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**FIRST COVID, NOW LAYOFFS**

## INDIAN PROFESSIONALS UNDERGO TREMENDOUS STRESS, ANXIETY

**About 3,000 tech professionals are losing their jobs on an average daily in the month of January, including thousands in India. According to health experts, the last 2-3 years of Covid lockdowns, deaths, and fear of re-infection, and now massive layoffs, have resulted in extreme stress for Indian professionals.**

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Amid the growing layoffs, there has been a surge in the number of patients coming from various companies -- both office-goers and those working from home -- with panic anxiety attacks and depression as they fear losing control over their immediate future plans, mental health experts said on Monday.

Dr Saumya Mudgal, Senior Consultant, Psychiatry, Max Hospital in Gurugram, said that there has been a drastic increase in the number of patients coming from MNCs.

"These patients are usually presented with the issues of panic anxiety and panic disorder with agoraphobia and there is quite an increase in such patients. Some of them are already taking medications and the requirement of medication has gone up and the severity of symptoms has gone up," Dr Mudgal said. According to her, there are a lot of people coming with fresh or recent onset symptoms of anxiety and adjustment issues pertaining to anxiety or mixed anxiety.



Layoffs and loss of employment are very stressful experiences for most people. It is a time filled with uncertainties, economic challenges and loss of control over your future.

Dr Arti Anand, a senior clinical psychologist at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital in Delhi, said that the pandemic and massive layoffs both knocked out the

working class without any warning. "This leads to fear and stress. The way to deal with it is to be able to use your available resources, not to panic and stop thinking negatively about the future," she advised. Health experts said that to cope in these uncertain times is by maintaining supportive relationships with friends and

family, exercising regularly and practicing mindfulness.

Keep a positive attitude and outlook. Stay away from generalising negative thoughts like "I will never have a job again or I will never enjoy my work again etc," said Dr Gautam.

Divya Mohindroo, Founder, Embrace Imperfections and a counselling psychologist, said that those impacted in the current layoffs need to deal with it practically, rather than emotionally. "Start making a list of potential employers, research about available opportunities and companies, look for avenues to up skill and even diversify into other sectors, if required," she advised. "Approach employers while being mentally prepared to describe their situation while pitching their candidature. It is also important to network - with friends, ex-bosses and colleagues," she said.

All professionals should share their work responsibilities with colleagues at work and family members at home, which will help them not only be accountable but also feel light about their life and tasks in hand," Mohindroo noted.

## Plea withdrawn against wrestlers alleging sexual harassment by WFI chief

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Hours after a plea was moved in the Delhi High Court on Monday against the sexual assault allegations on Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh by multiple wrestlers, it was withdrawn.

Talking to reporter, Lawyer Shrikant Prasad said that Vicky, who was the petitioner, has asked us to withdraw the plea as the matter has been highlighted a lot.

The lawyer further said that the motive to file the plea was about the misuse of law by women on sexual harassment and resorting to protests and there should be some guidelines set up in this context.

In the plea, it is said that Phogat, who is also the first respondent in the plea, started blackmailing Bhushan for resigning from the post of WFI president on the pretext of protest against the sexual harassment of the wrestlers.

It is said that the media thinks of itself as Janata Adalat and has started intervening in the proceedings of the court, the plea said.

It is contended that wrestlers, instead of moving to court, have approached the media to show their concern, said the petitioner.

In the petition, it has been argued that respondents (wrestlers) have crossed all their limits to approach the issue and that his reputation and dignity was being tarnished.

It further claimed that sexual harass-



ment laws were being misused and an extortion was being done on him. This writ petition is filed against the complete misuse of sexual harassment laws by the wrestler women, the petition read. It is in the petition that wrestlers are trying to get their own benefits out of this issue.

A huge protest by the wrestlers at Delhi's Jantar Mantar was called off following assurances from the Centre that grievances would be addressed and Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh was asked to step aside for four weeks.

## INS Vagir commissioned, adds teeth and stealth to Indian Navy

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The fifth submarine in the Kalvari Class, INS Vagir, built by the Mazagaon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd., was commissioned into the Indian Navy here on Monday in the presence of Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral R. Hari Kumar, a defence official said.

Adding to the Navy's fighting prowess, the INS Vagir -- literally meaning a sand shark symbolising stealth and fearlessness -- has been indigenously built with technology transfer from France.

Officials said it will further boost the Navy's capabilities to further Indian maritime interests in deterring enemies, for Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance to provide a decisive blow in times of cri-



sis. INS Vagir -- the third submarine to be commissioned into the Indian Navy in two years -- comes with a sophisticated weapons package, the best of the sensors in the world, mine-laying, wire-guided torpedoes, sub-surface to surface missiles capable of neutralising a large enemy fleet.

It can also launch marine commandos for special ops,

has a state-of-the-art torpedo decoy system and its powerful diesel engines can quickly charge batteries for stealth missions, said the officials. INS Vagir comes with a glorious legacy with a submarine of the same name commissioned in November 1973 which was decommissioned in January 2001 after three decades of valorous service to the nation.

## BODIES OF 3 OF THE 4 UP YOUTHS KILLED IN NEPAL PLANE CRASH IDENTIFIED

Ghazipur: Bodies of three of the four youths from Uttar Pradesh's Ghazipur district who died in the January 15 plane crash in Pokhara, Nepal, have been identified.

Ghazipur District Magistrate Aryaka Akhauri said the bodies of Abhishek Kushwaha, Anil Rajbhar and Vishal Sharma had been identified and handed over to family members present in Kathmandu. Efforts are on to ascertain identity of fourth youth, Sonu Jaiswal, she added. After the process of identification is over, the bodies will be brought to Ghazipur. On January 16, family members of the four youths were sent to Kathmandu by road with head of Chak Jainab village Vijay Jaiswal, nayab tehsildar and a revenue inspector to claim and bring back the bodies.

## 126TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF NETAJI



Students of Netaji Subhas Vidyanyetan School take part in a rally depicting different parts of the life of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose on the occasion of his 126th birth anniversary, in Agartala on Monday

## LOVE ACROSS BORDERS LANDS COUPLE IN TROUBLE

A Pakistani girl fell in love with a boy from Uttar Pradesh

Lucknow | Agencies

It was a case of love across the borders that led to drama across the states. A 19-year-old Pakistani girl was arrested in Bengaluru on Friday for allegedly forging her identity to stay in India illegally.

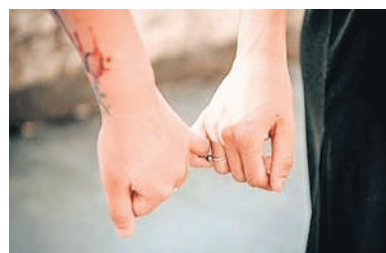
According to the police, the girl, named Iqra Jeevani, met a 25-year-old security guard, Mulayam Singh Yadav from Uttar Pradesh while playing Ludo online. The two fell in love and Iqra entered India through Nepal border where Yadav met her.

The two came to Birganj in Bihar and then Patna. The couple then moved to Bengaluru and stayed in a rented house near the Ayyappa temple in Junnasandra where the security guard started working in September 2022.

Yadav, even got an Aadhaar card made for Iqra after changing her name to Rava Yadav and applied for an Indian passport. The case came to light when the Central intelligence agencies came across Iqra who was trying to contact her family members back in Pakistan and alerted the state intelligence.

The police verified the details before swooping down on the house and arresting the couple. A background check is underway to see whether she is part of an espionage ring.

Iqra was later handed over to the FRRO officials, who later remanded her to a state home for women till further investigations are carried out.



## TN AIRPORTS ON HIGH ALERT OVER SMUGGLING OF EXOTIC SPECIES INTO COUNTRY

Chennai | Agencies

Security at the four international airports in Tamil Nadu has been heightened to curb the possibility of smuggling exotic species of wild animals into the country through them, officials said on Monday.

A few weeks ago, security officials at the Chennai and Tiruchi airports seized exotic species of coir snakes, ball pythons, pygmy marmosets, and star tortoises that were brought into the country from Thailand and Cambodia.

In Chennai, the exotic species were found to be in possession of a passenger, but in Tiruchi, the animals were found abandoned in the airport.

Sources in the air intelligence unit said that they have received a tip-off that more such species are being sought to brought into the country through Chennai, Coimbatore, and Madurai airports and these are used by people as domestic animals. In rare cases, some of these exotic species are smuggled to China where they are used as medicines.

Customs had made 11 seizures of exotic species from the Tamil Nadu airports in 2022. The seized species include albino porcupines, de braz-



za's monkeys, ball pythons, king snakes, and star tortoises. Five people were arrested and on questioning, admitted to a major racket behind the smuggling of exotic species into Tamil Nadu.

Police sources said that there is a thriving illegal pet trade in many parts of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh and these exotic species are being

brought in for such markets. A senior Greater Chennai Police official said: "The exotic species is a new trade which is slowly catching up in several south Indian states. The airports of Tamil Nadu are becoming the hot spots for smuggling in of exotic species. Central agencies have also provided inputs regarding the smuggling of exotic species into Tamil Nadu airports."

## Karnataka couple's attempt to sell infant in Goa



Panaji | Agencies

The Railway Protection Force (RPF) at Margao Railway station has foiled an attempt of a couple from Karnataka's Dharwad to allegedly sell their seven-month-old boy to a couple in Goa, an official said on Monday.

RPF Inspector Vinod Mishra said that an offence has been registered against the couple and three woman mediators (agents), who had done a deal of Rs 3 lakh with a Panaji-based couple to purchase the baby.

"On Sunday, the Panaji-based couple had come to Margao railway station to buy this baby and a couple from Dharwad, who wanted to sell

their first baby, had also come here. They were having an argument with each other, which was noticed by our staff and they were taken to our office. After interrogating them, the matter was clear that they were dealing to buy and sell a baby. Then the three mediators were detained," he said.

He said that initial interrogation revealed that the seller couple is working as labourer and the buyer has two kids. "Buyer said he was interested in buying this baby boy as he loves kids," Mishra said. Goa Police said that the father of the baby boy was arrested, after the case was handed over to them and they are undertaking further investigations.





GITA, MAHABHARATA AND RAMAYAN WILL BE INCLUDED IN SCHOOL CURRICULUM - CHIEF MINISTER CHOUHAN

CM Chouhan was addressing 1500 students on birth anniversary of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose at the Sughosh Darshan programme

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that books like Ramcharitmanas show us the path and guides us. The episodes of Gita and Mahabharata along with Ramcharit Manas will be included in the school curriculum.



anniversary of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. Chief Minister Chouhan offered floral tributes at the statue of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and garlanded the picture of Maa Saraswati and a figure of Om at the venue.

All India Organization Secretary Govind Chandra Mahant, retired Major General T.P.S. Rawat also

expressed their views. Banwari Lal Saxena, President of Vidya Bharti Madhya Bharat was also present. More than 1500 students, professors and teachers from 75 schools of 16 districts participated in the programme.

instruments including flute, conch shells, side drum, bamboo drum and other instruments on the Amrit Mahotsav of Independence.

Retired Major General T.P.S. Rawat said that India's independence was not possible without the contribution of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. Citing the context of India's 1962 war with China, Major General Rawat said that courage and determination are necessary to face the challenges ahead.

He said that a person should be ready for the supreme sacrifice by giving utmost importance to his name i.e. his identity, his motherland and his community, organisation, country. He told the students that it is necessary to keep the desire and effort to be a constant learner in life.

'Students should not wait for jobs, aim for self-employment' - Governor

Governor Mangubhai Patel distributed certificates to the students after completion of their training at Kaushal Samrasta Programme held at Subhash Yadav Bhawan on January 23. After the completion of training around 237 students from Scheduled Caste received the certificates

Team Absolute | Bhopal

There is a need for Skill Development for the new generation because this is the foundation stone of a self-reliant India. Students should keep upgrading their skills and it is our responsibility to make students skilled according to the changing socio-economic conditions.

Further, he said that it is important for every section of society to come forward to fulfil the PM Modi's dream of Atmanirbhar Bharat. He also said that this free residential training program organised by Centre for Research and Industrial Staff Performance would help these students to excel in their life.



said Satish Kumar from Swadeshi Jagran Manch.

While welcoming the guests at the beginning of the program, Managing Director of CRISP Dr. Shrikant Patil said that a lot of work is being done in Madhya Pradesh on Skill Development and the Entrepreneurship sector. He also said that, "Babasaheb Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar had foreseen the concept of skill development long back. His dream was to bring backward people into the mainstream. PM Modi is implementing this vision like a mission through various

schemes like Stand-up India, and Start-up India."

He further narrated that CRISP has recently completed Rural Tribal Technical Training Program under Gramin Udyami project in which 132 youths from across the State have been provided technical training in various trades. CRISP has also worked overseas. In the future CRISP also wants to contribute to G-20 skill and strategy planning. At the end of his speech, he thanked Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan for his guidance.

Nitin Gadkari offers prayers at Peetambra Peeth in MP's Datia

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Monday arrived in Madhya Pradesh's Datia to offer prayers at the renowned temple of Ma Peetambra. State Home Minister Narottam Mishra received Gadkari at the helipad.

Shri Peetambra Peeth, which is also called Shakti Peeth Or Tapasthali (place of meditation) is an ancient temple with a big Asharam in Datia, is located around 40 km from Jhansi railway station in Madhya Pradesh's Bundelkhand region. Being local politician from Datia, Narottam Mishra, who has been winning the elections since 1990 and became minister first time in 2005, would personally receives provide political personalities visiting to seek blessings of at Shri Peetambra Peeth in Datia.

In political circles of Madhya Pradesh, it is well-known that even if a non-BJP politician visits Datia to offer prayers at the renowned temple, Mishra welcomes them and arranges a guest house and food for the visitors.

About Datia temple, a mythological belief is that Venkateshwar Shiva belongs to the same age as that of Mahabharata. This place is also famously called - 'Satta Ki Devi' (Goddess of Power). Big politicians have always made a



beeline here to seek blessings.

Reports suggested that during India - China War in 1962, the then Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru had visited Datia temple and '51 kundaliya' mahayagya was performed. India's first Chief of Defence Staff, General Vipin Rawat had also visited Datia to offer his prayers here a few months before he died in a tragic plane crash. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah has also visited the temple to offer their prayers. Former Presidents Ram Nath Kovind and (late) Pranab Mukherjee had also visited the temple. Beside these politicians, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, former MP CM Digvijaya Singh, Uma Bharti, Kamal Nath have offered prayers here.

LIST OF OFFICE-BEARERS FOR MPCC IS NOT FINAL: MP CONGRESS

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The All India Congress Committee (AICC) is in the process of reconstituting the Madhya Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC), which also includes a 21-member Political Affairs Committee and district presidents.

According to sources, the AICC has appointed 64 district Congress presidents, however, a list of secretaries of the MPCC is yet to be announced.

Senior leader and in-charge for Madhya Pradesh J. P. Agrwal said the list issued by the AICC "is not the final", and modifications will be carried out after the 'Bharat Jodo Yatra'.

The state Political Affairs Committee (PAC) includes MP Congress head Kamal Nath, Rajya Sabha MP Digvijaya Singh, LoP Govind Singh, and former ministers such as Kanti Lal Bhuria, Suresh Pachori, Rajya Sabha MP Vivek Tankha, Jitu Patwari, Kamal Nath's son



and Chhindwara MP Nakul Nath, Shoba Ozha and others.

Insiders said that the state leadership wanted a "compact" committee from state to district level. Sources also said that many who were holding posts in MPCC were excluded from the new list, and therefore, a modification will be done in the fresh list.

Explaining further about MPCC members, a senior Congress leader said the compact in the sense that for a proper designated team. "For instance, if there are so many members appointed as secretaries or any

other designated post in the organisation, it may create confusion.

Therefore, the state leadership wants a compact team at every step of the organisation, so that everyone can freely execute the role assigned," Congress leader said on condition of anonymity.

AICC general secretary K. C. Venugopal in a release on Monday said Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has approved the proposal for the appointment of office-bearers and presidents of various district committees in Madhya Pradesh.

CONGRESS TO RELEASE SEPARATE MANIFESTO FOR WOMAN IN MP POLLS

Bhopal: The Madhya Pradesh Congress will release a separate manifesto for women in the Assembly polls, likely to be held later this year, a party functionary said on Monday.

The decision to release such a manifesto, christened 'Priyadarshini', was taken in a meeting chaired by state unit chief Kamal Nath on Sunday, he said.

'Priyadarshini' will be a manifesto for women, while there will be a common manifesto as well. Ten sub committees have been formed to submit manifesto related information pertaining to different segments of society," Vachan Patra Advisory Committee chairman Rajendra Singh said.

A meeting of the sub committees will be held after one month, he added. Incidentally, in May last year, the Congress had said it would release a separate manifesto for each district in the state.

CM Chouhan planted saplings with CRISP MD and students



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted saplings of Peepal, Gulmohar and Guava in the garden located at Shyamala Hills. Finance and Commercial Taxes Minister Jagdish Deora and

Managing Director of CRISP Dr. Shrikant B. Patil also planted saplings in the Smart city park. CM Chouhan also met 250 students trained by CRISP Institution under skill up-gradation in 8 sectors and guided and motivated them. He also inspired them to plant saplings.

ARMY OFFICER DIES BY SUICIDE AT TRAINING CENTRE

Jabalpur: A 43-year-old Indian Army colonel allegedly died by suicide by hanging at a training centre in Madhya Pradesh's Jabalpur city, police said on Monday. The body of Colonel Nishith Khanna, posted as Commanding Officer in the 1-Technical Training Regiment (TTR), was found hanging from a ceiling fan in a room of the officers' mess in the One Signal Training Centre at around 10.30 pm on Sunday, City Superintendent of Police (CSP) Priyanka Shukla said. Police found a suicide note purportedly written by the dead Army officer stating he was "sorry". The preliminary investigation suggested a family dispute could be the reason behind Colonel Khanna taking the extreme step, the CSP said. The Army officer was staying away from his family, which included his wife, son and daughter, since October 25, 2022, she said.

Shivraj Chouhan vs Kantilal Bhuria on government staff supporting RSS

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and the Congress in Madhya Pradesh were engaged in a verbal tussle on Monday after a leader from the opposition party allegedly threatened to prepare a list of government staffers who attend Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh shakhas so as to "fix them".

After former Union leader and Congress veteran Kantilal Bhuria issued the threat, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan hit back, saying "Several persons who have had this wish have



come and gone".

Bhuria, speaking to reporters on Sunday, said a list of employees who work for the government during the day and attend RSS shakhas at night will be prepared. "It is wrong to do so when you are a government

official or staffer. You (media) too should expose such people so that we can fix (take action) them," Bhuria said.

Asked about the statement, Chief Minister Chouhan said, "Kantilal, several people with this wish have come and gone. The RSS is an organisa-

tion of patriots. Such a process of personality building has started through this organisation that lakhs of volunteers are ready to live and die for the country." Slamming the use of terms like "fix them", Chouhan said those being threatened in this way are also human beings and must not be insulted.

"The public will give a befitting reply to such persons (who issue threats). The Congress' frustration is not understandable," he asserted. Assembly polls are likely to be held at the end of this year.

FARMERS RAISE HONEY BEE ARMIES TO WARD OFF WILD ELEPHANTS

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In an attempt to prevent incidents of human-elephant conflict, the Madhya Pradesh government has decided to pit tiny honey bees against wild elephants that stray into farms and destroy crops in the border districts of the state.

Intoxicated on mahua flowers, elephants wander into the border districts and leave a trail of destruction before they are driven away or return to neighbouring Chhattisgarh.

In a circular issued last week, the state government listed a standard operating procedure (SOP) with a host of do's and don'ts for people in the eastern part of the state, officials said.

As one of the measures, people have been advised to install bee boxes in the affected areas to ward off elephants, they said. Elephants have a natural fear of bees, as they dislike being stung on their trunks and eyes.

Beekeeping will be promoted in the villages of Sidhi, Singrauli, Shahdol, Anuppur, Umaria, Dindori and Mandla districts that have a significant indigenous population, officials said.

The latest step will not only protect crops and property, but it will also provide livelihood to



indigenous population in the districts bordering Chhattisgarh, officials said.

According to officials, the Khadi and Village Industries Commission, through its flagship "Honey Mission" program, had distributed 100 bee boxes to 10 beneficiaries in Morena district

last year. The state forest department has roped in NGOs to spread awareness among local communities about tricks to tame and drive away tuskers, they said. "We have asked NGOs that have experience of working in areas affected by wild elephants to impart training and share their

experiences with the local communities," principal chief conservator of forests (wildlife) J S Chauhan said.

With a little bit of understanding about the animal and by exercising restraint, people can avoid damage to life and property to a great extent, he said. Solar fencing will be put up in sensitive areas to keep elephants at bay, he said. Locals will be told not to hurl stones at elephants or confront them, as it may agitate the animals, the official added. As per official data, more than eight people were killed last year by wild elephants that wandered into the state from Chhattisgarh.

According to wildlife experts, elephants move towards human settlements in search of water and fodder in summers, as the water bodies in forests dry up and run thin.

As per official data, Madhya Pradesh had just seven elephants in 2017.

"This number has now touched the 60 mark. At least 60 wild elephants from Chhattisgarh have settled in Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (BTR) and Sanjay Dubri Tiger Reserve (SDTR) besides other animals straying occasionally," Chauhan said.

NATIONAL SEMINAR ON HOMEOPATHY SYSTEM OF MEDICINE AND COURSE IN BHOPAL

Bhopal: A two-day national seminar of principals and doctors of homeopathy colleges across the country on homeopathic system of and course is going to be held in Bhopal on January 24 and 25. The National Seminar will be held at the Government Homeopathy Medical College and Hospital, AYUSH Complex, MACT Hills.

The aim of the seminar is to make students aware of ability-based dynamic course, modern information technology techniques under the new education policy. The seminar is being organized by the National Commission for Homeopathy, New Delhi. In the seminar, principals of more than 250 homeopathy colleges across the country and officials of the commission will hold discussions. Secretary, Ministry of AYUSH, Central Government, Vaidya Rajesh Kotecha will be present as the chief guest in the programme.

Such a seminar is being organized for the first time in Bhopal by the National Homeopathy Commission in collaboration with the Union Ministry of AYUSH.



## EDITOR'S SPECS

## Polls ahead, prospects of populist budget appear bleak

The scope for a blatant populist budget looks bleak amid moderating tax revenue, high committed reves, and market loans, Emkay Global Financial Services said in a report. On the revenue side, lower tax buoyancy could be partly countered by higher RBI dividend and still-healthy assumption of divestment proceeds. "We watch for possible changes to capital gains tax structure and new personal tax regime, extension of concessional 15% tax rate for new manufacturing units, and higher import tariffs on PLI-related products," the report said. On the revenue front, gross tax/GDP ratio is expected to moderate to 10.9 per cent after a robust tax-buoyant FY23 across segments. "We will watch for possible changes to the capital gains tax structure to bring uniformity among tax rates/holding periods of various asset classes and some tinkering around the new concessional tax regime and an extension of concessional 15 per cent corporate tax rate for new manufacturing units and marginally higher customs duties on PLI-related products," the report said. Separately, higher non-tax revenue would be led by bumper RBI dividends amid FX sales. The upcoming budget faces acute policy trade-offs between nurturing a nascent growth recovery and diminishing fiscal space with challenging debt dynamics. The FY24 Union Budget will be presented against the backdrop of renewed uncertainties around global and domestic growth, tighter financial conditions, and the Union elections in CY24, the report said. However, even as additional support to some vulnerable segments of the economy is warranted, a delicate balance needs to be maintained, ensuring the fiscal impulse is maximized to boost potential growth, even as policy adherence to medium-term fiscal sustainability is signaled.

# ILLEGAL COAL MINING MAY PUSH WB'S RANIGANJ TOWARDS JOSHIMATH-LIKE CRISIS

SUMANTA RAY CHAUDHURI

Is Raniganj, the coal belt in West Burdwan district of West Bengal, heading towards a crisis similar to that of Joshimath in Uttarakhand where land subsidence has affected hundreds of houses, shops and other establishments? For several reasons, experts do not rule out Raniganj facing a Joshimath-like situation in the coming days unless all necessary steps are taken to arrest the man-made irregularities that are making the area increasingly subsidence-prone.

A caution on this count has been flagged off by the West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee last week as she claimed that a Joshimath-like tragedy in Raniganj will affect the lives and livelihood of over 20,000 people in the region.

She had blamed the Central government for not providing adequate funds for rehabilitation of the people of Raniganj.

Trinamool Congress MLA from Raniganj assembly constituency, Tapas Bandyopadhyay claimed that Asansol-Durgapur Development Authority (ADDA), the implementing authority for rehabilitation of the people of the affected people in the area, has received just Rs 150 crore as against the Centre-announced rehabilitation package of Rs 2,600 crore.

Local BJP leader and former mayor of Asansol Municipal Corporation Jitendra Tiwari has claimed that rampant corruption by ADDA in utilisation of the Central funds is pushing Raniganj towards this inevitable crisis.

While a political slugfest in the matter is going on, we made an attempt to get into the technical details on why this region has become so vulnerable to land-subsidence -- somewhat like Joshimath.

According to a civil engineer Pradipta Mitra, after a mine is abandoned by the official coal excavating authority like Coal India Limited the abandoned mines need to be filled up with a mixture of sand, soil and water.

"But often, there is grave negligence in this filling up process, which creates a vacuum there in the abandoned mines area. And after new constructions are made over these vacuum spots, the soils there are often unable to bear the weight and pressure of the new con-



structions and as a result frequent subsidence takes place in these areas," Mitra pointed out.

However, he added, that there will be a difference in the land-subsidence nature in Raniganj that of Joshimath.

"In case of Joshimath the entire area is highly prone to land-subsidence. However, in the case of Raniganj, those areas are prone to land subsidence where there are constructions over such abandoned mines which have not been properly filled up. So, the land-subsidence nature in Raniganj area will be in a scattered manner unlike Joshimath. Still the apprehension of loss of life and property is there," Mitra explained.

Columnist and a veteran observer of the coal sector, Sunil Mukhopadhyay, said that since the abandoned mines of Coal India Limited in the Raniganj area are not filled up with the mixture of sand-soil-water adequately, such abandoned mines become the easy target for the smugglers for illegal coal mining.

"When regular mining takes place, the coal

is excavated leaving pillars of coal blocks, which act as the support for the land over the undergrounds. Now it is the duty of the coal excavating entity to fill up the gaps between the pillars after abandoning the mines with that sand-soil-water mixture, so that the illegal miners are unable to target those coal-block pillars for illegal excavation.

"Now since there is blatant negligence in that filling up process, the smugglers target those pillars and start cutting and excavating coal from those pillars. Naturally, in this process the pillars become weak and the land-subsidence happens. And why does this negligence in filling up happens? The guess is easy... it is a nexus between the officials of the coal mining entity and the coal smugglers," Mukhopadhyay added.

According to the two-time former CPI-M Lok Sabha member from Asansol, Bansa Gopal Chowdhury, there was a verdict of the Supreme Court in 2004 which said that the coal excavating entity will also have to take the responsibility of filling up the

abandoned mines.

"ADDA was made the implementing authority for the Raniganj masterplan for which the Union government sanctioned Rs 2,600 crore. As the local MP, when I was the chairman of ADDA, the work started for identification of subsidence prone lands in Raniganj, Jamuria areas. However, later that process stopped totally and the crisis deepened," Chowdhury said.

At the same time, an ADDA official said that there is yet another problem that is halting the progress of rehabilitation in the region.

"Many of the residents in the region are reluctant to vacate their existing places and move to alternative places. They want the government authorities to take steps to arrest land subsidence without displacing them. But that is often not possible for technical reasons," the official said.

international

## Not a single foreign mountain expedition in Gilgit-Baltistan amid political chaos

Lahore | Agencies

Mounting political uncertainty in Pakistan and visa delays have poured frigid water on foreign adventurers plans to visit Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) this winter and attempt to scale some of the world's highest mountains, and not a single foreign mountain expedition has arrived this season. High permit fees and the US, Australia and Saudi Arabia cautioning their citizens against travelling to Pakistan also added insult to injury, Dawn reported.

According to the GB tourism department, no foreign expedition or trekking group has been issued a permit this winter expedition season, which usually lasts from November to February.

And the fact the season is set to end after a little over a month, no adventure group is expected as they usually need



at least two months to prepare for expeditions.

Only two foreign expedition groups applied for a visa to summit Nanga Parbat this winter, but visa delays compelled them to cancel their plans. This stands in stark contrast to previous years when hundreds of foreign mountaineers visited Pakistan in winter to attempt to summit the mighty mountains like K2 and Nanga Parbat, Dawn reported.

Besides, last summer was

the first time when more than 1,600 international climbers visited GB. Karar Haidri, secretary to the Alpine Club of Pakistan, said that prevailing political uncertainty in the country was the main factor behind the decline, as many adventure tourists cancelled their visits to the region.

However, Asghar Ali Porik, a tour operator from GB said the visa policy was main cause, as it resulted in delayed issuance of visas, Dawn reported.

## 16 KILLED AFTER BUILDING COLLAPSES IN SYRIA



**Damascus:** A total of 16 civilians were killed, and four others wounded when their residential building collapsed in the northern Syrian province of Aleppo.

The five-storey building, which the Interior Ministry said had housed seven families in the predominantly Kurdish neighborhood of Sheikh Maksoud, collapsed on Sunday due to a water leakage affecting its basis, SANA news agency reported. Rescuers are still working on finding survivors, Xinhua news agency reported, citing SANA.

## Thailand saw jump in tourist numbers last yr, but below pre-Covid level

Bangkok | Agencies

Thailand saw 11.81 million tourists in 2022, up from just 400,000 the previous year, but the figure was still lower than the record 39.8 million people that visited the Southeast Asian country in 2019.

The figures were released by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) on Monday and predicted that 2022's number will double to 25 million this year, reports the BBC.

The country is set to start charging overseas visitors 300 baht (\$9.20) each from the start of June and now it has a target to increase tourist numbers to 80 million a year by 2027.

Tourism revenue accounted for more than 10 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2019, says the TAT. In 2021, it was just 1 per cent.

By aiming to more than double the number of people who visited before the pandemic, the Thai government hopes to see tourism spending rise above \$150 billion. "This target, once achieved, could raise the country's tourism revenue to 5 trillion baht in 2027," the BBC quoted the government's Public



Relations Department as saying in a Facebook post.

The announcement also said Thailand plans to upgrade "tourism safety standards in order to accommodate the influx of visitors".

Like much of Southeast Asia, Thailand is expected to see a jump in tourist numbers from China, which dropped the strict border controls it put in place during the pandemic.

In December 2022, China's immigration administration said passport appli-

cations for its citizens wishing to travel internationally would resume from January 8.

The announcement brought to an end almost three years of strict quarantine rules for arrivals and prompted a rush of people booking overseas trips, with travel sites reporting a spike in traffic. Before the pandemic, China was Thailand's biggest source of tourists, with almost 11 million visitors in 2019.

This year the country is expecting at least five million Chinese tourists.

## Addressing plunging birthrate top priority for Japan's govt: PM

Tokyo | Agencies

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Monday warned that the country is on the "edge of losing its social function" owing to its plunging birthrate and addressing this will be the government's top priority.

Kishida's remarks were made during his policy speech on the first day of a 150-day regular parliamentary session, reports Xinhua news agency.

The Japanese leader highlighted that births last year are estimated to have fallen below the 800,000 mark for the first time since the government data available. As a result of the rapidly declining birthrate, coupled with Japan's ever-ageing population, the workforce is quickly being hollowed out and social welfare costs are ballooning.

Kishida said in his policy speech that the government will try to implement unprecedented countermeasures to

boost the number of births, pledging to "create a children-first economy and society to reverse the country's plummeting birthrate that is hampering longer-term productivity growth".

He said he intends to devise steps and seek stable financial sources to achieve this goal. Kishida mentioned the Children and Families Agency will be launched in April and a plan actualized by June to increase by 50 per cent an allocation of funds connected to child-rearing looking ahead. The Japanese leader also touched on the country's poor fiscal health, calling on politicians to put Japan on a "new growth track" in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Kishida said rising wages is the way to establish a "virtuous cycle" of ensuring increased profits from companies find their way into workers' pockets and in turn consumption, which has been stifled by inflation peaking to more than 40-year highs, would be stimulated.

Wage expansion should outpace current inflation, the Prime Minister said, which in December rose 4.0 percent from a year earlier, to hit its highest level since 1981, amid soaring food and energy prices, the latest core consumer price index data showed.

On foreign diplomacy, Kishida reiterated his keenness to establish "constructive and stable relations with China" and "communicate closely" with South Korea. In terms of the approval rating for his Cabinet tanking recently over a controversial defence spending plan and a number of ministerial dismissals, Kishida said the government will do its best from allowing similar problems to happen again. With specific reference to some Cabinet ministers resigning last year over political funds scandals and ties to a dubious religious group, Kishida said all steps would be taken so that there will not be a recurrence of such scandals.

## N.Korea received \$2.3 mn in humanitarian aid last year



Seoul | Agencies

North Korea saw a significant decline in humanitarian assistance from the international community last year amid prolonged border closures due to the coronavirus pandemic, new data revealed.

The financial tracking service of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) revealed that assistance to Pyongyang from international organisations and other agencies in 2022 reached around \$2.3 million, down sharply from \$14

million the previous year, reports Yonhap News Agency.

Switzerland's provision for the reclusive country last year through the Unicef and the Swiss Development Cooperation had accounted for 69.5 per cent of the total funding, or \$1.6 million.

Sweden provided \$513,927 to the North last year via the Swedish Red Cross, while the Norwegian Red Cross in Oslo contributed \$199,601.

Data showed that several countries, including Canada, Finland, France and Germany, had offered contributions to the North in 2021 but did not provide any last year.

Switzerland will contribute another \$1.2 million through Unicef this year for "essential nutrition services" in the impoverished country, according to the data as of January 4 shown on the OCHA website.

## 12 shot in US nightclub

**Washington:** Twelve people were shot and injured at a nightclub in Baton Rouge, capital city of the US state of Louisiana.

Three of the injured were in critical condition and were rushed to the hospital, Xinhua news agency quoted local media reports as saying. On Sunday evening, police spokesman L'Jean McNeely Jr. said all the injured were in stable condition.

The shooting occurred at the Dior Bar and Lounge around 1.30 a.m., said McNeely. No arrest has been made so far, and the motive of the shooting remains unknown. The Baton Rouge incident comes a day after at least 10 people were killed during a mass shooting in Monterey Park, California, deemed as one of the deadliest in the US state's recent history.

The incident on Saturday night took place at the Star Ballroom Dance Studio, a popular dance hall, as thousands gathered Asian-American majority city to mark the Lunar New Year state holiday.

According to police, the suspected gunman identified as 72-year-old Huu Can Tran shot and killed himself inside a white van that officers had surrounded earlier on Sunday.



# THACKERAY-AMBEDKAR 'UNITY' RATTLES MAHA POLITICS

MVA LAUDS, BJP TRASHES

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Ending two months' political suspense, the Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena (UBT) and Prakash Ambedkar's Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) entered into a brand-new 'Shiv Shakti-Bhim Shakti' alliance here, coinciding with the 97th birth anniversary of the late Balasaheb Thackeray, on Monday.



Uddhav, 62, ex-Chief Minister and son of Balasaheb Thackeray, and Ambedkar, 68, the grandson of the Chief Architect of Indian Constitution Dr B. R. Ambedkar, jointly made the formal announcement of the new political tie-up intended to electrify the state political scenario, with plans to fight the upcoming BMC civic elections.

Addressing the media, Thackeray recalled how his grandfather, Keshav Sitaram, alias Prabodhankar Thackeray, and Ambedkar's grandfather Dr B.R. Ambedkar were good friends and had followed the ideology of 'Desh Pratham' (Nation First). "We are now coming together to safeguard the nation and raise the concerns of the masses. We will take decisions on the next political courses in due time," said Thackeray.

Bhim Shakti' tie-up will work to save the Constitution and Democracy. Thackeray claimed that the new partnership has been discussed beforehand with the Maha Vikas Aghadi allies comprising Congress-Nationalist Congress Party-Sena (UBT), while Ambedkar expressed the hope that the MVA would soon accept the VBA.

Janata Party and would work in tandem with other political parties. Confirming that Thackeray had discussed the partnership with Ambedkar, Congress state President Nana Patole welcomed the new 'Shiv Shakti-Bhim Shakti' alliance saying it will help the Opposition parties' ambitions of dislodging the BJP in the state and Centre.NCP leader Anil Deshmukh also welcomed the Sena (UBT)-VBA tie-up saying all parties have a right to make their alliances.

should unite in the state". Asked what will be the impact of the tie-up in the upcoming civic polls, Ambedkar said it will work with other MVA parties, "will succeed and emerge victorious". In his first reaction, Balasahebanchi Shiv Sena (BSS) leader and Chief Minister Eknath Shinde expressed his 'good wishes' to the new entity, while the ally and BJP's leaders like Union Minister Narayan Rane and state President Chandrashekar Bawankule trashed it saying it will make no difference to the party. Criticising the tie-up, Rane asked 'where the Shiv Sena 'and' what is has Ambedkar done for Dalits', while Bawankule predicted that the alliance will not last long.

# SC junk CBI's plea against bail granted to Anil Deshmukh

Team Absolute | Mumbai/ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Monday declined to entertain a plea by CBI challenging bail granted by the Bombay High Court to former Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh regarding a corruption case in connection with alleged illegal gratification sought from bar owners and corruption in police transfers and postings in Maharashtra.



A bench comprising Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud said, "No, we are not interfering. SLP is dismissed." The bench, also comprising justices V. Ramasubramanian and J.B. Pardiwala, noted that Deshmukh has been granted bail in the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) case in connection with the same set of transactions.

Bombay High Court issued directions for an inquiry in response to a petition filed by Param Bir Singh, former Commissioner of Mumbai Police. The ED initiated a case of money laundering against Deshmukh and arrested him. Singh had accused him of trying to extort money from bar owners in the city via some police officials, including Waze. Also, claimed that he took money for transfers and postings of police officers. In a letter written to then chief minister Uddhav Thackeray, Singh alleged Deshmukh had instructed certain cops, including Waze, to collect Rs 100 crore every month from owners of bars in Mumbai.

# Governor Koshiyari wants to quit post and retire

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari has conveyed his desire to step down from his post and lead a retired life, an official said here. He expressed his sentiments to Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to Mumbai last week, seeking to spend the rest of his life in reading, writing, and other leisurely activities.



the recent visit of the PM to Mumbai, I have conveyed to him my desire to be discharged of all political responsibilities and to spend the remainder of my life in reading, writing and other activities," the Governor told the PM. He said he always received love and affection from the PM, and expressed hope this continues.

# MAN ARRESTED FOR RAPING 20-MONTH-OLD BABY

Mumbai: A 20-month-old baby girl was allegedly raped by her neighbour in central Mumbai, police said on Monday. The incident came to light after the child's parents approached the police to lodge a complaint against their neighbour on Sunday, an official said. As per the complaint, the family lives in a tenement and their 35-year-old neighbour had raped the toddler when the parents were away a couple of days ago, he said. The parents realised something was amiss when the child kept crying and complaining about being in pain, the official said. An FIR under section 376 (rape) of the Indian Penal Code and relevant provisions of the Protection of Children against Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act was registered against the accused, who has been arrested, he added.

# Bombay HC refuses bail to ex-cop Pradeep Sharma in Antilia case

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bombay High Court on Monday declined to give bail to former cop Pradeep Sharma who was arrested in connection with the planting of an SUV laden with gelatin sticks outside the residence of billionaire industrialist Mukesh Ambani, and the subsequent murder of the vehicle owner and Thane businessman Mansukh Hiran. A division bench of Justices Revati Mohite-Dere and R. N. Laddha dismissed Sharma's appeal challenging a Special NIA Court order which had rejected his bail plea of



February 2022. The SUV laden with gelatin with a printed death threat to the Ambani family was found

abandoned near the iconic Antilia building on February 25, 2021, and on March 5, the vehicle owner Hiran was found dead in the Thane Creek. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) which took over the probe from Maharashtra Police and arrested Sharma in June 2021, contended that he allegedly conspired with another sacked policeman Sachin Vaze to finish off Hiran, considered a 'weak link' in the entire conspiracy to terrorise the Ambanis. The NIA said that Hiran was in the know of the entire plot and the accused Sharma-Vaze were worried that he would spill the beans on them, so they plotted to eliminate him.

# SCHOOL IN VILLAGE OF 150 PEOPLE HAS ONLY 1 STUDENT

Ganeshpur: Kishore Mankar who is teaching at a Zila Parishad Primary School in Maharashtra's Ganeshpur village says the school has had only one student in the last two years. Located 22 kilometers from Maharashtra's Washim District, Mankar further stated that the population of Ganeshpur is only 150. Kishore Mankar said he has been teaching at this school for the last two years. "I'm the only teacher in school," said Kishore Mankar, a school teacher who has been showing up every day on his bike for two years to teach just one student. "There is only one teacher in the school for the last two years. I have been teaching during this period," Mankar added. "From 10:30 am to 12 pm, I follow all the rules and regulations including singing the national anthem," Mankar stated. "I teach him all the subjects. All the facilities given by the government including mid-day meal are being provided to the student," Mankar added.

# Rakhi Sawant gets relief till tomorrow in obscene video case

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bombay High Court on Monday directed the city police to not take any action against actor Rakhi Sawant till Tuesday in connection with a case lodged against her by a model for allegedly circulating and displaying her obscene and objectionable video. Ms Sawant moved the High Court seeking pre-arrest bail in the case. Her lawyer on Monday told a single bench of Justice M S Karnik that Ms Sawant had been cooperating with the police in its probe since the FIR was lodged in November 2022. Justice Karnik posted the



matter for hearing on Tuesday and directed the police to not take any action against her until then. The bench was informed by the additional public prosecutor that Ms Sawant had

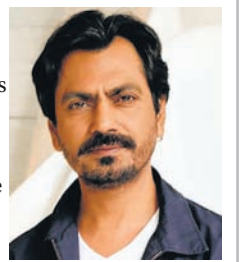


appeared before the police last week for questioning but before handing over her phone she deleted the said video. The police would now also charge Ms Sawant with the destruction of evidence, he said.

Justice Karnik asked Sawant's lawyer to take instructions on this. Based on the model's complaint, the suburban Amboli police had booked Ms Sawant and her lawyer Falguni Brahmabhatt on November 8, 2022, under sections 354A (sexual harassment), 500 (defamation), 504 (intentional insult) and 509 (insulting modesty of woman by act, word or gesture) of the Indian Penal Code and section 67 (transmission of obscene content in electronic form) of the Information Technology Act. Ms Sawant approached the court after a sessions court last week rejected her anticipatory bail application.

# ACTOR NAWAZUDDIN SIDDIQUI'S WIFE CHARGED ON HIS MOTHER'S ASSAULT COMPLAINT

Mumbai: The wife of actor Nawazuddin Siddiqui was booked for alleged trespass and voluntarily causing hurt on the complaint of his mother, a Mumbai police official said on Monday. The FIR against the actor's wife Zainab was registered on Sunday, the Versova police station official said. "The complainant Mehrunisa Siddiqui, who is the actor's mother, has alleged Zainab trespassed into her home and assaulted her after picking up an argument. Zainab has been questioned in the case," he said. A case under Indian Penal Code sections 452 (house-trespass after preparation for hurt, assault or wrongful restraint), 323 (voluntary causing hurt) and other offences has been registered against Zainab Siddiqui, he said. No arrest has been made in the case and further probe is underway, he added. Police sources, meanwhile, said the incident may be the fallout of a property dispute between the actor, his wife and his mother.



# MINOR GIRL KILLED BY FALLING DEBRIS OF UNDER-CONSTRUCTION TOWER

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a freak incident, a seven-year-old girl was killed by the falling plaster from an under-construction residential high-rise here in the early hours of Monday. According to the BMC Disaster Control, the incident occurred around 8 p.m. on Sunday near Chandanwadi in south Mumbai. As per initial reports from the V.P. Patel Road Police Station, the falling debris from the 24-storied structure, Shripati Jewels building, crashed on the girl below, injuring Krishna Patel seriously. The Patel family lives in

the 7th floor of the same partly-built building where construction work is going on above the 15th till the 24th floors. Krishna was rushed to the Reliance Foundation Hospital nearby and died early this morning, around 1.30 am, during treatment, said the BMC official. Treating it as a case of 'negligence,' the V. P. Road Police Station has booked the building developer Rajendra Chaturvedi and a site supervisor Raghav Parmar. The police and fire brigade have cordoned off the building premises and surrounding as a precaution and further investigation is underway.

# "Decision Is Hers Alone To Make": Court Allows 32-Week Pregnancy Termination

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A woman has the right to choose whether to continue her pregnancy or not and the decision is hers and hers alone to make, the Bombay High Court said while allowing a married woman to terminate her 32-week pregnancy after the fetus was detected with severe abnormalities. A division bench of Justices Gautam Patel and S G Dige, in its judgment of January 20, a copy of which was made available on Monday, refused to accept the medical board's view that the even though the fetus has serious abnormalities it should not be terminated as the pregnancy is almost at its

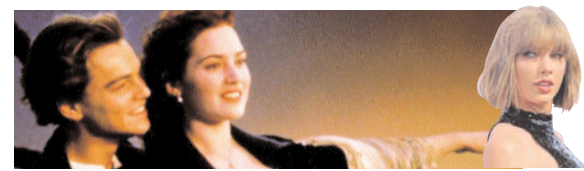
end. The woman had approached High Court seeking to terminate her pregnancy after a sonography revealed the fetus had severe abnormalities and that the baby would be born with physical and mental disabilities. "Given a severe fetal abnormality, the length of the pregnancy does not matter. The petitioner has taken an informed decision. It is not an easy one. But that decision is hers, and hers alone to make. The right to choose is of the petitioner's. It is not the right of the Medical Board," the court said in its order. Refusing termination of pregnancy only on grounds of delay would not only be condemning the fetus to a less than optimal life but would also be condemning the mother to a



future that will almost certainly rob her of every positive attribute of parenthood, the High Court said. "It would be a denial of her right to dignity, and her reproductive and decisional autonomy. The mother knows today there is no possibility

of having a normal healthy baby at the end of this delivery," the court said. The petitioner's fetus is detected with both microcephaly and lissencephaly, and this is what the future portends, the bench said. Asserting that the rights of the woman should never be compromised in the "blind application of a statute", the court said, "Justice may have to be blindfolded; it can never be allowed to be blindsided. We are agnostic about the relative positions of parties. We can never be agnostic about where justice needs to be delivered." It said cases such as this often raise profound moral questions and dilemmas, but it is immutable that the "arc of the moral universe always bends

towards justice". The bench said the existence of the fetal anomaly, as well as its severity, was certain as also the fact that it was detected late. The bench noted the medical board did not take into account the social and economic position of the couple. "It ignores their milieu entirely. It does not even attempt to envision the kind of life, one with no quality at all to speak of, that the petitioner must endure for an indefinite future if the Board's recommendation is to be followed," the court said. "The Board really does only one thing: because late, therefore no. And that is plainly wrong, as we have seen," the court said while allowing the pregnancy to be terminated.



# Cate Blanchett

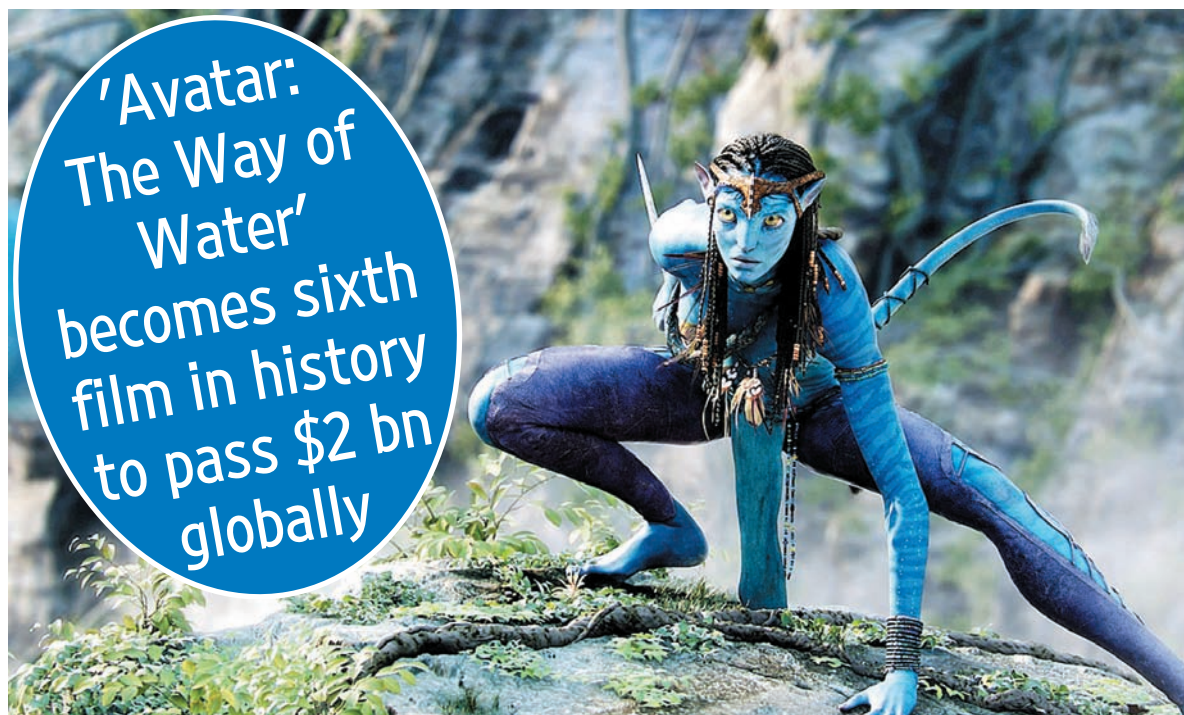
considered retiring from acting after demanding last role

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Cate Blanchett was left so drained by her latest role as obsessive Lydia Tar she thought about quitting acting, which she says has also left her profoundly homesick for her Australian homeland. The actress is being tipped for another Oscar for her portrayal of an obsessive composer in 'Tar', but said it was so physically and emotionally draining she thought about giving up work, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

She told Australian show 'The Sunday Project': "I think it was because it was such a physical role, the echoes of it are still with me and I think I'm like a lot of audience members, I need time to process it."

"Obviously I'm lucky enough to work with some amazing directors who have changed my life, but when it all comes together like that, it does stay with you." Blanchett then laughed: "So I don't ever want to work again." The actress, who has three sons and a daughter with her screenwriter husband Andrew Upton, 56, added her work across the globe has left her pining for her family and she has been left "profoundly homesick over the last four years" and she dreams of returning to her native Australia so she can garden and be near water. She added: "I'm very obsessed, as most Australians, obsessed by water. I want to be by the water, in the water. I would love to learn to be patient, to be still and think. My grandmother was a wonderful gardener and my mother is likewise an excellent gardener and she lives with us, and I really want to spend time in the garden with my mum."



'Avatar: The Way of Water' becomes sixth film in history to pass \$2 bn globally

Los Angeles | Agencies

It's just six weeks since award-winning filmmaker James Cameron's blockbuster sequel 'Avatar: The Way of Water' released and it has surpassed \$2 billion in global ticket sales.

It's the sixth film in history - and first in pandemic times - to cross the coveted milestone, joining an exclusive club that includes 'Avatar', 'Avengers: Endgame', 'Titanic', 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens', and 'Avengers: Infinity War', reports 'Variety'.

Now, Cameron is responsible for three of the six-highest grossing movies of all time. He's also the only director with three films to cross \$2 billion. Notably, Zoe Saldana, who plays Neytiri in the 'Avatar' series, has now starred in four of the six films to cross \$2 billion.

She also appears in both 'Avengers: Endgame' and 'Avengers: Infinity War'.

reprising her 'Guardians of the Galaxy' role of Gamora.

Notably, 'The Way of Water' has officially hit the lofty goal that Cameron set for himself prior to the film's release. Before the sequel opened in theaters, he told GQ that 'Avatar 2' represents "the worst business case in movie history" because it needs to become one of the three or four top-grossing movies of all time just to break even.

But in the coming days, it'll take down the fourth- and fifth-biggest movies, 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens' (\$2.07 billion) and 'Avengers: Infinity War' (\$2.04 billion), to achieve that feat.

The original 'Avatar', which debuted in theaters 13 years ago, remains the biggest movie of all time with \$2.9 billion. 'Avengers: Endgame' trails closely behind in second place with \$2.79 billion, while 'Titanic' stands as the third-highest grossing release ever with \$2.19 billion. The long-delayed sequel to 2009's 'Avatar' opened in December and remained hugely popular in the weeks since its release.

# 'Quentin, let's go!'

VIVICA FOX RALLIED FOR THE MARTIAL ART FILM 'KILL BILL 3'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Vivica Fox has rallied for the martial art film 'Kill Bill 3' and knows fans are ready for 'Vol. 3'. "People are hungry," she said at the Variety Studio presented by Audible at Sundance. "Quentin (Tarantino), let's go!" reports Variety. Fox portrayed Vernita Green in Tarantino's 2003 martial arts revenge drama 'Kill Bill Vol. 1' and the 2004 sequel 'Vol. 2', opposite Uma Thurman and Lucy Liu. The first movie stars Thurman as the Bride, who swears retribution on a team of assassins (Fox and Liu among them) after they try to kill her. There's nothing official in the works, but Tarantino has mentioned a potential 'Kill Bill Vol. 3' would focus in part on the daughter of Fox's character as she sets out to avenge her mother's death by killing Thurman's the Bride. Though her character doesn't survive the original 'Kill Bill', Fox says she'd "absolutely" participate in the third film, should it ever come to fruition. "I've been waiting," she said. "They said it's going to be my daughter growing up. I know he'll figure out some kind of way maybe I'll be in a flashback. I'd love to work Quentin again and I'd love to work with Uma again. It was a lot of training." Fox, who was at Sundance to promote 'Skilled', a documentary about trade workers, even has dream casting to portray her offspring. "Zendayaa she's beautiful, she's amazing. She's winning Emmys," Fox says. "We'd have to fit it in her schedule. She's killing the game."



# Christian Bale thought he'd never work again after portraying Batman

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Christian Bale thought he'd never work again after portraying Batman. Warned that he'd run the risk of being typecast and damaging his career when he accepted the role of the Caped Crusader in 'Batman Begins', the 'Pale Blue Eye' star actor admitted he was "tempted" by the prospect, reports aceshowbiz.com.

"I've had no strategy for anything I've ever done. I was quite taken with the idea of Batman being the last thing I ever did, the thing I'm remembered for," said Bale - who played Batman in a

further two films.

"I was also tempted by the fact that people said I might be typecast and not work again."

But I've kept on working."

When it comes to starting a new job, Bale, whose first film, 'Empire of the Sun', was made when he was just 13, approaches it like he's never worked before. He explained to Radio Times magazine: "I like approaching every film as though it's the first film I've ever made and it's the last film I'm ever going to make, so not going in with any arrogance."

And despite his years of success, the 47-year-old star insisted he still doesn't know what he doing on set so would

never offers advice to his co-stars.

Discussing working with Harry Melling on 'Pale Blue Eye', he said, "Harry knows what he's doing, I can't teach him anything."

"What kind of a\*\*\* would I be if I said, 'Harry, let me sit you down for a second and teach you a thing or two about acting?' I don't know what I'm doing; I don't know why I keep getting cast in things."

Bale also doesn't worry about what his career legacy will be.

He added: "I've heard someone say, 'If you want to be remembered, shoot a president' but if you want to have a legacy, you've got to do something good." It's the last thing on my mind."

# PAMELA ANDERSON SAYS TIM ALLEN FLASHED HIS PRIVATES AT HER WHEN SHE WAS 23

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood actress Pamela Anderson in her upcoming memoir has detailed a disturbing incident that took place on the set of 'Home Improvement' in 1991 when she was 23 years old. "On the first day of filming, I walked out of my dressing room, and Tim was in the hallway in his robe. He opened his robe and flashed me quickly - completely naked underneath. He said it was only fair, because he had seen me naked. Now we're even. I laughed uncomfortably," according to an excerpt in 'Love, Pamela', reports 'Variety'. Allen, who was 37 at the time of the reported incident, was presumably referring to Anderson's modeling for Playboy, which helped turn the budding actress into an internationally known sex symbol.

"No, it never happened. I would never do such a thing," Allen told 'Variety' in a statement. The explosive claim is one of many in the book, which traces Anderson's rise from small-town girl from Vancouver Island to one of the most recognizable women in the world. 'Home Improvement' marked one of Anderson's earliest credits, where she played Lisa the Tool Girl in what quickly became the No. 1 TV series in the United States. She appeared in the first two seasons of the ABC sitcom before leaving to focus on 'Baywatch', which became a global phenomenon exported to 150 countries. 'Love, Pamela' is one of the most anticipated titles of the year from HarperCollins. In it, Anderson addresses last year's hit Hulu series Pam and Tommy.

Anderson remained mum on the series, which delves into the infamous sex tape that was stolen from her home with then-husband Tommy Lee, when it launched in February 2022.

# ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Bella Thorne







# I'm collaborating with my most favourite co-star: Deepika on working with SRK



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Deepika Padukone has spoken about her pairing with Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan, whom she calls her "favourite co-star", as they are all set for the release of their upcoming film 'Pathaan'.

The two stars have previously worked in films such as 'Om Shanti Om', 'Happy New Year' and 'Chennai Express'.

"Shah Rukh and I have been very lucky to have had the opportunity to work in some incredible movies starting with Om Shanti Om! I'm collaborating with my most favourite co-star Shah Rukh. We have a beautiful relationship and I think the audience always sees that in the movies that we do," said Deepika.

SRK and Deepika also spoke about the secret behind their electric chemistry in 'Pathaan'.

She said: "Well, he and I can both take credit for that. Again he was also on this intense diet and exercise. So, he and I can both take credit for the work we have put individually. But at the end of the day, it is the team that you work with."

Deepika added: "Whether it is the director (Siddharth Anand) and his vision or it's the cinematographer (Sathith Paulose) and how he is envisioning lighting us, whether it's the stylist (Shaleena Nathani) - how she envisions these characters, whether it is your hair and make-up team. So, it's your entire team that sort of comes together, so sure you can put in the work and do the best you can but you also have incredible world class professionals who come in and make us look the way we do!"

For Deepika, 'Pathaan' is a very special film in her filmography.

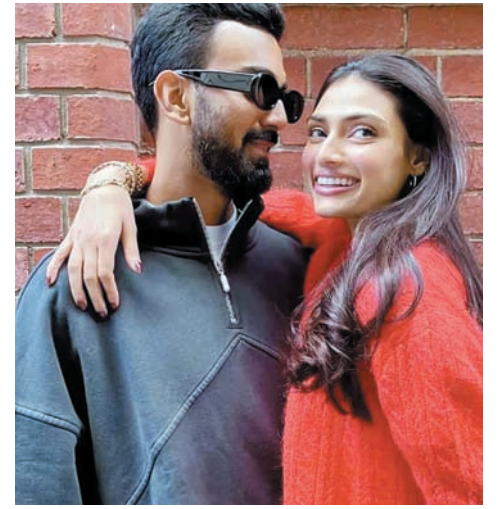
"The character that I am playing in this movie is extremely exciting, it is something that I haven't done before and even the movie - just this kind of spy thriller, an out and out action movie is something I haven't done before."

## 'IT'S OFFICIAL!'

### Athiya Shetty, KL Rahul are now married

Team Absolute | Mumbai

It's official! Athiya Shetty and cricketer KL Rahul have been pronounced the man and the wife. The wedding ceremony, which took place on Monday at Suniel Shetty's farmhouse in Khandala, saw the pheras taking place close to the magic hour in the evening. After the ceremony concluded, Suniel and his son Ahan Shetty came out of the venue greeted the media and distributed sweets to the media personnel stationed outside the venue. The father-son duo donned Indian ethnic wear. While Suniel wore a crepe coloured Kurta and pyjama, his son was seen decked up in all white ethnic attire. Expressing his happiness, Suniel told the media that he is very happy as the function went on really well and the family has something planned up for the reception once the Indian Premier League gets completed given Rahul has work commitments in the cricket league. The 'Phir Hera Pheri' actor also mentioned that he still remains a father for Rahul like he is for his daughter Athiya and opined that the 'in-law' is a thing of the past. Ahead of the wedding, Athiya and KL Rahul hosted a sanjeet night for their guests. Suniel and his wife Mana, along with Athiya's besties Krishna Shroff and Akansha Ranjan had set the dance floor on fire with the celebrations.



**NAWAZ, BHUMI WILL BE SEEN TOGETHER IN A MOVIE**

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actors Nawaz

and Bhumi

Pednekar's next film

'Afwaah', helmed by Sudhir

Mishra, is set to hit the screens on

February 24. Mishra, who is known for films such

as 'Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi',

'Dharavi', 'Chameli' and 'Yeh Saali Zindagi',

has previously worked with Nawaz in the

satirical comedy-drama 'Serious Men'.

Talking about the film, the director

shared, "Afwaah" is a thriller which

speaks of a very important mes-

sage in the current times. I am

glad that the release date is

finally out and I am really

looking forward to its

release." "The super-tal-

ented combo of Bhumi

and Nawaz has given

their best to this uncon-

ventional story and I am

sure the audience is going

to love watching them on the

big screen." The film has been

jointly produced by Bhushan

Kumar's T-Series and Anubhav Sinha's

Benaras Mediaworks. Bhushan Kumar

added, "The power-packed team of 'Afwaah' has

done a brilliant job and this is something that will

be worth a watch for movie lovers."

## Sunny Leone goes meticulously de-glam for her role in the upcoming movie

Team Absolute | Mumbai

ditching make-up, actress Sunny Leone decided to go de-glam for her role in the upcoming crime-drama 'Quotation Gang', directed by Vivek K. She said didn't want to compromise on the director's vision.

Sunny and her make-up artist worked extensively with the director in creating basic looks for her char-

acter. After cracking the genesis of the character and her backstory, the team put together some options. It is a raw part and Sunny didn't want to compromise on the authenticity.

The actress said: "The film's DNA is such that it hinges on its authenticity. I didn't want to compromise on the director's vision. I trusted the director completely. Now when I see the love our teaser is getting, I am glad that the power of his vision

is getting its due."

"Sometimes when the character has some much meat, you don't care about anything else. What matters is your performance. Once I stopped focussing on how I will look, I was able to be the character. I am grateful for the faith the director showed in me!"

Her make-up artist Richard Joseph said that the look is organically de-glammed.



## PIA BAJPIEE ALL SET TO REPRISER HER ROLE IN A MOVIE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Pia Bajpiee will be seen reprising her role of Poonam Sharma in Syed Ahmad Afzal's 'Laal Rang 2'. She talked about working with the same team after six years and also explained the way her role has shaped up with



time. She shared about continuing to play the role of a girl from Saharanpur in the second part.

She said: "I couldn't have asked for a better debut, and now that its sequel is coming soon, I'm super excited. It was an amazing experience working with the entire cast and the team, and a chance to

reunite with them makes me so happy." The actress, who is known for her roles in Venkat Prabhu's comedy drama 'Goa', Tamil film 'Ko', Telugu movie 'Dalam', Malayalam movie 'Masters' and Hindi movie 'Mumbai Delhi Mumbai', expressed her happiness at joining the entire team of the film after six years. She added: "Working with the entire team after 6 years will be exciting and fun. My role is still shaping, I have a lot to add and learn. I can't wait to start shooting as this time, my fans and audience will surely get to witness a lot more of me on screen."



## Trolling does affect mental health; it can disturb one's life: Anjali Arora

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Anjali Arora of 'Lock Upp' fame opened up about her depression and mental health issues and shared how tough it is to deal with unnecessary trolling. She shared: "When it comes to talking about anything wrong happening with anyone, there will be a lot of intellectual people seen putting forth their views and experiences, but the moment they switch off from society and open their social media, their mature, open, understanding thoughts get vanished and all they would leave with will be hate speech, abusive words, and I do not know what more."

She spoke about facing severe mental illness after getting brutally trolled online.

She shared: "Yes, trolling does affect mental health deeply and it can disturb one's life to the core. I know this very well as I have faced trolling at an immense amount, which not only made me cry a lot but also made me think about quitting social media."

Anjali has been facing depression for quite long. In fact, once she revealed on a reality show that she attempted suicide in the 11th Std.

"I have been in a depression for a very long period, about some months. There was just one thing on my mind: why these things are happening to me and why I have to face such things in life. But by speaking about those things to my close ones, I made myself stable, and after putting up so much effort and giving more time to myself, I became stronger and I bounced back into a life full of enthusiasm." Talking about the solutions to deal with depression and mental illness, Anjali concluded, saying: "There is not a single solution for everyone, as everyone's life, struggles, surroundings, thinking, mental health, and problems are not the same."

"But one can surely keep their mind healthy and strong through meditation, by following a good diet, ignoring haters, and most importantly, by running far away from those people who are just good in front of them and not in the back. By following these steps, one can keep their mind healthy," she concluded.

## INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Heli Daruwala