

# absolute india

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## Over 7 pc growth, 2nd highest GST collection: Economic indicators augur well

# GOOD POLL SEASON

India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth is slated to attain a new peak, sectors like manufacturing and automobiles have started looking up again, and the GST collections are attaining new highs. All these indicators augur well for the country's growth and have also come as a major boost for the incumbent Narendra Modi government.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

While the world powers grapple to rev up their economies in the post-Covid phase, India is yet again turning out to be the 'bright spot', on the back of its impressive economic parameters and growth outlook.

Political watchers see this as a "strong rallying point" for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government at the Centre as inclusive growth and economic upliftment have been its major poll planks. Prime Minister Modi's personal push for making growth one of the party's main war cries in elections is a known fact and the numbers, from GDP to GST to inflation, are only adding to the party's benefit.

The GDP estimates, released by the National Statistical Office on Thursday, saw India's resilient growth in the Financial Year 2023-2024. It recorded real GDP growth in Q3 of FY 23-24 at a whopping 8.4 per cent, aided



by double-digit growth in manufacturing and construction activities. Overall, the economy is expected to grow above 7.6 per cent in the current financial year. India Inc hailed the numbers and many saw it as India's resurgence amidst a cloudy economic scenario. The GST

collections also recorded stellar growth. It saw robust growth of 12.5 per cent in February (year-on-year) and rose to record Rs 1.68 lakh crore, the second highest in a month. Gross GST collection for the year also increased by 11.7 per cent. Moreover, vehicle sales set a new

record of 4.1 million while inflation was logged at a three-month low of 5 per cent. On Friday, Sensex also breached new barriers and closed at an all-time high of 73,574. All these economic indicators show that the economy is on an uptrend and the country is headed for another phase of bullish growth.

Contrary to this, the Western counterparts are clocking "not very encouraging" numbers in terms of economy.

The ramifications of the Russia-Ukraine military conflict and the Israel-Hamas war are only piling up and will only add more pressure on the already "burdened" economies.

### INDIA CAN NOTCH TRUE ECONOMIC POTENTIAL WITH MORE WOMEN IN WORKFORCE: US CONSUL-GENERAL

Ujjain: India cannot achieve its true economic potential without the greater inclusion of women in the formal workforce, US Consul-General in Mumbai, Mike Hankey, said here on Friday.

Addressing the Ujjain Regional Industrial Conclave, Hankey said that the US views India as one of its strongest partners globally.

"The US' partnership with India is one of our most consequential relationships. Simply put, our countries are better together. The backbone of our bilateral relationship is our critical commercial ties," Hankey said. He went on to add, ahead of the International Women's Day (March 8) that "India cannot reach its true economic potential without greater inclusion of women in the formal workforce. For the US Consulate in Mumbai, promotion of women's economic empowerment is a priority in all initiatives".

## Regional industry conclave in Ujjain will pave way for MP's growth: CM



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said that the two-day regional industry conclave that began in Ujjain on Friday will pave the way for all-round growth in the state. The state government has estimated that the conclave will succeed in achieving its target of attracting investment worth more than Rs 1 lakh crore. More than 800 investors across the world are participating in the conclave.

Chief Minister Yadav said that after the Regional Industry Conclave of Ujjain, Regional Conclaves will also be organized in Jabalpur, Rewa and Gwalior in the state. Inauguration of industrial units and bhoomi puja will also be done during the conclave. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that today India's GDP growth under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is surprising many countries. The world is looking at us with eyes of hope.

would be ready to invest in Madhya Pradesh as soon as possible. Signing MoUs with investors is not the only aim, but to execute those plans on the ground as early as possible. This is the main aim of this conclave," he said.

Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav said that after the Regional Industry Conclave of Ujjain, Regional Conclaves will also be organized in Jabalpur, Rewa and Gwalior in the state. Inauguration of industrial units and bhoomi puja will also be done during the conclave. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that today India's GDP growth under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is surprising many countries. The world is looking at us with eyes of hope.

### Chief Minister Dr. Yadav had one-to-one discussion with industrialists and investors

Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav held one-to-one discussions with industrialists and investors in the second session of the first day of the Regional Industry Conclave on Friday. Industry groups discussed with Chief Minister Dr. Yadav regarding investment possibilities and expansion of industrial units in the state. After a one-to-one meeting, Chief Minister Dr. Yadav presented the Smart City Electric Truck, Electric Staff Bus and Best Life Style Apparel Pvt. Ltd.

manufactured by VE Commercial and flagged off the first shipment from Ujjain. Along with Dr. Yadav, Raghavpat Singhania of JK Cement discussed the possibilities of expansion of the cement unit in the state. Vipul Mathur, Managing Director of Welspun Group, discussed the possibilities of textile unit and Andre Acholhard of Hettich India discussed the possibilities of expansion of the furniture unit. Vinod Agarwal of VE Commercial working in the

## SENSEX ZOOMS BY OVER 1,200 POINTS ON ROBUST GDP NUMBERS

Mumbai: The BSE Sensex gained a whopping 1,200 points on Friday on the back of a robust set of GDP numbers.

The Sensex, which touched a fresh all-time high of 73,819.21 in intra-day trade, ended 1.72 per cent or 1,245.05 points higher at 73,745.35, while the Nifty closed at 22,338.75, up 355.95 points or 1.62 per cent.

Among the Sensex stocks, Tata Steel gained a huge 6 per cent, while JSW Steel was up 4 per cent. L&T also gained 4 per cent, while Titan, Indusind Bank, Maruti, and ICICI gained 3 per cent each. As per a report by brokerage firm



Prabhudas Lilladher, the Indian economy witnessed robust growth of 8.4 per cent in Q3FY24 as against 4.3 per cent in Q3FY23

led by strong industrial performance backed by the government's 'Make in India' campaign and impetus on infrastructure building. In contrast, agrarian sector performance remained bleak following a sub-normal monsoon. The government estimates India to grow by 7.6 per cent in FY24, as compared to 7 per cent growth in the previous year.

"We believe the Indian economy will continue to be the fastest growing economy globally led by pro-growth policies, recovering domestic demand conditions, government spending and improving capacity utilisation of private firms," the firm said.

## Centre fine-tunes plan for new Mumbai-Indore broad gauge rail line project



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The 66th meeting of the Centre's Network Planning Group (NPG) has expedited the process for the new 309 km Broad Gauge (BG) railway line project to open a direct route from Mumbai to Indore, fostering improved connectivity and socio-economic growth in the backward areas of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. The project details were examined on Feb 27 from the perspective of integrated planning based on the principles of PM GatiShakti, according to an official statement issued on Friday.

The greenfield BG line

project will stretch across Maharashtra (Nashik and Dhule Districts) and Madhya Pradesh (Badwani, Kharagone, Dhar, Indore Districts), connecting existing rail head stations of Manmad and Ambedkar Nagar (Mhow). The Phaphamau-Unchahar railway line-doubling project in Uttar Pradesh covering 72.27 km across Allahabad, Pratapgarh, and RaeBareilly district was also taken up for discussion at the meeting. This brownfield project, aims to improve connectivity, reduce travel time, and enhance operating efficiency. The meeting was attended by the NPG members head-

ing the network planning wing of respective infrastructure Ministries to discuss the projects from the perspective of integrated planning based on the principles of PM GatiShakti and area development approach for overall regional socio-economic upliftment.

The attendees included officials from infrastructure Ministries, representatives from states where projects would be implemented, among others.

The project details were examined based on the planning on PM GatiShakti NMP. The key outcomes of the evaluation exercise were discussed with the objective of improving connectivity with various economic/social nodes ensuring first/last mile connectivity, and multi-modal infrastructure with the perspective of the whole of the government approach, the official statement added.

## 97.62 pc of Rs 2000 banknotes returned to banking system: RBI

Mumbai: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said on Friday that nearly 97.62 per cent of the Rs 2000 banknotes in circulation have been returned to the banking system.

According to RBI, the total value of Rs 2000 banknotes in circulation, which was Rs 3.56 lakh crore on May 19, 2023, when the withdrawal was announced, has declined to Rs 8,470 crore at the close of business on February 29. The Rs 2000 banknotes continue to be legal tender, the central bank said. It is for exchange of the Rs 2000 banknotes is available at the 19 Issue Offices of the Reserve Bank since May 19, 2023.

From October 9, 2023, RBI Issue Offices are also accepting Rs 2000 banknotes from individuals as well as entities for deposit

## B'luru cafe blast: Use of IED suspected, locals spotted movement of 'suspicious' persons

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar on Friday said that the identity of the man suspected to be behind the blast at a cafe here has been traced, adding the accused would be arrested "in a few hours". Chief Minister Siddaramaiah had earlier said that the blast that occurred at the Rameshwaram Cafe in Bengaluru's IT hub Whitefield on Friday was due to an improvised explosive device

Bengaluru | Agencies

The initial probe into the blast at a cafe in Bengaluru that left at least ten persons injured on Friday suggests the use of low-intensity Improvised Explosive Device (IED).

The authorities have also gathered information from the locals about the suspicious movement of two persons before the explosion at Bengaluru's popular eatery, The Rameshwaram Cafe, in the Whitefield area on Friday, which left at least ten persons injured, of which the condition of three is stated to be critical.

Sources said that soon after the blast, the entire cafe was engulfed in thick black smoke. The incident took place at around 1.15 p.m. during lunch time, when a large number of people had gathered at the cafe. Most of



the customers were IT professionals as the cafe is located in the Kundalahalli Gate area near Indiranagar, considered as an IT corridor, sources said. The police have recovered nuts, and a bag carrying batteries from the spot. The authorities are also suspecting that the act could be a fallout of business rivalry. "We are not ruling out any

possibilities," an officer said. The sources said the authorities have ruled out the possibility of an LPG cylinder blast, as was initially suspected. They have also ruled out the possibility of leakage from the gas pipes or boilers in the kitchen. The police have recovered the ID card of a woman bank employee who suffered More details are awaited.

## Mamata Banerjee meets PM Modi, terms it 'courtesy' meeting

Kolkata: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee met Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Raj Bhavan here on Friday evening. At the end of the brief interaction, she described it as a 'protocol' session between the Prime Minister and a Chief Minister.

The Prime Minister, who is on a two-day visit to West Bengal, reached the Raj Bhavan late on Friday afternoon after addressing a public rally at Arambagh in Hooghly district, where he launched a scathing attack against the state government and the ruling Trinamool Congress on issues such as Sandeshkhali and cases of

financial corruption. After her brief interaction with the Prime Minister, Banerjee told the waiting mediapersons outside the Raj Bhavan that it was nothing but a 'protocol' meeting.

"The dates for the Lok Sabha polls are yet to be announced. It is natural that if the Prime Minister visits any state, there will be a protocol meeting between him and the Chief Minister of the concerned state. So I came to the Raj Bhavan and updated the Prime Minister about the affairs of the state. The interaction was more like a courteous interaction, rather than a political exchange," the Chief Minister said.

## OVER 36 MN AI, GAMING CREDENTIALS COMPROMISED BY INFOSTEALERS IN 3 YRS: REPORT

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Investigating the dark web market for credential theft from popular AI and gaming websites, the researchers on Thursday said that more than 36 million credentials (logins and passwords) were compromised by infostealers in the past three years.

According to the cybersecurity company Kaspersky, 34,000,000 Roblox users' credentials were compromised with malware and leaked on the dark web over the past three years. This figure rose by 231 per cent from



roughly 4,700,000 in 2021 to 15,500,000 in 2023. "The reason behind such high volumes of thefts of

login credentials associated with Roblox is that children are among the most vulnerable audiences, as

they are susceptible to various kinds of social engineering," said Yuliya Novikova, head of Kaspersky Digital Footprint Intelligence.

Credentials from various AI services -- image editing, translation, text tuning, chatbots, to voice generators -- are being compromised due to their growing popularity, the researchers noted.

Over the past three years, about 1,160,000 application users' credentials from AI-powered online graphic design tool Canva were compromised with data-stealing malware. Another popular AI

writing assistant, Grammarly, had around 839,000 user credentials stolen between 2021 and 2023, the report said.

"The credential compromises in question stem from infostealer activity, a specialised form of malware designed to steal user credentials for cyberattacks, dark web sales, or other malicious activities," Novikova said.

"Both personal and corporate devices can be infected by infostealers through phishing emails or websites, public-faced sites with malicious content, and various other means," she added.

## Paytm Bank fined over Rs 5 crore for violations under money laundering act

New Delhi: Paytm Payments Bank has been fined Rs 5.49 crore over alleged money laundering in the latest setback to the fintech, a month after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) ordered it to stop accepting any fresh deposits in its accounts or wallets from February 29. That deadline was extended to March 15. The Financial Intelligence Unit-India (FIU-IND) in a statement said it reviewed Paytm Payments Bank after getting information from law-enforcement agencies over alleged illegal acts including online gambling.





# SC DISMISSES PIL SEEKING DIGITAL MONITORING OF ALL ACTIVITIES OF MPS, MLAS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain a PIL seeking to digitally monitor the activities of all elected MPs and MLAs for better transparency.

"We cannot monitor all MPs and MLAs in the country. There is something called the right to privacy also. We cannot put some (electronic) chips on their legs or hands to monitor what they do," said a bench presided over by CJI D.Y. Chandrachud.

Expressing surprise at the petitioner's prayer for 24 x 7 CCTV monitoring of all legislators, the bench, also comprising Justices J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, said that the elected representatives also have their own personal lives.

Initially, when the petitioner, who appeared in-person, sought a period of 15 minutes to present the case, the apex court cautioned him of imposing Rs 5 lakh costs.

It said: "There will be Rs 5 lakh costs and it will be executed as arrears of land revenue if we dismiss the petition. We may impose costs because this is public time and the nation pays for this time."

The petitioner, appearing in-person, contended that MPs and MLAs are salaried representatives under the Representation of the People



Act who represent opinions of people on making laws, plans and policies and post election, start behaving as rulers.

Unimpressed with the relief sought in the PIL, the Supreme Court refused to entertain the petition filed under Article 32 of the

Constitution. However, it decided not to impose any costs on the petitioner.

## ASARAM'S PLEA SEEKING SUSPENSION OF SENTENCE IN RAPE CASE REFUSED

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain a plea filed by self-styled godman, Asaram Bapu, seeking suspension of sentence on medical grounds.

Asaram has been serving life imprisonment in Jodhpur prison following his conviction under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and other offences by a trial court in 2018, for raping a minor girl.

A Bench presided over by Justice Sanjiv Khanna allowed the petitioner to file a fresh application before the Rajasthan High Court seeking to undergo treatment in Madhavbaug Heart Hospital in Maharashtra's Khopoli, under police custody. The Bench, also comprising Justice Dipankar Datta, said that Asaram's application would be considered by the High Court in accordance with the law. Further, the top court stressed for expeditious disposal of the appeal filed by Asaram challenging his conviction.

# Kharge expresses concern on 'rising suicide rates' in Gujarat

Ahmedabad: | Agencies

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday expressed concerns over suicide rates in Gujarat, urging the state government to take immediate measures.

Recent statistics unveiled in the state assembly reveal a distressing trend, with 25,478 individuals, including 495 students, having ended their lives in the last three fiscal years.

"The data, highlighting a sharp increase in suicide cases, points towards mental health issues, severe physical illnesses, family problems, financial crises, and academic failures as the principal causes," Kharge said in a statement.

The Congress president further said: "These figures not only shed light on the pressing issue but also underscore the failure of the BJP-led state government to address the myriad socio-economic challenges plaguing the citizens of Gujarat."

"Particularly concerning are the high incidence rates in urban centers such as



Ahmedabad, Surat, and Rajkot, with Ahmedabad alone reporting 3,280 cases. This stark statistic calls into question the effectiveness of the government's strategies to combat the root causes of this escalating crisis," he added.

In response to this crisis, the Congress has demanded a comprehensive evaluation

of the current helpline services and an increase in resources allocated for mental health and financial support for those in need.

Additionally, a call for a thorough and transparent investigation into the circumstances leading to these suicides has been made.

# They sold their souls': Himachal CM slams rebel Congress MLAs

Shimla | Agencies

A day after the political crisis in Himachal Pradesh was almost averted, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Friday said that some Congress MLAs sold their souls and went against the party ethics to cross-vote in the Rajya Sabha elections.

"Those who betrayed the party and above all played with the sentiments of the people of the state won't be spared even by the almighty," he said at a public meeting in Dharampur in Solan district's Kasuali Assembly constituency.

"Six rebel MLAs, escorted by the Central Reserve Police



Force (CRPF) and Haryana Police, reached Shimla by helicopter but abstained themselves from the House

when the budget was supposed to be passed on February 28 with a motive to overthrow the government,"

# JAGAN'S COUSIN APPEALS TO PEOPLE TO DEFEAT HIM, SUPPORT HER FIGHT FOR JUSTICE

Amaravati | New Delhi | Agencies

Alleging that Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy is protecting the accused in the murder of his uncle and former minister Y.S. Vivekananda Reddy, the latter's daughter Y. S. Sunitha Reddy on Friday appealed to people to defeat him in the coming elections.

Addressing a news conference in Delhi, she appealed to people to defeat the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) and support her fight for justice.

"Please do not vote for and bring my brother's party into power. If that happens, there will be no hope for justice," said Sunitha Reddy, who has been fighting for justice in the murder case for the last five years.

She alleged that the YSRCP government encouraged the politics of murder.

"You don't want murderers to be ruling you. You need a healthy democracy. You need a government that helps improve society and help uplift the society in all aspects."

Stating that the CBI investigations into her father's murder have come to a standstill, she said there was pressure on the investigating agency.

Replying to a query, she alleged that Jagan Mohan Reddy is shielding Y.S. Bhaskar Reddy - her father's cousin - and his son and Kadapa MP Y.S. Avinash Reddy, who are accused in the case. Asked



if she was suspected Jagan Mohan Reddy's involvement, she said: "I can't say if his role is there or not. It is for the CBI to probe. His name has come up, probe it. If there is involvement, make it public and if not, leave him. I am not here to say whether they did or not. It is for the CBI. They have to complete the investigation."

She referred to the CBI's statement that Jagan Mohan Reddy knew about the death of Vivekanand Reddy early on March 15, 2019, much before M.V. Krishna Reddy publicly announced it.

She said on March 15, it will be five years since her father's murder but the case has still not been

solved. "Normally a murder case is solved in five days but here five years have passed," she said.

She recalled that Vivekananda Reddy had contested the MLC election in 2017 and was defeated under a conspiracy. He, however, became stronger after that betrayal and was active in politics.

Sunitha Reddy also mentioned that after rushing to Pulivendula after learning after her father's murder, she went to the mortuary, where Avinash Reddy told her that Vivekananda Reddy campaigned for him till 11.30 p.m.

"I did not realise the motive behind this. In criminal cases we hear and see on TV, many times, the murderers will be amidst us but we don't realise. This was one of those things," she said.

Vivekananda Reddy's daughter remarked that she never realised that those close to them may be involved.

She said Jagan Mohan Reddy, who was then Leader of Opposition, had filed a petition in the High Court for transfer of murder case to the CBI. She said after the elections, she met him and drew her attention to the case pending in the High Court for transferring the murder case to CBI.

"If I don't catch those who killed my uncle, what will people think of me? I need to solve this. It will be done. Whoever is the culprit will be found," she quoted Jagan Mohan Reddy as saying.

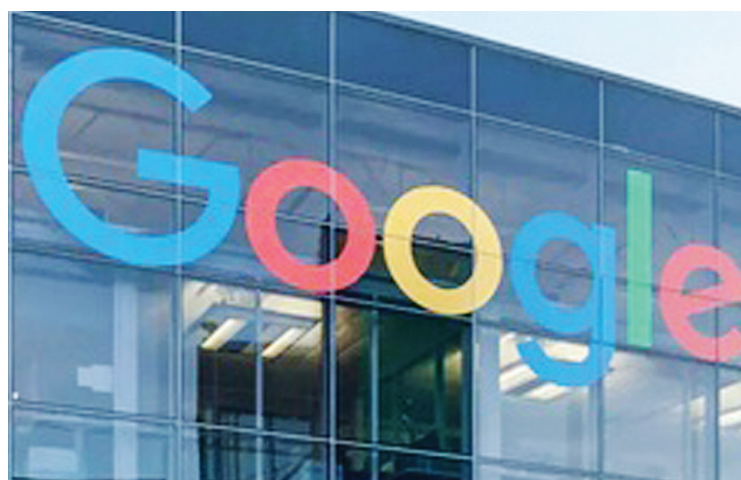
# India elections: Google partners with news publishers, fact-checkers to curb deepfakes

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Head of the Lok Sabha elections, Google on Friday announced to support 'Shakti, India Election Fact-Checking Collective', which is a consortium of news publishers and fact-checkers in the country, in order to curb the spread of deepfakes.

The project will focus on connecting independent fact checkers and Indian language publishers, giving them a collaborative platform to share fact checks, research resources and alerts on elections-related viral misinformation and deepfakes.

"Fact-checks in multiple Indian languages and formats, including videos, will be shared and amplified via partnering news publishers, ensuring they reach a wider set of language users and diverse audiences across the country," the company



said in a statement. The 'Shakti' project will be driven by DataLEADS, in collaboration with the Misinformation Combat Alliance and other fact checkers, with support

from the Google News Initiative (GNI).

The project will also provide news organisations and fact-checkers essential training in advanced fact-

checking methodologies, deepfake detection, and the latest Google tools like the Fact Check Explorer.

"The Fact-Checking Collective will continue to prioritise publishers producing original news in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Bengali and Marathi," said the tech giant.

"In an era where digital information flows faster than ever, the need to empower people with trustworthy and credible information has never been more critical," said Bharat Gupta, President, Misinformation Combat Alliance (MCA).

Google said that since 2018, it has supported the training of more than 65,000 journalists, media educators and journalism students in over 15 languages globally, "and empowered them with digital tools and skills needed to find, verify, and tell engaging stories while tackling the ever-evolving risk of misinformation".

# FSL report proves raising of pro-Pakistan slogans in K'taka Assembly, claims BJP

Bengaluru | Agencies

Karnataka BJP on Friday claimed that the Forensic Science Laboratory's (FSL) report has proved that pro-Pakistan slogans were raised in the Assembly during the celebration of the victory of Congress leader Syed Naseer Hussain.

Former BJP General Secretary C.T. Ravi said that the FSL report has proved that pro-Pakistan slogans were raised inside the Assembly.

Ravi told media persons that he had got information from his sources that the FSL report proves that pro-Pakistan slogans were raised during the celebration.

He said that the police has arrested four persons. "But there are doubts that the Congress government may



hush up the entire case. We demand the immediate release of the FSL report," Ravi said.

The Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Legislative Council Kota Srinivas Poojari asked why the government is showing negligence in the case. "No arrests have been made as of yet. The government has

utilised the assembly session to misguide people and even after 60 hours the government has not given any information regarding the arrests," he said.

LoP Poojari alleged that the government is supporting the anti-nationals who are indirectly supported by the Chief Minister, Home Minister and the Cabinet.

# Students clash at JNU as ABVP, Left-backed groups disagree on poll committees

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Some students were injured in a clash between two groups in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) here, said police on Friday.

The incident took place on Thursday night between the members of Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) and Left-backed groups, reportedly after disagreements over the appointment of election committee members at the School of Languages. The altercation grew uncontrollable and led to the clash.

Police have received three medico-legal case reports of students, Anwasha Rai, Shaurya and Madhurima, regarding the injuries from Safdarjung hospital.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Rohit Meena, said, "PCR calls were received at around 1:15 a.m. regarding a scuffle between students at GBM in JNU. Multiple complaints have been received in this regard and the alle-



gations are being verified."

A video circulating on social media platform X depicts a person hitting others with a stick, while another video shows someone hurling a bicycle at them.

Other videos from the scene purportedly display individuals being attacked by a group, despite efforts by university security personnel to intervene and stop them.

# AKHILESH FACES FLAK FROM UPPER CASTES, PDA CAMPS

Lucknow | Agencies

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav is caught in a bind. His strategy on OBCs, Dalits and minorities, has backfired badly with both upper castes and the PDA sections of society mounting seathing attacks on him.

Of the seven SP MLAs who cross-voted in recent Rajya Sabha polls, five belonged to upper castes -- three Brahmins, two Thakurs -- and their grievance was that the Samajwadi Party has given up on the policy of inclusiveness.

"PDA leaves no room for us in the party. The manner in which Swami Prasad Maurya slammed Sanatan Dharma and Akhilesh Yadav maintained a studied silence on the issue, shows that he

actually approved Maurya's diatribe," said one of the Brahmin MLAs.

Manoj Pandey, one of the MLAs who went against the party line, visited the Ram temple in Ayodhya on Thursday, said, "Majority of the MLAs wanted to go to Ayodhya with the delegation led by the chief minister. We felt that the temple visit should be above party lines but our leaders decided against going and we had to comply."

"While the upper caste MLAs are making no bones about their discomfort in the Samajwadi Party, the OBC leaders, ironically, are also questioning the PDA formula. Party MLA Pallavi Patel slammed the selection of candidates for the Rajya Sabha and said, "Where is the PDA in selection of candidates like (Jaya) Bachchan

and (Alok) Ranjan." She later relented but cast her vote for Ramji Lal Suman, a Dalit.

Swami Prasad Maurya, even after quitting the SP, said that the SP is not following the PDA in the true sense of the term. He said that "Akhilesh has lost his way on socialism and secularism."

Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party (SBSP) president Om Prakash Rajbhar, a former SP ally, has been repeatedly criticising Akhilesh and accusing him of using the PDA formula as a mere slogan.

Former MP Salim Sherwani also quit the party, accusing Akhilesh of ignoring Muslims while selecting candidates for the Rajya Sabha.

Former Minister Abid Raza has also resigned on the same grounds.

# Delhi records 10.8 degrees minimum temperature, AQI 'poor' at several stations

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi on Friday recorded a minimum temperature of 10.8

degrees Celsius, two notches below the seasonal average, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

Until last week, the minimum temperature was hovering around 12 degrees, and the maximum temperature was recorded at around 25 to 27 degrees.

The IMD's forecast showed that the maximum temperature was likely to hover around 27 degrees, with the minimum at around 11 degrees again.

The weather department said that there will be "generally cloudy sky and very light rain or thundershowers

accompanied with gusty winds".

Air quality at 9 a.m. at several stations across the city was in the 'poor' category.

In the Anand Vihar area, at 9 a.m., PM2.5 levels were recorded to be in the 'very poor' category, at 344 and PM10 reached 347, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

The Air Quality Index (AQI) between zero and 50 is considered 'good'; 51 and 100 'satisfactory'; 101 and 200 'moderate'; 201 and 300 'poor'; 301 and 400 'very poor'; and 401 and 500 'severe'. he Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport (T3) recorded PM2.5 levels at 225, which is counted as 'poor' and PM10 at 219.





# Pawar politics: MahaYuti govt invites NCP supremo for job fair

Quaid Najmi | Pune

A day after controversy erupted over the MahaYuti government not inviting NCP-SP President to an event being held in his hometown Baramati, another official invitation was sent out on Friday with Sharad Pawar's name featuring prominently on it.

The Pune Collector also called the veteran leader on behalf of the Maharashtra government and extended a formal invitation to attend the two-day NaMo Maharashtra Melava being held on March 2-3.

In the new invitation card, the name of Chief Minister Eknath Shinde is in the top position, followed by the two Deputy CMs Devendra Fadnavis and Ajit Pawar in the second slot, and Sharad Pawar in the third position.

The controversy arose as the job fair is being held in the 52-year-old Vidya Pratishthan educational campus,



which is an institution founded and currently headed by Sharad Pawar. Its committee members include his grand-nephew Yugendra S. Pawar, Supriya Sule, Ajit Pawar and his wife Sunetra A. Pawar, among others. NCP-SP leaders said on Friday that unkind of the "omission", Sharad

Pawar was planning to go for the event as a Baramatikar and sit in the audience among ordinary citizens. "Pawar Saheb is way above such politics. He considers it a great opportunity for the youth of Baramati and Maharashtra if they can get good employment opportunities at the job

fair," said a senior leader, requesting anonymity.

The job fair got more than its share of publicity on Thursday after Sharad Pawar invited Shinde-Fadnavis-Ajit Pawar for a "chai pe charcha" at the Vidya Pratishthan guest house, along with the entire Cabinet, and also solicited the trio's presence for dinner at his residence.

Pawar even made a phone call to Shinde, giving his invitation a personal touch. Given Pawar's 'dinner diplomacy' and the storm created by it, no major MahaYuti leader commented on the issue and even officials were at a loss to confirm whether Shinde-Fadnavis-Ajit Pawar would accept the dual invites. The MahaYuti faced severe criticism for ignoring Sharad Pawar and drew flak from the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi top leaders including Nana Patole, Supriya Sule, Dr. Jitendra Awhad, Dr. Amol Kolhe, Rohit R. Pawar, Clyde Crasto and Sanjay Raut.

# VBA can win 6 Maha LS seats solo, fight on all 48 if need be, claims Prakash Ambedkar

Team Absolute | Nagpur

Amid the finishing touches being given to the seat-sharing talks by MVA constituents, VBA President, Prakash Ambedkar, claimed on Friday that his party can bag at least six seats independently in the Maharashtra Lok Sabha elections and it was also prepared to field candidates in all 48 constituencies if need be.

An MVA ally, the VBA had claimed a couple of days ago that it was in a 'winnable' position in 27 of the 48 parliamentary constituencies in the state and had submitted its list of those seats, besides several other conditions like certain candidates, etc, to the alliance partners.

In a brief media interaction here, Ambedkar, the grandson of the Chief Architect of the Indian Constitution, said that Shiv Sena-UBT and Congress were engaged in a tussle over seat-sharing, though they have denied it.

"We (VBA) are still considered outsiders... Our talks will begin only after they resolve their differences. However, the VBA can bag at least six Lok Sabha seats on its own strength. We are also prepared to field our candidates in all 48 constituencies if the seat-sharing talks and alliance doesn't work out," declared Ambedkar.

The VBA's support for the MVA is considered critical as the latter is facing a big challenge from the ruling MahaYuti alliance of the Shiv Sena-BJP-NCP.

Responding cautiously to the latest contentions by Ambedkar, the MVA allies said that he had held discussions with AICC



General Secretary, Ramesh Chennithala, NCP-SP President Sharad Pawar and Shiv Sena-UBT President and former Chief Minister, Uddhav Thackeray.

In case there are any major differences over certain constituencies, the top leaders of the three main MVA allies will take a final call, they averred, conceding that the clock was ticking as the Election Commission of India is likely to announce the poll schedules shortly.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the erstwhile Congress-(undivided) NCP combine had suffered damage to its vote bank in at least a dozen seats when the VBA was in alliance with the AIMIM.

However, after the VBA-AIMIM partnership crashed before the 2019 Maharashtra Assembly polls, the Congress-(undivided) NCP partnership again soared and it captured power in alliance with the Shiv Sena (undivided) led by Uddhav Thackeray, which had snapped ties with the BJP over 'unfulfilled promises'.

# 16-Year-old spit on, beaten in Madrasa over Rs 100 watch theft

Team Absolute | Aurangabad

A 16-year-old student was at the receiving end of brutal corporal punishment not just from his teacher but also from his peers at a Madrasa in Maharashtra. His crime - alleged theft of a Rs 100 watch.

The student, from Surat, was enrolled at the Jamia Burhanul Uloom Madrasa in Aurangabad, the city which was recently renamed Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar. The disturbing episode unfolded when the teenager allegedly stole an automatic watch from a nearby shop. The theft was captured on CCTV cameras installed in the area.

Upon discovering the theft, the shopkeeper promptly filed a complaint, leading to the recovery of the stolen item. However, the situation took a grim turn when the cleric at the Madrasa, identified as Maulana Syed Omar Ali, decided to administer



what has been described as "brutal punishment" to the young student. Stripped half-naked, the teenager was subjected to spitting and a systematic beating by his fellow students, all allegedly under the orders of the cleric.

The incident was recorded on camera, and the footage eventually reached the victim's family, who wasted no time in filing a complaint with the local police. A case was registered against the cleric and he was booked under the Minor Students Protection Act.

The minors who participated in the assault were later provided counseling, while legal proceedings are underway against the cleric.

# More heatwave days in parts of Maharashtra as India to see warmer start to summer: IMD



Team Absolute | Mumbai

India is likely to experience a warmer start to the summer season this year with El Nino conditions predicted to continue through the season, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Friday. More heatwave days than normal are predicted over northeast peninsular India -- Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and north interior Karnataka -- and many parts of Maharashtra and Odisha.

The country is likely to record above-normal rainfall in March (more than 117 per cent of the long-period average of 29.9 mm).

India is likely to see above-normal maximum and minimum temperatures in most parts of the country in the March to May period, IMD Director General

Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said at a press conference.

Heatwave conditions are not expected over north and central India in March, he said.

Lok Sabha polls are likely to be held in April-May.

Mohapatra said that the prevailing El Nino conditions -- the periodic warming of waters in the central Pacific Ocean -- will continue through the summer season and neutral conditions are likely to develop thereafter.

La Nina conditions -- generally associated with good monsoon rainfall in India -- are likely to set in by the second half of the monsoon season.

Meanwhile, the residents of Mumbai were treated to unexpected rainfall early on Friday, bringing a delightful surprise. Both South

Mumbai and its suburbs such as Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC), Andheri, and Borivali experienced moderate rainfall accompanied by dark clouds, according to reports.

Areas including Thane, Kalyan, and Palghar also saw varying degrees of rainfall, ranging from moderate to heavy, as per reports. Videos capturing the Mumbai rains were shared by netizens on X.

Typically, Mumbai starts experiencing the onset of summer in March, following the festival of Holi. While light rainfall is common during Holi, heavy rain in February or early March is unusual for the city. Unlike other parts of India where winter is more severe, Mumbai tends to have hotter temperatures during February and March.

# Three booked in Thane for cheating Kolkata-based merchant of Rs 60 lakh in sugar trade

Team Absolute | Thane

Police has registered a case after a Kolkata-based merchant claimed he was cheated of Rs 60 lakh by three persons, including two from Navi Mumbai, an official said.

As per the complainant, one of the accused, who hails from Gurugram in Haryana, approached him with help to procure 135

tonnes of sugar for export from the trading firm of another accused, who hails from Navi Mumbai, a news wire reported.

"The three collected Rs 60 lakh from the Kolkata-based merchant but never delivered the sugar consignment. They also provided him fake documents. The accused have been charged with cheating, criminal breach of trust, forgery and other offences," the NRI Sagari police station official said.

# SC agrees to list next week Shiv Sena-UBT faction's plea against Maha Speaker's ruling

Team Absolute | New Delhi/Mumbai

The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to list next week the plea filed by the Shiv Sena-UBT faction challenging the ruling of Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar, which had held that Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and his camp constitute the "real" Shiv Sena. A Bench presided over by Chief Justice of India (CJI), DY Chandrachud, was urged by senior advocate Kapil Sibal, who appeared on behalf of former CM Uddhav Thackeray-led faction, to list the matter next day.

"We will list the matter next week," CJI Chandrachud assured Sibal.

On February 12, the top court had directed to list the plea filed by Shiv Sena UBT leader Sunil Prabhu on March 1. However, the matter was not listed for hearing on Monday.



The Supreme Court had earlier issued a notice in the matter and called for the response of CM Shinde and 38 other MLAs within a period of two weeks.

# Whole day will be busy: Devendra Fadnavis declines Sharad Pawar's dinner invite

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has declined an invitation to dine with Nationalist Congress Party (Sharadchandra Pawar) president Sharad Pawar, who had extended an invitation a day before to share a meal at his residence in Baramati during his visit to his hometown on March 2. Fadnavis, in a letter to Sharad Pawar on Friday, said that he cannot accept the invitation as he will be engaged in important programmes on March 2.

"I received the letter written by you, as well as an invitation for dinner from you. As you are aware that after the efforts of Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, the Namoharajgar Melava is



being organized in Baramati. This big programme will be held in Baramati, after that, the bhoomi puja of the memorial of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj will be held in Badhu Budruk and Tuljapur and immediately after that, the bhoomi puja of the memorial of revolutionary Lahujji Vastad Salve is scheduled. The whole day is

going to be very busy as two important programmes are being organized one after the other. Therefore, I will not be able to accept your urgent invitation this time. Thank you once again," the Maharashtra Deputy CM said.

Sharad Pawar, the opposition leader, had invited Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and

the two Deputy CMs, including his nephew Ajit Pawar, to share a meal at his residence in Baramati during their visit on March 2.

In his letter, Sharad Pawar wrote, "After taking the oath as CM of the state, the CM is coming to Baramati for the first time and I am very glad about his visit to attend the Namoharajgar Event in Baramati. Therefore, I would like to extend the invitation for the meal at my residence after the event, along with his other Cabinet colleagues."

Shinde along with his deputies Fadnavis and Ajit Pawar, all political rivals of Sharad Pawar, will be attending a job fair, 'Namoharajgar Melava', in the premises of Vidya Pratishthan college in Baramati town of Pune district.

# Scientist Pradeep Mahajan's stem-cell research earns him 'Maharashtra Bhushan Award'



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Globally-acclaimed Mumbai scientist Pradeep V. Mahajan's pioneering work in regenerative medicine and stem-cells has earned him this year's coveted 'Maharashtra Bhushan Award', officials said. The Founder-Chairman of StemRX Bioscience Solutions Pvt. Ltd. and Chairman-cum-Managing Director of StemRX Hospital & Research Centre in Navi Mumbai, Mahajan is credited with several ground-breaking clinical successes and intellectual contributions that have earned him national and international accolades. He shot to limelight for his contributions to tackling the Covid-19 crisis in India, treatment of the world's youngest case of cerebral palsy, and the first

instance of an empty nose syndrome in the country, which have pushed forward the boundaries of modern medical science. Mahajan, 64, developed a unique stem-cell/platelet-based remedy to kill the Coronavirus "naturally, with anti-inflammatory bodies", which reduced the need for hospitalisation of Covid-19 patients by nearly 75 per cent, lessening the load on the public health sector.

"We found that the lungs are the prime target of Covid-19, causing maximum morbidity, highest stay in/on ICU/ventilators and even deaths. Post-treatment, the patient needed oxygen for months as the lungs developed fibrosis," Mahajan told correspondent. However, most medicines or vaccines failed to work as they targeted the 'virus, and not

its environment', and to survive, it kept mutating as pharma companies fumbled for newer remedies, he said.

Mahajan's protocol was simple - to tackle and strengthen the environment which would kill the Coronavirus naturally - which was first highlighted by correspondent (May 10, 2021).

"For this, we acquired blood platelets - considered the first line defence of the lungs, followed by white blood corpuscles and platelets for the next stage of the healing process. Then, we took the platelets from regular blood banks or donors, they were lysed, (to remove its walls to extract the granules), converted into a powder and administered as a mixture through a nebuliser or a rotahaler directly into the lungs - similar to any asth-

ma patients," Mahajan explained.

These pumps (nebuliser-rotahaler) are easily available for Rs 250-1,500 apiece, while the stem-cell concoction used in them is prepared in a special lab machine.

The treatment proved very cost-effective. The patients could also be treated at home during quarantine through their mobile medical teams.

Gradually, Mahajan started producing the special concoction in 3,000 vials per day, which catered to Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, Thiruvananthapuram, Chandigarh, Ahmedabad and other cities.

The stem-cell therapy/lyophilised platelet nebulisation worked complementarily to other treatment protocols for mass benefits, he said.





EDITOR'S SPECS

PSU index in a rally

**E**mpirical evidence suggests that in a general election year, the BSE PSU Index rallies 14 per cent on an average, as per analysis of the past three elections in 2009, 2014 and 2014, with a tendency of returns to bottom out in February, according to an analysis by Elara Securities. Post bottoming and until the results announcement day, the Index has yielded a return of 22 per cent. Further upside post elections could come via value unlocking through disinvestment, the report said. On the disinvestment side, the government has kept the target at Rs 500 billion in FY25BE versus Rs 300 billion in FY24 RE (revised estimates), although in light of achievements this year, Rs 500 billion for FY25 may seem difficult. The impending sale of IDBI Bank may get revived post the general elections. The PSU basket's strong rally in the past three years, with a CAGR return of 39 per cent during CY21-23, has been primarily due to the benefits accrued based on high commodity prices, attractive valuation and government's capex measures. Most PSUs in deep cyclical industries have volatile and cyclical profitability and market cap performance. A large part of the FY10-20 decade was spent cleaning up the balance sheets of financials, which took a toll on the overall PSU profit. Post FY20, profitability of PSU shot up across domestic as well as global cyclicals with turnaround in the fortunes of PSU banks driving the overall trend. Higher commodity prices during the past two years have lifted P&L and balancesheets of metals and oil & gas PSUs. The government's emphasis on localisation and Make in India in the defence sector has driven the fortunes of industrial PSU, the analysis said.

NC, PDP & Congress firming up for pre-poll alliance in J&K

Sheikh Qayoom

**P**olitical circles are agog in J&K saying that a seat-sharing agreement between the Congress, National Conference (NC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) is in the offing and an announcement to this effect is likely within the next few days. NC president, Dr. Farooq Abdullah had earlier said that his party would fight all the Lok Sabha seats in J&K and Ladakh on its own. Dr. Abdullah appears to have climbed down from his stand as sources within the NC and the Congress are now saying that he never meant to rule out a pre-poll alliance between like-minded political parties. NC vice president Omar Abdullah had told reporters after his father's statement that the NC was engaged in seat-sharing parleys with the Congress. Vikar Rasool Wani, president of J&K Congress unit, told reporters recently that the seat-sharing agreement with the NC and the PDP is under serious consideration. Speculation is now rife that the agreement about pre-poll alliance between NC, PDP and the Congress could be announced sooner than later. Insiders say that the seat-sharing agreement could be announced before the end of the first week of this month. "NC would contest the Srinagar-Budgam-Ganderbal Lok Sabha seat and Omar Sahib would be the NC candidate. Mehbooba Mufti would be the PDP candidate from south Kashmir Anantnag-Rajouri-Poonch Lok Sabha constituency and the NC would support her candidature. "North Kashmir Baramulla Lok Sabha seat would be conceded to the NC by the PDP and the



Congress as these two parties would not field any candidate against the NC nominee from this constituency," sources within the probable election allies said. Same sources said the name of the NC candidate for the Baramulla seat is yet to be finalised. Meanwhile, it is now believed that senior leader and former deputy chief minister, Muzafar Hussain Beigh could stand as an independent candidate for Baramulla Lok Sabha constituency. Peoples Conference president, Sajad Gani Lone has already announced that he would fight the polls from Baramulla constituency for the PC. BJP state unit president, Ravinder Raina is likely to contest the

Lok Sabha polls from south Kashmir Anantnag seat. Raina would mainly depend on the BJP cadre in Anantnag, Rajouri and Poonch districts, the segments for the south Kashmir Lok Sabha constituency. In addition to this, the Pahari community living in Rajouri, Poonch and some parts of Anantnag and Kulgam districts are likely to support Raina overwhelmingly because the Paharis were recently granted the ST status by the Government of India. In contrast to this, Mehbooba Mufti is well entrenched in Anantnag district. Once the NC supports her, the large Gujjar/Bakarwal community living in Rajouri, Poonch and parts of Anantnag district is also expected to support her. Prominent and largely popular Gujjar/Bakarwal leader, Mian Altaf Ahmad of the NC could garner a large number of voters from his community in favour of Mehbooba Mufti. The outcome of two Lok Sabha seats of Jammu and Udhampur-Kathua is widely believed to favour the BJP. Udhampur-Kathua Lok Sabha seat is presently represented by Dr. Jitendra Singh, Minister of State (PMO) while Jugal Kishore of the BJP represents the Jammu seat. Whether Jitendra Singh and Jugal Kishore are repeated as the BJP candidates for these two seats is still not clear. Even if these candidates are not repeated by the BJP for these two seats, the outcome would still favour the BJP as the party is well entrenched in both these constituencies. Given these likely permutations and combinations, the forthcoming Lok Sabha election in J&K is going to be very interesting because of the number of stalwarts likely to throw in their hat into the poll ring.

In a first, India exports pomegranates by sea to USA

**I**ndia has successfully flagged off its first commercial trial shipment of pomegranates to the US via sea under the aegis of Agricultural Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) from Vashi in Navi Mumbai, the Commerce Ministry said on Friday. The pomegranate shipment comprising 4200 boxes (12.6 tons) by Inl Farms was flagged off by Rajesh Aggarwal, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Commerce & Industry and APEDA chairman Abhishek Dev. Last year APEDA successfully carried out an air shipment of pomegranates with irradiation treatment and static trial in association with ICAR-NRC Pomegranate Solapur as a technical partner. Based on the successful result of the static trial, APEDA aimed for a successful sign-off for this consignment via sea-opening trade relations to potential markets for Indian pomegranates. India, one of the largest producers of pomegranates in the world, is also now aiming to be amongst the top pomegranate exporting countries. The country is a key player with its market expanding in the EU, Middle East and Asian countries. The trial air shipment, static sea trial and the sea container were executed by APEDA-registered Inl Farms - a top exporter of fruits and vegetables from India with their produce being exported to over 25 countries worldwide. Over the years, the firm has made extensive efforts to enhance the quality and shelf life



of pomegranates to meet the strict standards of the global markets. As part of the Agrostar group, Inl Farms has established a value chain for pomegranates by working directly with farmers in the states of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan. The fruit was sourced from Anarjet registered farmers from Sangola in

Maharashtra. Significantly, the premium received by farmers was 20 per cent compared to other export markets and 35 per cent compared to the domestic market. Pomegranate is an important agri-produce of India, the rich history associated with fruit and its nutrition value contribute to its popular demand. India produces some of the best varieties of pomegranate in terms of quality with soft fleshy seeds, low acidity and attractive color. Bhagwa pomegranate is considered amongst the best varieties around the world. In the last decade, India has increased the area as well as the production of Pomegranate and seen an increase in exports. In the Pomegranate market, India holds a significant advantage of being able to supply Pomegranates throughout the year with trained farmers for export quality products. Pomegranate production in recent years has been growing at a healthy rate of 20-25 per cent.

In India, the major Pomegranate producing states are Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh with Maharashtra contributing to more than 50 per cent of the production share.

international

Guterres condemns killing of over 100 around food convoy in Gaza

**A**rul Louis | United Nations  
**U**N Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Thursday condemned the killing of more than 100 people in incidents in northern Gaza and repeated his demands for a ceasefire, his Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said. On the day Gaza's Health Ministry announced that the death toll crossed the 30,000 mark since Israel's attacks began on October 8, 104 people were killed and more than 700 injured in the incidents around a food convoy in the Gaza City area, according to the Palestine news agency, Wafa. The agency said that according to medical sources, Israeli troops had opened fire with heavy machine guns at people waiting for trucks laden with humanitarian assistance for distribution. "The Secretary-General condemns the incident today in northern Gaza in which more than a hundred people were reportedly killed or injured while seeking lifesaving aid," Dujarric said. He added that Guterres "is



appalled by the tragic human toll of the conflict in Gaza, in which more than 30,000 people have now reportedly been killed and more than 70,000 injured. Tragically, an unknown number of people lie under rubble." His statement did not name Israel in the attack, and Dujarric explained to reporters that the UN did not as yet have direct knowledge of what happened, but he said that acts of violence caused the incident. UN Human Rights High Commissioner Volker Turk called the killings in Gaza, "carnage". "There appear to be no bounds to -- no words to capture -- the horrors that are unfolding before our eyes in

Gaza," he said in Geneva at a meeting on Occupied Palestine Territories. While denouncing the 10/7 Hamas attack on Israel as "profoundly traumatising and totally unjustifiable," he also condemned "the brutality of the Israeli response" which resulted in "the unprecedented level of killing and maiming of civilians in Gaza, including UN staff and journalists". Turk said, "Since early October, over 100,000 people have been killed or wounded. Let me repeat that: about one in every 20 children, women, and men, are now dead or wounded." When Israel launched its counterattack for the Hamas assault, it ordered the people in

northern Gaza to move south, which most did while several Palestinians were trapped in the northern areas where Israeli troops have launched ground, air and sea attacks. Meanwhile talking to reporters in Washington, US President Joe Biden conceded that the Thursday incidents complicated the negotiations for freeing hostages held by Hamas. But he refused to take a stand on the incidents, saying, "We're checking that out right now. But there's two competing versions of what happened. I don't have an answer yet." Israel said that its forces opened fire on a crowd that advanced on them menacingly, but asserted that dozens were killed in a melee by being trampled or run over by trucks. Stung by growing opposition to Biden's support for Israel -- manifest this week by more than 100,000 protest votes in the Democratic Party primary in Michigan -- the US was recalibrating its position, renewing calls for a humanitarian ceasefire and asking Israel to be mindful of civilians.

Russia ready to return crash victims' bodies to Ukraine

**Moscow** | Agencies  
**R**ussia has expressed its readiness to transfer the bodies of those who perished in the crash of a military Il-76 aircraft in the Belgorod region to Ukraine, local media reported on Friday. "Yes, we are prepared. Everything necessary from a procedural standpoint is in place," Russian Human Rights Commissioner Tatyana Moskalkova was quoted as saying by Russia's RIA Novosti



news agency. She added that the bodies can be handed over following existing procedures, Xinhua news agency reported. On January 24, the Ukrainian armed forces shot down a Russian military transport aircraft, the Il-76, over the Belgorod region. The aircraft was carrying 65 Ukrainian prisoners for exchange. All the prisoners, along with three accompanying Russian officers and six crew members, lost their lives.

Musk sues OpenAI, its CEO Sam Altman over agreement breach around AI

**San Francisco** | Agencies  
**T**esla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk has sued OpenAI and its CEO Sam Altman, alleging they breached their original contractual agreements around AI. The lawsuit, filed in a court in San Francisco in the US, revolves around OpenAI's latest natural language model titled GPT-4. The X owner alleged that OpenAI and Microsoft (which has poured billions of dollars into Sam Altman-run company) have "improperly licensed GPT-4" despite agreeing that artificial general intelligence (AGI) capabilities "would remain non-profit and dedicated to humanity". "Musk has long recognised that AGI poses a grave threat to humanity -- perhaps the greatest existential threat we face today," read the lawsuit.



Musk's lawsuit details complaints such as contract breach, fiduciary duty violation, and unfair business practices. According to the lawsuit, OpenAI's initial research was performed in the "open, providing free and public access to designs, models, and code".

Musk was an original board member of OpenAI until 2018. When OpenAI researchers discovered that an algorithm called "Transformers", initially invented by Google, could perform many natural language tasks without any explicit training, "entire communities

sprung up to enhance and extend the models released by OpenAI". Altman became OpenAI CEO in 2019. On September 22, 2020, OpenAI entered into an agreement with Microsoft, exclusively licensing to Microsoft its Generative PreTrained Transformer (GPT)-3 language model. "Most critically, the Microsoft license only applied to OpenAI's pre-AGI technology. Microsoft obtained no rights to AGI. And it was up to OpenAI's non-profit Board, not Microsoft, to determine when OpenAI attained AGI," the lawsuit further read. Musk said that this case is filed to compel OpenAI to "adhere to the Founding Agreement and return to its mission to develop AGI for the benefit of humanity, not to personally benefit the individual defendants and the largest technology company in the world".

Death toll in Bangladesh building fire mounts to 46

**Dhaka** | Agencies  
**T**he death toll in the fire at a multi-storey building in Bangladesh has risen to 46, local media reported. President Mohammed Shahabuddin and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed grief over the loss of lives and property in the incident, Dhaka Tribune reported. The fire, which had broken out in a restaurant at around 22:00 local time (16:00 GMT) on Thursday in Dhaka, had spread to other floors of the building. The bodies of 39 people have been identified. At least 32 bodies have been handed over to families without autopsy. However, identities of six bodies remain unknown. Earlier in the day, Health Minister Samanta Lal Sen, who is also the coordinator of the Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery, said, "Most of the injured are critical and trachea of many has been burnt. We are trying best to save them." "Fourteen people are under treatment in Dhaka Medical College Hospital and eight people in Sheikh Hasina Burn Institute with 60 per cent burn injuries. Their health condition is critical," the Health Minister said. During treatment, patients are having a number of complica-



tions ranging from respiratory distress, wound infections and electrolyte imbalance, Samanta Lal Sen said. Dhaka Additional Deputy Commissioner AKM Hedayetul Islam said, "The DMCH authorities are handing over the bodies. We are helping them. Apart from this, we have given assistance of Tk25 thousand to the deceased's families who are not solvent."

War causes \$19.6 bn in losses to Ukraine's culture, tourism: PM

**Kiev** | Agencies  
**U**kraine's ongoing war with Russia has incurred losses of at least \$19.6 billion to the country's cultural and tourism sectors, Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal said. Shmyhal added on Thursday that 900 historical and cultural sites in Ukraine were destroyed or damaged during the war,

Xinhua news agency reported. Kiev plans to create a special register of the destroyed cultural and tourism facilities, which will be a tool for determining the amount of compensation from Russia, he said. According to him, Ukraine needs \$8.9 billion to restore cultural and tourist sites.





## VEDIC CLOCK WILL ENHANCE GLORY OF MADHYA PRADESH AND THE COUNTRY : CHIEF MINISTER DR. MOHAN YADAV

► CHIEF MINISTER DR. YADAV INAUGURATES VIKRAMOTSAV-2024 UJJAIN. REGIONAL INDUSTRIES CONCLAVE-UJJAIN 2024 AND UJJAINI TRADE FAIR INAUGURATED. RS 1576 CRORE TRANSFERRED TO ACCOUNTS OF 1.29 CRORE LADLI BEHNAS WITH A SINGLE CLICK. RS 85 CRORE TRANSFERRED TO THE ACCOUNTS OF 2.85 LAKH GIRLS UNDER LADLI LAKSHMI YOJANA. CHIEF MINISTER DR. YADAV RELEASES VIKRAM PANCHANG



Madhya Pradesh and the country renowned in the world. Now India's time will be known to the entire world. The state government is also trying to create literature centered on Samrat Vikramaditya. We have always been proud of Samrat Vikramaditya. This was stated by Chief Minister Dr. Yadav in his address after inaugurating the Vikramotsav-2024, Regional Industries Conclave Ujjain-2024 and Ujjaini Trade Fair-2024 organized by Culture Department, Swaraj Sansthan

and District Administration at Kalidas Academy, Ujjain on Friday. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that the civilization established by Samrat Vikramaditya has gained recognition in the world. Samrat Vikramaditya is known as the first person to have established a civil system. He said that Vikramotsav is a festival run by the government which takes society along. Ujjain is a city of time calculation. Besides, Ujjaini is also the city of Mahakal. We are the carriers of Sanatan culture and we are proud of

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav said that in the changing cycle of time, the world's first Vedic clock established in Ujjain will make

## Centre fast-tracks bypass projects to decongest Indore, Guwahati

Team Absolute | New

The Centre's Network Planning Group (NPG) has fast-tracked three highway projects including a 141 km new bypass for Indore and a 64 km bypass to decongest Guwahati.

The 66th meeting of the Network Planning Group (NPG) under PM Gati Shakti held on Feb 27 also took up for discussion the upgradation of NH 216H in Andhra Pradesh, according to an official statement issued on Friday.

The project for providing a bypass around Madhya Pradesh's Indore city, being taken up by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, will stretch across 141 km through Dhar, Indore, and Dewas districts of Madhya Pradesh.

The greenfield corridor, starting near Khandwa village and terminating at NH-52 near Bhardala, aims to reduce traffic congestion in Indore, offering an alternative route and ensuring



seamless transportation of goods and people.

The second project is a ring road of approximately 64 kms, around Guwahati city. The proposal includes an elevated structure at Jorabat and a new bridge across Brahmaputra.

This project will contribute to decongestion of Guwahati

city and major junctions under Kamrup metropolitan district resulting in reduced travel time and vehicle operating cost, offering a solution to congestion and improving connectivity.

The project is expected to provide smooth traffic flow, contributing to overall economic development.

## Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra will enter Madhya Pradesh today

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra of former All India Congress President Rahul Gandhi is coming to Madhya Pradesh. This yatra will enter Morena from Dholpur (Rajasthan) border on Saturday afternoon.

State Congress Media Department President K.K. Mishra told on Friday that Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra will enter Morena on Saturday, March 2 at 1.30 pm.

The party flag will be saluted under the leadership of Congress Seva Dal State President Yogesh Yadav and in the presence of State Congress President Jitu Patwari and other party leaders and party officials.

Mishra told that on the same day, there will be a road



show near the under bridge in Morena at 2.30 pm, and in Gwalior city at 5 pm, there will be a road show from Char City Naka to Zira Chowk.

Night stay is in Gwalior. This yatra will pass through different parts of the state till March 6.

## Adani Group to invest Rs 75,000 crore in MP, Pranav Adani sees infinite possibilities for growth

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Adani Group, at the Regional Industry Conclave 2024 which began in Ujjain on Friday, vowed to make colossal investments of up to Rs 75,000 crore in Madhya Pradesh, which, in turn, will generate over 15,000 direct and indirect employment opportunities in the state, spread across various industrial sectors.

In his address, Pranav Adani, Director of Adani Enterprises, talked about immense possibilities for growth in the state and reiterated the Adani Group's commitment for big-ticket investments in the state.

"I see infinite possibilities for infinite growth - especially in energy and infrastructure - and the Adani Group is excited about investing in Madhya Pradesh," he told the gathering.

Further, lauding the state government for prioritising progress over politics and creating a congenial environment for growth, he spoke about Adani Group's existing presence in a wide range of sectors including roads, cements, thermal power, renewable energy, and power transmission sectors. "In Madhya Pradesh, the Group's cumulative invest-



ment stands at Rs 18,000 crore and it has created over 11,000 job opportunities so far," he said. He further vowed to double down investments on existing projects and also launch new projects for spurring growth in the state.

Giving a low-down on upcoming investments planned by the business behemoth, Pranav Adani informed that Adani Group will increase investments in the state up to Rs 75,000 crore, out of which Rs 5,000 crore will be spent on building

Mahakal Expressway, from Ujjain to Bhopal through Indore.

He also unveiled the company's plans of setting up a clinker unit in Chorgadi and two cement grinding units in Dewas and Bhopal, at an estimated cost of Rs 5,000 crore.

The company has also ambitious plans of making big investments in natural resources and a food processing centre in the state.

"We will invest over Rs 4,000 crore in natural resource sector and another Rs 600 crore to expand our presence in food processing, logistics and agri-logistics, and defence manufacturing," said Pranav Adani.

In a bid to make the state power-surplus, the Adani Enterprises Director said that the company has set investment targets of Rs 30,000 crore for ramping up power generation capacity.

"We will invest close to Rs 30,000 crore to ramp up the power generation capacity, at our Mahan Energen plant in Singrauli, from its current 1,200 megawatts to a massive 4,400 megawatts. We will also invest close to Rs 28,000 crore to set up 3,410 MW capacity Pumped Storage Projects," he told the conclave.

## CASE AGAINST BAP LEGISLATOR OVER RS 1 CRORE EXTORTION ATTEMPT

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh MLA Kamleshwar Dodiya, who heads the Bhartiya Adivasi Party (BAP), faced accusations of attempting to extort Rs one crore from a medical store proprietor, a charge denied by him. Dodiya, whose organisation represents tribal political factions in certain areas bordering Rajasthan, had stated in his political affidavit during assembly elections that he was contesting with a mere Rs 10,000.

Facing a possible arrest once police get clearance from the state Assembly Speaker, the 33-year-old legislator, in a defiant video statement, vowed to counter baseless charges, attributing them to a conspiracy by the ruling BJP government.

Dodiya affirmed his commitment to exposing deceptive medical practitioners, like the one who filed the purportedly false complaint.

Claiming political vendetta, Dodiya, the sole BAP member in the Madhya Pradesh Assembly, criticised the timing of the accusation, insinuating a smear



campaign ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

The BAP, with three MLAs in neighbouring Rajasthan, advocates for a separate state for the Bhil tribe spanning Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Maharashtra.

Ratlam Superintendent of Police Rahul Lodha said charges including

extortion, assault for monetary gain, violence, use of offensive language, criminal threats and common intent under the IPC were filed against Dodiya.

"Investigations are on. After following the legal procedure like informing the MP assembly Speaker, the MLA will be arrested," the official said.

Highlighting Dodiya's past history, Lodha indicated his prior inclusion in criminal record, emphasising ongoing legal battles including an alleged rape case. The complaint leading to the recent accusation came from the medical store owner, Tapan Rai, following investigations, he said.

In a viral appeal to tribal communities, Dodiya urged residents of Ratlam, Jhabua and Alirajpur to rally against the BJP in the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections, citing continued persecution by the ruling party.

Dodiya, who contested the elections on a fundraising budget of 2.38 lakh, disclosed assets worth Rs 18 lakh and liabilities of Rs 10 lakh in his election affidavit, with a meager Rs 10,000 in hand at the time, marking him as the financially weakest candidate.

## Students will get better facilities in backward class hostels: Krishna Gaur

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The state government is committed to providing better facilities to the students in backward class hostels in the state. Meaningful efforts are being made to provide better facilities to the students in the hostel. State Minister of State (Independent Charge) of the Backward Classes and Minority Welfare, Displaced Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Welfare Department, Krishna Gaur

said this during the surprise inspection of boys and girls hostel in Gwalior on Friday.

Backward Class and Minority Welfare Minister Krishna Gaur, during her stay in Gwalior on Friday,



conducted a surprise inspection of Government Divisional Backward Class College Boys Hostel Huravali and Government Divisional Backward Class

College Girls Hostel Sharda Vihar, also discussed in detail with the students studying in the hostel. She has directed the departmental officers to provide

better facilities to the students in the hostel, along with this, the cleaning and painting work in the hostel should also be done promptly, so that the students can get a better environment for studies. While discussing with the students, Krishna Gaur said that the Chief Minister of the state Dr. Mohan Yadav

also wants that better facilities should be available to the students. She said that the government has decided that in all the hostels of backward class students,

there will be canteen (dining room), e-library, gym, solar panel on the roof of the hostel along with Wi-Fi facility in all the hostels will be made available.

## A DOZEN GAMBLERS CAUGHT GAMBLING IN SHIVPURI FOREST

Shivpuri: Police caught 12 gamblers gambling in the forest of Shivpuri district of Madhya Pradesh. Six cars and 12 mobile phones along with cash have been recovered from them.

Police have said that people from Guna, Shivpuri, Kolaras and other areas used to come to the forest located in Khod police post area to gamble.

The police had an eye on them for a long time. A large number of gamblers reached here on Thursday also.

Khod police outpost in-charge Anshul Gupta said that Bhaunti and Khod outpost police jointly raided the forest located near Veera. During this time, a dozen gamblers were caught gambling there.

Police recovered six cars, 12 mobiles and Rs 51 thousand 850 in cash from them.

## "Jal-Hath" campaign will be organized with the cooperation of all departments in the state

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Jal Jeevan Mission was launched in the year 2019 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to provide "water to every house" in every village of the country. For the complete success of this mission, "Jal-Hath" campaign will be run as a mass movement in the state under the leadership of Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav. In this, with the participation of government and society, old ponds and other water sources in every village and city will be upgraded, developed, beautified, deepened and trees will be planted by removing encroachments around the water sources.

Yesterday, Water Resources Minister in the Ministry, Tulsiram Silawat met Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav and told him the concept of this campaign and presented the action plan. Also requested that with the active cooperation of all the departments, the "Jal-Hath" cam-



campaign should be run as a mass movement in every village of the state. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav assured that

conservation of water sources and water conservation will be given the form of a people's movement in the

entire state. Silawat said that under the campaign, encroachments on water sources will be removed on priority. Due to encroachment in the ponds and other water sources of the state, their catchment area is getting depleted, due to which the problem of pollution in water sources is increasing and irrigation and drinking water is decreasing. Earlier, water was preserved throughout the year in small rivers and drains in rural areas, but these rivers and drains are now almost extinct. It is very important to revive them to conserve rain water and upgrade ground water.

Minister Silawat said that under the "Jal-Hath" campaign, a plan will be made for the revitalization of natural water sources and ponds in all the districts of the state by identifying them and with the help of various sections of the society and voluntary organizations, it will be implemented as a public movement.

## AIIMS Bhopal successfully treated a 9-year-old girl suffering with the rare HUS

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Under the dynamic leadership of Prof (Dr.) Ajai Singh, Executive Director of AIIMS Bhopal doctors have triumphantly treated and discharged a 9-year-old girl afflicted with the rare Atypical Hemolytic Syndrome (HUS). Initially presenting symptoms of body swelling, persistent fever, and reddish-colored urine, the child's challenging medical journey unfolded across multiple hospitals. Despite earlier interventions in local hospitals, her condition worsened, leading to admission to three more hospitals with severe symptoms. Three weeks into the onset of symptoms, the patient reached the Pediatric Nephrology Unit at AIIMS Bhopal. Diagnosed with Atypical HUS with elevated anti Factor H auto-antibody titres, the child was critically ill, requiring non-invasive ventilator sup-

port due to pulmonary edema. Dedicated medical team, led by Prof Girish Bhatt, Dr Amber, residents and dialysis staff skillfully managed the challenging aspects of treatment for children, incorporating 8 cycles of hemodialysis and 17 settings of Plasma Exchange Therapy (TPE). This involved passing the patient's blood through a plasma filter to remove disease-causing antibodies, showcasing a significant improvement in the patient's condition. Prof (Dr.) Ajai Singh, executive director of AIIMS Bhopal, underscored the success of this case, emphasizing the hospital's commitment to timely and expert intervention in managing complex pediatric conditions. The institution continues to pursue excellence in pediatric care through advanced treatments and multidisciplinary approaches, ensuring positive outcomes for young patients.





## Pamela Anderson shocks her sons by refusing to hire a glamour team

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Pamela Anderson has talked about why she is fine with not having a glamour squad on rotation, despite how her sons feel about it. Anderson, who is on a new cover story for *Highsnobiety's* spring 2024 issue, said: "My boys were like, 'Mom, you have to have a glam team! Where's the stylist?' I go, 'I know how to put a dress on myself.'"

"I don't need someone buttoning up my blouse. I got this. And they were just horrified," she added. The 'Baywatch' star has sons Brandon Thomas Lee and Dylan Jagger Lee with musician Tommy Lee.

Anderson also took the spotlight, when she appeared au naturel at Paris Fashion Week last September, as reported by *people.com*.

## EMILY BLUNT IN TALKS TO STAR ALONGSIDE DWAYNE JOHNSON IN 'THE SMASHING MACHINE'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Emily Blunt is currently in talks to feature in the upcoming film 'The Smashing Machine' starring Dwayne Johnson.

The Academy Award-nominated actress would essay the role of Dawn Staples, the new wife to legendary MMA fighter Mark Kerr.

The story is about how Dawn struggles to find her place within Champion's chaotic and contradictory world while trying to set up a life together, as reported by *deadline.com*.

'The Smashing Machine' is a drama based on the story of Kerr, the legendary MMA fighter from the no-holds-barred era of the UFC. He struggles with winning, relationships, substance abuse and friendship, set in the year 2000. Kerr was a two-time UFC Heavyweight Tournament Champion, World Vale Tudo Championship tournament winner, a PRIDE FC Heavyweight Champion, 1992 NCAA National Wrestling Champion, 1994 National Freestyle Champion and 4x ADCC World Submission Champion.

The MMA fighter was also a subject of a documentary titled 'The Smashing Machine' in 2003. The *Smashing Machine* is directed by Benny Safdie, who has helmed projects such as 'Heaven Knows What', 'Good Time' and 'Uncut Gems'.



## Seventeen's S.Coups exempt from mandatory military service post knee surgery

Seoul | Agencies

K-pop sensation Seventeen member S.Coups has been exempted from mandatory military duties after undergoing a knee surgery. S.Coups, who had undergone a physical examination to receive his mandatory service assignment, but was declared fully exempt and will not be required to carry out public service duties, according to *allkpop.com*.

According to talent management company Pledis Entertainment, S.Coups has got a level 5 exemption from the mandatory military service duties. It means that he is fully exempted from conscription unless the country enters a state of war.

In 2023, the K-pop star suffered a cruciate ligament rupture in his left knee during a filming schedule. It required surgery and extended treatment.

Since then, S.Coups has made limited public appearances as his main focus is on recovery.



In February, the talent agency had shared that his condition has improved significantly, and that he would resume his schedules till the time they do not require excessive physical activity commencing in March.

Meanwhile, Seventeen, which consists of thirteen members -- S.Coups, Jeonhan, Joshua, Jun, Hoshi, Wonwoo, Woozi, DK, Mingyu, The8, Seungkwon, Vernon, and Dino, plan on returning with a new album in April.

Los Angeles | Agencies

K-pop supergroup BTS member J-Hope, who is currently serving in the military, is seen enjoying his time in the mandatory service.

A few pictures of K-pop sensation J-Hope, who enlisted in the army as an active-duty soldier in April 2023, is seen enjoying his time in the military.

In the photographs, J-Hope is seen bonding with his fellow soldiers as he smiles ear-to-ear and poses by making a peace sign with his fingers.

He is currently working as an instructor at the training battalion in Gangwon Province, as reported by *allkpop.com*.

J-Hope is expected to complete his military service by October 2024.

On the work front, J-Hope's upcoming solo album titled 'Hope on the Street Vol.1', which he worked on before his enlistment, is set to drop next month.

It comprises six tracks and features collaborations with popular artists such as Yoon Mirae, Gaeko from Dynamic Duo, Jungkook, and Huh Yunjin from LE SSERAFIM.



**BTS'S J-HOPE BONDS WITH FELLOW SOLDIERS AS HE GETS BUSY WITH MILITARY SERVICE**

## STEPHEN GAGHAN RECALLS 'HORRIBLE MOMENT' WHEN HE LEARNED OF HEATH LEDGER'S DEATH

Los Angeles | Agencies

Filmmaker Stephen Gaghan has opened up about the film he almost made with late Hollywood star Heath Ledger and recalled the horrible moment he learned about the actor's death.

Stephen spoke about Ledger, who gained universal acclaim and global spotlight with his performance as the chaotic character of Joker in 'The Dark Knight', during his appearance on Malcolm Gladwell's podcast miniseries 'Development Hell'.

The director and actor back then wanted to adapt Gladwell's book, 'Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking', which talks about the kind of thinking that happens in a blink of an eye.

Stephen received a phone call from Ledger's father and his close friend. Ledger had been found dead in his Manhattan apartment at the age of 28 in January, 2008, due to accidental overdose of medications.

"They were there with the body, and our script was in bed with him, and your book was on the bedside table," Stephen told Gladwell as reported by *deadline.com*.

"I think my number was on the script -- like written. These guys are in, as you can imagine, they are in shock. And they dialed that number, and I don't know why."

At the time of the call, Stephen was at an airport with



his wife Minnie Mortimer. He said he almost collapsed after learning about the news.

"I literally just collapse. It's never happened to me before or since. I just literally sat down because I was like, 'What? What?' What they were going through I should not have been a party to in any way, really, and yet as a human and somebody who just cares, I just was there and I was listening."

"My wife was looking at me. I remember her face and I was just speechless. I just listened and listened and listened. It was just really, really sad. And it's still sad."

That shocking news led Stephen to put the Gladwell project on hold. He said: "For me, I just had to put a pin in it."

The film was originally slated to star Hollywood star Leonardo DiCaprio. However, changes in

the script called for a younger character.

"This other thing had happened off-camera, which is that I met Heath Ledger and I'd gotten to be very, very close with him instantly," Stephen said.

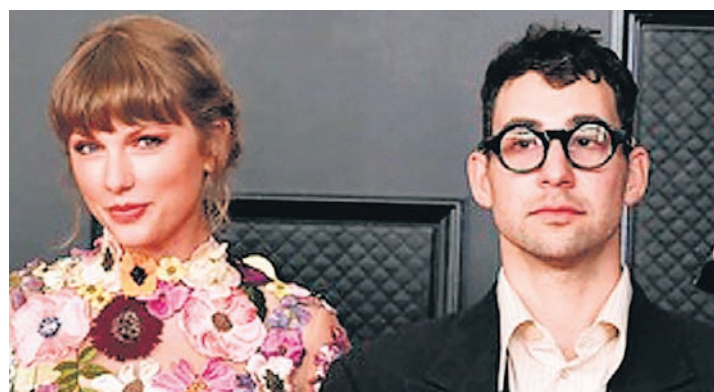
"I just had a real connection with him that was kind of unusual and really special to me. I got really excited, and I started seeing him as the main character. Once I started seeing that, I couldn't un-see it."

Revisiting the script has brought back many memories for the director.

"I got it out right before we got on. I was reading it. I was just like... 'I could be crazy, but I think this script is really good,'" he told Gladwell on the podcast.

"We really had something really special, and we might've been ahead of our time or something," he said.

## Questioning Taylor's songwriting ability 'like challenging someone's faith in God'



Los Angeles | Agencies

Grammy-winning producer Jack Antonoff, who is a longtime collaborator with Taylor Swift said that questioning the pop star's songwriting ability "is like challenging someone's faith in God".

Talking about Swift's songwriting ability, Antonoff said it "is like challenging someone's faith in God. You just don't go there."

"I'm a little... sometimes. But you come after my friend Taylor, you're toast to me."

Damon Albarn, the frontman of Blur and Gorillaz, had ignited outrage among Swift fans, fondly called Swifties, in 2022 after he said that the 'Blank Space' hitmaker "doesn't write her own songs."

"A really interesting songwriter is Billie Eilish and her brother," Albarn said at the time, as reported by vari-

ety.com.

He added: "I'm more attracted to that than Taylor Swift. It's just darker -- less endlessly upbeat. Way more minor and odd. I think she's exceptional."

This made Antonoff take to Twitter around the time to post: "I've never met Damon Albarn and he's never been to my studio but apparently he knows more than the rest of us about all those songs Taylor writes and brings in. Herb."

Antonoff in his latest interview also hit out at one of Swift's longtime foe and rapper Kanye West, saying he "just needs his diaper changed so badly."

"It's been a long time since I would've taken Kanye's call. I'm so incredibly bored when someone doesn't have the sauce anymore, so they go elsewhere to shock. It's just a remarkable waste of space," he said.

## ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Demi Rose





## 'Aiming to defend Asian Champions Trophy title to be the best', says men's hockey vice-captain Hardik Singh

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi  
Indian men's hockey team vice-captain Hardik Singh said that the team is aiming to defend their title at the Asian Champions Trophy as it will be important to become the best in the world.

The Asian Hockey Federation on February 28 announced that the Men's Asian Champions Trophy 2024 will take place in Hulunbuir City, Inner Mongolia, China from September 8-17.

The teams qualified for this edition are China, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, and defending Champions India.



Speaking on the significance of the tournament, Hardik said, "The Asian Champions Trophy is a prestigious tournament where teams battle to claim the title of being the best hockey team in Asia. We aim to be the best team in the world, and an important step in that journey will be to retain the trophy and solidify our position as the best team in Asia."

India emerged victorious in the previous edition, the Asian Champions Trophy Chennai 2023, held in Chennai from August 3-12. They topped the pool with 4 wins and 1 draw, the draw being against Japan. In the semifinal, they faced Japan

again and registered a 5-0 triumph. In the final, India found themselves trailing 3-1 at halftime, but goals from captain Harmanpreet Singh, Gurjant Singh, and Akashdeep Singh in the second half ensured that India were crowned champions of the continental event.

Reflecting on the team's performance, Hardik said, "The Asian Champions Trophy Chennai 2023 was a spectacular tournament. As a team, we were still adapting to the new style of play under Chief Coach Craig Fulton, and claiming the gold medal was a testament to the progress the team had made under him."

"We also had the Mental Trainer Paddy Upton with us to help us along the way, and the team showed immense character to keep their wits about them and turn things around when we were trailing to Malaysia in the Final."

"Coming back from behind to win the tournament was a special feeling, and looking back, I feel the team used that game as a springboard to reach greater heights. There is no doubt that we are looking forward to playing in the Men's Asian Champions Trophy 2024 and defending our title," the midfielder signed off.

## India's 8-year-old Zarah youngest competitor at World Skateboarding Tour 2024

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi  
India's Zarah Ann Gladys, at just eight years of age, has become the youngest competitor at the World Skateboarding Tour 2024 in Dubai. Zarah participated in the women's park event, achieving a score of 8.50 during the qualification round and securing the 61st position out of 63 competitors on Wednesday.

The Dubai meet is a crucial event for skateboarders looking to improve their Olympic World Skate Ranking for the Paris 2024 Olympics.

Zarah, who started skateboarding at the age of four, made her international debut at the Skateboarding Park World Championship 2023 in Rome last year, where she had the best run of 10.66, according to Olympics.com.

The adorable skateboarder, who hails from Kerala but currently resides in UAE, began skateboarding during Covid-19 pandemic after being inspired by her friends. Since then, she has participated in numerous local and international competitions, securing titles at events such as the Aljada Skate Jam and Circuit X in the UAE.

She also clinched a silver medal at India's National Roller Skating Championships in



December 2022 in the under-9 age group. The young girl has amazed people around the world with her impressive skating abilities. Her social media posts feature videos of her executing jumps onto her board from varying heights and successfully completing kickflips with finesse.

## WPL 2024: 'Slight adjustment in my mindset...', says DC's Shafali Verma on her consecutive fifties

**Team Absolute** | Bengaluru  
Shafali Verma, the Delhi Capitals' opener, said the reason behind her making back-to-back fifties in the 2024 Women's Premier League (WPL), has been a slight change in her mindset about converting her starts into big scores. At the M Chinnaswamy Stadium, Shafali smashed a 31-ball 50, laced with three fours and four sixes as the Capitals made 194/5, to comfortably secure a 25-run win over the Royal Challengers Bangalore and go on top of the points table. Shafali had earlier smashed an unbeaten 64 in the Capitals' previous match against UP Warriorz, where they chased down 121 in 14.3 overs. "Last time in the WPL, I was getting out in the 30s or 40s. Those knocks taught me a lot."



"I think because of that, now I want to convert a 30 or 40-run score into a 50 for the team and for myself. The main change is a slight adjustment in my mindset and I want to take this forward," said Shafali to JioCinema after the match. Speaking about batting alongside Meg Lanning, her skipper at the Capitals,

Shafali said, "When a very experienced person is standing across from you, your body language changes on its own. Playing with a player like that and building partnerships is a great privilege in my opinion. She has changed the game with her batting."

Reema Malhotra, the former India women's cricketer, felt Shafali is now achieving consistency with the bat in

## NRAI lauds Indian Army for initiating sustainable talent development program for girls in shooting

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi  
National Rifle Association of India (NRAI), the national governing body for the sport of Shooting, has lauded the efforts of the Indian Army for initiating a sustainable and structured talent development program exclusively for young girls, in order to build champion international shooters. The Army Marksmanship Unit (AMU) at Mhow, Madhya Pradesh, recently announced the raising of the Girls Sports Company in the Shooting category, inviting girls in the age group of 12-16 to enroll as Shooters.

Speaking on the initiative Kalikesh Narayan Singh Deo, senior vice-president, NRAI, said, "This is an excellent initiative by the Indian Army which will give girls, particularly from rural & economically weaker sections an opportunity to make a career in the sport. The Indian Army has always been at the forefront of developing sport in the country and they have again set the bar high. This is also an affirmative step in the spirit of the Olympic movement and will definitely enhance women empowerment and equal opportunity in the sport."

NRAI said it will offer complete support for this initiative which will create opportunities for talented rural girls, who will be provided with education, the best facilities and the required infrastructure.

The selection trials for the first batch of the Girls Sports Company, Mhow, will be conducted from March 20 to 23 at AMU and online registration for the same is open until March 10.

Girls who have passed fifth standard and are between the ages of 12 to 16 (as of April 1,



2024) are eligible for the trials. The selected girl athletes will be provided with free education up to the Matriculation level along with free boarding and lodging.

They will also have a chance to be enrolled in the Indian Army after attaining 17.5 years of age subject to passing recruitment standards and vacancies as per the policy.

Also sharing his thoughts on the salutary initiative K Sultan Singh, secretary general, NRAI, said, "The Government has been very supportive of sport promotion and athletes in the country and it is time that more and more Government and Corporate departments emulate the Indian Army in all-round development of sport towards developing a strong sports culture for the Nation."

"It is visionary & indeed a commendable effort by the Army who have continue to produce world-class marksmen and now will hopefully produce world beating women shooters as well."

## Golf: Indian Open scheduled from March 28 to 31



**Team Absolute** | New Delhi  
The Indian Golf Union on Friday announced the schedule of the Indian Open - the country's National Open and flagship golf tournament, which will be held from March 28-31 at the DLF Golf & Country Club, Gurgaon.

The tournament will feature 144 professional golfers across the globe including Aman Raj, Manu Gandas, and other 31 Indian participants. However, the list of players is still not confirmed for the event.

After a hiatus of three years from 2020 to 2022 due to COVID-19 restrictions, the tournament returned to DLF GC in 2023, where German player Marcel Siem secured victory. The tournament will mark its 57th edition in 2024 with a prize money of US\$ 2.25 mn.

Brijinder Singh, President, Indian Golf Union, said, "I take pride in announcing the Hero Indian Open 2024. It is our flagship event and we look forward to the excitement and bonhomie it brings. Let's make this event a memorable one."

"The Hero Indian Open stands as a pinnacle in the Indian Golf calendar offering a platform where our ace golfers can showcase their talents and also compete alongside and learn from the very best in the world."

This event has consistently brought together a fusion of skill, sportsmanship, and camaraderie fostering an environment that elevates the standard of golf in India." In October, the DP World Tour (formerly recognised as the European Tour) unveiled its 2024 season schedule, reserving a notable spot labelled "Asian swing". The Asian Swing will begin with the Singapore Classic from March 21-24, before heading to India, and Korea for the Korea Championship, the ISPS Handa Championship in Japan, and finally China for the return of the Volvo China Open.

The five 'Global Swings' are followed by the 'Back 9' events, and the season is rounded out by the 'DP World Tour Play-Offs'.

## Navarro books quarterfinal spot; Vekic holds off Stakusic at San Diego Open

**San Diego** | Agencies  
Emma Navarro of America advanced to her third quarterfinal of the season after defeating Katerina Siniakova 6-3, 3-6, 6-1 at the San Diego Open. The win is Navarro's second over Siniakova this month, having bested the Czech in three sets at the Dubai Tennis Championships.

Navarro will face Australian qualifier Daria Saville on Friday in a bid to make her third semifinal of the season and first at a WTA 500 since San Diego last fall.

The 22-year-old won her first WTA title in January in Hobart and has already notched 14 main draw wins this season. She is tied with World No.1 Iga Swiatek for the third-most wins this season, sitting behind only



Elena Rybakina (17) and Jelena Ostapenko (16), according to ATP.

Earlier in the day, No.7 seed Donna Vekic of Croatia fended off a valiant effort by Canadian teenager Marina Stakusic before posting a 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 win to reach the quarterfinals.

Vekic, the 2022 San Diego runner-up, took exactly 2 hours to overcome rising 19-year-old Stakusic, a qualifier ranked No.283 and paved the way into her second quarterfinal of the season, following her semifinal showing at Linz a month ago.

She will face Great Britain's Katie Boulter in the quarterfinals. It will be the first meeting between Vekic and 49th-ranked Boulter, who upset No.2 seed Beatriz Haddad Maia on Wednesday.

## Central Contracts: Hardik Pandya's case is different from Ishan Kishan, Shreyas Iyer, says Aakash Chopra

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi  
Former Indian cricketer-turned-commentator Aakash Chopra has backed the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) after it handed Hardik Pandya a Grade A category Annual contract despite not featuring in international cricket since the ODI World Cup 2023 while denying the same to Ishan Kishan and Shreyas Iyer for not playing domestic cricket. The BCCI on Wednesday released the list of players that have been awarded annual central contracts for 2023-2024.

Contracts were denied to players like Iyer and Ishan Kishan, while Hardik was placed in the Grade A category. Hardik suffered an ankle injury during the ODI World Cup 2023 in the match against Bangladesh in Pune in October and the all-rounder has been out of action ever since. Fans on social media also pointed out Pandya's unavailability from domestic cricket regularly. However, Aakash Chopra defended the BCCI's decision and reckoned that Hardik cannot be punished for not playing first-class cricket, given he has not been contesting for a spot in India's Test squad.

"Hardik Pandya's case is very simple. Why



would you punish him if he has not made a mistake? He is not playing red-ball cricket. That ambition or aspiration does not exist anymore. He has not said that as such, but the truth is that he is not available at all for any Test series," Chopra said on his YouTube Channel.

"So if you are not at all auditioning for Tests, no one will ask you to play first-class cricket. Why would you play four-day games when you don't have that much strength in your body to bowl so many overs and have injury problems? So why should he play - fair play," Chopra added. Chopra also emphasised the unavailability of Hardik Pandya's unavailability from domestic and international cricket and explained that the all-round player never missed a game like Ishan Kishan and Shreyas Iyer, therefore Hardik's situation cannot be compared to Kishan and Iyer's.

"Let's try to understand the chronology slightly. It will just clear up your mind why a different rule has been kept for him and why it is wrong to include him with Ishan and Shreyas. He got injured during the World Cup, that was October-November," Chopra explained.





## JACKIE SHROFF USED TO MAKE 'ANDA CURRY PATTA' FOR SON TIGER AFTER SHOOTING

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Tiger Shroff said that his father Jackie Shroff is a "really good cook" and revealed that the veteran Bollywood star would make a "meal of anda

curry patta" after coming home from shoots.

Talking about Jackie's cooking, Tiger said: "He used to make it for me all the time, you know, after he used to pack up from his shoots, come home and cook himself a meal of Anda Curry patta and the same for

me...He is a really good cook."

The 67-year-old star, who has worked in films such as 'Hero', 'Parinda', 'Karma' and 'Ram Lakhan' to name a few, went viral on social media after he shared easy recipes of "bhindi" (ladyfinger) and "kaddu" (pumpkin).

Social media influencers made

videos of his recipes and even shared it online. Tiger was on the chat show 'No Filter Neha', hosted by actress Neha Dhupia. Talking about his upcoming films, the 33-year-old actor will next be seen in 'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan' alongside Akshay Kumar. The film is slated to release on Eid.

## Kriti says her quest to do 'something meaningful' made her turn producer

Team Absolute | Mumbai

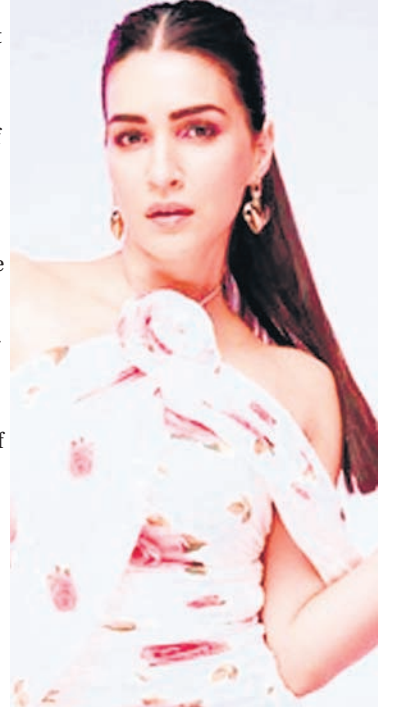
Actress Kriti Sanon shared that her upcoming film 'Do Patti' is an opportunity for her, both as an actor and producer.

Kriti is stepping into the realm of film production with 'Do Patti', which also stars Kajol.

The actress revealed the reason behind starting her home banner Blue Butterfly Films - creating more opportunities.

Reflecting on her choices, Kriti said: "After 'Mimi', I was consciously trying to find something meaningful, intense, and which had layers to it. As an actor, I should feel satisfied and be able to push myself to do things I haven't attempted before."

"I wasn't getting such an opportunity for a long time. I really believe that sometimes when you can't find an opportunity that excites you, you've got to create one. 'Do Patti' is that opportunity for me, both as an actor and producer," she added.



## YRF LAUNCHES CASTING APP SO THAT ASPIRING ACTORS CAN APPLY FROM ANYWHERE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Film production company Yash Raj Films, has launched its casting app to help acting aspirants to get casting information and submit auditions.

The YRF casting app will enable aspirants to register profile details and will be able to soon get information about all the upcoming auditions related to their projects -- films and streaming projects.

The company, headed by Aditya Chopra, believes that it will tackle the issues caused by fake YRF casting accounts that mislead people about auditions and are a threat to YRF's market reputation.

Shanoo Sharma, who looks after selecting and grooming aspirants to be launched in projects by the banner, will personally monitor all auditions coming through this app.

"The YRF Casting App is a progressive step towards making aspiring actors reach out directly

to YRF for projects that the company is making. We are certain that there are countless, brilliant actors throughout the world waiting to be discovered. This could be their chance of a lifetime!" Shanoo said

Calling it a "safe space", she added that for the first time, "an aspiring actor can reach out to a production house directly."

"They don't have to rely on anyone else for their shot at achieving their dreams."



## YAMI SAYS SHE HOPES TO HAVE INSPIRED YOUNG WOMEN TO JOIN IB, NIA

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Yami Gautam says she hopes her character, spirited intelligence officer Zooni Haksar in the political action thriller 'Article 370', inspires young women to join the Intelligence Bureau and the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

Sharing her vision, Yami, whose character in the film protects the nation from terrorist threats, noted: "If your audience connects with the film at a personal level and says their teenage daughters want to now join the IB or become an NIA officer, that is a huge compliment."

She also pointed out how important it was to get the acknowledged of Army veterans who have seen that life in the old Jammu and Kashmir state. "That kind of validation is precious," Yami added.

A political thriller, 'Article 370' is set against the backdrop of the abrogation by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi government of the constitutional provision that assured a special status to Jammu and Kashmir.

Set against the backdrop of true events, the film offers audiences a gripping narrative with political intrigue, national security threats and pulse-pounding action sequences woven in.



## DILJIT Dosanjh to Kareena Kapoor: 'Tera ni main lover'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Diljit Dosanjh has confessed his love for Bollywood diva Kareena Kapoor Khan, going by his latest post on social media. Diljit, who will be seen sharing screen space with Kareena in 'Crew', took to Instagram, where he dropped a few stills from the upcoming film.

In the pictures, Diljit looks dapper in a brown embroidered shirt paired with light brown pants. He is seen embracing Kareena, who looks every inch gorgeous in an all red backless outfit.

The still is from the upcoming song titled 'Naina' from the film, which is directed by Rajesh Krishnan.

The film also stars Tabu, Kriti Sanon and Kapil Sharma.

The motley of pictures has the song 'Lover', which was dropped two years ago by Diljit, playing in the background.

The singer captioned the post: "Tera ni main lover."

'Crew', which will release on March 29, revolves around three women, who hustle to move on with life. But as they try to make their way forward, their destinies lead them to some unexpected and unwaranted situations.



## Sara Ali Khan shines in photoshoot with her all-green ensemble

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood actress Sara Ali Khan has gone green in a floor-sweeping ensemble in a new photoshoot. Sara took to Instagram, where she shared a gamut of photographs along with a few clips from the shoot. In the pictures, the 28-year-old actress is seen sporting a lime green hued gown with a long trail. The puffy off shoulder neckline with a thigh-high slit makes the ensemble unique.

The actress completed her look with minimum make-up, flower shaped drop earrings and a neatly tied bun.

Instead of a caption, Sara chose to drop a flower bouquet, leaf and a cabbage emoji.

## INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Promita