chintala Co-Borrower. R/o. Door No. 14-6/1, 14th ward, Harijanwada Area, Ulavapadu Grama Panchayat, Urban, Ulavapadu, Prakasam District, Andhra Pradesh - 523292. Demand Notice Date & Amount: 21/03/2025 Reserve Price: Rs. 5,59,948/- Earnest Money Deposit (EMD): Rs. 1,32,165/- Total Outstanding As On Date (04-03-2026) Rs. 5,59,948/-

1. Sr Arama Tulla Bhavani Agro Foods thr. Its Prop. Swetha Kandi R/o. Survey No 87-1A1 Routhulapudi Mandal S Pydipala Panchayath S Pydipala Village East Godavari 533446 Contact: 9177027526 Email id: satbagrofoods@gmail.com. Also at, R/o. Old R/S No. 87 Sub Div R/S No. 87 1A1 Santha Pydipala Village Santha Pydipala Gram Panchayath Routhulapudi Mandal East Godavari 533466 Contact: 9949225226 Email id: satbagrofoods@gmail.com

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EDITORIAL

How Anthropic's Claude AI Helped US Bomb Iran

The same artificial-intelligence model that can help you draft a marketing email or a quick dinner recipe has also been used to attack Iran. US Central Command used Anthropic's Claude AI for "intelligence assessments, target identification and simulating battle scenarios" during the strikes on the country, according to a report in the Wall Street Journal.

Hours earlier, US President Donald Trump had ordered federal agencies to stop using Claude after a dispute with its maker, but the tool was so deeply baked into the Pentagon's systems that it would take months to untangle in favor of a more compliant rival. It was used, too, in the January operation that led to the capture of Nicolas Maduro.

But what does "intelligence assessments" and "target identification" mean in practice? Was Claude flagging locations to strike or making casualty estimates? Nobody has made that disclosure and, alarmingly, no one has an obligation to. Artificial intelligence has long been used in warfare for things like analyzing satellite imagery, detecting cyber threats and guiding missile-defense systems. But the use of chatbots - the same underlying technology that billions use for mundane tasks like writing emails - is now being used on the battlefield.

Last November, Anthropic partnered with Palantir Technologies Inc., a data-analytics company that does a lot of work for the Pentagon, turning its large language model Claude into the reasoning engine inside a decision-support system for the military. Then, in January, Anthropic submitted a \$100 million proposal to the Pentagon to develop voice-controlled autonomous drone swarming technology, Bloomberg News reported. The company's pitch: Use Claude to translate a commander's intent into digital instructions to coordinate a fleet of drones. Its bid was rejected, but the contest called for much more than just summarizing intelligence reports, as you might expect a chatbot to do. This contract was to develop "target-related awareness and sharing," and "launch to termination" for potentially lethal drone swarms.

Remarkably, all of this has been happening in a regulatory vacuum and with technology that is known to make errors. Hallucinations by large language models are a result of their training, when they are rewarded for grasping for an answer instead of admitting uncertainty. Some scientists say the persistent challenge of AI confabulation may never be fixed.

This would not be the first time unreliable AI systems have been used in warfare. Lavender was an AI-driven database used to help identify military targets associated with Hamas in Gaza. It was not a large language model but analyzed vast amounts of surveillance data, such as social connections and location history, to assign each individual a score from 1 to 100. When someone's score passed a certain threshold, Lavender flagged them as a military target.

The problem was that Lavender was wrong 10% of the time, according to an investigative report published by the Israeli-Palestinian outlet +972. "Around 3,600 people were targeted by mistake," Mariarosaria Taddeo, a professor of digital ethics and defense technology at the Oxford Internet Institute, tells me.

"There are such incredible vulnerabilities in these systems and such extreme unreliability... for something so dynamic, sensitive and human as warfare," says Elke Schwarz, a professor in political theory at Queen Mary University London and author of *Death Machines: The Ethics of Violent Technologies*.

Schwarz points out that AI is often used in war to speed things up, a recipe for unwanted outcomes. Faster decisions are made at a greater scale and with less human scrutiny. The last decade and a half has seen military use of AI become even more opaque, she says. And secrecy is baked into how AI labs operate even before the warfare applications.

GASPING IN 4 DAYS?

How Iran Humbled US-Israel's Million-Dollar War Inventory

Israel claimed Iran to be an 'existential threat', while the US claimed Iran to pose an 'imminent threat' to its mainland through the latter's rapidly growing capability in ballistic missiles. Both launched a pre-emptive air campaign on February 28, targeting key infrastructure in Iran and also taking out its top leadership in a well-timed and executed intelligence operation. Obviously, the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, was the top prize for both the US and Israel. The campaign was expected to pulverise Iran in a matter of days, decapitate its entire political and military leadership and orchestrate a change of regime in Iran in no time. However, what has been witnessed in the four days has shocked the world and has gone well beyond the wildest calculations of American and Israeli generals. The Iranian counterattack has been focused and ferocious, unmindful of the mighty armies that it is opposing. The death of its Supreme Leader and over 40 top generals has not deterred it but has, on the contrary, strengthened its resolve to fight back. The inadequacy of the American security umbrella in the Gulf region has been exposed as the American defensive systems get overwhelmed and outnumbered. US bases and embassies are being vacated, energy supplies across the Persian Gulf have come to a halt, and there is fear that if the conflict prolongs, the costs that it imposes will soon become untenable for Israel and the US.



Low-Cost For The Win?
Iran is fighting an uneven battle against Israel-US. There is no military matchup when Iran is up against the most modern and lethal militaries in the world. However, military superiority comes at a cost. This war is about fighting with stand-off weapon platforms such as missiles, drones and fighter jets. A comparison in costs is revealing. Some estimates suggest that the US may have incurred a cost of around USD 779 million in the first 24 hours of Operation Epic Fury. The cost estimates suggest an overall expense of around USD 1.24 billion in the first

three days. It may not seem too much given that the US military budget is around USD 1 trillion. But the figures give an idea about the cost of a military campaign of this size. Even so, it is not the overall expense that matters as much as the cost of each weapon platform pitched against what Iran is firing and paying for. The American Patriot and Tomahawk missiles cost between USD 1.3 million apiece, whereas an average Iranian ballistic missile is priced at merely USD 800,000 to 1 million. Similarly, the MQ-9 Reaper drone costs a staggering USD 30 million compared to the Shahed drone of Iran costing merely USD 30-50K. This huge disparity in costs is resulting in double trouble for Israel and the US. First is the heavy costs, and second is the shorter numbers being produced annually, as a result of which replacement in battlefields, where large numbers are required, becomes problematic.

Will US Run Out Of Inventory?
In the ongoing war, in just four days of battle, there are fears that the inventory of Patriot and Tomahawk missiles may run out soon. The availability of Patriot missiles in the war zone is estimated to be around 600-800 only. Also, for any incoming

missile from Iran, four to six interceptors are fired. With an estimate of 150-200 missile interceptors already fired, it is feared that Israel and the US may run out of interceptors in the next four to seven days. There are reports that the US is contemplating shifting some Patriot missiles from Japan and Korea to augment the inventory. Similarly, the Tomahawk missiles, too, may start facing criticality, especially if the battle intensifies in the seas. The production rate of around 600-650 Patriot missiles annually cannot keep pace with the requirements of a war where almost 250-400 missiles are required every week. Iran knows it and has prepared for it. It has huge missiles and drone inventories, many of them safely kept in underground silos deep inside mountains where American air or missile strikes cannot reach. As per some estimates, Iran's inventory of missiles of various types ranges from 20,000 to 50,000; its drones, too, are in thousands. Knowing the asymmetric advantage it has, Iran is steadily firing a combination of old and new missiles and drones, keeping the Israeli and American defences occupied, knowing fully well that its inventory could last months, if not longer. Plus, it is

producing dozens of missiles every month, enough to keep replenishing stocks for months to come. The costs that it is imposing both in terms of expenditure and availability of numbers for critical missiles is becoming a challenge for Israel and the US.

The Human Cost
The cost of body bags is yet another key determinant in the outcome of war. Although President Trump hinted at a number of casualties in the ongoing conflict, the return of body bags in 'away wars' is a big 'No' in America. The early signs of despair are already to be seen as President Trump as well as the Secretary of War counted in their address on March 2 the three lives lost. This was just the third day of war, and they promised to honour their sacrifice with a medal of honour. With many more casualties expected, especially as Iranian missiles are successfully hitting US embassies, bases, ammunition depots and even hotels where evacuated soldiers are staying, this could soon become a cost that President Trump will not be able to bear much longer. Similar is the case with Israel, although it can claim to have a higher threshold, especially as it is fighting an 'existential threat'.

Nepal Elections: New Beginnings Or Same Old, Same Old?

Nepal is all set to vote tomorrow for its first election since the September 2025 'Gen Z' protests and the third after the promulgation of the 2015 constitution. The candidates will compete for 275 parliamentary seats, of which 165 members will be selected through the direct first past the post system (FPTP), whereas 110 will be selected through the proportional representation system. Of the 120 parties which had initially registered, 68 fielded their candidates, with a total of 3,406 candidates contesting in the direct FPTP election. The elections are happening almost two years before their previously scheduled date of November/December 2027 owing to the Gen Z protests which led to the resignation of the then Prime Minister, K.P. Sharma Oli from the helm and spearheaded an overarching overhaul in how politics is practiced in the country. As the 18,903,689 voters prepare to vote tomorrow, expectations abound about the extent to which these elections will change the trajectory of Nepal's politics. What's At Stake? Politics in Nepal has generally been characterised as a 'game of musical chairs', a reflection of power switching hands amongst the three major parties and their leaders: the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) [CPN (MC)], led by Puspa Kamal Dahal Prachanda, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist) [CPN (UML)] and its leader K.P. Sharma Oli and the Nepali Congress (NC) led by Sher Bahadur Deuba. Over the last three and a half decades, these parties and their leaders have hatched fragile coalitions with each other, hinged on flimsy and self-aggrandizing power-sharing arrangements in order to retain their control on the government. In 2017, the CPN (UML) emerged as the biggest party whereas 2022 saw the NC rising to the top. Ultimately by July 2024, the CPN (UML) and the NC were leading a coalition government with Oli as the Prime Minister. It was this government which was overthrown after the Gen Z protests. Previously, much of the dis-



cussions preceding the elections would focus on the formation of pre-poll alliances which would quickly dismantle once a particular party gained the highest votes. These making and breaking of coalitions has led to a situation where no one Prime Minister has successfully completed their five-year term in office. This saturation with the same set of leaders and their failure to bring in any reforms in the country also led to the emergence of certain new actors in the last elections in 2022. The Rashtriya Swatantra Party (RSP) under Rabi Lamichhane emerged as the fourth-largest party. But the mood before the elections this year is different. The political battlefield is now starkly different yet distinctly similar to how it used to be in previous elections. Of the established parties, only the CPN (UML) has failed to bring in a fresh change in leadership, with Oli retaining his position as the chair of the party and its prime-ministerial face. He is contesting from his home constituency Jhapa-5, where he has previously won six times. When the protests broke out last year, Oli had framed them as an external attempt to destabilise his government and threaten Nepal's sovereignty and integrity. He maintained his strong rhetoric and refused to take responsibility for the violent crackdown on the protestors

which led to the death of 19 people on day 1 of the protests. He subsequently resigned, but in the period between his resignation and the elections, he kept his tempo high about the ulterior motive of the conspirators who conducted the protests. He rejected the dissolution of the House of Representatives and urged the Supreme Court to restore it while calling the interim government illegal. Despite this, he is now contesting the elections in hopes of retaining the prime ministerial seat even as the anti-incumbency sentiment in the country is at its peak. The NC on the other hand has seen some degree of change, with the party's leader, Sher Bahadur Deuba, who is no longer contesting from his home constituency of Dadeldhura being pushed to the back-seat and the emergence of Gagan Thapa as the party chair. The senior Deuba, and his wife, Arzoo Rana Deuba who was the foreign minister in the previous government came under the ire of the protesting groups last year. The acrimony between Deuba and Thapa had been going on for a while, particularly since the NC's decision to align with the CPN (UML). Deuba's reticence to hold a special convention despite support from his party members and Thapa's decision to organise a special convention despite that.

The Middle East Inferno, And Why India Can Play Mediator

In the shadow of perennially shifting alliances, the recent eruption of hostilities between Iran and a coalition led by Israel and the United States marks a pivotal moment in the geopolitics of the Middle East. With the targeted assassination of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the region stands at a crucial crossroads where retaliation and survival intersect, creating a tumultuous environment that threatens to engulf much of the Gulf. Though Iran has long been viewed as a formidable leader in shaping regional politics, its ambitions now wield a dangerous, double-edged sword. Perceived by Iran as the vassal states of the US, the six Gulf Arab monarchies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) find themselves ensnared in the conflagration, suffering immensely in the face of Iranian vengeance. Diversification Of Hydrocarbon Sector Having spent over a decade as an Editor of various media groups in the Gulf region, I witnessed the massive diversification out of the hydrocarbon sector and the transformation of some of these Gulf states from close quarters. During the first Gulf War of the 1990s, the Middle East practically lived off hydrocarbons: oil and gas. In sharp contrast today, about 77 per cent of the UAE's economy is based on non-hydrocarbon sectors: finance, technology, tourism, real estate, sports and education. The corresponding figures for Oman are 73 per cent, 66 per cent for Qatar and 57 per cent for Saudi Arabia. In the Global Financial Centre Index (GFCI) 38 Rank, for 2025, Dubai was ranked 11th out of 38 leading financial hubs globally, ahead of Frankfurt, Washington DC, Geneva, Tokyo, Zurich, Boston, Paris and others. To achieve such a remarkable structural transformation, all the Gulf countries have projected an image of safety and stability, as champions of "soft power." The days of relative stability, stretching from the 1990s to 2020, appear as a utopia of the past. In sharp contrast, today the Gulf countries, pounded by Iranian drones and missiles, appear as a desert inferno,



wherein each missile and drone strike sends ripples through the global energy supply and shakes the very foundations of regional economies. Iran's Fight For Survival Iran's response to the unprovoked aggression has been vehement and uncompromising. The drone strikes - targeting oil refineries, transport, and even iconic landmarks - serve not only as acts of defiance but as desperate measures in a fight for survival. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial artery for global oil transport, sends shockwaves through international markets, driving gas prices to unprecedented heights. The earth beneath the rich sands of the Gulf no longer feels stable; instead, it reverberates with the cries of economies on the brink, as investment flees and the prospect for growth dims. The Spectre Of War The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, once a beacon of energy wealth, finds its giant oil refining facility at Ras Tanura under siege, its economic backbone threatened by Iranian hostility. With every attack on US embassies across the region - be it in Riyadh or Kuwait - the landscape of safety and security that Gulf states had long cultivated crumbles. The closures of strategic sites are akin to death knells, resonating through the halls of power and striking fear into the hearts of investors. Half of Dubai, once a flour-

ishing hub of tourism and commerce, is scrambling for exits, as the spectre of a protracted war looms large. Ironically, the Gulf monarchies - despite their relative wealth, sovereign wealth funds and modernised economies - possess much more to lose in this newly minted chaos. Over the past quarter-century, they have diversified their economies away from a sole reliance on fossil fuels, yet the very infrastructure that allows this transformation is now vulnerable to threat. UAE's economy, for instance, is now predominantly non-hydrocarbon, driven by finance, tourism, and technology. Yet, when drones strike AWS facilities and disrupt critical services, the progress they made appears ephemeral, caught in the crossfire of escalating conflict. Psychological Toll On Gulf Monarchies The psychological toll on these nations is profound. The attacks sow seeds of doubt about safety and stability - qualities that were once a bedrock of their relationship with the United States. The image of the Gulf as a sanctuary for expatriates and tourists disintegrates under the weight of a sullied reputation. Faced with an uncertain horizon, nations like Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, UAE and Oman must urgently advocate for peace, seeking to quell the flames of unrest that threaten their very existence.

UK stock market calms but oil prices rise over fears Iran war may drag on

UK stock markets rose on Wednesday despite continuing energy price volatility over fears the US-Israel war with Iran may drag on. In London, the FTSE 100 index edged up alongside rises on markets in Germany and France, contrasting with Asian shares which fell for a third day. Oil prices increased by more than 1% to about \$83.50 a barrel, as Saudi Arabia's defence ministry reported an attempted drone attack on the Ras Tanura oil refinery - the second time this week it has been targeted. David Miles, committee member at the Office for Budget Responsibility, the government's independent forecaster, said if oil and gas prices remain elevated, it would add to inflation in the UK. However, he said it was important to note the increases were "nowhere near as large" as those seen after Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine four years ago. "If prices stayed where they were at the moment, probably we're talking about an impact on the level of prices in the UK maybe of 1% or so," Miles said. Brent crude prices have jumped by 15% since Israel and the US began bombing Iran on



Saturday and Tehran responded by attacking neighbouring Arab countries. At the same time, one of the biggest producers in the world state-run QatarEnergy suspended production of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG). Gas prices continued to be volatile on Wednesday, hovering around 127p per therm by midday, below Tuesday's high of 170p. Around a fifth of the world's oil and gas usually flows through the Strait of Hormuz - a narrow waterway between Iran and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). But traffic through the Strait of Hormuz has almost entirely

halted following Iran's threats to "set fire" to ships. According to Lloyd's List Intelligence, about 200 tankers have been effectively stranded, while insurance premiums - particularly on vessels considered American, British or Israeli - have risen significantly. "On Tuesday, President Donald Trump said the US would provide risk insurance "at a very reasonable price" and use the Navy to protect oil tankers "if necessary". However, experts warned his assurances might not be enough to ease companies' concerns, and the president did not detail how an escort through the

strait would work. Lindsay James, investment strategist at wealth management firm Quilter, told the BBC she believed markets had taken an "optimistic view" of the situation, because in reality Iran was well equipped to repel any ships using the strait. "Shipping companies, insurers, crew members, potentially, are probably going to be reluctant to do this... It's not really feasible to think that that is going to be the solution to reopening energy supplies," she said. "The solution is going to be a peace agreement, and it feels like we're some way away from that." US Treasury Secretary Scott

Bessent said on Wednesday that crude oil markets "are very well supplied". Stock markets have fallen sharply since the US and Israel attacked Iran over the weekend, and many Asian stock markets have been hit particularly hard as the region imports large amounts of energy from the Middle East. South Korea and Thailand stock markets were forced to temporarily halt trading after plunging by more than 8% and triggering so-called circuit breakers, which aim to avoid panic-selling. James Hosie, oil and gas equity analyst at Shore Capital said roughly 80% of Qatar's LNG goes to Asian markets. "Those consumers will now be bidding up the price of LNG cargoes to secure alternative supplies, as is now being seen with the spike in Asian LNG prices," he said. "There obviously is a knock-on effect to the price of gas elsewhere, including the UK, where LNG helps balance demand with supply." Risk to UK inflation and interest rates in the UK, Chancellor Rachel Reeves is set to meet with North Sea energy bosses on Wednesday afternoon to discuss the implications of the Middle East conflict "and work with them to manage this uncertain period".

WEST ASIA TURMOIL DRAGS STOCK MARKETS, SENSEX TUMBLES 1,123 POINTS

Mumbai: Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty closed more than 1 per cent lower on Wednesday, March 4, in tandem with a weak trend in Asian markets as the conflict in West Asia intensified, driving oil prices higher. Falling for the fourth straight session, the 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 1,122.66 points or 1.40 per cent to settle at 79,116.19. During the day, it crashed 1,795.65 points or 2.23 per cent to 78,443.20 but recovered some of the losses in the second half of the session. The 50-share NSE Nifty dived 385.20 points or 1.55 per cent to end at 24,460.50, marking its third straight session of losses and logging the lowest closing level in the past six months. During the day, it dropped 560.3 points or 2.25 per cent to 24,305.40. From the Sensex pack, Tata Steel tanked 6.76 per cent, followed by Larsen & Toubro (4.53 per cent). Bajaj Finance, UltraTech Cement, NTPC, InterGlobe Aviation, Bajaj Finserv and Kotak Mahindra Bank were also among the laggards. Bharti Airtel, Infosys and Tech Mahindra were the gainers. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, jumped 3.08 per cent to USD 83.91 per barrel. "Global risk sentiment remained fragile



amid ongoing tensions in the Middle East and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, which kept oil prices volatile. Indian equities mirrored the broader risk-off environment due to the impact of inflation and the potential for higher CAD. "The continued depreciation of the INR also remains a key concern, while incremental foreign outflows lead to near-term volatility in the market," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said. The rupee slumped to an all-time low of 92.35 against US dollar on Wednesday, weighed down by spiking crude oil prices. The BSE smallcap select index tumbled 2.42 per cent and midcap

select index dropped 2.10 per cent. Among sectoral indices, metal plunged 4 per cent, BSE PSU Bank (3.50 per cent), industrials (3.29 per cent), realty (3.16 per cent), commodities (3.12 per cent), capital goods (2.64 per cent), power (2.59 per cent), services (2.25 per cent) and energy (2.23 per cent). A total of 3,245 stocks declined, while 1,053 advanced and 135 remained unchanged on the BSE. Asian markets ended with deep cuts. South Korea's Kospi tumbled 12 per cent. Japan's Nikkei 225, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index also ended significantly lower. European markets were trading in positive territory.

TikTok won't protect DMs with controversial privacy tech, saying it would put users at risk

TikTok will not introduce end-to-end encryption (E2EE) - the controversial privacy feature used by nearly all its rivals - arguing it makes users less safe. E2EE means only the sender and recipient of a direct message can view its contents, making it the most secure form of communication available to the general public. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Messenger and X have embraced it because they say their priority is maximising user privacy. But critics have said E2EE makes it harder to stop harmful content spreading online, because it means tech firms and law enforcement have no way of viewing any material sent in direct messages. The situation is made more complex because TikTok has long faced accusations that ties to the Chinese state may put users' data at risk. TikTok has consistently denied this, but earlier this year the social media firm's US operations were separated from its global business on the orders of US lawmakers. TikTok has not commented before on why it chooses not to use E2EE. But



the company has now told the BBC it believes the technology prevents police and safety teams from being able to read direct messages if they needed to. It confirmed its approach in a briefing to the BBC about security at its London office - saying it wanted to protect users, especially young people, from harm. It described this stance as a deliberate decision to set itself apart from rivals. TikTok, which claims to have 30 million monthly users in the UK and more than a billion worldwide, has faced scrutiny over its data protection practices. The social video platform is headquartered in Los Angeles and Singapore, but owned by Chinese tech giant

ByteDance. Social media analyst Matt Navarra said TikTok's decision to "swim against the tide" is a savvy one - but comes with "pretty combustible optics". "Grooming and harassment risks are very real in DMs (direct messages) so TikTok now can credibly argue that it's prioritising proactive safety over 'privacy absolutism' which is a pretty powerful soundbite," he told the BBC. But Navarra said the move also "puts TikTok out of step with global privacy expectations" and might reinforce wariness for some about its ownership. E2EE has been hailed by privacy experts as the best way to protect conversations from hackers, corporations and

even repressive authorities trying to snoop on users. Which apps use end-to-end encryption? E2EE is the default technology used in Signal, WhatsApp, Facebook DMs/ Messenger, Apple's iMessage and Google Messages Instagram is in the process of making it default for DMs X (formerly Twitter) DMs are E2EE-like but some critics argue the platform's system is not as secure as the industry standard. It is offered as a choice on Telegram but not as default. Snapchat uses it for DM pictures and videos. Snap previously said it plans to roll out more widely to include text content too. On Monday, Discord announced that voice and video calls will soon be E2EE as default. End-to-end encryption has been criticised by governments, police forces and child protection charities. They warn it allows criminals to harm users and share illegal content without authorities or platforms being able to investigate the content exchanged. TikTok insists all direct messages are still secured using standard encryption, similar to services like Gmail.

TARGET TO PULL CEREALS WITH SYNTHETIC COLOURS FROM ITS SHELVES

Target has said it will stop selling breakfast cereals that are made with synthetic colours by the end of May, marking the latest response by a retailer to backlash against ultra-processed foods. The US retail giant's announcement on Friday follows commitments from several food companies to gradually phase out artificial dyes amid pressure from the Trump administration. Artificial dyes have become a key target in a broader crackdown on processed foods under US Health Secretary Robert F Kennedy Jr and his Make America Healthy Again movement. But shifting consumer preferences, as shoppers scrutinise ingredients in packaged foods, have encouraged food makers and retailers to reassess products. "We know consumers are increasingly prioritizing healthier lifestyles, and we're moving quickly to evolve our offerings to meet their needs," Cara Sylvester, Target's chief merchandising officer, said in a statement. Other retailers have taken steps in recent months to phase out synthetic colours. Walmart



last year announced plans to stop using synthetic dyes and dozens of other ingredients in its private-label food products by January 2027. Retailers are adjusting the products on their shelves at the same time that food manufacturers are rethinking their ingredients. Political pressure has contributed to commitments from packaged food companies, including General Mills, Kraft Heinz and Conagra Brands, to remove artificial dyes in the years ahead. But Target's deadline to change its cereal offerings - by this spring - puts it ahead of some rivals and

ahead of some food companies' multi-year timelines. As of now, cereals made without synthetic dyes already account for 85% of Target's cereal sales, the company said. Target declined to say whether cereal brands will adjust their formulas to accommodate Target's policy. A spokesperson for General Mills, whose cereal brands include Cheerios and Lucky Charms, said the company remains committed to removing certified synthetic colours from all US cereals by this summer. WK Kellogg, the company behind Froot Loops and Rice

Krispies, did not immediately respond to a BBC inquiry. The food maker has previously said it plans to remove artificial dyes from its cereals by the end of 2027. Last April, Kennedy announced that the US would ban eight commonly used artificial food dyes. The US health secretary and his Make America Healthy Again movement have also called for companies to remove ingredients such as corn syrup, seed oils and artificial dyes from their products, linking them to health problems. Coca-Cola last summer agreed to use real cane sugar in its drinks sold in the US.

Rupee slumps to all-time low of 92.16 against US dollar

Mumbai: The rupee slumped 67 paise to close at an all-time low of 92.16 against US dollar on Wednesday, March 4, weighed down by spiking crude oil prices in the wake of the Iran crisis. Forex traders said the dollar index crossed 98 levels on the risk-off situation prevailing all around the globe amid the US-Iran crisis, further pressuring the rupee. Moreover, massive selling in domestic equity markets and withdrawal of foreign funds further dragged the Indian currency down, they said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 92.05 and touched an all-time intraday low of 92.35 against the greenback. The currency ended the session at an all-time low of 92.16 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a steep loss of 67 paise from the previous closing level. On Monday, March 2, the rupee saw a steep loss of 41 paise to settle at 91.49 against the US dollar. The



forex Market was closed on Tuesday on account of Holi. "A sharp escalation in Middle East conflict and the consequent spike in oil prices have reduced investor risk appetite. Higher oil prices increase inflation concerns and fiscal pressure on India (a major oil importer), leading to selling in bonds and rising yields," Anil Kumar Bhansali, head of treasury and executive director, Finrex Treasury Advisors LLP, said. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six cur-

rencies, was trading 0.23 per cent lower at 98.82. "The dollar index crossed 98 levels comfortably on the risk-off situation prevailing all around the globe with stocks and bond markets getting hit badly, along with gold and silver, with predominance of the dollar, Bhansali said. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was up 1.29 per cent at 82.46 per barrel in futures trade, after the US attacks on Iran and Iran's retaliatory measures as threats to energy flows through the Strait of Hormuz continued to underpin disruption worries.

Remote work, offices shut: Tech giants scramble to respond as Middle East tensions escalate

Some of the world's largest companies are moving to protect employees and facilities in the Middle East during the US-Israel war with Iran. Amazon, Google, Snap and Nvidia are among the firms to have implemented emergency protocols as the safety of thousands of their workers across the region is brought into sharp focus. The conflict has also raised fears of global tech shortages, but chip leader Nvidia says it is "not currently experiencing any supply chain disruptions". Francisco Jeronimo, a specialist covering the Middle Eastern and European markets for data firm IDC, said the escalation raised "red flags" for technology companies which have committed "billions of dollars" to the region. Since the US-Israeli attacks began on Saturday, Iran has launched a series of strikes on US bases and its allies across the region. Images authenticated by BBC Verify show the US consulate building in Dubai in flames after being hit by a drone on



Tuesday evening, Nvidia said in a statement it was keeping a close watch on its operational footprint, but would not confirm reports that it had temporarily shut its Dubai office. The company, best known for making computer chips for AI companies, said it was "managing our supply chain to address changing conditions". A spokesperson for the company said: "regarding our operations in Israel

and the Middle East, our primary concern is for the safety of our employees, their families, and all those affected during this difficult time". Amazon, meanwhile, has begun an assessment of its regional sites, which spans corporate offices, fulfilment centres, delivery stations, and quick commerce outlets. "We are adjusting operations in response to the evolving situation, including temporary

pauses where necessary," an Amazon spokesperson confirmed, noting that the safety of employees and partners is the company's "top priority". On Monday Amazon Web Services (AWS) confirmed drones hit three of its facilities in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain. The incidents happened on Sunday morning, with the cloud computing business saying at the time that "objects" had hit a

data centre in the UAE, creating "sparks and fire". Also on Sunday, AWS said it was investigating power and connectivity issues at a facility in Bahrain. Amazon has also asked its corporate workforce in the region to work remotely - a move mirrored by social media company Snap. Snap told the BBC that it is urging staff to follow advice from both local authorities and foreign embassies, including specific instructions for shelter-in-place orders and departure recommendations. Google said it has activated security and safety protocols and remains in contact with its Middle East teams. Like its industry peers, the search giant is advising staff to rely on official government channels as the conflict continues. For now, tech's biggest players are adopting a "wait and see" attitude as the situation unfolds. Francisco Jeronimo said that while it was likely we would see "companies slow or temporarily pause new investments" to see how the situation evolves.

US submarine sinks Iranian warship with torpedo in Indian Ocean, as Pentagon releases footage of strike

The bodies of 80 people on board the Iranian ship that was sunk in the Indian Ocean have been found, Defence Ministry Secretary Air Vice Marshal Sampath Thuyyakontha tells BBC Sinhala. US allies hoping for a quick end to the war with Iran will be dismayed by the latest update on Operation Epic Fury from senior administration and military officials. The war is "far from over," Gen Dan Caine, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters on Wednesday at a briefing alongside Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth. Caine didn't lay out a specific timeline for exactly how long the military campaign might continue. But he also said that the US planned to strike "progressively deeper into Iranian territory." The comments followed statements from President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio earlier this week that the US has not delivered its hardest blow to the Iranian regime. The president and



other advisers have offered a wide range of reasons for attacking Iran. But they have consistently signaled the war won't be short, and their updates this week suggest nothing has changed. What the administration hasn't addressed is how a protracted conflict will impact the rest of the region — and its potential political fallout back home. Polls show the war is broadly unpopular in the US. The longer it continues, the more

damaging it might be to the White House and Republicans heading into the midterm elections. Ship traffic through the Strait of Hormuz is continuing to reduce, with many gas and oil tankers reluctant to risk coming under Iranian attack while transiting the vital waterway. Claire Jungman, from energy intelligence company Vortexa, says an average of 24 tankers a day transited the waterway between January and the war

breaking out. Maritime intelligence firm Kpler has told BBC Verify that vessel movements through the strait dropped by around 90% between 2 and 3 March, compared with the average for 21 to 27 Feb. The sharp decline comes as major maritime insurers have pulled back or cancelled the war-risk coverage for ships operating in the Gulf, making passage through the narrow strait — which carries roughly a fifth of the

world's traded oil — significantly more hazardous. In the past 24 hours, BBC Verify has identified at least two cargo vessels whose tracking data indicates they travelled east to west through the Strait of Hormuz into the Gulf. Recently, the signal of onboard trackers for a number of vessels — including one flagged to India — have disappeared or have shown evidence of being jammed. Hegseth said the US military had sunk "an Iranian warship" in the Indian Ocean, with a torpedo. He didn't name the ship, but it follows earlier confirmation from the Sri Lankan navy that it rescued 32 people after a distress call from the Iranian IRIS Dena, with around 140 people on board currently missing. The Iranian regime "are toast", declared Hegseth, who said that the US was "winning, decisively, devastatingly and without mercy." He suggested more military action was imminent, stating that "more and larger waves are coming" — this was echoed by Caine

who announced that the military would "now begin to expand inland, striking progressively deeper into Iranian territory." Hegseth also says Iran tried "to kill" Donald Trump, telling reporters that the US "hunted down and killed" the "leader of the unit who attempted to assassinate" the president. Asked about the bombing of a girls school in Minab in Iran, Hegseth said that the US was "investigating" and refused to be drawn on if there was intelligence about which country's munition had hit the school. HMS Dragon, a UK warship, is expected to sail from Portsmouth next week. It has just come out of maintenance and was earmarked to carry out a different mission before yesterday's decision to send her to the eastern Mediterranean. Dragon is currently being loaded with ammunition in Portsmouth but is not expected to sail towards Cyprus this week. Two Royal Navy Wildcat helicopters.

South Africa's long-serving former defence minister and former Robben Island prisoner dies



South Africa's former defence minister and anti-apartheid campaigner Mosiuoa Lekota has died at the age of 77. He played a key role in the struggle against the racist system of apartheid and was imprisoned on Robben Island alongside former President Nelson Mandela. Lekota went on to become chairperson of the African National Congress (ANC) but broke away to form a rival party, the Congress of the People (Cope), citing allegations of corruption in the party which has led South Africa since 1994. He died after a "period of illness", Cope said in a statement. President Cyril

Ramaphosa paid tribute to the "freedom fighter and a servant of the people". "His life was one of resilience, courage, and steadfast belief in justice," Ramaphosa said in a statement. Lekota was one of South Africa's longest-serving ministers, heading the defence ministry for a decade between 1998-2008. He also served as the chairperson of the ANC for a decade and was the first premier of the newly-established Free State province after 1994, when South Africa entered the democratic era. Lekota, nicknamed "Terror" due to his prowess on the football field, left the ANC in 2008 shortly after former South African President Thabo Mbeki was removed by the party. Among his reasons for leaving was disillusionment with how the ANC was governing and mounting allegations of corruption against some of its senior leaders. He founded Cope in 2008 alongside another former ANC leader Mbhazima Shilowa.

Spain's Pedro Sánchez hits back at Trump threat to sever trade saying 'no to war'



Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has delivered a strong rebuttal to US President Donald Trump's threat to end trade with Spain by restating his opposition to war and what he called the "breakdown of international law". In a 10-minute televised address, Sánchez reflected on the wars in Ukraine and Gaza as well as the Iraq War more than 20 years ago and said the Spanish government's position could be summed up as "no to war". Trump threatened to impose a full trade embargo on Spain in response to Madrid's refusal to allow the US to use the jointly-run bases at Morón and Rota for strikes on Iran. "Spain has been terrible," Trump said during a meeting with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz on Tuesday. "We're going to cut off all trade with Spain. We don't want anything to do with Spain," he added. Merz said later he had told Trump very clearly that he could not conclude a separate trade agreement with Germany or all of Europe but not with Spain. In response to the US economic threat, the Élysée Palace said French President

Emmanuel Macron had conveyed his "solidarity" with Spain, during a phone conversation with Sánchez on Wednesday. European Council President António Costa also said he had spoken to the Spanish leader "to express the EU's full solidarity". Trump accused Spain on Tuesday of being a "terrible partner" in Nato for failing to increase its defence budget in line with a target of 5% of economic output (GDP). Earlier this year Sánchez drew Trump's anger by speaking out against the US military incursion into Venezuela. In his televised address from the prime minister's Madrid residence at La Moncloa on Wednesday, Sánchez said the government was studying economic measures to counter the impact of the conflict on Spaniards, although he avoided directly referring to Trump's trade threat. "The question is not if we are on the side of the ayatollahs — nobody is. The question is whether we are in favour of peace and international legality." "You cannot answer one illegality with another, because that is how the great catastrophes of humanity begin."

NIGERIAN DOCTORS SUSPENDED OVER DEATH OF ADICHIE'S SON



Nigeria's medical council has provisionally suspended the director of a private hospital and two other doctors following the death of the 21-month-old son of renowned author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Nkanu Adichie-Esege, one of twins, died on 7 January after complications arose during preparatory medical procedures at Euracare Hospital in Lagos. The Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria (MDCN) investigation panel established a prima facie case of

medical negligence against Euracare and Atlantis Hospital over the child's management. The three doctors have all been suspended from practising medicine pending the determination of their cases by a disciplinary tribunal. Dr Munir Bature, publicity secretary for the Nigeria Medical Association, confirmed the suspensions to the BBC. "What will ultimately happen to those affected will be determined after another panel sits on their case," he said. He added that they could permanently lose their licences. The doctors have not commented. Butare encouraged Nigerians to report any perceived wrongdoing by medical personnel so the council could intervene.

Greek court upholds criminal organisation verdict on neo-Nazi Golden Dawn

An appeal court in Athens has upheld the 2020 convictions of 42 defendants linked to the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party. Founder Nikos Mihaloliakos and six other leading Golden Dawn officials were found guilty of "belonging to and running a criminal organisation" under the guise of a political party. Another 24 defendants, who included 11 former MPs, were found guilty of joining the organisation. Further convictions were upheld for the 2013 murder of left-wing musician and activist Pavlos Fyssas and the savage beating of a group of Egyptian fishermen in Athens. The defendants face sentences of up to 15 years in prison, although only two of the 42 involved



in the appeal were in court to hear the judges deliver their verdict. A crowd of more than 200 gathered outside the tribunal and welcomed the guilty verdicts. The appeals trial started in 2022 and last December prosecutor Kyriaki Stefanatou called on the court to uphold the original guilty verdicts. Golden Dawn, she said, was a "gen-

uine child of Nazi ideology and this is the motivation for their actions." "Nazi ideology is the motivation for the criminal action that is carried out against political dissidents and immigrants," Stefanatou added. Golden Dawn entered the Greek parliament in 2012 at the height of Greece's economic crisis, when it came third in the election with 18 MPs elected. It took advantage of growing public discontent fuelled by corruption and mismanagement by the established political parties, as well as drastic cuts to spending enforced by international lenders and a rise in immigration to the EU. In 2013, MP Ilias Panagiotaros told the BBC that Greek society was "ready... [for] a new type of civil war. On one side will be nationalists like us, and Greeks who want our country to be as it used to be. On the other will be illegal immigrants and anarchists." Golden Dawn's popularity soon waned after Fyssas' murder, for which some 22 members were arrested, including six MPs and party leader Nikos Mihaloliakos.

US AND ECUADOR FORCES LAUNCH OPERATION TO FIGHT DRUG TRAFFICKING

Ecuadorian and US forces have launched operations against what it said were designated terrorist organisations in the South American country, the US military's Southern Command said on Tuesday. The Southern Command said the action was aimed at tackling illicit drug trafficking, but did not provide more details in a statement on X. The announcement comes a day after Ecuador's President Daniel Noboa said the US was among "regional allies" taking part in a "new phase" of Ecuador's war on the drug cartels. Noboa says



around 70% of the world's cocaine now flows through Ecuador's huge ports, making it a lucrative location for drug-trafficking gangs. It also neighbours Colombia and Peru, the world's two largest producers of cocaine. The latest opera-

tions come four months after Ecuadorians dashed US hopes of expanding its presence in the eastern Pacific region by voting against allowing the return of foreign military bases in the country. The referendum result was a blow to Noboa, a close ally of US President Donald Trump, who is trying to fight organised crime and reduce soaring violence. In recent years, the country has become one of the world's biggest drug-trafficking hotspots. On Monday, Noboa held talks in Quito with US Southern Command chief Francis Donovan and Mark Schafer, head of US Special Operations in Central and South America and the Caribbean. During the meeting, they discussed plans for information sharing and operational coordination at airports and seaports, Noboa's office said in a statement.

What to know about the 'two sessions', China's biggest political meeting



The stage is set for China's biggest political gathering — carefully choreographed annual meetings of the political advisory body and the rubber-stamp national legislature. The "two sessions", which started on Wednesday and typically run for one to two weeks, signal the priorities of the world's second-largest economy. Observers will be watching if China aims for ambitious growth targets despite struggling to lift domestic consumption, and will pore over its new Five Year Plan to understand Xi Jinping's roadmap for the country. Looming over the event are the recent purges of high-level military officials who have been dismissed as part of Xi's long-running anti-corruption campaign. What are the 'two sessions'? The term refers to two different meetings. The first is that of the advisory body, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), which begins on Wednesday. It's 2,000-plus members are drawn from various sectors, and not just the Communist Party. Its discussions offer insight into key policy debates, but it has no legislative power. That technically

rests with the National People's Congress or NPC, which will convene on Thursday. Although its extensive authority includes making laws, amending the constitution and approving state budgets, it functions as little more than a rubber-stamp parliament, approving decisions made behind closed doors by the Communist Party. Established in 1954, the NPC meets only once a year. Some 3,000 delegates from all provinces, autonomous regions, municipalities and branches of the government, including the armed forces, will be in Beijing to attend the NPC. Most of them are party members or government officials, and they each hold office for a term of five years. Real influence lies within a smaller standing committee elected from congress delegates, which meets every couple of months. The current standing committee comprises 175 members and is chaired by Zhao Leji, who is also part of the Communist Party's politburo standing committee — China's equivalent of a cabinet. But that does not mean it is not important to watch for those who want to understand where China is heading.

MP says husband has not broken law, after arrests over China spying

Scottish Labour MP Joani Reid has said "I am not part of my husband's business activities" after three men were arrested on suspicion of spying for China along. Reid said she has "never seen anything" to make her suspect her spouse, David Taylor, has broken any law. Earlier, the Metropolitan Police said three men, aged 39, 43 and 68, were arrested in London and Wales as part of a counter-terrorism policing investigation under the National Security Act. There is no "imminent or direct threat to the public", the Met added, and all three suspects are being held in custody. Reid, who represents East Kilbride and Strathaven, said in a state-



ment: "I have never seen anything to make me suspect my husband has broken any law. "I am not part of my husband's business activities and neither I nor my children are part of this investigation, and we should not be treated by media organisations as though we are. "Above all I expect media organisations

to respect my children's privacy." Reid added that she had never been to China nor had she ever spoken on any China-related matters in the House of Commons. "I have never asked a question on China-related matters. As far as I am aware I have never met any Chinese businesses whilst I have been an MP, any Chinese diplomats

or government employees, nor raised any concern with ministers or anyone else on behalf of, even coincidentally, Chinese interests. "I am a social democrat who believes in freedom of expression, free trade unions and free elections. I am not any sort of admirer or apologist for the Chinese Communist party's dictatorship." The Met Police said the 39-year-old man was arrested at an address in London; while the 68-year-old man was arrested in Powys, Wales and the 43-year-old man was arrested in Pontyclun, Wales. All three have been detained under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act and remain in police custody, the Met added.

Pregnant women's brains shed grey matter to prime them for motherhood, study suggests

"Baby brain" is a cliché long-used to describe women becoming forgetful and feeling less capable during pregnancy. But a recent study — the largest to date — indicates that pregnancy has a profound structural impact on brains and offers new clues into the neurological changes in mums-to-be. It suggests that grey matter — the nerve-rich part of the brain involved in processing information, emotions and empathy — decreases by an average of nearly 5% during pregnancy. But rather than being a cause for concern, these changes may be beneficial when it comes to caring for newborns, say scientists working on the project in Spain. One of the dozens of women, now a new

mum, who took part in the study told us she welcomed the findings and was "tired of pregnant women being infantilised". "Rather than becoming dumber, we are becoming more specialised for the job," said Tania Esparza. The BBC was given exclusive access to the Be Mother project and those who have been taking part in it. The brains of 127 pregnant women were scanned — before, during and after pregnancy — and compared to scans from a smaller number of women who were not expecting. The greater the changes in the brain, the more likely women were to say they were relating to, and bonding well, with their babies — the team of scientists found.



"IT WAS SCARY, HAPPY TO BE BACK HOME"

PV Sindhu On Two Days Of Horror In Dubai

In her glorious career, during which she became one of the most elite athletes in the world, PV Sindhu has seen and overcome many challenges. We are talking about a champion who has won two Olympic medals and five World Championship medals. Yet none of those experiences could prepare the 30-year-old badminton star for what she went through in the last 72 hours. Sindhu was travelling to Birmingham for the prestigious All England Championships, which started on Tuesday, with a

layover in Dubai. But the two-time Olympic medallist found herself stranded at Dubai Airport amid a major flight disruption triggered by the escalating conflict in the Middle East. What followed was a "scary" experience, as Sindhu described it. She returned home on Tuesday and spoke to NDTV about the ordeal. "I'm happy that I'm back home safe. I mean, it was scary, it was terrifying... it's an experience nobody expects - that you get stuck in a war and the airspace suddenly getting closed. I was just in transit at Dubai and all of a sudden, all flights were suspended," Sindhu said in the exclusive interview with NDTV's Padmaja Joshi. Sindhu landed in Dubai on February 28, and almost immediately, the airspace was shut. "When we landed on the 28th at around 1 p.m.,

within minutes they told us the airspace was shut. Then they said flights were delayed, which sounded normal. But soon after, they told us all flights were suspended because of what was happening... it was confusing. A few hours earlier, some of my colleagues flying to Birmingham had also transited through Dubai and reached safely. So I kept wondering what had changed so drastically for us to be stuck," Sindhu said. Airport authorities moved passengers to transit hotels, but thousands of people were stranded. "It was very crowded. At first, there was no place, and they were not allowing anyone to step out because immigration was shut. We waited for hours at the airport. Eventually, we were moved to a hotel." But that wasn't the end of the ordeal.

HEATED DONCIC INTERACTION 'VERY NORMAL' - REDICK

Los Angeles Lakers coach JJ Redick says he and star player Luka Doncic have a "great relationship" despite a heated exchange between the pair that went viral. The Lakers were on a three-game losing streak going into Saturday's game at the Golden State Warriors but were leading comfortably when Doncic was replaced late in the first quarter. The Slovenian, 27, tried to avoid a fist bump from Redick as he walked to his seat on the bench, and the Lakers coach then followed Doncic down the sideline. The pair exchanged words as Doncic took his seat before Redick turned to walk back towards half court. As he did, Doncic got back to his feet and said more towards Redick while his team-mate Jarred Vanderbilt stood up, ostensibly to clap encouragement for the Lakers but also putting a barrier in front of Doncic, who sat back down moments later. Speaking before Tuesday's 110-101 win over the New Orleans Pelicans, Redick said: "I don't know why it went viral. It felt very normal to me. I didn't think



much of it at the time, to be honest with you. I don't think Luka did either." Doncic had claimed four points and three assists by that point, and returned on Saturday to finish with a game-high 26 points. The six-time All-Star scored another game-high 27 points as the Lakers won a third straight game on Tuesday to stay sixth in the Western Conference standings. "He and I have a great relationship," Redick added. "I really value our relationship. And I think those things happen. Not every game, but they happen very frequently. It's a competition. And

there's two guys here who, in this case, are trying to win a basketball game and be on the same page about stuff." The Western Conference leaders Oklahoma City Thunder beat the Chicago Bulls 116-108 on Tuesday while second-placed San Antonio Spurs thumped the Philadelphia 76ers 131-91. The Eastern Conference-leading Detroit Pistons suffered a 113-109 loss at the Cleveland Cavaliers, for whom Jaylon Tyson scored 22 points and new signing James Harden added 18, while the third-placed New York Knicks took advantage with a 111-95 win at the Toronto Raptors.

"CALLED ME THE 'C' WORD":

Podcaster On Spat With Stuart MacGill Over Mention Of David Warner's Wife

Former Australia spinner Stuart MacGill wasn't happy seeing a 2018 controversy involving David Warner's wife, Candice being brought up again during a podcast. MacGill didn't hold back his frustration and decided to lash out at the podcaster while the video was being shot. The shoot ended abruptly as the host, Andrew 'Menners' Mencil decided to walk out. He has now opened up on the controversy, claiming that MacGill used even worse words for him off the camera when the shoot was stopped. "Show ends and then he goes off some more. Yells at me, calls me the 'C' word. Storm out the door, and I just say I'm going to



release the episode," Mencil said on the incident. "There's no way I'm going to sit on this apart from the fact that he was yelling at me to release the episode. And you think the way he was carrying on, he'd be begging me not to release it." "Then he was saying for me to bleep

out Sonny Bill Williams' name because no one can hear the ex-footballer's name. What an absolute muppet he is. "So he leaves, I release it and look, I was fine. I don't mind being called those things. I'm no shrinking violet." The confrontation escalated when the discus-

sion shifted towards the sexist treatment Candice endured during the 2018 tour of South Africa. While Mencil intended to criticise the crowd's behaviour as "low," MacGill took immediate offence, labelling the host a "f***ing idiot" and "pig-headed" for revisiting the details. MacGill, who maintains a close personal friendship with the Warners, allegedly threatened to "jump across the mic" and warned the host that he would refuse to work with him again if the segment were edited out. Despite the explosive nature of the fallout, the former leg-spinner has yet to offer a public apology or a formal statement regarding his conduct.

Jones' 'humbling' journey from the pinnacle to boxing

After bidding an emotional farewell to a sport that was her whole life, Jade Jones was in the perfect position to retire having reached the pinnacle in taekwondo. But taking the easy option quite simply isn't in the DNA of the Flint native - who is pursuing a boxing career less than a year after losing in the first round at the 2024 Olympics. "It was difficult because I am taekwondo, that's made my life and I'll forever be grateful to the sport," she said. "I still absolutely love taekwondo, I still train and throw a few kicks. "The way the Olympics went... I needed a fresh start. "Most people would have retired whereas I've still got the fire in my belly and I'm craving the challenge." Jones, 32, won Olympic gold at the 2012 Olympics in London and again in Rio de Janeiro four



years later. But having reached the ultimate high in one sport, Jones is now bidding to go from bottom to top in a whole new discipline. She takes on Egypt Criss - daughter of hip-hop stars Anthony 'Treach' Criss from Salt-N-Pepa - in her maiden boxing bout in Derby on 7

March, a crossover Jones herself labelled "crazy". Having trained for little more than a year, Jones swiftly became aware of the unforgiving nature of the sport. "I think one of the hardest challenges that people don't realise is going from being at the top of one sport and going to the complete bottom of another sport. It's very hum-

bling," Jones told BBC Sport Wales. "I remember first walking into this gym, I'd never thrown a punch before. "I said I was going to be a boxer and everyone laughed at me and looked at me as though I was crazy." Training under the guidance of former professional boxer Stephen 'Swifty' Smith at Liverpool's iconic 4 Corners Gym, Jones has made huge strides ahead of her boxing debut. "Bit by bit, the coaches have seen how quickly I've improved," she said. "I've been putting in the work, it's still only a short time to learn a completely new sport, but I learn really fast and I'm just excited to see the progress and how it's going to transition into the ring. "Swifty and the other Smith brothers have been amazing with me, and everybody here at 4 Corners Gym.

TOP-RANKED TENNIS PLAYER ARYNA SABALENKA ANNOUNCES ENGAGEMENT TO GEORGIOS FRANGULIS



Top-ranked tennis player Aryna Sabalenka has announced her engagement to Brazilian businessman Georgios Frangulis. Sabalenka posted a video of the proposal on Instagram, accompanied with the words "You & me, forever" along with a ring and heart emoji. The news quickly drew congratulations from fellow tennis players, including Carlos Alcaraz, Novak Djokovic, and Amanda Anisimova, a possible opponent for Sabalenka in the quarter-finals at the forthcoming Indian Wells tournament in the Southern California desert. Listen to the latest songs, only on JioSaavn.com The tournament that opens on Wednesday will be Sabalenka's first since she reached the final at the Australian Open, where she lost to Elena Rybakina

6-4, 4-6, 6-4 on Jan 31. World number one Aryna Sabalenka on Tuesday voiced her support for a proposal to make women's matches best-of-five sets during the later stages of Grand Slam tournaments. Speaking ahead of this week's ATP-WTA tournament in Indian Wells, the hard-hitting Sabalenka said she believed switching to five sets would benefit her game. "Yeah, let's do that," the four-time Grand Slam singles champion said when asked about the idea, which was floated by incoming US Tennis Association chief Craig Tiley at the Australian Open earlier this year. "I feel like I would have probably more Grand Slams," Sabalenka added. "Physically I'm really strong, and I'm pretty confident that my body can handle that. So let's do it."



MS Dhoni Fined For Violating Traffic Norm

WOMEN'S ASIAN CUP:

GRITTY INDIA CONCEDE GOAL IN INJURY TIME TO GO DOWN TO VIETNAM

A gritty India conceded a goal in the injury stoppage time to go down fighting against higher-ranked Vietnam 1-2 in their Women's AFC Asian Cup opening match on Wednesday. Debutant Sanfida Nongrum, a second half substitute, equalised in the 65th minute after Vietnam took the lead in the 30th minute through Ngan Thi Van Su. India were agonisingly close to grab one point from the match but conceded a goal in the fourth minute of second half added time with Ngan Thi Van Su (94th) scoring her second of the match. It was a heart-break for the Indians under new head coach Amelia Valverde from Costa Rica as there was just three minutes left in the match after seven minutes added for injury



stoppage. Despite the loss, India, lowest ranked in Group C at 67th, will hold their heads high against the 36th-ranked Vietnam, who though dominated throughout. Vietnam had made it to the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup and had reached quarterfinals in the previous edition of the Asian Cup in 2022. Goalkeeper Panthoi Chanu was outstanding

under the bar, making as many as five saves, while captain Sweetie Devi Ngangbam marshalled the Indian backline with aplomb. Forward Manisha Kalyan, who currently plies her trade in a top tier league in Peru, was a constant threat for the Vietnamese defence. Early in the second half, Vietnam thought they had scored but the goal was disal-

lowed by the Video Assistant Referee, ruling on a handball instead on the part of an attacker during a goal mouth melee. India were lacklustre in the first half, as they could not hold ball for a considerable period of time to construct attacking moves. They also lost possession easily. Vietnamese midfielder Nguyen Thi Bich Thu was the main threat for India and her shot in the 14th minute struck the crossbar. Next minute, goalkeeper Panthoi was called into action as she parried a Cu Thi Huynh Nhu shot from close range. She made another save in the 17th minute. Vietnam were, however, not to be denied in the half-hour mark as Ngan Thi Van Su sent a curling shot from the left side of the box to beat Panthoi after Nguyen Thi Bich Thu did the hard work. <

Pressure On Lando Norris As Formula One Enters New Era In Melbourne



A new era in Formula One revs up this week with Lando Norris starting his world title defence and Cadillac making their debut at a wide-open Australian Grand Prix that will test the impact of sweeping rule changes. McLaren ace Norris began his drive to a maiden Formula One crown last year with victory at Melbourne's full-throttle Albert Park from pole, edging Red Bull's Max Verstappen. It was an incident-packed race in the rain with the safety car repeatedly forced into action after a slew of crashes on the wet circuit. Better weather is forecast this time but there will be as many, if not more, variables to deal with after a dramatic overhaul to both engine and chassis regulations. With hybrid power units now roughly 50 per cent thermal and 50 per cent electric, there is more focus

on battery management, prompting Max Verstappen to say driving felt like "Formula E on steroids". The uncertainty of what to expect makes Melbourne one of the most anticipated races in years as drivers grapple with finding maximum performance in what are vastly different cars. It also sees the grid expand from 20 cars to 22 with the debut of an 11th team in Cadillac, whose hopes rest on experienced pair Valtteri Bottas and Sergio Perez. Battery tests drivers Britain's Norris, who narrowly clinched the championship at the season finale in Abu Dhabi in December from Australian teammate Oscar Piastri, has reservations about the new cars "A lot of the driving is focused on just trying to get the battery to work properly and less focused on how can you as a driver get everything out of the car," he said.

'SARASWATHY' IS A GRIPPING THRILLER THAT WILL CONNECT WITH EVERYONE

The film will be very engaging: Producer Pooja Sarath Kumar

Varalakshmi Sarathkumar, who is entertaining with versatile roles, is directing her own film 'Saraswathy', which is being produced by her sister Pooja Sarathkumar under the banner of Dosa Diaries. This film, which is being made as a high-concept thriller, has Varalakshmi Sarathkumar playing the lead role. The trailer that has already been released has increased the curiosity among the audience. The film will be released in theatres on March 6. On this occasion, producer Pooja Sarathkumar shared the details of the film in a press conference.



■ WHAT WILL SARASWATHY BE LIKE?
Saraswathy is a one-package firecracker with good thrilling elements and twists. You all will enjoy it a lot. Let's make the film as gripping as possible for a two-hour film.

■ WHAT ABOUT THE CHARACTER OF PRIYAMANI?
I shouldn't reveal too much about that character right now. Varalakshmi designed that character with a good vision. Priyamani is a perfect fit for that character. She gave a very good performance.

■ WHAT ABOUT YOUR BANNER DOSHA DIARIES?

When we thought of giving the banner a good name, we thought that if my name had a connection with food, it would connect everyone. Dosa is Varalakshmi's favorite. Everyone liked the idea of Dosa Diaries.

■ WERE YOU INTERESTED IN PRODUCTION FROM THE START?

I am interested in production. I have done many music shows. Rahman's shows are also among them.

Later I worked for Radar for a few years. I like being behind the camera. I am not really good at acting.

■ WHAT WAS THE INSPIRATION FOR THE MOVIE SARASWATHY?

This is a crime thriller. It has a very good social message. There is a dialogue in this trailer that says that not every girl is like Saraswathy, but when the time comes, she will become like Kali.

"THE ENTIRE FAMILY SHOULD COME TOGETHER AND ENJOY SAAMPRA DAYINI SUPPINI SUDDHAPUSANI IN THEATRES": GUESTS AT THE PRE-RELEASE EVENT

After classic entertainers like Missamma, Adirindaya Chandram, and Tata Birla Madhyalo Laila, the film Saampradayini Suppini Suddhapusani brings back the pair Shivaji and Laya. Following the successes of Little Hearts and Raju Weds Rambai, noted producers Bunny Vaas and Vamsi Nandipati are releasing this film in association with ETV Win. The recently released trailer has significantly raised expectations for the movie. Presented by Ricky under the banner of Sri Shivaji Productions in association with ETV Win, the film is produced by hero Shivaji himself and directed by Sudheer Sriram. The crime-comedy family thriller is set to hit theatres on March 6. The pre-release event was held grandly, with comedy legend Brahmanandam and Bandla Ganesh attending as chief guests. Brahmanandam said, "Shivaji is like a younger brother and a very dear person to me. The young team has made a wonderful film together. Ali invited me to attend Shivaji's film function, and I came immediately without a second thought. I have acted with Shivaji before and also been part of films he produced. It feels exciting to participate in such a festive event. Many talented comedians have acted in this film. It is rare to see so many talented artists together in one movie, and this film has



achieved that. I believe this movie, filled with a festive vibe, will entertain everyone with laughter. I wish the film great success and hope Shivaji succeeds as a producer." Bandla Ganesh said, "ETV Win has been encouraging many new talents. Shivaji is like a soul brother to me. I always wish the best for him. When I first heard the film was going to OTT, I was disappointed. I called Sai and Nithin and asked them to release it in theatres. With Anil Ravipudi's suggestion, the film is coming to theatres, which makes me happy. I hope this film becomes a super hit. I also wish ETV Win continues to encourage new talent." ETV Win Head Sai Krishna said, "Shivaji and Laya have

made this film with great responsibility and love. We want everyone to come with their families. To make it more accessible to family audiences, we have announced a Family Ticket Combo. In single-screen theatres, four tickets and one large popcorn will be available for ₹799. I request everyone to make use of this offer." Hero Shivaji said, "Whenever a film comes from ETV Win, there is curiosity among the audience. The same interest is seen for Saampradayini Suppini Suddhapusani. With the intention that the film should not become distant from the audience, ETV Win has announced

this family package for the theatre viewing. The offer includes four tickets and popcorn for ₹999 in single screens and four tickets with a big popcorn for ₹799 in multiplexes. This offer is designed keeping families and friends in mind, helping the film reach more people. I can confidently say this movie will not disappoint the audience. Families can happily enjoy this film together in theatres. I thank Sai, Nithin, and Bapineedu from ETV Win. I am very happy that Brahmanandam garu attended the event. Bandla Ganesh garu came immediately when invited. Ali treated it like his own film. Everyone supported me, and that's why we achieved such a good output today.

My thanks to all." Producer Vamsi Nandipati said, "We are happy to release Shivaji garu's film. Seeing this event has given us great energy. The film has good fun and a crime element. The hero plays a common man, a role that will connect with everyone. With this film's success, Shivaji's hard work will bear fruit." ETV Win's Nithin Chakravarthy said, "This event is filled with superheroes. Whenever people face difficulties, comedians like Brahmanandam and Ali help them forget their worries with laughter. It feels like Sankranti is arriving again in March. We wish to continue this journey with Shivaji. There is no one who dislikes comedy."

AYESHA KHAN OPENS UP ON BODY SHAMING AND GETTING RAPE THREATS

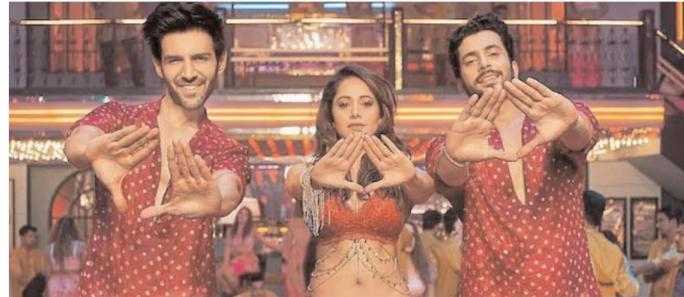


Mumbai: Fame may bring admiration and success, but it also exposes celebrities, especially female stars to harsh scrutiny and online abuse. While some actresses openly speak about the darker side of stardom, others remain silent due to fear of online backlash. Actress Ayesha Khan has chosen to speak out and recently opened up about the constant trolling and abuse she faces on social media. The 23-year-old actor, who appeared in Dhurandhar and featured alongside Krystle D'Souza in the song Shararat, has been receiving praise for her recent work. However, she revealed that success has not shielded her from online harassment. Here's what she revealed Speaking at the We The Women event, the Baalveer actor recalled a painful experience from her college days when she was

removed from a T-Series song because she was considered "fat." She said she was in Class 12 and had been selected as the second lead in the track but was replaced just a night before the shoot. Opening up about her daily struggles, Ayesha said, "I am almost every day sexualised for my body on Instagram. I wear a normal top; people have a problem, I wear skirts, people have a problem. I have to think before posting. If I have to think before wearing something or wanting to post something, just because someone else is going to sexualise me, it's, of course, a very sad space to be in. I don't know, there's a very thin line I keep struggling, sometimes I think I'll post whatever I want, but other times I am not in the mood to see any comments telling me whatever they would have done to me if they had a chance."

KARTIK AARYAN-STARRER 'SONU KE TITU KI SWEETY' TO RE-RELEASE IN THEATRES

Mumbai: "Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweety", featuring Kartik Aaryan, is all set to return to the big screens on March 6. The 2018 film, which was directed by Luv Ranjan, redefined the genre of bromance and was a blockbuster hit. Aaryan shared the announcement with a post on his Instagram handle on Tuesday. "This Friday... Relive the laughter and emotions once again on the big screen!"



#SonuKeTituKiSweety re-releases in theatres on 6th March." The 2018 film, which was directed by Luv Ranjan, redefined the genre of bromance and was a blockbuster hit. Aaryan wrote on Instagram. The romantic-comedy catapulted Aaryan to new

stardom and was a game-changer for lead actors Nushratt Bharucha and Sunny Singh. Following this film, Aaryan tasted success with movies like "Luka Chuppi", "Pati Patni Aur Woh", "Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2", "Satyaprem Ki Katha", "Chandu Champion", and "Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3". The 35-year-old actor was last seen in "Tu Meri Main

Tera Main Tera Tu Meri", which released in December 2025. Aaryan will next feature in Anurag Basu's romantic film and fantasy-comedy "Naagzilla", directed by Mrighdeep Singh Lamba of the "Fukrey" franchise. The 2018 film, which was directed by Luv Ranjan, redefined the genre of bromance and was a blockbuster hit.

With Holi festive wishes, the first-look poster of Tharun Bhascker as BalRaj from the complete entertainer Crazy Kalyanam has been released

Crazy Kalyanam stars Naresh VK, Anupama Parameswaran, Tharun Bhascker, and Raju Weds Rambai fame Akhil Uddemari in the lead roles. The film is being produced as Production No. 2 under the Arrow Cinemas banner by passionate producer Boosam Jagan Mohan Reddy. It is directed by Badrappa Gajula. On the occasion of Holi, the makers unveiled the first-look poster of talented actor Tharun Bhascker as BalRaj. In the poster, Tharun Bhascker appears energetic and vibrant, striking a pose reminiscent of Superman. The film promises to be a complete entertainer revolving around an engaging story set against the backdrop of a wedding. Crazy



Kalyanam has been extensively shot across several rural locations in Telangana. The music for the film is composed by Suresh Bobbili.



TOXIC RELEASE POSTPONED AMID RISING MIDDLE EAST TENSIONS

Bangalore: The makers of director Geethu Mohandas's highly anticipated action-drama, "Toxic: A Fairy Tale for Grown-ups", featuring Yash in the lead, on Wednesday announced that the film's release was being postponed to June 4 this year in the wake of the current conflict going on in the Middle East. It may be recalled that the film was

originally slated for a worldwide premiere on March 19 this year. KVN Productions and Monster Mind Creations announced the strategic rescheduling of the global theatrical release of the film based on the advise of one of their major distribution partner Phars Films. The makers' decision to reschedule the release was made in response to escalating tensions and the resulting disruptions to cinema operations across the Gulf region, a key market for the film's multi-language global roll-

out. The producers have been closely monitoring the rapidly evolving regional developments with the utmost caution. This announcement comes at a time when the makers were gearing up for a grand trailer launch on March 8 in Bangalore in the presence of mediapersons from across the country. The makers had already mapped out the film's final promotional schedule ahead of its earlier release date of March 19 this year. Even though the film's first single, "Tabaahi", was ready for its scheduled debut on March 2, the makers chose to hold the music video and momentarily pause the promotional roll-out which was locked and to be activated within a day or two. In an official statement, KVN Productions and

Monster Mind Creations said, "Toxic: A Fairy Tale for Grown-ups is a film we conceptualized with the vision to create cinema for a global audience. Filmed in Kannada and English. It is built with the conviction to connect with viewers both at home and across the world." The makers further said, "After years of dedicated labour, we were excited to share our film with you all on the 19th of March. However, the current uncertainty, especially in the Middle East, has created a situation that impacts our goal to reach and connect with the widest possible audience. Therefore, in the interest of our partners and our audience, we have made the difficult but carefully considered decision to reschedule our release."