

# absolute india



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## SC Constitution Bench strikes down electoral bonds scheme 2018 as

# 'UNCONSTITUTIONAL'

Saying that financial contribution to a political party may potentially lead to quid pro quo arrangements, the judgment authored by Chief Justice of India (CJI) D.Y. Chandrachud said the electoral bonds scheme by anonymizing contributions to the political parties infringe upon the right to information of the voter provided under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution. The Supreme Court held it "manifestly arbitrary" to permit unlimited political contribution by the companies, saying that contributions made by companies are purely business transactions made with the intent of securing benefits in return.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In a unanimous verdict, a 5-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court on Thursday struck down the electoral bonds scheme 2018 as unconstitutional.

Asking the State Bank of India (SBI) to forthwith stop the issuance of electoral bonds, CJI Chandrachud ordered the Election Commission of India (ECI) to publish on its official website by March 13 the details of the political parties which have received contributions through electoral bonds since April 2019.

CJI Chandrachud's opinion, concurred by Justices B.R. Gawai, J.B. Padiwala and Manoj Misra, added that the infringement of the right to information of voters cannot be justified for the purpose of curbing black money in the electoral process.

"The right to information under Article 19(1)(a) can only be restricted based on the ground stipulated in Article 19(2). The purpose of curbing black money is not traceable to any of the grounds in Article 19(2)," the top court said.

Further, it said that the electoral bond scheme is "not the only means for curbing black money" in electoral financing and there are other alternatives which substantially fulfill the purpose and impact the right to information minimally when compared to the impact of electoral bonds on the right to information.

Saying that the political contributions give a seat at the table to the contributor, i.e., it enhances access to



legislators and this access also translates into influence over policy making, the apex court added that the information of funding of political parties is essential for effective exercise of the choice of voting.

It said, "There is also a legitimate possibility that financial contribution to a political party would lead to quid pro quo arrangements because of the closed nexus between money and politics. Quid pro quo arrangements

could be in the form of introducing a policy change or granting a license to the person making financial contribution to the political party in power. The electoral bond scheme and the impugned provisions to the extent that they infringe upon the right to information of the voter by anonymizing contributions through electoral bonds are violative of Article 19(1)(a)."

In sum, the apex court declared the amendment to the Income Tax Act introduced by the Finance Act, 2017, the amendment to the Companies Act, 2013 and the amendment to the Representation of People Act as unconstitutional.

## "STILL LONG WAY TO GO": EX POLL BODY CHIEF

New Delhi: The Supreme Court verdict striking down the electoral bonds scheme is a "great boon for democracy", former chief election commissioner S Y Quraishi said on Thursday. N Gopalaswami, who was the chief election commissioner from June 2006 to April 2009, said, "We are still very long way off in cleaning up the electoral funding system." A five-judge bench of the top court headed by Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud said the electoral bonds scheme violates the right to information and the freedom of speech and expression under the Constitution.

## CONGRESS TARGETS CENTRE, CLAIMS 'PARTY FOUGHT THIS BATTLE FOR 7 YRS'

New Delhi: The Congress on Thursday welcomed the revocation of the contentious electoral bonds by the Supreme Court and said that today's judgment vindicates their long fight against the 'unconstitutional and unlawful' scheme which the NDA government brought and 'misused to fill its coffers for electoral gains'. Congress in a press statement asserted about its seven year long battle against the 'coercive and corporatised' scheme, inside and outside the Parliament and said that it was the first party to condemn the bonds scheme, in clear and unequivocal terms. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi took to his X account to denounce the bonds scheme as Modi government's 'ploy' to gain political mileage over rivals by 'monopolising' the electoral funding by big players. "Electoral bond is yet another evidence of Modi government's corrupt practices. The BJP made the electoral bonds a medium for taking bribes and commission," he tweeted.

## Farooq Abdullah-led NC gives jolt to INDIA bloc, Cong's troubles far from over



Team Absolute | New Delhi

In yet another setback for the opposition INDIA bloc, the Farooq Abdullah-led National Conference (NC) on Thursday announced to go solo in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Speaking to reporters in Srinagar, Abdullah said his party will not enter into any pre-poll alliance, either in the Parliamentary or Assembly elections in J&K.

The announcement put an end to all speculation about seat-sharing between the NC and the Congress in Jammu and Kashmir (four seats) and Ladakh (one seat). Notably,

the NC has been a key constituent of the INDIA bloc and its octogenarian leader Farooq Abdullah, in the last few months, rallied with the alliance partners to 'stonewall' BJP's ascent to power for a record third time.

The central leadership of the Congress also suffered a sort of jolt after Sonia Gandhi, the architect of UPA 1 and UPA 2 governments, bid goodbye to Lok Sabha elections.

The party's Delhi unit looks in a 'pitiable' state and not in a condition to challenge the (Narendra) Modi bandwagon. It is evident from the fact that Ajay

Maken, once the face of Delhi Congress, has been fielded for the Rajya Sabha elections from Karnataka.

NC's announcement to go solo comes as another 'direct' blow to the Congress-led alliance.

The Trinamool Congress (TMC) and the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) Punjab unit have already abandoned the Congress on grounds that if the 'weak and insipid' party fields candidates from their strongholds, it will do more harm to the Opposition than hurting BJP's prospects.

The first and biggest body-blow to the INDIA bloc came from the alliance's chief architect Nitish Kumar.

## Navy to get stabilised remote control guns: MoD

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) on Wednesday said it has signed a contract with Advanced Weapon Equipment India Ltd. (AWEIL), Kanpur for manufacturing and supply of Stabilised Remote Control Guns (SRCG) for the navy.

"A total of 463 indigenously manufactured -- 12.7 mm stabilised remote control guns -- at a total cost of Rs 1,752 crores will be purchased," the Ministry of Defence said.

The ministry said that these guns will be manufactured with Indigenous Content (IC) of more than 85 per cent.

The ministry said that this weaponry will enhance the capability of the Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard to accurately engage small targets that pose threat to ships in an



asymmetric environment, both by day and night.

"This contract will also open up a large avenue in defence manufacturing for over 125 Indian Vendors and DPSUs for over a period of 5 years," the ministry said.

The ministry said that the Navy will also get 11 Shakti Electronic Warfare System.

## Maratha quota matter: Jarange-Patil's health slides, Bombay HC orders treatment

Jalna (Maharashtra) | Agencies

The health of Shivba Sanghatana chief Manoj Jarange-Patil continued to slide on Thursday on the sixth day of his hunger strike, sparking anger and leading to stray incidents of violence in some parts of Maharashtra.

In a major development late on Thursday evening, following the intervention of the Bombay High Court, a team of medics reached the protest venue in Antaravali-Sarati village and he is likely to be put on proper medical treatment or shifted to a hospital. After blood was seen



oozing out of his nose on Wednesday, he was put on saline which he had yanked off in the evening, complaining of tummy aches, even as his anxious supporters kept a 24x7 vigil at his village Antaravali-Sarati. On Thursday, Jarange-Patil appeared to have further weakened and could barely sit

even with help and was seen collapsing at least on two occasions, and was mostly lying on a mattress at the agitation venue.

The Maharashtra government has expressed its commitment to provide the Maratha quotas and has convened a Special Session of the Legislature on February 20, days ahead of the scheduled Budget Session starting on February 26. Meanwhile, district officials have been closely monitoring Jarange-Patil's health and also the potential security situation in case of any unforeseen circumstances.

## FARMERS' PROTEST: INTERNET SERVICES SUSPENDED IN PARTS OF PUNJAB

Chandigarh | Agencies

Internet services have been suspended in certain areas of Punjab's Patiala, Sangrur and Fatehgarh Sahib districts till February 16 on the orders of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The order came in the wake of the farmers' 'Delhi Chalo' march.

According to the ministry order, internet services will remain suspended in areas falling under police stations Shatrana, Samana, Ghanaour, Deigarh and Balbhera in Patiala, areas under police stations Khanauri, Moonak, Lehra, Sunam, Chajli in Sangrur and area under Fatehgarh Sahib police station.

"In exercise of the power conferred by section 7 of Indian Telegraph Act,



1885 read with Sub-rule 1 of Rule 2 of the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules 2017, and in

the interest of maintaining public safety and averting public emergency, it is necessary and expedient to order, the temporary suspension of internet services from 18:00 Hrs on February 12, 2024 to 23:59 Hrs on February 16, 2024 in the following areas," the order issued on February 12 said.

The Haryana government has already suspended mobile internet services and bulk SMS in Ambala, Kurukshetra, Kaithal, Jind, Hisar, Fatehabad and Sirsa districts.

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha are spearheading the 'Delhi Chalo' agitation to put pressure on the Centre over their demands, including a law on minimum support price for crops and loan waivers.

## Finance Minister Sitharaman launches 3 souvenir coins

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday launched three souvenir coins which include a coloured coin on endangered animals of India -- Greater One-Horned Rhino, a bi-metallic clad souvenir coin on Enlightenment of Buddha and a coloured souvenir coin of Ram Lalla and Ayodhya's Ram Mandir.

The three coins were launched on the occasion of the 19th Foundation Day celebrations of the Security Printing and Minting Corporation of India Limited (SPMCIL) through hybrid mode in New Delhi. The coins can be purchased from the SPMCIL website.



During her address, Sitharaman appreciated SPMCIL for the security products being produced, including bank notes, security paper, postal stamps, passports, medallions, among others. She acknowledged SPMCIL's thoughtfulness for minting 'Visually Impaired Friendly' Coin Series and SPMCIL's new initiatives of production of e-Passport with Track and Trace system which ensures enhanced security along with convenience of information.

## Now remix your YouTube music videos in Shorts

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In a bid to take on Chinese short-video making platform TikTok, Google-owned YouTube on Thursday said that users can now "remix" their music videos in Shorts. Last Year, YouTube introduced new remixing tools like Collab and fun effects on Shorts. "Today, we're helping you take it to a whole new level with the ability to remix a music video on Shorts, unlocking even more ways to connect and get creative with your favourite artists and their music on YouTube," the company said in a statement. This is how you can remix



videos in Shorts.

According to the company, directly from the video on YouTube, tap "Remix" to choose from four options to remix: Sound, Green Screen, Cut and Collab.

"Take just the sound from the video and use it in your Short, making a perfect soundtrack for your upcoming trip to Nashville that happens to be this weekend,"

said YouTube.

You can create a Short right alongside the video, "so you and your friends can do the choreography side-by-side with the artist".

You can use the video as the background to your Short, so you can film your real-time reaction to your very first listen.

"On YouTube, you can watch the music video on repeat, check out other Shorts that have been created from the same song by fellow fans, and discover deep catalog cuts from your favourite artists and relive those moments by remixing them as your own," the company informed.

## VARANASI COURT TO HEAR PLEA AGAINST PUJA IN GYANVAPI MOSQUE ON FEB 28

Varanasi: A Varanasi court on Thursday fixed February 28 as the date for hearing the Gyanvapi masjid committee's plea against puja in a cellar of the mosque, the Hindu side's counsel said. The Varanasi district court had on January 31 ruled that a priest can perform prayers before the idols in the southern cellar of the Gyanvapi mosque.

The mosque committee moved the court challenging the verdict. Advocate MM Yadav said Additional District Judge (I) Anil Kumar has fixed February 28 for the hearing. The mosque committee has also moved a petition in the Allahabad High Court against the district court's verdict.

## Garlic prices soar out of control in UP

Lucknow | Agencies

Connoisseurs of good food can put away basic Chinese and Mughlai dishes from their plates for a while. Garlic, which is a basic ingredient in these two cuisines, is now out of reach for the common man.

The price of garlic in major cities of Uttar Pradesh has soared and is selling between Rs 500-550 per kg.

Traders assure that the prices may fall after two weeks when the new crop arrives. Garlic comes to the cities from local farms in small supply, but mainly from Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, besides other districts of UP. Traders attributed



price hike to delayed monsoon last year that pushed garlic sowing to August, leading to a late harvest in January and a subsequent supply deficit. In the wake of this, city restaurants are dilemma over whether to absorb the increased cost and bear loss, or pass it on to customers.

Street vendors selling noodles and momos have also been directly hit. Mughlai restaurants are also feeling the heat.



# DELHI'S POOR AIR QUALITY SPIKES RESPIRATORY, CARDIAC PROBLEMS: DOCTORS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Even as the national Capital's air quality continues to dip, doctors on Thursday reported a rise in respiratory and cardiac issues.

As per data by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), Delhi's overall Air Quality Index (AQI) showed no sign of improvement as it was recorded at 294 on Thursday at 9 am. The AQI was 341 on Wednesday and 342 a day earlier.

"We have noticed a significant increase in the number of patients seeking medical attention for various health issues, ranging from respiratory problems to cardiac conditions. Many individuals are experiencing worsened symptoms of respiratory ailments such as asthma, persistent cough, colds, and viral infections, including cases of H1N1," Dr. Sushila Kataria, Senior Director, Internal Medicine, Medanta, Gurugram, told reporter. "The primary contributing factor to these health issues is the presence of smog, which directly irritates the lungs and throat, particularly affecting those with pre-existing respiratory conditions," she explained.

A recent analysis done by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) showed that Delhi was ranked first on the list of the country's most polluted cities in January. Of the 254 cities, Delhi's pollution levels were recorded at the highest with the average PM2.5 concentration at 206 micrograms per cubic metre.

The city exceeded the National Ambient Air Quality Standards



(NAAQS) every day of the month.

"In the face of escalating air pollution, especially evident in cities like Delhi, the impact on respiratory health, is significant. People suffering from asthma as well as COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary disease) -- both chronic respiratory ailments -- experience considerable aggravation due to air pollutants, resulting in symptoms like shortness of breath and exacerbations.

Therefore taking precautionary measures becomes paramount," said Dr Anshum Aneja Arora, a Gurgugram-based pulmonologist. Dr. Puneet

Khanna, HOD and Consultant Respiratory Medicine, Manipal Hospital, Dwarka told IANS that children are also getting mild respiratory tract infections, and are also coming with lots of complaints of coughing, sneezing, and cold. "The major complaints are upper airway conditions, nose blockage, coughing, wheezing, breathlessness, and a sore throat. Sometimes it is accompanied by chest pain and fever, but most of these symptoms are mild and self-limiting, and usually they recover after three to five days of medication," he said. According to the Air Quality Early

Warning System for Delhi, the air quality is likely to remain "very poor" from February 15-17.

The outlook for subsequent six days from February 17 is that the air quality is likely to be "poor."

Dr Anshum said utilising masks to reduce inhalation of pollutants is a simple yet effective practice.

The doctor stressed on adequate hydration to counteract air pollution-induced dehydration which can cause the lining of the airways and sinuses to become dry, causing asthma symptoms or other symptoms like headache and nausea.

# 'Miffed' with local leadership, Trinamool MP Mimi Chakraborty announces resignation

Kolkata | Agencies

Actress-politician Mimi Chakraborty, who's the Trinamool Congress MP from Jadavpur in Kolkata, announced her decision to resign as a Lok Sabha member after meeting Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee here on Thursday.

Chakraborty has also expressed her desire to permanently move away from politics and concentrate on her acting career instead.

The actress-politician reached the Assembly premises on Thursday afternoon and complained to the Chief Minister against the behaviour meted out to her by the local leadership of her own party in her constituency.

Chakraborty also told the Chief Minister that she has no intention to contest the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections.

"I have tendered my resignation to the Chief Minister and once she accepts it, I will go the national capital and submit the same to the Lok Sabha Speaker," Chakraborty said after meeting the Chief Minister.

Recently, Chakraborty had resigned from two Parliamentary standing committees in which she was the representative of the Trinamool Congress. She had also stepped down from different organisational posts within her constituency.



Speaking about her resignation from the standing committees and organisational posts, Chakraborty said that some people tried to create a rumour that these resignations were meant to ensure her candidature for the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls.

"I personally feel now that politics is not an area suitable for me. People often get the licence to abuse you once you enter politics. Had I done

anything wrong, my name would have been in the headlines.

"I haven't caused harm to anyone. I am not a politician. I do not want to be a politician. I just wanted to work for the people as an ordinary worker. I have never used abusive language against those belonging to the opposition camps," she said.

Chakraborty also said that she wanted to resign as an MP in 2022.

# RJD leader found dead under mysterious circumstances in Rohtas

Patna | Agencies

An RJD leader was found dead under mysterious circumstances in Bihar's Rohtas district on Thursday, the police said.

The deceased, Keshav Pal, a native of Gaighat village, was missing since Wednesday night. His body was found in the old mines under the Karwandi police outpost limits on Thursday.

Following the incident, the agitated villagers of the area put the body on the main carriageway of Delhi-Kolkata National Highway, which they blocked, leading to massive traffic snarls on both sides of the highway. The police have recovered a mobile phone from the pocket of the deceased. A forensic



team has been sent to the spot to find more clues about the incident. Keshav Pal was a district secretary of the RJD who owned a chemist shop in the Amra Talab block of the district. "After closing the shop on Wednesday night, Pal was

returning home but disappeared midway. His bike was also found near the body. We are investigating the matter from all angles, including murder," said an official spokesperson of Rohtas police.

# BJP FIELDS 8TH CANDIDATE FOR RS IN UP, FORCES ELECTION

Lucknow | Agencies

The BJP in Uttar Pradesh has announced its eighth candidate for the Rajya Sabha, queering the pitch for the Samajwadi Party and also forcing an election for ten vacant Rajya Sabha seats.

UP BJP president Bhupendra Chaudhary announced Sanjay Seth's candidature at the party office on Thursday.

He said that Seth would get support from MLAs outside the BJP who were impressed by the party's policies.

The effective strength of the UP state Assembly, at present, is 396. Four MLAs have passed away and two are in jail.

A candidate needs 37 votes to win the Rajya Sabha election.

The BJP has 252 MLAs while



its ally Apna Dal(S) has 13 seats in the Assembly, RLD has nine seats and Nishad Party also has six seats. Om Prakash Rajbhar's party also has six seats in the Assembly. BJP will also get two votes from Raja Bhaiya's Jansatta Dal.

With second preference votes, Seth may find the going easy.

The Samajwadi Party (SP) currently has 108 seats in the Assembly, while the Congress has two MLAs and BSP has one.

Since there is trouble within the SP and Pallavi Patel has already declined to vote for its candidate, the Samajwadi Party could face cross-voting from some legislators.

Sanjay Seth, a builder, is a former SP leader and also has many friends in the party. He joined the BJP in 2019.

# Nude body of suspected rape and murder victim triggers tension in Malda

Kolkata | Agencies

Amid continuing tension in West Bengal's Sandeshkhali area, protests by local women alleging sexual harassment, similar tension was triggered at Mothabari in Malda district on Thursday after the recovery of a nude body of a suspected rape and murder victim from a corn field there.

Initial investigation suggests that the woman was first raped and then hacked to death after which her body was dumped in the corn field. The exact cause of death will be ascertained after the post-mortem report comes, which will also confirm if she was raped. The victim's father works as a

sharecropper. Her family members said that she was missing since late Wednesday evening. "We started looking for her and continued the search till late in the night night.

On Thursday morning, as we were about to file a missing person's complaint with the local police, we were informed about the recovery of her body from a corn field. We have registered complaints with the local police in the matter," said the victim's brother.

Meanwhile, BJP's IT cell chief and observer for West Bengal, Amit Malviya, has launched a scathing attack against the state government and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee over the incident.

# LOUISE KHURSHID APPEARS BEFORE ED IN MONEY LAUNDERING CASE

Lucknow | Agencies

Louise Khurshid, wife of Congress leader Salman Khurshid, appeared before the Enforcement Directorate on Thursday for questioning in a money-laundering investigation linked to alleged misuse of government funds in distribution of artificial limbs and equipment by a trust headed by her.

According to ED sources, Louise Khurshid was questioned on a number of issues related to charges against her.

She was asked to depose at the ED zonal office in Lucknow for recording her statement under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

Last week, an MP-MLA court in Bareilly had issued an arrest warrant against Louise Khurshid and another accused in this case and fixed February 16 as the next date of hearing.

The ED case of money laundering stems from the state police's FIR of 2017. Special Public Prosecutor Achintya Dwivedi



had said that during 2009-10, a programme for distribution of artificial limbs and equipment was organised by Dr Zakir Hussain Memorial Trust for Disabled Persons, run by Dr Zakir Hussain Memorial Trust of Louise Khurshid in Bhojipura area of the district.

The government got the matter investigated after receiving allegations of discrepancies.

It was found that government funds were misused by using fake seals and signatures in the programme, he said.

There were three main accused in the case, including project manager of the trust Louise Khurshid, the trust's representative Pratyush Shukla and its secretary Athar Farooqui.

Shukla died a few years ago. According to the sources, the ED has recorded the statement of Shukla's wife and some others and has now asked Louise Khurshid to join the probe.

The court had issued summons to the accused several times but they neither appeared nor got bail in the case.

# THREE KILLED IN DELHI FACTORY BLAZE

New Delhi: Three bodies were recovered from a factory in Delhi's Alipur area, where a massive fire broke out on Thursday evening, a fire department official said. Sharing the details, Atul Garg, Director of Delhi Fire Service (DFS), said that a call regarding blaze at a factory in Dayal Market was received at 5:26 p.m. "As many as 22 fire tenders were rushed to the spot, which managed to douse the flame. So far, three bodies have been recovered. The search operation is on," Garg said. Further details are awaited.

# DAYS AFTER DITCHING GRAND ALLIANCE, NITISH EXCHANGES PLEASANTRIES WITH LALU

Patna: Day after parting ways with the Mahagathbandhan (Grand Alliance) and returning to NDA fold, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Thursday exchanged pleasantries with RJD chief Lalu Prasad in Bihar assembly.

Lalu, along with wife Rabri Devi, son Tejashwi Yadav and two candidates of Rajya Sabha Manoj Kumar Jha and Sanjay Yadav, was going towards the chamber of secretary cum returning officer at the Vidhan Sabha secretariat while Nitish was stepping out from it.

Jha and Sanjay Yadav have filed the nominations of Rajya Sabha in front of Raj Kumar, the secretary cum returning officer of the state assembly.

# Sonia Gandhi pens emotional letter to people of Rae Bareilly on her RS move

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Congress leader Sonia Gandhi on Thursday penned an emotional letter to the residents of her Parliamentary constituency Rae Bareilly and shared reasons on why she decided not to contest the Lok Sabha elections.

She cited 'health issues and increasing age' as the reason behind not contesting the elections from Rae Bareilly.

Sonia filed her nomination for the Rajya Sabha biennial elections from Rajasthan on Wednesday and was flanked by Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and former Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot at the electoral



office. In a letter shared on X, she expressed gratitude to the people of Rae Bareilly for unflinching support to the Gandhi family, through thick and thin of things and wrote, "Whatever I am today is

because of you." Recalling the family's ties with the Lok Sabha constituency, a Congress pocket-borough for long, Sonia wrote, "Roots of our family in Rae Bareilly is very deep. I

know you will stand by me in future too."

Notably, Sonia Gandhi's decision to 'call it quits' from the heat of Lok Sabha elections, comes after her four consecutive terms as the MP from Rae Bareilly.

Gandhi, reluctantly, made her debut in politics in 1999 and was elected as MP from Amethi. In the 2004 General elections, she was elected as an MP from Rae Bareilly and led her party to power at the Centre. Rae Bareilly, a Congress stronghold, also witnessed defeat for the grand old party on three occasions since Independence. The first defeat came, soon after the 1975-77 'Emergency era'.

# Siddaramaiah writes letter to MP CM on farmers' detention

Bengaluru | Agencies

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday wrote a letter to his counterpart in Madhya Pradesh, Mohan Yadav, requesting his intervention in the farmers' detention case.

The group of farmers from Karnataka were detained in Bhopal while on their way to the national capital for the 'Delhi Chalo' farmers' protest.

The letter reads, "A group of farmers from Karnataka travelling from Bengaluru to Delhi to participate in a protest against the anti-farmer policies of the Central government have been detained in Bhopal, Madhya



Pradesh without any reason. "It is four days since our farmers have been detained and yet they have not been released. It is now learnt that your police authorities are shifting them to Varanasi. "Travelling to Delhi to participate in a peaceful protest is the Constitutional right of the people. It is highly unfortunate that farmers who are seeking better policies are being arrested and ill-treated

by police authorities in Madhya Pradesh.

"I request you to personally look into this and immediately get the farmers released without shifting them from place to place," says the letter. CM Siddaramaiah also spoke to the farmers detained in Madhya Pradesh in the presence of Kuruburu Shanthakumar, President of Federation of Farmers Organisations, Karnataka. He inquired about their condition. He also assured them of their safe return.

Darshan Puttanaiah, MLA of the Sarvodaya Karnataka Paksha, raised the issue in the Assembly and demanded that the state government should ensure the safe return of the farmers.



# Maha's 6 RS candidates file nominations including one from MVA

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A total of six candidates, including five from the ruling MahaYuti alliance, and one of the Opposition Congress filed their nomination papers for the upcoming Rajya Sabha biennial elections here on Thursday.

They are: Ashok S. Chavan, Dr. Medha Kulkarni and Dr. Ajit Gopchhade (Bharatiya Janata Party), Praful M. Patel (Nationalist Congress Party) and Milind M. Deora (Shiv Sena), all belonging to the ruling MahaYuti. The Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi's lone Congress candidate and Dalit leader Chandrakant D. Handore also submitted his nomination papers.

With the BJP state President Chandrashekhar Bawankule's announcement, the election to the six seats is likely to be unopposed, though last-minute surprises are not ruled out in political circles.

Thursday is the last date for filing nominations and if necessary, polling will be held on February 27.



The elections will be held to fill up six seats that fell vacant due to the retirement of: Union MSME Minister Narayan Rane, ex-Union Minister Prakash Javadekar and V. Muraleedharan (BJP); journalist Kumar Ketkar (Congress); Anil Desai (Shiv Sena-UBT) and Vandana Chavan (NCP-SP) -- none of whom were re-nominated for various reasons by their respective parties.

Of the six who filed their nominations on Thursday, two are former Congress leaders -- ex-Chief Minister Narayan Rane, and ex-Union Minister Prakash Javadekar, while former Union Minister Patel (NCP) is a sitting RS MP, but is contesting owing to certain technicalities in the wake of the ongoing disqualification proceedings case.

Kulkarni, the sole woman candidate, is a former MLA from Pune and

Dr. Gopchhade is an RSS Pracharak and currently state party vice-president.

Handore is a respected Dalit leader from the state who was defeated in June 2022 biennial elections for the Maharashtra Legislative Council amid cross-voting after the BJP put up an extra candidate.

His defeat was followed by a revolt against the MVA by the current CM, Eknath Shinde which led to the toppling of the then CM, Uddhav Thackeray.

Among the retirees, Rane is likely to be fielded for the Lok Sabha elections from Ratnagiri-Sindhudurg to wrest the seat from the SS-UBT strongman Vinayak Raut, while Javadekar and Muraleedharan were dropped.

The Maharashtra electoral college comprises the 288 MLAs of which the current strength is 284, and each candidate needs 41 'first preference votes' to sail through. Presently, all the parties have sufficient quotas in their kitty to ensure an uncontested win for the six candidates.

# Will go to Mumbai to press for Maratha quota implementation: Manoj Jarange

Team Absolute | Jalna

Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange on Thursday said he would go to Mumbai on February 18 or 19 to press for the demand of converting the Maharashtra government's draft notification on 'blood relatives' of Kunbi Marathas into a law, reported a news agency.

His comments came a day after the Maharashtra government said a special session of the state legislature would be held on February 20 to discuss reservation and other demands of the Maratha community.

Jarange's health condition has deteriorated, said an activist close to him as he continued the indefinite fast for the sixth day at his native Antarwali Sarati village in Jalna district for the demand for inclusion of the Maratha community into the Other Backward Class (OBC) category.

Speaking to reporters in a feeble voice, Jarange said, "I would go to Mumbai on February 18 or 19 to press for the implementation of the draft notification on 'sage soyre' (blood relatives) of Kunbi Marathas."

Kishor Markad, a Maratha



quota activist who is monitoring Jarange's health, said the government representatives should talk to him and give an assurance on the implementation of the notification. On Wednesday evening, Jarange was given intravenous (IV) fluids when he was asleep during the Maratha quota protest. Agitated on learning

about being given IV fluids without his knowledge, Jarange said if the government wants to provide medical treatment to him, it should implement the Maratha quota immediately or else he would again go to Mumbai for another round of protest. Jarange's associates also gave him a glass of water on Wednesday, Markad said.

# Chhagan Bhujbal: Jarange should refrain from speaking, govt will decide on Maratha quota

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Minister Chhagan Bhujbal, a prominent opponent of including Marathas in the OBC quota, asked activist Manoj Jarange to exercise restraint, claiming that the state government will take serious action on the Maratha reservation issue. Bhujbal supported a distinct quota for Marathas but opposed issuing Kunbi caste certificates without sufficient verification, stated a news report.

Speaking to the media, Bhujbal underlined the approaching special session of the state assembly on February 20 to address reservations and other Maratha community demands. He encouraged Jarange, who had resumed his indefinite fast in Jalna district, to stop using harsh language towards senior ministers and government officials, emphasising that the government was dedicated to addressing the Maratha community's problems.

"Jarange should sit quietly as the state is going to



take a firm decision on giving reservation benefits to the Maratha community. He is unnecessarily using abusive language against senior ministers and government officials," Bhujbal said.

The OBC leader said, "Now Jarange is stuck and using abusive language."

According to the report, Bhujbal criticised Jarange's conduct, claiming that the activist's premature assumptions about the release of the government's survey report on Maratha community

backwardness prompted his fast, which lacked factual support. He warned against premature judgments and harsh words, arguing for a deliberate approach to settling the difficult issue of the Maratha reservation.

Bhujbal expressed his support for a separate quota for Marathas and restated his opposition to their inclusion in the OBC category via "backdoor entry," emphasising the importance of comprehensive inspection to ensure the reservation system's integrity. He questioned why Marathas wanted OBC classification when there are already 374 separate OBC castes in Maharashtra, the PTI report further stated.

"However, I am opposed to issuing Kunbi caste certificates to Marathas without any due diligence. Such backdoor entry for Marathas in the OBC (category) is not acceptable. There are nearly 374 different types of castes categorised as OBCs in Maharashtra. Why do Marathas want to be a part of it," Bhujbal added.

# Man feared drowned after being thrown into Thane creek

Team Absolute | Thane

A man has been feared drowned after he was allegedly thrown into a creek in Maharashtra's Thane city by some persons. He was yet to be traced, officials said on Thursday. According to a news agency, a local fire station received an alert at 10.55 pm on Wednesday that some persons threw a man into the creek from a pipeline in Rabodi area, Thane Municipal Corporation's disaster man-

agement cell chief Yasin Tadvi said. Local firemen, disaster management cell personnel and a rescue team rushed to the spot and carried out a search for about an hour before the operation was stopped due to darkness, he said.

The search operation resumed with the help of a boat at around 7.30 am on Thursday. The man could not be found after four hours and the search operation was then called off, he said.

# Congress united, Maha govt trying to divert attention from real issues: Nana Patole

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Congress president Nana Patole asserted the unity within the state's Congress party, alleging that the BJP-led government is attempting to divert attention from crucial issues.

Speaking ahead of a Congress Legislature Party meeting, Patole denied allegations of MLAs missing the meeting, blaming any absences on personal reasons. He accused the government of creating distractions to divert attention away from real issues such as farm misery and unemployment.

"Rumours are being spread that Congress MLAs are not coming for the meeting today which is not true. We have our two-day session in Lonavala from tomorrow and MLAs will be coming there," Patole told news agency.

"A few MLAs are not coming today due to personal reasons. All this is done to divert us from the real issues like farmers' death, and unemployment. All Congress MLAs are united and will stay united. I think the strategy behind the environment that is being created is such that the government itself has fallen into the trap," he further added.

According to the report, Patole argued the government's activities attempted to divert attention away from farmer suicides and unemployment. He criticised how the situation of Maratha quota activist Jarange Patil was handled, as well as the failure to confront rising inflation. Patole also voiced trust in Congress allies, notably the groups led by Sharad Pawar



and Uddhav Thackeray. By telling lies again and again about Jarange Patil (Maratha quota activist). The way Jarange situation is prevailing today and this kind of game was played to divert that topic and the way the suicides of farmers in Maharashtra are increasing. This kind of game is being made to divert it and I feel that there is a lot of anger among the youth as well, they are being trapped again and again by assuring them of jobs, they could not stop the inflation, and the public is also worried about that. Those people have trapped him and hence by bringing up such topics the government is trying to divert the questions of the public," Patole said.

# Maharashtra introduces online sale of sand at cost price to combat illegal mining

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra government has announced a new programme to sell sand online at cost, with the goal of making vital construction materials cheaper while cracking down on unlawful mining. Revenue Minister Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil announced the decision following a state cabinet meeting on Wednesday, during which revisions to the sand mining policy were presented and agreed.

The updated regulation requires selling sand through an online platform on a "no profit, no loss" basis, ensuring that buyers receive the material at a fair and competitive price. Vikhe Patil emphasised that this method would not only ben-



efit consumers but also serve as a deterrent to illegal sand mining by streamlining the process of sand acquisition

and distribution while removing opportunities for exploitation and irregularities.

According to the report, the new strategy would request tenders for the management of sand mining operations, transportation, and the building of sand mining depots. In addition, a technical committee would be constituted under these departments' jurisdiction to oversee sand extraction activities in creeks and rivers, increasing monitoring and control measures to prevent environmental degradation and promote sustainable resource management.

Last year, the authorities seized at least six barges and two boats during raids against sand mining in the creeks of Maharashtra's Raigad district.

# Maharashtra opposition MVA hails SC judgement on electoral bonds, slams BJP

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) on Thursday welcomed the Supreme Court judgement on electoral bonds and slammed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for introducing this mode of political funding in the country.

Top leaders of MVA allies -- Congress-Shiv Sena (UBT)-Nationalist Congress Party (SP)-CPI-M -- said that the apex court verdict will pave the way for a future of openness, fairness and accountability in matters of political funding.

"Wholeheartedly welcome the decision to strike down the opaque scheme of electoral bonds. An unconstitutional scheme has been struck down by the Supreme Court! Next, Maharashtra hopes the unconstitutional regime is struck down," said SS-UBT leader and MLA Aditya U. Thackeray.

NCP-SP Working President Supriye Sule, MP said that the Supreme Court's decision is laudable and it reinforces the importance of transparency and accountability in our democratic system.

Maharashtra unit Congress president Nana Patole also lauded the Supreme Court verdict and said it was the "visionary Rahul Gandhi who had first opposed the electoral bonds in 2019 which have now been struck down by the country's



top court". SS-UBT MP Priyanka Chaturvedi said that all the corporate houses that indulged this government and which became a party to the corruption of electoral practices, will be worried now. CPI-M Maharashtra leaders like Dr. Ashok Dhawale endorsed the verdict and said it was the only party which had challenged the policy that legalised political corruption in the SC.

Sule said that the landmark ruling the anonymity provided by the electoral bonds infringes upon the fundamental Right To Information enshrined in the Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution, which is crucial for informed voting and holding political parties accountable.

"The electoral bonds scheme institutionalised influenced policy making and

legitimised potential corruption under the curtain of anonymity, and yet or rather therefore, was railroaded by the BJP government in the Parliament," said Sule, the Baramati MP.

Chaturvedi added that "one of the most corrupt tools in the BJP's kitty" is rightfully struck down by the SC, and said "only if governments formed through corrupt and unconstitutional practices could also be struck down".

Sule pointed out that the verdict is a victory for transparency in political parties and elections and comes at a time when it was most necessary, and urged all to commit themselves to a future of openness, fairness and accountability.

Thackeray expressed hope that "transparency is ensured and every word of the order is followed, in time".

# Ajit Pawar-led NCP is 'real political party': Rahul Narwekar

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar on Thursday pronounced his ruling on disqualification pleas filed by rival NCP factions and said that the Ajit Pawar-led NCP was 'real political party' when rival factions emerged, a news agency reported. Ajit Pawar-led group was the real Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) when two factions emerged in the party in July 2023, Maharashtra assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar on Thursday held.

"All the petitions seeking disqualification of MLAs are rejected," Rahul Narwekar further said.

Rahul Narwekar started reading out his ruling on disqualification petitions filed by the warring factions led by deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar and his uncle Sharad Pawar on Thursday evening.

Meanwhile, hours before Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar's verdict on Thursday on the petitions filed by the two NCP factions against each other, the group headed by Ajit Pawar asserted that it won't back-track on its decision to join the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

The NCP was split in July last year after Ajit Pawar along with eight other MLAs joined the state government under the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena



and BJP, resulting in the cross-petitions. As directed by the Supreme Court, Speaker Narwekar is expected to deliver his verdict on Thursday on the disqualification petitions by the rival NCP factions. Speaking to the news channel ABP Majha, Sunil Tatkare from NCP (Ajit Pawar group) said, "There is no turning back from our decision to join the NDA. The decision was taken by our leader

and state Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar. We are hopeful that the speaker will give his verdict in our favour," according to the news agency.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) recently allotted the party name 'NCP' and poll symbol 'clock' to the Ajit Pawar-led group. It has also allotted 'Nationalist Congress Party-Sharadchandra Pawar' as the party name for the group led by Sharad Pawar.



EDITOR'S SPECS

Modi's 'temple diplomacy' and India-UAE ties

The auspicious occasion of 'Basant Panchami' went down in the history of Indian diplomacy as a unique and memorable day even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday inaugurated the first 'Hindu temple' in UAE's Abu Dhabi, marking the expansion of India's cultural footprint in a significant country of the Arab world. It was all a show of India's 'growing presence and influence' not only in UAE alone but also in other parts of the world when 'global aarti' took place. The entire programme reaffirmed the focus of PM Modi's diplomacy on "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (the whole world is one family). Definitely, PM Modi's temple diplomacy has strengthened the bonds between India and UAE, taking the ties on a much higher trajectory. But the larger message was for the entire Middle East and the Gulf as well. It was aimed at expanding outreach to the other Islamic nations of the region. UAE has a good clout in the Middle East by virtue of being its third largest economy. The release of eight Indian ex-naval personnel held on espionage charges in Doha (Qatar) was also a reaffirmation of the fact that PM Modi's diplomacy is highly effective and powerful in the region. The inauguration of the BAPS Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi took place close on heels of the release of navy veterans from Doha. There is no denying that PM Modi's visit to UAE saw the strategic and diplomatic ties gaining dizzy heights, which will have positive ramifications as far as Delhi's relationship with the Gulf is concerned. It was not simply a cultural event where the temple was unveiled in UAE, but it also reflected PM Modi's larger diplomatic plans to take up a much bigger role in the region, with the various projects in mind.

In search of lost flavours

She talks about food like it is living and defines wafting aromas with the intensity of a lover. There is talk of the magical 'adrak halwa' and the lost art of making dishes that her ancestors relished. Also, the grief that most have not been lucky to know what they did to the pallet.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

She talks about food like it is living and defines wafting aromas with the intensity of a lover. There is talk of the magical 'adrak halwa' and the lost art of making dishes that her ancestors relished. Also, the grief that most have not been lucky to know what they did to the pallet.

Author and food historian Tarana Khan, who recently co-edited the book 'Forgotten Foods: Memories and Recipes from Muslim South Asia' (Picador India) makes it clear that food cannot be narrowed down to just sustenance.

"While eating, all senses come into play. And it is also the associated memories that transport a dish into a different realm -- like how your mother would prepare and feed you a particular dish. All these senses create a sense of identity. So when we lose a dish, it is a major cultural loss. When we lost the heritage rice, we lost the aroma, the feel of the khichdi in winters and things that were a part of our cultural language because hybrids have taken over," she said



during the recent Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival.

'Forgotten foods', focuses on the fact that while heritage foods still abound in the streets and kitchens of South Asia, it may just be a matter of time before many of these historic dishes and culinary traditions, especially of Muslim provenance, pass into oblivion. In Forgotten Foods, historians, literary scholars, plant scientists, heritage practitioners, writers and chefs come together to document precious stories and memories, histories and recipes in a valiant endeavour to stem this lamentable tide.

As world faces hunger crisis, India decries primacy of open markets in foodgrains

Arul Louis

India has decried the primacy of the concept of open markets in foodgrains amid warnings from Secretary-General Antonio Guterres of a looming "hellscape of hunger" for the world's poorest. "Open Markets must not become an argument to perpetuate inequity and promote discrimination" in the availability of foodgrain, India's Permanent Representative Ruchira Kamboj told the Security Council on Tuesday. It is "necessary for all of us to adequately appreciate the importance of equity, affordability and accessibility when it comes to foodgrains", she said at the meeting on the impact of climate change and food insecurity on international peace. "Addressing global food insecurity should begin by choosing peace, cooperation and multilateralism, and working together to find common solutions through dialogue and diplomacy", she said. At the height of the foodgrain crisis resulting from Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the blockade of the Black Sea by Moscow, for example, India faced pressures to lift its restrictions on foodgrains and let them flow into the open markets where developed nations can corral supplies, while New Delhi was following a policy of selectively sending them to countries of the Global South in need. "India had provided food aid to several countries, including in our neighbourhood and Africa to strengthen food security", Kamboj noted. "We've also extended assistance to the people of Afghanistan, Myanmar and Palestine". This was in keeping with India's ethos of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" which sees the world as one family. Guterres, who spoke earlier, said, "A global food crisis is creating a hellscap of hunger and heartache for many of the world's poorest people and the climate crisis is accelerating with a deadly force - last year was the hottest ever". "Climate chaos and



food crises are serious and mounting threats to global peace and security," he said. "We need massive investment in a just transformation to healthy, equitable and sustainable food systems" to overcome these challenges, he said, "and we need governments, business and society working together to make such systems a reality. The meeting was billed as the signature event of its presidency by Guyana and was presided over by its President Mohamad Iffraan Ali. Ali said that the triad of conflicts, food insecurity and climate change were impacting global security. He said that nearly 149 million Africans are threatened with acute food insecurity and of them, 122 million live in areas of conflict. He faulted the international community for not dealing with the crisis adequately. "We do not see the interplay and we do not place priority on these issues", he said. Taking a stand against the Council's mission creep of abrogating to itself matters beyond the ambit of what the UN Charter has set for it, Kamboj said that the issues of development linked to climate change should be taken up in forums with universal participation. "Choosing to place the issue

Initially, the idea was not to do a book. During the Pandemic, we were doing forgotten food projects but it came to a halt. So we connected with other food writers and we started doing a series for a digital platform, which became quite popular and went on for two years. Then I decided to publish these articles, in the form of an anthology and also connected with other writers, asking them to write for the anthology. When we started out, it was a very north India based but when I connected with others, much diversity emerged and our culinary knowledge expanded," says the author who has written three articles for the book. Khan, who has to her credit books like 'The Begum and The Dastan' and 'Degh to Dastarkhwan agrees that India does not really have a great history of archiving in its character. While one can archive recipes and now even pictures and videos, she adds, "But what about the taste, feel and smell? It is just like music. Two singers can perform the same raag, but what they achieve can be extremely different, no? How do you define that? Archiving is extremely important. Food cultures and subcultures are fast disappearing. And we should start taking the practice of archiving very seriously." Currently working on a coffee table cookbook and a project that aims to support the Khansamas by getting them employment, she adds, "I am also thinking of food festivals, organising food and heritage tours to Rampur from the Capital," she concludes.

of climate change in forums other than the UNFCCC [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change], especially those where all members do not sit on an equal footing may undermine the larger cause of securing equity and climate justice", she said. UNFCCC is the forum where all nations come together as equals to set and evaluate goals for fighting climate change, while the Council is an unrepresentative body dominated by the five permanent powers with veto powers. Kamboj said that the world should also look for more resilient and viable alternatives to meet global food security needs. "Anticipating precisely such challenges, India has been championing the cultivation, production and marketing of millets, which are climate resilient and climate-friendly crops for fostering food security", she said. At India's initiative, the UN had declared 2023 as the International Year of Millets to raise awareness of their value in providing healthy nutritional alternatives to the cereals widely used now. Millets need less water and grow faster and can, therefore, help in fighting hunger. During its presidency of the G20, the group of large industrialised and emerging economies, last year Kamboj said India had committed to a set of high-level principles on food security and nutrition. These "include a range of responses to food security, from strengthening research cooperation on climate resilient and nutritious grains to accelerating innovations and investment focused on increasing agricultural productivity and most critically to supporting developing countries efforts and capacities to address their food security challenges", she said.

international

Israel pulls out of peace talks in Cairo over 'delusional' Hamas demands

Washington | Agencies

Israel has pulled out of the middle east peace talks in Cairo dealing a serious blow to the on-going truce negotiations to end the war, blaming Hamas' "delusional demands" and a lack of new proposals.

The talks aimed at ending fighting in the conflict zone in Gaza and freeing more than 100 remaining hostages did not yield the expected breakthrough but were extended for three more days before Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu opted to recall his negotiating team, Israeli media outlets reported Wednesday.

"Israel did not receive in Cairo any new proposal from Hamas on the release of our hostages," Netanyahu's office said in a statement. "A change in Hamas' positions will allow the negotiations to advance," he said.

Netanyahu also released a video statement saying "strong military pressure and firm negotiations" are the keys to getting the captives released, the Times of Israel reported.

Senior Hamas official Osama Hamdan blamed Netanyahu, telling a leading news media in the US that Israel's proposal veered away from agreements the parties had previously reached. Families of the hostages called Netanyahu's decision a "death sentence" for their loved ones, who have been held by militants in Gaza for more than 130 days.

Issues which the media says is preventing a deal is Israel's pledge to crush Hamas and remain in charge of security in Gaza



after the war and Hamas' demands of a permanent cease-fire and the withdrawal of all Israeli troops from the war-torn territory, USA TODAY said.

The latest developments in the Middle East:

The State Department has confirmed the death of 17-year-old Palestinian American Mohammad Ahmad Khmour in the West Bank and called for an investigation. The Washington Post reported he was shot in the head. He's the second US citizen, both teenagers, to be killed in the occupied territory since the war started.

US forces carried out an airstrike on an anti-cruise missile in a part of Yemen controlled by the Houthis, the rebel group that for months has launched attacks on commercial and Navy ships in the Red Sea, according to US Central Command.

Family members of hostages held in

Gaza as well as former captives were in the Netherlands on Wednesday to file a legal complaint seeking the International Criminal Court to arrest and prosecute the leaders of Hamas.

More than 28,500 people, mostly women and children, are claimed to have been killed in Gaza since October 7, when Hamas launched an attack on Israel, killing about 1,200 people and taking more than 240 hostages, triggering the war.

The Israeli military said on X it "located and struck" Hamas infrastructure, including tunnel shafts, but did not say where. At least 10 militants were killed, the Israel Defence Forces said.

Thousands of Palestinians protected from US deportation: About 6,000 Palestinians living in the US will avoid deportation for 18 months, thanks to a programme President Joe Biden invoked Wednesday, the New York Times reported.

The programme, called Deferred Enforced Departure, allows citizens of countries in crisis to remain and work in the US.

The Times cited a memo in which Biden said many Palestinian civilians are in danger because of the war in Gaza, so he granted authority for some who are in the US to stay.

Biden recently sent a group of top advisers to Michigan, a battleground state with the second-largest number of Arab Americans in the nation, to mend fences with members of that community embittered by his handling of the war.

Ukraine claims to have hit Russian landing ship in Black Sea

Kiev | Agencies

Ukrainian forces hit the Russian landing ship Caesar Kunikov in the Black Sea off the coast of Crimea, the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces has said.

The vessel was hit by "the Armed Forces of Ukraine, together with units of the Main Intelligence Directorate", near the town of Alupka, it said on Wednesday on Telegram, without giving further details.

Separately, the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ukrainian Defense



Ministry said the ship sustained critical holes on the left side as it was attacked by "MAGURA V5" combat sea drones, Xinhua news agency reported.

The Ukrayinska Pravda media outlet, cit-

ing its sources, said the vessel had sunk following the attack.

The Russian side has not confirmed the attack.

Caesar Kunikov is designed for beach landing and can carry up to 500 tons of cargo. It is equipped with AK-725 autocannons and Grad-M rocket launchers, among other weapons.

Earlier this month, the Ukrainian military said it has damaged 25 Russian vessels, or some 33 per cent of Russia's Black Sea Fleet, since February 2022.

Putin says Biden presidency better for Russia than Trump

TN Ashok | Washington

Russian President Vladimir Putin, under fire from US President Joe Biden and NATO allies for Ukraine invasion, shocked the world, saying "A Biden Presidency in the US is better for Russia". "A Joe Biden presidency would be better for Russia than a Donald Trump one, Russian President Vladimir Putin told Kremlin journalist Pavel Zarubin in an on-camera interview Wednesday, CNN reported.

Putin said Biden would be better for Russia "because he is a more experienced person, he is predictable, he is a politician of an old formation."

However, he added that Russia would "work with any leader of the US that gains the trust of the American people."

Putin also said to judge actions of the current administration in the US, one



should look at its "political position".

"I believe that the position of the current administration is extremely harmful and erroneous," Putin said in a reference to Russia's war in Ukraine.

According to Putin, that war "could have been over a year and a half ago" if agreements during a meeting in Istanbul in March 2022 were kept. Putin didn't specify which agreements he was referring to. The Russian president said he regretted that he "didn't start active actions in Ukraine earli-

er" than February 2022, claiming that Western leaders had lied to Russia about "not expanding NATO to the East." "We were and are concerned about the possibility of Ukraine being drawn into NATO, since this threatens our security," Putin said. Putin also alleged that the Minsk agreements, a ceasefire protocol signed by Ukraine and Russia in 2015, was never meant to be kept but used "to buy time to lead Ukraine with additional weapons."

The Russian leader also expressed disappointment around his recent interview with far-right media figure Tucker Carlson.

"I honestly thought he would be aggressive and ask tough questions. I wasn't only ready for that, I wanted that, because it would give me the opportunity to give tough answers back," Putin said.

"To be frank, I didn't fully enjoy that interview," he said.

Elderly Indian-American motel owner shot dead after altercation over room rental

New York | Agencies

A 76-year-old Indian-origin motel owner has been shot dead in the US state of Alabama following a confrontation over room rental.

Pravin Raojibhai Patel, the owner of the Hillcrest Motel in Sheffield, was gunned down last week after which police arrested 34-year-old William Jeremy Moore, Alabama-based news outlet al.com reported.

Moore was arrested shortly after the incident as he was trying to break into an abandoned house on 13th Avenue, Sheffield Police Chief Ricky Terry said.

According to investigators, Moore wanted to rent a room at the motel when an altercation with Patel took place on February 8, following which the former pulled a handgun and shot the elderly man.

"When searching Moore, the murder weapon was found in his possession," Terry said.

The police chief added that Moore is currently being held in the Sheffield City Jail until a warrant is issued after which he will be transported to the Colbert County Jail.



North Korea test-fires new surface-to-sea missile

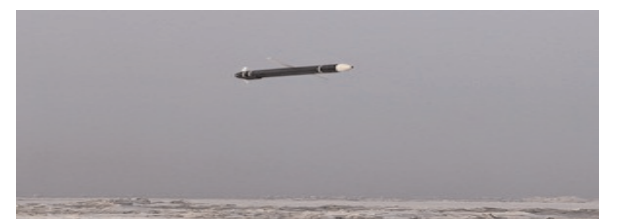
Seoul | Agencies

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has supervised the test-firing of a new surface-to-sea missile and ordered a tighter defence posture near the western maritime border, Pyongyang's state media reported on Thursday.

North Korea test-launched the new missile, named Padasuri-6, on Wednesday, Yonhap news agency reported, citing the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

The missile hit a target after flying over waters in the East Sea for around 1,400 seconds, KCNA said, without disclosing other details such as how many missiles were fired.

The South Korean military said Wednesday it detected several cruise missile launches at around 9 a.m. into waters northeast of the eastern city of Wonsan.



It marked North Korea's fifth cruise missile launch this year. The provocation came two days before the 82nd birthday of late former leader Kim Jong-il, the father of the current leader Kim Jong-un.

The North Korea's leader ordered a stronger defence posture near the western maritime border, saying that South Korean warships have frequently violated it, KCNA said.



## ELECTION ALMOST CERTAIN TO BE UNOPPOSED

### BJP'S DR. MURUGAN, MAYA, BANSHILAL, UMESH NATH AND CONGRESS'S ASHOK SINGH FILED NOMINATIONS

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The four BJP candidates Maya Narolia, Dr. L. Murugan, Banshilal Gurjar and Umesh Nath Maharaj along with senior party leaders reached the Returning Officer's office at around 11.30 am on Thursday and filed nominations for the Rajya Sabha elections. During this, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, BJP State President VD Sharma, former Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Prahlad Patel, Kailash Vijayvargiya and all senior leaders of the state unit of the party were present.

At around 11 am on Thursday morning, all four BJP candidates reached the party office at stop number seven. Party state president VD Sharma congratulated and congratulated him on being made the Rajya Sabha candidate. From here he along with Chief Minister



Mohan Yadav and State President VD Sharma reached the office of the Returning Officer in the Assembly. Shivraj Singh Chauhan, Kailash Vijayvargiya also reached the Rajya Sabha Returning Officer office located in the Assembly.

After BJP candidates filed their nominations, Congress candidate Ashok Singh also arrived to file his nomination. During this time, party leaders including Arun Yadav, Umang Singhar remained with him. According to the equations, the victory of BJP candidate

on four seats of MP and Congress candidate on one seems certain. BJP's Rajya Sabha candidate from Madhya Pradesh Umesh Nath met Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav today before filing his Rajya Sabha nomination.

## Bhopal Railway Station Platform No. 1 area will be developed as a world class façade

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Sports and Youth Welfare Minister Vishwas Kailash Sarang said that the platform number 1 area of Bhopal station will be developed as a world class facade of the city. In this regard, he inspected Bhopal station area under Narela assembly. After the inspection, information was obtained from Bhopal DRM about the plan for development work in the area around the station.

Minister Sarang said that Railways, Public Works Department and Municipal Corporation should jointly make plans for the beautification and development works of Bhopal area, so that there is uniformity among them. Sarang talked about working on the plan to widen the road in front of Platform No. 1 and develop it into 8 lanes in the coming time. On this occasion, Bhopal DRM



Devashish Tripathi, senior officials of Public Works and Municipal Corporation were present. Minister Sarang said that platform number-1 area of Bhopal station will be developed in a world class format. He said that the station courtyard is the facade of the city, the facilities and development works available outside the station courtyard create the image of the city in the minds of the tourists coming from outside the city. For this, now Railways, PWD and Municipal Corporation will jointly carry out beautifi-

cation and other development work in the area around the station, so that there will be uniformity in the work.

Sarang also gave instructions to prepare map routes for the promotion of famous tourist places located in the areas around Bhopal. Instructions were also given to provide soft skill training to the rickshaw pullers present at the auto stand located at the station. He said that this will make the journey of passengers coming to the station more accessible.

## Due to Ladli Behna Scheme the amount was not received on time and in full: Indore Mayor

Team Absolute | Indore

Indore Mayor's grief over former CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan's Ladli Behna scheme came to the fore. Not only is the current CM Dr. Mohan Yadav's government in trouble, municipal corporations are also being affected by it. Indore Mayor Pushyamitra Bhargava himself said in the Mayor's Council meeting regarding this scheme that from the year 2023 to January 2024, he has received Rs 142 crore less in the Octroi Compensation Scheme.

In six months, the octroi money which was supposed to be received due to Ladli Behna Yojana was not received on time and has been received less. However, then the Mayor handled the



matter and said that corporations are also for the last person of the society and this scheme is also for 1.25 crore women. The Mayor had given this answer to the question raised by opposition leader Chintu Chowksey about the deteriorating financial condition of the corporation. The Mayor also openly said that whether it was the BJP government or Kamal Nath's Congress government, we did not get the amount that was due to Indore

Municipal Corporation from the state government. The Kamal Nath government reduced the corporation's monthly allowance of Rs 45 crore to Rs 37 crore.

The Mayor also said that there is no harm in demanding rights. I demanded the amount of the corporation thrice in front of former CM Shivraj Singh Chauhan and also gave the letter. I have also made this demand with respect to the current CM Dr. Mohan Yadav.

## 'MAHABHARAT KRISHNA' APPROACHES BHOPAL POLICE, COMPLAINT OF IAS WIFE

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The ongoing dispute between Nitish Bhardwaj, who played the role of Lord Krishna in the TV serial Mahabharata, with his IAS wife Smita Ghate Bhardwaj has reached the Bhopal Police Commissioner.

Actually, Nitish Bhardwaj first married Monisha Patil in 1991. After a few years of marriage, there was a rift in their relationship and they separated in 2005. Nitish married IAS officer Smita Ghate for the second time in 2009. Smita Ghate is a 1992 batch IAS officer of MP cadre.

On Wednesday, February 14, Nitish Bhardwaj met Police Commissioner Harinarayanchari Mishra and gave him a complaint. In this he has said that his IAS wife Smita has 'kidnapped' his daughters.

In the complaint he said- Even after the court order, the wife is pre-



venting him from meeting his daughters. They do not know where both their daughters are and what

condition they are in. My wife is not giving any answer even after asking repeatedly. She is instigating my

daughters against me. Within one and a half years, the wife got her daughters admitted in boarding schools from Bhopal to Ooty and then got their names removed from there. Now she is not telling where her daughters are.

Nitish has requested the police to meet his daughters. The Commissioner has handed over the investigation of this case to ACP Shalini Dixit. Police Commissioner says that complaint has been received. This is a family dispute. Investigation is being done. When they contacted the boarding school of Ooty, they came to know that 4 months ago the names of their daughters were removed from the school. Even after repeated asking, the IAS wife is not answering where her daughters are. My phone numbers have also been blocked. She is not even responding to my e-mails. My WhatsApp has also been blocked, so that I cannot talk to my daughters.

## WORKSHOP HELD AT POLICE HEADQUARTERS REGARDING NEW LAWS

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A one-day training workshop was organized for senior police officers on Thursday after the central government passed three new laws. In this training program held in the auditorium of the Police Headquarters, senior officers from across Madhya Pradesh were provided detailed information regarding the new laws and their implementation.

In this training program held under the guidance of DGP Sudhir Saxena, retired senior police officer and former Special Director of CBI D.C. Jain, as the key speaker, gave detailed information regarding the new laws. In this workshop, Deputy Superintendents of Police of all the units of Madhya Pradesh and all the police officers senior to them were present virtually. All the senior police officers of Police Headquarters and Bhopal participated directly. It is noteworthy that the Central Government passed the prevalent



criminal law after amending and renewing the Indian Penal Code 1860 as the Indian Justice Code 2023, the Code of Criminal Procedure 1973 as the Indian Civil Defense Code 2023 and the Indian Evidence Act 1872 as the Indian Evidence Act 2023. On the above basis, changes are expected in the justice system and implementation of laws on a large scale. In this context, utmost importance is being given to capacity development of police as a law enforcement agency. While making an action plan, DGP Saxena has directed his subordinate officers and employees to carry out the work in a planned

manner for its wide publicity, training and implementation. In the workshop, the key speaker Jain gave detailed information regarding the new laws to all the senior police officers of Madhya Pradesh. In his address that lasted for three hours, Mr. Jain told how the new laws are different from the old laws, which acts have been included in the scope of crime? And how is the scope of police crime investigation referred to? The use of IT and electronic resources has been made valid as law, what amendments have been made in crimes against women and children? And how has the criminal investigation and accountability of the police been expanded? He expressed his views on this. Apart from this, he explained in detail what the police should keep in mind in the use of technology during research and in implementing justice-oriented legal process instead of punishment, the duties of the police in taking action as per the new laws and the expected professional efficiency.

## ANJALI SINGH SELECTED FOR YOUTH WORLD CUP BOXING CHAMPIONSHIP

Bhopal: Sports and Youth Welfare Minister Vishwas Kailash Sarang congratulated State Boxing Academy player Congratulations to Anjali Singh on her selection for the Indian team in the Youth World Cup Boxing Championship Montenegro (Budva). He expressed happiness and extended best wishes for better sports performance.

The Youth World Cup Boxing Championship will take place in Montenegro (Budva) from 3 to 11 March. Boxer Anjali Singh is in 57 kg weight category. National Selection Trials were held from 11 to 15 February in Rohtak, Haryana. Boxer Anjali was successful in making her place in the Indian team for the Youth World Cup Boxing Championship by defeating players from Delhi, NBA and Haryana 5-0.

## Sehore youth raped Indore girl in Ujjain, arrested

Team Absolute | Indore

A young man from Sehore has been arrested by Indore Police for raping a girl from Indore in a hotel in Ujjain. The young man raped the girl on the pretext of marriage and later refused to marry her and got engaged to another girl. When the police arrested him, he again started asking the girl to marry him.

The introduction of a twenty-six-year-old girl from Tihi village, Indore, to Vishal's father Ajab Singh, a twenty-two-year-old resident of Phanda Phatak Pachama, Sehore, in the year 2022

turned into a love affair. On December 31, Vishal told her on phone that he was coming to visit Ujjain with his family. You also come to Ujjain to meet him. On reaching Ujjain, Vishal told him that the family members had returned to Sehore after having darshan. After which both of them visited Mahakal temple and stayed in a nearby hotel. Here Vishal raped the girl on the pretext of marriage and then both of them returned to their home.

When the girl came to know about Vishal's engagement to another girl on January 17, she reached Sehore and insisted on marrying Vishal. Even then

Vishal tricked her that he would break the engagement and took her to a hotel and raped her but did not break the engagement. When she protested, he threatened to kill the girl and sent her away from Sehore. After this the girl narrated her ordeal to her parents and filed a case under section 376 against Vishal in Indore.

According to Indore Police, since the incident took place in the Mahakal police station area, Vishal has been arrested and the actual incident has been registered in the Mahakal police station. After being caught by the police, he is now again talking about marrying the girl.

## FIFTH PASS HAD MADE FAKE OBJECTIONABLE CHAT OF IAS OFFICER VIRAL

Indore: On the complaint of CEDMAP Executive Director Anuradha Singhai against an unknown accused, the crime branch arrested the accused Javed Mohammad, a fifth pass resident of Indore, on the complaint of making the screenshot of the fabricated and imaginary objectionable chat of her and her senior IAS officer P. Narhari viral on social media. He was arrested and during interrogation he confessed that on the instructions of his brother-in-law Ramanveer Singh Arora, he had made fake screenshots and made them viral through the app. Now the police are searching for the main conspirator Ramanveer Singh Arora.

The fifth pass accused, Javed Mohammad, father of Safi Mohammad Khan, age 35, who made a fake and fabricated screenshot of an objectionable chat of an IAS officer and went viral, is originally a resident of Dhar and is currently in Khajrana area of Indore, H.No. 249 Silver Nagar, Mohammad Israr. Was living in Khajrana's house, street no. 2, police station. The police have arrested him under U.P.C.28/24 Section 469,500 IPC and Section 201,204,471,120 B IPC. This fifth pass accused, who made the fake chat of an IAS officer viral, is so clever that he used to lure poor/illiterate women with money and take fake SIMs in their names. And through them he used to make such chat messages viral. Ramanveer Singh Arora, the conspirator and main accused in this entire case, used to do outsourcing work in Sedmap Company, where IAS officer P. NARHARI took action after several frauds came to light. To take revenge, Ramanveer had made this fake WhatsApp chat viral. At present Ramanveer Singh has absconded and the police is searching for him.

## INTERNATIONAL CHILDHOOD CANCER DAY CELEBRATED AT AIIMS BHOPAL

Team Absolute | Bhopal

International Childhood Cancer Day celebrated at AIIMS Bhopal. It is a global collaborative campaign to raise awareness about childhood cancer, and to express support for children and adolescents with cancer, the survivors and their families. A program was organized today by Department of Pediatrics of AIIMS Bhopal. Prof. (Dr) Ajai Singh, Executive Director AIIMS Bhopal congratulated the pediatric department and other departments for taking care of kids with cancer. Prof. Singh also inaugurated a 24x7 helpline no. - 8370001226 to provide any type of information about childhood cancer required by people of Madhya Pradesh and adjoining regions of central India. It will also felicitate to find out nearest treating centre as per mapping available with Indian Pediatric Hematology Oncology Group (InPHOG) and Cankids-KidsCan.

He also launched "We Can Together" a childhood cancer parent's mentorship program by parents of the survivors of childhood cancer. Department of Happiness, AIIMS Bhopal agreed to take this concept forward in future. He also sensitized Pediatric Department to involve more and more parents to increase the scope of work for this group. According to Pediatric Haematologist Oncologist Dr Narendra Chaudhary, "We Can Together" group will guide the new patient's parents to accept the bad news, understand the options courageously and to decide about their treatment appropriately after discussion with the treating team. This effort will likely to decrease the



refusal to diagnose, refusal to treat and abandonment of the treatment which are the biggest reasons for the poorer outcomes of highly curable childhood cancers in India.

Earlier Prof. Shikha Malik Head of the Pediatric department welcomed the guests and briefed the services being provided for children with cancer at AIIMS Bhopal. The department has registered about 700 children with cancer.

Currently about 120 children are undergoing months long therapies and more than 80 children have successfully completed the treatment.

The children with cancer also performed different cultural activities. The supporters from the society Manish Vijayraj and Par Peeda Har president Mr Radheshyam Saaboo were felicitated for their valuable service to children with

cancer. Manju Dhakad, Nursing Officer, was felicitated for best learner in pediatric oncology nursing services. Best enthusiastic team member was awarded to Pediatric Oncology Teacher Bharti Chorasia. Winners of poster competition among cancer children were awarded by the dignitaries. Three children who are doing excellent performance in their school despite all odds were also felicitated.



# Kanye West slams Taylor Swift, says he's been 'more helpful than harmful'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Rapper Kanye West has taken a dig at singer-songwriter Taylor Swift in a lengthy all-caps Instagram post. The rapper claimed that he's been "more helpful" to her career "than harmful", reports Mirror.co.uk.

The controversial 'Bound 2' rapper

was reportedly removed from last weekend's Super Bowl at the request of the 'Blank Space' hitmaker, claims he now denies.

He'd only recently bragged on his Story about overtaking Taylor in Spotify's global popularity charts.

Screening another post on X, urging users to stream Beyoncé's new single 'Texas Hold 'em' in a bid to keep Ye's Vultures out of the Billboard charts, Kanye finally addressed his recent run-ins with Taylor.

As per Mirror.co.uk, the pair have history, famously clashing at the 2009 VMAs when Ye interrupted Swift's award acceptance speech.

"When I said that I'm the new Jesus b\*\*\*\* I wasn't even thinking about Taylor Swift," Kanye wrote on his new Instagram upload. "That was a whole line before but I appreciate the free promo. Lil Wayne actually mentions Travis Kelce on vultures 2. This album is actually super positive and fun it's all about triumphant."

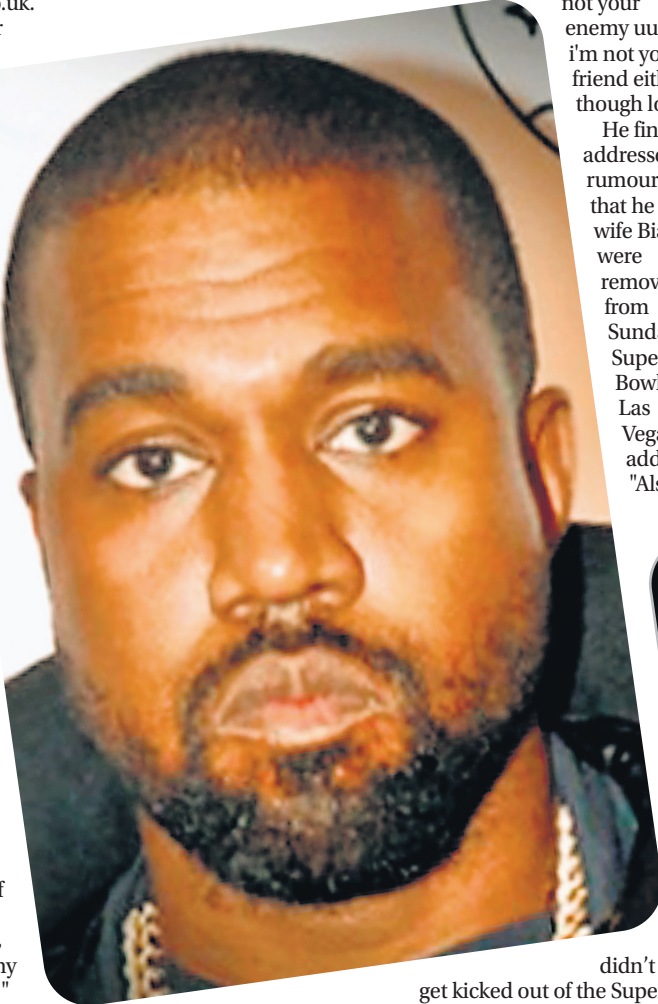
He admitted 2023, the year in which he was cancelled for a string of vile antisemitic remarks before being banned from most social media sites, was "incredibly challenging for me, my wife, my children, friends and family." The rapper explained: "I've been banned from hotels, kicked out of companies, and even not allowed to eat in some restaurants. Everyone saw vultures 1 get taken off of platforms to limit our first week numbers."

He added: "This reminds me of the mistreatment of my people because of the colour of our skin," before circling back to talking about Taylor.

"Remember I was on Taylor's side when Scooter bought her masters behind her back", Kanye told his followers. "She and Beyoncé are big inspirations to all

musicians, we always say how both sell out tours and movies."

Mirror.co.uk further states that Ye fired back at Swifties, saying: "Also, I'm sure I've been far more helpful to Taylor Swift's career than harmful. To all Taylor Swift fans, I am



not your enemy uuum i'm not your friend either though lol."

He finally addressed rumours that he and wife Bianca were removed from Sunday's Super Bowl in Las Vegas, adding: "Also I

didn't get kicked out of the Super

Bowl, we left our seats to go to YG's box and see different friends. My wife had never been to a Super Bowl so I wanted to walk around and have a nice time, we had such a fun day."

Former NFL star Brandon Marshall claimed that while Taylor cheered on beau Travis Kelce and the Kansas City Chiefs when they won 25-22 against the San Francisco 49ers, she got the rapper "removed" from the Allegiant Stadium in Vegas.



Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Will Smith will be seen in the upcoming high-octane actioner 'Sugar Bandits', where he will play an Iraq war veteran. Based on the Chuck Hogan book 'Devils in Exile', the thriller centres on an Iraq war veteran who teams up with a crew of fellow vets to target the drug trade in Boston.

Hogan, whose writing credits include 'The Town' and 'The Strain' (which he co-wrote with Guillermo del Toro), penned the screenplay, reports Variety. Smith and Jon Mone will produce through Westbrook Studios with Ryan Shimazaki overseeing; Stuart Ford will produce for AGC Studios, which is fully financing the film; and Richard Abate ('13 Hours', 'From Scratch') will produce for 3 Arts Entertainment.

**WILL SMITH TO PLAY IRAQ WAR VETERAN IN UPCOMING ACTION THRILLER**

'Sugar Bandits' marks the latest film for Smith, whose last major feature and the first since his infamous Oscars slap was Antoine Fuqua's 'Emancipation', which sold to Apple TV+ in Cannes for a market record deal of \$120 million, but failed to make a significant impact on launch.

He also has the untitled fourth 'Bad Boys' film, which is still in production, alongside the upcoming sequel to zombie hit 'I Am Legend', which is set to co-star Michael B. Jordan and see Smith reprise his role from the 2007 original. 'Sugar Bandits' was first announced back in 2013 with Universal developing the feature.

# HALLE BERRY SHARES PLAYFUL VIDEO WITH BOYFRIEND VAN HUNT

Los Angeles | Agencies



Hollywood actress Halle Berry shared a playful Instagram video of her boyfriend Van Hunt, while he was on a business call. The video shows a split screen of Hunt on the phone and Berry making silly faces as she reacts to his conversation, telling the camera: "Money, honey," reports People magazine. After her singer/songwriter beau catches on to what the Oscar winner is doing, he looks at her and chuckles before continuing his call. She wrote in the caption: "It's Valentine's Day and he's WOORRRRKKIINNNGGG! But tonight he'll be working on me. Happy Valentine's Day everyone." As per People, Berry gave a peek at their holiday-themed breakfast by sharing a photo of heart-shaped toast on her Instagram Story, writing, "Let's hear it for the love egg this Valentine's Day morning." The two confirmed their romance in September 2020. Berry announced that she had found her "match" while marking their first Valentine's Day together in 2021. "To all the Valentines who may be struggling to get it right... I feel you, but never give up and NEVER SETTLE for less than what makes your heart sing!" Berry wrote in an Instagram tribute with photos of the two wearing pyjamas. She added: "No matter what they say or what they call you. No matter how many times you try, it's always worth it. If you desire love, you will find your match, your equal... your person... even if it takes you until you're 54."

# Kate Hudson still earns royalty, even if it's a dime, from 1992 hit movie 'Home Alone 2'



Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Kate Hudson has revealed that her appearance in 'Home Alone 2: Lost in New York', which released in 1992, still pays her residuals, even if she's only earning a dime.

Kate was speaking on her podcast Sibling Revelry, hosted with her brother, Oliver Hudson, reports deadline.com.

During a conversation on her podcast, Kate discussed her credits with Joey Lawrence, Matthew Lawrence, and Andy Lawrence.

"I still get residuals from 'Home Alone 2' because I sang in the chorus," Kate said, referencing the scene where Macaulay Culkin's Kevin McAllister ruins a school Christmas pageant. "I'm in that chorus, and then I get 10 cents every once in a while."

Joey Lawrence knows the feeling. "Sometimes I'll get, like, 2 cents and I'm like, 'Wait. Doesn't the envelope and paper cost more?'"

The Christmas comedy film is directed by Chris Columbus. The sequel to the 1990 film 'Home Alone' and the second film in the Home Alone franchise, stars Macaulay Culkin, Joe Pesci, Daniel Stern, John Heard, Tim Curry, Brenda Fricker and Catherine O'Hara.



Los Angeles | Agencies

'Marry My Husband' star Na In Woo will be enlisting for mandatory military service.

There were reports doing the rounds that the actor has been asked to delay his enlistment into the military in order to enjoy a vacation with the cast of his hit K-Drama.

Na In Woo's representatives confirmed the report in a statement, reports koreaboo.com.

"We are hoping to join the vacation after receiving permission from the Military Manpower Administration," said Na In Woo's representative in a statement.

'Marry My

**'Marry My Husband' star Na In Woo to enlist for mandatory military service**

'Husband' is an ongoing South Korean television series. It also stars Park Min-young, Lee Yi-kyung and Song Ha-yoon. The show is based on a web novel of the same name, which was also serialised as a webtoon.

# ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Margot Robbie



## 3rd Test: Rohit, Jadeja centuries; Sarfaraz's 62 lead India's fightback after early trouble

Team Absolute | Rajkot

Captain Rohit Sharma and all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja smashed centuries each, while Sarfaraz Khan sparkled on his Test debut with 62 off 66 balls as India reached 326/5 in 86 overs at stumps on Day One of the third Test against England at the Niranjan Shah Stadium here on Thursday.

While Rohit made 131, Jadeja was unbeaten on 110, as the duo added 204 runs for the fourth wicket, after India were reduced to 33/3 in the first 45 minutes on a pitch which flattened out as the day progressed.

After the Rohit-Jadeja partnership, also India's first century stand of the current series ended, Sarfaraz played immaculately against the England spinners, making a 48-ball fifty on Test debut.

But he was run out after a huge mix-up with Jadeja, who was on 99. Jadeja eventually got his century to be undefeated at the end of day one's play, which sets up the game well for India to make a grand total in their first innings.

The early morning moisture on the Rajkot pitch benefited Mark Wood, who came into England's playing eleven in place of spinner Shoab Bashir. He drew first blood when he

angled across a delivery which caught Yashviji Jaiswal at the crease and the left-hander could only edge behind to first slip. In his next over, Wood had an uncomfortable Shubman Gill nicking behind a good length delivery which nipped away to wicketkeeper Ben Foakes.

England had their third wicket in the ninth over when Hartley got a delivery to jump off a length, which gripped and turned very sharply to take Rajat Patidar's edge towards cover. After being hit on the helmet grille by Wood in a short-ball play, with three fielders stationed deep in the leg-side, Rohit tried to unsettle Hartley with cut and sweep for boundaries.

He even got a life at 27 in the same over when Joe Root dropped his catch at first slip on an attempted slog. Luck continued to favour Rohit when survived a close lbw shout while dancing down the pitch against Anderson.

Rohit then brought out his good-looking punch, loft down the pitch, pulls and sweeps to reach his fifty in 71 balls. From the other end, Jadeja, promoted to No.5, remained rock-solid, driving and punching Root for a brace of fours to be an ideal partner for Rohit in leading the recovery act for India.

After lunch, Rohit and Jadeja were in control of



their approach, rotating the strike well and putting the bad balls away to get runs easily as the pitch began to flatten out. Jadeja edged a four off Wood while Rohit danced down the pitch to loft Hartley over long-on for six, before glancing Anderson for a boundary, as the duo continued their recovery act for India.

Shortly after India got its first century-plus stand of the series through the Rohit-Jadeja

stand, boundaries continued to flow as Jadeja got his fifty off 97 balls, with England not finding much help off the pitch to test the batters.

Rohit then greeted Root with a swing over long-on for six and whipped Ahmed wide over mid-on for a boundary. Jadeja then drove Root powerfully past mid-on for four and pulled him over mid-wicket for six to get the second session in India's favour -- 92 runs for no wicket -- with more hard work under the sun awaiting England.

After tea, Rohit reached his 11th Test century with a brace off Ahmed and England lost a review against him in desperation. The runs continued to flow for the duo as 50 runs came in the first 11 overs of the session, till Wood was rewarded for his persistence when Rohit miscued a pull to mid-wicket.

Sarfaraz had a few nervous moments, especially with Wood bowling short balls, before settling himself in nicely against the spinners. He showed good footwork, used the depth of the crease well, and was fine in picking the lengths and playing with soft hands to manoeuvre against the spinners while taking calculated risks.

It meant that Sarfaraz was flawless with his lofts down the ground, pulls and sweeps to reach his first Test fifty with seven fours and a six in

front of his father and wife. Sarfaraz would dazzle with boundaries off Anderson and Hartley, even as Jadeja slowed down and survived on 93 when England chose not to take a review off Hartley, with replays later showing he would have been out lbw.

Sarfaraz was then sold down the river by Jadeja in pursuit of taking a single for the century, as Wood aimed a direct hit from mid-on at the non-striker's end, ending the debutant's innings. That run-out of Sarfaraz brought out an angry reaction from Rohit, who threw his cap in anger in the dressing room.

A ball later, Jadeja would reach his fourth Test hundred and brought out the sword-like celebration, but it was subdued. He would collect two more boundaries before stumps arrived on a fruitful day for India, who would need Jadeja and nightwatchman Kuldeep Yadav to go big on day two, with debutant Dhruv Jurel still there to bat.

### Brief scores:

India 326/5 in 86 overs (Rohit Sharma 131, Ravindra Jadeja 110 not out, Sarfaraz Khan 62; Mark Wood 3-69, Tom Hartley 1-81) against England.

### Bengaluru Open 2024: India's Sumit Nagal packs off Coleman Wong, enters quarterfinals



Team Absolute | Bengaluru

Second-seed Sumit Nagal of India continued his sensational unbeaten run to enter the singles quarterfinals of the Bengaluru Open 2024 after beating Hong Kong's Coleman Wong in straight sets at the Karnataka State Lawn Tennis Association (KSLTA) Stadium in Bengaluru on Thursday.

Nagal, who won the ATP Challenger title in Chennai last week, was in total control of the second-round clash on centre court, packing off Wong 6-2, 7-5 in an hour and 45 minutes.

The World No.98 Nagal quickly opened up a 3-1 lead in the opening set and then broke Wong once again to wrap up the set. Wong put up a better fight in the second set, breaking Nagal in the fifth game. But the Indian responded by breaking back his opponent's serve without dropping a single point immediately to draw level. He then made the most of his experience to keep the 19-year-old Hong Kong player at bay to close out the set and match four games later.

Nagal will now face fifth seed Adam Walton

of Australia, who defeated Belgium's Gauthier Onclin 6-2, 6-2 in the second round in the prestigious ATP Challenger event being organised by Karnataka State Lawn Tennis Association.

Earlier, seventh seed Stefano Napolitano of Italy got the better of Canada's Vasek Pospisil 6-4, 4-6, 6-4. The former World No. 25 Pospisil, who was given a wild card for the tournament, had fought back after losing the opening set to force a decider. While he hit eight aces, the Canadian was also guilty of nine double faults and it hurt his chances in the final analysis.

### Key results:

5-Adam Walton (Aus) bt Gauthier Onclin (Bel) 6-2, 6-2; Moez Echargui (Tun) bt Enrico Dalla Vella (Ita) 6-2, 6-2; 7-Stefano Napolitano (Ita) bt Vasek Pospisil (Can) 6-4, 4-6, 6-4; 2-Sumit Nagal (Ind) bt Coleman Wong (Hkg) 6-2; 7-5.

### 'Felling bad for Sarfaraz Khan': Ravindra Jadeja apologises after his error causes run-out

Team Absolute | Rajkot

Ravindra Jadeja apologized to Test debutant Sarfaraz Khan after a mistake in the call for a run got the Mumbai batter run out on Day 1 of the third Test against England at the Niranjan Shah Stadium here on Thursday.

Sarfaraz was flawless with his lofts down the ground, pulls, and sweeps to reach his first Test fifty with seven fours and a six in 48 deliveries, the joint second-quickest for an India debutant. However, a nervous moment got him run out when Jadeja on 99 played a straight drive down to mid-on called for an impossible single, and unsuccessfully sent Sarfaraz back. Mark Wood guarding the mid-on region picked the ball early and threw it straight at the non-striker's end to send back the debutant. Sarfaraz, who was looking good for a



three-figure mark, got out to an unfortunate incident on 62.

"Feeling bad for Sarfaraz Khan, it was my wrong call. Well played," said Ravindra Jadeja on Instagram.

That run out of Sarfaraz brought out an angry reaction from skipper Rohit Sharma, who flung his cap down in anger in the dressing room. Jadeja got to the hundred on the next ball, but the celebrations were subdued since Sarfaraz had got out just one delivery before.

Sarfaraz had a few nervous moments, especially with Wood bowling short balls, before settling himself in nicely against the spinners. He showed good footwork, used the depth of the crease well, and was fine in picking the lengths and playing with soft hands to manoeuvre against the spinners while taking calculated risks.

### Rohit Sharma surpasses Dhoni's record for second most Test Sixes by an Indian



Team Absolute | Rajkot

India skipper Rohit Sharma on Thursday surpassed Mahendra Singh Dhoni's tally of 78 maximums in Test cricket during the opening day of the third Test

against England at the Niranjan Shah Stadium in Rajkot on Thursday.

Rohit overtook Dhoni's tally of 78 maximums in Test cricket by hitting the second six of the innings, bringing his total to 79 sixes. With 91

sixes to his name, former opener Virender Sehwag holds the record for most sixes in Tests by an Indian.

Rohit showcased his sublime batting prowess, spectacularly notching his 11th Test century. With an impressive innings comprising 11 boundaries and two towering sixes, his century came off just 157 deliveries.

Rohit's innings was particularly commendable as he stood firm after India suffered early setbacks, losing key wickets in the first hour of play.

The dismissals of Yashviji Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, and Rajat Patidar threatened to derail India's innings, but Rohit's resilient knock provided stability and momentum to the team.

Rohit along with Ravindra Jadeja, who scored his 21st half-century stitched a 204 run partnership for the fourth wicket, before the skipper fell victim to Mark Wood after scoring 131 off 196.

### Nadal withdraws from Qatar Open, says 'not ready to compete'



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Former world no. 1 tennis star Rafael Nadal has further delayed his comeback after pulling out of the upcoming Qatar Open. The 22-time Grand Slam winner was due to compete at the event in Doha which begins on February 19. But, the 37-year-old said he is won't be able to compete in Doha and targeting in an exhibition match against Carlos Alcaraz in Las Vegas in March, and Indian Wells later in the month.

"I would have loved to play in Doha, where the tournament team, as well as the amazing Qatar fans have always supported me greatly. Unfortunately I am not ready to compete and I won't be able to come to Doha where I really wanted to be and play again after that unforgettable win in 2014.

"I will focus on keep working to be ready for the exhibition in Las Vegas and the amazing Indian Wells tournament," the Spaniard wrote on X.

Nadal made his long-awaited return after almost a year out with injury at January's Brisbane International. He reached the quarterfinal but sustained a muscle tear near his hip during his encounter against Jordan Thompson.

The injury caused Nadal to withdraw from the Australian Open a week before the Grand Slam began.

### INDIA SLIP TO 117 IN LATEST FIFA RANKINGS AFTER ASIAN CUP DEBACLE



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Indian men's national football team fell to 117th place in the latest FIFA rankings after its AFC Asian Cup debacle. India slipped 15 spots from 102 in the latest edition of the FIFA men's world ranking released on Thursday, following the team's first-round exit from the continental tournament in Doha, last month.

There is plenty of movement further down the standings following the matches contested in the CAF Africa Cup of Nations and the AFC Asian Cup. Amongst the African sides, Ivory Coast jumped 10 spots to be placed 39th, reaping the rewards of their continental triumph on home soil, secured following an eventful AFCON campaign.

AFCON runners-up Nigeria sit at 28th after jumping 14 places making significant strides but are no match for Angola (93rd, up 24), a side they ousted in the last eight, who are the

biggest climbers in the latest instalment of the global ranking. Two-time Asian Cup winners Qatar (37th, up 21) chalk up the biggest tally (92.04 points) after capitalising on home comforts to successfully defend their continental crown. Elsewhere, Jordan (70th, up 17), who were edged out in the Asian Cup final, make good ground, as do Thailand (101st, up 12), whose journey came to an end at the last-16 stage. Qatar's rise sees them enter uncharted territory, with two other teams also recording best-ever rankings.

Senegal (17th, up 3), who suffered shoot-out heartbreak at the hands of the eventual winners Ivory Coast in the Africa Cup of Nations round of 16, break new ground, while Tajikistan (99th, up 7) mark their maiden Asian Cup campaign by making a first-ever appearance in the top 100.

There are no changes seen in the top ten of the global rankings.

### Bajrang Punia writes open letter to UWW over revoking of WFI suspension, says 'wrestlers under threat'

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Olympic medalist wrestler Bajrang Punia wrote an open letter to United World Wrestling (UWW) on Thursday, demanding the world Wrestling body to take action against the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI).

In a letter, Punia wrote that the decision to lift WFI suspension has put the "wrestlers under threat again" by WFI members.

UWW, the global governing body for the sport, had placed the WFI under provisional suspension on August 23 last year after the Indian body failed to hold an election in due course. However, the UWW decided to lift the suspension on Tuesday with immediate effect.

The UWW Bureau met on February 9 to review the suspension among other topics and considering all the elements and information, it decided to lift the suspension under the condition that WFI has to immediately provide UWW with written guarantees that all wrestlers will be considered for participation without any discrimination in all WFI events.

In a letter to UWW, Punia wrote: "This decision has again put Indian wrestlers under threat and harassment by WFI members. This is to bring to your notice that this WFI was suspended by Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYAS) dated 27



December 2023 due to serious anomalies after a couple of days of taking charge. MYAS also formed an Ad Hoc Committee to overlook and conduct wrestling activities.

"Even after this suspended WFI members took blatant decisions to conduct sporting activities without any recognition from sports ministries under the same leadership. Wrestlers all over India have lost trust and belief in functioning of Wrestling Federation of India. Because of this MYAS took diligent steps and issued a circular dated 7th January 2024.

"Even after this they have publicly issued statements against wrestlers and Ad Hoc Committee. This elected body is still being run by same individual and their allies who serious charges against them and MYAS also took the same in consideration while suspending the body.

"For your reference we have attached the mentioned letters. We wrestlers request you kindly support Indian athletes against unfair practices and harassment through various means. Indian wrestlers are looking up to you for justice and their rights to fair and safe play."

On Wednesday, former wrestler Sakshi Malik accused WFI chief Sanjay Singh that he used underhanded tactics to have the suspension on WFI lifted by UWW.



### Suniel Shetty gets nostalgic as he reminisces about his father

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Suniel Shetty, has reflected on the significance of physical touch, particularly between fathers and sons. He noted that while children often share physical closeness with their mothers, the same isn't true for fathers. In the new episode of 'Dance Deewane', audiences were swept away by the mesmerising performance of two extraordinary brothers, Rohit and Roshan Patro. The 18- and 15-year-old from Jamshedpur, Jharkhand performed on the song 'Papa Meri Jaan' dedicating their performance to their father. The emotionally loaded performance earned them a standing ovation from both the judges. Moved to tears, Suniel missed the bond he shared with his late father. He remarked that the way the brothers included their father in the frame was the best moment of their performance. Suniel expressed: "Bache humesha Ma ke saath bahut physical hote hai, pitaji ke saath kabhi physical nahi hote, kyunki humhe lagta hai yeh mard hai ye hugs nahin chahenge (We always get very physical with our mothers, but never get physical with our fathers, because we feel he is a man and he will not need hugs from us)." The 62-year-old actor, however, made a personal revelation from spending time with his own father during his final years, realising the profound importance of touch for him. He said: "Last chaar saal jab pitaji bistar pe the and tab unke saath mene wakt guzara, tab mene yeh realise kiya ki touch unke liye kitna maayne rakhta tha. Unka haath pakadna, jo shayad unhone bachpan mei mere saath kiya tha, lekin pata nhi kya awkward stage aata hai baap-bete ke beech mei ki aap woh kabhi nahi kar paate (When I spent time with my father during the last four years when he was bed-ridden, I realised how much touch meant to him. Holding his hand, which he probably did with me in my childhood, but I don't know what an awkward stage comes between a father and son that you can never do it)."



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## SHAH RUKH KHAN MAKES KOREAN HEARTS, SAYS 'LOVE YOU BTS'

In a new video, where he announced the digital release of 'Dunki' on OTT, Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan was seen professing love for K-Pop superband BTS.

Shah Rukh and the streaming giant on Thursday took to Instagram, where they shared an announcement video in a quirky manner.

The clip starts with the "Badshah" of Bollywood entering a visa office for permission; to which, the visa officer says what if he doesn't come back and what are the assets he owns.

SRK then talks about his assets, hilariously says: "Mannat isn't sea facing, the sea is Mannat facing"

He then asks for a visa to visit 190 countries - Australia to Zimbabwe - on a single visa.

However, visa officer lets him know that such a visa doesn't exist but SRK doesn't take no for an answer.

SRK says that he has influenced everyone around the world and how every third person in London is named Raj courtesy his character from 'Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge', to how Europe told UK "palat" during Brexit.

SRK then makes Korean hearts and tells: "It was me who taught South Koreans to give hearts," and then said: "Love you BTS." His visa still gets rejected.

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## COMPARING HIMSELF WITH EMRAAN HASHMI, KJO SAYS HE'S A GREAT KISSER. I'M A TERRIBLE KISSER"

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood producer-director Karan Johar, who is awaiting the release of his upcoming streaming production 'Showtime' starring Emraan Hashmi, has shared that he is a terrible kisser.

KJo, who last directed the Alia Bhatt- and Ranveer Singh-starrer 'Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani', spoke about his experience working with Emraan.

He said: "It was my desire to be a dashing, gorgeous, good looking, good kisser as a producer. I haven't matched any of those four qualities that Emraan has in abundance."

Emraan had earlier said that he is not a good kisser but a great kisser. Giving a spin to the actor's statement, KJo said: "I promise you, he said he's not a good kisser, he's a great kisser. I'm a terrible kisser."



## Karan Wahi talks of 'on-screen dynamics' as he reunites with Jennifer Winget after 14 yrs

Actor Karan Wahi has reflected upon his reunion with Jennifer Winget in the show 'Raisinghani vs Raisinghani' after more than a decade, calling it a reinvention of their on-screen dynamics. The duo have starred together in the 2007 medical drama 'Dill Mill Gayye'. Jennifer played the role of Dr Riddhima Gupta, while Karan portrayed Dr Siddhant Modi.

The show which ended in 2010 had attracted viewers with its fresh storyline.

The return of Karan and Jennifer in the legal drama 'Raisinghani vs Raisinghani' showcases more than just a walk down memory lane; it's a fresh chapter that transcends their previous roles, delving deeper into the intricacies of their characters and their evolving chemistry.

Talking about the same, Karan expressed: "Sharing the screen with Jenny after 14 years is a nostalgic moment for us as well as for our fans. But this time our chemistry has evolved and so have our characters. More than just the romantic tension, the audience can expect a sense of rivalry, redemption, and relentless passion that will keep them hooked throughout the series."

"Our characters carry deeper layers of emotion and complexity, making every scene charged with anticipation and intrigue. It's not just a reunion; it's a reinvention of our on-screen dynamics, which I am sure the audience will like," he added.

## BEYONCE SPARKLES IN INDIAN DESIGNER CRYSTAL ENSEMBLE AT NYFW

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It was a "sparkley" affair at New York Fashion Week, where grammy winner Beyonce, also called as Queen B by her fans, made heads turn in an outfit by renowned Indian designer Gupta took to his Instagram account, where he shared the slick looks donned by Beyonce. The statement outfit was from the designer's recent collection, "Aarohanam," which was unveiled at the Paris Couture Week's Spring Summer 2024. Beyonce looked every-inch-gorgeous in a celestial hued blazer dress having a plunging neckline paired with thigh-boots and a cowboy hat. She completed her look with a hologram coloured bag and big sunglasses. The outfit had crystals embedded on it. For the caption, Gupta detailed the look for the readers: "@beyonce in Gaurav Gupta Couture for #NYFW. She wears the Galaxy crystal jacket with embroidered body suit and boots from our recently launched Paris Couture SS'24 collection, Aarohanam."

He has previously styled globally popular names such as Kylie Minogue, Megan Thee Stallion, Lizzo and Priyanka Chopra



## Allu Arjun is all set to represent Indian cinema at the Berlin Film Festival

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Actor Allu Arjun is all set to represent Indian cinema at the Berlin Film Festival with the special screening of the 2021 blockbuster 'Pushpa: The Rise', directed by Sukumar. Arjun will be seen having a conversation with international filmmakers, producers, and market buyers during his visit. Also, he will interact with the international press alongside the screening.

The action drama also stars Fahadh Faasil and Rashmika Mandanna. The first instalment depicts the rise of a coolie Pushpa Raj in



the smuggling syndicate of red sandalwood, a rare wood that grows only in the Seshachalam Hills of Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh.

The 'Pushpa' franchise has gained global success with 'Pushpa: The Rise' in countries such as Russia, US, Gulf, Australia and UK.

The film's second instalment christened 'Pushpa 2: The Rule' is all set to release on August 15. It will be released in Telugu, Hindi, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam.

## INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Priya P Varrier