

# absolute india

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## AAP-Congress's candidate Kuldeep Kumar declared as Chandigarh Mayoral poll winner

# CHEERS FOR SUPREME COURT

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Setting aside the election of the BJP candidate as declared by the Returning Officer, the Supreme Court on Tuesday declared AAP councillor Kuldeep Kumar as the Mayor of Chandigarh Municipal Corporation during the hearing on the contentious Chandigarh mayoral election case.

The apex court was dealing with a plea filed by INDIA bloc's mayoral candidate Kuldeep Kumar accusing Returning Officer Anil Masih of allegedly "defacing the ballots" during the Chandigarh mayoral polls held on January 30. Kumar had accused the Returning Officer of resorting to fraud and forgery in the counting process.

"Setting aside the election process itself would not be proper since the issue is only when the Returning Officer made the counting," a bench comprising Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud and justices J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra observed.

The court also ordered prosecution of Returning Officer Masih for 'misdemeanour'.

"It is evident that Anil Masih is guilty of serious misdemeanour for deliberately defacing eight ballot papers. He must be held accountable" the CJI said. Contempt proceedings has been initiated against Masih.

On Monday, the top court had said that it would examine the ballot papers of the Chandigarh Mayoral polls along with the entire video recording of the counting day on Tuesday, citing concerns about potential horse-trading.

Expressing the need for transparency and fairness in the electoral process, CJI Chandrachud stressed the importance of scrutinising the invalidated ballots.

On Monday, the court had directed the



Registrar General of the Punjab and Haryana High Court to assign a judicial officer to safely transport the records to Delhi.

CJI Chandrachud had stressed the urgency of the matter and declined a plea to postpone the hearing, citing ongoing horse-trading concerns.

Masih, appearing before the bench, had admitted to marking eight already defaced ballot papers with an 'X' and accused AAP councillors of creating disturbance during the process.

Masih had said that he had to monitor the situation via CCTV due to the disruptions caused by the AAP councillors.

The top court had summoned the official in question to remain present before it on Monday to explain his conduct.

After perusal of the CCTV footage given in the pen drive by senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, representing the AAP councillor, CJI Chandrachud had orally observed: "This is a mockery of democracy. He is murdering democracy. Is this the behaviour of a Returning Officer, who looks at the camera and defaces the ballot? It is obvious that he defaced the ballots. This man has to be prosecuted."

Deferring the February 7 meeting of the Corporation, the Supreme Court had ordered that the entire record pertaining to the election, including ballot papers and videography footage, would be sequestered under the custody of the Registrar General of the Punjab and Haryana High Court.

The AAP and Congress' joint candidate

Kuldeep Kumar had petitioned the top court after the Punjab and Haryana High Court refused to stay the election results for the post of Mayor.

In his petition before the high court, Kuldeep Kumar had alleged complete departure from the practice and rules, saying that the Returning Officer refused to allow the nominees of parties to monitor the counting of votes. He also prayed for fresh elections in a free and fair manner under the supervision of a retired high court judge.

## RETURNING OFFICER SERVED NOTICE

**New Delhi:** The returning officer at the centre of Chandigarh vote-tampering row is guilty of misdemeanour and made a deliberate attempt to deface eight ballot papers so that BJP's candidate is elected the city's mayor, the Supreme Court held today.

The court has now directed contempt of court proceedings against the officer, Anil Masih. A showcause notice has been issued, and he has been asked to file a response in Punjab and Haryana High Court within three weeks. The returning officer was earlier removed as a member of the BJP's minority cell in the wake of a massive row over a video of him tampering with the ballot papers after the January 30 election.

The bench, led by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, noted that all the eight ballot papers declared invalid by returning officer Anil Masih were in the favour of AAP candidate and petitioner Kuldeep Kumar. The court has now ordered that Mr Kumar will now take over as Chandigarh mayor.

## Maha Assembly unanimously passes 10% Maratha quotas bill



Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra Legislative Assembly unanimously passed the Maratha Reservation Bill giving 10 per cent quotas to the community in education and government jobs, here on Tuesday.

The Bill was introduced in the assembly at the Special Session of the Legislature this afternoon and Chief Minister Eknath Shinde detailed the government's position on the quotas issue.

Now, the Marathas will be entitled to 10 per cent reservations in educational institutions and in state government jobs, fulfilling a long-pending demand of the community.

Addressing the House, Shinde said that he was a soldier of the late

Balasaheb Thackeray and would stick to his word, and said he felt proud to introduce the reservation for the Maratha community.

"This is the victory of the movement launched by (Shivba Sanghatana leader) Manoj Jarange-Patil, and is a day of fulfilment of the aspirations of the Marathas. This has been done without doing injustice to any other community including the OBCs or disturbing their quotas," said Shinde.

He assured that this reservation will stand legal scrutiny before the courts and everybody had worked very hard to finalise it to ensure justice to the Marathas, as the Bill was passed without any opposition with thumping of desks.

## Sonia Gandhi elected as RS MP for first time

Jaipur | Agencies

Congress leader Sonia Gandhi was elected as Rajya Sabha MP for the first time in Rajasthan and two candidates from the BJP, Chunni Lal Garasiya and Madan Rathore were elected unanimously from the state, confirmed Election Commission officials on Tuesday.

Mahavir Prasad Sharma, Principal Secretary of Rajasthan Legislative Assembly and Returning



Officer of Rajya Sabha, declared that all three candidates from Rajasthan had

been elected unopposed in the Rajya Sabha biennial elections. After the deadline for withdrawal of nominations passed, the election officer announced the victory of all three candidates.

After the announcement, Chunni Lal Garasiya and Madan Rathore received their certificates while Sonia Gandhi's agent received the certificate on her behalf.

As of now, out of 10 Rajya Sabha seats in the state, six seats are with the Congress and four are with the BJP.

## 'MAKESHIFT TANKS', IRON SHEETS: FARMERS' PLAN TO CROSS HARYANA BORDER

Chandigarh | Agencies

The protesting farmers from Punjab have rejected the Centre's proposal to buy three types of pulses, maize and cotton at the old MSP and their march to Delhi will continue tomorrow. The police and paramilitary forces have geared up to stop the convoy with multi-layer fortifications at the Shambhu border between Punjab and Haryana and other checkpoints that lead to the national capital.

Concrete barriers, barbed wires and large shipping containers are part of the multi-layer blockade by the administration. The cops have cemented nail strips on the highway to stop the movement of tractors and other vehicles by the farmers. Four years ago, farmers in large



numbers had camped at various Delhi borders for months and the cops, anticipating a similar scenario, had taken such measures.

The farmers have created a makeshift "tank" to counter the measures and continue their 'Dilli Chalo' march.

## TALKS FAIL, MARCH RESUMES

Protesting farmers rejected the government's proposal of a five-year contract to buy maize, cotton and three types of pulses at the old minimum support price. The announcement by the protesting farmers came hours after the Sanyukt Kisan Morcha, an umbrella organisation of farmer unions, which is not part of the current protests, also criticised the MSP proposal. Laying out the reasons for rejecting the proposal, farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal said in Hindi, "The government proposed (on Sunday night) and we have studied it. It doesn't make sense for the MSP to apply to only two or three crops and for the other farmers to be left to fend for themselves."

## SP's final offer, INDIA unity in up hinges on Congress reply

New Delhi | Agencies

Signs of fresh trouble for the INDIA Opposition bloc in Uttar Pradesh, seat-sharing talks between the Samajwadi Party and Congress have hit a roadblock. The Akhilesh Yadav-led party, sources said, has made a final offer of 17 seats, but the Congress is yet to accept it. Yadav has so far stayed away from the Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, which is moving through Uttar Pradesh, and said his party will join the yatra once the seat-sharing arrangement for Lok Sabha polls is finalised. The Congress has been trying to

drive a hard bargain in the politically significant state. The Samajwadi Party had first offered 11 seats to the Grand Old Party. But with the Jayant Chaudhary-led Rastriya Lok Dal switching to the NDA camp, the Samajwadi Party agreed to give 15 seats to the Congress. The latter bargained for more and Samajwadi Party offered Saharanpur and Amroha seats too, reportedly on the request of Congress's Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. Then, sources said, Congress asked for Moradabad or Bijnor seat. The Samajwadi Party put its foot down on a final 17-seats offer, and the talks stalled.

"We have had several rounds

of discussions, exchanged many lists. When the seat-sharing is done, Samajwadi Party will participate in their Nyay yatra,"

Yadav said yesterday. The Samajwadi Party leader, sources said, is waiting for a reply from the Congress leadership. Yadav wants the Congress to reply before the first leg of Rahul Gandhi's Yatra ends. If Congress does not seal the deal in the next three days, the alliance is likely to fall apart, the sources said.

Amid the tussle between the allies, Samajwadi Party spokesperson Fakhru Hassan Chand posted on X that the Congress will be responsible if the alliance gets derailed.

## Modi launches India's longest transportation tunnel in Jammu and Kashmir

Srinagar | Agencies

The longest transportation tunnel of the country on the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) was opened by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday as he flagged off the first electrified trains of the Kashmir valley. "Prime Minister Modi was present in Jammu and he virtually flagged off two electrified trains simultaneously -- one from Srinagar to Sangaldan in the down direction and the other from Sangaldan to Srinagar in the up direction," a railway official said.

Over 100 school children and



their teachers took the inaugural trip from each side as special guests. The official added that the

prime minister also inaugurated the 48.1-km-long Banihal-Khari-Sumber-Sangaldan section. "This

longest tunnel, which is 12.77 km long and known as T-50, falls between the Khari-Sumber section," the official said.

According to the Northern Railway (NR), trains can now run from Baramulla to Sangaldan via Banihal, which used to be the last or originating station earlier.

T-50 is supposed to be the most challenging of the 11 tunnels in the Banihal-Khari-Sumber-Sangaldan section. According to railway officials associated with the project, the tunnel survey work started around 1996 but the tender was awarded in December 2013 so it took around 10 years to operationalise it.

## RAKUL PREET - JACKKY BHAGNANI WEDDING: PICS VENUE GO VIRAL

**Mumbai:** Actress Rakul Preet Singh and actor-producer Jackky Bhagnani will reportedly get married on February 21. The festivities for their big fat beach wedding have already kicked off in Goa. Oh, and, the initial pictures from the celebrations are making waves on the Internet. The first photo, shared by a paparazzi on Instagram, shows a "welcome you" board adorned with flowers. The text on it read, "Bhagnani & Singh family welcome you." Following that, there's a coconut with the couple's initials "RJ" imprinted on it. Adorable, isn't it? The side note attached to the post read, "Jackky Bhagnani and Rakul Preet Singh's wedding festivities kick off in Goa! Check out the first glimpse from their special day as the venue signboard surfaces online."

## TEJAS JET FLIES SUCCESSFULLY WITH INDIA-MADE DIGITAL FLIGHT CONTROL SYSTEM

Team Absolute | New Delhi

An indigenously developed digital fly-by-wire flight control computer was integrated into the Tejas light combat jet, the defence ministry said on Tuesday, describing it as a "significant development" in the aircraft programme.

The home-grown Tejas is a single-engine multi-role fighter aircraft capable of operating in high-threat air environments. It has been designed to undertake air defence, maritime reconnaissance and strike roles.

"In a significant development towards Tejas Mk1A programme, the digital fly-by-wire flight control computer (DFCC) was integrated into prototype LSP7 and successfully flown on February 19," the defence ministry said. The DFCC has been indigenously developed by the Aeronautical Development Establishment (ADE), Bengaluru, for the Tejas-Mk1A version. All critical parameters and performance of the flight controls were found satisfactory, the ministry said in a state-



ment. The maiden flight was piloted by Wing Commander Siddarth Singh KJM (Retd) of the National Flight Test Centre. The Indian Air Force has already operationalised Tejas LCA Mk1.

The improved version of the aircraft, Tejas Mk1A features an advanced mission computer, high-performance digital flight control computer (DFCC Mk1A), smart multi-function displays (SMFD), advanced electronically scanned array (AESA) radar, advanced self-protection jammer, and electronic warfare suit among others, the ministry said. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh complimented joint teams from the Defence Research and Development Organisation, the IAF, ADA and industries involved in the development and successful flight test of this critical system for Tejas Mk1A. Singh described it as a major step towards 'atmanirbhara' (self-reliance) with a reduced count of special imports.

Tejas aircraft are set to be the mainstay of the IAF. It has already inducted nearly 40 Tejas of initial variants. In February 2021, the defence ministry sealed a Rs 48,000 crore deal with Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd for procurement of 83 Tejas Mk-1A jets for the IAF. In November, the ministry accorded an initial approval to procure an additional batch of 97 Tejas jets for the IAF.



# AMIT SHAH SOUNDS POLL BUGLE IN RAJASTHAN, REITERATES 400-SEAT TARGET

Jaipur | Agencies

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday sounded the poll bugle for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections from Bikaner in Rajasthan during his day-long tour of the desert state.

Addressing a gathering of party workers that was attended by Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma and other senior leaders from the nearby constituencies, Shah shared the strategies to achieve the party's target of winning 400 seats in the coming Lok Sabha polls.

He also urged the party workers to ensure that the BJP wins all the 25 Lok Sabha seats in Rajasthan.

Those who attended the event included MPs, MLAs, former MLAs, district heads and Mayors, along with members of the management committee, steering committee and core committee of the three Lok Sabha constituencies in the area.

Later, the Home Minister visited Udaipur where he reiterated the party's goal of winning more than 400



seats in the Lok Sabha polls.

"There should be no mistake anywhere. The BJP had won all the seats in Rajasthan in 2014 and 2019 (its ally Rashtriya Loktantrik Party had won one seat in 2019), and the same should be repeated this time too," Shah said.

Shah also accused the Congress of working to divide the country.

"The Congress is bent on dividing the country. Their leaders want that North India and South India should be divided. You have a double-engine government in Rajasthan, where no one has the courage to incite commu-

nal tension anymore," Shah said.

Praising the Narendra Modi government at the Centre, Shah said, "Narendra Modi took our economy from 11th to fifth position in 10 years. Once we get another chance, the economy will jump to the number three spot."

Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma said, "We will win every seat in the state by more than 5 lakh votes in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections."

State BJP chief C.P. Joshi said, "Former minister Mahendra Singh Malviya has joined the BJP because Congress did not allow him to attend the Pran Pratishtha ceremony of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

At the Prabuddhajan Sammelan in Udaipur on Monday, former state minister and tribal leader Mahendra Singh Malviya joined the BJP from the Congress, and claimed that he also has influence in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat.

"I will go there and make the tribal brothers and sisters working in the Congress join the BJP," he had said.

Gurugram | Agencies

The district administration of Gurugram is going to organise a Mega Marathon event in Gurugram on February 25.

Cricketer Shikhar Dhawan will be the brand ambassador for the event while the Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar will also join the event.

The official said that more than 27,000 people have registered themselves for the Gurugram marathon. "This number is expected to increase to around 40,000," he said.

Deputy Commissioner of Gurugram Nishant Kumar Yadav said that this is going to be the biggest mega marathon event of the entire country. He said that meetings have been held with all the universities located in the district, school associa-



tions, runners community and major RWAs for their positive support.

"Since Gurugram is the hub of MNCs, the district administration has also approached all the major corporates located in the district for their active participation," he said.

The marathon will have four different categories - three for competitive runners and one for fun runners. The competitive cate-

gories are full marathon (42 km), half marathon (21 km) and 10km marathon, boasting prizes ranging from Rs 75,000 to Rs 1.5 lakh.

Additionally, there will be prizes for master runners (above 42 years), oldest runners, youngest runners, persons with disabilities, and LGBTQ categories.

The majority of participants are expected to take part in the non-competitive fun marathon (5 km).

# SP announces five more LS poll candidates, Shivpal to contest from Badaun

Lucknow | Agencies

The Samajwadi Party on Tuesday announced its third list of candidates for the Lok Sabha elections, with five names.

Senior SP leader Shivpal Singh Yadav will contest the Badaun seat while Iqra Hasan is the candidate for the Kairana seat.

The Bareilly seat candidate is Praveen Singh Aron and Ajendra Singh Rajput will contest the Hamirpur seat.

Surendra Singh Patel will be the SP candidate on the Varanasi seat.

The Samajwadi Party has also appointed in charge for Lok Sabha seats. Dharmendra Yadav is in



charge of Azamgarh and Kannauj seats, Manoj Chaudhary is in charge of Baghatpat seat, while Mehboob Ali and Ram Avtar Saini are in charge of Amroha seat.

# ARUNACHAL, MIZORAM CELEBRATE STATEHOOD DAY WITH VARIETY OF FUNCTIONS

Itanagar/Aizawl | Agencies

Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram on Tuesday separately celebrated their Statehood Day by holding a variety of colourful cultural programmes and other functions.

President Droupadi Murmu, Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, BJP President J.P. Nadda and several Union ministers and Chief Ministers of the neighbouring northeastern states greeted the people of the two states on the occasion.

Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu said that the 38th Statehood Day was celebrated with usual fervour and enthusiasm on Tuesday.

The Chief Minister said that from day one, Team Arunachal is leaving no stone unturned to make the state witness remarkable infrastructure growth with the construction of new roads, bridges and airports, enhancing connectivity within and beyond its borders in sync with the spirit of last mile development as envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.



Vice President Dhankhar along with his wife Sudesh Dhankhar, Arunachal Governor Lt Gen K.T. Parnaik (Retd), Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein and many other dignitaries were present in the main Statehood Day in Itanagar. In Mizoram, Governor Hari Babu Kamhampati said that the state was conferred the status of a full state after the signing of a memorandum of settlement, also known

as the 'Mizoram Peace Accord', between the Central government and the Mizo National Front (MNF) on June 30, 1986.

Addressing the Statehood Day function, the Governor congratulated the people of Mizoram for maintaining the reputation of being one of the most peaceful states in India.

The Peace Accord was a culmination of two decades of insurgency while the formalisation

of Mizoram state took place on February 20, 1987, the Governor said adding that it was noteworthy that while the Government of India had granted statehood as a condition of the Peace Accord, Mizoram has also kept its end of the bargain and maintained peace for 37 years.

Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma, as part of the commemoration of Mizoram Statehood Day, laid a wreath and paid tributes to the fallen martyrs at the Assam Rifles War Memorial in Aizawl.

Addressing the function, the Chief Minister underlined how Mizoram, as a state, was already lagging behind other states by 25 years on the day of its creation.

He said that during these 25 years, Mizoram missed out on all the progress and developments that came with the five consecutive five-year plans. Since the state was a very late starter, the Chief Minister stressed that the state needed to walk faster and, most importantly, work harder than others to catch up. He also briefly hinted how his government will take all the necessary steps to promote growth and progress even if it takes some hard decisions.

# RAHUL APPEARS IN SULTANPUR COURT, GETS BAIL IN DEFAMATION CASE

Sultanpur (UP) | Agencies

A special court in Sultanpur on Tuesday granted bail to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in a defamation case dating back to 2018.

Advocate Santosh Pandey told reporters, "Rahul Gandhi surrendered in the court today and the court took him into custody for 30-45 minutes. After that, his bail application was submitted and was accepted. The further date has not been given yet."

The court asked Rahul to submit two bail bonds of Rs 25,000 each.

The case, initiated by Vijay Mishra on August 4, 2018, stemmed from remarks Gandhi purportedly made against Union Home Minister Amit Shah during a Press conference in Bengaluru on May 8, 2018 during the Karnataka elections.

The complainant cited Rahul



Gandhi's statement during which he asserted that while the BJP professes a commitment to honest and clean politics it is led by a "party President who is an accused in a murder case."

At the time of Gandhi's comment, Amit Shah was the BJP President. However, approximately four years prior to Gandhi's remark, a special CBI court in Mumbai had cleared Shah of charges in a 2005 fake encounter case. This decision came during Shah's tenure as the Minister of State for Home in Gujarat.

Rahul Gandhi was unable to attend the previous hearing in the special MP-MLA court on January 18 due to his commitments to the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra.

Talking to reporters, Vijay Mishra, the complainant, said, "The BJP is the biggest party of the country. Calling its then President a murderer is unjustifiable."

# TN govt to set up 100 farmers markets: Minister

Chennai | Agencies

Tamil Nadu Minister for Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare M.R.K. Panneerselvam on Tuesday said that the government will set up 100 Uzhavur Angadis (farmers markets) across the state.

"An amount of Rs 5 crore has been allocated for this project," the minister said while presenting the Tamil Nadu Agriculture Budget for the year 2024-25.

He said that the farmers markets will be established to facilitate easy access to quality agricultural produce as well as value added products to the urban consumers.

"Agriculture produce with specified quality norms will be directly procured from farmers and then will be graded, packed and branded and sold through Uzhavur Angadis," the minister said.

He said that the government will provide



kits comprising saplings of banana, papaya, moringa and curry leaf will be distributed to encourage the cultivation of nutritious fruit crops in home gardens. "This initiative aims to provide access to pesticide-free, non-toxic fruits and vegetables. An allocation of Rs 4 crore has been earmarked for this scheme," the minister said.

# 50 HUTS GUTTED IN FIRE IN TELANGANA'S KARIMNAGAR TOWN

Hyderabad: At least 50 huts were gutted in a major fire in Karimnagar town of Telangana on Tuesday.

However, no loss of life was reported.

The incident occurred in the busy area Subhash Nagar in the town.

Police said the dwellings of migrant labourers from Khammam, Warangal and other districts were gutted in the fire.

At least five cooking gas cylinders exploded in the fire. Multiple fire engines rushed to the spot and doused the fire.

There was no loss of life. Almost all the residents had gone to Medaram in Mulugu district for Sammakkka Sarakka jatara.

The cause of the fire is not yet known. Police said they were trying to ascertain how the fire broke out.

According to locals there was a dispute with regard to the land. The workers, who had been living there for over two decades, had refused to vacate the land located in a key commercial area.

# RAIN & SNOW IN J&K, SRINAGAR-JAMMU HIGHWAY BLOCKED

Srinagar | Agencies

Rain/snow occurred in J&K during the last 24 hours as landslides blocked the Srinagar-Jammu national highway on Tuesday.

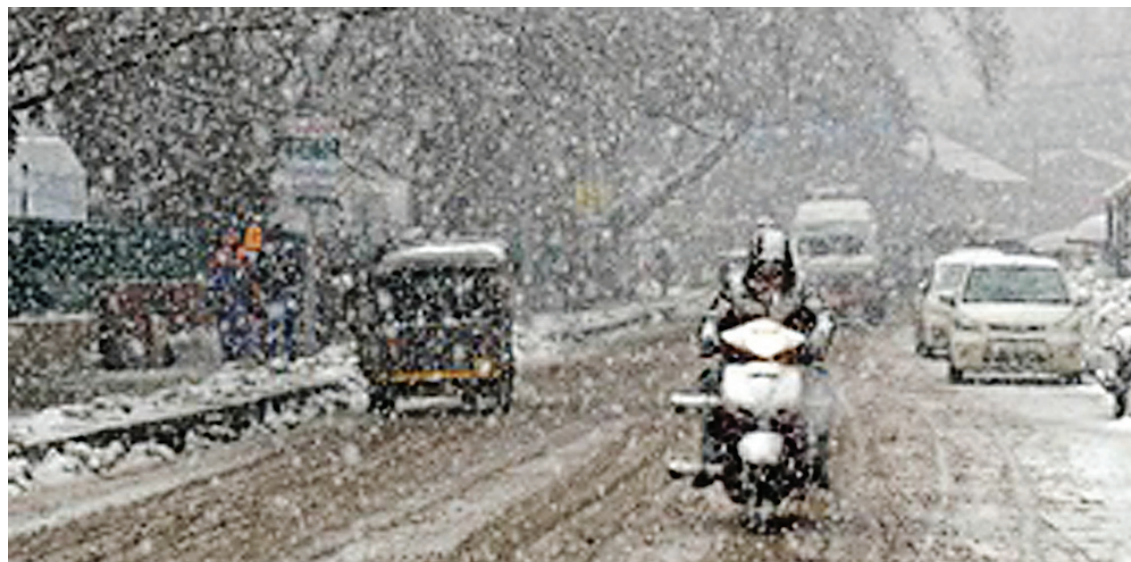
Traffic department officials said that due to multiple landslides on the Srinagar-Jammu national highway in Ramban district, traffic on the highway has been suspended.

"Before undertaking the journey, intending travellers must contact our control rooms in Srinagar and Jammu to know about the latest status of the highway," traffic officials said.

Rain/snow occurred in J&K during the last 24 hours as the MeT office said weather would improve from Wednesday afternoon.

Srinagar had minus 0.7, Gulmarg minus 1 and Pahalgam minus 0.5 as the minimum temperature today.

Leh town in Ladakh region had



minus 4.5 and Kargil minus 9.2 as the minimum temperature.

Jammu city had 13.4, Katra 9.2, Batote 3.4, Bhaderwah 1.6 and

Banihal 2 as the minimum temperature.

# TRACTOR-TRAILERS CAN'T BE USED ON HIGHWAYS, OBSERVES PUNJAB AND HARYANA HIGH COURT

Chandigarh: Ahead of the farmers groups' call for a protest march to the national capital over their demands, the Punjab and Haryana High Court on Tuesday slammed them for camping at Shambhu border with hundreds of tractors, saying tractor-trailers can't be used on highways.

A bench of acting Chief Justice G.S. Sandhawalia and Justice Lapita Banerji questioned the Punjab government for allowing the assembly of farmers in such large numbers. "According to the Motor Vehicle Act, you can't use tractor-trolleys on the highway. You are travelling from Amritsar to Delhi on trolleys," the bench remarked. Justice Sandhawalia orally asked the state government to ensure that protestors are not gathered in large numbers as "they have right to protest but it is subjected to reasonable restrictions". During the hearing, he also objected to farmers travelling in tractors and trolleys for protest. The court was hearing a public



interest litigation, moved by advocate Uday Pratap Singh, who said the road blockade is not only causing inconvenience to residents but also hindrance in the movement of ambulance, school buses and pedestrians since February 13.

# SWAMI PRASAD MAURYA RESIGNS FROM SAMJWADI PARTY, ALSO QUITS AS MLC

Lucknow:

Senior Samajwadi Party (SP) leader Swami Prasad Maurya, on Tuesday, resigned from the primary membership of the party and also from the membership of the UP Vidhan Parishad.

In a brief letter to SP President Akhilesh Yadav, Maurya said that since there had been no talks following his letter of February 13 in which he had stepped down from the post of party general secretary, he thought it fit to quit the party.

Immediately after, he also resigned from the membership of the UP Vidhan Parishad.

"Since I had been elected to the Vidhan Parishad as SP member and I have now resigned from the SP, it is morally correct for me to resign from the membership of the Parishad too," he wrote in his resignation letter. Talking to reporters later, Maurya said that Akhilesh Yadav had not even telephoned him after he resigned from the party post.

"I have resigned due to ideological differences and not any personal issues. Akhilesh had strayed from the path that was pursued by his father, late Mulayam Singh Yadav. Whenever he gets back on the right track, I will welcome him," he said.

Asked about his future plans, he said that he would continue his fight for the weaker sections.





# Mumbai region's 2nd Ro-Ro service starts, links Bhayander-Vasai towns

Team Absolute | Thane

The Maharashtra Maritime Board (MMB) on Tuesday launched a new RoRo (Roll-on-Rolloff) boat service connecting the busy towns of Bhayander (Thane) with Vasai (Palghar), officials said.

The maiden service was inaugurated by Shiv Sena-UBT MP from Thane, Rajan Vichare amidst claps and cheers as the first of the passengers and vehicles sailed from Bhayander to Vasai.

Presently, besides the Western Railway (WR) suburban services, the two towns can be accessed via the Mumbai-Ahmedabad National Highway and the journey can take around 100-125 minutes one way.

With the new RoRo ferry, the time will be slashed to barely 15 minutes enabling huge savings in time, fuel, and pollution, said Vichare at the inaugural.

MMB officials said that the RoRo ferry has been started on an experimental basis for three months, and



after checking out all the problems and difficulties, it would be expanded.

During the trial period, the MMB will carefully monitor aspects like safe and easy navigation of the boats, ease of boarding and disembarking both for passengers and the vehicles, the

time taken for the total voyage, including the time taken for vehicles to roll on and roll off.

To begin with, there will be eight round trips in 12 hours, starting at 6.45 a.m. from Vasai end, and from 7.30 a.m. from the Bhayander side. Each RoRo vessel has a capacity of

100 passengers and at least 33 vehicles per trip, and can ferry two, three, four wheelers, or even heavy vehicles.

The minimum fare for children (3-12 years) is Rs 15, for adult passengers Rs 30 and for a two-wheeler Rs 60, and will increase depending on the type of vehicles and the number of occupants.

The RoRo, being operated by Suvarnadurg Shipping & Marine Services Pvt Ltd., will help decongest highway traffic as well as within the two towns.

This has become the second RoRo service in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region with a similar service operational from the Ferry Wharf (Mumbai) to the Mandwa jetty (Raigad) on the mainland which has proved immensely popular.

In the next few months, under the larger Sagar Mala initiative, the state government plans to start four more RoRo services this year at: Dighi, Kashid, Mora, and Rewas - all in the MMR vicinity, as per an official announcement made by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde last year.

# GOVT TO HOLD ROADSHOW IN MUMBAI TO PUSH RS 8,500 CR COAL GASIFICATION SCHEME

Team Absolute | New Delhi/Mumbai

The Ministry of Coal is planning to hold an interaction with industry leaders in Mumbai on Wednesday as part of a roadshow for the promotion of coal/lignite gasification projects nationwide.

This event aims to nurture the growth and widespread adoption of coal/lignite gasification projects throughout the country. It signifies a notable stride towards leveraging the abundant coal and lignite resources to propel sustainable energy initiatives in India, the Coal Ministry said on Tuesday. An earlier interaction was held with captains of industry in Hyderabad which the ministry termed as "successful" as it elicited a lot of enthusiasm.

The Centre has approved an investment outlay of Rs 8,500 crore scheme for coal/lignite gasification projects under three categories that include Government PSU's, Private Players as well as Small Scale Projects. The scheme forms part of the



government's vision to diversify energy sources, lessen reliance on imported fuels, and mitigate environmental impact through cleaner technologies.

Secretary, Ministry of Coal, Amrit Lal Meena, will be the Chief Guest for the event.

By forging strategic partnerships with industry players, the Ministry of Coal aims to expedite the adoption of gasification technologies and facilitate the creation of a robust ecosystem for coal/lignite-based energy solutions. The event will convene key stakeholders,

including policymakers, licensors, EPC agencies, PMC consultants, industry frontrunners, and investors, to discuss the opportunities and hurdles associated with coal/lignite gasification projects. Participants will engage in insightful conversations, exchange best practices, and explore avenues for collaboration to propel the growth of gasification initiatives in India, the Coal Ministry said in a statement.

The Ministry of Coal has given an open invitation to all interested stakeholders to join the event for drawing up coal gasification plans.

# Previous govts involved in some of the biggest scams: Union Minister

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Previous governments inadequately regulated critical sectors such as telecom, amid massive scams, but our approach in creating a framework of regulation has been open and transparent, Union Minister of State for Electronics and IT Rajeev Chandrasekhar has said.

During a discussion at the 'Mumbai Tech Week', Chandrasekhar emphasised the transformative approach of the Narendra Modi government. "The telecom sector had some of the biggest scams. So, there is also a healthy dose of cynicism and skepticism when the government talks about regulation because there is a feeling that regulation is either pushing for a particular agenda or pushing forward the need for the government or a politician to control," the minister told the gathering.

"But our approach to creating a framework of regulation has been open, transparent, and consultative. And it is not so much about government regulation as it is about all of the stakeholders coming together and creating the guardrails that are important for the orderly growth of any segment of our economy," Chandrasekhar stressed.



"If it were just about innovation, if it were just about entrepreneurs doing their thing and we did not have some rules, laws, and guardrails, you would have chaos," he added.

The White Paper on Indian Economy, tabled in the Lok Sabha by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman earlier this month, enumerated about 15 cases of corruption and scams that happened during the 10-year rule of the Congress-led UPA government.

As per the document, the UPA's decade of governance was marked by a series of scams in multiple sectors, ranging from coal to telecom to aviation.

# NHRC seeks report from DGCA on death of 80-yr old man at Mumbai Airport

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has sought a report from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on the death of an 80-year-old Air India (AI) passenger who was not provided a wheelchair after landing at Mumbai Airport from New York, on February 12.

Taking suo motu cognizance of the incident, the NHRC said that if the media reports of the incident were true, they "raise a serious issue of violation of human rights" of the deceased passenger.

The passenger, along with his elderly wife, had made a prior request for wheelchairs with Air India, but only one was provided to the couple. While he walked around 1.5 kms inside the terminal to the immigration counters, his wife was in the sole wheelchair provided. Midway, the US-passport holder



collapsed and was rushed to Nanavati Hospital in Vile Parle west, where he was declared dead.

Subsequently, the AI had said that there was a heavy demand for wheelchairs that day and they had requested the passenger to wait till they

could arrange a wheelchair for him. "But he opted to walk along with his spouse. As advised by the airport doctor, the passenger was immediately rushed to the hospital where he was declared to have passed away," said the AI statement later.

The NHRC has issued a notice to DGCA seeking its detailed report in the matter within four weeks, including the status of compensation, if any, was provided to the next of kin of the deceased passenger, and the steps/measures taken/proposed to ensure that such incidents do not recur.

The NHRC observed that there has been a significant increase in the number of air passengers and also the airfares, "but the standard of facilities doesn't seem to have improved proportionately, resulting in several complaints reported," in the media and social media.

On that particular AI flight on February 12, there were 32 wheelchair requests, but only 15 were available with the ground staff at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport, forcing the man to walk alongside his wife in the wheelchair, that led to the tragedy.

# BJP PRESIDENT NADDA TO BE ON TWO-DAY VISIT TO MUMBAI FROM TODAY

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) National President Jagat Prakash Nadda will begin his two-day visit to Mumbai on Wednesday. The BJP chief will participate in several public and organizational programs, a news wire reported. According to the BJP, during his stay, JP Nadda will also address the party workers and will take cluster meetings. Besides, he will also inaugurate the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj sculpture.

He will also hold a tiffin meeting with the Mumbai Election Steering Committee from 1 pm in Vasant Smruthi. Also, Nadda will address the party's workers' convention on Wednesday which will be organized at BMC Ground in Mumbai. On Thursday, the BJP President will inaugurate the Chhatrapati Shivaji



Maharaj sculpture at Band Stand and will also hold interaction with beneficiaries of the government schemes.

Earlier, Bharatiya Janata Party pres-

ident JP Nadda on Saturday urged party workers to strive hard in the Lok Sabha polls to take the party beyond the 370-seat mark and expressed con-

fidence that the Modi government will return to power scoring a hat-trick and create a record.

Addressing the party's National Convention in Delhi, Nadda spoke of the BJP's commitment to the construction of the grand Ram temple in Ayodhya and said Prime Minister Narendra Modi had led the rituals at the Pran Pratishtha event on January 22 in Ayodhya.

"We all here are happy and full of enthusiasm but with this we have to stay alert and work with full force to cross 370 (seats) and more than 400 for NDA. We have to cross 370 and for that, we have to work with full strength at every booth. Workers of BJP work very hard, I have full faith in you that you will fully immerse yourself, and BJP, under the leadership of Modiji, will score a hat-trick in the third term and will move forward by breaking record," Nadda said.

# Pune Police orders Bars and permit rooms to shut by 1:30 am

Pune | Agencies

Pune police have issued an order asking bars and permit rooms to shut their establishments by the stipulated time limit of 1.30 am to avoid any law and order issues. The order was issued on Monday under section 144 of CrPC in the wake of certain incidents having implications on public peace reported in and around bars, permit rooms and restaurants.

"It has come to my notice that some guests/customers are indulging in disorderly behaviour and such ruckus is causing a sense of insecurity amongst fellow guests including women. To curb such incidents, the establishments have been instructed to follow rules and regulations," as per the order issued by Police Commissioner Amitesh Kumar.

Some owners of these establishments are either not exercising due diligence to prevent such incidents, or are wilfully doing certain



acts leading to such incidents, the official said.

The order said all the bars and permit rooms shall strictly adhere to the outer time limit of 1.30 am and shut the establishments by 1.30 am sharp.

"Indoor music performances will not be allowed after 1.30 am and orders for food and liquor cannot be taken after 1 am," it said.

# Maratha quota bill will not pass legal test: Congress; dubs it 'pre-poll farce'

Mumbai | Agencies

The Congress on Tuesday said that the Maratha quota bill passed by the Maharashtra legislature will not stand the legal scrutiny and accused the government of deceiving Marathas and OBCs.

According to the news agency, senior Congress leader Vijay Wadettiwar dubbed the exercise a "farce" with an eye on elections. The Maharashtra State Socially and Educationally Backward Bill 2024 providing 10 per cent reservation for the Maratha community in education and government jobs was passed unanimously by the state legislature in the special session.

"The law on the Maratha reservation was passed earlier also, but it was rejected by the Supreme Court. This (the passage of the bill) was done conveniently before polls. The



legislation will not stand the test of law," Leader of Opposition in the state legislative assembly, Vijay Wadettiwar, told reporters.

"This is a farce to win elections. The government has deceived the Maratha community and OBCs," he alleged.

Vijay Wadettiwar said the government will showcase the passage of the bill to derive political mileage ahead of the elections.

# PUNE POLICE SEIZE STAGGERING 600 KG MEPHEDRONE WORTH RS 1100 CRORE; THREE ARRESTED

Mumbai | Agencies

Pune Police has seized a staggering 600 kilograms of illicit drugs, estimated to be worth approximately Rs. 1100 crores and arrested three persons.

"Unprecedented Action by Pune Police. In the biggest ever haul yet, 600 kg drugs worth approximately Rs. 1100 crores seized," Commissioner of Police Pune City posted on X.

"Like we said, #DrugFreePune is our top priority & we will do what it takes to ensure an end to manufacture, possession, use or distribution of illicit drugs in #Pune," CP Police's post on X added.

The three persons arrested in connection with the



biggest-ever drug seizure in Pune district were booked under relevant sections of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (NDPS Act), police said.

"On Sunday, three persons were arrested and around 1.75 kg of mephedrone (also known as MD) worth Rs 3.85 crore was recovered from

them. During investigation, we traced two godowns where another 55 kg of MD was found.

"Following interrogation of the trio and based on inputs received from them, another operation was carried out in the Kurkumbh MIDC area and approximately 550kg of MD was recovered from a

unit there," said Pune police commissioner Amitesh Kumar.

He said as of now, the police have recovered more than 600 kg of mephedrone which is approximately worth Rs 1,100 crore.

"Investigations are going on a war footing. Upward and downward linkages are being probed and our teams are working in close coordination with other agencies," the IPS officer said.

Asked about antecedents of the arrested accused, Kumar said they were primarily acting as "courier boys" and had some offences registered against them.

The police commissioner declined to divulge further details, saying probe was still at the preliminary stage.

# ASHOK CHAVAN, 5 CANDIDATES ELECTED UNOPPOSED TO RAJYA SABHA

Mumbai: All six candidates from Maharashtra in the fray for Rajya Sabha elections, including Congress turncoat Ashok Chavan, were on Tuesday declared elected unopposed.

Among the six, the BJP had fielded three nominees including Chavan, and the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena and NCP one each. The opposition Congress had fielded one nominee. The BJP nominees declared elected unopposed include Chavan, former MLA Medha Kulkarni, and RSS worker Ajit Gopchade.

The nominees of Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party are ex-Congress MP Milind Deora and Praful Patel, respectively.

The Congress had nominated Dalit leader Chandrakant Handore, the lone candidate from the opposition.



## EDITOR'S SPECS

## RS polls: Fear of cross voting looms large over BJP, SP in UP

The fear of cross voting is now looming large over the BJP and Samajwadi Party in the upcoming Rajya Sabha biennial elections. Resentment is brewing in the Nishad Party -- an ally of the BJP -- over the selection of candidates for the Rajya Sabha biennial elections. At least, two Nishad Party legislators have voiced their reservations over the candidature of Sanjay Seth, who is BJP's eighth candidate. The BJP has 252 MLAs and its NDA allies account for 34 MLAs -- 13 from the Apna Dal, nine from the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), six each from the NISHAD Party and the Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party (S BSP). The Jansatta Dal Loktantrik, which has two MLAs and is headed by strongman politician Raja Bhaiya, is also expected to vote in favour of the BJP. The BJP has also nominated former Union minister R P N Singh, ex-MP Chaudhary Tejveer Singh, state party general secretary Amarपाल Maurya, former state minister Sangeeta Balwant, party spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi, former MLA Sadhna Singh and former Agra mayor Naveen Jain for the Rajya Sabha. Meanwhile, the SP's Rajya Sabha list includes senior leader and actor Jaya Bachchan, Dalit leader Ramji Lal Suman and former state chief secretary Alok Ranjan. If the two Congress MLAs vote for the SP candidates, taking the SP's tally to 110, the latter will still fall short by one vote to reach the required 111 votes (37 multiplied by 3) to get its three candidates elected. SP MLA Pallavi Patel has already announced that she would not vote for "candidates like Bachchan and Ranjan" because they do not fit into the PDA (Pichhda, Dalit Alpasankhyak) formula. Sources said that some other legislators could cross vote because of prevailing crisis in the SP.

# FARMERS PROTEST: WHOSE POPULARITY GRAPH IS AT STAKE?

Deepika Bhan

Hundreds of Punjab farmers who have been trying to swarm the national capital for the past week have failed to recreate the 2020-2021 sensation. Their agitation this time is increasingly proving to be an activism for a political case, the target of which seems to be Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP.

Statements of some farmer leaders, videos of the protesters resorting to violence and raising anti-country slogans have exposed the intention.

"Modi's popularity graph has risen due to the Mandir... we must find a way to lower his graph. He will not do anything till his graph is high..." farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal said in a video on February 14 which went viral.

Dallewal's public submission, perhaps, has given away the plot and the BJP was quick enough to accuse the farmers of having a political agenda. The farmer leader later tried to offer clarification, but there are others who are brazenly revealing the agenda.

Many of those at the protesting sites are not shying away from even making violent statements, like "will attack Modi, will punch him hard".

Some protesters have been seen flaunting Bhindranwale T-shirts, and raising slogans like -- "Bhindranwale Zindabad", "Deep Sidhu Zindabaad", "Amritpal Zindabad".

In a viral video a group of elderly protesters are heard talking about the need to "break away". Some even can be heard saying, "set Punjab free... we can have an accord with Pakistan".

Raising a red flag for the agencies, gangster-turned-pro-Khalistan activist Lakha Sidhana was reportedly seen at a farmers' protest site encouraging protesters to resort to



violence. The video also went viral. Sidhana was involved with the 2020-21 farmers protest during which a mob stormed the Red Fort on Republic Day and erected a religious flag.

Also jumping into the ring is the US-based Sikh terrorist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, who has also released a video urging "pro-Khalistani elements to infiltrate the ongoing farmers protest" and "raise Khalistani flags".

While the farmer leaders are claiming that their agenda is to raise concerns about the MSP, etc., their supporters on the roads are following an entirely different course.

The protesters at some spots have been attacking the police and trying to remove the barricades. Armed with modified trucks and carrying various tools and weapons too, these protesters this time seem

more violent and ready to take on the security personnel unlike the 2020-2021 protest.

The Haryana Police even shared a video on February 16 showing a group of farmers pelting stones and trying to provoke the security personnel. The police posted on X in Hindi, "Violence cannot be allowed to spread under the guise of farmers' movement, protesters should not disrupt law and order and demonstrate peacefully."

The question is: If the protest is about the rights of the farmers, then why say the graph of PM Modi has to be lowered? And, also why slogans of Bhindranwale or Amritpal, why pelt stones or threaten to swarm Delhi at all?

As the timing and the colour of the latest protest is coming under scrutiny, common people in Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and

National Capital Region (NCR) are once again reeling under the impact, including blockade of roads and rail traffic, impact on local economy and overall feeling of uncertainty. The common man is not liking this at all.

There is also the question, why are the farmers from Punjab always involved in this? They may as well protest against their own state government and force their chosen leaders to change their policies.

Agriculture is a state subject as it forms a part of the state list of the Constitution. This means that states should address all the issues related to the state subject. Then why is not the Punjab government doing its own bit. Perhaps, politics here is heavily lopsided.

The Aam Aadmi Party

after winning a huge mandate in the state has failed to address the genuine problems of its farmers, and has pushed all the burden to the central government.

With the Lok Sabha elections near, the unrest on the Delhi borders and the image of an unhappy farmer can affect the BJP's image and performance, that is what the opposition may be believing. But, far from the toolkit theory, this time the plot is too obvious and stark.

This time the list of demands by the farmers is long -- enactment of a law guaranteeing a minimum support price (MSP) for crops, repeal of the Electricity Act 2020, compensation for farmers killed in Lakhimpur Kheri, and the withdrawal of cases against those involved in the farmers' movement, pension of Rs 10,000 a month, or Rs 1.2 lakh a year, to all farmers and farm labour aged 60 or older, etc.

The demands are too many and some of these are difficult for any government. The strikers know this. And, perhaps, this is what the farmers are aiming at. By making a long and difficult list, they want to impact the graph of Modi-led Centre as said by Dallewal.

In 2021, the Modi government retracted the three farm laws against which various farmer unions held a year-long agitation. Obviously, emboldened by the Centre's climb down, the unions this time are believing that they can repeat a similar situation again.

But this time the government is playing cautious. Three ministers are involved in talks right from the day one of the protest 2.0, and the government is willing to stretch. The onus is on the unions to shun their rigidity. It is their graph which is now increasingly appearing to be declining.

## international

## China makes biggest-ever cut to mortgage rate to boost housing market

Hong Kong | Agencies

China's central bank has cut its key mortgage reference rate by a record amount, as it ramps up efforts to stem a prolonged property crisis, a media report said.

The People's Bank of China (PBoC) announced on Tuesday that it would cut its five-year loan prime rate (LPR) from 4.2 per cent to 3.95 per cent, while keeping the one-year LPR unchanged at 3.45 per cent, CNN reported.

The 25 basis point cut to the five-year LPR is the biggest reduction the central bank has made since it revamped its LPR system in 2019.

LPR is the rate at which



commercial banks lend to their best customers. The five-year rate usually serves as a reference for mortgages.

"Today's 25 (basis point) cut to the five-year LPR is clearly aimed at supporting

the housing market," analysts from Capital Economics said in a note on Tuesday, CNN reported.

"On its own, it will not revive new home sales. But coupled with efforts to pro-

vide increased credit support to the developers, today's cut should help to reduce pressure on the property sector somewhat," they said, as per the report.

China's economy has been hobbled by a real-estate downturn since 2021, when a government crackdown on developers' borrowing triggered a liquidity crisis in the sector.

The property market has since entered a prolonged slump, marked by an ongoing decline in both investment and sales of property. Dozens of major developers have defaulted on their debt, with Evergrande, once the country's second largest homebuilder, ordered to liquidate last month, CNN reported.

## Australia to double naval warships, largest since World War II

Canberra: Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Richard Marles and Defence Industry Minister Pat Conroy on Tuesday announced the major overhaul in Navy and said the government is committed to more than doubling the size of the nation's naval warships. With the announcement, Australia's fleet of combat-ready warships will be expanded from the current 11 to 26, Xinhua news agency reported. The government will spend an additional \$7.2 billion over the next decade to accelerate the delivery of the future fleet, which Marles and Conroy said will be Australia's largest since the end of World War II. The plan in total will boost the country's defence spend in the early 2030s to 2.4 per cent of GDP, compared to the 2.1 per cent it was planned to be when the government came to office, said reports.

## ISRAEL HITS TARGETS IN LEBANON'S SOUTHERN TOWN OF GHAZIEH, CAUSING CASUALTIES

Beirut | Agencies

A massive explosion was heard after Israeli warplanes hit with air-to-surface missiles multiple targets in the southern town of Ghazieh, around 45 km from Lebanon's capital Beirut, causing several casualties, Lebanese military sources told the media. Civil defence vehicles and the Lebanese Red Cross teams arrived at the targeted areas with several bulldozers and cranes to carry out the rescue work, Xinhua news agency reported. Meanwhile, casualties were transferred to a hospital in the nearby city of Sidon, said the civil defence, without specifying the details of the casualties. The Lebanese army has isolated the area, with all roads



leading to it being blocked. Israel's military announced on Monday that its warplanes carried out airstrikes near the city of Sidon in Lebanon, stating that the attack targeted the Hezbollah armed group's weapons storage facilities. Two weapons storage facilities were struck in the attack, which, according to a statement released by the military, was carried out following an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle launched by Hezbollah toward the Lower Galilee region in northern Israel earlier on

Monday. "An examination of the incident suggests that the UAV was most likely launched from Lebanon by the Hezbollah," said the military, adding that the incident was under review.

The Lebanon-Israel border has been witnessing increased tension since October 8, 2023, after Hezbollah fired dozens of rockets toward Israel in support of the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, prompting Israel to respond by firing heavy artillery toward southeastern Lebanon.

## South Korea: More than 6,400 trainee doctors submit resignations

Seoul | Agencies

More than 6,400 trainee doctors have submitted their resignations to protest the South Korean government's plan of boosting the number of medical students, leading to delays in surgeries and medical treatment, officials said on Tuesday.

Talking to reporters, Second Vice Health Minister Park Min-said that the ministry has ordered 831 trainee doctors to return to work, Yonhap news agency reported.

Tensions brewed between doctors and the government over the latter's plan to add 2,000 to the country's medical school enrollment quota next year.

Till Monday, 6,415 trainee doctors at 100 hospitals submitted their resignations, with about 1,600 of them walking off the job, Park said.

Park said the government will



extend operating hours at 97 public hospitals and emergency rooms at 12 military hospitals will be opened to the public to cope with a potential disruption of medical services.

The admission quota needs to be enhanced to address a shortage of doctors, particularly in rural areas and essential medical fields, such as high-risk surgeries, pediatrics, obstetrics and emergency medicine.

As per the health authorities, the number of doctors in South Korea relative to the size of the population is among the lowest in the developed world.

## UK university slammed for confusing Sikhs with Muslims in social media post

London | Agencies

Members of the Sikh community in the UK have slammed the University of Birmingham for confusing them with Muslims in a social media post, saying that "these mistakes should not happen in 2024".

The University deleted and apologised for the post incorrectly claiming that a recent 'langar (community meal)' event hosted by its Sikh students was part of an Islamic awareness week, The Birmingham Mail newspaper reported on Monday.

Students within the university's Sikh Society hosted the event earlier this month, serving free vegetarian meals on the campus.

But they were left disappointed when a staff member tagged their event in a post with the text 'Discover Islam Week', which is an annual awareness campaign run by the university's Islamic Society.

"It is disappointing... There is clearly an issue with the training



and education given to the staff,"

Jasveer Singh, a member of Sikh Press Association, told the newspaper.

Singh said that aspects of Sikhism are taught at the University, which has lecturers from the community and regularly hosts Sikh events.

Social media users described the mistake as "embarrassing" that left them "utterly gobsmacked".

"The university sincerely apologises for any offence or upset this has been caused. We recognise this post was incorrect. It was identified shortly after being posted and immediately deleted," a University of Birmingham spokesperson said.

"The university respects and celebrates the diversity of our community and continually works to provide a welcoming and inclusive environment. We have made contact with relevant individuals and groups to apologise directly and listen to their views."

Singh said that the University owes a wider apology to two groups for the mistake.

## Heavy rain hits California with millions under flood alerts

Los Angeles: New rounds of heavy rain soaked large portions of Southern California, and up to 37 million people are under flood alerts.

A low-pressure system in the Pacific is directing moisture onshore in California, resulting in widespread heavy rain and mountain snow, according to the US National Weather Service (NWS) as quoted by Xinhua news agency report.

Flash flood warnings were issued Monday morning for Southern California counties, including Santa Barbara and Ventura, where 2 to 5 inches of rain had already fallen, according to NWS.

Several roads across the state were closed because of flooding and rockslides, California's transportation agency reported.

Severe thunderstorms packing damaging wind gusts, hail and even a couple of brief tornadoes may develop Monday afternoon and evening, according to NWS.

Areas of rainfall and isolated thunderstorms continue to migrate northward across portions of northern and central California.



## PM SHRI MODI GIVES RS. 400 CRORE TO MPS UNIVERSITIES

► FUNDS RELEASED IN DIGITAL LAUNCH PROGRAM FROM JAMMU. GOVERNOR DR. PATEL AND C.M. DR. YADAV ATTEND AT BARKATULLAH UNIVERSITY. CM DR. MOHAN YADAV EXPRESSES GRATITUDE TO PM MODI. BARKATULLAH, VIKRAM AND JIWAJI UNIVERSITIES TO GET RS 100 CRORE EACH

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Governor Mangubhai Patel and Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav participated in the digital launch program of projects from Jammu under the Pradhan Mantri Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan by Prime Minister Narendra Modi from Gyan Vigyan Bhawan of Barkatullah University, Bhopal.

Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that the Pradhan Mantri Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan launched by Prime Minister Modi will help carry out



innovation, research and infrastructure development works in universities. Thanking Prime Minister Modi and Union Education Minister Shri Dharmendra Pradhan for their immense support for improving higher education system, he said that Madhya Pradesh will live up to the mark will emerge as the best in the country in respect of higher education.

Governor Dr. Patel and Chief Minister Dr. Yadav inaugurated the programme. Chief Minister Dr.

Mohan Yadav expressed gratitude to Prime Minister for sanctioning Rs 400 crore to the universities of Madhya Pradesh. The programme was held at Gyan Vigyan Bhawan of Barkatullah University, Bhopal.

Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that PM Modi's contribution for the unity and integrity of the country will be remembered forever.

It is noteworthy that in the PM Modi under the Prime Minister Higher Education Mission (PM-USHA), 220 development projects

worth Rs. 32 thousand crores including Jammu AIIMS were inaugurated, inaugurated and the foundation stone was laid.

It may be mentioned that along with providing industrial training to the youth through the Pradhan Mantri Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan, the objective of the New Education Policy 2020 will also be achieved. Assistance of Rs 100 crore each has been approved to Barkatullah, Vikram and Jiwaaji Universities under the Multi-Disciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERU) component.

Similarly, under the Grant to Strengthen Universities (GSU) component, assistance of Rs 20 crore each has been approved for Devi Ahilya, Rani Durgavati, Awadhesh Pratap Singh, Pandit SN Shukla and Maharaj Chhatrasal Bundelkhand University. With this, administrative buildings, academic buildings, research labs, library buildings, computer labs, hostels and classrooms will be constructed for infrastructure development in universities. Besides, facilities for national and international conferences, seminars, webinars, educational tours, faculty enrichment and professional training will be available.

## Union Minister L Murugan among 5 candidates elected as Rajya Sabha MPs unopposed



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Leaders L. Murugan, Maya Naroliya and Bansilal Gurjar show their certificates after being elected as Rajya Sabha members, at the state assembly in Bhopal.

All five contenders in the running for Rajya Sabha elections from Madhya Pradesh, comprising Union Minister L. Murugan and three others from the BJP, were declared elected unopposed on Tuesday, as confirmed by an official. They secured their unopposed victory as only five nominations were submitted for the vacant seats by the

deadline for withdrawal of nominations (February 20). "All five candidates, including four from the BJP and one from the Congress, were declared elected unopposed to Rajya Sabha by the Returning Officer," the official stated.

The BJP's four candidates include Union Minister L. Murugan, Umesh Nath Maharaj, the head of Valmiki Dham Ashram, Banshilal Gurjar, the national vice president of Kisan Morcha, and Maya Naroliya, the president of the Madhya Pradesh BJP women's wing. According to the official, except Umesh

Nath Maharaj, the four candidates have already received their certificates of victory from the returning officer.

The sole nominee from the Congress who was declared elected unopposed is Ashok Singh. He won the Rajya Sabha elections from Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday. Following his victory, former CM Kamal Nath congratulated him in a post on his social media account. He wrote, "Hearty congratulations to Ashok Singh, a loyal and struggling Congress member, on being elected as Rajya Sabha member from Madhya Pradesh."

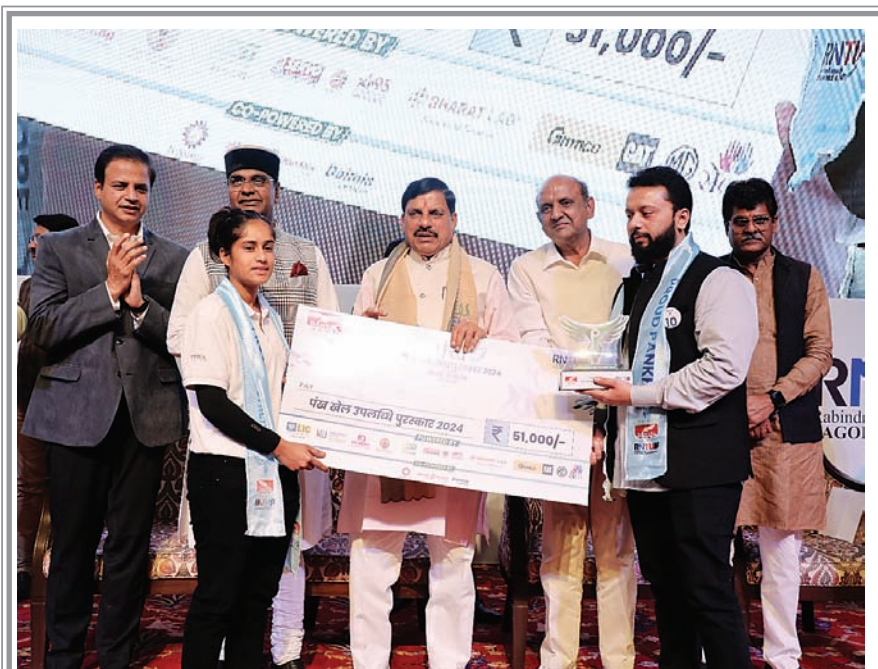
## Chief Minister Dr. Yadav plants saplings with former CM Chouhan



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav along with former Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted a sapling of Tabebuia (Pink Trumpet) in the Smart City Park, went on a tree walk and honoured environmentalist Dr. Anil Joshi. In the programme held amid chanting of mantras, Minister of State for

Backward Classes and Minority Welfare (Independent Charge) Krishna Gaur, MP V.D. Sharma, representatives of voluntary organizations, environment lovers and distinguished citizens also planted saplings. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav and former CM Chouhan viewed the saplings planted in the Smart City Park in the last three years during the tree walk.



Bhopal. Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav honored 55 emerging sports talents from 55 districts of the state in the Pankh Sports Achievement Award-2024 organized by Bansal News on Tuesday. In a dignified ceremony organized at the Kushabhau Thackeray Convention Center in the capital, the Chief Minister honored the young and promising players of the state, who fought hard and brought glory to the state in national and international level sports competitions.

## Modi is also on the wedding invitation card with strange appeal

Team Absolute | Ujjain

Lok Sabha elections 2024 are near and wedding season is going on across the country. In such a situation, in this wedding season, the magic of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also influencing people. The craze about Narendra Modi is to such an extent that even in the wedding cards, an appeal is being made to make PM Modi the Prime Minister again in 2024.

After the consecration ceremony of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya, the country's Prime Minister Narendra Modi has become a more popular leader than ever before for every person, child, old and young, for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Amidst all this, a wedding card from Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh is going viral. In this, it is being written that Narendra Modi will be made the PM again in 2024.

People have been urged in this card that this time they will bring back PM Modi again. This means that the magic of Modi has become so prevalent in the minds of people that now the appeal to make Modi win is being made as a message even in the magazines of marriage ceremonies held at home. A slogan for Prime Minister Narendra



Modi has been given on the first page of the invitation card for the wedding ceremony to be held at the house of Daulatganj-based seed businessman Babulal Raghuvanshi and Jitendra Raghuvanshi in Ujjain. It is written in it that last time there was a wave, this time we have to bring a tsunami - only Modi ji has to be made the Prime Minister in 2024.

This card of the wedding taking place in the Raghuvanshi family has been sent to all the relatives outside Ujjain and also. The groom's father Arjun Singh Raghuvanshi says that Narendra Modi has done a lot for Sanatan Dharma and this country. He has completed the work that was pending for many years and built Ram temple in Ayodhya.

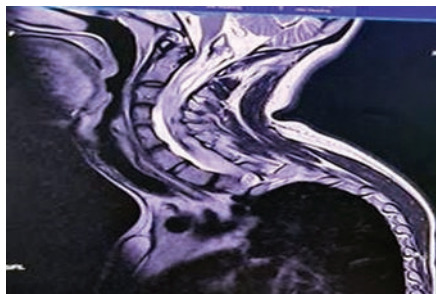
## World's longest spinal tumour operated at AIIMS Bhopal

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Surgery of Longest intramedullary spinal tumour was done at AIIMS Bhopal in the Department of Neurosurgery in a 22 years female, who is a resident of Distt. Rajgarh (M.P.).

A 22 years old female presented in Neurosurgery OPD with weakness of all the 4 limbs and was admitted for complete evaluation. M.R.I. of whole spine was done in the Radiology Department and discussion was done with Dr. Radha Gupta and Dr. Harsha. M.R.I showed an intramedullary tumour extending from cervicomedullary junction to D11 vertebra. It was more challenging as the patient had scoliosis.

Intradepartmental meeting was held with Prof. Amit Agrawal and all the faculties of the department and it was decided to operate as early as possible as delaying could be life threatening. The case was operated by Dr. Sumit Raj and was assisted by Dr. Jitendra and



Dr. Abhishek. A laminotomy was done from cervical to D12 vertebra. Total excision of the tumour was done and the case was finished in exhausting 15 hours. The tumour was around 40 cms in length. After tumour removal the spine laminotomy was fixed with mini plates and screws. The support from Neuro Ot staff was exemplary especially from Neenu, Bhagwati, Nandram and others.

Anesthesia team played an important role for carrying out the procedure which comprised of Dr. Shikha and Dr. Rhea. Post-opera-

tive patient was managed by Critical care unit under Dr. Saurabh Sehgal. Patient is now planned for discharge. Such cases are done only in specialized centers like AIIMS Bhopal. As the patient was an Ayushman beneficiary, they did not have to pay for the procedure.

### WHAT IS INTRAMEDULLARY TUMOURS?

There are commonly three types of spinal tumours: extradural, intradural extramedullary and intramedullary. Out of these intramedullary tumours are the most challenging. These tumours are inside the spinal cord and hence to reach these tumours, have to open the spinal cord. The management of Intramedullary tumour is challenging. Success depends on the coordination between Neurosurgeons, Neuro-anesthesiologist, Neurophysiologist and a cooperative patient.

## 7 CULPRITS SENTENCED TO 7 YEARS EACH IN POLICE CONSTABLE RECRUITMENT EXAMINATION-2013

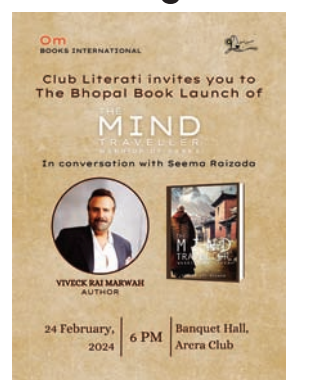
Bhopal: The court has given a big decision in the Police Constable Recruitment Scam case of 2013. In the case of Police Constable Recruitment Examination 2013 scam, Judge Nitiraj Singh Sisodia has sentenced seven accused to seven years imprisonment (MP Vyapam Scam). Apart from this, a fine of Rs 10,000 has been imposed on him, while 12 accused have been acquitted. Madhya Pradesh Police Constable Recruitment Examination 2013 scam, also known as Vyapam scam, was a major corruption scam in which the Police Constable Recruitment Examination in Madhya Pradesh was rigged. In 2013, some candidates alleged rigging in the examination. After investigation, it was revealed that the allegations were true and several people were involved in the scam, including government officials, exam organizers and candidates.

## Launch of the bestselling book

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Club Literati in association with Om Books International, invites people on the Bhopal Book Launch of the bestselling book, "The Mind Traveller - Warrior of Shaka" by Viveck Rai Marwah, who'll be in conversation with Dr. Seema Raizada.

Viveck Rai is a theosophist with a keen interest in philosophy, religion and mysticism. His spiritual knowledge of Buddhism is reflected in his transcendental writings. "The Mind Traveller - Warrior of Shaka" showcases the transformative journey of Sankalp, a man caught up in his tragedies, who under the



guidance of a monk, ventures down the path of self-discovery. There will be an impactful conversation about spirituality, life and beyond! On 24 February at Banquet Hall, Arera Club, Bhopal.

## Congress gets another shock in Madhya Pradesh, many leaders join BJP

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Before the Lok Sabha elections in Madhya Pradesh, Congress is facing setbacks. Congress leaders are continuously joining the BJP. Meanwhile, many Congress leaders including Damoh District Panchayat Vice President Manju Katara, retired police officer took membership of the party in the state office of BJP.



retired ADJ Narayan Singh Meena, advocates Kalrav Srivastava and Rohan Srivastava also took membership of BJP. BJP State President welcomed everyone. He said that the work of service and development being done in the country under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is possible only under his leadership. A large number of people are joining BJP

for those works of service and development and to connect with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. BJP is not just a political party, but a family and everyone is welcome in this family.

On this occasion, Convenor of New Joining Committee and senior leader Dr. Narottam Mishra, State General Secretary of the party and MLA Bhagwan Das Sabnani were also present.

## Youth should contribute in building Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat with its cultural distinctiveness: Governor Patel

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Governor Mangubhai Patel said that Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram are a unique gift of nature on earth. The cultural and natural beauty of both the regions contribute to their unique identity in the country. Both the states are symbols of India's geographical and cultural diversity. He said that India is the largest and strongest democracy in the world, where everyone gets equal opportunities for development. He urged the youths to actively preserve and promote cultural specialties to create Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat.

Governor Patel was addressing the Foundation Day celebrations of the States of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram held at Raj Bhavan. On this occasion, he wished the residents of both the states on their Foundation Day. Principal Secretary to the Governor, Sanjay Kumar Shukla and natives of Arunachal and Mizoram residing in Madhya Pradesh were



present. Governor said that both Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh are important states of the country from social and geographical point of view. These regions houses dense forests, lakes, waterfalls, flora and fauna and rich cultural diversity. He emphasised that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has prioritized the legacy of the country's unity in diver-

sity, national security and development of the states. A task force has been constituted to boost agricultural development in the north-eastern states. The completion of projects of bridges, roads, railway lines, tunnels, airports and flights pending for many decades has given impetus to the basic development of the region, which has also created new opportu-

nities for the youth. Governor Patel was felicitated in the programme by the representatives of Arunachal Pradesh by presenting him traditional Tenga attire and the representatives of Mizoram state by presenting him traditional cap and Angvastra. Major CSR - 21 Corps Jimmy Lalrin Fela greeted Governor Shri Patel with a bouquet and proposed vote of thanks.

A short film based on the history and development of the states of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram was screened in the programme. The greeting message of Mizoram State Governor Dr. Hari Babu Kumbhapat on the occasion of State Foundation Day was also broadcast. A group of students from Arunachal Pradesh presented cultural programmes based on the rich heritage and identity of the state. Natives of both the states and students of both the states studying in Gandhi Medical College, Mansarovar, Sage and other educational institutions of Bhopal attended the programme.



## Amid dating rumours, Britney Spears says 'being single is awesome'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Pop icon Britney Spears has insisted she is still single, despite being linked to an ex. The "Toxic singer" opened up about her love-life as she shared another dancing video on Instagram.

She said, "Being single is awesome," seemingly shutting down rumours she is back with her felon ex Paul Richard Soliz, reports 'Mirror.co.uk'.

"Beautiful Sunday. Hopeless romantic, understanding that being single is awesome," she added. It came as it was reported the star was dating Soliz, a convicted felon who worked as her housekeeper to 'clean toilets, mop floors and pick up trash'.

Sources told Us Weekly Paul is very much back on the scene. One said: "Britney and Paul are definitely together. He's still in the picture."

A second source confirmed the same, despite Britney declaring to fans she is still a free agent. Just last week Britney boldly declared she "loves" someone new, five months after her sad split from her husband of one year Sam Asghari.

As per 'Mirror.co.uk', the singer broke the news to her 42 million fans, revealing she could have a new love interest in her life. Britney has been updating her page. She sent rumour mills into overdrive as she posed up a storm standing inside a private jet.

She kept fans guessing as she captioned the shot "I love him". It comes after Britney showed off her moves as she danced around in a red latex bodysuit, complete with devil horns.



## Adult film star Kagney Linn Karter dies by apparent suicide

Los Angeles | Agencies

Adult film star Kagney Linn Karter died aged 36 of an apparent suicide. Karter, who according to friends, struggled with mental health, died on Thursday in Ohio, according to TMZ. The medical examiner's office received her body that day from an address in the city of Parma, reports nypost.com.

A police department representative shared that she appeared to have died by suicide. A GoFundMe page remembered Karter for her beauty and love of dancing and singing.

"Kagney was kind. Kagney was generous. As cold as the world could be, Kagney brought with her a light," two of her friends wrote. The fundraising page also noted that "despite all of her many impressive accomplishments and talents, Kagney struggled with mental health issues as the years passed by."

"As alone as she undoubtedly felt within the confines of her own head, she continued to make an effort to show up for her friends and the community who cared about her," her friends, who knew her through fitness studios, said.

"She fought her own battles with the same tenacity and drive she showed in every other area of her life, with as much strength as she could." The GoFundMe, which is raising money for memorial costs, stated she "tragically took her own life" in her home.

She started her journey in the adult film industry in the mid-2000s before moving back to Ohio in recent years where she started a pole studio.



## Beyonce reminisces about being inspired by her mother's salon

Los Angeles | Agencies

Grammy-winner Beyonce worked in her mother Tina Knowles' hair salon during her younger years, and she shared that it's been a huge inspiration to her throughout her adult life. Beyonce told Essence magazine: "My mom had a roster of amazing clients at her salon, and while the environment was therapeutic for them, it was also for me."

It was the salon that made Beyonce realise her dream of being a performer.

"She found a therapist for me, during a period when I was extremely introverted and hardly spoke. It was in her salon that I realised my dreams of being a performer -- inspired by one of her clients who happened to be an opera singer," said Beyonce, who is married to rapper Jay-Z.

The 'Single Ladies' hitmaker added: "I was captivated by her stories of a recent trip to Germany. In awe, I distinctly remember telling my mom that I wanted to be just like her client."

It was those experiences that helped Beyonce in character building and sense of style, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

"So much of the fabric of who I am came from her salon. It is something that just connects to all of my senses, and it's a beautiful place to grow up," said the 42-year-old singer.

Beyonce concluded by saying: "That's my foundation -- and I think as an artist, so much of my bold experimentation with hair comes from being inspired by art and sculptures; getting creative with braids; figuring out new techniques; and exploring ways to maintain hair growth with protective styles and wigs, while still feeling fabulous. It all stems from my experiences growing up in my mother's salon."

## Zendaya on working with director Denis Villeneuve: He was so open, collaborative

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Actors Zendaya and Timothee Chalamet have talked about working with award-winning filmmaker Denis Villeneuve for 'Dune: Part Two'. Reflecting on this collaboration with Denis again after 'Dune', Timothee expresses, "For an actor, at least for me, your relationship with your director is incredibly important. And Denis is amazing, such an amazing leader and partner and friend."

"I had just come off shooting 'Wonka' when we started up, and he helped me find my way back into Paul. And of course, Denis' passion for the material, and being in the environments that he and our amazing design teams created helped, because I could pull from that and feel the weight, the pressure that Paul was feeling."

Zendaya added that Denis was so open and collaborative. "On some big film like this, the nuance and the subtleties get lost, but Denis never lost sight of those things. He was also always open to having conversations with the actors and the heads of departments if there was something that they wanted to creatively bring to the table and discuss. He was so open and collaborative," she said.

Zendaya added that the "spirit of collaboration on something with this kind of massive scale is what lends itself to being a film with real heart and human emotion. He was so down to work with his collaborators, which felt really nice."

'Dune: Part Two' will explore the mythic journey of Paul Atreides as he unites with Chani and the Fremen while on a path of revenge against the conspirators who destroyed his family.



## South Korean trot star Jung Dong Won to venture into forming a dance-focused idol group

Seoul | Agencies

Popular South Korean trot singer Jung Dong Won, known for his recent stint as an idol under the name 'JD1', is all set to venture on a new musical journey as he plans to form an idol group.

The plan entails assembling a dynamic dance ensemble through rigorous audition processes.

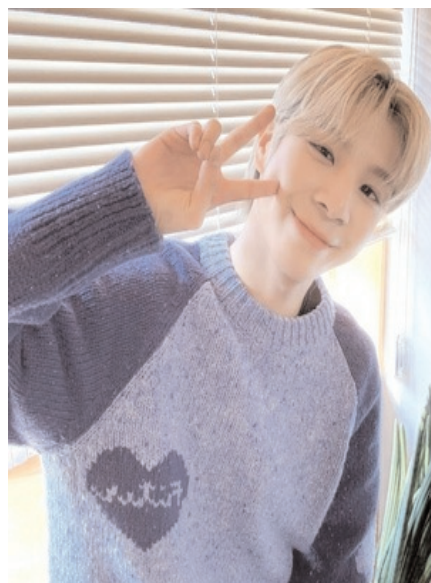
Previously embracing the persona of an 'artificial intelligence idol' with his alter ego 'JD1', Jung Dong Won invested nearly two years into choreography and styling endeavours.

'Who Am I' a recent track by them, showcased JD1's talents in collaboration with Ryan Jeon contributed to the song's production, reports allkpop.com.

The agency expressed their ambitious vision for JD1, positioning the idol as a formidable contender in the competitive K-pop market, ready to explore diverse avenues alongside JD1.

Now, JD1 is poised to conquer new horizons with the formation of a dance-focused group.

The selection process is currently underway, with emphasis placed on identifying



individuals with exceptional singing and dancing abilities to complement JD1's vision.

Notably, Jung Dong Won made his debut with the single 'Miracle' in December 2019, garnering attention for his distinct musical style.

## Usher all set for first European tour since 2015 to celebrate 30 years in music industry

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer-songwriter Usher is set to make his return to the UK as he has announced a new mega tour. Usher, who said it will mark 30 years in the music industry and has promised a performance of a lifetime, will be heading over to the UK in April for a number of incredible shows, reports 'Mirror.co.uk'.

As per 'Mirror.co.uk', this will be Usher's first European tour since 2015. He will play three dates in London and tickets go on sale this Thursday at 12 p.m. on his website. After playing the 02 Arena, he heads to Paris, Amsterdam and then Berlin, concluding his tour in Germany's Mercedes-Benz Arena in May.

Usher said: "Europe, you ready? After the epic experience at the Super Bowl and the huge demand for shows across North America, I'm happy to announce I'm coming your way as well -- for shows in London, Paris, Amsterdam and Berlin. This tour is both a celebration of the past 30 years and a glimpse into the future. We are just getting started."

Last week he set the stage aight alongside guest stars like Alicia Keys and H.E.R. They performed 'If I Ain't Got You' and 'My Boo'. Usher then returned to the song



'Confessions Pt. 2' in a shiny, sparkling suit. He then brought out Ludacris and Lil Jon to perform Yeah!

## ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Kim Kardashian



## India win 6 medals at WPC series- 2024 Asia Pickleball Open

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi  
The All-India Pickleball Association showcased their prowess, at the WPC series-2024 Asia Pickleball Open held in Thailand, with Indian players dominating the event with six medals including two gold, one silver and three bronze. The duo of Tejas Mahajan and Vanshik Kapadia, demonstrated exceptional coordination and strategic prowess to win the gold in the open men's doubles category. India also secured its second gold in the team event. The cohesive efforts of Vanshik Kapadia, Tejas Mahajan, Kuldip Mahajan, Himansh Mehta, Divyanshu Kataria, Sonukumar Vishwakarma, Avinash Kumar, Vrushi Thakare, Isha Lakhani, and Urvi Abhyankar showcased a remarkable synergy, securing a resounding victory.

In the open mixed doubles category, Mayur Patil and Isha Lakhani secured the silver, while the international collaboration of Kuldip Mahajan and Hong Yi Wong from Hong Kong earned them the bronze. In the Open Women Doubles category, Isha Lakhani and Vrushi Thakare added to the accolades with a bronze medal, highlighting the strength and talent of Indian women in the sport.

In the 35+ Mixed Doubles category, Isha Lakhani and Martin Clark secured the bronze. "I am immensely proud of our Indian players who demonstrated exceptional skill and sportsmanship at the WPC SERIES - 2024 Asia Pickleball Open. Their dedication and triumph, both individually and as a team, reflects the spirit of excellence that defines our presence on the international pickleball stage," president of AIPA and the International Pickleball Federation, Arvind Prabhoo said.

Tejas Mahajan, gold medalist in



Open Men's Doubles and the team event also expresses gratitude for the unwavering support. He said, "This victory is not just mine; it symbolizes the collective effort and dedication of our team, showcasing the strength of

Indian pickleball on the global platform, all thanks to AIPA (All India Pickleball Association)."

Vanshik Kapadia added: "I am honoured to secure gold in Open Men's Doubles at the 2024 Thailand

Championship, extends appreciation to teammates and supporters. This triumph is a testament to the collaborative spirit within our team, and I am proud to contribute to India's success in the world of pickleball."

## FIH Hockey Pro League: India beat Spain in shootout after 2-2 draw



Rourkela | Agencies

**P**R. Sreejesh's heroics in the shootout saw India pull off a thrilling 8-7 shootout win against Spain after the two teams tied 2-2 at the end of regulation time in their fifth match of the FIH Hockey Pro League 2023/24 at the Birsamunda Hockey Stadium here on Monday. Sreejesh made one save in the shootout, while Harmanpreet Singh, Sukhjeet Singh, Lalit Upadhyay, Abhishek, Raj Kumar Pal converted their chances to help India bag a bonus point.

Jarmanpreet Singh (1st min) and Abhishek (35th min) scored a goal each for India, while Jose Basterra (3rd min) and Borja Lacalle (15th min) were on the scoresheet for Spain in regulation time.

India started the game on an aggressive note as Jarmanpreet Singh scored an excellent field goal in the first minute from an acute angle. Spain responded well after going down and started playing a fast counter-attack game, which helped them earn a PC. Spain equalised as Jose Basterra (3rd min) found the back of the net.

India kept constant pressure on Spain's defenders. Akashdeep earned a PC soon but Harmanpreet Singh's shot went wide.

With just seconds remaining in the end of the first quarter, Spain took lead as Borja Lacalle (15th min) found the back of the net

after receiving a pass from the Spain's captain Marc Miralles from the right flank.

At the beginning of the second quarter, India made an aggressive start in the opening minutes as they put pressure on Spain's defence with constant attacks. India enjoyed greater possession of the ball but the Spain's defence was tough in not allowing the Indian forwards to equalize. Going into the half-time, Spain led India by 2-1.

With India trying to find ways to bounce back, the third quarter was entertaining with both teams displaying quick-fire hockey and both stepping up the ante in attack. With India putting constant pressure on Spain's defenders, India earned a PC on which they capitalized as Abhishek (35th min) reacted quickly and fired the ball in the back of the net to make the score 2-2. At the end of the third quarter, the score was tied at 2-2.

With 15 minutes left on the clock, India started mounting more pressure on Spain. With constant attacking moves, India earned a PC with six minutes remaining but failed to convert as Amit Rohidas's shot was blocked well by the Spain goalkeeper. Sreejesh made some superb saves in the last five minutes of the game as the Spain gave their all, but couldn't find the back of the net, ending the regulation time in a 2-2 scoreline.

India will face The Netherlands in their fourth match on Wednesday.

## Norrie kicks off Rio Open title defence with a win



Rio de Janeiro | Agencies

**B**riton Cameron Norrie made a perfect start to his Rio Open title defence when he defeated Bolivian Hugo Dellien 6-3, 6-2.

The second seed saved the only break point he faced and converted three of his seven opportunities to

advance to the second round of the ATP 500 after one hour and 22 minutes on Monday night, ATP reports.

Norrie will next play Chilean Tomas Barrios Vera, who eliminated Brazilian wild card Gustavo Heide 7-5, 6-3. In other action, fourth seed Francisco Cerundolo snapped a three-match losing streak with a 6-1, 1-6, 6-2

victory against fellow Argentine Francisco Comesana. The two-time ATP Tour titlist will face Spaniard Albert Ramos-Vinolas in the second round.

The former No. 17 player in the ATP Rankings, Ramos-Vinolas clawed past Peruvian Juan Pablo Varillas 3-6, 6-3, 7-5 after two hours and 44 minutes.

## Warner, Head confirm as Aussies' T20I openers; Smith's role less clear ahead of T20 WC

Wellington | Agencies

**D**avid Warner and Travis Head seem to open the batting for Australia in the T20 World Cup after the duo was confirmed as the opening pair for the three-match series against New Zealand, beginning on Wednesday in Wellington.

Australia all-rounder Mitchell Marsh, captain for the three-match T20I series, also confirmed he will remain in the number three role he has made his own in the 20-over format over recent years.

With Glenn Maxwell excelling at number four and Tim David consistently contributing at six, Australia's top order appears to be well-established leading up to the World Cup in June.

Furthermore, with keeper-batters John Inglis and Matthew Wade (who will miss the start of the NZ series due to the birth of his third child) ready to fit in, along with allrounder Marcus Stoinis also in contention, Smith, who was rested during the West Indies series, faces uncertainty about his position in the team's lineup for the World Cup.

Despite admitting "our top order is pretty set" when asked about his team's planning, Marsh added that few of the 15-member squad in NZ are expected to play all three matches over the coming six days



"You'll have to find out, we'll announce our team at the toss. There will be certain guys that probably bat in different positions than they have done in the past, but ultimately we're here to win the series," Marsh said in response to a query about Maxwell and Smith's batting roles against NZ, as quoted by Cricket.com.au website. "I've batted three for the last 18

months, so I'll be there to start with. And obviously Heady and Davey Warner have been amazing for us over the last period of time, so I dare say that will be the top three.

"I think players like Tim (David) are a rarity, and it (number six) is probably the hardest role within T20 cricket. We're lucky to have him. He's become a phenomenal player in that

role and there's no doubt he's going to play a big part for us," he added.

As Australia prepares for their final bilateral T20I series against New Zealand before the World Cup, the return of star bowlers Pat Cummins and Mitchell Starc adds further strength to the team.

Marsh, who has not been formally appointed Aaron Finch's replacement as Australia T20 captain and continues to lead on a series-by-series basis, joked about anticipating the chance to oust Test and ODI skipper Cummins.

"I can't wait to tell him what to do," Marsh said of the role reversal. "I'm normally filling in for his press conferences when he's had enough, so I'll get him back at some stage."

"But I also feel pretty lucky to have somebody like Pat as another leader within our group to fall back on, and the experienced heads we've got that will help me in certain times throughout this series."

"I just think their experience (Cummins and Starc), certainly at this level and the three of them (with Hazlewood) work together so well.

"We're lucky to have those guys back. Over the international schedule you don't see those guys play a lot of T20 international cricket together so to have them back and building towards a World Cup is great," said Marsh.

## 'Yashasvi Jaiswal has not learnt from you': Naseer Hussain hits out at Ben Duckett for 'credit' remark

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi  
Former England captain Hussain has hit out at Ben Duckett for his remark suggesting that India's young batting sensation Yashasvi Jaiswal's aggressive approach in the Rajkot Test was influenced by England's Bazball strategy.

Jaiswal's scintillating unbeaten double century propelled India to a resounding victory, leaving England to face a crushing 434-run defeat in the third Test of the ongoing series. Speaking at the end of day three of the Rajkot Test Duckett had praised Jaiswal for his century, but also said "when you see players from the opposition playing like that, it almost feels like we [England] should take some credit that they're playing differently than how other people play Test cricket, reacting strongly to Duckett's remark, Hussain said Jaiswal's success stems



from his own upbringing, hard work, and experiences in tournaments like the IPL, rather than any influence from England's tactics.

"The comment on Jaiswal that he has learned from us, I am going to touch on that. He has not learned from you, he has learned from his upbringing and all the hard yards he has put in while

growing up, he has learned from the IPL. If anything, I would look at him and learn from him," Hussain said during a discussion with former England cricketer Michael Atherton on Sky Sports.

Jaiswal's stellar performance in the series has seen him emerge as the leading run-scorer, amassing a total of 545 runs at an exceptional

average of 109 and a strike rate of over 80.

Addressing England's lackluster display in the series, Hussain urged the Ben Stokes-led squad to analyse their mistakes and make necessary adjustments ahead of the fourth Test in Ranchi.

"Whatever they are saying in public and in that dressing room, I hope they are going back into their room with self-introspection. Otherwise, it becomes a cult, doesn't it? At times, Bazball has been described as a cult where you cannot criticise either within or externally. Even in this regime, there is room for learning and improving," Hussain remarked.

With England aiming to bounce back after consecutive losses, the fourth Test is scheduled to kick off on Friday at Ranchi with an opportunity for England to level the series against the hosts India.

## CCI Snooker Classic: Jabalpur cueist Nikhilesh Pillai moves into the second round of qualifying stage

Team Absolute | Mumbai

**M**adhya Pradesh cueist Nikhilesh Pillai potted fluently to overcome home challenger Amitesh Goenka 3-0 in a first-round match of the CCI Snooker Classic 2024 at the CCI's Sir Wilson Jones billiards hall here on Tuesday.

The Jabalpur player tactfully constructed a break of 64 points in the first frame which set the tone for his 89-18, 77-43, 74-10 win in the Rs 12.5 lakh prize-money event organised by the Cricket Club of India.

Seasoned campaigner Siddharth Parikh also showed great touch and rolled in 65 point break in the opening frame and went on to tame Hardik Kariya by a convincing 3-0 (89-18, 77-43, 74-10) victory in a second-round encounter. Meanwhile, Nikhil Saigal faced quite a stiff challenge from Hyderabad's Abed Sayed and managed to scrape through by a tight 3-2 (24-64, 64-42, 62-37, 12-53, 53-48) win to advance to the third round. Saigal made a break of 49 in the third and won a close fifth to seal his win.

In third-round encounters, Rajeev Sharma outshone Marzdi Kalyaniwala cruising to a quick 3-0 (66-10, 70-29, 64-39) win, while Nikhil Ghadge fought hard to put it across a spirited Samarth Vernekar snatching a 3-2 (44-77, 61-28, 27-66, 50-46, 68-38) victory.

Results - Round-1: Raj Charri bt J.N. Nagpal 3-0 (60-38, 47-41, 62-49); Samar Khandelwal bt Amit Poojari 3-0 (53-29, 64-39, 68-56); Rehan Patel bt Narendra Bhavsar 3-0 (68-34, 71-45, 72-16); Raj Shetty bt Gaurav Prabhu 3-1 (24-67, 58-19, 67-52, 58-30); Jignesh Choksi bt Arun Barve 3-2 (18-52, 46-53, 64-36, 52-16, 50-9); Md. Salim bt Monaj Kasare 3-0 (53-41, 71-17, 69-21); Sukeel Venkatramani bt Manoj Nandwani 3-0 (54-30, 75-52, 47-34); Nikhilesh Pillai (MP) bt Amitesh Goenka 3-0



(72(64)-10, 57-24, 57-13).

Round-2: Danish Khan bt Sandeep Gulrajani 3-1 (23-50, 53-22, 61-40, 50-40); Jayesh Salvi bt Suraj Veer 3-1 (68-54(46), 54-34, 19-53, 57-17); Devendra Patel bt Shafique Khatri 3-0 (60-38, 77-32, 67-1); Nikhil Saigal bt Abed Sayed (Hyd) 3-2 (24-64, 64-42, 62(49)-37, 12-53, 53-48); Siddharth Parikh bt Hardik Kariya 3-0 (89(65)-18, 77-43, 74-10).

Round-3: Rajeev Sharma bt Marzdi Kalyaniwala 3-0 (66-10, 70(37)-29, 64-39); Nikhil Ghadge bt Samarth Vernekar 3-2 (44-77, 61-28, 27-66, 50-46, 68-38).



## Deepika, Ranveer expecting their first child? Mumbai abuzz with speculation

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood couple Deepika Padukone and Ranveer Singh are said to be expecting their first child. The actress is reportedly in her second trimester. A couple of days back, there was a wave of speculation about her pregnancy as she was seen hiding her midriff at the recently concluded 77th edition of the BAFTA Awards.

This is not the first time, however, that Deepika has been the subject of pregnancy rumours.

Not long ago, the actress had shared pictures from promotions of her latest release, 'Fighter', and fans went into a frenzy over whether or not she had a baby bump. Many took to the comments section to ask if she was pregnant.

Deepika and Ranveer, who first worked together in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's 2013 film 'Goliyon Ki Rasleela Ram-Leela' and reportedly fell in love on the sets of the film, tied the knot on November 14, 2018, at



Lake Como, Italy.

They again collaborated with

Bhansali, and were seen together, in 'Bajirao Mastani' and 'Padmaavat'.

## Sonam Kapoor in elite company on UK's Top 40 Best Dressed List



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Sonam Kapoor has made it to the UK's Top 40 Best Dressed people list joining names such as Harry Styles, Kate Middleton, Rosamund Pike and Kate Moss, among many others.

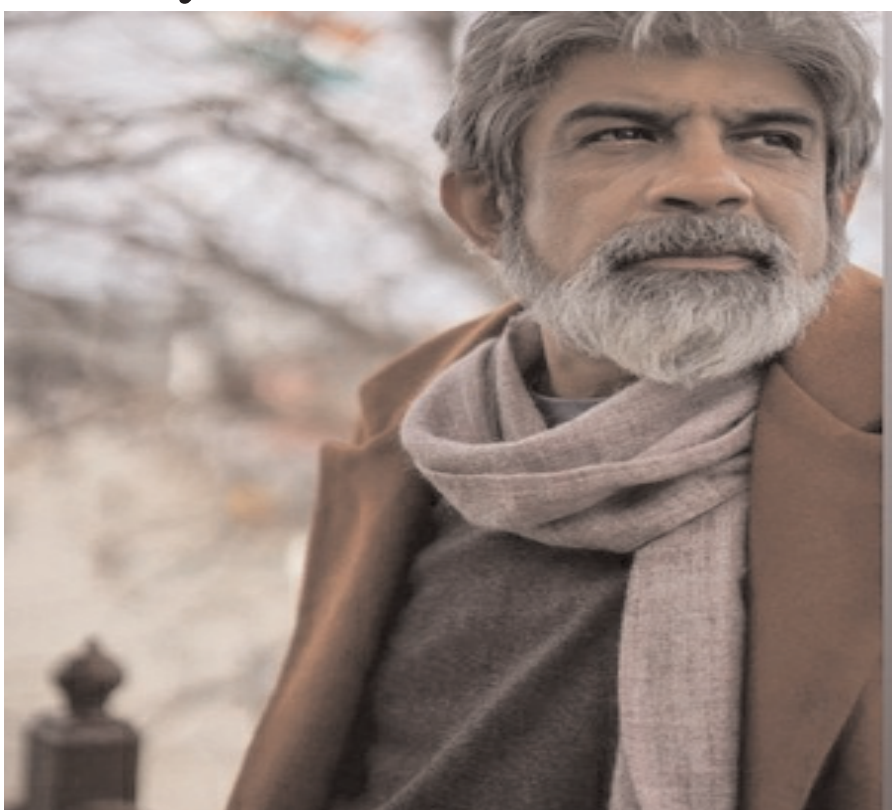
Last night, UK's prestigious media house The Standard, hailed Sonam

as one of UK's Top 40 Best Dressed people. Others who are in the list include names such as Sienna Miller, Bianca Jagger, Alexa Chung, Stormzy, Naomi Campbell, Edward Enninful, Stella McCartney, Phoebe Philo, Akshata Murty (businessperson and wife of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak).

In Sonam's citation The Standard wrote, "The Bollywood sensation is a

Notting Hill girl and international fixture of the couture circuit -- not to mention one of Dior and Valentino's top clients." Recently, according to a global fashion report, Sonam was among the list of celebrities like Zendaya, Kylie Jenner, Kendall Jenner, Blackpink, BTS, etc who had the highest impact for luxury fashion brands in 2023.

## TV actor Rituraj Singh passes away due to cardiac arrest



Team Absolute | Mumbai

TV actor Rituraj Singh passed away at the age of 59 in the wee hours of Tuesday. The actor was discharged from the hospital after he was admitted following stomach infection. But, his health condition deteriorated last night, and suffered a heart attack. Actor Amit Behl told: "Rituraj was admitted in the hospital and was dis-

charged. Last night at 12.30 a.m. he got a cardiac arrest."

"He was admitted in the hospital for a stomach infection," the actor said. Asked about the cremation, Amit categorically said, "I have no details about his cremation." Meanwhile, Bollywood actor Arshad Warsi expressed grief over the death of Rituraj. In a post on X, Arshad wrote, "I am so saddened to know that Ritu Raj passed away.

We lived in the same building, he was a part of my first film as a producer. Lost a friend and a great actor... will miss you brother..."

With a career spanning over three decades, Rituraj was known for his work in shows like 'Banegi Apni Baat', 'Tehkikaat', 'Kutumb', 'Jyoti', 'Beintehaa', and most recent 'Anupamaa'.

He also featured in 2022 web series 'Made in Heaven' and 2023 movie 'Yaariyan 2'.

## Rajkummar Rao pens b'day note for 'love' Patralekha: You complete me

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood actor Rajkummar Rao has showered love on the 'strongest girl', his wife and actress Patralekha on the occasion of her 34th birthday.

The 'Shahid' actor has called his ladylove the light of his life.

Rajkummar and Patralekha, who have starred together in Hansal Mehta's 2014 directorial 'Citylights', had tied the knot in November 2021.

The two have been in a romantic relationship since 2010. They have also features in web series 'Bose: Dead/Alive'.

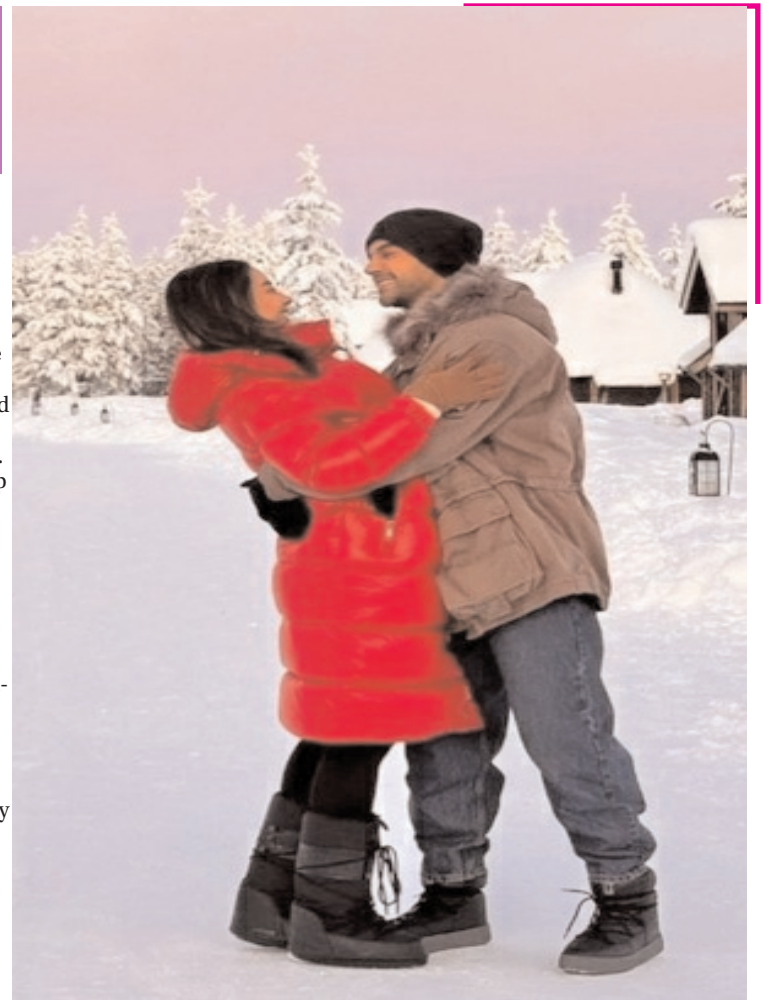
On Tuesday, Rajkummar took to his Instagram and shared unseen pictures with Patralekha, which seems to be from their vacation to the mesmerising location of the northern lights.

The first picture shows the lovebirds romantically posing in a snow-clad backdrop, dressed in winter outfits.

There is also a solo photo of the 'Nanu Ki Jaanu' actress enjoying the northern lights.

Rajkummar penned a heartwarming birthday note for his wife, which read as: "Happy birthday my love, the most beautiful and strongest girl @patralekhaa. You are the love and light of my life and always remember you are God's favourite child. You complete me."

He gave the tune of 'Sang Rahiyo' by Jasleen Royal to his post.



## Manisha Koirala: After 30 years, 100 films, I have earned my me time

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Manisha Koirala has shared as to why she slowed down after turning 50. The acclaimed actress shared that after having a career spanning over three decades. And 100 films, she has "earned" her "me time".

Manisha took to Instagram, where she shared a slew of pictures, which she captioned: "A lot of people ask me what I'm doing these days...some genuinely asking but sometimes it's like asking at 53 you couldn't be doing much...true!!"

She added: "But happy too for I m tasting different flavour of life, doing only those things I love and that means, at times doing absolutely nothing and relaxing with my cats n dogs or with book, music and perusing spiritual learnings, learning to sing and dance, walk in the nature, gymming, globe trotting.."

"After 30 years and 100 films I think I have earned my me time...I work when I know I would love the process of work!"

The actress, a cancer crusader, said that by the grace of god, good people are around her.

Manisha said: "I soak in their love and care...having lived alone most of my life in a buzzing city with most demanding profession that I absolutely adore yet filled with uncertainty not to forget being a celebrity one has to face too many ups and downs, good and bad people...good media and harmful fake news...without security of supportive circle of people and all alone!!"

The actress when looks back, she says she doesn't know how she did it.

"I guess being younger one had a zeal to take the world head on...besides I think in your most loneliest times god sends angles and I had very handful of true friends!!! My memories are timeless treasures of my heart... like life, good n bad, happy n sad..."



Manisha concluded: "You see now I prefer much quieter, slower, less shocks, less drama, no more impulsive decisions but a thorough thought out long term thing...co creating peaceful, happy, healthy wholesome life!!"

Manisha stepped into the world of acting with the Nepali film 'Pheri Bhetaula' in 1989. It was in 1991, when she featured in the Hindi film 'Saudagar'. She has starred in several acclaimed movies such as '1942: A Love Story', 'Bombay', 'Indian', 'Gupt: The Hidden Truth', 'Khamoshi: The Musical', 'Dil Se.', 'Kache Dhaage' and 'Ek Chhotisi Love Story', among many others.

## Performance of his CCL team pacers impresses Sonu Sood ahead of tournament



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Sonu Sood, who is gearing up for the upcoming edition of the 'Celebrity Cricket League' (CCL), is pretty happy with the way his team Punjab de Sher has performed during the practise sessions. Sonu, who serves as the skipper for Punjab de Sher, is specifically impressed with the performance of his pacers during the practice. The 'Celebrity Cricket League' features notable figures such as Salman Khan, Sohail Khan,

Sonu Sood, Riteish Deshmukh, Mohanlal, Bobby Deol and Manoj Tiwari.

Talking about what lies ahead in the tournament for his team, the 'Yuva' actor said in a statement: "CCL is an opportunity for us to venture into sports and bring out the best of ourselves in sports by taking a break from on-screen and getting on-field. This season, the stakes are even higher as our matches will be broadcasting live on JioCinema, reaching a vast audience across the platform." He further mentioned

that before the start of the upcoming season their practice games showed their progress.

He said: "I'm happy with how our fast bowlers performed during the practice matches, proving we have a strong team and a long run ahead. We will surely give a tough time to the opponents in this season, I surely believe we can win! With our hard work and solid performance, Punjab de Sher is ready to compete and make a statement in the tournament."

## INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Charlie Chauhan