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India is one of the world's fastest-growing major economies. While it is also one of the most populous - with millions entering the workforce each year - gaps in education make the fight for talent acute even as the overall unemployment rate stays high.

Korn Ferry, which surveyed 818 companies in India employing more than a combined 800,000 staff, found 61% of organizations are providing retention payments to key individuals.

## Indian Employees Set For 15-30% Hikes This Year, Asia's Biggest: Report

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Indian employees are set for Asia's biggest pay increases this year, with top talent earning as much as 15%-30% more, according to a survey by Korn Ferry. On average, pay in the South Asian nation will increase by 9.8% in 2023 after a 9.4% bump last year, the consulting firm said in a report. High-tech industries, life sciences and healthcare lead the pack with jumps of more than 10%.



The 9.8% rise for India compares with 3.5% in

Australia, 5.5% China, 3.6% Hong Kong, 7% Indonesia,

4.5% Korea, 5% Malaysia, 3.8% New Zealand, 5.5% Philippines, 4% Singapore, 5% Thailand, 8% Vietnam. 60% companies asked employees to follow a hybrid model of work, NDTV reported. While employees in major metropolitan centers, known as Tier 1 cities, still receive higher compensation, there is a pattern for firms to become "location agnostic" as hybrid and remote working becomes the norm, the survey found.

### GOLDMAN SACHS LAYS OFF 3,000 STAFF

New Delhi: Global investment firm Goldman Sachs sacked more than 3,000 employees in disguise of business meetings as early as 7.30 a.m. and the meetings with senior managers were put on Google calendar under "false pretences", the media reported.

The New York Post reported that Goldman Sachs' CEO David Solomon "e-mailed calendar invites that called targeted employees to phony 'business meetings' at its New York headquarters" last week. Once the employees arrived at the conference room - some as early as 7.30 a.m. - they were told by their managers that they were being fired. "Managers were sorry to do this but their hand was forced and they wished him the best of luck," the report said, citing inside sources.

The layoffs at Goldman Sachs were dubbed as "David's Demolition Day". The layoffs at the global financial services also hit Indian workers hard and some of the impacted IITians and IIM graduates shared their plight on various social media platforms.

# MAHA TRIPLE WHAMMY

**CLIMATE EXTREMES, RAMPANT FLOODS, RISING ARABIAN SEA**

▶ THESE ARE AN INCREASE IN THE MEAN TEMPERATURE FROM 1.2C TO 1.6C IN THE NEXT DECADE (2030S), INCREASED RAINFALL WHICH WILL GO UP FROM 2030-2050-2070 THOUGH IT WILL BE HIGHLY VARIABLE SPATIALLY.

▶ THE GOVERNMENT SAID THAT ANNUAL RAINFALL SHOWING THE HIGHEST INCREASING TRENDS IN MUMBAI, SINDHUDURG, KOLHAPUR AND SOLAPUR AND THE MAXIMUM DECREASING TREND IN LATUR AND BHANDARA WILL BE WITNESSED IN THE 2030S.

▶ THE ENTIRE STATE WILL SEE EXTREME RAINFALL EVENTS WITH LONGER DRY SPELLS, PLUS THE NUMBER OF DRY DAYS WOULD INCREASE FROM 3-9 DAYS IN THE NEXT DECADE.

▶ COUPLED WITH THESE, THE ARABIAN SEA LEVEL COULD GO UP BY 24 CMS-66 CMS IN THE COASTAL AREAS IN SYNC WITH THE PROJECTIONS FOR GLOBAL SEA LEVEL INCREASE, GREATER HEIGHTS OF WAVES, WINDSPEEDS, MORE STORMS AND SURGES.



Quaid Najmi | Mumbai

A piqued Mother Nature has shown her wrath at the environmental degradation perpetrated in Maharashtra on several occasions in the past, with ominous signs of more calamities slated for the future. It was nine years ago - July 30, 2014 - when Malin village, standing on a hillock around 620 m above sea level in Pune district, overnight turned into a slushy graveyard for scores of people after torrential rain.

At least 151 villagers were buried alive at the dead of night. The disaster was preceded by heavy rain that lashed the area for over 24 hours and without sufficient

forest cover, the hill-slide buried scores in their sleep, shocking the nation the next morning -- with many lessons for the long-term.

Another recent affront were the massive unprecedented floods that submerged large areas for days in the regions of western Maharashtra like Sangli, Kolhapur and Satara, first in August 2019 and a repeat in September 2021, in the sprawling Krishna River basin, with its ramifications felt even in Karnataka.

A Maharashtra government's 10-member experts panel identified the main culprits -- cyclones, cloudburst and persistent downpour -- and pointed fingers at other topological factors like inadequate drainage from

the regions, saturated subsoil and unbridled development activities on the flood plains, blocking the natural drainage channels, river damming and diversions and destruction of natural flood barriers.

A water resources expert and Advisor to the Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh governments, Barrister Vinod Tiwari said that unless the brutalisation of the environment is ended, the consequences will be of unimaginable proportions to peoples' lives and properties, whether in the mountains of the Himalayas, coastal areas like Mumbai or the hinterlands like western Maharashtra.

A former key member of the Maharashtra State Water Resources Regulatory Authority and Maharashtra State Groundwater Authority, Tiwari is currently advising the governments of J&K, Punjab and UP to set up similar statutory panels there. Dr Todmal warns that the increased frequency of natural disasters pose a threat to the very existence of the most intelligent species called 'Human', whose activities in the past two centuries have irritated nature to such an extent that it has now launched 'a mission to wipe us out'.

Even the Maharashtra government has become a soothsayer of sorts and made dark predictions about what is in store in the foreseeable future.

## Why states don't respond?

Supreme Court on plea to declare minorities at state/district level

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Tuesday expressed its discontent over six state governments and Union Territories (UTs), including Jammu and Kashmir, for not submitting their response to the central government on the issue of identification of minorities at the state or district level.

Attorney General R. Venkataramani, appearing for the Centre, cited the recent status report filed by the Ministry of Minority Affairs saying that 24 states and six UTs have so far furnished their comments on the issue.

The bench said it is giving last opportunity to the Centre to obtain their responses failing which it will presume that they have nothing to say.

The status report, filed in the top court, said comments from Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Lakshadweep, Rajasthan, and Telangana are still awaited.

Citing no response from states and UTs, the bench told the AG that "We will presume that they do not want to give responses." The top court has scheduled the matter for further hearing on March 21.

### Delhi riots case DON'T BELIEVE IN UNNECESSARILY KEEPING PEOPLE BEHIND BARS

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Tuesday observed that it does not believe in unnecessarily keeping people behind the bars while hearing the Delhi Police's petitions challenging bail granted to three student activists in a case of 2020 Delhi riots, which left 53 dead and over 700 injured.

The bench orally observed that spending hours on bail petitions hearing in the case was a waste of time of the Delhi High Court. During the hearing, the bench orally remarked that it does not believe in unnecessarily putting people behind bars and bail matters should not go on and on and should not be dealt with in this manner. The bench observed that in bail matters, the hearing gets prolonged the moment one goes into the merits of the case.

The top court was hearing the Delhi Police petitions against the high court's June 15, 2021 judgments granting bail to activists Natasha Narwal, Devangana Kalita, and Asif Iqbal Tanha in a larger conspiracy in Delhi riots case. The top court scheduled the matter for further hearing on January 31.

## Preparations to shift Badrinath deity's 'treasure'

Joshimath | Agencies

Even as residents of Uttarakhand's Joshimath are grappling with land subsidence and cracks that have appeared in the city's structures, the offerings to Lord Badrinath have been brought here from Badrinath, and kept in the treasury of Narsingh temple. Minor cracks were recently detected in the temple premises, due to which arrangements are being made to keep the 'treasure' safe by the Shri Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple

Committee. Devotees offer jewellery, diamonds, gems, gold, silver, and cash among other items to the deity during the Char Dham pilgrimage. The treasure is transferred back to Badrinath, after a ceremonial reopening of the temple.

According to sources, apart from cash in crores, 30 quintals of silver, more than 45 kg of gold and jewellery are included in the treasury. At present, the winter worship place of the lord is safe but is under threat. The Committee has been planning to shift the offerings to its Dharamshala, located at

Pipalkoti.

On Monday, Committee Chairman Ajendra Ajay inspected the place. He instructed the officials to take immediate steps in shifting the treasure if such a situation arises. Significantly, Saint Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati Maharaj of Jyotishpeeth has started the 'Joshimath Raksha Mahayagya,' which will last for 100 days in the temple premises. 10 lakh sacrifices will be made in this. Along with the saints, the affected people are participating in the Yagya.

## UNSC lists LeT's Abdul Rehman Makki as global terrorist

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The United Nations Security Council listed Pakistan-based terrorist Abdul Rehman Makki, associated with the terror outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), as a global terrorist. Makki is a relative of LeT head and 26/11 mastermind Hafiz Muhammad Saeed.

India sought to declare the LeT leader as a global terrorist last year, but the proposal was blocked by China. On January 16, China



lifted its hold and Makki was declared a global terrorist.

The UN in its statement said: "On January 16, 2023, the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) con-

cerning Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) (Da'esh), Al-Qaida, and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities approved the addition of the entry specified below to its ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida

Sanctions List of individuals and entities subject to the assets freeze, travel ban and arms embargo set out in paragraph 1 of Security Council resolution 2610 (2021) and adopted under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations." Makki is the head of the political wing of LeT and has been carrying out terror activities, terror funding and recruitment. The U.S. government has announced a reward of \$2 million on Makki.

## 2 TERRORISTS, TASKED FOR ATTACKS AHEAD OF R DAY, ELIMINATED IN J&K

Srinagar: Two LeT terrorists, who had escaped from a recent encounter and were tasked to carry out some sensational terror incident in Budgam ahead of forthcoming Republic Day, were killed in an encounter in the district on Tuesday, officials said. Police said acting on specific input regarding movement of terrorists, a joint police and army checkpoint was set up near the Court crossing in Budgam. During area domination, the joint party signalled a suspected vehicle bearing registration number JK04B-6771 to stop, however, the terrorists onboard jumped out from the vehicle and started firing indiscriminately on the joint party which was retaliated effectively, leading to an encounter," police said.

During the brief shoot-out, two terrorists linked with the proscribed terrorist outfit LeT were neutralised and have been identified as Arbaaz Ahmad Mir, resident of Putrigam Rajpora and Shahid Ahmad Sheikh, resident of Kisrigam Kakapora.

## Nadda to continue as BJP President till June 2024

Team Absolute | New Delhi

BJP President J.P. Nadda's tenure, set to end this month, had been extended till June 2024 in view of the upcoming Assembly elections this year and the Lok Sabha elections next year. Informing about the

decision taken in the BJP National Executive meeting, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said that Defence Minister Rajnath Singh proposed to extend the presidential term of Nadda till June 2024, which was approved. Shah claimed that under the leadership of Prime Minister



Narendra Modi and the chairmanship of Nadda, the 2024 Lok Sabha elections will see the BJP win even bigger than 2019.

### BENGALURU HORROR

## Two-wheeler rider rams into car, drags driver for nearly 1 km

Bengaluru | Agencies

In a horrific incident, a two-wheeler rider dragged a 71-year-old man on road for almost a kilometre on Magadi Road in the city on Tuesday. The victim, who has been identified as Muttappa, has been admitted to the hospital.

The incident took place when Muttappa, a native of Bijapur district, was driving a Boleno

car on Magadi Road. Sahil (25), the accused who is a resident of Nayandahalli in Bengaluru, suddenly his rammed his two-wheeler into the car from behind, the police said.

A salesman by profession, Sahil was reportedly talking on his phone when the incident took place. When Muttappa came out of the car to question Sahil, the latter tried to escape without stopping his scooter.

Muttappa somehow managed to cling on to the rear part of the scooter but Sahil, instead of stopping the two-wheeler, sped away, dragging Muttappa along.

Sahil kept on driving for nearly 1 km, with Muttappa clinging on to the scooter before someone another car and auto-rickshaw waylaid him, forcing Sahil to stop. Sahil was then beaten up by the public who later handed him over to the police.









EDITOR'S SPECS

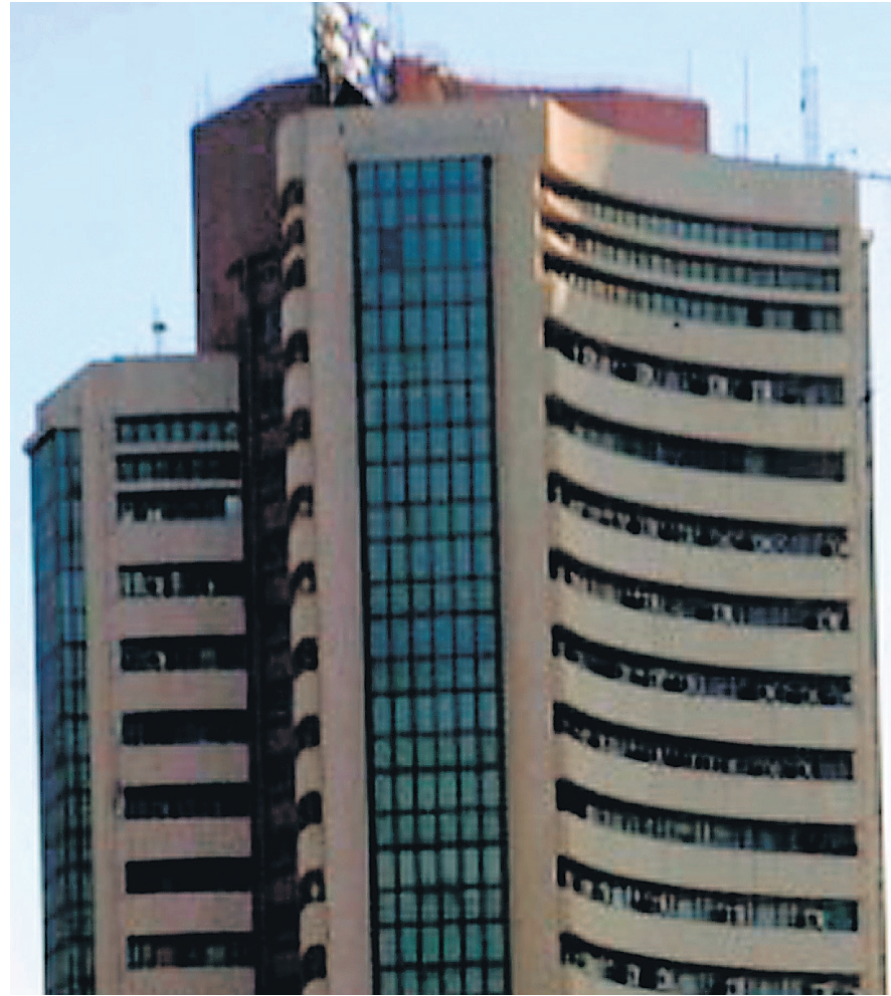
TEMPLE TRUST DROPS PLAN OF RAMAYANA MUSEUM

The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Tirath Kshetra Trust has reportedly dropped their plan of building a museum at the Ram Janmabhoomi campus in Ayodhya, mainly due to security reasons. The trust had earlier planned to construct a museum -- housing Ramayan-era artifacts -- at the Ram Janmabhoomi campus. These artifacts were recovered when the campus was dug up 50 feet deep for laying the temple's foundation. The temple trust's move to drop the idea of the museum comes in the wake of the state government beefing up security at the Ram Janmabhoomi campus after the Centre received inputs regarding a possible terror attack. Instead of developing a museum, the temple trust has now proposed to acquire the Ram Katha Sangrahalaya near Naya Ghat. Nripendra Misra, chairman of the trust, has already written a letter to the state government requesting the handover of the Sangrahalaya to the trust. At present, the Ram Katha Sangrahalaya is under the state government. A member of the Trust, said that a large number of Ramayan-era artifacts were recovered from the temple campus when its foundation was dug-up in September 2020. Significantly, around 150 of the Ramayana-era artifacts -- which were recovered during Karseva by Vishwa Hindu Parishad in July 1992 -- are showcased at Ram Katha Sangrahalaya. Apart from an attempt to get custody of these artifacts, the trust has also identified 11 historic structures inside the Ram Janmabhoomi campus that will be preserved and restored in their original form. At present, around 60 per cent construction work of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya has been completed. The idol of the deity is scheduled to be installed at the sanctorium-sanctorum on Makar Sankranti next year. Thereafter, devotees would be allowed to pay obeisance to the deity.

Will markets rally pre-budget now?

Arun Kejriwal

Markets opened with a gap at the start of the week on expected lines, but then lost on the next three consecutive days before a strong rear-guard action on Friday, the last day of the week saw markets regaining ground. With gains on just two of the three trading sessions, they could do so much and no more. BSESENSEX gained 360.81 points or 0.60 per cent to close at 60,261.18 points. NSENIFTY gained 97.15 points or 0.54 per cent to close at 17,956.60 points. The broader markets saw BSE100, BSE200 and BSE500 gain 0.5 per cent, 0.5 per cent and 0.49 per cent respectively. BSEMIDCAP was up 0.02 per cent while BSESMLLCAP was up 0.26 per cent. The Indian Rupee had a strong showing during the week and gained Rs 1.40 or 1.69 per cent to close at Rs 81.32 to the US Dollar. Dow Jones lost on the opening day of the week and then gained on the four remaining days consecutively. Dow ended the week up 672 points or 2 per cent to close at 34,302.61 points. It's interesting to note that FPI's have been sellers on every day of the current year. They have sold over the ten sessions that have happened. Their total sales have not been very high, but they have sold shares worth Rs 17,400 crore on a net basis. Domestic institutions flush with domestic flows and SIP's bought stock worth Rs 12,800 crore. Sankranti, the Indian festival which coincides with Lohri and Pongal of the north and south, has been celebrated over the weekend all over the country. Readers would recall it is the popular kite-flying festival and the entire Gujarat would spend the weekend on their terraces, flying kites. It was expected that the fortnight ahead would see a spate of public issues happening. Unfortunately, it appears that the same is not the case. No reported filings of updated DRHPs have been heard. Hence it could be presumed that the second fortnight of January could be a cold one as far as primary market issuances are concerned. For the record, of the nine listings since December 1, 2022, six are trading at a discount to the issue price while three are trading above the issue price. Not too good for record purposes and IPO market. TCS declared its October-December quarter results. Its net profit was at Rs 10,846 crore against Rs 9,769 crore in the year ago quarter.



Revenues grew at 19.1 per cent to clock Rs 58,229 crore against Rs 48,885 crore. EBIT margin was lower by 50 basis points at 24.5 per cent. The company declared a dividend of Rs 8 for the quarter and a special dividend of Rs 67. Though the street felt that the results were a tad below expectation, share prices fell only during the day to bounce back. At the end of the period under review, they closed at Rs 3,374.20, a gain of Rs 162.20 or 5.04 per cent against previous Friday's close of Rs 3,212. Besides TCS, Infosys, HCL and Wipro declared results from the IT pack during the week. There is some amount of pressure on the margins being witnessed but new order wins are there. Growth seems to have moderated but continues at a pace which seems fair. Concerns in the IT space which were raised

about a slowdown seem to have come unfounded as of now. IT being an important sector for India and a big export earner has done reasonably well for itself. Interest rates on fixed deposits are moving up. The way one gets marketing calls or on a visit to the bank the push being made for fixed deposits gives an indication that money is becoming tighter and interest rates are set to rise. This could be true at least for the deposit side. Once deposit rates rise, lending rates rise as well, as the job of the bank is to earn a differential on the money handled. Expect the impact to be significant as rates continue to harden. The Union Budget is now virtually round the corner with a mere 11 trading sessions to go before the same is presented

on February 1. Parliament session begins on January 31 when the Economic survey would be presented. If there is to be a pre-budget rally it's now or never. With markets having sustained the mid-week selling last week, it could be fair to assume that the momentum for the rally to begin is in place. FPI are sellers but they have not pushed the market to sell. While in relative terms, valuations in India are not cheap compared to other emerging markets, there is an opportunity for growth as well. The lifetime highs were made on December 1, 2022. These were at levels of 63,583 on BSESENSEX and 18,887 on NIFTY. The next two lower tops were made on December 14 at 62,835 and 18,632 points respectively. The third and final one was made last week on January 3 at 61,343 and 18,265 points. It is very important that if there is to be a pre-budget rally, this level is to be crossed at the bare minimum. Markets have gone down to the lows or around the lows but not broken them. They remain at 59,625-59,675 on BSESENSEX and at 17,760-17,795 on NIFTY. Over the last six trading sessions, these levels have been tested three times. It's now or never. If markets are to turn weak in the immediate short-term these levels would break on the down side and we would see selling pressure. If, however, markets turn positive, we would see these levels being held and markets crossing the levels of 61,343 and 18,265 early next week. The strategy would be to wait for levels to be breached in either direction. There would be swift movement thereafter. My gut feel says that this time the trend could be upwards with global cues also supporting the market trend. Dow after a long time has gained on four consecutive trading sessions and has been supported by Nasdaq as well. In India, the IT results have been supportive and markets have not taken the numbers from four top IT companies, in any negative manner. With a number of positives on hand, it's the best time to push the pedal for the bulls. Expect markets to rally in the immediate short-term.

(Arun Kejriwal is the founder of Kejriwal Research and Investment Services. The views expressed are personal)

international

China's Covid death data underestimated: Report

London | Agencies

The nearly 60,000 Covid-related deaths China reported for the first five weeks of its current outbreak, the largest the world has ever seen, may underestimate the true toll by hundreds of thousands of fatalities, experts were quoted as saying in a media report. China's abrupt pivot from Covid Zero in early December (2022) unleashed a surge of omicron infections and led to 59,938 virus-related deaths in the nation's hospitals through January 12, Bloomberg news agency reported, citing the figures disclosed by the National Health Commission. While the number swamps the few dozen deaths previously recorded in the official tally - which drew widespread criticism both at home and abroad, including from the World Health Organization (WHO) - experts say it's still likely to

be an underestimate given the enormous scale of the outbreak and the mortality rates seen at the height of omicron waves in other countries that initially pursued a Covid Zero strategy, the news agency reported. While the figure is roughly in line with what Zhang estimated might be coming from the country's hospitals, he said it's only a fraction of the total Covid deaths across the country. Using a report from the National School of Development at Peking University that found 64 per cent of the population was infected by mid-January, he estimated 900,000 people would have died in the previous five weeks based on a conservative 0.1 per cent case fatality rate. That means the official hospital death count is less than 7 per cent of the total mortality seen during the outbreak, the news agency reported. The official toll translates to 1.17 deaths daily for every million people

in the country over the course of five weeks, according to a Bloomberg analysis. That's well below the average daily mortality rate seen in other countries that initially pursued Covid Zero or managed to contain the virus after relaxing their pandemic rules. When omicron hit South Korea, daily deaths quickly climbed to nearly seven for every 1 million people. Australia and New Zealand saw mortality nearing or topping four per million a day during their first winters with omicron. Even Singapore, which had a well-planned and gradual shift away from its zero tolerance approach, had deaths peak at about two per million people daily. It could be that many of the country's deaths occurred in nursing care facilities or at home, explaining some of the undercount, Blair said, as China's latest disclosure only counted hospital deaths. Reports of overwhelmed crematoriums around the

country suggest excess mortality is at a high level. WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus recently spoke with Ma Xiaowei, the director of China's National Health Commission, about the Covid-19 situation in the country. "WHO appreciates this meeting, as well as the public release of information on the overall situation," the United Nations' health agency said in a statement. Chinese officials have provided information to the WHO on a range of topics, including outpatient clinics, hospitalisations, patients requiring emergency treatment and critical care, and hospital deaths related to Covid-19 infection. The WHO is currently analysing the information, which covers early December 2022 to January 12, 2023, and allows for a "better understanding of the epidemiological situation and the impact of this wave in China".

UK office building likely to be turned into gurdwara

London | Agencies

A three-storey office building in the UK, could soon be transformed into a Sikh temple if plans are approved. An application has been filed by a Sikh community member with Telford & Wrekin Council to move the current gurdwara in Oakengates to Abbey House in Shropshire's Telford region, the shropshirestar.com reported. The Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara in Oakengates covers an area of 6,573 sq ft, less than a quarter of the size of Abbey House. The Abbey House building was until two years ago, leased by the council to HMRC (Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs). It was built in 1990, and provides 28,886 sq ft of space.



"The intention is to use this building as a place of worship for the Sikh Community in Shropshire and surrounding areas," Inderjit Singh Gill wrote in the application. According to the report, the upcoming gurdwara will provide kitchen and community services, and there will be a Sikh priest living on the site. While the move has been largely supported by the Sikh community members, a few

of them have raised objections to the proposal. "The current property is freehold and the new proposed property is only a leasehold which will cost so much to run, it is our family temple that we have used since being born - we do not want it to get shut or moved," Sukhjit Singh, a community member, told Shropshirestar. Singh further said that it took 30 years of hard work to make the Oakengates gurdwara fully sustainable.

SIX KILLED IN SHOOTING IN CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles: Six people were killed in a shooting in central California in the US, local media reported. Two of the victims of the shooting in Goshen, Tulare County, are a 17-year-old mother and a six-month-old baby, Xinhua news agency reported, citing a central California-based KFSN-TV's report. The Tulare County Sheriff's Office said in a release posted on its Facebook page that deputies were called to a home in the 6800 Block of Harvest Road in Goshen just after 3:30 a.m. Monday local time for multiple shots heard. The Sheriff's Office did not give details in the release. The agency only said that it is investigating the shooting and will update the shooting after they receive more information. The KFSN-TV report said that deputies immediately noticed two victims dead in the street and then a third in the doorway of the home after they arrived at the spot. Deputies found six victims in total. Five of them were declared dead at the scene. Another died at the hospital, according to the report. Authorities believe there are at least two suspects at this time. They do not believe this was a random act and that there is a gang connection, the report added.

6 killed as ambulance crashes into truck in Bangladesh

Kathmandu | Agencies

Dhaka: In a tragic accident, an ambulance with six people on board crashed into a truck in Shariatpur district, some 101 km south of Bangladesh's capital Dhaka, early on Tuesday. The collision was so massive that all six people including the driver died on the spot, Xinhua News Agency reported. Rescuers say they had to carry out the relief work for hours to rescue the bodies from the mangled ambulance. Md Selim Miah, deputy director of the district's Fire Service and Civil Defence, told journalists that the Dhaka-bound ambulance rammed into the compressed natural gas truck at around 4:20 a.m. local time due to poor visibility caused by dense fog. The patient and ambulance driver and a helper were among the deceased, he said, adding



that their identities could not be known immediately. The ambulance was taking the patient to a hospital in Dhaka when it crashed into the truck coming from the opposite direction.

Bangladesh has a higher fatality rate for road accidents in the world due to shoddy highways, poorly maintained vehicles, violation of traffic rules by inept drivers and lack of monitoring by the traffic department.

A total of 10,858 people were killed, and 12,875 others injured in 7,617 road, railway and waterway accidents across the country in 2022, according to a report of Bangladesh Passengers' Welfare Association, a local organisation.

PAKISTAN PM OFFERS INDIA TO RESOLVE 'BURNING ISSUES' THROUGH TALKS

Islamabad | Agencies

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has sent out a fresh offer to India to resolve all longstanding bilateral issues, which have led to disputes and conflicts between the two nations through sincere and forward looking negotiations. In an interview to Al-Arabiya television, Sharif offered his Indian counterpart Prime Minister Narendra Modi to sit together and resolve issues including Kashmir. "My message to the Indian leadership and Prime Minister Modi is that let us sit down on the table and have serious and sincere talks to resolve our burning issues like Kashmir," he said. "In Kashmir, flagrant human rights violations are taking place day in and day out," he added.



Sharif has asked the UAE to play its role in bringing both India and Pakistan to table talks. Emphasising the urgent need to find mutual grounds of understanding on the issue of Kashmir, Sharif said: "India had usurped any semblance of autonomy, given to the Kashmiris according to Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, as the autonomy was revoked in August 2019." Shehbaz Sharif said that the not only the world need to realise that India and Pakistan are neighbours, but both the countries need to understand the importance of co-existing peacefully.



### PRIME MINISTER MODI TO VISIT MUMBAI TOMORROW



Prime Minister Modi will visit Mumbai on Thursday, January 19 to lay the foundation stone of various infrastructure projects in the city and also inaugurate two Metro lines - 2A (which will run between Andheri to west Dahisar), and 7 (which will run between Andheri east to

expected to gather at the ground by 1 pm on Thursday, as the Western Express Highway will be kept closed for security reasons. Additionally, large size cut outs of PM Modi, Shiv Sena founder Balasaheb Thackeray, Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and his deputy Devendra Fadnis have been put up outside former CM Uddhav Thackeray's residence in Bandra. PM Modi is also expected to make a few announcements ahead of the civic polls. Elections to the BMC, the country's richest civic body, are due since last year. During his visit, PM Modi is scheduled to participate in various programs and inaugurate several civic projects. He will also lay foundation stones for setting up two hospitals, and a new sewerage treatment plant in Mumbai to prevent the mixing of sewage water into the sea.

### MOUS WORTH RS 46KCR AT DAVOS WEF SIGNED BY CM SHINDE



Team Absolute | Davos / Mumbai

Getting into the business mode in Davos, Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and his team inked MoUs worth around Rs 45,900 crore for various projects with a potential to create around 10,000 direct jobs, an official from the delegation said here on Tuesday. Industry Minister Uday Samant, who is part of the CM entourage,

said that on the first day on Monday (January 16), the state government has signed the agreements with several major global conglomerates and investors. The investments include Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Orenda India (Rs 16,000 cr), ICP Investments/Indus Capitals (Rs 16,000 cr), Greenko Energy Projects Pvt. Ltd. of Telangana (Rs 12,000 cr), Nipro Pharma Packaging India Pvt. Ltd. of Pune (Rs 1,650 cr) and Rukhi

Agro Foods of Thane (Rs 250 cr). Setting the state on an ambitious journey of a USD One Trillion economy, Shinde is all set to sign a total of 21 MoUs worth Rs 1.40 lakh-crore, intended to create over 66,500 jobs in the next five years. He showcased the progressive policy reforms of the government, making the state a part of the global conversation, to reiterate to political leaders and global investors why Maharashtra is a premier investment destination. Maharashtra has signed the prestigious three-year Platform Partnership with the WEF, a commercial contract for continuous engagements on subjects of strategic importance to the state. The subjects focus on Shaping the Future of Urban Transformation - smart and connected cities, urban resilience, governance, infrastructure & services and resource management, and New Economies and Societies, focusing on entrepreneurship, education & skills, economic growth and job creation, said Shinde. Among the most industrialised states in India, Maharashtra contributes 15 per cent to the national GDP and 16 per cent of the country's

industrial output. The services sector accounts for much of the state economy, upto 62 per cent of the state GDP, followed by the manufacturing sector which contributes 20 per cent through major industries including automobiles, engineering, textiles, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, petrochemicals, food processing and IT/ITes.



The Shiv Sena (UBT) Chief Spokesperson and MP Sanjay Raut said that if all these investments are indeed coming then that is good for the state. "However, let's wait till the investments actually come and jobs are really created before we can comment," he added.

### Chaos in Maha Congress', change party chief, demands state leader

In a jolt for the Congress, a party leader in Maharashtra on Tuesday claimed that there is "anarchy" in the state unit for which state President Nana Patole is responsible, and has sought his removal. The demand has been in a letter penned to Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge by former legislator from Nagpur Dr Ashishrao R. Deshmukh - the son of Congress strongman, former state party chief minister Ranjeet Deshmukh. Without mincing words, Deshmukh has blamed Patole for all the ills plaguing the party after he took over as the state chief in February 2021, and claimed that it has gone into "anarchy". "The recent rebellion by Dr Satyajit Tambe (in Nashik) has brought disgrace to the Congress. During Patole's tenure, the party has been facing constant upheavals. Vidarbha (from where Patole also hails) was once known as the stronghold of the



Congress, but it has slipped out of the hands," he alleged. He recalled the examples of how Dr. Ravindra Bhojar was the Congress candidate for the 2021 MLC polls from Nagpur; but after dramatic political developments, at the last minute, the party supported independent Mangesh Deshmukh, due to

which the Bharatiya Janata Party's Chandrashekhar Bawankule won overwhelmingly. Similarly, in June 2022 MLC polls, official Congress candidate Chandrakant Handore was defeated while another party leader Bhai Jagtap bagged more votes and won. Patole had promised to investigate all these cases and submit a report to the party high command, but till date no action has been taken nor anybody held responsible though many people continued to do anti-party work even when they were in the party, he said in the letter to Kharge. On the upcoming MLC's polls on January 30, Dr. Deshmukh warned that its outcome could have a bearing on the election of the Chairman of the Legislative Council. He rued that in the erstwhile bastion of Maharashtra, today, there are many leaders but no dedicated workers left, the Congress is struggling for survival, its ideology is not respected by the leaders, and the party is viewed as one without a competent state leadership.

### Two women choke to death in fire at apartment

Team Absolute | Thane



A 70-year-old woman and her grand-daughter were killed in a fire that broke out in their apartment in Maharashtra's Thane district in the early hours of Tuesday, a fire official said. The blaze erupted around 3.30 am in the apartment on the third floor of a building in Ghass Baug locality of Kalyan town, sub-officer Namdeo Chowdhary of the civic fire station said. Local firemen rushed to the scene and doused the flames within half an hour, but the two women had suffocated due to the smoke, he said. The women were rushed to a hospital, where doctors

declared them brought dead, the official said. Initial reports suggest that a short circuit may have caused the blaze, he said, adding that the local police were probing into the incident further.

### 53 passengers injured as bus overturns

Team Absolute | Latur

Fifty three passengers were injured when a bus overturned in Maharashtra's Latur district on Tuesday, police said. The accident took place near Borgoa Kale village at around 8.30 am when the bus belonging to the Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) was heading towards Pune from Nilanga via Latur, head constable Ratan Shaikh said. The bus was on a narrow bridge when its driver lost control over the wheels while trying to prevent hitting another vehicle coming from the opposite side. As a result,



the bus overturned, he said. Some villagers present at the spot immediately dialled '108' emergency medical service number. All the injured passengers were taken to a rural hospital in Murud for treatment. Later, 16 of them rushed to a government hospital in Latur for further treatment, the official said.

### CASE FILED AGAINST A HOUSING SOCIETY CHAIRMAN UNDER ATROCITIES ACT FOR ABUSING FLAT OWNER

Thane: Police have registered an FIR under Atrocities Act against the chairman and other office-bearers of a housing society in Maharashtra's Thane city for allegedly abusing a flat owner who had a dispute with them over the maintenance bill of his house, an official said on Tuesday. The flat owner, who belongs to a Scheduled Caste, in his police complaint said he had raised an objection over the maintenance charges worth Rs 5 lakh levied on him, an official from Kapurbawdi police station said. He claimed the housing society office-bearers were harassing him since 2016 by way of the "wrong billing" and did not give an explanation for it, the official said. When he approached the society office, the chairman had in the presence of other office-bearers allegedly abused him over his caste, he said. Based on his complaint, the Kapurbawdi police on Monday registered the case against the housing society's chairman, secretary, treasurer and two other members of the managing committee under provisions of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, the official said. No arrest has been made so far, he said, adding a probe was on into the case.

### Court acquits man accused of kidnapping minor girl

Team Absolute | Thane

A court in Maharashtra's Thane district has acquitted a 30-year-old man in a case of kidnapping and procurement of a 14-year-old girl, noting the main culprit was absconding and the victim had died. Sessions Judge Dr Rachna R Tehra, in her order passed on January 12, said the prosecution failed to prove the charges against the accused under Indian Penal Code Sections 363 (kidnapping), 366-A (procurement of minor girl) and 34 (common intention). A copy of the order was made available on Tuesday. The prosecutor told the court that the girl went missing from her home in Thane city on January 13, 2013. When her



father enquired in the neighbourhood, he came to know she had run away with a man (main culprit) to Haryana. The next day she was traced there in the company of that man and his mother and brought back to Thane. The police then registered a case against the 30-year-old man, a sweeper, of helping the main culprit in kidnapping the girl. The judge said on the basis of evidence available on record, it appears the prosecution has

only examined the informant and investigating officer and proved the missing complaint and arrest (of the accused). "Further, the victim is dead as deposed by her father," the court noted. It is necessary to mention here that the present matter is an old one and summons have been issued to the witnesses several times, but they are not traced, it said. Only on the sole testimony of the informant, the accused cannot be held guilty of the alleged offence, the court said. The main culprit and his mother are absconding and not traced by the police machinery, it said. There is nothing on record to show the accused helped the main culprit and his mother in kidnapping the victim, the court said.

### CASE AGAINST SHOPKEEPER AFTER KITE STRING KILLS MAN

Thane: Police have registered a case against a shopkeeper in Maharashtra's Thane district for stocking and selling the banned nylon 'manja', days after the death of a 47-year-old man after the kite string slit his throat, an official said on Tuesday. The incident took place in Bhiwandi town on Sunday night when the man was heading home on a motorcycle. The kite string got entangled around his neck and slit his throat, he said. The police got a tip-off that a shopkeeper in the area was selling the banned nylon kite string, an official from Bhiwandi town police station said. A police team raided the shop and seized the kite string stock from there, he said. A case was registered against the shopkeeper under Indian Penal Code Sections 188 (disobedience to an order lawfully promulgated by a public servant), 290 (public nuisance) and 291 (continuance of nuisance after injunction to discontinuance), the official said. No arrest has been made so far, he added.

### G20 Delegates Join Local Folk Dancers in Pune

Team Absolute | Pune

Delegates who arrived in India for the G20 (Group of Twenty Summit) were seen performing traditional lezim dance with local artists at a cultural program in Pune. In a video shared by a news agency on Twitter, several delegates are seen matching steps with the dancers and grooving to the thumping beats of dhols can be heard at the event. We can also see a number of people dressed in traditional Maharashtrian attire to welcome the guests. In December, several G20 delegates joined local traditional dancers at Girgaon Chowpatty when they were on their way to Colaba, Mumbai. They too were given the same welcome with the sound of drums and Koli and Lavani songs. The envoys were seen enjoying and grooving to the music. India assumed the G20 presidency from Indonesia on December 1, 2022. As part of the summit, the country will host more than 200 meetings across over 50 cities. The theme of the G20 summit is Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam or "One Earth. One Family. One Future." The first meeting of the G20 Development Working Group (DWG) was



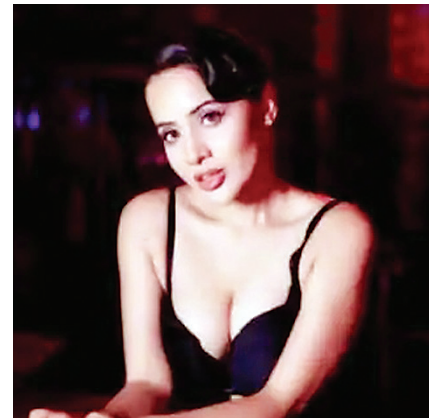
held from December 13 to December 16 in Mumbai. The delegates went to the Kanheri Caves in Mumbai for an excursion in December and also attended a light and sound show at Victoria Memorial in Kolkata this month. "A glimpse into India's history! G20 delegates enjoyed a spectacular light & sound show on India's struggle against colonialism and contribution of Indian heroes to the independence movement," a post by the official Twitter handle of G20 India read. Kolkata hosted the first meeting for the G20 Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion (GPIFI) from January 9 to January 11. The meeting was conducted by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Ministry of Finance.

### Urfi Javed nudity row

### Maharashtra women's panel chief asks police to take 'immediate' action over model's plaint

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Taking cognisance of actor model Urfi Javed's complaint against BJP leader Chitra Wagh, Maharashtra Women's Commission Chief Rupali Chakankar on Tuesday wrote to the Mumbai Police Commissioner Vivek Phansalkar asking him to take appropriate action over the same. Sharing the letter on her social media, she wrote, "Maharashtra State Commission for Women has received the complaint application of Urfi Javed. In this the applicant states, I am working in the fashion industry related to cinema, my living conditions and appearance are professionally necessary." Urfi in her complaint further stated that despite there being no issues, Chitra

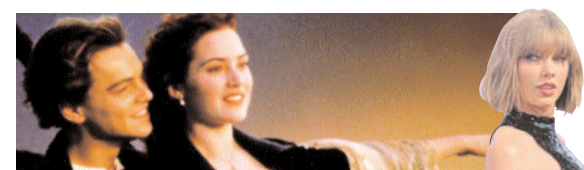


Wagh has publicly threatened her through media that she will assault Javed. "Be it for political gain or personal publicity, Wagh's threat hints I may be attacked. It creates an unsafe environment for me and I cannot move freely," Urfi had told the women's panel seek-



ing security. Chakankar, further wrote, "The right of free movement is given to every Indian by the constitution, feeling unsafe in a city like Mumbai, the capital of Maharashtra, is a serious matter. Therefore, I urge Mumbai Police Commissioner take immedi-

ate action on the application," she wrote. The letter further read, "A report should be submitted immediately as per Section 12 (2) and 12 (3) of the Maharashtra State Commission for Women Act, 1993 regarding the action taken."



# MARGOT ROBBIE RISKS WARDROBE MALFUNCTION AT 'BABYLON' SYDNEY PREMIERE

Los Angeles | Agencies

**H**ollywood star Margot Robbie narrowly avoided a wardrobe blunder on the red carpet as she stepped out in a dress with a daring thigh-high split. The actress greeted fans and paparazzi at the 'Babylon' premiere in Sydney and almost revealed more than she intended

as she walked around outside the State Theatre, reports Mirror.co.uk.

Margot was dressed to impress in a baby blue plunging gown which featured a delicate red lace trim. The dress featured a tie detail at the side which cinched her in at the waist. She completed her look with a matching pair of blue heels and opted for a minimal makeup look. Margot let her long dark blonde hair flow behind her in loose waves. As per Mirror.co.uk, the Hollywood

star had to use her hand to cover her modesty as she walked, but Margot pulled it off effortlessly. Margot's new film 'Babylon' is set in 1920s Hollywood, as studios move away from silent movies, and showcases the decadence and debauchery of the era

The movie has so far been regarded as a flop, underperforming commercially by grossing just \$4.85 million in its first four days and \$15 million to date, against a production budget of \$78 million.



## 'So good to be back'

Amanda Holden sizzles as she shows off her age-defying figure

Los Angeles | Agencies

**A**manda Holden looked nothing short of incredible on set of a racy new photoshoot on Monday. The Britain's Got Talent judge and radio host sizzled as she showed off her age-defying figure in nothing but a bathrobe as she posed up for Sam Faiers' Revive Collagen brand.

Amanda shared a short clip of herself posing on the edge of a bath while on set, saying: 'So good to be back with revive collagen.' Amanda stunned showing off a golden tan, fresh pedicure and with her blonde locks out and over her shoulders in tousled curls. She could be seen putting on a leggy display in the robe and posing seductively while baring one shoulder.

Sam also shared a picture of herself with Amanda onset of the shoot in Notting Hill.

Amanda has just returned from a lavish trip to Mauritius, where she stayed in a £1,700 per night beachside resort.

The TV personality made sure to document her trip and shared various pictures of her slipping her figure into tiny bikinis. She stayed at the luxurious five-star LUX Grand Baie situated on the northern shore of the island. Designer and former Dragon's Den star Kelly Hoppen helped to design the hotel, with the suites and villas designed to feel like private apartments.

## SELENA GOMEZ HAS FOUND HER LOVE IN DREW TAGGART: REPORTS

Los Angeles | Agencies

**S**inger-actress Selena Gomez, who recently slammed a section of netizens over body shaming, is said to be enjoying time with 'The Chainsmokers' star Drew Taggart. The couple is apparently not afraid to showcase their "casual" relationship, reports 'The Mirror'.

The singer had recently joked she was in a throuple with Nicola Peltz-Beckham and her hubby Brooklyn, but it appears she's now potentially found a man of her own.

The former Disney Channel star is said to be "so affectionate" with her fellow musician as the pair enjoy regular date nights.

As per 'Mirror.co.uk', a source has claimed that they are in the early stages of their romance, saying they are "very casual and low-key".

However, they said the duo are enjoying trips to the movies and going bowling as they get to know each other better.

The insider told US Weekly: "They aren't trying to hide their romance by sneaking around at members only club."

And they added: "Selena can hardly keep her hands off him," before saying they are "having a lot of fun together".

The news comes after Selena admitted she is "a little big right now" in a response to fans who tried to

body shame her following her appearance on the red carpet for this year's Golden Globe Awards.



## Bruno Tonioli to replace David Walliams as a judge on Britain's Got Talent'

Los Angeles | Agencies

**B**runo Tonioli is reportedly set to replace David Walliams as a new judge on Britain's Got Talent. The former Strictly Come Dancing judge is set to begin the filming



auditions next week alongside his pal Simon Cowell and fellow judges Amanda Holden and Alesha Dixon following David's exit amid his vile comments about BGT contestants.

The news comes after it was believed that comedian Alan Carr was set to step into David's shoes and join the panel.

According to The Mirror, both Bruno and Simon are 'thrilled' by the signing, with the Italian choreographer's appointment set to be made official in the coming days.

A source told the publication: 'Bruno has all the right experience and his famous exuberance will go down a treat. He and Simon have long hoped to work together so this has proved the perfect opportunity. Everyone's very excited.'

Meanwhile, The Sun reports that Bruno was show boss Simon's preferred choice over Alan, with producers recently happening out an alleged six-figure deal for the star.

A source said: 'For almost two months Alan may have been the favourite to take over from David, but Bruno was always Simon's preferred choice.'

'Not only does he have years of judging experience under his belt from his time on Strictly he will bring an outrageous brand of comedy that BGT needs on the panel.'

'In so many ways this is already the perfect job for Bruno as it sees him return to a glitzy showbusiness favourite that fits in with the rest of his work.' The insider went on to add that the sealing of the deal had always been down to whether Bruno found the offer 'enticing enough' to commit to the show.

They added that the following a period of 'intense negotiations' and agreement has been reached that will see Bruno make a comeback to peime time Saturday night TV following his strictly exit.

Los Angeles | Agencies

**L**ift Me Up' singer Rihanna has been enjoying parenthood since welcoming her first child last year, and said that she "loves being a mom." The singer and her partner ASAP Rocky welcomed their son in May last year. They have yet to announce the name of their baby, now almost eight months old, reports Mirror.co.uk.

## Rihanna 'loves being a mom'

As per Mirror.co.uk, Rihanna, who was born Robyn Rihanna Fenty, and her partner ASAP Rocky - whose real name is Rakim Athelston Mayers - are said to be happy and focused on their son. A source told People magazine: "Rihanna loves being a mom. She is obsessed with her baby boy". They added that her partner ASAP Rocky is "very involved as well and (is) a great dad."

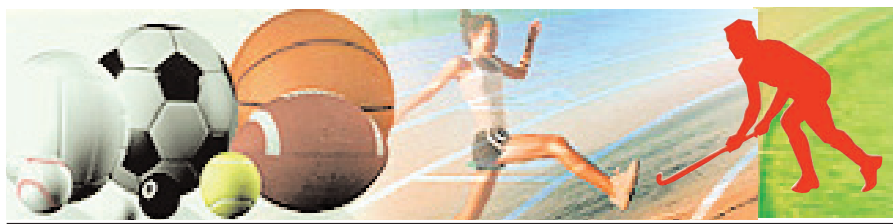
It comes after Rihanna shared a video of their baby on social media last month. She gave fans a glimpse of her son in a clip that marked her first post on TikTok. He was seen sitting in the back of a car and smiling for the camera. His mother can be heard talking to him in the video, which has amassed more than 20 million views.



## ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Tanyel Revan



INDIA TO PLAY THE FIRST ODI AGAINST NEW ZEALAND

Mumbai | Agencies

India will be playing the first ODI against New Zealand in Hyderabad at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium. Middle-order batter Shreyas Iyer has been ruled out of the upcoming three-match ODI series against New Zealand due to a back injury, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announced on Tuesday. "He will be heading to the National Cricket Academy (NCA) for further assessment and management," it said in a statement. Rajat Patidar, who is yet to make his debut, has been named as Iyer's replacement in the ODI squad for the series. Iyer played in all the matches in the recently-concluded series against Sri Lanka, scoring 28, 28 and 38 batting at No. 4. He is India's second-highest run-scorer in ODIs since 2022, after Shubman Gill, scoring 818 at an average of 51.12. The 28-year-old also played a



starring role in India's Test series win over Bangladesh in December last year, scoring 87 and 29\* at Mirpur to help India win the deciding game. India's updated ODI

squad against New Zealand: Rohit Sharma (captain), Shubman Gill, Ishan Kishan (wk), Virat Kohli, Suryakumar Yadav, KS Bharat (wk), Hardik Pandya (vice-captain), Rajat

Patidar, Washington Sundar, Shahbaz Ahmed, Shardul Thakur, Yuzvendra Chahal, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohd. Shami, Mohd. Siraj, Umran Malik.

Thailand overcomes Vietnam to retain ASEAN football title



Bangkok | Agencies

Thailand beat visiting Vietnam 1-0 in the second leg of the ASEAN Football Federation (AFF) Cup final to retain the title on a 3-2 aggregate.

The two teams entered the match after a 2-2 draw in the first leg at Vietnam's home ground, reports Xinhua news agency. Thai skipper Theerathon Bunmathan struck from outside the box in the 24th minute to score for

the home team. Thailand last won the biennial event in Singapore after the 2020 edition was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The victory on Monday handed Thailand a record seventh title of the tournament.

Nitesh Rana takes stunning catch as Delhi dismiss Mumbai for 293

RANJI TROPHY

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Seasoned Delhi player Nitesh Rana grabbed a stunner of a catch on Tuesday to dismiss Mumbai batter Prasad Pawar in their Elite Group B Ranji Trophy match at the Arun Jaitley Stadium. Rana, who turned Entrepreneur recently with the launch of his gym 'NevRst', made a strong comeback to the Delhi team, with a stunning catch that helped the hosts dismiss Mumbai for 293 in their first innings in the four-day encounter. Winning the toss Delhi elected to bowl at the Arun Jaitley Stadium against a strong Mumbai team. The Delhi bowlers exploited the conditions well and had



Mumbai on the backfoot right from the start. The highlight of the day came in the 36th over when Rana took a sharp catch to dismiss Prasad Pawar, who was looking steady on 25. Rana, fielding in the first slip, dived to his left to take a superb catch to dismiss the batsman off Pranshu Vijayan. The Delhi team overall played well with Vijayan taking 4-66 in 20 overs to wrap up Mumbai's innings at 293 at the end of the day's play. Sarfaraz Khan steered Mumbai to a respectable total with a brilliant 125 (155b, 16x4, 4x6). Prithvi Shaw, who scored a triple hundred in the previous match against Assam, contributed 40 runs to the score.

Fritz, Rune and Zverev progress to second round with contrasting wins

Australian Open

Melbourne | Agencies

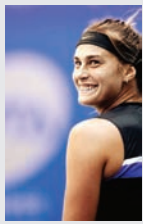
American tennis player Taylor Fritz, in his first Grand Slam campaign as a top-eight seed, made a strong start to his 2023 Australian Open campaign with a 6-4, 6-2, 4-6, 7-5 win against Nikoloz Basilashvili. Fritz, who also reached the Wimbledon quarterfinals last season, fired 32 aces in the victory as he progressed to the second round for the fifth straight year in Melbourne. He won 84 per cent of his first-serve points in the match. The player will face either Chun-Hsin Tseng or Australian wild card Alexei Popyrin on Thursday in the second round. Danish ninth seed Holger Rune and German 12th seed Alexander Zverev -- contesting his first major since Roland Garros last year -- posted contrasting victories to join Fritz in the second round. Rune needed just two hours and three minutes to complete the 6-2, 6-3, 6-4 win over



Filip Krajinovic to set up a clash with American Maxime Cressy or Spaniard Albert Ramos-Vinolas. In his first Grand Slam outing since he suffered a horror ankle injury in his semifinal against Rafael Nadal at last year's Roland Garros, former world No.3 Zverev put his body to the test in a four-hour and six-minute thriller against Peruvian Juan Pablo Varillas. Trailing by two sets to one, the German rose to the occasion, rallying past the World No. 103 4-6, 6-1, 5-7, 7-6(3), 6-4 to earn his first four-lev win of the season.

SABALENKA, GARCIA AND PLISKOVA CRUISE INTO SECOND ROUND

Melbourne | Aryna Sabalenka extended her stellar season start, beating Tereza Martincova, while Frenchwoman Caroline Garcia stormed past Katherine Sebov of Canada to reach the women's singles second round of the Australian Open. Sabalenka's typical power game was bolstered by supreme steeliness when down break points -- she saved all five she faced. She had to fend off four of those at 1-1 in the first set. Thereafter, she raced through the rest of the opener without the loss of a game. A similar scenario occurred at 1-0 in the second set, when she fired a rally forehand pass down the line out of nowhere to save Martincova's final break point. Sabalenka went on to hold, then immediately claimed the decisive break for a 2-1 lead en route to the comprehensive victory. On the other hand, World No.190 Sebov, stuck with Garcia for the first seven games before the French player unleashed a forehand winner to break for 5-3. Garcia slammed two straight aces to end the first set before being mostly untroubled in the second set.



AMANDEEP, VANI, SEHER AND PRANAVI LEAD STAR CAST FOR LEG 2 OF WOMEN'S TOUR

Golf

Mumbai | Agencies

Seher Atwal will be looking to get another morale-boosting win as she tees up for the Rs.12 lakh second leg of the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour 2023 at the Bombay Presidency Golf Club. While Seher won the first event last week, some very strong names are lined up this week with Amandeep Drall and Vani Kapoor leading the way along with Pranavi Urs, winner of the 2022 Hero WPGT season, with five wins in 13 starts, also playing. Seher has won at least once in each of the last three years, including the one that has just begun. Her consistency also saw her finish second on the Hero Order of Merit in 2022. She was fourth in 2020-21. Seher, who won the opening leg last week, will soon head to Nairobi for her first Ladies European Tour (LET) event of 2023 at the Magical Kenya Ladies Open in the first week of February, where she will join Aditi Ashok, Diksha Dagar, Amandeep Drall and Vani Kapoor. Amandeep and Vani are looking to get match-sharp ahead of the 2023 LET season.



Amandeep and Vani had fair success in 2022 with the former coming within a whisker of a breakthrough win at the Hero Women's Indian Open, where she was the runner-up. She was also seventh at the Swiss Ladies Open. Vani was tied for third at the Big Green Egg Open in the Netherlands and tied for eighth at the Hero Women's Indian Open. Vani, an experienced player, won the Hero Order of Merit three years in a row from 2014 to 2016, while Amandeep was the topper in the combined 2020-21 season when Vani was second. Other players looking for good results early in the season would be Ridhima Dilawari and Sneha Singh.

Robin Uthappa becomes first player to receive Green Belt

ILT20

Dubai | Agencies

Former Indian cricketer Robin Uthappa became the first player to receive the Green Belt at the DP World ILT20 after his fantastic innings of 79 runs off 46 balls against Gulf Giants at the Dubai International Stadium. Uthappa is currently leading the top run-scorer's chart with 122 runs in the competition so far. Once the winning team has lifted the magnificent DP World ILT20 tournament trophy, and as part of the final



presentations, the coveted Black Belt will be presented to the owner of the victorious team. Also during the presentations, the most valuable player of the league will be recognised and receive the stunning Red Belt, acknowledging his crowd-pleasing, consistent efforts. Meanwhile,

the 24 UAE players hand-selected to participate in the league, will be vying for the Blue Belt, which will be presented to the best UAE player at the end of the season. Speaking about the unique set of player awards, Mubashshir Usmani, General Secretary, the Emirates Cricket Board said, "We wanted to come up with something new with regard to the player awards and we are thrilled to introduce the various Belts, which will add another kind of flavour to the tournament.

I LIKE LIVINGSTONE'S BATTING, SACHIN SIR IS ALSO MY ROLE MODEL: SHAFALI VERMA

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Women's cricketer Shafali Verma, who is captaining the Indian side in her first ICC U19 Women's T20 World Cup, has said that she likes English all-rounder Liam Livingstone's batting, and legendary cricketer Sachin Tendulkar is also her role model. "I think nowadays, I like Livingstone's batting because he's hitting very well, and of course growing up, playing cricket, I used to watch Sachin Tendulkar sir. So of course, Sachin sir is also my role model and I love to see him, how he is playing the game and he's very calm. And I was also thinking to learn something like that from him," Shafali said on Star Sports show 'Follow the Blues'. Capped for the first time by the senior Indian women's team at the age of just 15, Shafali has already played at both ICC Women's Cricket World Cup and an ICC Women's T20 World Cup. She was



also a member of the silver-winning side from the 2022 Commonwealth Games. The 18-year-old batter is on another level at the ICC U19 Women's T20 World Cup as she has been the star performer for India in the first two games. "Of course, it's very good, it's my first and last, because it's my last year of the U-19, but of course

very exciting. We have a good team, we are really enjoying with the girls and I hope we will play good cricket and of course we will be here for the world cup and we will try to achieve that," Shafali shared her thoughts on playing her first U-19 World Cup. "There is lots of difference because the ball is coming in a little slow in the U-19 and the wicket is also in the slow end and we are trying to get used to that. And of course, a little bit of difference, seamers have good pace, a good mind-set here also but they are all learning and I really enjoying playing with them. Speaking on the mindset and strengths of Team India at the U-19 World Cup, she said: "I would say we are averaging well in batting, bowling and fielding, it's just the mind-set of how they are taking them, but as a captain, I hope we win the world cup." India will next take on Scotland in their third and final group-stage match on Wednesday at the Willowmoore Park B Field in Benoni, South Africa.

# Sushmita & Sikandar Kher starts shooting for web series' sequel

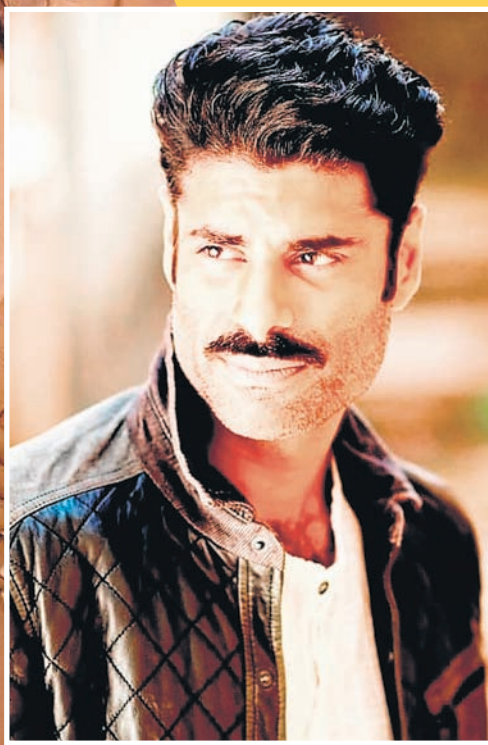
Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Sikandar Kher, who swayed the audience with his work in the streaming film 'Monica O My Darling', is back on the sets of his popular OTT show 'Aarya' which sees former Miss Universe and actress Sushmita Sen essaying the titular role. As he recently began shooting for season 3, the actor shared a video giving a glimpse that his character of Daulat is soon going to be back on the big screen. He also shared that sweet welcome note from the director of the show, Ram Madhvani and his team.

The note quoted Al Pacino's Tony Montana from 'Scarface', "The eyes, chico. They never lie." The quote refers to the subtle but very impactful acting prowess that Sikandar has brought to the table with his eyes in the previous two seasons essaying the complex role of Daulat in the show.

The actor says, "It's great to be back the character I have worked and lived with for two seasons now. Looking forward to be working with Ram, Sushmita and the entire team again. From what I have read in certain there's a lot for the audiences to look forward to". He further mentioned, "I can't reveal much at the moment as we have just begun shooting, but yes the character progresses a lot in the third season of the show! Excited for Daulat to be back".

Season 3 of the crime action thriller series 'Aarya' will soon bow on Disney+Hotstar.



## WE USED TO GIGGLE AND SHY AWAY FROM SEX EDUCATION CLASS: RAKUL

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Rakul Preet Singh, who is gearing up for her upcoming streaming film 'Chhatriwali', spoke about her experience with sex education when she was in school.

The film talks about the inhibitions around male contraceptives and safe sex. However, the actress said that it is a family drama and can be watched with parents as well. She said: "It's a family film, a film which I can watch with my family or parents or my father sitting right next to me because not one dialogue in the film is creepy or has double meaning. Everything is a matter of fact, and it is the need of the hour." "In 2023, we need to have conversations which are important and highlight topics which are important and there is nothing in the film which could have caused any inhibition. It's a story of a girl and how she realises the importance of safe sex and why she takes the onus upon herself of speaking about it freely and openly," she added. The actress, who is known for her work in Bollywood and South cinema and was seen in films such as 'Doctor G' and 'Thank God', spoke about the taboo around discussing sex education.

"When I was in 9th/10th grade and whenever sex education class used to happen, as teenagers, we used to giggle and shy away from this topic and find excuses to bunk these classes because somewhere knowingly or unknowingly, there is a taboo around this conversation," she confessed.

"I feel it's absolutely normal to discuss this because if we can discuss heart health then why can't we discuss uterus health or STDs. It's part of our health, so we shouldn't shy away from speaking about this topic openly," the actress further mentioned.

She shared her hope from the movie and said that people who watch the film will have a change in approach.

"The motive of the film is entertaining people, and I feel that if through entertainment you can change people's ideology and set them on the right path, that's a bonus. And if ten people change their way of thinking, it's an achievement for us." Produced by Ronnie Screwvala and directed by Tejas Prabha Vijay Deoskar, 'Chhatriwali' features Rakul Preet Singh and Sumeet Vyas.



## 'Battata is a quintessential part of our lives'

Shweta Tripathi Sharma reveals why she uses 'battatawada' as social media handle

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Shweta Tripathi Sharma, who is known for her work in "Masaan" and crime drama series "Mirzapur", has shared the reason behind using 'battatawada' as her social media username while also seeking to raise awareness about 'Local Tourism'.

The actress, who earlier asked for snack recommendations from her followers, visited local eateries and followed the suggestions thrown in by her fans. Sharing the reason and thought behind her Instagram handle, Shweta said: "Just the way a potato engulfs the taste of every dish that it is added in, I aim to engulf, I aim to embrace every character that comes my way and make it my own. 'Battata' is a quintessential part of our lives; with my craft, I want to be a 'battata' in my work,



I want to exude that ease and naturalness."

On playing diverse characters and its connection with 'battatawada', she added: "If a character doesn't camouflage the plot of the story, will the content piece be consumed? Similarly, 'battata' just mixes up with anything and everything be it any dish, any cuisine! I feel happy when people address me by the names of my characters like Golu (Mirzapur universe), Shalu (Masaan). I feel that I could impact those people in a positive way. A 'battata' always brings happiness and that's what I aim to do!"

Recently, Shweta also pioneered the wave of sustainable clothing which was highly appreciated and acknowledged by netizens as well as environmentalists. On the work front, Shweta, has many releases lined up for 2023, including the most-awaited "Mirzapur 3" along with "Kanjoos Makkhichoos", and a couple of other untitled projects. Also, Shweta shall soon begin shooting for the sequel of her 2022 hit show, "Yeh Kaali Kaali Ankhein", reprising her role of Shikha.

## 'I was thrilled when I heard the script'

Urvashi Dholakia gets candid about playing bold, powerful character in the series

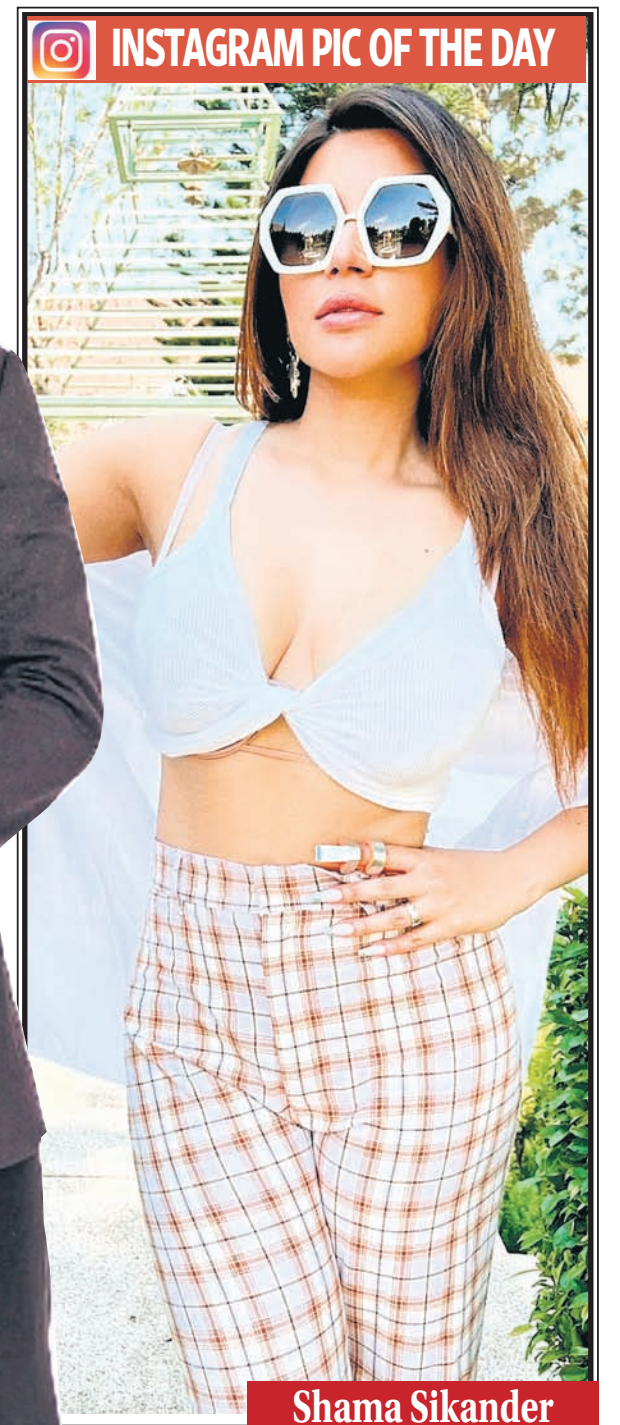
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Actress Urvashi Dholakia, of "Kasautii Zindagii Kay" fame, will be seen playing an intriguing character of a powerful businesswoman who sexually exploits her employee in the 'Me Too' episode of the web series "Avaidh". The series comprises eight different short stories based on a common theme of illicit relationships. Urvashi is seen as Ketki, who sexually exploits her employee, Vicky.

Under the influence of his colleague, Vicky takes an extreme step.

Urvashi says: "I am really excited to be a part of this interesting project. I was thrilled when I heard the script, and one does not get the chance every day to play with a complex and multi-layered character. Ketki is a powerful, influential, bold woman who knows how to get things done and I think that's what makes her so fascinating."

"The actress, who rose to fame with her negative role of Komolika in the popular TV show "Kasautii Zindagii Kay" and was also seen in "Kabhi Sautan Kabhi Saheli", "Kahiin To Hoga", among others, further spoke about the intriguing plot of the show. "The climax of the story is something that needs to be seen to believe and it will surely leave an impact on the viewers. The best thing is the entire web series would be in a quick snackable format and I just can't wait for the audience to watch this series," she added.



## Waiting for the 'woods' to be burnt for one global cinema: Ram Charan

Hyderabad | Agencies

Flying high on the successes of 'RRR' at the Golden Globes and the Critics Choice Awards, Tollywood's 'Mega Power' Star Ram Charan shared his vision of time when the film industry around the world will put one unified global foot forward.

Speaking to the American media, Ram

Charan said: "It was not part of our goal to come to LA, but we landed up here. So we are taking it as it goes. Of course, we want to experience the great directors of LA and Hollywood, and I want them to also experience us as actors and share cultural ideas and stories between the East and the West."

He added: "And Quentin Tarantino is one of my favourite directors."

Talking about 'RRR' director S.S. Rajamouli, Ram Charan said: "I clear my calendar each time Rajamouli garu calls me." And he added that he would clear his calendar for a sequel too!

Responding to queries about collaborating globally, Ram Charan said, "We are waiting for the day when all the 'woods' get burnt and there's one global cinema."

Shama Sikander