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PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM NEW DELHI, MUMBAI AND BHOPAL

NATION > 02
Nitish Kumar should not repeat obscene remarks against...



HOLYWOOD > 06
Dakota Johnson calls Taylor Swift 'most powerful person in America' ...



SPORTS > 07
Jadeja, Rahul ruled out of India's second Test against England...



India's social transformation: A key welfare initiatives & achievements

ONLY IN 10 YEARS

The Finance Ministry on Monday said that the Central government's expenditure on social services has registered a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 5.9 per cent between the fiscal years 2014 and 2023. The capital expenditure on social services has seen an even more robust growth, with an 8.1 per cent CAGR over the same period, indicating the creation of societal assets. Notably, programmes aimed at ensuring universal access to basic amenities, including Ujjwala Yojana, PM-Jan Aarogya Yojana, PM-Jal Jeevan Mission, and PM-AWAS Yojana, have gained prominence.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In the next three years, India is expected to become the third-largest economy in the world, with a GDP of \$5 trillion, the Finance Ministry said in a review of the Indian economy just days before the Interim Budget (Feb 1).

This is not the Economic Survey of India prepared by the Department of Economic Affairs. That will come before the full Budget after the general elections, the ministry said.

Ten years ago, India was the 10th largest economy in the world, with a GDP of \$1.9 trillion at current market prices. Today, it is the fifth largest with a GDP of \$3.7 trillion (est. FY24), despite the pandemic and despite inheriting an economy with macro imbalances and a broken financial sector, the review said.

This 10-year journey is marked by several reforms, both substantive and incremental, which have significantly contributed to the country's economic progress. These reforms have also delivered an economic resilience that the



country will need to deal with unanticipated global shocks in the future. The government has, however, set a higher goal of becoming a 'developed country' by 2047. With the journey of reforms continuing, this goal is achievable. The reforms will be more purposeful and fruitful with the full participation of the state governments. The participation of the states will be fuller when reforms encompass changes in governance at the district, block,

and village levels, making them citizen-friendly and small business-friendly and in areas such as health, education, land and labour in which states have a big role to play, it added.

The strength of the domestic demand has driven the economy to a 7 per cent plus growth rate in the last three years.

UP, BIHAR, MP LEAD IN DECLINE IN YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

New Delhi: The Finance Ministry in a review of the Indian economy just days before the Union Budget said at the state level, the decline in the youth unemployment rate has been led by the states with a larger share of the young population, such as Uttar Pradesh (with 6.9 crore youth as per MoHFW's population estimates for 2021), Bihar (with 3.5 crore youth), and Madhya Pradesh (with 2.3 crore youth).

According to the PLFS, youth (age 15-29 years) unemployment rate has declined from 17.8 per cent in 2017-18 to 10 per cent in 2022-23, while youth LFPR has expanded from 38.2 per cent to 44.5 per cent over the same period. For the proportion of employed youth to rise from 31 per cent to 40.1 per cent in these six years is a feat for a populous country on the upside of a demographic transition, the review said.

MIDDLE CLASS PROPELLED E-COMMERCE MARKET: ECONOMY REVIEW

New Delhi: The Indian Economy Review prepared by the Ministry of Finance ahead of the Interim Budget (Feb 1) said that the proliferation of internet connectivity and smartphones in India, coupled with rapid urbanisation and the rising influence of India's middle class, have propelled the e-commerce market. During the Covid pandemic, the Aarogya Setu and CoWin apps helped track and contain the spread of the virus and facilitate the vaccination of many people in a short period of time. Using these digital infrastructure, India was able to provide support to many households quickly. In the first months of the pandemic, about 87 per cent of poor households received at least one benefit. The Indian Economy Review said the PM eVIDYA was another initiative launched with the use of digital technology to bridge learning gaps during the pandemic. The digital world has also built several e-commerce platforms for merchandise, food, and transport services that proved critical during the lockdowns. As per a report by UNICOMMERCE on 'India E-Commerce Index 2023136', the overall order volume witnessed a growth of 26.2 per cent in FY23, indicating a flourishing e-commerce landscape in India, supported by a 23.5 per cent rise in annual Gross Merchandise Value (GMV) as compared to FY22. India's e-commerce market is expected to reach \$163 billion by 2026, with online sales accounting for over 25 per cent of the sales across major non-grocery

Women employee can now nominate children for family pension

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The government on Monday amended rules granting the women employee the right to nominate their son(s) or daughter(s) for family pension instead of her husband.

Minister of State (Independent Charge) Jitendra Singh said that the Department of Pensions and Pensioners' Welfare (DoP&PW) has introduced an amendment to the CCS (Pension) Rules, 2021 which will now allow a female government employees or pensioners to grant family pension to their eligible child/children after their own demise, instead of their spouse. He said that the amendment will address situations where marital discord leads to divorce proceedings or cases filed under acts such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, Dowry Prohibition Act or the Indian Penal Code. He said that previously, the family pension was granted to the spouse of a deceased government servant or pensioner, while other family members became eligible only after the



spouse's ineligibility or demise.

"The new amendment allows female government servants or pensioners to request the grant of family pension to their eligible child/children after their own demise, instead of their spouse," he said.

The DoP&PW said that the female government servant or pensioner must make a written request to the concerned Head of Office, stating that family pension should be granted to her eligible child/children in precedence to her spouse, in the event of her death during the ongoing proceedings.

"If the female government servant or pensioner passes away during the proceedings, the family pension will be

disbursed accordingly," the DoP&PW said.

It said that if a woman employee is survived by a widower with no eligible child, the family pension will be payable to the widower.

It said that for cases where the deceased female government servant or pensioner is survived by a widower and children who have attained majority but are still eligible for family pension, the family pension will be payable to such children.

It said that similarly, the families of missing employees covered under NPS can now get a family pension within six months of lodging FIR and not wait for seven years after which the employee is considered deemed dead.

Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra enters Bihar

Patna | Agencies

The Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi entered Bihar on Monday.

He will reach Islampur in Kishanganj district from West Bengal's Sonpur village. Rahul Gandhi will start padyatra from Farigola village and go to Sell Tax Chowk, Dharamganj Chowk, station service road, bus stand and finally reach Khagra stadium.

Gandhi will address a public meeting in Khagra stadium. The team of West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee handed over the baton to Bihar Congress



President Akhilesh Prasad Singh at Sonpur-Islampur border. "We have been preparing for the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra of Rahul Gandhi for the last 9 days in extreme cold conditions. The Congress workers worked round the clock here to make

the Yatra successful. He will get the huge public support in Seemanchal area of Bihar," said Madan Mohan Jha, MLC and former state president of Congress party in Bihar.

Gandhi will address a rally in Purnia on Tuesday.

BMC bans illegal posters, hoardings, banners on all Mumbai roads

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In wake of a Bombay High Court order, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation has banned any illegal posters, banners, hoardings or announcements on all public roads in the city and suburbs, an official said here on Monday.

The BMC has published a list of locations where such displays are authorised, and will now initiate a campaign to remove the illegal displays in other areas. The civic body has also appealed to citizens, social organisations, and political parties to refrain from erecting any such hoardings,



banners or posters without the prior permission of the department concerned at the ward level. The issue was also discussed at a state-level committee chaired by the Additional Chief Secretary, Home, recently to discourage such unauthorised displays on public roads, pathways, etc. The BMC said that violators will be penalised under the Maharashtra Prevention of Defacement of Property

Act, 1995 and Mumbai Municipal Corporation Act, 1888. In 2022, the BMC had initiated several drives and uprooted over 16,300 illegal posters, banners, hoardings, announcements, flags, etc from main and arterial roads, and conducted regular campaigns against the public nuisance in different parts of the city and suburbs.

There have been instances when such illegal hoardings/banners have posed a risk to pedestrians or vehicles by obstructing the view of traffic signals, and hindering visibility of major heritage buildings or monuments or scenic locations.

MP honey-trapping scandal: SIT FAILS TO TELL COURT IF KAMAL NATH HAS PEN DRIVE WITH PROOF

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The hearing in the high-profile honey-trapping and blackmailing scandal, that rocked Madhya Pradesh four-and-half-years ago, was deferred to February 10 on Monday as the Special Investigation Team (SIT) failed to submit its report on whether Congress leader Kamal Nath has a 'pen-drive' purportedly containing evidence of the case.

Claiming that the new SIT chief Adarsh Katiyar, who took charge recently, was on training in Coimbatore, the team sought some more time to submit the report.

Subsequently, a District Court of Indore fixed February 10 as the next date of hearing.

The court was hearing a petition filed by lawyer Yavar Khan seeking to know how the pen drive related to the sensational case had fallen into the hands of former Chief Minister Kamal Nath. Khan filed the petition after Nath at a press conference



here on May 21, 2021 claimed that he had in his possession the pen drive containing evidence of

the scandal.

The court had earlier sent notices to the police and Kamal Nath to reply to the petition. The SIT constituted by the state government to probe the matter was supposed to present its report on the notice sent to Kamal Nath in this regard.

Importantly, Kamal Nath had earlier issued a clarification that he had only watched the 29 second-clip relating to the scandal.

In his clarification, he had said that the police produced the pen drive before him when he was the Chief Minister, but, he had returned the pen drive to the police after watching the clip. The scandal came to light on September 19, 2019 when an engineer of Indore Municipal Corporation (IMC) filed a complaint with a police station in Indore alleging that he was being blackmailed with the release of a video of him in a compromising position if he did not pay Rs 3 crore to a woman.

All the six accused are now out on bail.

US issues record-high 1.4 mn visas to Indians in 2023

New Delhi: Bringing down the visitor visa appointment wait times by 75 per cent, the US Consular Team in India processed a record-smashing 1.4 million US visas in the year 2023.

Stating that the demand across all visa classes was unprecedented -- with a 60 per cent increase in applications compared to 2022 -- the US Embassy and Consulates said on Monday that Indians now represent one out of every 10 US visa applicants around the world. In addition, visitor visas (B1/B2) rebounded to represent the second-highest number of applications in the US Mission's history -- over 700,000. The US Embassy and Consulates said that it met this demand through a three-month staffing surge in Mumbai early in the year, by increased permanent staff levels, and through the employment of innovative technical solutions. Last year, the US consular team in India issued over 140,000 student visas -- more than in any other country in the world setting a record for the third year in a row.

Liver cancer cure possible through target therapy: research

Lucknow | Agencies

An advanced technique called Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (NMR) is employed to analyse the metabolism of the liver cells and blood cells in a highly growing stage.

This revealed abnormal changes in cell cycle, including energy formation and utilisation, such as the accumulation of a substance called succinate in the liver tissue, increased breakdown of ketones, and alterations in how the body processes amino acids in advanced stages of HCC.

Importantly, these metabolic changes in cells were found to closely align with the progression of liver cancer, potentially serving as early indicators of the upcoming disease.

A new research has shown that liver cancer, a growing health challenge often diagnosed in its advanced stages, can be prevented by changing the metabolic programming of cells as a target therapy.

The research, conducted over six years, is a collaborative effort of scientists from CSIR-Central Drug Research Institute (CDRI), Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (CIMAP), and Centre of Biomedical Research (CBMR), SGGPIMS, Lucknow.

The research, published in the renowned international journal Elsevier, also unravels crucial



insights into the metabolic mysteries behind Hepatocellular Carcinoma (HCC), a challenging form of liver cancer. Besides delving into the intricacies of HCC, the research opens avenues for targeted therapies.

In their research work, CDRI's Mugale and his team utilised an animal model of HCC induced by a substance called Diethylnitrosamine

(DEN), mirroring the development of the disease in humans.

The study revealed changes like decreased body weight, higher levels of certain enzymes in the blood, and alterations in the liver structure observed through special staining and microscopy techniques during the progression of HCC.

"Our team used advanced techniques like Immunohistochemistry (IHC) to identify elevated levels of specific markers in the cancerous liver, providing insights into the enhanced cancer-causing potential. They also delved into the role of a signalling pathway called STAT3-NFKB, uncovering its impact on the cell's metabolism, which was found to be a key driver in the malfunction

GOVT BANS SIMI FOR 5 MORE YEARS

New Delhi: The Central government on Monday banned the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) for five more years and declared it an 'unlawful association'.

"The ban on SIMI has been imposed under Section 3(1) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) 1967 for a further period of five years," the Ministry of Home Affairs said. The ministry said that the ban on SIMI has been imposed vide Gazette Notification Number S.O. 564(E), dated the 31st January, 2019.



NITISH KUMAR SHOULD NOT REPEAT OBSCENE REMARKS AGAINST WOMEN: BJP WOMEN LEADERS

Patna | Agencies

Bihar BJP women wing leaders on Monday said that the Chief Minister Nitish Kumar should not repeat the obscene remarks against women which he had made last year inside the assembly, drawing sharp criticism from all quarters.

"Nitish Kumar should give assurance that he will not repeat the obscene remarks against the women again. The women of the state will not forgive him if he repeats vulgar remarks against women," said a BJP woman leader.

Another BJP woman leader said that Nitish Kumar was in the wrong alliance which prompted him to make such vulgar comments against women. "He has now become clean after joining NDA," she said.

She said that Nitish Kumar has a clean image and the



remarks against women came mistakenly out of his mouth.

"He is a human and had made the mistake by talking against the women. I think the vulgar comments mistakenly came out from his mouth. As he has now joined the NDA, he will now work for women empowerment," she said.

On November 7, 2023 -- Nitish Kumar -- during the winter session of Bihar assembly while elaborating on population control made vulgar comments against the women, drawing sharp criticism.

His remarks also became an election issue in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chattisgarh.

WILL REMOVE TURBAN, TONSURE HEAD IN AYODHYA: SAMRAT CHOUDHARY

Patna: A day after the formation of the NDA Government in Bihar, Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary, on Monday claimed that he will tonsure his head and remove his turban in Ayodhya.

The BJP's Samrat Choudhary had taken the oath that he would remove his turban, which he had donned after his mother's death, only after he removes Nitish Kumar from the post of Chief Minister of Bihar.

However, in a twist of fate, Nitish Kumar retained his post as Bihar Chief Minister and now Samrat Choudhary has to work under him as the Deputy Chief Minister.

When asked about his vow, Samrat Choudhary said, "After my mother died in 2022, I tonsured my head and tied a turban. When I became the Leader of Opposition in Bihar's legislative council soon after that, I took an oath that I would remove my turban only after removing Nitish Kumar from the post of Chief Minister of Bihar. As the BJP is my second mother, I would do anything for my second mother." When the national leadership of the BJP decided to go with Nitish Kumar as the Chief Minister, it was a sentimental moment for me. I told our top leadership that I will go to Ayodhya and remove the turban and shave my head and place it at the feet of Lord Ram," he said.

Maha cop, journalist nabbed for honey-trap sextortion racket in Gadchiroli

Gadchiroli | Agencies

Police in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli have arrested a journalist and a policeman among others for allegedly running a major honey-trap sextortion racket, an official said on Monday.

The accused are: policeman Sushil Gawai, journalist Ravikant Kamble, and their accomplice Rohit Ahire, all hailing from Nagpur.

Besides, a woman associate who was part of the sextortion gang, identified only as Ishani, has also been arrested, while the police are on the lookout for another unidentified woman who is absconding.

According to a complaint lodged with the police, a government employee from Gadchiroli had gone to Nagpur on January 3 on official duties, where his old friend Gawai arranged for an accommodation at a hotel in the Hingna area of the city.

However, there were two other women already in the room, who threatened the complainant (government servant) with rape charges if he did not pay them Rs 10 lakh, and later, the other accused also joined in.

They warned him of filing a police complaint with evidence, ruining his reputation, and other dire consequences if he did not comply with their demands.



Pretending to help out, the complainant's friend Gawai claimed that he had already paid up around Rs 2 to 3 lakh from his pocket, while Kamble had also reportedly chipped in with Rs 28,000 to silence the two women.

They demanded that the complainant should refund the money they had already allegedly paid up on his behalf, plus make arrangements for the remaining cash to save his image, and hush up the matter to avoid any legal hassles, said a police official.

Finally, after over three weeks of these demands, the government servant lodged the complaint and the police team nabbed the four accused in the case within hours. Further investigations are underway.

Upset over unnatural sex demand, woman in UP bites husband's private parts

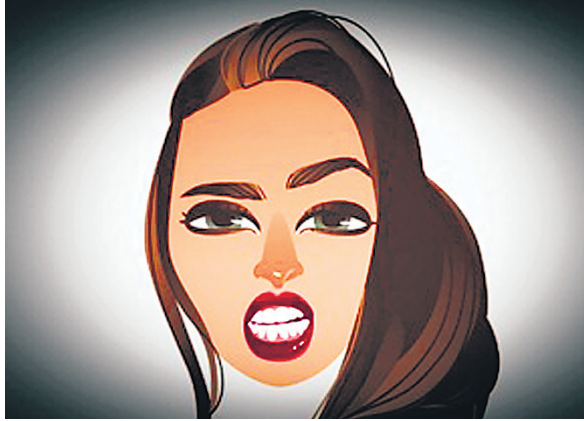
Hamirpur | Agencies

A woman in Uttar Pradesh's Hamirpur district allegedly bit her husband's private parts, causing severe injuries, as she was reportedly fed up with his insistence on unnatural sex.

Ramu Nishad, 34, has been hospitalised following the episode, and his condition is stated to be critical.

The incident occurred on Sunday night after a dispute between the couple involving unnatural sex.

The wife bit her husband's private parts with her teeth, leaving him profusely bleeding. The man was initially taken to a nearby hospital and later shifted to another hospital for advanced treatment as his condition remained critical.



The wife alleged that she was upset over the husband's demand for unnatural sex.

A case has been registered under Section 326 of the Indian Penal Code for voluntarily causing grievous hurt and Section 506 for criminal intimidation.

A senior police officer, Anoop Singh, said that a probe has been launched, adding action will be taken against the accused.

NOT HEART ATTACK, BUT HUSBAND KILLED MADHYA PRADESH SDM: POLICE

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) Nisha Napit didn't die of heart attack, as was suspected initially, in Madhya Pradesh's Dindori district on Sunday, but was reportedly killed by her husband Manish Sharma for not making him the nominee in service, insurance and bank records, the police said on Monday.

In 2020, Nisha (51) got married to Manish (45) through a social media site. However, Manish's repeated demands to make him the nominee in all records had led to a discord between the two.

SDM Nisha, who was posted at Shahpura tehsil in Dindori district, died under mysterious circumstances at her official residence on Sunday. The cause of her death was initially suspected as heart attack.

However, the forensic reports and the views of the doctors at the community health centre, where she was rushed for treatment, did not match with the story narrated by Manish, making the police suspicious. On Sunday, Manish, a resident of Gwalior, had told the police that his wife felt acute pain on her chest following which he took her to the nearby community health centre, where she died during treatment. The doctors at the community centre, on the other hand, told the police that by the time the officer was brought there, she was already dead.

Subsequently, the police sealed the officer's residence and detained her husband for further inter-



rogation. It was revealed that Nisha was allegedly killed by her husband for not making him the nominee in service, insurance and bank records, Dindori SP Akhil Patel to mediapersons on Monday. According to Patil, Sharma suffocated her wife with a pillow on Sunday, sat near the corpse for six hours and then took the body to the nearby community health centre, where the doctors there

alerted the police. Sharma had also washed her blood-stained clothes as well as the pillow in the washing machine, Patel said. "Based on our probe and leads gathered from the spot, we questioned Sharma and then arrested him. He has been charged with murder, dowry-related death, destroying evidence and other offences," he said.

Varanasi's Gyanvapi mosque: Plea in SC seeks ASI survey of entire sealed area, including 'Shivling'

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Hindu plaintiffs in Varanasi's Gyanvapi case have moved an application before the Supreme Court seeking directions to Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to survey the 'Shivling' and entire 'wazukhana' (ablution pond) area of the mosque area - which had remained sealed since May 2022.

In October 2022, the Varanasi District Judge rejected the application filed by Hindu side for conducting scientific survey of Shivlingam, mainly on the ground that there is an order of sealing passed by the Supreme Court.

"The survey of the entire premises has been conducted except the sealed area by ASI and now it is necessary that the sealed area be also surveyed by ASI, otherwise, the very purpose of survey would be frustrated as there will be no report of ASI regarding the area under seal," said the application filed before the apex court.

The application filed through advocate Vishnu Shankar Jain said that the plaintiffs and the Hindus, in general, have every right to have darshan and perform pooja of the deity as



Shivlingam is an object of worship for Hindus and devotees of Lord Shiva.

It said that to establish the truth in the matter, whether the object found is Shivlingam or a fountain, a scientific survey of the entire sealed area, including Shivlingam, is required to be carried out by the ASI. "To meet the ends of justice, the ASI may further be directed to conduct a survey in the entire sealed area and also of the Shivlingam as to whether the same is a fountain or not," the application said. The Muslim party

claims that the object found in May 2022 during the videographic survey is not Shivlingam but a fountain.

Recently, the Archaeological Survey of India in its report filed before the district court found evidence of a Hindu temple after surveying the mosque complex (excluding the 'wazukhana'). The top court on January 16 had asked the district administration to supervise the cleaning of the sealed area after the Hindu plaintiffs moved an application saying that a putrid smell coming from the water tank due to the presence of dead fish. "Since there exists a Shivlingam which is sacred to Hindus, it should be kept away from all dirt, grime, dead animals, etc. and it must be in a clean condition. It is currently in the midst of dead fish which is hurtful to the sentiments of the devotees of Lord Shiva," the application had said. Hindu plaintiffs had instituted a suit in Varanasi court demanding the right of unhindered worship at the Maa Shringar Gauri Sthal.

However, the Anjuman Intezamia Masjid Committee refutes the claim that the mosque was built over a temple, maintaining the structure at the spot was always a mosque.

DMRC changes colour code of upcoming Aerocity-Tughlakabad corridor

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) has decided to change the colour code of the upcoming Delhi Aerocity-Tughlakabad corridor of Phase IV from "silver" to "golden" for better visibility and convenience for the passengers, an official said on Monday.

"The decision has been taken since the golden colour can be displayed more prominently and clearly on the trains rather than silver, which tends to get mixed with the overall silvery texture of the stainless steel body of the Metro trains," Delhi Metro spokesperson Anuj Dayal said.

"Therefore, the selection of 'golden' as the colour code would ensure better visibility on trains and will be more convenient for the passengers," he said.

The Delhi metro has colour-coded all its operational corridors for easier identification by the passengers. A coloured strip indicating the code of that particular corridor is displayed prominently on the body of the trains. For example, a train operating on the blue



line from Dwarka Sector 21 to Noida/ Vaishali has a blue strip below the window.

The Aerocity-Tughlakabad Metro corridor of Delhi Metro's Phase IV will be 23.62 km long with 15 stations.

"This corridor will connect the Kashmere Gate-Raja Nahar Singh Violet Line with the Airport Express Line and will provide connectivity to many new areas in the southern part of the national capital. This corridor is expected to be made operational by March 2026," Dayal said.

BJP expands Gujarat cadre with high-profile inductions from rival parties



Gandhinagar | Agencies

The BJP in Gujarat on Monday announced the induction of several leaders from various political parties, marking a substantial shift in the state's political dynamics.

At an event held here, which was attended by state BJP chief C.R. Paatil and saw the participation of influential figures, a large number of people from other parties chose to join the BJP.

Those who joined the safe-camp included Balkrishna Patel, former Dabhoi MLA who had

switched from the BJP to the Congress in 2022 after being denied a ticket, but lost in 2022 polls contesting on a Congress ticket; Kuldipsinh, Director of Vadodara Dairy, who also contested the Assembly elections on a Congress ticket, and joined the BJP along with approximately 1,000 of his supporters; Balvant Gadhvi, the district Congress chief of Ahmedabad and contestant for the Vatva Assembly seat in 2022; and Ghanshyam Gadhvi, head of the state Congress' Other Backward Class (OBC) wing, among others.

Operation launched to nab tiger from BJP leader's farmhouse in UP

Sitapur | Agencies

Forest officials have launched a search operation to locate and secure a tiger, which was spotted inside the premises of BJP leader Munindra Awasthi's farmhouse in Sandana village of Uttar Pradesh's Sitapur district. The big cat was spotted at Awasthi's house on Saturday night and had been roaming freely for the past 24 hours according to Dinesh Gupta Forest Ranger, Sitapur district.

Awasthi's farmhouse is situated in Khevatarampur village of Naimisharanya police station area.

According to forest ranger Gupta, a dedicated team combed the farmhouse on Sunday, and efforts were intensified to locate and secure the tiger.

"Visual surveillance, including the use of drones, has been employed since Sunday evening to monitor the movements of the tiger," he said.

The Forest Department team has yet to successfully apprehend the tiger. Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Sitapur, Brij Mohan Shukla, said, "Plans are in place to employ a cage in the



Sandana area to safely contain the tiger. The tiger will not be tranquilized as the it is not aggressive." He said that 10 to 12 members from the forest and police department were involved in the operation. The presence of a tiger within a residential area has raised concerns among locals in the area. In December last year,

a tiger resting atop a wall in Pilibhit in Uttar Pradesh drew a massive crowd before being rescued by forest officials.

A team of forest department officials rescued the big cat that had ventured into a man's house in the Athkona village, located nearly 20 km from Pilibhit Tiger Reserve forest.

No one can dictate us which god to worship: Mamata

Kolkata | Agencies

West Bengal Chief Minister on Monday took an indirect dig at the BJP over the recent 'Pran Pratishthan' ceremony of the Ram Temple at Ayodhya, saying no one has the right to dictate others as to which god one should worship.

"What do they think? I will only worship the god that they suggest? I am not ready to allow that. I have studied Ramayana. I have studied the Bible, Guru Granth Sahib and Tripitaka as well," the Chief Minister said while addressing an administrative review meeting in Cooch Behar on Monday. Banerjee also indirectly ridiculed BJP for not referring to "Sita Mata" or "Mata Koushyalya".

"They never speak about them or the sacrifices they made," Banerjee said.

She also accused the BJP of ignoring the popular religious places and religious festivals in West Bengal. "They never speak of the Madan Mohan



Temple or the Jalpeshwar Temple. I never speak of Durga Puja. I have said this before and I am saying this again, religion is about personal faith, but festivals are for all," she said.

Banerjee also accused the BJP of "unnecessarily targeting" her over the issue of corruption. "My party will not take the responsibility of personal corruption by just 1 per cent of the leaders. Similarly, the state government will also not take the responsibility. Now the 'dacoits' are addressing us as 'thieves'. I do not accept any salary as the Chief Minister. I even pay the bill for a single cup of tea. So do not lie and call me a thief," the Chief Minister said.



MP, RAJASTHAN SIGN MOU OVER SHARING RIVER WATER

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan have signed a MoU over East Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP) water sharing which will benefit 5 lakh and 60 thousand hectares of land in both the states.

The officials said that a total of 26 districts of Rajasthan and 13 districts of Madhya Pradesh will get direct benefits by connecting Chambal, Parvati and Kalisindh rivers.

The MoU was signed by two respective chief ministers in presence of Jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat in New Delhi.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said that Chambal belt is very important from the point of view of agriculture and a proper implementation of this scheme will be of great benefit. "Along with agri-



culture, industrial development and tourism will also get a boost. Like Rajasthan, 13 districts of Madhya

Pradesh are also included in this scheme. Maximum benefits will be available in Malwa and Chambal

belt," the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister said. Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma said that ERCP was pending for a long time.

"The previous Congress government of Madhya Pradesh and sometimes Rajasthan had made a lot of efforts to complicate this issue. But now this scheme will prove to be a big boon for Eastern Rajasthan," the Rajasthan Chief Minister said.

Jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat said that the agreement is a golden day for both the states. "After the completion of this scheme, 5 lakh 60 thousand hectares of new land in both the states will come under irrigation. The problem of drinking water for the next 30 to 40 years will also be solved," the minister said. He said that this scheme will not only save a large area from drought but will also save many states of the country from the floods too.

Dilemma for Rajya Sabha candidature in Madhya Pradesh

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Elections are going to be held for five vacant Rajya Sabha seats of Madhya Pradesh. Discussion of names of contenders for these places has also started. The tenure of five Rajya Sabha members from the state is ending on April 2. The election process for this has also been announced. Out of these five seats, BJP has MPs on four seats, whereas, only one seat is with Congress. The MPs from the Rajya Sabha seats that are falling vacant in the state are currently BJP's Ajay Pratap Singh and Kailash Soni, who are also from the state. Whereas, Dharmendra Pradhan and L. Murugan are members from outside the state. Whereas, Rajmani Patel is from Congress.

BJP has 163 members in the Assembly and support of 39 MLAs is required for one member, thus four Rajya Sabha members from BJP and



one from Congress are certain to be elected. In the recently held assembly elections in the state, many stalwarts of BJP have faced defeat while many stalwarts of Congress have also lost the elections. Veterans who lost the assembly elections are also in the process of going to Rajya Sabha. This is also because there is little possibility that the party will give a chance to those who have lost the assembly elections in the Lok Sabha elections.

Political analysts believe that this time also BJP will field at least two leaders from outside the state and the remaining

two will be from the state itself. Whereas, Congress is facing the problem of selecting a better candidate because Rajmani Patel comes from a backward class and Congress is under pressure to field a person from the backward class.

Congress would like to give a chance to such a person from the backward class, who is recognized in the entire state and also has his own support base. It is not possible that this will happen, because in the politics within the Congress, powerful leaders do not want any influential face from the backward class to come forward.

Won't contest LS polls, says Digvijaya Singh

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Amid speculation of whether Congress stalwarts in Madhya Pradesh will contest the forthcoming Lok Sabha election, former Chief Minister Digvijaya Singh has said that he was not keen on contesting the polls.

Congress veteran leader said he won't contest the Lok Sabha election as his Rajya Sabha tenure has two more years to go. The two-time Chief Minister was elected as MP for the Upper House of Parliament in June 2020, and therefore, the six-year tenure will end in June 2026.

During an interaction with the press reporters in his home district Rajgarh on Sunday, he said, "The question of contesting the elections does not arise because I am a member of Rajya Sabha and still have over two years."



Singh ruled out the possibility of contesting the Lok Sabha election. However, the political circle was full of speculation that the Congress may field him from Rajgarh this time. Over the past week, Singh has been taking meetings of party workers in Rajgarh, Raghogarh and Khilchipur -- all these Assembly segments fall in the Rajgarh Lok Sabha constituency. Sources in the Congress told IANS that there were very rare chances for the Congress to further give tenure as Rajya Sabha MP to Digvijaya Singh and wanted

him to contest the Lok Sabha election.

Singh had contested from Bhopal Lok Sabha seat in 2019 but lost to BJP's Pragya Singh Thakur by a margin of 3.65 lakh votes.

Rajgarh Lok Sabha seat is the home turf of Singh, who hails from the Raghogarh Assembly segment (Guna district) which falls under the Rajgarh parliamentary constituency. Singh had represented Rajgarh LS seat in 1984 and 1991.

He said the Congress party will decide the candidate for Rajgarh Lok Sabha constituency. Of the total 29 Lok Sabha seats in Madhya Pradesh, the BJP holds 28 and the Congress one. In the Assembly elections held last year in the state, the Congress recorded its worst performance under Singh and another veteran Kamal Nath.

DISTRICT COURT REJECTS DEFAMATION CASE AGAINST J&K L-G

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A district court in Madhya Pradesh has rejected a defamation case against Jammu & Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha for his alleged "defamatory" remarks on Mahatma Gandhi.

The defamation case was filed by a senior journalist, Rakesh Pathak, in June 2023.

The special MP-MLA court of Gwalior district dismissed the charges against Sinha saying that the "complaint is not a family member or a close relative of Mahatma Gandhi".

The court further asserted that according to section 499 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), "Making any imputation against a deceased person amount to defamation if the imputation would be harmful to the reputation of that person if he were alive, and is intended to hurt the feelings of his family or near relatives."

Hearing the matter, the court said, "Dr. Rakesh Pathak is not a member of Mahatma Gandhi's family or is a close relative, hence he does not have the jurisdiction to file the complaint. Therefore, it is rejected under Section 203 of the Code of Criminal Procedure."

Notably, addressing the gathering



at Ram Manohar Lohia Memorial Lecture at ITM University, in Gwalior on March 23, last year, Manoj Sinha had stated that, "Perhaps very few people know. And even many educated people in the country have this misconception that Gandhiji had a law degree, Gandhiji did not have any degree."

Subsequently, claiming that Sinha has made a fake statement against Mahatma Gandhi's degree, journalist Pathak, who is a Gandhian activist and also a resident of Gwalior, has issued a notice to the Lt. Governor and had demanded an apology from for his alleged fake statement on Gandhi in March last year.

Having got no response from Sinha on this matter, Pathak had then filed a defamation case in June last year and had submitted the proof related with Gandhi's degree ranging from the primary education to his studies as a barrister from University College London.

Madhya Pradesh will get the gift of 24 national highway projects worth Rs 10,405 crore

Union Minister Gadkari and Chief Minister Dr. Yadav will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone. Programs will be held in Bhopal and Jabalpur

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Shri Nitin Gadkari and Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav will lay the foundation stone and inaugurate 24 National Highway projects, 724 kilometers long, at a cost of Rs 10,405 crore in the state on January 30 through programs organized in Bhopal and Jabalpur. In Bhopal, the founda-

tion stone laying ceremony of 15 National Highway projects, 498 kilometers long, at a cost of Rs 8,38 crore was organized at Lal Parade Ground and in Jabalpur, the foundation stone laying ceremony of 9 National Highway projects, 226 kilometers long, at a cost of Rs 2,367 crore, was organized at the Veterinary College Ground.

In the program organized in Bhopal, six-lane widening of Ayodhya bypass section of NH-

46, four-lane widening of Shahganj to Bari section of NH-146B, Madhya Pradesh of NH-552 (extended) / Construction of two-lane (with paved shoulder) road of Sheopur-Goras from Rajasthan border, construction of two-lane (with paved shoulder) road of Sujalpur bypass on NH-752C, NH-552 (extended) Construction of two-lane road (with paved shoulder) of Ater and Bhind bypass at, Construction of two-

lane (with paved shoulder) road from Goras to Shyampur stretch of NH-552 (extended), two-lane (with paved shoulder) road construction of Dahod (Gujarat border) to Ambua section of NH-56. Along with) Road construction, foundation stone of two-lane (with paved shoulder) road construction works from NH-347A Multai to Madhya Pradesh/Maharashtra border will be laid.

BJP'S CONSPIRACY TO END RESERVATION: KAMAL NATH

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh Kamal Nath has accused the BJP government of conspiring to end reservation.

Kamal Nath wrote on X that the anti-reservation face of the Bharatiya Janata Party is now coming out openly. The way the University Grants Commission (UGC) has prepared the draft to end the reservation of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes in the university, it is an extremely dangerous trend.

Referring to the draft, Kamal Nath said that in this draft it has been said that if



eligible candidates from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes are not found for higher education institutions, then the reserved seats should be unreserved. This is a clear conspiracy to end reservation. Kamal Nath alleges that

this is not the first time that the Bharatiya Janata Party wants to snatch reservation from the weaker section of the society. Earlier, my government in Madhya Pradesh had given 27 percent reservation to the Other Backward Classes, which the BJP government conspiratorially allowed to end. The Modi government is not making the caste census data public so that the deprived sections of the society do not have to give up their rights. But, the Congress party will not allow BJP's plans to succeed and will continue to fight for Dalits, tribals, backward classes and all sections of society at every level.

Sweetness dissolves in bitter relationships through 'Ram'

Team Absolute | Bhopal

After the consecration of Ramlala in the Ram temple in Ayodhya, innovative initiatives are being taken towards strengthening relationships in the society. An initiative has been taken in Satna district of Madhya Pradesh, where 'Ram' and 'Ramayana' are being used to end the bitterness in family relationships.

The biggest obstacle to progress and peace in society and families is sourness and hostility in relationships. Many cases reach from the police stations to the threshold of the court, but an innovative experiment has started in Satna district to remove this bitterness.

Madhurima Seva Sanskar Foundation, an organization here, took the help of dialogue to settle the family dispute. The people of this organization contact those families between whom, due to some reason, distance has increased and bitterness has arisen.

Both the parties are instructed by giving the example of Ram and given the message to live together and it is said that now after 500 years of struggle, Ram Lalla has come, so why should we stay away from each other.

One case is that of Shiv Veer Singh of Kothi Municipal Council. He did not listen to his parents and was engrossed in his own fun, but now he has decided to follow the character of Ram ji and has decided that now he will



obey everything his parents say and obey Lord Shri Ram ji and will follow the ideals of. Similarly, Gauraiya's Rekha Singh was not having a good relationship with her mother-in-law. Members of the organization contacted both these women. The result was that the daughter-in-law not only apologized to her mother-in-law, but also pledged that together they would help in ending the bitterness in the relationships of other people for the establishment of Ram Rajya. Dr. Swapna Verma, founder of Dhurima Seva Sanskar Foundation, says that Lord Ram has come to Ayodhya after 500 years of struggle. In such a situation, it is the duty of all of us that Ram Rajya should come in the society also. This is possible only when there is no bitterness among people and animosity ends.

Inside Madhya Pradesh's Cow shelters, never ending wait for funds

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A cow protection board, a cow cabinet and around 2400, Government or government aided cow shelters across the state -- and still the elderly cows of Madhya Pradesh do not have enough to eat. An inspection of 4 cow shelters across Bhopal by NDTV showed that the authorities of the shelters do not get regular payments from the state government.

During elections, Congress promised to increase the financial assistance for cows to Rs 40 per day from Rs 20 per day if voted to power.

Former Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's promise of purchasing cowdung and cow urine, has also not materialised.

There are about 140 cows at the Maa Gayatri Gaushala in the middle of Bhopal city. The shelter is located in the premises of the Gayatri temple.

President of the Gaushala trust, Subhash Sharma, said the grant of Rs 20 is not only insufficient, it comes only once in four to five months.

The cowshed being in the middle of the city, many come here to feed their animals.

At Kokta Mahamrityunjay Gaushala outside the city, there are more than 600 cows. The civic body leaves injured and destitute cows here. Most of the cows are old and do not give milk.

Govind Vyas, chairman of the gaushala, has been



running this shelter for 20 years. A retired bank employee, he said they have to spend Rs 60-70 per cow just on fodder. The grant falls far short of requirement. Even that comes once in every six or seven months, he said. He uses money from his pension to take care of the cows.

Brijesh Vyas, a member of the same gaushala, said he has appealed to the government several times. "Rs 20 cannot cover the cost of water, let alone fodder. Today the price of chaff is Rs 700 a quintal. At least 25 kg of straw is required for a cow's fodder each day," he said. The Nandini Gaushala in Bhopal's Kaliyasot, which has 75 cows, received the last grant in August. The owner said there is a delay of 6-7 months in receiving government grants.

There are two types of cow shelters in Madhya Pradesh -- 618 are cowsheds recognised by the gov-

ernment, which have about 1.5 lakh cows. Besides, there are 1,800 cow shelters built on government land with MNREGA funds, which have 2.80 lakh cows. The government claims it pays Rs20 every day for each of the 4 lakh-plus cows as grant. The dues till December 31 are paid, it said.

"It is true that the grant is less," said Lakhna Patel, the minister for Animal Husbandry and Dairy. "Efforts are being made to increase it. But our biggest problem is that people leave animals on the roads," he added. Last year, the state had passed a law increasing the Rs 1000 penalty for those found guilty of neglecting cattle or any other animal. Data from the police helpline indicated that 45,800 distress calls about stray cattle were received in the last seven years - meaning on an average, 18 calls are received a day.

Madhya Pradesh has a Gau Samvardhan Board (cow protection board) from the last two decades. Three years ago, then Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan announced the creation of a "cow cabinet" meant to protect cattle and promote the use for dairy products.

The website of the Gau Samvardhan board has not been updated since the state elections. It says "Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan" is its president and Prem Singh Patel -- former animal husbandry minister who lost the election -- is the Vice-President.



EDITOR'S SPECS

SP, Congress restless in UP following political developments in Bihar

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar snapping ties with INDIA bloc and again joining NDA has come as a jolt to alliance partners in Uttar Pradesh between Samajwadi Party (SP) and Congress. Both parties feel that the developments in Bihar have undermined their position in UP against the BJP. Nitish Kumar not only laid the foundation of the INDIA bloc, but had also worked to unite the opposition on a single platform by meeting with leaders of different political parties and convincing them to join hands against the BJP. Akhilesh had worked hard to knit the opposition alliance with Nitish Kumar, holding a series of meetings with Kumar in Delhi to draft the strategy for the Lok Sabha election. They had even addressed a joint press conference in Lucknow to send a message of the alliances of the two top OBC leaders among the masses. The caste census conducted by Nitish Kumar in Bihar had set the ground for the INDIA bloc to target the NDA. Moreover, to break the hold of the BJP over Kurmi voters, the opposition alliance had planned to field Nitish Kumar from either of the three seats -- Phulpur, Mirzapur and Ambedkar Nagar in UP, as these three seats have strong OBC presence. SP sources said Akhilesh tried to contact Kumar to convince him to stay in INDIA bloc but his efforts proved futile. An immediate impact of Nitish Kumar joining the BJP will be that the SP and the Congress will now have to work overtime to keep the alliance intact - even if it means compromising on the number of seats. If the alliance cracks up in UP, the INDIA bloc will be in danger and the advantage will clearly go to the BJP.

A MOMENT OF NATIONAL RESURGENCE

D.C. Pathak

The extensive ceremony of the inauguration of the Ram Temple at Ayodhya on January 22, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the principal invitee performing all the religious duties pertaining to the installation of the deity of Ram Lalla, has proved to be a national event that electrified the belief system of Hindus across India - including those who were living abroad. This happened in a manner not seen in this country's history before.

The Prime Minister was at Ayodhya both as a Hindu and as the chief of the political executive governing the nation and this established, in the Indian context, the principle that holding a high political office did not mean that a leader should shy away from his or her religious commitments.

Secularism means that India granted complete freedom of worship and did not put a denominational stamp on the national or state government - it also at the same time, did not deny people in power their right to publicly own their faith.

Apart from the basic democratic concept of 'one man one vote' - that was in play regardless of caste, creed or gender - the only other secular requirement of governance would be that policy should not discriminate between sections of the citizenry.

The address of Prime Minister Modi was free of any suggestion of religious 'exclusivism' and it effectively countered the narrative of 'majoritarianism' and allegation of any other form of bias and largely focused on the importance of socio-cultural unity as a powerful instrument of national advancement.

The extraordinary turnout of people associating with the ceremony was no doubt driven by the historicity of the event - but they also had a clear perception that it is precisely the Hindu faith that alone had remained unacknowledged even after Independence. The fact that the temple construction was started only after the Supreme Court gave its judgement in its favour through a constitutional Bench - this was highlighted by the Prime Minister - freed the event of any communal projections. If the inauguration of Ram Temple at Ayodhya enhances the political status of Prime Minister Modi in the eyes of the people, nobody can grudge it - the voter it should be remembered is an astute judge of the merit of the rulers.

In his scintillating address on the occasion, Prime Minister Modi declared that Lord Ram was the 'spirit of the Constitution' and Ram Temple a 'symbol of national consciousness' that liberated the people from 'slavery' and a 'colonial mindset'. This latter was a reference to the historical subjugation of the Hindu religion as also to the British game of dividing India into communities and creating a minority-majority issue in politics.

He validated the place of glory that Hinduism enjoyed in India's nationalism by affirming that "Ram is the faith of India, the foundation of India and the idea of India" and went on to add that "Ram was also the law of India, the leader of India as well as the poli-



cy of India'.

He put a stamp of eternity on it by saying that Ram was not only the present but also the future of India.

The speech was remarkable for steering clear of any sectarian overtones and for emphasising how the story of Ram established that differences between 'high' and 'low' did not exist for him.

Prime Minister Modi emphasised that "there should be humility in victory", that Ram was "a solution, not a problem" and recalling how the opponents of Ayodhya temple warned of catastrophic consequences, asserted that "Ram was not a source of fire but of energy". Many leaders in India have misled the minorities into believing that giving respect to the religion of the majority amounted to encouraging 'majoritarianism' - they knew only too well that the Constitution would not permit any political moves in that direction. They in fact injected religion into politics by demanding "a share in governance on the basis of community identity".

So long as the minorities had religio-cultural freedom and the same political rights and economic opportunities that others had, they should have no problem about being a part of the political umbrella that the nation provides through the universal adult franchise. If because of numbers the majority sends more members to Assemblies and Parliament it does not violate the intrinsic strand of secularism that runs through a democratic state like India.

It is time the Hindu majority of India was consciously involved in building nationalism which is a sentiment to be shared by all communities here. Communal politics in India was pushed to a point where 'nationalism' was considered a 'diminishing' concept if not a politically 'abusive' word - all in the name of 'sensitivity' of the minorities - and there was even an endorsement of the suggestion that saluting the national flag or standing during the singing of national anthem should be made optional. India no doubt had to suffer the unfortunate parti-

tion on communal lines in the process of achieving freedom - that was bound to produce a spill over - but many minority leaders of India continued to base their politics on the Hindu-Muslim divide which came in the way of national advancement and reconstruction.

A sense of belonging to the cultural heritage of the nation and adherence to the human value system shared by all Indians, should not be impeded by politics and it goes to the credit of Prime Minister Modi that he has been able to legitimise the concept of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' within India and at the global level as well. The Prime Minister has taken this idea from the esoteric to the level of practicality in the international arena at a time when the world was marked by divisions, stealth attacks and disregard for human values and it is no surprise that he has emerged as a global leader whose influence mattered on the issues of war and peace. Prime Minister succeeded in turning the inauguration of Ram Temple into a starting point for a new nation-building effort, in this light. The civilisational content of a nation today is a factor of newfound importance working for its strength. In a composite scenario marked by a multi-religious and multi-lingual setting, people need to have a deeper sense of unity on the strength of a shared value system, the historical sense of ups and downs and an idea of friendship and adversaries in the present. 'Religion' defines the relationship of an individual with his or her God and presumably makes a positive contribution to 'culture' that determines how the individual would treat others in society.

A collectively acceptable code of ethics can run through the nation provided notions of 'supremacism' were not flaunted by the followers of any faith - the assimilative character of Hinduism stood out in this context, for its adherence to the idea that "God was one but the paths to

reaching Him could be many". Prime Minister Modi's advocacy of this approach in his Ayodhya address befitted the occasion and was timely as well.

India should set an example of how nationalism strengthens democracy and vice versa. We should take notice of how China under President Xi Jinping has evolved a new doctrine of 'Marxism with Chinese characteristics' which has been acknowledged as 'Xi's Thought' in the CPC constitution - like the Mao's Thought was in the party's history - but also how he has called for realisation of the 'civilisational strength' of China for national advancement.

India can more than match China on the point of civilisational history in terms of its vintage and richness on all fronts and it is a matter of great satisfaction that Prime Minister Modi in his address at Ayodhya brought out in adequate measure, the civilisational gift that India was able to offer to the entire world. In going through the rigorous practices prescribed for his duty as the principal invitee at the religious ceremony at Ayodhya, Prime Minister Modi was conducting himself as a pious Hindu in his own personal right but it is in his public address that he stood out as the leader of a diverse nation, a torch bearer of nationalism and as a Prime Minister who was totally dedicated to carrying India forward towards prosperity and peace. He talked of the demographic dividend of India accruing from the population of the young, exhorted people to have optimism and expressed his confidence that the installation of Ram Temple was a transformative moment that marked the advancement of a united India 'for a thousand years ahead'. He mandated all Indians to follow the mission of 'Ram to Rashtra'.

The temple has already showcased Indian talent in the fields of sculpture & arts, mobilisation of internally available material resources, technological progress, management techniques and the country's acumen for national discipline.

Perhaps a good illustration of technological and spiritual advancement going together was in a website put out on the following day showing with the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) how the newly installed Ram Lalla was turning his eyes, changing his smile and even moving his head like a child.

It is a sign of the quality of leadership Prime Minister Modi has provided in all walks of national life - political, cultural and economic, not to forget national security and governance as such - that the Ayodhya event emerged as a national milestone in fostering unity and a sense of purpose among all Indians who were prepared to rise above domestic differences to look upon India as a great civilisational whole serving the cause of human development and global economic advancement.

(The writer is a former Director of the Intelligence Bureau. Views are personal)

international

NYC MAYOR UNVEILS GANDHI STATUE OUTSIDE HINDU TEMPLE AFTER 2022 VANDALISM INCIDENTS

New York | Agencies

New York City Mayor Eric Adams and Indian-American State Assembly Member Jenifer Rajkumar have unveiled a new Mahatma Gandhi statue, more than a year after the previous one was vandalised twice outside a Hindu temple in the state.

Located in front of Shri Tulsi Mandir on 111th Street in Richmond Hill, the Gandhi statue was knocked over, spray painted with the word "dog", and battered with a sledgehammer on August 3 and 16, 2022.

"Last year, the statue of Gandhi that stood in South Richmond Hill was destroyed. But our solidarity and spirit to rebuild was not. Today, we stood with the community to say in one voice: Hate has no place in our city," Mayor Adams said, unveiling the statue last week.

We embody the values of justice for which Gandhi gave his life," Mayor Adams said at the event attended by



members of the Indian-American community.

Rajkumar, who was at the forefront, calling for an investigation into the inci-

dent as a hate crime against Hindus and Indians, posted a video of the ceremony on X and said it was "exciting" to unveil the statue along with Mayor Adams.

"EXCITING! Watch myself and @NYCMayor unveil the new Mahatma Gandhi Statue at Tulsi Mandir at the site of last year's hateful vandalism. It was a historic moment for our Richmond Hill community as we came together to show that our love will conquer all hate," she wrote on X.

After the first attack, Rajkumar brought together several elected officials, including House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee Gregory Meeks, to condemn the attack and demand police action.

As the first Hindu elected to the New York State legislature, Rajkumar said, "When the Gandhi statue was vandalised, that really flew in the face of all of our beliefs and it's very disturbing for the community".

Assembly Member David Weprin, Council Member Lynn Schulman, and Pandit Lakhram Maharaj, founder of Shri Tulsi Mandir, were also present in the ceremony.

Iraqi Shia militia claims attacks on 3 US bases in Syria, naval facility in Israel

Baghdad | Agencies

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq, an Iraqi Shia militia, has claimed the responsibility for drone attacks on three US bases in Syria and a naval facility in Israel.

The group said on Sunday in an online statement that its fighters launched explosive-laden drones on three US military bases in Syria, including the al-Shaddadi base, the al-Tanf base, and the Rukban camp near Syria's borders with Iraq and Jordan, Xinhua news agency reported.

It added that it launched a fourth drone strike on the Zevulun naval facility near the port city of Haifa in Israel.

The group said the attacks were part of a series of retaliatory measures against the US forces amid the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict in the Gaza



Strip.

Meanwhile, the US Central Command said in a statement that three US troops were killed and dozens more injured in a drone attack on a US base in northeastern Jordan, near the Syrian border. Jordanian Minister of Government Communications Muhannad Mubaidin on Sunday also confirmed to Jordan's state-run Al Mamlaka TV that an attack had targeted the al-Tanf base in

southeastern Syria, affirming that no attack targeting US forces occurred on the country's soil. It is not clear yet whether the drone attack is the same that the group carried out near Syria's borders with Iraq and Jordan. US President Joe Biden vowed on Sunday in a statement to hold accountable those responsible for the killing of three US service members and cast blame on Iran-backed militant groups.

Peace talks constructive, says Israel PMO

Tel Aviv | Agencies

The Israel Prime Minister's Office said that the peace talks held for a ceasefire and the release of all its hostages from Hamas custody were constructive.

The office of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a statement on Sunday night confirmed that a four way meeting involving US, Israel, Qatar and Egypt had taken place in Europe and was quite constructive.

The PMO said that there were still gaps regarding the deal to be adopted for a ceasefire and release of hostages and that this would be taken forward again this week itself.

Director of Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), William Burns; David Barnea, the head of the Mossad intelligence agency; Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani and the Egyptian intelligence chief Abbas Kamel participated in the discussions widely



believed to have been held in Paris.

Ronen Bar, the head of the Israeli Shin Ben security service, as well as IDF hostage envoy Nitzan Alon were also at the four nation summit.

Hamas, according to information available, has demanded an end to the war and the withdrawal of all IDF forces as a condition for the release of hostages and Israel has rejected these demands outright.

Israel Defense ministry sources told reporter that the peace agreement would be carried out in two phases.

42 KILLED IN FRESH COMMUNAL CLASHES NEAR SOUTH SUDAN

Juba | Agencies

At least 42 people were killed, including a UN peacekeeper, during clashes last week in the Abyei Administrative Area between armed youth of the Twic community of neighbouring Warrap state and Ngok Dinka of Abyei, officials confirmed.

Rou Manyiel Rou, the Secretary General of Abyei Special Administrative Area, said on Sunday that the attacks in Nyinkuac, Majbong, and Khadian areas by armed youth from the Twic community in collaboration with Nuer youth loyal to their spiritual leader Gai Machiek also left 35 people wounded, Xinhua news agency reported.

"As we face these barbaric coordinated attacks, the government of Abyei Special Administrative Area condemns in the strongest terms possible the attempt by Twic and their allied armed youth to defy the presidential order issued recently by President Salva Kiir to end the conflict between



Ngok Dinka and Twic communities," Manyiel told Xinhua in an interview.

President Kiir's order issued on January 18 called on security forces to expel from Warrap state the Nuer spiritual leader Gai Machiek and his loyal Nuer youth in a bid to resolve the conflict between Ngok Dinka and the Twic communities.

Aguek added that the fighting was between armed Nuer youth staying within Abyei and the local Ngok Dinka youth. "The Nuer armed youth who fought with Abyei youth on

Saturday are the ones who have been killing people in Twic, they have heavy machine guns and I believe they are from organised forces because the weapons they have are not supposed to be for civilians," he said.

The United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) condemned the series of armed attacks that took place on Saturday in the Abyei Administrative Area, which resulted in the death of a UN peacekeeper from Ghana.

"The Mission confirms that the inter-communal clashes that took place in the Nyinkuac, Majbong, and Khadian areas led to casualties and the evacuation of civilians to UNISFA bases to provide safety for those caught up in the violence. Efforts are underway to verify the number of those killed, injured, and displaced in the violence," it said in a statement.

It added that the UNISFA base in Agok came under attack by an armed group that was repelled by the peacekeepers.

Israeli army kills over 350 in Gaza's Khan Younis during past 48 hrs: Hamas



Gaza | Agencies

The Hamas-run government in Gaza said in a statement that the Israeli army killed at least 350 Palestinians in the past 48 hours in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip.

Medical teams were unable to reach dozens of bodies scattered on the streets, the statement added on Sunday, noting that local residents had to bury the dead in the courtyard of the city's Nasser Hospital as they could not take them to the Khan Younis cemetery, Xinhua news agency reported. Meanwhile, the Hamas-run Health Ministry said on Sunday that Nasser Hospital has been filled with medical

waste due to a blockade by the Israeli army, noting that at least 7,000 wounded and sick people in the enclave are in urgent need of life-saving treatment.

The Palestine Red Crescent Society warned in a statement about the depletion of the oxygen supply at Al-Amal Hospital in Khan Younis amid the ongoing siege by Israeli forces, which has made it difficult for medical teams at the hospital to perform surgical operations. Since its onset on October 7, 2023, the months-long deadly conflict between Israel and Hamas has led to a Palestinian death toll of 26,422 in Gaza, with the number of injuries rising to 65,087, according to the Hamas-run Health Ministry on Sunday.



SC grants 15-day extension, asks Maha Speaker to decide defection pleas in NCP split by Feb 15

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Monday granted a 15-day extension to Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar for deciding the pending defection petitions in the NCP split case.

Earlier, the top court had ordered the Speaker to announce his decision by January 31 on disqualification petitions filed by the Sharad Pawar faction of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) against the Ajit Pawar faction.

During the hearing, a bench headed by CJI D.Y. Chandrachud was apprised by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta that the Speaker would conclude the proceedings in the next two days and for dictation of orders in disqualification proceedings, the deadline may be extended by three weeks.

"Final hearing shall commence from 30th January and conclude on 31st January and matter will be closed for final orders. For dictation of orders, the Speaker needs three more weeks," submitted SG Mehta.

Opposing this, senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, appearing for Sharad Pawar-led faction, said that order does not take three weeks to be dictated. "Your lordships may give him one week," Singhvi said.

Responding, SG Mehta said that a three-week extension "realistically may not be an unreasonable request".

Thereafter, the bench, also comprising Justices J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, ordered: "Since only the final order remains to be pronounced, we extend the time for concluding the proceedings and passing of final orders until February 15, 2024."

The apex court noted that the time schedule pre-



petitions by January 31, 2024. Jayant Patil of the NCP-Sharad Pawar faction petitioned the Supreme Court against the delay by the Speaker in hearing the defection pleas following a split in the NCP.

pared with consent of parties itself prescribed January 31 for conclusion of proceedings in disqualification pleas. The top court in October last year directed the Speaker to conclude the hearing in NCP defection

Our govt will not allow any injustice to the OBC community: Devendra Fadnavis

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday clarified that there will be no injustice done to any community in regards to the government's decision to grant reservation to Maratha community. This came after Union Minister Narayan Rane disagreed with the decision taken by the Maharashtra government led by on reservation to Maratha community stating that it may create dissatisfaction among other backward communities (OBC) in the state. "With the ordinance, the rights of the Maratha community have become easily available to them. It was legal for the registered Maratha community to obtain the certificate. While doing so, 100% security is also provided to the OBC community. The personal role of some leaders may be different on this. What has been done will be brought to their attention," said Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. "The government has taken a decision that is benefiting the Maratha com-



munity, but there will be no injustice to any community. There is nothing for anyone to worry about in this. Our government will not allow any injustice to the OBC community. Recently, the reservation given to the Maratha community was upheld in the High Court. However, due to some reasons, the Supreme Court rejected that reservation. We have also launched a survey to determine these reasons," added Devendra Fadnavis. Meanwhile, Narayan Rane, Union Minister of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) said that he will hold a press conference on Monday in Mumbai on the Maratha reservation issue. Rane on Sunday in a post on social media platform X said, "I do not agree with the decision taken by the state government and the hope given regarding the reservation of

the Maratha community. This may lead to discontent in the state as the Maratha community with historical traditions will be disappointed and this will lead to encroachment on other backward communities. Tomorrow is Monday. On January 29, I will hold a press conference and talk about it." On January 27, Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange Patil ended his indefinite hunger strike after the Eknath Shinde led state government accepted all his demands on Maratha reservation. Shinde had held meetings with officials over the activist's demands and sent a delegation with a draft ordinance on Friday night after which Patil said he was calling off his protest. Shinde also emphasised his commitment to the Maratha reservation and said, "We will ensure the reservation falls in legal framework." Shinde said that Patil's demand was not to take away the reservation for the OBC. "OBC and Marathas live together in villages. Manoj Jarange Patil is of the view that reservations for any community must not be taken," he said.

Merit over 'maarpit', Raj Thackeray wants maximum Marathis to grab Railways jobs

Quaid Najmi | Mumbai

Maharashtra Navnirman Sena President Raj Thackeray on Monday exhorted his party to ensure the maximum number of jobs of Assistant Loco Pilots of the Ministry of Railways go to Marathi youth.

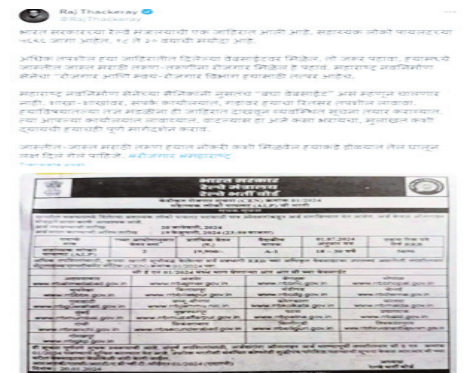
Referring to a recent recruitment drive for 5,696 jobs of ALPs with the age limit of 18-30, the MNS chief called upon his party activists and the Employment Cell to ensure that maximum number of Marathi youngsters get these jobs.

The Ministry of Railways (MoR) had issued this year's first central notice advertisement for the Grade II jobs on January 20, which carries an attractive starting salary of Rs 19,900 per month, and the last late for submitting applications is February 19.

Raj Thackeray pointed out that while the basic details are available, "more details will be available on the website" for the prospective candidates who are expected to study it.

There are around 21 website addresses listed by the MoR, for different states and regions across the country for the ALP jobs.

"The MNS soldiers should not just tell the candi-



dates to 'check out the website'. Proper details should be posted at the (party) branches, liaison offices, and other places. Experts in this subject should be shown this advertisement and prepare suitable instructions for those intending to apply for these jobs," Raj Thackeray ordered his party.

He said: "It must be ensured that maximum number Marathi youths should get employment in this. The Employment Cell is prepared for it".

Raj Thackeray urged his activists that the full details of the jobs should be prominently posted in

all the party office, and the candidates must be given full guidance on how to fill in the applications online, tips on clearing the interviews, etc., so that the highest number of Marathis can get these railway jobs.

This spells a sea-change for the aggressive Raj Thackeray of the fledgling MNS (founded in 2006) who had allegedly instigated attacks against North Indians in the state, including railway recruitment candidates in October 2008, and on other occasions.

At that time, the issue had snowballed into a major political crisis with the Bihar Chief Minister Lalu Prasad calling him 'a mental case', demanding his arrest and banning the MNS.

The MNS had attacked North Indian hawkers, traders, businessmen in different cities in the state and even targeted senior politicians like Congress' Sanjay Nirupam and Bharatiya Janata Party's Manoj Tewari and others.

Given the current job scenario and public sentiments, this time Raj Thackeray has apparently chosen the strategy of 'merit' over 'maarpit' to make certain that not only Marathi youth get the right counseling, but also hand-holding them at all the stages to get the MoR's ALP jobs.

Biennial RS polls for 56 seats on Feb 27



Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Election Commission of India has said that the biennial elections for 56 Rajya Sabha seats including six in Maharashtra, shall be held on February 27. The states going to the RS polls are: Uttar Pradesh (10 seats), Maharashtra and Bihar (six each), Madhya Pradesh and

West Bengal (five each), Gujarat and Karnataka (four each), Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha and Rajasthan (three each), Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand (one seat each). The elections are being held to fill up the seats after the term of the 56 incumbents end in early April. The election notification will be

issued on February 8, the last date for filing nominations is February 15, scrutiny will be done on February 16 and the last date for withdrawals shall be February 20.

The polling shall be held on February 27, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., followed by the counting of votes, and the election process shall be completed by February 29, said the ECI.

Woman techie shot dead by boyfriend in hotel room

Team Absolute | Pune

A Lucknow man, who allegedly pumped at least four bullets into his girlfriend from his hometown, was arrested near Thane.

The victim, identified as Vandana Dwivedi, 26, was a techie with the Infosys in Pune and the alleged accused is Rishabh Nigam, who was caught late on Sunday during a 'nakabandi' in Navi Mumbai (Thane) with the murder weapon.

Pimpri-Chinchwad Assistant Commissioner of Police (Wakad Division) Vishal Hire said that "the motive behind the killing is not yet clear".

"We have registered the case on Sunday and investigations are progressing. The accused shall be produced before a court for remand," ACP Hire told reporter.

As per the sequence of events, Nigam had



booked a hotel room in Hinjewadi's Laxminagar area on January 27 where the deceased Dwivedi had gone to meet him. Preliminary probe suggests that after the woman shifted to Pune for work, the duo had a rocky relationship which may have led to a dispute and a brawl in the hotel room late on Saturday night. In a fit of anger, Nigam whipped out

his pistol and shot her repeatedly, with at least four bullets hitting her on the head and neck, before he fled from there, according to police.

The hotel staff on Sunday discovered the woman's blood-soaked body with the bullet marks and informed the police who immediately launched a probe and a manhunt to track down Nigam.

He was intercepted on Sunday morning while going to Mumbai, the murder weapon also retrieved from him, and he was handed over to the Pimpri Chinchwad Police late last night.

Subsequently, Nigam has confessed to the murder. The hotel staff have told the police they did not hear the multiple bullets being fired as there was a huge celebration in the vicinity after the Maratha quota agitation was called off in Navi Mumbai on January 27.

Man's body found near Palghar Railway Station; cops suspect murder

Team Absolute | Palghar

The body of a 40-year-old man with injury marks has been found outside a railway station in Palghar district of Maharashtra, with the police suspecting it to be a case of murder, an official said on Monday. Some passers-by spotted the body near a toilet close to the Naigaon railway station on Sunday evening and alerted the police, inspector Mangesh Aandhare from Naigaon police station said. The police rushed to the spot and sent the body to a government hospital for post-mortem. The deceased has been identified as Bhagoji Uttekar, the official said, adding the autopsy report is awaited.

The police have registered a case under Indian Penal Code section 302 (murder) and are conducting a probe into it, he added.

"Public Will Teach Him A Lesson": Sharad Pawar on Nitish Kumar's switch

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Attacking Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar for dumping the Mahagathbandhan and switching his side to the NDA, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) President Sharad Pawar on Sunday said that the public will teach a lesson to the JD(U) chief in the future.

Speaking to ANI, Mr Pawar, however, said that he has no idea why Nitish Kumar took the step to forge his alliance with the NDA.

"On the contrary, he was playing a role against the BJP. I don't know what happened suddenly, but the public will definitely teach him a lesson for his role in the future..." he said.

Pawar, the chief of the NCP, a party among others in the INDIA bloc, said that such a situation had never been seen before in such a short period of time.

"Whatever happened in Patna, such a situation was never seen before in such a short period of time...I remember it was Nitish Kumar who had called all the non-BJP parties to Patna...His role was



also similar but what happened in the last 10-15 days that he left this ideology and today he joined BJP and formed the government...In the last 10 days, it did not seem that he would take such a step," Pawar added.

JDU leader Nitish Kumar's move to end his alliance with the Lalu Prasad Yadav-led Rashtriya Janata Dal to revive

his tie-up with the BJP comes as a massive setback to the INDIA bloc months before it takes on the formidable BJP in Lok Sabha polls. Nitish Kumar, after parting ways with the BJP in 2022, took on the initiative of uniting all opposition forces to jointly take on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the ruling party in the national election.

Nashik man threatens & extorts Rs 40L from childhood sweetheart; absconds

Team Absolute | Nashik

A Nashik jobless man has fled after allegedly threatening and extorting around Rs 40 lakh from his childhood sweetheart, police said here on Monday.

According to the Mumbainaka Police Station here, the unemployed youth identified as one Abhijit N. Ahire was a neighbour and acquainted with the victim woman, 31, since their schooldays.

Later, the friendship blossomed into a discreet love-affair, and while the woman went on to become a computer engineer and then took up a good job in Gujarat, the boy remained a vagabond.

However, invoking their past relationship and affair, Ahire started extorting



money from the woman citing various excuses and she kept obliging, for over five years, either voluntarily or reluctantly.

When she refused, Ahire allegedly showed her their intimate photos and videos and threatened to expose her before her relatives and friends if she failed to fulfil his constant monetary needs.

Apparently fed up by his demands and scared of his

threats, the woman finally gathered courage to come and lodge a complaint with the Mumbainaka Police Station on Saturday, said the Investigating Officer Pankaj Sonawane.

"The accused man had allegedly claimed that he was working somewhere in a Gulf country, but he may have tried to fool the girl to part with the cash in big and small installments or through online payments, taking advantage of their old relationship," Sonawane told reporter.

Senior Police Inspector Yuvraj Patki said that police teams are on the lookout for the accused Ahire -- whose current whereabouts are not known -- but police suspect he may have holed up somewhere in the state.

Woman among several duped of Rs 2.97 crore in investment fraud

Team Absolute | Navi Mumbai

Police have registered a case against nine persons for allegedly cheating a 42-year-old woman from Navi Mumbai and other persons of Rs 2.97 crore after promising them high returns in various investment schemes, an official said on Monday.

The accused invested funds of the woman and other victims in shares and also to acquire movable and immovable properties over the last three years, the official from Sanpada police station said.

But, the accused failed to provide any gains or return the invested money to the victims, he said.

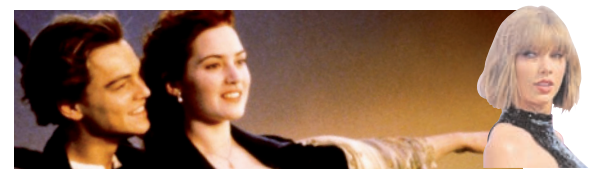
The woman, who is a resident of Seawoods area in Navi Mumbai township, filed a complaint with the police on Sunday.

Based on it, the police registered a case against nine persons under relevant provisions of the Indian Penal Code, the Prize Chits



and Money Circulation Schemes (Banning) Act, the Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Act and the Maharashtra Protection of Interest of Depositors (In Financial Establishments) Act.

An investigation was on into the case, the police said.



Dakota Johnson calls Taylor Swift 'most powerful person in America'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Dakota Johnson, who is known for 'Shades of Grey', dubbed singer-songwriter Taylor Swift as the "most powerful person in America" during her stint on Saturday Night Live. She used this opportunity to tease Donald Trump, the former US president and current presidential candidate, reports Mirror.co.uk. While reminiscing about the last time she hosted the show for its 40th Anniversary Special in 2015, Dakota showed a photo of herself surrounded by VIPs like Sarah Palin, George Lucas, and Steven Spielberg. Pointing at Trump, who was also in the audience, she said: "And look who's sitting right behind me."

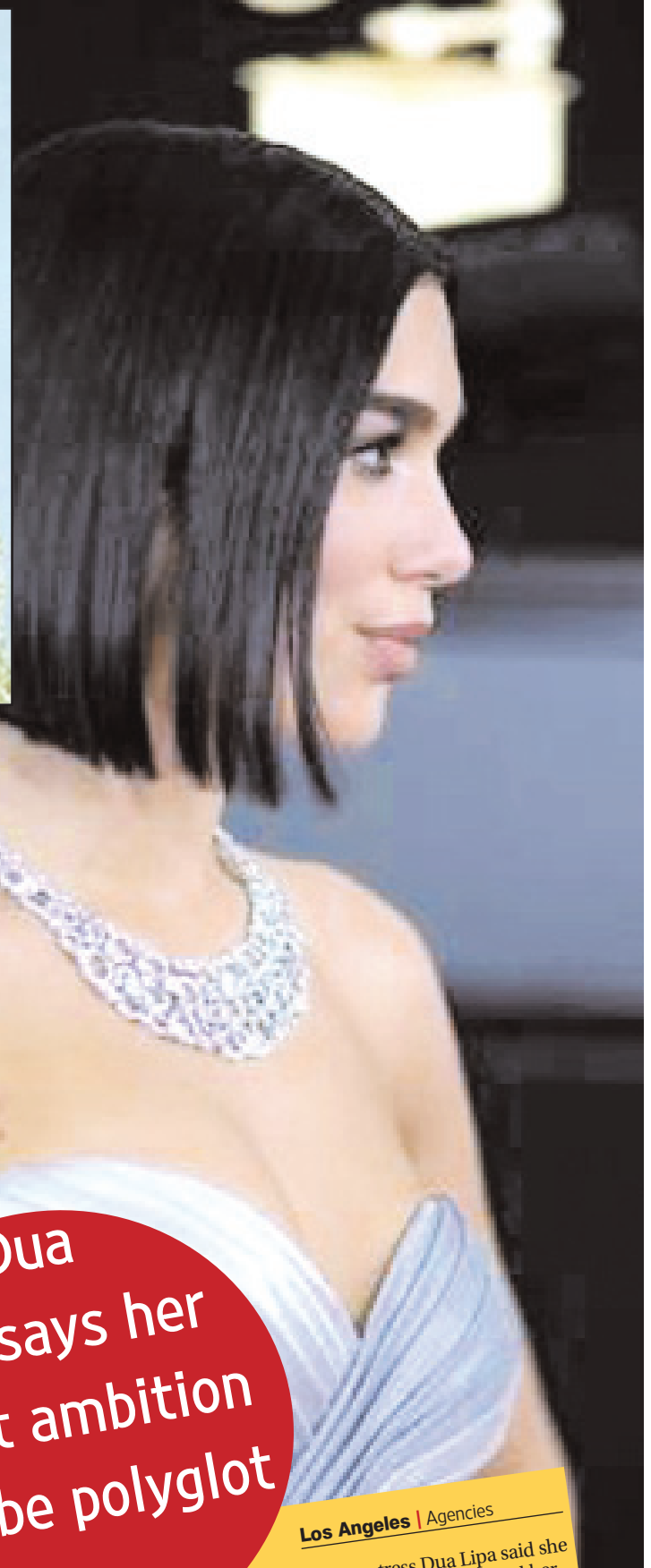
As the camera zoomed in on Taylor Swift, who was seated in front of her, Dakota quipped: "Crazy to be standing so close to someone who would become the most powerful person in America." This joke had the audience in stitches, with many cheering for Dakota.

As per Mirror.co.uk, Dakota was joined on stage at a recent gig by Justin Timberlake who joked: "I remember those days, Dakota."

She playfully responded: "Justin, what are you doing up here? Are you lost?" Justin's humorous reply was: "I heard my name. I thought that was my cue."

In other news, Taylor Swift's presence at the Kansas City game to cheer on her beau Travis Kelce is still under wraps. The couple has been an item since the start of the 2023 NFL season.

The fans searching for 'Taylor Swift' on X aren't getting any joy after a controversy involving inappropriate AI-generated images. When typing in Taylor's name, an error message appears saying: "Posts aren't loading right now. Try again". Fans were left frustrated after unsavoury images tagged "Taylor Swift AI" appeared, sparking calls for legal action.



Nicki Minaj: New song isn't a diss track against Megan Thee Stallion

Los Angeles | Agencies

Rapper Nicki Minaj has dismissed rumours of her latest track titled 'Big Foot' being a "diss track" at rival Megan Thee Stallion. The new track was thought to be taking aim at the artist amid the pair's long-standing spat, reports 'Mirror.co.uk'. Nicki had already played a part of the track during an Instagram Live video on Friday, seemingly making subtle digs at Megan. In the song's lyrics it says, "Bad b****, she like 6 foot, I call her big foot / The b**** fell off I said get up on your good foot". Fans thought this was making reference to rapper Tory Lanez shooting Megan in the foot all the way back in July 2020. As per 'Mirror.co.uk', Nicki even posted a snap of Megan when announcing the song. But she's since taken to X, after an account wrote: "Cover art for Nicki Minaj's Megan Thee Stallion diss track 'Big Foot'". She furiously replied, denying the post. "Who said 'diss track'????? don't play tonight. Fix your tweet!" The account then followed up with, "Nicki Minaj says she has 5 extra songs ready if Megan Thee Stallion denies anything said on her new track 'Big Foot'." Nicki was quick to respond again, writing: "Never said that ugly name. Stop lying on me. You want engagement so bad. Ima put your REAL name in the 2nd song just for s**** & giggles. Go to bed (sic)."



Dua Lipa says her secret ambition is to be polyglot

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer-actress Dua Lipa said she has got the itch to expand her horizons after being on a treadmill of churning out tunes and going on promotional tours. "You make the album, you promote it, you go on tour, you do the same thing, and that's so amazing, but I think there's going to come a point where maybe I want to take just a little bit longer (in between). I have all these other things that I can also do that really interest me," she told Rolling Stone, reports aceshowbiz.com. Rolling Stone said as part of their profile of the musician she "could see herself moving outside of the UK one day," maybe to Barcelona, Madrid, Paris or Mexico City. It noted she has been learning Spanish and French and said by 35, she wants to be more fluent in both, as well as Italian. Lipa, brought up in London after being born to Kosovo-Albanian parents, confirmed to the magazine: "I want to know all of them. I get so jealous when people are speaking in French, or Spanish, or Italian... I just want to respond. I think I can pick them up fairly easily because of Albanian, although it's quite different."



'Squid Game' star Lee Byung-Hun home burglarised

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor Lee Byung-hun's home got hit by burglars. Law enforcement sources told TMZ, one of Lee's staff members stopped by his Los Angeles area home last week to find the place ransacked. The thieves smashed a sliding glass door to get inside the house. The incident went down while the 'Squid Game' star was out of town. But it's unclear what, if anything, was stolen and how much those items might be worth. Police officials say Lee will go through his belongings when he gets home to figure out if anything is missing. The law enforcement sources say that the police don't believe Lee was targeted here, instead, police say this appears to be the work of one of the burglary crews that have been robbing wealthy neighbourhoods around Los Angeles. Lee Byung-hun plays Hwang In-ho, the Front Man, overseer of the Game in 'Squid Game', which revolves around a secret contest where 456 players, all of whom are in deep financial hardship, risk their lives to play a series of deadly children's games for the chance to win a \$45.6 billion prize.

Joni Mitchell to perform for 1st time at Grammy Awards

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell is set to perform at the upcoming edition of Grammy Awards for the first time. The 80-year-old singer, who is nominated for Best Folk Album for 'Joni Mitchell at Newport', will take to the stage at Los Angeles Crypto.com Arena on 4 February, reports Female First UK. This marks the only time she has sung at the annual ceremony, despite having been honoured with 10 Grammy awards in the past, including the Recording Academy's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2002. The 'Both Sides Now' singer suffered a brain aneurysm in 2015 which left her unable to talk or walk for some time but in July 2022, she returned to the stage for her first full show since 2000 when she made a surprise appearance at the Newport Folk Festival in Rhode Island, before making her official comeback in June 2023 at the Echoes Through the Canyon festival. As per Female First UK, Joni joins a long list of performers for this year's ceremony, with Billy Joel -- who is returning to sing at the event for the first time in 20 years -- Dua Lipa, Billie Eilish, Burna Boy, Like Combs, Travis Scott and Olivia Rodrigo among those who will be taking to the stage. In addition, U2 will also stage a performance from their Sphere residency in Las Vegas. SZA is the most-nominated artist, having received nine nominations in total, including nods in the Album of the Year, Record of the Year, and Song of the Year categories.



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY

Jennifer Lopez



JADEJA, RAHUL RULED OUT OF INDIA'S SECOND TEST AGAINST ENGLAND; SARFARAZ, WASHINGTON, SOURABH CALLED UP



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Left-arm spin all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja and middle-order batter K.L. Rahul have been ruled out of India's second Test against England, starting in Visakhapatnam on February 2. The Board of Control for Cricket in

India (BCCI) said in a statement that Jadeja sustained a hamstring injury during batting in India's chase of 231 on the fourth day of the first Test in Hyderabad while Rahul complained of a right quadriceps pain, with the medical team monitoring the progress of the duo.

It further said the men's selection committee has added right-handed batter Sarfaraz Khan, left-arm spinner Sourabh Kumar and off-spin all-rounder Washington Sundar to India's Test squad for the Visakhapatnam Test.

The injuries to Jadeja and Rahul come as further big blows to the Indian team, especially after losing the Hyderabad Test by 28 runs and trailing 0-1 in the five-match series against England. The hosts are already without talismanic batter Virat Kohli, who pulled out of the first two Tests due to personal reasons, as well as senior pacer Mohammed Shami nursing an ankle injury.

On Day Four of the Hyderabad Test, Jadeja had been seen clutching his hamstring and was in discomfort after being run out for just two by a sensational direct hit from England skipper Ben Stokes, while attempting to take a single.

Jadeja and Rahul were India's top run-scorers with 87 and 86 respectively in their first innings total of 436 in Hyderabad, with the former also clinching figures of 3-88 and 2-131 with this left-arm spin.

Washington has played four Tests for India, picking six wickets and slamming three fifties. He has earned a recall into the Test set-up after his last appearance in the format came against England at Ahmedabad in March 2021. Sourabh had been a member of India's Test squad for the home series against Sri Lanka in March 2022 and was called up as a replacement for Jadeja for the away series against Bangladesh later in the year. Sarfaraz, meanwhile, has got his well-deserved, but long-awaited maiden call-up to the Indian Test team. Sarfaraz, a prolific run-getter in the last three seasons of domestic cricket for Mumbai, recently smashed a brilliant 161 as India A defeated England Lions by an innings and 16 runs in the second four-day match in Ahmedabad.

In the same game, Sundar had picked figures of 2-25 and 0-35 respectively while making 52 with the bat. Meanwhile, Saurabh slammed 77 with the bat and had figures of 1-35

and 5-104 respectively in that match.

BCCI also said Madhya Pradesh off-spinner Saransh Jain has been named as a replacement for Sundar in the India A squad for the third and final multi-day game against England Lions starting February 1 in Ahmedabad. It added that fast-bowler Avesh Khan will continue to travel with his Ranji Trophy team Madhya Pradesh and will join the Test squad if required.

India's next Test match against England will be held at the Dr. Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy ACA-VDCA Cricket Stadium in Visakhapatnam on February 2. Uncapped batter Rajat Patidar, who came into the team as Kohli's replacement and left-arm wrist-spinner Kuldeep Yadav looks likely options to replace Rahul and Jadeja in India's playing eleven for the Visakhapatnam Test.

India's updated squad for the 2nd Test against England: Rohit Sharma (C), Shubman Gill, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shreyas Iyer, KS Bharat (WK), Dhruv Jurel (WK), Ravichandran Ashwin, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohd. Siraj, Mukesh Kumar, Jasprit Bumrah (VC), Avesh Khan, Rajat Patidar, Sarfaraz Khan, Washington Sundar, Sourabh Kumar.

Rishabh Pant felt his 'time in this world is up' during the December 2022 accident

Team Absolute | Mumbai

As the Mercedes SUV car he was driving from Roorkee to New Delhi burst into flames on that fateful day of December 30, 2022, young Indian wicketkeeper-batter Rishabh Pant for a few moments felt that his 'time in this world is up'.

Pant sustained injuries to his head, back and feet including two cuts on his forehead and a ligament tear to his right knee and also hurt his right wrist, ankle and toe and suffered abrasion injuries to his back. He underwent plastic surgery for his facial injuries, lacerations and abrasions.

In a candid conversation with Star Sports 'Believe' series, featuring real heroes of the game who have overcome the odds to become champions, Rishabh Pant delved into the harrowing experience that nearly cost him his life and the remarkable resilience that propelled him towards redemption. Pant narrated his journey towards glory for the first time and the programme will be exclusively broadcast on Star Sports Network on Thursday (February 1), 7 PM onwards.

In the promo shared by Star Sports, Pant vividly recounted the chilling moments of his near-fatal car accident at the end of 2022.

"First time in my life I felt like my time in this world was up. During the accident, I was aware of the wounds, but I was lucky as it could have been even more serious. I felt that someone saved me. I asked the doctor how long will it take for me to recover, he said it would take 16-18 months. I knew I had to



work hard to cut this recovery time," Pant said.

More than a year after that accident, Pant is now recovered and is likely to soon return to action.

In the tumultuous world of sports, tales of triumph often emerge from the depths of adversity. Such is the narrative of Rishabh Pant, India's superstar wicketkeeper, whose journey from the brink of despair to the pinnacle of success serves as an inspiration to millions.

Jasprit Bumrah reprimanded for breaching ICC Code of Conduct during Hyderabad Test

Hyderabad | Agencies

India's fast-bowling spearhead Jasprit Bumrah has been handed an official reprimand for breaching Level 1 of the ICC Code of Conduct during the first match of the Test series against England, which ended in a 28-run loss for the hosts' at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium on Sunday.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) said Bumrah was found to have breached Article 2.12 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel, which relates to "inappropriate physical contact with a Player, Player Support Personnel, Umpire, Match Referee or any other person (including a spectator during an International Match."

It also added that one demerit point has been added to Bumrah's disciplinary record, for whom it was the first offence in a 24-month period. The incident occurred in the 81st over of England's second innings, when Bumrah, after completing his follow through, deliberately stepped in Ollie Pope's way as the batter went for a run, leading to inappropriate physical contact.

Bumrah, who had figures of 2/28 and 4/41 in the Hyderabad Test, admitted to the offence



and accepted the sanction proposed by Richie Richardson of the Emirates ICC Elite Panel of Match Referees, so there was no need for a formal hearing. On-field umpires Paul Reiffel and Chris Gaffaney, third umpire Marais Erasmus and fourth umpire Rohan Pandit levelled the charge. Level 1 breaches carry a minimum penalty of an official reprimand, a maximum penalty of 50 per cent of a player's match fee, and one or two demerit points. Demerit Points to remain on a Player or Player Support Personnel's disciplinary record for a period of twenty-four (24) months from their imposition following which they will be expunged.

Elgar revealed shocking incident claiming, "Virat Kohli spat on me"

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Former South Africa captain Dean Elgar shared a shocking incident from the Proteas' tour of India in 2015 claiming that during the first Test in Mohali, a young Virat Kohli spat at him on the challenging pitch.

"Those wickets were jokes. Like playing on that... that surface there. And I came into bat and I was actually holding my own against Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja, and Kohli, he like spat at me," Elgar recalled on the "Banter, with The Boys" podcast.

On being asked if Kohli knew the meaning of the word, Elgar replied: "Yes, he did because de Villiers was his teammate at RCB, so he understood. And I said if you do that, I'll



... on this field, I'll absolutely knock you out. Anyways, we are in India so you got to be a little bit cautious."

Despite the heated exchange, Elgar acknowledged that Kohli later apologized during India's tour to South Africa in 2017-18. "Two, three years later, Kohli pulled me aside and said, 'Listen, can we go and have a drink after the series? I want to apologize for my actions.' So we drank till 3 in the morning," shared Elgar.

The incident marked a turning point in their relationship, showcasing the unpredictable dynamics of cricket rivalries. Elgar's final Test against India earlier this month at Newlands in Cape Town, where he captained South Africa, ended with India winning the second Test to level the series 1-1.

Chennai to host Season 3 of Prime Volleyball League from February 15

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The highly anticipated third edition of the Prime Volleyball League is set to begin on February 15 in Chennai with nine franchises taking part in the event.

The franchises -- Ahmedabad Defenders, Bengaluru Torpedoes, Calicut Heroes, Chennai Blitz, Delhi Toofans, Hyderabad Black Hawks, Kochi Blue Spikers, Kolkata Thunderbolts, and Mumbai Meteors -- will compete for the coveted trophy, with the final set to take place on March 21 at the SDAT Multipurpose Indoor Stadium, Chennai.

The defending champions Ahmedabad Defenders will start against the hosts Chennai Blitz in the opening game of the tournament on February 15, while last year's runners-up Bengaluru Torpedoes will take on the Season 1 winners Kolkata



Thunderbolts on the same day. The third season of Prime Volleyball League will bring an exciting new format with the introduction of Super 5s, promising a bigger, better, and bolder edition. The Super 5s stage will take place between March 11 and March 18 in

which the top five teams from the League stage will compete in a round-robin format to determine the final three teams. The team finishing first in the Super 5s will earn a direct qualification for the Final, while the teams finishing in the second and third places will compete in the

Eliminator on March 19th. The winner of the Eliminator will be the second team to book a spot in the Final.

Speaking on hosting the upcoming season in Chennai, the Minister of Youth Welfare and Sports Development of Tamil Nadu, Udhayanidhi Stalin said, "Ever since its inception, we have always wanted to host an edition of Prime Volleyball League in our city due to its rising popularity. Volleyball is a sport that is close to the people of Tamil Nadu and there is a huge amount of untapped potential for the sport here. We truly believe that their presence here will not only help start a revolution in volleyball across the state of Tamil Nadu but also inspire the next generation of athletes to think of a professional career in this sport. We hope to host another successful edition of the tournament and wish all the teams the best. Let the games begin."

IWL 2023-24: Fredrica Torkudzor's hat-trick helps HOPS score an away win against Kickstart

Bengaluru | Agencies

Striker Fredrica Torkudzor struck a hat-trick as HOPS FC put in a clinical performance to beat Kickstart FC 5-1 in their Indian Women's Football League (IWL) at the Bangalore Football Stadium, here on Monday.

After Karishma Shirvoikar had put Kickstart FC in the lead in the fifth minute, Fredrica scored a hat-trick, which she completed in the second half injury time as she scored in the 28th minute, 59th and 90+5 minutes. Shailja and Gladys Amfobea added one each to make it a big win for HOPS FC.

While Kickstart got off to a quick start with Karishma opening the scoring, Fredrica and Gladys threatened the Bengaluru side's defence in a bid to help HOPS get back into the game, which created quite the spectacle for the viewers who were treated to some end-to-end action.

Kickstart FC, despite taking the lead, persisted in their offensive efforts, seeking to double their lead. However, HOPS seized the opportunity that was created for them, as Torkudzor gracefully controlled a long ball from Rinku Devi and flawlessly executed a run that resulted in the equaliser in the 28th minute. Shailja put HOPS in the lead with six



minutes of regulation time left in the first half, as she produced a spectacular effort from outside the box. After the change of ends, Kickstart came out with more momentum, enjoying long spells of possession. However, HOPS sat back and looked to play through the wings to create their chances. This strategy paid dividends for the Delhi-based side, as Torkudzor managed to get her head onto a ball by Amfobea to double the lead for HOPS. Amfobea turned scorer 24 minutes later when she received a pass inside the penalty area and slotted it home.

There was more misery in store for Kickstart, as Torkudzor capitalised on a mistake by the Kickstart defence to complete her hat-trick deep in injury time.

Bundesliga DORTMUND SEE OFF RESILIENT BOCHUM

Berlin | Agencies

Niclas Fullkrug's hat-trick propelled Borussia Dortmund to their third consecutive win in the Bundesliga, securing a 3-1 victory over Bochum in the 19th round's finale on Sunday. Dortmund got off to an ideal start at home when Bochum goalkeeper Manuel Riemann brought down Donyell Malen inside the box. Fullkrug coolly converted the ensuing penalty into the bottom left corner, opening the scoring in the 7th minute, reported Xinhua.

Despite Bochum keeping its defense compact, Riemann was kept busy, thwarting attempts from Ian Maatsen and Marcel Sabitzer.

Bochum unexpectedly equalized when Nico Schlotterbeck inadvertently



deflected Patrick Osterhage's pass into his own net towards the end of the first half.

Dortmund nearly regained the lead immediately, but Maximilian Wittek skillfully thwarted Malen's effort on goal. The visitors began the second half energetically, creating opportunities as Osterhage missed a promising chance, and Christopher Antwi-Adjei forced

Dortmund's goalkeeper, Alexander Meyer, into action around the hour mark.

FA Cup: Liverpool breeze through, Man Utd fight hard

London | Agencies

Manchester United, Liverpool and Wolverhampton

Wanderers put their names in the hat for the last-16 of the FA Cup on Sunday, while Watford and Southampton will need a replay.

Manchester United made hard work of their 4-2 win away to League Two (fourth tier) Newport County, who fought back from 2-0 down to 2-2 after Bruno Fernandes and Kobbie Mainoo put United 2-0 up in just 13 minutes, reported Xinhua.

Bryn Morris and Will Evans pulled Newport level. Antony put United back ahead with 21 minutes to play, but the



result was in the air until the 94th minute when Rasmus Hojlund netted a fourth goal. The news that coach Jurgen Klopp will leave at the end of the season didn't

affect Liverpool who won 5-2 at home to Norwich City, with goals from Curtis Jones, Darwin Nunez, Diogo Jota, Virgil van Dijk and Ryan Gravenberch.

Wolverhampton Wanderers won the first Black Country derby in over 10 years away to West Bromwich Albion at 2-0, thanks to goals from Pedro Neto after 38 minutes, and Matheus Cunha with 12 minutes left. The game was suspended for 35 minutes after Cunha's goal triggered ugly incidents between rival fans. On Saturday, Luton Town, Brighton, Newcastle United, Leicester City and Maidstone United qualified for the last 16, with Maidstone from the National League South - the sixth tier of the English game, winning away to Ipswich Town (second in the Championship) to make the biggest Cup upset of all time.

India slip down below Bangladesh in latest WTC points table

Hyderabad | Agencies

India slipped down the World Test Championship (WTC) points table below Bangladesh in the latest rankings and are currently ranked at the No. 5 after they suffered a drastic defeat to England in the opening Test match of the five match series by 28 runs.

The stage was set for a gripping battle as India and England clashed in the opening Test match. India, led by Rohit Sharma, dominated the initial days, but Ollie Pope's resilience turned the game on its head. His masterful innings of 196 runs shifted the momentum, leaving India with a challenging target of 231 runs.

In a nail-biting finale, the Indian batting lineup faced the spin prowess of debutant

Tom Hartley. The young spinner spun a web, claiming 7 crucial wickets in the final innings. Despite the valiant efforts, India fell short by 28 runs, handing England a memorable victory.

As the dust settles, India finds itself slipping down the World Test Championship rankings to the fifth spot. The disappointment is palpable, especially considering their mixed performance in the ongoing tournament. With two wins, two losses, and a draw, the Indian team faces a critical juncture in the championship.

Attention now turns to the upcoming Test match in Vizag, where redemption beckons for the home team. Shubman Gill, in the spotlight for his struggles at the No. 3 position, carries the weight of expectations.



Fans pour out on Dongri streets as local boy Munawar comes home with trophy

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Comedian-musician Munawar Faruqi, who won the reality television show 'Bigg Boss 17', unleashed a storm in the Dongri area of Mumbai as he reached with the 'Bigg Boss 17' trophy at the place of his residence. A video of Munawar Faruqi arriving in Dongri shows him greeting his fans from the car as thousands of fans mobbed his car. He came out of the car and waved at his fans. He was seen wearing an off-white jacket and black jeans. He folded his hands and thanked all his well-wishers for showering a lot of love and blessings on him. Munawar, took home the trophy along with a whopping amount of over Rs 50 lakh and a Hyundai Creta car.

Having spent 105 days inside the house, touted as one of the most difficult places to be in, Munawar maintained the position alongside the other four top contenders Ankita Lokhande, Mannara Chopra, Abhishek Kumar and Arun Mahshetty.



Over his journey in the house, Munawar saw a great support from celebrity friends such as Badshah, Raftaar, Emiway Bantai, Ganesh Acharya, Karan Kundrra, MC Stan and Prince Narula, among many others.

After winning the controversial reality show, he shared a picture of him holding the trophy with the show host Salman Khan.

The comedian expressed his gratitude towards the Bollywood superstar for his guidance throughout the latest season. He also thanked his fans for their support.

He wrote in the caption: "Bohot Bohot Shukriya Janta. Aapke pyaar aur support ke liye Aakhir kar Trophy Dongri aa hi gayi. Special thanks to Bade Bhai @beingsalmankhan Sir for

all your guidance." Munawar, who had a bumpy ride during the show, defeated actor Abhishek Kumar to win the finale.

With this, the comedian is now proud winner of two reality shows in the same format, the Kangana Ranaut-hosted streaming reality show 'Lock Upp' and the Salman Khan hosted 'Bigg Boss 17'.

Sonam Kapoor: When I entered the industry, red carpet looks were non-existent

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress and fashionista Sonam Kapoor said that she grew up surrounded by fashion and when she entered the film industry in 2007 with 'Saawariya', the red carpet looks were "non-existent." Sonam said: "I love fashion. My mum used to be a fashion designer. So, I grew up surrounded by fashion."

"When I entered the industry, I noticed that red carpet looks were not so common, in fact non-existent, and I wanted to wear beautiful things and go on the red carpet. I started doing that without realising I was different to everyone else."

She added that her passion for films and fashion led her to create an impact.

"I am enjoying fashion and beautiful things without taking myself too seriously. Fashion is supposed to be fun, an escape. It's important to appreciate the beauty and goodness in life."

According to a global fashion report, Sonam was amongst the list of celebrities like Zendaya, Kylie Jenner, Kendall Jenner, Blackpink, BTS, etc who had the highest impact for luxury fashion brands in 2023.



Parineeti: My first live singing performance was everything I could wish for

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Parineeti Chopra finally made her live singing debut and said that the performance was everything she could wish for. Parineeti took to Instagram, where she shared a motley of pictures giving a glimpse of what her concert looks like. She also shared a video saying that this performance was special because she performed in her own city Mumbai.

Captioning the memories, she wrote: "Andddd it's done.... I have tears of joy as I type this: MY FIRST EVER LIVE SINGING PERFORMANCE was last night and it was everythinggg I could wish for and more. Thank you all for the love and kindness you all have shown. It means a lot to me."

It was earlier this month, when Parineeti shared that she is now having two careers - acting and her musical journey.

Talking about her acting career, Parineeti, who made her debut in 2011 with the film 'Ladies Vs Ricky Bahl', was last seen on screen in 'Mission Raniganj' opposite Akshay Kumar.



Security stops Nick Jonas at Mumbai airport over documents

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Singer-songwriter Nick Jonas, who was recently in India for the maiden gig of Jonas Brothers, was stopped by airport security at the Mumbai airport. The video, which has gone viral, shows the singer, hounded by paparazzi at the airport, being temporarily stopped from entering the terminal. The security personnel at the airport asked his team for some documents as they checked for a solution while the singer had to wait outside the terminal. As per media reports, the singer was stopped due to an alleged oversight by his team regarding his tickets. The Jonas Brothers' performance at the second edition of the multi-genre music festival Lollapalooza India in Mumbai. The crowd at the venue went mad when Nick's elder brother Kevin called him 'Jiju' for the Indian audience prior to performing the song 'Waffle House' from their studio album.



While Nick owned the stage with his vocals, he also shredded on stage as he joined forces with his brother on the lead guitar.

The energy of the performers and the crowd was over the roof. Nick also sang

'Maan Meri Jaan' with the Indian rapper King, Nick, who was dressed in a floral cotton shirt and beige pants, sang his portion of 'Maan Meri Jaan x Afterlife', a song that he recorded with Indian artiste King.

Ranbir, Alia do the 'Jamal Kudu' hookstep, end with a kiss

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Star couple Ranbir Kapoor and Alia Bhatt were seen dancing on the track 'Jamal Kudu' from the actor's latest blockbuster 'Animal', which has gone viral on social media. A video is doing the rounds on social media, where Ranbir and Alia were seen attending an award show. In the clip, the two are seen recreating Bobby Deol's dance moves on 'Jamal Kudu'. The two had a glass balanced on their head as they danced to the song. Ranbir concluded the dance with a kiss on Alia's cheek.

'Animal' is directed by Sandeep Reddy Vanga. The film stars Ranbir Kapoor, Anil Kapoor, Bobby Deol, Rashmika Mandanna, and Triptii Dimri.

The film is about a violent man who learns about an assassination attempt on his estranged father and sets out on a dark path of revenge and destruction.

'Jamal Kudu' is the entry score for Bobby's menacing character Abrar in the film. However, due to popularity it was later released as a track in the film's album. The track currently has over 1 million likes on YouTube since its release in December.



Rajinikanth defends daughter Aishwarya's comment on him being called 'Sanghi'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Tamil megastar Rajinikanth, who is gearing up for the release of his upcoming film 'Lal Salaam', has defended his daughter Aishwarya Rajinikanth, who objected to her father being called 'Sanghi.' The megastar said that his daughter didn't use the word 'Sanghi' in a wrong sense. He said that Aishwarya never said that Sanghi is a bad word. The actor told the media: "My daughter never said that

Sanghi [the term] was a bad word. She questioned why her father was being branded that way when he is into spirituality."

Earlier, speaking at the audio launch of 'Lal Salaam' in Chennai, Aishwarya had said:

"I generally stay away from social media, but my team often tells me what's happening and keep showing some posts.

I used to get angry seeing them. We're human beings too. In recent times, many people call my father a

Sanghi."

She further mentioned: "I didn't know what it meant.

I then asked someone what the meaning of Sanghi was, and they said that people who support a particular political party are called Sanghi.

I'd like to make it clear here, Rajinikanth is not a Sanghi. If he was, he wouldn't have done a film like 'Lal Salaam!'"

Rajinikanth, who was last seen in the blockbuster film 'Jailer', will have an extended cameo in 'Lal Salaam'.



Ankita Sharma