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**FM gives major thrust to boost farmers' incomes, aims for self-reliance in oilseeds**

# GOVERNMENT'S 10-YEAR REPORT CARD

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Interim Budget, presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, on Thursday gives a major thrust to stepping up value addition in the agricultural sector and boosting farmers' incomes. The interim budget also proposes to formulate a strategy to achieve 'atmanirbharta' (self-reliance) in oilseeds such as mustard, groundnut, sesame, soybean, and sunflower. The Finance Minister said in her speech that this will cover research for high-yielding varieties, widespread adoption of modern farming techniques, market linkages, procurement, value addition, and crop insurance. Mentioning the steps being taken to ensure efficient fertiliser use, she said: "After the successful adoption of Nano Urea, application of Nano DAP on vari-



ous crops will be expanded in all agro-climatic zones." Terming farmers as "our Annadata", Sitharaman stated that the minimum support prices for the farm produce are being periodically increased appropriately and direct financial assistance is being provided 11.8 crore farmers every year under PM-KISAN SAMMAN. Besides crop insurance is being given to

4 crore farmers under PM Fasal Bima Yojana. "Besides, several other programmes are assisting 'Annadata' in producing food for the country and the world and added that the worries about food have been eliminated through free ration for 80 crore people," she added. Sitharaman said private and public investment would be further promoted in post-harvest activities including aggregation, modern storage, efficient supply chains, primary and secondary processing and marketing and branding to ensure faster growth of the agriculture and food processing sector. "The sector is poised for inclusive, balanced, higher growth and productivity. These are facilitated from farmer-centric policies, income support, coverage of risks through price and insurance support, promotion of technologies and innovations through start-ups," she said in her speech. She said that the Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises Yojana has assisted 2.4 lakh self-help groups and 60,000 individuals with credit linkages. The Finance Minister added that other schemes are complementing the efforts for reducing post-harvest losses, and improving productivity and incomes. She pointed out that Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana has benefited 38 lakh farmers and generated employment for 10 lakh people. She also said that Electronic National Agriculture Market has integrated 1,361 mandis, and is providing services to 1.8 crore farmers with trading volume of Rs. 3 lakh crore. "These and the provision of basic necessities have enhanced real income in the rural areas. Their economic needs could be addressed, thus spurring growth and generating jobs," the Finance Minister asserted.

**BUDGET LACKS FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH, RISING COST OF MEDICAL DEVICES: EXPERTS**

New Delhi: The Interim Budget presented on Thursday by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman lacks focus on mental health, rising cost of medical devices, said experts. The experts hailed the government's proposal to encourage vaccination for girls in the age group of 9 to 14 years for prevention of cervical cancer, and lauded the plan to make one comprehensive programme for various schemes for maternal child care. "We welcome the announcements made by the government towards the health sector including the need for strengthening the primary healthcare facilities. But, as a mental health expert, we are disappointed that nothing much has been announced for strengthening mental health," said Dr Jyoti Kapoor, Founder & Director, Manasthali Wellness. "We had expected that mental illness would be included in the Ayushman Bharat scheme to increase accessibility to treatment for financially disadvantaged populations. We also wished that insurance policies and schemes cover mental illnesses to improve affordability," she added. Experts noted that the need to address mental health is urgent as approximately 150 million Indians require mental health care services, and there is a stark shortage of professionals -- only 0.3 psychiatrists, 0.07 psychologists, and 0.07 social workers per 100,000 people. "While the interim budget lacked specific policies or initiatives for the mental health sector, we remain optimistic that post-election, the full budget will address this critical area," said Dr Neeraja Agarwal, Psychologist and Co-founder Emoneeds (Mental & Health Wellness). The Budget also stressed on upgradation of anganwadi centres under sasham anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 for improved nutrition delivery, early childhood care, and development. "While the government's laudable efforts, such as cervical cancer vaccination and maternal healthcare schemes, tackle vital health concerns, there remains room for improvement. Greater emphasis on budgetary allocations for healthcare infrastructure, telemedicine expansion, medical research funding, could have significantly enhanced accessibility and healthcare delivery across the nation," said Lovekesh Phasu, Group COO, Sakra World Hospital, Bengaluru. The experts said that the budget also failed to focus on the rising cost of medical devices.

**Biden administration notifies Congress of sale of drones to India**



Washington | Agencies

The Joe Biden administration notified the US Congress on Thursday of the proposed sale of 31 MQ-9B HALE armed drones, clearing a period of informal review that had raised concerns of the deal being in some kind of jeopardy. Congress now has 30 days to either greenlight the deal by doing nothing, or reject it through a congressional vote. There is no attempt to put a "hold" on it yet, but as a person familiar with the development said, "The clock starts now." The formal notification goes to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The notification by the US State Department's Defense Security Cooperation Agency has come amidst reports that some lawmakers had tried to link the deal's clearance to India's wholehearted cooperation with a US investigation into allegations that an Indian businessman Nikhil Gupta, tried to arrange a murder-for-hire hit on a US-based Khalistani activist. Gupta is in custody of Czech authorities in Prague on an extradition request from the US. The \$3 billion deal was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Joe Biden in June 2023 along with joint production of GE jet engines in India. There were a slew of other announcements, but these two were clearly the most significant. The Sea Guardian deal, especially, had been in the making for several years with talks starting during President Donald Trump's administration. Of the 31 MQ-9B UAVs, 15 Sea Guardians are meant for the Indian Navy, and eight each for the Indian Air Force and Indian Army. India is currently using two of these armed drones in a company-owned, company-operated lease agreement. These drones are being used by the US, the UK, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Belgium and Japan. India is buying these drones in a government-to-government deal through a process called Foreign Military Sale (FMS), which must be cleared by congress after a statutory period of 15, 30 or 45 days, as the case may be depending on the size of the sale and the purchasing country. In this instance, Congress has 30 days. Lawmakers can let the deal go through by doing nothing. But if they oppose it, they can either put a hold on it seeking further answers and guarantees from the Biden administration, the burden of which will probably fall on India. The "hold", if it happened, can be put only by the Chair and ranking members of the House's Foreign Affairs Committee, and the Armed Services Committee and the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee and the Armed Services Committee. The "hold" can have a smothering impact on the deal, killing it eventually. In 2016, the US Senate defeated a move to block the Obama administration's plans to sell F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan. However, Bob Corker, the then Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, put a "hold" on US subsidy for the deal, which meant Pakistan would have to pay all of the \$700 million, which it couldn't and deal failed.

**NIFTY SEES LOWEST INTRA-DAY VOLATILITY IN 6 YEARS**

Mumbai: Nifty saw the lowest intra-day volatility on a Budget Day in at least six years on Thursday as the expectation buildup ahead was limited, said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research at HDFC Securities. The Nifty 50 fell 67 points on Thursday to hit an intra-day low of 21,658.75 before ending 28 points, or 0.13 per cent, lower at 21,697.45. Cash market volumes on the NSE were high at Rs 1.35 lakh crore. Broad market indices fell a little more than the Nifty, even as the advance decline ratio fell to 0.77:1. The Sensex fell 177 points to hit an intra-day low of 71,574.89, before ending 107 points, or 0.15 per cent, down at 71,645.30. The 21,832-21,851 band remains a tough resistance on the upside, while 21,429 could provide support. Markets could soon breakout on either side after remaining in a range over the last few weeks, Jasani said. Asian shares were mixed on Thursday after Wall Street fell to its worst loss since September as the US Federal Reserve indicated that cuts to interest rates are not imminent. European stocks were slightly lower ahead of euro zone inflation data for January and the Bank of England's latest monetary policy decision on Thursday, he said. Indian bonds rallied, with the benchmark 10-year yield falling by the most in more than a year, after the government announced a lower-than-expected borrowing programme.

**Sukhbir Badal bats for re-opening of borders with Pakistan**

Attari (Punjab): Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) President Sukhbir Singh Badal on Thursday launched the party's 'Punjab Bachao Yatra' from near the zero line here, as he gave a clarion call for re-opening of the international border with Pakistan to facilitate trade between the two countries, besides demanding enhancement in compensation to farmers tilling land beyond the barbed wire fence in the Indian territory. Earlier, the SAD chief and the senior party leadership

offered prayers at Sri Akal Takhat Sahib to seek divine blessings for the success of the party's 'Punjab Bachao Yatra' that formally started from Attari on Thursday. Senior party leaders Gulzar Singh Ranike, Bikram Singh Majithia and Anil Joshi accompanied the SAD President at the head of the cavalcade along with hundreds of youth on foot. All along the way from Attari to Raja Sansi, hundreds of tractors joined the Yatra along with a crowd of youth.

Badal also held a detailed discussion with the border farmers near the zero point during the course of which the farmers disclosed that thousands of people had lost their livelihood due to the closure of the Integrated Check Post (ICP) at Wagah. The farmers also said that they did not receive compensation of Rs 12,000 per acre per annum for land across the barbed wire fence since the last two years. The farmers called for moving the fence close to the zero line, saying restrictions on caring,

**Gyanvapi issue: Muslim side files plea against prayers in Allahabad HC, Hindu side files caveat**

Varanasi: The Anjuman Intezamia Masjid Committee, which manages Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi, has moved the Allahabad High Court challenging the Varanasi district court's order which allowed Hindus to perform prayers in the southern cellar of the mosque. The Muslim side has also filed a plea in district court seeking a stay for 15 days on puja inside the basement. The Hindu side has also filed a caveat, seeking that it should be heard before the court passes any order. The matter was mentioned before Acting Chief Justice Manoj Kumar Gupta by senior advocate S.F.A. Naqvi



and he was asked to move an urgent listing plea before the Registrar. Listing. Accordingly, an application has been moved before the Registrar,

Listing and the matter is likely to be taken up soon. The development comes after the Supreme Court refused to urgently hear the Mosque Committee's plea against the order allowing puja in Vyas Ji ka Tehkhana, located at the southern cellar of the Mosque. The Varanasi District Judge had directed the district administration to make appropriate arrangements within 7 days for Hindus to conduct worship rituals inside one of the sealed cellars (Vyas Ji ka tehkhana) inside the existing Gyanvapi mosque complex. Worship at this spot was stopped in the year 1993.

**Hemant Soren terms arrest by ED as 'well-orchestrated conspiracy'**

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In his petition filed before the Supreme Court, former Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren termed his arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) as part of a "well-orchestrated conspiracy" ahead of the Lok Sabha polls. Terming the arrest as "illegal", the plea filed by Soren alleged that the ED officials abused their powers for extraneous considerations under the dictates of the Central government as the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) is a prominent opposition party and an active constituent of the opposition INDIA bloc. "The arrest is part of a well-orchestrated conspiracy,



which has been given shape at the anvil of the general elections slated in a few months," it said. The petition filed directly before the Supreme Court said the entire proceedings by the ED are without jurisdiction and the petitioner should be released by setting aside the illegal and arbitrary arrest.

**WET SPELL OVER NORTHWEST INDIA TO CONTINUE FOR NEXT 24 HOURS: IMD**

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Thursday said that a wet spell over northwest India is likely to continue during next 24 hours, and thereafter another spell is likely to affect the region on Saturday and February 5. It further said that a Western Disturbance as a trough in middle tropospheric westerlies is running roughly along longitude 72 degrees east to the north of latitude 30 degrees north with an induced cyclonic circulation over northwest Rajasthan and neighbourhood in lower tropospheric level. "Another Western Disturbance is likely to affect northwest India from Saturday," the IMD said in its daily bulletin. "Under the influence of these systems, light/moderate fairly widespread to widespread rainfall/snowfall is very likely over Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh,



Gilgit, Baltistan, Muzaffarabad, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand till February 5," it said. The IMD further predicted that isolated heavy rainfall/snowfall is also likely over Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand on Thursday while light/moderate scattered to fairly widespread rainfall is very likely over Punjab, Chandigarh, Haryana, Delhi and isolat-

ed to scattered rainfall over Uttar Pradesh, and east Rajasthan on Thursday. "Light/moderate isolated to scattered rainfall is very likely over the above regions on Saturday and Sunday," the IMD said. Isolated hailstorm is also likely over Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, west Uttar Pradesh on Thursday, and west Rajasthan on Saturday and over east Rajasthan on Sunday," it said. The IMD also predicted that strong and chilly surface winds of the order of 30-40 kmph are very likely over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, and west Uttar Pradesh on Saturday. "Light/moderate scattered to fairly widespread rainfall/snowfall is very likely over Arunachal Pradesh during next five days and isolated to scattered rainfall over West Bengal & Sikkim, Odisha, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura till Friday," it said.

**K'taka govt to facilitate online registration of marriage, to amend Hindu Marriage Registration Act**

Bengaluru: The Congress government in Karnataka decided during a Cabinet meeting on Thursday to amend the provisions of the Hindu Marriage Registration (Karnataka) (Amendment) Rules, 2024 and facilitate online registration of marriages in the state.

The move is likely to stir controversy in the state as Hindu organisations had earlier objected to the proposal, claiming that it would encourage 'Love-Jihad' in the state. The Cabinet led by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah gave its consent for the amendment of the law in this regard, as stated by Law Minister H.K. Patil after the meeting. Action will be taken as per the announcement of Siddaramaiah made in this regard during the budget presentation last year. Siddaramaiah had made an announcement in July last year on couples entering into wedlock. "You need not visit the sub-registrar's office to get the registration of your marriage done. A provision for online registration of marriages will be made," he had said. He also proposed to enable couples to submit applications to register their marriages in gram panchayats. The government has also enabled registration of marriages through the Kaveri 2.0 software application. The marriages can also be registered at the Bapu Seva centres and Grama One centres.





# MAHAYUTI PRAISES INTERIM BUDGET, MVA CALLS IT EMPTY AND 'GYANI'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The ruling MahaYuti welcomed the Interim Budget - 2024-2025 as common-man oriented and laying the foundation of a self-reliant and strong India, while the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi slammed it as full of empty promises and giving 'gyan', here on Thursday.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde said that the interim budget will take the country closer to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi's goal of making India a superpower and a \$5 trillion economy.

"It is comprehensive, gives justice to the common people, women, youth, the elderly, farmers, workers and all others. Not changing the direct and indirect tax structure is a relief to commoners. The move to amend the schemes introduced in the last ten years to avoid the loss of farmers, more arrangement of godowns, self-sufficient oil seed campaign, comprehensive scheme for dairy farmers will definitely help the farmers to stand on their own feet," said Shinde.

The CM highlighted other proposals like benefits for women, Anganwadi Sevikas, the universal cancer scheme for women, housing for poor, the interest-free loans scheme for the youth, the increase in IITs, IIMs, promotion of electric vehicles, and other that would boost development.

Congress' Leader of Opposition (Assembly) Vijay Wadettiwar attacked the interim budget as meaningless, cheating the farmers, youth and commoners, while giving an impression of creating development.

"It's a last-ditch attempt to show day-dreams to India. The Bharatiya Janata Party government cares for and stands only behind its rich business and industry friends. The corporate tax is reduced but not tax exemption granted to the masses. The Interim Budget is a statement on PM Modi-led government's failure in the last 10 years," declared Wadettiwar.



He said ironically, the government claims that 20 crore people are lifted out of the poverty line, yet they are giving free foodgrains to 80 crore people, which means that the number of poor have actually increased in the country, but the BJP creates a religious frenzy to divert attention.

"The budget will further widen the schism between the rich and poor, the future of farmers and agriculture, industry, the growing number of jobless people, infrastructure, investors and other sections appears bleak, the tradition of doing injustice to the backward classes, minorities, farmers

continues in the latest Interim Budget as well but Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman was indulging in 'self-praise' over broken dreams," said Wadettiwar. Shiv Sena (UBT)'s Leader of Opposition (Council) Ambadas Danve said the country expected new schemes and financial provisions for peasants and agro-sector, but nothing has been given.

"Modi government has again shown it is insensitive towards the farmers by not making any provision for them. Without coming up with any concrete plan for rural areas, farmers and farm labourers, Modi government is under the impression that

it will be re-elected only by talking of religion," said Danve.

Bharatiya Janata Party's Deputy CM Devendra Fadnis said that the Interim Budget has paid special attention to all sections like women, farmers, poor, youth and the middle classes.

"It is envisaged to provide free electricity upto 300 units through solar power system to one crore families, housing schemes for the poor and middle-classes in urban centres who live in chawls or rentals, the Rs 1 lakh-crore corpus for interest-free loans to youth is revolutionary and many will become entrepreneurs, boosting the startup ecosystem and research," said Fadnis.

He lauded the proposal to make three-crore women millionaires under the 'lakhpati didi programme', include 9 crore women to the economic centre-stage through SHGs, etc as other major highlights in the confidence-boosting presentation.

Nationalist Congress Party (AP)'s Deputy CM Ajit Pawar lauded the Interim Budget as instrumental in laying "the foundations of a developed India by 2047", and giving top priority to the welfare of the poor, women, youth and farmers.

"The financial assistance to 11.80 crore farmers through Pradhan Mantri Kisan Yojana, benefit of PM crop insurance scheme to 4 crore farmers, special efforts to produce mustard, sesame, sunflower, groundnut, soybean oil seeds in the country under self-sufficient oil seed campaign, comprehensive scheme for dairy farmers, etc are highly laudable. The move for 3,000 new IITs, 7 IITs, 16 IITs, 7 IIMs and 15 AIIMS plus 390 universities will promote higher education, and enhance the quality of education," said Ajit Pawar.

Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Priyanka Chaturvedi slammed the budget saying: "In this chilly weather, they have poured cold water on peoples' expectations, and this is happening consistently for the past 10 years... even the policies announced by the PM in 2014 are yet to be fulfilled."

**RAGHURAM RAJAN SAYS UNEMPLOYMENT 'INCREASING RAPIDLY' IN INDIA**



**Jaipur:** Former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan said on Thursday that unemployment is "increasing rapidly" in India and the employment graph "has fallen in the last ten years". He made the remarks during a press conference at the 17th edition of the Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF) which started here on Thursday. Rajan also expressed his displeasure over the actions being taken against Opposition leaders by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in different states. "This is a threat to Indian democracy. Everything will not be achieved just by putting the Opposition in jail... This matter is not just for politicians but for all of us. Activating ED before elections is not a good thing."

The former RBI Governor also underlined the need for reform in the education system. He said: "...There should be improvement in the education system not only in private but also in government schools." Rajan further said that there are "two India in our country". "There is one which is moving faster than China while in the other, 80 crore people have to be given food packets. We have to focus on skill, education and medical sector."

## KCR TAKES OATH AS MLA

**Hyderabad:** Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) President and former Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhara Reddy on Thursday took oath as the member of state Assembly. In his first public appearance after suffering hip fracture in December, he came to Assembly premises and took oath as the MLA.

Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar administered the oath.

KCR, as Rao is popularly known, was seen walking into the Assembly building with the help of a walking stick. The BRS leader was accompanied by Rajya Sabha member J. Santosh Kumar.

A large number of BRS leaders had gathered in Assembly premises to greet the BRS supremo.

KCR could not attend the first session of the new Assembly held in December as he was bed-ridden after undergoing hip replacement surgery.

Barring KCR, all the MLAs took oath during the session.

## PUJA BEGINS IN GYANVAPI BASEMENT AFTER COURT ORDERS

Varanasi | Agencies

More than 30 years after worship was banned in the basement of the Gyanvapi complex, barricading was removed at around midnight, within nine hours of the court's order, and puja-aarti was performed and prasad was also distributed at the 'Vyasji ka tehkhana'.

Following the court order regarding the basement located at Gyanvapi, top police and administration officials reached Vishwanath Dham, late on Wednesday night.

The officials earlier held a meeting regarding the implementation of the order given by the District Judge's court regarding the arrangement of worship in the basement of Vyasji.

Puja started late on Wednesday night in the basement of Vyasji in the Gyanvapi complex while the 'Mangala Aarti' also took place early on Thursday.

In view of the puja, the security of the premises has been increased.

Divisional Commissioner Kaushal Raj Sharma said that in order to comply with the court's order, regular worship will be conducted as per the rituals in the basement of Vyasji from Thursday morning.

The District Judge had directed the Receiver District Magistrate to get the worship of the idols and 'Raag-Bhog'



done by the priest in the basement located to the south of the building at Settlement Plot No.-9130. The receiver was also instructed to make proper arrangements for the iron fence within seven days. The next hearing of the case will be on February 8. Meanwhile, the plaintiff and defendant parties can submit objections.

On September 25 last year, Shailendra Kumar Pathak Vyas had filed a suit in the court demanding

handing over Vyasji's basement to the District Magistrate and permission to worship as before December 1993.

It was feared in the suit that the basement might be forcibly taken over by the Anjuman Intejamia Masjid Committee.

On January 17, the District Judge had made the District Magistrate the receiver of Vyasji's basement. The second demand was also accepted by allowing puja on Wednesday.

However, when asked in this regard, no police or administration officer was ready to say anything formally. Informally, the officers simply said that whatever order given by the court, was studied and followed as per the rules.

Divisional Commissioner Kaushal Raj Sharma said that in order to comply with the court's order, regular worship is being conducted as per the rituals in the basement of Vyasji from Thursday morning. All the officers are still inside Kashi Vishwanath Dham. He says that arrangements have been made in order to comply with the court order. Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has expressed happiness over the decision. International Working President Alok Kumar said: "I am happy that the court has asked the plaintiff and Kashi Vishwanath Trust to jointly appoint a priest."

Plaintiff Shailendra Kumar Pathak Vyas cited the Advocate Commissioner's report dated July 30, 1996 in the court. The commission had said in the report, apart from the plaintiff's lock, there was an administration lock on the southern door of the basement. The plaintiff opened his lock with the key in front of the Advocate Commissioner, but could not go inside due to lack of permission from the administration to open the lock.

## 'Directionless' budget disappointing for the common people: Pilot



Jaipur | Agencies

Congress General Secretary and former Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot termed the Interim Budget presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Parliament on Thursday as "directionless" and "disappointing", noting that "apart from glorifying the last 10 years of the BJP government", there was nothing new. He said that in his budget speech, the Union Minister has claimed to bring 25 crore people out of the poverty line but did not clarify that if this figure is 25 crore, then it also includes 14 crore poor people during the time of UPA government.

"BJP government is giving

free food grain to 80 crore poor people, and shows filing of income tax returns by about 8 crore people, who belong to the middle and upper class. In such a situation, which class of people have been taken out of the poverty line is questionable," he added. Pilot said that the demand of Congress to increase the scope of Ayushman Bharat has been ignored in this Interim Budget and the health of common citizens has been ignored. "Not reducing the excise duty of petrol and diesel, not giving income tax exemption to the middle class, not making any concrete announcement to provide relief to farmers are examples of the anti-people policy of the BJP government," he said.

## Put me behind bars and I will come out of the prison by making a hole: Mamata



Kolkata | Agencies

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday challenged the Union government to put her in prison, asserting that she will come out by making a hole there.

"West Bengal will move ahead. If all in India are put behind the bars nothing will be achieved. If I am put behind the bars I will come out making a hole there," she said while addressing an administrative review meeting in Nadia district.

Banerjee also claimed that the activities against the opposition parties by the Union government entities have increased keeping the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections in mind. "Their inten-

tions are to put everyone behind the bars before the elections. But they should not forget that they can use the central agencies now since they are currently in power. But what will happen when tomorrow they will be driven out of power?" she questioned. The Chief Minister also ridiculed the Congress-CPI-M show of unity over the Nyay Yatra rally.

"The CPI-M and Congress have united with the aim of helping the BJP. I do not believe in making such an unholy alliance. I just work for the interest of common people," she said.

Banerjee also made it clear that the expelled party Lok Sabha member Mahua Moitra will be re-nominated as a party candidate in the forthcoming elections.

## Jaipur Literature Festival begins

**Jaipur:** The 17th edition of the world-famous Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF) will begin from Thursday in Jaipur. On the very first day, literature lovers will get a chance to attend sessions of personalities like Gulzar, Raghuram Rajan and Ajay Jadeja.

JLF was inaugurated by Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister Diya Kumari at 9.30 am at Hotel Clarks Amer, Jaipur. Litterateurs from across the country are participating in this 5-day festival. A new venue 'Nandghar' has also been built for the festival. The festival's earlier venue called Mughal Tent had run into controversy over its name.

Notably, the name of the tent sparked controversy last year when several BJP leaders objected to it. "In Hollywood, the word 'Mughal' is used to look at a certain lifestyle and not to denote any religion or community," JLF organiser Sanjoy K Roy had said.

Lyricist Gulzar will be seen reciting poems during the poetry session on the first day of JLF. Former Indian team cricketer Ajay Jadeja will also be seen sharing his experiences related to cricket.



Former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan will talk on the future economy. There will be a performance by singer Kalapini Komkali. Litterateurs from 10 Indian languages and 7 international languages have also been included in this season JLF. It will host over 550 speakers for the 2024 edition. These include Booker, International Booker, Pulitzer, Sahitya Akademi,

Padmashree, Padma Bhushan, Padma Vibhushan, Baillie Gifford, DSC Prize, JCB Award winning writers.

Many topics including history, politics and current affairs, gender, science and medicine, food, myths, spirituality and religion, mental health, fashion and lifestyle, law and justice, geopolitics, sports, climate change, environment will be discussed in JLF.

## KASHMIR PLAINS RECEIVE SEASON'S FIRST SNOWFALL

**Srinagar:** Plains of the Valley received season's first snowfall on Thursday thereby ending a nearly two-month long dry spell. Srinagar city and all other district headquarters of the Valley received season's first snowfall today while higher reaches received moderate snowfall.

Authorities moved out snow clearance machines right since the wee hours of the morning to clear major highways and link roads in the Valley.

MeT department has forecast another wet spell beginning on February 3. Srinagar recorded 0.2; Gulmarg minus 7.6; and Pahalgam minus 4.1 as the minimum temperature.

Leh town in Ladakh region had minus 4.4 and Kargil minus 6.9 as the night's lowest temperature. Jammu city recorded 7.2; Katra 4.1; Batote minus 1.4; both Baderwah and Banihal had 0.2 as the minimum temperature.

## Air quality slips to 'severe' category at various places in Patna



Patna | Agencies

The people in city are living under toxic air conditions these days as the Air Quality Index (AQI) at various places in Patna crossed 400-mark.

The officials claimed that the air pollution is high due to dust in the region.

The categorisation of AQI ranges from 0-50 as 'good', 51-100 as 'satisfactory', 101-200 as 'moderate', 201-300 as 'poor', 301-400 as 'very poor', and 401-500 as 'severe.'

The average AQI in Patna was registered at 401 per cubic meter in the morning hours. However, it eased out around 11 a.m. on Thursday. The AQI of Patna on Wednesday was 444 per cubic meter and comes under the category of hazardous. The official said that Particulate Matter (PM) 10 is rising in Patna as there is the dust on

the roads. Rampant constructions and transportations of sand and building materials in the city are disturbing the AQI.

As per the real time AQI, Ashiana Digha Road has 401 AQI per cubic meter, Gardaniabagh 414 and Mithapur is 401. The PM 10 at Ashiana Digha Road is 505, Gardaniabagh 518, Mithapur 505 and Muradpur 653. The AQI in other cities like Muzaffarpur, Arrah, Chapra, Biharsharif, Aurangabad, Rajgir, Purnia, Kishanganj, Araria are also crossing 400 marks. When contacted, an officer of Patna municipal corporation claimed that the water sprinkling is being done in three shifts at various places. He also said that the construction work of Metro, roads, transportation of building materials are responsible for the deterioration of AQI.





## RAPED, THROAT SLIT 5 YEARS AGO, SURVIVOR WAITS FOR PROMISED EDUCATION FUND

Team Absolute | Bhopal

She was gang-raped and left to die when she was only 7 years old. The then Madhya Pradesh government had promised her a better life, complete with proper housing and fully-funded education. Five years later, the survivor is still struggling and waiting for the current dispensation to fulfil the promises made by the previous government. On June 26, 2018, she was kidnapped from near her school by two men in Mandasaur district. After raping her, the accused slit her throat. She survived the brutal incident. The then Shivraj Singh Chouhan government announced proper housing and assured to fund her and her sister's education. They soon got a house and shop in Indore. In 2019, however, when the Kamal Nath-led government came to power, the Indore Development Authority asked the family of the minor rape survivor to vacate the home as, they claimed, no official order was issued by the previous BJP government. Later, the Congress government issued the orders and they got back their house. Five years after she was brutalised,



there seems no end in sight for the survivor's distress. Her family has alleged that the government is yet to pay their daughters' school fees that now run in lakhs. The school authorities sent a letter, dated December 22, 2023, to the father that cited financial problems being faced by them. They said that

the pandemic-caused economic slump and rising prices of essential commodities have led to the worsened financial situation. The survivor is a class 6 student and her sister is in class 11. They have written a letter to the Indore district collector, mentioning an outstanding payment of ₹ 14.16

lakh. Even in 2022, the results of the two sisters were withheld over non-payment of dues. At that time, Shivraj Singh Chouhan intervened and the issue was resolved. The rape-accused men were caught within 24 hours of the rape after police examined the photographs and CCTV footage from the neighbourhood.

## All sections including poor, women, youth and farmers have been considered in the budget: Chief Minister Dr. Yadav

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav, while reacting to Union Budget during his stay in Morena said that persistent efforts are being made to make the country progressive under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. Today's budget presented in the form of Vote on Account is all-inclusive and comprehensive. All sections including the poor, women, youth and farmers have been taken care of in the budget. The ongoing development and public welfare works in the country, has brought 25 crore population out of the poverty line, which is a big achievement. Thanks to the efforts of Prime Minister Modi, India has emerged as the fourth economy of the world. In the coming times, we will realize the resolve of Modi for making India the third economy of the world. In Amrit Kaal by the year 2047, India will be the first nation in the world. The country will move ahead with the concept of Digital India. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that the idea of providing housing to two crore people in the country is extraordinary. Prime Minister Modi has resolved to ensure "Pakka Makan" for all. The new housing scheme for the middle class is also an achievement. Arrangements have been made to provide benefits of Ayushman Yojana to Anganwadi workers and ASHA workers in the budget. There was a long standing need to provide such facilities to poor families. India will move ahead with the promotion of Digital India and the reforms being implemented through it. The Union Finance Minister deserves congratulations for facilitating cervical cancer vaccination for girls in the 9-14 age group. In the coming time, the new



scheme made under roof top solar plant in one crore houses will pave the way for saving 300 units of electricity in these houses. This will prove to be a revolutionary step towards energy conservation and we all will reap benefits from it. Madhya Pradesh has immense potential for tourism. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that there is immense potential for tourism in Madhya Pradesh. The decision to provide interest free long term loan in the tourism sector will lead to all-round development of tourism. Construction and expansion of airports on 517 new routes under the UDAN scheme will prove to be a milestone in the progress of air traffic and this will also expand air traffic in Madhya Pradesh. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that the budget extends much hope for India's economic and all-round progress. The state government will take advantage of the budget in Vote on Account and we will move towards making Madhya Pradesh number one in the country. Congratulations and best wishes to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for an all-encompassing welfare budget.

## People took to the streets over vandalism of temple in Guna

Team Absolute | Guna

Some anti-social elements vandalized a temple in Guna district of Madhya Pradesh. When this matter came to light, local people took to the streets on Thursday and started searching for the culprits and demanding action. According to the information received, there is a Shiva temple on the outskirts of Bamori, Guna. Anti-social elements vandalized this Shiva temple late on Wednesday night and also uprooted the Shivalinga. When the local people came to know about this information on Thursday, they came out on the streets and started demanding the arrest of the accused. In view of the increasing tension, heavy police force



has been deployed. Police have registered a case against unknown people and are searching for those who carried out this incident.

## Junior got promotion first due to lack of ACR, High Court imposed cost of one lakh on the department

Team Absolute | Jabalpur

Due to non-submission of ACR, promotion was given to the junior first. After submitting the ACR, he got promotion, but his seniority got affected. A petition was filed in the High Court challenging this. High Court Justice Vivek Aggarwal has ordered to provide seniority and other benefits to the petitioner. While imposing a cost of Rs 1 lakh on the department, the single bench has also ordered to provide the said amount to the petitioner as litigation expenses. In the petition filed on behalf of petitioner Santosh Kumar Srivastava, it was said that he was appointed to the post of Testing Assistant Grade 2 in the Electricity Department in September 1977. After this he got promotion to the post of Testing Assistant Grade 1. He was posted in the transmission company. Departmental DPC was held in October 2010 for promotion. His seniority order was seven, but due to lack of ACR report, promotions



were given to those who were ranked 21st and 40th in the seniority order. After submitting the ACR, he was given promotion in November 2010. Due to this his juniors became senior to him. He had presented a representation before the department in this regard. His representation was rejected by the Department of Justice without giving any proper reason. Due to this the said petition has been filed. Issuing the above instructions, the single bench has said in its order that it was the responsibility of the department to submit the ACR. Due to the mistake of the department, the petitioner got promotion late, even though there was no fault of his.

## INTERIM BUDGET IS LIKE A PALM TREE: KAMAL NATH

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the interim budget in Parliament on Thursday. Former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh Kamal Nath has compared this budget to a palm tree. Kamal Nath has said in his reaction on the interim budget, "What if it has grown, it is like a palm tree. There is no shade for the birds and the fruits grow very far away. The situation of the interim budget presented today by the Modi government is something like this. We had hoped that in this pre-election budget, will the Finance Minister tell whether the target of providing 20 crore jobs as per the promise of providing 2 crore jobs every year by the Prime Minister



has been achieved or not? Referring to the expectations of the middle class, Kamal Nath said that the middle class had hoped that the

government would give some relaxation in the income tax slab, but once again exposing its anti-people face, the Modi government did not give any relaxation in the income tax. Modi government had promised that the income of farmers will be doubled by 2022, but today even in the budget of 2024, the government could not say even a single thing in favor of the farmers. Referring to youth and women, Kamal Nath said that there is nothing in the budget for youth, women, unemployed, farmers and soldiers. The government has not presented any blueprint for the economic development of the country and the things it has said are things 15 and 20 years away. It's not a budget, just a quibble.

## Madhya Pradesh government's anti-employee attitude has come to the fore again: Congress

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Employees of Madhya Pradesh are not getting their demand. I support. Before voting for the assembly elections, the BJP government had sought permission from the Election Commission to increase the dearness allowance. The BJP government knew very well that the Election Commission cannot do this amidst the code of conduct. That's why BJP did this hypocrisy to show itself as employee friendly." Kamal Nath alleges that now that the BJP govern-

demanding for a long time to give 46 percent dearness allowance at par with the Centre. I am supporting their demand. I support. Before voting for the assembly elections, the BJP government had sought permission from the Election Commission to increase the dearness allowance. The BJP government knew very well that the Election Commission cannot do this amidst the code of conduct. That's why BJP did this hypocrisy to show itself as employee friendly." Kamal Nath alleges that now that the BJP govern-

ment has been formed again, the file for increasing the dearness allowance of the employees is not being moved forward. This shows that the Bharatiya Janata Party talks about public interest at the time of elections and after winning the elections, it ignores all sections of society. Kamal Nath demanded from the Chief Minister that instead of playing tricks with the government employees, he should give their rights to the employees and ensure to pay 46 percent dearness allowance.

## UGC: 18 universities of Madhya Pradesh declared defaulters...

Team Absolute | Bhopal/New Delhi

University Grants Commission i.e. UGC has declared 18 universities of Madhya Pradesh as defaulters. The matter is about the appointment of Lokpal. Ombudsman has not been appointed in the university declared a defaulter. The University Grants Commission has declared 421 universities across India as defaulters in this matter. Despite the university becoming a defaulter, there will be no impact on examinations, mark sheets, degrees, diplomas in the current session, because these are recognized universities. It is believed that in the coming 3 months all the universities will appoint the ombudsman and due to this their names will be removed from the list of defaulters.

**Defaulter Universities**  
Avedhash Pratap Singh University, Rewa, Pandit SN Shukla University, Shahdol, Mahatma Gandhi Gramodaya University, Chitrakoot, Music and Arts University, Gwalior, University of Veterinary Sciences, Jabalpur, University of Journalism and Communication, Bhopal, Sanskrit and Vedic University, Ujjain, Chhatrasal Bundelkhand University, Jabalpur, MP University of Medical Sciences, Jabalpur, Jiwaji University, Gwalior, Agricultural University, Jabalpur, University of Social Sciences, Indore, Law University, Jabalpur, Hindi University, Bhopal, Raja Shankarshah University, Chhindwara, Rajiv Gandhi University of Technology, Bhopal, Rani Durgavati University, Jabalpur, Sanchi

## Participation in the Republic Day Parade is an inspiring accomplishment: Governor

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The officials and volunteers of the National Service Scheme, who participated in the parade contingent of the National Service Scheme in the Republic Day Parade in New Delhi, paid a courtesy visit to Governor Mangubhai Patel at the Raj Bhavan. They shared their experiences from the month-long camp held in New Delhi during the Republic Day celebrations. Information about awards and certificates earned in various programmes and competitions during the camp was given and photographs were shown. In the programme, the volunteers welcomed Governor Patel by presenting a bouquet and the officials of the National



Service Scheme presented mementos. On this occasion, Principal Secretary to the Governor Sanjay Shukla, Higher Education Commissioner Nishant Warwade, Vice Chancellor of Barkatullah University SK Jain, officials of the National Service Scheme Regional Directorate and volunteers were present. Governor Patel expressed that participating in the Republic Day Parade in the nation's capital is a truly

inspiring accomplishment. The success of the participant fills his family, community, region and state with joy and enthusiasm. The participants become a source of inspiration for the future generations. Congratulating the volunteers, he said that he himself is feeling proud of their achievement. The parade of women in front of the President, Droupadi Murmu, who holds the highest post of the Republic, symbolizes the pleasant changes

occurring in the country. Governor Patel said that the volunteers experienced the feeling of national unity in the camp. It is their responsibility to spread it in the society. Working with the feeling that their actions should bring glory to the nation is the way to make a developed India. He appreciated the efforts of the National Service Scheme to create public awareness about environmental, health and social challenges and responsibilities. He said that nature has bestowed more intellectual and physical powers to humans than any other creature. Nature intends that humans should help in the development of other living beings. The relevance of human life lies in this.

## Transgender Clinic inaugurated at AIIMS Bhopal

Bhopal: A dedicated specialty clinic named "Transgender Clinic" is inaugurated today at AIIMS Bhopal to cater to the unmet needs of transgender. This is the first such clinic amongst all AIIMS in the country. This specialty clinic will have collaborative services from the Department of Psychiatry, Endocrinology, Urology, and Plastic Surgery. Clinic will function on the 1st and 3rd Thursday of every month from 2 pm - 4 pm. All the involved departments will function along with the need-based assistance from other medical and surgical specialties to provide comprehensive clinical care. Inaugurating the clinic Prof. (Dr) Ajai Singh, Executive Director AIIMS Bhopal said that this is a unique initiative by departments of Psychiatry, Endocrinology, Urology and Burns and Plastic Surgery. He further said that this clinic will provide comprehensive services to transgender populations and their families in a special manner, keeping in view the sensitivities involved in their care. The services will be provided in collaboration with private initiatives such as NGOs working in the field of Transgender sensitization and destigmatization programs and workshops with a focus on the overall health of Transgender and LGBTQ+ members. During the session Abdul Majid, President of Anmol NGO, shared the ground level difficulties faced by LGBTQ+ members and he has assured to facilitate the reach the needy individuals to the said clinic. In the inaugural function some transgender also participated and expressed happiness on starting an exclusive clinic for them. Earlier, Dr. Vijender Singh Head of Psychiatry department welcomed the gathering and highlighted the services that will be available.





EDITOR'S SPECS

Hanuman flag removal controversy spreads to other parts of K'taka

The Hanuman flag removal row, that became a flashpoint between the Congress government, BJP and Hindu organisations in Karnataka, is now gradually spreading to other regions of the state. After the removal of a Hanuman flag from a public place in Mandya district, green flags have been installed at public places in several towns. The local people in Chikkaballapur city have filed a complaint with authorities to remove the green flag hoisted on a flag post near Doddabhajame Mane area on Thursday. The civic authorities had visited the spot and directed the concerned to remove the flag. The BJP leaders have demanded removal of a half moon and star structure installed on the famous Clock Tower in Kolar city. The authorities had cleared the green flag at the Chandni Chowk in communally sensitive Shivajinagar in Bengaluru and hoisted the national tricolour following the controversy. Meanwhile, sources in Bajrang Dal stated that they will launch the Hanuma Dhwaj campaign in Mandya from Friday in the district. Earlier, Vishwa Hindu Parishat (VHP) had announced that the saffron flag campaign will be taken up throughout the state where in flags would be hoisted atop all houses. Samana Manaskara Vedike has called for a bandh in Mandya on February 7. While Bajrang Dal has called for a bandh in Mandya district on February 9 condemning the removal of the Hanuman flag. BJP unit had already observed state-wide bandh recently. To avoid any untoward incident, more than 200 police personnel have been deputed at the Keragodu village in Mandya district from where the controversy started. The prohibitory orders will continue in the village. The Karnataka Government is in a fix over the development.

PORTAL OF TROUBLE OPENS AGAIN FOR MADHYA PRADESH TRIBALS ON THE LOOKOUT FOR PATTAS

Sanavver Shafi

Ravalusinh Baiga (50) had been cultivating four to five acres of land since 1998. When the Forest Rights Act (FRA) came into existence in 2006, he filed a lease claim for those eight fields. However, the lease copy he got in 2016 gave him the right to only an acre, or four fields. "Now you can guess how we run the house," sighs Ravalusinh, whose eight-member family lives at Dhaba in Samnapur tehsil of Madhya Pradesh's Dindori district.

Budhlal Baiga (40) alleges that every third person in the village has suffered this setback.

"They got 10 or 20 decimals after making claims for two to five acres. Despite lodging complaints and officials taking note, the problem persists," he says.

Organisations working for tribal welfare claim that 90 per cent of the distributed leases have seen unwarranted reduction of land, whether the application was made offline or online. The problem persists not only in the 89 tribal development blocks of Madhya Pradesh, but also in other states Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Odisha and Chhattisgarh.

Madhuri Ben, president, Jan Jagruti Samiti, which helps tribals in Burhanpur attain forest rights pattas (land titles), says applicants are now being forced to file claims through Van Mitra portal or app. "This has proved even more disastrous."

**Why portal?** The members or community of the Scheduled Tribes who primarily reside in and depend on the forests or forest land for livelihood can claim rights under FRA 2006. Any member or community whose three generations (75 years) prior to December 13, 2005, primarily resided in forest land is also eligible. Ten acres can be claimed for individual lease, whereas no limit has been set for community lease.

When rejections mounted, the state government launched the Madhya Pradesh Van Mitra portal and mobile app in December 2019 to review the rejected claims. From December 2019 to November 2022, a total of 6,27,513 applications went through the Van Mitra portal and 6,17,284 claims (98%) were resolved.

However, the portal gradually shut in 2020, citing confusion due to the arrival of new claims. By May last year, the portal was functional only in eight of the total 55 districts. Last July, the portal reopened to hear both new and rejected claims, but that meant only more trouble. The claims sent back for amendments will still be heard offline.

Before reopening the portal, a 12-member task force was formed last April under the chairmanship of the then Chief Minister, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, for effective implementation of the



rules of Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, and FRA. This task force is functional only on paper now.

**Task force's suggestions ignored**

Task force member Millind Thatte says they had suggested that the forest lease hearing should be held offline at gram sabhas because the rules itself say that the decision should be taken at gram sabha public meeting. "We had suggested that Van Mitra portal is needed to bring transparency, but should be limited to keeping records of claim documents, gram sabha decisions and leases," he details.

Another task force member and FRA expert Dr Sharad Lele tells 101Reporters that he had brought issues related to portal use before the government's notice in a meeting held under the chairmanship of Chouhan, about 10 months ago. Some of them were poor network coverage, non-availability of mobiles or laptops, poor education status of most tribals, and lack of clarity in satellite images.

However, last April itself, the administration called lease applications in 20 forest villages of Dindori district with help from Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) and National Institute of Women, Child and Youth Development. "Wrong names and land compartments, and mistakes in farm size and location were found in the approved land titles during this period."

"As these are old forest villages settled by the forest department, all the fields here are eligible for individual pattas. So it was decided to mark and measure every field. Maps were prepared and then claims made afresh," says Lele, Distinguished Fellow, ATREE, which also applied for amendments in many claims.

Notably, 230 claims, including new and those requiring revisions, were filed offline at

Sheetalpani in Bajag tehsil and Pondi in Samnapur tehsil, in culmination of the work that began last April. Amendments had to be made to 70 per cent of the claims given earlier. The work could not proceed in the remaining 18 villages due to portal reopening.

**Offline new applications stalled**

"We first examined the land titles received at Sheetalpani and Pondi, and realised that most of them needed amendment. We formed a team each of village elders and youth. We held workshops to make tribals aware of the maps, land measurement and other technical information," details Mohit Mahajan, ATREE coordinator, Dindori.

Along with both teams, ATREE listed farms of every person in a register. Maps were prepared using mobiles with GPS and AMCHO CFR open source application to mark the location and size of each person's farm. Details of every claimant's Aadhaar and ration cards, and voter ID were added. After claims were resubmitted offline, the forest rights committee along with revenue and forest officials measured the plots.

After the claims got gram sabha approval, they went to the sub-divisional and district committees, where 90 out of the 134 claims of Sheetalpani got approval. The remaining were returned to the gram sabha for corrections. However, only 51 of the 90 approved claimants have received land titles. Remaining are on hold because they are new claims, for which the district administration now allows applications only online. Of the 96 claims from Pondi, the sub-divisional committee accepted 80, while the forest department wanted changes to the rest. After site re-inspection and claim improvement, the claims have reached the district committee.

The district administration has

not made a final decision on the mandatory online process. The district magistrate had written to the state government in October itself to allow offline process, but there has been no response.

**Not much luck with offline revision**

"The lease of most of the people in our village is yet to be amended... Van Mitra portal has been reopened, and officials are now forcing them to apply online only," alleges Bigari Singh (32), a Baiga tribal of Sheetalpani.

Bigari has been quite lucky in his second attempt. He filed a forest rights claim for 1.99 hectares in 2008.

"Our claim got accepted the next year, but the forest department team destroyed half of my crop one day. It was through them that we came to know that our lease was only for 0.32 hectare," he says. A revised lease for 1.99 hectares was issued to Bigari on September 25 last year, after he approached ATREE.

Baisakhu Baiga (55) has been into farming at Sheetalpani for years together.

"I made a claim for 2.57 hectares in 2006, but got 0.174 hectare on lease in 2009," says Baisakhu, who has an eight-member family.

After much struggle, he filed a claim with ATREE's help last year and received his revised lease giving rights to the entire 2.57 hectares on September 25.

**Making online option a norm**

Sunaram Navasiya (47) of Sheetalpani made lease amendment applications several times, but got rejected repeatedly.

"We worked jointly with ATREE to prepare maps of every farm and land for three months. The officials told us many times that our applications are correct, but added that their hands are tied," he explains.

"You have to apply through Van Mitra portal only; pattas will not be given by applying offline' is the standard reply we get," he says.

Land title of Nasu Baiga (45) of Pondi is not been amended despite making an application. "Officials are insisting on online application," Nasu laments. A Tribal Affairs Department order of July 13 last year says new applications can also be heard through Van Mitra portal. However, officials have tweaked it to emphasise that claims can only be made online. Mahajan says there was no restriction on offline application as per the order, yet it was discontinued. Also, most of the applications that ATREE deals with require amendments. The portal, on the other hand, hears new and rejected applications only.

international

TRUMP RUNS LOW ON CASH FOR CAMPAIGN AS LEGAL FEES DRAIN HIM, BIDEN FLUSH WITH FUNDS

Washington | Agencies

Former President Donald Trump is literally roughing it out in the 2024 presidential race, despite being a front runner for the GOP nomination, as he is facing a cash crunch with legal fees draining him out and as he tries desperately to lock down the Republican nomination spending monies to eliminate Nikki Haley from the competition.

Trump has spent more than he has earned through his donations or self-financing schemes.

As a potential 2024 Trump-Biden general election rematch looms large, President Joe Biden appears money-flush. Trump's campaign and super PAC both spent more than they raised in their most recent finance reports, while Biden built up more reserves, media reports claimed.

Campaign finance records filed Wednesday show the main super PAC supporting Trump's campaign, MAGA Inc., spent more than it raised in the last six months of 2023 - primarily by transferring back \$30 million to Save America, the main vehicle for paying



the former president's prodigious legal fees. Similarly, Trump's official campaign blew through more cash than it took in over the last three months of the year, NBC reported after perusing the campaign records of both candidates.

That suggests that Trump's recent

threats to blackball Republican donors who don't give money to him are about more than just loyalty. He also needs the money, media reports said.

President Biden's campaign in comparison ended the year with \$46 million in cash, far more than the \$33 million

Trump's campaign held before the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary. Flash to the Future, the main super PAC backing Biden, held a little bit more in the bank than MAGA Inc., \$24 million to \$23.3 million, at the end of the year. Democrats claimed on Wednesday night that Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris are stockpiling money for campaign purposes, rather than legal fights like Trump, and are in an advantageous position. "While Donald Trump lights money on fire paying the tab on his various expenses, Team Biden-Harris, powered by grassroots donors, is hard at work talking to the voters who will decide this election and building the campaign infrastructure to win in November," Biden's campaign spokesman TJ Ducklo said in a statement. Though Trump's legal troubles make him a martyr before his republican supporters, he is also down in cash for the campaigns paying his legal fees through his various outfits. Trump is rallying GOP voters to his cause without a shred of evidence accusing Biden of using the Justice Department to target him and hamstringing his campaign.

Tel Aviv | Agencies

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said that Israel will not end the ongoing war with Hamas and that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) would stay in Gaza.

Netanyahu on Wednesday night ruled out speculations that Israel would end the war.

Speaking to mediapersons, he said that speculations were rife in the media that Israel would end the war in Gaza but added that it was "untrue" and "Israel's plan of elimination of Hamas" and "making Gaza a place which will not be a threat to Israel would continue".

Commenting on the ongoing mediatory talks by Qatar, Egypt and the US regarding the release of Israeli hostages in Hamas's custody, Netanyahu said that the hostage deal was being worked out.

He, however, said that Israel would not go for a total stoppage of war and added, "We are



working on another outline for the release of hostages and that won't be at any cost."

It may be noted that active mediatory talks are being held at various places between Qatar, Egypt and the US for the release of Israeli hostages.

A month-long ceasefire is on the cards and according to sources in the Israel Defence Ministry, hostages will be

released in steps with the elderly, sick and women hostages to be released at first. In the second step, women IDF soldiers in captivity will be released and in the last stage, all the hostages, including male soldiers, would be released.

While Hamas is insisting on a total stoppage of war, Israel has, according to sources, categorically rejected that.

207 CAPTIVES RETURNED TO UKRAINE FROM RUSSIA: ZELENSKY

Kiev: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has said that 207 Ukrainian captives returned home from Russia.

"Our people are back. 207 of them. We return them home no matter what," Zelensky wrote on Wednesday in a post on Telegram. He thanked the Chief of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ukrainian Defence Ministry, Kyrylo Budanov, the President's Office head, Andriy Yermak, and other officials, for the efforts to free captured Ukrainians, Xinhua news agency reported. Meanwhile, Yermak said on Telegram that the released soldiers served in the Ukrainian Armed Forces, the National Guard, the State Border Guard Service and the National Police.

US addressing 'questions' lawmakers have on drone deal with India

Washington | Agencies

A US State Department Spokesperson on Wednesday did not deny or confirm a news report that the proposed sale of MQ-9B SeaGuardian drones to India was being blocked by lawmakers but did say that officials "routinely consult" with members of the foreign relations committees of the US Congress and address any "questions" that they may have before they are formally notified in the final stage of the approval process.

News site 'The Wire' reported that the sale of 31 of these armed drones to India for \$3 billion was being blocked by lawmakers to ensure India cooperated with US investigation into allegations that an Indian businessman had tried to arrange the killing of a US-based Khalistani activist at the direction of an official in India.

Although the report cited a joint statement issued by the five Indian-descent members of US Congress that threatened long-term damage to the relationship if India came up short in cooperating with the US investigation, the outrage felt on Capitol Hill, home to US



Congress, over the alleged assassination attempt was much broader.

The proposed sale of these SeaGuardian drones was among two big-ticket announcements by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Joe Biden in June. The other was the joint production of GE jet engines in India. "Congress plays -- as you know -- an important role in the US arms transfer process," Mathew Miller, the Spokesperson, said in response to a question at the State Department's daily briefing.

"We routinely consult with members of Congress with the foreign -- on the foreign affairs committees before our formal notification to -- so we can address questions that they might have, but I don't have any comment on when that formal notification might take place."

While the Spokesperson said no more, the deal may be in some jeopardy -- delays more likely than cancellation -- as lawmakers seek to convey their consternation over Indian involvement in a plot to kill a US-based Khalistani activist, as alleged in an indictment filed in a federal court in New York in June, the same month as Modi's state visit, but unsealed last November.

Yemen's Houthis claim new attack on US vessel in Gulf of Aden

Sanaa | Agencies

Yemen's Houthi group has said that they launched a missile attack on a US commercial ship in the Gulf of Aden, claiming a "direct hit".

The group added on Wednesday that they targeted the vessel KOI, a container ship that was heading to Israeli ports, "in support of the Palestinians in Gaza and response to the US-British aggression against Yemen," according to a statement released by Houthi military spokesman Yahya Sarea.

Sarea said the attack was carried out with "several suitable naval missiles that directly hit the target". He added the attack came hours after the group fired missiles at a US destroyer,



the USS Gravelly, in the Red Sea, Xinhua news agency reported.

He noted the Houthis would confront "any US-British escalation with escalation" and would not hesitate to launch more attacks in retaliation for any "foolishness" against Yemen. He also added that all US and British ships in the Red Sea and Arabian Sea were "legitimate targets" for the group as long as the US-British "aggression" continued.

There was no immediate comment from the US side on the claims.





# "Victory Of Dishonesty, Mobocracy": Team Uddhav As BJP Wins Chandigarh Mayor Poll

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Amid the controversy over the result of the Chandigarh Mayor elections, Shiv Sena's (UBT) mouthpiece 'Saamana' took a dig at the Centre and said that it is the victory of dishonesty and mobocracy, adding, "The world's largest democracy bowed its head in shame in Chandigarh."

"BJP's victory in Chandigarh Mayor elections is the victory of dishonesty and mobocracy. The world's largest democracy bowed its head in shame in Chandigarh and this murder of democracy took place on the day of Gandhi Jayanti. In the Chandigarh Mayor election, the AAP and Congress had 20 votes each, while the BJP had 16 votes. Yet the presiding officer announced that the BJP had won the mayor's seat, rejected your eight votes for it and ran away from the auditorium. This 'horror show' of democracy was portrayed and the world saw this cowardly side of BJP," Saamana said in its editorial.

The BJP's Manoj Sonkar was declared the Mayor of Chandigarh on



Tuesday after he won the mayoral polls with 16 votes against the 12 votes bagged by Congress-AAP candidate Kuldeep Tita. Eight votes were

declared invalid. "Without fraud and dishonesty, BJP cannot win an election of Mayor, the BJP has been in power at the Centre

for the last ten years and is talking about coming to power again in 2024. The terrible thing that happened in the Chandigarh Mayor elections is an example of what the 2024 elections will be like and what villainous drama can unfold in Parliament after the results. What happened in Chandigarh was straight bullying by the BJP. Those who committed such a heinous crime out of jealousy of winning an election in Chandigarh will stoop to a lower level to win the general elections of the country," it added.

Saamana further added that it was the so-called Ram devotees who kidnapped Sita in the form of democracy.

"In the Chandigarh Mayor elections, BJP has committed hooliganism in an 'underworld' manner. There was no success in breaking the parties like Congress and AAP to establish power there, hence the presiding officer declared 8 votes invalid and took away those ballot papers. This is the kidnapping of Sita in the form of democracy, which happened openly in Chandigarh," it said.



## Coast Guard celebrates 48th Raising Day with Kerala-Mumbai motorbike rally

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Indian Coast Guard celebrated the 48th Raising Day with a five-day long motorcycle rally from Vizhinjam (Kerala) to Mumbai (Maharashtra), here on Thursday, officials said.

The bike rally, which was flagged off in Kerala on Jan 28, interacted with coastal and fishing communities in four states and Union Territory of Daman en route, stressing the importance of safety at sea, clean beaches and ecology, culminating here this afternoon.

Starting in a modest way with just 7 surface platforms in 1978, today the ICG has grown into a formidable force with 152 ships, 78 aircraft, and will grow to a force level of 200 surface platforms and 100 aircraft by 2030.

Living up to its motto 'Vayam Rakshamah' (We Protect), in 48 years, it has saved over 11,554 lives and 200 lives in 2023 alone.

Keeping a 24x7 vigil to ensure security in the Maritime Zones of India, the ICG daily deploys around 50-60 ships and a dozen aircraft to keep the seas safe and secure for the progress of the blue economy.

The vast seas with overlapping jurisdiction provide avenues for anti-nationals to exploit the maritime routes by posing themselves as mariners at work in the sea.

The ICG has also strongly enforced maritime laws in the near coast and the blue

waters with seizure of weapons, contraband and narcotics worth Rs 15,343 Crores since inception with Rs 478 crore worth being seized in the year 2023 alone.

"Our collaborative actions have created an effective deterrence and created a shield at sea where the penetration by the smugglers has been made nearly impossible," said an official.

Over the years, the ICG has inducted indigenous ships, aircraft, equipment and other assets in tune with 'Make in India' and 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' missions.

Another 21 ships are under construction at three shipyards including two Pollution Control Vessels to combat maritime pollution.

The ICG has inducted 16 ALH MK-III aircraft and another 9 ALHs, 8 Dornier and 6 multi-mission surveillance aircraft are likely to join its fleet soon.

On the marine environment protection front, the ICG being the Central Coordinating Authority for Oil Spill response in Indian EEZ, has ensured that there were no major oil spill incidents in Indian waters throughout last year. The President of India, Vice President, Prime Minister and Defence Minister have greeted and congratulated the ICG on completion of 47 glorious years of yeoman service to the nation and appreciated the remarkable role played by the service in pursuit of the nation's interests in the Maritime Zones.

## TWO BOOKED FOR CHEATING NAVI MUMBAI BUSINESSMAN OF RS 4.41 CRORE

Team Absolute | Thane

The Navi Mumbai Police in Maharashtra have registered a case against two persons for allegedly cheating a 61-year-old businessman from Navi Mumbai township of Rs 4.41 crore in a deal pertaining to the optical fibre cables, an official said on Thursday.

According to the news agency, the victim, a resident of Kharghar area who operates a business of optical fibre cables, entered into a deal with the accused for taking the supply from them.



The businessman paid a total sum of Rs 4,41,64,000 into the account of the accused since January last year but the cables were not supplied, the official from CBD police station said.

Based on his complaint, the police on Wednesday registered a case against two persons from Nagpur under Indian Penal Code sections 420 (cheating), 406 (criminal breach of trust) and 34 (common intention), the official said. A probe was on into the case.



## Tiny 2 BHK Mumbai Flat Built Only In 323 Sq Ft Stuns Internet

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Needless to say, housing in Mumbai is extremely costly, and finding a decent place to rent or buy can be a real headache. Mumbai, also known as India's financial capital, tops among the most expensive cities in the country, where commercial and residential real estate markets contribute to the higher cost of living. Recently, a home tour video showing a 2BHK flat built within a mere 323 sq ft area in Mumbai's Kandivali area left the internet stunned.

In the video, a real estate influencer gives a tour of the 323 sq ft. flat available at ₹ 75 lakh in the city. She says, "If you are looking for a 2BHK but your budget is worth buying a 1BHK, then you can purchase this project which happens to be on a 23-storey building. It is a compact 2BHK, however, it is made very well."

Further in the video, she showcases the two tiny bedrooms with micro bathrooms, a living room, and a kitchen, that have been squeezed in the limited space. The master bedroom has room enough only for a sofa, while there is no space in the washroom to take a bath. The property is located in a 23-storey tower. "Only possible in Mumbai," said an X user while sharing the video.

Internet users were shocked to see the video, and many made fun of the apartment's compact size, saying how their balconies and drawing rooms are bigger than the entire apartment. Many also expressed serious concerns about Mumbai's real estate market while some mentioned that the housing situation in countries like Singapore and Hong Kong is way worse.

One user wrote, "Waste of money You will get 1000 SFT 2Bhk In Hyderabad in prime locations." Another joked, "So Spacious."

A third wrote, "One can't help but feel bad for people living in Mumbai." A fourth said, "20 feet x 16 feet = 320 square ft. That is a balcony for flats in Pune." A fourth added, "2BHK flat in a 323 sq ft area. 323 sq ft is less than even one-half of a badminton court. This is for 75 lakh. Don't miss the washrooms and try to find the bathing space in them."

A fifth added, "I had to replay the wash-room part to understand where exactly I take a bath." Yet another added, "Their definition of a master bedroom is slightly (very) different... ~300sqft is usually the actual size of a 'master bedroom' in reality. Mumbai RE is a joke." Mumbai is a major economic center in India and attracts a large number of people for work and business, leading to a high demand for housing.

## 'Chinese spy' pigeon released from Mumbai 'jail' after PETA intervention

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A pigeon held captive for eight months on alleged charges of being a 'Chinese spy', was finally released and took flight after intervention by the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India, activists said here on Thursday.

The pigeon was caught near the Pir Pau Jetty in Chembur in May 2023 by the RCF Police Station after they found a message on the bird's wings in illegible letters, suspected to be a Chinese language.

The bird had two rings of copper and aluminium attached to its legs, with the message written in Chinese-style lettering.

Suspecting the pigeon to be a 'spy' it was sent to the Bai Sakarbai Dinshaw Petit Hospital for Animals (BSDPHA) in Parel as 'case property' in the investigations.

It underwent a medical checkup and then was 'jailed' in a separate cage there.

The police probe finally revealed that it was probably a racing pigeon from Taiwan and in one such race, it strayed from the path to reach



Mumbai, where it was caught. The case was shut, but the 'reluctant spy' was forgotten and remained in the caged confines of the BSDPHA for months till they recently reminded the police, saying the pigeon was still in custody. The hospital said that the bird was

perfectly healthy, but was unnecessarily holding up a cage, and sought the RCF Police Station's permission to release it back into the skies, but did not get a proper response.

When PETA's Saloni Sakaria learnt of this strange tale, she jumped into action to secure the bird's freedom,

contacted the RCF Police Station officials and urged them to immediately grant permission for releasing the bird from its cage in BSDPHA.

After some persuasion, the police finally conceded to let go off their prized feathered 'catch' and granted a NOC to the BSDPHA to release the bird. After completing the formalities, the pigeon was finally set free to soar the skies on Wednesday, on the hospital premises by the BSDPHA Chief Medical Superintendent, Colonel (Retd) Dr BB Kulkarni, amidst claps and cheers by the small gathering of animal lovers.

"We at PETA India express our gratitude to the BSDPHA for taking care of the bird for so many months," said Sakaria. She also lauded the RCF Police Station for acceding to PETA's request promptly and granting permission to the BSDPHA that helped set the poor bird free.

The PETA has also referred to certain cases of Gujarat High Court and Delhi High Court which have upheld the fundamental rights of birds to live free in the open sky and said they should not be cages for business or any other purposes.

## FIR Filed After Over 100 Students Suffer From Food Poisoning In Thane School



Team Absolute | Thane

Police registered an FIR against four persons on Thursday, a day after more than 100 students of a private ashram school in Maharashtra's Thane district suffered from food poisoning after consuming the mid-day meal, an official said.

A total of 117 students, including 48 girls, were admitted to the Shahapur sub-district hospital after they suffered from food poisoning on Wednesday, Shahapur tehsildar Komal Thakur told media.

The Sant Gadge Maharaj Primary and Secondary Ashram School (residential school for tribal children), where the incident took place, is located at Bhatsai in Shahapur taluka on the outskirts of Mumbai.

The school houses 290 students from Classes 1 to 10 and 168 of them, who were present on Wednesday, were served the food brought from outside, Thakur said.

Students were served food (pulaos) and a sweet dish (gulab jamun) following which they experienced vomiting and other symptoms of food poisoning, the official said.

They were immediately rushed to the hospital, she said. The food was brought from outside on the occasion of the first death anniversary of a villager from Bhatsai, she added.

A case was registered against the school superintendent, headmistress of the primary school, headmaster of the secondary school and a person who brought the food from outside, an official from the district rural police control room said.

They have been booked under Indian Penal Code sections 284 (handling poisonous substance in a reckless or negligent manner, endangering human life), 336 (doing any act which endangers human life or personal safety of others), 337 (causing hurt to any person by committing an act, rashly or negligently, endangering human life or safety of others) and 34 (common intention), the police said.

Thakur said out of the 117 students admitted to the hospital, seven girls were still undergoing treatment while the others were discharged.

Samples of food items served to the children were collected and sent for laboratory examination, she said.

Senior officials visited the hospital and enquired about the condition of the students. Families and relatives of the affected pupils also gathered outside the medical facility, prompting the deployment of police to maintain order.



## Anganwadis across Maharashtra reopen

Team Absolute | Mumbai

After nearly a two-month closure due to a strike, lakhs of anganwadis across the state reopened on Republic Day for flag hoisting, with workers resuming their daily tasks on Monday (January 29).

However, it is unclear whether or not the termination notices served to some of the workers on strike would be withdrawn.

Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Commissioner Rubal Agarwal did not wish to comment on the same.

Thousands of Anganwadi workers across the state had taken Azad Maidan by storm earlier this month, demanding fair treatment for the essential services they provide. Although their primary demand for a rise in honorarium is still pending, the strike brought about guarantees for pension, gratuity, and new smartphones for the workers.

"Parents in the area are relieved that the centres have reopened. I have not received a phone yet but even the announcement is a relief. We are hoping our pay will also increase with time," said Savita Chavan, an anganwadi worker in Ghatkopar who caters to 30 children in her area.

The Anganwadi workers require smartphones to enter daily data on the health of children and pregnant women into the Union government's 'Poshan Tracker' (nutrition tracker) app.

Without this, their day's honorarium is not sanctioned. At the moment, the workers are paid Rs10,000, and the helpers are paid Rs5,500 per month.

## IIT BOMBAY CANCELS LECTURE ON 'CRISIS IN INDIAN EDUCATION'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay has cancelled a scheduled lecture by scholar Ganesh Devy, a prominent cultural activist and former professor of English at Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda.

The lecture, titled 'The crisis within: On Knowledge and Education in India,' was part of the 'Institute Lecture' series and was initially planned for January 31.

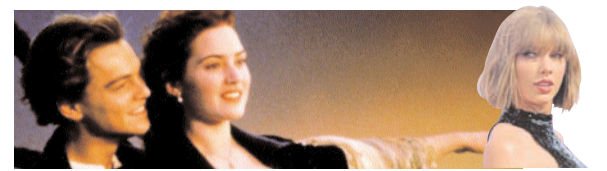
While students and faculty were informed a month in advance about the lecture, the cancellation notice was issued on January 30, citing "unforeseen circumstances." The decision, made by the committee overseeing lectures at IIT Bombay, has sparked concerns among stu-



dents about the institute's practice of calling off lectures. A disappointed student said that they were excited to hear Professor Devy, an intellectual who shares insights on history and present society. A news report quoted Professor Devy expressing his disappointment, "I have

never been previously associated with IIT Bombay. A day before I was leaving, the same person who invited me informed about the cancellation. I did not inquire about the reason as it is not my basic right. Such last-minute cancellations do leave a bitter taste."





## Priyanka Chopra, Nick Jonas forced to move out of \$20M mansion over health concerns

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas and her husband Nick Jonas, who recently performed at the Lollapalooza India music festival, have moved out of their lavish California mansion. Their dream home turned into a nightmare when water damage led to a mould infestation in their home, sparking a legal battle that is still ongoing, reports Page Six. The couple purchased the luxury property — which boasts seven bedrooms, nine bathrooms, a chef's kitchen, temperature-controlled wine room, an indoor basketball court, interior bowling alley, a home theatre, an entertainment lounge, a spa with steam shower, a full service gym and a billiards room — in September 2019 for \$20 million.

However, as per a copy of a lawsuit filed in May 2023 and exclusively obtained by Page Six, the pool and spa began to present a series of issues for the then-newlyweds around April 2020, including "porous waterproofing" that "fostered mould contamination and related issues".

"At or about the same time, a water leak appeared at the barbecue area on the deck. This leak damaged a portion of the interior living area immediately below the deck," the complaint states.

As per Page Six, the home's problems allegedly made the premises "virtually unlivable" and "dangerous from a health perspective to occupy."

This has resulted in substantial and significant damage along with a failure of consideration which requires that the purchase and sale be rescinded," the lawsuit also states, further noting that Jonas and Chopra are seeking via their trustee "consequential damages".

"In the alternative, the plaintiff should be reimbursed for all costs of repair, plus compensation for the loss of use and other damages caused by defendants' conduct," their attorneys further argue.

The exact costs have not yet been determined but, as per the complaint, the waterproofing issues "will exceed" \$1.5 million and "general damages" are estimated to be at around \$2.5 million.



## Austin Butler reveals his secret childhood crush

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor Austin Butler, who essayed the role of Elvis Presley in the film 'Elvis', has revealed his first crush. The actor said that his first crush was Danielle Fishel's character Topanga Lawrence, reports Female First UK.

Speaking on "The Drew Barrymore Show", he said: "I think like Topanga on that show, 'Boy Meets World'."

The 32-year-old actor was joined on the couch by his 'Masters of the Air' co-star Callum Turner, 33 - who is dating pop star Dua Lipa, 28 - and they both said the way to a woman's heart is penning love letters.

Austin said: "I think writing love letters, little notes."

Callum agreed: "I was going to say love letters as well. I think writing to each other is a beautiful thing."

As per Female First UK, Callum Turner also revealed that his childhood crush was Jessica Rabbit. Austin, who previously dated model Kaia Gerber, also revealed his romantic secret talent.

He said: "I can make a rose out of a paper napkin."

Meanwhile, Austin recently revealed Tom Hanks recruited him for 'Masters of the Air' while they were working on 'Elvis' together. The former Disney star played Elvis Presley in Baz Luhrmann's 2023 blockbuster opposite Hanks as the singer's manager Colonel Tom Parker, and Austin has revealed his co-star found him his next job in the Apple TV Plus war drama before they'd even wrapped filming.



'Not sad', says Margot Robbie as she breaks her silence over Oscars snub

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Margot Robbie is "not sad" about her lack of Oscar nomination for 'Barbie'. The 33-year-old actress starred as the iconic Mattel doll alongside Ryan Gosling as her boyfriend Ken in Greta Gerwig's summer blockbuster. While her co-star received a nod for Best Supporting Actor and the movie is up for Best Picture at the upcoming Academy Awards, both she and the film's director missed out

on a nomination, reports Female First UK. But Margot admitted that she feels so "blessed" in the first place, although she believes that moviemaker Greta, 40, should have been nominated.

Speaking as part of a panel at a SAG screening of 'Barbie', she said: "There's no way to feel sad when you know you're this blessed. Obviously I think Greta should be nominated as a director, because what she did is a once-in-a-career, once-in-a-lifetime thing, what she pulled off, it really is. But it's been an incredible year for all the films."

As per Female First UK, upon its release in July 2023, 'Barbie' pulled in almost \$1.5 billion at the box office whilst its competitor 'Oppenheimer' - which leads the way with a total of 13 nominations - made just over \$950 million.

Margot speculated that the reaction 'Barbie' has simply become "bigger" than the industry itself. She said: "I just suspect it's bigger than us. It's bigger than this movie, it's bigger than our industry."

As well as Best Picture and Best Supporting Actor, 'Barbie' is up for Best Supporting Actress for America Ferrera, costume design, production design, and adapted screenplay whilst 'I'm Just Ken' and Billie Eilish track 'What Was I Made For?' are up for Best Original Song.

Margot added: "Everyone getting the nods that they've had is just incredible, and the best picture nod. We set out to do something that would shift culture, affect culture, just make some sort of impact. And it's already done that and some, way more than we ever dreamed it would. And that is truly the biggest reward that could come out of all of this."

## Tracy Chapman to perform 'Fast Car' with Luke Combs at Grammy Awards

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer-songwriter Tracy Chapman, who has not performed in public in years, will return into the spotlight to perform a duet of 'Fast Car' with Luke Combs at the Grammys on Sunday night. Luke Combs, who had a massive hit with his cover version of 'Fast Car' last year, was already announced as a performer on the show, reports Variety. Chapman's appearance

comes as a significant surprise, as she has only performed for the cameras three times since wrapping up her last tour in 2009, and the singer had thus far resisted the popular demand to take advantage of the resurgence of 'Fast Car' as an international phenomenon.

As per Variety, Luke's version of 'Fast Car' was a multi-format crossover hit for the country superstar, topping Billboard's Radio Songs chart for four weeks, making it to Number 1 on the adult pop and country formats for two weeks each, and topping out at an impressive Number 6 at Top 40 radio and Number 2 on the Hot 100.

Chapman's original version came out in 1988 and peaked at Number 6 on the Hot 100, not really a reflection of how massive it was across demographics at the time. It reached the top 5 in the U.K. twice, once in 1988 and then again 23 years later in 2011. Chapman issued a statement of support for Combs' version but otherwise has stayed out of the public eye since her song became dominant again last year.

The country star's camp got permission from Chapman's to release the tune as a single, even though legally they could have put it out without her blessing. Combs, for his part, said last year that he had not had any conversations with Chapman about the tune, but added that getting her approval was enough.

Along with royalties, Chapman has subsequently received accolades like a song of the year award from the Country Music Association.



## ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



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## Trevor Noah got a 'random call' from Jennifer Lopez to appear in her new movie

Los Angeles | Agencies

Comedian Trevor Noah has revealed that he received a call from singer-actress Jennifer Lopez to appear in her upcoming streaming musical film 'This Is Me...Now: A Love Story'. However, upon learning about the opportunity, he couldn't believe it was real, reports People magazine.

"That was a random call where your phone rings, and it's Jennifer Lopez, and you're like, 'This must be a prank,'" Noah, 39, told 'People'. "And she wants you to come and do a cameo in her visual experience, and you're like, 'Whoa. I mean, I don't know what I'm doing, but OK, I'll join in!'"

Earlier this month, Lopez, 54, unveiled the trailer for her Prime Video movie 'This Is Me...Now: A Love Story', which arrives in tandem with her new album on February 16.

As per People, the preview featured the 'Hustlers' star on a journey through both dreamscapes and challenges grounded in reality in order to find love. In the film, the 'Jenny from the Block' singer will be joined by her husband Ben Affleck — who was famously the inspiration for her 2002 album 'This Is Me... Then' as well as celebrities including Noah, Fat Joe, Kim Petras, Post Malone, Keke Palmer, Sofia Vergara, Jenifer Lewis, Jay Shetty, Neil deGrasse Tyson, Sadhguru and Derek Hough.

"There's just a fun collection of people who've come together to celebrate an icon and somebody who has, across different genres, really just blazed her own trail," said Noah. "It was a lot of fun."

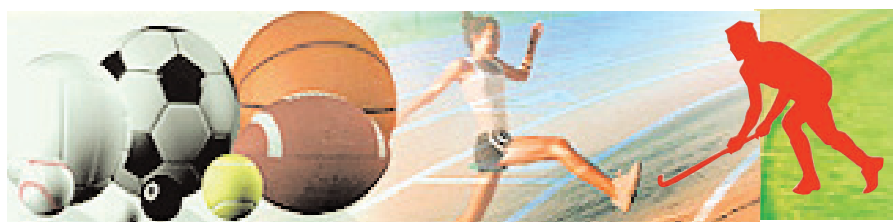
Despite taking part in the project, however, the Daily Show alum still isn't exactly sure of what



fans can expect from This Is Me...Now: A Love Story. "I'm really excited to see what it is. The funny thing is I don't know too much about it because they were very secretive about how they did it," he said. "I only know about my parts of what it is, but I don't know about all of it. I too am waiting to see what it's going to be."







## LIONEL MESSI TEAMS UP WITH 'TED LASSO' STAR JASON SUDEKIS FOR SUPER BOWL AD

Los Angeles | Agencies

Soccer great Lionel Messi will show off fancy footwork in Michelob beer's latest Big Game commercial, which is slated to run during the CBS broadcast of Super Bowl LVIII on February 11, reports 'Variety'.

Messi is joined in the spot by 'Ted Lasso' actor and producer Jason Sudekis as well as NFL Hall of Famer Dan Marino. The action takes place on a beach with plenty of moves from Messi as he waits for his next glass of Michelob Ultra, adds 'Variety'.

The three personalities got together for the first time on the set of the commercial, says Marques, but hit it off relatively quickly, says Ricardo Marques, Michelob Ultra's vice-president of marketing.

Last year, according to 'Variety', the Anheuser-Busch InBev beer teamed up with Netflix to highlight 'Full Swing', a documentary series that follows a group of golfers across an entire PGA Tour season. In 2024, the emphasis is on football, of course, but not necessarily the American kind. Soccer is "approaching, I believe,



what is a golden era in the US," says Marques. "There is a bigger play for us as a brand in the space of soccer

and we could not make that happen without having the GOAT himself be a part of that story." He also sees the

Super Bowl ad serving as "a great kickoff" to a year that will include the Paris Olympics.

## Hitaashee takes a three-shot lead over Ananya in third leg of WPGT

Kolkata | Agencies

Hitaashee Bakshi fired four birdies in a five-hole stretch in the middle of the round to grab a handy three-shot lead over Ananya Garg after the second round of the third leg of the 2024 Women's Pro Golf Tour at the Tollygunge Club.

Hitaashee, starting in the final group, had a bogey-bogey start, but then a series of birdies saw her roar into contention. She dropped a shot on the Par-4 12th but got that back with her fifth birdie of the day on the Par-4 15th. Her round of 68 put her at 1-under 139 and three clear of Ananya (68).

Ananya, looking for her maiden win on the WPGT made up for her opening round of 74 as she had four birdies against two bogeys. Ananya is now 2-over for 36 holes at 142.

Seher Atwal (71-71) tied second (T2), could have been better but for a bogey finish. She also had a double bogey on Par-4 12th. She had three



birdies during the day.

Three players, Ridhima Dilawari (69), amateur Anaahat Bindra (71) and Gauri Karhade (73) were in a tie for fifth place at 4-over 144, while Amandeep Drall, who actually went into the lead after a birdie on the second hole, slipped later.

Amandeep, playing in the lead group, birdied the second, while her playing partners, Hitaashee and Khushi started bogey-bogey.

Amandeep suffered three bogeys in a row from third to fifth and then had two more bogeys and a double bogey

against just one birdie for a round of 76 that saw her drop down to eighth.

Karishma Govind (75) and Khushi Khanijau (80) were tied for ninth place, while Sneha Singh (72), winner of the last event, was Tied-11th with Kriti Chowhan (72).

Overnight leader Khushi Khanijau had a rough day with a round of 80 that included a finish with two double bogeys on the last two holes as she slipped to tied ninth at 149.

The cut fell at 157 and 20 players made it to the final round.

## India's Ankita, Rutuja, Sahaja get wild cards for Mumbai Open Tennis Championships



Team Absolute | Mumbai

To provide level playing opportunities and world-class competition to top Indian players Ankita Raina, Sahaja Yamalalpalli and Rutuja Bhosale and promising teenager Vaishnavi Adkar of Maharashtra, have been awarded the singles main draw wild cards for the Mumbai Open WTA 125K Series Tennis Championships, starting here on February 5.

Speaking to reporters on Thursday, the Organising Committee members, Sanjay Khandare and Pravin Darade stated, "We are happy to get this world-class event back to India to provide world-class

competition to our players. We also thank our Sponsors, L&T, for coming forward and supporting women's tennis in the country. I'm sure that having such a major event at the beginning of the year will help our players to improve their ranking and participate in higher-level events globally." "Our players do not get to play such high-level events due to various reasons and that is why we decided to organise this event here so at least 8 to 10 Indians can get a chance to gain valuable WTA points and thereby improve their world rankings," added Khandare and Darade.

The event is being organised by the Maharashtra State Lawn Tennis Association (MSLTA) and the Cricket

Club of India (CCI).

Prashant Sutar, Chairman of MSLTA, thanked the Maharashtra Government for their continued support. "We are thankful to the Government of Maharashtra for their support to tennis, with their backing we have been able to organise ATP tour events, Davis Cup ties, ATP Challengers and the WTA 125 Series events," he said.

He further added, "With the government support, we are launching the Lakshyavedh project for Maharashtra players. Under this initiative, we have joined hands with JC Ferrero Academy to start a world-class tennis academy in Pune.

## Hockey India name 24-man squad for FIH Pro League 2023-24

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Hockey India on Thursday announced the 24-member men's squad that will participate in the Bhubaneswar and Rourkela legs of the FIH Pro League 2023-24.

The Bhubaneswar leg will begin on February 10 and end on February 16 while the Rourkela leg will commence on February 19 and conclude on February 25.

India will play against Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain, and Australia twice each across both legs, beginning their campaign against Spain on February 10.

Taking charge of the team will be the seasoned duo of captain Harmanpreet Singh, known for his drag-flicking prowess, and vice-captain Hardik Singh, an accomplished midfielder. Speaking on the team selection, chief coach Craig Fulton said: "We've carefully selected a well-balanced squad, blending seasoned expertise with the vigour of youth. Our goal is to forge a cohesive unit capable of competing at the highest level.

"The FIH Pro League serves as an ideal platform to refine our strategies and measure our skills against top-tier opponents. The league's significance is paramount, with champions earning a coveted spot in the FIH

**SQUAD ANNOUNCEMENT**  
FIH PRO League 2023-24  
Bhubaneswar (10th to 16th February)  
Rourkela (19th to 25th February)

<b>GOALKEEPER</b> Sreejesh PR Krishan Bahadur Pathak	<b>MIDFIELDERS</b> Vivek Sagar Prasad Nilakanta Sharma Manpreet Singh Shamsher Singh Hardik Singh (VC) Rajkumar Pal Rabichandra Singh Moirangthem
<b>DEFENDERS</b> Harmanpreet Singh (C) Jarnmanpreet Singh Varun Kumar Amit Rohidas Sumit Sanjay Jugraj Singh Vishnukant Singh	<b>FORWARDS</b> Mandeep Singh Abhishek Sukhjeet Singh Lalit Kumar Upadhyay Gurjant Singh Akashdeep Singh Arajeet Singh Hundal

Hockey World Cup 2026.

"Additionally, it offers a valuable opportunity to pinpoint areas for enhancement, playing a pivotal role in our preparations for the Paris Olympics. We hold the belief that this exposure will elevate our performance and equip us to confront the impending challenges with con-

fidence." Indian Men's Hockey

Team:  
Goalkeepers: Sreejesh Parattu Raveendran, Krishan Bahadur Pathak

Defenders: Harmanpreet Singh, Amit Rohidas, Jarnmanpreet Singh, Varun Kumar, Sumit, Sanjay, Jugraj Singh, Vishnukant Singh

Midfielders: Hardik Singh, Manpreet Singh, Vivek Sagar Prasad, Shamsher Singh, Rajkumar Pal, Nilakanta Sharma, Rabichandra Moirangthem Forwards: Lalit Kumar Upadhyay, Mandeep Singh, Gurjant Singh, Sukhjeet Singh, Abhishek, Akashdeep Singh, Arajeet Singh Hundal

## IND v ENG: Ravindra Jadeja likely to miss Rajkot Test: Report

New Delhi | Agencies

India all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja, who was ruled out of the second Test against England due to a hamstring injury, might miss the third Test scheduled to be played at Rajkot from February 15, as per reports.

Jadeja's hamstring injury appears to be more severe than initially anticipated, possibly sidelining him for an extended period, according to a report on Cricbuzz.

Speculation suggests it would be remarkable if he manages to return for the fourth Test in Ranchi, with the third Test in Rajkot also likely to be beyond his reach. The BCCI's recent release only confirms his absence for the second Test.

India, who are currently trailing 0-1 in the five-match series, might also miss the services of key players such as Virat Kohli, K.L. Rahul, Ravindra Jadeja, and Mohammed Shami.

Shami, grappling with an ankle issue, is currently in London, undergoing treatments and injections. His participation in any match of the ongoing five-match Test series seems unlikely, raising questions about his readiness for the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL) scheduled for March to May.

The silence surrounding Virat Kohli's absence leaves uncertainty over his availability for the remaining matches. While the BCCI initially stated his withdrawal was limited to the first two Tests, Kohli's current absence from the country adds a layer of mystery to the situation.

In contrast, K.L. Rahul's situation appears less alarming. Complaints of right quadriceps pain, related to a thigh surgery in 2022,



prompted precautionary measures. Rahul is currently at the National Cricket Academy (NCA), and indications suggest he could

recover in time for the third Test, given the substantial gap between the second and third Tests.

## Prithvi Shaw to make Ranji Trophy return after injury layoff; included in Mumbai's squad

Kolkata | Agencies

India batter Prithvi Shaw set to make a return to competitive cricket after a six-month hiatus due to a knee injury as he has been included in Mumbai's squad for the fifth round of the 2023-24 Ranji Trophy against Bengal here at Eden Gardens.

The decision to include Shaw in Mumbai's squad came after a clearance from the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru, following a fitness test in which he was deemed fit for competitive cricket.

"Prithvi Shaw is progressing well in his batting and fielding drills. He will undergo higher volumes of acceleration, change of direction, and agility drills over the next 3 weeks to develop the required robustness for his injured knee ligament before making a return to sports," The NCA had informed the Mumbai Cricket Association, as quoted by Cricbuzz.

The 24-year-old, who sustained the injury during a county stint with Northamptonshire in August, underwent surgery in London, followed by three-month rehabilitation process at NCA.

Shaw's injury came at a time when he was in peak



form, leading the run charts in England's domestic one-day competition with 429 runs, including a record-breaking 244 off 153 balls

against Somerset.

Mumbai, the 41-time Ranji champions, currently leads Group B with three wins in four matches.



## Ajay Devgn strategically invests in UK-based global T20 cricket tournament

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood actor Ajay Devgn, who is currently busy with his action film 'Singham Again', has strategically invested in the cricket World Championship Of Legends.

Iconic cricketers like Yuvraj Singh, Brett Lee, Kevin Petersen, Suresh Raina and Shahid Afridi will be a part of World Championship Of Legends which is set to be held at the Edgbaston Stadium, Birmingham in the UK. The star-studded event guarantees a nostalgic reunion of cricketing legends, injecting brilliance and experience into this global T20 spectacle.

Expressing his passion for the sport, Ajay Devgn said: "As a cricket lover,



witnessing celebrated cricket legends back in action is a dream come true.

The tournament not only brings forth cricketing nostalgia but also marks a unique collaboration between cinema and cricket, offering an extraordinary gift for fans worldwide."

Harshit Tomar, the visionary founder of the World Championship Of Legends, said: "We are thrilled to welcome Indian Legend Mr. Ajay Devgn on board.

His passion for the game and commitment to promoting cricket align perfectly with the values of WCL. With an anticipated list of renowned players, we are confident that WCL 2024 will be an unparalleled success."

## Divyah Khosla Kumar starts shooting for 'Hero Heeroine' in Hyderabad

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Divyah Khosla Kumar has started shooting for the first schedule of her upcoming film titled 'Hero Heeroine' in Hyderabad. On Thursday, the makers of the film shared the second poster of the film as well.

While Divyah's first look offered a chic and classy diva like vibe, the second poster is a strong reminiscent of the era of Meena Kumari and Vyjayanthimala with sheer elegance. Directed by Suresh Krishna, the film explores the unscripted journey of on-screen romance turning into real-life love.

Divyah Khosla Kumar said, "It's the most promising role I am playing so far and I can't express how happy and thrilled I am to see so much love coming my way already with first look coming out. Stepping into the world of 'Hero Heeroine' is an experience that will be engraved in me forever. The script is a captivating blend of glamour and substance, and I am

thrilled to be part of a project that promises to be a visual and emotional spectacle."

She further mentioned, "The second poster offers a sneak peek into the dual worlds of Priyadarshini and I am excited how this film holds many aspects that will blow your mind, can't wait for audiences to join us on this cinematic journey". Producer Prema Arora said, "Thrilled with the response so far, it's a film very close to my heart. It unravels a tapestry of emotions, where love takes unexpected turns. The posters give a sneak peek into what to expect from this cinematic journey, I promise the story will keep you on the edge of your seats".

She added, "This film is a celebration of modern love, and we can't wait to share the magic we've created. I hope this film will be accepted in the same way that my past films have, its the constant love and support from my fans that keeps me going and want to offer you the best, can't wait to share more soon".



## Sushmita Sen:

### 'I feel Aarya's pain as it's my own'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Sushmita Sen, who is gearing up for 'Aarya Antim Vaar', has said that the pain of her titular character of Aarya Sareen feels very personal to her. The International Emmy nominated series follows the journey of its titular character, who is an independent woman putting all her might to protect her family. She joins a mafia gang in order to get revenge for her husband's murder.

Elaborating on the same, Sushmita Sen said:

"Just like I always say, playing Aarya for three seasons makes me feel her pain as if it's my own. When we filmed the scenes where all her kids - Veer and Aaru turn against her, it broke my heart. There is a point in the series where she feels totally alone against the odds, even felt short of a family." She further mentioned: "I think that truly got to me and felt gratitude towards my own family and felt inspired by how Aarya handled it so well. She is like one of us, working hard every day to protect her family. I was really emotional, and it felt like every part of me was sharing Aarya Sareen's feelings, but again she fought through them and you'll know the how and why in Aarya Antim Vaar."



## Vintage memorabilia, lobby cards, song booklets from Dev Anand films to be auctioned online

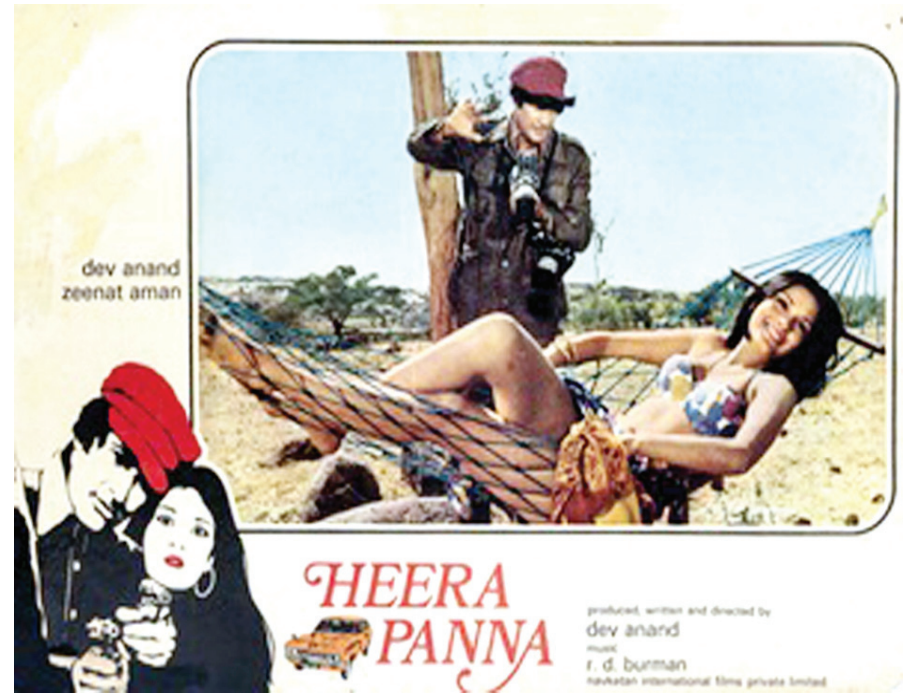
Team Absolute | Mumbai

Rare and vintage memorabilia from the films of legendary actor late Dev Anand are set to be auctioned online.

The memorabilia includes film publicity art from the classics such as 'Baazi', 'Kala Bazaar', 'C.I.D.', 'Kala Pani', 'Guide', 'Tere Ghar Ke Samne', 'Hare Rama Hare Krishna', 'Johnny Mera Naam' and 'Heera Panna'.

It also includes rare and vintage photographic stills, posters, showcards, lobby cards, song booklets from his lesser known films such as 'Aaram', 'Milap', 'Maya', 'Manzil', 'Kahin Aur Chal', 'Baarish', 'Baat Ek Raat Ki', 'Sarhad' and 'Kinare Kinare'.

The highlights include a rare set of sixteen 'Kala Bazaar' and 'Johnny Mera Naam' lobby cards, 8 first release publicity black and white photographic stills from 'Guide', 15 coloured photographic stills from 'Hare Rama Hare Krishna', rare and beautifully designed posters of 'Munimji', 'Milap',



'Sarhad', 'Maya', 'Manzil', 'Kinare Kinare', 'Guide', 'Gambler', 'Darling Darling', and the unique Indian collaged handmade showcards from 'Kala Pani' and 'Amir Gharib'.

Senior Spokesperson for deRivaz & Ives Film Department - SMM Ausaja, said: "The small famous black and white silver gelatin photograph from 'Baazi', the 'Guide' photographic publi-

ty stills created for the international launch, the publicity and song booklets for Sarhad, the full set of 'Kala Bazaar' Lobby Cards are some of the standout rare items of memorabilia in this auction."

## Kartik Aaryan tastes sugar after a year

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood star Kartik Aaryan, who was last seen in the film 'Satyaprem Ki Katha', finally got to taste the sugar after a year as he wrapped up the shooting of his upcoming film 'Chandu Champion'.

The actor took to his Instagram recently, and shared a video from the wrap up of the film. The video shows director Kabir Khan feeding Kartik a Rasmalai to mark the end of the journey on a sweet note. For 'Chandu Champion', the actor underwent a physical transformation to star in the real-life story of a sportsman.

Kartik, who seemed surprised by the gesture at first, proceeded to eat the sweet and give his director a hug. The rest of the crew was seen cheering and smiling at the sweet moment, one person even spoke about Kartik getting a sugar rush since he consumed sugar after a year. The actor penned a note in the caption: "This RasMalai Tasted Like Victory! Finally eating sugar after a year!! After more than a year of intense preparation and 8 months of day-n-night shoots across the globe, today we complete the shooting journey of #ChanduChampion. And it couldn't have been sweeter



than my fav, Rasmalai - from the Man himself who carved this challenging path for

me... you have been a profound inspiration Sir! @kabirkhankk"



## Varun Sood opens up on intimate scenes with actress Namrata Sheth

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Varun Sood, who essays the role of Ahaan Kothari in the streaming show 'Karma Calling', has opened up on the intimate scenes with his co-actor Namrata Sheth on the show.

Shooting intimate scenes can be a little tricky at times and needs a delicate balance to bring out the scene aesthetically and ensure comfort of the actors. The two actors found their comfort as they developed good understanding between each other and the show director Ruchi Narain.

Talking about the same, Varun Sood said, "There was actually no preparation that we

took for shooting the intimate scenes because I think there was a very nice understanding between Ruchi, Namrata and I. And obviously people who watch it think that Oh my god, how was this shot and all. But actually it is pretty technical and professional. You decide the whole thing, you catch the light you are listening to the director while it is happening".

He further mentioned, "You have to just build that rapport with your co-actor, build that comfort and be like okay, let's get this done, it's another scene because we have more things to shoot after this. So there was actually no nerves or fear when shooting that scene. Everything was very comfortable and everything was natural".

## INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Inayat Sharma