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UPA MADE ECONOMY NON-PERFORMING IN 10 YEARS: WHITE PAPER

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday tabled a 59-page White Paper in the Lok Sabha, showcasing the achievements of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in the last 10 years of Narendra Modi-led Central government while also giving an account of the 'economic mismanagement' of the previous Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) regime.

people's confidence and increased their worries about their future. This comes at a time when the Congress party and the constituents of the INDIA bloc have been taking on Modi government on the issue of price rise and inflation and have decided to make it one of the issues in the run-up to the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections.

The 'White Paper' pointed out that economic mismanagement happened despite the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led NDA Government having handed over a healthy and resilient economy with high growth potential in 2004 to the UPA regime.

It stated that even as India was "standing at the



cup of emerging as a powerful economy, little was done by the UPA government to build upon the strong foundation laid by the previous NDA government".

While inflation based on wholesale prices averaged 6.1 per cent during the UPA-I regime from 2004-2009, due to the strong foundation

laid by the previous NDA government, it was a percentage point higher at 7.1 per cent in UPA-II in 2009-14.

However, in the case of food inflation, the acceleration was pronounced, rising from 6.74 per cent to 12.2 per cent over the same period. The average retail inflation under the UPA-II

"The government will never say how many people got jobs. They are releasing MNREGA funds. They are discriminating against states. Despite being in power for 10 years, instead of talking about himself, he only criticises the Congress party. Even today he did not talk about price rise, unemployment and economic inequality? 'Modi Ki Guarantee' is only to spread LIES!"



Mallikarjun Kharge, President, Congress

government was 10.25 per cent and went up to 12.5 at one point.

The paper stated that in the years between 2004 and 2008, the Indian economy grew fast, thanks to the lagged effects of the reforms of the NDA government and favourable global conditions and while the UPA government took credit for the high growth but did little to consolidate it.

The White Paper will be discussed in parliament tomorrow, when the Congress is expected to come up with a strong rebuttal. Ahead of the White Paper, the party had presented a "Black Paper" targeting the Centre.

RBI RETAINS REPO RATE AT 6.5% FOR SIXTH TIME IN A ROW

Chennai: Not belying the expectations of senior economists, the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has retained the repo rate at 6.50 per cent for sixth time in a row. The repo rate is the rate at which the RBI lends to the commercial banks.

The RBI has also decided that banks should disclose to retail and MSME borrowers the all inclusive rate chart -- basic interest rate plus other charges like processing fee etc -- as Key Facts Statement. Announcing the decisions of the MPC after its three-day deliberations, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said on Thursday that the committee decided to keep the repo rate at 6.5 per cent. Consequently, the standing deposit facility (SDF) rate remains unchanged at 6.25 per cent and the marginal standing facility (MSF) rate and the Bank Rate at 6.75 per cent.

The MPC also decided not to change its stance from 'withdrawal of accommodation' as the inflation continues to be above the target rate of 4 per cent and the incomplete transmission of revised repo rates. Five of the six MPC members voted in favour of retaining the repo rate while Prof. Jayanth R. Varma voted to reduce the policy repo rate by 25 basis points.

Economy transformed from 'fragile five' to 'top five'

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Comparing the performance of the 10-year rule of the Narendra Modi government with that of the erstwhile UPA regime, the White Paper on Indian Economy tabled in the Lok Sabha by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman highlights the fact that in 2014, India was among the 'fragile five' economies, but now figures among the 'top five' economies, making the third highest contribution to global growth every year.

It goes on to present a 'Then and Now' scenario of the comparison to drive home its point:

Then, the world had lost confidence in India's economic potential and dynamism; now, with our economic stability and

growth prospects, we inspire hope in others. It cites the perceptions of two major international organisations.

Then, we had a scam-riddled 12-day Commonwealth Games; now, we successfully hosted a far-bigger and year-long G20 Presidency in 2023, showcasing India at its best in terms of content, consensus and logistics, providing acceptable solutions to global problems.

Then, we had 2G scam; now, we have extensive coverage of the population under 4G with the lowest rates and the world's fastest rollout of 5G in 2023.

Then, we had the Coalgate scam; now, we have built systems for transparent and objective auctions for harnessing natural resources to boost the economy and the

public finances.

Then we provided gold import license for a chosen few; now, we have set up a bullion exchange in GIFT IFSC with a transparent mechanism for import.

Then, we had the economy facing a 'twin balance sheet problem'; now, we have turned the economy to having a 'twin balance sheet advantage' for companies as well as banking sector with ample capacity to ramp up investments and credit and generate employment.

Then, we had double-digit inflation; now, inflation has been brought down to little over 5 per cent.

Then, we had a foreign exchange crisis; now, we have record foreign exchange reserves of over USD 620 billion.

Then, we had 'policy-paralysis'; infrastructure was not a priority; now, the wheels of the virtuous cycle of 'investment, growth, employment and entrepreneurship, and savings' leading to more investments and productivity has been set into fast motion.

Then, we had sporadic coverage of development programmes; now, we have 'saturation coverage' for providing basic necessities for all, with measured, targeted, and inclusive support for the needy and empowerment of all to pursue their aspirations.

In sum, the progress achieved in the ten years of our government has overcome the malaise and paralysis of the previous ten years of the UPA government.

In 2024, confidence and purpose have

replaced the diffidence and drift of 2014, the paper stated as it listed selected socio-economic indicators such as the alleviation of poverty and creation of more employment. "Our government, armed with political and policy stability, recognised the need to make tough decisions for the greater economic good... Rather than employing quick fixes, we undertook bold reforms to nurture the coming decades of economic performance," it said. Contrasting its style of functioning with the UPA, the White Paper asserted that the Modi government, unlike its predecessor, invested in the foundations of the economy along with building a sturdy superstructure. The White Paper concludes by saying that the government will not rest on its past laurels as the goal is to make India a "developed nation by 2047".

PM Modi not born in OBC family: Rahul Gandhi



Jharsuguda | Agencies

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was not born in an Other Backward Class family, and he is "misleading" people by identifying himself as an OBC.

Rahul Gandhi, while making a brief speech here on the third and concluding day of his

'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' in Odisha, said PM Modi "was born in a family that belonged to the general caste". "Modi ji has been misleading the people by saying that he is an OBC. He was born in a family of the Teli caste, which was included in the OBC list during the BJP government's tenure in Gujarat in 2000. Therefore, Modi ji is not an OBC by birth," the Congress MP asserted.

BJP I-T cell in-charge Amit Malviya shared official government document from the Gazette of India to refute his claims on Modi's OBC status.

Rubbing the 'blatant lies' of Congress leader, Malviya wrote, "Modi's caste was notified as an OBC on October 27, 1999, a full two years before he became the Chief Minister of Gujarat." The official records in Gazette of India show that the notification released in 1999, listed Narendra Modi's caste as OBC. This came about two years, before he assumed the post of Gujarat Chief Minister.

Maha primary schools to start classes from 9 a.m. onwards



Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a major initiative, the Maharashtra government on Thursday directed that all pre-primary and primary schools in the state - public or private - should start their classes from 9 a.m. onwards in the interests of students' health. The decision comes over two months after Governor Ramesh Bais had raised

concerns over the early morning schools for the children, who are below the age of 10.

The government made the decision after studying the timing change proposal and conducting a survey among parents and teachers, academic experts and others, who had expressed the need to reconsider the early school hours, 7 a.m. in cities and rural areas.

MHA decides to scrap Free Movement Regime between India and Myanmar

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has decided to scrap the Free Movement Regime (FMR) between India and Myanmar to ensure the internal security of the country and to maintain the demographic structure of India's northeastern states bordering Myanmar.

Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation Amit Shah in his post on 'X' on Thursday said that "It is Prime Minister Narendra Modi Ji's resolve to secure our borders, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has decided that the Free Movement Regime (FMR) between India and Myanmar be scrapped to ensure the



internal security of the country and to maintain the demographic structure of India's North Eastern States bordering Myanmar. Since the Ministry of External Affairs is currently in the process of scrapping it, MHA has recommended the

immediate suspension of the FMR." The Home Ministry said that it has been decided to construct a fence along the entire 1643-kilometre long Indo-Myanmar border. To facilitate better surveillance, a patrol track along the border will also be paved.

Shiv Sena-UBT leader shot at in Mumbai's Borivali, condition critical

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Shiv Sena-UBT leader Abhishek Ghosalkar, the son of a Shiv Sena UBT leader, was shot by a man with while doing a Facebook live with him. The attacker then turned the gun on himself. The shooting was caught on camera during the Facebook live. Ghosalkar and his attacker are both dead.

with some visitors about local works. As he stood up, one person whipped out a revolver and fired at least three rounds at him. Ghosalkar was seen stumbling forward and falling down, even as videos of the incident went viral.

The incident was reported to the nearby Karuna Hospital in Borivali where his condition is reported to be critical, and further details are awaited.

The son of senior SS-UBT leader Vinod Ghosalkar, Abhishek is a former BMC Municipal Corporator from Dahisar.

30 space missions planned from India in next 14 months

Chennai | Agencies

A total of 30 space launches -- commercial and non-commercial by government and private players-- are being planned from India over the next 14 months from the Indian spaceport in Sriharikota in Andhra Pradesh, the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe) said on Thursday.

Included in the proposed missions are the test flights relating to India's human space mission, Gaganyaan.

This was stated by IN-SPACe, the regulator for the private sector in the space industry, in its integrated launch manifesto using Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) infrastructure.

"About 30 launches are planned for 2023-24 (Q4) and 2024-25 from SDSC (Satish Dhawan Space Centre) half of which are catering to the commercial space sector of India with the rest being user-funded, scientific missions or tech-



nology test launches," IN-SPACe said.

According to IN-SPACe, out of the 14 commercial missions identified, seven launches are being undertaken by NewSpace India Ltd -- the commercial arm of Department of Space -- including the realisation of two Polar Satellite Launch Vehicles (PSLV) from the L&T-HAL consortium.

This marks a substantial increase in launch activity compared to previous years and is a positive indicator of the expanding space ecosystem in the country. This initiative aligns with the directives of the recently-ratified Indian Space Policy, entrusting IN-SPACe with authorisation of launch manifesto for launch-infrastructure created through public expenditure. The launch manifesto comprehensively covers user-funded, scientific missions and other technology demonstration launches by ISRO along with the commercial launches and associated primary and co-sharing passengers.

"The Integrated Launch Manifesto is in line with Department of Space's vision on optimising resources and encouraging innovation to establish India as a global manufacturing hub for space activities, aligning with the vision of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' (Self-Reliant India)," IN-SPACe said. The key private sector rocket missions include planned Sub-Orbital and Orbital launches by Agnikul Cosmos and Skyroot Aerospace.



RS 777-CRORE PRAGATI MAIDAN TUNNEL BEYOND REPAIR, NEEDS OVERHAUL: REPORT

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Pragati Maidan tunnel in Delhi is beyond repair and needs a major overhaul, The Hindu cited a senior Delhi government official as saying. A delay in the tunnel's completion and negligence in maintenance has led to cracks in the tunnel, the PWD official was quoted as saying. The structure is not safe for commuters anymore and it cannot be repaired without a complete revamp, he said.

The Delhi government's Public Works Department (PWD) issued a notice to Larsen and Toubro over alleged "glaring infirmities" in the Rs 777-crore tunnel. The department has also demanded Rs 500 crore as a "token amount" from L&T, prompting a counterclaim of a similar amount from the construction firm. The government department has also direct-

ed the company to immediately begin repair work.

Speaking about the leaks and cracks in the tunnel it built, the spokesperson of L&T said, "The PWD is our respected client. We have happily worked with them for years. L&T wishes to inform the company has filed a claim of Rs 500 crore against PWD."

The tunnel, built just a little over a year ago, has developed seepage issues with water leaking from the walls. A stream of water is seen coming from the middle of the road, inundating the tunnel, and there are cracks in the tunnel walls.

The road has also developed massive cracks, NDTV's ground report showed. The tunnel has now become quite dangerous for the people using it given the leaks at several places.

Archit Singh, an urban planning expert, said, "There seems to be an

issue of waterproofing. It seems that soil testing was not done properly. First of all, the use of this tunnel should be stopped. The government should form a fact-finding team of geological experts, architects, tunnel engineers, and structural engineers. The team should find the reasons for leakage and cracks and figure out if the tunnel can be repaired and how."

The tunnel and five underpasses form the Pragati Maidan Integrated Transit Corridor Project which aims to ease connectivity between central Delhi with the eastern parts of the city and the nearby cities of Noida and Ghaziabad.

The 1.3-km tunnel, inaugurated in 2022, faced multiple closures during floods last year.

Pointing to this, another official said all underground tunnels develop leakages and blamed L&T, the company entrusted with its maintenance,

for not undertaking repair work despite being asked to multiple times in the past two months.

The PWD notice to L&T alleged the project has "glaring infirmities" that were both technical in nature and also design flaws. "The most glaring as well as alarming issue was the accumulation of water across various locations in the tunnel/underpass," it noted.

"This issue, especially during the monsoon season, rendered the entire project non-operational for the general public and ultimately ended up causing far more blockages and congestion along the arterial roads of the entire New Delhi area which defeated the very purpose of this ambitious project," the notice stated.

In its show-cause notice, the PWD asked L&T to deposit a "minimum token amount" of ? 500 crore and begin repair work immediately.

Probe launched in Chennai after 5 popular schools receive hoax bomb threat

Chennai | Agencies

The cybercrime wing of the Greater Chennai Police has launched a probe after five popular schools in the city received hoax bomb threat.

An anonymous person sent e-mails to five popular schools under the Greater Chennai Police limits on Thursday, claiming that bombs would detonate in their premises.

After the e-mail was received, many schools, including those that did not receive the mail, also closed early and asked parents to take their children home.

The police said in a statement, "Following the threat



e-mails, our personnel from Greater Chennai City Police/Bomb Disposal and Detection Squad (BDDS) have been deployed to these schools for anti-sabotage checks. Action is being taken to identify the culprit who sent these e-mails." Public are requested not to panic, the police said.

U'Khand: Violence breaks out in Haldwani as 'illegally constructed' mosque & madarsa razed

Haldwani | Agencies

Tension prevailed here on Thursday after several establishments, including a mosque and a madarsa, which were illegally constructed on government land, were demolished.

The situation, however, turned violent after the mosque and the madarsa were razed in the Vanbhulpura area, as enraged locals pelted stones on the police personnel and mediapersons.

Several police personnel sustained injuries in the attack, sources said. The mob also damaged a JCB machine and set a number of vehicles on fire.

Shoot-at-sight order has been issued while a curfew has also been imposed in the



violence-hit area.

Taking note of the violence, Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami convened a high-level meeting as he appealed to the people to maintain peace.

Haldwani Mayor Pankaj Upadhyay said the madarsa and mosque were illegally constructed.

Heavy deployment of police personnel has been made in the city.

WITH EYE ON POLLS, WEST BENGAL BUDGET FOCUSES ON WOMEN, POOR

Kolkata | Agencies

With an eye on the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls, West Bengal Finance Minister Chandrima Bhattacharya on Thursday presented a Rs 3,66,116 crore state budget for 2024-25 with enhanced sums for various key sections of the people.

Understanding that the women voters have played a crucial role for Trinamool Congress' electoral success in consecutive elections, Bhattacharya proposed a substantial increase in the entitlements under Lakshmir Bhandar, the monthly scheme for women in the state.

Under the new proposals, the monthly amount for the general category women will be doubled from Rs 500 to Rs 1,000, and the amount for the reserved categories will be increased from Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,200.

"An additional annual allocation of Rs 12,000 crore has been provided for this purpose. On attaining the age of 60 years, there will be an automatic and seamless transition from



Lakshmir Bhandar to old age pension scheme and the beneficiaries will continue to receive the same amount," Bhattacharya said.

Reading out the budget speech, Bhattacharya reminded the Assembly of the assurance from the Chief

Minister Mamata Banerjee, about paying the beneficiaries of 100-day job scheme under MGNREGA from the state exchequer and said that the state government has earmarked an allocation of Rs 3,700 crore for 2024-25. At the same time, she also

announced the state's own job scheme Karmasree, through which the state government will ensure at least 50 days of work to each job card holder. This scheme shall commence from May 2024, the Finance Minister said. She also said that the state government has also announced an additional four per cent dearness allowance (DA) for the state government employees. However, the announcement has not made the agitating state government employees happy as even after the enhancement the gap in DA payment with their counterparts in the Union government remains at 32 per cent.

Economic analysts feel that although several proposals on enhanced dole amounts were announced, there was no concrete proposal for balancing the same through additional generation of tax revenues. On the contrary, pointed out economists, there had been proposals on relaxations of taxes in certain spheres like taxes of vehicles, luxury tax, stamp duty, among others.

BIHAR: BJP DECIDES TO TAKE ALL ITS 78 MLAS TO BODH GAYA BEFORE FLOOR TEST

Patna | Agencies

Ahead of the trust vote of the Nitish Kumar-led NDA government in Bihar, the BJP's top leadership has decided to keep all its 78 MLAs at one place in Bodh Gaya to avoid any kind of 'mishap' before the floor test.

A meeting in this regard took place at the residence of deputy chief minister Samrat Choudhary in Patna where BJP senior leaders decided to keep all their MLAs at one place in Bodh Gaya. BJP leaders are claiming that the party has a two-day training programme on February 10 and 11 in Bodh Gaya and hence all the MLAs will be present there to take political tips from senior leaders of the party.

Arvind Kumar Singh, spokesperson of the BJP Bihar unit, confirmed the development.

"The party has decided to organize a training camp in Bodh Gaya. The party MLAs will stay there for two days and return to Patna on February 12 to take part in the trust vote. We have a complete majority and we will prove it in the House. No 'Khela' will take place in Bihar on February 12,"



Singh said.

The BJP is saying that it is a normal practice of the party but the timing of the event is giving some indication

that the saffron party leaders do not want to take any chance before the crucial trust vote on February 12. The training camp in Bodh Gaya is not a

pre-scheduled event but was suddenly decided on Wednesday night.

Sources said that if the BJP MLAs stay in Patna, there could be a chance that some of them may go here and there and hence the party has decided to keep them at one place. The MLAs will come back on the morning of February 12 to Patna and straight away go to the Vidhan Sabha to participate in the trust vote.

The budget session of the Vidhan Sabha is scheduled to start from February 12 with the speech of Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar followed by the NDA leaders bringing in the no confidence motion against Speaker Awadh Bihari Choudhary. After that, voting will take place to elect a new Speaker and then the Nitish Kumar government will prove its majority in the House.

As Speaker Awadh Bihari Choudhary refused to resign, it will be interesting to see what kind of 'Khela' will take place on February 12.

Sources said that some MLAs of the BJP and half a dozen MLAs of the JD-U are in touch with RJD leader and former chief minister Lalu Prasad Yadav.

Woman falls into borewell, dies despite 10-hour rescue operation

Jaipur | Agencies

A woman who fell into a borewell near her house on Wednesday afternoon could not be saved even after a rescue operation that lasted for 10 hours. Now, SDRF and NDRF teams will dig from a distance of 130 feet from the borewell to bring out her body, police officials said on Thursday.

The incident took place in Gudla village of Gangapur city.

Deputy Commissioner Santram Meena said that information about Mona Bai (25) of Bairwa Dhani, wife of Suresh, falling into an open borewell was received on Wednesday afternoon. The villagers had informed the police when the woman's slippers were found near the borewell. Additional District Collector Hariram Meena said that rescue arrange-



ments started at around 1 p.m. The teams reached the spot and arrangements for oxygen were also made. The rescue operation continued till around 4.30 a.m. on Thursday morning.

Excavation started again after putting in place a security cordon.

Traffic was stopped by creating a security cordon

around the borewell. Big machines are being brought to remove the body from the spot. The biggest problem in the rescue was related to digging because there is a house on one side and a high tension wire above.

Officials say that the high tension line will be cut so that the digging machines can work properly.

Axis Mutual Fund launches 'Axis S&P BSE Sensex Index Fund'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Axis Mutual Fund, one among the fastest growing fund houses in India, is pleased to announce the launch of its New Fund Offer - Axis S&P BSE Sensex Index Fund (an open-ended index fund tracking the S&P BSE Sensex TRI). The fund will be managed by Mr. Karthik Kumar (Fund Manager) and Mr. Ashish Naik (Fund Manager). The new fund will track the S&P BSE Sensex TRI benchmark. The minimum investment amount is Rs. 500 and in multiples of Re.1/- thereafter.

A representation of the large cap companies in India, the S&P BSE Sensex Index is a free float market-weighted stock market index of 30 well-established and financially sound companies listed on the Bombay Stock Exchange. Considering the wide spectrum of sectors the index covers, it offers investors a diversified portfolio and an opportunity to participate in the growth



story of various sectors with a single index.

Axis S&P BSE Sensex Index Fund

The investment objective of the Axis S&P BSE Sensex Index Fund is to provide returns before expenses that corresponds to the total returns of the S & P BSE Sensex TRI subject to tracking errors. However, there is no assurance that the investment objective of the scheme will be achieved. The Scheme endeavours to invest in stocks forming part of the underlying index in the same ratio as per the index to the extent possible. Essentially, 95% to 100% of the investments will be made in securities covered by S&P BSE Sensex TRI and for the remaining, the fund has the flexibility to invest in Debt and Money Market investments. To that extent follows a passive investment

strategy, except to the extent of meeting liquidity and expense requirements. (Please refer to SID for detailed Asset Allocation & Investment Strategy and other scheme related features available at www.axismf.com).

The scheme aims to invest and maintain domestic equity exposure greater than 95% of net assets at all times. Accordingly, the resulting tax treatment will be that of equity mutual funds. Given the mutual fund structure, investors can look to invest through various systematic options like SIPs, STP's & lumpsum investments. Investments through SIPs can offer an efficient and convenient way for investors to participate in the growth of the overall market, encouraging regular and disciplined investing, regardless of market conditions.

TAZKIRA: TAPESTRY OF INDIAN AND IRANIAN ARTISTIC HERITAGE

Jaipur | Agencies

The Welcome Art Gallery at ITC Rajputana stands as a beacon of support for young artists and a platform for the promotion of art and literature, as evidenced by the inauguration of "Tazkira," a four-day art exhibition showcasing the rich tapestry of Indian and Iranian artistic heritage.

Organized by the Jaipur Art Summit, Tazkira opened its doors on Monday, welcoming art enthusiasts and connoisseurs to immerse themselves in the splendour of traditional paintings, handicrafts, and miniature art from two ancient civilizations.

Highlighting the profound communal bonds and shared cultural ethos between India and Iran, Tazkira serves as a testament to the enduring legacy of artistic expression that transcends borders and spans generations.

The exhibition was inaugurated by esteemed dignitaries, including Mr. Prem Surana, Chairman of the University of Technology, Jaipur, who graced the occasion as the chief guest. Joining him were distinguished guests Wato Tsereteli, Director of the Center of Contemporary Art, Tbilisi; Rusudan Chkonia, Georgian Film Director; and Pandit Madhukar Chaturvedi, Cultural Writer & Analyst, Agra.



Special guests added to the grandeur of the event, with Aakif Habib, Founder of Atelier Habib, Dubai-London-Mumbai, and Lakshmi Raman, Eminent Art Collector & Promoter from Jaipur, lending their presence to the celebration of artistic heritage.

At the heart of this exhibition is a commitment to supporting emerging talent, with the Welcome Art Gallery of ITC Rajputana showcasing the works of promising young artists

alongside masterpieces by renowned Indian and Iranian artists. This dedication to nurturing creativity and fostering artistic dialogue underscores the gallery's role as a catalyst for cultural exchange and artistic innovation.

Tazkira promises to captivate art lovers and enthusiasts alike with its captivating display of creativity, culture, and heritage. The exhibition runs until February 8, inviting visitors to delve into the timeless allure of

Indian and Iranian artistry.

Additionally, Dr. Shailendra Bhatt highlights India's rich artistic heritage, stating that there are 256 traditional arts and creatives practiced from dawn till dusk, deeply intertwined with culture and religion. Recurring symbols such as holy images, flowers, rivers, mountains, stones, stars, and color palettes manifest across various mediums, including sculptures, paintings, calligraphy, music, and dance.



Bullet Train project's 21-km tunnel, terminus work proceeds swiftly in Maha

Quaid Najmi | Mumbai

The works on the Mumbai-Ahmedabad Bullet Train project's terminus at Bandra Kurla Complex and a key 21-km underground-undersea tunnel work, wrought with challenges, are progressing satisfactorily, National High Speed Rail Corporation Ltd., an official said here on Thursday.

The 21-km long single-tunnel, including 7 km running under-sea, with two lines is coming up between Bandra Kurla Complex and Shilphata in Thane.

Work is currently on for three shafts en route for the tunnel section at Bandra Kurla Complex, Vikhroli, Sawli, Shilphata and an Additional Driven Intermediate Tunnel portal.

The shaft 1 is coming up at the Mumbai High Speed Railway Station in Bandra at a depth of 36 metres where 100 per cent secant piling work is completed and excavation work is underway. The shaft 2 at Vikhroli is at a similar depth of 36 metres, with 100 per cent piling work done and excavation work is on.

These shafts shall be used to lower two tunnel boring machines (TBMs) in opposite directions - one which will bore towards the BKC and the other towards Ghansoli.

The 39 metres deep shaft 3 in Sawli (near Ghansoli) excavation work is on, while at Shilphata, the tunnel end, portal work has begun at the site.

The tunnel will be dug by three TBMs with a cutter head diameter of 13.6 metres - usually 5-6 meter diameter cutter heads are deployed for digging urban tunnels as in the Mumbai Metro systems.

Three TBMs will be used to make around 16 kms



of the tunnel, while the remaining 5 km shall be dug through New Austrian Tunnelling Method (NATM).

The tunnel will be around 25-27 metres deep from the ground level, with the deepest point at 114 metres below the Parsik Hill near Shilphata.

The three shafts of BKC, Vikhroli and Sawli shall be at depths of 36, 56 and 39 metres, the inclined shaft of 42 metres at Ghansoli and at Shilphata will facilitate the construction of a 5 km tunnel through the NATM method.

Besides, the Additional Drive Intermediate Tunnel (ADIT) portal is also coming up which will facilitate an additional access to the tunnel for faster construction activity.

The NHSRCL engineers are grappling with multiple challenges to speed up and make the show-piece -- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's dream project, work on which started in September 2017 - into a reality.

The work entails controlled multiple blasting with sufficient noise-air pollution control measures to cause minimal disturbances to the environment and population in the adjoining areas.

The shafts are being dug in areas with high pop-

ulation density and adjoining utilities like various pipelines, electrical installations, other neighbouring infrastructure projects like metros, highways, flyovers, etc.

"We are ensuring that the work is carried out with least disruption to these. The disposal of the huge quantities of excavated materials is done with the supervision of Maharashtra Pollution Control Board, with each trip approved and GPS tracked," said an official. Other facilities like Gantry Cranes, labour force colonies, site offices and other requirements are also being built in tandem with the bullet train.

The single-tube tunnel has 39 equipment rooms at 37 spots shall be constructed adjoining the tunnel location.

Around 4.8 hectares of land for the Bullet Train terminus at BKC Station has been handed over by NHSRCL to the contractors to build the station with the 'bottom-up method'.

This implies that the excavation work of at least 32 metres depth will commence from the ground level and concrete work will be taken up from the foundation.

The deep excavation involves around 18 lakh cubic metres for which a suitable ground support system has to be constructed to prevent the soil from collapsing.

This involves constructing 3,382 secant piles, each ranging from 17 to 21 metres in depth, all of which are in place and the excavation in the station area has begun, and around 1.5 lakh cubic metres of the earth is already removed and disposed off.

Currently, teams of around 681 workers and supervisors are toiling at the project sites round the clock, and as the project advances, it may touch upto 6,000 people daily during peak times.

BJP's top brass to decide on Pankaja Munde's nomination for LS or RS polls: Fadnavis

Team Absolute | Nagpur

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Thursday said Bharatiya Janata Party's top brass will decide on whether to nominate leader Pankaja Munde for the Rajya Sabha elections, give a ticket for the Lok Sabha polls or offer another post in the party.

The senior BJP leader said that it was up to the central leadership of the saffron party to decide candidates for the upcoming elections to the Upper House of Parliament, reported a news agency.

Munde, who is presently the BJP Secretary, was a minister in the Maharashtra Cabinet led by Devendra Fadnavis between 2014-19. Pankaja Munde, daughter of the late BJP stalwart Gopinath Munde, lost the 2019 Maharashtra Assembly Elections. The former minister was denied a nomination for the state legislative council when the elections for it were held in June 2022.

Reportedly, BJP's six Rajya Sabha members from Maharashtra are scheduled to retire in April this year and they include Narayan Rane and Prakash Javadekar. Meanwhile, the biennial



elections for 56 seats will be held on February 27.

Fadnavis, responding to a query on his meeting with Munde, said, "Pankaja tai is a leader of our party and there should be nothing surprising about a meeting between us. No discussion about Rajya Sabha was held during our meeting. We held political and party-related talks." According to the report, when asked whether she would be given Rajya Sabha candidature, the former CM said, "Our seniors take a decision about who will go to the Rajya Sabha...Pankaja tai is our

(party's) national secretary and whatever decision - be it sending her to the Rajya Sabha or to the Lok Sabha or giving any post to her will be taken by the central leadership. I believe a good decision will be taken."

On July 7 last year, Pankaja Munde said she was planning to take a break for "one or two months" since she was anguished at her integrity being persistently questioned. She had also said her party (BJP) would have to answer if she had merit and asserted only time will tell if she was treated unfairly.

Explosives recovered in jungle after Maha Police encounter with Maoists in Gadchiroli

Team Absolute | Gadchiroli (Maharashtra)

Maharashtra Police recovered explosives after an encounter with Maoists in the forest near Hiddur Village, Narayanpur area of the Gadchiroli district late on Wednesday night, an official said here on Thursday.

Police got a tip off that a group of armed Maoists were camping on the outskirts of Hiddur with plans to conduct a recce of Wangeturi and Gardewada for their subversive activities.

A four-member team of crack C-60 commandos, led by Additional Superintendent (Operations) Yatish Deshmukh, launched a search operation in the evening.

When they were barely 500 metres from Hiddur Village, the Maoists hiding in the jungles opened fire at them around 7 pm.

The C-60 commandos returned fire which forced the Maoists to retreat from the area under cover of darkness.

The commandos recovered explosives, bundles of wires, IED battery, deto-



nators, hooks for claymore mines, solar panels, bags and Maoist literature from the area. Intensive combing and search operations have been launched in the area to trace any other suspicious objects and activities there, said officials.

Woman talathi held by ACB for taking Rs 6,000 bribe in Raigad

Team Absolute | Alibaug

A woman talathi, or revenue department official, was held by the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) in Maharashtra's Raigad district for allegedly accepting a bribe of Rs 6,000 to do an official work, the ACB said on Thursday. The woman, identified as Shilpa Pawar, was arrested on Wednesday, said the ACB.

A local resident had approached the talathi office for getting his name entered in an official document. Pawar demanded Rs 6,000 from him for making the entry in government record, it said. He filed a complaint with the ACB's Raigad unit, which laid a trap and caught the revenue department official while accepting the bribe, said the anti-corruption agency. A case was registered against her under the Prevention of Corruption Act.

Mumbai flyovers to bloom with a riot of multi-coloured 'bougainvilleas'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

As part of the efforts to beautify Mumbai, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) will plant multi-coloured bougainvilleas in over 2,000 pots to be placed on the city flyovers, an official said here on Thursday.

The BMC Parks Department has selected the locations on the road dividers of the 20 flyovers around the city for its colourful bougainvillea project to improve the road aesthetics and make driving more pleasant.

The idea apparently struck after the Parks Department organised a horticulture exhibition last week in the Byculla Zoo where over 10,000 different plant varieties were displayed and lakhs of Mumbaikars visited the 3-day expo.

After seeing the public response and conducting a survey, the BMC has decided on the project to make driving more scenic and appealing, especially



during jams or slow traffic movement or hot weather conditions.

Accordingly, the 20 flyovers where the road dividers are wide shall now be decorated with pots of bougainvillea in different colours, taking care not to obstruct traffic or visibility.

Explaining the choice of bougainvilleas, an official said that these flowering plants grow well with minimal water and stay fresh for longer periods, bloom

in different shades of red, pink, orange, purple, violets, white, yellow and more, almost in all seasons plus offer a cool sight particularly in the summer heat when the flyovers also heat up considerably.

Some of the flyovers selected are on the Western Express Highway, the Link Road, Bandra Kurla Complex, Santacruz, Vakola, Lalbaug, Sanjay Gandhi National Park Flyover, Magathane, Sudhir Phadke Flyover, the Santacruz-Chembur Link Road, Shiva Bridge, Matunga, Dadar, Eastern Freeway, Goregaon-Mulund Link Road, Sion-Panvel highway, Eastern Express Highway's T junction, Sion-Bandra road, Swatantryaveer Savarkar Road, Suman Nagar, etc.

Officials indicate that after seeing the response the project may be expanded to cover more flyovers and wide roads with bougainvilleas or even other flowering plants, depending on various factors.

Maha Congress jolted as ex-minister Baba Z. Siddique quits, may join NCP

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a jolt to Maharashtra Congress, a senior leader, Bandra strongman and former minister Baba Ziauddin Siddique on Thursday quit the party's primary membership with immediate effect.

Siddique, who was a party loyalist through thick and thin for some 48 years, announced his resignation on an X post. "I joined the Indian National Congress Party as a young teenager and it has been a significant journey lasting 48 years... There's a lot I would have liked to express but as they say, some things are better left unsaid," said Siddique in his sign off tweet.

Though he has not indicated his future plans, there's speculation in political circles that he may throw in his lot with the Nationalist Congress Party led by Deputy CM Ajit Pawar.

Siddique was elected BMC Municipal Corporator twice in 1992 and 1997, and served as a MLA from the prestigious Bandra West Assembly constituency for three terms in 1999, 2004 and 2009, plus as Chairman of MHADA (2000-2004).

Incidentally, his son, Zeeshan Siddique, 34, is the current Congress MLA from Bandra East constituency, and also leader of the Mumbai Youth Congress.



Third Bombay HC to decide on stay on fact checking unit formation to flag fake news against govt



Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bombay High Court on Thursday announced a third judge will be deciding whether to uphold the stay on the formation of Fact Checking Unit (FCU) under the recently amended Information Technology Rules, which is intended to identify fake or false content on social media pertaining to the Union government.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, per the report, confirmed the government's assurance to not notify the FCU would stand until the case is considered by a third judge for temporary relief.

According to the report, earlier, on January 31, a division bench of Justices Gautam Patel and Neela Gokhale issued a split decision on petitions challenging the Information Technology Rules. While Justice Patel viewed the Rules as

editorial, Justice Gokhale disagreed, claiming that they do not limit free speech. The court decided to refer the matter to a third judge for further consideration.

SG Mehta, after the Jan 31 split verdict, had said that the centre would not notify FCU for 10 additional days. The petitioners, including stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra and Editors Guild of India and the Association of Indian Magazine, then moved HC seeking a stay on its notification till the third judge pronounces their order.

Recognising Justices Patel and Gokhale's differing views on the constitutional legitimacy of the Rules and the necessity of extending the interim stay, the bench indicated that the third judge would rule on the interim motions seeking to extend the government's earlier assurance, the report added.

"Hence, the interim applications seeking continuance of the earlier statement on stay on formation of the FCU needs to be decided by the third judge," the bench said. The court said that the Chief Justice of HC passed an order on Wednesday referring the issue to a third judge. Petitioners, including stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra and Editors Guild of India and the Association of Indian Magazine, had said that the Rules were arbitrary and unconstitutional.

Man kills his wife, hides her body at house in Kanjurmarg; held from Uttar Pradesh



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Mumbai Police on Thursday said that a man was held from a village in Uttar Pradesh after he allegedly killed his wife and later hid her dead body in his house in Kanjurmarg area of eastern Mumbai. According to the police, the Kanjurmarg Police has registered a murder case after a dead body of a 22-year-old woman was found wrapped in a bed sheet inside the house where she lived. The woman's dead body was found on Tuesday with its hands and legs tied and wrapped in a bed sheet. Following the murder, the woman's husband was found to be untraceable. The two had got married some months ago and had been living in a rented house in Kanjurmarg, the police said.

A murder case was registered by the Kanjurmarg police which has been investigating the matter, the police said.

The case was also being probed by the Mumbai Crime Branch's Unit 7 which had formed multiple teams to solve the murder case, the police said.

Sources said, The murder took place on Sunday and their neighbours complained of bad odour emanating from the house and informed the police.

During primary investigations of the Unit 7, the officials found that the woman's husband who was identified as Rajesh Yadav, 24 had been untraceable after the murder. The officials began tracing him and found that Yadav was a local resident of a village in Gazipur in Uttar Pradesh.

"A team of officials was sent to his village in Gazipur to trace him but it was found that he had not reached there. The officials began to further trace his location and found that he was in a different village to dodge the police action against him," an official said.



EDITOR'S SPECS

INFLOWS INTO EQUITY FUNDS AT 22-MONTH HIGH AS MARKETS SCALE RECORD HIGHS

Inflows into equity funds in India surged to a 22-month high in January, driven by investments into multi and smallcap schemes as the markets scaled record highs. Net investment into equity and equity-linked schemes surged 28 per cent over the previous month to Rs 21,780 crore in January. SIP contribution to the mutual funds industry stood at a record Rs 18,838 crore in January, compared to Rs 17,610 crore in December. Sectoral/thematic and smallcap oriented funds were the primary contributors, with contributions of Rs 4,804 crore and Rs 3,256 crore, respectively. However, this was lower than the previous month's flows. Multicap category funds also witnessed a significant increase, reaching Rs 3,038 crore in January from approximately Rs 1,852 crores in December 2023. Largecaps demonstrated positive contributions this month, reversing the net outflows experienced in December 2023. This shift in trend is in line with valuation differentials among large v/s mid and small caps, suggesting that large caps/flexi caps oriented schemes may attract higher flows in the future. While FPIs pulled out from equity in January, domestic investors showed highest interest in January vs entire FY24 - both in terms of number of folios and net inflows in equity. Total equity folios have increased by 3.3 per cent in January, the highest growth in absolute and percentage terms in the last nine months. Owing to both higher inflows and lower outflows in January, net inflows have increased to Rs 21,781 crore. This is up 28 per cent from December and up 73 per cent from average inflow of last eight months. While FPIs increased inflow in debt schemes, individual investors showed lower interest as seen in reduction in number of folios in debt schemes.

WHERE THE MUSLIM LEADERSHIP ERRED

Asad Mirza

The unravelling of the Mandir-Masjid controversy over the years has exposed the amateur and impulsive handling of the issue, by the Muslim leadership. Had they acted wisely earlier, then it would not have been such a cakewalk for the Hindu chauvinists.

Modern politics is not a game of chance, but agenda setting and narrative building most often lead it. These two essential components of any political party's strategy often translate in success for it.

In India, the most obvious example of a political party using these techniques is the present day ruling party. The party is not new to agenda setting and narrative building, and in this exercise it is often helped by leading corporate consultants, who help it devise a plan, which could help it gain power.

In its case the party has reaped huge benefits in electoral terms using these techniques, by increasing its parliamentary tally from just 2 in 1984 to finally 304 in 2014.

The party, which was led by Vajpayee-Advani duo from 1984 to 2009, was not so savvy in using these techniques, but it was very adept in exploiting the emotional feelings of the large Hindu community.

From 2009, onwards under Modi's leadership, these techniques were turned into a finesse, and every technique to reap maximum results was deployed, including those which could counter the Muslim leaders emotionally and push them into a corner.

On the other hand the so-called Muslim leaders of the community have always indulged in knee-jerk reactions and pursuing a form of politics which only ensures power for a selected few and does not allow the benefits of progress to trickle down to the masses.

In fact what we saw on 22 January 2024, in Ayodhya is the culmination of a campaign, which had its roots in the Shah Bano case of 1985. The manner in which the Rajiv Gandhi-led government bowed to the pressure of the Muslim Personal Law Board and reversed the secular judgement of the Supreme Court of 1985 by passing the Muslim Women (Protection of Divorce Act), 1986, set the ball in motion to get the locks of the Babri Masjid unlocked in 1986.

Afterwards, the manner in which the Muslim leadership, both political and religious, manoeuvred the Babri Masjid case, reeks of their complete disconnect with the reality. I really wonder how many of these so-called Muslim leaders who were spearheading the Babri Masjid case, had ever visited Ayodhya or the disputed site, to get a first hand impression of the ground reality.



Even the lawyers who were representing the Muslim community, were not competent enough to handle such a nuanced case, but irrespective of their professional competence, they reaped huge monetary and moved on from bicycles to plush cars and palatial bungalows. Those who were really aware of the legal and constitutional aspects of the case were slowly shunted out and replaced by lawyers who had carried out only the routine clerical jobs in a court, what to say about appearing before the Supreme Court.

On the other hand the leaders, both political and religious, who were heading the two Babri Masjid Action committees were interested in only collecting donations in the name of fighting the court case for the Babri Masjid. Most of their statements and stands were often knee jerk and adamant, without any logical or argumentative basis, and lacked any long-term strategy or vision.

Beginning January 2024, there were some advisories issued by the so-called Muslim leaders, who were so far not even involved in any manner with the Babri Masjid case, ever. Such advisories and messages reeked of the emotional rather than logical aspect and further show the siege mentality of the Muslims since 1947.

It would have been better if the Muslim leaders had seen the writing on the wall earlier and instead of rooting for a confrontation with the majority community, had tried for a reconciliatory approach, it might have delivered different results, for the community, as a whole.

Additionally, if in the last year, to counter the BJP's push to convert the Pran Pratishtha ceremony of Lord Ram at Ayodhya, to a religiously-couched political campaign, it would have helped them better if they would have joined hands with those Hindu seers who were opposing the ceremony on various religious technicalities. The social media is full of many Hindu seers, historians and academics, criticising the whole show.

They should have understood right from the beginning that it was the ruling party's and its supremo's grand design to convert this religious ceremony into a vote grabbing political campaign. To counter it you had to adopt the same techniques. But alas, we can't expect this from the so-called Muslim leaders, who have led the community since 1947 in a completely slapdash and amateurish manner, whether on religious issues or political issues.

The main plank of their cam-

paign should have been to counter the claim that the new Ram temple has been built at the same spot, at which the Babri Masjid stood.

The reality is that the sanctum sanctorum of the new Ram temple lies about 3 kms away from the central dome of the Babri Masjid, and so far it was claimed that the birthplace of Lord Ram was below the central dome or the pulpit of the masjid. Even the new structure touches only the outer wall of the erstwhile Babri Masjid's structure. So this means that the claim to build Ram Temple at the same spot as that of Babri Masjid, is a hoax and the promise has still not been carried out.

If the Muslim leaders had raised this point, then they would have taken the wind out of sails of the self-proclaimed Ram Bhakts, for having achieved, what was unthinkable even a few decades back. But for this, they would have had to visit the Babri Masjid, to know the real situation, which none of them did and this shows their complete inaptitude and unworthiness to lead the community. It is high time that the Muslim community's leadership should be taken over by the young generation, as they don't carry the Partition baggage with them and are more realistic and open about chartering new paths. If the present leadership continues then it may lead to further isolation of the community.

What we need now is a complete new approach to get the Muslims what they deserve and also highlight the gains the community has made during the last 77 years of independence, based on its efforts. It is a long time to change a community's fortunes but Indian Muslims courtesy their leaders have fallen into a morass.

Instead of looking at the government of the day with a begging bowl for some privileges, these so-called Muslim leaders should have led the community by establishing an eco system, which might have propelled it to greater achievements in every domain, like other minority communities in India. But these leaders harp on the backwardness of the community instead of collating its success stories and achievements, as they know that if they start highlighting the community's achievements then they might become redundant, as whatever the Muslim community has achieved during the last 77 years is mostly based on individuals who never proclaimed to be the self-claimed leaders of the community.

(Asad Mirza is a Delhi-based senior political and international affairs commentator. Views expressed in this article are personal.)

international

INDIA PARTNERS WITH RUSSIA AS IT SEES US AS WEAK, DOESN'T TRUST IT TO LEAD: HALEY

Washington | Agencies

Asserting that India has always played it smart, Indian-American Republican Presidential hopeful Nikki Haley said that the country partners with Russia as it doesn't trust the US to win and lead.

In an interview with Charles Payne of Fox Business News, the 51-year-old former UN ambassador said that she has "deal" with India and spoken to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"India wants to be a partner with us. They don't want to be a partner with Russia. The problem is India doesn't trust us to win. They don't trust us to lead. They see right now that we're weak," Haley said, responding to a volley of questions on the US "letting" India buy cheap oil from Russia.

Despite efforts by Ukraine and its allies to persuade countries around the world to distance themselves from Russia, India's oil purchases from the Central Asian nation rose sharply.



imports at the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, a White House official said

that every sovereign country, including India, has the right to buy oil or lubricants from any country.

"India has always played it smart. They play it smart and they stay close with Russia because that's where they get a lot of their military equipment," Haley said, adding that the US needs to "get the weakness out".

The two-time former South Carolina governor said things will get better when the US "acknowledges" that it has a problem.

"We need to start building up our alliances. You have to first acknowledge you have a problem," she said.

"When we start to lead again, when we start to get the weakness out and stop putting our head in the sand, that's when our friends, India, Australia, New Zealand, all of them will -- and Israel, Japan, South Korea -- all of them want to do that."

Citing examples of India and Japan, Haley said the countries gave themselves a billion-dollar stimulus to become less dependent on China.

Islamabad | Agencies

At least five policemen were killed and six others injured in militant attacks in Pakistan, where polling for general elections is underway on Thursday.

At least four police officials were killed and six others injured in a bomb attack on a police vehicle in Grahra Aslam polling station in Dera Ismail Khan district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, The Express Tribune reported.

A security officer was killed when gunmen opened fire at a security forces vehicle in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province's Tank district, Khyber news reported. In NA-49 Attock, PML-N and PTI workers entered into a scuffle leading to a temporary suspension of polling at two booths.



The scuffle erupted due to halt in the polling process at Government Boys High School Bhangi Hazro. The polling resumed after a delay of approximately five hours.

National Democratic Movement (NDM) chairman Mohsin Dawar said: "Taliban have taken over the polling stations in NA-40, Tappi."

In a post on X, he said: "I have written to the CEC urging @ECP_Pakistan to take notice of the security situation in Tappi, N. Waziristan in NA-40 where Taliban have taken over polling

stations. We have also filed an application with the police against an attack there on 3 of our female polling agents, the Taliban have 'taken over the polling stations' in NA-40, Tappi." PTI leader Hammad Azhar claimed that half of polling time has elapsed and voting is yet to begin at NA 129 Lahore.

"The presiding officer says he cannot contact anyone at RO office or ECP because mobile services are down," Azhar said. Internet has also been suspended across the country in what the government has described as a "security measure". The government's move was decried by various political parties.

A total of 128 million people - 69 million women and 59 million men -- are eligible to vote in the general elections.

ICELAND VOLCANO ERUPTS AGAIN



quake, national broadcaster RUV reported.

The location is close to the eruption that started on December 18, 2023. The fissure is 3 km long, with the lava flowing to the west. There is no immediate threat to Grindavik, Xinhua news agency reported.

The Blue Lagoon, a geothermal spa and one of Iceland's most popular attractions, was evacuated this morning when the eruption started, reports said. Helga Arnadottir, director of sales, operations, and services at the Blue Lagoon, told local media that the guests had been transferred to hotels in nearby towns Keflavik and Reykjavik.

According to media reports, the Blue Lagoon will be closed on Thursday.

On November 10, 2023, authorities ordered the evacuation of Grindavik, though Icelandic experts told RUV there was no immediate threat to the fishing town.

Reykjavik | Agencies

A volcano in the southwest Iceland erupted on Thursday morning for the second time this year, media reports said.

The eruption began at 6 am local time, northeast of Sylingarfell mountain. Magma intrusion north of the town of Grindavik began half an hour earlier following an earth-

ISRAEL INSTRUCTS IDF TO TAKE ACTION IN GAZA'S RAFAH



Tel Aviv | Agencies

wipe out Hamas from the Gaza strip.

Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has directed Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to take action in Rafah to

facilitate the civilian population to move away through a humanitarian corridor according to international law."

This is the most direct statement made by an Israeli leader about the IDF plans on Rafah.

Rafah is highly sensitive as it borders Egypt and is densely populated. Around 1.5 million Palestinians are estimated to be living in Rafah border.

Netanyahu, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, and top IDF officials have repeated generic threats about eventually going to Rafah, but they had all refrained from any concrete statements till now.

IDF sources told IANS that that there has been some forward movement towards taking action in Rafah. According to sources in Israel defence minister's office, Hamas leadership and the hostages may be in Rafah, hiding among around 1.5 million Palestinian civilians. The IDF has almost taken control of Khan Younis area, considered as one of the strongholds of Hamas and home to one of the most wanted Hamas leader - Yahya Sinwar.

The Israel army has conducted multiple raids at the offices of Sinwar as also at his and his brother Mohammed Sinwar's multiple residences in Khan Younis area.

US strike in Iraq kills commander of militia group behind deadly attack on American forces



Washington | Agencies

The US military has launched a strike in Iraq and killed a commander of Kataib Hezbollah, a militia group the Joe Biden administration said was linked to the deadly attack on US forces in Jordan in late January.

The US Central Command (CENTCOM) said on Wednesday in a post on its X account that its forces conducted a unilateral strike at 9:30 p.m. Baghdad Time, killing a Kataib Hezbollah commander "responsible for directly planning and participating in attacks on US forces in the region".

CENTCOM added that the strike caused no collateral damage or civilian casualties, and that "the US will continue to take necessary action to protect our people".

The strike was part of ongoing US retaliation to a drone attack on a US military base in Jordan on January 28, in which three US soldiers were killed and more than 40 others were injured, Xinhua news agency reported.

The White House assessed that an Iran-backed umbrella group known as Islamic Resistance in Iraq -- of which Kataib Hezbollah is a part -- carried out the attack on US forces.



THERE WAS NO LOSS OF LIFE DUE TO IMMEDIATE MANAGEMENT: CHIEF MINISTER DR. YADAV

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav, while talking to the media representatives in the assembly hall today, said that in the Harda accident, due to the alertness of the state government and taking all the relief and rescue steps together, it was successful in minimizing the loss of life. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav, while discussing the Harda firecracker factory explosion incident, gave information about the relief and rescue operations. He said that keeping in view the magnitude of the accident, quick and concrete management was done and people were immediately taken to hospitals for treatment. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that the work of providing assistance to the families affected by the accident was ensured.

Chief Minister Dr. Yadav told the media representatives that after the Harda accident, the work of treating the injured and providing them financial assistance was done promptly. This management did not cause much damage. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that information has been collected regarding the operation of firecracker factories in the entire state and information regarding security management has been sought. In this regard, instructions have been given to all district collectors to take strict action wherever rules are violated.



Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that no matter who is a big official coming under the investigation of Harda accident, he will not be spared after the investigation. Strictest action will be taken against those guilty in the case. Every incident will be investigated completely

impartially, whoever is at fault will not be spared.

Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that in the context of the accident in Harda, an emergency meeting was held immediately and after that a meeting of all the collectors of the

state was held through video conference. Every collector was instructed to inspect the firecracker factories operating in his district and report to the government. In this sequence, information has been received from the districts.

The state government has decided to provide an amount of Rs 4 lakh each to the family of each deceased in the Harda accident, Rs 2 lakh each to the seriously injured person and Rs 50 thousand to the moderately injured person. The amount was delivered to the affected families. In case of serious incidents like Harda, planning has also been done to increase medical facilities and air ambulance. Wherever needed, the state government will provide full assistance.

Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that the state government has made concrete arrangements in the last two days on the Harda accident. There could have been many times more damage in this accident, but due to the alertness of the government, it was controlled. All types of arrangements were made immediately. The injured were admitted to hospitals without delay and instructions were given for their better treatment. The state government stands with the families of those who died in the accident. Along with providing financial assistance to the affected families, various other types of help are also being provided.

Jolt to Congress in MP as several leaders switch to BJP



Team Absolute | Bhopal

In a major jolt to the Congress in Madhya Pradesh ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, several leaders of the grand old party on Wednesday switched to the BJP on Wednesday. On Thursday, Congress suffered another setback in Mahakaushal area, where former Advocate General Shashank Shekhar Singh, who is associated with the area, left the Congress and joined the BJP. In a program organized at the state office of BJP, BJP State President Vishnu Dutt Sharma gave membership of the party to former Advocate General of Madhya Pradesh and senior Congress leader Shashank Shekhar and welcomed him

by dressing him in body clothes. Congress leader and Jabalpur Mayor Jagat Bahadur Singh, also known as 'Annu', joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Wednesday at the saffron party's office here.

He was welcomed by senior BJP leaders, including Kailash Vijayvargya and Narottam Mishra. Singh was elected the mayor of Jabalpur on Congress' ticket. At one point, he was also considered close to former Chief Minister Kamal Nath. In another jolt to the Congress, ex-CM and Raja Sabha MP Dignivijaya Singh's close aide and party leader Sumer Singh also joined the BJP in the presence of Union Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Wednesday.

Brainstorming for candidature in MP BJP, discussion of Shivraj's name

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In Madhya Pradesh, BJP has intensified preparations for the Lok Sabha elections and brainstorming regarding candidates is going on. Suggestions are also being given to former Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan to contest the elections. Out of 29 Lok Sabha seats in the state, BJP has control over 28 seats. Chhindwara Lok Sabha seat is the only one in the state which is held by Congress, from here former Chief Minister's son Nakul Nath is the MP. BJP wants to win this seat in the upcoming elections and bring all 29 seats in its kitty. Apart from the state in-charge and co-in-charge, BJP has appointed seven cluster in-charges for the



elections. BJP has started emphasizing on candidates for six parliamentary seats in the first phase, these seats are Jabalpur, Sidhi, Damoh, Chhindwara, Morena and Hoshangabad.

Apart from Chhindwara, there are five places where MPs have become MLAs. There is maximum emphasis on who should be made the candidate from Chhindwara and many leaders have even suggested former Chief

Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan to contest elections from here.

New faces are being searched for the remaining five places. Sources say that in the meeting of the State BJP Election Committee on Wednesday, there was a special discussion on 6 parliamentary constituencies and a panel has also been made for capable candidates in these areas. This panel will be sent to the national leadership.

IISER BHOPAL'S NEW TECHNOLOGY TO AID IN DRUG DEVELOPMENT

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A team of scientists at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) Bhopal has developed a technology for attaching chemical tags to proteins, an important process in the development of drugs.

Proteins are extremely prone to loss of function when treated with chemical reagents. However, for the first time, the novel technique eliminates this problem.

The technology, called Baylis Hillman orchestrated Protein Amino-thiol Labelling (BHOPAL), efficiently tags chemicals to proteins without compromising their function.

The findings, published in the peer-reviewed journal Nature Communications, showed that this technology easily allows chemical agents to be attached to any site of the protein, a process that was very difficult to achieve before.

This is a promising development that shall find applications in disease



diagnosis, cellular imaging, drug development, and understanding drug-target interactions on a molecular level.

"Proteins are cellular entities that play crucial roles in all cellular functions. Protein dysfunction results in major life-threatening diseases such

as Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, etc.," said Dr. Dimpy Kalia, Assistant Professor, Department of Chemistry, IISER Bhopal, in a statement. "Hence, developing effective approaches to study proteins in cells is crucial for developing therapeutic approaches targeting them," she

added. To test the platform, the researchers developed a new chemical reaction that has never been explored before.

It occurred between N-Cysteine, an important amino acid present in proteins, and Baylis Hillman adducts, and results in the formation of a linkage (a bis-heterocyclic scaffold) on specific sites on the protein.

Labelling multiple sites of a protein is extremely difficult, but by using this approach, researchers can easily accomplish this task within a few minutes.

"What we have developed has diverse applications in chemical biology, synthetic chemistry, and medicinal chemistry. Protein conjugates fabricated using our BHOPAL technology shall be employed for the fabrication of antibody-drug conjugates (ADCs) for cancer therapy," Dr. Kalia said. "Moreover, the BHOPAL technology shall also contribute tremendously to basic biological research by enabling the imaging of proteins within human cells."

Ensure availability of experts for CHCs to be developed as FRUs: Deputy Chief Minister Shukla

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Deputy Chief Minister Shukla has directed that the availability of specialist doctors should be ensured as per the guidelines to develop the community health centers of the state as First Referral Units (FRU). He said that for the appointment of specialist doctors, discussions should be held and proposals should be presented on the basis of prevailing standards. Deputy Chief Minister Shukla reviewed the strengthening of health services in the state in the meeting room of Mantralaya Vallabh Bhawan.

The Deputy Chief Minister said that the government is committed to strengthening and



strengthening health services at the primary level. Infrastructure development works are being done on a large scale.

Continuous efforts should be made for manpower availability. The Deputy Chief Minister gave instructions to submit proposals on the basis of direct recruitment, contract, bond, outsource and all available means.

Deputy Chief Minister Shukla reviewed the actual status of the construction work of the hospital affiliated to Satna Medical College and the construction work of MCH in Singrauli and gave instructions for speedy execution of the work. He said that work should not be delayed due to lack of technical or any other formality.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER CAUGHT TAKING BRIBE

Team Absolute | Umaria

In Umaria, Lokayukta Rewa has arrested Chief Executive Officer Karkeli with a bribe of ten thousand rupees. Chief Executive Officer Karkeli had demanded an amount of Rs 10,000 from the Sarpanch to withdraw the funds for the construction of Nadep.

Chief Executive Officer Prerna Parmhans had demanded bribe from Sarpanch Baharwah Pramod Yadav to withdraw the amount of one lakh fifty thousand rupees for the construction of Nadep. Sarpanch Pramod Yadav complained about this to Lokayukta Rewa. A 15-member team of Lokayukta Rewa arrested Chief Executive Officer Prerna Singh while taking a



bribe of Rs 10,000 from his official residence. Prerna Singh's husband Kaushalendra Singh took ten thousand rupees from Sarpanch Pramod Yadav. Lokayukta Rewa has arrested both the accused and is engaged in investigation. Lokayukta Sub Inspector Aanksha Pandey said that

Chief Executive Officer Prerna Singh had demanded money from the District Panchayat. Chief Executive Officer Prerna Singh and her husband Kaushalendra Singh have been arrested for taking a bribe of ten thousand rupees from Sarpanch Barharwa. Is being investigated.

AIIMS Bhopal becomes the first government hospital in the state to conduct the Intracardiac Pacemaker (MICRA) procedure

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In a remarkable medical feat, AIIMS Bhopal's Cardiology Department, under the dynamic leadership of Prof. (Dr.) Ajai Singh, Executive Director of AIIMS Bhopal, successfully performed a complex surgery to save the life of a patient facing a dire cardiac crisis. The patient, a woman, arrived at the Cardiac OPD with her pacemaker device and wires protruding from her body, accompanied by severe infection at the site.

This extraordinary surgery, which has only been performed twice in the state, marks a historic milestone for government hospitals in the region. The procedure was executed with precision and expertise, reflecting the dedication and commitment of AIIMS Bhopal's medical team. The patient's condition was critical, with infection spreading rapidly due to the exposed pacemaker device and wires. The removal of the old device and wires posed a significant challenge to the doctors. However, through meticulous planning and innovative techniques, the team successfully eliminated the infection and replaced the pacemaker with an intracardiac device. The decision to opt for an intracardiac pacemaker was made considering the patient's condition and medical history. The surgery, performed by the proficient team led by Dr. Kishay Srivastava, Dr. Madhur, and Dr. Bhushan Shah, was com-



pleted in a remarkably short period of 30 minutes only. The procedure, which involved inserting a small MICRA device directly into the heart, eliminated the need for chest incisions and external wires, providing the patient with relief from heart rhythm complications.

"We are immensely proud of our team's exceptional skill and dedication in successfully performing this groundbreaking surgery," stated Prof. (Dr.) Ajai Singh. "This achievement underscores AIIMS Bhopal's commitment to delivering exceptional healthcare and pushing the boundaries of medical innovation." The success of this surgery reflects the collaborative efforts of AIIMS Bhopal's cardiology and cardiovascular surgery teams, including Dr. Yogesh Niwariya, Dr. Kishan, Dr. Surendra, Dr. Vikram Vati, and the backup support from the CTVS team.

Demand for judicial inquiry into Harda blast case, Congress created ruckus and walkout from the House

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Congress MLAs created a ruckus in the Madhya Pradesh Assembly demanding a judicial inquiry into the explosion in the firecracker factory in Harda. When the demands of the Congress MLAs were not met, they walked out of the assembly.

On the second day of the assembly session, Congress MLAs raised the issue of the explosion in the firecracker factory of Harda and demanded a judicial inquiry into the matter. When no assurance was received from the government to conduct a judicial inquiry, the Congress MLAs came out of the House creating ruckus.

Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav has said that the blast case is being investigated and action will be taken against whoever is found guilty.

Harda MLA reached the assembly premises wearing a garland of twine bombs, holding the administration responsible for the double accident. He was not allowed to enter the assembly.

The Congress MLA wanted to enter the House wearing a garland of twine bombs, but the security personnel stopped him on the way. The security personnel forcefully removed the twine bomb garland from his neck. The Congress MLA wanted to enter the House

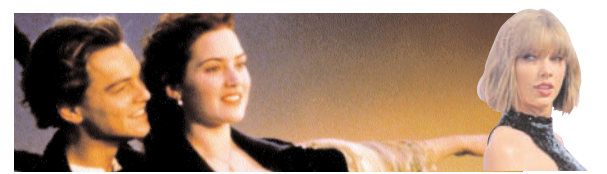


wearing the twine bomb garland, but the security personnel stopped him on the way. The security personnel forcefully removed the string of twine bombs from his neck.

The MLA alleges that our people have died in the explosion in the firecracker factory and all this has happened due to administrative inefficiency. There should be a high level investigation into this matter.

Leader of Opposition in the Assembly, Umang Singhar, while talking to reporters outside the House, said that what has happened in Harda is worrying. A criminal case should be registered against the officers in this case. Also, a judicial inquiry should be conducted. If the authorities investigate this matter then he will definitely save his comrades. Mere transfer of SP and Collector is not enough but a criminal case should be registered against them. Deputy Leader of Opposition Hemant Katara says that this illegal firecracker factory was running under the protection of ruling party leaders and administrative officials. Therefore, it is necessary that a judicial inquiry be conducted into this entire incident.

Let it be known that in this case, three people including the factory operator have been arrested and the operator's house has also been sealed. Along with this, the Chief Minister has also constituted a committee to investigate the entire matter.



Britney Spears deletes Ben Affleck post after claiming they 'made out'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer Britney Spears has removed a post featuring actor-filmmaker Ben Affleck after suddenly making a shocking claim that she once "made out" with the actor. On Wednesday, the 42-year-old posted a throwback picture with the 'Argo' star-director and songwriter Diane Warren, which she said was taken years ago.

In the caption, she recalled their encounter, noting that she almost "forgot" how "crazy" it was. "Cool pic of me and Ben Affleck and Diane Warren years ago!!! He's such an amazing actor," the '...Baby One More Time' hitmaker gushed over Affleck in the caption, before dropping the claim: "Did I fail to mention I made out with Ben that night ... I honestly forgot ... damn that's crazy!!!"

"Wish I could tell you guys the story that happened before that!!!" Britney further wrote. She added: "Oh dear, I'm just being a gossip girl!!! Psss I actually forgot!!"

The post in question featured a black-and-white image of Britney being sandwiched between Affleck and Diane.

In the photo, the 'Justice League' actor put his arm on the 'Lucky' singer's shoulder as she put one of her hands behind his back and her other hand on the songwriter's back. The three of them were all smiles.

Their encounter reportedly took place in 1999, likely before Britney started dating Justin Timberlake that same year.

The 'Me Against the Music' songstress and the NSYNC member were first romantically linked in the spring of 1999, though she initially told Rolling Stone that she had "no feelings at all" for the boybander, reports aceshowbiz.com.

The former couple split in 2003 and Britney spilled some shocking secrets about their past relationship in her 2023 memoir 'The Woman in Me', including his alleged infidelities and her abortion. Recently, she apologised to her ex-boyfriend for offending him with the content of her autobiography.



BoA addresses comments about her lips on K-drama 'Marry My Husband'

Seoul | Agencies

Singer-actress BoA, who's surprise entry in the Park Min-young-starrer 'Marry My Husband' created a stir, has addressed comments about her appearance and acting skills.

BoA plays an antagonist named Oh Yu Ra, posing threats to Min-young's Kang Ji Won in the later episodes of the show. However, there has been chatter about BoA's appearance and acting skills in the drama, according to allpop.com.

Several netizens found that BoA's acting was awkward and cited her mouth area as very unnatural. Some even speculated that BoA had stiff philtrum due to excessive Botox.

Putting an end to every comment, BoA on a live stream directly addressed the comments.

She said: "Over-lip? Oh, actually, I have this habit. So, it seems like it spread around my lips back then. Many people are concerned about my lips, but they're fine, right? You don't need to worry- My lips are fine-"

She then rubbed her lips to show her fans that her lips are natural.

Miley Cyrus, boyfriend Maxx Morando are living together

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer-songwriter Miley Cyrus and her boyfriend Maxx Morando seem to have taken a big step forward. The 'Flowers' singer, 31, and the Lily drummer, 25, are living together, reports People magazine. A source said: "She is very happy with him. Miley has changed a lot in the past couple of years. She seems more calm and harmonious. Everyone loves Maxx. He's a great guy. She is very happy with him. He's private and doesn't like being in the press. It's been good for her."

Cyrus won big at the 66th annual Grammy Awards on Sunday, taking home her first and second Grammy for best pop solo performance and record of the year (both for 'Flowers').

As per People, she also took the stage for her debut performance of the smash hit, during which she sported a bedazzled silver look, channelling the late icon Tina Turner. She gave her boyfriend a sweet shout out as she took home record of the year for 'Flowers'. In addition to showing gratitude for her team, the 'Wrecking Ball' artiste thanked her mom Tish and sister Brandi, who sat in the audience, as well as Morando, whom she called "my love."

At the event, the couple was photographed sharing a kiss as they sat together during the ceremony with Miley Cyrus' family.

The pop star and Morando were first linked in 2021 when Cyrus was hosting her NBC special, Miley's New Year's Eve Party. They were photographed holding hands backstage and dancing to music.



Emma Watson's luxury car towed away during night out at bar

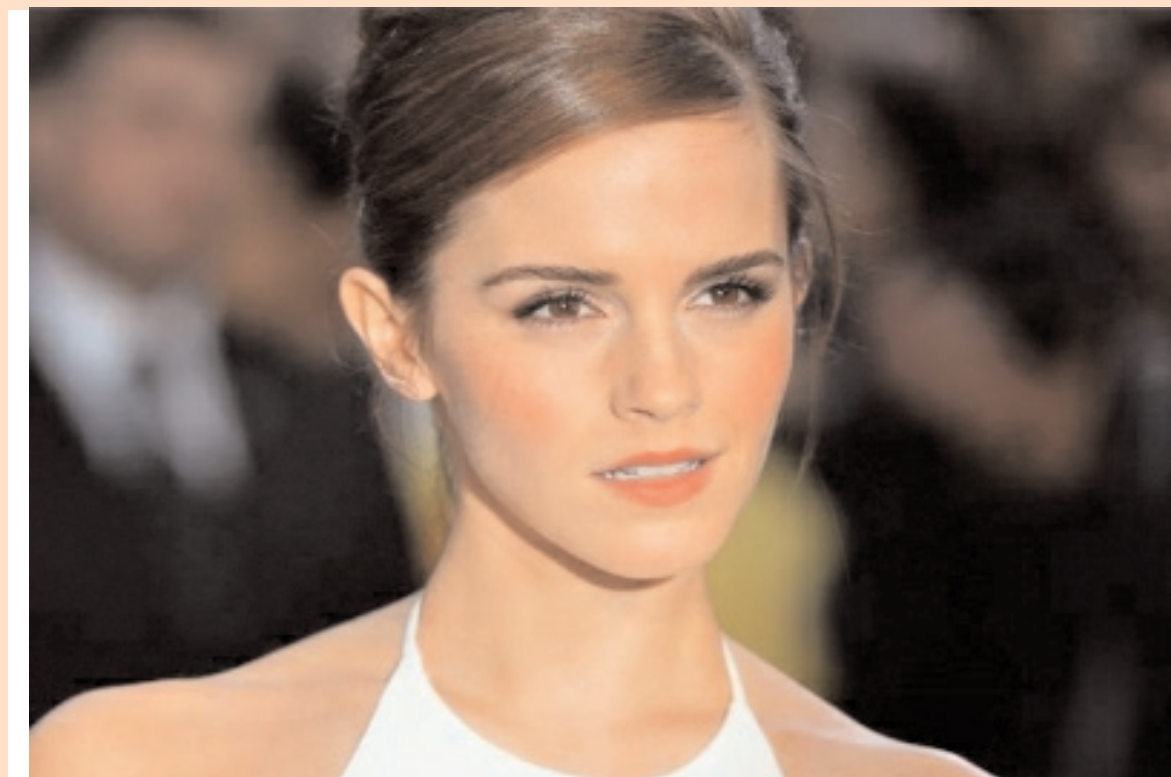
Los Angeles | Agencies

While out at a bar with her mother, actress Emma Watson had her blue luxurious Audi towed away after it blocked in a pizza restaurant manager's vehicle for nearly four hours.

A witness said the actress had blocked the entrance to a car park, leaving the owner of a pizza restaurant across the street having his car blocked in by the actress' vehicle.

The manager told MailOnline: "Three-and-a-half hours of searching for the driver was the last thing I needed after working a 12-hour shift. The car was parked in front of our gate which is a no-parking zone."

Watson was said to have parked it illegally on a



quiet street before she nipped into a nearby pub, the Rose and Crown, with her mum Jacqueline, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

When the pizza restaurant owner called the police and they started to tow away her car the manager said Watson came "flying out of the pub shouting, 'That's my car, that's my car.'"

The actress was photographed wearing a long black trench coat while apparently begging cops and a tow truck employee to leave her car alone.

But it was taken away leaving the star facing a over Rs 20,000 (£192) charge to get her Audi S3 back. She also faces a over Rs 2,000 (£26) charge for every day it waits at the car pound.

A witness told Sun Online: "Emma was pretty upset that her car was being towed away, she came running over shouting, 'Hey, that's my car', and was arguing with the truck driver, but he was having none of it."

"He told her the car was being impounded, signed some paperwork to give her and hauled the car away."

"Emma was with her mum who watched the whole thing in the street."

Warwickshire Police said in a statement: "A report of a blue Audi S3 parked across a driveway and blocking in two cars on High Street near the junction with Sheep Street in Stratford. The report was made at 9.42 p.m. and the car was impounded and taken away at 10.21 p.m."

"No crime was recorded."

'Mr Bean' actor Rowan Atkinson blamed in House of Lords for slump in EV sales in UK

Team Absolute | Mumbai

'Mr Bean' actor Rowan Atkinson has been blamed for the slump in the sale of electric cars in the UK. The actor was named in the House of Lords, upper house of the Parliament of the United Kingdom, recently during its environment and climate change committee meeting.

During the meeting, the think tank Green Alliance presented its views on the main obstacles faced by the UK government in phasing out petrol and diesel cars by 2035. As per Sky News, the think tank pinned the blame on an article written by the actor and deemed it as damaging to the cause.

The actor had made the contentious comment back in June 2023.

The think tank told the House of Lords, quoted by



Sky News: "One of the most damaging articles was a comment piece written by Rowan Atkinson in 'The Guardian' which has been roundly debunked."

Unfortunately, fact checks never reach the same breadth of audience as the original false claim, emphasising the need to ensure

high editorial standards around the net zero transition."

The actor's piece was headlined: "I love electric vehicles - and was an early adopter. But increasingly I feel duped," he wrote that EVs were "a bit soulless" and criticised the use of their lithium-ion batteries.

Jennifer Coolidge is 'jealous' of 'The White Lotus' Season 3 cast

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Jennifer Coolidge said that she is "jealous" of the cast of the third season of 'The White Lotus', of which she is not a part.

She said that during a Today interview about her Super Bowl pregame show commercial, she is struggling with that.

"I'm jealous of everyone that's going. I just want to stress I'm not a good sport about it, but there's nothing I can do. When they kill you, you have to accept it. Because it means they're not calling for your costume sizes or anything," Coolidge said.

"It's over! I have to get another thing, I have to make another thing happen, I guess."

She added: "But am I sad?"



I just want to say in all honesty, I'm very sad I'm not in it." The ending of Season Two saw Coolidge's character, Tanya McQuoid, seemingly take a tragic fall off the side of a boat off the shore of Sicily, hitting her head and falling into the ocean.

"I had a blast," she said of

her time on the show.

"I think (Season 3) is going to be good. There's going to be all sorts of good stuff in it, probably great sex stuff. You know how Mike White writes - it's never, never a dull moment. I think he's going to slay with this one."

HBO said the Mike White-created show will be filmed in three cities throughout Thailand - Koh Samui, Phuket and Bangkok - and that cast members include Carrie Coon, Parker Posey and Patrick Schwarzenegger, plus a familiar face from Season One, Natasha Rothwell.

"I think that's a great place for another 'White Lotus,' Coolidge said of Thailand.

"It's never a dull moment with (White). I promise everyone it will be riveting, whatever he writes."

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Megan Mckenna



I FEEL CSK WILL COME IN TOP FOUR IN IPL 2024: SUNIL GAVASKAR

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Former India cricketer Sunil Gavaskar expressed his unwavering confidence in the Chennai Super Kings (CSK) ability to once again storm into the playoffs of the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024.

CSK made it to the playoffs twelve times in fourteen seasons, which solidifies their status as a consistent challenger for the IPL trophy. With five titles each, the MS Dhoni-led side share the record for most title victories in the tournament's history with the Mumbai Indians (MI).

Daryl Mitchell, Rachin Ravindra, and Mustafizur Rahman were CSK's overseas picks at the mini-auction held last December and Shardul Thakur, Sameer Rizvi, and Avaneesh Rao Aravelly in their Indian contingent. Gavaskar dissected CSK's prospects for the upcoming season, highlighting their astute moves in the auction to address key areas of concern. "If you see the purchases they did at the auction table, the aspects they had to strengthen, it seemed like



they lacked a little in bowling last year and in batting also they had to strengthen the middle order slightly after Ambati Rayudu's retirement, they have done all that. They have a good mix of youth and experience," Gavaskar said on Star Sports.

"So, I feel CSK will definitely come in the top four as always. You cannot say any team 'definitely yes' as

favorites. However, the way the Chennai Super Kings have performed for so many years, they have qualified in 12 of the 16 editions. So it's likely to happen for the 13th time," the former India captain added. Despite concerns over the fitness of certain key players, particularly in the seam-bowling department, Gavaskar remains bullish about CSK's prospects, citing the

depth and versatility of their squad and said that the five-time champions won't have any seam-bowling issues. "I feel they are covered because they have options. Shardul Thakur getting reacquired has removed the concern slightly about whether Deepak Chahar will play the entire tournament because Shardul Thakur can take his place," said Gavaskar.

Bengaluru Open 2024: Prajwal Dev gets wild card entry

Bengaluru | Agencies

The Karnataka State Lawn Tennis Association (KSLTA) has handed a wild card to talented Prajwal Dev in the singles main draw of the Bengaluru Open ATP Challenger 80 Series Tennis Tournament.

The 27-year-old Dev was also named a reserve in the Indian Davis Cup team for the tie against Pakistan.

Dev had a decent 2023 season in which he ended a runner-up at the ITF 15k event in Thailand and also reached the semifinals in three other tournaments, including Mysuru.

"I would like to thank KSLTA for the wonderful opportunity to play in the main draw. I am privileged to receive the wild card and I am looking forward to the tournament. Hopefully, I can do well. I am coming off a good week in Chennai and hopefully, I continue with



that," said Prajwal Dev, currently ranked 611.

"Expectation is there and I am hopeful I will live up to that," he said. Having the Davis Cuppers in action, the KSLTA will soon announce more main draw wild cards for the tournament which will conclude on February 18.

"Prajwal has the potential to break into the Top 500 soon and we want to give

him an opportunity to achieve the feat at the earliest. He is a very talented player, and support at the right time is what a player needs. Our endeavour is to support local talent," said Sunil Yajaman, Tournament Director. "We are delighted to give this opportunity to Prajwal. Hopefully, he will make full use of it," Yajaman further added.

SAI released over Rs 30.83 Cr for Khelo India athletes in 2023-24 under scholarship scheme

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Sports Authority of India (SAI) has released a fund of Rs 30.83 Crore under the Khelo India Scholarship Scheme for financial year 2023-24 with Out-of-Pocket Allowance (OPA) of Rs 7,71,30,000 for 2571 Khelo India Athletes for Quarter 4.

The Quarter 4 amount released for 2023-24 covers January to March 2024 and the entire amount released to the athletes for Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4 for 2023-24 is Rs 30,83,30,000. As part of long term development program of Khelo India Scheme, close to 3000 athletes are identified as Khelo India athletes and are provided an out-of-pocket allowance of Rs



1,20,000/- per annum per athlete. In addition, Rs. 5 Lakh is spent on each athlete towards training and competition. The close to 3000 talented athletes, who are a part of the Khelo India

scheme are provided a total annual scholarship of Rs. 6.28 lakhs for their training, coaching, diet, kitting, medical insurance, kits, and out of pocket allowance.

ANY SIDE WOULD MISS SOMEONE OF THE STATURE OF KOHLI...': NASSER HUSSAIN

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Amidst multiple reports of Virat Kohli's absence to continue for India's next two Tests against England, former captain Nasser Hussain said any team would miss a player who's of his status, but added that the game now needs to look after the right-handed talisman batter.

Kohli had pulled out of the first two Tests against England three days before the start of the series at Hyderabad, citing personal reasons. But multiple reports have suggested that he may miss India's next two matches of the Tests against England at Rajkot and Ranchi, and could even not be available for the last game of the series at Dharamshala.

The BCCI had also requested the media and fans on January 22 to respect Kohli's privacy during this time and refrain from speculating



over the nature of his personal reasons leading to his absence from the Tests against England.

"Well, nothing's confirmed at the moment. It's all speculation whether it's the next two Test matches or three games. They're (India) going to announce their side in the next few days. Nothing's confirmed, but it will be a blow for India, the series and world cricket. It's going to be a special series - it already has been.

"The first two games have been fascinating and make no mistake, Virat Kohli is one of the greatest to ever play the game and any series and any side would miss someone of the stature of Kohli," said Hussain on Sky Sports Cricket.

The five-match series between India and England is tied at 1-1, with the next Test to be played in Rajkot on February 15. Kohli's absence means that his duel with James Anderson will not be seen yet in the

Test series. Anderson has dismissed Kohli a total of seven times, the most any bowler has dismissed the right-handed batter. "But first things first, the game needs to look after the likes of Virat Kohli as well. He's been playing international cricket for more than 15 years now and if he needs a break to be away with family, get some time away from the game, we absolutely wish Virat Kohli all the best. If it means we don't get the mouth-watering possibility of an Anderson versus Kohli contest that we've seen over the years, then so be it. But Kohli, and his family and his private life has to come first.

"It will be a blow for India, but as we have seen, they have got a very good lot of young batters. I think, just speculating, KL Rahul, who missed the second game after being brilliant over the last few months, could come back in for India," concluded Hussain.

JAMES ANDERSON WAS PHENOMENAL, JASPRIT BUMRAH IS A FREAK, SAYS MICHAEL CLARKE

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Former Australia captain Michael Clarke found himself spellbound by the virtuoso display of India's Jasprit Bumrah and England's James Anderson in the riveting second Test between the two countries in Visakhapatnam, which the hosts won by 106 runs.

Clarke labelled the Indian pacer a "freak" after Bumrah's mesmerising exhibition of reverse swing mastery helped him extract nine wickets in the second Test. With the odds stacked against him on a pitch devoid of assistance for fast bowlers, Bumrah's uncanny ability to extract movement and wreak havoc among England's batting lineup left Clarke awestruck.

From bamboozling Ollie Pope with a lethal reverse-swinging yorker to shattering Ben Stokes' stumps with a delivery of sheer wizardry, Bumrah's heroics propelled India to a stirring comeback victory, earning him the coveted Player of the Match award. "Phenomenal effort, physical, mental and the demands for a fast bowler are more for a fast bowler now than ever. James Anderson, with the ball, was phenomenal in the second Test, on a flat batting pitch that did not have much for the fast bowlers. And Bumrah, what can you say? He is a freak. His skill use in conditions that are not con-



ducive to fast-bowling, uff, it's unbelievable. He is a freak," Michael Clarke told ESPN Around the Wicket show. But amidst the fervour surrounding Bumrah's heroics, Clarke was quick to acknowledge the enduring brilliance of England's stalwart, James Anderson. Despite facing scrutiny and skepticism over his age and adaptability, the seasoned campaigner silenced his critics with a masterclass in seam bowling. Anderson picked up five wickets across the two innings and bowled 35 overs, Anderson orchestrated a virtuoso performance, claiming vital wickets and providing much-needed control to England's bowling attack.

"A big part of greatness is longevity, no matter what you do. He has gone through those highs and lows. Yes, he has had some injuries. But, to be able to play this amount of cricket over that amount of time is phenomenal. Again, I think he showed his class and skill in that Test match," he added.

"His record in England is crazy. There is always talk that he can only play in his own backyard. But he continues to show that's not the case. I think he is a significant part of this team as well. I think Ben Stokes and Brendon McCullum like him being a part of this group. And it doesn't look like he is going to stop. If he keeps bowling the way he bowled in the second Test match, he has got a lot more cricket left in him," he concluded.

Shivpuri 's first PP tiles badminton court was gifted by Douce Boisgelin

200 girl students will get benefits Douce Boisgelin Chief of Girls in Motion participated in the online program.

Shivpuri | Agencies

The first synthetic PP tiles badminton court in Shivpuri district has been established in Government Maharani Lakshmi Bai Girls Higher Secondary School, Court Road. In this court, 200 students will practice badminton on international standards, and will be conducted by a female coach. Today, with the support of the Girls in Motion and SDIF will conduct badminton at Court at School. Chief speaker and head of girls in motion, the court was formally inaugurated.

Through this PP tiles court, international level badminton training was imparted to the economically backward students coming from faraway places. Along with this, they will also be provided with dress shoes, racket shuttle and healthy diet to prevent anemia by Douce Boisgelin in Motion. Giving more information by the program coordinator



ravi, said that the head of SDIF and Girls in Motion, Douce Boisgelin, collected money for the children from her school and gave it to 200 daughters of Girls Higher Secondary School, Court Road, Shivpuri, through female trainer Kratika Mishra. PTI Manoj Under the direction of Gupta, a batch of badminton will be formed and good training will be provided. So that children of government schools can perform well.

In the programme, Douce Boisgelin was joined virtually from London, appealed to the children to make good use of this gift and bring glory to their country in the game of badminton. She also thanked the district administration officials present in the program, she said that you should make full use of this court and fulfill your dream of badminton. I am very happy to join the online program and I am thankful to everyone for organizing such a good program. Special guest Gayatri Sharma said that Dues Madam has made a very good and strong badminton court for the girls of the school; with this the girls will be able to practice well in the game and will bring glory to Shivpuri at the national and international level. CMHO Dr. Pawan Jain said that the main objective of the synthetic badminton court is to encourage talented players. He appreciated the efforts of the SDIF organization.

Brentford condemn 'vile harassment' after Toney faces online racist abuse



London | Agencies

Premier League club Brentford have condemned the 'vile harassment' of Ivan Toney after the striker received racist abuse via Instagram.

Toney has previously received racist comments on Instagram posts and Brentford have called for decisive action and criminal prosecutions.

"We are angered and frustrated to report that Ivan Toney has been subjected to racist abuse on Instagram once more," the club said in a statement. "We have initiated investigations into this vile harassment which we condemn in the strongest terms."

Last March, an individual received a three-year stadium ban for engaging in abusive behavior towards Toney on social media. Nonetheless, Brentford contends that insufficient action has been taken to penalise the offender.

"Sadly, this isn't the first time Ivan has had to deal with this. A

similar incident occurred just four weeks ago, leading us to identify an alleged perpetrator whom we reported to the authorities. To date, we have yet to see any action taken against that individual.

"In general, the response from social media platforms to these ongoing issues has been underwhelming. Their solutions, such as filters to simply hide the abuse may safeguard the players, but miss the mark entirely and do not discourage the offenders. Without real consequences for those responsible, the cycle is doomed to repeat," it added. However, Brentford did express their belief that there that things can improve to ensure better conditions for players in the future.

"We do have faith that things can change. We appreciate the dialogue that we have with the likes of Meta but we call for more decisive and urgent action to combat online hate. We call for prompt investigations, and importantly, we call for criminal prosecutions," the statement further read.

Sneha opens a big five-shot lead over Hitaashee in 4th leg of WPGT 2024

Visakhapatnam | Agencies

Sneha Singh continued her march in the fourth leg of the Women's Pro Golf Tour (WPGT) at the East Point Golf Club here as she extended her lead to five shots with one more round to go. Sneha, winner of the Order of Merit last season, carded 3-under 69 that included a superb hat-trick of birdies on the back-nine as she recovered from two bogeys before that.

Sneha with 70-69 is now 5-under 139 and leads by five over archrival Hitaashee Bakshi (72-72), who had a par round for the second straight



day. Hitaashee is even par for two days as Sneha is the only player with under-par rounds on both days.

The day's amateur star was Zara Anand (74-72), who with three birdies in the last four holes rose to a Tied third spot alongside Khushi Khanijau (72-74). They are both at 2-over 146.

Sneha, who started the day two shots ahead of Hitaashee, extended her lead early in the round. She birdied the second and the third to get off to a flying start. A bogey on the fourth was repaired with a birdie on the ninth. On the back nine, Sneha seemed to have given away some ground with back-to-back bogeys on the 10th and the 11th. Yet she fought back strongly with a birdie on the 12th and then three in a row from the 14th to the 16th. Despite closing with a bogey on the 18th she was three-under for the day and once again it was the only under-par round of the day.



Aditya Dhar confirms Yami is five-month pregnant: 'Baby on its way'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Director Aditya Dhar of 'Uri' fame and his actress wife Yami Gautam Dhar, who are gearing up for their upcoming film 'Article 370', are also expecting their first child.

The couple confirmed the pregnancy at the film's trailer event in Mumbai on Thursday.

"There is a baby on its way," Dhar, who has written and produced 'Article 370', announced dramatically. "It was an amazing time because of the way the movie happened and the way we got to know it. It almost felt like Abhimanyu, the baby, knew exactly how 370 was made. We are yet to know whether it is Laxmi or Ganesha."

Gautam, who is five months' pregnant, was visibly touched by her husband's gesture. She said, "If I cry right now listening to him, everyone will say, 'it's the pregnancy hormones', but genuinely this is so heartwarming." Talking to the media about the film, Dhar said 'Article 370', which draws its name from the now-abrogated constitutional provision that gave Jammu & Kashmir a special status, is a 'ghar ki film' with his wife and his brother Lokesh.

Gautam, incidentally, essayed the role of a RAW agent in Aditya Dhar's directorial debut film 'Uri: The



Surgical Strike'. The film, with Vicky Kaushal in the lead role, presents a dramatised account of India's surgical strike in response to Pakistan's 2016 Uri attack. Yami and Aditya tied the nuptial knot on June 4, 2021, and have

been going strong on both professional and personal fronts.

They kept their romance under wraps until finally taking the wedding vows in an intimate ceremony in Himachal Pradesh.

Living with Irrfan, still: Sutapa Sikdar

Team Absolute | New Delhi

She says he never left. That snatches of him keep coming back, reminding her that those we love leave a part of them with us. But writer Sutapa Sikdar, wife of late actor Irrfan also says that these days when she takes two steps forward, something pushes her back. That life's chronology seems to have altered, and time moves with an erratic rhythm. "He was not just my husband. Our relationship began with friendship and he stayed my best buddy. A partner of 30 years... how do you deal with that loss? It has been more than three years but... I was never prepared but then we never are," she told. A National School of Drama (NSD) graduate who began her career with Govind Nihlani, Sikdar who was at the recently concluded Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF) to be part of the session 'Irrfan: A Life in Movies' and has written the Hindi version of a Bengali film besides consulting on two shows, says: "I told the writer of 'Irrfan: A Life in Memories', Shubra Gupta that the book must be launched in Jaipur as Irrfan was from here, so it has been a homecoming of sorts."

Sikdar says she has not given anyone permission to write his biography and all books on him explore the different facets of him as an actor, and what his co-actors thought about him.

Remembering him from the time he entered NSD, Sikdar recalls, "He was a very shy guy. But there was a certain depth to him, the conviction to understand his craft thoroughly. He always wanted to exceed his expectations and kept working on his craft."

Filmmaker Anup Singh, who directed the late actor in 'Qissa' and 'The Song of Scorpions' has also written a beautiful book on him titled 'Dialogues with the Wind'.



"He is a very close family friend who knew different facets of Irrfan. I liked what he has written."

Stressing that Irrfan was an extremely private man, and there are many sides of him that Sikdar says she has discovered through the books written by others.

"I am discovering so much more about him. He shared a special relationship with everyone and everyone has a story to tell. There are times when I get surprised by people's stories about him," says Sikdar who has written various television series including 'Banegi Apni Baa' and films like 'Kahani', 'Khamoshi' and Shabd.

She has also produced many best-sellers and films such as 'Madari' and 'Qareeb Qareeb Single'.

Even as their son, Babil Khan has now entered films, the mother confesses that she never wanted him to get into this profession. "Unlike our times, there is so much insensitivity now. Look at the venomous posts on social media... he is a very sensitive child, but no one will care about that. Also, there is an unfair comparison and abnormal expectations. It is just not right to compare him with Irrfan. Earlier he would get distressed with the comparison, but now he has realised that he is his own person who has an individual journey. He told me once -- 'Baba would not have liked if I followed his style.'"

Ganesh Acharya: My life began in a slum, but today I stand as a choreographer

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Popular choreographer Ganesh Acharya, who has made the who's who of Bollywood dance to his steps, recalled his rags to riches journey in the industry. The choreographer said that the reason behind his success was his "quality" of work.

"My life began in a slum, but today I stand as a choreographer. I was the youngest choreographer in Bollywood, and the sole reason for this achievement was quality," Acharya said during the Youth for Quality Bharat Festival.

The 52-year-old choreographer added that it was the presence of "quality" in him that enabled him to fulfill his "dreams". "It was the presence of quality within me that enabled me to fulfill my dreams. Cultivate quality within yourselves as well.

I am delighted to have had the opportunity to connect with the Quality Bharat Mission, which adds to my



happiness," he said. Apart from choreographing A-listers in Hindi cinema, Acharya has been feted with several honours.

He was honoured with the

National Film Award for Best Choreography for his work on the 2013 songs 'Havan Kund' from 'Bhaag Milkha Bhaag' and 'Gori tu lath mar' from the Akshay Kumar-star-

rer 'Toilet: Ek Prem Katha'. His latest work includes 'What Jhumka?' from 'Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani' and 'Rom Rom' from 'Crakk-Jeetega Toh Jiyega'.

Priyanka, Nick are completely doting parents, says Madhu Chopra

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Priyanka Chopra Jonas' mother Madhu Chopra has spoken about smart parenting and heaped praise on her actress-daughter and her son-in-law Nick Jonas by calling them "doting parents" to their daughter Malti Marie Chopra Jonas. Reflecting on her upbringing, Madhu believes that parents should adopt the approach of smart parenting. "Smart parents have the ability to discern and wisely choose what lessons to derive from their own upbringing. New parents who possess this discernment can make thoughtful decisions about which values to adopt from their parents. I believe I was one of the smart ones," Madhu said. Admiring the seamless parenting partnership between Priyanka and Nick, she added: "Both are completely doting parents; I don't see a division of line of anything between them. Where Priyanka leaves off, Nick picks up and where he leaves off, she picks up."



"The conversations are free-flowing. I love this about them," she said on Coto,

a safe online space that encourages women to speak freely.

Shahid Kapoor recreates Virat Kohli's viral video with a hilarious twist



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood actor Shahid Kapoor, who is gearing up for the release of his upcoming theatrical film 'Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya', has shared his plans on gorging on delectable and desi food as the promotions of his upcoming film opposite Kriti Sanon get over. The actor recently took to his Instagram and shared a funny video of himself with audio from a viral interview of Indian cricketer Virat Kohli.

Referring to Virat Kohli, he shared that he is going to eat now that he has wrapped up the promotion of his upcoming film. He wrote on the video: "Promotions khatam hone ke baad waali feeling (The feeling after pro-

motions are done)." In the video, he lip syncs viral lines of Virat Kohli from an old interview where he had shared what he was planning to eat after his match. As Shahid strikes goofy expressions throughout the video, he also holds a bat as a homage to the cricketer. Meanwhile, 'Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya', which also stars Dimple Kapadia and Dharmendra, will see Shahid essaying the character of a computer engineer, who falls in love with Kriti's character, a humanoid robot.

The film is a unique romantic comedy which is about an impossible love story in the uncharted territories of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Produced by Dinesh Vijan, Jyoti Deshpande, and Laxman Utekar.

Javed Akhtar spells out why he calls Shankar Mahadevan a 'musical genius'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Let me begin by saying what I will say at the end too -- Shankar Mahadevan is a musical genius. Reflecting on my journey with Shankar, it all began through the creative Imtiaz Dharker -- a cherished friend and renowned painter.

She reached out to me to write the lyrics for her documentary focused on Mumbai's street children. She was aiming to capture their essence through a singular song rather than conventional commentary. I happily agreed.

Guided by Imtiaz, I found myself at a studio to meet Ehsaan Noorani. Soon after, his partner Shankar Mahadevan arrived. It was a brief yet defining interaction. In just minutes, he composed a musical masterpiece, leaving a lasting impression on me.

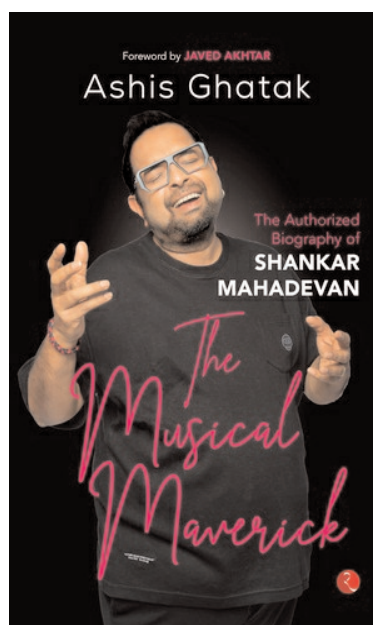
Later, I called Ehsaan, asking if they would be interested in composing for films. He said he would get back but never did. Later, I learnt that he got so flustered and nervous that he couldn't muster the courage to return my call!

Despite that, I kept telling my producers about these exceptionally talented young individuals. It is ironic, though, that anything that's different faces resistance from the market.

Besides the music of Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy, there was another idea I had been trying to sell for almost seven years. Many singers and composers found it interesting, amusing and new, but I suppose most people believe that nothing should be done for the first time.

One day, incidentally, I met Shankar at Saregama and narrated the musical idea to him. He instantly agreed to collaborate. We titled it 'Breathless'.

By the way, the music video for 'Breathless' marked the first directorial attempt of Zoya and Farhan, as they teamed up on it. This is how two of my



'convictions', which were not widely shared, came together, giving birth to 'Breathless'.

Meanwhile, doors began opening for them in the industry. The trio's versatility and range were evident in Farhan's 'Dil Chahta Hai', Nikkhil Advani's 'Kal Ho Naa Ho' and Vidhu Vinod Chopra's 'Mission Kashmir' proving them to be a force to reckon with. In addition to being an excellent composer, Shankar is an exceptional singer. The way he sings, most people can't even speak with such ease. I've seen him in the recording studio; while rummaging through a pile of papers for the second stanza of a song, he effortlessly continued to sing into the mic. There's also this memorable incident. At an event, Shankar was singing on the stage when Yesudas arrived and sat in the front row. Just then, the interlude started. Shankar, with his cordless mic, came down the steps to pay his

respects by touching Yesudas's feet.

Then he was returning, the interlude concluded and Shankar started singing the 'sargam' while climbing the steps back to the stage. His singing is as effortless as breathing is for you and me.

I would be undermining his talent if I mentioned only his work in films. Shankar is an esteemed member of the highly respected international musical group Shakti.

Being one of the busiest people with an overpacked schedule, it's obvious that he has no time for any 'riyaz'. However, I have watched him engage in 'jugalbandi' with maestros like Ustad Rashid Khan and it is truly amazing.

They have known him for almost 30 years now, yet he hasn't stopped surprising me. Artists are often associated with mood swings, careless attitudes and narcissism. But none of these 'qualities' have ever shown up in him, not even from miles away.

Throughout our association, I have never seen him flustered, irritated or praising himself. But perhaps, it is these qualities that make him a great friend, a perfect husband and a wonderful father. Although, I must also give equal credit to his wife, Sangeeta, and their sons Siddharth and Shivam, both of whom are exceptional singers.

Without any exaggeration, the Mahadevans are the most closely-knit, loving and happy family I have seen in my life. Perhaps what keeps them even closer is that all of them are serious foodies.

Do I even have to tell you that I have thoroughly enjoyed working with Shankar and quite often with great results? In all these years, besides music and lyrics, we have shared millions of jokes and tons of vanilla ice-cream! He is much younger than I am. I not only love him but also respect him because he is a musical genius.



Nia Sharma