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## PM DID NOTHING TO RESOLVE THE NAGA POLITICAL ISSUE: RAHUL GANDHI

Imphal | Agencies

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday accused the Prime Minister of doing nothing to resolve the Naga political issue though Narendra Modi committed to solve the issue nine years ago after the Framework Agreement was signed with the Naga groups in 2015. Addressing a rally on the fourth day of the ongoing Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Nagaland's Mokokchung town, Rahul Gandhi said a solution to the problem cannot be brought without winning the trust of the Naga people and without holding a dialogue with them. "If you don't have a solution, you cannot lie and claim that you have a solution. You can say that you have to work towards the solution of the Naga issue and work would be done towards finding the solution but you must not lie to the Naga people," the Congress leader said. "The Prime Minister gave an empty commitment about the Naga accord nine years ago



and did nothing yet," he said, adding that the Congress knows that the issue is serious and a solution is required. "We would do the hard work to resolve the Naga political issue," Gandhi said on Wednesday

while talking to the media and asserted that his party was committed to a solution to the decades-old Naga Political Issue. "While driving through the roads, I can see your (Naga people's) way of life, history,

traditions and culture. Though Naga people understand English, my speech was translated into Naga language as I respect the language and the people's culture," he said and added that the Naga people's traditions were their own culture and no party should interfere in it. Referring to the ethnic violence in neighbouring Manipur, Rahul Gandhi said, "As an Indian I am ashamed that the Prime Minister is yet to visit Manipur despite the state witnessing devastating violence for over eight months." Without naming the BJP, he said, "Their politics has torn apart the state, divided the community, they have weaponised the state." Referring to the bad roads of Nagaland, he claimed that it was a betrayal of the people of the state. "Naga children are getting deprived of electricity, healthcare and other facilities. Why can't a Naga man be an industrialist? Naga people's rich traditions and culture are assets of India," he said.

## AAP will contest alone on all 13 parliamentary seats in Punjab: Mann

Chandigarh | Agencies

Amidst seat-sharing talks with the Congress, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Wednesday said his AAP will contest all the 13 parliamentary seats in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. "History will be created in Punjab as AAP will win all 13 seats. It will be verdict in favour of pro-people policies of the state government and the opposition will be badly renounced by people for their anti-Punjab stance," Mann said, while categorically stating that AAP will contest alone in Punjab. The INDIA bloc -- a coalition of 26 opposition parties, which aims to take on NDA-led by BJP -- is currently engaged in seat sharing talks. AAP is also a constituent and its senior leadership are presently holding talks with the Congress to finalise seat sharing in Punjab and Delhi.



Interestingly, AAP and Congress -- this week -- stitched an alliance to contest the January 18 mayoral post in Chandigarh as allies. AAP candidate Kuldeep Kumar Tita will contest the polls for the mayor's post, whereas Congress' Gurpreet Singh Gabi and Nirmala Devi will fight for the posts of senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor respectively. Responding to Khalistani terrorist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun's threat to assassinate him and DGP Gaurav Yadav on Republic Day, Mann said he is the custodian of peace, progress and prosperity of the state and such intermediation cannot stop him from this noble

task. "Such threats are a natural outcome of the zero-tolerance policy adopted by the state to foil the nefarious designs of anti-Punjab forces," the Chief Minister said. He said these people are trying to disturb the hard earned peace but his government will not allow these forces to succeed in their evil designs. "Punjab being a border state is hostile to such challenges both from within and outside the state. We will face it valiantly by not succumbing to threats," the Chief Minister said. He said that the masterminds of such anti-Punjab stances have taken shelter in countries abroad but "we are trying to bring them back and punish them for their sins." He said that the countries that are haven to such dreaded criminals should send these hardcore criminals back in the larger interest of world peace.

## Ex-Odisha CM Giridhar Gamang, wife and son rejoin Congress

Bhubaneswar | Agencies

Former Odisha Chief Minister Giridhar Gamang, who had resigned from the Congress in 2015, returned to the grand old party on Wednesday after a gap of almost eight years. The 80-year-old tribal leader rejoined the Congress in the presence of the party's Odisha in-charge Ajoy Kumar at a programme in New Delhi on Wednesday. Gamang's wife and former Congress MP, Hema Gamang, son Sishir Gamang and ex-Bargarh MP Sanjay Bhoi, too, rejoined the party at the event. Last year the veteran leader had joined the BRS at the party's headquarters in the presence of party President KC Rao in Telangana, just a few days after resigning from the BJP. Gamang had joined the



saffron party after snapping his 43-year-long relationship with the Congress in 2015. Gamang had been elected to the Lok Sabha from Koraput constituency nine times since 1972. He held several positions including Union Ministers of Communications, Food Processing Industries, Mines etc. under several Congress

Governments during his long career. The Vajpayee-led NDA Government lost the no confidence motion by one vote in April 1999 and Gamang was held responsible for this. Gamang voted in the motion as a Congress member of the Lok Sabha even after becoming the Chief Minister of Odisha in February 1999.

## POLICE COMMANDO KILLED, SEVERAL HURT IN FRESH MANIPUR VIOLENCE

Imphal | Agencies

One Manipur Police Commando was killed and three others injured on Wednesday when suspected armed militants attacked them in Manipur's Moreh area, along the Myanmar border, police said. Moreh is a very old and major trading town on the India-Myanmar border in Tengnoupal district. When the security personnel tried to shift the three injured security personnel to the hospital for medical treatment, some tribals including women tried to stop them. They clashed with the forces and several tribal people were injured in the fight. Earlier police and the Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF), an apex body of tribals in Manipur, separately claimed that a woman was killed in the clash. Later in the evening police said that the woman was unconscious for some time as she had sustained serious injuries, but she is alive and undergoing medical treatment at a hospital. However, ITLF spokesman Ginza Vualzong said that the woman died after a security force car hit her. Police officers in Imphal said that a police Commando Wangkhem Somorjit was killed and three others injured when suspected militants attacked the security forces on a search operation in Moreh to nab the militants. Somorjit hails from Malom area in Imphal's West



district. Heavy exchange of fire between the security forces and the suspected militants was reported in three different locations in Moreh since Wednesday morning, police said. The militants had also fired Rocket-Propelled Grenade shells on the security forces. Tension runs high and additional security forces, including Assam Rifles have rushed to the bordering areas to bring the situation under con-

trol. Fearing fresh violence, the district administration imposed a total curfew in the trouble-torn Tengnoupal district from Tuesday afternoon. "Following inputs of the likelihood of breach of peace, disturbance of public tranquillity and grave danger to human lives and property within the revenue jurisdiction of Tengnoupal district, total curfew was imposed," a notification said.

## I'M A MONK BECAUSE OF RAM MANDIR MOVEMENT: YOGI

Lucknow | Agencies

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday said that he became a monk because of the Ram Mandir movement. "We have been associated with movement from the beginning. However, we are not taking credit for the Pran Pratishtha ceremony of Lord Ram. We are going there as servants," Adityanath said. Speaking at a function, he said that invitations for the temple inauguration have been extended to the Congress and the Samajwadi Party. He said that no one has been stopped from coming to the Ram temple. "Those who come as servants



of Lord Ram are welcomed," he remarked. The Chief Minister further said:



"We are fortunate that our revered Gurudev (Mahant Avaidyanath) was one of the frontline warriors in the

Ram Mandir movement. Even during that period, he had the leadership of this movement in mind and the Gorakhnath Peeth was with him. This movement progressed under the leadership of my guru, RSS and Vishwa Hindu Parishad." "We consider ourselves fortunate to have participated in the Ram Temple cause. The work that several generations could not witness has come to fruition after 500 years. Over 3 lakh people have sacrificed their lives for the temple while conflicts took place more than 76 times. People associated with the Ram Temple movement used to visit Gorakhnath Peeth. Today, the Ram Temple stands in front of everyone as the result," Adityanath said.

## SC to hear on January 22 Thackeray faction's plea against Maha Speaker ruling

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday agreed to hear, on January 22, the plea filed by Shiv Sena-UBT leader Sunil Prabhu against the ruling of Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar holding that the Chief Minister Eknath Shinde-led faction is the "real" Shiv Sena. A bench, headed by CJI D.Y. Chandrachud, acceded to the request made by senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Uddhav Thackeray-led faction, for listing the matter on Monday next week instead of this Friday.



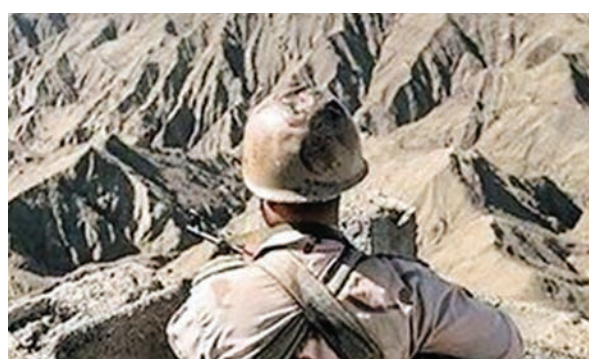
The matter was earlier ordered to be urgently listed on February 19 for hearing. On January 15, former CM Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena faction petitioned the apex court questioning the

January 10 decision passed by Narwekar holding that the group led by CM Shinde was the real "Shiv Sena" as it commanded a majority in the legislature and also in the party's National Executive.

## Iranian guards clash with terrorists at Pakistan border

Tehran | Agencies

The Iranian Border Guard Command has said that a team of terrorists was trying to infiltrate in Iran by crossing the shared borders with Pakistan and were confronted by border guards, media reports said. The Iranian Border Guard Command informed of an armed conflict and the destruction of the terrorists which intended to enter the country for sabotage activities. "The incident was reported by the border guards in the south-eastern borders of the country," Mehr News reported. The Iranian news report



said that a terrorist group that was planning to enter the country for destructive actions was prevented from entering the country through the vigilance of the border guards of the Jakigur border regiment in an armed con-

flict, exchange of heavy fire and fierce confrontation. "In the ensuing clash, one member of the terrorist group was killed and two others were injured and fled the scene," the media reports said.

## REMOVAL OF BRTS CORRIDOR IN BHOPAL STARTS FROM JANUARY 20

Team Absolute | Bhopal

BRTS, built to facilitate transportation in Bhopal, the capital of Madhya Pradesh, has now become a cause of trouble, hence the state government has decided to remove it and the removal of BRTS is going to start from January 20. In the meeting chaired by Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav, it was told that the work of removing the corridor will be started from Sant Hirdaram Nagar (Bairagarh) on January 20. BRTS corridors will be removed from all parts of the city in a phased manner in the next three months. The Chief Minister said that BRTS corridors are being removed for ease of traffic and public convenience. The work of removing the corridor should be done at night and in coordination



with the police, smooth and safe traffic system should be ensured in the city during the entire period of removing the corridor.

Dr. Yadav said that to start normal traffic in the BRTS corridor, an action plan should be made after necessary coordination with the

traffic police. While removing the corridor, efforts should be made to maintain traffic flow by using service lanes etc. It is noteworthy that the BRTS corridor has four parts - 6.4 km from Misrod to Empree, 1.42 km from Roshanpura to Kamla Park, 1.73 km from Collectorate Office to Lalghati and 3.81 km from Halalpur to Sehore Naka (Bairagarh). The action to remove BRTS corridor from Halalpur to Sehore Naka (Bairagarh) will be taken by the Public Works Department. Bhopal Municipal Corporation will remove the corridor in the remaining three parts. After the removal of the corridor, six lanes of traffic will be available. Earlier too, in the meeting of public representatives, it was agreed to remove the BRTS corridor of Bhopal.



## RBI CHIEF SEES INDIA'S GDP GROWTH AT 7% IN 2024-25 DESPITE GLOBAL CHALLENGES

Team Absolute | New Delhi

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das on Wednesday said that the Indian economy is likely to grow 7 per cent in the next financial year (2024-25) despite the global slowdown. "Amid a challenging global macroeconomic environment, India presents a picture of growth and stability," Das said at a CII session on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos.

"The structural reforms undertaken by the government in recent years have boosted the medium and long-term growth prospects of the Indian economy," he pointed out. With a strong



domestic demand, India remains the fastest growing major economy, he added.

Das also said that inflation in India has come down from the high levels witnessed in the middle of 2022.

"Chances of soft landing have improved and markets have reacted positively. However, geopolitical risks and climate risks remain matters of concern," he said.

A soft landing is a situation where the central bank does not go for a sharp increase in interest rates to control inflation in order to avoid choking economic growth.

He also said that India was in a comfortable situation as far as the external balance is concerned with robust foreign exchange reserves.

### TWO PERSONS GORED TO DEATH BY BULL DURING JALLIKATTU IN TN

Chennai: Two persons were gored to death by a bull during a Jallikattu event at Siravayal in Sivaganga district of Tamil Nadu on Wednesday.

Among the two who succumbed to their injuries are 11-year-old boy and 30-year-old man. They were gored by an angry bull near the entry point of the venue. The two were rushed to the hospital immediately but their lives could not be saved. The Jallikattu events or bull taming are carried out during the Pongal celebrations in Tamil Nadu. Pongal is the biggest harvest festival of Tamil Nadu and marks the advent of a new Tamil year.

Several big and small Jallikattu events are held in several districts of the state of Tamil Nadu with huge participation of people.

## PM Modi inaugurates Rs 4,000 cr-worth projects in Kerala, dispels CM Vijayan's concerns

Kochi | Agencies

A day after Pinarayi Vijayan-led Left Front government announced its decision to stage a protest at Jantar Mantar in Delhi on February 8, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday dispelled concerns about the Centre not doing enough for Kerala by saying that he had commissioned Rs 4,000 crore worth projects here.

PM Modi said the Centre was with Kerala and that can be witnessed at Kochi where strategic projects in Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL) and at the Indian Oil Corporation, here have been commissioned. The Prime Minister said this here while inaugurating these projects and seated on the dais was none other than CM Vijayan.



PM Modi said that through these new projects, there will be numerous employment opportunities too.

At the CSL Modi launched a 310 meter long Drydock, built in accordance with

international standards, as well as the International Ship Repair Facility (ISR), which is India's first fully developed pure ship repair ecosystem besides the Indian Oil Corporation's LPG import terminal.

## Execution of 3 new criminal laws will be equally challenging, says Delhi CP

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora on Wednesday said that drafting the laws, particularly the creation of new criminal statutes, presented a challenging endeavour, however equally challenging is the execution of these laws.

"To effectively implement the newly established laws, it is imperative to comprehend the underlying reasons for the changes and the rationale behind them," said the CP, during the launch of four-day training module focused training programme for officers to adapt to the new criminal laws passed by the Parliament i.e. Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita 2023 and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam 2023.

Delhi Police Academy, in collaboration with the



National Law University, Dwarka, has meticulously designed its training modules to cover all its officers from Special Commissioners of Police to the Constables of Delhi Police in a phased manner. Experts from the National Law University are conducting the sessions, ensuring that officers at all levels are proficient in the application of the new laws. In the inaugural function, Arora underscored the significance of the training, urging participants, including Inspectors and above, to embrace the forthcoming changes as both a challenge and an opportunity. The CP highlighted the

change in laws as a paradigm shift from Bharatiya 'Dand' Sanhita; to the Bharatiya 'Nyaya' Sanhita. "Initially, it was focused on simultaneously punishing the accused and delivering justice to the victim," said the CP. The Special CP, Chhaya Sharma, emphasised the gradual expansion of the training programme from constable to DCP levels.

She said that the Phase I training of 5500 Investigating Officers & CCTNS operators is about to begin on February 5 with the aim of equipping the officers at the cutting-edge of the force with the necessary skills to execute the new legal frameworks once notified. "Phase I is targeted at equipping all the cutting-edge offices to become hands on with the forthcoming changes in laws, its new procedures and challenges through a trained batch of officers," she said.

## Scindia inaugurates Air India Express flights connecting Ayodhya to Bengaluru & Kolkata

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Union Civil Aviation Minister, Jyotiraditya Scindia on Wednesday inaugurated the first-ever Air India Express flights connecting Ayodhya to Bengaluru and Kolkata ahead of the Pran Pratishtha ceremony at the Ram Temple on January 22.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath received the boarding pass for the maiden flight between Kolkata and Ayodhya, marking the commencement of air connectivity between the cities.

In a post on X, the Union Minister emphasised on the country "becoming established as an economic and spiritual power" under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"Only a few days are left for the consecration of Lord Shri Ram and many historical works are being completed to establish Ayodhya as a religious capital," he said.

Scindia also noted that the newly-inaugurated Air India Express flights "will not only boost traffic between these three cities but will also provide a new energy to India's economic, social and cultural power".

He further stressed on the progress and development taking place in Uttar Pradesh, saying that it is scaling unprecedented levels.



"We celebrated Diwali last November, followed by the second Diwali on December 3 when the election results were declared, and on January 22 there will be a third Diwali not just for the entire country but for the entire world," the Union Minister added. On his part, Yogi thanked Scindia for the launch of the new air service and for "all

possible support with special focus on the air connectivity of Uttar Pradesh".

In a post on X, Air India Express said: "#DilYePukare, ab #SaryuKinare! We are proud to have started our inaugural direct flights to Ayodhya from @aakolairport and @BLRAirport today, along with our daily direct flights from @DelhiAirport."

## MVA SLAMS BJP AS FILMFARE-2024 AWARDS TO UNVEIL IN GUJARAT

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) on Wednesday criticised the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for taking away important events to Gujarat as the stage is set for the 69th Filmfare Awards-2024 to be held in the neighbouring state. The organisers announced that the coveted 69th Hyundai Filmfare Awards in collaboration with Gujarat Tourism shall be held at the new GIFT City in Gandhinagar as a two-day glamour-filled extravaganza on January 27-28.

Hitting out at the BJP, the Congress' Leader of Opposition (Assembly) Vijay Wadetiwar said "this is not fair" and called it yet another attempt to downgrade the importance of Mumbai by taking away the film industry, known world over as "Bollywood" out of Maharashtra.

"This is an attempt to dilute the importance of Mumbai. Earlier, the industries of Maharashtra were taken to Gujarat. Now the eye has fallen on the film industry," said Wadetiwar.

He said Mumbai and Bollywood have an unbreakable bond and this



decision will have a big impact on cine business, the actors and workers that are dependent on the film industry.

Nationalist Congress Party National Spokesperson Clyde Crasto said Gujarat is "stealing" everything from

Mumbai and Maharashtra in the last couple of years, several big ticket projects were 'stolen' last year, and now the latest being the prestigious Bollywood film fraternity's Filmfare awards. "The Gujarat government's invita-

tion to Filmfare to hold the awards in Gujarat is just another ploy to take away the prestige of Mumbai and Maharashtra. It is shameful that, as always, the BJP led Maharashtra Government is silent on this issue, like they have been when projects and financial prospects were being taken away from the state," said Crasto.

He said that Gujarat is also a state of India and it should prosper always, "but then why is the state and Central government not thinking the same for Maharashtra which is also an Indian state?" According to the organisers, the January 27 curtain-raiser shall be held at the Mahatma Mandir Convention & Exhibition Centre where Bollywood technical awards shall be announced, followed by the main glittering awards at the GIFT City on January 28.

The hosts for the shows shall be veteran film-maker Karan Johar, actor Ayushmann Khurrana, television celeb Manish Paul, plus performances by Kareena Kapoor, Janhvi Kapoor, Sara Ali Khan, Ranbir Kapoor, Varun Dhawan, Kartik Aaryan, et al.

## Those who pose as patriots today did not fight against British but reconciled: Siddaramaiah

Bengaluru | Agencies

The Congress party brought freedom to this country by fighting against the British, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said on Wednesday and asked why those who were posing as patriots now did not fight against the British then.

He was speaking after inaugurating the Sangolli Rayanna festival organised by the Department of Kannada and Culture, at Sangolli Village in Belagavi District.

Siddaramaiah said, "The British, French and Mughals ruled our country through the policy of divide and rule. Sangolli fought hard against the British, but some betrayed Rayanna and handed him over to the British."

Siddaramaiah added that if Rayanna was an example of patriotism, those who betrayed Rayanna to the British were traitors.

"Patriotism means loving the people of the country. Those who hate the people of the country in the name of caste and religion cannot be patriots. Sharanshrestha Basavanna explained that even BR Ambedkar, who drafted the Constitution, preached love for man without caste discrimination," Siddaramaiah



said.

He added that farmers, teachers and soldiers were guarding the country from inside and outside and even a farmer who grows rice is like a soldier. Siddaramaiah said that the Congress party had brought the green revolution to India for the prosperity of the farmers. "Sangolli Rayanna was born on August 15. On this date the country got independence and he was martyred on January 26. That is a marvelous coincidence. But there are still people who spread hatred and who call for the destruction of mosques," Siddaramaiah said and asked people not to applaud those fools.

## First induct me into MVA, INDIA bloc then I will join yatra: Ambedkar tells Rahul

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In what is being seen as a snub, Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi President, Prakash Ambedkar on Wednesday spurned an invitation from Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to join his ongoing Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra (BJNY).

While stating that he had "conditionally accepted" Rahul Gandhi's invite, Prakash Ambedkar made it clear that it would be difficult for him to join the BJNY as the "VBA has not yet been invited to join the INDIA bloc and the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA)".

In a two-page letter to Rahul Gandhi, he said that if he participated in the BJNY at this stage without being inducted into the national and state Opposition alliances, it would "lead to speculation" of a tie-up which has not yet materialised. "Hence, I have requested Rahul Gandhi to send VBA an invitation (to

join) both INDIA and MVA," declared Prakash Ambedkar. In the letter, Prakash Ambedkar rued how, despite his repeated requests, the VBA was not inducted into the two alliances, though ironically, the invitation mentions, "You are an important pillar" of the INDIA bloc.

He reiterated that though only six-years-old, the VBA has been relentlessly fighting against the BJP and RSS ideology of 'Manusmriti', and for the cause of the Dalits, OBCs, Muslims, economically weak Marathas, tribals and all other discriminated or marginalised groups in the country. Accordingly, Prakash Ambedkar again pleaded to be included in the INDIA and MVA blocs to avoid any speculation and negative implications. Incidentally, in November 2023, Rahul Gandhi did not attend the VBA's mega-event to honour the Constitution held in Mumbai.

## ARMY AVERTS MAJOR TRAGEDY, RECOVERS AND DESTROYS IED IN J&K'S KUPWARA

Srinagar: A major tragedy was averted by the army in J&K's Kupwara district on Wednesday as alert troops recovered and destroyed an improvised explosive device (IED), officials said.

Troops recovered an IED planted by the terrorists in Chowkibal area of Kupwara and destroyed it safely at the spot itself. "Chinar Warriors averted a major terror incident today by recovering & in-situ destroying an IED near Chowkibal on Srinagar-Chowkibal Highway.

Indian Army stands by its commitment to keep Kashmir terror-free," the Srinagar-headquartered Chinar Corps said on its X account.

## Akasa Air to operate daily Pune-Ayodhya flights from Feb 15



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Akasa Air on Wednesday announced to operate daily flights from February 15 between Pune and Ayodhya via Delhi with no change of aircraft required at Delhi.

The flights have been introduced for daytime travel during prime hours for passenger convenience. Travellers can now book flights on Akasa Air's website -

www.akasaair.com, Android and iOS app or through multiple leading OTAs.

"The 18th destination addition of Ayodhya to Akasa Air's network is aligned with the airline's commitment to strengthen its domestic operations and provide transportation links to travellers visiting the city at affordable fares," a spokesperson said.

Praveen Iyer, Co-Founder and Chief Commercial Officer, Akasa Air, said that Akasa Air

was set up with a purpose to connect people, cultures and regions and the addition of Ayodhya to our growing network is a testament to our commitment. "The city of Ayodhya has immense spiritual, religious, and cultural significance and by connecting it to two major hubs - Delhi and Pune, we will provide ease of access to people travelling while also bolstering economic growth, trade, and regional development," he said.

## Sixty kids, rescued from beggary, to be part of R-Day parade in UP

Lucknow | Agencies

A group of 60 children, rescued from beggary, will take part in the Republic Day Parade in Lucknow this year.

Children aged 6 to 12 years are practising diligently to perform in the very first tableau in the cultural segment of the parade.

These children from across Lucknow are the first group of kids to be selected to perform at the Republic Day Parade on January 26, from amongst thousands who auditioned for the same.

Their tableau will be on the theme 'Bhiksha se Shiksha ki Ore' (from beggary towards education), and they will be dancing to a medley of Hindi patriotic songs. A total of 14 other schools (both public and private) will follow their performance in the cultural display. These kids are among 500 others rescued from beggary in

Uttar Pradesh and inducted into the Chief Minister's Bal Seva Yojana, which was recently expanded to include child beggars.

These children are now either already getting or are receiving government funds to pay for their education and placed in government schools. "An opportunity like this will serve to inspire other families which are in beggary and give them the hope that their children can also be freed from that unfortunate way of life," said Balvir Singh Mann of Ummeed NGO, which is the administration's NGO partner for engaging children in the Bal Seva Yojana. "The children are extremely excited to be a part of the parade, and theirs will be the very first performance," he said. Besides the cultural tableau, 17 other children will also be a part of the children's Raj Bhawan band which will also perform at the parade.



# 2nd time in 5 years, Sushilkumar Shinde claims he got BJP 'offer' to switch parties



Team Absolute | Mumbai

For the second time in five years, former Maharashtra Chief Minister and Union Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde on Wednesday claimed that he and his MLA daughter Praniti Shinde have "got offers to join the Bharatiya Janata Party".

Not specifying when the lure from the BJP came or from whom, Shinde said this is despite the fact that he had lost the elections twice on Congress tickets.

Asked about his response, a smiling Shinde said that he is 83 now and has been a staunch Congress loyalist all his life, "so there's no question of my daughter or me accepting any such offers". Queried by media persons, BJP state President Chandrashekhar Bawankule categorically denied that any such offer has been made to either Shinde or his daughter.

BJP MLA Nitesh N. Rane took a swipe at the Congress and said that since Shinde has lost twice with his party, "now he's trying to push his daughter to the BJP".

Shinde shot back that he was not bothered about these reactions, but "a top BJP leader had

given us the proposal to join, which we rejected outright".

Senior Congress leader Yashomati Thakur said that the BJP has no talent and are trying to take away leaders from other parties, but expressed confidence that senior leaders like Shinde or his daughter would not deviate from the party. Incidentally, in March 2019, just before the Lok Sabha elections, Shinde had made a similar statement that sent shockwaves in political circles, though it was trashed by senior BJP leaders even at that time.

This time, the situation is different as Shinde's revelation came just three days after the abrupt exit of the high-profile Congress veteran, Milind M. Deora did the unthinkable by joining the Shiv Sena led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. Besides, CM Shinde and other leaders have claimed that Deora's departure "is just a trailer, the main picture is still to come", sparking concerns among senior leaders of the grand old party, as memories of the June 2022 Shiv Sena split and the July 2023 Nationalist Congress Party breakup are still fresh in their minds.

# Bombay HC notice to Shinde, Thackeray factions on disqualification issue

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday issued notice to all respondents in the petition filed by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena, challenging Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar's January 10 verdict on the disqualification of Shiv Sena-UBT MLAs.

A division bench of Justice G.S. Kulkarni and Justice F.P. Pooniwalla has issued the notice to the Speaker, the Legislature Secretariat and the 14 SS-UBT MLAs, against whom the ruling Shiv Sena's Chief Whip Bharat Gogavale has filed the plea.

The judges have posted the matter for further hearing on February 8, even as the SS-UBT led by former CM Uddhav Thackeray has approached the Supreme Court.

On January 10, the Speaker ruled that the (original) Shiv Sena belongs to Shinde and not ex-CM



Thackeray, and approved Gogavale as the Chief Whip, but rejected the pleas by both rival factions for disqualification of the legislators from the opposite sides.

Both warring Sena factions have challenged the Speaker's ruling - the Shiv Sena has petitioned against it in the Bombay High Court, while the Shiv Sena-UBT has moved the apex court where it is expected to come up for hearing next week.

# SC to hear on January 22 Thackeray faction's plea against Maha Speaker ruling

Team Absolute | New Delhi/Mumbai

The Supreme Court on Wednesday agreed to hear, on January 22, the plea filed by Shiv Sena-UBT leader Sunil Prabhu against the ruling of Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar holding that the Chief Minister Eknath Shinde-led faction is the "real" Shiv Sena.

A bench, headed by CJI D.Y. Chandrachud, acceded to the request made by senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Uddhav Thackeray-led faction, for listing the matter on Monday next week instead of this Friday.

The matter was earlier ordered to be urgently listed on February 19 for hearing.

On January 15, former CM Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena faction petitioned the apex court questioning the January 10 decision passed by Narwekar holding that the group led by CM Shinde was the real "Shiv Sena" as it commanded a majority in the legislature and also in the party's National Executive.

# Maha nets investments worth Rs 70K-crore on first day in Davos

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Marking a record of sorts, the Maharashtra government has signed MoUs worth around Rs 70,000 crore on the first day of Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's visit to the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, officials said here on Wednesday.

They include a deal of Rs 41,000 crore with the B. C. Jindal Group, one of the biggest corporations in the country for their proposed plant in the state that will generate 5000 jobs in electronics system design and manufacturing.

The state's MAHAPRIET has



signed a MoU of Rs 4000 crore with Prediction Co., USA for creating a hub for Artificial Intelligence in the state.

The project will pave the way for launching innovative AI projects in the state and will be the first of its kind for India, said officials.

Besides, another MoU was signed with INOX Air Products for a Green Ammonia plant with an investment of around Rs 25,000 crore.

These investments are nearly half the MoUs worth Rs 1.37 lakh-crores signed during Davos-2023 trip, and this year the state government aims to more than double the previous year.

Apart from the Chief Minister, present for these signing events were Industry Minister Uday Samant, top officials like Bhushan Gagrani, Brijesh Singh, Harshadeep Kamble, Vipin Sharma, Amol Shinde and others.

Shinde, currently in Davos on a four-day trip to the WEF, plans to sign MoU's worth over Rs 3.10 lakh-crore across sectors to benefit different regions of the state.



# 'Atal' to showcase special 'Ram Katha' narrative

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The upcoming sequence of the show 'Atal' is all set to take the audience back to the era of Ramayan with its compelling storyline of Ram Katha.

The show revolves around the childhood story of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

In this captivating Ram Katha narrative, Atal, belonging to the Pandit family, accompanies his Dadaji to recite the Ram Katha in a nearby village. Dadaji, Shyam Lal Vajpayee (Milind Dastane), falls ill during the event, disrupting the recital. Without hesitation, young Atal (Vyom Thakkar) takes the stage, infusing Ram Katha with his unique style, earning admiration and praise from people. Elaborating on this special track, actor Milind Dastane, who plays Shyam Lal Vajpayee said: "Atal and his family face adversity after his father Krishna Bihari (Ashutosh Kulkarni) are facing shortage of money and striving to make ends meet. In the meantime, an opportunity for Ram Katha comes as Dadaji, a pandit, is invited to recite the Katha in a nearby village." "Atal, accompanying his Dadaji, steps in when

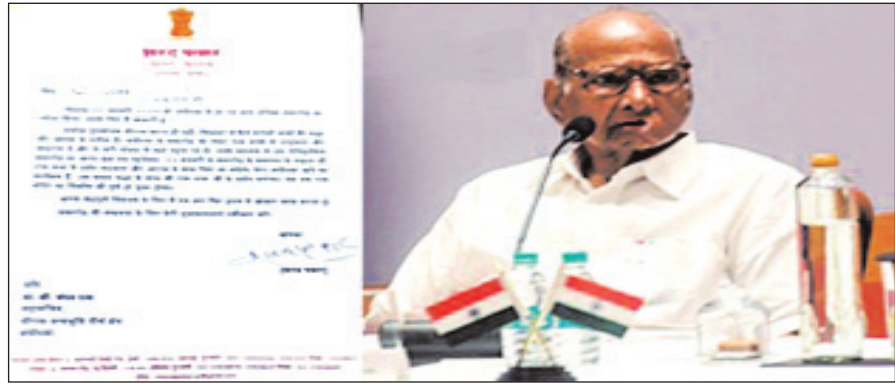
Dadaji suddenly falls sick, injecting his unique style into the Ram Katha that wins him admiration. However, a disruption occurs when a British officer and his team interrupt. Atal, known for his commitment to Sanskrit, intervenes and challenges the profound teachings of Ramayan with the British officers," he said.

Milind shared that the narrative takes a transformative turn as the once-resistant officer undergoes a change of heart, moved by the timeless wisdom of Ramayan and bows respectfully, offering admiration and respect towards the Ram Katha.

"Atal's stand for cultural values becomes a catalyst for bridging understanding between cultures, presenting the universal impact of the epic tale," he added.

Singers Senjuti Das and Nishant Pandey, composer Nishant Raja and lyricist Amit Sharma collaborated to craft a special song depicting the poignant moment when Lord Rama embarked on his journey to the vanvas (forest) to heighten the emotional resonance of the sequence.

The special 'Ram Katha' episode will air on January 23 and 24 on &TV.



# Sharad Pawar to skip Jan 22 Ayodhya event, will go later

Team Absolute | Pune

Nationalist Congress Party President Sharad Pawar has said that he will not attend the Shri Ram Temple 'Pran Pratishtha' ceremony on January 22 in Ayodhya. Pawar, 83, who received an invite for the ceremony, has written a brief letter to the Ram Janmabhoomi Tirth Kshetra General Secretary Champat Rai on the issue, promising to go at a later date with more time in hand for a 'darshan'.

"Lord Ram is revered not only in India, but around the world by millions of his devoted followers. There is great enthusiasm among the Ram Bhakts over the Ayodhya ceremonies

and they are reaching there in huge numbers. Through them I shall also derive the joy of the historic occasion," Pawar said.

However, the NCP supremo added that after the January 22 event, it will be possible to take a proper and relaxed 'darshan' of Ram Lalla. "I have plans to come to Ayodhya for some engagements. At that time, I shall take out sufficient time for a darshan of Shri Ram Lalla with full faith. By that time, even the construction works of the Ram Temple will also be completed," said Pawar.

He expressed his gratitude to Rai for the invite and also conveyed his best wishes for the upcoming grand ceremonies in Ayodhya next Monday. (January 22).

# Maha Congress gets cracking for LS polls with preparatory meets

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra Congress has announced a series of preparatory meetings for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections across the state, officials said here on Wednesday.

The division-level meetings, starting from Thursday (January 18), are to be held against the backdrop of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra (NJJY) launched by party MP Rahul Gandhi, which will culminate in Mumbai later.

The first meeting for Vidarbha region, considered a party stronghold, will be held in Amravati on January 18, followed by Nagpur on January 20.

Later, on January 23 it will shift for western Maharashtra in Pune, on January 24 for Konkan region at Bhiwandi.

The attention will then focus on the North Maharashtra meeting at Dhule on January 27 and for Marathwada at Latur on January 29.

Top leaders, including AICC's state in-charge Ramesh Chennithala, state Congress President Nana Patole, Congress Legislative Party Leader Balasaheb Thorat, Leader of Opposition in Assembly Vijay Wadettivar, Working Presidents M. Arif Naseem Khan and Chandrakant Handore, all former CMs like Sushil Kumar Shinde, Ashok Chavan,



Prithviraj Chavan, heads of allied organisations like Mahila, youth wings, and others will be present at these brain-stormers in different divisions.

The Congress, which bagged two Lok Sabha seats in 2014 and later just one in 2019, is making all-out efforts to improve its tally, even as the seat-sharing talks with the Maha Vikas Aghadi are also said to be in the final stages with Nationalist Congress Party (SP), and Shiv Sena (UBT).



# MAHA INKS MOU IN DAVOS FOR \$3 BN GREEN AMMONIA PLANT

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra government has signed a MoU with INOX Air Products group in Davos to set up a mega-plant to produce green ammonia in the state, an official said here on Tuesday. The plant, with a capacity of 500,000 tonnes per annum, will be set up with a planned outlay of \$3 billion, and will be commissioned within three to five years, though the location where it will come up is not yet clear. The MoU was inked in the presence of Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, Industry Minister Uday Samant, Principal Secretary, Industry, Dr Harshdeep Kamble and INOX Group Promoter and Director Siddharth Jain, besides other officials. The plant would produce liquid ammonia, which would be a climate-neutral Hydrogen carrier, and with its size and capacity, the new plant is poised to play a critical role in the global value chain for the sustainable and versatile green hydrogen. As a primary alternative to fossil fuels, green hydrogen is a key to a secure energy future with a capability to decarbonise the economy and reduce carbon emissions substantially. Shinde, currently in Davos on a four-day trip to the World Economic Forum meet, plans to sign MoUs worth over Rs 3.10 lakh crore across various sectors to benefit different regions of the state.

# Residents Oppose Mumbai Racecourse's Takeover For Theme Park, Garden

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The campaign against the government's proposal to construct a theme park and a Mumbai Eye at the Mahalaxmi Racecourse in south Mumbai has gained considerable momentum. A petition is being run on Change.org to "save Mahalaxmi Racecourse - the only green lung of Mumbai".

Launched by Mumbai resident Tanuj Bhatia on January 13, the petition has so far recorded 24,029 signatures, all opposing the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's plan.

"The Mahalaxmi Racecourse, a Grade II-B heritage site, has been in existence for over 140 years. It comprises an open space of around 230 acres of natural terrain i.e. mud and grass. The only structures within this open space are stables for horses, stands to view the races, and some offices of RWITC, all of which are ancillary and necessary for horse racing. The racecourse is not only an open space but is also a green space with hundreds of old trees," the petition says.

The racecourse is "frequented by thousands of citizens daily", it further states, adding, "It is the main, if not the only, green lung of Mumbai, and its importance to the lives of the residents of Mumbai cannot be undermined. It is the lifeline of the residents of Mumbai."

The petition further lists the state government and the BMC's plans for the racecourse



and how it will affect the area.

There is a plan to develop a theme park in the racecourse, the petition said, adding, "Have no doubt that the theme park will include hotels, restaurants, amusement parks and other places of entertainment. This will mean restricted access to citizens into the racecourse. We will no longer be able to enjoy the greenery and fresh air, as we are doing today." There is a proposal to "construct multi-storied residential and commercial buildings and complexes by following the slum rehabilitation route", the petition said. "The state gov-

ernment/MCGM have already stated they will rehabilitate the slum dwellers of the racecourse somewhere outside the racecourse, but what they don't say is that in lieu of rehabilitation of slum dwellers, developers will be entitled to construct multi-storied residential and commercial complexes in situ i.e. inside the racecourse," it added.

Opposing the state's "donation of nearly 700 acres to the RWITC to build an exclusive modern clubhouse and stables for itself", the petition said, "Public funds are being used to finance a private club."

It says that "building an exclusive modern clubhouse means that a large part of the racecourse will become a full-fledged club only for the members of RWITC and will result in further deprivation of open space to the public". "Although the plan designates certain areas as public gardens or theme parks, this is where hotels, restaurants, towers, residential, and commercial complexes will be built. There will be large-scale concretisation of the ground which is presently permeable consisting of just mud or grass," it says. "There is just one consequence of this proposal - the deprivation of the only open space and green lung in Mumbai to us Mumbaikars.

"Is this not clearly environment unfriendly?" the petition asks, adding, "Is this not the destruction of the only open space and green lung in the city of Mumbai? Is this not a deprivation of the citizen's right to breathe fresh air and to enjoy an open recreational space? Will this not change the city forever?"

"The answer to all the above questions is an emphatic YES..."

Maharashtra has decided to build a theme park and a Mumbai eye at the racecourse. In addition, the state will renew the lease of the racecourse to the Royal Western India Turf Club, or RWITC, for 40 years. This includes the 10 years that have passed. The RWITC will build a clubhouse with all modern amenities and give a huge chunk of land for a garden and a theme park.



EDITOR'S SPECS

'Neighbours' of Ram Lalla

The neighbouring temples in the Ram Janmabhoomi complex have been accorded the status of 'padosi' (neighbour) of Ram Lalla. The Mahants of these temples have been invited for the Pran Pratishtha ceremony on January 22 while their disciples would be deputed as volunteers in the ceremony. As the majority of the land around the temple has been acquired by the Trust, the few temples situated next door have attained special status as padosis of Ram Lalla. The Amawa Ram temple, known for round the year open kitchen service, is the new selfie spot for the visitors looking to click themselves with Ram temple in the background. The increased interest in religious tourism is evident as one steps inside Amawa Ram temple, established in 1919, which remains crowded through the day. It has been serving free food to the visitors for the past four years (since the court case was decided in favour of Ram Lalla. Since carrying mobile phones or electronic items is not allowed inside the makeshift temple, devotees climb up on the first floor of the Amawa temple to take photographs of the under-construction Ram temple complex. While Rang Mahal and Amawa are situated just opposite the Ram temple, Sri Aurobindo Ashram is situated on the other end, next to the existing makeshift temple site. The mahants and chiefs of all the three establishments have been invited to the ceremony by the trust. The trust has also promised to facilitate darshan for followers of the padosis January 27 onwards.

WITH NO CEASEFIRE IN SIGHT, GAZA BATTLES FAMINE, EPIDEMIC AMID ISRAELI ASSAULT

Kavya Dubey

War claims a great price which is paid by those who did not choose it. The amount of destruction in the face of a relentless war inevitably results in a humanitarian crisis, just as Gaza has been battling amid ceaseless assault by Israel. Nearly 100 days of the armed conflict has led to disruption of basic amenities and collapse of health and sanitation systems have escalated the humanitarian disaster in Gaza, where at least 22,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, have been killed since Israel announced war on Hamas on October 7, 2023. As agencies try to bring in more food, water, medical supplies and shelter equipment into Gaza, it was announced in December that Israel would set up a second security check post at the Kerem Shalom Crossing, at the border between Israel, Gaza and Egypt, in order to screen humanitarian aid coming through Egypt. Humanitarian agencies have said



that the rate of aid coming into Gaza has been dwindling after the temporary cease fire in December ended. Decimation of primary healthcare system there has exacerbated the urgency of providing medical care to increasing numbers of victims. Added to this is rampant malnutrition which has become difficult to contain, and spread of anemia and dehydration among children that has increased threefold, according to reports. In the absence of clean water and sanitation, shortage of food, and cold and wet weather, stomach, respiratory and other ailments are fast taking the shape of an epidemic in the region. The World Health Organization has announced that there are no functioning hospitals in Gaza. Amid rows of dead bodies and throngs of injured, patients who have been injured for more than a month await surgery. There are also

many who are contracting infections after surgery because there is not enough post-operative care. Further, as it comes to light from sources on ground zero, the region is pushed to the brink of a famine. As per the UN, over 90 per cent of Palestinians in Gaza have regularly gone without food for an entire day. With about half of the population (nearly 2.2 million) at risk of starvation, Gaza has met the first criterion of a famine, where 20 per cent of the population face extreme scarcity of food. To compound woes further, thorough inspections at check points at two border crossings by Israeli authorities, strict time windows for passage for trucks carrying aid, bottlenecks and numerous safety concerns while traversing through rubble and ruins are further exacerbating the humanitarian concern in Gaza. Aid groups also say that their trucks at times come under Israeli fire despite efforts to coordinate convoys with the Israeli army in advance.

The Israeli government denied creating obstruction to any humanitarian aid, instead, blamed Hamas for shortages, accusing them of appropriating some aid for their own use. However, Western and Arab authorities assert that Hamas is known to have accumulated food, fuel and medicine. Agencies and aid workers say that cease fire is the pre-requisite to alleviating the humanitarian catastrophe unleashing in Gaza. The war has claimed nearly 23,000 lives in Gaza alone, and this includes more than 150 aid workers. Meanwhile, India indirectly supported a call for humanitarian cease fire in Gaza in a joint statement with UAE on January 11, wherein both nations stressed the importance of multilateralism and "called for collective action to promote a just, rule-based global order." This statement followed the visit of UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan to Gujarat on January 9 and 10, as the chief guest of the Vibrant Gujarat summit.

Without real enforcement power, ICJ verdicts are at best moral indictments

The ICJ is composed of 15 judges appointed for nine-year terms through separate, simultaneous elections at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and the UN Security Council (UNSC). Any country can propose candidates but no two judges must come from one nation, Al Jazeera reported. At the moment, the bench includes judges from all parts of the world including France, Slovakia, Somalia and India's Dalveer Bhandari -- a former Supreme Court judge and Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court. To appoint a president and vice president, the judges hold a secret ballot. President Joan E. Donoghue of the US leads the ICJ presently, alongside Vice President Kirill Gevorgian of Russia. Both of their terms will expire in February, Al Jazeera reported. ICJ judges ought to be impartial and not act as extensions of their countries. In the past though, judges have voted in line with their

countries' politics. In 2022, when the bench voted in favour of the decision to order Russia out of Ukraine, judges from Russia and China were the only two who voted against the decision. Israel and South Africa can appoint one "ad hoc" judge each to join the bench since neither is represented. Aharon Barak, a former Supreme Court chief justice and Holocaust survivor, is Israel's choice. Barak was accused of "legitimising" Israeli occupation of Palestine during his stint at the top court. South Africa has appointed Dikgang Moseneke, a former deputy chief justice, Al Jazeera reported. While the provisional hearing will be over in a matter of weeks, the main case, which will determine whether Israel is indeed guilty of committing genocide as South Africa claims, will take time. The Hague-based court will give both parties time to build and submit more detailed



arguments. Multiple hearings will follow. After that, the judges will take a vote, and then a final decision will be announced. ICJ judgements are legally binding and cannot be appealed. One issue though: The court has no real enforcement power. If Israel does not comply, South Africa can approach the

UNSC for enforcement. But there, the US, Israel's number one backer, has veto power as a permanent member. Washington could shield Israel from punishment, as it has done multiple times in this war. "This is one of the reasons why it's important to think less about the judgement issued by the ICJ and more about the process itself," said Mai El-Sadany, the director of Washington-based Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy. A full judgement from the court, determining whether Israel has committed genocide in Gaza, will likely take years to emerge, Al Jazeera reported. A 2019 case that The Gambia brought against Myanmar for its military crackdown on Rohingya refugees is still in trial, for example, more than four years after it began.

international

Trumps kicks off 2024 bid with Iowa win; Ramaswamy gives up

Yashwant Raj | Washington

America's twice-impeached former President, who is also facing more than 90 criminal charges, kicked off his bid for the Republican party's nomination for President with a thumping victory in the first of the primaries held Monday in Iowa. Former President Donald Trump's convincing win in the Iowa caucuses -- 98 of the state's 99 counties -- bore testimony to his continued dominance of the Republican party and showed it was not yet ready for someone else, such as one of his remaining rivals in the race - Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, and former Ambassador to US Nikki Haley, who came second and third respectively. Indian American entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy's long-shot campaign did not last the night as he announced he was dropping out of the race and endorsed Trump.



Trump called his victory a "landslide". DeSantis and Haley are both spinning their Iowa performance as proof of the nomination is a two-person race between either one of them and Trump. But, the reality is, the Republican nomination contest remains unambiguously a one-person race. Iowa caucuses are a unique feature of the US presidential election process. The state is the first to vote in the process. But, starting this year, the first only for Republicans; Democrats have announced a parallel schedule for their primaries, kicking it off in South

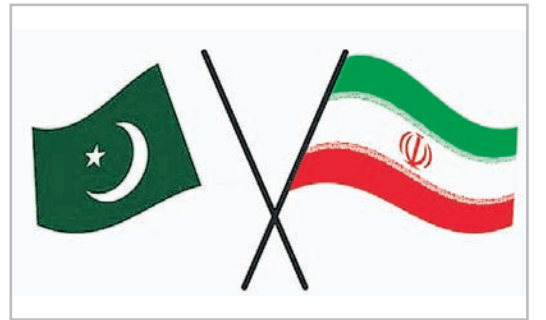
Carolina. But, equally, Iowa has a reputation for backing candidates who go on to either lose the nomination or the presidential election - it voted for Ted Cruz, the Texas Senator, in 2016 over Trump, who went on to pick up the nomination and the White House. Trump's victory advances his claim on the nomination but does not guarantee it. Haley and DeSantis are both hoping to overtake him further down the primaries but the gap between the former President and both his rivals remains too wide. New Hampshire is the next state in the Republicans primary

and Haley has closed it to Trump in polls and with the backing of the state's popular Governor, Chris Sununu, who has endorsed her, hopes to catch up with the former President. The state after this is South Carolina, her home state where she served as Governor for two terms. "The race now moves to less Trump-friendly territory. And the field of candidates is effectively down to two, with only Trump and Nikki Haley having substantial support in both New Hampshire and South Carolina," the Haley campaign said in a statement on Tuesday. "That never happened in the 2016 nominating contest, when a larger field allowed Trump to win many primaries with pluralities rather than majorities." In a new ad, Haley projected herself as an alternative to both Trump and President Joe Biden, who is seeking a second term. Though she trails Trump in polls on the Republican primary

race, she has a commanding lead over the President in head-to-head matches, beating him by a wider margin than Trump's over Biden. "The two most disliked politicians in America?", the narrator says in the ad. "Trump and Biden. Both are consumed by chaos, negativity, and grievances of the past. The better choice for a better America? Nikki Haley." The former President is facing 93 criminal charges and runs the risk of being disqualified from running in 2024; two states have already struck him off the list of candidates for the presidential nomination. Both Haley and DeSantis may stay in the race in the hope of Trump being taken down by any one of these cases, but that would depend on their ability to finance their campaigns long enough in the face of Trump's unstoppable run; donors may fade away rather than sink their money in doomed campaigns.

PAKISTAN EXPELS IRANIAN AMBASSADOR AFTER AIR STRIKE

Islamabad | Agencies



Following Iran's attack on its territory, Pakistan on Wednesday announced it was expelling the Iranian Ambassador while recalling its envoy from Tehran. "Pakistan has decided to recall its Ambassador from Iran and that the Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan who is currently visiting Iran may not return for the time being," Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said while addressing a press briefing here, Geo News reported. The development comes after Tehran targeted the bases of, what it claimed was a terrorist organisation, inside Pakistani territory, "Green Mountain" with drones and missiles, and destroyed the headquarters of the said terrorist group, it cited Iranian media as reporting. Calling it an "unprovoked and blatant" breach of Pakistan's sover-

eignty by Iran, Islamabad termed the move as a violation of international law and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. "This illegal act is completely unacceptable and has no justification whatsoever. Pakistan reserves the right to respond to this illegal act. The responsibility for the consequences will lie squarely with Iran," Baloch said. Furthermore, the spokesperson also revealed that Islamabad has decided to suspend all high-level visits that were ongoing or were planned between Pakistan and Iran in the coming days, Geo News reported.

Trump, columnist Jean Carroll face off in defamation trial

Washington | Agencies

Fresh from his victory in the Iowa caucuses, former US President Donald Trump attended the first day of a \$10 million defamation trial filed by columnist E. Jean Carroll for sexually abusing and making defamatory statements against her. Jean Carroll (79) had accused Trump of raping her in a Manhattan department store dressing room in the mid-1990s, and then branding the incident a hoax in an October 2022 post on his Truth Social platform. The trial that began on Tuesday is to determine whether Trump harmed her with the defamatory statements and if so, how much money he must pay her in compensation, the BBC reported.



Last May, a different jury trial found that Trump had sexually assaulted and defamed Carroll. The findings of that case are considered relevant in the new trial. At Tuesday's hearing, Trump, who was seated a few rows behind Jean Carroll, stared at the columnist who he claims he had "never met, saw, or touched... and knows absolutely nothing about". On her part, Carroll did not appear to look at him and faced towards the bench for nearly all of the proceedings, allowing Trump only a view of her back. Trump also remained quiet. One of Carroll's attorneys, Shawn Crowley said the jury will need to consider "how much money Donald Trump should have to pay for what he's done".

PALESTINIAN DEATH TOLL IN GAZA RISES TO 24,285

Gaza: The Palestinian death toll from ongoing Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip has risen to 24,285, the Gaza-based Health Ministry has said. The ministry in a press statement on Tuesday said that the Israeli army killed 158 Palestinians and wounded 320 others during the past 24 hours, Xinhua news agency reported. It added that the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict has led to the injuries of 61,154 Palestinians since its outbreak on October 7, 2023. Meanwhile, it noted that a large number of victims were still under the rubble, and ambulance and civil defense crews could not reach them. The ministry also warned of serious health complications facing patients with chronic illnesses, noting that 350,000 of them have been without medication. It called on international institutions to provide medicines for chronic patients urgently.

Putin meets N. Korean FM amid deepening military cooperation

Seoul/Moscow | Agencies

Russian President Vladimir Putin met visiting North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son-hui in Moscow amid deepening military cooperation between the two countries, the media reported on Wednesday. Putin met with Choe late Tuesday and was briefed on the results of her talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov earlier in the day, Yonhap News Agency quoted the Kremlin as saying, without providing further details. Choe has been on a three-day visit to Russia at Lavrov's



invitation. The trip came amid deepening military cooperation between the two countries, with the North providing Russia with arms for use in its war with Ukraine in exchange for Moscow providing technical assistance for

reached at September's summit between Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. On Monday, the Kremlin said it intends to further develop its partnership with North Korea in all areas, calling the North its "closest neighbour" and "partner". Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov also said Moscow hopes for a visit by Putin to North Korea to take place in the "foreseeable future", adding that further coordination, including its timing, will be discussed through diplomatic channels. North Korean state media has not yet reported on the meeting between Putin and Choe.





## CHITRAKOOT TO BE DEVELOPED IN LINE WITH AYODHYA: CM YADAV

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said on Tuesday that Chitrakoot in Satna district, where Lord Ram stayed for 11 years during his exile, will be developed in line with Ayodhya.

Yadav, who was on a visit to Chitrakoot on Tuesday, made the announcement after chairing a meeting with all stakeholders associated with the proposed 'Ram Van Gaman Path' project -- a circuit that covers parts of the route that Lord Ram had followed after he was sent to the exile.

He said that a complete blueprint would be prepared for the development of Chitrakoot and 'Ram Van Gaman Path'. All sacred places falling under the proposed 'Ram Van Gaman Path' would be developed with the consultation of priests, Yadav added.



He also said that everyone has an opportunity to celebrate Diwali on

January 22, the day scheduled for the Pran Pratishtha ceremony at Ram temple in Ayodhya.

The Chief Minister's announcement came at a time when euphoria over the Ram temple is high across the country.

The 'Ram Van Gaman Path' project proposal was made during the Kamal Nath-led Congress government in 2019 and an amount of Rs 22 crore was sanctioned for it. However, the project could not take off since then.

The construction work for the 'Ram Van Gaman Path' is underway in Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, but has not yet been started in Madhya Pradesh.

Yadav has announced that the project would be completed phase-wise and the entire 'Ram Van Gaman Path' would be developed in line with Ayodhya, however, when exactly the construction work would start is still unclear.

## BJP appoints cluster in-charges for MP's 29 Lok Sabha seats

Team Absolute | Bhopal

After a landslide victory in Madhya Pradesh assembly election held in November, 2023, the ruling BJP has turned its complete focus on the Lok Sabha elections due later this year.

In Madhya Pradesh, where the BJP bagged 28 out of 29 Lok Sabha seats in 2019 general election, the central leadership of the saffron party has appointed state leaders as in-charges for seven clusters.

The Lok Sabha seats have been divided into seven clusters, as per the state's divisions, for instance Gwalior-Chambal, Vindhya, Malwa-Nimar, Bundelkhand, Narmadapuram and Mahakaushal. Five ministers of Chief Minister Mohan Yadav's cabinet, including his two deputies - Rajendra Shukla and Jagdish Devda, have been appointed as in-charges of clusters. Two former ministers - Narottam Mishra and Bhupendra Singh have also been given responsibility as in-charges.

Former state's home minister Mishra, who lost the assembly election 2023 from Datia seat, has been appointed as in-charge for Gwalior-Chambal cluster. This particular segment consists of four Lok Sabha seats - Gwalior, Morena, Guna and Bhind. Urban Development Minister Kailash Vijayvargiya



has been given responsibility of Malwa-Nimar region, which has five Lok Sabha seats - Indore, Dhar, Khargone, Khandwa and Ratlam. Deputy Chief Minister Rajendra Shukla has been appointed as in-charge for Vindhya region, which consists of four Lok Sabha seats - Rewa, Satna, Sidhi and Shahdol. The BJP has won 25 out of 30 assembly seats in this region in the assembly election. Former Minister Bhupendra Singh will be in-charge for Bundelkhand cluster, which has four Lok Sabha seats - Sagar, Khajuraho, Tikamgarh and Damoh. Pralhad Singh Patel, who is minister in CM Mohan Yadav's cabinet, has been appointed as in-charge for Mahakaushal cluster. He will be preparing reports for Lok Sabha seats - Mandla, Balaghat, Jabalpur and Chhindwara.

## Woman found dead in her parents' house in Bhopal

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A 25-year-old woman was found dead in mysterious circumstances in her parents' house in Bhopal, said officials on Wednesday.

The woman, married to a Delhi-based man, had come to her parents' house a month ago.

As per the information, the woman's body was lying in a pool of blood in the wash-room, said police officials.

However, the police have yet to make any statement on whether any injury marks were found on her body.

Police have sent the body for post-mortem, and an investigation has been launched, police said.

Woman had come to Bhopal after her husband



went to France for a job related training. She was an engineering graduate from Bhopal.

Police said the post-mortem report would make it clear what exactly caused her death.

## Digvijaya Singh accuses BJP govt in MP of shielding 'irregularities' in recruitment exams

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Congress leader Digvijaya Singh accused the BJP government in Madhya Pradesh of shielding "irregularities" in recruitment exams conducted last year.

The Rajya Sabha MP claimed the previous government led by former Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan had conducted exams for 37,790 posts in different categories between March to August, 2023, however, the results were not announced.

He further added that the irregularities were found in many recruitment exams conducted during the period. "Exams were conducted for a total 37,790 posts in the state government, of which the results of only 9,073 candidates were declared, the selection process could not be initiated due to various irregularities being exposed," Digvijaya said in a letter to Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on



Wednesday. He recalled that an inquiry committee was formed to investigate the waste irregularities in Group 2 and Patwari recruitment

exams conducted last year. "The inquiry committee was supposed to submit its report by August last year; however, the report has not

been submitted so far. It is an indication that the BJP government is trying to protect the persons involved in the corrupt practices," Singh said.

After the irregularities were "exposed" in Patwari exams last year, then Chief Minister Chouhan had put the recruitments on hold and an inquiry committee under the supervision of a retired judge was formed in July last year to investigate the matter.

Veteran Congress leader has appealed to Chief Minister Yadav to announce the results of various exams conducted in the previous year and start the recruitment process to protect the future youths.

"I would request the CM to punish those who were involved in ruining the future of lakh of youths of the state and do justice with the job aspirants. Uncertainty over results of various exams and back to back irregularities have made a negative impact on youths," he added.

## Indore man's collection of Ramayana-themed stamps on display till January 22

Team Absolute | Indore

A 72-year-old Indore resident has collected hundreds of stamps based on the Ramayana from all over the world, which are now on display at an exhibition put up by the postal department.

Om Prakash Kedia told media on Wednesday that he has been collecting stamps for the last 60 years and started accumulating stamps that have been released by different countries on the topic of Ramayana in the past two to three years.

Apart from Indian stamps, Kedia's collection includes the ones from Indonesia, Nepal, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Cambodia.

"The story of Ramayana is very famous in countries of South-East Asia and it is presented in different ways there. These countries have released stamps on events involving characters like Ram, Sita, Lakshman, Bharata, Hanuman and Jatayu," he



said. During British rule, the septuagenarian said, Indians used to print scenes from Ramayana on postcards and such rare postcards also figure in his collection. Special postage stamps issued on the occasion of the 'ASEAN-India Friendship Silver Jubilee

Summit' in 2018 are also in his collection. The Department of Posts has put up an exhibition based on Kedia's collection in Indore which will continue till January 22.

The exhibition, put up on the occasion of the consecration of the Lord

Ram temple in Ayodhya on January 22, is attracting people's attention.

Preeti Agarwal, postmaster general of Indore range, said, "We will come out with a special cover on Ram temple on the conclusion of this exhibition on January 22."

## Ratlam cops red-faced as 2 men steal MP Police vehicle, go on joy ride with siren blaring

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In a daring theft that left the cops in Madhya Pradesh's Ratlam district red-faced on Monday, two men stole a police vehicle from inside a police station and went for a joy ride in it with the siren blaring.

However, their joy ride was a short one as they were caught soon after an eatery owner informed the police, who came and arrested the two men, identified as Irfan Khan and Sadab Khan and recovered the stolen police vehicle, MP 11, CC- 7326, from them.

As per the police report, the incident occurred at midnight on Monday when the two men entered the police station, took the vehicle's key from inside and drove it away without the cops on night duty noticing them!

Once they reached the



main road the accused switched on the police siren and made for a market place located near the railway station in Ratlam.

Posing as cops on patrol in civil dress, the accused demanded money for liquor from an eatery owner who refused to give it.

Irfan and Sadab then slapped him and threatened the eatery owner with dire

consequences before moving on to the next shop.

While the accused were busy threatening and asking for money from some other shopkeepers there, the eatery owner called the police.

A police team reached the spot and the accused were arrested. The police vehicle was recovered and returned to the sheepish staff of the police station.

## Prioritize recruitment on vacant posts in Health Department - Deputy CM Shukla

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Deputy Chief Minister Rajendra Shukla has instructed to complete the necessary formalities for recruitment process of the sanctioned posts in the Health Department instantly. The examination for the sanctioned post has been conducted by Madhya Pradesh Staff Selection Board. He instructed to prioritize resolving the issues of departmental co-ordination to release their final results. Deputy Chief Minister Shukla took a meeting regarding recruitments to vacant posts of Health Department in Mantralaya.

Health department staff should work with spirit of service

The deputy Chief minister emphasized the significance of a service-oriented approach, highlighting the crucial role of health officer and paramedical staff play in the state's healthcare system for the well-being of the entire state. He directed that in matters related to departmental co-ordination, the concerned officers should establish regular contact and ensure resolving the issues. The deputy Chief minister asked the Staff Selection Board to release the results of 2576 posts of ANM, 140 posts of Radiographer, 265 posts of Lab Technician and 472 posts of Pharmacist Grade-2, a total of 3453 posts



soon.

Send demand for newly approved posts soon

Deputy Chief Minister Shukla directed to immediately send the demands regarding the newly approved posts to the Public Service Commission and the Staff Selection Board, so that the recruitment process can be completed quickly. It may be noted that demand is to be sent to the Public Service Commission for recruitment to 441 posts of specialist, 470 posts of medical officer and 156 posts of dentist which includes the backlog and newly sanctioned posts. The deputy Chief minister apprised himself about the current situation regarding the appointment of health staff posts, nursing staff and paramedical staff to be recruited by NHM and issued necessary instructions.

## Amid prep for Ajodhya Ram temple event, a Madhya Pradesh subplot unfolds

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Amid frenetic preparations for the grand consecration ceremony at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, a Madhya Pradesh subplot has seen some movement after being on the back burner for as long as 16 years.

Chief Minister Dr Mohan Yadav yesterday chaired the first meeting of Shri Ramchandra Path Gaman Trust in Satna. The trust was constituted



under former Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan six months before

### What Is The Project

Lord Ram, Sita and Lakshman are believed to have passed through several places in Madhya Pradesh after they left Ayodhya for their 14-year exile. These places include Chitrakoot in Satna district, Badwara in Katni, Ramghat in Jabalpur, Ramnagar in Mandla and spots in Shahdol, Dindoli and Amarkantak. Several temples at these places attract high tourist footfall. The state government's plan aims to link all these pilgrimage centres and offer better infrastructure and facilities to tourists. A formal announcement to develop the Ram Van Gaman Path was first made by Chouhan in 2007. He had then said a sum of Rs 56 crore will be allotted to develop the first phase of the religious tourism corridor.

### Project On Paper, Not On Ground

Since Chouhan's announcement in 2007, the project remained only on paper. In the 16 years since then, the BJP has been in power for 14, barring the two-year tenure of Congress under Kamal Nath. In 2015, eight years after Chouhan's announcement, the Narendra Modi government at the Centre announced a Rs 13,000 crore Ramayana Circuit project to develop pilgrimage sites linked to Lord Ram. These sites were spread across nine states, including Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Bihar. Soon after, the then Shivraj Singh Chouhan government linked its plan to the centre's project. Ahead of 2018 Assembly polls, the BJP government made a provision of Rs 1,000 crore for the project in the state budget. The development of the Ram Van

the assembly polls last year that saw the BJP return to power. At the meeting, Dr Yadav said the Ram Bhagwan Path Gaman Marg will be developed in phases.

### What's Latest

In yesterday's meeting, Chief Minister Yadav said all sites on the Ram Bhagwan Path Gaman Marg route will be developed in phases. "A detailed action plan would be drawn and implemented in phases. The development plan will include infrastructure development and aspects related to creating religious awareness, spiritual development and facets related to Ram Katha," he said.

Dharmendra Lodhi, Minister for Culture, Tourism and Religious Trusts, said that budget allocation for the project will be made during the upcoming assembly session. "Work will start (soon). We will try to bring the best possible budget for the project," he said.



**Dua Lipa learned a lot from rough break-ups**

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer Dua Lipa, who has been reported to be dating British actor and model Callum Turner, has now opened up about the influences of love splits on her life. "I think overall, (dating) is just a little confusing. It's either through friends of friends or people you trust where you can meet new people, because (dating) is not really so straightforward when you are, I guess, a public person," she told Rolling Stone magazine.

She added: "I've had break-ups in my life where I felt like the only kind of break-up you could have was when things just ended really badly. Things ending in a nice way was such a new thing... it taught me a lot."

Her remarks appear to be a reference to her split from her French boyfriend Romain Gavras, 42, the son of acclaimed film director Costa-Gavras. Reports began circulating in December the pair had broken up after eight months of dating, reports aceshowbiz.com.

Before Romain, Lipa had a two-year relationship with 24-year-old model Anwar Hadid.

Her rumoured current boyfriend Callum was last year linked to English model Mathilda Lowther, granddaughter of the 7th Earl of Lonsdale. He also spent four years involved with Vanessa Kirby, 35, famed for playing Princess Margaret on the first two series of 'The Crown'.

Lipa also used her Rolling Stone chat to hit back at the criticism of her holidaying. The 'Houdini' hitmaker, who rang in New Year's Eve in Rajasthan's capital city of Jaipur, has insisted she shouldn't need to justify taking a break from her work to travel the world.

She added: "I think people are quick to forget. I was on tour up until the end of December. I felt like I missed out on so much time with my family and friends. It shows how short our attention span is, which is why music comes out so much faster."

"Of course, I was going to holiday and chill during the year that I was just going in the studio and had some time off. As long as I'm doing my job, hitting my deadlines, and getting my (work) done, then I will find a way to relax, too. It's really work hard and play hard. Why not?"

# Brad Pitt would go 'longest without showering', says former roommate Jason Priestley

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor and filmmaker Jason Priestley was Brad Pitt's roommate and he revealed the Hollywood star's shocking hygiene habit.

According to the Beverly Hills, '90210' alum, Pitt wasn't huge on hygiene back then, reports eonline.com.

"We used to play this game to see who could go the longest without showering," Jason told Live! With Kelly and Mark co hosts Kelly Ripa and Mark Consuelos. "I think about it now and I'm like, 'Dude, how disgusting. What were you thinking?'"

As for who would win? "Brad," Priestley shared. "Always Brad." However, the 54-year-old noted that it's unlikely Brad has stuck with the same routine.



"I don't think he does that anymore," Priestley said "but back then he could go a long time without showering." Jason and Brad, 60, were roommates back in the '90s when they were both up-and-coming actors. The duo lived in a two-bedroom apartment located in what Jason called the "really crappy part" of Los Angeles alongside a third friend.

In his 2015 memoir, the Tru Calling actor recalled that the pair were basically "broke" as they struggled to find acting work. "We lived on Ramen noodles and generic beer-the kind that came in white cans labeled 'beer,'" Jason wrote in the book, "and Marlboro Light cigarettes." But after Priestley was cast in Beverly Hills, 90210 and Pitt shot to fame in Thelma & Louise, the two lost contact with each other. Still, Jason has nothing but fond memories of the Oscar winner.

## SHARON OSBOURNE SAYS SHE HAS NO REGRETS OVER TAKING WEIGHT LOSS DRUG

Los Angeles | Agencies

Sharon Osbourne insists she has no regrets about taking Ozempic. The reality television veteran, 71, lost 40lbs when she started injecting the weight loss drug that has become a hit with Hollywood stars looking to drop fat.

She said that she is glad she took it despite wanting to have a fuller figure again, reports Female First UK.

She told ITV's 'Loose Women' show: "I don't regret it. Everything with weight with me was, 'I want it now'. The injections that I was on worked, but it just seems that now I can't put anything on really."

Sharon added she wishes she could add 10 pounds back to her frame but has been unable to do so. As per Female First UK, the former 'Osbournes' star admitted in May she took Ozempic jabs for four months in an effort to drop 30lbs, but was hit with horrible side effects.

She said on 'The Talk': "I was very sick for a couple of months. The first couple of months, I just felt nauseous. Every day I felt nauseous, my stomach was upset, whatever."

Six months later, Sharon revealed she weighed under 100lbs. She told the Daily Mail about her current look: "I'm too gaunt, and I can't put any weight on. I want to because I feel I'm too skinny. I'm under 100lbs, and I don't want to be. Be careful what you wish for."

Sharon also warned against giving the weight-loss drug to teenagers as she thinks it's "too easy" to abuse. She added: "You can lose so much weight, and it's easy to become addicted to that, which is very dangerous. I couldn't stop losing weight, and now I've lost 42 lbs and I can't afford to lose any more." She also said her husband, Ozzy Osbourne, 75, wasn't a fan of her slimmer frame, adding on 'Good Morning Britain': "Ozzy doesn't like it. He thinks something is going to happen to me. It's too good to be true."



## NICOLE KIDMAN WAS TOLD SHE WON'T HAVE A CAREER IN ACTING DUE TO HER HEIGHT

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Nicole Kidman, who stands at 5ft 11, confessed she lied that she was just half an inch shorter, 5ft10 and a half, after she was bullied as a child for her height and called names such as "Stalky".

"I was told, 'You won't have a career. You're too tall,'" she told Radio Times magazine, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

Even now she is a Hollywood star, Kidman has to think twice about her choice of heel. She continued: "People would say, 'How's the air up there?'"

"Now, I get, 'You're so much taller than I thought', or men grappling with how high my heels should be. Whenever I go on the red carpet, I get sent shoes that are always so high. I'm like, 'Do they have a kitten heel? I'm going to be the tallest person - a giraffe!'"

The 56-year-old star was rejected for a part in the musical 'Annie' when she was young due to her height because she was two inches above the 5ft2 maximum height required.

The star had even persuaded the production team to allow her to at least audition.

She recalled: "I didn't get the part. I didn't even get a call back - but at least I got to sing four lines of a chorus."

The 'Expats' star tries not to see her stature as a setback and instead views it as a "superpower".

She added: "What matters is how you allow other people to either say 'yes' or 'no' to you, and whether you accept that."

"Inner resilience as a human being, that's the superpower really."



## LANA DEL REY, TYLER, THE CREATOR, DOJA CAT, NO DOUBT TO HEADLINE COACHELLA 2024

Los Angeles | Agencies

The line-up for the upcoming edition of the Coachella festival has been announced. Lana Del Rey, Doja Cat, Tyler, the Creator and No Doubt are set to headline the 2024 Coachella festival. The line-up was announced by the promoters Goldenvoice announced on Tuesday. The lineup poster appears below, reports Variety.

Peso Pluma, Blur, J Balvin, Ice Spice, Sublime, Lil Uzi Vert, Grimes, Victoria Monet, Jon Batiste, Bleachers, Justice, Deftones and Lil Yachty are also on the list with big looks for rising artists like Bizarrap, Khruangbin and others.

As per Variety, the 23rd installment of the festival takes place at its home at the Empire Polo Grounds in Indio, California on the weekends of April 12-14 and April 19-21. Those who purchased tickets for the 2023 or 2022 festival have early access to passes during the loyalty presale starting Jan. 18 at 2 p.m. PST. The general presale begins Jan. 19 at 11 a.m. PST.

YouTube returns in 2023 as the exclusive livestream partner for both Coachella weekends on the festival's official YouTube channel. This year marks the third with a curious fourth headlining slot at the bottom of the festival poster, which gives the artist headliner billing - via the all-important font-size hierarchy - but without a specific date; the first three headliners top the bills for each of the festival's three days.

Its meaning has never been fully clear: At first it seemed that the billing was either a late-night dance slot or sort of insurance headliner in case one of the main headliners pulled out (which ended up being the case with Swedish House Mafia in 2022, who took over the Sunday-night slots with the Weeknd when Kanye West cancelled just days before the festival).

However, last year, when Frank Ocean pulled out of the second weekend after his controversial headlining slot during the first, his place was taken by Blink-182 while Harris played late-night DJ sets. This year, with veteran alt-rock act No Doubt in that position, the significance is even more confusing.

Sources say that Dua Lipa and Shakira, both of whom have new albums on the way in 2024, were also in contention to headline; Lipa reportedly bowed out because the timing did not work, while festival organisers reportedly passed on Shakira.

## ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Chloe Sims



## IND V AFG: BISHNOI AND ROHIT'S BRILLIANCE SEAL EPIC THRILLER AS INDIA CLINCH SERIES IN HISTORIC DOUBLE SUPER OVER



Bengaluru | Agencies

India beat Afghanistan in a double super over to complete a 3-0 lead in the 5-match T20I series at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium on Wednesday. With this victory against Afghanistan, Skipper Rohit Sharma

now has the most T20I wins (42) as India's captain in men's cricket. From the outset, the script seemed to favor India, who won the toss and opted to bat first. However, Afghanistan's bowlers had other plans, wreaking havoc on the Indian top order and reducing them to a precarious 22/4 within the first powerplay. Just when the momentum seemed to slip away, Rohit Sharma and Rinku Singh emerged as the saviors, conjuring a magical partnership that defied the odds. Rohit Sharma's masterclass took center stage as he crafted his fifth T20I century, a remarkable unbeaten 121 off 69 balls. Rinku Singh played the perfect supporting role, finishing unbeaten on 69\* off 39 balls. The duo's extraordinary 190-run partnership propelled India to a commanding total of 212/4 in 20 overs, with Afghanistan conceding 17 extras in the process. Rohit's blade danced with grace as

he notched up his fifth T20I century, a feat that propelled him to the summit of centuries in the format, most by any batter in T20I, leaving behind the likes of Glenn Maxwell and Suryakumar Yadav. The innings, a masterpiece crafted with finesse, saw Rohit amass an unbeaten 121 off 69 balls, marking his highest T20I score and the fourth-highest individual score for India in T20Is. In a stellar display of partnership, Rohit found an able ally in Rinku Singh, and together they orchestrated a monumental stand. The duo's unbroken partnership of 190\* runs not only became the highest for India in T20Is but also surpassed the 176-run milestone set by Deepak Hooda and Sanju Samson against Ireland in 2022. Rohit's leadership prowess shone through as three of his five T20I centuries were achieved while captaining India. This milestone saw him draw level with Babar Azam for the most T20I tons as captain, marking

ing a testament to his batting prowess and captaincy acumen. The tale took an unexpected twist with Rinku Singh's heroics. Batting at No.6, he notched up an unbeaten 69\*, the highest score by an Indian in that position in T20Is. His remarkable innings etched a new narrative, surpassing Axar Patel's previous record against Sri Lanka in Pune in 2023. The climax of this cricketing saga revealed Rohit's age - 36 years and 262 days - making him the oldest player from a Test-playing nation to score a century in T20Is. This landmark achievement surpassed the previous record held by the formidable Chris Gayle. Afghanistan's response was equally valiant, with openers Rahmanullah Gurbaz and Ibrahim Zadran setting the stage with impressive half-centuries. Gulbadin Naib's heroic unbeaten 55\* off 23 balls pushed the match into a Super Over, where the drama only intensified.

## Praggnanandhaa becomes India No. 1 after beating world champ Ding Liren

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Eighteen-year-old Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa surpassed Viswanathan Anand in live classical chess rankings after beating reigning world champion Ding Liren at the Tata Steel Masters in Wijk aan Zee, Netherlands. Praggnanandhaa jumped two spots to 11th overall with 2748.3 rating points, 0.3 more than Anand. He entered the fourth round of the prestigious tournament with a sensational win. He is only the second Indian after Viswanathan Anand to beat a reigning world champion in classical chess. Cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar took to social media to shower praise on



the young chess prodigy. "Big cheers to @praggnachess for this remarkable triumph against World Champion, Ding Liren. At the

young age of 18, you haven't just dominated the game but also risen to become India's top-rated player," Tendulkar said in his post on X.

## Australian Open: Tsitsipas Grand Slam hope alive after hard-fought victory over Thompson

Melbourne | Agencies

In a captivating clash at Margaret Court Arena, Stefanos Tsitsipas faced the relentless challenge of Jordan Thompson and a fervent home crowd during his second-round bout at the Australian Open. The 2023 finalist exhibited remarkable resilience, battling through a rollercoaster of emotions and momentum shifts to secure a hard-fought 4-6, 7-6(6), 6-2, 7-6(4) victory that kept his Grand Slam aspirations alive.



The 25-year-old's serving prowess proved instrumental throughout the match, with Tsitsipas saving nine of 11 break points and maintaining an impressive 75 percent success rate behind his first serve. Despite facing adversity and Thompson's spirited fightback, Tsitsipas showcased composure and skill, closing out the match in three hours and 36 minutes. Looking ahead, Tsitsipas will face NextGenATP Frenchman Luca Van Assche in the third round, following Van Assche's upset victory over 25th seed Lorenzo Musetti. The young French talent secured a thrilling 6-3, 3-6, 6-7(5), 6-3, 6-0 win, setting the stage for an intriguing clash against the Greek star in Melbourne.

## Sue Redfern becomes first ICC-appointed female neutral umpire for bilateral series

Dubai | Agencies

England's Sue Redfern will become the first female neutral umpire appointed by the International Cricket Council (ICC) to stand in a bilateral series after being named for the upcoming ICC Women's Championship and T20I fixtures between Australia and South Africa. Sue's appointment follows the ICC's decision to appoint one neutral umpire for all ICC Women's Championship series as well as any T20I matches scheduled between two same opponents. The move will ensure some neutrality in running matches while also keeping in mind the long-term development of female umpires. "It's an honour to be named by the ICC as its first official female neutral umpire and I'm very excited about the upcoming series between Australia and South Africa. This is a defining moment for both women's cricket and female cricket officials, who have worked hard and been given development opportunities in recent years." "I've seen the landscape evolve for female officials and how many are now being recognised and supported across many countries. I am sure this appointment can help build momentum and visibility to help further develop female officials across



the world in the future. Personally, I would like to thank the ICC and the ECB for their support over the years and I look forward to more such appointments," said Sue in the ICC statement. Sue played

in six Tests and 15 ODIs for England between 1995 and 1999, including four in the 1997 Women's ODI World Cup in India. Post the end of her playing career, Sue has been on the ICC Development Panel of Umpires since 2016. She has officiated in two ICC Women's ODI Cricket World Cups (2017 and 2022) and three ICC Women's T20 World Cups (2018, 2022 and 2024). The ICC said it will prioritise female officials for the neutral umpires' role in ICC Women's Championship series. The ICC-appointed female umpires will get match-day parity with their male counterparts on the ICC Elite Panel of Umpires and receive comparable perks. The female neutral umpires will be selected on merit and more of them will find themselves in the ICC International Panel of Umpires in the coming years, as part of ICC's strategic ambition to advance the involvement and visibility of women both on and off field within the game. "This is a watershed moment for women's cricket as we look to both implement a female match officials' pathway programme and accelerate officiating opportunities for our very best performers." "Neutral appointments will give female umpires more exposure to different conditions and will support the learning and development of local female umpires who officiate alongside them."

## Three-time Grand Slam winner Kerber feels burden on her return to tennis

Berlin | Agencies

Reality seemed to come as quick as nightfall on a tropical island nearby. After one hour and 52 minutes, Germany's tennis icon Angelique Kerber's Australian Open adventures were over. As much as the 2-6, 6-3, 1-6 defeat against Danielle Collins in the first round of this year's first major was far from enjoyable, Kerber's first appearance on the big stage after the birth of her daughter Liana set a milestone on her bumpy road back, reports Xinhua. Things have changed entirely since the 2016 Australian Open and US Open and 2018 Wimbledon winner joined the group of eight mothers in the main draw at Melbourne. "I need to be patient. It might take weeks or better months," she said before returning after her daughter's birth on February 23 last year. Leaving the court after losing, the 35-year-old might have remembered discussions with her close friend, Caroline Wozniacki, about competing in professional tennis as a mother. The Dane has a son and a daughter and seems to know all about comebacks under particular circumstances. "When I return to the hotel after a match, I have to be someone else. That's nice," Kerber said trying to describe the changes after the break of 18 months. "This is maybe the biggest challenge of my career." To cope with the changes, she has created an oasis of wellbeing around her. Her mother, partner, coach Torben Beltz and phys-



iotherapist Timo Schall complete her entourage. Her mother, Beata Kerber, takes care of Liana while Kerber is in action, with others looking after everything else. "I am impressed by her ambitions and determination," German head coach Barbara Rittner said. "I am anxiously looking at the performance of the mothers returning." Despite the latest defeat, there are rays of hope

for the former World No. 1. "I am more relaxed and at the same time feel the fire for tennis burning," Kerber said after taking victory at the United Cup in Sydney with the German team together with Alexander Zverev. "I need time and games to get back to success. It's an entirely new experience but I am determined to continue."

## Axar, Yashasvi achieve career-best positions in T20I rankings

Bengaluru | Agencies

Following strong performances in the two T20Is against Afghanistan so far, India's left-arm spin all-rounder Axar Patel and young left-handed opener Yashasvi Jaiswal have achieved career-best positions in the recent update of the ICC men's T20I rankings on Wednesday. Patel has advanced 12 places to a career-best fifth position among rankings for bowlers in the shortest format. His hauls of 2-23 and 2-16 in India's identical six-wicket wins over Afghanistan in the first two T20Is of their three-match series have also lifted him two places to 16th position among all-rounders. Jaiswal's 34-ball 68 in the second T20I in Indore after missing series opener in Mohali due to a groin strain has lifted him seven places to a career-best sixth position while seam-bowling all-rounder Shivam Dube's successive unbeaten knocks of 60 and 63 have helped him



shoot up from 265th to 58th place in the rankings for the batters. Shubman Gill (up seven places to 60th among batters), Tilak Verma (up three places to joint-61st among batters) and Arshdeep Singh (up four places to 21st among bowlers) are the other India players to move up in the rankings. For Afghanistan, Najibullah Zadran (up one place to 46th) and Mohammad Nabi (up two places to 54th) have moved up in the batters rankings. New Zealand opener Finn Allen, whose two innings of 34 off 15 balls and 74 off 41 deliveries helped his team

win the first two matches against Pakistan and lifted him 11 places to 16th position among batters. His team-mate Tim Southee, who took six wickets in the first two matches, is up eight places to 18th in the bowlers' list. Pakistan's star batter Babar Azam is up one place to fourth after notching consecutive half-centuries in the first two matches against New Zealand while Fakhar Zaman is up 14 places to 81st. Daryl Mitchell (up nine places to 37th) and Kane Williamson (up 13 places to 59th) are the Kiwi batters to move up in the rankings.

## India Open: Srikanth crashes out in opening round, loses to Lee Cheuk Yiu

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Former world no.1 Kidambi Srikanth was knocked out in the first round of the India Open, a BWF Super 750 badminton tournament, after he went down to Lee Cheuk Yiu of Hong Kong in straight games, 22-24, 13-21 here at KD Jadhav Hall on Wednesday. The encounter marked Srikanth's third loss to Lee in their four meetings, solidifying the Hong Kong player's dominance in their head-to-head battles. In the first game, Srikanth initially dominated the court and seized an early 2-point lead while engaging in a nail-biting battle against the formidable Lee from Hong

Kong. His swift and strategic moves allowed him to surge ahead, commanding an impressive 11-7 lead by the time of mid-game break. After the break, the Indian riding the wave of his earlier momentum, maintained a firm grip on his lead. However, the player from Hong Kong skillfully narrowed the scoreboard deficit to 15-14. Soon after, he secured a slender one-point lead before reaching a crucial game-point opportunity at 20-18. As the intensity escalated, the game took a turn and Srikanth skillfully saved two game points, bringing the score to 20-all. The momentum of the match swung like a pendulum, with both shuttlers locked in a

neck-and-neck showdown. At a crucial juncture with the scores deadlocked at 22-all, Srikanth's shot went wide, granting Lee a valuable game-point opportunity. Lee seized this chance with both hands and secured the first game, closing it out with a score of 24-22. After the change of sides, Lee swiftly established a 5-1 lead in the early exchanges, which he expanded to an impressive 11-2 at the time of break. After mid-game interval, Lee maintained his dominance in the game, securing a substantial 7-point advantage. Srikanth staged a brief turnaround, notching up four consecutive points before an unfortunate wide shot.

## Hockey Olympic Qualifiers: Back from the brink, India quietly confident for key clash against Germany

Ranchi, Jan 17 (IANS) Pushed to the brink by their defeat to the United States in their opening match, the Indian women's hockey team goes into the semifinal against Germany with a lot of confidence in the Women's FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifiers here on Thursday. The next league match against New Zealand was a real pressure cooker situation for India and a do-or-die clash as defeat would have ended their hopes in the tournament and could have made heads toll. The team survived that as it came up with a brilliant comeback to beat the Black Sticks 3-1. They capitalised on that second breath to outplay Italy 5-1 and sealed a place in the semifinals. Victory against Germany in the semifinal will confirm a berth in the Paris Olympic Games to be played later this year, defeat would not end India's chances, and they will have one more opportunity in the third-fourth match to clinch their ticket to Paris. "The match against New Zealand had us really under pressure. We had already lost to the US and another loss would have meant that we would be out of the tournament. So, we were really under pressure. Germany is a good team, the play-



ers have good individual skills and they are very strong defensively. But we are also confident, we have prepared well and are ready for the match," said the Indian women's hockey team captain Savita ahead of the semifinal clash. Another reason for Savita and her team being confident ahead of the semifinal clash is the improved performance against New Zealand and Italy, which has boosted the team's morale. They know that Germany will be their toughest opponent in this tournament but are not daunted by their reputation even though Germany was held 1-1 by Japan. Head coach Janneke Schopman said

India will have their chances if they play to their strengths. "We know Germany well, we played them this summer. We played them in Spain. They're a very good team, they're very good individual players, they have very good individual skill, they defend really well. But I think if we play to our strengths and focus on ourselves, we can also hurt them a little bit," said Schopman. Both the coach and captain said the Indians will have to be very proactive, vigilant and reactive in the final third at both ends of the pitch. "I think we need to defend really well and like I said, if we can attack to our strengths and play to our strengths in general, let's see what happens because it's a hockey game and everyone can win," said the 46-year-old coach. Though a bit short on experience, the Indians have done well in defence and attack against New Zealand and Italy. They scored early and defended stoutly. However, Schopman said she would prefer neither team to score an early goal on Thursday. India scored an early goal both against New Zealand and Italy, sounding the board within the first minute. Coach Schopman said early goal tends to make the team a bit complacent as they get into defensive mode.



## Manoj Bajpayee to unravel origins, significance of Buddhism

Team Absolute | Mumbai

**M**anoj Bajpayee will be narrating the tale of Gautama Buddha's relics loaded with intrigue and secrets in the upcoming show 'Secrets of the Buddha Relics'.

The new season, which belongs to the 'Secrets' franchise, takes a deep dive into the ancient legends surrounding the final days of Gautama Buddha and relics that surround the very centre of Buddhism.

Manoj Bajpayee, the documentary will acquaint viewers with the historical and cultural significance of Buddha's relics. The National Award-winning actor will acquaint viewers with the historical and cultural significance of Buddha's relics in the show.

The show has been created by showrunner Neeraj Pandey. It will trace the origins, cultural significance, and mystical stories behind these relics, exploring their spread worldwide and the role they play in making Buddhism the world's fourth-largest faith. Delving into the types of relics and their classification, the documentary combines historical and mythological narratives to provide a comprehensive understanding of their role in Buddhism.

Manoj said: "Working alongside Neeraj Pandey is always a rewarding experience with insightful takeaways that contribute to shaping the documentary. The documentary promises to transport viewers to the time of the Buddha, delving into the historical period that witnessed his life and teachings. It aims to connect audiences with profound stories that have played a pivotal role in shaping our spiritual heritage."

## Orry shares his idea of dating five people

Team Absolute | Mumbai

**T**he finale of the streaming chat show 'Koffee With Karan' features guests from the world of digital and social media entertainment. During the course of the episode, Orry, who is known for his selfies with B-town celebs and his phone covers, opened up on dating five people.

On Wednesday, the makers unveiled the promo of the upcoming episode which shows Orry and other social media creators like Kusha Kapila, Danish Sait, Sumukhi Suresh and Tanmay Bhat gracing the couch.

Talking about his idea of relationships, Orry said that he was earlier an old-fashioned guy and at one point just wanted to get married to someone "rich and comfortable."

As Orry graces the couch and the show host Karan Johar asks him his relationship status, he makes a shocking revelation about the same. Talking about this, Karan Johar asked, "Is Orry single or dating someone?"

Opening up about his relationships, Orry said: "I was an old fashioned guy. I was not really seeing anyone, I just wanted to get married to someone really rich and comfortable. Then I started seeing someone,

and realised this is fun. So, am I seeing anyone? No, as of now, I am seeing any five. I am dating five, because dating one person is so fun, goddamn date five."

He further mentioned: "You are only young once. I don't want them to find each other and rip each other's heads off. I didn't want to be married, because if you are married one day, you can't cheat. So, I was like if you have to cheat, it is got to be now. I am cheating. Orry is a cheater."

He also opened up about the inception of 'Brand Orry' and said that producer Boney Kapoor is to be blamed for the same.

Talking about the same, Karan Johar asked: "What was the origin and advent when 'Brand Orry' began?"

Opening up about it, Orry said: "Brand Orry always existed. If you want to blame someone, blame Boney Kapoor. I am going to make a t-shirt, 'I blame Boney.' Because the first time I got the limelight was Boney Kapoor's fault. I was attending his daughter's birthday. When I entered the gate, all the media was like 'Orry, Orry!'"

"Boney uncle being the gentleman he is, had come down to receive me at the gate. I was like 'Boney uncle, they were screaming my name. I was so shy'. He grabbed me by the wrist and flung me in front of the media and said, 'Yeh Orry hai, iska photo lelo, mera bacha hai'. All the media circled me. My Instagram dates back to a decade. The match was always there, the gunpowder was there and Boney just lit it," he added.



## Richa Chadha highlights monopoly in aviation sector



Team Absolute | New Delhi

**B**ollywood actress Richa Chadha on Wednesday said that she too had to face delays in two domestic flights of IndiGo airlines.

She took to X and said that she took three flights in the last three days, two were with IndiGo, and the third, an international flight, which was on time. Reflecting on the delayed flights issue, she suggested that factors like fog in Delhi and the recent air show in Mumbai might have contributed to IndiGo's challenges.

"On my 3rd flight in 3 days... day 1, @IndiGo6E delayed by over 4 hours. Day 2, @IndiGo6E delayed by 4 hours. But the only direct flights on some

routes are often IndiGo. Day 3, international flight, no problem," her tweet read.

"On the 14th of Jan, there was an air show in Mumbai, because of which the runway was closed in the morning. And then fog/smog in North India - Delhi runway closed. Ripple effect? Flights delayed all over the country, staff overextended. I am surprised only one person got physically assaulted because tempers were running very high (I don't condone violence)," she added on X.

"Lesson: Monopoly - whether airlines, airport ownership or leadership - creates lack of accountability. Common citizens suffer, with no recourse. Till we don't recognise it, we will be at a disadvantage while paying through our noses. And if we don't wake up, we deserve it," she expressed.

## 'Bigg Boss 17': Munawar, Vicky get into a physical fight

**Mumbai:** In the upcoming episode of 'Bigg Boss 17', Vicky Jain and Munawar Faruqui will be seen getting into a physical fight over a "bucket".

It seems the fight happens after the nomination task, where the first team had to take all the torture from the second team. In the torture task, the second team consisting of Vicky Jain, Isha Malviya and others were seen throwing cold water and chillies on Munawar, Mannara and Arun.

Now that the tables of turned and it's their chance to torture, Vicky going by the promo of the show is seen putting the bucket and mug on the roof of the house.

Munawar sees it and instantly goes to remove it by climbing on to a tree and is seen the pool net to pull the bucket down. However, with Abhishek and Vicky pulling the cleaning net, Munawar falls down.

This leads to a fight between Munawar and Vicky and the entire house gets into the matter.

The two even come close to each other's face for a fight.



## Emraan Hashmi reveals why he wanted to play villain

Team Absolute | Mumbai

**A**ctor Emraan Hashmi, who has dabbled in almost all genres and essayed a myriad of characters, has finally explained the reason as to why he wanted to play a villain.

Emraan was pitted against Salman Khan in the third installment of the 'Tiger' franchise, which is now streaming digitally.

Emraan said: "It is truly special when a film keeps giving you appreciation and respect again and again. This means that a film has made a place for

itself in the books of time. It is really amazing to have got so much love playing an anti-hero in Tiger 3."

He added: "I was sold on the idea to play a villain who as much shrewd and cunning as he is powerful enough to take on an iconic hero like Tiger in a hand to hand combat. Aditya Chopra & Maneesh Sharma created a very unique anti-hero archetype for me to play with and make him my own."

Emraan further shared: "I'm delighted that audience gave me love when Tiger 3 released in

theatres and the film went on to become a big hit. Now, they are again pouring love on me when Tiger 3 has released on streaming. This is testimony to the fact that the film and its story and its characters have connected to the hearts of audiences."

Also starring superstars Salman Khan and Katrina Kaif in lead roles, Tiger 3 is the fifth film from YRF Spy Universe, the biggest movie IP of India. All the films from YRF's spy-verse - Ek Tha Tiger, Tiger Zinda Hai, War, Pathaan & Tiger 3 - have been blockbusters.

## One of the most challenging yet significant part of playing Indrani Kothari : Raveena Tandon

Team Absolute | Mumbai

**A**ctress Raveena Tandon has opened up about how she slipped into the glam look of her character Indrani Kothari for 'Karma Calling', and shared how she took tips from her daughter Rasha in order to fit into the trends.

The reigning queen of Alibaug, Indrani Kothari played by Raveena is all things glam and glitz but what no one knows is what goes behind the making of this picture perfect character on screen.

Talking about it, Raveena said: "One of the most challenging yet significant part of playing Indrani Kothari was acing her glamorous outlook. She is all things extravagant and larger than life. Before we decided her final looks, we had over 50 look tests and costume trails."

"As a team, we needed to be convinced about how Indrani dressed and looked. From classy make-up, hair and colourful bling costumes, Indrani Kothari's character had to reflect grandeur," shared the actress.

The 'Mohra' fame actress shared how the director Ruchi Narain and the producer Ashutosh had a great eye for detail and went through every look test to get the right look for Indrani. "In Indrani's world, there is no one better than her. I also took some tips from my



daughter, Rasha to fit into the trends, stylish and blingy outfits that Indrani wore," added Raveena.

## INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Sonali Raut