



**BJP's downfall has begun, its govt at Centre in minority: CM Mamata**

NATION | NEWS

**US negotiators to return to Pakistan for talks as Trump repeats threat to Iran's infrastructure**

WORLD | NEWS



**HOLLYWOOD'S BIG STUDIO TO DISTRIBUTE RAMAYANA?**

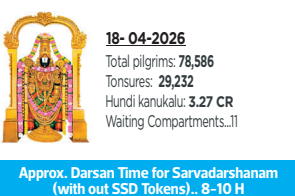
CINEMA | PAGE



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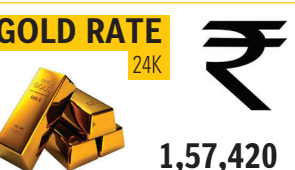
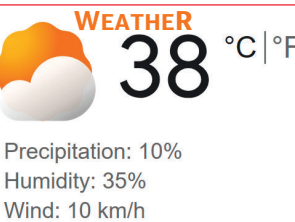


**OM NAMO VENKATESAYA**



18-04-2026  
Total pilgrims: 78,586  
Tonsures: 29,232  
Hundi kankaluk: 3,27 CR  
Waiting Compartments: 11

Approx. Darshan Time for Sarvadarshanam (with out SSD Tokens): 8-10 H

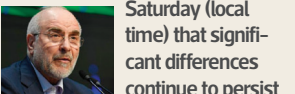


**ED raids residence of Kolkata Police DCP Shantanu Sinha Biswas**

Kolkata, April 19 : The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Sunday conducted raids at the residence of Kolkata Police Deputy Commissioner (DCP) Shantanu Sinha Biswas. The ED officials reached the DCP's house on Fern Road in Ballygunge at 7 a.m. It is reported that a search is underway at the house. Officials said the search operation was being held in connection with the Sona Pappu syndicate case in the Ballygunge area of South Kolkata. Biswas was once the Officer-in-Charge of Kalighat police station, which falls under Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's Bhawanipur Assembly constituency.

**IRAN SAYS 'PROGRESS' IN US TALKS, BUT 'FAR FROM FINAL DISCUSSION'**

Tehran, April 19 : Iran has indicated that there has been "progress" in its ongoing discussions with the United States, though it stressed that a final agreement is still a long way off, with the current two-week ceasefire due to expire on April 22, according to local media reports on Sunday. Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, Speaker of the Iranian Parliament, said in a televised address on Saturday (local time) that significant differences continue to persist between the two sides. "There are many gaps and some fundamental points remain," Ghalibaf said, underlining that negotiations have yet to reach a decisive stage. "We are still far from the final discussion," he added, signalling that while dialogue is ongoing, a comprehensive settlement has not yet been achieved. Ghalibaf also asserted that Iran had maintained an upper hand during the recent weeks of conflict and suggested that Tehran agreed to the temporary ceasefire only after its conditions were acknowledged by Washington. "If we accepted the ceasefire, it was because they accepted our demands," he said, referring to the United States. Emphasising Iran's strategic position, he said the US had failed to accomplish its objectives, while Iran continued to exercise control over the crucial Strait of Hormuz, a key maritime route for global energy supplies.



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## At least Twenty two killed in explosion at Virudhunagar firecracker unit

VIRUDHUNAGAR (TSIT):

At least 22 people were charred to death, and six others sustaining grievous injuries following a massive explosion at a private firecracker manufacturing unit near here, police said on Sunday.

The explosion occurred at the 'Vanaja' fireworks factory owned by one Muthumanickam, in Kattanarpatti near here. The place is located within the Vachakarapatti police station limits. According to police and fire rescue officials, four of the six injured are in critical condition and are undergoing treatment at the Virudhunagar Government Medical College Hospital.

Preliminary investigations suggest that the unit reportedly holds a license from the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO), Nagpur. Over 100 labourers were reportedly engaged in work in the complex. The blast is believed to have originated in the front veranda area,



where workers were allegedly handling raw materials and giving finishing to the firecrackers.

The impact of the blast was so severe that at least three rooms were reduced to rubble, and several adjacent structures were completely levelled. "We have recovered 18 bodies so far, many of which were charred beyond recognition," a police official told PTI.

Of the six injured, three are women and have sustained 60 per cent burn injuries, the official added.

Sources said fire and rescue services personnel battled the flames for several hours.

## Stalin unveils 'Chennai Super 6' manifesto with 20 key promises ahead of polls

Chennai (TSIT):

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. K. Stalin on Sunday released a special election manifesto for Chennai district, outlining a series of targeted urban initiatives under the banner 'Chennai Super 6'. The document features 20 announcements across six core sectors, focusing on infrastructure, mobility, urban amenities, and future-ready economic growth. Under the theme of improving public amenities, the manifesto promises to upgrade facilities in Tamil Nadu Urban Habitat Development Board apartments through government funding routed via Residents' Welfare Women Associations.

To address water scarcity, the government has proposed setting up RO-purified drinking water systems in areas lacking metro water connections, while ensuring periodic supply in regions already covered under the metro water network. The plan also includes the installation of high-intensity street lighting across all residential areas and the creation of a world-class cultural centre to promote art, music, and literature.

In a major push for urban mobility, the DMK has pledged to deploy 1,000 new mini buses to improve last-mile connectivity by linking streets with bus stops, metro stations, and railway hubs. Additionally, an AI-based traffic



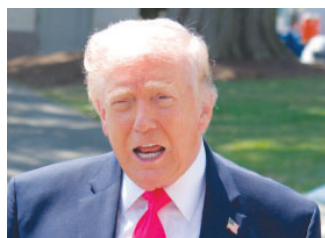
management system will be introduced to ease congestion and reduce travel time by up to 25 per cent.

The manifesto lays out a clear timeline for completing key infrastructure projects. More than ten major schemes, including the Chennai Peripheral Road project from Ennore to Poonjeri, are scheduled for completion by 2027. Metro rail expansion and stormwater drain works are expected to be completed by 2028, while underground sewerage projects will be wrapped up by 2027. By 2029, the city aims to achieve world-class road infrastructure, featuring wider footpaths, shaded avenues, and accessible public toilets. Addressing the issue of stray dogs, the government proposes a humane and scientific approach by strengthening the Animal Birth Control programme, including tripling the number of veterinarians and dog catchers, and expanding shelters in collaboration with NGOs.

## Trump warns Iran, sends team for talks

Washington (TSIT):

US President Donald Trump on Sunday accused Iran of breaching a ceasefire in the Strait of Hormuz and warned of sweeping retaliation, even as he announced fresh negotiations in Pakistan aimed at ending the conflict. "Iran decided to fire bullets yesterday in the Strait of



Hormuz — A Total Violation of our Ceasefire Agreement!" Trump wrote on social media. He added that "many of them were aimed at a French Ship, and a Freighter from the United Kingdom." The President said American representatives would travel to Islamabad for talks. "My Representatives are going to Islamabad, Pakistan — They will be there tomorrow evening, for Negotiations," he said. The US and Iran are vying to take control of the strategic Strait of Hormuz. Two tankers attempting to exit the Strait turned back, with traffic in the waterway "practically at a standstill."

## CM Revanth meets Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla at Lok Bhavan

Hyderabad TSIT BUREAU:

Chief Minister A.Revanth Reddy paid a courtesy call on Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla at Lok Bhavan on Sunday. Minister D. Sridhar Babu and MP Vem Narender Reddy were also present during the meeting. During the interaction, the Governor discussed various issues related to the education sector with the Chief Minister. He particularly stressed the need to create awareness in educational institutions on the dangers of drug abuse.

The Governor suggested that students should be made to take a pledge against the use of narcotic substances. He also discussed with the Chief



Minister the proposed awareness programme to be held under his leadership at the LB Stadium on June 12. Further, the Governor advised that at the time of admissions in schools and colleges, students should submit a pledge affirm-

ing that they would stay away from drugs. Responding positively, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy assured the Governor that all his suggestions would be taken into consideration and appropriate action would be initiated.

## Bengal's tribal-dominant districts have fallen behind during 15 years of TMC rule, says PM Modi

Kolkata (TSIT):

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the tribal-dominated districts in West Bengal have gone backwards during the 15 years of Trinamool Congress rule in the state. He said this while addressing a campaign rally, the second of the day, in the tribal-dominated Purulia district. "The tribal-dominated districts in West Bengal have constantly gone backwards during the last 15 years of the Trinamool Congress regime. The conditions of schools, roads, and water supply systems in such districts are pathetic. Rampant illegal mining in these tribal-dominated districts has made the conditions there worse. Places like Ayodhya Hills and Sitakund are in the Purulia district. But in this land of Sitakund, the people are thirsty. The farmers are helpless. Several projects have been kept on hold because of this inhuman state government," the Prime Minister said. On the other hand, he said, there is a separate ministry in the Union government on tribal wel-



fare. "During the Bharatiya Janata Party's rule, India got its first tribal president. States like Odisha and Assam got their first tribal Chief Ministers during the BJP rule," the Prime Minister said. Elated by the crowd at his Purulia rally, ignoring the scorching heat, PM Modi said the enthusiasm of the crowd was an indication that the BJP would be in power in West Bengal after the Assembly elections. "The rule of corruption and intimidation during the last 15 years has terrorised every family in West Bengal. This time, the BJP will form the government here. BJP will get a huge majority. The crowd is giving that signal," the Prime Minister said.

## 2 Indian men shot dead outside gurdwara in Italy

Rome (TSIT):

Two Indian men were shot dead in Italy's Covo just as they were leaving the warehouse used as a place of worship, local media reported on Sunday. The incident occurred on Friday, a few minutes before midnight, near Gurdwara Mata Sahib Kaur Ji in the industrial area of Bergamo town of the Lombardy region. The victims have been identified as Raginder Singh, 48, a resident of Covo, and Gurmit Singh, from Agnadello, Italian daily La Sicilia reported. The assailant approached the men, opened fire and then fled from the spot in a car. According to initial findings, a sudden brawl that escalated into bloodshed has been ruled out and instead suggests a rapid and lethal attack. Approximately ten shell casings were found at the site of the incident, far more than was "necessary" to target the two victims, as authorities investigate the "hypothesis of a coldly planned execution", it said.

## 32 bank officials among 52 held for cyber fraud by Hyderabad Police in 9 states

Hyderabad (TSIT)

The Hyderabad City Police have dismantled a pan-India cyber fraud network with the arrest of 52 accused, including 32 bank officials in nine states. Hyderabad Police Commissioner V. C. Sajjanar said on Sunday that a major operation titled Operation Octopus 2.0 was launched to dismantle an organised cyber fraud network. Sixteen spe-



cial teams comprising seasoned investigators conducted the operation simultaneously across nine states over a span of seven days. The Commissioner said 52 individ-

uals, including 32 bank officials who played pivotal roles in the execution of the fraud, were apprehended. Six officials from Indusind Bank, five officials each from Bandhan Bank and Bank of Baroda, four each from Federal Bank and IDFC First Bank, two each from Karnataka Bank, Karur Vysya Bank and AU Small Finance Bank and one each from Equitas Small Finance Bank and HDFC Bank

## TMC will pay for conspiring to stall Women's Reservation Bill, says PM Modi in Bengal

Kolkata (TSIT):

Trinamool Congress will have to pay the price in the forthcoming Assembly elections in West Bengal for being part of the conspiracy along with Congress and other opposition parties in blocking the Women's Reservation (Amendment) Bill in the Lok Sabha, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday.

"The mothers and sisters of West Bengal will punish the Trinamool Congress for this. We have seen what happened in the Parliament. Trinamool Congress has once again betrayed the sisters of West Bengal. Trinamool Congress does not want women in West Bengal to be MLAs and MPs in large numbers. This is because

the women in West Bengal are challenging Trinamool Congress' misrule in the state," the Prime Minister said while addressing a campaign rally in Darjeeling district in the morning. Speaking on the occasion at the rally in this tribal-dominated district, the Prime Minister also launched a scathing attack against Trinamool Congress and the state government for allegedly ignoring the issues and demands of the people from the tribal communities in the state.

"Trinamool Congress has no time to listen to the tribal people. But they have enough time to listen to the illegal infiltrators. Trinamool Congress wants to bypass the Constitutional provision to ensure their dedicated vote



bank. Because of such attempts, they had been censured by the High Court several times. But they don't even listen to the court. Even the court had called for the reservation of women without delay. But the Trinamool Congress does not want that," the Prime Minister

said. According to him, Trinamool Congress' attitude towards tribal people was evident from the recent insult of President Droupadi Murmu, during the latter's visit to West Bengal to attend an International Santal Conference. "BJP gave the

country its first tribal President. We want their empowerment. Even the Trinamool Congress fielded its own candidate against our tribal candidate. Just like Pandit Nehru fielded a candidate to defeat Babasaheb Ambedkar. Similarly, Congress and Trinamool Congress also started playing the game of defeating the tribal presidential candidate. They did not want anyone from the tribal community to become the Indian President," the Prime Minister said. He also said that if the BJP comes to power in West Bengal, its priority will be to ensure the safety and empowerment of the women of the state.

"Women in West Bengal are totally deprived now of many things. What they get in BJP-

ruled states, they do not get here. What women get in Assam, Odisha, and Gujarat, they do not get that here. If the BJP comes to power here, poor sisters will be provided free ration. No one will be able to snatch it away. The BJP will help up to Rs 1.5 lakh under the PM Awas Yojana to build concrete houses. The Ayushman Bharat scheme is not allowed here. If the BJP comes to power, it will pay up to Rs 5 lakh for treatment. If a woman has kidney disease, dialysis will be done free of cost in government hospitals," the Prime Minister said. He said, "West Bengal is rejecting TMC's cut-money culture and deep-rooted corruption. People are now placing their trust in the BJP for honest governance and development."

## BJP's downfall has begun, its govt at Centre in minority: CM Mamata

**HOWRAH:** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday hit out at the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, claiming that the saffron party's "downfall" began after the Centre failed to secure passage of a Constitution amendment bill to implement women's reservation in legislatures from 2029.

Addressing back-to-back rallies at Uluberia in Howrah and Barurpur in South 24 Parganas, the TMC supremo said Friday's events in Parliament had shown that the BJP was no longer a party with a majority of its own and was surviving in office only with the support of two allies.

"Yesterday proved they are no longer a majority government. It is a minority government. They are somehow running it with the support of two parties," she said, in an apparent reference to the BJP's dependence on allies in the NDA.

In a major setback to



the Centre, a Constitution amendment bill to implement 33 per cent reservation for women in legislatures in 2029 and increase the number of Lok Sabha seats to 816 was defeated on Friday, with the ruling dispensation asserting that the struggle to give the rights to women will continue.

While 298 members voted in support of the bill in the Lok Sabha, 230 MPs voted against it. Out of 528 members who voted, the bill required 352 votes for a two-thirds majority.

Banerjee questioned why the women's reserva-

tion was tied to the delimitation exercise.

"Why link it with delimitation? Is this an attempt to hide fish with greens?" she asked, invoking the Bengali phrase 'shak diye mach dhaka' to claim that the "Centre was trying to conceal its real intentions".

Ahead of the upcoming West Bengal assembly elections, Banerjee sought to turn the BJP's parliamentary setback into a larger political narrative, portraying it as the "beginning of the BJP's decline nationally".

"Modi sahib's downfall began in Delhi yesterday.

In the Lok Sabha, you have been defeated; now you will have to be defeated on the ground. Bengal will show the way," she told cheering supporters at Uluberia.

In typical Mamata style, she mixed political attacks with personal anecdotes and old grievances.

Recalling her long association with the demand for women's reservation, Banerjee said she had been fighting for the cause since 1998, long before the BJP made it an issue.

"This is not a women's bill. I have fought for women's reservation since 1998. They are using the media to spread lies," she said.

The TMC supremo accused the Centre of linking the women's quota with delimitation in order to conceal what she described as a larger political design.

Banerjee alleged that the proposed delimitation exercise was aimed at redrawing political boundaries and weakening states like West Bengal.

## Cabinet nod to two multi-tracking railway projects covering 15 districts across UP, AP

**NEW DELHI:** The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, in a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Saturday approved two multi-tracking projects of the railways covering 15 districts across Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, increasing the existing network of Indian Railways by about 601 Kms. These projects include Ghaziabad - Sitapur 3rd and 4th Line and Rajahmundry (Nidadavolu) - Visakhapatnam (Duvvada) 3rd and 4th Line. The total estimated cost of the projects is Rs 24,815 crore and will be completed up to 2030-31.

Ghaziabad - Sitapur 3rd and 4th Line, is of route length of 403 km and a track length of 859 km and the estimated cost



of this project is Rs 14,926 crore (approx.) and the Rajahmundry (Nidadavolu) - Visakhapatnam (Duvvada) 3rd and 4th Line, is of route and track lengths of 198 km and 458 km, respectively and the estimated cost of this project is Rs 9,889 crore (approx.). The increased line capacity will significantly enhance mobility, resulting in improved operational efficiency

and service reliability for Indian Railways. These multi-tracking proposals are poised to streamline operations and alleviate congestion.

The projects are in line with the Prime Minister's vision of a New India which will make people of the region "Atmanirbhar" by way of comprehensive development in the area which will enhance their employment/ self-em-

ployment opportunities.

The projects are planned on PM-Gati Shakti National Master Plan with focus on enhancing multi-modal connectivity and logistic efficiency through integrated planning and stakeholder consultations. These projects will provide seamless connectivity for movement of people, goods, and services.

The proposed capacity enhancement will improve rail connectivity to several prominent tourist destinations across the country, including Dudheshwarnath Temple, Garhmukteshwar Ganga Ghat, Dargah Shah Wilayat Jama Masjid (Amroha), Naimisharanya (Sitapur), Annavaram, Antarvedi, Draksharamam, etc.

## Maharashtra CM orders swift land allocation, priority power supply for upcoming data centres

**MUMBAI:** Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis on Saturday directed officials to ensure swift allotment of land to data centre companies once agreements are finalised, noting that several firms from Central Asia are keen to invest in the state.

Chairing a meeting here, Fadnis said all critical requirements for setting up data centre projects, especially land acquisition, must be completed within the defined timelines. He also instructed that power supply to such projects be prioritised.

The meeting reviewed the state's preparedness to attract investments in the data centre sector, an official release issued here said.

Fadnis said agencies must act with urgency and coordination.

Directing the City and Industrial Development Corporation of Maha-

rastra (CIDCO) to develop a dedicated land bank for such projects, he asked the energy department to expedite land allocation for substations.

Officials said in the meeting that infrastructure for data centres is being strengthened and that adequate electricity supply arrangements are being put in place to support incoming investments, according to the release.

Fadnis also directed officials to expedite land allocation for the proposed EduCity and MediCity projects, aimed at attracting global universities and creating world-class higher education opportunities in the state.

In a separate review meeting, Fadnis said several leading international universities have shown interest in setting up campuses in the state, and stressed that all concerned departments must act within time-bound

frameworks to facilitate the projects.

Fadnis said the EduCity and MediCity initiatives will enable students in Maharashtra to access globally competitive higher education within the state, while also boosting research, innovation and startup growth.

The projects are proposed near the upcoming Navi Mumbai International Airport, with land acquisition and planning processes already underway.

Officials said a master plan for MediCity has been prepared and that steps are being taken to ensure timely availability of land for both projects.

CM Fadnis also underlined that the presence of globally reputed universities will enhance opportunities across sectors and strengthen the state's position as an emerging hub for education and research, an official release said.

### Nashik TCS

## Employee cites pregnancy to seek pre-arrest bail; custody of two male accused extended

**NASHIK:** A female employee of the TCS unit in Nashik, accused in a case related to alleged religious conversion and sexual harassment of some women colleagues at the office, on Saturday, moved an anticipatory bail application, citing her two-month-old pregnancy.

The accused, identified as Nida Khan, stated that the charges invoked against her attract less than seven years of punishment.

Khan's plea will be heard by the Nashik sessions court on Monday.

Separately, a court extended the police remand of two male accused, Raza Memon (35) and Shafi Sheikh (36), in the alleged sexual harassment and religious conversion case till April 20 to allow police to identify and question key witnesses and collect more evidence.

Nida Khan's lawyer has denied the charges against

his client, saying she cannot be accused of outraging the modesty of other women.

Nashik Police Commissioner Sandip Karnik had said that Khan is accused in only one case of religious harassment at the IT firm unit.

Memon and Sheikh are among the seven employees, including a woman HR manager, who have been arrested so far, while Nida Khan is absconding.

The duo was arrested afresh in a related case on Wednesday and were produced before a magistrate at the end of their remand on Saturday. The other accused are already in judicial custody.

The police requested the court to extend their remand for five days to identify and question key witnesses in the case.

The accused have allegedly committed various acts with religious motives

against male and female colleagues. Due to the large scope of these crimes, a detailed interrogation is needed, the police said.

Government lawyers Kiran Bendbhar and Aniket Avhad submitted that the accused duo are habitual offenders with multiple cases registered against them at the Mumbai Naka police station in Nashik.

The prosecution submitted that the custody of Memon and Sheikh is required to conduct a technical analysis of their mobile phones. Additionally, police need to identify and question eyewitnesses and collect further evidence.

Defence lawyers Rahul Kasliwal and Baba Sayyad questioned the need for physical police custody of the accused for analysing technical evidence, such as the recovery of the password, and urged that they be remanded in judicial custody.

### CPI(M) writes to PM Modi seeking intervention in Delhi-NCR workers' stir

**NEW DELHI:** Communist Party of India (Marxist) General Secretary M A Baby has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking his intervention to address the concerns of striking workers in industrial clusters across Delhi-NCR, the party said on Saturday. In the letter released by the party, Baby said resentment has been simmering among workers in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and the Delhi-NCR region "for a long time", fueled by "extremely harsh working conditions, abysmal wages and workplace accidents". Referring to his recent visit to Noida, he said the situation has worsened over the past month due to LPG shortages and rising inflation, pushing workers "to their absolute breaking point".

He highlighted that declared minimum monthly wages range from Rs 11,314 in Uttar Pradesh to Rs 18,456 in Delhi, which he termed grossly inadequate given the high cost of living in the region. "Even for subsistence-level needs such as accommodation, food and rent, the current wages are insufficient, let alone expenses on education and health," he said, adding that a large section of unorganised sector workers earn far below statutory minimum wages. The CPI(M) leader also alleged that instead of addressing workers' grievances, the Uttar Pradesh and Haryana governments responded with "severe police repression", treating the protests as a law-and-order issue rather than a labour dispute.

## Dushyant Chautala demands FIR against police team for 'blocking' convoy in Hisar

**CHANDIGARH:** Jannayak Janta Party leader Dushyant Chautala on Saturday demanded an FIR against a police team that he accused of blocking his car while he was going to meet the Hisar district police chief.

Chautala also slammed Hisar Superintendent of Police Siddhant Jain, alleging that no action has been taken yet despite his complaint.

He sought the SP's transfer, demanding a fair probe under the supervision of the home secretary.

Chautala said he was on his way to meet the SP regarding the "wrongful arrest" of six people connected with the JJP over a protest at Guru Jambheshwar University in Hisar on Thursday, when a police team intercepted his convoy.

Two men stepped out of the vehicle and one of them, wearing a red-shirt, was holding an object that appeared to be a weapon and issued a threat, he claimed, speaking to reporters.

Chautala claimed that the man wearing the red shirt was Inspector Pawan.

"When I came out of my car and approached the vehicle, they ran away," he said.

He said five policemen from the City police station had been tailing him. "What was their motive? It is still unclear," Chautala said. "Their intention was not to stop us. Their intention was something else," he

said, warning he would move to court if an FIR is not filed by Monday.

Meanwhile, the Hisar police claimed the confrontation resulted from an overtake attempt at high speed.

They said the in-charge of the Hisar Crime Investigation Agency was traveling along the Old Sabzi Mandi Road toward the Additional Director General of Police's office.

On the route, a convoy approached from behind at a high speed, blaring sirens.

One of the vehicles, the police said, attempted to overtake the police car and attempted to ram into it.

Another car, fitted with a flashing light, also sped past the police vehicle, narrowly averting a collision, the police said on Friday.

When the officer stopped to clarify the situation, some party workers and security men accompanying Dushyant Chautala rushed to the vehicle, opened the window, and attempted to pull him out of the car, the police said.

The police officer had no weapon and Rajkumar, a member of the CIA staff, was also manhandled, they claimed.

The matter is being investigated by a Deputy Superintendent of Police rank officer, the police said.

A video purported to be of the incident was shared by the JJP leader on Thursday.

## Illegal silver melting unit busted in MP's Agar Malwa; 2 held

**AGAR MALWA:** Police busted an illegal silver melting and refining unit operating from a house in Madhya Pradesh's Agar Malwa town on Saturday and arrested two persons following complaints of foul smell in the locality, an official said.

The unit functioned in the Khirni Takiya area in the middle of the town, Kotwali police station house officer Shashi Upadhyay told reporters. He said local resi-

dents had complained of a strong chemical stench in their neighbourhood for the past few days, prompting police to activate informers and initiate a probe. The official said that silver was being secretly melted and refined inside a house in the area. Police raided the place and recovered nearly 1,500 litres of chemicals stored in about 30 cans. These comprised 20 cans of nitric acid, four cans of sulphuric acid and two

cans of hydrochloric acid. Besides the powerful acids, 50 kg of a material in powdered form, caustic soda and urea were also seized, the official said. These chemicals are used in the process of melting and refining silver, he said. A 30-year-old man, identified as Abid, and his father Maujudeen (50), were arrested at the spot, the official said, adding that further investigation into the matter is underway.

## Defeat of Constitution Amendment Bill betrayal of nation's woman power: Yogi

**LUCKNOW:** Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath termed the defeat of the Constitution Amendment Bill to implement reservation for women in legislatures by 2029 and increase the number of Lok Sabha seats a "betrayal of women's power" in the nation.

The amendment bill to implement 33 per cent reservation for women in legislatures by 2029 and increase the number of Lok Sabha seats to 816 was defeated on Friday.

"Today, a dark chapter has been added to the history of India's great democracy. The opposition's obstruction of the passage of the Constitutional Amendment Bill, essential for the 'Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam', is a blow to the honour of 'Bharat Mata'. It is a betrayal of all women in the nation and an infringement of their democratic rights," Adityanath said in a post on X in Hindi late Friday night.

Accusing the Congress-led 'INDI' alliance of displaying an 'anti-women mindset', Adityanath remarked that the women of the nation are observant and will remember this 'deceit and injustice.' "When the time comes, they will surely respond. Under the leader-

ship of our Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the NDA alliance will continue its unwavering efforts to protect the honour, dignity, and rights of women and ensure their empowerment," the chief minister said.

Late Friday night, Aparna Yadav, vice-president of the Uttar Pradesh State Women's Commission, burned flags of the Samajwadi Party and Congress outside the Vidhan Bhavan in Lucknow.

Speaking to PTI Videos, Yadav said, "The manner in which the bill was prevented from being passed means that 'Naari Shakti' (women's power) will never forgive them. This has occurred repeatedly—in 1996, 1998, 2003, and now again in 2026. They do not want women from ordinary families to advance; they wish to install their own family members in positions of power."

Yadav noted that burning the flags was her way of protesting against parties with the mindset of 'Dushasan' and 'Duryodhan,' adding, "If I had remained silent, then Aparna Yadav's soul would not have forgiven me."

Reacting to Yadav's statement, former MLC and SP spokesperson



Udaiveer Singh said in a post on X in Hindi on Friday, "Those belonging to the tradition of 'Kaikeyi', 'Manthara' and 'Shakuni' should not attempt to impart wisdom to the descendants of Krishna. Everyone fully understands and sees through this 'nautanki' (drama) and fraudulence."

The Samajwadi Party, in a post on X in Hindi on Saturday, citing party chief Akhilesh Yadav, said, "Our party supports women's res-

ervation. We have never opposed it; rather, we stopped those who sought to snatch away women's rights."

Late on Friday night, a group of women gathered outside the Samajwadi Party office in Lucknow, chanting slogans such as "Naari shakti ka apmaan, nahi sahega Hindustan" (India will not tolerate the insult to women's power). They also protested against the Samajwadi Party and Akhilesh Yadav.

**WOMEN WON'T FORGIVE DMK OVER RESERVATION BILL: AIADMK CHIEF PALANISWAMI**

NAMAKKAL: Charging the DMK government for opposing the women reservation amendment bill, AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami on Sunday said that each and every woman would not forgive the ruling party. Addressing a poll rally in Tiruchengode constituency, he asked, "What exactly did the central government propose? It was a bill granting 33 per cent reservation for women, yet, the DMK defeated this bill. It was the Congress and the DMK that obstructed the rights of the women they were poised to receive."

Claiming that the AIADMK genuinely desires reservation for women, the former CM said the parties aligned with the DMK lack commitment to the cause.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi held consultations with us, and we gave our assent, following which he introduced the bill."

"However, the DMK along with its alliance partners voted against it and ensured its defeat. Will the women of this state ever forgive them?" he asked. On delimitation bill, Palaniswami said the DMK opposed it despite the Centre's assurances that TN would not be affected. Targeting Chief Minister M K Stalin, he said concerns were raised that population-based delimitation would reduce the state's representation. According to him, the Centre had clarified that TN's share would not decline and could, in fact, rise from 7.18 percent to 7.23 per cent with the number of seats proposed to increase from 39 to 59. "The Centre's stance was entirely favourable to Tamil Nadu," he said. Alleging that



Stalin had let down the people of this nation, he said, "you (Stalin) have shattered the dreams of the public and specifically, the dreams of women."

"Teach a fitting lesson to the DMK-Congress alliance, which obstructed the provision of 33% reservation for women in both Parliament and the State Assemblies," he told the gathering.

Regarding the law and order situation in the state, Palaniswami alleged a rise in crime, citing figures attributed by Minister of Social Welfare.

He claimed that 24,000 cases of sexual offenses were registered during the DMK regime and of these, 18,000 involved minor girls and 6,999 were cases registered under the POCSO Act.

"Criminals have no fear of the police, because members of the DMK stand as their accomplices. Just as reports regarding gold prices used to dominate the news in the past, today they are filled with reports of murders, sexual crimes, and drug-related offenses," he added. Listing out AIADMK election manifesto, Palaniswami said if his party comes to power the rice, which is supplied through ration shops, will be on par with one available in the provision stores. "We will also increase the pension for weavers from Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,500 per month," he assured and said.

**Vijay likely to accept divorce as settlement talks continue ahead of court hearing**

CHENNAI: Speculation around a possible mutual split between actor and Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) chief Vijay and his wife Sangeetha has intensified, with reports suggesting that a divorce petition has been filed and is likely to come up for hearing soon.

Amid this, sources indicate that Vijay is considering granting a divorce, with discussions said to have taken place between legal representatives from both sides in Chennai recently. It is also reported that the talks were held in the presence of a close



family astrologer who had travelled from Mumbai. According to a Maalaimalar report, Sangeetha has sought a substantial financial settlement, allegedly asking that it be

based on the asset details declared by Vijay in his election affidavit. She is also said to have requested that provisions be made not only for herself but also for their

children.

Sources further suggest that Vijay may have agreed to provide a settlement amount for Sangeetha and has expressed willingness to take responsibility for the care of their son and daughter. However, there has been no official confirmation from either party regarding these claims. With the case expected to be taken up for hearing soon, the reported negotiations have drawn significant attention. Vijay and Sangeetha were married in 1999. The couple have two children a son, Jason Sanjay, and a daughter, Divya Saasha.

**Serious criminal cases among TN assembly candidates rise to 10%**



CHENNAI: The number of candidates with serious criminal charges in the upcoming Tamil Nadu Assembly elections has increased to 404—representing 10% of all contestants, up from 6% in 2021. This is according to a joint report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and Tamil Nadu Election Watch.

The analysis reviewed affidavits from 3,992 out of 4,023 candidates, noting that 31 affidavits were unavailable on the Election Commission website. Overall, 722 candidates (18%) have declared criminal cases of any kind. Among major parties, the AIADMK has the highest proportion of candidates facing serious charges at

35%, followed by the PMK (33%), BJP (27%), TVK (19%), and DMK (18%).

The report also reveals that 18% of candidates face charges related to crimes against women. Additionally, 13 candidates have been charged with murder, and 44 with attempt to murder.

Candidate wealth has also surged. Nearly 981 candidates (25%) are millionaires, compared to 18% in 2021. The average asset value has jumped sharply from Rs.1.72 crore to Rs 5.17 crore. The ADR has called for stricter electoral reforms, including disqualifying candidates with serious criminal records and ensuring greater transparency. It warned that the rising trend could undermine democratic values in the long run.

**Central Railway announces weekly special train from Mumbai to Thoothukudi via Madurai**

The train will halt at several key stations including Dadar, Thane, Kalyan, Lonavala, Pune, Daund, Kurduwadi, Solapur, Kalaburagi, Wadi, Yadgir, Krishna, Raichur, Mantralayam Road, Guntakal, Anantapur, Dharmavaram, Yelahanka, Krishnarajapuram, Bangarapet, Salem, Namakkal, Karur, Dindigul, Kodai Road, Madurai, Virudhunagar, Sattur, Kovilpatti and Thoothukudi Melur (2nd Gate).

CHENNAI: To improve connectivity for passengers from southern districts, Central Railway has announced a weekly special train service between Mumbai and Thoothukudi via Bengaluru and Madurai, starting April 21.

Train No. 01005 will depart from Mumbai every Tuesday at 12.30 am from April 21 to June 2. It will reach Madurai at 7.55 am the next day and arrive in Thoothukudi at 11.30 am.

In the return direction, Train No. 01006 will leave Thoothukudi every Wednesday at 3.30 pm from April 22 to June 3. It will reach



Madurai at 5.50 pm and arrive at Mumbai CSMT at 6 am on Friday.

The train will halt at several key stations including Dadar, Thane, Kalyan, Lonavala, Pune, Daund, Kurduwadi, Solapur, Kalaburagi,

Wadi, Yadgir, Krishna, Raichur, Mantralayam Road, Guntakal, Anantapur, Dharmavaram, Yelahanka, Krishnarajapuram, Bangarapet, Salem, Namakkal, Karur, Dindigul, Kodai Road, Madurai, Virudhunagar, Sattur, Kovilpatti and Thoothukudi Melur (2nd Gate).

The train composition includes one AC 2-tier coach, six AC 3-tier coaches, nine sleeper class coaches and four general compartments.

**How Climate Change Is Supercharging Wildfire Risks**



Scientists examined multiple fire danger indices for the contiguous U.S. to assess the impact of climate change on future wildfire risk and seasonality. Wildfires are some of the most destructive natural disasters in the country, threatening lives, destroying homes and infrastructure, and creating air pollution. In order to properly forecast and manage wildfires, managers need to understand wildfire risk and allocate resources accordingly. A new study contributes scientific expertise to this effort. Assessing Future Fire

Risks In the study, published in the November issue of the journal Earth's Future, researchers from the Desert Research Institute (DRI), Argonne National Laboratory, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, teamed up to assess future fire risk. They looked at the four fire danger indices used across North America to predict and manage the risk of wildfire to see how the risk correlated with observed wildfire size between 1984 and 2019. Then, they examined how wildfire risk changed under the pro-

jected future climate, finding that both fire potential and a longer wildfire season are likely under climate change. **COMPREHENSIVE RISK EVALUATION** "We use several of these fire danger indices to evaluate fire risk in the contiguous U.S.," said Guo Yu, Ph.D., assistant research professor at DRI and lead author of the study. "But previous studies have only looked at how climate change will alter wildfire risk using one of them, and only a few studies have looked at how fire risk has translated to the size or characteristics of actual wild-

fires. We wanted to rigorously assess both in this paper." Fire danger indices use information about weather conditions and fuel moisture, or how dry vegetation is on the ground. The most common fire danger indices used in North America are the USGS Fire Potential Index, the Canadian Forest Fire Weather Index, and the Energy Release Component and Burning Indices from the National Fire Danger Rating System. **CORRELATION AND CLIMATE PROJECTIONS** First, the scientists used

satellite remote sensing data from 1984-2019 to see how potential fire risk correlated with ultimate wildfire size for more than 13,000 wildfires, excluding controlled burns.

They found that when wildfire risk was higher, wildfire size tended to be larger, and this relationship was stronger over larger areas. By plugging the fire danger indices into future climate projections, the study found that extreme wildfire risk will increase by an average of 10 days across the continental U.S. by the end of the century, driven largely by increased temperatures. Certain regions, like the southern Great Plains (including Kansas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Texas) are projected to have more than 40 additional days per year of extreme wildfire danger. A few small regions are projected to see a decrease in their annual wildfire risk season due to higher rainfall and humidity, including the Pacific Northwest coast and the mid-Atlantic coast.

**REGIONAL VARIATIONS AND SEASONAL SHIFTS**

In the Southwest, the extreme wildfire season is projected to increase by more than 20 days per year, most of which will occur in the spring and summer months. Longer fire seasons extending into the winter months are also projected, particularly for the Texas-Louisiana coastal plain. "Under a warmer future climate, we can see that the fire danger will even be higher in the winter," Yu said. "This surprised me, because it feels counterintuitive, but climate change will alter the landscape in so many ways."

**A Winter Wonderland in Leavenworth**



The name "icicle" frequently shows up in and around the Bavarian-inspired town of Leavenworth in Washington state. Winter-like names are abundant in and around Leavenworth, a Bavarian-inspired town in central Washington state. Icicle Creek and Icicle Ridge lie south of the town, which itself grew from a settlement known as Icicle Flats. The creek, ridge, and town of Leavenworth are visible in this image, acquired by Landsat 8's OLI (Operational Land Imager) on October 28, 2023. Snow already capped the ridge and nearby peaks, while green vegetation remained visible at lower elevations in the valley. By December, additional snowfall transformed Leavenworth's landscape. On average, the town can see more than an inch of snow per day during the winter months. The blanket of white forms a wintery backdrop for the town's "village of lights" and other holiday festivities ongoing through most of December. The image also shows several of the icicle-named features. Icicle Creek begins as an outlet of Josephine Lake (northwest of this image), just east of the crest of the North Cascades. From there, it flows south-southeast through a narrow glacier-carved valley, bordered to the north by Icicle Ridge. It then turns northward and meanders across the widening valley floor as it nears Leavenworth and the Wenatchee River. Piles of boulders and mounded debris created during the last ice age dot the valley. These "moraines" are evidence of Icicle Glacier, which scoured the ground here more than 15,000 years ago.

Icicle, however, is a relatively recent naming convention unrelated to the spears of frozen water associated with winter. According to a 1943 study of place names in the U.S. Northwest, Icicle Creek was a misinterpretation of the similar-sounding Indigenous American word "nasikelt," meaning narrow-bottom canyon or gorge. Icicle began showing up on U.S. Geological Survey maps in the early 1900s.

The confluence of the creek and the Wenatchee River provided fertile hunting and fishing grounds for Indigenous peoples for centuries. Non-native settlers arrived during the gold rush of the 1860s, fueling the development of Icicle Flats, a small community just south of the Wenatchee River. After the Great Northern Railway was built in 1892, Leavenworth was established on the river's north side and grew as a sawmill and lumber hub until the train was rerouted in 1929. The town launched a revitalization effort centered on a Bavarian theme in the 1960s to encourage tourism.

# EDITORIAL

## Amir Hamza Attack Was A Symptom. A Deadlier Storm Is Brewing Within Lashkar

In the midst of the Iran war and its threatened re-emergence in an even fiercer avatar, some welcome news. Hamza, a founding member of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), was shot by unknown gunmen in Lahore and is said to be currently in critical condition. The elimination of any terrorist anywhere is to be greeted with a sigh of relief. But the Lashkar is in a category of its own. As American negotiators label Iran as the worst terrorist state in the world, nothing Tehran has in its armoury can match what Pakistan has in its quiver of terrorist groups.

### Amir Hamza As A Day 1 Node

Available reports say unidentified attackers opened fire on Hamza outside a news channel office in Lahore while he was walking on the streets. Hamza is no ordinary terrorist. A fiery speaker and writer, he was picked up by Zaki Ur Rehman Lakhvi in 1985, when he was a student at a madrassa in Punjab. This was long before the LeT was even formed. He was taken to meet Hafeez Saeed at his residence, and as a result of these and other meetings, the first 'institution' of the Lashkar, the Markaz Da'wa-Ilshad (MDI), was established. Its publications division was headed by the enthusiastic Hamza, then in his early 20s. He also edited the monthly magazine Mujallah Ad-Dawah and the Al Jarar, the inflammatory rhetoric of both of which directly led to an increase in the membership of the organisation to more than 10,000 in less than three years. The tenor of these and other publications reveals some interesting aspects other than 'jihad' - primarily against India and then the US - and the whole 'heaven' rewards belief. It specifically endorses the Pakistan Army as the 'Army of Islam', contrasting it with corrupt politicians and civilians, and thereby justifying its every action. Hamza's position was that every Pakistani should be a 'symbolic Minister of Defence'. Another recent one was this: "When their combined fist of self-defence lands on the terrorists, we could see Modi falling flat on his face". All this was bolstered by references from the Quran and Sunna, providing a solid base for the Army, particularly the Chiefs whom Hamza eulogised to the hilt.

But Hamza is not just talk. He went to the then Soviet Union to tie up with Salafist groups, and later to Iran to bolster Sunni resistance to the Shia majority. He was also at the core of the Afghan jihad, and, therefore, is well-linked with members of the original Taliban and the mujahideen. He was also a fundraiser of note, and, all in all, is a central figure of the Lashkar, embodying their absolute hatred for India and the US.

### What His Loss Means

He's the historical memory of the group, and losing him would hit LeT leaders hard. The organisation, however, will survive, and perhaps even thrive as younger and even more radical leaders come up. That's the core of the issue. Lashkar has never been without its internal feuds. For instance, a major fissure was reported following the second marriage of Hafiz Saeed to a much younger woman, which, together with operational reasons, led to the estrangement between him and the operational chief Zaki-ur-Rehman. Following the 26/11 attack in Mumbai, Pakistan faced immense pressure to clean up its act, and several Lashkar leaders were 'arrested' and given showpiece sentences. Hamza, however, seems to have got away, and, in fact, seems to have been given yet another group to head: the Jaish-e-Manqafa. This helped the LeT raise financial resources, even as known fronts like the Falah-e-Insaniyat were shut down. That this was done with the full knowledge of the Pakistan 'establishment' is without doubt.

# WOMEN POWER OR A NEW MASK OF POWER?



PRIYANKA SAURABH

(Reservation, the real question of morality and politics)

When the Nari Shakti Vandan Act was passed in India, it was hailed as "historic," Parliament erupted in applause, and a new era of women's empowerment was announced. But amidst all this celebration, an uncomfortable question persisted: are the doors of politics truly open for women, or is it merely a new symbolic framework being created into which the same old image of power will be fitted? The character of Indian politics has been more realistic and, at times, harsh, than idealistic. Where equations prevail over principles, and morality often shifts according to the convenience of power, expecting that reservation alone will change the character of the system may be naive. Increasing women's participation in politics is a fundamental democratic necessity, but the question is whether this participation will translate into genuine empowerment or whether the same power structures will adapt them to their own mold, as they have done with every new entrant. The path to entry into politics is still extremely complex, with pressures from family, capital, connections and party loyalty at play. For women, the path becomes even more difficult as they face additional hurdles such as social constraints, character questions and lack of opportunities. To



assume that every woman who rises will do so only through compromise is not only an oversimplification but also an insult to the struggles of thousands of women who are making their way through their hard work and talent. The real problem is that the system under which this reservation is being implemented is itself not transparent and fair. The lack of democracy within political parties, the opacity in ticket distribution, and the centralization of leadership ensure that opportunities are distributed more

based on proximity than merit. Therefore, even if seats are reserved for women, they will not necessarily emerge as truly independent and empowered representatives; rather, they may become part of the same power game where decisions are made elsewhere and faces are seen elsewhere. This is why both hope and apprehension about this law are natural, because if the structure remains unchanged, the outcome will remain the same as before. The question of ethics in politics is also central to this

debate, as a culture of "contact" and "compromise" has long existed in the corridors of power, and it is not limited to women but permeates the entire system. Therefore, if this culture is not challenged, reservations could become ingrained in the same structure and lose their original purpose. It's also important to understand that increasing representation doesn't guarantee change. Sometimes, even newcomers fall into the trap of following old patterns because the system forces them to do so. Therefore, any reform should be evaluated not just on the basis of numbers, but on its impact. Whether increasing the number of women will bring sensitivity to policies, prioritize social issues, or will politics simply continue in the same old direction with new faces is an open question that only time will answer. The most important element in this entire scenario is accountability. If anyone, whether male or female, abuses power, action should be taken against them. However, this requires independent and strong institutions that can function without political pressure. Unfortunately, the nexus between crime and politics has become a serious problem today, where in many cases the accused are protected and the voices of the victims are suppressed. Expecting reservation alone to solve this problem is unrealistic.

As a solution, we need comprehensive reforms, bringing transparency within political parties, establishing clear and fair criteria for ticket distribution, developing safe and independent grievance mechanisms for women so they can express themselves without fear, and preparing them not just as symbolic representatives but as capable and trained leaders. This requires political education, resources, and institutional support. And most importantly, a change in societal mindsets, because unless women are given equal status, no law will fully achieve its objective.

## DONALD TRUMP'S TOUGHEST OPPONENT? HIS OWN ECONOMY



When it comes to the affordability debate that will define the midterm elections, President Donald Trump's biggest and toughest opponent is this: reality. Consider that in July 2025, when Trump signed his tax cut policy into law with the sweeping One Big Beautiful Bill Act, average national gas prices were \$3.16 a gallon. Fast forward to today, and average gas prices are \$4.12 a gallon. Researchers at Stanford estimate that the average household will spend an additional \$740 this year for gas. Average tax refunds are up only about \$350, or 11%, over last year, according to the Treasury Department. That's far lower than the original projections of nearly \$1,000. All of that overshadowed a series of events that Trump and Republicans held this week to celebrate their tax cuts as Americans closed out tax-filing season. The GOP has been counting on generous tax refunds to give them a political boost heading into the midterms, but so far, it has not materialized. The good news for Republicans is this: Trump largely stayed on message during a round-table event in Las Vegas. It was a notable contrast from his affordability rallies, where his wild oratorical "weave" often drowned out

his message. The bad news is this: In the reality-based world, the economy for workers in Las Vegas - and beyond - isn't so great. Tariffs and a decline in international visitors have dented tourism in Las Vegas, where the unemployment rate has been among the highest for a large metro area over the past year. And while workers in Sin City earned some of the highest tax refunds in the country, they are also contending with \$5 a gallon gas, among the highest in the country. Still, Trump touted a rosy reality, claiming the economy was "booming" and would do even better, once the "diversion" of the Iran war was settled. "For the remainder of 2026, you're going to see a big surge," Trump said during the 45-minute event at a downtown Las Vegas ballroom. "The numbers are really tremendous, and that's why I'm out here. If they were bad, I wouldn't be here today. I'd be sitting home watching televi-

sion." Consumers aren't as bullish. An April consumer confidence survey by the University of Michigan was the gloomiest in 70 years. The previous low was in June 2022, when gas prices hit \$5 a gallon and inflation was at 9.1%, a 40-year high. Other polls find much the same. An April YouGov poll found that just 16% of those surveyed thought that the economy was improving, with 57% saying the economy was getting worse. Just 13% said that they are financially better off than they were a year ago, and 38% said they were not. South Carolina Senator Tim Scott, who leads the GOP effort to retain control of the chamber, released a video touting tax cuts that amount to \$300 a month for some filers. "Thank a Republican!" he says. But Americans aren't feeling grateful. According to a Fox News poll, a record 70% of those surveyed think their taxes are too high, with 75% seeing government spending

as wasteful. Trump has asked for \$1.5 trillion in defense spending, the largest year-over-year hike in decades. According to a survey from the Bipartisan Policy Center, only 27% of those surveyed felt the Trump tax law favored them, with Republicans and tipped and overtime workers more likely to hold this view. Many Americans used their refund money to pay down debt, increasing their payments by 20% for car and student loans and credit card balances. And then there's gas prices. Nearly two-thirds of all voters (65%) and 73% of independents directly blame Trump for increasing prices at the pump, according to a Quinnipiac poll. Democrats, meanwhile, are highlighting the GOP tax law's bigger breaks for upper income earners. That's a smart message, given that some 38% of voters say the biggest annoyance about taxes is that the rich aren't paying their fair share, according to the Fox poll. Republicans are set to continue the messaging around taxes and their megabill into the midterms. But messaging can't overcome the anxiety many Americans feel about an economy that Trump has disrupted with tariffs and a war of choice. And that's the reality for the Republicans who will be on the ballot.

When it comes to the affordability debate that will define the midterm elections, President Donald Trump's biggest and toughest opponent is this: reality.

## Seats In South And West That Hold Key To Tamil Nadu

In an earlier opinion piece on the Tamil Nadu elections, I had stated that this election is not a big wave election, but one that's being fought on a seat-by-seat basis. In any general election, there are tough contests, and then there are defining battles. The first is about candidates; the second will reveal a battle that's bigger - one that could reflect a decisive trend that will determine the overall result. From our extensive travel across the state, below are the defining contests and why. This is not about high-profile candidates; this piece is about the key contest seats in the western and southern districts. In the next piece, I will list out Central (Delta districts), north Tamil Nadu, and Chennai city seats to watch out for.

### Western Region

The AIADMK alliance swept this region in 2021, winning 43 out of 57 seats here. It swept Salem with 10 of 11 seats, won all 10 in Coimbatore, six of eight in Tiruppur, five of eight in Erode, and all five in Dharmapuri. In Namakkal, it won only two of six, and in the hilly Nilgiris, it lost all three. The reason this is important is because Coimbatore, Tiruppur, Erode, Salem, and Dharmapuri are the districts where the DMK must make gains this time to offset losses elsewhere. The DMK had a full sweep in Chennai and peaked in the north and central districts and the south in 2021. If it faces losses after five years in power in these regions, the only space for gains, arguably, is in the West.

### 1. Coimbatore South

This seat will show if the DMK's most powerful face in the region - the one known for his organisational might and the one facing ED cases, former minister Senthil



Balaji - can rewrite the DMK's Coimbatore calculus. In fact, across this region, the candidates have been selected by Senthil Balaji, who has vacated his traditional Karur seat to contest from here and prove a point. The BJP's Vanathi Srinivasan (AIADMK alliance) beat MNM Chief and actor Kamal Haasan (DMK alliance) by less than 2,000 votes in 2021. She has shifted to Coimbatore North, and Senthil Balaji is facing off with AIADMK strongman Amman K Arjunan, who won Coimbatore North in 2021 and is now contesting from here. Results here will test whether the AIADMK can hold on to its bastion. Vijay's TVK and Seeman's NTK are also factors here, and the impact they will have on a classic AIADMK vs DMK battle is being closely watched.

### 2. Gobichettipalayam (Erode district)

Eight-time AIADMK MLA from this seat and now one of the TVK's biggest faces, KA Sengottayan, will show whether the loyalty to "Two Leaves", which is deep and emotional, can shift to the TVK's whistle on voting day. The AIADMK has fielded a young VB Prabhu to take on Sengottayan. In 2021, the

DMK had lost by over 25,000 votes, but if the AIADMK vote gets split, it could throw open an opportunity for the DMK. In the big picture, this seat will show how strong the 'Two Leaves' vote is in seats where former AIADMK leaders have shifted to the TVK. It's also a crucial test for the TVK on whether it can win seats. The possible tacit grassroots understandings between the DMK and AIADMK to keep the TVK at bay would also be crucial to watch out for here.

### 3. Tiruchengode (Namakkal District)

The TVK's general secretary and former IRS officer, one known as a crucial strategist in the party, KG Arun Raj, is facing off with the sub-regional, caste-based Kongu Makkal Desiya Katchi's incumbent MLA ER Easwaran (part of the DMK alliance) and AIADMK's R Chandrashekar. This seat will show whether the TVK and one of its strongest faces can wipe out small regional parties and make a huge inroad into caste vote bases in the western parts of the state. This will also show how much the AIADMK can hold grassroots equations, as Easwaran was an AIADMK ally who has shifted to the

DMK this time.

### 4. Salem West

This will be one of the crucial seats where the 'PMK factor', after the split between Ramadoss Sr and Ramadoss Jr, will be assessed. The incumbent MLA Arul Ramadoss is part of the family and has stuck with Ramadoss senior. Ramadoss Junior (part of the AIADMK alliance) has fielded a strong candidate, M Karthe. The DMK has stayed out of the PMK battle and has given the seat to the DMK. How much the split in the PMK family has hurt the party and who has the people's support will be tested here. The PMK, which has the OBC Vanniyaar caste vote base, is a crucial AIADMK ally, and if the split in the party impacts its vote base, it may be felt across the region. That's why Salem West is crucial to watch out for. This will also show if the split in the PMK and the alliance with the DMK can help the DMK alliance breach Edappadi Palaniswami's fortress. The entire district, with seats like neighbouring Veerapandi, which the DMK is fighting hard to wrest, will be a fascinating test of alliance arithmetic and 'Two Leaves' resilience.

# India LPG consumption slides 13 pc amid West Asia conflict

**New Delhi:** India's cooking gas LPG consumption fell by a steep 13 per cent in March as supply disruptions linked to the West Asia conflict hit availability for both household kitchens and commercial users, according to the latest official data. Liquefied Petroleum Gas consumption was at 2.379 million tonnes in March, 12.8 per cent lower than 2.729 million tonnes consumed in the same period last year. India imports about 60 per cent of its LPG requirements, much of it via the Strait of Hormuz, which was effectively shut following US and Israeli strikes on Iran and Tehran's retaliation. With supplies from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates disrupted, the government has cut LPG supplies to commercial establishments like hotels and industries to safeguard household cooking gas availability. According to the Oil Ministry's Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC), LPG cylinders sold to domestic households fell 8.1 per cent in March to 2.219 million tonnes, while those sold to non-domestic users were down almost 48 per cent.



Bulk LPG sales were down by a massive 75.5 per cent. The PPAC data showed lower consumption when compared to government claims of LPG supplies being normal and all demand from domestic users being met. To offset the shortfall, the government directed refineries to divert feedstock from petrochemical production to boost LPG output. This led to domestic LPG production rising to 1.4 million tonnes in March from 1.1 million tonnes a year ago, according

to data from PPAC.

This push led to LPG production in the full 2025-26 fiscal (April 2025 to March 2026) rising to 13.1 million tonnes from 12.8 million tonnes output in the previous two financial years. Despite March being an exception, LPG consumption in the fiscal year ending March 2026 was 6 per cent up to 33.212 million tonnes. LPG consumption has grown at a steady pace in recent years, driven by government efforts to replace firewood and other pollut-

ing fuels with cleaner alternatives. With the war leading to airspace closures in many Gulf countries and flight suspensions, jet fuel or ATF consumption was almost flat at 807,000 tonnes in March, compared with 801,000 tonnes a year ago. Other than the two war-impacted fuels, petrol and diesel sales posted a handsome rise in demand. Petrol sales were up 7.6 per cent to 3.78 million tonnes while diesel consumption rose 8.1 per cent to 8.727 million tonnes. For the full fiscal,

## Highlights

■ India's cooking gas LPG consumption fell by a steep 13 per cent in March as supply disruptions linked to the West Asia conflict hit availability for both household kitchens and commercial users, according to the latest official data.

ATF sales were up 2 per cent to 9.161 million tonnes while petrol consumption rose 6.5 per cent to 42.586 million tonnes. Diesel consumption was higher by 3.6 per cent to 94.705 million tonnes. Industrial fuels naphtha and fuel oil posted a loss of 9.9 per cent and 1.4 per cent, respectively, while bitumen used for road making saw a 3 per cent rise in consumption to 8.84 million tonnes in 2025-26. According to the Oil Ministry's Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell, LPG cylinder sold to domestic households fell 8.1 per cent in March.

# 600 PC GAS PRICE SPIKE DUE TO IRAN WAR LIT FUSE FOR WORKER STRIKES AROUND DELHI



A wave of labour unrest has swept through the industrial belts of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, with thousands of workers, many of them migrants, walking off factory floors to demand a minimum wage of Rs 20,000 a month, as soaring living costs - driven in part by the Iran war - push the costs to a breaking point. The protests, which began in early April at Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India's plant in Manesar's Industrial Model Township in Haryana, quickly spread to Noida, Faridabad and Sonapat, drawing workers from garment units, auto ancillary firms and export-oriented factories. According to a ground report by The Hindu, over

350 people, including women, have been arrested, while key trade union leaders have been placed under house arrest. At the centre of the discontent is a 600 per cent spike in open-market cooking gas prices, a direct fallout of the West Asia conflict. Workers told The Hindu that a kilogram of cooking gas, once available at Rs 100, now costs between Rs 600 and Rs 700. Combined with room rents of Rs 3,000 to Rs 4,000 a month and wages that don't increase, casual workers earning around Rs 10,000 monthly say they can't save a penny. Honda's casual workers, or contract workers, whose wages had remained unchanged for over a decade despite regular employees

securing a "decent hike," were among the first to snap. The anger soon became a rallying point for workers across several sectors. Both Haryana and Uttar Pradesh announced wage hikes under pressure. While Haryana revised its minimum wage upward by 10 per cent for unskilled and semi-skilled workers, UP, whose last revision was in 2024, revised the floor to Rs 13,600 for Noida after protests intensified. Workers and union leaders rejected these as inadequate, maintaining their demand of Rs 20,000. The protests have not been without violence. Workers and their representatives allege unprovoked baton charges by police, including against women.

# 2 pc Dearness Allowance hike for central govt employees approved

**New Delhi:** The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Saturday, April 18, approved a 2 per cent increase in Dearness Allowance (DA) for central government employees effective from January 1, 2026, providing an increase in their take-home pay. The Cabinet okayed to release an additional instalment of DA to central government employees and Dearness Relief (DR) to pensioners, representing an increase of 2 per cent over the existing rate of 58 per cent of the basic pay/pension, to compensate for the price rise. "The combined impact on the exchequer on account of an increase in both Dearness Allowance and Dearness Relief would be Rs 6,791.24 crore per annum. This will benefit about 50.46 lakh Central Government employees and 68.27 lakh pensioners," said an official statement. This increase is in accordance with the accepted formula, which is based on the recommendations of the 7th Central Pay



Commission. The decision offers a boost to salaries even as broader demands for pay restructuring gather momentum under the proposed 8th Pay Commission. Meanwhile, in a memorandum submitted to the government, the National Council-Joint Consultative Machinery (NC-JCM) has pitched for a significantly higher fitment factor of 3.83. If accepted, the proposal could sharply raise the minimum basic pay from Rs 18,000 to

around Rs 69,000, marking a substantial revision in the overall pay structure. The NC-JCM has proposed a steep uplift for minimum pay of central government employees in its common memorandum to the 8th Pay Commission, one month's wages as gratuity and other benefits. Fitment factor is a multiplier that is used to revise salaries, based on factors such as cost of living and inflation and is then applied to existing basic pay to calculate

## Highlights

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new pay in a pay commission. NC-JCM also proposed a 6 per cent annual increment, two increments on promotion, subject to a minimum benefit of Rs 10,000, etc. The changes adopted by the new Pay Commission would affect over 50 lakh central employees and nearly 65 lakh pensioners. The Cabinet okayed to release an additional instalment of DA to central government employees and Dearness Relief (DR) to pensioners.

# Indian refiners settle Iran oil payments in Chinese yuan through ICICI Bank

In a significant, if short-lived, shift in India's energy trade posture, Indian refiners have been settling payments for Iranian crude oil in Chinese yuan, routed through ICICI Bank's Shanghai branch. The details were reported exclusively by Reuters, citing four sources familiar with the matter. The purchases were made possible by a 30-day waiver on American sanctions that Washington granted to ease oil prices driven up by the US-Israeli war on Iran. That exemption is now lapsing, which US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has confirmed will not be renewed. The waiver on Iranian oil expiring this Sunday, April 19. Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), the country's largest refiner, bought 2 million barrels of Iranian crude, its first such purchase in seven years, carried aboard the tanker "Jaya." The cargo was valued at roughly USD 200 million, Reuters reported. Separately, privately-run Reliance Industries was



permitted to berth four vessels carrying Iranian oil, of which at least one, the MT Felicity, has discharged its cargo. Both companies settled these trades through ICICI Bank, which routed funds in

yuan via its Shanghai branch into seller accounts. The identity of the sellers could not be established. The payment structure itself drew notice. IOC reportedly paid around 95 per cent of the

cargo's value against the supplier's notice of readiness, meaning that once the loaded tanker had entered Indian waters, the payment is made rather than upon actual delivery or discharge, which is the more common practice for oil sourced from sanctioned countries. One source described the arrangement as unusual. India has not purchased Iranian oil since 2019, when Washington's sanctions pressure effectively shut Tehran out of Indian markets. In the intervening years, Chinese independent refiners - colloquially known as "teapots" - emerged as the dominant buyers of Iranian crude. Indian refiners, meanwhile, pivoted sharply toward Russian oil following the West's sweeping sanctions on Moscow after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, and have on occasion also used the yuan to settle those purchases. IOC does not plan to make further Iranian oil purchases, according to one of the sources cited by Reuters.

# The South Korean authors rising above a tide of hate to become bestsellers

When Seen Aromi's memoir documenting the joys of singlehood hit the shelves in early 2024, it became an instant bestseller. Women young and old, single or married, those with children and without seemed to relish So What if I Love My Single Life!, drawing "second-hand satisfaction" from Seen's confident retorts to unsolicited advice, or finding in it the freedom to be "unapologetically single". But soon her success encountered a deluge of criticism and hate online, largely from men. They told her she would die lonely, called her selfish, and accused her of "betraying her country". Embracing female independence and challenging patriarchy has become increasingly dicey in South Korea, where young men have driven a huge backlash against feminism. Discrimination, harassment and sexual violence against women remain huge challenges, but feminism has become such a polarised term here it is



often levelled as a grave charge, inviting witch-hunts online and censure offline. Now women are carving out a space to share their stories in what is shaping up to be a quiet revolution in the country's literary scene. This year women swept the country's most prestigious literary prize - the Yi Sang Awards - winning in all six categories for the first time. Book talks, and reading and writing rooms called guelbang, have sprung up, offering time and space for women to gather and - crucially, they emphasise - grow as a community. Han Kang's historic Nobel Prize win in 2024 aside,

women's voices haven't always been that prominent in Korean writing. However, the country's MeToo movement in 2016 "encouraged ordinary women to speak up," says Eunyuu, an author who launched her writing room in 2011. She prefers using her pen name. Even as the revolt against anything deemed feminist grew, more women began to teach writing classes or hold reading sessions, making these spaces more accessible for other women. "Many of the women who joined as attendees have gone on to become writers in their own right," Eunyuu adds.

# Silver, Gold Face Key Test As Middle East Tensions, US Data Set Tone: Analysts

Silver and gold are expected to witness a decisive week ahead as escalating tensions in West Asia and a slate of macroeconomic data are likely to determine whether the rally extends or undergoes a correction, analysts said. Traders will closely monitor crude prices and key US macroeconomic data including retail sales, housing numbers, and consumer sentiments. Provisional manufacturing and services PMI numbers from major economies such as the UK and the US will also remain on investors' radar, analysts added. The geopolitical outlook turned uncertain after Iran announced on Friday that it has opened the waterway for commercial traffic and several commercial vessels tried to cross it. However, Tehran later reversed the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz and reimposed restrictions following the US decision to continue its blockade of Iran's ports. On the domes-



tic front, Ministry of External Affairs said it had summoned the Iranian envoy and lodged a protest after two Indian-flagged vessels carrying crude oil reversed course in the Strait of Hormuz after coming under Iranian military gunfire. For precious metals, it's going to be a crucial week on deciding the continuation of trend or the possibility of a correction. Focus will be on the infla-

tion data from Japan and the UK, and monetary policy decision by China," Pranav Mer, Vice President, EBG - Commodity & Currency Research, JM Financial Services Ltd, said. On the Multi Commodity Exchange, silver futures surged Rs 13,868, or 5.7%, to settle at Rs 2.57 lakh per kilogram over the past week, and gold gained Rs 1,957, or 1.3%, to close at Rs

1.54 lakh per 10 grams. Mer said bullion prices ended higher for the fourth straight week, supported by a weaker dollar and safe-haven buying amid volatile global environment. He added that frequent policy shifts by US President Donald Trump regarding the Iran conflict have led to sharp swings across financial markets. Meanwhile, the ceasefire between the US and Iran is set to expire

on April 22, which may further influence market sentiment. Mer noted that exchange-traded fund investors have returned to precious metals over the past week after record liquidation in March. Silver also continues to gain support from improving industrial metal sentiment, particularly copper, along with forecasts of another year of supply deficit. In the international markets, Comex silver gained \$5.36, or 7%, to close the week at \$81.84 per ounce, and gold rose \$92.2, or 2%, to \$4,879.6 per ounce. Brokerage firm Choice Broking said gold and silver held steady around \$4,800 and \$80 per ounce on Friday amid improved sentiment after confirmation the Strait of Hormuz would remain open during a 10-day ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon. However, uncertainty persists as the US naval blockade targeting Iran remains in place until a final agreement is reached, it added.

# US negotiators to return to Pakistan for talks as Trump repeats threat to Iran's infrastructure

Monday evening won't be the first time that negotiators from the US and Iran have met in Pakistan for peace talks. Just a week ago, US Vice President JD Vance announced he was taking his delegation home from Islamabad without a deal. As both sides left empty-handed, they blamed each other for the failure. After 21 hours of discussions, Vance said: "we just could not get to a situation where the Iranians would accept our terms." Meanwhile Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, who led his side in the negotiations, suggested the US "failed to gain the trust of the Iranian delegation". Later, a US official said that the two sides did not reach an agreement on what to do with the Iranian regime's enriched uranium. Other unresolved issues, according to the official, included reopening the Strait of Hormuz without toll charges, and securing a commitment from Iran to stop



funding proxy groups like Hezbollah and Hamas. Preparations are already under way in Pakistan after US President Donald Trump said Middle East talks would take place in Islamabad on Monday night. Here's the scene in the Pakistani capital, as we await confirmation of who will make up the US delegation for talks with Iran. Even before President Trump's social media post, Islamabad was already start-

ing to lock down. Guests at the hotel where the talks took place between the US and Iranian delegations last weekend were told they needed to leave. Three universities have moved their classes online. Islamabad police announced that due to the arrival of foreign delegations key roads into the city may be closed with heavy traffic completely restricted from entering the city; traffic has already built up around the

edges of the city. The US president has described Iran's efforts to close the Strait of Hormuz as "strange" because the US blockade "has already closed it". The American naval blockade hasn't specifically barred passage of ships in the strait - so let's break down what each side has said about their restrictions. Iran's Supreme National Security Council, the country's top security body, said on state TV on Saturday that

Tehran is "determined to enforce monitoring and control over transit through the Strait of Hormuz until the definitive end of the war and the establishment of lasting peace in the region". The statement says this will be done by collecting full information from vessels passing through, issuing transit certificates, and requiring payment of service fees for "security, safety, and environmental protection services". US When Trump first announced the US blockade, he said it would apply to "any and all ships trying to enter, or leave, the Strait of Hormuz". He also said he had instructed the navy to "interdict every vessel" in international waters that pays a toll to Iran to pass the strait. But the US military's description of how the US blockade was worded differently - focusing on blockading Iranian ports, and not restricting passage through the strait for others. It said it would not "impede freedom of navigation for

vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz to and from non-Iranian ports". Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei has criticised the US blockade of Iranian ports as a violation of the ceasefire agreement, adding it is "unlawful and criminal". In a post on social media, Baghaei cites an article from the UN Charter and a UN resolution which he says prohibit the blockading a country's ports and coastline. Baghaei accuses the US of committing a war crime by "deliberately inflicting collective punishment on the Iranian population", describing it as a "crime against humanity". More from Donald Trump's social media post, where he accuses Iran of a "Violation of our Ceasefire Agreement" after it "decided to fire bullets yesterday in the Strait of Hormuz". "That wasn't nice, was it?" Trump writes, saying the shots were "aimed at a French Ship, and a Freighter from the United Kingdom".

## Rat poison found in HiPP baby food jar in Austria, police say



Police in Austria have urged people to be vigilant after a sample of HiPP baby food was found to contain rat poison. Police in the eastern region of Burgenland said the poisoned jar of carrot and potato purée had been reported by a customer and that their baby had fortunately not consumed the food. The jar had apparently been tampered with, police said. Authorities believe at least one more poisoned jar is in circulation and have issued guidance on how to recognise tampered jars. They have not confirmed that the cases involve an alleged extortion attempt. But the police statement said the warning had come from German investigators and tampered jars had also been

seized in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. On Saturday, HiPP recalled its entire range of jarred purées sold in Spar supermarkets in Austria, saying consuming them may be potentially "life-threatening". The German-based company said the recall of baby food jars at Spar Austria was "not due to a product or quality defect on our part" - and that jars had left its factory in "perfect condition". "The recall is related to a criminal act that is being investigated by the authorities," it said on its website. "As part of ongoing criminal investigations, isolated cases of tampered HiPP baby food jars have been seized - as previously reported in Austria, now also in the Czech Republic and Slovakia."

## BODIES OF 50 INFANTS DUMPED AT TRINIDAD GRAVEYARD



The remains of at least 50 infants and six adults have been dumped at a graveyard in Trinidad and Tobago, police say. The country's police service (TTPS) said in a statement that the bodies were found in the town of Cumuto, about 40km (25 miles) from the capital Port of Spain on Trinidad - one of the two islands forming the Caribbean nation. A preliminary investigation showed it may be a case of an "unlawful disposal of unclaimed corpses", it added. It is unclear if the incident is linked to gang violence in the country with one of the highest murder rates in Latin America and the Caribbean. The police statement said five of the six adults - four men and two women - had identification tags on them. Two showed signs of having

had post-mortem examinations. The discovery was "deeply troubling", police commissioner Allister Guevarro said. "Any individual or institution found to have violated that duty will be held fully accountable," the commissioner said. A state of emergency which gives police extended powers of search and arrest has been renewed since being introduced on 2 March. The US state department has issued several travel advisories since then - due to crime as well as "a heightened risk of terrorism". "Although violent crime in Trinidad and Tobago has dropped greatly since 2024 due to security efforts started during the previous state of emergencies, crime remains a challenge throughout the country," the advisory said.

## ALEC BALDWIN TO FACE CIVIL TRIAL OVER RUST FILM SET SHOOTING

Actor Alec Baldwin could face a civil trial over a 2021 shooting on the set of the film Rust, after a judge ruled a lawsuit could go to trial. The lawsuit, which was filed by Serge Svetnoy, who worked as the lighting technician on the film, alleges the Hollywood actor was negligent leading up to the shooting. While he was rehearsing a scene on the film set in New Mexico, Baldwin's prop gun fired a live round, killing cinematographer Halyna Hutchins and injuring director Joel Souza in 2021. Baldwin has denied pulling the trigger, and a criminal case against him was dismissed in 2024. Svetnoy claims a bullet narrowly missed him and accuses Baldwin and the film's pro-



duction company of violating gun safety protocols. Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Maurice Leiter allowed Svetnoy's claims of negligence and intentional infliction of emotional distress, but threw out a claim of assault, according to documents released on Friday. If no settlement is reached, a civil trial date has been provisionally set for 12 October.

## Australia's most-decorated soldier vows to fight war crime charges

Australia's most decorated living soldier, Ben Roberts-Smith, has publicly denied all allegations against him in his first statement after being charged with five counts of the war crime of murder last week. The Victoria Cross recipient, released on bail on Friday, said he was "proud of my service in Afghanistan", and would use the charges against him as an opportunity to "finally" clear his name. He said: "I understand this journey will be difficult. But I can promise everybody that I have never run from a fight in my life." Roberts-Smith, 47, is accused of being involved in the deaths of unarmed Afghan detainees, either by killing them or ordering a subordinate to, between 2009 and



2012. A former corporal in Australia's Special Air Service (SAS) Regiment, Roberts-Smith told the media that "while I would have preferred these charges not to be brought, I will be taking this opportunity to finally clear my name". He went on: "I'm proud of my service in Afghanistan. While I was there, I always acted within

my values, within my training and within the rules of engagement." He described his arrest as a "sensational" and "unnecessary spectacle", and refused to take any questions from journalists. Roberts-Smith was arrested at Sydney airport on 7 April, and was released from jail on bail on Friday. The presiding judge noted that his case was "exceptional" and he

was likely to spend "possibly years and years" in custody before it went to trial, if not granted bail. The criminal case against Roberts-Smith follows a 2023 civil defamation case, in which a judge found - on the balance of probabilities - there was "substantial truth" to some of the murder claims against him. Brought by Roberts-Smith against Nine newspapers, which first published allegations of misconduct in 2018, the high-profile trial was the first time in history any court has examined claims of war crimes by Australian forces. The former soldier argued the alleged killings occurred legally during combat or did not happen at all, and last year lost an appeal against the Federal Court finding.

## POPE SAYS 'TYRANTS' SPEECH WAS NOT AIMED AT TRUMP

Pope Leo says he was not seeking to debate Donald Trump when he criticised "tyrants" for spending billions on wars in a speech earlier this week. The pontiff said the remarks, delivered days after a high-profile spat with the US president, had been written a fortnight earlier - "well before the president ever commented on myself". "And yet as it happens, it was looked at as if I was trying to debate, again, the president, which is not in my interest at all," he told reporters aboard a flight to Angola on Saturday. On Monday, Trump launched a scathing attack on the first American Pope - who has been a vocal critic of the US-Israeli military operation in



Iran - as "terrible for foreign policy". The Pope, who is on a tour of Africa, said a "certain narrative that has not been accurately" had developed, citing "the political situation created" by Trump's comments. In response to the pontiff's latest remarks, US Vice-President JD Vance, who con-

verted to Catholicism as an adult, said he was "grateful to Pope Leo for saying this". "While the media narrative constantly gins up conflict - and yes, real disagreements have happened and will happen - the reality is often much more complicated," Vance added. Earlier in the week -

before the Pope's speech referring to "tyrants" - Vance had urged the Vatican to "stick to matters of morality". During the speech in Cameroon on Thursday, the Pope had criticised leaders who "turn a blind eye to the fact that billions of dollars are spent on killing and devastation, yet the resources needed for healing, education and restoration are nowhere to be found". "The masters of war pretend not to know that it takes only a moment to destroy, yet often a lifetime is not enough to rebuild," he said. The Pope also condemned "an endless cycle of destabilisation and death" in a "bloodstained" region of Cameroon that had been gripped by insurgency for nearly a decade.

## Zelensky condemns US extension of Russian sanctions waiver



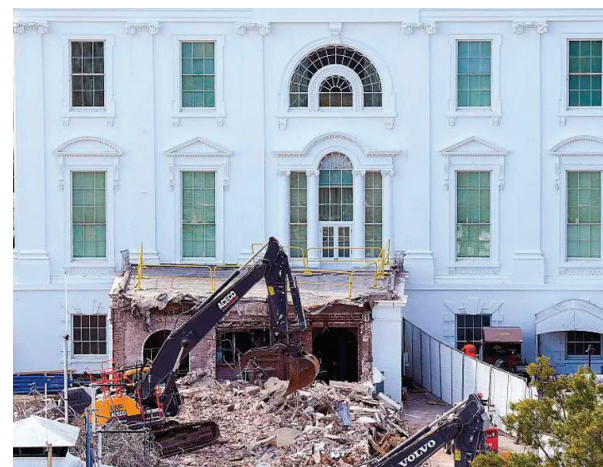
Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky has condemned a US decision to extend the period during which Russia is allowed to sell oil despite Western sanctions. The move means countries can purchase Russian oil and petroleum products already loaded on vessels at sea until 16 May. The US argues that the waiver is meant to ease the energy supply crunch sparked by the US-Israel war with Iran. But in his remarks on Sunday, Zelensky said "every dollar paid for Russian oil is money for the war" in Ukraine. Widespread sanctions have been in place against Russia since President Vladimir Putin launched his full-scale invasion of its neighbour in February 2022. The devastating US and Israel attacks against Iran have prompted it to retaliate not only against Israel and US military bases in the Gulf, but also against energy fatalities and other civilian sites across Arab allies of the US in the region. Additionally, Iran has virtually shut the Strait of Hormuz - the narrow passage where some 20% of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) is usually transported through. This has led to turmoil in energy

markets, with fears that a world recession may ensue if it is not reopened soon. The US move to ease Russian sanctions on 13 March was widely condemned by Zelensky as well as his European allies. Extending the waiver on Friday, the US said it wanted "to ensure oil is available to those who need it" as negotiations to end the war "accelerate". The Ukrainian leader said Russia had more than 110 tankers from its "shadow fleet" - vessels with obscured ownership designed to help it bypass sanctions - with "over 12 million tons" of oil. Their sale, he added, would bring \$10bn (£7.4bn) to Moscow's coffers as "a resource that is directly converted into new strikes against Ukraine". The Ukrainian leader did not explain what those figures were based on. But he added that just over the past week, Russia had launched "over 2,360 attack drones, more than 1,320 guided aerial bombs, and nearly 60 missiles of various types at our cities and communities". That included the deadliest attack against Ukraine in months on 15 April during which more than 700 drones and missiles were used in multiple waves in one night, killing at least 18 people.

## BUILDING OF TRUMP'S WHITE HOUSE BALLROOM CAN RESUME IN FULL, APPEALS COURT SAYS

Construction of the underground and above ground portions of US President Donald Trump's White House ballroom will be allowed to continue, an appeals court has ruled. The US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia granted an administrative stay after the Trump administration appealed against US District Judge Richard Leon's decision to halt above-ground construction on Thursday. Construction is now expected to continue until the next hearing, which is due to take place on 5 June. This week's rulings came after the appeals court ordered the judge to reconsider the national security implica-

tions of halting the work after he temporarily blocked all construction of the ballroom in March. The ruling marks a victory for the president in his effort to redesign the storied American structure. Leon said on Thursday that he thought the project required congressional approval, adding that the administration reclassifying the ballroom plans as vital for national security appeared to be an attempted work around. "National security is not a blank cheque to proceed with otherwise unlawful activity," he wrote. Following the ruling, Trump took to Truth Social to accuse the judge of "attempting to prevent



future Presidents and World Leaders from having a safe and secure large scale Meeting Place". "It's all tied together as one big, expensive, and very complex

unit, which is vital for National Security and Military Operations of the United States of America!" he wrote, adding that the underground complex

would include bomb shelters and medical facilities. He also said that the ballroom was "needed now" and that "no judge can be allowed to stop" it. The Justice Department filed an appeal against Leon's ruling on Thursday, arguing it "would imperil the president and national security and indefinitely leave a large hole beside the Executive Residence". The BBC has contacted the White House for comment. The judge temporarily halted the construction project in late March, ruling that proper procedures were not followed before it had begun. That decision came after the White House was sued by the National Trust

for Historic Preservation. The preservation group's lawsuit, filed last year, alleges that the White House broke the law when it started construction on the ballroom and bunker without filing plans with the National Capital Planning Commission and by declining to seek authorisation from Congress. The East Wing of the White House, constructed in 1902, was demolished in October to make way for the multi-million-dollar ballroom, which will have capacity for 1,350 guests. The White House has said the project was expected to cost \$400m (£302m) and was being funded entirely by private donors.



## IPL 2026: Punjab Kings Set 254/7-Run Target for Lucknow Super Giants

Priyansh Arya and Cooper Connolly forged a 182-run partnership off 80 balls as Punjab Kings posted 254 for 7 against Lucknow Super Giants in their IPL 2026 game in Mullanpur tonight. Mohammed Shami dismissed Prabhsimran Singh on the third ball to provide LSG with an early wicket, but Priyansh and Connolly completely rattled the bowling with a sensational counter-attack. Priyansh smashed 93 off 37 with the help of four fours and nine sixes, while Connolly hit 87 off 46. Earlier, LSG captain Rishabh Pant won the toss and opted to bowl. Marcus Stoinis has been run out on the final ball. That puts an end to the Punjab Kings innings. PBKS have posted a mammoth total of 254 for 7 in 20 overs. Meanwhile, LSG pacer Prince Yadav has finished with impressive figures of 2 for 25. Prince



Yadav has dismissed Shashank Singh! The right-handed batter was rushed by the pace of Prince and ended up being caught by Aiden Markram at mid-on. 20 runs came off the final over of Mohammed Shami. Marcus Stoinis slammed a six while Shashank Singh too hit a maximum apart from a four in the over.

Shami finished with figures of 1 for 56. Rinku Singh once again rose to the occasion as his knock helped Kolkata Knight Riders defeat Rajasthan Royals by four wickets in their IPL 2026 match on Sunday in Eden Gardens. The spin duo of Varun Chakaravathy and Sunil Narine applied the brakes effectively to restrict

Rajasthan Royals to 155 for nine. Opting to bat, Yashasvi Jaiswal (39) and Vaibhav Sooryavanshi (46) provided a flying start as RR reached 81-0 in 8.3 overs but spin duo of Varun Chakaravathy (3/14) and Sunil Narine (2/26) put in the squeeze to leave the visitors at 124 for 5 in 16 overs. Shimron Hetmyer (15) and Riyan

Parag (12) reached double digit scores but Kartik Tyagi (3/22) then scalped three wickets as they couldn't recover, managing a below-par total. In reply, KKR slipped 5 for 2 in 2nd over before losing half their side for 70 in 11th over. Rinku then steadied the chase, sharing a decisive 76-run stand off 37 balls with Anukul Roy (29) to guide KKR home with two balls to spare. Kolkata Knight Riders (161/6) defeated Rajasthan Royals (155/9) by four wickets in their IPL 2026 match on Sunday. Chasing 156, Rinku Singh scored an unbeaten 53 off 34 balls, while Anukul Roy scored 29 off 16 balls. This is KKR's first win of the season and it came on the second-last ball of the match. Interestingly, Rinku was dropped on eight by Nandre Burger, which turned out to be the game-changing moment.

## Shreyas Iyer To Become Next India T20I Captain? Report Reveals Major Details

Shreyas Iyer has emerged as a top candidate to succeed Suryakumar Yadav as the Indian cricket team T20I captain, according to Times of India. The report claimed that the BCCI are looking at Shreyas as a proper option and his batting display at No. 4 for Punjab Kings in the IPL has further boosted his chances. Shreyas led Delhi Capitals to the IPL final back in 2020 and then won the title with Kolkata Knight Riders in 2024. With Punjab Kings, he enjoyed a brilliant run of form in 2025 and even finished runners-up after losing to Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the final. Although Suryakumar guided India to the T20 World Cup 2026 title, his batting display has not been good and as a result, the chatter around Shreyas has grown over time. According to the TOI report, sources said that Iyer is an obvious replacement for Suryakumar if the selectors decide to move on. "Iyer last played a T20I in 2023. He has not been part of the current setup. It's a big call to bring him back and hand him the captaincy straightaway," a BCCI source told TOI. "The



focus has shifted towards the 2027 ODI World Cup, which has given selectors breathing space to plan for a T20I leadership transition." Suryakumar Yadav may have led India to an impressive T20 World Cup title defence but given his patchy batting form, serious questions remain on whether he will be in the scheme of things for the country's Los Angeles Olympics campaign in 2028. And in this backdrop, India's tour of England and

Ireland in June-July will be crucial for the skipper as more than his captaincy, his batting would be under scrutiny. The tour could decide whether he will be given another two years till the next phase of big events in 2028 which includes the Olympics and T20 World Cup in Australia. Suryakumar still remains the first choice for head coach Gautam Gambhir, who is expecting a contract extension till the 2028 T20 World Cup in Australia.

## Kavya Maran Can't Keep Calm As Sunrisers Hyderabad Beat CSK In IPL 2026 Thriller

Sunrisers Hyderabad pulled off a brilliant win over Chennai Super Kings in a thrilling IPL 2026 encounter in Hyderabad on Saturday. CSK looked well on course for victory during their 195-run chase but Nitish Kumar Reddy and Eshan Malinga took five wickets among themselves to snatch the win from the jaws of defeat. The magnitude and importance of the victory was quite clear from SRH owner Kavya Maran's reaction after the victory. In a video going viral on social media, Kavya Maran looked extremely excited as her team emerged victorious and she celebrated by punching the air and clapping for the players. Sunrisers Hyderabad skipper Ishan Kishan couldn't have been more pleased with a



group of young pacers, who are executing the bowling plans to the T. Chasing 195, Chennai Super Kings were kept down to 184 for 8 as pacers Eshan Malinga (3/29 in 4 overs), Sakib Hussain (1/32 in 4 overs), Nitish Reddy (2/31 in 4 overs) and spinner Shivang Kumar (1/18 in 3 overs) were

bang on target. "It is lovely when you have a bunch of young bowlers who are coming up with their own plans and executing the team plans as well. As a captain, it makes my job easier to set fields," Kishan said after the end of the match. With Pat Cummins not available during first half,

Kishan was happy to trust the young bunch. "Looking at them at practice, seeing them get better day by day, they are keen on doing well, so you give them ball and let them do what they want to," he said. While he was happy with bowling, Kishan conceded that on this batting track, SRH were at least 20 runs short but bowlers covered for the batters. CSK skipper Rituraj Gaikwad said that not having big overs at the start of the back-10 dented their chances. "It was just about 80 runs needed in 10 overs (with the bat). From there it was just about building a couple of partnerships. We scored just 4 runs in the next 2 overs after the 10-over mark. Chasing 12-13 at the death is going to be difficult," said Gaikwad.

## Vaibhav Sooryavanshi Sent Big Warning Over Brand Endorsements: "If You Stop Performing"

Rajasthan Royals young sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi is already a household name thanks to his brilliant performances in the IPL. The 15-year-old has not made his India debut yet but the fanfare around him has grown over time and he has already signed few brand deals. In a conversation with Cricbuzz, former New Zealand cricketer Simon Doull warned the youngster about being vigilant when dealing with brand endorsements and said that he needs to be careful about the kind of people he surrounds himself with. Doull went on to say that many management companies only think about themselves and not the client and warned that if



Sooryavanshi stop performing in the future, these same companies will just start searching for the new sensation. "He already is a bit of a superstar. If things carry on like this, he will be a superstar. It is the people you sur-

round yourself with. He will have every management company looking for him in the past 2 years. Trying to find this deal or that deal. Management companies and management people are there to look after you. Too

many of them think about looking after themselves. How much can I make off this young man. That is the biggest issue I have with management companies worldwide. If you stop performing, they will start chasing the next bloke. Just be careful with whom you surround yourself with," Doull said. Renowned commentator Harsha Bhogle supported Doull and drew a comparison with Sachin Tendulkar - someone who also tasted fame at a very young age. Bhogle said that Tendulkar had a strong support from his family who made sure that he was not led astray before adding that Sooryavanshi will also need similar support from his family in the future.

## Four Assam Players Power ZFA Into AIFF Under-18 Elite League Final Round

Miles away from home, four young footballers from Assam are scripting a powerful story of ambition, courage, and success with the Hindustan Zinc's Zinc Football Academy (ZFA). The Udaipur-based academy has recently secured qualification for the Final Round of the AIFF Under-18 Elite League 2025-26. Coming from different corners of Assam - Udalguri, Tinsukia, and Duliagan, Ashish Chetry, Bryant Dihingia, Rishi Konwar, and Dwiden Boro have each played a unique role in ZFA's impressive campaign. Together, they represent not just talent, but the spirit of chasing dreams far from home. Leading the charge in the AIFF 3-star Academy is striker Ashish



Chetry, a farmer's son from Udalguri, who has emerged as one of the most lethal forwards in the league. With 23 goals in the Zonal Round, including three hat-tricks, Ashish is currently the second-highest goal scorer in the national competition. His relentless pressing, sharp movement, and clini-

cal finishing have made him the focal point of ZFA's attack. Off the pitch, the Class 11 student remains a shy teenager who is often seen drawing inspiration from his idol Cristiano Ronaldo, who dreams of helping his team lift the national title for the very first time.

## Bizarre Controversy Hits PSL 2026. Fans Call Team Official's Justification A 'Joke'

A bizarre incident took place during the ongoing Pakistan Super League (PSL) 2026 season. Quetta Gladiators announced Sri Lanka batter Dinesh Chandimal as a direct replacement for New Zealand all-rounder Bevon Jacobs in the middle of the tournament, with the latter set to join his national side. Incredibly, however, both Chandimal and Jacobs played together in Quetta Gladiators' game against Lahore Qalandars on Friday. The franchise later attempted to clarify how the confusing incident took place, despite an official announcement having already been made. After the match, Nabeel Hashmi, the General Manager of Quetta Gladiators, tried to reason why Chandimal and Jacobs played together. Hashmi



responded to a fan's question on social media, stating that English pacer Tom Curran suffered an untimely illness, forcing Chandimal and Jacobs to both play. "Tom Curran was unwell and had to stay back in hotel. Chandimal came in for Tom in this particular match," Hashmi wrote on X. The explanation was met by criti-

cism from several other fans on social media, with some questioning the legality of such a manoeuvre and others trolling the move. What makes the replacement announcement even more intriguing is that Jacobs' international duties with New Zealand are still more than a week away, beginning from April 27.

## Sanju Samson Will Lead Chennai Super Kings 'At Some Point': Ravichandran Ashwin's Massive Prediction



Chennai Super Kings' tryst with appointing a new captain after MS Dhoni has not gone well. First, Ravindra Jadeja was tried, but Dhoni had to be brought back as skipper mid-season in IPL 2022. Then, Rituraj Gaikwad was named CSK captain in IPL 2024. The results so far have not been encouraging. CSK missed out on a playoff spot in 2024 and finished last among 10 teams in 2025. In IPL 2026, CSK have lost three out of five matches and are placed among the bottom three teams. Ahead of IPL 2026, CSK brought in Sanju Samson. Ever since the India star was roped in, there has been a buzz about whether he is being primed to become the CSK captain. Former India off-spinner

Ravichandran Ashwin believes that Sanju Samson could one day take over the captaincy of the five-time champions Chennai Super Kings (CSK) in the Indian Premier League (IPL), while stressing that the wicketkeeper-batter should carve out his own identity rather than follow in anyone's footsteps. Speaking about CSK's leadership transition over the years, Ashwin said the shift had already begun during Ravindra Jadeja's brief stint as captain, even though it did not pan out as expected. He added that current skipper Rituraj Gaikwad has effectively been running the show alongside head coach Stephen Fleming in recent seasons.

## Lionel Messi Scores Winner As Inter Miami Down Colorado On Coach Debut

Lionel Messi gifted Inter Miami's new coach a 3-2 victory over the Colorado Rapids with a brace including a spectacular late winner in front of 75,000 Major League Soccer fans on Saturday. Shifted to Denver's giant NFL stadium to accommodate the huge demand to see Argentina's World Cup-winning icon, the game appeared to be drifting Colorado's way after a spirited home team fightback from 2-0 down. But Messi, having already converted a penalty, had other ideas. With just over 10 minutes remaining, the Argentine sprinted onto a through ball sent down the

right by Rodrigo De Paul. He dribbled into the box and somehow threaded a shot with his favorite left foot through three defenders and past the keeper into the corner. It handed Messi's longtime friend Guillermo Hoyos a win on his debut as Miami coach, after Javier Mascherano departed the club for "personal reasons" Tuesday, just four months after guiding the club to its first MLS Cup title. "We have the greatest player in history, someone who completely shifts the momentum of matches," said a delighted Hoyos. Hoyos, 62, made few changes to the lineup, notably

bringing in German Bertrame to replace Tadeo Allende, who continues to recover from a muscle injury. The win sends Inter Miami up to second place in the Eastern Conference. "This continues the work we've been doing and the progress the team has been making - the team is the reigning MLS champion. We are a solid unit," said Hoyos. "Just look at the energy Inter Miami generates - how they've had to move to a larger stadium to accommodate it all - and contrast that with the quiet humility with which we have always tried to go about our business," he added, in

Spanish. **Late heroics** Playing in front of 75,824 fans - the second-largest crowd in MLS history - Miami got off to a sluggish start, but were handed a golden opportunity. As Colorado tried to play the ball out from the back under Miami's press, Josh Atencio conceded a penalty for tripping Yannick Bright in the box. Following a lengthy VAR check Messi stepped up, rolling it calmly down the middle as the keeper dived left. Colorado continued to dominate possession while rarely threatening.



## 'VOLLEY' TITLE REVEALED WITH MOTION POSTER BY DIRECTOR KRISH JAGARLAMUDI

Tollywood's first volleyball sports drama VOLLEY, presented by G Vikram Reddy under the banner of Firewater Entertainments, has officially unveiled its title through an engaging motion poster. The motion poster was launched by versatile filmmaker Krish Jagarlamudi on his official X handle, drawing attention from cinema enthusiasts and industry circles alike. Directed by Dilip K Manukonda, VOLLEY is set against a coastal rural backdrop and dives into the lives of two brothers while showcasing an intense, emotionally charged grassroots-level volleyball world. The film explores themes of ambition, rivalry, and human relationships, promising a compelling blend of action and drama rooted in the spirit of volleyball. The film introduces Ronith GRG and Nipun Satya, while Abhignya Vuthaluru plays the female lead. The supporting cast includes Ravi Varma, Kalpalatha, Vadlamani Srinivas, Lakshman Meesala, Kiran Varanasi, and Ramana Bharghav, bringing together a strong ensemble to drive the narrative. The project is produced by G Rohan Reddy, with Srinivas Karanki serving as Co-Producer and Sneha Dasari as Executive Producer. The story and screenplay are written by Dilip K Manukonda and



Pavan K Vipparthi. On the technical front, the film boasts a strong crew with Arun VJK as the cinematographer, Auranova Studios composing the music, and Raviteja Girijala handling editing. Shot in picturesque locations in Uppada and other nearby villages in Andhra, the shoot for the project is completed and the team is busy with the post-produc-

tion works currently. With the title now revealed and the motion poster generating positive buzz, VOLLEY is shaping up to be a powerful sports drama that captures both the intensity of the game and the depth of human emotions. Further updates regarding the film are expected soon on Firewater Entertainments' social media channels.

## SOUTH INDIAN FILM PRODUCERS UNITE TO PROTECT INDUSTRY ECOSYSTEM; FORM A STEERING COMMITTEE FOR THE NEW ASSOCIATION



**HYDERABAD, 19th April 2026** - In a landmark meeting held today at Hotel Dasapalla, leading film producers and representatives from the Producers' Associations and Guilds of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala met to address the critical challenges threatening the film production sector. The assembly unanimously condemned any unilateral decisions taken by other stakeholders of the

industry regarding theatrical terms or 8 Weeks OTT window terms, without mutual consultation. It was emphasized that the existing film-making ecosystem, which supports thousands of livelihoods, cannot be disturbed overnight, as such sudden shifts would create chaos for projects at various stages of production. Key Outcomes of the Meeting: Formation of South Indian Film Producers Association: To

ensure long-term protection of producers' interests, the participants have unanimously agreed to form a dedicated South Indian Film Producers Association (SIFPA). Steering Committee: A high-level steering committee, comprising representative members from each of the four South Indian language film industries, has been established to oversee immediate challenges and facilitate frequent coordina-

tion among the four language industries and Producers. Advisory to Producers: All Producer members are advised to continue with their current processes of film-making, sale terms of various rights and release schedules on their own, without any controls or terms imposed by any Association. Stand on OTT Windowing: Producer Members are specifically advised not to issue any letters of commitment regard-

ing OTT release windows at this stage to any Association or Sector. Any such terms must only be decided through collective consultation to ensure the financial viability of the production sector. The newly formed Steering Committee of SIFPA will meet frequently to ensure that the Producer, the primary risk-taker of the industry, remains a sovereign stakeholder in all decision-making processes.



## Virat Karna, Abhishek Nama, Nick Studios' Pan India Project 'Nagabandham' Releases Visual Spectacular Grand Wedding Celebration Song 'Sura Sura'

Expectations are rising as Abhishek Nama's 'Nagabandham: The Secret Treasure', starring Virat Karna, is set to hit the theatres on July 3rd. With every update, the buzz around the film is reaching the next level. The excitement has increased further with the release of the film's second single 'Sura Sura'. 'Sura Sura' is a full-fledged celebration song that captures the joy of a traditional wedding. The song captivates the audience with its vibrant beat and colorful

visuals. Shot on a grand scale, the song showcases the cultural backdrop and grandeur of the film. The music composed by Junaid Kumar

and Abhe stands out with its powerful orchestration of tribal sounds and folk elements. The rhythm of this song is cinematic and gives a grander experience. Singers like Anurag Kulkarni, Kaalbhairava, Mangli, Sahithi Chaganti, Kanakavva, Nalgonda Gaddar have added more energy to the song with their unique vocals. Choreographed by Ganesh Acharya, the song is a visual spectacle.



## HOLLYWOOD'S BIG STUDIO TO DISTRIBUTE RAMAYANA?



Nitesh Tiwari's film Ramayana was recently presented at CinemaCon, a major film event held in Las Vegas. About 20 minutes of the movie's footage was shown to a select group, giving them an early look at the film. There has been a positive response to the footage from whoever has watched it. Interestingly, producer Namit Malhotra and actor Yash also interacted with the media there post-screening. Reports suggest that Warner Bros. is showing interest in distributing the film globally. Still, bringing Warner Bros on board for distribu-

tion is not an easy task. If this turns true, the film will have a wider overseas release and could easily hit over 4500 screens in the USA. However, this distribution deal has not been officially confirmed by Warner Bros. or the film's team yet. The rumor is fast spreading in Bollywood media. Especially, at the time when the teaser received a mediocre response, and if this deal news comes true, that will only benefit the film. Billed to be a mythological epic grand epic fantasy, the film features Ranbir Kapoor, Sai Pallavi and Yash in the lead roles.

## 'Doomsday' Trailer Shakes CinemaCon as Robert Downey Jr. Unveils Doom First-Look

Doom came to CinemaCon Thursday, where Marvel Studios showed off the first extensive look at Avengers: Doomsday, its multiverse mashup movie that brings Robert Downey Jr. back to the fold. Marvel Studios honcho Kevin Feige took the stage in Las Vegas on Thursday to close out Disney's presentation. "Doomsday picks up where Avengers: Endgame left off," Feige said, also expressing his excitement in introducing the Avengers to the X-Men. Doomsday returns directors Anthony Russo and Joe Russo to the Marvel

fray, as they helm the movie from a script by Michael Waldron and Stephen McFeely. Joe Russo said of Doom, "He's not simply a villain — he's one of the most complex Marvel characters. He's always three moves ahead." At that, Downey took the stage to the tune of the Rolling Stones' "Sympathy for the Devil." The star, who is known for his previous Marvel Cinematic Universe role as Tony Stark's Iron Man, exclaimed, "I couldn't have imagined reuniting with this amazing team — let alone as a new character." The team then revealed a trailer that provided the

first look at Downey's Doctor Doom in his mask. "Put aside your petty squabbles. Presume nothing except this: If you return, you will return as brothers and sisters," Chris Hemsworth's Thor tells his fellow heroes about the threat of Doom. "Mark my words: We are going to need a miracle." The footage ended with Chris Evans surprising Hemsworth, who says, "It's not possible," as Evans grabs Thor's hammer. Evans then took the stage and quipped about Doom, "This guy — I don't like it." This marked the first extensive footage of Doomsday following brief

teasers released in late 2025 and earlier this year focusing on Steve Rogers, Thor and the X-Men, as well as one centering on Shuri and Wakanada friends and The Thing from the Fantastic Four. Combined, the teasers generated 1 billion views online. Downey's return as Doom was not revealed in those teasers (he briefly appeared as the character in Fantastic Four: First Steps, but his face was not shown).

### DAVE CHAPPELLE PITCHES EDDIE MURPHY ON JOINING POTENTIAL 'CHAPPELLE'S SHOW' REBOOT AT AFI GALA



Veteran actor Babu Mohan has been honored with the prestigious Relangi Award by the Telugu Film Television Welfare Forum & Bharat Cultural Academy, marking a significant milestone as he completes 41 years in the Telugu film industry. Having acted in over 2,000 films, Babu Mohan is widely respected not only for his contributions to cinema but also for his social commitment and political service. He previously served as a Cabinet Minister in the united Andhra Pradesh state, earning recognition for his dedication and integrity. A media meet was organized on this occasion, attended by several prominent personalities including Telugu Film Producers Council Secretary Tummala

## ACTOR BABU MOHAN HONORED WITH PRESTIGIOUS RELANGI AWARD BY TELUGU FILM TELEVISION WELFARE FORUM & BHARAT CULTURAL ACADEMY

Prasanna Kumar, Naga Bala Suresh, actor Rangky, actor 30 Years Prudhvi Raj, noted journalist Suresh Kondeti, and others. Speaking at the event, Naga Bala Suresh praised Babu Mohan's remarkable journey and his grounded personality, expressing happiness over the recognition. Tummala Prasanna Kumar highlighted his humility and commitment, recalling his growth from early film days to serving as a minister while maintaining simplicity and integrity. Actor Rangky emphasized that the Relangi Award is given only to truly deserving individuals and expressed joy that Babu Mohan received it. Journalist Suresh Kondeti



appreciated his consistent nature and warm relationship with the media over the years. Actor 30 Years Prudhvi Raj described Babu Mohan as one of the great pillars of Telugu comedy, alongside legends like Kota Srinivasa Rao and Brahmanandam. He also praised his contributions as a Labour Minister during the tenure of N. T. Rama Rao. Addressing the gathering, Babu Mohan expressed gratitude to all attendees and media members. He reflected on his journey in cinema and politics, recalling his dedication as a Labour Minister and his passion for public service. He also mentioned his continued involvement in films and social service activities through a trust he established after stepping away from active politics.