

absolute india

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Adani-Hindenburg row: SC's no to SIT probe, says media reports not conclusive proof

CLEAN CHIT?

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to form any SIT or group of experts to conduct an investigation into the Adani-Hindenburg controversy saying that the media and third party reports were not conclusive proof.

Taking note of the submission made by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta that 22 out of 24 investigations relating to allegations against Adani group of companies have already been finalised, the bench, also comprising Justices J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, asked the market regulator to complete the pending two investigations "expeditiously within a period of three months".

The top court said that reports prepared by third party organisations such as the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) and Hindenburg Research cannot be regarded as "conclusive proof".

It added: "The allegations of conflict of interest against members of the (court-appointed) expert committee are unsubstantiated and are rejected."

"SEBI should take its investigation to its logical conclusion in accordance with law. The facts of this case do not warrant a transfer of investigation from SEBI."

D.Y. Chandrachud, CJ



The Supreme Court asked the Central government to constructively consider the suggestions made by the

expert panel headed by former apex court judge Justice A.M. Sapre. "The Government of India and SEBI

will take any further actions as are necessary to strengthen the regulatory framework to protect investors and ensure the orderly functioning of the securities market," it said.

The apex court asked SEBI and other investigative agencies of the Union government to probe into allegations of short selling resulting in loss of investors value.

NOTICE TO CENTRE, 11 STATES ON PIL HIGHLIGHTING CASTE-BASED DISCRIMINATION IN JAIL MANUALS

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Wednesday issued notice to the Centre and 11 states on a public interest litigation (PIL) highlighting caste-based discrimination in state prison manuals.

A bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) D.Y. Chandrachud sought response from the Union Home Ministry and the state governments of Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Punjab, Odisha, Jharkhand, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra in the matter. The bench, also comprising Justices J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, sought the assistance of Solicitor General Tushar Mehta in the matter. The matter will be next heard after four weeks. In the meantime, the apex court asked senior advocate S. Muralidhar to make a compilation of jail manuals from the states.

NO INTERIM RELIEF FOR MAHUA MOITRA IN PLEA AGAINST EXPULSION FROM LS

New Delhi: In a big setback for Trinamool Congress leader Mahua Moitra, the Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to pass any interim relief in her plea filed against her expulsion from the Lok Sabha following the 'cash-for-query' controversy. A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta sought a reply from the Lok Sabha Secretariat and directed to list Moitra's plea in the week commencing March 11. The bench told senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, who appeared on

Moitra's behalf, that it will consider the application for interim relief in March. After hearing the arguments, the bench decided not to issue any notice to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and the Ethics Committee of the Lower House, which were arrayed as respondent party in Moitra's plea, and sought a reply from the Lok Sabha Secretariat only. Moitra had moved the court under Article 32 of the Constitution, challenging her expulsion from the Lok Sabha on December 8.

India's GDP to touch \$4 tn ahead of LS polls: Piyush Goyal

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India will become a \$4 trillion economy before the Lok Sabha elections and in 2 to 2.5 years, it will touch the \$5 trillion GDP mark, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Wednesday.

"India will have the third largest GDP in the world latest by 2027, as per every street estimate," Goyal said at the launch of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat Utsav in the national capital. The Lok Sabha polls are likely to be held around April-May this year.

The minister also said that the government has raised the forecast for the GDP, as official estimates until now expect the economy to touch \$3.7 trillion mark at the completion of the current financial year ending April 31, 2024. The International



Monetary Fund's World Economic Outlook data for GDP projections of countries up to 2028 forecasts India's GDP at \$4.95 trillion in 2026. India has emerged as the fastest growing major economy in the world and had posted a robust growth rate of 7.6 per cent in the July-Sept quarter of the current financial year

(FY24). This has prompted the IMF and the RBI to raise their growth forecast for the Indian economy as well.

Goyal also said, "Aatmanirbhar Bharat does not mean India is anti-imports. We will increase our exports and for that if we require to import some products, we will do so."

12 dead, 25 injured in Assam road accident

Guwahati | Agencies

At least 12 people were killed and 25 others injured after a bus collided with a truck in Assam's Golaghat district on Wednesday, police said.

The accident took place at around 5 a.m. in the Balijan area near Dergaon. Golaghat SP Rajen Singh said: "All the deceased and injured persons were travelling by the bus which was heading towards Tilanga Mandir from the Kambandha area of the district. It suffered a major collision with the truck which was com-



ing from the opposite direction." According to the police, 10 people died on the spot and the remaining two succumbed to their injuries at the Jorhat Medical College and Hospital.

Over 100 killed in twin blasts near late Iranian commander's burial site

Tehran | Agencies

Over hundred people killed and others injured on Wednesday in two blasts near the burial ground of Iran's late commander Qasem Soleimani in the southwestern province of Kerman, reported the semi-official Fars news agency citing Iran's Emergency organisation.

According to the Islamic Republic of Iran News Network (IRINN), the blasts occurred in an underpass one kilometer away from the burial ground, with the first one heard at 15:04 local time (11:34 GMT) and the second one a few minutes later at 15:17, as people were paying homage to the late command-



er on his fourth assassination anniversary, the IRINN added, Xinhua news agency reported.

According to the report, the cause of the blasts has not been determined yet, and rescue teams have been sent to the scene.

It added most of the injuries had been sustained due to overcrowding and people's panicking.

On January 3, 2020, the U.S. military assassinated Soleimani in a drone strike near the Baghdad International Airport.

IN A FIRST, GIRL BAND FROM NE TO PARTICIPATE IN NCC R-DAY CAMP

New Delhi: Ministry of Defence (MoD) on

Wednesday said that a band, comprising of 45 girls from North East (NE), will participate - in the time - in the National Cadet Corps (NCC) Republic Day Camp 2024.

The ministry said that the girls are in the age group of 13-15 and will represent the rich cultural heritage of the North East and showcase the reach of the NCC. DG NCC, Lt Gen Gurbirpal Singh said that a total of 2,274 cadets, including the highest participation of 907 girls, from across the country are taking part in the month-long camp.

The cadets also include 122 from Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh as well as 177 from the North East. In addition, cadets and officers from 25 friendly countries under the Youth Exchange Programme (YEP) will participate, Singh added. The DG NCC said that the aim of the Republic Day Camp is to provide exposure to the rich traditions of the nation and strengthen the value system of the cadets. The DG NCC said that the training philosophy of the cadets has been refined to accommodate the changing aspirations of the youth.



Ahmedabad clears 103L metric tonnes of solid waste; frees 35 acres of land

Ahmedabad | Agencies

Authorities in Ahmedabad have processed over 103 lakh metric tonnes of solid waste, clearing about 35 acres of urban land, according to data shared by the Gujarat government on Wednesday.

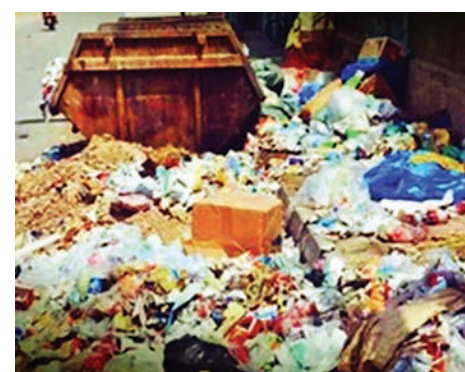
One of the pivotal projects in this initiative is the bio-mining pilot project launched in January 2019 at the Pirana site in Ahmedabad.

The project features 60 trommel machines with a capacity of 300 metric tons and 10 automated segregation mobile trommel machines, each handling 1,000 metric tonnes.

These machines have so far processed a substantial portion of legacy waste, contributing to the clearance of the land. The Ahmedabad Corporation has also allocated a six-acre area for processing the 'Refuse-Derived Fuel' from the Pirana biomining project.

Additionally, the inert material extracted from this process is used to construct the Dholera Express Highway, symbolising a circular economy model.

The state is implementing a Waste to Energy policy, integrating 'Waste to Energy' technology to pre-



serve the environment.

This policy focuses on utilising 'Municipal Solid Waste' as a renewable energy source.

It marks a step towards India's commitment to reducing its GDP's emission intensity by 45 per cent by 2030 and achieving nearly 50 per cent of its electric power capacity from non-fossil fuel sources.

In urban areas of Gujarat, which include eight municipal corporations and 162 municipalities, there is a potential to generate approximately 100 megawatts of power from solid waste.

India reports 602 new Covid cases, 511 of JN.1 series variant

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India has recorded 602 new Covid-19 infections in the past 24 hours, pushing the total number of active cases to 4,440 on Wednesday.

The country had recorded 865 new cases on May 19. Five new fatalities -- one each from Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Punjab, two from Kerala -- have been reported in the span of 24 hours, according to the ministry's data.

As of now, the total number of coronavirus cases in India, since the outbreak in January 2020, has reached 4,50,15,083.

The death toll related to Covid cases in the country has risen to 5,33,371. The new variant, JN.1 subvariant is descendent of the Omicron subvariant known as BA.2.86 or Pirola, with Kerala being the first state to report a case. A total of 511 cases of the JN.1 series variant have been reported from 11 states till January 2. Karnataka has



reported 199 cases of the sub-variant. Kerala has reported 148 cases. 47 cases have been reported from Goa, 36 from Gujarat, 32 from Maharashtra, the health ministry has said.

The overall recovery from Covid has reached over 4.4 crore individuals, reflecting a national recovery rate of 98.81 per cent.

The country has administered a total of 220.67 crore doses of Covid vaccines, as per the available data.

Critical gaps exist in workplace safety for women in India

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A staggering 40 per cent of working women experiencing workplace insecurity are unaware of the protective measures offered by the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) Act, according to a report on Wednesday.

The report by Walchand Plus emphasises the urgent need for a transformative approach to ensure workplace safety.

Only 42 per cent of employees possess a thorough understanding of the POSH Act, revealed the report.

This lack of awareness among employees, as highlighted by the research, underscores the imperative for enhanced education on the Act's provisions.

The report also exposes prevalent misconceptions within organisations, where compliance with the Act is often seen as a mere checkbox rather than a genuine commitment to fostering a safe environment for women.

Surveys indicate that 53 per cent of HR professionals are confused about the Act.

Furthermore, the research found that HR managers are concerned about the underrepresentation of women and the tendency to downplay harassment issues within senior management. "As a woman, I feel India still has a long way to go when it comes to bridging gender disparity. In many ways, we're still a patriarchal society. Protecting women at the workplace should be a basic expectation but unfortunately many organisations treat this at a very cosmetic level," said Pallavi Jha, Chairperson and Managing Director of Walchand PeopleFirst, in a statement.



The research reveals that owing to constraints such as a lack of senior women representation in Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs), among many others, has left much to be desired when it comes to implementation and adherence of the POSH Act. It also underscores the crucial role of training sessions that go beyond legal literacy, addressing procedural aspects and fostering a preventive culture.

The report urges a proactive response from organisations, advocating for immediate measures to address the gaps identified. It emphasises the importance of workshops, guidance, and a zero-tolerance policy towards harassment.

UP bans those under 18 from driving two-wheelers, four-wheelers

Lucknow | Agencies

The Uttar Pradesh government has banned those below 18 years of age from driving scooters and cars.

If parents allow children to drive scooter or car, they will be punished with three years of imprisonment and a fine of Rs 25,000.

Following the instructions issued by the government regarding this, strictness will be enforced in secondary schools with the help of the Transport Department, said a government spokesman.

For this, the youth will be made aware by running a campaign. Besides, students will also be given information about road safety through various mediums. The spokesman further said that under this, a road safety club will be formed in every school. One student in all classes will be made Road Safety Captain. A class on road safety information will also be held in the school. Besides, in every school, one teacher will be made nodal head and will be given online and offline



training with the help of the transport department. At the same time, strict action will be taken to ensure that children below 18 years of age do not drive any motor vehicle.

Detailed guidelines have been issued by Transport Commissioner, Chandra Bhusan Singh, in this regard.

The Director of Secondary Education has also been asked to run a campaign in schools for this. He has said that in the prayer meeting, students should be given information about road safety and they should also be given an oath on it. Wall painting related to road safety rules should be done in schools. Information and suggestions related to this should be shared by creating a WhatsApp group of students.



COLD CONDITIONS TO CONTINUE IN PARTS OF PUNJAB, HARYANA, UP, RAJ FOR NEXT TWO DAYS: IMD

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Wednesday said that the Cold Day to 'severe' Cold Day conditions are likely to continue over some parts of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan during the next two days and will decrease thereafter.

The weather forecast agency further said that dense to very dense fog is likely to continue over some parts of plains of Northwest and East India during the next two days and gradually decrease thereafter.

The IMD said the 'minimum temperatures' are in the range of 6-9 degree Celsius in most parts of Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, west Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, and are in the range of 10-12 degree Celsius in East Uttar Pradesh, north Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Sikim.

"These are above normal by 2-4 degree Celsius over many parts of Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Gujarat," said the IMD.

The IMD further predicted that dense to very dense fog conditions are very likely to prevail for a few hours in the morning in some parts over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Bihar on Thursday and Friday, and dense fog in isolated pockets for subsequent three



days. "Dense to very dense fog conditions are also very likely to prevail for a few hours in the morning in isolated pockets over Rajasthan on Thursday and Friday and dense fog in isolated pockets for subsequent two days. Dense to very dense fog conditions are also very likely to prevail for a few hours in the

morning in isolated pockets over West Uttar Pradesh on Thursday and dense fog in isolated pockets on Friday," said the IMD.

The IMD also predicted that the Cold Day to Severe Cold Day conditions are very likely to continue in some parts over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and Rajasthan on Wednesday and Thursday, and in isolated pockets on Friday.

"Cold Day conditions are very likely to continue in isolated pockets over West Uttar Pradesh on Wednesday and Thursday, and over east Uttar Pradesh Thursday while 'Cold Wave' conditions are very likely in isolated pockets over east Rajasthan on Thursday and Friday," said the IMD.

The IMD also predicted light to moderate rainfall at some places very likely over south Tamil Nadu, south Kerala and Lakshadweep during the next 3-4 days with isolated heavy rainfall over Lakshadweep during Wednesday and Thursday.

The IMD said that a rise by 2-3 degree Celsius in minimum temperatures is likely over many parts of Central and East India during the next three days and no significant change thereafter. "There is no significant change in minimum temperatures likely over the rest of parts of north India during the next five days," the IMD added.

NIA raids 31 places in Rajasthan, Haryana in Gogamedi murder case

Jaipur | Agencies

National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Wednesday raided 31 places in Rajasthan and Haryana regarding the Sukhdev Singh Gogamedi murder case.

Raids were also conducted at the houses of the accused and several other suspects.

NIA said that they have seized a large number of pistols, ammunition, mobile phones, and digital devices including SIM cards and DVRs as well as incriminating documents related to financial transactions.

NIA said that the raids were conducted after receiving inputs from shooters Rohit Rathod and Nitin Fauji.

The central agency said that prime suspect, Ashok Kumar Meghwal, was also arrested from his residence in Jherli village (Jhunjhunu).

"Eight weapons were seized from the accused. The interrogation of the accused revealed his role in the case and also revealed his connection with gangster Rohit Godara, who had allegedly inspired the two shooters to kill Sri Rashtriya Rajput Karni Sena president Gogamedi," NIA said.

The agency said that a total of nine accused have been arrested so far in the case.

It said that the NIA team along with Makrana police went to Justri village and searched the



house of shooter Rohit Rathod -- accused of Gogamedi's murder -- and sealed the house.

Rohit and his family have been living in Jaipur for the last 30 years. Recently his house was raised to the ground by a bulldozer.

NIA said that raids were conducted in three districts of Rajasthan and at least 31 places were raided, including Haryana. In Jaipur, the NIA also interrogated the mother and sister of shooter Rohit Rathod.

In Tonk, NIA interrogated family members of another accused Pooja Saini.

NIA said that it has also interrogated all seven accused in the case lodged in Ajmer jail.

Lord Ram does not need temples or castles: Tejashwi Yadav

Patna | Agencies

Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav on Wednesday said that Lord Ram does not need temples or castles.

"Whatever the BJP leaders are saying is just rubbish," the Deputy Chief Minister said.

During his address in Jhunjharpur in Madhubani district, the Deputy Chief Minister brought up the issue of Ram Temple while attacking the BJP. "PM Modi is talking about Ram temple in Ayodhya. I want to ask people does Lord Ram need Modi. If Lord Ram wants, he can easily make a temple for himself anywhere he wants. However, Modi is showing like he has given a house to Lord Ram," the Deputy Chief Minister said. He



said that there are some people who are projecting Modi like Lord Ram. "I want to ask these people if they become sick, will they go to a temple or hospital. Lord Ram wants prosperity for every section of society and prosperity will come through good health, education, jobs, and removing

poverty," the Deputy Chief Minister said. However he clarified that he has no objection over Lord Ram temple in Ayodhya. "My mother is doing Chhath Puja for a long time. We also have a temple at our home where Puja takes place every day," the Deputy Chief Minister said.

TWO GET DEATH SENTENCE IN 2005 SHRAMJEEVI TRAIN BLAST

Jaunpur (UP) | Agencies

The court of Additional District Judge (I) Rajesh Rai has awarded the death sentence to two accused convicted in the Shramjeevi Express terror blast case. The 2005 train blast using an RDX bomb had left 14 people dead and 61 injured.

Two operatives of the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami, Hilaluddin and Nafikul Biswas were convicted by the court on December 22 and the quantum of punishment was announced on Wednesday.

While Hilaluddin, a resident of Bangladesh has been accused of planting a bomb on the train, Nafikul Biswas who is a resident of West Bengal was accused of helping him.

Two others in the Shramjeevi train blast case were given death sentences in 2016.

The RDX bomb had been kept in the general coach. The two convicts are at present lodged in Hyderabad jail in another case. The duo's final hearings



dragged on for six years due to several adjournments.

Eyewitnesses had reported that two young men boarded the train with a white suitcase. Shortly afterwards both had jumped out of the moving train and fled, leaving the suitcase in the train.

A few minutes later, the explosion shook the train and killed 14 people.

In all, six people, all Bangladeshi nationals, were accused in the case.

Roni Alamgir and Obaidur Rahman, convicted in 2016 for assembling the bomb, have appealed their death sentences in the Allahabad HC.

Two others, Ghulam Razdani a.k.a. Yahya and Sayeed, died during the pendency of the case.

District government counsel Virendra Pratap Maurya submitted before the court and prayed to the court for maximum possible punishment. After hearing the arguments on both sides, the court had fixed January 3 as the date for pronouncing quantum of punishment.

Leopard injures one in Gurugram village, captured

Gurugram | Agencies

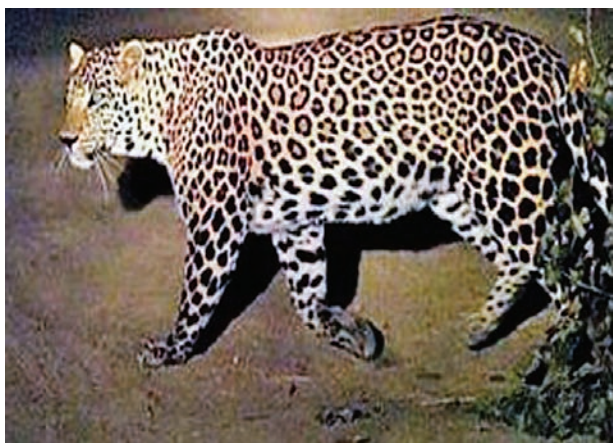
A leopard, which strayed into the residential area in Narsinghpur village in Gurugram on Wednesday and injured a person, was captured after several hours of long effort by forest department.

Gurugram forest department officials said they captured the leopard after tranquillising it with the help of the local police.

The officials said the leopard attacked one person who ran after seeing the animal. The injured has been administered first aid.

In the viral video, the leopard can be seen jumping onto someone recording its movement from behind a glass panel of a door in a multi-story house.

After the reports of leopard entering the village was received



by forest department, a team reached the Narsinghpur village and captured the animal.

The officials said the big cat was first spotted around 5 a.m. by a resident who immediately alerted others and later informa-

tion was given to the forest and the police department.

"The leopard will be soon released in the forest area," Rajesh Chahal, a forest department officer, told reporter.

OIL MINISTER RULES OUT CUT IN FUEL PRICES

New Delhi | Agencies

Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Hardeep Singh Puri said on Wednesday that there was no proposal to cut petrol and diesel prices at present as there was "high volatility" in global crude oil prices.

The minister dismissed media reports about a fuel price cut as 'speculative', saying the government's top priority is energy availability.

He also said that the oil marketing companies -- Indian Oil, BPCL and HPCL, incurred heavy losses when the prices of crude oil had skyrocketed recently.

There are no discussions with oil marketing companies on fuel price cuts and they want a stable and positive forward-looking situation in terms of pricing, the minister added. The minister pointed out that India was the only country where fuel prices had come down in recent months. "In the South Asian countries, the prices of petrol and diesel increased by around 40-80 per cent. If you look at the Western industrialized world, the prices have gone up there, but in India prices have come down," Puri said.

"We are able to do it because of far-sighted and visionary leadership. Central excise duty reduction was done on two occasions, November 2021, and May 2022 and we carried that into 2023," he added.



PM Modi holds roadshow in Kerala's Thrissur

Kochi | Agencies

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday held a roadshow in Thrissur city of Kerala and was greeted by a sea of people.

Modi held the roadshow in a special vehicle which was brought from his home-state of Gujarat. State BJP president K. Surendran, actor Suresh Gopi and Kerala BJP Mahila Morcha leader Nivedita accompanied Modi in the vehicle. Modi was seen waving to the crowd lined up from the helipad to the public meeting venue. He will also address a women's rally. Actress Sobhana, P.T. Usha, Minnu Mani were also on the stage with the Prime Minister.

State's leading personality the 83-year-old Mariakutty --



who took to the streets with a begging bowl after the Pinarayi Vijayan government failed to pay the social welfare pension on time -- was also seen on the stage with the Prime Minister.

All Malayalam television channels -- barring People TV (backed by the CPI-M) and Jaihind (backed by the Congress) -- showed the road show live.

SUV attempts to hit people on Delhi road after dispute over Rs 5



Team Absolute | New Delhi

A video has emerged on social media showing an SUV trying to run over a group of people in Delhi, and as per the police the dispute escalated over the non-payment of Rs 5.

In the video, the SUV can be seen swerving to the side of a road near Delhi's Signature Bridge in an apparent attempt to hit the people. According to police, the

complainant, Ram Chand (a Pakistani Hindu), living in a refugee camp near Signature bridge and running a small eatery near the bridge, had alleged that on Tuesday at around 8:30 a.m., two boys came in the car and asked for two glasses of water.

"He gave it to them and asked for Rs five. They refused to pay, which led to an altercation and assault," said a senior police official. Chand was taken to the Jag

Pravesh Chandra Hospital, where the doctor examined him but found no visible injuries. "A case of criminal assault and rash driving was registered against the accused persons on his complaint. The car is registered in the name of Mohd Habib, a resident of Bhajanpura," said the official.

The official further said that the vehicle, a Mahindra NuvoSport SUV and the occupants were being traced.

Arrested man not mentioned as Kar Sevak in FIR, has 16 cases against him: K'taka Home Min

Bengaluru | Agencies

Karnataka Home Minister Dr G Parameshwara reacting to the protest launched by the BJP condemning the arrest of an alleged Kar Sevak stated that the man was not a Kar Sevak and has 16 police cases against him.

Speaking to reporters, Home Minister Parameshwara stated that the man, Srikanth Poojari, is not mentioned as a Kar Sevak in the FIR and other documents.

The Home Minister said, "He is in the position of an accused and has 16 cases against him. He has come out with a few cases among them. The BJP is a party that is supporting a person who is not abiding by the law and has 16 cases against him. I don't know what has happened to the BJP."

"Poojari's case came up while digging into older cases as orders were given to clear them. It is natural that a question is raised why after 31 years action is being taken. But, the cases could have been withdrawn during the four-year rule of the BJP Government or when former Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa was in power. They have also not done anything. The question is who should be blamed."

Reacting to the challenge by former BJP minister V Sunil Kumar that he would give the list of Kar Sevaks and if the Congress Government had the capacity, let them make arrests, Parameshwara said, "There are no individuals. This is a government elected by the people. The strength, capacity and power have been given by the people. The govern-



ment will function as per the law."

The Hubballi police arrested Poojari in connection with an alleged case of torching of a shop on December 5, 1992, in Hubballi. Poojari is the third accused in the case and the police are looking for other eight accused in connection with the case.

Poojari has been sent to judicial custody and Hubballi police has prepared a list of 300 people

wanted in the communal clashes that took place between 1992 and 1996.

Police sources explained that most of the accused are in their early and late 70s now and many of them have gone from the city.

The arrest of Poojari has stirred a huge controversy in the state, bringing the Government and Opposition in confrontation mode.



BMC RAISED JUST 20 PER CENT PROPERTY TAX IN 2023

Team Absolute | Mumbai

While the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's (BMC) revenue model has taken a hit with the civic body being unable to hike property tax for the last four years, the situation has become worse due to the 10-month delay in issuing bills this year. The delay has resulted in a loss worth crores of rupees which the BMC earns as interest while only 20 per cent of the bill amount was collected till December 31 as compared to the same period last year.

The corporation usually starts issuing property tax bills in April-the first month of the financial year-while it starts action against the defaulters in January. Last year (2022-23), the BMC was able to collect Rs 3,175 crore till December 31 despite a few months delay in issuing the bills. This year only Rs 638 crore was added to the BMC kitty during the same period. The corporation hasn't handed over tax bills till now and the amount collected is mostly pending tax or disputed tax amounts from earlier years. Now, with the end of the financial year just months away, it will be extremely difficult for the civic body to collect the target amount of Rs 6,000 crore.

In the last four years, the BMC missed the first month of collection in an attempt to increase the



property tax amount later in the year. But in general, the bills were issued within the first half (six months) of financial years. Taxpayers settle the first

bill (April 1 to September 30) by September and the remaining six-month bill (October 1 to March 31) by March. This year, the civic body waited for nine months to issue bills. The BMC finally started uploading bills after December 25 with a 15-20 per cent higher amount with a footnote of it being a security amount. Civic officials also started sending SMSs to citizens to collect the physical bill copies from their respective wards.

However, after citizens started objecting to the bills and news about the same was published, the BMC reversed the decision and withdrew the online bills. According to a statement of S Chahal, administrator of the BMC, the civic body will send physical copies of the bills, with the exact amount like the last year, without any hike. Now the BMC is in the process of printing the new bills. The process will take at least another month to print the bills and then distribute them. In other words, the BMC can collect the tax only in February and will have only two months for collection.

Mahesh Patil, assistant municipal commissioner of the assessment and collection department, did not respond to messages and calls. Another civic official said, "Though the amount this year is comparatively less than the last year, once we start issuing bills, the amount will increase sharply as citizens have been waiting to clear their bills."

Bhima Koregaon Elgar Parishad case: SC notice to NIA, Maha Govt on bail plea by DU Prof

Team Absolute | New Delhi/Mumbai

The Supreme Court on Wednesday issued a notice to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) and Maharashtra Government on a plea filed by Delhi University's Professor Hany Babu against an order of the Bombay High Court denying him bail in connection with the Bhima Koregaon Elgar Parishad case.

A Bench of Justices Aniruddha Bose and Sanjay Karol of the apex court sought a response from the state government and the central anti-terror agency within a period of three weeks.

In September 2022, a Bench of Justices Nitin Jamdar and NR Borkar of the Bombay High Court refused to interfere with the judgment of Greater Mumbai's Special Court rejecting the bail application filed by Babu - an Associate Professor in the Department of English at Delhi University and a resident of Gautam Buddha Nagar in Uttar Pradesh.

The High Court said, "We find that there are reasonable grounds for believing that the accusations of the NIA against the Appellant having conspired, attempted, advocated and abetted the commission of a terrorist act/s and the act/s of preparatory to the commission of a terrorist act, are prima facie true."

The case pertains to organisation of the Elgar Parishad at Pune, Maharashtra on December 12, 2017 which promoted enmity between various caste groups and led to violence resulting in loss of life and property and state-wide agitation in Maharashtra. In its investigation, the NIA revealed that



Babu was allegedly in contact with Paikhomba Meitei, Secretary Information and Publicity, Military Affairs, Kangleipak Communist Party (MC), an organisation banned under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and was propagating Maoist activities and Maoist ideology and was a co-conspirator with other accused.

Pune heist caught on camera: thief steals gold worth Rs 3 crore

Team Absolute | Pune

Jewellery worth over Rs 3 crore was stolen from a showroom in Pune. The entire episode has been captured on a CCTV camera inside the Jewellery showroom located in Raviwar Peth area.

The incident happened on December 31 last year. According to police, the showroom owner has, in his complaint, stated that around 5 kg gold worth over Rs 3 crore has been stolen.

The owner has also stated that the thief, who broke into the showroom, has stolen Rs 10 lakh cash from the counter. In the CCTV footage, the thief wearing a white hoodie can be seen opening the locker, where the gold was kept. He then puts the stolen gold in a white backpack that he was carrying. Police said



that the thief has cleaned up the entire locker that was filled with gold. Per the initial police investigation, an employee of the showroom may be involved in the theft as there was no sign of forced entry into the showroom.

Police have registered a case in this regard and started investigation. A team of officers has also been formed

to track and arrest the thief.

"The theft took place in the Raviwar Peth area on December 31. There was no forced entry; instead, it seems an unknown person made a duplicate key to access the shop," news agency ANI said quoting Senior Police Inspector Dada Chuddpa.

BOLLYWOOD ACTOR FALLS PREY TO 'DRUGS IN PACKAGE' SCAM, LOSES RS 5.79 LAKH

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood actor Anjali Patil was duped of Rs 5.79 lakh by a cyber fraud posing as a Mumbai Police officer, a report said. The incident took place last week when Patil received a call from an individual claiming to be Deepak Sharma, an employee of FedEx Courier Company.

Sharma reportedly informed the actor that a parcel registered in her name, bound for Taiwan, had been intercepted by customs authorities who allegedly discovered drugs inside. The caller also claimed that Patil's Aadhaar card was found within the parcel, urging her to contact the Mumbai cyber police to prevent any potential misuse of her personal information.

Subsequently, Anjali received a Skype call from an individual identifying themselves as Mr Banerjee from the Mumbai cyber police. Banerjee said that Patil's Aadhaar card had been linked to three bank accounts involved in a money laundering case. To verify her innocence, Banerjee demanded a processing fee of Rs 96,525.



As the scam unfolded, the fraudulent officer escalated the situation by

alleging the involvement of bank officials in the money laundering

scheme. To close the case and avoid potential legal consequences, Ms Patil was coerced into transferring an additional Rs 4,83,291 to a Punjab National Bank account controlled by the fraud.

Days later, Patil confided in her landlord about the incident, only to realise that she had fallen victim to a well-orchestrated cyber scam. The actor reported the incident to the DN Nagar Police, who promptly registered a case and initiated an investigation into the matter.

Patil is best known for her roles in films like Finding Fanny (2014), Newton (2017), and Kaun Pravin Tambe? (2022).

The courier company FedEx in a statement said they never request personal information through unsolicited phone calls, mail, or email for goods being shipped.

"If any individual receives any suspicious phone calls or messages, they are advised not to provide their personal information. Instead, they should immediately contact the local law enforcement authorities within the vicinity or report to the cyber-crime department of the government of India," FedEx said.

TIMINGS OF SOME WESTERN RAILWAY SERVICES TO BE CHANGED



Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Western Railway on Wednesday said that the timings of some Mumbai local train suburban services will be changed w.e.f. 04.01.2024. The timing have been altered by few minutes.

"The passengers are requested to

take note of the above changes," the Western Railway said.

Meanwhile, the Western Railway on Wednesday said that some trains from Mumbai will be affected this week on the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday i.e. 03rd and 04th January, 2024 due to the ongoing Gokhale bridge construction

in Andheri area of the city.

In an official statement, the Western Railway said that in connection with the work of construction of Gokhale Rail Over Bridge (ROB), a major traffic and power block will be taken from 01.40 hrs to 04.40 hrs on up and down harbour lines, slow lines and fast lines as well as 5th and 6th lines on the intervening night of Wednesday/Thursday i.e. 03rd/04th

January, 2024.

The Western Railway said that due to the block some Western Railway's Mumbai trains will be cancelled and regulated. In an another statement, the Western Railway said that for the convenience of passengers and with a view to meet the travel demand, Western Railway has extended the trips of 03 pairs of Special Trains on Special Fare.

According to a press release issued by Sumit Thakur - Chief Public Relations Officer, the trains of which the timings have been changed are as under:-

1. Train No. 92042 Virar - Churchgate Local departing from Virar at 08.01 hrs. will now depart from Virar at 07.55 hrs.
2. Train No. 94016 Virar - Churchgate AC Local departing from Virar at 07.56 hrs. will now depart from Virar at 07.59 hrs.
3. Train No. 92027 Churchgate - Virar Local departing from Churchgate at 06.40 hrs will now depart from Churchgate at 06.32 hrs.
4. Train No. 92067 Churchgate - Borivali Local departing from Churchgate at 09.27 hrs. will now depart from Churchgate at 09.19 hrs.
5. Train No. 94019 Churchgate - Virar AC Local departing from Churchgate at 09.19 hrs. will now depart from Churchgate at 09.23 hrs.
6. Train No. 94021 Churchgate - Borivali AC Local departing from Churchgate at 09.24 hrs. will now depart from Churchgate at 09.27 hrs.

IAS officer, his brother booked for thrashing two telecom service provider employees in Navi Mumbai

Team Absolute | Navi Mumbai

An IAS officer and his brother was booked by the police for allegedly thrashing two telecom service provider employees in Navi Mumbai at the latter's residence in Maharashtra's Navi Mumbai over an Internet router issue, the police said on Wednesday.

Four security guards of the residential society also allegedly joined the brother duo in attacking the two men with pipe and wooden sticks on December 30 evening, an official said quoting the FIR.

The IAS officer currently posted as Maharashtra water supply and sanitation department was among those booked by the police including four security guards of his building.

"Two men who work for the telecom company's internet installation service had visited the residence of the IAS officer to fix an internet router issue. An argument broke out between them who claimed they are not getting the expected Internet range in the bedroom," the official said quoting the FIR lodged by the victim, who works as an engineer for



the telecom company.

He stated that he was attacked by the IAS officer and his brother who were joined by four security guards of the building with a pipe and wooden sticks.

They also thrashed his colleague who works in the sales team, the official said.

The incident was captured on CCTV cameras installed on the premises of the building, he added.

Pune Police arrest serial molester based on partial vehicle registration number seen in CCTV

Team Absolute | Pune

Pune Police arrested a serial molester accused of harassing a minor in the city's Kondhwa area, an official said. Maruti Nanaware, a 45-year-old serial molester, was arrested after officials discovered a critical clue in CCTV footage.

Nanaware was reportedly identified based on a partial vehicle registration number seen in the tape. He has been previously booked for many cases of molestation and kidnapping; he has also been convicted for 10 years in a 2013 rape case. Pune police arrested Nanaware after he recently molested an eight-year-old girl. The cops arrested the accused with only a



part of a vehicle's registration number visible in one CCTV clip. Reportedly, the authori-

ties combed through over 100 tapes to arrest the serial molester.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Shiv Sena (UBT)'s Aaditya Thackeray has claimed that a builder close to the state government is forcing the management of Mahalaxmi Racecourse to let him develop part of its land. On the other hand, a proposal by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) asking for the state-owned racecourse land to develop a theme park has been pending with the government for 10 years.

Aaditya claimed in a post on X (formerly Twitter) that a builder close to the current state government threatened the management of Royal Western India Turf Club (RWITC) to sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with him and allow him to develop a hotel and commercial space on the racecourse land. "Earlier, the state government



wanted to shift the racecourse to Mulund to benefit a builder and now

a builder himself is leading the talks. I wonder if there is any reason for any

of us to believe that this illegal regime is for the common people," Aaditya said in his post. "Imagine what will happen to our Mumbai, when these builders will sell our 226-acre open space to other builders. We as Mumbaikars must stand up to these people who want to loot our city," Aaditya's post read.

The BMC leased the racecourse plot to the RWITC in 1914 for 80 years. After the lease ended in 1994, the lease was renewed until 2013. Then BMC's general body decided to end the arrangement with the turf club and develop a theme park on the plot. Accordingly, it sent a proposal to the state government asking for the racecourse land. The total area of the racecourse is 8.55 lakh square metres, out of which 5.96 lakh square metres belong to the state government and the remaining 2.59 lakh square metres belong to the BMC.



EDITOR'S SPECS

Nervousness in markets

In some areas, valuations seem stretched, as seen in the surge of micro-cap stocks and the enthusiasm for new issues, including in the SME sector, Jaykrishna Gandhi, Head of Business Development, Institutional Equities at Emkay Global Financial Services, said on Wednesday. The Nifty trailing PE stands at 23.4x, indicating a balance between not being overly expensive and not particularly cheap, especially considering the forecast 12-14 per cent earnings CAGR over the next two years, he said. The Indian stock market ended 2023 close to its highest levels ever. As the New Year begins, there's been some nervousness, with a slight correction of 1-2 per cent from Monday's peak. On Wednesday, Sensex slipped 536 Points to 71,356.6, while Nifty was down 148 points at 21,517.35. This week, various macroeconomic data from both India and globally will likely keep the markets volatile. A key event to watch out for is the release of the US Federal Reserve's minutes, which may hint at the timing of potential rate cuts. This week, the energy and metals sectors have been prominent in market news, but no specific sector has significantly outperformed the overall market. Looking ahead, increased volatility might become more common as the election season nears. However, factors like stable inflation and strong credit/GDP growth are positive signs for the market's health, Gandhi said. Global stock markets extended a New Year slide on Wednesday, as market optimism about early US interest rate cuts ebbed and the latest escalation of hostilities in the Middle East weighed on sentiments. Caution was dominating the markets ahead of the release of minutes from the US Federal Reserve's December meeting. Meanwhile, India's manufacturing sector activity expanded in December, although the HSBC Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) came in at an 18-month low of 54.9, data released on Wednesday showed.

2024: GLOBAL ELECTION FEST

Asad Mirza

2024 will be a historic election year, when democracy will undergo a major test with elections in approximately 70 countries including the US, India, Mexico and South Africa. More than 3.7 billion voters will head to the polls, and their results may have global impact and ramifications.

The current year will be the greatest year for democracy and democratic institutions worldwide.

The greatest power in the world (the US), the most-populous country (India), the biggest trading bloc (the European Union), the largest Muslim country (Indonesia), the largest Spanish-speaking country (Mexico) and the territory that is the most contentious one between the two superpowers of this century (Taiwan), all will hold elections in 2024.

A total of more than 3.7 billion inhabitants around 70 countries -- or almost half of the global population -- will head to cast their votes in either presidential or legislative elections in the coming year.

The verdict of these polls may have profound consequences on the lives of people and on a world that is going through a turbulent time, with on-going brutal wars in Ukraine and Gaza, as the West seems falling into decline, with no clear alternative.

On a geopolitical level, this electoral jamboree might have a major impact. Major disruptive results include the return of Donald Trump to the White House, a third consecutive victory in Taiwan by candidates that Beijing considers hostile, or a consolidation of the extreme right in the European Union, all of which could lead to far-reaching consequences.

In addition to these, other elections to watch out for include the potential presidential elections in Venezuela to those in Ukraine, from Indonesia to South Africa and Mexico, besides the UK -- where a substantial change of course would not be expected regardless of the outcome.

Test for Democracy

However, what might be the worrisome aspect of these elections is the litmus test which democracy will undergo. Surveys by different international think tanks and institutes indicate dissatisfaction with the present-day working of democratic institutions -- a sentiment common throughout the nations of the west -- meaning the US and Europe -- even though they see themselves as democracy's home ground. A recent Ipsos opinion poll in western countries found a widespread belief that current democratic systems favour the rich and powerful and ignore everyone else.

Freedom House, the independent, US-based watchdog concluded in its 2023 report that the Global Freedom Index declined for the 17th consecutive year. The principle of free speech, essential to a fully functioning democracy, is also under attack. Paradoxically, this unprecedented vote-fest comes at a moment when classic forms of liberal democracy are under existential attack from authoritarians and dictators such as China's Xi Jinping and Russia's Vladimir Putin, far-right nationalist-populist parties such as in Austria, Hungary and Scandinavia, and military coup plotters and Islamists from Venezuela to Chad.

Yet the report said while 35 countries experienced declines in political rights and civil liberties, 34 saw overall gains. Autocrats were neither infallible nor unbeatable. The geopolitical and economic impacts of so many ballot box battles, occurring more or less at once, may combine to further destabilise an unstable world -- for good or bad.

Rise of the Far Right

The European continent will see elections in Austria, Belgium, Croatia and Finland, as well as for the European Parliament in June. The pervasive fear is that they may accelerate advances by nationalist-populist, anti-migrant, xenophobic parties of the far right, matching those seen recently in Italy, the Netherlands and Slovakia. The results will shape the new chamber, with possible new legislative majorities that will influence the leadership of the EU. One wonders how high the far-right wave may rise.

The average of polls compiled by Politico magazine indicates a rise of the two far-right blocs and a decline in support of the traditional European conservatives, social democrats, liberals and greens. Even so, the latter groups might retain a comfortable majority. The crux of the question is to see if an eventual coalition between populist and far-right groups could form an alternative majority. At the beginning of December, in the seat projection put out by Politico, the distance between extremists and moderates was only about 20 seats, out of a total of 720.

India and Its Neighbours For India, which itself will be holding the general elections, in which the incumbent Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to score a hat trick, will watch closely elections in its neighbourhood i.e. in Pakistan and Bangladesh which may have a major regional and strategic impact. Pakistan is plagued by a serious economic crisis and high political tensions, including arrests and attempted assassinations of political leaders. Following the dissolution of Parliament back in August, elections should have been held within 90 days, but have been postponed twice. They are now scheduled for

February. The country -- with some 240 million inhabitants -- has enormous strategic depth, not only due to its nuclear arsenal, but also due to its close relationship with China. The Beijing-Islamabad axis is New Delhi's biggest concern. The first election of 2024 could be one of the most contentious. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the ruling Awami League have dominated Bangladeshi politics for the past fifteen years. Over that time, they have increasingly eroded Bangladesh's democracy. As Freedom House puts it, the AL "has consolidated political power through sustained harassment of the opposition and those perceived to be allied with it, as well as of critical media and voices in civil society."

The US has been pressing Sheikh Hasina for months to hold free-and-fair elections, that pressure has yet to pay off. Major Elections At the global level the US elections and those of the EU may have a major bearing on India's foreign and defence policies, with some overlap on its internal politics, too.

The US presidential elections next November have immense disruptive potential. The possibility that Trump will be the Republican candidate and return to the White House is still not ruled out. A Trump-return to the White House would represent a major shake-up with associated risks. It would be a step towards American isolationism at a time when rival powers are questioning the world order that Washington has created. Trump would embody a break with "America first" doctrine means limiting efforts and expenses in distant horizons. It's doubtful whether he would commit to supporting Taiwan if it comes under attack, or whether he would maintain financing and security guarantees made to Ukraine and NATO. New trade wars would be likely, as would a withdrawal of commitments against climate change. In addition, the elections in 2024 will further highlight the manner in which our lives have become slaves to the social media and this will have an impact on the election processes too. As Kay Spencer, program director of elections at the Washington-based National Democratic Institute (NDI) puts it, the year 2024 is a big year for social media platforms and it will be important to monitor how they will manage all the elections that are coming up. Indeed 2024 might prove to be a year, which consolidates the liberal democratic principles and institutions, or lead to their further erosion.



international

IDF KILLS HAMAS DEPUTY LEADER IN LEBANON

Tel Aviv | Agencies

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) claimed on Tuesday that it has neutralised the deputy leader of Hamas, Saleh al-Arouri, in Lebanon.

Hamas has confirmed the assassination, though the IDF is yet to issue an official statement in this regard.

Senior official of the Hamas group, Izzat al-Rishq, said in a statement, "The cowardly assassinations carried out by the Zionist occupation against the leaders and symbols of our Palestinian people inside and outside Palestine will not succeed in breaking the will and steadfastness of our people or in undermining the continuation of their resistance."

He claimed that the strike "proves once again the abject failure of the enemy to achieve any of its aggressive goals in the Gaza Strip".

While Israel has not officially issued a statement on the killing, Israeli politician and former diplomat Danny Danon in a social media post praised Israeli security forces for the killing of Saleh al-Arouri outside of Beirut.



It may be noted that top Israel leaders, including Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, have time and again said that Israel will kill all the top leaders of Hamas.

Meanwhile, Hamas has reportedly

announced a freeze on ceasefire negotiations with Israel after the faction's deputy chief, Saleh al-Arouri, was killed on Tuesday evening in an Israeli attack in Lebanon.

"We have informed the brothers in

Qatar and Egypt of the freezing of negotiations," a Palestinian source told Xinhua news agency on condition of anonymity. Qatar and Egypt have been mediating a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas.

The source added that Hamas, at war with Israel, rejected any talks about reaching a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip amid escalated Israeli aggression and "assassination schemes" against Palestinian leaders.

Earlier, a Hamas source told Xinhua that several aides of al-Arouri, deputy head of the Hamas politburo, were also killed in the Israeli attack targeting a Hamas office in the southern suburb of the Lebanese capital of Beirut.

In a statement, Hamas confirmed that seven of its members were slain in the Israeli attack, slamming it as a "barbaric and heinous" terrorist act, a violation of Lebanon's sovereignty, and an expansion of Israeli aggression against Palestine and its people.

Lebanese armed group Hezbollah said the attack was a serious assault on the Lebanese people, security, and sovereignty.

New IRCC measures to verify foreign students' letters of acceptance: Report

Toronto | Agencies

In one of its first measures to bolster international student programme and prevent abuse, Canadian immigration has launched an online portal to verify letters of acceptance (LOAs) that students submit in support of their visa application.

An LOA, submitted by the student to the Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), is an official confirmation that a student has received admission into a Designated Learning Institution (DLI) -- the only schools in Canada authorised to accept international students.

Obtaining an LOA from a DLI, for which the portal has been launched, is the first step in the application for a Canadian study permit.

"We've developed a solution for designated learning institutions (DLIs) to make sure



the letters of acceptance that students submit are genuine," the IRCC said in a statement.

"The goal is to protect vulnerable students and preserve the integrity of the International Student Program," it said.

Under this new system, the DLIs will now be required to verify the LOAs students submit via the online portal, which only their representative(s) to the IRCC will have access to, the CIC news website reported.

There is also a time frame to verify letters of acceptance, up to 10 calendar days, past which the access will be denied.

So, if a DLI fails to validate the LOA within that time frame, or if they validate the letter as fake, the student visa application will be cancelled and returned to the applicant.

In addition to the application, the students will also be returned any fees that they may have paid as processing costs, the CIC report said.

2023 warmest year of all time for S. Korea

Seoul | Agencies

The year 2023 was the warmest of all time for South Korea as global warming heated up the Korean Peninsula to reach the average temperature of 13.7 degrees Celsius last year, the state weather agency said on Wednesday.



higher than average years all throughout January-November, and six months ranked within the top 10 temperatures last year.

Last month, the weather stayed warm by and large, excluding when a cold snap gripped the country for about a week in mid-December, and the average temperature nationwide recorded below-freezing temperatures from December 16 to 25.

Many parts of the region recorded the highest temperature of the month, with some going above 20 degrees in the daytime on December 8.

JAPAN BEGINS PROBE INTO TOKYO AIRPORT COLLISION

Tokyo | Agencies

Japanese transportation authorities on Wednesday started a probe into the cause of a collision between a Coast Guard aircraft and a Japan Airlines (JAL) passenger plane at Tokyo's Haneda Airport the previous day, which led to over 300 flight cancellations.

The Japan Transport Safety Board, the government-affiliated agency in charge of probing serious accidents involving airplanes, trains and ships, examined the aircraft wreckage during the day while police also inspected the accident site, reports Xinhua news agency.

The safety board reported that it had retrieved the flight and voice recorders of the Coast Guard aircraft and was still searching for those of the JAL plane, which had flown from New Chitose Airport in Hokkaido prefecture, according to local media outlets.

A Haneda air traffic con-



troller had permitted the passenger plane to land on a runway before the crash took place, and had ordered the coast guard aircraft to "hold short of the runway," national broadcaster NHK reported, citing sources with Japan's transport ministry. The plane's crew members had told the company that they

proceeded with the landing after confirming with air traffic control and that there were no abnormalities with the aircraft during the flight, national news agency Kyodo quoted JAL as saying on Wednesday.

The crash forced the airport to shut down all runways for several hours on Tuesday evening, leading to cancella-

tions of 226 flights to and from Haneda, affecting over 40,000 passengers.

Despite the reopening of three runways on Wednesday, about 100 flights are still expected to be scrubbed on Wednesday, disrupting the travel plans of 19,000 passengers.

At around 6 p.m. on Tuesday, JAL Flight 516, an Airbus A-350, was landing on Haneda's C-runway when the Coast Guard flight MA-722, a Bombardier Dash-8, collided with it, with both aircraft catching fire.

Television footage on Tuesday showed a large burst of fire erupting from the side of the JAL plane as it taxied on a runway.

The area around the wing then caught fire. The footage seen an hour later showed the blaze engulfed the aircraft.

Five of the six crew members aboard the MA-722 were confirmed dead, while the captain who managed to escape earlier was severely injured.

Alleged Israeli strike on Red Crescent hospital in Gaza kills 5



Tel Aviv | Agencies

At least five people, including a five-day-old infant, were killed in an alleged Israeli strike that hit a hospital within the premises of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) in southern Gaza's Khan Younis city.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Al Amal hospital was struck in the attack on Tuesday. A training centre run by the PRCS within the hospital complex was also severely damaged, it said.

Condemning the strike,

Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that officials from OCHA and WHO "undertook a mission to the facilities, where they witnessed extensive damage and displacement of civilians".

"The attacks, according to the PRCS, killed at least five civilians, including a 5-day old infant. 14,000 people were sheltering at the hospital in the besieged southern Gaza city of Khan Younis. Many of them have now left, and those remaining are extremely fearful for their safety and planning to leave a place they had turned to for refuge and protection.



'AUKAAT' REMARK TO TRUCK DRIVER EARNS IAS OFFICER TRANSFER WITHIN 24 HOURS

Team Absolute | Bhopal

An IAS officer's insulting remark "kya aukaat hai tumhari (what is your worth)" to a protesting truck driver wasn't received well by Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and the officer has been issued a transfer order with immediate effect.

Kishor Kanyal, a 2013-batch IAS officer, who was posted as the Shajapur District Collector, lost his cool during a meeting with protesting truck drivers on Tuesday and made the disparaging remark to one of the truckers.

A video of that incident surfaced on social media, wherein Kanyal was heard saying, "Hamari koi aukaat nahi hai, tumhari aukat kya hai?"

The truck driver, who argued back saying, "Hamari koi aukaat nahi hai, isi liye to lad rahe hain (we are fighting for our worth)," was thrown out of the meeting.



On Wednesday, Madhya Pradesh Chief Secretary Veera Rana issued a transfer order to Kanyal and he has

been shifted to Bhopal as Under-Secretary. The government has replaced him

with Riju Bafna, a 2014-batch IAS officer, who is posted as Collector of Narsinghpur district.

Responding to the incident, CM Yadav on Wednesday said, "Officials should respect both the work and feelings of the poor. Under the leadership of PM Modi, our government is working for the welfare of the poor. I am also from a working class family. This type of behaviour would not be accepted." The meeting was called by the District Collector to convince the protesting truck drivers to allow the supply of essential goods in the district.

The meeting was called after Yadav instructed senior officials to ensure that public life was not affected by the protests and the three-day-long strike by the drivers over the new MV Act.

However, things returned to normal after the All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC) called off its strike after a meeting with officials in Delhi late on Tuesday night.

Namibian cheetah Aasha gives birth to three cubs at Kuno

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The new year began with good news for Kuno National Park (KNP) in Madhya Pradesh as the Namibian cheetah Aasha gave birth to three cubs on Wednesday. All three cubs are reported to be healthy.

Union Forest Minister Bhupendra Yadav shared a video on his social media account, expressing his happiness on the birth of the cubs at KNP.

He said their birth was a sign of success of India's ambitious 'Project Cheetah' introduced in MP on September 17, 2022. "Purrs in the wild! Thrilled to share that Kuno National Park has welcomed three new members. The cubs have been born to Namibian Cheetah Aasha. This is a roaring success for Project Cheetah, envisioned by PM Modi to restore ecological balance. My big congrats to all experts involved in the project, the Kuno wildlife officials, and wildlife enthusiasts across India," Yadav said.

Asha was pregnant at the time of translocation from Namibia as well but had miscarried, probably due to stress. The new cubs have pushed the total num-



ber of cheetahs at KNP to 18, further giving a boost to India's cheetah conservation project.

Five-year-old Aasha, known as 'F1' before she was renamed, had ventured out of the park a couple of times, but returned on her own.

Importantly, it is the second time cheetah cubs have been born at the park since the first batch of eight Namibian cheetahs were brought to India.

Notably, earlier in March last year, Namibian cheetah Siyava had given birth to four cubs, however, they died due to heat stroke after two months of their birth and only cub survived, who is now healthy.

Where is the real statue of Shivraj Chouhan names his house 'Mama Ka Ghar', says doors open for all

Team Absolute | Indore

Senior Congress leader and former Chief Minister Digvijay Singh has created a new controversy regarding the grand Shri Ram temple being built in Ayodhya. During his stay in Indore, he asked why there was a need to make new statues for the Ram temple being built in Ayodhya. Where is the main idol of Ramlala, why is it not being installed, whereas that was the whole controversy of Ayodhya Jannabhoomi? The government should have raised questions on this.



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader and former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan today named his house, a government bungalow in Bhopal, as "Mama Ka Ghar" and said its doors were open for everyone.

Chouhan's government accommodation is located off Link Road No. 1 in the posh 74 Bungalows locality in the state capital where he moved after vacating the chief minister's house on relinquishing the top post last month.

The four-term former chief minister, who was at the helm in Madhya Pradesh for more than 16 years, is popularly known as "mama" (maternal uncle).



On Wednesday, Chouhan, 64, shared photos of the naming of his bungalow as "Mama Ka Ghar", nearly a month after he resigned as Chief Minister following the BJP's decision

to select three-term MLA Mohan Yadav as his successor on winning the November 17 assembly polls. Sharing the pictures on his official X account, the BJP stalwart, who is

the MLA from Budhni in Sehore district, said his relationship with his "sisters, brothers, nephews and nieces" was one of love, trust and affection.

"The address has changed, but 'Mama Ka Ghar' is still mama's house. I will remain connected to you like a brother and maternal uncle. The doors of my house will always be open for you," he said.

Chouhan further added, "Whenever you miss me or need me, feel free to come home, after all this is your maternal uncle and brother's house." The house in the upscale 74 Bungalows locality was one of the two government accommodations Chouhan was possessing for the past several years.

"Sometimes one waits for Coronation, gets Exile": Shivraj Chouhan

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader and former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said sometimes one ends up in "vanvas" while waiting for "rajtilak" (coronation).

After the BJP's landslide victory in the Madhya Pradesh assembly polls held in November 2023, the party chose Mohan Yadav as the chief minister, replacing Shivraj Chouhan who served as the state's CM for four times.

Shivraj Chouhan, while addressing a gathering in Shahganj town under his Budhni assembly seat on Tuesday evening, got emotional and said he will continue to be among the people, especially his sisters.

"I will not go anywhere. I will live here and die here," Chouhan said when a couple of women sitting in the audience shouted "bhayiya (brother), don't go anywhere leaving us alone." The former chief minister



said all the works started by the previous BJP government, including the Ladli Behna Yojana (for women's welfare), housing scheme for beneficiaries of the Ladli Behna scheme, a scheme of one job in each family and promises made to farmers, will be fulfilled by the present government.

"The new government will take forward all these works. There must be some big objective somewhere, sometimes by the time 'rajtilak' takes place, one even ends up in 'vanvas' (exile). But all this happens to fulfil

some or the other objective," Chouhan told the gathering.

He said the present ruling dispensation will implement all these schemes as there is BJP's government in the state and not of the Congress.

The former chief minister also noted that children who were among the audience had come to show their love for "mama" (maternal uncle - as Chouhan is popularly referred).

Earlier, a large number of BJP workers and women welcomed Chouhan on his arrival in Shahganj. Chouhan won the election from Budhni assembly seat by a margin of more than 1.04 lakh votes over his Congress rival Vikram Mastal.

In the November 2023 state elections, the BJP bagged 163 of the 230 assembly seats, posting a resounding victory and retaining power in the central state. The opposition Congress was relegated to a distant second spot with victory in 66 assembly segments, while one seat was won by the Bharat Adivasi Party.

Life started getting back on track as soon as the truck-bus drivers' strike ended in MP

Team Absolute | Bhopal

As soon as the truck and bus drivers' strike ends, life is back on track in Madhya Pradesh. Transport services are gaining momentum again and the supply of diesel-petrol, milk and vegetables has also become normal. City buses are also gaining momentum.

Truck and bus drivers were on a nationwide strike following the Central Government's amendment to the hit and run law. The strike lasted for two days and was later called off after talks between the Central Government's Home Ministry and the All India Motor Transporters Association.

The announcement was made.

After the strike ended, life returned to normal on Wednesday. The wheels of the buses started moving, while the trucks standing on



the roads also started leaving for their respective destinations.

With the end of the strike in other parts of the state including the capital Bhopal, the transport service improved and the supply of essential goods also started.

Fruits and vegetables have started arriving in the markets, while the supply of milk has also become normal.

Due to the drivers' strike, even school buses were not able to take children to

school, but after the end of the strike, the attendance of students in schools also increased today. School buses also reached the homes of the children to pick them up.

The strike of truck and bus drivers had badly affected life for two days. Transport services were severely affected due to shortage of petrol and diesel at petrol pumps, and the supply of essential commodities was also being disrupted.

Determine the boundaries of police stations by January 15: Chief Minister Dr. Yadav

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav, while reviewing the law and order situation of Jabalpur division, said that the determination of boundaries of police stations in the districts should be completed by January 15. For this, the claims and objections will be resolved after preliminary determination of the boundaries of the police stations after discussion in the meeting of all the public representatives at the SDM level. In this way, all the processes related to boundary determination should be completed by January 15.

Chief Minister Dr. During the review of divisional level law and order in Jabalpur, Yadav said that strict action should be taken against effective and habitual goons and miscreants. It is more important to tighten the screws on them. So that the message reaches the lower level that no one involved in criminal activities will be spared by the administration.

The Chief Minister said that strict action should be taken against habitual criminals. This is also the purpose of laws and rules. The Chief Minister also said that there should be a strict ban on the sale of meat and fish in the open. This business should not be done in the open; till the permanent construction is done, a market with shed should be built and adequate space should be provided to its vendors.

The Chief Minister said that the district jail and the police force should jointly make a plan considering the human aspects of the



prisoners who have completed their sentence in jails. He gave instructions to work towards building open jails in the districts. The Chief Minister said that there should be a police band in every district. So that the government band can be used in the programs organized on national festivals, in the districts where there is no band team, a police band team should be formed by training the soldiers of SAF companies and newly recruited police forces. Apart from this, regarding the learning classes started by the police in the districts earlier, Chief Minister Dr. Yadav directed that in this way, those who do better work in enhancing service and reputation will be honored and rewarded.

Regarding the recent promotions in the police department, the Chief Minister said that the eligible and deserving promoted police personnel who were left out of getting promotion will also be promoted.

Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra Ensures Every Eligible Individual Reaps Schemes Benefits: Governor Patel

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra is ongoing in Madhya Pradesh since 16th December. The main objective of Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra is to extend the benefits of government schemes to those needy and eligible citizens who were left out of the benefits of government schemes due to some reason. It involves disseminating information about schemes through LED-equipped IEC vans, reaching door-to-door in rural areas alongwith distributing benefits. Governor Mangubhai Patel expressed these views in the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra programme organised at Gram Panchayat Diwananj of Raisen district.

Addressing the villagers, he said that scheme catering to diverse segments of of the society are being implemented by central and state governments. Earlier, citizens had to go to offices to avail the benefits of the schemes. But now through this Sankalp Yatra, the officers themselves are reaching out to the citizens and receiving applications. So far, this Viksit Yatra has covered 252 Gram Panchayats in Raisen district and the beneficiaries have also been given the



benefits of the schemes as per their eligibility.

Governor Patel said that due to lack of information, citizens of remote areas are not able to get the benefits of the schemes. In this yatra, through publicity mediums, information about welfare schemes run by the government is reaching far-flung eligible and needy citizens. Efforts are being made to bring happiness and prosperity in their lives through

schemes. Citizens should join the mainstream of development by availing benefits as per their eligibility. Everyone's progress will ensure the economic development of the country thus realising the dream of developed India.

Governor Shri Patel said that many schemes like Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan, Pradhan Mantri Awas, Ayushman Bharat, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala are innovative initiatives of

Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The benefits of Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi, Suraksha Bima, Jeevan Jyoti and Atal Pension Schemes are being extended to the eligible people simultaneously women of self-help groups are becoming self-reliant. Significant efforts have been undertaken by the government to promote women's empowerment which are yielding positive results. Empowered by the scheme women are not only becoming self-reliant but are also playing pivotal role in the family's progress.

Referring to the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, he said that women have benefited a lot from this scheme. Earlier, they used to cook on traditional stove and smoke coming out of it was very harmful for their health. Under Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, free gas stove and connection is being provided to them. Under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, pucca houses are being given to the poor. MP Ramakant Bhargava also addressed the programme. Vote of thanks was expressed by District Panchayat President Yashwant Meena. Vice President of Sanchi District Panchayat, Vajjanti Gangaram Chouksey was also present.



Taylor Swift breaks Elvis Presley's record

Became solo artiste with most weeks at top spot on album chart

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer-songwriter Taylor Swift has broken Elvis Presley's long standing record for the most weeks spent atop the Billboard 200 album chart by a solo artiste. She set a new mark of 68 total weeks, as '1989 (Taylor's Version)' landed on top of the chart for a fifth time in the final full tracking week of 2023, reports Variety. Although Swift set a new record for an individual, the ultimate high-water mark among all artistes is still held by the Beatles, whose albums have spent 132 weeks on top of the Billboard 200. Presley's 67 weeks now puts him in second place among solo recording artistes and third place among all acts. As per Variety, '1989 (Taylor's Version)' registered 98,000 album-equivalent units for the week ending December 28, which was roughly half-in and half-out of the peak holiday buying season, marking a 28 percent decline from the previous week, per Luminate, and as reported by Billboard. Of those 98,000 units for the week, 61,000 were in full-album sales, boosted by a last-minute surge of Christmas gift purchases. Filling out the top 10 of the album chart beyond Swift's leader were Michael Buble's 2011 Christmas album rising two places to Number 2, Nicki Minaj's 'Pink Friday' slipping a spot to Number 3, Nat King Cole's seasonal album at Number 4 (its historical peak to date), Morgan Wallen's 2023 blockbuster 'One Thing at a Time' holding on at Number 5, Drake also holding steady at Number 6 with 'For All the Dogs', 'A Christmas Gift for You From Phil Spector' at Number 7 (another historic peak), Mariah Carey's Christmas album at Number 8, Swift's 2022 release 'Midnights' at Number 9 and Pentatonix's 'Greatest Christmas Hits' at Number 10.



John Travolta shares festive pictures with kids Ella and Ben

Los Angeles | Agencies

The 'Pulp Fiction' star John Travolta spent quality time with his kids for the holidays. The actor recently shared a video montage on Instagram with his two children, Ella Bleu and Benjamin. The clip was set to Travolta's recording of 'Come Rain or Come Shine', and began with his daughter spinning around in a dimly lit room with a Christmas tree and decorations visible in the background, reports People magazine. "Happy New Year!! Thank you for always being there for us! Love John Ella and Ben," he captioned the upload. Elsewhere in the video, Ella posed with her dad and her little brother. In the snapshot with Ben, they both smiled as they held their arms up in front of a Christmas tree. A final photo showed the youngest sitting on his father's lap, cuddled up as they rode on an aeroplane. As per People, Travolta and his late wife, actress Kelly Preston, shared three children together. The couple's oldest son, Jett, was born in April 1992. In January 2009, he died at the age of 16 after a fall at his family's home in the Bahamas resulted in a seizure. Preston died in 2020 after being diagnosed with breast cancer. She was 57. Last week, the 'Saturday Night Fever' star and his kids hit the slopes for some quality time on Christmas. "Merry Christmas to everyone, we love you," he captioned a group shot of the three of them standing in the snow for a picturesque winter family photo. The Travoltas also shared a sweet tribute to Preston on what was her and the Hairspray actor's wedding anniversary in September.



Cardi B says she and Offset haven't reconciled despite having sex on New Year's eve

Los Angeles | Agencies

Rappers Cardi B and Offset celebrated the new year together amid their ongoing relationship drama. However, they are not together as yet. After fans captured footage of the two celebrating New Year's Eve together at a club in Miami, Cardi B took to social media to clarify the status of their relationship, since she previously confirmed their split in December, reports People magazine. In a now-expired Spaces livestream on X (formerly Twitter) that fans recorded, the 'WAP' rapper confirmed that they did spend the holiday together, but admitted that she won't consider their relationship to be reconciled until they work on their issues as a couple and individually. As per People, the Grammy winner began the live chat by referring to the viral clip of her dancing next to the 'Set It Off' artiste, with whom she tied the knot in 2017. "I want to be clear to you guys because you guys are making your assumptions and I just wanted you to hear it from the horse's mouth. Was I clubbing with my baby father yesterday? Yes. Did I get d**** down yesterday? Absolutely, baby." Cardi B (whose real name is Belcalis Marlenis Almazán) added that she and Offset were "vibing" and "had a good time," and then opened up about how the two - who both performed at different Miami Beach venues earlier that night - ended up partying together. "We was both in the same club and it was just really awkward. Like, I'm in my section, he's in his section (sic)," she explained. "So it's like, 'Man, just f**** come over here. Let's just chill. We're having a good time.'"



Is Elton John collaborating with Brandi Carlile for a new album?

Los Angeles | Agencies

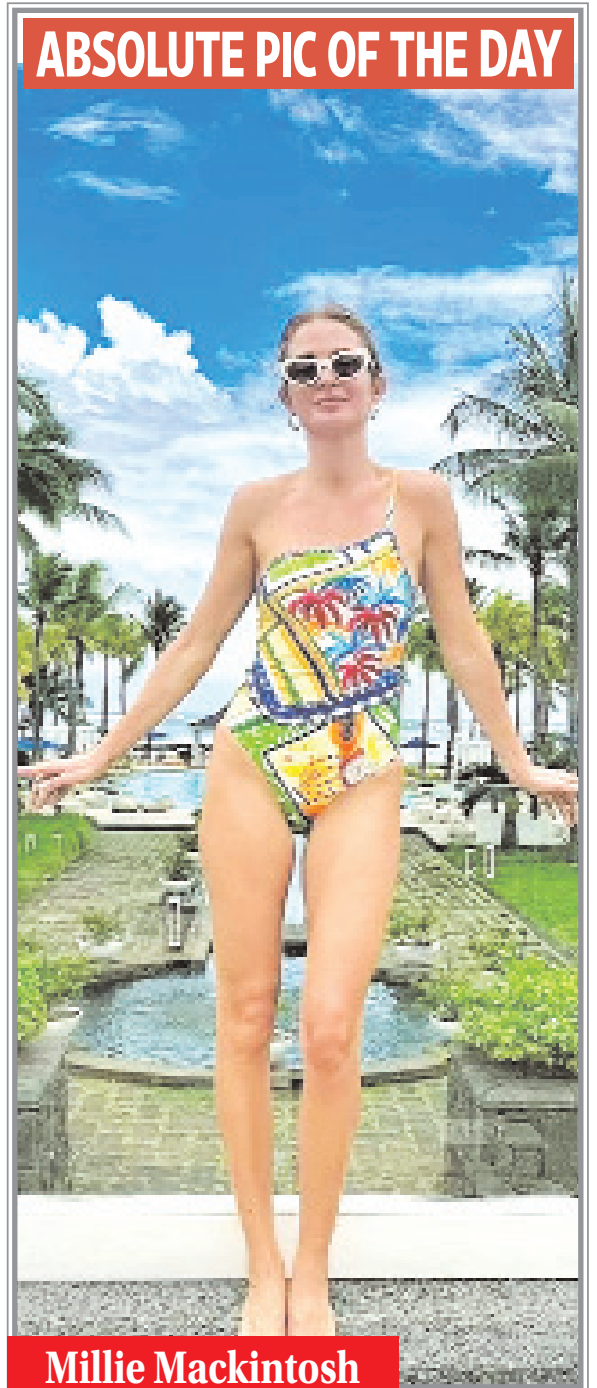
Music legend Elton John and Brandi Carlile apparently have recorded a new album together, according to an interview with Elton's longtime friend, Pete Townshend of the English rock band, The Who. The interview was published by Clashmusic late last month. Speaking about Elton's plans now that he's retired from touring, Townshend said: "Elton is so fraught with loss at not knowing what to do next. He's just gone over to Los Angeles to make an album with Brandi Carlile," reports Variety. He further mentioned: "They made an album together in two weeks. He says it's one of the best things they've ever done." As per Variety, Elton himself teased a new album when inducting his longtime songwriting partner Bernie Taupin into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame last November, noting that the pair recently completed an album that "is going to surprise the s**** out of you." While Townshend didn't specify what role Carlile was playing in the collaboration, and his language leaves open the possibility that it could be a joint album as artistes, she may be taking on the role of producer, as she has increased her focus on taking that role. Carlile won three Grammys for co-producing and co-writing Tanya Tucker's comeback album, 'While I'm Livin', and also produced Tucker's followup effort this year. She helmed Brandy Clark's self-titled, currently Grammy-nominated album, as well as albums by Lucius, the Secret Sisters and Tish Melton, along with Joni Mitchell's recent live album.

Jack Black joins Jason Momoa in 'Minecraft'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor Jack Black has joined the cast of 'Minecraft', a live-action adaptation of the popular eponymous video game. As previously announced, Jason Momoa is starring in the movie alongside Emma Myers and 'The Color Purple' actor Danielle Brooks. Production is expected to begin imminently in New Zealand. 'Napoleon Dynamite' filmmaker Jared Hess, who previously worked with Black on the 2006 comedy 'Nacho Libre', is directing the project, reports Variety. Warner Bros. and Legendary are backing 'Minecraft', which is slated to

open in theatres on April 4, 2025. It's unclear what the 'Minecraft' movie will be about, or who is writing the screenplay. As per Variety, a film version of the game has been in the works for years, with Shawn Levy, Rob McElhenney and Peter Sollett all at one point in talks to direct. 'Minecraft', which debuted in 2011, is one of the best-selling video games in history and boasts more than 140 million monthly users. The sandbox-style game allows players to use colourful blocks to create 3D worlds. It has also spawned numerous spinoffs, like 'Minecraft: Story Mode', 'Minecraft Earth', 'Minecraft Dungeons' and 'Minecraft Legends'.



Millie Mackintosh

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



India vs South Africa, 2nd Test, Day 1

MUKESH, BUMRAH STRIKE AS SOUTH AFRICA TRAIL INDIA BY 36 RUNS AS 23 WICKETS FALL IN A DAY



Cape Town | Agencies

Fast-bowlers Mukesh Kumar and Jasprit Bumrah made three strikes collectively to give India a slight edge to leave South Africa at 62/3 in 17 overs as the hosts' still trail the visitors' by 36 runs at stumps on day one of second Test at Newlands Cricket Ground on Wednesday.

It was an exhilarating day of Test cricket where an astonishing 23 wickets fell in a single day's play. Mohammed Siraj first took a fiery, career-best 6-15 to bowl out South Africa for just 55 in first innings. India took the lead and were comfortably placed at 153/4, before suffering a sensational collapse, losing six wickets for just zero runs to be out on that score.

Aiden Markram and Dean Elgar hit six boundaries in 9.3 overs to get South Africa's second innings going. But in the next over, Elgar poked at one outside the off-stump off Mukesh Kumar and nicked to first slip, dismissed for 12 off 28 balls in what was his final innings in international cricket.

Elgar was congratulated by on-field Indian players, and given a standing ovation by the crowd over the end of a wonderful international Test career. Shortly after, Tony de Zorzi nicked behind off

Mukesh for one, followed by Jasprit Bumrah having Tristan Stubbs caught behind for second time in the day off an unplayable delivery. Previously, in the mid of second session, India were 153/4 with a lead of 98, with Virat Kohli pulling and driving off Kagiso Rabada to pick boundaries with aplomb. Lungi Ngidi, who looked off-colour and conceded 30 runs from five overs, changed the course of the game with a three-wicket maiden over, and waking up the Cape Town crowd from sleep. Ngidi, Rabada and Nandre Burger ended with three wickets each on a pitch which still offers steep bounce and seam movement. India's sensational implosion is also the first ever instance of six wickets falling on the same score in a Test match, as 20 wickets fell inside two and a half sessions of day one.

Brief scores

South Africa 55 in 23.2 overs (Kyle Verreynne 15; Mohammed Siraj 6-15) and 62/3 in 17 overs (Aiden Markram 36 not out; Mukesh Kumar 2-25) trail India 153 in 34.5 overs (Virat Kohli 46, Rohit Sharma 39; Lungi Ngidi 3-30, Kagiso Rabada 3-38) by 36 runs

SKY nominated for ICC Men's T20I Player of the Year award; Perry, Matthews amongst nominees in women's category

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Phoebe Litchfield and skipper Alyssa Healy raised 189 runs for the opening wicket as Australia Women posted their highest total of 338/7 against India and then dismissed the hosts for 148 to win the third and final ODI by a massive 190 runs for a 3-0 clean sweep at the Wankhede Stadium here on Tuesday.

Litchfield's stylish 119 and Healy's commanding 82 propelled Australia to a formidable 338 for 7 setting a new record for the highest total against India in this format breaking the previous record of 332 for 7 back in 2018.

In reply, the Indian innings failed to get going, succumbing to scoreboard pressure as well as some good bowling by Georgia Wareham (3-23), Annabel Sutherland (2-9), Alana King (2-21) and Megan Schutt (2-23) as the hosts were bowled out for 148 in 32.4 overs for one of their worst defeats to



six batters failed to even reach double figures as the hosts came up with a poor display with the bat. Annabel Sutherland claimed two wickets off successive deliveries in the 30th over as India slumped to 135/9.

Earlier, Litchfield's left-handed elegance, coupled with her effortless footwork, brought a touch of class to the innings.

The young sensation crafted a splendid 119 off 125 balls, a stark contrast to her previous knock of 63 in the second match.

Her second ODI hundred was a masterclass in precision, featuring an array of boundaries -- 16 fours and a six. The Healy-Litchfield partnership dictated terms for 29 overs, maintaining a run-rate of around six as Australia eyed a total of 350 at one stage.

However, India's fielding woes continued, with two more dropped catches adding to the tally of ten in this series.

Yastika Bhatia (6) and Smriti Mandhana (29) raised 32 runs for the opening wicket but both of them departed in quick succession. Richa Ghosh, who struck 96 runs in the second ODI as India lost by three runs, got out for 19 as India slumped to 57/3. Jemimah Rodrigues (25) and Deepthi Sharma (25 not out) pushed the score, but

United Cup

De Minaur stuns Djokovic to give Australia QF lead in Perth

Perth | Agencies

Alex de Minaur laid down a stunning marker for his 2024 season on Wednesday as he upset World No. 1 Novak Djokovic 6-4, 6-4 to give the host Australia a 1-0 lead in the quarterfinal against Serbia at the United Cup.

De Minaur delivered a top-class all-around performance, during which he won 33 of 34 points behind first serves, to notch the biggest win of his career in 94 minutes.

It was Djokovic's first defeat in Australia since he fell to Hyeon Chung in the quarter-finals at the 2018 Australian Open. The Serbian great was far below the level he showed in his season-opening victories against Zhang Zhizhen and Jiri Lehecka in Perth, and he again struggled with the right wrist issue for which he had a medical time-out against Lehecka on Tuesday.

With his victory against Djokovic, De Minaur moved Australia within one win of a semi-final spot on home soil at the mixed



teams event. His teammate Ajla Tomljanovic can book Australia's ticket to the last four in Sydney by beating Natalija Stevanovic in the WTA singles match next inside RAC Arena.

Premier League

West Ham hold Brighton to goalless draw

London | Agencies

West Ham United goalkeeper Alphonse Areola was the star of the show as his side held Brighton & Hove Albion to a goalless draw at London Stadium.

West Ham remain sixth on 34 points while Brighton move above Manchester United on goal difference into seventh with 31.

It is only the fifth Premier League fixture this season to end without a goal, as West Ham's three-match winning run came to an end and it is their first 0-0 draw at home since September 2018 against Chelsea, ending a run of 101 matches at London Stadium without one, according to Premier League website.

Meanwhile, Brighton recorded a first Premier League clean sheet in 24 matches.

There were few clear-cut chances in the first half until Jason Steele was forced to make a smart save with his legs from a James Ward-Prowse vol-



ley. Brighton dominated possession with 63 per cent in the opening 45

minutes and nearly made it count, but Areola saved a first-time effort from Jack Hinshelwood.

Pascal Gross, who has four Premier League goals against West Ham in his career and scored in the reverse fixture in August, had his point-blank header well saved just before the break.

Brighton continued where they left off from the first half and 10 minutes into the second, they had a great chance to take the lead, but Danny Welbeck's shot was parried by Areola, before Milner fired the rebound over. At the other end, Tomas Soucek shot narrowly wide of a post under pressure from Brighton's defence.

Brighton had scored 12 goals off the bench this season and 19-year-old substitute Evan Ferguson was inches away from making it 13, but his brilliant flick over Edson Alvarez and volley flew inches wide.

Roberto De Zerbi's side piled on the pressure in the final 10 minutes and did enough to have won the match as Ferguson glanced a header wide and then almost nudged Adam Lallana's cross over the line.

La Liga

Valencia, Rayo kick off 2024 with wins

Madrid | Agencies

Valencia got 2024 off to a perfect start with a comfortable 3-1 home win over Villarreal in their La Liga derby on Tuesday night.

Valencia enjoyed a flying start when Roman Yaremchuk fired home in the fourth minute following Jose Gaya's cross from the left.

Pepelu doubled the lead from the penalty spot in the 25th minute after Roman Terrats' untidy challenge on Hugo Duro, reports Xinhua.

Valencia were in control and Duro hit the post early in the second half, before Pepelu added his second from the penalty spot because of a handball in the Villarreal area.

Gerard Moreno pulled a goal back for Villarreal with 18 minutes left to play, but they never looked like they were getting back into the game. Martin Zubimendi's injury time



goal saved a point for sixth place Real Sociedad in their Basque derby at home to Alaves after the visitors had threatened to take three vital points.

Real Sociedad were down to 10 men in the 36th minute when goalkeeper Alex Remiro totally misjudged the bounce of a long ball and was

forced to handle out of his area to stop Luis Rioja scoring.

Alaves rarely threatened in the second half, but took the lead in the 76th minute from the penalty spot as Rioja sent Remiro's replacement Unai Marrero the wrong way. Real Sociedad threw everything at

their rivals in the closing minutes and Zubimendi slotted home in the 97th minute after the ball fell kindly for him in the area. Rayo Vallecano began the New Year with a 2-0 win away to Getafe in a match that was played at Atletico Madrid's Metropolitan Stadium because of an unserved stadium ban for Getafe dating back over a decade. The game was a disaster for Getafe, as Juanmi Latasa was sent off for two yellow cards in the 42nd minute, before Sergio Camello put Rayo ahead in the first half injury time. Camello doubled Rayo's lead two minutes into the second half and Getafe were down to nine men minutes later when Mason Greenwood was sent off for apparently swearing at the referee. Getafe defender Damien Suarez was also shown a red card for making a comment to the referee just two minutes after he was withdrawn from the game.

Brisbane International: Sabalenka beats Bronzetti, races to Round of 16

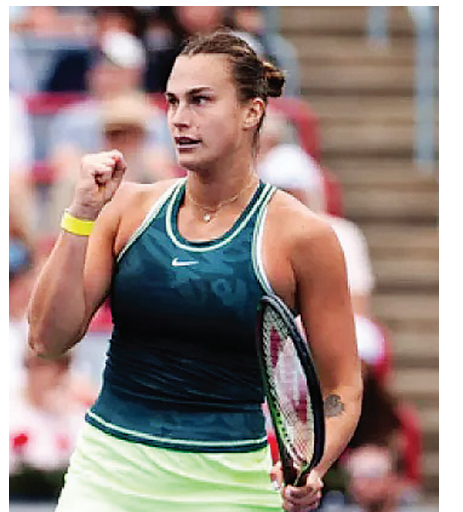
Brisbane | Agencies

World no.2 Aryna Sabalenka triumphed over Lucia Bronzetti from Italy in the second round of the Brisbane International, clinching the match in a mere 58 minutes with a commanding scoreline of 6-3, 6-0.

Sabalenka's victorious Brisbane debut extended her Australian winning streak to 12. Last year, the 25-year-old went undefeated to sweep the titles in Adelaide and the Australian Open, where she captured her first major title.

"I'm super happy to play in front of fans here in Australia. They're amazing. I'm not focusing on the record I'm making right now. I'm just focusing on myself and bringing my best tennis in every match I play," Sabalenka was quoted by WTA.

Facing the 52nd-ranked Bronzetti in her first match of the season, Sabalenka broke open the match with a break to 4-2 in the opening set. She proceeded to win 8 of the next nine games, overpowering Bronzetti to



lay down a marker on her season.

She fired eight aces in the match and saved the one break point she faced.

Sabalenka will face either Danielle Collins or Zhu Lin next.

Ian Smith slams SA sending weak Test team to NZ

Auckland | Agencies

Former New Zealand cricketer Ian Smith has slammed Cricket South Africa (CSA) for naming a weak Test team for the upcoming two-match tour of New Zealand in February, saying it is a 'bit of a kick in the teeth' moment.

South Africa recently named a 14-man squad for the New Zealand Test tour, to be captained by opener Neil Brand, who is amongst the seven uncapped players in the team. Capped Test players in the squad will be batters David Bedingham, Zubayr Hamza and Keegan Petersen, currently playing in the series against India.

Other capped players on tour of New Zealand include batter Khaya Zondo, fast-bowling pair of Duanne Olivier and Dane Paterson,



and spinner Dane Piedt. Cricket South Africa (CSA) has chosen to field a weakened Test squad due to the series clashing with the second season of SA20 league at home. "We (New Zealand) have such a proud record in sport in South Africa. Mainly through the rugby, All Blacks (and) Springboks is one of the great rivals. We've always got great respect for South

African sporting people. So, this is a bit of a kick in the teeth, to be perfectly honest, for us anyway at this time," said Smith on SEN Radio.

Frontline Test players like Temba Bavuma, Aiden Markram, Ryan Rickelton, Heinrich Klaasen, Rassie van der Dussen, Wiaan Mulder, Kagiso Rabada, Lungi Ngidi, Marco Jansen, Anrich Nortje, Gerald Coetzee, Keshav Maharaj, Tony de Zorzi, Nandre Burger and Simon Harmer will play in the SA20, as they are obliged to play in the league at home instead of being on national duties.

Amidst heavy criticism over the move, CSA Board said it is a one-off instance for the Test team being depleted on tour of New Zealand due to the scheduling conflicts between the series and second edition of SA20.

Something similar happened in Australia two years ago: Sunil Gavaskar

Team Absolute | New Delhi

After being bowled out for their lowest total of mere 55 runs at the stroke of lunch on Day 1 in the second Test against India, South Africa's decision to bat first left former Indian cricketer Sunil Gavaskar surprised.

In a stunning turn of events at the Newlands venue in Cape Town, the second Test match between India and South Africa took an unexpected twist as the home side, captained by Dean Elgar, found themselves on the receiving end of a formidable Indian bowling attack.

South Africa's previous lowest innings total against India in Tests was 79 at Nagpur in 2015. At home it was 130 at the same Newlands venue in 2018.

Sunil Gavaskar, while expressing his surprise at South Africa's decision to bat first, highlighted the psychological aspect of the Indian



team. Having suffered a defeat and poor batting performance in the

previous innings, Gavaskar suggested that batting first on a fresh

pitch would have put India on the back foot. He pointed out that South Africa could have capitalized on this vulnerability by choosing to bowl first, especially given their strong fast bowling lineup. "Well, I tell you what I was a bit surprised by what happened. Because a lot of times, captains and coaches make a deal about what the pitch is gonna be. I think you've also got to look at the psychology of the Indian team, having been defeated in three days, having batted so poorly in the second innings and gonna be batting first on a fresh pitch would have been just a little bit defensive," Sunil Gavaskar said while speaking to Star Sports.

"And I have thought that be South Africans with the fast bowlers that they have in their in their lineup could look to take advantage of the fact that they have not played any cricket in between and therefore put them in," he added.



Salman trains 3.5 hours every day for next film, tweaks his diet

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood superstar Salman Khan, who was recently seen in the Diwali release 'Tiger 3', will be seen playing the role of Brigadier Farukh Bulsara in his next film titled 'Bull'. The Bollywood superstar is undergoing rigorous physical training to look the part for this film.

Salman is training for 3.5 Hours a day and has also changed his diet a bit as a part of preparations for the role.

The team of the film started with the mahurat shot in Mumbai on December 29, and the superstar is also training with paramilitary forces.

A source said: "Salman Khan to play Brigadier Farukh Bulsara, who led Operation Cactus in 1988 in the Maldives. He will be playing a paramilitary officer in the upcoming Dharma project, to begin filming in February. The superstar is undergoing rigorous physical training to play the character of Brigadier Bulsara."

'Bull' directed by Vishnu Varadhan, and produced by Dharma Productions, presents a retelling of Operation Cactus wherein the Indian Armed Forces, on November 3, 1988, assisted the Maldives in reclaiming control following a coup attempt led by businessman Abdullah Luthufi and the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE).



The Indian forces efficiently neutralised the mercenaries and restored control to President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom's government within hours.

The source added: "The superstar is training for 3.5 hours daily to get into the skin of the character. Of course with a minor change in his diet."

Janhvi Kapoor calls dating actors 'chaotic': They get very weird

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Janhvi Kapoor has opened up on dating actors and called it "chaotic," adding that actors often get very "competitive and weird."

Dating actors can be tricky at times and looks like Janhvi has had enough of it. The gorgeous diva spilled the beans on the Koffee couch.

Bollywood sibling pair Janhvi and Khushi Kapoor will be appearing on the upcoming episode of the streaming chat show 'Koffee with Karan'. The two will be seen spilling beans on their careers, family and love life.

Host and filmmaker Karan Johar asked: "You also have a philosophy which we have spoken about that you don't really want to date actors, because you think it is somewhere or the other turbulent."

Opening up about it, Janhvi said: "It is chaotic for sure. Vanity is such a big part of this profession. I am extremely vain, this profession is where you need to be obsessed with yourself at all times. It consumes you."

"You need to be with someone who is okay to let you have your moments also. But I find with actors, they get very competitive and very weird," said the 'Dhadak' actress.

Janhvi has reportedly dated her 'Dhadak' co-star Ishaan Khattar. After that she was rumoured to be dating handsome hunk Kartik Aaryan.

KJo asked: "You would never date an actor because where you are right now, you are comfortable?"

To this, the 'Mili' actress replied: "There is always tension when there is an actor, I am telling you. I can't deal with that tension because I like to be undyingly devoted and expect that devotion. When you are in the same profession, it is difficult. Specifically in this profession." Reportedly, the actress is currently dating Shikhar Pahariya.



Preity Zinta kicks off 2024 on a 'colourful' note, shares pic

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Preity Zinta on Wednesday shared picture of herself from the New Year celebrations, and shared that she is starting the year 2024 on a colourful note.

The 'Veer Zaira' actress is an ardent social media user, and enjoys 10.8 million followers on Instagram. Taking to the photo-sharing application, Preity dropped a happy selfie, wearing a colourful hat, and an orange coloured tee shirt.

With black sunglasses, the actress is flaunting her dimpled smile.

She captioned the post: "Starting 2024 on a colourful note #pztravel #ting."

Though, the 'Koi Mil Gaya' actress did not disclose the location where the photograph was clicked, her fans commented on the post, saying that it is Peru.

On February 29, 2016, Zinta married Gene Goodenough at a private ceremony in Los Angeles. In 2021, she and her husband became parents to twins, a boy and a girl, through surrogacy.

On the work front, Preity was last seen in 2018 film 'Bhaaiji Superhit', which was an action comedy film starring Sunny Deol, Arshad Warsi, Ameesha Patel and Shreyas Talpade.



Rakul Preet Singh sweats away New Year's feasts

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Rakul Preet Singh, who was on New Year vacation with her boyfriend and filmmaker Jacky Bhagnani, is back in town, and kicked off her 'first' workout of the year 2024.

Rakul Preet and Jacky went to a picturesque foreign land for their holidays, and celebrated the 39th birthday of the latter.

Taking to Instagram Stories, the 'Yaariyan' actress shared a smiling selfie, wearing a pastel blue tank top, and her hair tied in a ponytail.

She captioned it: "Finally first workout of the year after all the food debauchery."

The 'De De Pyaar De' actress has been treating fans with her photographs from the holidays, wherein she can be seen enjoying by the beach side.

The actress gave major fashion and holiday goals with her scintillating beach outfits.

Meanwhile, on the film front, Rakul has 'Meri Patni Ka' remake, 'Ayalaan', and 'Indian 2'.



'HANUMAN' BREAKS NEW GROUND AS FIRST PAN-INDIA FILM TO FEATURE SANSKRIT SONG

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a groundbreaking move for pan-India and multilingual cinema, the makers of 'HanuMan' are set to release a song in Sanskrit, titled 'Sri Ramadhoota Stotram'.

This bold endeavour shows the makers' commitment to embracing and promoting Indian traditions and culture on an unparalleled scale.

'Sri Ramadhoota Stotram' marks a significant milestone as the first-ever Sanskrit song featured in a mainstream pan-India film.

The decision to incorporate the ancient and revered language into the film's soundtrack stems from the makers' dedication to preserving and celebrating the rich cultural heritage of India.

The song, carefully crafted as a 'Sri Ramadhoota Stotram', adds a spiritual and traditional dimension to the cinematic experience of 'HanuMan'. Its inclusion amplifies the authenticity of the film but also serves as a bridge between the contemporary medium of cinema and the timeless depth of Sanskrit literature.

The song aligns seamlessly with the overarching vision of 'HanuMan', where director Prasanth Varma seeks to not only entertain but also educate and inspire audiences about Indian mythology and scriptures.

By venturing into Sanskrit, the filmmakers are trying to create a cultural resonance that goes beyond the screen, encouraging people to dig into treasures embedded in India's ancient traditions.

Sharing his vision, Varma said, "We see 'Sri Ramadhoota Stotram' as a spiritual journey within our film. By introducing Sanskrit, the language of our ancient texts, we are aiming to connect audiences with our rich cultural heritage."

"It is a way to make our traditions come alive on the big screen and leave a lasting impact on viewers, fostering a deeper appreciation for our roots."

As 'HanuMan' blazes a trail with this pioneering move, it opens a gateway for future films to explore and celebrate the diverse colours of the Indian subcontinent.

'HanuMan' is presented by RKD Studios, PrimeShow Entertainment (Niranjan Reddy) is the producer of the film and Venkat Kumar Jetty is the line producer. Catch the film in theatres on January 12.



INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Neha Malik