

# absolute india

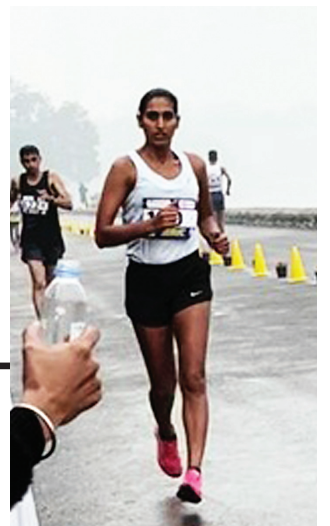
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## RBI BARS PAYTM PAYMENTS BANK FROM ACCEPTING DEPOSITS AFTER FEB 29

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The RBI has barred Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) from further deposits or credit transactions or top ups in any customer accounts, prepaid instruments, wallets, FASTags, NCMC cards, etc., after February 29, 2024, other than any interest, cashbacks, or refunds which may be credited anytime.



The action has been taken after a Comprehensive System Audit report and subsequent compliance validation report of the external auditors revealed persistent non-compliances and continued material supervisory concerns in the bank, warranting further supervisory action, the RBI said in a statement on Wednesday.

"Withdrawal or utilisation of balances by PPBL customers from their accounts including savings bank accounts, current accounts, prepaid instruments, FASTags, National Common Mobility Cards, etc. are to be per-

mited without any restrictions, up to their available balance, the RBI order states. Apart from this, no other banking services like fund transfers (irrespective of name and nature of services like AEPS, IMPS, etc.), BBPOU and UPI facility should be provided by the bank after February 29, 2024, the order states. The Nodal Accounts of One97 Communications Ltd

and Paytm Payments Services Ltd. are to be terminated at the earliest, in any case not later than February 29, according to the order. Settlement of all pipeline transactions and nodal accounts (in respect of all transactions initiated on or before February 29, 2024) shall be completed by March 15, 2024 and no further transactions shall be permitted thereafter, the order further states.

### YOUR FASTAG WILL BE DEACTIVATED TOMORROW IF YOU HAVEN'T DONE THIS. SEE HOW

**New Delhi:** There is an important update for those planning to take road journey in the next few days. According to National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), the deadline to get Know Your Customer (KYC) done for your FASTag is ended yesterday, January 31. Those who fail to get the KYC done, their FASTag is inoperative from February 1. FASTag is a pre-paid tag facility for vehicles that allows non-stop movement of traffic without having to wait at the toll plazas. A FASTag is usually affixed on the windscreen of the car.



The FASTag KYC check has been introduced to enhance the efficiency of the electronic toll collection system and provide seamless movement at toll plazas. The highways body said it took the initiative after it was informed that more than one FASTag has been issued for a particular vehicle and FASTags being issued without KYC in violation of RBI's mandate.

#### What to do for FASTag KYC update?

The NHAI released the notification regarding the January 31 deadline in December last year. But if you are among those who forgot to update the KYC of your FASTag, here's what you can do: Most of the bank branches close by 4pm, so people will have to avail online facility instead of an in-person solution. Open the FASTag website of the bank that have issued your RFID document. To access the required page, you can Google the name of the website with the keyword 'FASTag'. Log in using your registered mobile number and entering the OTP received. Go to My Profile section and click on the KYC tab. After filling in the required details like address proof and submit and it will be done. The KYC page will then show your KYC status. Documents required to complete FASTag KYC: Registration certificate of the vehicle. Identity proof. Address proof. A passport-size photo. Passport, Voter's ID, Aadhar Card, Driving licence and PAN card can be used as identity and address proof.

## Varanasi court allows Hindus to worship in Gyanvapi mosque basement



Team Absolute | Varanasi

A Varanasi court on Wednesday allowed Hindus to worship inside the sealed basement of the Gyanvapi mosque.

The court has asked the district administration to make the necessary arrange-

ments in the next seven days. As per the court order, Hindu devotees can now offer prayers at 'Vyas Ka Tehkhana', a sealed area inside the Gyanvapi mosque.

While speaking to reporters, advocate Vishnu Shankar Jain, representing the Hindu side, said, "The

Hindu side has been allowed to offer prayers at 'Vyas Ka Tehkhana'. The District Administration will have to make arrangements within seven days. Everyone will now have the right to perform puja." The Muslim side said that it will appeal against the court order in the High Court.

## FTC ORDERS UNSEALING OF ASI'S GYANVAPI REPORT

Varanasi | Agencies

The Fast Track Court (FTC) of Civil Judge (senior division) Prashant Kumar Singh in Varanasi has issued an order to unseal the Archaeological Survey of India's (ASI) Gyanvapi survey report.

The court, on Tuesday, also directed the report to be handed over to the plaintiff in original (suit no. 610/1991) Swayambhu Lord Vishweshwar vs Anjuman Intezamia Masjid (AIM)-Gyanvapi Mosque Management Committee and others. While the ASI report given to the district court was opened on January 25, making its content public, the one submitted to the FTC is still waiting to be unsealed. Advocate Vijay Shankar Rastogi, representing Swayambhu Jyotirlinga Bhagwan Vishweshwar, said: "In response to a December 19, 2023, order of the Allahabad high court, the ASI was instructed to conduct a comprehen-

sive survey of the entire Gyanvapi mosque, encompassing three plots, numbers 9130, 9131, and 9132. In compliance with this directive, the FTC in Varanasi, on January 4, directed the ASI to submit its survey report on the Gyanvapi mosque by January 19. Subsequently, the ASI submitted the report in sealed envelopes before the FTC on January 24, following an extension. "Rastogi added: "On Tuesday, the court ordered the provision of certified copies of the report to me and the AIM. After reviewing the report, I intend to submit an application detailing the areas on the Gyanvapi premises where further ASI survey is deemed necessary." Meanwhile, the court has scheduled the next hearing for February 5, when it will address the pleas by the two sons of the late litigant Harihar Pandey, as well as the grandson of Somnath Vyas and head priest of Acharya Ved Vyas Peeth Temple, Shailendra Kumar Pathak Vyas.

## Champai Soren set to be next Jharkhand CM as Hemant Soren quits, arrested

Ranchi | Agencies

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren on Wednesday went to the Raj Bhavan to tender his resignation to the Governor, while members of the ruling coalition were reaching there to stake claim for a new government to be headed by senior JMM leader Champai Soren.

Champai Soren is currently the Transport Minister.

The fast-paced developments came as the ED, which was questioning Hemant Soren at his residence since the afternoon in a money laundering case probe linked to an alleged land scam, informed him that it was arresting him as it was not satisfied with his answers to their queries. Meanwhile, Chief Secretary L. Khiaingte, DGP Ajay Kumar Singh, and other top officials reached the CM's residence and security



there was tightened.

The ED, which was questioning Hemant Soren at his residence since the afternoon, informed him that it was arresting him as it was not satisfied with his answers to their queries. Subsequently, it was announced that Hemant Soren had challenged the ED probe and his arrest in a writ petition in the Jharkhand High Court on Wednesday but the matter was not heard

and is likely to be mentioned on Thursday for hearing.

Hemant Soren, who was reportedly "missing", resurfaced in Ranchi on late Tuesday, reaching his Kanke Road residence at around 1:50 p.m. The ED had been on the lookout for him in Delhi since Monday morning. They searched for him at several places including his Delhi residence and Jharkhand Bhawan, but did not find him.

## 109 STUDENTS FALL ILL AT SCHOOL NEAR MUMBAI, FOOD POISONING SUSPECTED

**Thane:** As many as 109 students of a private ashram school, including 63 girls, were rushed to a government hospital in Thane district after showing symptoms of food poisoning on Wednesday, an official said.

The ashram school (residential schools for tribal children) is located at Bhatsai in Shahapur taluka on the outskirts of Mumbai.

Shahapur tehsildar Komal Thakur told media that barring four students, all were discharged from the hospital after treatment.

In the morning, students were served food brought from outside, including a sweet dish. After consuming the food, 109 students -- 63 girls and 46 boys -- complained of vomiting, nausea and dizziness, and they were immediately rushed to a government hospital, she said. Samples of food items served to the children were collected and sent for laboratory examination, said Thakur. The local police were carrying out a probe into the incident, she added.

## Growth of core sector slows to 14-month low of 3.8% in Dec

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The growth rate of India's eight core sector industries slowed to a 14-month low of 3.8 per cent in December, official figures released on Wednesday showed.

The growth of the cement and electricity segments fell to a crawl of 1.3 per cent and 0.6 per cent, respectively, during the month under review. Production of crude oil contracted by 1 per cent in December.

The fertiliser and steel sectors grew by 5.8 per cent and 5.9 per cent, respectively, year-on-year in December. The coal sector performed better than the other segments to register a double-digit growth of 10.6 per cent in the month, although this was the lowest pace of growth recorded since June 2023.

The core sector growth for November was provisionally put at 7.8 per cent, which was on Wednesday revised to 7.9 per cent.



Considering the April to December period, infrastructure output grew 8.1 per cent in the same period of the previous fiscal year.

ICRA chief economist Aditi Nayar said, "The core sector expansion halved to a 14-month low of 3.8 per cent in December 2023 from 7.9 per

cent in November 2023, with a moderation in growth across six of the eight constituents. Following the tepid core sector growth in December 2023, we project the IIP expansion for that month at a bleak 1-3 per cent."

## Ladakh Shepherds stand up to Chinese soldiers, viral video wins hearts

Srinagar | Agencies

A group of Ladakh shepherds bravely stood up to Chinese soldiers who tried to stop them from grazing sheep near the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Local shepherds had stopped grazing animals in this area following the 2020 Galwan clash. A video of them arguing with PLA troops and asserting that they were on Indian territory has won hearts on social media.

Chushul councillor Konchok Stanzin hailed the resistance shown by the local shepherds and praised the Indian army for supporting them. "It is heartening to see the positive impact made by @firefurycorps\_IA in Border areas of Eastern Ladakh in facilitating the graziers and nomads to assert their rights in traditional grazing grounds along the north bank of Pangong. See how our local

people are showing their bravery in front of the PLA claiming that the area they are stopping our nomad's grazing land. PLA stopping our nomads from grazing in our territory. Seems it is never a never-ending process due to different lines of perceptions. But I salute our nomads, who always stand to protect our land and stand as the second guardian force of the nation." The video shows at least three Chinese armoured vehicles and several soldiers on the spot. The vehicles blare an alarm, apparently signalling the shepherds to leave. But they stand their ground and are seen arguing with the PLA troops. The shepherds insist that they are grazing on the Indian territory. On a couple of occasions, when the altercation escalates, some shepherds appear to pick up stones. But the video does not show violence breaking out.

## Rear windscreen of Rahul Gandhi's vehicle smashed in Bengal's Malda District

Kolkata | Agencies

The second phase of the Congress' Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra from Malda District in West Bengal on Wednesday started on a sour note as the rear windscreen of Rahul Gandhi's vehicle was smashed as the rally was passing through Dewanganj area in the morning.

State Congress leaders have claimed that in all probability the rear window screen got smashed because someone threw a stone or brick on it.

However, the state Congress President in West Bengal and five-time Lok Sabha member Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury did not name any political party while making this accusation.

"You understand yourself, whose handiwork this could be. Rahul Gandhi's Nyay Yatra had been facing hurdles since the time it entered West



Bengal last week," said Chowdhury, who was with Rahul Gandhi in the vehicle when its rear windscreen was smashed.

According to Chowdhury, all possible attempts have been made to disrupt the rally since the beginning. "This phenomenon started

last week at Cooch Behar," he said. According to him, the opposition started with the destruction of the flexes set up by the state Congress workers to welcome Rahul Gandhi.

"Since then, such hurdles have been created one after another," Chowdhury said.

However, the national-level Congress leaders did not utter a single word on incident.

Significantly, Rahul Gandhi's yatra at Malda coincides with West Bengal Chief Minister's administrative review meetings in the same district.

## CPI-M responsible for spoiling Trinamool's relationship with Congress: Mamata

Kolkata | Agencies

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday accused the CPI-M of being responsible for deterioration of her Trinamool Congress "amiable" relationship with the Congress.

"I was with the Congress at one point of time. My understanding with Congress leadership was quite amicable. But because of the CPI-M, our relationship with Congress got spoiled," she said while addressing an administrative review meeting at Malda district.

Again holding the Congress responsible for the failed seat-sharing arrangement, Banerjee said excessive demands from the section of its leaders ultimately prompted her to take a decision of moving alone in West Bengal. "I thought of working together for the sake of the bigger national interest. They do not have a representative



in the West Bengal Assembly. They just have two Lok Sabha seats from the state. So I was willing to offer two. I also ensured their victory from those two seats. But they refused to accept that offer. Then I thought it was enough. I will not be able to move along with the CPI-M, which conspired to kill me again and again. They have killed so many people in West Bengal," she said.

Banerjee also said that the Congress's understanding with the CPI-M will actually benefit the BJP in West Bengal. "So it is better that the Trinamool Congress contests alone and make an all-out effort to defeat BJP," she said.



16 AIIMS, 315 MEDICAL COLLEGES ESTABLISHED IN LAST 10 YEARS: PRESIDENT MURMU

SC imposes Rs 12 lakh cost on 6 Maharashtra cops for illegally detaining three persons

Team Absolute | New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday said that as many as 16 AIIMS and 315 medical colleges have been established in the last decade while the number of MBBS seats has more than doubled during the period.

President Murmu made the remarks while addressing the joint sitting of both Houses of the Parliament.

In her address, the President said that in the National Education Policy, emphasis has been laid on education in mother tongue and Indian languages.

"Teaching of subjects like engineering, medical, law has been started in Indian languages. To provide quality education to school students, my government is working on more than 14,000 'PM Shri Vidyalayas'. Out of these, more than 6000 schools have started functioning," she added.

"The school dropout rate in the country has reduced due to efforts of my government. The enrolment of girls in higher education has increased. Enrolment of Scheduled Caste students has increased by about 44 per cent, that of Scheduled Tribe students by more than 65 per cent and that of OBC by more than 44 per cent. Under Atal Innovation Mission, 10,000 Atal Tinkering Labs have been established to promote innovation. More than 1 crore students are involved in it," she added.



President Murmu further said that in the last 10 years, the government has done "unprecedented" work in the field of tourism. "Along with the number of domestic tourists in India, the number of foreign tourists coming to India has also increased... The reason for the growth in the tourism sector is owed to India's growing stature. Today the world wants to explore and know India."

"Apart from this, the scope of tourism has also increased due to excellent connectivity. Building of airports at various places is also advantageous. Now, North East is witnessing record tourist arrivals. Now there is heightened excitement about Andaman-Nicobar and Lakshadweep islands," she said.

The government has made pilgrimage in India easier now. "In the last one year 8.5 crores of people have visited Kashi. More than 5 crores of people have visited Mahakaal. More than 19 lakh people have visited Kedar Dham. In the 5 days of "Pran Pratishtha", 13 lakh devotees have visited Ayodhya Dham itself." President Murmu said that there is "unprecedented expansion" of facilities at pilgrimage sites in every part of the country.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court has imposed a cost of Rs 12 lakh on six Maharashtra Police personnel for conspiring and abetting illegal detention of three persons and getting their rented property demolished without any court order.

"Out of the six police personnel, three are constables, one is a Head Constable, one is a Sub-Inspector, and one is an Inspector. They shall suffer a cost of Rs 50,000 per constable, Rs 1 lakh by the Head Constable, Rs 1.50 lakh by the Sub-Inspector, and Rs 2 lakh by the Inspector, totalling Rs 6 lakh for each case with the above distribution," said a bench of Justices Vikram Nath and S.C. Sharma.

The bench said that this amount will be deposited within 4 weeks in the Armed Forces Battle Casualties Welfare Fund and thereupon, the proceedings of the two complaint cases will stand closed.



On March 9, 2022, three tenants were held for about 24 hours in the police station and in the meantime, their rented premises were demolished by relatives of the former owner with the support of the local police.

At the police station, the tenants were also forced to sign some documents, apparently giving their consent to vacate the premises voluntarily. Thereafter, two tenants moved an application before a Magistrate for registration of FIR against relatives of former owner, subsequent purchasers, and six police personnel namely, Shatrughna Atmaram Patil, Jaipal Manikrao Hire, Milind Ashok Bhamare, Suryakant Raghunath Salunkhe, Nilesh Subhash More, and Sunil Kautik Hatkar.

Andhra to introduce syllabus of Geneva-based education body in govt schools

Amaravati | Agencies

The Andhra Pradesh government on Wednesday signed an MoU with the Switzerland-based International Baccalaureate (IB) in introducing IB curriculum in government schools.

The IB syllabus will be first introduced to students of class I from the academic year 2025-26 and as they are promoted to upper classes every year, they would be learning the upgraded lessons making IB part of all classes in government schools by 2035 and IB syllabus would be taught to students of Class XII in 2037.

School Education Principal Secretary Praveen Prakash and Chief Education Officer (Director of Education Innovation) of IB Anton Beguin exchanged MoU copies in the presence of the Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy at the Camp Office here. Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister said that it is a great satisfying programme as it paves way for integrating IB syllabus and practices with the syllabus of students of Classes I to XII.



In countries like India, quality education is necessary for students to make them competitive at the global level, he said, adding that the MoU with the IB offers a good future and helps them get high-paid jobs in the ever-competitive job market. Compared to the western countries, it is necessary to upgrade the present educational system and syllabus in India for enhancing problem solving abilities of students, the Chief Minister said, adding that IB curriculum integration with the school syllabus would help achieve this objective.

As per the MoU, IB experts will impart training to teachers in government schools, education department officials at mandal and district level, officers and staff of the SSC and Intermediate Boards and APSCERT in handling IB syllabus. This will make them part of the IB global teaching network. A new journey has begun and it helps set a new standard in the educational system, he said. IB Director General Olli Pekka Heinonen, who participated in the programme virtually from Geneva, said this is their biggest MoU of its kind and it would be an inspiration for other countries and regions.

AAP, Congress protest over 'rigging' in Chandigarh mayoral polls

Chandigarh | Agencies

Leaders of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Congress protested outside the Sector 17 police station here on Wednesday against the alleged rigging in the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation's mayoral elections.

They demanded the police to register a case against Anil Masih, the presiding officer appointed for the elections.

In their statement, the councillors and leaders of both the parties accused the BJP of rigging the elections, saying Masih deliberately cancelled the votes of eight councillors so that the BJP could make their mayor.

AAP leader Sunny Ahluwalia met the SHO, demanding to register a case against the presiding officer, handed him video clips and other materials related to 'rigging' in the elections.

Later, he met the Senior Superintendent of Police and demanded immediate action against Masih.



Ahluwalia told the media that the BJP "is the biggest threat to our country's democracy", adding that as per the strategy, the BJP managed all officials related to the elections and made its mayor by rigging the polls.

He said all AAP and Congress councillors have submitted an affidavit in the Punjab and Haryana High Court stating that they voted for Kuldeep Kumar Tita as the mayor.

"We will continue our fight until the wrongfully appointed mayor steps down," he added.

Meanwhile, the high court has issued a notice to the corporation and the local administration, seeking their reply within three weeks.

Both AAP and the Congress have appealed to the high court to hold fresh mayoral elections.

Jaipur Literature Festival 2024 opens and keeps up its tradition of uncovering a gamut of 'stories' from across the world.

Jaipur | Agencies

Like every year, this year too, the magnificent and diverse programme for the much-awaited 17th edition will feature some of the most celebrated minds from across the world. Audiences can savour a range of diversity in languages in this edition, which will feature 16 Indian and 8 international languages with sessions spread across 5 venues. The Festival will host over 550 speakers and performers from across a vast array of nationalities. The speakers are recipients of awards such as the Booker, the International Booker, the Pulitzer, the Baillie Gifford; the Sahitya Akademi, Dada Saheb Phalke Award, the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature, the JCB Prize for Literature and many more. It will feature a range of themes including Fiction & Non Fiction, Literary Criticism, History, Politics & Current Affairs, Economics, Poetry, Art & Culture, Art & Architecture, Translation, Graphic Novels, Gender, Science & Medicine, Food & Memory, Biographies & Memoir, Mythology, Spirituality & Religion, Mental Health, Fashion & Lifestyle, Law & Justice, Geopolitics, Sports, Crime Fiction, Climate Change + Environment & Climate Justice, Pet Parents +



Pets & Animals, Cities, Literary Icons Through The Ages, Bollywood & Cinema amongst others.

Beginning on Thursday, February 1st, the Festival will open with the calming strains of Morning Music and celebrate the centenary year of Pandit Kumar Gandharv with a performance by acclaimed Hindustani classical vocalist and Kumar

Gandharv's daughter, Kalapini Komkali. The opening will also see inaugural addresses by Founders and Festival Co-directors Namita Gokhale and William Dalrymple along with Festival Producer Sanjoy K. Roy, Managing Director, Teamwork Arts. Son'ble Deputy Chief Minister of Rajasthan, Diya Kumari will grace the milestone occasion and address the audience. The Samsung Galaxy Tab S9 Series Jaipur Literature Festival 2024 marked its opening by hosting an exclusive evening for speakers and dignitaries today at the Rambagh Palace - Jaipur.

The event saw an illustrious assembly of the finest minds and talents, a true constellation of literary figures, eloquent authors, distinguished speakers, and passionate aficionados of literature. Under the guidance of the legendary chef Raghu Deora, the palace's culinary virtuoso crafted an extraordinary banquet, a harmonious blend of local flavours and international culinary artistry.

The 17th edition of the Festival will also feature South Asia's biggest publishing conclave, the prestigious Jaipur BookMark from 1st-5th February, which will bring together publishers, literary agents, translation agencies, writers, and major industry players from across the world.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

JSW Paints, India's leading environment-friendly paints company and part of US\$ 23 billion JSW Group has recorded a 5x higher than industry growth in business since its launch 5 years ago. After crossing INR 1,000 crore in FY22, JSW Paints has now hit a INR 2,000 crore run-rate within 15 months. The company is on track to close FY24 with a turnover higher than INR 2,000 crore. The company is confident of achieving its next INR 1,000 crore of revenue in an even shorter time period, having already crossed the INR 1,500 crore mark within 9 months in the current fiscal. These milestones place JSW Paints in a unique position and sets the company up well to move from its current spot of being the 6th largest

paints player in the country to becoming one among the largest 4 players within the next few years.

During the current fiscal, JSW Paints enhanced its market presence across India to achieve a market scale and coverage of greater than 60% in paint selling towns. Further, it continues to increase its retailer network with the addition of more than 2,000 retailers every year. The growth in this network has been due to better market penetration in new clusters across existing large cities, nationwide. The company continues to launch new products to complement its 'Simple-Swift-Sure' range. Over the recent past, it brought in more than 20 new products across markets, with new brand launches currently contributing over 15% of gross revenues.

The company continues to focus on selling a wide range of interior, exterior wall, wood & metal finishes as well as waterproofing products & surface preparation and treatment related ancillaries. JSW Paints is also growing its presence in the institutional segment and building deep relationships with the communities of architects and interior decorators. The company is on track to turn profitable this fiscal ending March 31, 2024, a significant achievement within just five years of its commencing business operations.

Within a short span of time, it has already become the largest Industrial Coil Coatings company in India. JSW Paints is endorsed by well-known Bollywood actors Ayushmann Khurana and Alia Bhatt.

Smuggled in from Myanmar, drugs worth Rs 30 cr seized in Mizoram; 2 held

Aizawl | Agencies

The Assam Rifles along with other law enforcing agencies in separate raids have recovered drugs worth over Rs 30.17 crore in Mizoram and apprehended two drug peddlers, officials said on Wednesday.

The Assam Rifles along with the officials of Special Narcotics Police Station, CID (Crime), recovered 34.99 gm heroin valued at Rs 17.49 lakh from the Zembawak area in Aizawl and apprehended one person on Tuesday night. In another operation, the para-military personnel accompanied by other officials recovered over one lakh highly-addictive methamphetamine tablets worth Rs 30 crore from the Zokhawthar bordering



Champhai district on Tuesday night and arrested one drug trafficker.

The recovered drugs and the accused persons have been handed over to the police for necessary legal proceedings under the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act 1985.

An Assam Rifles statement said that the ongoing smug-

gling of illegal drugs is a major cause of concern for the state of Mizoram and India. Officials said that the methamphetamine tablets smuggled in from Myanmar have been one of the most trafficked drugs in recent years, which have huge demand in northeastern states, and other parts of India and neighbouring Bangladesh.

Tejashwi is a child, he does not know anything about Bihar: Nitish Kumar

Patna | Agencies

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, without taking the name of Tejashwi Yadav, said that he is a child who does not know anything about the state.

After his exit from the INDIA bloc, Nitish Kumar for the first time interacted with media persons and slammed RJD leader Lalu Prasad Yadav and the Rabri Devi government.

"There was nothing in Bihar. No roads were available before 2005 and people used to walk to their destinations. People were not stepping out in the evening due to crime. I have done development work after coming to power in 2005. Today, you are travelling on roads, you are seeing buildings. Who did it? It is I. Tejashwi was a child who did not know anything," Kumar said.

Speaking on the jobs given to teachers in 17 months of the Mahagathbandhan government in



Bihar, Nitish Kumar said: "All he (Tejashwi Yadav) is claiming is absolutely rubbish. He is taking credit for teacher recruitments but he does not know anything. His claim is false. It was my vision to give jobs under 'Saat Nischaay Part 2 programme,'" Kumar said. Reacting to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's

claim that he forced Kumar to conduct a caste based survey in Bihar, Nitish Kumar said: "This is an absolutely false claim. He is taking the credit for the caste based survey. We were planning for the caste based survey since 2019-20. We held an all-party meeting and then went to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to meet him on this issue. He said that the Centre would not conduct the caste based census but you are free to do it. Hence, we have conducted this survey. When asked about the action against the Lalu Prasad Yadav family, Nitish Kumar said: "This is an old case and the questioning is taking place here. I am just watching the news. No one informed me about it. It is a matter at the higher level (Centre)."



## APPROVAL OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO START-UPS FOR PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

### Approval of Rs 164 crore 49 lakh for superspeciality hospital under Medical College, Rewa. Decisions of the Council of Ministers under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Dr. Yadav

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The meeting of the Council of Ministers was held in the Ministry under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav. The Council of Ministers has decided to amend the Madhya Pradesh Start-up Policy and Implementation Plan, 2022. According to the amendment, start-ups of the state will be provided financial assistance for participation in national and international events. On participation in domestic events, reimbursement of 75% of the expenditure incurred per event up to a maximum of Rs 50 thousand will be given and on participation in events outside the country, 75% of the expenditure incurred per event up to a maximum of Rs 1 lakh 50 thousand will be reimbursed. A start-up will be given assistance maximum 1 time in 1 financial year and maximum 2 times in the entire lifetime. The Council of Ministers gave revised administrative approval of Rs



164 crore 49 lakh for the expansion of the Superspeciality Hospital under the Medical College, Rewa. Additional sanction of Rs 25 crore 31 lakh has been given for the expansion

of Super Specialty Hospital Rewa. This amount will be spent on construction of new ICU beds, cath lab, private ward and purchase of furniture etc. It is noteworthy that earlier

approval of Rs 139 crore 18 lakh was issued for the construction of superspeciality hospital under Medical College, Rewa. Now it has increased to Rs 164 crore 49 lakh.

## Congress will make roadmap for Lok Sabha in Madhya Pradesh through Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In Madhya Pradesh, Congress is preparing to make a roadmap for the Lok Sabha elections through Rahul Gandhi's proposed Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra. Before Rahul Gandhi's visit, prominent Congress leaders are going to visit the respective Lok Sabha constituencies through which the Nyay Yatra will pass. Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra has started from Manipur, which will enter Madhya Pradesh in the second fortnight of February. This yatra will pass through seven Lok Sabha constituencies falling under nine districts of the state namely Morena, Gwalior, Shivpuri, Guna, Rajgarh, Agar Malwa, Ujjain, Ratlam and Jhabua. Congress leaders are active before this visit and senior leaders are also going to visit those areas and hold Lok Sabha wise meetings. In this sequence, All India Congress Committee General Secretary Madhya Pradesh in-charge Bhanwar Jitendra Singh, State Congress President Jitu Patwari and Leader of Opposition in Madhya Pradesh Assembly



Umang Singh visited Gwalior, Ujjain and Bhopal from February 4 to February 7 for the Lok Sabha elections and Rahul Gandhi's visit and conduct a joint visit to review the preparations. These three prominent leaders will hold the meeting of Guna, Bhand Lok Sabha level coordination committee in Gwalior and workers of Gwalior, Bhand, Morena, Guna Lok Sabha constituencies will attend the conference. After that these leaders will hold the meeting of Ujjain, Mandsaur, Ratlam, Dhar, Indore Lok Sabha level coordination committee. There will be a conference of workers of Ujjain, Mandsaur, Ratlam, Dhar and Indore Lok Sabha constituencies in Ujjain itself. During their stay, the three leaders will attend the

meeting of Bhopal Lok Sabha level, Hoshangabad, Betul Lok Sabha, Rajgarh, Dewas, Vidisha Lok Sabha level coordination committee besides the legislative party meeting in Bhopal on February 6. These leaders will hold a meeting of the Bharat Jodo Mein Nyaya Yatra Coordination Committee in Bhopal on February 7. They will also hold a meeting of the state presidents of State Youth Congress, State Seva Dal, Mahila Congress, Indian National Students Organization and department cells. At the status of Lok Sabha seats in the state, there are a total of 29 Lok Sabha seats in the state, out of which 28 are held by BJP, only Chhindwara seat is with Congress. Both the parties are busy preparing for the upcoming elections.

## Mohan Yadav cabinet meets Governor

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Ministers of the Mohan Yadav cabinet of Madhya Pradesh met Governor Mangubhai Patel at Raj Bhavan on Wednesday. It is being described as a courtesy meeting. Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and his cabinet members reached Raj Bhavan on Wednesday morning. Governor Patel welcomed him and also introduced him. There have been very few such occasions in the politics of the state when the Governor has had a courtesy meeting with the Chief Minister in the presence of the entire cabinet. Earlier, Lalji Tandon, who



was the Governor of the state, welcomed the cabinet members at Raj Bhavan. Courtesy meetings of cabinet members and the Chief Minister have been taking place on the occasion of special events, but there have been

less opportunities for this group meeting. Governor Patel keeps a special eye on the welfare schemes of the Scheduled Tribes of the state and is also active in improving higher education.

## CBI RAID IN BMHRC, DOCUMENTS BEING SEARCHED IN DIRECTOR'S CHAMBER

Bhopal. Big news has come out from Madhya Pradesh capital Bhopal. Where the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has raided BMHRC (Bhopal Memorial Hospital & Research Centre). Team action is going on for the last one hour. Actually, CBI had received a complaint of irregularities in purchasing in the hospital. On the basis of the complaint, the CBI team has conducted raids in the hospital. A team of about 20 CBI officers has carried out the action. The team is examining the documents in the director's chamber.

## Tiger pounces on bike rider in Panna, video surfaced from buffer area of PTR

Team Absolute | Panna

A heart-wrenching video has surfaced from Panna Amanganj road of Panna Tiger Reserve. Here, when a tiger came out in the middle of the road, the passers-by saw it and parked their bikes. During this, the tiger pounced towards the bike rider, but fortunately the tiger did not attack and went towards the forest. But the passers-by stopped breathing. In fact, due to the increasing number of tigers in Panna Tiger Reserve, it is not a big deal to see tigers passing in front of pedestrians on the roads every day. But the video of this first incident of tiger attacking pedestrians is going viral on social media. It is being told that the video is from near Rampura



Gate of Panna Amanganj road. Some bikers were passing here. Then suddenly they saw a tiger passing in the middle of the road. Seeing this, the passers-by stopped the bike and stood up, but the tiger suddenly turned towards

them. The anger of the tiger is clearly visible in the video of just one second.

## BJP's post-Mining mafia is in trouble, will stop it with AI, illegal sand mining starts in Chambal; Sub Inspector injured

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh government is preparing to deal with illegal mining with the help of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Giving this information on its In the BJP government, illegal mining will be curbed in Madhya Pradesh with the help of AI technology. Here, in Bhand district of Chambal division, challenging the government and administration, illegal mining of sand was started after performing regular puja. Here, sand is being extracted illegally from the Sindh River at the Indurkhi mine. This area comes under Raun police station area. On Tuesday evening, the Machand Chowk police team which had come to arrest the tractor-trolley which was illegally transporting sand was attacked by the sand mafia. Outpost in-charge SI Kamalkant Dubey has suffered a head injury. The sand of Sindh river found in Indurkhi village of



Bhand district is considered good for building construction. This sand mine has not been tendered for the last two years, but the mine has not been closed. The mafia secretly extracts sand from here and sells it. Local people say that the mafia has got political protection.

There are about 72 sand mines on the Sindh river in Bhand district. These mines are to be tendered. Tenders have also been called by the Mineral Department, but till now the tenders of any company have not been opened. Meanwhile, the revenue generated by the administration and the gov-

ernment due to illegal sand extraction is being affected. The police of Raun police station of Bhand was attacked by the sand mafia on Tuesday evening. The Machhand outpost in-charge was assaulted. He got hurt. An attempt was made to snatch a rifle from a constable. Machhand outpost in-charge SI Kamalkant Dubey had reached Tehanpur Ghat in Dohai and Nayagaon area on the information of illegal transportation of sand. He had received information that a tractor-trolley was taking out sand from the Sindh River illegally. As soon as the police arrived, the mafia attacked. The number of accused was high. There were only 5 to 6 soldiers in the police team. Machhand outpost in-charge has suffered a head injury. After the incident, Raun, Machand and Umri police stations have become active. Police have started searching for the accused everywhere. Some family members of the accused have also been detained by the police.

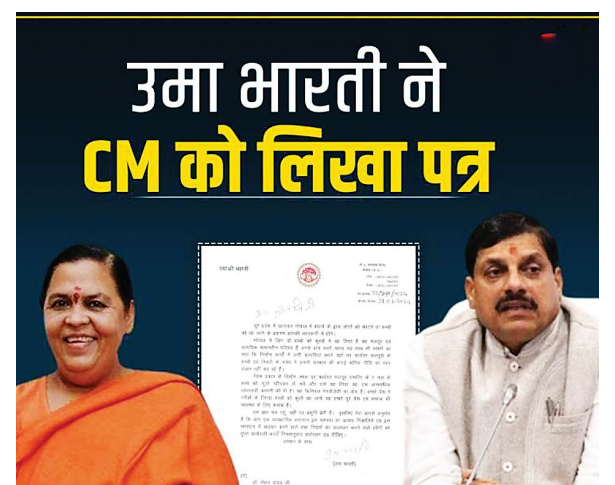
## SCHOOLS WILL NOT START IN BHOPAL BEFORE 9.30 AM

Bhopal: Bhopal Collector Kaushalendra Vikram Singh has ordered to continue the timing of schools as per earlier orders in view of the changed weather. In the order issued on Wednesday, it has been asked not to start classes 1 to 5 before 9.30 am. Pre-determined examinations from class 6th to 12th will be conducted as per the prescribed time table. This order will remain effective till February 10.

## Uma Bharti again raised the issue of dog bite, wrote a letter to Chief Minister

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Uma Bharti has also met the family of the deceased child. During this, she consoled the family and held the construction company responsible for the incident at the place where it took place. Along with this, Uma Bharti also visited the incident site. Through this letter, she demanded to take concrete steps to stop the menace of stray dogs (Action Against Dog Bites). Along with this, while referring to the recent death of a child due to dog bite in the capital Bhopal, she wrote in the letter that live children of poor people are eaten by dogs, this is a stigma



on our society. Uma Bharti said that this is criminal negligence. Strict action should be taken

against those who violate the rules made. Those who are violating the rules made by the government, it is a crim.

## Name transfer has to be done within 30 days of registry: Revenue Minister Verma

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Resolve nomination, demarcation and divisional cases within the stipulated time period. Along with the Patwari, Naib Tehsildar, Tehsildar and SDM should also reach every village for the solution. Solve the revenue related problems of the farmers by sitting at the doorstep of the common man in the village. These instructions were given by Revenue Minister Karan Singh Verma in the divisional review meeting held in Gwalior. Minister Verma also reviewed the Revenue Campaign and the activities of the Revenue Department. He cautioned the revenue officers and said



that if any Tehsildar-Naib Tehsildar does not transfer the name within 30 days of registration, then he should consider himself suspended. Revenue Minister Shri Verma said that Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav intends that no farmer of the state should have to wander for revenue related problems. Revenue campaign is being run for this purpose. He said that in cases of transfer, nomination and division, do not wait for the maximum time limit. All the revenue officers

should resolve the cases as soon as possible with positive thinking and a feeling of helping the farmers, so that the common man's trust in the department and respect for all of you increases. He said that demarcation issues should be resolved in the presence of all parties, so that there is no further dispute. During the Revenue Campaign, Shri Verma laid special emphasis on correcting the errors in the revenue records (correction on the map) and reading B-1 with prominence. Revenue Minister said in the meeting that Patwaris posted at the same place in urban areas for more than three years will be transferred.

## FIRST KIDNEY TRANSPLANT SUCCESSFULLY CONDUCTED AT AIIMS BHOPAL

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In a groundbreaking achievement, AIIMS Bhopal proudly announces the successful completion of its first kidney transplant procedure. The landmark surgery, performed on January 22, 2024, marks a significant advancement in the healthcare landscape of the region. The recipient of this life-saving procedure is a 32-year-old male hailing from Rewa, who had been battling kidney disease for the past three years. His journey towards recovery began when he sought medical attention at the OPD of AIIMS Bhopal, presenting symptoms including vomiting sensation and weakness etc. Following thorough examinations, his condition was diagnosed, necessitating either a kidney transplant or dialysis. Opting for a kidney transplant, the patient embarked on a transformative medical journey at AIIMS Bhopal. The process commenced with the meticulous selection of prospective donors from his family, ultimately identifying a suitable match in his father. With matching blood group and tissue compatibility confirmed, the stage was set for the groundbreaking procedure.



Under the skilled guidance of a distinguished team of medical professionals led by Dr. Mahendra Atlani, Dr. D Kaushal, Dr. M Kumar, Dr. K Mehra, Dr. S Tejpal, Dr. S Jain, and Dr. Saurabh, the intricate surgery unfolded seamlessly. The team's expertise and dedication ensured the successful completion of the transplant, marking a triumph of medical science and human resilience. During the post-operative phase, the patient received meticulous care and attention, including a ten-day regimen of anti-

rejection medication, ensuring optimal recovery and long-term success of the transplant. Today, with the patient's remarkable recovery, AIIMS Bhopal celebrates a new chapter in its commitment to advancing healthcare excellence. Notably, the entire transplant procedure was provided free of cost, underscoring AIIMS Bhopal's unwavering commitment to accessible and quality healthcare. Leveraging the benefits of the Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Yojna, the patient received comprehensive medical care, alleviating financial burdens and prioritizing his well-being above all else. Both, the President of AIIMS Bhopal, Dr. Sunil Malik and the Executive Director of AIIMS Bhopal Prof (Dr) Ajai Singh said that "transplantation is an example of cooperation, science and teamwork in healthcare". Besides appreciating the role of the faculty and staff of AIIMS Bhopal, both have acknowledged the role of State government and the State organ and Tissue transplant organization. This milestone achievement adds yet another feather to the cap of AIIMS Bhopal, reinforcing its stature as a beacon of hope and healing in the region.



EDITOR'S SPECS

**Kerala Tourism a hit at global tourism fair in Madrid**

Stepping up the global outreach with its highly-rated initiatives, Kerala Tourism has made a big impact at FITUR, the global meeting point for tourism professionals and one of the leading trade & tourism fairs in the world, in Madrid, Spain. Reinforcing its position as an all-season experiential tourism destination and unlocking new opportunities in the Spanish travel market in particular, Kerala's pavilion themed 'The Magical Every Day' drew a steady stream of visitors including business delegates, right from the opening day of the five-day fair on January 24. FITUR, considered to be the world's second most important tourism fair, had in the past substantially helped the state flaunt its destinations and packages before the world, leading to win-win business deals. Spain itself is an important market for Kerala, touching around 18,947 arrivals in pre-pandemic 2019. Of late, arrivals have shown a steady uptick, recouping from the global disruption wreaked by the Covid pandemic. The Kerala Pavilion stole the show with a gigantic installation of a pair of bulls seen in Kerala's temple festivals, called 'Kettukala' in local parlance. Kerala Tourism's participation in FITUR will be followed by a series of B2B meets in Barcelona, Milan, Paris and London. Significantly, Kerala's appealing presence in FITUR comes in the wake of the state Tourism Department scaling up its global campaign to bolster international tourist footfalls.

**NIKKI HALEY HOPES TO STOP TRUMP'S BULL RUN IN THE PRESIDENTIAL GOP PRIMARY**

T. N. Ashok

Nikki Haley, the fiercest challenger to ex-president Donald Trump in the GOP 2024 primary, banks on the most unlikely of ally, Democrats, who might flip, to vote for her on her home turf South Carolina, to stop Trump's bull run in the presidential race.

Nikki Haley, the former UN ambassador appointed by Trump himself, will try to slow down Trump's seemingly inevitable march toward the GOP nomination. Haley is banking on a bloc of home state voters she's never needed to court before, the Democrats, media reports said.

Trump's absolute dominance in the Iowa primary, narrow win in New Hampshire, seems to have instilled an aura of invincibility around his primary campaign. Haley hopes to pierce that and salvage an sense of viability past South Carolina, and she is planning to expand her coalition beyond anti-Trump Republicans and independent-minded voters - a task that would almost certainly include at least small pockets of Democrats not sold on re-electing President Joe Biden or those willing to switch sides to try to stop Trump from getting the GOP nomination, NBC reported.

The political maths is being made more complicated by the incentive for Biden and Democrats to generate a "monster turnout" after making South Carolina the party's first sanctioned nominating contest, and there is less evidence of any cross voting in the Palmetto State.

"Democrats do not vote in Republican primaries here, just like Republicans won't vote in Democratic primaries," said former South Carolina Republican Party Chairman Katon Dawson. "We tried and tried and tried, I spent money doing it. We found there was not much there." Haley says she does not "have to win" her home state of South Carolina but needs "momentum". In both New Hampshire and Iowa, Haley faced criticism from opponents that she was targeting Democrats to offset her disadvantage with Republican primary voters, an idea her campaign has rejected. Officials have not, however, disputed that they are trying to expand the Republican base.

"The Republican Party has to be a story of addition again, not subtraction. Trump lost races we should have won in 2018, 2020 and 2022," Haley spokeswoman Olivia Perez-Cubas said. "If Republicans want to start winning again, we have to start bringing in new voters, including conservatives, independents and Democrats who are fed up with Joe Biden."

Some Republicans feel there are still three



weeks between the Democrats' primary on Saturday and the Republicans' February 24 primary that creates a unique opportunity for Haley to pick up voters who might not ordinarily vote in a GOP primary. In South Carolina, people can vote to take part in either party's primary. So if a voter does not cast a ballot in the Democratic primary, Haley's team will have three weeks to crunch the numbers and come up with a plan to target the exact set of voters who have yet to vote in the state, NBC said. "Haley should absolutely look to turn out every voter possible in the primary, and with the democratic Presidential Primary being held three weeks prior, there should be ample time to identify those who did not vote in the primary and encourage them to vote in the Republican Primary," said Alex Stroman, a former executive director of the South Carolina GOP.

He said South Carolina not requiring party registration "gives us the best candidates to win general elections." Haley needs to juice turnout among those independents, moderates and true Republicans to improve on her results in New Hampshire and launch her into Michigan and then Super Tuesday states," Stroman said referring to the March 5 round of primaries in 16 states.

Jay Parmley, executive director of the South

Carolina Democratic Party, said they have heard from some Democrats planning to vote for Haley. "Yeah, we have heard that is happening. It might be smart for Haley, but it's stupid for Democrats to vote in the Republican primary," he said. "She is just as bad as Donald Trump. My call to Democrats is, 'If you didn't vote for her as governor, why you would vote for her as governor, why you would vote for her as the nominee?'" "We are doing everything we can to talk to Democrats and get them to vote. Now we have some saying they may vote for Haley to try and stop Trump," Parmley added. "That's just stupid." Haley has portrayed herself as the eager beaver politician ready to take head on the establishment in both political parties, an opportunity she has in her home state. Both the Biden and Trump camps have signalled to Haley to drop out so that they can turn their focus to a general election matchup they view as already set. On the night of the New Hampshire primary, Biden said in a statement that it is "now clear" that Trump will win the GOP nomination.

Democratic strategists say they expect many of their party's voters to cast ballots for Biden on Saturday, making them ineligible to participate in the Republican primary three weeks later. Moreover, there's little love lost between Haley and Democrats in the state she gov-

erned from the political right. "There is no major effort by Democrats to vote for Nikki Haley. She was not good for us when she was governor. So there's no need to think she would be good for us as president," said Clay Middleton, a long-time Democratic operative who is serving as a senior adviser to the Biden campaign in South Carolina.

"Our goal as a campaign is to make sure that we contact voters and show them, remind them, what the president has done for South Carolinians and for African Americans, in particular, and show that appreciation by voting on February 3."

Middleton noted that Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris and "a slew" of top surrogates have visited the state in recent weeks, a group that includes Democratic National Committee Chairman Jaime Harrison, a South Carolina native, California Gov. Gavin Newsom and Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif. Biden spoke at a 'First in the Nation' dinner Saturday in Columbia, which highlighted his decision to make South Carolina's primary the opening contest on the party's calendar.

international

**ISRAELI ATTEMPT TO CONTROL EGYPT-GAZA BORDER 'UNACCEPTABLE': EGYPTIAN OFFICIAL**

Cairo | Agencies

Any Israeli attempt to control the Philadelphi Corridor along the border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip is "unacceptable," an Egyptian high-ranking official said.

"No new arrangements have been discussed with Israel regarding the Philadelphi Corridor on the border, and any Israeli unilateral moves in this regard are unacceptable," the unnamed Egyptian official was quoted on Tuesday as saying by Egypt's Al-Qahera News TV.

The remarks came a week after Diaa Rashwan, the chairman of Egypt's State Information Service, warned that Israel's retaking control of the Philadelphi Corridor would violate its 1979 peace treaty with Egypt, Xinhua news agency reported.

The Philadelphi Corridor is a 100-metre wide, 14-km-long buffer zone along the Egypt-Gaza border.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has recently expressed his desire to retake control of the corridor to ensure future demilitarisation of Gaza and prevent the alleged smuggling of



weapons into Gaza through border tunnels. Rashwan also denied last week the Israeli claims about the weapon smuggling from Egypt to Gaza. The Rafah border crossing between Egypt and Gaza

has been a major lifeline to provide humanitarian aid to the Palestinians in the war-ravaged enclave, which has witnessed relentless Israeli bombings and a massive military offensive since October

7 last year. The Israeli attacks in Gaza have so far killed 26,751 Palestinians and wounded 65,636 others, according to data released by Gaza's Health Ministry on Tuesday.

**Imran Khan, Bushra Bibi sentenced to 14-year imprisonment in Toshakhana case**

Rawalpindi | Agencies

An accountability court on Wednesday sentenced former Pakistan premier Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi to 14 years imprisonment in the Toshakhana case, local media reported.

The verdict comes a day after the PTI founder was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment in the cipher case by a special court established under the Official Secrets Act.

Accountability court judge Mohammad Bashir presided over the hearing at Rawalpindi's Adiala jail, where the former Khan is incarcerated, The Express Tribune reported.

Imran and Bushra were also barred from holding any public office for the next 10 years and were fined around Rs1,574 million, The Express Tribune reported. The judge also asked the two to record their statements under Section 342 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and closed the right of cross-examination of the prosecution witnesses.



The couple were indicted in the reference on January 9.

Reacting strongly to the verdict, the PTI termed it as "complete destruction of every law" and claimed the former premier and first lady, have faced

"yet another kangaroo trial".

The party further said no right of defence was given to either Imran or Bushra and the case has "no basis" to stand on in any higher court, similar to the cipher trial.

**US FIGHTER JET CRASHES OFF S.KOREA'S WESTERN COAST; PILOT RESCUED**

Seoul: A US F-16 fighter jet crashed in waters off South Korea's west coast on Wednesday and a pilot was rescued after ejecting from the aircraft, multiple sources said. The fighter jet fell in waters near Gunsan, 274 km south of Seoul, at around 8:40 a.m., sources familiar with the matter said.

Gunsan is home to the US Air Force's Kunsan Air Base, which operates F-16 aircraft, Yonhap news agency reported. "The fighter jet crashed into the water and the rescued pilot is safe," the source said, asking for anonymity.

**Indian national sentenced for nearly \$2.8mn healthcare fraud in US**

New York: A 43-year-old Indian national in the US state of Michigan has been sentenced to nine years in prison for orchestrating a nearly \$2.8 million healthcare fraud.

Yogesh K Pancholi from Northville was also found guilty of wire fraud conspiracy, engaging in money laundering, aggravated identity theft, and witness tampering.

According to court documents and evidence presented at trial, Pancholi owned and operated Shring Home Care Inc, a home health company based in Livonia, Michigan, a Department of Justice release said.

Despite being excluded from billing Medicare, Pancholi purchased Shring using the names, signatures, and personal identifying information of others to conceal his ownership of the company.

In a two-month period, Pancholi and his co-conspirators billed and were paid nearly \$2.8 million by Medicare for services that were never provided.



Pancholi then transferred these funds through bank accounts belonging to shell corporations and eventually into his accounts in India.

After being indicted, and on the eve of trial, Pancholi, using a pseudonym, wrote false and malicious emails to various federal government agencies.

In those emails, he alleged a government witness had committed various crimes and should not be allowed to remain in the US in an attempt to keep the witness from testifying. In September 2023, a federal jury in the Eastern District of Michigan convicted Pancholi of conspiracy to commit healthcare and wire fraud, two substantive counts of healthcare fraud, two counts of money laundering, two counts of aggravated identity theft, and one count of witness tampering.

Pancholi's case was investigated by the FBI Detroit Field Office and the Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General (HHS-OIG).

The Justice Department's Criminal Division has been making efforts to combat healthcare fraud through the Health Care Fraud Strike Force Program.

Since March 2007, this program, currently comprised of nine strike forces operating in 27 federal districts, has charged more than 5,400 defendants who collectively have billed federal healthcare programs and private insurers more than \$27 billion.

**Australia sees 40% rise in sexual assault cases since 2013**

Canberra | Agencies

Australia has recorded 40 per cent rise in sexual assault cases since 2013, a government report said.

In an annual report published on Monday, the federal government's principal review body, the Productivity Commission, said that 123.7 out of every 100,000 Australians reported being sexually assaulted to police in 2022, an increase of 42.8 percent from 86.6 out of every 100,000 people in 2013, Xinhua news agency reported.

The highest numbers of such cases were reported from New South Wales, the largest of Australia's states and territories, with 152.2 out of every 100,000 people having made

complaints to police in the state in 2022, more than double the 71.2 out of every 100,000 people in the Australian Capital Territory. The national rate of armed robbery reports fell from 24.3 out of every 100,000 people in 2013 to 18.1 in 2022, and homicide rate fell slightly from 1.9 victims per 100,000 people to 1.6 in the same period, the report said. Mark Dreyfus, Australia's attorney-general, said the inquiry would look into how the government can improve the justice system experiences of victims and survivors of sexual assault.

In January, the federal government announced an Australian Law Reform Commission review into justice system responses to sexual violence.



## OBCs file plea in Bombay HC challenging Maha govt quotas for Marathas

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a fresh twist in the ongoing Maratha versus OBC reservations issue, an OBC group on Wednesday filed a plea in the Bombay High Court challenging the Maharashtra government's January 26 draft notification for the Maratha quotas.

The PIL has been filed by OBC Welfare Foundation Chairman Mangesh Sasane, who has challenged various decisions on the Maratha reservation for the past 20 years, starting from 2004.

It is likely to come up for hearing on Feb. 6 before Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya's bench, said the petitioner's lawyer, advocate Ashish Mishra.

Following a massive procession of Marathas, on January 27, the state government had issued a draft



notification widening the scope of quotas for Marathas to avail Kumbhi caste certificates and become eligible for reservation in jobs and education from the OBC quotas.

Mishra said that earlier the process of granting Kumbhi caste certificates to Marathas was very cumbersome but with every agitation, the process

became simpler and it was merely to facilitate the Marathas to get quotas from the OBC share.

The lawyer said that even the list of castes included in the OBC category has undergone many changes without giving any justification or even providing any data.

"It indicates that the list is more of a convenience and the communities included in the Maratha-Kunbi or Kunbi-Maratha are not in far-flung remote areas, or out of the national mainstream or can be attributed with any peculiar or exceptional and extraordinary circumstances," he argued.

The state government's decision was greeted by the Marathas but has been flayed by various OBC groups who apprehend it would cut into the OBC share, but this has been stoutly denied by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, Deputy CM Devendra Fadnis and other ministers.

## Maha's Central Gandhi varsity bars students tribute event on Gandhiji's martyrdom

Quaid Najmi | Wardha (Maharashtra)

In a strange development, the Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya (MGAHV) here allegedly barred a programme organised by students to pay homage to the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, on his 76th death anniversary.

Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated on January 30, 1948 and the day is observed as 'Martyrs Day' all over India. President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other top leaders across the political spectrum had paid tributes to Mahatma Gandhi at Rajghat on Tuesday.

Simultaneously, the students of the MGAHV here also planned a small memorial event in front of Bapu's statue at the Gandhi Hill on the sprawling campus, but they were reportedly halted midway by the varsity management.

"It was a solemn event held at 6 p.m. on Tuesday (Jan. 30), but the university administration abruptly trooped in there and ordered us to stop the homage ceremony. They had brought the campus security personnel in large numbers and prevented us from honouring Bapu's martyrdom, ironically, at a Central University named in Gandhiji's memory," a senior student pursuing Gandhian studies, told IANS, requesting anonymity.

When the students' gathering sought the reasons



for stopping the memorial event, an administrator claimed that "you have not taken permission for this".

"However, we had submitted a letter to the administration a day in advance (January 29) about the Gandhiji tribute event which is also organised all over the world. Besides, we held it in the Student Corner of the campus where such restrictions should not have been placed," said a student activist Akshay Krantiveer.

Another activist Chandan Saroj alleged that the MGAHV reportedly has "a long record of an anti-student mindset", which has led to frictions on the serene campus of the 27-year-old Central University, dedicated to the cause of fulfilling

Gandhiji's dreams for the Hindi language.

Wishing to avoid another fracas on the Shaheed Divas, the students quietly moved out of the varsity premises and held a small tribute ceremony to Bapu outside the campus gate later.

"All the students are feeling so remorseful about this that we have decided to take out a march from Gandhi Hill to the Sevagram Ashram, today afternoon. We will go and seek forgiveness and repent at Gandhiji's monument there," Krantiveer said.

However, Saroj said that so far the police and local authorities have not granted them the permission to take out the peaceful march to Sevagram Ashram, some 7 kms away, for obvious reasons.

"If the clearances are not granted, then we shall go individually to Sevagram Ashram and participate in the daily prayer meetings there, for atonement, and seek 'enlightenment' for the university officials who seem to forget that the institution is dedicated to Gandhiji," Saroj declared.

Despite repeated attempts, top varsity officials like the Registrar and In-Charge Vice-Chancellor were not available for their comments in the matter.

The activists acknowledge that the varsity had organised a formal tribute ceremony to Bapu at Gandhi Hills yesterday, but are still flummoxed as to why the students were not allowed to conduct their humble 'shraddhanjali' event.

## Thane hospital got aid from Maharashtra CM on forged papers, reveals RTI query

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a shocking revelation under RTI, it has come to light that a Thane hospital allegedly secured financial assistance from the Maharashtra Chief Minister's Relief Fund on the basis of forged documents, an activist said here on Wednesday.

The RTI crusader, Anil Galgali, had sought details from the office of Chief Minister Eknath Shinde about fake or cheating cases pertaining to the CM Relief Fund in the last two years, after he (CM) took office.

In the reply, the CM Relief Fund Assistant Accounts Officer, Sanjay Tambe has admitted the case pertaining to one Dr. Anudurg Dhoni of Ganapati Multispecialty Hospital at Ambivali in Thane east - which is Shinde's hometown.

The CMO has said that Dr. Dhoni's hospital, his staff and others associated with them are suspected



to have received the financial aid on the basis of fake documents submitted to the government.

However, the exact amount of the monetary help, for what purpose, or when it was disbursed to the alleged fake beneficiary, what kind of fake documents were submitted and other relevant details are not provided in the RTI reply to Galgali.

After the matter came to light, the CMO promptly asked the Mumbai Commissioner of Police to investigate the matter and file a case as required, on November 6, 2023, said the reply.

Galgali, who sent in his query on November 30, 2023, said this was a disturbing matter and the CMO must upload the list of all the beneficiaries along with the details of the type and amounts of financial assistance they have received from the CM Relief Fund on the official website.

"This could help expose many more such cases and put an end to such fraudulent practices, besides benefitting the genuine persons who need such financial help," urged Galgali.

## Political tongues wag in Maharashtra as Raghuram Rajan drops in to meet Thackeray

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Well-known economist and ex-Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, Raghuram Rajan called on former Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, at his house late on Tuesday night, setting tongues wagging in political circles in the state.

The meeting, described as a "courtesy call", nevertheless fueled intense political speculation, though Shiv Sena (UBT) leaders and other Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) bigwigs remained tight-lipped about it.

Rajan, 60, was welcomed warmly with a bouquet of flowers by Uddhav, wife Rashmi and their children, Yuva



Sena chief and Worli MLA Aditya besides environmentalist Tejas, at the family home, 'Matoshri' in Bandra east.

Party officials claimed that issues of mutual interest were discussed at the

meeting held in a cordial atmosphere, though details were not revealed.

Rajan was appointed as the 23rd RBI Governor in September 2013 by the erstwhile UPA Government of former Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh. His tenure was till September 2016 and then he was succeeded by Urjit Patel, who was appointed by the NDA Government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Barely two months later on November 8, 2016, the country witnessed the historic demonetisation exercise, which was first openly opposed by the then NDA ally and undivided Shiv Sena chieftain Thackeray, and he still remains a staunch critic of the move.

## Mumbai Teacher gets 5 years in jail for sexually assaulting minor girls

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A special court in Mumbai has sentenced a 28-year-old school teacher here to five years' rigorous imprisonment for sexually assaulting minor girl students. A teacher is expected to act as a protector and such heinous acts by the accused have left a lifelong "psychological and emotional impact" on the victims, special judge Seema Jadhav said in the order on Tuesday. The accused, who worked as a teacher at a school in suburban Govandi, was held guilty under relevant provisions of the Protection of Children From Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act by the court.

In the detailed order, available on Wednesday, the court said the accused is not a layman but a teacher, "the only career that influences other professions."

"Hence, the teacher is expected to act as a pro-



tektor. Such heinous acts by the accused have cast a lifelong psychological and emotional impact on the victims," the judge said.

The court also noted the teacher has no criminal antecedents.

Considering the facts in the present case, the minimum punishment under relevant provisions of the POCSO Act "would meet the ends of justice", the court said, while sentencing him to five years in jail.

The mother of one of the victims complained to

the police in September 2019, following which a case was registered against the teacher.

As per the complaint, the three victims were students of standard fifth and the accused was their class teacher.

The victims have accused him of "frequently touching them inappropriately".

The court held that there is no reason to disbelieve the testimony of the victims, which is corroborated by other witnesses as well.

The accused has not brought on record any probable evidence to corroborate his defense of false implication at the instance of another teacher, it said.

"Upon evaluating the testimony of victims and other witnesses, the prosecution has been able to prove its case beyond reasonable doubt that the accused has committed non-penetrative sexual assault, as defined in section 7 of the POCSO Act, upon the victims below 12 years repeatedly," the court said.

## Teacher arrested for shooting videos of women in washroom in Nagpur

Team Absolute | Nagpur

Police have arrested a school teacher for allegedly shooting videos of women using the washroom at an industrial expo in Maharashtra's Nagpur city where they had come to participate in the event, officials said. The accused, identified as Mangesh Vinayakrao Khapre (37), a resident of Kasarpura in Nagpur, had been discreetly recording videos on his mobile phone of women through a window of the washroom, the officials said on Tuesday.

The three-day industrial expo, 'Advantage Vidarbha', was organised on the Nagpur university campus in Ambazari and it concluded on Monday.

A woman reported the incident to organisers and the police conducted an investigation which led to the arrest of the accused.

Khapre, an art teacher at a prestigious private school, was enlisted to design the festival gate, police officials said.

Ambazari police station inspector Vinayak Golhe



and his team scanned CCTV footage of the premises and zeroed-in on the teacher.

The investigation revealed he had been present on the campus for the past few days preparing for the event. He was immediately arrested and his mobile phone seized, said the officials.

The accused was produced in a local court which granted him bail on Tuesday, they added.

Upon examination of the phone, it was found that Khapre had recorded videos of nearly a dozen women

over the previous three days and deleted some of the clips, the officials said, adding the teacher may be battling mental health issues. A case was registered against him under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code and the Information Technology Act.

It also came to light that Khapre has a history of recording videos of women in public toilets. Nearly 30 such videos were found in his mobile phone and they were recorded since 2022, the officials said.

## Shiv Sena MLA Anil Babar dies at 74; to be accorded state funeral

Team Absolute | Sangli (Maharashtra)

Veteran politician and ruling Shiv Sena MLA from Khanapur-Atpadi in Sangli Anil Kalajerao Babar passed away here on Wednesday following a brief illness, party officials said.

He was 74 and had been admitted to a local hospital for treatment of pneumonia but did not recover.

Chief Minister Eknath Shinde condoled the passing of Babar and has directed that his funeral should be performed with full state honours.

As a mark of respect, the state cabinet meeting was cancelled and the CM, along with several cabinet ministers, shall be going to Sangli and pay their last respects to Babar.

Babar started his political life aged 19 with the Congress, became a Sarpanch, then joined Sharan Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party with which he remained for over 15 years before joining the undivided Shiv Sena.



He was elected as MLA from Sangli in 1990 (Independent) and 1999 (NCP) plus again on a Shiv Sena ticket in 2014 and 2019.

In 2019, he was extremely hopeful of getting a cabinet berth in the erstwhile Maha Vikas Aghadi government but was overlooked.

Later, when the Shiv Sena split in June 2022, Babar joined the Shinde faction and remained a close loyalist of the CM till his demise on Wednesday.

## Claim your abandoned cars before Feb 15 or it will be auctioned, says Mumbai Police



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Mumbai Police on Wednesday issued a public notice for the vehicle owners who have not yet visited the traffic police chowkies to release their vehicles. The police have asked the vehicle owners to claim their abandoned cars before February 15 or else it will be auctioned, the public notice issued by the Mumbai Police said.

The Mumbai Traffic Police in its notification said, "This is to inform the citizens that 3,901 abandoned vehicles are lying unclaimed in different traffic chowkies of Traffic Control Branch of Mumbai Police. A detailed list of these vehicles is displayed on the website of the Mumbai Traffic Police."

The Mumbai Traffic Police also shared the detailed path on its official website to the find an abandoned.

The police further said, "Owners of the vehicles with registration numbers mentioned in the list may please contact Police Inspector,

Multimedia Cell Traffic, whose office is located at the Traffic Police Head Quarters, 4th Floor, Sir Pochkhanwala Road, Worli, Mumbai 400030 before 15th of February, 2024."

The Mumbai Traffic Police said, the claimants should bring along with them all original documents pertaining to the vehicle, R.C. Book as well as owners identity documents such as Aadhar Card, Driving Licence etc. "All Vehicles not claimed before February 15 will be disposed off by legal auction process," the traffic police notice said.

"The vehicles are occupying spaces at the traffic chowkies and lying abandoned for months or even years. The space needs to be emptied to make it free for other vehicles hence the process has been initiated," sources said.

The details can also be viewed through the official mobile application of 'Mumbai Traffic Police App'.

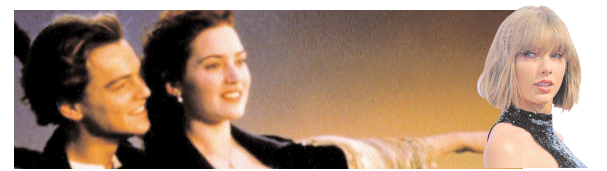
In August last year, the BMC had reportedly auc-

tioned 4,533 abandoned automobiles to scrap dealers, collecting Rs 4.23 crore, sources said. The vehicles were sold for scrap in an auction. For the process the pictures of abandoned automobiles were uploaded on an eAuction portal.

"Once a notice is issued, the vehicles are towed to scrapyards and depots. The procedure takes several weeks before an actual action takes place. The vehicles are auctioned to make room for other vehicles," an official said.

### Where to find your vehicle

- Visit the official Mumbai Traffic Police website: <https://trafficpolice.mumbai.maharashtra.gov.in>
- Under the Main Page of the website click on the 'Notice' bar
- Scroll down to 'Abandoned Vehicles'
- Click on the 'Public Notice'



## Celine Dion's docu to raise awareness about challenges of stiff-person syndrome

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer-songwriter Celine Dion hopes to "raise awareness" about stiff-person syndrome through a new feature-length documentary. The 55-year-old singer announced in 2022 that she had been diagnosed with the neurological disorder which affects her muscles, and Celine hasn't shied away from the issue in 'I Am: Celine Dion', reports Female First UK.

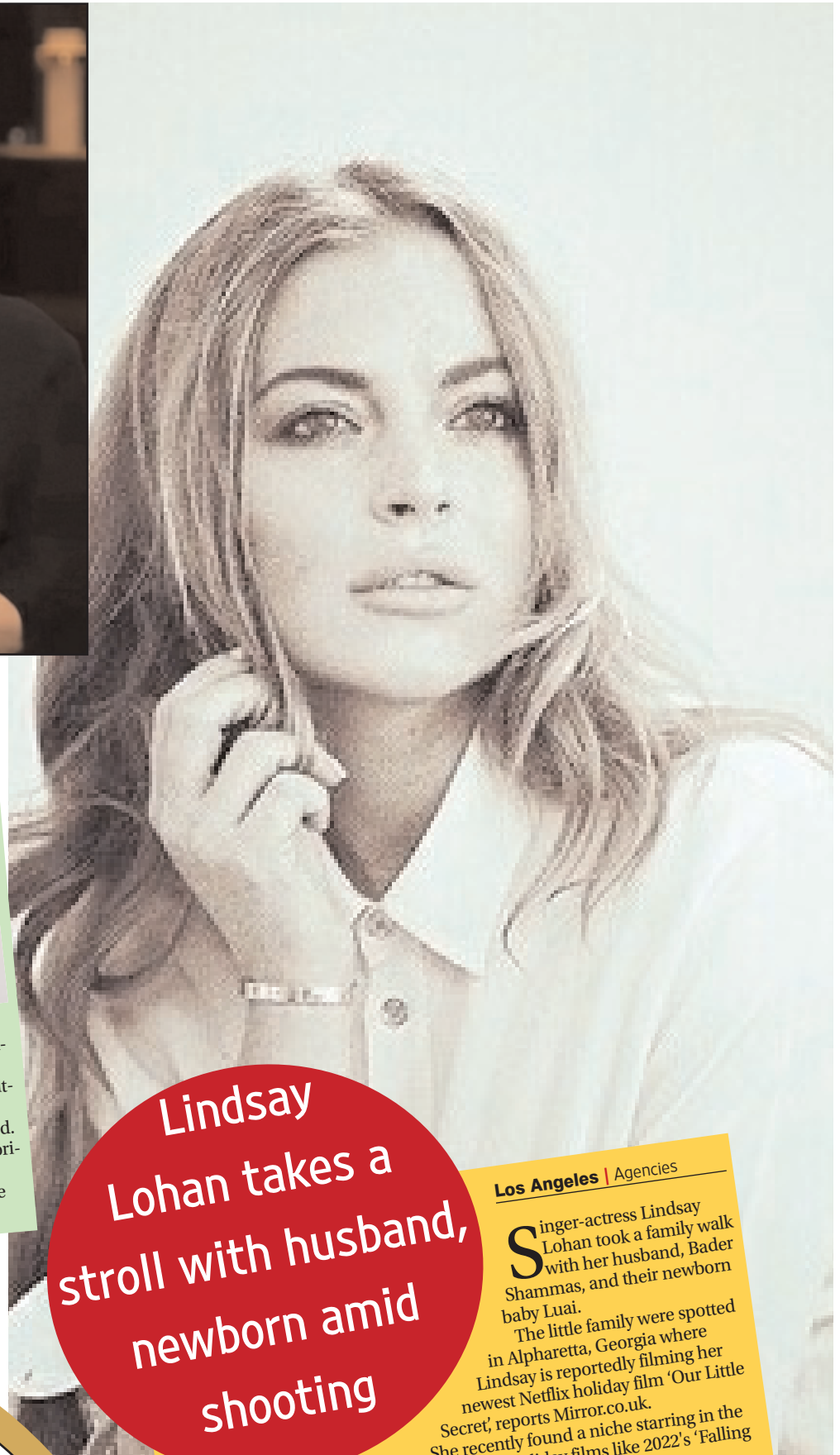
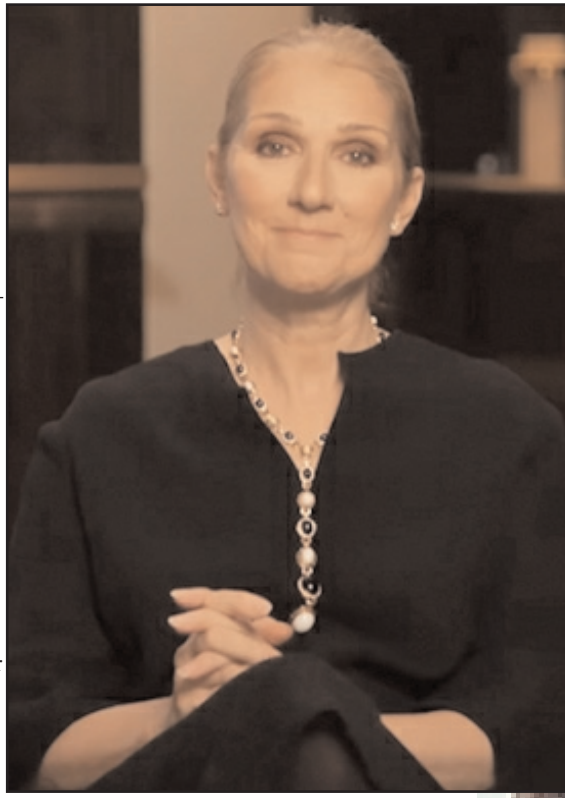
She said: "This last couple of years has been such a challenge for me, the journey from discovering my condition to learning how to live with and manage it, but not to let it define me. As the road to resuming my performing career continues, I have realised how much I have missed it, of being able to see my fans."

She further mentioned: "During this absence, I decided I wanted to document this part of my life, to try to raise awareness of this little-known condition, to help others who share this diagnosis."

The intimate documentary, which will be available on Prime Video, will give fans a behind-the-scenes look at Celine's life amid her health struggles.

As per Female First UK, Jennifer Salke, the head of Amazon MGM Studios, said: "Celine Dion is a global megastar with a career defined not only by her extraordinary work ethic and passion, but by her dedication to her fans."

He added: "This documentary is a raw, intimate portrayal of a pivotal time in her personal life and career, pulling back the curtain on her journey as she overcomes an unthinkable diagnosis. It's an honour to be trusted with her story, and we can't wait to share it with Prime Video audiences around the world."



Lindsay Lohan takes a stroll with husband, newborn amid shooting

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer-actress Lindsay Lohan took a family walk with her husband, Bader Shammass, and their newborn baby Luai.

The little family were spotted in Alpharetta, Georgia where Lindsay is reportedly filming her newest Netflix holiday film 'Our Little Secret', reports Mirror.co.uk.

She recently found a niche starring in the streaming service's holiday films like 2022's 'Falling

for Christmas'. While out on the walk, the 37-year-old Mean Girls star ate ice cream in a waffle cone as she strolled next to Bader pushing Luai in an olive green stroller.

As per Mirror.co.uk, Lindsay bundled up in a dark olive coat with a hood lined with brown faux fur. On her bottom half she wore grey leggings, Adidas trainers, and black socks. Her signature red hair was up in a bun and she had black sunglasses perched on top of her head.

The actress opted for a no-makeup look and accessorised with a grey zipped up black puffer jacket with the hood up.

He also appeared to have a clean-shaven stubble. The happy couple announced they had their son last July in Dubai, where the couple live together. At the time, a representative of the family said, "Lindsay Lohan and her financier husband, Bader Shammass, welcomed a beautiful, healthy son named Luai. The family is over the moon in love."

## Kevin Bacon, Kyra Sedgwick to co-star in new movie after two decades

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actors Kevin Bacon and Kyra Sedgwick are heading back to the big screen together. The couple, who celebrated their 35th wedding anniversary together back in September, will co-star in the upcoming movie 'Connescence'.

The movie will mark their first film together since 2004, when the couple appeared together in two films: 'Cavedweller' and 'The Woodsman', reports People magazine. 'Connescence' is written and directed by Michael J. Weithorn, a longtime writer, director and producer who is best known for creating the CBS Kevin James sitcom 'The King of Queens'. Deadline was the first to report the news.

Outside his work in television, Weithorn last directed a feature film with 2010's 'A Little Help'. As per People, his latest movie stars Bacon, 65, as a security guard named Stan, who meets Sedgwick's character Cynthia after he stops an attempted robbery at her home. "From this chance encounter grows a charged and dynamic friendship - first as late-night text sessions filled with humour and intimate revelations, growing into something that shakes the foundation of both their lives," reads the synopsis, as per Deadline. "We are so excited to work together on screen again for the first time in 20 years in such a funny, moving and original script," the couple shared in a statement with the outlet. While Bacon and Sedgwick, 58, have not acted together onscreen in 20 years, the pair have worked on different movies each have directed. Sedgwick starred in Bacon's feature directorial debut with 2005's 'Loverboy', and Bacon returned the favour when she made her own feature directorial debut in 2022 with the movie 'Space Oddity'. "It's great working with your family, and it's complicated working with your family," Sedgwick told People of working with her family on 'Space Oddity' in March 2023. "But you know no one's going anywhere, so that's kind of nice. You can struggle through it and puzzle through it together," she added.



## Adele announces European tour dates, first after 2016

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer-songwriter Adele will be taking her show on the road and perform in a "one off, bespoke pop-up stadium" in Germany this summer. The 35-year-old singer, who is currently performing in a residency in Las Vegas, hasn't toured in six years and previously admitted she probably wouldn't hit the road again as it "doesn't suit me particularly well", reports 'Mirror.co.uk'.

But it appears the 'Set Fire To The Rain' hitmaker has had a change of heart. Adele will perform at The Colosseum at Caesars Palace, Las Vegas, for the final time on June 15, before kick-starting a new run of shows in Munich.

As per 'Mirror.co.uk', announcing the new tour dates on Wednesday morning, Adele admitted performing in Europe for the first time since 2016 will be a "wonderful" and a fitting way to "end this beautiful phase of my life and career with shows closer to home during such an exciting summer".

The mum-of-one will take to the stage at Open Air Arena, Messe Munchen for four dates across two weeks on August 2, August 3, August 9 and August 10. Artiste presale starts on February 7, with the general sale commencing two days later. Writing on Instagram, the award-winning singer told fans, "So a few months ago I got a call about a summer run of shows. I've been content as anything with my shows in London's Hyde Park and my residency in Vegas, so I hadn't had any other plans."

She continued, "However, I was too curious to not follow up and indulge in this idea - a one off, bespoke pop-up stadium designed around whatever show I want to put on? Ohh! Pretty much slap bang in the middle of Europe? In Munich? That's a bit random, but still fabulous! Right after the Euros? Come on England! With the Olympics next door? Go on Simone. And some of my favourite artistes playing shows too? Why...YES!! I haven't played in Europe since 2016." "I couldn't think of a more wonderful way to spend my summer and end this beautiful phase of my life and career with shows closer to home during such an exciting summer," she added.



## Snoop Dogg to host Super Bowl after-party

Los Angeles | Agencies

The rap legend Snoop Dogg will host a Super Bowl after-party in Las Vegas. He is preparing to co-host an after-party alongside Dr Dre on February 11, following the Super Bowl final between the San Francisco 49ers and the Kansas City Chiefs at Allegiant Stadium. Snoop and Dre, 58, will be staging the party to commemorate the 30th anniversary of their hit record 'Gin and Juice', reports Female First UK.

Diplo is set to DJ the party at Wynn Las Vegas' Encore Beach Club, according to the New York Post newspaper's Page Six column, which has been told that it will be the "biggest" bash of the night.

Usher - who is performing the eagerly-anticipated Halftime Show - is expected to be a guest of honour at the party. In fact, the event is expected to serve as an album release celebration for 'Coming Home', Usher's latest studio project.

As per Female First UK, Usher recently admitted that his Super Bowl performance "has to be perfect". The 45-year-old star is determined to deliver a memorable performance for his fans.

He told Vogue: "It has to be perfect. I've been doing this for 30 years. I want people who have been a part of that journey to feel like it's a celebration for everybody, for all of us, from the beginning up until this point."

Usher also revealed that he wants fans to feel "hopeful" after watching his performance. He shared: "People will tune in for a football game, but I hope when they look at that halftime performance, I'm hoping they walk away with something that's healing them. Something that makes them feel hopeful, and not just look at the past, but have hope for the future, and have hope for a different type of future than we're looking at right now in the present."



## ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Sofia Vergara



## JAY SHAH UNANIMOUSLY REAPPOINTED AS ACC PRESIDENT FOR A THIRD TERM

Team Absolute | New Delhi

BCCI Secretary Jay Shah will be continuing as President of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) after being unanimously reappointed for a third straight term at the organisation's Annual General Meeting (AGM), held in Bali, Indonesia on Wednesday.

Shah's extension was proposed by Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) president Shammi Silva for the second time and the nomination was unanimously backed by all ACC members. "I am grateful to the ACC Board for their continued trust. We must remain committed to ensuring the all-round development of the sport with a special focus on regions where it is still in its infancy. The ACC is committed to nurturing cricket across Asia," said Shah in an ACC statement.

Shah, who has been the BCCI secretary since 2019, had taken over as ACC president in January 2021 from Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan, making him the youngest administrator to be re-appointed as the ACC president.

"Jay has played a pivotal role in steering the ACC towards significant progress in promoting and developing cricket across the Asian region. I am pleased that the ACC Board supported the proposal unanimously. Jay has a proven record of boosting finances through commercial and broadcast deals and channelizing the



finances to the grassroots level, uplifting the associate members," said Silva. The ACC board also acknowl-

edged Shah's proven track record in enhancing financial stability through strategic commercial and broadcast

deals, as well as his commitment to channelizing these financial resources to grassroots levels, thereby uplifting associate members within the organisation.

"I've worked closely with Mr. Jay Shah for a considerable time and know firsthand of his passion and enthusiasm towards administration. He is a young and dynamic leader with a clear vision and roadmap. Not only has he managed to foster a collaborative spirit among the Member Boards but has significantly enhanced the financial and commercial standing of the ACC.

"Today, stakeholders see value in investing in tournaments that the ACC conducts, and I credit him for this major transformation, which will further fuel the growth of the game in the region. I look forward to working closely with him on taking ACC to the next level," stated Pankaj Khimji, ACC Vice-President and Chairman of Oman Cricket. The ACC also said it has achieved significant progress in promoting and developing cricket across the Asian region under Shah's leadership, like organising the Men's and Women's Asia Cup, as well as Emerging Teams' tournaments and U19 competitions. "I congratulate Mr. Jay Shah and all the members of the ACC for unanimously voting to extend his term. Under Mr. Shah, the ACC has scaled new heights, and he has been instrumental in developing and strengthening grassroots cricket.

## Manju Rani wins 10km gold at National Open Race Walking Competition

Chennai | Agencies

Punjab's international race walker, Manju Rani, had a good run at the 11th edition of the National Open Race Walking Competition. The day after winning gold in the women's 20km, she dominated the 10km on Wednesday to brighten her chance to compete in the inaugural marathon race walking mixed relay that will feature at the 2024 Paris Olympic Games.

Manju, 24, gold medal winning time in 10km was 45:20.00. The promising race walker from Punjab had paired with Ram Babu to win bronze in the 35km mixed relay race walking team event at the Hangzhou Asian Games.

Manju was elated to have won back-to-back gold medals at the national competition in Chandigarh. "My main focus will be the mixed relay event this year and I hope to represent India at the Olympic Games," Manju said after winning gold in the women's 10km on Wednesday. "The senior 10km race walk was included in the programme by the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) to select potential athletes for the national team that will compete at the April 20-21 World Athletics Race



Walk Team Championships to be held in Antalya, Turkey.

During the Turkey competition, top 22 teams will get automatic qualification for the Olympic Games. The final selection of the national team for Turkey will be done in March. In the men's 10km event, Sahil of Punjab out-classed more experienced athletes to claim gold. Sahil, 22, a college-going student from Patiala clocked 39:25.00. He had finished fifth in the

men's 20km race walk on Tuesday. Paramjeet Singh Bisht of Uttarakhand was second with a time of 39:36.00, while Asian bronze medalist Vikash Singh of Delhi was third with a time of 39:47.00.

Goa's Vijay Omkar Vishwakaram won the men's 35 km race with a time of 2:39:19.00, while the women's 35km gold went to Bandana Patel of Uttar Pradesh, whose gold-medal winning time was 3:11:06.00.

## 'I won't quit': Murray hits back at suggestion 'tarnishing his legacy'

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Former world No. 1 Andy Murray has staunchly dismissed suggestions that he is tarnishing his legacy and affirmed his determination to continue fighting on the court.

Murray, currently facing a winless streak in ATP Tour since October 2023, has faced recent setbacks, including first-round exits in the Brisbane International, and Australian Open. At 36, Murray's recent form has prompted speculation about the future of his tennis career. However, the three-time Grand Slam champion remains resolute, asserting that he won't quit the sport despite the difficult phase he is currently experiencing. Responding to an article questioning whether he should consider calling time on his career, Murray expressed his determination on social media platform X (formerly Twitter). "Tarnishing my legacy? Do me a favour," Murray declared. "I'm in a terrible moment right now, I'll give you that. Most people would



quit and give up in my situation right now. But I'm not most people, and my mind works differently. I won't quit. I will keep fighting and working to produce the performances I know I'm capable of." The sentiment was echoed by former world No. 1 Andy Roddick, who offered support to Murray, emphasizing that accomplishments and legacy endure beyond transient challenges. "Preach! Imagine telling an accomplished iconic adult your opinion on what they should choose for work and when they should do it. Can't take a legacy away. accomplishment lives forever," Roddick remarked. Murray has faced a tough stretch, losing eight of

his last nine matches, and there's a possibility he could drop out of the top 50 in the ATP rankings. While acknowledging the difficulties and expressing concerns about his recent performance, Murray remains committed to the sport. He disclosed that there's a "definite possibility" he might not play in Grand Slam events again after his first-round exit at the Australian Open but acknowledged the need for improvement in his game. "If I play like today, I won't win many matches playing that way," he added. "Practice is not the same thing, I'm totally aware of that. I also know what good tennis is, and played well before."

## Para swimmer Shams Aalam set two national records, wins six medals at Reykjavik International Games

Laugardalslaug (Iceland), Jan 31 (IANS) Indian para swimmer Shams Aalam Shaikh emerged victorious on the international stage, clinching a remarkable six medals and setting two national records at the Reykjavik International Games.

At the Reykjavik International Games, Shams shattered expectations by setting new national records in the 100m butterfly and 100m backstroke S5 events. His stellar performances in the pool showcased not only his physical prowess but also the indomitable spirit that propelled him to overcome significant obstacles. Shams Aalam Shaikh's medal tally at the event included one gold, two silver, and three bronze medals, a testament to his exceptional skill and tenacity. His achievements in Iceland add to an already illustrious career that includes representation of India at prestigious events such as the Asian Para Games in 2018 in Jakarta, Indonesia, and the 2022 World Para Swimming Championships in Madeira, Portugal. Hailing from Rathos Village in Madhubani District, Bihar, the 24-year-old athlete faced a formidable challenge early in life when a benign tumor in his lower back immobilized his lower half, despite unsuccessful surgeries. Undeterred by the tragedy, Shams, along with his parents, shifted base to Mumbai, where he found sol-



ace and purpose in swimming. This journey marked the beginning of an extraordinary saga of determination

and triumph over adversity. In a noteworthy feat in 2017, Shams broke the record for the longest open-sea swim-

ming by a paraplegic, covering an impressive 8km in four hours and four minutes along the shores of Goa.

## Avani, five others all set for Women's Amateur Asia Pacific

Pattaya | Agencies

India's leading amateur, Avani Prashanth, will make her fourth appearance at the 2024 Women's Amateur Asia Pacific (WAAP) with five other Indians at the region's finest amateur event.

India's six-member field sent by the Indian Golf Union comprises Avani, Vidhatri Urs, Mannat Brar, Keerthana Rajeev Nair, Saanvi Somu and Heena Kang at the event to be held from February 1 to 4 at the Siam Country Club. Former National champion Vandana Agarwal is the manager of the team.

As Avani plays her fourth WAAP, Vidhatri and Mannat are making a second appearance and the remaining three are debutants. Incidentally, Heena's sister, Ceerat, played in the 2022 edition at the same course.

As per the list of players entered this week, Avani is one of the top 10 stars. Some of the players ranked above the World No. 42 Avani, are World No. 4 Minsol Kim of Korea, Japan's Hinano Muguruma (22), Sayaka Teraoka (23), Mamika Shinchi (33), Rin Yoshida



(38) and defending champion from Thailand Eila Galitsky (40th). Rianne Malixi of the Philippines is 43rd.

Avani, who has been planning to turn pro at some point in 2024, has had some success in 2024 with a second place finish at the Australian Masters of Amateurs and is a winner of the Queen Sirikit Cup in 2023 and was fourth at World Amateur Team Championships. She also won a pro event in Europe and was in Top-10 at numerous Ladies European Tour events, including the Hero Women's Indian Open in 2023. After the WAAP, Avani has been invited to play at the Magical Kenya Ladies, then the Sage Valley Invitational and Augusta National Women's Amateur. Avani has played at both events in the past.

## Jack Leach doubtful for England's second Test against India due to knee injury

Visakhapatnam | Agencies

England's left-arm spinner Jack Leach is highly doubtful for playing in the second Test against India, starting in Visakhapatnam on Friday, after sitting out the side's first training session held on Wednesday.

Leach jarred his left knee while fielding during England's thrilling 28-run win over India in the series opener at Hyderabad last week. He aggravated the injury later on in the same match, bowling with a swollen joint and took out the wicket of Shreyas Iyer in the second innings.

"He's a tough kid, Leachy, so I'm not sure. You can never really write him off. We'll see how he pulls up in a couple of days," said opening batter Zak Crawley to reporters.

Leach's injury means England may not be able to execute their plan of playing four spinners in Visakhapatnam, with uncapped off-spinner Shoab Bashir likely to get a debut in case the senior spinner is not fit in time for the second Test.

Bashir has played just six first-class matches and has 10 wickets to his name. He arrived in India during the Hyderabad Test after visa issues owing to his Pakistani heritage forced him to return home to London and get the visa there. "He's a great kid, he's got a lot about him. He knows what he is trying to do with his bowling, and he



backs himself. I like that and feel like if he got his chance in this series he would go well," added Crawley.

Though England have a 1-0 lead in the five-game series, but Crawley, who was a member of the 2021 touring party winning the opening game in Chennai, before suffering a slide to lose the series 3-1, isn't taking India lightly. "Whoever they pick, they're going to be a very good team. They're a top side in their own conditions. There are four games left and we need to stick to what we do well. Hopefully the results come from there but we're not getting too far ahead of ourselves. We're preparing for this one like it's the first game, we're staying where our feet are and we'll see where that takes us."

India will be missing the services of KL Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja due to injuries, but Crawley stated England are focused on what they need to go for getting things right in Visakhapatnam.

"We haven't spoken about that, to be honest. As I said, it sounds a cliché, but we stick to what we do well, we're not too worried about what they're doing. Two very good players missing, but I'm sure looking at their depth, they've got two very good players coming in. So that won't change anything for us too much."

"We just try and play the same, read the conditions on day one and see what happens from then. They're absolutely a top side in their own conditions. There are four games left, we have got to stick to what we do well and hopefully results come from there," he said.

## Vishnu Saravanan secures India's first Paris 2024 quota in sailing

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Indian sailor Vishnu Saravanan secured the country's first Paris 2024 Olympics quota in sailing at the ILCA World Championship 2024 in Adelaide, Australia.

Competing in the one person dinghy event at the Adelaide Sailing Club, Saravanan accumulated 125 net points over six days and secured the 26th position on the overall leaderboard. Notably, he claimed the fifth spot among eligible sailors to secure quota place for the Paris Olympics.

"Vishnu Saravanan has secured India's 1st #ParisOlympics quota in Sailing at the ILCA 7 World Championship, held in Adelaide.

"Clinching one of the 7 Olympic quotas available at the event, #TOPScheme Athlete Vishnu out-sailed many Asian sailors to finish 26th overall and secure the Paris berth," Sports Authority of India shared the post on X.

In the 2023 World Sailing Championships held last year, Saravanan narrowly



missed securing a spot for the Paris Olympics. Finishing 23rd in the overall race standings, he fell just seven places short of obtaining one of the 16 Paris quota places available. The ILCA 7 Men's World Championship served as a qualifying event for Paris 2024 with seven quotas on offer for countries which had not qualified for the Olympics earlier. The other six quotas on offer at the Adelaide meet went to Guatemala, Montenegro, Chile, Denmark, Turkey and Sweden. Last year, the 24-year-old won the bronze medal at the Asian Games in Hangzhou in the same sailing category.



## Rakul & Jacky change wedding venue from abroad to India

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood actor-producer Jacky Bhagnani and actress Rakul Preet Singh, who are set to tie the nuptial knot, changed their wedding venue to India influenced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for families to host their wedding festivities within India.

The two will tie the knot in an intimate two-day celebration, set to conclude on February 21 in Goa. The couple, originally planned a destination wedding overseas, made a last-minute decision to align with Prime Minister Modi's call.

A source close to the soon-to-be-married couple revealed, "Rakul and Jacky had initially planned for



their wedding to take place in the Middle East. After nearly six months of meticulous planning, everything was pretty much in order. However, following the call from the Indian Prime Minister in December, urging rich and influential families to choose India as the venue for their big life events, Rakul and Jacky reconsidered their original plans and relocated the wedding to India."

The source further mentioned, "Their decision, made in mid-December, necessitated a complete reset, involving the destination, and accommodations. Despite the considerable changes, the couple embraced the overhaul, driven by their love for the country and desire to contribute to its growing economy."

## Suniel Shetty: My family believed judging 'Dance Deewane' is my best decision

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Suniel Shetty, who is all set to be seen as a judge on 'Dance Deewane' shared that he received an overwhelming support from his mother, wife Mana, daughter Athiya and son Ahan, who collectively deemed it the best decision of his life.

Changing gears by debuting as a judge on the show, Suniel revealed how he stumbled into this mesmerising journey of dance.

It was his family's unanimous cheerleading and the allure of the platform that nudged him into the coveted judge's seat of the dance battle.

Talking about the same, the 'Mohra' actor said: "Many people said that this is probably the best decision that I have made. My mother said that too because she loves this show. My wife, daughter, son, and friends said the same thing. However, initially, I was doubtful of this decision."

"When the team of the show approached me, I asked 'Why me?' I'm probably the worst in the country with two left feet. The team mentioned that they wanted to change this thinking with this Dance Deewane. They said 'Aap Bus Deewane Banke appreciate karo jo apko accha lagta hai'. That's when I became comfortable," he shared.

Suniel thanked the platform, the show and co-judge Madhuri Dixit.

"I'm happy that I embraced this change," he added.

'Dance Deewane' is about to offer the grandest stage for dancers across age groups. The epic dance floor is set to unite three generations of incredible artists, forming India's dance families bound by their passion for the art.

The evergreen dancing queen Madhuri Dixit Nene reclaims her throne on the esteemed judges' panel.



## Aamir Khan to visit Japan for son Junaid's upcoming film

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan is set to visit Japan to gauge the progress of his elder son, Junaid Khan's second film which is yet-to-be-titled. As per a well placed source, after wrapping a shoot schedule in Mumbai, the production unit has moved to Japan to shoot the next schedule.

The film captures the picturesque landscapes of Sapporo, a location that has never been showcased on the silver screen before.

It is considered the cultural, economic, and political center of Hokkaido.

A source close to the project shared: "While Aamir sir is in Mumbai, he is in constant touch with the team to take updates on how everything is progressing on the film. He is extremely gung ho about this film and is also planning a quick trip to Japan to see how it's all shaping up."

The film is being produced by Aamir Khan Productions. Meanwhile, Junaid, who has worked in theatre for over seven years, is set to make his Hindi film debut with 'Maharaj'.



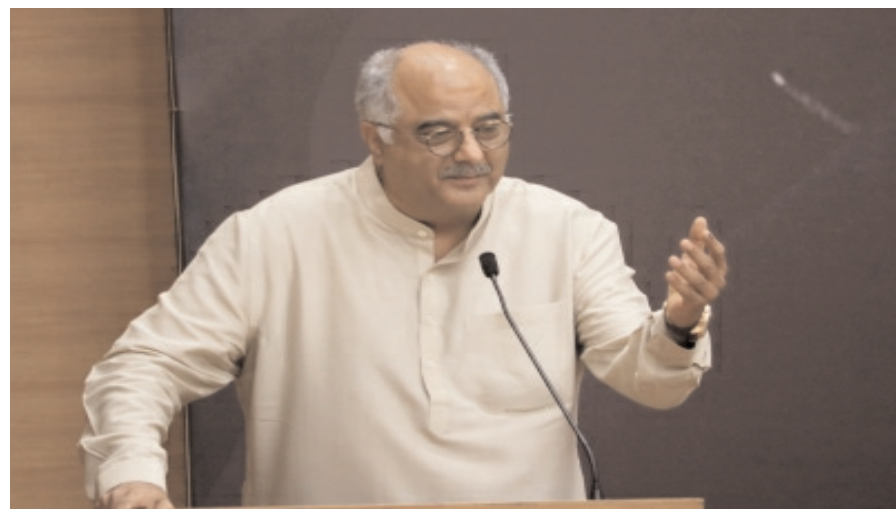
## Kareena Kapoor wishes 'queen of hearts' Amrita Arora on 43rd b'day

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Kareena Kapoor Khan has showered love on her "forever" best friend Amrita Arora, as the latter is celebrating her 43rd birthday. She called her the "queen of hearts." Taking to the social media, Kareena dropped a Reel, wherein there are unseen glimpses of their bond. The video features Kareena's husband and actor Saif Ali Khan, Amrita's sister Malaika Arora, and Kareena's elder sister Karisma Kapoor. There are many throwback candid pictures of the duo. The post is captioned: "Happy birthday to the queen of our hearts ... I love you my amolas. Forever and ever and ever ... And happily ever after... Beboo and AMU @amuroraofficial." Amrita commented on the post: "I love youuuu." Meanwhile, on the work front, Kareena was last seen in 'Jaane Jaan', 'The Buckingham Murders'. She next has 'The Crew' and 'Singham Again' in her kitty.



## Boney Kapoor's firm wins bid to develop Film City project in Noida



Team Absolute | Lucknow

Filmmaker Boney Kapoor's Bayview Projects LLP and Bhutani Group will jointly develop the Film City project in Noida's Sector-21, near Jewar airport, as they placed the highest bid, surpassing the other three players, officials said.

"The committee of officials of the Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority (YEIDA) opened the financial bids. The Bayview Projects LLP and Bhutani Group placed the highest bid, promising the maximum 18 per cent share of the profit to the government, thereby becoming eligible for developing this project. Lions Films Private Limited of KC Bokadia quoted 15.12 per cent while Supersonic Technobuild Private Limited of actor Akshay Kumar and Super Cassettes Industries Private Limited of T-Series placed 10.80 per cent and 5.12 per cent respectively," officials added.

Arun Vir Singh, Chief Executive Officer, YEIDA, said, "Following the guidelines of the public-private partnership, the proposed bids will be presented before the committee of secretaries, and subsequently, they will be forwarded to the state government cabinet for

the necessary approvals."

"Once the Cabinet gives its approval, the highest bidder will receive the letter of award," Singh added.

"We are pleased to be chosen and are eager to commence work at the site once all necessary procedures are completed. Our goal is to develop the Film City project within a span of three years. In the initial phase, we plan to develop commercial facilities on 75 acre out of the total 230 acre," said Ashish Bhutani, Chief Executive Officer of Bhutani Group.

On November 23, 2021, YEIDA issued a global tender for the Film City developer selection; however, no one came forward to take up the project.

In response, YEIDA revised the Detailed Project Report, and on November 7, 2022, a second global tender was issued, with no interest shown this time as well.

On September 30, 2023, YEIDA issued the tender for the third time, setting January 5, 2024, as the last date for bid submissions.

Subsequently, on January 27, YEIDA opened the technical bids, qualifying four companies and paving the way for the opening of the financial bid on Tuesday (January 30).

## Sushmita Sen: I learned Kalaripayattu from a professional



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Sushmita Sen, who plays the lead in the thriller series 'Aarya', revealed that for the show, she learned Kalaripayattu from a professional, adding how she adores action sequences.

Sushmita caused a stir on the internet with snapshots of her Kalaripayattu practice. Not just about posing, the seasoned actress took lessons from a pro to embody both the stance and fierceness.

Sushmita, who portrays the character of Aarya Sareen said: "I absolutely adore action

sequences. I've developed a mindset to embrace every opportunity, even if it involves risks. To prepare for these action-packed moments, I learned Kalaripayattu from a professional."

"It left me wondering why I didn't try it earlier. It's not just about strength; it's also an expression of vulnerability, something you can see on my face during those scenes," added the former Miss Universe.

Kalaripayattu is a martial art form that originated in Kerala. It includes strikes, kicks, grappling, preset forms, weaponry, and healing methods.

## INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Sandeepa Dhar