

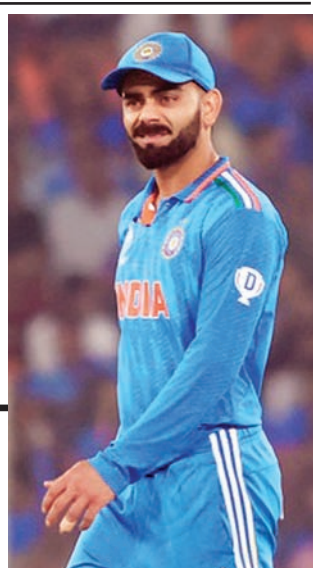
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11 BURNT ALIVE, SEVERAL INJURED IN FIRE IN MP'S CRACKERS FACTORY

Rahul promises modified GST if Oppn bloc comes to power

- ▶ ACCORDING TO PEOPLE, HARDA FACTORY OWNER RAJEEV AGRAWAL IS POWERFUL BUSINESSMAN.
- ▶ HE HAS A GOOD HOLD ON THE ADMINISTRATION; HENCE NO ACTION IS TAKEN AGAINST HIM. HE RUNS THE FACTORY ARBITRARILY.
- ▶ CONGRESS ALLEGES THAT BOTH THE FACTORIES WERE RUNNING WITHOUT PERMISSION.
- ▶ THREE PEOPLE HAD LOST THEIR LIVES IN AN ACCIDENT THAT TOOK PLACE IN THE FACTORY TWO YEARS AGO.
- ▶ PEOPLE HAD COMPLAINED TO THE COLLECTOR MANY TIMES, BUT THE COMPLAINTS WERE IGNORED.



persons were rushed to different hospitals. At present, the state government was unclear about the exact number of casualties in the incident.

However, reports suggested that several persons burnt alive and bodies were spotted on road outside the factory. The fire broke out at 11:30 a.m. on Tuesday, and effort to douse the blaze was still going on at the time of going for print. Chief Minister Mohan Yadav chaired an emergency meeting with senior officials and has passed necessary instructions regarding this. Minister Uday Pratap Singh along with some senior officials has been sent to Harda, CMO said in an official communication.

State Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav wrote on Twitter regarding this accident, "Received very sad news of fire in firecracker factory in Harda. Minister Uday Pratap Singh and senior officials are reaching the incident site. He has asked the Medical Colleges in Bhopal and Indore and the Burn Unit in AIIMS Bhopal to make necessary preparations to provide better treatment to those burnt and injured in this accident. Besides, fire brigades are also being sent from Indore and Bhopal.

After the explosion of firecrackers in the factory and the fire taking a huge form, many nearby houses have also come under the grip of this fire. Not only this, the bricks and stones thrown from the houses in the area around the factory also hit the people passing through the streets. Many people were also seen unconscious on the road. Relief and rescue work is going on at the accident site. More than a dozen JCBs are engaged in removing the debris, while fire brigade vehicles are deployed to control the burning fire and rising smoke at various places.

Former state government minister Kamal Patel has also described this accident as tragic. He says that this factory was banned and

blacklisted. How things were going after that will be known only after investigation.

Local people say that several explosions were heard one after the other and a cloud of fire became visible. Along with this, the houses around the firecracker factory were also affected. These explosions were so strong that the surrounding area also shook.

HARDA FIRECRACKER FACTORY OWNER ARRESTED IN RAJGARH

Bhopal: Rajeev Agrawal, who is the owner of the Harda firecrackers factory has been arrested in Rajgarh. Due to his negligence, there was an explosion in the factory and a dozen people lost their lives. Due to his negligence, hundreds of people suffered lifelong pain. The officers remained kind to him and he continued running the factory without permission.

So far 11 people have died in the blast in the firecracker factory of Harda. Many people are injured. The negligence of the administration has come to light in the Harda Blast. His empire is spread over two and a half acres. Hundreds of people lived around two and a half acres of land.

PETLAWAD BLAST HAPPENED 9 YEARS AGO, 79 PEOPLE LOST THEIR LIVES

Bhopal: Illegal storage was done in the houses around the factory. Rajeev Aggarwal's factory has been running for about 20 years. It is being told that the factory owner had illegally stored gunpowder in nearby houses. SDM told that the factory was not fit and hence the accident happened. The investigation is on.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Congress MP Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday announced a new financial model for the small and medium businesses and industries with special focus on backward classes, Dalits, Adivasis and the poor, who will benefit by it.

He also said if the Opposition alliance government comes to power, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) will be modified.

Addressing a press conference on the 24th day of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Jharkhand's Gumla, Rahul Gandhi claimed that the INDIA bloc is intact, adding that seat-sharing formulas are being discussed and will be resolved soon. Replying to a question on removing the 50 per cent cap on reservation, the former Congress President said that it was an artificial and unfair cap. He maintained that while pro-

tecting reservation rights of the Dalits and Adivasis, the 50 per cent cap will be removed.

Rahul Gandhi also said that caste census would be conducted in the country to find out the exact status of various castes.

He informed mediapersons that Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, who participated in the Yatra recently, had told him that it will soon be started in his state. Meanwhile, the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra entered Odisha on its 24th day on Tuesday. The national flag was handed over at a ceremony.

The Yatra completed its first phase in Jharkhand and will return to the state on February 14 for the second phase. "Today, the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra bid goodbye to Phase 1 of its Jharkhand leg," party General Secretary in-charge of communications, Jairam Ramesh, said.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The death toll has risen to eleven and 167 are injured in a massive fire that broke out following multiple explosions at an illegal firecracker factory in Madhya Pradesh's Harda district. Many injured have been taken to various hospitals.

Police along with locals rescued several persons living nearby the factory. As per the information, at least 100 homes located near the factory have been vacated to ensure the safety of people.

The incident occurred at the firecrackers factory located in Bairagarh village in Harda district, around 150 km from Bhopal. A green corridor has been set up to rush the injured persons to AIIMS and Hamidiya hospital in

Bhopal.

Treatment of 142 injured is going on in Harda District Hospital, 25 in AIIMS of Bhopal and Narmadapuram Hospital. Relief and rescue operations are underway. Fire brigade vehicles have been called from the surrounding area to control the fire.

Similarly, a green corridor was also made from Harda to Indore and several injured

Centre launches 'Bharat' rice at Rs 29 per kg

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Union Minister for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Piyush Goyal, on Tuesday launched the sale of rice under the 'Bharat' brand at an MRP of Rs 29/kg in 5 kg and 10 kg packs.

The minister flagged off 100 mobile vans through which the rice will be made available to a wider segment of consumers in the national capital.

The affordable rice will now be available at physical and mobile outlets of Kendriya Bhandar, National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED), and National Cooperative Consumers' Federation of India (NCCF). 'Bharat' rice will be available at all physical and



mobile outlets of Kendriya Bhandar, National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED), and National Cooperative Consumers' Federation of India (NCCF) from Tuesday and will be

expanded to other retail outlets and e-commerce platforms soon, the minister said. 'Bharat' brand rice will be sold in family-friendly 5 kg and 10 kg bags at a maximum retail price (MRP) of Rs 29/kg.

IRAN WAIVES VISA REQUIREMENT FOR INDIAN TOURISTS

New Delhi: Indian tourists do not need a visa for visiting Iran with a new policy coming into effect from February 4, according to a statement issued by the Embassy of Iran here on Tuesday. It is important to note that the 15-day period cannot be extended, the statement clarified.

The visa-free entry applies only to individuals entering Iran for tourism purposes. Indians who visit Iran for business or educational purposes would have to apply for visa under the respective categories. Those who want to visit Iran more than once within the six-month time span will have to obtain a visa. The statement also made it clear that the visa-free entry would be applicable only to those Indian tourists who arrive in Iran by air. Those coming to Iran via the land route through Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan or any neighbouring nation would not be allowed to enter without a prior visa. Iran now joins the list of countries like Thailand, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Vietnam, which have recently waived visa requirements for Indian visitors.

EC recognises Ajit Pawar's side as real NCP, allots 'clock' symbol

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Election Commission on Tuesday accorded recognition to the Ajit Pawar faction as the "real" Nationalist Congress Party and allotted it the party's "clock" symbol.

The decision is seen as major blow to veteran leader Sharad Pawar and his supporters.

However there is a little relief for Sharad Pawar faction as the poll panel has given it an option to name his faction in view of imminent Rajya Sabha elections. It can furnish three



choices for the name till 3 p.m. on Wednesday, an official added.

According to the sources at EC, the test of legislative majority helped Ajit Pawar led group to win the fight for the NCP's name and symbol. This decision came almost after 10 hearings which lasted for over

6 months. The NCP split in July last year, with a faction led by Ajit Pawar rebelling against his uncle and NCP founder Sharad Pawar to join the ruling BJP-Shiv Sena government in Maharashtra. After that, both sides laid claims to the party name and symbol.

MURDER OF DEMOCRACY: SHARAD PAWAR CAMP

Mumbai: The Sharad Pawar camp on Tuesday described as the "murder of democracy" the Election Commission's decision to declare the Ajit Pawar faction as the real Nationalist Congress Party which it claimed was taken under pressure, whereas ex-Union minister Praful Patel welcomed the ruling.

The Commission also allotted the NCP symbol 'wall clock' to the group led by Ajit Pawar. "This is the murder of democracy. What happened is unfortunate," former Maharashtra minister Anil Deshmukh said. The poll panel gave this ruling under "pressure from above," Deshmukh told a TV channel.

On the other hand, senior NCP leader Praful Patel said the EC ruling proves that the majority of party workers and elected representatives are with Ajit Pawar.

Bombay HC terms Chanda, Deepak Kochhar's arrests 'illegal', confirms interim bail



Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bombay High Court on Tuesday termed the arrests of ex-ICICI Bank CEO and MD Chanda Kochhar and her businessman husband Deepak Kochhar as "illegal" and confirmed the 2023 interim bail order. The Kochhar couple was arrested in the ICICI Bank-Videcon loan fraud case, and in January 2023, a bench of Justice Revati Mohite-Dere had granted them interim bail order. A division bench of Justices

Anuja Prabhudesai and Nitin R. Borkar confirmed the January 2023 interim bail order on Tuesday, after they completed the hearing last month and reserved the verdict.

Last year Justice Mohite-Dere had questioned the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) why the investigation into the case took so long while the FIR was lodged in 2019, while granting the interim bail to the Kochhars who were arrested on December 23, 2022, pending their plea.

First endo-robotic surgery performed at Kochi hospital on 75-yr-old woman

▶ Endo-robotic surgery is the name of the procedure in which the lower part of the head and neck cancer reaching the food pipe is removed using a combination of endoscopic surgery and robotic surgery.

▶ The woman was diagnosed with cancer in the beginning of the food pipe (post-cricoid region). Initially, she took radiation treatment, but the cancer did not respond.

▶ Subsequently, a comprehensive examination revealed no signs of the disease elsewhere in the body.

Kochi | Agencies

Doctors at the VPS Lakeshore hospital here successfully conducted the first ever endo-robotic surgery on a 75-year-old woman.

Robotic technology can play a significant role in reducing the morbidity of head and neck surgery. However, robots



cannot be used for cancer below the voice box, because the

robotic arms cannot reach below it.

But the doctors at the hospital came up with a new surgical method to solve this problem.

Typically, surgical removal of the voice box and food pipe is the course of action in this condition, followed by the reconstruction of the food passage using tissue from other parts of the body. This surgery is known to pose significant challenges to the patient, including loss of the natural ability to speak and eat.

The part of the cancer that the robot couldn't reach within the food pipe was incised using a gastro endoscope, while the upper part was approached from the oral cavity using robotic surgery. The whole cancer-affected area was removed en bloc and intra operative pathology reports were used to confirm the completeness of cancer removal.

Post-surgery, the defect of surgery was reconstructed using tissue from the inner part of the cheek with the help of the robot. This was also a novel approach to reconstruct such defects. The hospital informed that the patient is currently recovering, having regained the ability to talk and drink water. The doctors are optimistic that with some more days of rehabilitation, the woman will be able to eat more comfortably.



"ISN'T THIS SHEER HOOLIGANISM?": ARVIND KEJRIWAL ON PROBE AGENCY RAIDS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal launched an attack on the BJP-led Centre over the Enforcement Directorate (ED) searches of premises of his personal assistant (PA) and others, saying all these actions were aimed at "crushing the Aam Aadmi Party".

In a post on X, Mr Kejriwal said the ED didn't find a single penny, no jewellery or illegal property papers despite a raid that lasted 16 hours.

"They raided Manish Sisodia's house, nothing was found there. They raided Satyendra Jain's place, nothing was found there. They raided Sanjay Singh's place, nothing was found there. Can ED enter anyone's house without any reason? Is this not sheer hooliganism?" Kejriwal said.

"It is clear that all these raids and arrests are being done only out of political malice, to harass us, to crush the Aam Aadmi Party. It's been two years since they started investigating. Not a single new penny or any evidence was found," he added.

"This country is run by law and the Constitution. India is not anyone's inheritance. This country has 140 crore people. People will never tolerate this kind of hooliganism," the Chief Minister said.

Earlier today, AAP leader and Delhi minister Atishi today also slammed the ED raids on party members' homes, and accused the BJP-led Centre of trying to "scare and silence" the party using probe agencies.



The ED searched premises of Mr Kejriwal's personal assistant Bibhav Kumar and others as part of a probe into charges that bribes generated from "irregularities" in the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) tendering process were routed as election funds to the AAP.

"Yesterday, I posted on Twitter about doing a big expose on the ED today. In response, to threaten AAP and silence the party, the ED has been raiding the residences of people related to the Aam Aadmi Party since 7 am today," Atishi said.

"This is the way the BJP is trying to threaten the

AAP and intimidate its leaders to suppress their voices. I would like to tell the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi and their agencies that AAP is not scared of their threats," she said.

Atishi claimed that despite an investigation of two years, ED has not been able to recover anything.

"For the past two years, AAP leaders have been threatened like this. In the name of 'liquor scam', investigating agencies CBI and ED have been raiding AAP leaders now and then in Delhi. But despite such investigations for nearly two years, ED has not been able to find anything," she said.

She recalled how many accused, witnesses, and government witnesses have come forward and told that they were pressured to record their statements. Responding to her, Union Minister and BJP MP Meenakshi Lekhi launched a sharp attack on the AAP and Mr Kejriwal, ramping up the bitter spat between the two parties over alleged corruption in the city's liquor excise policy and the water development authority.

An apoplectic Ms Lekhi held Prime Minister Narendra Modi up as an ideal for Kejriwal to follow, declaring PM Modi had (when he was Gujarat Chief Minister) "sat for 12 hours answering questions"; the reference was to PM Modi being questioned by a special team investigating the 2002 Gujarat riots.

"That is how you face... instead of drama and corruption like Kejriwal," Lekhi thundered.

MP Assembly's budget session begins today

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The budget session of Madhya Pradesh Assembly will commence with the address of Governor Mangubhai Patel on Wednesday and continue till February 19, said a notification issued by the Assembly secretariat on Tuesday.

A total of nine sittings are proposed during the 13-day long session. The vote on account for the financial year 2024-25 is likely to be introduced in this second session of the 16th Assembly.

Finance Minister Jagdish Devda, who is also one of two Deputy CMs in Chief Minister Mohan Yadav's Cabinet, will present the interim budget, while the complete annual budget will be presented during the monsoon session in July.

To ensure that the session meets its purpose and for the



utilisation of maximum time, Speaker Narendra Singh Tomar has conducted a two-day training session for all the elected members of the state Assembly.

The Assembly secretariat has received a total 2,303 questions from the legislators from both the ruling BJP and the opposition Congress for the session, while 233 attention seeking proposals are put up before the Assembly.

While the Mohan Yadav-led BJP government is prepared to set its mark with

several public interest Bills to be presented during the session, the opposition Congress is also set to corner the government on various matters, including farmers issues and the law and order situation in the state. On the eve of the session, the Congress led by its state unit chief Jitu Patwari and leader of opposition (LoP) Umag Singh, chalked out a plan during a meeting with party legislatures on Tuesday. Veteran leader and former CM Kamal Nath also attended the meeting.

Tribal leaders of violence-hit Manipur to meet MHA officials today

Team Absolute | Imphal

A nine-member delegation of various tribal organisations from Manipur under the banner of 'Zo United' is in Delhi to meet Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) officials on Wednesday.

The delegation will discuss the current situation in the northeastern state, which has been devastated by ethnic violence for over nine months. The tribal leaders' delegation comprises leaders of Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF), Committee on Tribal Unity, Kuki Inpi Manipur, Zomi Council, Hill Tribal Council and all tribe councils. The delegation is also trying to meet Union Home Minister Amit Shah to apprise him of the situation in Manipur and present their unfulfilled demands, which include promulgation of the (Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act) in the remaining parts of the state.



The ITLF and other tribal organisations have been demanding imposition of President's Rule in Manipur and creation of separate administrations (equivalent to separate state) for the tribals. Ten tribal MLAs of Manipur, including seven from the ruling BJP have also been demanding a separate administration for the tribals.

The demand was on a number of occasions rejected by the Union Home Minister and Manipur Chief Minister,

N Biren Singh.

Meanwhile, the ITLF on Tuesday alleged that since May 3 last year, the Meitei community has blocked all goods-laden vehicles from entering Kuki-Zo tribal areas, including essential commodities and life-saving drugs. Since February 1, the only power line that supplies electricity to Churachandpur and Pherzawl, two Kuki-Zo tribal districts, has been sabotaged, leading to a complete blackout of electricity.

MVA SLAMS EC DECISION ON NCP, SHARAD PAWAR SIDE TO CHALLENGE IT IN SC

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), led by Sharad Pawar, on Tuesday slammed the Election Commission decision to hand over the party name and 'clock' symbol to the breakaway faction of Ajit Pawar and said that it will move the Supreme Court challenging the move.

NCP Working President Supriya Sule said that this is "a murder of democracy" as the EC has given its ruling based on the strength of MLAs, "with the presence of an 'invisible power' behind it".

"We are not at all surprised by the EC decision. It has unjustly taken away the party (NCP) from its founder-member (Sharad Pawar). We shall challenge the EC ruling with full vigour in the Supreme Court to get justice," she said.

Maharashtra NCP-SP President Jayant Patil said that the party will challenge the EC ruling in the apex court mostly by Wednesday.

"Wherever Sharad Pawar goes, NCP goes with him... This (EC) decision is not correct. The EC ruling will not stand in the apex court, we are confident of getting a stay," he said.

Patil alleged that the "body language" of the EC officials during the



hearings had made it amply clear which way the decision would go, despite the NCP-SP being formed by Sharad Pawar 25 years ago and now it has grown into a national party with presence in 28 states.

"However, the decision is taken only on the basis of the strength of MLAs which is sheer injustice done to us and Sharad Pawar. We are moving the apex court and expect its verdict before the Lok Sabha elections are announced," said Patil.

NCP-SP national General Secretary

Dr Jitendra Awhad said that "this decision was expected, and I have been saying this for the past several weeks". "Treachery is not in our blood... This is unfair and we shall fight it out. I have been saying for the past so many weeks what the EC decision would be," he said, adding that "for us, Sharad Pawar Saheb is the party name and symbol".

Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) alliance constituent Congress's leader Nana Patole said that the EC ruling was written by the

Central government and the EC merely read it out, and the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is finishing off Opposition political parties and democracy in India.

"A few months ago, Bharatiya Janata Party President J.P. Nadda had said that no regional parties would exist in the country. After that the central investigation agencies and the EC have started eliminating regional parties at the behest of the Centre. What happened earlier with Shiv Sena and now with NCP is another form of killing democracy," he said.

Shiv Sena-UBT national Spokesperson Kishore Tiwari said that the BJP has perfected a new art of breaking off established political parties by taking away MLAs-MPs with either threats or bribes or false cases or jail. "The EC is putting its stamp of approval on such shameless goings-on. It appears that democracy is now at peril from the very constitutional institutions that are intended to safeguard it, and all are trying to please one individual and one political party," he said.

Targeting her cousin without taking names, Sule said that "its regretful that the house belongs to Sharad Pawar Saheb, and 'he' (Ajit Pawar) has ousted him from his own home".

Agra couple celebrates wedding anniversary near garbage dump to draw attention

Agra | Agencies

In a unique initiative, designed to draw the district administration's attention, a couple, dressed as a bride and groom, marked their 17th wedding anniversary amid the dirt and rubbish on the road located in Agra city's Nagala Kali area in Uttar Pradesh.

The couple garlanded each other while local residents held placards saying that they would not vote if the road and drain were not properly constructed.

According to the locals, the problem has persisted for 15 years, but in the last eight months, the road has turned into a dirty drain, making it difficult for people in the area to



move about. People from more than 30 colonies use this road. But due to the filthy conditions, the locals now have to

take a detour of two kilometres.

Posters, saying 'No development, no vote' were also pasted outside a dozen colonies in the area, but to no avail. The residents have complained that public representatives did not take any action despite multiple demands so Bhagwan Sharma decided to stage this unique protest alongside his wife Uma Sharma.

"Since the last 15 years, we have been making continued efforts. We have gone to all the public representatives and concerned authorities. Since there was no action, we were forced to protest in such a manner," he said.

Uma Sharma said the protest is to reveal the issue on a larger scale.

NOC to be no longer required for land, property registration in Punjab

Chandigarh | Agencies

In a big relief to residents of the state, the Punjab government has decided to do away with the clause of no objection certificate (NOC) for registration of any land and property.

Divulging details, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann said the decision has been taken in larger public interest to ensure that people do not face any sort of inconvenience.

He said the legal mechanism for this decision has already been worked out and details will be shared soon.

Mann said this decision has been taken in due consultation with the public and is aimed solely at ensuring their benefit.

He said the people in both urban and rural areas were facing problems due to non-availability of NOC. This resulted in non-execution of registration of land, thereby creating a lot of problems for the common man.



Mann said now this problem will be solved as the requirement of NOC for the registration of land and property has been abolished by the government.

SHOPKEEPER RAPES EIGHT-YEAR-OLD GIRL IN UP

Kanpur | Agencies

An eight-year-old girl was allegedly raped by a shopkeeper who had rented a shop outside the minor's house.

The incident took place in Sanigawan in Kanpur, where the girl's father had rented out the shop to the accused, Mukesh Gupta, who ran a bicycle repair shop.

Gupta allegedly raped the girl inside her house when she was alone, police officials said.

The victim did not reveal anything to her parents. Instead, she narrated her ordeal to her maternal grandmother.

When her parents came to know about it on February 1, they dialed the emergency number, 112.

The parents alleged that the police did not register an FIR in the first four days when they reported the matter. They said the station in charge asked them to keep quiet. The family then reached out to Deputy



Commissioner of Police, Kanpur, SK Singh, on Monday. On hearing the matter, the senior police official immediately ordered the police to register an FIR.

The police also conducted a medical examination on the girl and started the hunt for the accused, Mukesh Gupta, who is absconding.

Delhi court permits Sanjay Singh for the second time to take oath as RS MP

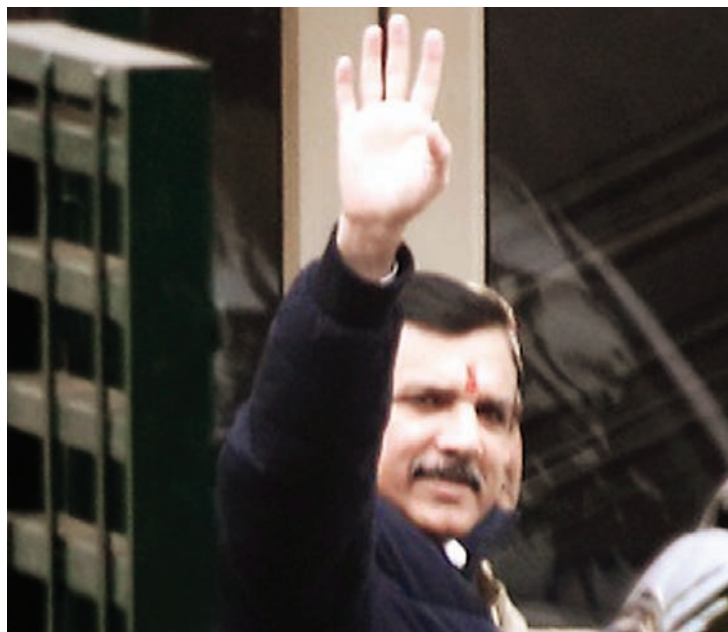
Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi court on Tuesday granted permission, for the second time, to Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Sanjay Singh, to attend Parliament in police custody and take oath as a Rajya Sabha MP.

Sanjay Singh was arrested and chargesheeted in the alleged excise policy money laundering case. The development comes after Singh was not allowed to take oath on Monday.

A source from Rajya Sabha Chairman, Jagdeep Dhankhar's office had said, "Proceedings of Rajya Sabha are regulated by the listed business which is notified in the bulletin. The oath taking of Sanjay Singh wasn't listed in the business of the House and no communication from Rajya Sabha on this matter ever came for consideration of the Rajya Sabha Chair."

Special Judge MK Nagpal of Rouse Avenue Court, on Tuesday, allowed



Singh to go to Parliament on either February 8 or February 9.

The Judge directed the jail authorities to take Singh to the Rajya Sabha under judicial custody and appropriate security for the oath administration process. Singh's lawyer has been allowed to visit Tihar Jail to meet him and obtain his signatures on relevant documents required for the oath-taking ceremony. Singh's counsel informed the court that certain documents need to be signed by him and submitted to the Rajya Sabha office to finalise the oath-taking date.

Notably, some matters concerning Singh are pending before the Committee of Privileges, including the alleged deliberate disregard of directions of the Rajya Sabha Chairman.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) had arrested Singh on October 4, 2023 after carrying out searches at his residence in the North Avenue area. His suspension was ordered on July 24, 2023, and on August, 11, 2023, the House passed the order. As per that, his suspension continues.



'Guns, goons & govt': MVA accuses ruling Mahayuti of hiring gangsters before elections

Quaid Najmi | Mumbai

Congress' Leader of Opposition (Assembly) Vijay Wadettiwar and Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut accused the ruling Mahayuti government of 'recruiting gangsters' and baddies in its grand coalition ahead of the elections, here on Tuesday.

"Before the elections, the recruitment of gangsters in the grand coalition! All the three parties in power have a fierce competition to strengthen their own gangs," said Wadettiwar, referring to the ruling trio of Shiv Sena-Bharatiya Janata Party-Nationalist Congress Party (AP).

"The rule of gangsters continues in Maharashtra... MLAs of the ruling party shoot inside the police station. Why did the gangsters become so strong? Who is responsible for this state of affairs," demanded Raut of the MVA bloc.

Reacting to the MVA charges, Shiv Sena Minister Deepak Kesarkar said that many people call on the CM daily. "We cannot stop them from meeting the CM or clicking pictures with him. The allegations have no basis," said Kesarkar.



Citing examples, Wadettiwar said that the Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's son, Dr. Shrikant E. Shinde held a meeting with a known gangster Hemant Dabhekar -- an aide of the slain Pune don Sharad Mohol.

Pictures of Dabhekar allegedly visiting the CM's official residence 'Varsha' to felicitate Dr. Shinde on his birthday are viral on the social media.

Another Pune baddie Nilesh Ghaiwal called on the CM at 'Varsha' and photos of that trip are also doing the rounds on social media, embarrassing the ruling coalition. Deputy CM Ajit Pawar's son created waves when he wittingly or unwittingly called on a notorious history-sheeter

Gajanan Marne in Pune, leading to many red faces in the breakaway NCP (AP) last month. Even as a much-concerned father, he pulled the ears of his son for the indiscretion, Ajit Pawar himself came under a cloud when a purported shady element, Asif Mohammed Iqbal Shaikh, alias Asif Dadhi, allegedly having links with the banned SIMI terror outfit, called on him. "How can people expect law and order from rulers who entertain goons?" demanded Wadettiwar sharply, adding that the mafia is getting the full backing of the Mahayuti regime.

Raut said that gangsters are roaming around freely with the blessings of

the state government, and asked "who is feeding them".

The MVA's hit-list came just a day after a worried group of ruling Shiv Sena Ministers called on Deputy CM Devendra Fadnis and complained to him about the allegations hurled against the CM by a BJP MLA Ganpat Kalu Gaikwad. The Kalyan East MLA Gaikwad is charged with shooting a Shiv Sena Kalyan chief Mahesh Gaikwad and his aide Rahul Patil inside the Hill Lines Police Station in Ulhasnagar on February 2, shocking the state and sparking a huge political row.

"Shinde is trying to establish a kingdom of goons in the state. He deceived Uddhav Thackeray, he will betray the BJP also. He owes me crores of rupees. Shinde should quit if Maharashtra has to be administered well. This is my humble plea to Fadnis and Prime Minister Narendra Modi," Gaikwad blurted out before he was whisked off by the Thane Police, early on Saturday.

Rattled by the political ramifications of Gaikwad's allegations, which the Shiv Sena has termed as 'baseless and unwarranted', the ministers sought Fadnis' action in the matter.

Navi Mumbai hostel manager dies by suicide; facility's in-charge arrested

Team Absolute | Thane

A 26-year-old manager of a hostel meant for paying guests allegedly committed suicide by hanging himself at his residence in Maharashtra's Navi Mumbai township, police said on Tuesday. The manager was found dead on Monday morning at his residence in Kharghar following which the police arrested a 32-year-old man who operated the private hostel, located in Ulve area, on charges of abducting the victim and abetting his suicide, they said. The accused suspected that the victim misappropriated Rs 60,000 of the hostel's



funds which were later recovered from him. The accused also claimed that the manager had been taken an additional Rs 5,500 from the facility's customers over and above the cost of staying, NRI Sagri police station's sub-inspector Subhash Shelar said. On Sunday, the accused, along with some associates who

are yet to be identified, allegedly abducted the victim from Ulve. They took him to a flat near a temple in Divale village and allegedly assaulted him with an iron pipe, the official said. The victim was depressed over this which led him to take the extreme step, he said quoting a complaint by the mother of the deceased. The police arrested the accused man in the wee hours of Tuesday and booked him under sections 306 (abetment of suicide), 363 (kidnapping) and 34 (common intention) of the Indian Penal Code, the official said. Search was on for the others involved in the case.

4-year-old Mumbai girl raped by school watchman; accused held

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a shocking incident, a four-year-old girl was allegedly brutally raped and assaulted by the watchman of a private school in Kandivali East where studied, officials said here on Monday. The incident occurred on February 2, but her terrified parents were

reluctant to lodge a police complaint. Finally, her mother approached the Samata Nagar police station on Monday and lodged a complaint, which was registered under the POCSO Act and other sections of various laws. Earlier, in a preemptive action, the police had arrested the accused watchman

late on Saturday after they got an alert about the incident, even as the girl was hospitalized.

As per preliminary investigation, the accused watchman lured the child to the washroom on the pretext of giving her a chocolate and then committed the heinous crime there before fleeing the spot.

India's EV charging station count rises to 12,146; Maharashtra leads, Delhi 2nd

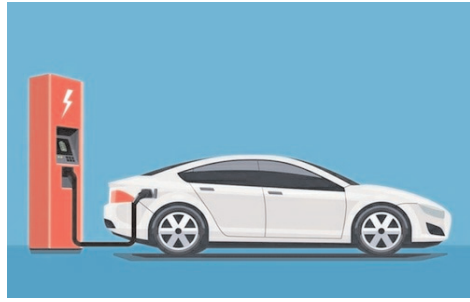
Team Absolute | New Delhi/Mumbai

The number of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations that are operating in the country has gone up to 12,146 as of February 2 this year, Minister of State for Heavy Industries, Krishan Pal Gurjar, said in a written reply in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

The data provided by the minister shows that Maharashtra leads with 3,079 EV charging stations followed by Delhi with 1,886, while Karnataka is at the third spot with 1,041 charging stations.

The top three states are followed by: Kerala (852), Tamil Nadu (643), Uttar Pradesh (582), Rajasthan (500), Telangana (481), Gujarat (476) and Madhya Pradesh (341), making up the top 10 list.

The Ministry of Heavy Industries (MHI) has been making consistent efforts for facilitating the promotion of EVs in India. The FAME-II scheme inter-alia included financial support in the form of subsidy for setting up of public charging infrastructure to instill confidence among the EV users, the minister said.



Further, the Ministry of Power has taken several initiatives to accelerate the deployment of public EV charging infrastructure in the country.

The government has issued guidelines and standards for charging infrastructure, which enable the owners of EVs to charge their vehicles at their residence/office using their existing electricity connections.

A revenue sharing model for provision of land at promotional rates for public charging stations has also been introduced and provision has been made

for providing electricity connection to Public Charging Station (PCS) within stipulated timelines.

The government has also prescribed the single part EV tariff for public charging stations. This amount cannot exceed Average Cost of Supply (ACoS) till 31.03.2025.

The guidelines specify a ceiling of Rs 2.50 per unit and Rs 3.50 per unit of electricity used for slow AC charging of EVs at PCS during the solar and non-solar hours, respectively.

Additionally, a ceiling limit of Rs 10 per unit and Rs 12 per unit of electricity used for DC fast charging of EVs at PCS during the solar and non-solar hours, respectively, has also been specified.

Average cost of supply (ACoS) by DISCOMs to PCSs during solar hours shall have a rebate of 20 per cent and a surcharge of 20 per cent during all other times.

The Green Energy Open Access Rules, 2022, has been notified with the objective of further accelerating renewable energy adoption, ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and green energy for all, the minister added.

'Kar Sevak' gifts Raj Thackeray brick from demolished Babri Masjid

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The usually stern-looking Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) President Raj Thackeray was seen beaming here on Tuesday, when he got an unusual gift from a senior party leader -- a brick from the ruins of the Babri Mosque, felled on December 6, 1992 in Ayodhya.

Former MNS MLA Bala D. Nandgaonkar, a member of the undivided Shiv Sena and one of the 'Kar Sevaks' from Mumbai, formally presented the brick to Raj Thackeray at the latter's home in Dadar.

For 32 years, he had carefully preserved the two bricks he had managed to bring back with him to Mumbai, and one brick he handed over to a thrilled Raj



Thackeray this morning. "I had gone to Ayodhya for Kar Seva then... Those were difficult times. We did not know if we would return alive. After the Babri Mosque was demolished, I had brought a couple of bricks with me here," Nandgaonkar told reporter.

Nandgaonkar said that after the demolition of the structure, he had taken a vow "to gift the brick as a souvenir to the late Shiv Sena founder Balasaheb

Thackeray", but only after the Lord Ram Temple would actually be constructed at the site in Ayodhya, as per his cherished desires.

However, the Hindu HridaySamrat Balasaheb Thackeray passed away in November 2012, and the Lord Ram Temple came up only in January 2024, so he decided to present it to his nephew, Raj Thackeray.

"As far as we are concerned, Raj Thackeray is our Balasaheb... Raj Saheb is

Balasaheb's ideological heir... So I have fulfilled my promise today," Nandgaonkar smiled with pride, pointing out that the Pran Pratishtha ceremony of the Lord Ram Temple was completed in Ayodhya on January 22. Accepting the brick, Raj Thackeray said Nandgaonkar was among the Kar Sevaks who had gone to Ayodhya and proof of the Shiv Sena's contribution to that event when the structure finally crashed down.

"Look at this brick... It's very heavy... Gives us an idea of the excellent constructions then," commented the MNS chief, staring, closely examining the heavy and centuries old brick coming from the rubble of the demolished structure.

Maharashtra will decide the direction of the country: Uddhav Thackeray



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Former Maharashtra Chief Minister and Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray Tuesday said that Maharashtra will decide the direction of the country and claimed that a "saffron storm will hit Delhi and uproot the dictatorship."

Addressing the party workers at his residence 'Matoshri' in Mumbai, Thackeray said "dictatorship cannot be an option" and it should be uprooted, newswire reported.

Maharashtra will decide the direction of the country which will be to overthrow dictatorship, he said.

"A saffron storm will hit Delhi and uproot the dictatorship. Some people have questions about the opposition INDIA alliance, Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), but where is the option," Thackeray said addressing the people from Marathwada who joined his party.

"Dictatorship cannot be an option and it should be uprooted," he added.

Thackeray claimed that many Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) workers and people from the Muslim community were joining his party. Taking a dig at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Shiv Sena (UBT) leader said there is no relation between "Mann ki Baat" and "Jan ki Baat".

On Monday, Thackeray on Monday slammed the Maharashtra government alleging that investigation agencies are missing in the MLA Ganpat Gaikwad firing case. "Why no probe agency swung into action after BJP MLA Ganpat Gaikwad claimed that Chief Minister Eknath Shinde owes him crores of rupees", Thackeray questioned, news wire reported.

Speaking at a public rally in Rajapur, Ratnagiri, Thackeray said that he does not support the action of Ganpat Gaikwad but his claims cannot be ignored. The Thane BJP MLA Ganpat Gaikwad, is accused of firing at former KDMC corporator from Shiv Sena, Mahesh Gaikwad inside a police station in Ulhasnagar on Friday night. Before his arrest in connection with the firing incident, Ganpat Gaikwad on Friday said only criminals will be born in Maharashtra if Shinde is the chief minister, report said.

"Shinde sahib betrayed Uddhav. He will betray the BJP. He owes me crores of rupees. Shinde should resign if Maharashtra has to be well-managed," the MLA told a news channel. Thackeray asked, "Why has no action been taken against the chief minister when BJP MLA Ganpat Gaikwad has levelled serious allegations against him? Thackeray asked during the rally in Konkan region on Monday.

Man dupes 300 Western Railway job hopefuls of Rs 21 cr, nabbed

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A man, who promised railways jobs and thugged over 300 persons of around Rs 21 crore, has been nabbed by the Western Railway (WR) Vigilance Department, officials said here. Following a tip-off, the vigilance sleuths lay watch and detected the fake jobs racket going on for more than three months, with likely further ramifications.

WR Chief Spokesperson Sumit Thakur said the vigilance team laid a trap to nab the suspect with help from an outsider and two 'proxy candidates' seeking rail jobs.

An amount of Rs 20,000 was also transferred as part payment to the fraudster's account through Gpay, as part of the trap to call him for a meeting at Mumbai Central Station to collect the balance amount.

As expected, the suspect came to the designated location at 2 p.m. on Friday and was caught when he came to take



the remaining amount against a job.

The WR vigilance probe has revealed that the accused -- whose identity has not been disclosed -- had allegedly collected Rs 9-10 lakh per candidate, and used to make forged documents with the assistance of a Kolkata-based associate.

Thakur said that a total of 180 blocked

numbers were found in the smartphone of the accused, probably belonging to the victims who had paid him huge amounts to get a lucrative railway job.

The investigation also detected about 120 chats of the duped victims demanding their money back, ranging from Rs 5-8 lakh, which were paid to him for the jobs.





EDITOR'S SPECS

How childhood trauma affects brain?

Researchers have found how childhood trauma affects brain development and rewires vital pathways, a finding that may pave the way for treatments. The team from University of Essex in the UK uncovered a disruption in neural networks involved in self-focus and problem-solving. The findings, published in the journal *Biological Psychiatry: Cognitive Neuroscience and Neuroimaging*, suggests that those under age 18 who have experienced abuse will likely struggle with emotions, empathy and understanding their bodies. "Currently, science-based treatments for childhood trauma primarily focus on addressing the fearful thoughts and avoidance of trauma triggers. This is a very important part of trauma treatment. However, our study has revealed that we are only treating one part of the problem," said Dr. Megan Klabunde at the varsity's Department of Psychology. "Even when a child who has experienced trauma is not thinking about their traumatic experiences, their brains are struggling to process their sensations within their bodies. This influences how one thinks and feels about one's 'internal world' and this also influences one's ability to empathize and form relationships." Dr. Klabunde reviewed 14 studies involving more than 580 children for the research, which re-examined functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) scans using AI. The study discovered a marked difference in traumatised children's default mode (DMN) and central executive networks (CEN)-two large scale brain systems. The DMN and the posterior insula are involved in how people sense their bodies, their sense of self and their internal reflections. New studies are finding that the DMN plays an important role in most mental health problems and may be influenced by experiencing childhood trauma. The CEN is also more active than in healthy children, which means that children with trauma histories tend to ruminate and relive terrible experiences when triggered.

HOW BIG-TICKET OFFENDERS ARE ABLE TO RELOCATE, ESCAPE LONG ARM OF THE LAW

Shekhar Singh

It has been several years since high-profile economic offenders such as Vijay Mallya and Nirav Modi made headlines by fleeing the country, leaving a trail of unpaid debts amounting to thousands of crores from Indian banks. Their departure thrust the nation into a web of financial challenges and raised poignant questions about the effectiveness of legal processes and probe agencies tracking their movement. It also triggered a broader conversation about accountability and the resilience of the financial system. Sources say that a joint team of the Enforcement Directorate (ED), Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), and National Investigation Agency (NIA), is actively working to identify properties belonging to such financial fugitives in the UK and other countries. The goal is to seize the 'proceeds of crime' acquired by these financial fraudsters. A joint team is also working on the extradition of arms dealer Sanjay Bhandari, who fled the country in 2016 amidst investigations into multiple defence deals. Bhandari, allegedly linked to Robert Vadra, husband of Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, is said to have acquired properties in London and Dubai, and transferred them to shell companies associated with Vadra's alleged aide. Bhandari, Nirav Modi, and Mallya, all three declared fugitive economic offenders (FEOs) are expected to be extradited to India, but they still have pending appeals against their deportation. The government has already attached their assets in India, with some properties sold to recover funds for outstanding bank dues. Under the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT), India and the UK are obligated to share information on criminal investigations related to economic offenders. "A three-agency team is set to hold bilateral discussions in London to

facilitate the exchange of information, emphasising the importance of international cooperation," the sources say. While the Union Home Ministry typically handles MLAT, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has taken charge due to diplomatic engagements requiring all requests to be routed through the MEA. Meanwhile, in a recent setback for Vijay Mallya, who fled from the country on March 2, 2016, the UK High Court ruled in favour of his extradition to India, dismissing his appeal. However, Mallya's legal team has obtained permission to appeal to the UK Supreme Court, further extending the extradition process. In March last year, the CBI submitted an additional chargesheet in a bank fraud case related to Mallya in a Mumbai court. The chargesheet stated that while Kingfisher Airlines faced a severe cash crunch in 2008, and lenders were still attempting to recover loans defaulted in 2015-16, Mallya acquired a property valued at Rs 80 crore in the UK and another worth Rs 250 crore in France. The CBI had said that evidence obtained from the UK, through a Letter Rogatory, indicated significant diversions to Mallya's motor-racing team, Force India Formula-1 Team Ltd (F1F1), from Kingfisher's account with HSBC Bank, London. Information provided during the opening of Swiss bank accounts linked to Mallya in 2014-15 stated that he was neither a politician nor a member of any political party. The chargesheet also revealed that Mallya was slated to receive \$75 million (\$40 million upfront and the remainder in the form of \$7 million annually from 2017 to 2021) from Diageo PLC in exchange for stepping down from the position of Chairman of United Spirits Limited (USL) and refraining from competing with Diageo PLC in Asian liquor markets. The amount constituted an asset that Mallya was obligated not to alienate, as per the terms of the personal guarantee agreement dated December 21, 2010, executed by him



in favour of the lenders, including IDBI Bank, for the loans obtained by Kingfisher. For Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi, accused in the Punjab National Bank (PNB) scam, their legal battles have also taken an international turn. Court hearings in Dominica have complicated Choksi's extradition proceedings, with concerns raised about Indian prison conditions causing delays. Nirav Modi, facing charges of fraud and money laundering, in November last year told a UK court that his stay in England might extend for years due to ongoing legal proceedings. Nirav Modi was arrested on March 19, 2019, in the UK on the basis of India's extradition request to face trial in the multi-crore bank fraud case in the country. "After his arrest, he had filed several bail petitions which were strongly opposed and all the bail petitions were rejected by UK courts," a CBI official says. CBI had registered a case on January 31, 2018, against the partner of three private firms and others including then officials of Punjab National Bank (PNB) on a complaint from Punjab National Bank on the allegations that Nirav Modi had hatched a criminal conspiracy amongst themselves to defraud the Punjab National Bank to the tune of Rs. 6,498 crore (approx) by fraudu-

lently issuing Letters of Undertaking (LoUs). During the investigation, the CBI conducted searches at 42 premises and arrested fifteen persons. "A large number of witnesses were examined and voluminous documents were collected. Investigation revealed that the accused officials of the PNB, in conspiracy with said owners of the firms and others, had fraudulently issued a large number of LoUs to overseas banks for obtaining Buyer's credit in favour of said three firms without any sanctioned limit or cash margin and without making entries in the CBS system of the bank," he says. The investigation further revealed that the fraud was allegedly perpetrated despite the circulars issued by RBI. Meanwhile, a Mumbai Magistrate's court issued a proclamation notice against Mehul Choksi in connection with a cheating case filed by the Mumbai Police's Economic Offences Wing. Another high-profile fugitive, Lalit Modi, the man credited with transforming cricket with the Indian Premier League (IPL), found himself embroiled in financial controversies during his tenure as the league's chief

irregularities and money laundering, Lalit Modi left India in 2010 and has since been in the UK. His case brings attention to the intersection of sports and financial impropriety, exposing how influential figures can exploit positions in the world of sports for personal gain. Experts argue that the challenges faced by Indian authorities are multifaceted, citing extradition laws, varying legal systems, and international human rights considerations as significant roadblocks. Critics emphasised the need for a streamlined and efficient extradition process, underlining the importance of international cooperation in tackling economic offences. Vineet Jindal, a Supreme Court lawyer says that extradition treaties alone will not fetch the desired results for India. "Extradition often involves conflicting sovereign interests. While the requesting state seeks to prosecute offenders pursuant to its sovereign power, the state where the fugitive is located has sovereign interests as well," he says. "These include treaty obligations, different laws, the prerogative to grant asylum, and higher standards of protection of human rights," Jindal adds. According to Jindal, the newly passed bill which is yet to be implemented, the Bharatiya Sanhita Bill has been legislated keeping in mind the importance of a balanced, evidence-based approach to crime prevention. "The bill's aims are pragmatic as it not only gives harsh penalties but also has a humanistic approach towards the offenders. This would prevent the convicts from getting asylum in foreign countries as the offenders would be given an opportunity of rehabilitation in the home country itself," he says. "Through this, it also synchronises with the global criminal laws, as it has the features that essentially are framed to bring restorative justice," Jindal adds.

international

'RUSSIA'S GOOGLE' PULLS OUT OF HOME COUNTRY, SELLS BIZ FOR \$5.2 BN

London | Agencies

The Dutch owner of Yandex which is touted as "Russia's Google" has announced to divest its Russia-based businesses for \$5.2 billion. Yandex NV, the Dutch parent company of the Yandex group has entered into a definitive agreement with a purchaser consortium to sell all of the Yandex group's businesses in Russia and certain international markets. The total consideration for the sale will be 475 billion ruble (around \$5.2 billion) and at least 50 per cent will be paid in cash. "Since February 2022, the Yandex group and our team have faced exceptional challenges. We believe that we have found the best possible solution for our shareholders, our teams and our users in these extraordinary circumstances," said John Boynton, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Yandex NV. "The proposed transaction will allow shareholders to recover some value for the businesses that we are divesting, while unlocking new growth potential for the international businesses we will retain and enabling the divested businesses to operate under new owner-



ship," Boynton said in a statement. Following the successful completion of the transaction, in full compliance with international sanctions where applicable, the company will hold no interest in its businesses in Russia. The Russian government welcomed

the deal. "This is exactly what we wanted to achieve a few years ago when Yandex was under threat of being taken over by Western IT giants," said Anton Gorelkin, deputy head of the Russian parliament's committee on information policy. "Yandex is more than a company, it is

an asset of the entire Russian society," he added. Launched in 1997, the firm is the largest technology company in Russia. It had more than 30 offices worldwide in 2018. Its main competitors in the Russian market are Google, Microsoft, VK, and Rambler.

Fresh US-British airstrikes hit Yemen

Sanaa | Agencies

The US-British coalition launched three airstrikes on Yemen's northern province of Saada before dawn on Tuesday, media reported. The strikes targeted sites in the eastern part of the province's capital city, which bears the same name, the Houthi-run al-Masirah TV said without elaborating. The fresh airstrikes occurred following a reported missile attack towards the Red Sea, Xinhua news agency reported. The US Central Command confirmed that the US military struck two Houthi explosive uncrewed surface vehicles in Yemen. The command said in a statement that the strikes were launched at nearly 3:30 p.m. Sanaa time, and the targets were deemed "an imminent threat to US Navy ships and merchant vessels in the region". The airstrikes are part of an ongoing military response by Washington and London since January 12, targeting Houthi-controlled areas of Sanaa and



other northern provinces. The actions are reportedly in retaliation for Houthi attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea. The Houthis, who have been engaging in military actions in the Red Sea, the Bab al-Mandab Strait, and the Gulf of Aden since last November,

claim to be targeting Israeli ships and vessels sailing to Israel. These actions unfold against the backdrop of the ongoing crisis in Gaza since October. The situation remains tense, with both sides showing no signs of de-escalation.

Snowfall in eastern Canada causes state of emergency

Ottawa | Agencies

A historic multi-day snowstorm in eastern Canada has caused a local state of emergency, leaving many schools, universities and government offices closed. Cape Breton Regional Municipality of Nova Scotia has declared a local state of emergency with some places in the region receiving up to 80 centimetres of snow, Xinhua news agency reported, citing local media. "Residents are directed to shelter in place and advised to clear snow from their home's entryways, walkways and driveway to facilitate home access," a news release from the municipality read. "Residents should also remove snow from ventilation points at your home." Do not travel.



Roadways are being cleared for emergency response and travel of essential workers. The process is slow and ploughs require several passes to deal with the significant accumulation," the news release said. CBC News reported that the airport in Sydney, Nova Scotia, had received more than 90 centimetres of snow by Monday morning, while downtown Sydney was pummelled with 150 centimetres. CTV News reported that a local by-election in Prince Edward Island Elections would be postponed due to the storm.

More N.Koreans negative about leader Kim Jong-un, hereditary power succession: Report

Seoul | Agencies

A growing number of North Koreans have negatively assessed Kim Jong-un as a political leader and harboured doubts about whether the Kim family's hereditary power succession is legitimate, a report showed on Tuesday. Seoul's Unification Ministry released the 280-page report on North Korea's economic and social situation for the first time on Tuesday. The report is based on in-depth interviews with 6,351 North Korean defectors conducted between 2013 and 2022, Yonhap news agency reported. It showed 43.8 per cent of the North Korea's defectors said they thought Kim Jong-un taking power was inappropriate when they lived in North

Korea. For those who fled North Korea between 2016 and 2020, some 56.3 per cent gave a negative assessment of Kim as a leader. "Negative public sentiments toward the 'Paektu bloodline'-based leadership system have been increasing and this perception appears to be gaining traction since Kim Jong-un assumed power (in late 2011)," the report showed. North Korean propaganda has idolised the ruling family as the "Paektu bloodline," claiming that Kim's late father, former leader Kim Jong-il, was born on Mount Paektu, the highest peak on the Korean Peninsula, despite the fact that he was born in the far eastern Russian city of Khabarovsk. Nearly 55 per cent of the North Korea's defectors who

fled the North Korea between 2016 and 2020 said they had a negative opinion of the Kim family's power succession. Some 42.6 per cent held such a view among those who escaped the country between 2011 and 2015. Kim Jong-un has brought his teen daughter, Ju-ae, to public events since late 2022 in an apparent bid to demonstrate his commitment to the third hereditary power succession. The National Intelligence Service, Seoul's spy agency, said it sees Ju-ae as the "most likely successor". Amid a sluggish economy, more North Koreans have been doing various activities in the "private" economy, including selling goods at markets, cultivating unauthorised lands, smuggling and engaging in housing con-

struction projects. Markets are playing a critical role in the livelihoods of North Koreans, as the food rationing system has collapsed. Around 91 per cent of the North Korea's defectors said life was not sustainable without markets, and for those who fled the North Korea after 2012, some 68.1 per cent of their income came from "non-official" income sources. "The influence of markets has been expanding to healthcare, education, transportation and information infrastructure from the necessities of life, such as food, clothing and shelter, as well as energy, water and sewage," it said. North Korea has been suffering from a chronic food shortage amid prolonged UN sanctions on Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programmes.

Chile wildfire death toll hits 122

Santiago | Agencies

Raging forest fires in central Chile's Valparaiso region have claimed at least 122 lives, the Chilean government said on Monday. According to the South American country's forensics agency, the Legal Medical Service, only 32 of the fatal victims have been identified, while teams of experts have performed 40 autopsies. Fires sparked on Friday in different locations have burned more than 11,000 hectares in Valparaiso, and between 3,000 and 6,000 homes have suffered some degree of damage, Xinhua news agency reported. The causes of the fires are still under investigation amid an ongoing heat wave hitting



Chile this summer in the Southern Hemisphere. Authorities declared a state of emergency to deploy military troops to help control the fires and channel extra resources to the region. This is the worst tragedy hitting Chile since a powerful 8.8 magnitude earthquake and subsequent tsunami claimed 525 lives and left 23 missing in 2010, according to official figures.



ALL POSSIBLE ARRANGEMENTS FOR TREATMENT OF INJURED IN HARDA INCIDENT: CM DR. YADAV

The state government has constituted a six-member committee under the chairmanship of Additional Chief Secretary Mohammad Suleman to investigate the explosion and fire in an illegal firecracker factory in Harda district of Madhya Pradesh.

▶ GREEN CORRIDOR TO BRING INJURED. FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE OF RS 4 LAKH EACH TO FAMILIES OF DECEASED. HOME SECRETARY TO INVESTIGATE INTO INCIDENT

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav called an emergency meeting at Mantralaya here today immediately after getting informed about the tragic incident that took place in Harda and immediately sent Minister Rao Uday Pratap Singh, Additional Chief Secretary Ajit Kesari and DG Home Guard. Along with this, police force also reached the incident site.

Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav while talking to media representatives that the Harda incident is extremely painful. An explosion in a firecracker factory occurred. According to preliminary information, six people have died and about 50 people injured. A financial assistance of Rs 4 lakh will be provided to each of the families of those who died. The injured are being



treated. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has announced an assistance of Rs 2 lakh each for the families of each deceased from the Prime Minister's Relief Fund.

Convict was running firecracker factory in Harda: Congress

Bhopal/Harda: Congress has launched a major attack on the government over the explosion in a firecracker factory in Harda district of Madhya Pradesh in which many people lost their lives. It has been alleged that the convict was running an illegal firecracker factory. State Congress Media Department President KK. After the massive explosion in the firecracker factory in Harda, Mishra has alleged that under whose political patronage the factory was running, before this, after the explosion in the same factory, a second additional session of Harda was filed against the factory owner Raju Aggarwal and his other partner. Judge Rajendra Kumar Dakshini had punished them with 10 years of simple imprisonment and a fine of Rs 10,000 each on charges of Section 5 (a) of the Explosive Substances Act, 1908. Raising questions on the operation of the factory, Mishra said that even after Agarwal was sentenced, how was the convicted person running this factory, not only this, which politician would get the license of this factory renewed even after its license was suspended for years. Stayed? Describing this incident as equivalent to the horrific explosion that took place in the tribal-dominated Petawad in the past years, Mishra said that even at that time, the then government chief Shivraj Singh Chauhan had promised to take strict action against the identified culprits, which could not be fulfilled. And the culprits responsible for more than 100 innocent lives were acquitted. Will this incident also be investigated honestly?

115 AMBULANCES ARE BEING SENT TO HARDA, HOSPITALS ON ALERT

Bhopal/Harda: The state government has taken major decisions to provide better treatment to those injured in the explosion in an illegal firecracker factory in Harda district of Madhya Pradesh. On one hand hospitals have been alerted. At the same time, 115 ambulances are being sent from different places. State Health Minister Rajendra Shukla has said that 20 ambulances are being sent to Harda from Bhopal and a total of 115 from other districts. Burn related equipment and medicines are being sent in three additional ambulances. Shukla further said that a special team of doctors from Medical College Bhopal and Medical College Indore has been sent to Harda. Along with this, 50 beds in Medical College Bhopal and 10 beds in AIIMS Bhopal have been reserved for accident victims.

NCW carries out drive in MP to make Bedia tribes aware of legal rights

Team Absolute | Bhopal

How do you explain rights and entitlements to someone who does not know what rights are?

This was the main question during a conference at the National Law Institute University (NLIU) here on Monday. The conference was organised by the National Commission for Women (NCW) with the participation of an NGO on the occasion of the culmination of a legal awareness drive for the members of the Bedia Tribe in different districts of Madhya Pradesh. The legal and health



awareness drive was aimed at uplifting the community and combat caste-based commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking. During a span of two months, the drive was conducted in several districts such as Bhopal, Vidisha, Raisen and Guna in Madhya Pradesh.

The camps involved speed mentoring and one-to-one interaction with the people from the Bedia community, and educating them on rights and health. At the camps, people from Bedia tribes were taught about their rights, entitlements, and the opportunities available to them pertaining to employment and scholarship, said a student of NLIU.

During the conference on Monday, it was also said that the members of the Bedia tribes have been traditionally involved in inter-generational prostitution, and were once considered one of the so-called 'criminal tribes'.

TENSION IN DAMOH AS IMAM THRASHED; SITUATION UNDER CONTROL

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Tension prevailed in Madhya Pradesh's Damoh district after a group of people allegedly thrashed an Imam when he tried to stop a group of people from beating up a tailor, an official said on Monday.

Tension further built up as people from Hindu and Muslim communities came face-to-face, with a large crowd from both sides gathering outside a police station. The incident happened on Sunday. However, quick action by the police brought the situation under control and prevented an untoward incident in the region where incidents of communal violence were reported in the past too.

It all started after a group of youth belonging to Hindu community allegedly beat up a Muslim tailor on Saturday night.

While the miscreants were beating up a tailor near the mosque, an Imam, who was passing by, tried to stop the fight. The Imam was allegedly pushed by youths who were beating up the tailor. As



the message of the thrashing of Imam spread, numerous people from the Muslim community assembled at a local police station and demanded action. While the people from Muslim community were staging a protest to press their demand to arrest the persons who allegedly thrashed Imam, a video surfaced on social media, which escalated the tension further.

Seeing that, many people from both sides had gathered outside the police station. In a video that

surfaced on social media, a cop was seen confronting an aggressive crowd, warning them to leave the spot otherwise "the police will handle the situation in their own way". The aggrieved crowd from both sides later dispersed. Eventually, four youths, who thrashed the tailor and Imam, were booked under relevant charges and action was assured by the police.

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Monday asked the police to take quick action against those who tried to create violence. Subsequently, at least 40 people have been booked.

He has ordered a magisterial inquiry into the matter. Damoh SP Sandeep Sharma said the situation was under control and no further disputes were reported in the last 24 hours in the region. He further said that those tried to take the law in their hands will be punished as per the law.

"Four persons mainly responsible for the situation have been booked under Section 294, 323, 506, 427 and 34 of IPC. Further investigation in the matter is underway," Sharma added.

Man gets 30 years in jail for raping girl in temple

Team Absolute | New Delhi/Bhopal

Upholding the conviction of a man for raping a seven-year-old girl in a temple in Madhya Pradesh in 2018, the Supreme Court has sentenced him to 30 years in jail while noting that his action was barbaric.

The victim girl's grandmother lodged an FIR against the man who was 40 years old at the time of the crime, for kidnapping and raping the minor. The convict took the victim to a temple and committed raped her.

After finding the man guilty, the trial court awarded him the capital punishment under Section 376 AB (rape on woman under 12 years of age) of the Indian Penal Code. The Madhya Pradesh High Court, however, commuted the same to life imprisonment for the remainder of the convict's natural life.

A bench of Justices C T Ravikumar and Rajesh Binal took into account the present age of the petitioner and the fact that he has already undergone incarceration.

While modifying his sentence, the top court also imposed a fine of Rs 1 lakh on the convict.

Noting how the incident may haunt the victim,



the top court said every visit to any temple may hark back to the unfortunate and barbaric action to which she was subjected to.

"It is noted that if the victim is religious, every visit to any temple may hark back to her the unfortunate, barbaric action to which she was subjected

to. So also, the incident may haunt her and adversely impact her future married life," the bench said.

"Then, we are also to take into account the present age of the petitioner and the fact that he has already undergone incarceration. On consideration of all such aspects, we are of the considered view that a fixed term of sentence of 30 years, which shall include the period already undergone, must be the modified sentence of imprisonment," the bench said.

The top court said the High Court had lost sight of the fact that despite conviction under Section 376 (2) (i) and sections of the POCSO Act, no separate sentences were imposed on the man for the offence under the POCSO Act by the trial court, as the capital sentence was imposed on him. "In terms of the provisions under Section 376 AB, IPC, when a sentence of imprisonment for a term not less than 20 years which may extend up to life imprisonment is imposed, the convict is also liable to suffer a sentence of fine which shall be just and reasonable to meet the medical expenses and rehabilitation of the victim which we quantify as Rs 1 lakh and the same shall be paid to the victim," the bench said.

RSS TO HOLD 6-DAY BRAINSTORMING SESSION IN MP

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A six-day brainstorming session of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) will be held in Madhya Pradesh's Ujjain and Gwalior-Chambal regions from Tuesday.

The dignitaries who will be attending the conference and address different sessions include RSS Chief Dr. Mohan Bhagwat, General Secretary (RSS) Duttatreya Hosabole, Dr. Krishna Gopal, Dr. Mohan Vaidya, Ramdutt Chakradhar and Sri Mukunda. The BJP organisation leaders will also be joining the meeting.

Sources said the main focus will be to discuss the future agenda.

Sources also told IANS that a two-day (February 6 and 7)



session will start in Ujjain and thereafter they will move to the Gwalior-Chambal region and continue with its meetings in Morena for the next three days. The session will culminate on February 11. A Bhopal-based RSS functionary said it is a regular meeting, which the organisation holds after an interval in different parts of the country. However, it speculated that along with the success of

building Ram temple in Ayodhya, the issue of Gyanvapi and Krishna janam bhoomi may also be a part of discussion in the meetings.

Notably, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will also arrive in Madhya Pradesh on February 11 to kick-start the party's campaign for the coming Lok Sabha election for 29 seats in Madhya Pradesh.

Case registered in Lokayukta against former minister Paras Jain, his brother and 3 engineers of PWD

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Lokayukta registered a case under the Corruption Act against former minister and senior BJP leader Paras Jain, his brother, three PWD engineers and a statistics officer. Lokayukta has taken action in the case of misuse of office.



Jain is accused of showing a drain near the 15 bigha land purchased in his wife's name in Padyakhedi and building a wall around it using government funds. Due to this the government had to pay Rs 1 crore 52 lakh. In this case, Rs 44 lakh more were sanctioned. Paras Jain is also accused of illegally occupying government land.

District hospitals and civil hospitals will be further strengthened: Dy CM Shukla

Attended the 9th General Council meeting of Medical College Gwalior

Team Absolute | Bhopal

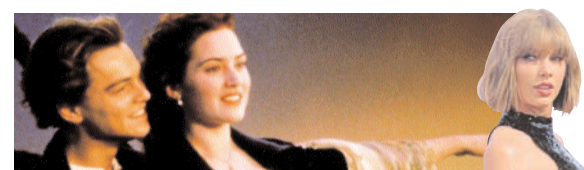
Deputy Chief Minister Shukla has said that District Hospital Murar, Civil Hospital Hazira as well as hospitals of Dabra and Bhitwar in Gwalior should be upgraded, so that the patients coming to the one thousand bed hospital can get better health facilities at the initial level itself. The Deputy Chief Minister directed to immediately send proposals for solving the sewer problem in the Gajrajara Medical Group premises. The 9th General Council meeting of Gwalior Medical College was held under the chairmanship of Deputy Chief Minister Shukla. Deputy Chief Minister Shukla inspected Gwalior's



One Thousand Bed Hospital, Super Speciality Hospital and Kamalaraja

Hospital and gave necessary directions regarding the arrangements.

Deputy Chief Minister Shukla said that action should be taken immediately to fill the vacant posts in hospitals. All the posts of nurses and ward boys should be filled on priority, so that better care can be provided to the patients. Meaningful efforts should be made to obtain funds and support from MP fund, MLA fund and CSR head for better equipment and other facilities required for better treatment in hospitals. There should be a continuous supply of medicines in hospitals. About 80 percent of the medicines are available in hospitals, the medicines which are not available should be purchased from the Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Kendra.



xCarey Mulligan accuses stars of '100 per cent lying' when saying they don't care about awards

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Carey Mulligan is upset for Greta Gerwig after she failed to be nominated for 'Barbie'. The blockbuster live-action movie about the iconic Mattel doll became the biggest film of 2023, and given its deep message of female empowerment, it was a surprise when Margot Robbie's (Barbie) co-star Ryan Gosling (Ken) received only nods for Best Supporting Actor and Best Picture at the upcoming Academy Awards, but both the leading lady and the film's director missed out on a nomination. "(It) is just the coolest thing. Because it's from your peers. It's wicked," Mulligan said of being nominated herself for her role as Leonard Bernstein's wife Felicia Montealegre in the Netflix biopic "Maestro" in an interview with Britain's The Times, reports aceshowbiz.com. Mulligan says that any actors who claim they don't care about winning awards "are 100 per cent lying."

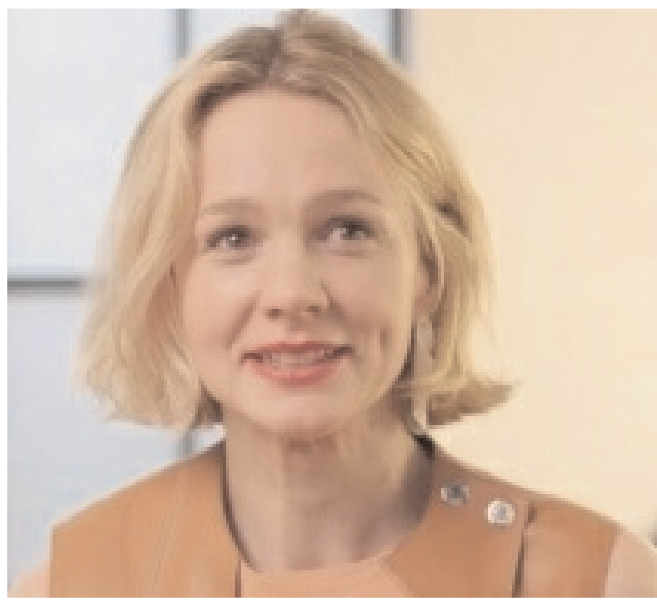
The 'Saltburn' star cannot understand why Greta failed to receive a single nod. She said, "I'm gutted for Greta because I don't know what else you can do as a director to get nominated. You make a critically acclaimed film that's also an incredible global success, and yet you don't get nominated?"

Mulligan speaking out on the snub comes after Margot claimed she is "not sad" about her lack of Oscar nomination, but said she feels bad for Greta.

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."

Upon its release in July 2023, 'Barbie' pulled in almost \$1.5 billion at the box office while its competitor 'Oppenheimer', which leads the way with a total of 13 nominations, made just over \$950 million. Robbie believes that the reaction to '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."



Taylor Swift's 'The Tortured Poets Department' tracklist features Post Malone among other collabs

Los Angeles | Agencies

Pop singer Taylor Swift has dropped the tracklist for her upcoming album, 'The Tortured Poets Department', which she announced at the Grammy Awards. In a social media post, Swift revealed the names of the 16 songs that will make up her new album. The album features collaborations with Post Malone and Florence + the Machine, plus a 17th track titled 'The Manuscript', reports deadline.com.

While taking the stage at the Grammys and winning her 13th gramophone, Swift said: "My lucky number, I don't know if I ever told you that. I know the way the Recording Academy voted is a direct reflection of the passion of the fans."

"So, I want to say thank you to the fans by telling you a secret that I've been keeping from you for the last two years, which is that my brand new album comes out April 19."

'The Tortured Poets Department' tracklist includes 'Fortnight' (feat. Post Malone), 'The Tortured Poets Department', 'My Boy Only Breaks His Favorite Toys', 'Down Bad', 'So Long, London', 'But Daddy I Love Him', 'Fresh Out the Slammer' and 'Florida!!!' (featuring Florence + the Machine)

The other tracks include: 'Guilty as Sin?', 'Who's Afraid of Little Old Me?', 'I Can Fix Him (No Really I Can)', 'I'm!', 'I Can Do It With a Broken Heart', 'The Smallest Man Who Ever Lived', 'The Alchemy', 'Clara Bow' and Bonus Track: 'The Manuscript'.

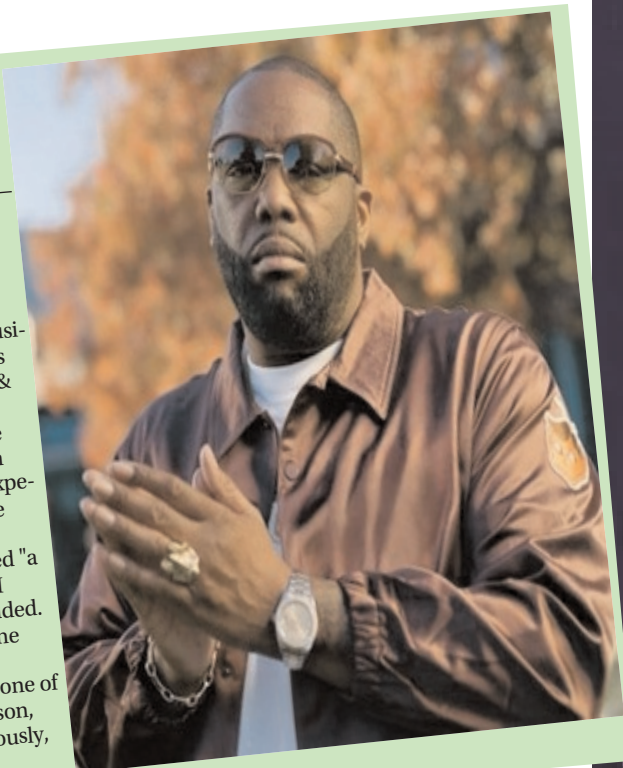
Swift unveiled the cover art for 'The Tortured Poets Department' after her Grammy win and captioned the social media post, "All's fair in love and poetry..."

Killer Mike speaks up after being handcuffed and questioned by police at 2024 Grammys

Los Angeles | Agencies

Rapper Killer Mike, who was handcuffed and questioned by police at the 2024 Grammys, has broken his silence on the issue. The incident occurred after the Atlanta rapper won best rap song and best rap performance for 'Scientist & Engineers' and best rap album for Michael during the show's pre-telecast ceremony, reports 'People' magazine. In a video shared by 'The Hollywood Reporter' on X, the musician was seen being escorted out of Crypto.com Arena by officers from the Los Angeles Police Department. The LAPD confirmed on X that an adult male who "was detained & handcuffed for a physical altercation that occurred at the 700 block of Chick Hearn Court" was placed under arrest and transported to LAPD Central Division. Killer Mike said in a statement shared with 'People', "As you can imagine, there was a lot going on and there was some confusion around which door my team and I should enter. We experienced an overzealous security guard but my team and I have the utmost confidence that I will ultimately be cleared of all wrongdoing. Until that time, keep listening to Michael, and keep going after your dreams." Killer Mike said he and his team received "a number of calls from concerned fans and colleagues wanting to know if I was OK". "I greatly appreciate the concern and support, but I am better than OK", Killer Mike added. Apart from extending his appreciation to the Recording Academy for his awards, he shared that he had another big win following the ceremony.

"We are incredibly proud and are basking in this moment. I am also grateful that one of my prayers has been answered - the day after my Grammy win - I learned that my son, who has been on the list for a kidney for years, finally has a match. Obviously, we are elated," his statement read.



'Saltburn' actor Jacob Elordi accused of assault

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor Jacob Elordi has found himself at the centre of a police investigation after he allegedly assaulted a man. The 'Saltburn' star reportedly became involved in an altercation with a radio star outside of a hotel in Sydney over the weekend, reports 'Mirror.co.uk'.

Police have since confirmed that they are investigating an alleged assault by a 26-year-old, for which they have seized CCTV footage.

Joshua Fox, who appears on Australia's KIIS FM approached the actor outside of the swanky Cleverly Hotel in Sydney and had hoped to question him but things took a drastic turn. Manchester UK-born Josh, 32, had asked Jacob if he could fill a jar with his bathwater, referencing the infamous 'Saltburn' scene.

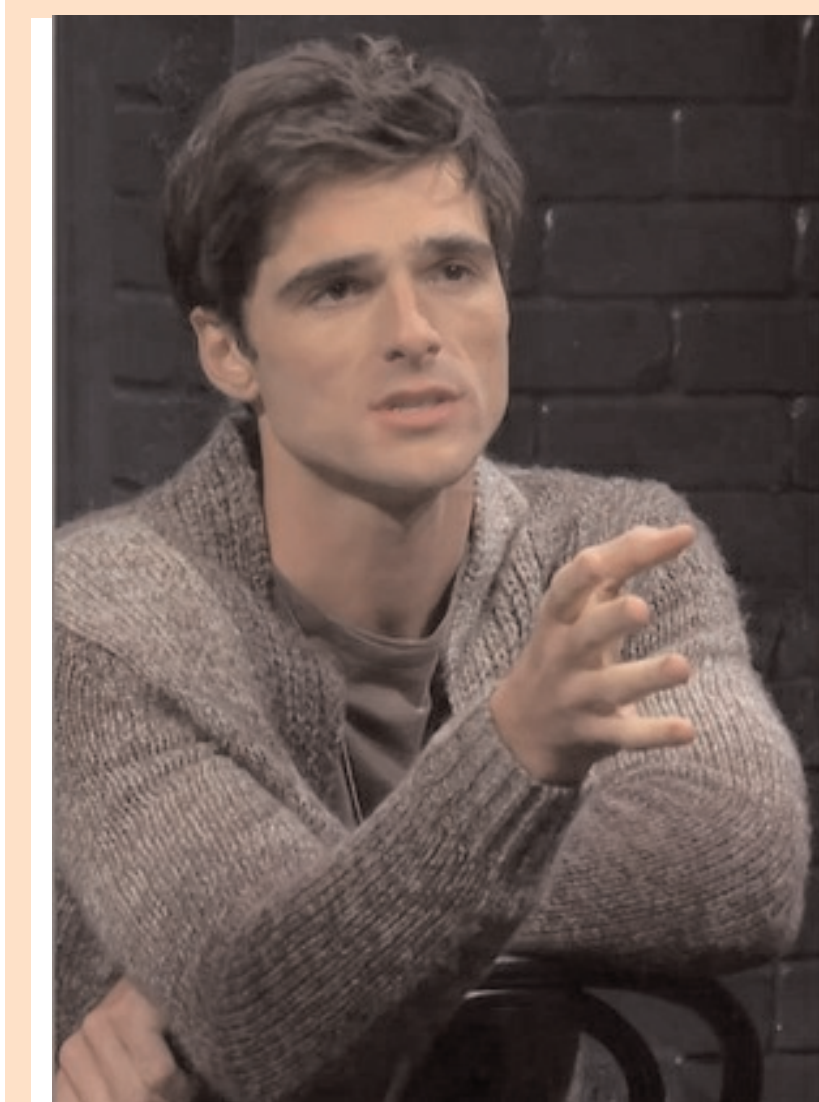
As per 'Mirror.co.uk', Jacob was said to have been "offended" by the question before "getting in his face". Josh claimed that Elordi, who is a whopping 6 feet tall, pushed him against a wall before his pals surrounded him.

Elordi is said to have demanded that Fox delete the footage of him being asked the question. Speaking to his co-stars, Josh said: "He's in the beer garden, I don't want to intrude on his personal space, I know how this works."

He added: "I'm holding the Tupperware in one hand, my phone in the other so it's clear I'm filming," before Josh admits he stopped filming after Elordi's request.

Josh continued: "He kind of gets up in my face and he's so close, someone is standing over you and he's a lot taller than me. I could have kissed him, he was that close. I'm backed against this wall and he's right in my face and these two boys are either side of me. I'm feeling quite intimidated and Jacob demands I delete the footage, and I say, 'Yeah that's fine, we're not going to use it', I said 'I'm sorry', I can't step away."

He further mentioned, "Jacob goes 'Yeah go into your recently deleted', I'm thinking 'Something is going to happen, I can't move, they're all surrounding me to this wall', it was kind of scary, I don't get into confrontations. I'm thinking if I delete this footage, there's no evidence that this encounter happened."



Drew Barrymore has no intentions of embracing her grays yet

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress and talk show host Drew Barrymore says she can't give up colouring her hair just yet.

"I do love that it's trending and looks so beautiful and is like a fashion statement," she told people.com of women leaning into their natural hair colour.

"But I just don't feel ready to go down that road."

Barrymore, who has been coloring her hair at home for years and who recently launched her own hair shade, jokes that these days she knows she has a lot of gray hairs, it's just a matter of if and when she chooses to show them off.

"It's almost a bronze," she says of her hair colour, for which she graces the box for the first time.

"It's not too light. Light is



something I can't do anymore because of the maintenance. I can't deal with roots, roots, roots."

Barrymore adds that while she's here for a little maintenance when it comes to her hair, she feels the opposite when it comes to getting work done on her face.

"Never say never, but I haven't resorted to it yet," she says of getting injectables or fillers.

"I'm going to maintain that for as long as possible. Because I'm not only interested in seeing myself as a Just For Men ad, but also as an old leather bag."

While Barrymore's joking, but she does note that because of her addictive personality, she's nervous about getting into topical treatments and plastic surgery.

"I fear I would continue to chase that, and be like, now this, and that."

After years of a wild Hollywood ride, Barrymore knows that most important thing is to be healthy and happy.

"I saw something from Cindy Crawford on her social saying that she embraced aging. That's such positive, healthy messaging. She was like, it means you're here, that you're alive, that you're living," Barrymore said.

James Cameron looks beyond the fifth, already has ideas for 'Avatar' 6 and 7

Los Angeles | Agencies

Filmmaker James Cameron has shared that he has ideas for at least two more movies in the 'Avatar' franchise beyond the five films that have been released or announced.

He said, "We're fully written through movie five, and I've got ideas for six and seven, although I'll probably be handing the baton on at that point," reports 'Entertainment Weekly'.

He told 'People' magazine, "I mean, mortality catches up. But I mean, we're enjoying what we're doing. We're loving it. We get to work with great people."

If Cameron has his way, the Avatar series could one day be on par with some other mega-franchises. He said, "'Star Trek', 'Star Wars', the world-building franchises



that have been around since I was a kid, those were my inspirations."

He added, "We're still a young universe. We're only two movies in, we're halfway through our third right now. To have that kind of cultural impact over time, you got to pour all your heart and energy into it."

As per 'Entertainment Weekly', following the suc-

cess of 'Avatar: The Way of Water' in 2022, a third Avatar film is slated to hit theatres in 2025, with a fourth set for 2029 and fifth for 2031.

It might be disappointing news for anyone hoping to see Cameron write or direct some non-Avatar projects. Cameron compared his commitment to the series to the ambitions of visionaries like George Lucas.



Zendaya



CASE REGISTERED AGAINST TOKYO BRONZE MEDALIST VARUN KUMAR UNDER POCSO ACT

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Tokyo Olympics bronze medalist hockey player Varun Kumar was booked under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act by Karnataka Police on Tuesday, according to a report.

According to NNIS Sports, a 22-year-old woman has filed a formal complaint accusing Varun of raping her under the pretence of marriage. The woman asserts that she met Varun on Instagram when she was 17 years old, and the two of them used to get together frequently.

The lady has accused Varun of having sex with her while he was in Bengaluru to attend the Indian men's hockey team's national training camp at the Sports Authority of India Centre.

The case was registered a few days before India's opening match against Spain in the FIH Pro League season 2023-24 at Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar. Although Varun was included in the tournament's 24-person roster, the most recent event now calls into question his selection. Varun was a member of the his-



toric team that won the bronze medal in the Tokyo Olympics and has been a consistent member of the Indian

men's hockey team for the past few years. In addition, he competed for the team that won the gold medal in

the Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, in 2023.

75th Strandja Memorial boxing: Sachin, and Sagar storm into quarters

Sofia, (Bulgaria) | Agencies

Former World Youth Champion Sachin and Commonwealth Games silver medalist Sagar entered the quarterfinals on Day Three of the ongoing 75th Strandja Memorial Tournament here on Tuesday.

Sachin (57kg) was up against Uzbekistan's Fayzov Khudoynazar in the pre-quarters and both the boxers came out with an attacking intent but it was Fayzov, who took a slight advantage in the first round.

Sachin looked transformed in the second round and initiated a comeback by using his quick reflexes to dodge multiple attacks before landing some accurate jabs.

In the third round, he was at his attacking best, leaving his opponent clueless with his sharp punches and quick movements, ultimately grabbing a phenomenal 3-2 win to enter the quarterfinals. He will now face Kapanadze Giorgi of Georgia on Friday to secure a place in the semifinals.

Sagar (92+kg) faced Lithuania's Jazevicius Jonas in the pre-quarters. The Indian pugilist looked completely in control of the game from the get-go as he put up a scintillating attacking display, making his way into the quarterfinals with a 5-0 unanimous decision win. Sagar will now take on Zokirov Jakhongir of Uzbekistan on Thursday.

Vanshaj (63.5kg) went down fighting in a



close contest against Iran's Habibinezhad Ali. Both the boxers were cautious in their approach and were looking to capitalize on counterattacks. Vanshaj had his moments of domination but eventually, the final verdict came against him as he lost the bout 2-3 to end his campaign. Late on Monday, Arundhati Choudhary (66kg) made her way into the quarterfinals with a 4-1 win over France's Sonvico Emilie. She will now face Matovic Milena of Serbia on Thursday. Manisha (60kg), on the other hand, went down 2-3 against Zidani Amina of France in the pre-quarters. On Wednesday, five Indian pugilists will kick off their campaign in their respective pre-quarter bouts. Amit Panghal (51kg) will be in action against Rudyk Maksym of Ukraine, Akash (71kg) will take on Traore Makan of France and Deepak (75kg) will face Asankul Uulu Sultan of Kyrgyzstan. Abhimanyu Loura (80kg) and Naveen Kumar (92kg) will go up against France's Monny Raphael and Voisnarovic Darius of Lithuania, respectively.

Five Indian chess players among top 10 in junior world rankings

Chennai | Agencies

For the first time in the history, young Indian chess players occupied five slots -- including the top spot -- in the junior world rankings.

The honours go to Grandmasters (GM) the top-ranked R. Praggnanandhaa (Elo rating 2747), D. Gukesh (2743) ranked third, Nihal Sarin (2693) ranked sixth, Raunak Sadhwani (2654) ranked seventh and Leon Luke Meendonca (2631) ranked tenth as per International Chess

Federation or FIDE's latest ranking list. Interestingly, Praggnanandhaa and Gukesh will be playing in the upcoming Candidates Tournament in Canada. The winner of the tournament will challenge the World Chess Champion Liren Ding (2762) for the



world title. In the girls section too two Indian players are figuring in the top 10 club viz Sarayu Velpula (2444-2nd rank) and Woman GM (WGM) Divya Deshmukh (2427, 3rd rank). In the women's section, India's seasoned GM Koneru

Humpy is ranked third with a rating of 2554. Humpy will also be playing in the Women Candidates in Canada.

Though not ranked in the top ten in the world, WGM R. Vaishali will also be competing in the Women Candidates tournament.

Sports Minister Anurag Thakur kicks off 1st BIMSTEC Aquatics C'ships in New Delhi

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Union Minister for Youth Affairs Anurag Singh Thakur on Tuesday kicked off Aquatics Championships 2024 which is being held for the first time.

The 1st BIMSTEC Aquatics Championships is being held at Delhi's Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee Swimming Pool Complex from February 6 to 9 with competitions being held for Under 20 age category in Swimming, Water Polo and Diving events.

A total of 39 medals will be given out across three sporting events along with a total of 9 trophies that will be at stake. Over 500 personnel are expected at the events, including 268 athletes from various BIMSTEC member countries.

Along with the Sports Minister, the opening ceremony was also attended by Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Nepal Dig Bahadur Limbu and Indra Mani Pandey, Secretary General, BIMSTEC High



Commissioners & Ambassadors to India of BIMSTEC among dignitaries from visiting countries and the government of India.

"World's 25% population lives in South Asia and Southeast Asian region and with the coming together of 7 BIMSTEC countries, the Bay of

Bengal area not only becomes a region used for travel and transportation but also becomes an area of progress, development and collaboration which will help in not only deeper friendship but also building a deeper sporting culture which will help deepen even friendship between

athletes and that is exactly the thought that our honourable Prime Minister envisioned when he announced this sporting event at the summit in Nepal," the Sports Minister said. BIMSTEC (The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) constitutes a unique link between South and South-East Asian countries with five members from South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka) and two members from South-East Asia (Myanmar & Thailand). The organisation for the very first time in history is hosting a sports competition which is being hosted in India. The announcement for the same was made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the 4th BIMSTEC Summit in 2018, where he announced the organising of the Youth Water Sports competition in India. The event was initially proposed for the year 2021, however, it was later postponed to 2024 due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic across the world.

MOHSIN RAZA NAQVI IS ELECTED UNOPPOSED AS PCB CHAIRMAN

Lahore | Agencies

Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi was on Tuesday unanimously and unopposed elected as the 37th Chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) for a three-year term, the PCB informed in a statement. His election, which took place at a special meeting of the Board of Governors (BoG) summoned by Shah Khawar at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Lahore, comes after a period of transition and uncertainty.

After his election, Naqvi expressed his deep honour and commitment to the development of cricket in the country.

"I am deeply honoured and humbled to have been unanimously elected as the chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board," Naqvi stated. "I am thankful for the trust and confidence reposed in me. I am fully committed to upgrading the standard of the game in the country and bringing professionalism to the administration of cricket in Pakistan." Naqvi's ascension to the PCB chairmanship was widely anticipated following the resignation of Zaka Ashraf, who had served as de



facto chairman, and Naqvi's subsequent appointment as Punjab's caretaker chief minister. Despite holding dual roles, Naqvi's

appointment as PCB chairman brings a fresh perspective to the cricketing landscape, even as his tenure as chief minister comes to an

end with Pakistan's upcoming general elections. According to Pakistan's law, a caretaker government can serve in that capacity for only three months while preparations for upcoming elections take place. Naqvi, however, was appointed over a year ago, in January 2023, with Pakistan's elections pushed back by several months.

While Naqvi lacks direct cricketing experience or a background in the administration of the sport, his appointment aligns with the trend of recent PCB chairmen. His immediate priorities include overseeing the upcoming edition of the Pakistan Super League which starts on February 17 and preparations for the 2025 ICC Champions Trophy, a landmark event for Pakistan cricket.

One of Naqvi's key challenges will be navigating the complexities of hosting major international events, especially amid potential logistical and geopolitical considerations. With Pakistan set to host the 2025 ICC Champions Trophy, Naqvi must ensure adequate infrastructure and arrangements are in place while addressing potential concerns, such as the participation of teams like India.

Virat is one of the greatest players of the game, we are prepared for him, says Brendon McCullum

Team Absolute | New Delhi

England's head coach Brendon McCullum has emphasized his team's readiness to face a potential return of Indian cricketing stalwart Virat Kohli in the upcoming matches. With the series delicately poised at 1-1 after India's resounding victory in Visakhapatnam, the anticipation surrounding Kohli's potential comeback looms large. Kohli's absence from the first two Tests due to personal reasons left a noticeable void in the Indian lineup. However, amidst the uncertainty, England's resilience shone through as they capitalised on the opportunities presented, with Ben Stokes leading the charge in the series opener in Hyderabad. "Virat's one of the greatest players of the game has seen. No doubt it improves this squad. As we have said throughout, the depth of Indian cricket, and



the talent in India is immense. So, we respect every opposition player that we come up against," Brendon McCullum told TalkSport. McCullum expressed respect for Kohli's prowess and competitiveness, underscoring the challenge his presence poses to the English side. "If Virat is coming back...we hope everything is well with his family. We look forward to that challenge too. He is a great competitor. I know him

very well and I enjoyed playing against him, I enjoyed our team playing against him. And if you have success against the best, I am sure you have earned it," he added. Previously on Monday, India's head coach Rahul Dravid provided an update regarding Virat Kohli's potential return to the squad for the three remaining Test matches against England, stating, "best to ask the selectors."

"I think it's best to ask the selectors. I am sure they are the best people to answer ahead of the team selection for the next three Tests. We will get to that. I am sure there will be a selection over the next few days. We will connect with him and find out," Rahul Dravid said at the post-match press conference. After losing the second Test by 106 runs, the England cricket team travelled to Abu Dhabi for 10 days of training for the third Test starting from Feb 15.

Zimbabwe to host India for T20I series in July

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Zimbabwe Cricket (ZC) and the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Tuesday announced that Zimbabwe will host India for a five-match T20I series in July.

The five-match series is scheduled to take place from July 6 to 14 at Harare Sport Club in Harare.

The confirmation of this tour comes after productive discussions between ZC and the BCCI, with the primary objective of fortifying bilateral ties and fostering a spirit of collaboration between the two cricketing boards, Zimbabwe Cricket (ZC) statement read.

ZC Chairman Tavengwa Mukuhli said: "We are absolutely thrilled to be hosting India for a T20I series in July in what will be our biggest international attraction at home this year.

The game of cricket has always immensely benefited from India's influence and dedication to the sport, and I would like to say a huge thank you to the BCCI



for committing to tour Zimbabwe once again." The significance and magnitude of this tour cannot be over-emphasised, especially as it is coming at a time we are working round the clock to re-establish ourselves as a force to reckon with at the highest level of the game."

BCCI Jay Shah said: "The BCCI has always played a pioneering role in contributing to the global cricketing community.

We understand that it is a period of rebuilding for Zimbabwe, and Zimbabwe Cricket needs our support at this juncture.

"Our steadfast commitment to touring and supporting fellow member boards aligns with our principle of bringing about a positive transformation within the cricketing landscape. The BCCI will do its best to make bilateral cricket stronger and commercially more viable.

"Our pledge to support Zimbabwe Cricket reflects a shared vision for the growth and prosperity of cricket on the international stage."



'Fighter' gets legal notice over Hrithik-Deepika's kissing scene



Team Absolute | Mumbai

The recently released Hrithik Roshan-starrer action film 'Fighter' has landed in legal trouble. The makers of the film have been served a legal notice over a kissing scene between the film's lead pair of Hrithik and Deepika Padukone both of whom essays Indian Air Force officers in the film.

As per reports, the notice against the makers of the film has been issued by an Air Force officer from Assam,

Saumya Deep Das. Saumya Deep Das has claimed that the scene was an insult to the Indian Air Force as the lead characters are seen kissing while donning their IAF uniforms. In his complaint, the officer has said that the IAF uniform is a powerful symbol of commitment to duty, national security and selfless service. He further said that the film misrepresents its inherent dignity by utilising the uniform for a scene promoting personal romantic entanglements. 'Fighter', which was released a day prior to the Republic

Day in India, follows the dramatised events after the Pulwama attack on CRPF personnel, and how India retaliated by conducting an airstrike at a terrorist camp.

The story develops through the events following a terrorist attack. As the story progresses, they fall in love.

The film is written by Ramon Chibb, who was commissioned in the Indian Army in 1990 and is the son of an Air Force Officer. He served in the Kumaon Regiment of the Indian Army until 1995.

Kartik Aaryan workouts next to 'Dadi' in the gym

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood star Kartik Aaryan, who is gearing up for the release of his upcoming film 'Chandu Champion', shared a video of him working out in the gym. However, his grandmother took all the attention as she worked out next to him serving as an inspiration for the actor.

Kartik took to his Instagram and shared a workout video in which he can be seen lifting 50 kg dumbbells for his back muscles. His dadi can be seen next to him training her shoulders.

She goes on to give him a tap and says, "Thanks buddy".

Kartik wrote in the caption, "Dadi on fire. Don't focus on me... but focus on the Champion behind me. Always working out in the gym and is a real inspiration for fitness and enthusiasm #ChampionsFitness #ThanxBuddy."

For 'Chandu Champion', the actor underwent a physical transformation to star in the real-life story of a sportsman.

Earlier, Kartik had shared a post on his social media in which he mentioned how he finally got to taste the sugar after a year as he wrapped up the shooting of 'Chandu Champion'.

The actor shared a video from the wrap up of the film showing director Kabir Khan feeding him a Rasmalai to mark the end of the journey on a sweet note. 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.



Atul Kasbekar shares throwback pic featuring young Shah Rukh Khan from ad shoot

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A picture of Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan from "many moons ago" has been shared by photographer-producer Atul Kasbekar, which he says was from an ad shoot. Kasbekar took to Instagram, where he shared the old picture. It has Shah Rukh Khan sitting in the middle. It also has late filmmaker Pradeep Sarkar, Kasbekar and many others looking into the camera lens and smiling. It seems the picture was taken around the time when Shah Rukh was working on or had the release of 'Yes Boss' in 1997 as Kasbekar had the song 'Chand Taare' from the film playing in the background.

Kasbekar wrote: "Post some ad shoot with SRK and @pradeepsarkar at my studio many moons ago The late Pradeep-da was an art director in those days with Contract Advtg in Delhi and we did loads of print work together."

He added: "Also in frame the brilliant makeup artist @michelletung5, production designer Chetana Prabhu, my then



asst and a superb photographer now in his own right @jatinkampani Cannot for the life of me recall which brand it was for PS: sorry for the fuzzy image, was sent to me copied of a print (remember those?)"

He is recognised for his Kingfisher Calendar shoots. He is a Bollywood film producer through partnership in Ellipsis Entertainment and has produced films such as 'Neerja', 'Tumhari Sulu', 'Why Cheat India' and 'Loop Lapeta'.

Archana Puran Singh on son Ayushmaan's b'day: Everyday with you is a celebration

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Archana Puran Singh on Tuesday showered love on her son Ayushmaan Sethi on the occasion of his birthday, saying everyday with him is a celebration. Archana is married to actor Parmeet Sethi, and the couple have two sons Aryamann and Ayushmaan. The actress known for her work in movies like 'Kuch Kuch Hota Hai', 'Mohabbatein', 'Krish', among others, took to Instagram and dropped a Reel video, wherein she can be seen posing with her son candidly. The montage video features candid pictures of mother and son duo, having fun with each other. The video is captioned as: "Every day with you is a celebration... Happy birthday son #unfiltered."

Archana is known for her infectious laughter in 'The Kapil Sharma Show'. The standup comedy and chat show is hosted by Kapil Sharma.

She was also the judge in 'India's Laughter Champion'.

On the other hand, Parmeet, who is best known for his role in 'Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge' was last seen in the movie 'Tumse Na Ho Payega'.

He also featured in the web series 'Special Ops 1.5'. Parmeet has recently directed the web show 'Hack Crimes Online'.



Sushmita Sen: Ram Madhvani revealed new layers in my acting



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Sushmita Sen expressed her delight in working with director Ram Madhvani, and shared how the latter has revealed new layers in her acting that she never knew existed.

Sushmita is seen as the lead in Ram Madhvani's crime thriller series 'Aarya'.

Sharing insights on working with the 'Neerja' director, Sushmita said: "Working with Ram Madhvani is always a delight. I truly admire his genius. He transformed Aarya from a naive, sheltered woman to someone resilient in facing life's challenges."

"Off-screen, Ram revealed new layers in my acting that I never knew existed. The trust he has in me is incredible; he

saw Aarya in me before I could," said the former Miss Universe.

Sushmita added: "For 'Aarya Antim Vaar', Ram and I spent time understanding Aarya's soul. When he asked me to look into my soul, I followed his advice and isolated myself. You can see the pain and anger on screen - Ram's guidance brought those emotions to life."

Neha Dhupia sings b'day song for Angad; couple spotted on a breakfast date



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Neha Dhupia showered love on her 'soulmate', 'roommate', and 'cheque-mate', husband Angad Bedi by singing a birthday song for him at midnight. The couple was also spotted by the paparazzi as they went out for a breakfast date.

Angad, who is the son of former Indian cricket captain Bishan Singh Bedi is celebrating his 41st birthday on Tuesday.

In the video, Angad and Neha are seen coming out of a restaurant, twinning in black outfits. Neha is holding a pastry with a candle on it. Angad cuts the pastry, and the paparazzi can be heard singing the birthday song for the 'Soorma' fame actor.

Neha took to her Instagram account, and shared an adorable video, wherein she is seen singing a birthday song for her husband, who is sleeping holding his baby girl Mehr.

The video was captioned as: "The mandatory midnight wish... I love you sooo much that I didn't wake you up!!!! Happy birthday my love, my life, my world Angad Bedi. Also our mehrunissa is love".

In another post, Neha shared a series of pictures, in which she can be seen giving a lip kiss to Angad. She is wearing a blue outfit, while Angad is sporting a black tee shirt.

The post is captioned as: "Happy birthday my soulmate, my roommate, and my 'cheque-mate'... I love you so damn much".

Neha and Angad got married in May 2018. The couple have a baby girl Mehr, and a son Guriq.

On the work front, Neha last featured in the movie 'A Thursday'. Angad was last seen in 'Ghoomer' and 'Hi Nanna'.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Sonam Bajwa