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MAHAYUTI & MVA PARTNERS STEP UP VOTER OUTREACH ACTIVITIES; NAME A FEW CANDIDATES

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Even as MahaYuti partners and Maha Vikas Aghadi allies in Maharashtra are yet to finalise the seat-sharing deal for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, they have stepped up their outreach to voters.

Some programmes were also held for launching and foundation laying of a slew of development projects ahead of the announcement of the Model Code Conduct for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde as well as his deputies -- Devendra Fadnavis and Ajit Pawar, have been conducting whirlwind tours across Maharashtra.

Also, the NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar, Shiv Sena (UBT) head Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray, Congress leaders Nana Patole and Legislature Party leader Balasaheb Thorat have been visiting across the state to seek the voters' support in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

Maharashtra has a total of 48 Lok Sabha constituencies. Simultaneously, there has been a rush for the release of notifications on many government schemes, programmes, and projects in the last two days. Over 250 such notifications were issued and their numbers are expected to increase ahead of the announcement of the poll schedule.

Maharashtra CM Eknath Shinde has announced the candidature of sitting MP Rahul Shewale from the Mumbai South Central constituency.

Shinde has been travelling to attend a number of government functions and also party rallies as he is the leading campaigner and mobiliser in his party.

On the other hand, his deputy, Devendra Fadnavis has also been quite pro-active in taking up government programmes to the voters and addressing party functions with a resolve to achieve BJP's Mission 400 plus at the national level, and 45-plus target in Maharashtra.



According to political observers, as far as another deputy to CM Shinde -- Ajit Pawar is concerned, the upcoming general elections are an acid test for him to prove his pan-Maharashtra leadership.

The upcoming LS polls also provide him a window to justify his move to ditch his uncle -- former Union Minister and veteran politician Sharad Pawar -- and join hands with the BJP and CM Shinde. Ajit Pawar has been addressing a series of party rallies and attending government functions in an attempt to increase the party's presence across the state. NCP (SP) has declared the candidature of party chief Sharad Pawar's daughter from Baramati, Supriya Sule, who is the sitting MP, and actor Amol Kolhe from Shirur seat in Pune district.

Sunil Tatkare, the Maharashtra unit chief of the NCP faction led by Ajit Pawar, has announced Sunetra Pawar -- Ajit Pawar's wife, as the party candidate from Baramati.

Baramati is set to witness a straight fight between Supriya Sule (Sharad Pawar's daughter) and Sunetra Pawar (Ajit Pawar's wife). Sharad Pawar, 84, has been extensively travelling across Baramati and

Maharashtra, appealing to the party members to remain with him during the current crisis.

Pawar, who has a direct connection with youth and old guards, is exhorting them not to be deterred by pressure tactics by the MahaYuti but to be ready for the upcoming polls.

Meanwhile, Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray has declared Amol Kirtikar's nomination from Mumbai North West.

Amol Kirtikar, who is the son of veteran Shiv Sena leader and MP Gajanan Kirtikar, is expected to take on his father in Mumbai, though Thackeray's unilateral announcement was criticised by former Mumbai Congress chief, Sanjay Nirupam, claiming that it was against the 'alliance dharma'.

He also alleged that Amol Kirtikar was accused in the 'Khichadi scam', especially for his involvement in the free food distribution programme undertaken by Mumbai civic body by allegedly accepting bribes during the Covid period.

Nirupam has claimed that he has been preparing for the elections for the last five years and is quite keen to contest from Mumbai North West.

Incidentally, Uddhav Thackeray despite being targeted by the BJP and Eknath Shinde, has been carrying out region-wise tours to charge up the cadres. He has so far travelled to Konkan, Marathwada, North Maharashtra, and Vidarbha, taking an aggressive posture against the BJP.

Besides, Thackeray has been visiting the 'shakhnas' in Mumbai.

In the case of Congress, its state unit chief Nana Patole and legislature party leader Balasaheb Thorat are on the move while downplaying the exit of former Ashok Chavan who recently joined BJP and was elected to the Rajya Sabha.

The Congress is banking on Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra's entry in Maharashtra to help in re-energising and activating the party cadres for the upcoming general elections.

MP CM will inaugurate the Ken-Betwa Jal Kalash Yatra on March 11



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav will inaugurate the Ken-Betwa Jal Kalash Yatra on March 11 at 10 am at Kusha Bhau Thackeray Convention Hall. Water Resources Minister Tulsi Silawat will be specially present on this occasion. Water awareness programs will be organized in the respective villages from March 11 to March 13. Under this, Kalash Yatra and various water-based programs will be organized in 3614 possible beneficiary villages of 17 districts of Ken-Betwa Link

Project and Parvati-Kalisindh-Chambal Link Project.

Additional Chief Secretary Water Resources Dr. Rajesh Rajora said that Kalash Yatra will be taken out on the main roads in all the potentially benefited villages, in which maximum number of villagers will participate, including distinguished citizens, public representatives, farmers, women and students. Street plays focusing on the importance of Ken-Betwa Link Project and Parvati-Kalisindh-Chambal Link Project and the need for water, bhajan presentation by

bhajan troupe and various cultural programs will also be organized in these villages.

Besides, painting, essay, sports and debate competitions based on water will be organized in the schools of these villages. Water-based wall writing and other publicity will also be done in these villages.

Films focusing on the benefits of the project and the importance of water will also be shown through mobile vehicles in all these villages. Participation of self-help groups and voluntary organizations will be ensured in the programs.

Mayawati gives nod for alliance talks with BRS, claims BSP leader

Hyderabad | Agencies

Bhujan Samaj Party (BSP) national president Mayawati has given go ahead for advance negotiations on alliance with the Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS) in Telangana for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

This was revealed by BSP state president R.S. Praveen Kumar on Sunday.

BSP Central Coordinator and MP, Sri Ramji will arrive soon in Hyderabad to guide the party in this historic effort, Praveen Kumar said.

He thanked the BSP chief and former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh for her nod for advance talks with the BRS. He reiterated that the alliance with BRS is not part of any national alliance. Praveen Kumar had Saturday made a clarification about Mayawati's statement on alliances. She had posted on 'X' that reports about "forming an electoral alliance or third front, etc., are fake and wrong". The BSP state president said the BSP chief on



several occasions made it clear that the party will not have an alliance with any national party, NDA or INDIA alliance. He said Mayawati did not speak about the parties which are not part of any alliance. Praveen Kumar said BSP high command has given permission for alliance talks with BRS. The talks will continue till an agreement on seat-sharing is reached.

On March 5, BRS president K. Chandrasekhar Rao and Praveen Kumar had announced that BRS and BSP have in principle decided to work together in the coming polls. The announcement was made after a meeting. The BRS, which lost power to Congress in the recent Assembly elections, has announced candidates for five out of 17 Lok Sabha seats.

Shock to Congress in Bengal, Trinamool fields candidates on all 42 seats

Kolkata | Agencies

As Trinamool Congress general secretary Abhishek Banerjee announced the name of former cricketer Yusuf Pathan as party's candidate from Baharampur constituency of West Bengal for Lok Sabha elections, there was a pin-drop silence for a moment at the mega rally at Brigade Parade Ground in Central Kolkata on Sunday.

The very next moment, the entire ground heard the roar of accolades, probably after the audience got over the initial surprise as the Pathan's name was never any sort of discussion or speculation during the last few days as a probable party candidate.

State Congress President Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury is the five-time sitting Lok Sabha member from that constituency.

Few minutes later, there was another round of silence followed by accolades as Abhishek Banerjee announced the name of another former cricketer Kirti Azad as the party candidate from Bardhaman-Durgapur constituency in West Burdwan district. BJP's Surinder



Singh Ahluwalia is the sitting MP from that constituency.

Another major surprise, actor Nusrat Jahan, the sitting MP from the Basirhat seat, has been dropped from the list. Party MLA Haji Nurul Islam has been fielded from the constituency. As expected, popular actor of yesteryears, Shatrughan Sinha, who is

the sitting TMC Lok Sabha member from Asansol constituency also in West Burdwan district, got re-nominated this time as well.

Another surprise in the list was fielding of Bengali cine-star and anchor of the popular reality show "Didi Number 1" Rachana Banerjee for Hooghly Lok Sabha constituency

in Hooghly district. The sitting BJP Lok Sabha member from that constituency is another act-turned-politician Lok Chatterjee.

Actress Saayoni Ghosh, who is the currently the state president of the youth wing of Trinamool Congress in West Bengal, will be contesting from the Jadavpur constituency after actor and the sitting MP from that constituency Mimi Chakraborty announced that she wanted to quit politics.

Another actress-turned politician June Malia, who is already a Trinamool Congress legislator, will be contesting from Medinipur constituency in West Midnapore district. BJP's former national vice-president and former state president in West Bengal, Dilip Ghosh, is sitting Lok Sabha MP of the seat.

Actor Prasun Banerjee, who is already the sitting Lok Sabha member from Howrah constituency in Kolkata adjacent Howrah district, has also been re-nominated.

Mahua Moitra, who was expelled from the Lok Sabha in a bribe-for-question scam, has been re-nominated from the Krishnanagar Lok Sabha constituency.

Protesters resort to 'rail roko' agitation in Punjab



Chandigarh | Agencies

Protesters in Punjab on Sunday stopped trains for five hours from 12 noon at various places in the state as part of their agitation, leaving commuters harried.

The call for the 'rail roko' protest was given by Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha over their demands, including a legal guarantee of minimum support price (MSP).

The protest ended peacefully with no untoward incident across the state.

The agitators staged sit-in protests on railway tracks at 52 locations in 22 districts,

including Amritsar, Ludhiana, Tarn Taran, Hoshiarpur, Fazilka, Sangrur, Moga and Bathinda.

The trains were halted at nearly 52 places across Punjab. The farmers, mainly from Punjab, have established camps at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points on the Punjab-Haryana border since February 13 as they were stopped by security forces for moving ahead during their march to Delhi.

They have also been demanding implementation of the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations for MSP, pensions, and waiver of debts.

Mutual funds AUM grows at 38 pc year on year in Feb

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The overall assets under management (AUM) of the mutual fund industry in February continued to remain above the Rs 50 lakh crore threshold at Rs 54.5 lakh crore, growing at 38.2 per cent year-on-year and 3.4 per cent sequentially, due to continued inflows as capital markets test new highs, said Sanjay Agarwal, Senior Director, CareEdge Ratings.

Inflows in equity funds remain high even as investments into mid and smallcap schemes remain strong yet moderate sequentially, he said.

The SIP contribution to the mutual funds industry continues to remain robust as retail investors continue to



retain faith in the markets. Meanwhile, the debt schemes recorded an inflow of Rs 0.64 lakh crore during February compared to inflows of Rs 0.76 lakh crore in January. The largest inflows have been in the liquid fund category, he said.

The Credit Risk category continued to witness 11th straight month of outflows, Agarwal said.

Venkat Chalasani, Chief Executive, AMFI, said, "As we delve into the February 2024 data, we observe that there is a surge in SIP accounts, totalling 8.20 crore with 49.79 lakh new SIP registrations. This underscores investors' unwavering commitment to disciplined wealth accumulation. The industry's net AUM also reached Rs 54.5 lakh crore in February 2024."

BJP MP FROM HISAR BRIJENDRA SINGH JOINS CONGRESS

Chandigarh: Ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP from Haryana's Hisar constituency, Brijendra Singh, on Sunday resigned from the primary membership of the party and joined the Congress.

Brijendra Singh is the son of BJP leader and former Union Minister Chaudhary Birender Singh.

He took voluntary retirement as an Indian Administrative Service officer after serving for 21 years and made his electoral debut in 2019. A few minutes after his announcement on 'X', Brijendra Singh reached the residence of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge in Delhi to join the grand old party.

Brijendra Singh quit the BJP nearly five months after his father Birender Singh gave an ultimatum to the party at a rally in Jind in October 2023.

Birender Singh had then said that he would leave the BJP if it continued an alliance with the Jannayak Janta Party (JJP) of Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala in Haryana.

Meanwhile, it has been learnt that bureaucrat-turned-politician, Brijendra Singh, is set to be the Congress candidate from Hisar.

Sand mining case: Lalu Yadav's aide Subhash Yadav arrested

Team Absolute | New Delhi

RJD leader Subhash Yadav, a close aide of former Bihar chief minister Lalu Prasad, has been arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in connection with illegal sand mining case.

Subhash Yadav was arrested late Saturday night and Rs 2.15 crore were recovered from his possession.

The RJD leader's arrest follows 14 hours of raids by the ED at six places related to him and his associates in Patna.

The ED teams reached the residence of Subhash Yadav in Danapur locality on Saturday morning.

Simultaneous raids were also conducted at his other house in the Maa Marachiya Devi Apartment and the biscuit factory in Nasriganj.

Sources said the ED scanned documents related to sand mining and other financial transactions.



Earlier, the Income Tax Department had conducted raids at Yadav's premises in connection with a tax evasion case in 2018.

The ED had also raided his premises two years ago. At least 20 FIRs have been registered by the Bihar Police against M/s Broadsons Commodities Pvt Ltd (BCPL) whose director is Subhash Yadav.

The case pertains to BCPL engaging in illegal sand mining and sale without using e-challans leading to revenue losses.



HARYANA: BJP'S ALLIANCE PARTNER JJP TO CONTEST LS POLLS ALONE

Chandigarh | Agencies

BJP's alliance partner in Haryana, the Jannayak Janta Party (JJP), whose leader Dushyant Chautala is the Deputy Chief Minister in the government, on Saturday announced that it is fully prepared to contest the Lok Sabha elections.

A party leader quoting Chautala, said the JJP coordination committee has held two rounds of talks on the issue of alliance.

He said the Hisar and Bhiwani-Mahendragarh Lok Sabha seats are JJP's priority, on which the possibility of an alliance can be discussed.

He said the party is preparing for 10 out of 10 seats.

"Till now, the JJP has held successful rallies in six Lok Sabha seats and on March 13, the seventh Lok Sabha rally will be held in Hisar in which the public will be informed about the development works done in Hisar," Chautala told the media in Sirsa after



the election coordination committee meeting.

At the meeting, the strategy to contest the upcoming Lok Sabha elections "strongly" was discussed in detail. In response to a question, Chautala said regional parties are continuously joining the NDA.

"The BJP-JJP coalition government has been successful in the last four and a half years with the objective of providing better facilities for farmers and the common person, and we will continue to work with the same thinking in future also."

On the question of Hisar MP Brijendra Singh leaving the BJP and joining the Congress, the Deputy Haryana Chief Minister said "that is his own political decision and Brijendra Singh has taken this decision after a year of demanding discontinuing the alliance (with the JJP)". He said that time would tell whether Brijendra Singh will stay in Hisar or go to Sonapat.

President swears in former SC judge Justice A.M. Khanwilkar as Chairperson, Lokpal



Team Absolute | New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu administered the oath of office of Chairperson, Lokpal to former apex court judge, Justice Ajay Manikrao Khanwilkar, at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on Sunday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Vice President Jagdeep Thakkar were also present on the occasion.

Justice Khanwilkar superannuated in July 2022 after serving a 6-year term in the Supreme Court. It was a Justice Khanwilkar-led bench of the

top court which had affirmed the stringent provisions of the PMLA (Provisions of Money Laundering Act) in connection with the definition of proceeds of crime, power of arrest, search & seizure, attachment of properties and also the twin bail conditions.

Sandeshkhali will turn around BJP's fate in LS polls: Bengal LoP

Kolkata | Agencies

West Bengal Leader of the Opposition (LoP) Suwendu Adhikari on Sunday said that Sandeshkhali would turn around the fate of BJP in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

"Sandeshkhali alone can change the equation in the entire Lok Sabha election. We are expecting a lead of at least one lakh votes from Sandeshkhali alone," the LoP said while addressing a meeting organised by BJP in Sandeshkhali along with BJP State President Sukanta Majumdar.

Sandeshkhali has witnessed protests by local women against alleged sexual harassment and violence by a section of local Trinamool Congress leaders. The LoP said that people



in West Bengal will give a fitting reply to the Trinamool Congress in the Lok Sabha polls. "The verdict will be farewell to the corrupt Trinamool Congress," Adhikari said.

Meanwhile, Majumdar ridiculed Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for her comments frequently describing Prime Minister Narendra Modi as an "outsider".

"The Prime Minister is a genuine Bengali since he knows how to respect the women of Bengal," Majumdar said.

Commenting on the Trinamool Congress list of Lok Sabha candidates, BJP's Rajya Sabha member Samik Bhattacharya said that the state's ruling party is an ideologically and politically bankrupt political force.

SS-UBT legislator Ravindra Waikar joins Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Shiv Sena Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray (SS-UBT) legislator and former Maharashtra minister Ravindra Waikar on Sunday switched to the Shiv Sena faction led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. Waikar's move to desert SS-UBT is being seen as a major setback to the party supremo and former CM Uddhav Thackeray ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

He made the switch just a day after he had welcomed Uddhav Thackeray to Jogeshwari East -- the constituency Waikar represents in the Maharashtra Assembly.

Waikar has been under the scanner of the Enforcement Directorate in a money laundering case related to alleged irregularities in luxury hotel construction.

Waikar has already been questioned by the financial probe agency



in this connection.

The Economic Offences Wing of the Mumbai Police had booked Waikar and five others on a complaint filed by BJP leader, Kirit Somaiya. Waikar's exit came days after the BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) told the Supreme

Court that it was withdrawing its earlier order that had revoked permission granted to Waikar to build a five-star hotel in Jogeshwari East.

The civic body submitted that it will reconsider his representation.

Waikar received a major relief and immediately after the BMC's move,

speculation about his switch to Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena began in the political circles of Mumbai.

However, Waikar, after joining Shinde-led Sena, in the presence of the party MP Gajanan Kirtikar, said that he has already extended his cooperation to the probe agencies and will continue to do so in the future as well.

He added that he has taken a decision to join CM Shinde-led Shiv Sena for the completion of a slew of developmental work in his (Jogeshwari East) constituency lying pending over lack of funds.

Chief Minister Eknath Shinde welcomed Waikar, his family and a number of 'Shiv Sainiks' and office bearers who joined the Sena faction led by him on Sunday.

CM Shinde also promised to look into the work proposals submitted by Waikar and take the necessary decisions for their completion.

MAN WHO FELL INTO 40-FOOT DEEP BOREWELL IN DELHI FOUND DEAD

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A man, who fell into a 40-foot deep borewell in Delhi's Keshopur area, was found dead by the rescuers, who dug a parallel hole on Sunday with the aim to save him.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (west) Vichitra Veer said that the person has been extracted from the borewell and unfortunately, he is dead.

"He appears to be of the age between 25-35 years. Efforts are being made to identify him," said the DCP.

"With deep sorrow, I am sharing the news that the man who fell into the borewell has been found dead by the rescue team. May God grant him a place at His divine feet," said Delhi Minister Atishi.

"According to initial information, the deceased person was around 30-years-old. The police will investigate how he entered the borewell chamber and fell inside. I express my gratitude to the NDRF team, who made every possible effort in the rescue operation for many hours," she wrote on X. The borewell is located in the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) area in Keshopur Mandi.

Delhi Fire Services Director Atul Garg said that initial message "was received at around 1 a.m. that a person had fallen in the water treatment



plant following which teams along with five tenders were rushed to the spot which is DJB, Keshopur Mandi."

The DCP said that after receiving a police control room call at Vikaspuri police station, a police team rushed to the spot.

For over eight hours, the rescue team attempted various strategies to extract the person from the borewell without success. This morning, an NDRF team arrived and, following careful consideration, devised a plan to rescue the person by excavating a

new borewell adjacent to the existing one. In the afternoon, the rescuers extracted the man, who was already dead.

Following the incident, Atishi had issued an order and directed the Chief Secretary to conduct a time-bound enquiry into the incident and take strong and exemplary action against any officers found responsible.

"A deeply unfortunate incident has taken place in Delhi today, where someone has fallen into an aban-

doned borewell in the Keshopur Sewerage Treatment Plant. While this borewell was on land that had been handed over to Delhi Metro in 2020, nonetheless it is our responsibility to examine if any lapses have taken place on the part of Delhi Jal Board, and to ensure that no such incident takes place in Delhi in the future," read the order.

"Chief Secretary is hereby directed to conduct a time-bound enquiry into the incident and take strong and exemplary action against any officers found responsible and ensure that all government and private abandoned borewells to be welded and sealed immediately," the order added.

However, Delhi Metro Rail Corporation in a statement said that they did not build this borewell nor did they make any use of it.

"The pump room inside which this borewell was located belongs to the Delhi Jal Board. The borewell was already installed inside that pump room when DMRC took over the area around it for construction work," said DMRC spokesperson Anuj Dayal.

"However, as a humanitarian gesture, DMRC engineers are present at the site and are ready to extend all necessary cooperation. In fact, DMRC has already constructed an alternative road and guard rooms for Delhi Jal Board in that vicinity in the last few months," he added.

Tripura Police seize drugs valued at Rs 5 crore, 3 held

Agartala | Agencies

Tripura Police on Sunday seized 55,000 methamphetamine tablets valued at Rs 5 crore from Agartala-bound vehicle near Bagbasa Naka Point in north Tripura and arrested three youths, police officials said.

North Tripura district Superintendent of Police Bhanupada Chakraborty said that acting on a tip-off, the police intercepted a vehicle at Bagbasa along Tripura-Assam inter-state border and recovered the highly addictive methamphetamine tablets, also locally called Yaba tablet or party tablet.

"The drugs smuggled from Myanmar and entered Tripura through Mizoram and Assam states. We are now interrogating the detainees to obtain further details. The arrested drug peddlers belong to Karimganj in southern Assam," Chakraborty told reporters.

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha, who also holds



the home portfolio, appreciating the role of the police in seizing the drugs, said on the X: "Tripura Police's role towards our vision of building Nasha Mukta Bharat is commendable."

Methamphetamine tablets smuggled in from Myanmar are one of the most trafficked drugs in recent years. These drugs have a huge demand in northeastern states, and other parts of India and neighbouring Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, the Assam Rifles organised an awareness programme as part of 'Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyan'

(drugs-free India campaign) at Radhanagar in Tripura's Unakoti District, Tripura on Sunday. During the campaign, an interactive session with the local youths and troops was conducted to educate them about the adverse effects of narcotics and psychotropic substances.

Assam Rifles is determined to address the root causes of substance abuse, providing education, counselling and organising lectures and demonstrations for the locals and make Tripura a drug-free state, an Assam Rifles statement said.

MANIPUR TO DEPORT 77 MYANMAR NATIONALS

Imphal | Agencies

The Manipur government will deport 77 Myanmar nationals, including 55 women and five children, by Monday, officials said here.

The Myanmar nationals fled to Manipur after the Military junta seized power in that country on February 1, 2021.

A senior official said here on Sunday that the first batch of seven Myanmar people was deported on March 8 through the Moreh border town in Manipur's Tengenoupal district.

The state home department had sought the Assam Rifles support for necessary assistance to the Deputy Commissioner and Superintendent of Police of Tengenoupal district in the deportation process.

Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh earlier said that although India is not signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, it has given shelter and aid to those fleeing the crisis in Myanmar on humanitarian grounds with a systematic approach.

Since the Military took over in Myanmar three years ago and the armed clashes have been going on between the Army and the pro-democracy civilian armed forces, over 5,000 Myanmar nationals, including women and children, have taken shelter in Manipur while over 32,000 people have taken shelter in Mizoram.

A majority of the refugees live in relief camps and government buildings in Mizoram, while many others are accommodated by their relatives. A large number of Myanmar people have been staying in rented houses.

Besides the civilians, a few hundred Myanmar soldiers also fled to Mizoram in different phases after their camps were captured by the armed pro-democracy ethnic groups, who stepped up their battle against the Army in early October last year. However, all the Army personnel were deported to their country.

The Manipur government has collected the biometric details of the Myanmar nationals, sheltered in the state.

Ashok Gehlot's close aide, 2 ex-ministers among 25 Cong leaders join BJP in Rajasthan

Jaipur | Agencies

As many as 25 Congress leaders in Rajasthan, including former Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot's close aide and former Agriculture Minister Lalchand Katariya, joined BJP here in the presence of Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma and state unit President C.P. Joshi on Sunday.

Former MLAs Richpal Singh Mirdha and Vijaypal Singh Mirdha were among the Nagaur's prominent Jat leaders who joined the BJP.

Over half a dozen senior leaders including three former ministers joined BJP, confirmed BJP leaders. Former minister Khiladi Lal Bairwa, considered close to former deputy CM Sachin Pilot, and former Minister of State for Home Rajendra Yadav,



also joined the party.

Bairwa said that he joined BJP considering the vision of PM Modi. "I was the chairman of the SC Commission. Then for one and a half years, I kept

telling CM Gehlot to give constitutional status to the commission.

SC population is only 18 per cent. But Congress considers SC-ST as its puppets. However, BJP made Dalit

Law Minister setting an example, he added. Many BJP leaders including Union Minister Bhupendra Yadav, Deputy CM Diya Kumari, Rajendra Rathore, Alka Gurjar and Vijaya Rahatkar were present on the stage during the joining ceremony of these leaders. Besides three former ministers and two Jat leaders who joined the BJP are: Alok Beniwal, Rampal Sharma, Ramnarayan Kisan, Anil Vyas, Omkar Singh Chaudhary, Gopal Ram Kukna, Ashok Jangid, Priya Meghwal, Suresh Choudhary, Rajendra Parswal, Shaitan Singh Mehra, Ramnarayan Jhajhra, Jagannath Burdak, Karamveer Choudhary, Kuldeep Dheva, Bachchu Singh Chaudhary, Ramlal Meena, Mahesh Sharma, Ranjeet Singh and Madhusudan Sharma.



GWALIOR SETS REMARKABLE BENCHMARK WITH AIRPORT CONSTRUCTION COMPLETED IN JUST 16 MONTHS: PM MODI

► PM MODI INAUGURATES AND LAYS THE FOUNDATION STONE FOR 14 OTHER AIRPORT PROJECTS WORTH RS 9 THOUSAND 811 CRORE. CM DR. MOHAN YADAV DISTRIBUTES RS. 678 CRORE TO 30,551 LABOUR FAMILIES WITH A SINGLE CLICK. THE ASSISTANCE FOR DISABILITY AND DEATH OF WORKERS HIKE TO RS 4 LAKH. HIKE IN WAGES OF UNSKILLED, SEMI-SKILLED AND AGRICULTURAL LABORERS. PART TIME LABORERS TO BE LINKED TO SAMBAL YOJANA. AIRPORTS TO BE BUILT IN UJJAIN, REWA, SATNA, DATIA, GUNA AND SHIVPURI. CM DR. YADAV LAUNCHING AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE FOR PUBLIC DEMONSTRATES HIS COMPASSION: ASSEMBLY SPEAKER TOMAR. RAJUMATA VIJAYARAJE SCINDIA INAUGURATES THE NEW TERMINAL BUILDING OF GWALIOR AIRPORT



mendable precedent for rapid progress nationwide. He emphasized that Gwalior's swift development epitomizes the pace of growth in the country. The government remains dedicated to enhancing the lives of all citizens, with a particular focus on facilitating easier access to air travel. Efforts are underway to expand air services to smaller cities, fostering increased industrial and business activities across the nation. Prime Minister Modi addressed the inauguration and foundation stone laying ceremony of sev-

eral national projects virtually from Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh. During the event, he remotely inaugurated the new terminal building of Rajmata Vijayaraje Scindia Airport, Gwalior. Additionally, Prime Minister Modi also marked the commencement and foundation stone laying of 14 other airport projects across the country, totaling an investment of Rs. 9,811 crore. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav disbursed a total sum of Rs 678 crore to 30,551 labor families with a single click under Mukhya Mantri Jan

Kalyan Sambal Yojana 2.0 in the programme at Gwalior Airport. Additionally, Dr. Yadav announced a substantial increase in assistance for workers affected by disability or death, raising the amount from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 4 lakh, emphasizing the government's unwavering support for laborers. Furthermore, workers will now receive a financial aid of Rs 40,000 to facilitate the purchase of e-scooters. In a bid to further bolster support for laborers, Dr. Yadav announced enhanced wages: Rs 11,450 for unskilled laborers, Rs 12,446 for semi-skilled laborers, and Rs 9,160 for agricultural laborers, underlining the government's commitment to the welfare of laborers. Moreover, part-time laborers will benefit from integration into the Sambal Yojana scheme. Dr. Yadav attributed these transformative measures to the guidance and vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, emphasizing the government's dedication to uplifting the lives of the most vulnerable segments of society. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav highlighted the remarkable strides of development under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, heralding a new era of transformation in India. He emphasized the government's commitment to ensuring air services accessible to every stratum of society, symbolizing inclusivity and progress. The inauguration of the new airport in honor of revered Rajmata Vijayaraje Scindia ji stands as a testament to India's rich heritage and evolving development landscape. Dr. Yadav expressed gratitude to Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia for the announcement of the Ujjain Airport, underscoring the collective effort towards state development. He affirmed the state's unwavering dedication to the continued pursuit of progress and prosperity.

PM Modi to gift fourth Vande Bharat to MP



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will flag-off the fourth semi-high speed Vande Bharat Express train for Madhya Pradesh on Monday, which will run between Khajuraho to Hazrat Nizamuddin (Delhi). PM Modi has already gifted three Vande Bharat Express trains at different occasions last year - one of them running between Bhopal to Anand Vihar (Delhi). While two others are running from Bhopal to Indore and Bhopal to Rewa (via Jabalpur). These two were gifted by PM Modi to the state on June 27. The fourth Vande Bharat Express train that will be operating from Khajuraho, will have five stops in Madhya Pradesh - Khajuraho, Gwalior, Jhansi, Lalitpur and Tikamgarh, a senior Railways official told IANS. According

to the West Central Railway Zone (Bhopal- division), the Vande Bharat Express train running between Khajuraho to Hazrat Nizamuddin will cover 667 km in 6.40 hours. As per the schedule, Vande Bharat Express train will leave from Khajuraho railway station at 2:30 pm (except on Monday) and will reach Delhi at 11.10 pm. Madhya Pradesh BJP president V D Sharma said the Prime Minister is giving a big gift to the people of Bundelkhand region. Notably, PM Modi had flagged-off the first Vande Bharat Express train for Madhya Pradesh during his visit to Bhopal on April 3, 2023. Prime Minister Modi had inaugurated the revamped Rani Kamalapati station, India's 'most-modern' railway station, in Madhya Pradesh's Bhopal city which was earlier known as Habibganj.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has hailed Gwalior's achievement in completing the construction of its new terminal building within just 16 months, setting a com-

2 charred to death as gas tanker catches fire after falling into gorge

Team Absolute | Raisen

The driver and cleaner of a gas tanker were charred to death as the vehicle caught fire after falling into a gorge in Madhya Pradesh's Raisen district on Sunday, police said. The accident occurred around 3.30 pm on the Bhopal-Jabalpur Highway under Sultanpur police station limits, about 40 km from the district headquarters, an official said. The driver of the capsule tanker transporting LPG lost control of the vehicle, and it fell into a gorge, Sultanpur police station in-charge Rajat



Sarath said. The tanker caught fire, and the blaze spread to a few huts in the vicinity, killing four to five cattle, he said. Both the driver and cleaner were charred to death, and their identity is yet to be

ascertained, the official said. Fire tenders were called in from neighbouring towns, and the firefighting operation was underway, he said. A case has been registered in this regard, the official said.

Country's progress visible under Prime Minister Modi's leadership: Jyotiraditya Scindia

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Sunday said that a great leader is one who always thinks about the progress of the country and under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India is witnessing tremendous growth which is visible. "It is the first time in the last 75 years that 15 new airport terminals, including three airports, are being inaugurated at one time. It is a historic day for the country's civil aviation department," Scindia said while addressing the gathering of BJP leaders during the inaugural ceremony of a new terminal at Gwalior airport. PM Modi on Sunday inaugurated and laid the foundation of as many as 15 airports in different parts of the country, including two in Madhya Pradesh - Gwalior and Jabalpur. Specifying about the newly developed airport terminal of Gwalior, which has been named after one of the founding members of the BJP and his



grand-mother Vijaya Raje Scindia, the minister said the new terminal will help to connect Gwalior with all prominent cities in the country. He said Gwalior airport was named after his grandmother during former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's regime. "This occasion is very special for me as the new terminal of Gwalior airport, which has been named after my grandmother, is

being inaugurated on the occasion of the birth anniversary of my father (Madhavrao Scindia), who built the Gwalior airport," Scindia added. Visitors will find a glimpse of the history of the Gwalior dynasty as well as the heritage of cultural and social values of Gwalior-Chambal regions at the newly developed airport terminal. Gwalior airport has been one of the fourth in Madhya Pradesh, three others being Indore, Jabalpur and Bhopal. Scindia said that the state has only four airports but will be increased to 10 in the next few years. He said that PM Modi has already laid the foundations of three airports - Rewa, Satna and Datia. Three more airports, including one in Ujjain will be developed soon. "Gwalior airport was established on 29 acres of land, which now has spread on more than 144 acres of land. With addition a new terminal, which has been developed at Rs 650 crore and was completed in a record 16 months, Gwalior airport is now state's largest airport," Scindia added.

SOUTH AFRICAN CHEETAH GIVES BIRTH TO 5 CUBS, NUMBER IN KUNO PARK NOW 26

Team Absolute | New Delhi/Bhopal

A five-year-old cheetah, brought to the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh from South Africa as part of an ambitious reintroduction project, has given birth to five cubs, Union Minister Bhupendra Yadav said today. With this, the tally of Indian-born cubs has increased to 13 while the total number of cheetahs, including the cubs, is 26 at the Kuno park. "High Five, Kuno! Female cheetah Gamiini, age about 5 years, brought from Tswalu Kalahari Reserve, South Africa, has given birth to 5 cubs today. This takes the tally of the Indian born cubs to 13. This is the fourth cheetah litter on Indian soil and the first litter of cheetahs brought from South Africa," said Yadav on X, formerly Twitter. "Congratulations to all, especially the team of forest officers, vets, and field staff



who have ensured a stress-free environment for cheetahs, which has led to successful mating and birth of the cubs. The total number of cheetahs, including cubs in Kuno National Park, is 26. Gamiini's legacy leaps forward: Introducing her adorable cubs," added the Forest Minister. Namibian cheetah Jwala gave birth to four cubs on January 20 and Aasha, another Namibian cheetah, gave birth to three cubs earlier that month. While January recorded the birth of seven cubs, it also witnessed the death of Shaurya -- an adult Namibian cheetah -- on January 16. Cheetahs were declared extinct in India in 1952. In 2022, eight Cheetahs - brought from Namibia - were introduced in India under Project Cheetah. Subsequently, 12 cheetahs from South Africa were also translocated and released in Kuno National Park in February 2023.

Man kills brother with axe for turning off music at family function

Team Absolute | BSatna

A man allegedly hacked his brother to death with an axe after the latter turned off the music and stopped him from dancing at a family function in Madhya Pradesh's Satna district, police said on Sunday. The police have arrested the accused, Rajkumar Kol (30), for the murder that occurred at Mauhar village under Kothi police station limits on Friday night, an official said. Rajkumar's brother Rakesh (35) had organised a function at his house, during which music was being played on a

sound system, said Rupendra Rajput, in-charge of Kothi police station. The victim later turned off the music, and the accused wanted to continue dancing, he said. An argument ensued between the brothers, and in a fit of anger, Rajkumar allegedly attacked Rakesh with an axe and killed him on the spot, the official said. The accused fled the scene and was later apprehended near a culvert where he was hiding, he said. The accused was placed under arrest, and the weapon used in the crime was seized, the official said.

Conclusion of the three-day "Mahadev" festival organized on the holy occasion of Mahashivratri in Bhojpur

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The three-day Mahadev Mahotsav organized by Madhya Pradesh Government, Culture Department in collaboration with District Administration-Raisen on the auspicious occasion of Mahashivratri in the temple complex, Bhojpur, concluded on Sunday. On this occasion, three cultural presentations took place, in which the first presentation was folk singing by Sheela Tripathi and partner, Bhopal, Mahadev centered group dance by. Amita Khare and partner, Bhopal and devotional music by Raksha Srivastava and partner, Mumbai. In the cool evening and spiritual atmosphere, cultural music and poetry filled the art lovers with spiritual joy. The series of presentations started with folk singing, in which Sheela Tripathi and her friends from Bhopal presented the faith in Mahadev



in folk traditions. He first presented Bhola decorated palanquin... Dadr. After this, Kaharwa was presented in Raga Peelu, the lyrics of which were Bhola Saji Ke Chale Hain. After this came the time for Shiva centric dance presentation, in which the presentation was given by Amita Khare and friends, Bhopal. The first performance was the opening stanza of Angikam Abhinaya Darpan, composed by Acharya Nandakeshwar and dedicated to Lord Shiva. This

presentation showed that Shiva is worshiped as Nataraja in all forms of Indian classical dance. The third presentation of the last day was of devotional and easy singing. Devotional music springs from the soul and brings union with God. A similar scene was seen in the presentation of devotional music by the country's famous singer Ms. Raksha Srivastava and her friends, Mumbai. He started his singing with Subhash Subh Le Shivi.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATED BY NURSING COLLEGE AIIMS BHOPAL

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Nursing College AIIMS, Bhopal, commemorated the Foundation Day and celebrated International Women's Day with a Cultural Conclave on March 9th, 2024. The theme of the event was "Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress - Role of Women towards Social Transformation in the Modern Era." Prof. (Dr.) Ajai Singh, Executive Director and CEO of AIIMS Bhopal Inaugurated the event and highlighted the role of women not only in family but also in society and nation building. He underlined the important role of women in the development of modern India. Dr. Saikat Das, Associate Dean (Nursing and Allied Health Sciences) welcomed the guests and delegates and highlighted the various unique initiatives by Nursing College including Nurse led clinics, compassionate care (KARUNYA) initiative, and various steps for holistic development of nursing students. Guest speaker of the event, Ms. Naqui Jahan Qureshi Joint Director Department of Women and Child Development M.P. Govt. shared her inspiring journey of success offering insight on various initiatives by Govt.



of India for women health and empowerment. In her address, Ms. Soumya Saxena, Programme Officer Action Aid and Ex. Member ICC, AIIMS Bhopal focused on the role of women in shaping an inclusive workplace, promoting equality. The event also featured an interactive session moderated by Dr. Lily Podder,

Associate Professor at Nursing College AIIMS Bhopal, discussing the pivotal role of women in social transformation. A theatrical performance by the B.Sc. (Hons.) nursing students on "Empowered Women in Ancient India" was one more attraction of the program. Apart from the nursing students and nursing officers of

AIIMS Bhopal, the program was attended by students from People's university, Bhopal School of Social Sciences and MANIT, Bhopal. The event provided an opportunity for students from various institutions to explore the infrastructure and facilities of Nursing College AIIMS Bhopal.



EDITOR'S SPECS

Shri Ram Anubhav Kendra to come up in Ayodhya

The Uttar Pradesh government plans to develop Shri Ram Anubhav Kendra and Panchavati Island, on 75 acres of land near Guptar Ghat on the banks of Saryu River. Ram Anubhav Kendra on Panchvati Island aims to instill a sense of pride among the people for Vedic civilisation. The objective of the government is to promote the assimilation of these cultural roots into daily life and foster a path towards happier existence. The construction of Ram Anubhav Kendra will involve the use of temporary structures, which will be dismantled during the rainy season as the centre will be non-operational during this period as a precautionary measure, considering its proximity to the river. After monsoon, the structures will be reassembled and the centre will resume operations. To ensure safety, the structures will be positioned at a considerable distance from the river, creating a 100-foot buffer zone to eliminate any potential accident. Prior to the construction and operation of the centre, all necessary approvals and NOCs from regulatory departments such as the municipal corporation, fire department, electrical safety, and pollution control board, will be obtained. Panchavati Island will be a no-plastic zone. Bio-digestive septic tanks will be used for sewage disposal and water will be treated by STP according to standards and will be used in horticulture and agriculture. 'Shree Anna' (millet) will play a prominent role in this project. Various programmes, including meditation, pranayama, yagya, havan, will be organised for yoga practitioners. Naturopathy and ayurveda centres will also be established. Organic and cosmic agriculture methods will be employed for growing crops on Panchvati Island. Local folk artists will find employment opportunities through traditional folk singing and cultural events. Devotees will be given a chance to plant a sapling in Ayodhya in memory of their ancestors. Panchvati Island will provide employment opportunities for local farmers and labourers, officials said.

Pandemic-stricken villagers revive bamboo art with NGO help in MP

Mohammad Asif Siddiqui

Living in the remote forest village of Gulaimal in Khandwa district of Madhya Pradesh, Prakash Barole, (41), crafts decorative items from bamboo to earn a living.

He acquired this relatively new skill after making up his mind to stop working as a migrant sugarcane cutter and find employment in his own village.

Prakash and his wife Sangeeta Barole (34) used to migrate to Beed district of Maharashtra for four months annually to work as farm labourers. Despite working for over 18 hours a day, they could barely make ends meet.

During the COVID-19 outbreak and the subsequent lockdown of 2020, they found themselves stranded in Maharashtra with their employer denying them full wages. They were forced to return to Khandwa on foot - a journey of over 100 km - along with 10 others from their village. They had no money, not even to buy food.

"We both used to get Rs 10,000 per month, but we did not even have a day off. Most of what we earned was spent on lodging and food," he recalls.

"Just 10 days into the lockdown, our employer told us that he could not pay us anymore."

Prakash then decided to fend for himself in his own village, even if it meant learning a new skill in his late 30s. His determination paid off as both earn around the same amount every month by making bamboo items for Gulaimal-based non-government organisation (NGO) Manmohan Kala Samiti (MKS).

"We work for eight hours daily and get a good price for our work," says Prakash, who saves a large part of his income and manages to send his children to school.

Seeds of change

The NGO was established under the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) and operates under SFURTI (Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries) of the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, which assists traditional industries such as khadi, coir, handloom and handicrafts by providing grants of up to Rs 5 crore. The NGO set up operations in the district in 2020 under the nodal agency Council for Handicrafts Development Corporations. A Bamboo Craft Centre was established, with a 90 per cent Central grant under SFURTI and the remaining investment from MKS.

Of the 150 families employed by the NGO in Gulaimal, about 60 work directly at the bamboo centre. The rest make the products at their homes. Most of them are Korku tribals. The cen-



tre purchases the bamboo planted by village farmers at a price equal to the minimum support price. Until the establishment of the centre, around 40 per cent (1,100 people) of the village population used to migrate for work.

Pradeep Awase (27), a resident managing the bamboo art work under MKS, used to go to Pune. "I worked at a local furniture firm. Most of what I earned was spent there and despite having worked with the employer for a long time, I was deserted when the pandemic struck. I was forced to walk back home. The employer did not even bother to arrange a transport facility for me," he says.

Pradeep joined MKS and honed his management skills in the last three years. He now imparts training to new artisans and organises local craft exhibitions with the help of MKS.

According to a survey conducted by the NGO, migration has reduced by half since its inception, as the locals earn a monthly salary of Rs 6,000 to 8,000 at the centre. However, not all villagers are into bamboo crafts. Due to the surge in bamboo-related work, other trades and businesses have increased in the village, thereby providing a source of employment to many.

To increase their income further, locals have started planting native bamboo varieties such as Katanga (Bambusa Arundinacea) and Deshi (Dendrocalamus Strictus) on the margins of their fields under the guidance of MKS. This will reduce the need to get bamboo from other villages. When needed, the MKS also provides them with bamboo seedlings.

Furniture, toys, home decor, reception, office and coffee house items are produced at the centre and sent to NRLM sales centres. They are also exported. MKS director Mohan Rokade tells 101Reporters that the NGO expanded to accom-

modate more artisans in 2021 and that its annual income has soared to above Rs 50 lakh.

"Bamboo craft has been a part of the village culture for generations. But people were making only specific items such as mats and baskets that were useful to the village community. When the availability of bamboo reduced, people migrated in search of employment. After the NGO formation, we distributed bamboo seedlings to the locals at a minimal cost, leading to a surge in bamboo production," Rokade says.

Earlier, farmers sold their bamboo to the forest department or in the market. Raju Vaskale, a farmer from Dhimaria, located four km from Gulaimal, says he now gets money immediately after selling bamboo unlike in the case of the forest department. "We do not have to bear transportation costs as the centre collects bamboo from our fields. Katanga bamboo is priced at Rs 80 in the market, Deshi at Rs 100 and Assamese bamboo at Rs 220. We get the same price from the centre," he says.

Prakash has also planted bamboo saplings on his two-and-a-half acre plot. He plans to sell it to MKS. Apart from Gulaimal, bamboo clusters are functional under SFURTI at Hoshangabad, Betul, Chhindwara, Balaghat, Seoni, Ratlam and Burhanpur. Last year, Harda district was included in the cluster.

Life gets better

When she migrated to Beed, Sangeeta used to leave her five children in the custody of their grandmother Lalitabai. This affected their studies as the older children would often be occupied with taking care of their younger siblings and miss out on school.

"I at least had my mother-in-law to help out, but the mothers with newborns and those with

children under five years of age had to take them along when they migrated. Life as a farm labourer is difficult. Sometimes, we have to survive on just one meal. So, even the babies could not be fed since the lactating mothers barely ate," highlights Sangeeta.

New mothers who were forced to quit work due to these challenges are now joining the NGO as it has a secure campus for children with proper facilities and caretakers. The centre is spread over five acres of land, where a factory has been built on an acre.

"Since new and expectant mothers can stay in the village and make bamboo crafts, they have also registered at local anganwadis, thus bringing them under the government's nutritional programmes. They get fortified milk powder and nutrition-rich food from anganwadis," she adds.

Young women who used to be either married off right after school or were forced to join their parents as farm labourers are now enrolling in colleges to find well-paying jobs. "Working on the field with my parents was tiresome. We did not even have enough to fulfill our basic needs, so college was a distant dream. But now I work with the NGO, while pursuing my post graduation in commerce from an open university," says Usha Barole.

Madhuri Awase and Aarti Barne earn Rs 7,000 each and are able to keep some money aside for their children's education. Even specially-abled people have got a chance to earn through the NGO.

The products such as table lamps, clocks and showpieces produced by the company were showcased in the Parliament House, New Delhi, and exhibited at the Dubai Expo alongside products from 190 countries last year. Artisans add that they were not skilled at anything and were looked down upon, but they enjoy a newfound respect in their communities and feel proud of the work they do when their handcrafted products are admired at both local markets and international exhibitions.

"Once awareness about the sustainability of bamboo products versus plastic pollution increases, and the new electricity grid comes into operation, I think we will be able to expand operations and hire more people," says Rokade.

(Mohammad Asif Siddiqui is a Madhya Pradesh-based freelance journalist and a member of 101Reporters, a pan-India network of grassroots reporters.)

international

British government makes it tougher for Indians to work in the UK

London | Agencies

An estimated 300,000 non-Britons - many of them Indians - will be affected by the British government on Monday raising the bar for people eligible to apply for skilled worker visas for the United Kingdom. The minimum salary that an applicant must now command is 38,700 pounds, up from 26,000 pounds. "Enough is enough," said Home Secretary James Cleverly in the House of Commons. The policy is designed, he added, to reduce net migration to the UK. Net migration - the difference between the number of people coming to live in the UK and the people leaving - was 745,000 in 2022 and has become deeply unpopular with Britons across the board.

One of the main arguments for exiting the European Union (EU) was to control immigration - which compulsory free movement of people in the EU could not prevent. This has been defeated by people swamping the UK from other parts of the world, including significantly from India. Those coming on health and social

IMMIGRATION ACTION

BANNING
overseas students from bringing their families to the UK, unless they are on postgraduate research degrees

STOPPING
immigration undercutting British workers

SCRAPPING
the 20% going rate salary discounts offered for shortage occupations

care visas, mostly nurses, will, however, be exempt from the higher salary threshold. They will not, though, be permitted to bring dependents, namely their partners and children, with them. Cleverly stated this will "end the abuse of the Health and Care Visa". Nurses in the UK also come from India as well as from other parts of Asia, Africa, and the West Indies. Cleverly asserted: "Approximately 120,000

dependents accompanied 100,000 care workers and senior care workers in the year ending September 2023. Only 25 per cent of dependents are estimated to be in work, meaning a significant number are drawing on public services and not helping to grow the economy." Earlier this year, tougher rules were announced for students bringing dependents to the UK. Undergraduate students are no longer allowed to

bring their partners or children.

Cleverly also indicated that the health surcharge payable by foreign job seekers will rise by 66 per cent - from 624 pounds to 1,035 pounds.

Without criticising the move, the opposition Labour party's Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper maintained the new proposals are "an admission of years of total failure by this Conservative government". She slammed Prime Minister Rishi Sunak by saying he is "clearly veering" without "steering" and is being "pushed around all over the place".

The Scottish National Party spokesperson said Cleverly's pronouncement will be judged on whether it's "pandering to the right wing of his party".

The chair of the Independent Care Group warned: "I think we are going to find more businesses fail, care homes closing."

It appears post-study work (PSW) visas available after finishing a masters degree in the UK will not as yet come under the new guidelines. This will come as a relief to Indian students, who numbered 120,000 in 2021-22.

Indonesia's Ibu volcano erupts, ash up to 1,200m

Jakarta | Agencies

The Ibu volcano on Halmahera Island in the eastern Indonesian province of North Maluku erupted on Thursday at around 11 a.m. local time for about 90 seconds, throwing ash up to 1,200 metre above its peak, according to the country's Center for Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation (PVMBG).

"The ash column was observed to be gray in color with thick intensity towards the southeast," said Efrita Saragih, an officer of the volcano's monitoring post.



Standing as high as around 1,300 metre above sea level, Ibu volcano is classified in

the second danger level, below the highest level of IV. The volcano has erupted 60 times since the beginning of this year, PVMBG said.

Saragih called on the public not to have activities within a radius of 3.5 km from the crater, Xinhua news agency reported.

"People who have outdoor activities are advised to wear nose, mouth and eye protectors when volcanic ashes fall," she said. Located on the Pacific Ring of Fire, Indonesia is one of the countries with the most volcanoes in the world.

S.Korea, US, Japan hold 1st trilateral working-level talks on N.Korea's cyber threats

Seoul | Agencies

South Korea, the US and Japan held their first trilateral working-level talks on Thursday on ways to boost cooperation against North Korea's growing cyber threats, in a follow-up to the summit among their leaders in August, Seoul's Foreign Ministry said on Thursday.

The talks in Tokyo were led by Lee Jun-il, the Ministry's director-general for North Korean nuclear affairs, US Deputy Special Representative for North Korea Jung Pak and Ishizuki Hideo, Japan's ambas-



sador in charge of cyber policy.

The dialogue was launched as part of a follow-up to an agreement reached among President Yoon Suk Yeol, US

President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida during their Camp David summit to beef up tripartite cooperation in securi-

ty and establish a working group tasked with combating North Korea's cyber threats, Yonhap news agency reported.

During Thursday's meeting, the three sides discussed ways to counter North Korea's cryptocurrency theft, and other illegal cyber activities aimed at financing its nuclear and missile development programs.

They also agreed to boost cooperation with the international community and the private sector to block illegal North Korean workers in the IT sector, the Ministry said in a press statement.

2 killed, 4 wounded in Russian school shooting

Moscow | Agencies

Two people were killed and four others wounded in a shooting at a school in the Russian city of Bryansk on Thursday, the media reported, citing local authorities. The incident occurred at gymnasium No. 5 in the Bezhtitskiy region, with preliminary information suggesting that an eighth-grade schoolgirl, armed with a weapon, initiated the shooting, it said.

One of the victims may have been the said girl as she may have killed herself, Xinhua news agency reported.

Following the incident, all other students have been evacuated from the building and sent home, and the area has been cordoned off by the police.



Amid slush funds scandal, Japan PM Kishida to quit as ruling party faction leader

Tokyo | Agencies

Amid a growing slush funds scandal, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida looks set to step down as chief of his faction in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), local media reported on Thursday.

As per Kyodo news, Kishida, also president of the LDP, is set to announce his resignation as the leader of Kochikai, the party's fourth-largest faction, later during the day, Xinhua news agency reported.

Kochikai is among the five LDP factions that allegedly understated their revenue from political fundraising parties, from which the extra income may have been returned to some of their lawmakers as kickbacks.

Seiwaken, or the Seiwaka policy study group, the largest LDP faction previously



led by the late former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, was suspected of having pooled secret funds amounting to around 100 million yen (about 679,000 U.S. dollars) over at least the past five years through 2022.

At least 10 LDP lawmakers in the Abe faction received kickbacks, the latest media reports showed.

Although many prime ministers keep their distance from their faction while in office, Kishida has remained active as the leader of his faction since taking office in October 2021.

The decision to quit followed Kishida's request on Wednesday that all LDP factions should refrain from holding fundraising parties for the time being, and as the Japan Times put it, the prime minister is "in damage control mode."



'India's decade has dawned', says Devendra Fadnavis at Pune Viksit Bharat Brand Ambassador event

Quaid Najmi | Pune

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said here on Saturday that India's decade has dawned in the last 10 years and the country got onto the global centre-stage due to the economic transformation under Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Addressing the 'Viksit Bharat Brand Ambassador - Viksit Pune Conclave' here, Fadnavis said that in 2013, India was ranked among the 'Fragile Five' economies in the world but under PM Modi, everybody is saying that "we are the brightest spot", and now among top five globally.

This transformation has come in a record, in the next five years, India shall be the third largest by 2027, and by 2047, we shall be a fully developed nation with a thriving strong economy, the BJP leader said.

Devendra Fadnavis said the GDP growth under the UPA was around 4.5 per cent, now it is 8.4 per cent, inflation has reduced from mostly double to a single digit around 5 per cent, FDI inflows increased from \$36 billion to \$85 billion, exports shot up from \$300 billion to \$770 billion, FOREX reserves zoomed from \$270 billion to \$600 billion, and Current Account Deficit which was 5.1 per cent of GDP, now stands at a reasonable 2 per cent of GDP.

Previously, for setting up any project, the industrialists had to get environmental approval which would take at least two years, which is now around 4 months, and we are still trying to bring it down.

"All this is due to transparency and a political will... earlier there were many scams which rocked the country, crony capitalism, no political will, policy paralysis, and India's rating and FDI plummeted. We are now out of it thanks to PM Modi's vision of 'Reform, Perform, Transform, and Inform', and ensuring the welfare



reaches the last man," said Fadnavis.

Explaining PM Modi's vision for a Viksit Bharat (Developed India) through 'Modinomics', Fadnavis said that PM Modi has brought welfare to the poorest of the poor and joined them into the national mainstream. Earlier, 60 crore people had no access to banking, now they have got bank accounts due to the Jan Dhan scheme, the PM Mudra Yojana to 'fund the unfunded' has helped people get loans without security and guarantees, benefitting 30 crore people. The Maharashtra Deputy CM said that PM Modi ensured "insuring the uninsured" through a cheap insurance cover to the poor, while in the last 9 years, 25 crore people have been lifted above the poverty line, which is a world record.

He said the country has seen unprecedented growth in all sectors paving the way for a Viksit Bharat through speeding up of the economy, building 11 crore toilets, 3 crore houses, giving electricity and piped water to homes, boost to retail and services, creating jobs and increasing people's prosperity, putting it on the track as the world's fastest growing economy now.

Fadnavis said that from around 50

per cent previously, now only three per cent of the population lives in extreme poverty and this will also be tackled in the next couple of years.

He said that the 'Ease of Doing Business' has reduced the cost of doing business drastically couple with scrapping archaic laws and decriminalising certain aspects that occur in the routine course of doing business, brought in investor-friendly policies and a digital transformation in which the ordinary masses like street vendors and helpers are involved.

Earlier, Fadnavis said, the entrepreneurs had to seek 146 approvals which took 3 years, and now, it has been brought down to 25 clearances, and in just 3-4 months, PM Modi brought in ease of doing business and cost of doing business improved drastically. All this has led to a formal economy, where in the past, nearly 50 per cent transactions were done in cash but now, GST and digitalisation have removed cash dealings and ensured full transparency, he pointed out.

The Deputy CM cited other things like 'GatiShakti', infra-mapping where all levels of infrastructure are put on a single platform, capital expenditure

has increased from Rs 2 lakh-crore to Rs 10 lakh-crore now, 91 km village roads and 34 km highways are being built daily, exports have shot up to a record Rs 766 billion, and with 'Make in India' and 'Make for India' initiatives, an entire ecosystem for Viksit Bharat is firmly in place to achieve the next level.

The number of airports in the country has doubled -- from 74 to 149 -- in 10 years, and the country is going to import a large number of aircraft in the coming years.

The PM told Boeing and Airbus that India needs more aircraft, the country has increased the number of airports and also fliers but put a condition that they should manufacture their aircraft here, which they have agreed. In FDI, India is racing ahead, and Maharashtra is the leader as per the RBI's latest data, which shows this state getting more FDI than the combined figures of Gujarat, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh, and the PM sees Maharashtra as the growth engine of the Indian economy, the Maharashtra Deputy CM said.

Fadnavis further said that the MSME contribution to the GDP is now 30 per cent and it is significant as the MSME sector is a huge employment generator, 99 per cent of mobiles which were earlier imported are now manufactured in India, and the country is the world's third largest automobile market.

On the global arena, India is redefining the world order, last year, the G-20 programmes were organised in 60 countries and later the New Delhi Declaration was approved unanimously, proving that India can lead the world.

Fadnavis touched upon several other facets of the 10 years of PM Modi-led government and urged all the people to become the Viksit Bharat Brand Ambassadors by excelling in every field or sector that they are serving or working in.

Lawyers provide free legal aid to needy undertrials languishing in jails

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Several undertrials, mostly from the poor strata of society, languishing in Maharashtra jails due to lack of proper legal assistance have found a ray of hope with a group of lawyers coming forward to take up their cases pro bono.

These lawyers, as part of NGO 'Dard se Humdard Tak', have helped the undertrials secure bail, arrange for their bail bond, and facilitated the release of those arrested in petty crimes cases such as robbery, mobile theft, etc after having spent considerable time in Maharashtra jails, advocate Prakash Salsingkar said. They visit Maharashtra jails across the state after having received permission from the state government and collect data of prisoners who need their services.

The organisation has come to the aid of more than 500 prisoners in the last three years, claimed Salsingkar who is working along with 20 other lawyers to provide such services. Their organisation was registered as an NGO in May 2023, he said.

The lawyers visit the Arthur Road jail in Mumbai thrice a week, the Thane jail and Pune's Yerwada prison twice a



week and the Byculla womens' prison here once a fortnight. They meet the prisoners, study their case papers and provide assistance accordingly. Salsingkar said majority of the undertrials fail to get proper legal assistance either due to non-awareness of remedies available to them under the law or because of their poor financial condition.

A woman, who is mother of two daughters, spent more than four years in a jail for allegedly killing her husband after being forced to conceive again.

She came across this organisation and with the help of its lawyer, secured bail from the Bombay

High Court earlier this year.

"I did not get any help from outside until I came across this NGO. I am educated so I spent the time in jail doing office work but life for many others is very difficult," she said.

Fayal Sheikh, a daily wage labourer from Mankhurd in Mumbai, spent two years in jail after he was arrested for allegedly killing a man with whom he had an altercation with over urination.

His mother said they had lost all hope until lawyers from this organisation got in touch with them and fought his case.

Cow dies at goshala in Navi Mumbai; one booked



Team Absolute | Thane

A case has been registered against an attendant of a goshala following the death of a cow at the facility run by a temple in Navi Mumbai, police said on Sunday, reported news agency.

Based on a complaint, a

first information report (FIR) was registered at Vashi police station on Friday under section 429 (mischief by killing, poisoning, maiming or rendering useless any elephant, camel, horse, mule, buffalo, bull, cow or ox) of the IPC, an official said. The incident occurred on February 21, and the authorities were soon

alerted, he said. An attendant at the goshala in Navi Mumbai allegedly did not provide the necessary care, leading to the death of a cow, and he also mishandled the carcass, the official said.

The police are probing the incident at goshala in Navi Mumbai, and no action has been taken so far, he said.

Navi Mumbai builder duped of Rs 60.6 lakh by cyber fraudster

Team Absolute | Thane

Navi Mumbai builder was allegedly duped by a cyber fraudster who impersonated him and tricked his office into siphoning off Rs 60.6 lakh, police said on Sunday, reported news agency. Based on a complaint, the police on Saturday registered a case under sections 406 (criminal breach of trust), 419 (cheating by per-

sonation), and 420 (cheating) of the Indian Penal Code and provisions of the Information Technology Act, an official said. The complainant has alleged that his office received a phone call on March 6, during which the caller posed as him, got hold of his accountant's phone number and sent him a message on WhatsApp, senior inspector Gajanan Kadam said. The unidentified accused,

posing as the Navi Mumbai builder, sent the accountant bank details for an online transaction and asked him to transfer Rs 60.6 lakh, he said.

The accountant transferred the money without verifying the instructions with the builder in person, the official said.

The cyber police station is probing into the case, and no arrest has been made so far, he said.

Trouble For INDIA In Maharashtra? Congress Leader Jobs Uddhav Thackeray

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Amid seat-sharing talks among the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) parties in Maharashtra, Sanjay Nirupam, a prominent Congress leader, has slammed Uddhav Thackeray for prematurely announcing the candidate for Mumbai's North-West Lok Sabha constituency. The MVA, a coalition of Shiv Sena (UBT), NCP (Sharad Pawar faction), and Congress, is currently engaged in poll pact talks ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. Nirupam without mincing words, referred to Uddhav Thackeray as the "bachhi khuchi Shiv Sena ke pramukh" (the remaining Shiv Sena's chief). The Congress leader expressed his disappointment over the announcement of Amol Kirtikar as the Shiv Sena candidate for the Mumbai North-West constituency, a decision made by Thackeray before the MVA could finalise seat-sharing arrangements.

The Mumbai North-West seat, which Nirupam himself is vying for, remains a bone of contention as no official decision has been reached within the alliance.



"Shiv Sena says that this was their seat. Let me remind them that Congress has always had the maximum number of candidates from this seat. I will contest the elections, I have been preparing for the North West seat for five years, the decision has to be taken by my Congress party," Nirupam said at a press con-

ference. Nirupam, taking to social media, voiced his concerns: "How can this happen? Despite two dozen meetings of MVA, the final decision on seat-sharing has not been taken yet. Is announcing the candidate from Shiv Sena a violation of alliance dharma or a deliberate attempt to humiliate Congress?"

The Congress leader also raised serious allegations against Amol Kirtikar, claiming his involvement in the 'Khichdi Scam'. Nirupam accused Kirtikar of accepting bribes during the COVID-era program initiated by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) to provide free food to migrant labourers. According to Nirupam, Kirtikar has taken commissions from the scheme intended to support the impoverished, and the Enforcement Directorate (ED) is currently investigating the matter.

"What is wrong in calling an accused an accused? Even though BJP had raised the issue of Khichdi Scam, if ED is investigating it then what is wrong in speaking about it? I am also a citizen and can speak," he said.

Kirtikar's father, Gajanan Kirtikar, is the sitting MP from the same constituency and is affiliated with the rival Shiv Sena faction led by Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde.

Nirupam questioned whether Congress and Shiv Sena (UBT) workers would willingly campaign for a candidate embroiled in a scandal.

High Court Relief To 2 Ex Excise Officials In 1993 Mumbai Serial Blasts

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bombay High Court has granted relief to two retired Central Excise officials, nearly 20 years after disciplinary action orders against them for allegedly allowing landing of explosives used in the 1993 serial bomb blasts in the city.

There was no evidence to prove the charges against them in the departmental proceedings, a division bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Arif Doctor said while quashing the disciplinary action orders. The duo, S M Padwal and Yashwant Lotale, retired superintendents of the Central Excise department, shall be entitled to all consequential benefits such as arrears of salary and pension, which shall be made available to them within two months, the HC said in its judgment on March 4.

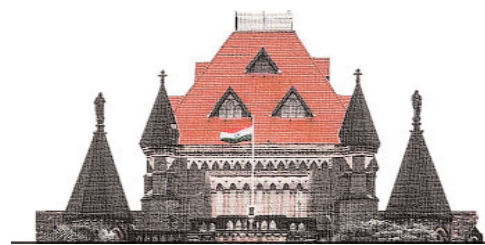
Twelve bombs went off at different locations in Mumbai on March 12, 1993, killing 257 persons and injuring more than 700 others.

A special court later convicted 100 persons in the case and acquitted 23 others.

The HC noted that Padwal and Lotale did not face any criminal trial in the case.

Based on the alleged evidence available, the charges against them do not stand proved, it said. "Our indefeasible conclusion is that it is a case where there was no evidence at all and accordingly, the conclusion arrived at by the disciplinary authority while passing the punishment orders is erroneous," the HC said.

The high court said the only evidence available against them is the alleged confessional statements made by the accused persons to the police during investigation.



"In our opinion, this (confessional statements) could not be made basis of inflicting the punishment upon the employees in this case," the bench said.

Padwal and Lotale were charged for accepting illegal gratification to permit landing of the consignments containing explosives, arms and ammunition that were used in the bomb blasts.

They were charged with failure to maintain absolute integrity and devotion of duty and for having acted in a manner unbecoming of a government servant.

While Padwal was ordered to be dismissed from service, Lotale was handed over compulsory retirement and was held to be entitled to only 65 per cent of the full compensation of pension and gratuity.

Both the officers challenged the orders before the Central Administrative Tribunal. While Padwal's dismissal order was quashed by the tribunal, Lotale's disciplinary order was upheld.

Lotale then moved the high court in appeal, while the Union government filed a petition in the HC against the tribunal order granting relief to Padwal.

The HC dismissed the Union government's petition against Padwal and allowed Lotale's plea.

The confessional statements made by the accused person in the criminal case of the 1993 serial bomb blasts before the police could not have been relied upon in the departmental proceedings, the court said.

In the departmental proceedings, the authority has heavily relied on the confessional statements of four accused persons but they were not examined during the proceedings, it noted.

"Such confessional statements made in a criminal case cannot be the basis of proving the charge in departmental proceedings," the HC said.

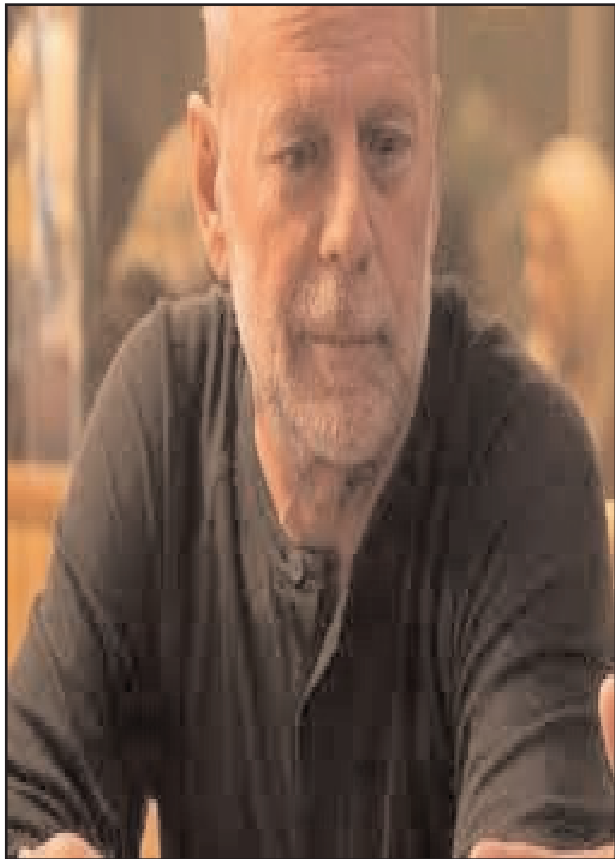
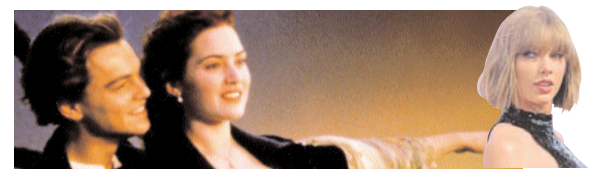
The duo had refuted the allegations. They said there was no evidence against them and the disciplinary action was initiated against them merely on the statements given by some police officers who had relied on alleged confessional statements given by the accused in the 1993 serial bomb blasts case.

The two persons further said they were never named as accused in the criminal case.

The Union government, however, said due to the laxity and misconduct by officials, contraband goods such as explosives, arms and ammunition were allowed to be landed which were then used in the serial bomb blasts.

The bench in its judgment said mere suspicion even in the matter of departmental proceedings cannot be allowed to take the place of proof and the disciplinary authority should arrive at its conclusion of guilt based on definite evidence.

"In both the departmental proceedings, the employees (Padwal and Lotale) were not tried as accused persons in the criminal case which the CBI had investigated and even prosecuted certain other departmental officers," the HC said.



Bruce Willis' family has more bad days than good amid dementia battle

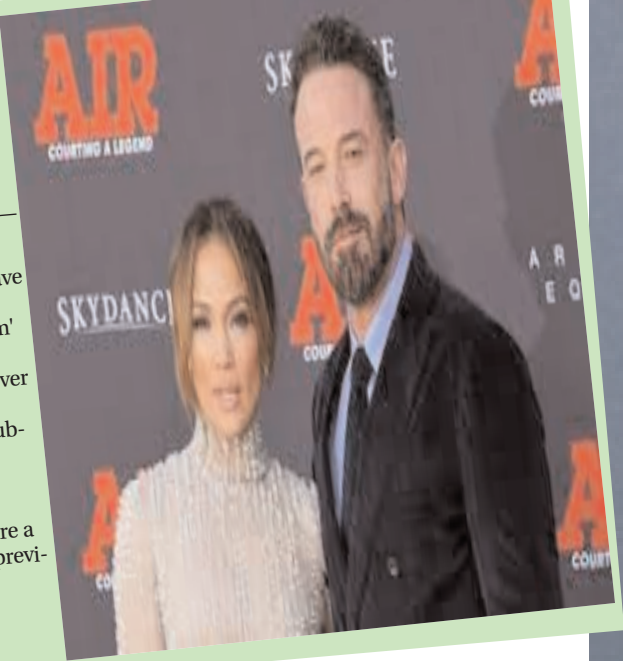
Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Bruce Willis' family is said to be "soaking up every moment" with him while they still can. Hollywood star Bruce Willis' family is said to be "soaking up every moment" with him while they still can. The 'Die Hard' actor, 68, has frontotemporal dementia (FTD), an uncommon form of the disease which causes a deterioration in personality, behaviour, and language. A source told this week's edition of UsWeekly, "Bruce has good days and bad days, but in the last two months, there are many more bad days than good. This experience has brought the whole family even closer together." "No one knows how much time Bruce has left, so they're soaking up every moment they get with him. (Everything) revolves around him, Bruce has around-the-clock care, but at least one family member is always with him." Bruce, who is married to model Emma Heming Willis, 45, but has daughters Rumer Willis, 35, Scout Willis, 32, and Tallulah Willis, 29, with ex-wife Demi Moore, became a grandfather for the first time when his eldest welcomed daughter Louetta in April and a second insider went on to add that the 'House Bunny' star is keen to make sure the little one is "involved" with him as much as possible, reports aceshowbiz.com. The source said, "Once Bruce was diagnosed, everyone came together to keep his memory of the family intact and to be there as a constant reminder (that they) love him."

Jennifer Lopez feels 'grateful' for Ben Affleck's support

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress-singer Jennifer Lopez feels "grateful" to have husband-actor Ben Affleck by her side for her new short film. Actress-singer Jennifer Lopez feels "grateful" to have husband-actor Ben Affleck by her side for her new short film. The 54-year-old star recently announced plans to release 'This is Me...Now: The Film' in 2024, and Lopez enjoyed working on the project with her husband. A source told Us Weekly: "He helped her feel safe to share parts of her nobody has ever known." The eagerly-awaited new film has been described as a "visual reimagining of her publicly scrutinised love life", reports femalefirst.co.uk. She "wouldn't have wished for anybody else" to work with her on the project. The insider added: "Nobody knows her better than Ben." The project will stream globally on Amazon's Prime Video platform, and will feature a nod to Jennifer's high-profile romance with the Hollywood star. Meanwhile, Affleck previously joked that Lopez looks like she's "20 years old".



Julia Roberts confesses she's a spirited college mom

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Julia Roberts has shared that she is passionate about her twins' college experience. The 'Pretty Woman' star shares 19-year-old twins Hazel Patricia and Phinnaeus Walter and her husband Danny Moder, reports People magazine. Prior to the twins heading off to college, Roberts shared with Extra how "completely excited" she was for them and their new chapter. "It's really thrilling and I wasn't lucky enough to have a college experience," she said. "And so to see how it's happening for them is really fascinating. And yeah, I'm just, I'm excited for them." The 'Notting Hill' star publicly celebrated the twins' 19th birthday on November 28 via Instagram. Roberts - who rarely shows photos of her children - explained to Extra that their birthdays are "something to be celebrated".



Bradley Cooper serves cheesesteaks at food truck in New York City

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Bradley Cooper recently took a break from Hollywood and stepped into a New York City food truck. A parlour based in Philadelphia which is known for classic and creative sandwiches, fried snacks and breakfast options, shared footage of the actor serving up the city's speciality - Philly cheesesteaks, reports People magazine. "Good afternoon, bread heads," Cooper says with a smile in the Instagram video shared by the eatery. "Come on down, get a cheesesteak!" The person behind the camera is heard saying, "Danny and Coops," which is also tagged in the caption of the post and seen on their clothing. He also lets viewers know that they are situated at West Third Street near Sixth Avenue in New York's Greenwich Village. According to The Philadelphia Inquirer, Cooper and Angelo's Pizzeria owner Danny DiGiampietro have partnered together to open Danny and Coops Cheesesteaks. Although the food truck was serving patrons in New York, DiGiampietro made it clear that he's not leaving Philly anytime soon, and that the team was only in the area "to see if people want cheesesteaks in New York," the outlet reports. He added that he and Cooper have been scouting for locations in the Big Apple for two years, but have yet to settle on a place to call home for their budding business. As per People, all proceeds from the pop-up event - scheduled to reprise on Thursday - are reportedly being donated to a nonprofit organisation focused on helping to feed New Yorkers in need. The pair was first romantically linked in early October, when they were spotted dining together at Via Carota in New York City's West Village neighbourhood before getting into the same SUV.

Halle Berry 'bonded' with Angelina Jolie over their divorces

Los Angeles | Agencies

Oscar-winning actress Halle Berry "bonded" with co-star Angelina Jolie over their "divorces and exes". Berry will star alongside Jolie in her new film project 'Maude v Maude', and she has said that they actually spent some time together discussing their love lives. The 57-year-old actress, who was previously married to David Justice, Eric Benet and Olivier Martinez, told Variety: "We've been talking a lot about divorces and exes. We bonded, let's say that." Despite this, Berry acknowledged that their friendship actually got off to a "rocky start". The Hollywood actress - whose co-star has also been married three times - shared: "We had a rocky start and I think that is going to serve us well in our screen time together." 'Maude v Maude' marks Berry's first directorial project since 'Bruised', the 2020 MMA drama. Halle has described making 'Bruised' as "hell" and she thinks it was a "miracle" that Netflix ever bought the movie, reports femalefirst.co.uk. She added: "Because I was a woman, and a black woman, the treatment I received and the things I had to put up with were unconscionable. If I were a white man or even a black man, it would have been easier. It's amazing I even made it and a miracle Netflix bought it."



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY

Taylor Swift



BWF French Open

Satwik-Chirag beat world champions to enter final; Lakshya loses in men's singles

Paris | Agencies

Top seeds and former men's doubles champions Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty reached BWF Super 750 French Open final for the third time.

The world no.1 Indian pair registered a dominating win over reigning world champions Kang Minhyuk and Seo Seungjae of Korea 21-13, 21-16 in the semifinal late on Saturday night to make their third successive final of the 2024 season.

The Indian pair previously made it to the final of the Malaysia Open at the start of the season, but were defeated by the then-top-ranked Chinese duo of Liang Wei Keng and Wang Chang. In the India Open final, Chirag-Satwik suffered a loss against the world champions.

India's top duo will face Chinese Taipei's Lee Jhe-Huei and Yang Po-Hsuan in the summit clash on Sunday.

The Indian duo encountered a tough test early in the opening game,



with the score tied at 5-5. However, they managed to seize control by winning six consecutive points, leading 11-5 at the interval. Following the mid-game break, Satwik-Chirag maintained their momentum and comfortably secured the first game 21-13.

Following their convincing victory in the first game, the Satwik-Chirag continued to dominate in the second game. Despite Koreans displaying some resistance after the mid-game interval, the Indians' early lead proved decisive as they sealed the match in 40 minutes.

On the other hand, Lakshya Sen's encouraging run came to an end as he went down fighting to reigning world champion Kunlavut Vitidsarn 22-20, 13-21, 11-21 in the men's singles semifinal.

Earlier in the tournament, Lakshya scored some big wins by defeating the 2021 French Open champion Kanta Tsuneyama, third seed Li Shi Feng and former world champion Loh Kean Yew.

India return to top in ICC Test team rankings after series win over England



Dubai | Agencies

Following a 4-1 series win over England India reclaimed the top position in the ICC Men's Test Team Rankings, taking over defending Australia.

India now has 122 rating points in the rankings table. Australia are second with 117 rating points, while England are at the third place with 111 rating points.

India secured a massive victory by an innings and 64 runs in the fifth and final Test in Dharamsala, propelling them to a 4-1 series win over England on Saturday.

After losing the first Test in

Hyderabad by 28 runs, India fought back in style to win the remaining four Tests against England. Wins in Vizag, Rajkot, Ranchi, and now Dharamsala have helped the side to overtake Australia return and reclaimed top position in the ICC Test Team Rankings. India had slipped to second place in Test Team Rankings after a drawn 1-1 series against South Africa this January with Australia overtaking Rohit Sharma-led side at the top of the Test rankings, after sweeping the three-Test series at home against Pakistan.

India will remain at the top

regardless of the outcome of the second New Zealand-Australia Test in Christchurch, ICC reports. The ICC World Test Championship 2023 winners Australia currently lead the two-Test series 1-0 following their 172-run victory in Wellington.

After returning to top in Test rankings, India are now at the summit of rankings in all three formats. They have 121 rating points in the ODI rankings, with Australia sitting a close second with 118 rating points. In the T20Is, India have 266 rating points, with England (256) at the second place.

Osaka sweeps into Indian Wells third round, Gauff survives scare; Pegula exits

Indian Wells | Agencies

Former World No.1 Naomi Osaka kept up her winning ways at the Paribas Open with a 7-5, 6-3 victory over No.14 seed Liudmila Samsonova in the second round.

Playing the fifth tournament of her return to tour after her 2023 maternity leave, former champion Osaka took 1 hour and 37 minutes to battle past Samsonova in their first meeting on Saturday.

Four-time Grand Slam champion Osaka posted her 34th career win over a Top 20 player -- but her first in almost two years. Before Saturday's victory, Osaka's last Top 20 win came over Danielle Collins in the 2022 Miami Open quarterfinals, according to WTA tour.

The Japanese improved her Indian Wells win-loss record to 14-3 over her career. Osaka won her first WTA title at the 2018 Paribas Open, defeating Daria Kasatkina in the final to capture the WTA 1000 crown. She would go on to win her second career title later that



year, at the US Open.

In other action, Coco Gauff had to pull off an almighty comeback against France's Clara Burel on Saturday, the No.3 seed trailed 6-2, 2-0 -- and 4-0 and 5-2 in the third set -- but battled all the way back to a 2-6, 6-3, 7-6(4) win and a spot in the third round.

The American became the first teenager in the last 15 years to collect 50 wins at WTA 1000 events with her

victory against Burel.

On the other hand, Jessica Pegula, Gauff's pal and doubles partner in Indian Wells, saw her own match comeback cut short against Anna Blinkova.

In her second tournament since parting ways with long-time coach David Witt, Pegula fell behind, rallied, but ultimately departed 6-2, 3-6, 6-3 at the hands of the World No. 45 Blinkova.

UP Warriorz's Sophie Ecclestone, Kiran Navgire penalised for code of conduct breach



Team Absolute | New Delhi

UP Warriorz's Sophie Ecclestone and Kiran Navgire have been pulled up for breaching the Women's Premier League (WPL) Code of Conduct during the match against Delhi Capitals at the Arun Jaitley Stadium here on Friday. The duo has been fined 10% of their match fees. However, Sophie and Kiran admitted to the Level 1 offence under Article 2.2, as per the WPL statement. "Both Sophie and Kiran admitted to the Level 1 offence under Article 2.2 which relates to the abuse of cricket equipment or cloth-

ing, ground equipment or fixtures and fittings during a match," said the WPL statement on Sunday.

For Level 1 breaches of the Code of Conduct, the Match Referee's decision is final and binding.

UP Warriorz stunned Delhi Capitals in Match 15 by one run. Kiran Navgire scored five runs while Sophie Ecclestone scored eight runs as UP Warriorz scored 138/8 in 20 overs. In reply, Delhi Capitals were bowled out for 137 in 19.5 overs with Ecclestone claiming 1-15 off 4 overs. Deepti Sharma claimed a hat-trick during a 4-19 haul.

Formula 2: Kush Maini gets maiden podium this season in Jeddah

Jeddah | Agencies

Kush Maini, who is part of the Alpine Academy and racing for Invicta (Car no. 9) put up an impressive show to finish on the Podium in P2 in the 28 Laps Feature race in Formula 2.

Starting in Pole Position, Kush got off to a brilliant start and opened up the gap.

However, an incident on Lap 1 brought out the safety car from Lap 2 which closed the pack. On the restart after a few laps, Kush once again made a brilliant restart on his Supersoft tires to ensure that Jack Crawford was out of his DRS range. After an early mandatory pitstop, he found himself 3 Seconds ahead of Enzo Fittipaldi in a net Second Position. However, many cars had not yet made a stop. Fittipaldi had extremely good pace and was able to pass Kush. After the next Safety car, Kush found himself in 4th Position



behind Correa and Cordeel with eight Laps to go. Cordeel was on the defensive with Correa passing him into the first corner but as the pair squabbled on a corner exit, Maini was able to clear the Belgian to improve to third on the road. Correa finally made his stop on Lap 26 to leave Kush, Cordeel, Crawford, Antonelli, and Hauger to scrap for the podium places. Onto the final lap and Kush led a DRS train down to fifth and kept P2 for Invicta but a three-car-wide drag race for the final podium position went the way of Hauger, who finished just 0.031s ahead of Crawford in fourth, and Cordeel, who dropped to fifth by 0.127s.

FIA Formula 2 will move to Melbourne from March 22-24.

Rishabh Pant all set to play for DC after obtaining fitness certificate from NCA, say sources

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Rishabh Pant is all set to make his long-awaited return to competitive cricket for the Delhi Capitals (DC) in the upcoming edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL) after obtaining the fitness certificate from the National Cricket Academy (NCA). Sources tracking the development have told IANS that Pant, who has been undergoing extensive rehabilitation at the NCA in Bengaluru since April last year, got his fitness clearance and left the NCA two to three days ago.

The IPL 2024 season will mark Pant's return to competitive cricket action since the two-match Test series in Bangladesh ended in December 2022. A couple of days after the series ended, Pant miraculously survived a near-fatal car crash while on the way to his hometown Roorkee on December 30, 2022. He was initially taken to Saksham Hospital Multispecialty and Trauma Centre, before being shifted to Max Hospital, Dehradun. On January 4, 2023, Pant was airlifted to Mumbai for surgery and further recovery at the Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital in Andheri West, Mumbai.

Pant was operated upon for his right knee ligament injuries by Dr. Dinshaw Pardiwala, the head of the Centre for Sports Medicine, and Director of Arthroscopy & Shoulder Service, who also serves on the medical committee of the International Cricket Council (ICC). Since then, Pant has been on an extensive road to recovery which included hydrotherapy and physiotherapy sessions initially to become crutches-free in May. In April, he was also seen attending DC's match against Gujarat Titans at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi.

At the NCA, he was made to walk on soil and grass, climb the stairs, run on an anti-gravity treadmill, and go through a tailored regime with an eye on regaining strength and flexibility as part of his recovery routine. Physio Thulasi Ram Yuvaraj, as well as strength & conditioning coach Rajnikanth Sivagnanam,



were associated with Pant in his rehab and recovery journey at the NCA.

In July 2023, Pant commenced batting and keeping practice as part of his return to play routine, while also making an appearance on DC's auction table at the IPL 2024 Player Auction in Dubai last year.

The left-handed wicketkeeper-batter, also DC's designated captain in the IPL, was also seen participating in the various 20-over match stimulations conducted at the NCA of late, alongside Hardik Pandya, as part of testing his readiness for playing competitive cricket matches.

IANS also understands that Delhi Capitals, after conducting a mini camp for its Indian playing contingent at the Arun Jaitley Stadium for five days which began on February 29, are going to assemble in Visakhapatnam in a few days' time.

The Dr. Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy ACA-VVCA Cricket Stadium in Visakhapatnam is the venue for DC's first two home games due to the Arun Jaitley Stadium needing time for preparation for the IPL 2024 games, after hosting the second half of WPL 2024, ending on March 17.

This agency also understands that the scope of Pant's role in the playing eleven will be assessed by the team management in Visakhapatnam, with head coach Ricky Ponting, director of cricket Sourav Ganguly and physio Patrick Farhart looming as key decision makers in this regard.

Delhi Capitals, who finished in ninth place in IPL 2023 in Pant's absence, will open their IPL 2024 campaign by taking on Punjab Kings in an afternoon match on March 23 at the newly-developed Maharaja Yadavindra Singh Stadium in Mullanpur, Mohali.

Djokovic survives scare to make winning return to Indian Wells

Indian Wells (US) | Agencies

The World No. 1 and five-time champion Novak Djokovic survived an opening-round scare in his return to Paribas Open, taken the distance by World No. 69 Australian Aleksandar Vukic before eventually grinding out a 6-2, 5-7, 6-3 victory.

Playing for the first time since his loss in the 2024 Australian Open semifinals to Jannik Sinner, Djokovic recorded his 400th Masters 1000 win, and improved to 51-9 lifetime at Indian Wells with his triumph on Saturday night.

"Five years is a very long time for a player. It's amazing to be a part of this tournament as a player. There's a great community, culture and love for the sport, and for tennis - you can feel it," Djokovic told the crowd after his win.

The 24-time Grand Slam champion was out of the blocks quickly in his first appearance in the California desert since 2019, breaking for 1-0, and then solidifying his hold on the set with another break for 5-2. But it wasn't all smooth sailing for the 36-year-old legend.

The Aussie rebounded in set two, and he made his opportunity to prolong the match count when he scorched a forehand inside-out return to break Djokovic and claim the second set, 7-5, at the 90-minute mark.

Djokovic put his best serving on repeat and dropped a mere five points on serve across the stanza.

Vukic, sensing the inevitability of the situation, yielded a break in the fifth game, and another in the final game of the contest. Djokovic blew kisses to the raucous crowd, the match done and dusted in two hours and 10 hard-fought minutes.

The Serb will next meet Italian lucky loser Luca Nardi, who defeated China's Zhang Zhizhen 6-3, 3-6, 6-3. It will be the first ATP Head-to-Head meeting between the pair.



Among others to advance on Saturday was Emma Raducanu, the 2021 US Open winner. Raducanu, who has had one injury after another, advanced when opponent Dayana Yastrembska retired at 0-4 in the first set due to an injury.

Squash: Urwashi suffers 2-3 loss in Bristol Open semis

Bristol | Agencies

Urwashi Joshi's impressive run at the University of the West of England the Bristol Open was snapped in the semifinals by Breanne Flynn of Ireland, who pulled off a come-from-behind 3-2 win.

High on confidence after accounting for two seeded players in the previous



rounds of the USD 3000 PSA Challenger Tour event, the Indian world No 153 took early control of the match by winning the opening two games 16-14 and 11-6.

However, higher-ranked Breanne drew deep from her reserves to win the next three 11-8, 11-6 and 11-4 to deny the Maharashtra player a maiden PSA final appearance.



'Dilli ka sidha sadha launda hoon'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood actress Kiara Advani, who was most recently seen in the film 'Satyaprem Ki Katha', graced the latest episode of the streaming chat show 'Koffee With Karan' along with Bollywood star Vicky Kaushal. During the episode, KJo revealed that Kiara was late for her wedding with actor Sidharth Malhotra.

Mumbai, Dec 7 (IANS) Bollywood actress Kiara Advani, who was most recently seen in the film 'Satyaprem Ki Katha', graced the latest episode of the streaming chat show 'Koffee With Karan' along with Bollywood star Vicky Kaushal. During the episode, KJo revealed that Kiara was late for her wedding with actor Sidharth Malhotra.

KJo recollected the wedding as he said: "It was such an intimate wedding; they were so filmy when they met, that whole video. I didn't know that any of this was planned."

Vicky reacted to it and did Sidharth's watch act, expressing that it was all so sweet. Karan revealed that the 'watch' gesture was edited later because Kiara was so late! In her defence, the actress said that the baraat arrived too early. She said, "It was the earliest baraat."



Karan laughed, as he said: "You know how Punjabis are at the baaraat. The baaraat was filled with such vigour and energy which kept increasing. But then it reached a point where we were like, 'Koi Kiara ko bulao ab. Kab aayegi?'. It was getting so hot and all of us were tired. Everyone was actually giving gaalis to Kiara but when she came, she was looking so beautiful that it was all for-

gotten."

The actress also shared the intricate details of Sidharth Malhotra's romantic proposal and revealed that he said the lines from their 2021 film 'Shershaah' to propose to her.

She said: "He's like, 'Dilli ka sidha sadha launda hoon' (I am a simple boy from Delhi) with the full dialogues of 'Shershaah' and I burst out laughing."

I managed to propose to Katrina by going down on my knees a night before their wedding: Vicky

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood star Vicky Kaushal, who is receiving a lot of positive response to his recently released film 'Sam Bahadur', graced the latest episode of the streaming chat show 'Koffee With Karan' with actress Kiara Advani. During the episode, Vicky revealed that he proposed to his wife, actress Katrina Kaif just a day before their wedding.

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Show host Karan Johar nudged Vicky to speak on the proposal, the actor blushed and revealed how their busy schedules became a roadblock for him to plan an elaborate proposal for Katrina.

Vicky shared that he finally managed to propose to her by going down on his knees a night before their wedding in their hotel before their friends and families arrived.

He said: "It was very last minute. I had been warned by everybody that if you don't propose, it's something you'll have to be prepared for for the rest of your life that you got to hear about it. I did that one day before the wedding. It was dinner, just before any of the friends and families could come."



The 'Uri' actor also said that he met Katrina's siblings and mother for the first time just a week before the wedding when they flew down to Mumbai as they couldn't meet earlier due to the pandemic.

Vicky and Katrina tied the knot in an intimate but lavish ceremony at Six Senses Fort Barwara, Rajasthan on December 9, 2021.

Social media and the Internet has made everyone a health expert : Lara Dutta

Team Absolute | Mumbai

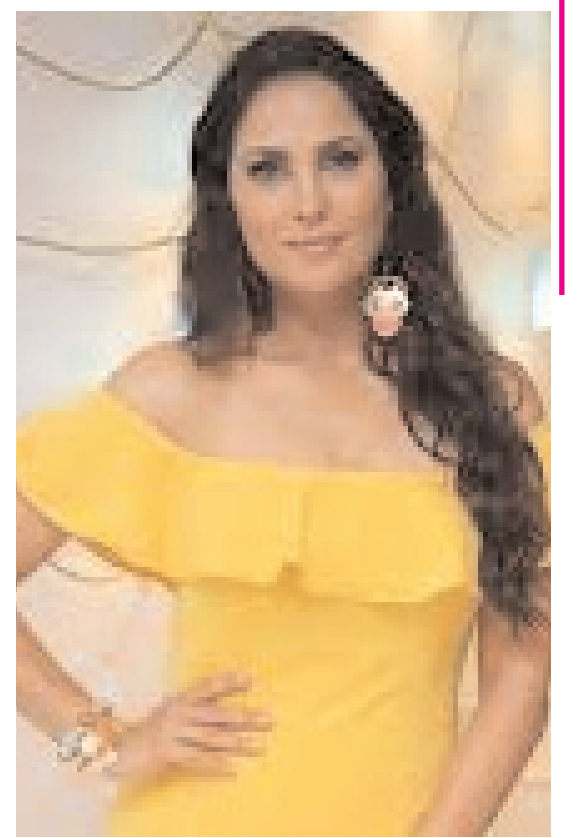
Actress Lara Dutta, who was recently seen in the streaming series 'Charlie Chopra & The Mystery Of Solang Valley', has said that the world of social media and the Internet has made everyone a health expert and that it's a very unsettling precedent.

The actress said that in matters of health one should always consult the professionals who have invested their time and energy in research and have a deep understanding of the subject.

The 'Kaun Banegi Shikharwati' actress attended the Media Roundtable on Empowering Menopause Conversations on Thursday, where she spoke about menstrual health.

She said, "All of us today with everything that we are exposed to, we have all become Google, Instagram doctors. Even for women, we are bombarded constantly with so much information. Today, if you want to know what you're going through even if you mistakenly click on one link, the algorithm will throw up multiple posts about the same thing."

She further mentioned: "They all may sound like the right fixes to what I'm going through. But, at the end of the day, are they the experts? Are they the people who really know what my personal experience is, and just because it has worked for someone, will it work for me? I believe in people, who have put their time, money, research and effort into actually getting the right kind of information."



P Diddy sued by 4th woman for alleged sexual assault

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Another woman has filed a lawsuit against rapper Sean 'Diddy' Combs for sexual assault. This is Combs' fourth sexual assault lawsuit in three weeks.

The woman, known as Jane Doe, claims in her lawsuit that in 2003 she was "sex trafficked" and "gang raped" by Combs; Harve Pierre, the then-president of Bad Boy Records; and a third unnamed person, reports.

She was 17 years old at the time. Combs has posted a statement on social media about the various allegations against him. "Enough is enough. For the last couple of weeks, I have sat silently and watched people try to assassinate my character, destroy my reputation, and my legacy," he said. "Sickening allegations have been made against me by individuals looking for a quick payday. Let me be absolutely clear: I did not do any of the awful things being alleged. I will fight for my name, my family, and for the truth."

In documents obtained by Mirror.co.uk, the lawsuit alleges that Jane Doe met the men in a lounge near Detroit, Michigan. Reportedly Combs "convinced" the woman to accompany them on a private jet to New York City.

They allegedly flew to Teterboro, New Jersey, and were driven to Diddy's House Recording Studio, owned and operated by Combs and his company Bad Boy Records.

As per Mirror.co.uk, throughout the night the alleged victim was given drugs and alcohol where the suit states she was "more and more inebriated, eventually to the point that she



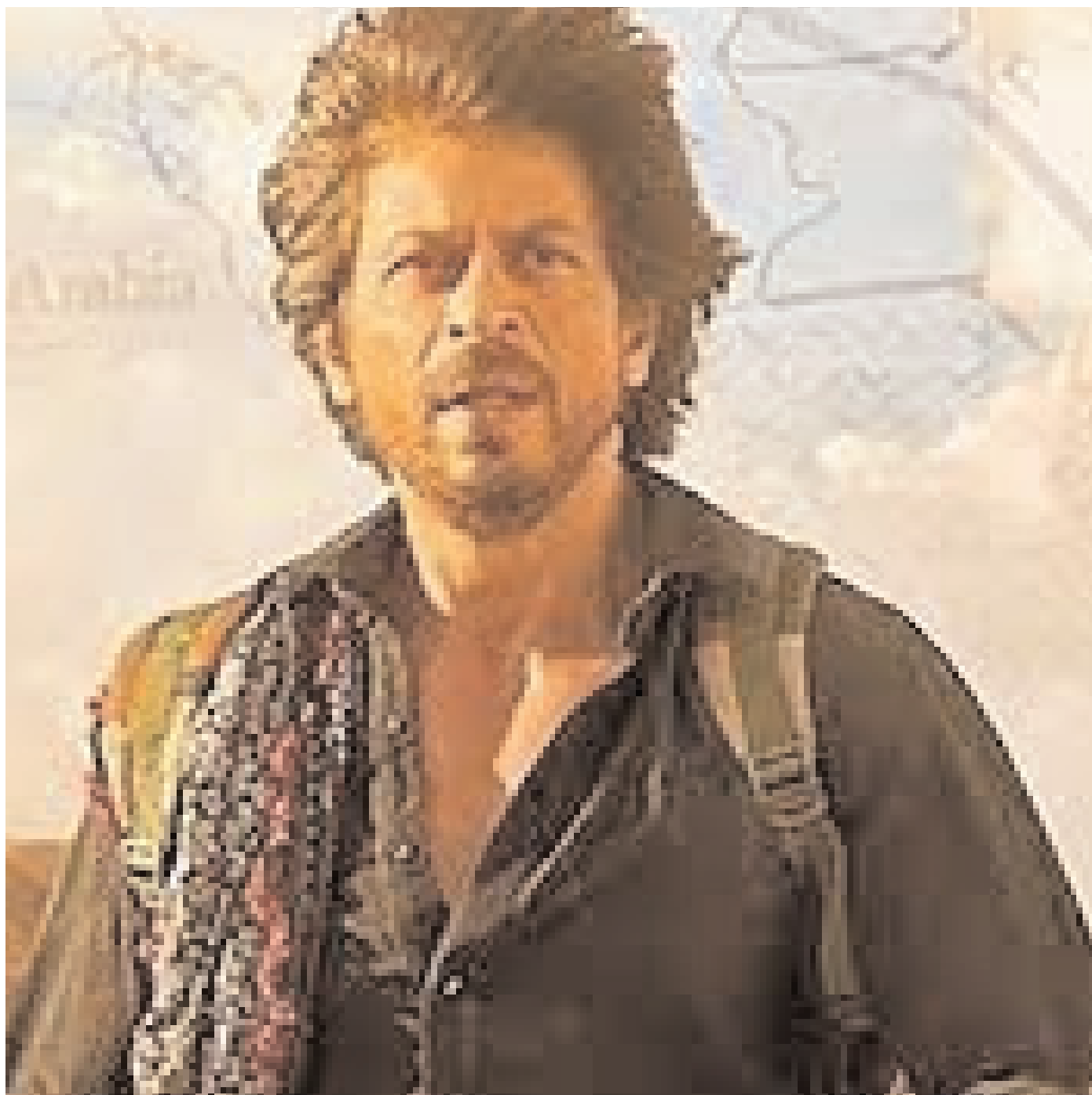
could not possibly have consented to having sex with anyone, much less someone twice her age." In the suit, Jane Doe provided photos of her and Combs in his studio during the night of the alleged assault. The suit claims that while in the studio she was raped by the three men and forced to give Pierre oral sex. She then reportedly was taken back to the airport and put on a plane back to Michigan.

SHAH RUKH SHARED THAT THE KEY TO HIS CHARACTER IN THE FILM DUNKI IS "HONESTY" AND "PATRIOTISM"

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood megastar Shah Rukh Khan, who is awaiting the release of his upcoming film 'Dunki', has shared that the key to his character in the film is "honesty" and "patriotism". SRK recently engaged with his fans on X during #AskSRK session. During the session, a fan asked, "When our sweetest Raju nd Abhijat sir came to u with this role for #Dunki nd u started your preparation by giving each shot in 25 different ways.. what did u feel was the key to this character Shah Rukh Bhai? Love u (sic)." Responding to the tweet, SRK wrote, "Goodness. Honesty. Loyalty. Patriotism. #Dunkitrailer." "Dunki", directed by superstar director Rajkumar Hirani, also stars Boman Irani, Taapsee Pannu, Vicky Kaushal, Vikram Kochhar and Anil Grover. Another fan asked, "#AskSRK Dunki looks like having SRK from every decade since you're working. How tough was the transformation? or VFX was used? Also, plans for 2024?" SRK replied, "One has to work on physical attributes to play different ages... prosthetics and vfx and whole lot of team members have to work very hard to try and get it right. Months of work. #DunkiTrailer."

A JIO Studios, Red Chillies Entertainment and Rajkumar Hirani Films presentation, produced by Rajkumar Hirani and Gauri Khan. Written by Abhijat Joshi, Rajkumar Hirani and Kanika Dhillon, Dunki is slated to release on December 21, 2023.



Ameesha Patel