

NATION > 02

PM Modi says India's mood & style today 'youthful', urges...



HOLLYWOOD > 06

Dua Lipa is dating British actor Callum Turner...



SPORTS > 07

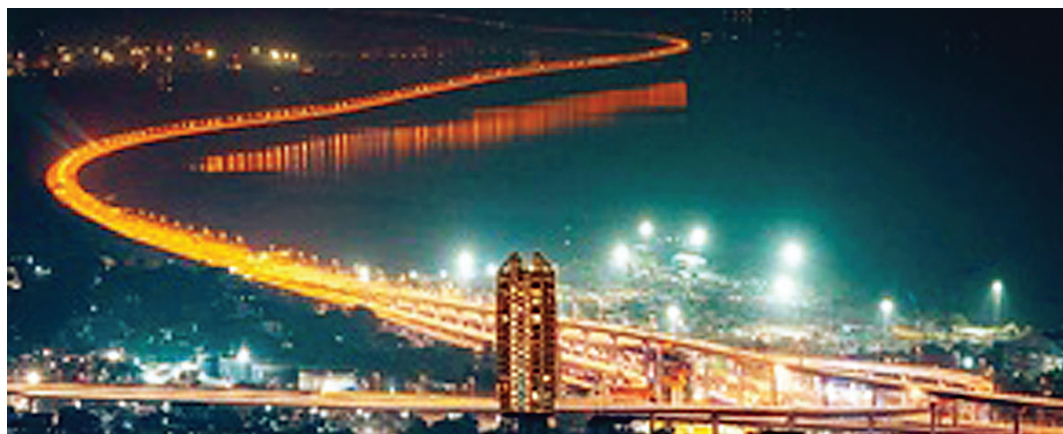
Babar Azam surpasses Guptill to become third highest...



PRIME MINISTER INAUGURATES MTHL, OTHER PROJECTS WORTH RS 30K CRORE IN MUMBAI

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Prime Minister Narendra Modi dedicated the sleek new and gleaming, India's longest sea-bridge, 'Atal Bihari Vajpayee Sewri-Nhava Sheva Atal Setu' or the Mumbai Trans Harbour Link, built at a cost of over Rs 18,000 crore to the nation, here on Friday. The Prime Minister also launched/dedicated several other major infra projects worth over Rs 30,000 crore, in the presence of Governor Ramesh Bais, Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, Deputy CMs Devendra Fadnis and Ajit Pawar, plus other dignitaries. Virtually kickstarting the Bharatiya Janata Party's 2024 poll campaign, the PM launched a sharp attack on the opposition parties in the state that sends the second largest contingent of MPs to Lok Sabha -- 48. "The inauguration of 'Atal Setu' exemplifies India's infrastructural prowess and underscores the country's trajectory towards a 'Viksit Bharat', making the government's intentions clear," said PM Modi, addressing the huge gathering. "Our 'neeyat, nishtha and neeti' are clear and hence our 'reeti'. Ten years ago, there was corruption worth crores and lakhs of rupees, there were mega-scams... but today, we are completing mega projects worth thousands of crores," PM



Modi said, pointing fingers at the Opposition parties. After the formal inaugural, the Prime Minister took the first official ride on the MTHL in a special vehicle, and the bridge will be open to traffic from Saturday. On the occasion, PM Modi laid the foundation stone for the 9.2 km-long tunnel between Orange Gate to Marine Drive, which will drastically slash commuting time from the eastern suburbs of Chembur to Marine Lines, where the Mumbai Coastal Road Project is proceeding at a quick pace, with the first phase (north-south) slated to open by Jan-end. The tunnel will also ease traffic congestion in the business hubs of south Mumbai like Churchgate, Colaba, Nariman Point, and the project is slated to cost over Rs 9,000

crore. PM Modi inaugurated the Surya Regional Water Supply Project which will quench the thirst of the people in Vasai and Virar towns in Palghar. The SRWSP is expected to supply an additional 400 million litres of water daily (mld), with Vasai-Virar getting 185 mld and later, Thane towns of Mira Road-Bhayander will also get 218 mld of water. PM Modi formally inaugurated Navi Mumbai's Belapur-Pendhar 11.10 km long metro line which has 11 stations en route, which will greatly smoothen commuter comforts and ease road traffic. The much-awaited Uran-Kharkapur railway line was inaugurated with five new stations and would result in an additional 40 suburban services, up from the current

20 services. The project will benefit the commuters to Mumbai, business folks, students and boost tourism in the Raigad region. The PM inaugurated the Dighaogao Railway Station, which is part of the Airoli-Kalwa corridor that will prove a boon to thousands of daily commuters in the Thane and Airoli regions. Another major project the PM inaugurated is the Goregaon-Khar sixth line on the Western Railway which will be a dedicated corridor for long-distance trains, and render the suburban section free with additional local train services on the cards, and would particularly ease the woes of people on the Andheri-Borivali-Bhayander-Virar suburban sector.

Trinamool not to initiate further seat-sharing talks with Congress

Mumbai | Agencies

Kolkata, Jan 12 (IANS) The Trinamool Congress is no longer interested in initiating fresh talks with the Congress regarding the seat sharing arrangement for the Lok Sabha polls this year as part of the INDIA bloc. A veteran leader of the party and also a senior member of the West Bengal Cabinet said that the party supremo and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was of the opinion that further talks with the Congress were useless on two grounds. "The first reason is that the Congress' demand for eight to ten seats in West Bengal is totally absurd considering that the vote share of the country's oldest national party had come down to just three per cent in the 2021 state Assembly polls. "Without a single member in the state Assembly and just two MPs in the Lok Sabha, the demand for eight to ten seats is nothing but overreach," said a state Cabinet member. He added, "It seems that the Congress leadership is more interested in a seat-sharing agreement with the CPI(M)-led Left Front rather than with the Trinamool



Congress and hence the leadership of the state's ruling party does not find the necessity of initiating any further discussions on seat sharing with the Congress." Party insiders said that Mamata Banerjee was specially irked on receiving the information that the Congress along with the CPI(M) had taken an in-principle decision to back the lone All-India Secular Front (AISEF) candidate Naushad Siddique in the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls from Diamond Harbour constituency in South 24 Parganas district from where the sitting MP is Trinamool

Congress' General Secretary and the Chief Minister's nephew Abhishek Banerjee. Recently Mamata Banerjee herself gave hints on this count as she said that while the Opposition INDIA bloc will continue in the national perspective, in West Bengal the Trinamool Congress will fight alone. Soon after that State Congress President and veteran Lok Sabha member Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury challenged the Chief Minister to contest against him from Baharampur Lok Sabha constituency in Murshidabad district from where he is a five-time MP.

Debris of IAF plane that went missing in 2016 with 29 onboard found on sea bed

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The debris of an Indian Air Force (IAF) plane with 29 personnel onboard that went missing in 2016 while flying across the Bay of Bengal have been found by a search and rescue team on the sea bed after seven years, an official said on Friday. An IAF official said that the debris of the ill-fated An-32 aircraft were spotted on the sea bed around 310 km off the Chennai coast. The plane went missing over the Bay of Bengal on July 22, 2016 during a mission. A large-scale search and rescue operations by aircraft and ships that was launched then could not locate any missing personnel or the aircraft debris. The National Institute of Ocean Technology, which functions



under the Ministry of Earth Sciences, recently deployed an Autonomous Underwater Vehicle with deep sea exploration capability at the last known location of the missing An-32. The Ministry of Defence said the search operation was conducted at a depth of 3,400 metres using multiple payloads, including a multi-beam SONAR (Sound Navigation and Ranging), synthetic aperture SONAR and high resolution photography. Analysis of search images had indicated the

presence of debris of a crashed aircraft on the sea bed approximately 140 nautical miles (approximately 310 km) from the Chennai coast. The IAF said that the search images were examined and found to be conforming with an An-32 aircraft. This discovery at the probable crash site, with no other recorded history of any other missing aircraft report in the same area, points to the debris as possibly belonging to the crashed IAF An-32 (K-2743) said.

NOT EVERY FINGERPRINT IS UNIQUE, REVEALS AI

New York: Engineers from Columbia University in the US have built a new AI that shattered a long-held belief in forensics - that fingerprints from different fingers of the same person are unique.

It turns out they are similar, only we've been comparing fingerprints the wrong way! It's a well-accepted fact in the forensics community that fingerprints of different fingers of the same person are unique, and therefore, unmatched. A team led by Columbia Engineering undergraduate senior Gabe Guo challenged this widely held presumption. Guo, who had no prior knowledge of forensics, found a public US government database of some 60,000 fingerprints and fed them in pairs into an artificial intelligence-based system known as a deep contrastive network. Sometimes the pairs belonged to the same person (but different fingers), and sometimes they belonged to different people. Over time, the AI system, which the team designed by modifying a state-of-the-art framework, got better at telling when seemingly unique fingerprints belonged to the same person and when they didn't. The accuracy for a single pair reached 77 per cent. When multiple pairs were presented, the accuracy shot significantly higher, potentially increasing current forensic efficiency by more than tenfold.

ED raids at Bengal minister's houses & office in municipalities recruitment case conclude

Kolkata | Agencies

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday conducted raids and search operations for over 13 hours at the residence and offices of West Bengal Fire Services Minister Sujit Basu in connection with the municipalities recruitment scam case, an official said. The ED sleuths left the minister's residence after accumulating many documents from two of his residences and one of his offices. The raids and searches began at around 8 a.m. on Friday at Basu's residence in the Lake Town area. The ED team and Central armed forces personnel escorting them left the raiding spots after 9 p.m. Even as sources claimed that ED sleuths had collected several documents from the residences of the minister as well as from his office in the same locality, they refused to disclose the nature of the documents seized. Sources, however, confirmed that the mobile phone of the minister was also seized by the ED. Basu's role as the erstwhile deputy chairman of Dun Dum (South) municipality had been under the scanner of the central agency sleuths. Several recruitments were purportedly made against cash payments. The raid was prompted by a code-word "SB"



inscribed in the diary of one Ayan Sil, where details of the payments relating to such recruitment irregularities in several municipalities were written. Speaking to the reporters after the raids ended, Basu told the mediapersons that "the unnecessary exercise had destabilised crucial schedules for the day". "I challenge that if my involvement in the municipalities' recruitment case is proved, the next moment I will send my resignation to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. I will extend full cooperation to the central agencies in the matter," Basu said.

Hundreds of Maha women to fly kites for 'gender equality & empowerment'

Raigad (Maharashtra) | Agencies

Nearly a thousand women shall take part in the 11th edition of the state's sole event of its kind, a "Women's Kite Festival-2024", with the theme of 'Nirdhar Maaza', scheduled in Pen town on January 13, an organiser said here on Friday. Organised by the NGOs Ankur Trust and Women's Atrocities Forum (WAF) headed by social activist Vaishali Patil, the festival will draw attention to crucial social issues of women's empowerment, gender equality, violence, etc, through the theme of 'Nirdhar Maaza'. "The term 'Nirdhar Maaza' symbolises 'I Declare' -- all the participants will resolve that they will henceforth not tolerate discrimination or gender bias of any kind, sexual abuse, harassment, juvenile marriage, demand education, equal pay for equal work, respecting all women's rights, etc.," Patil said. The WAF was formed after



the Nirbhaya gang-rape case and is continued as a movement that brings women together to celebrate the traditional kite festival on Makar Sankranti, generally considered a male-dominated event. The participants will be women from Raigad district, expected to be over 700, who will indulge in playful celebrations, hoist only handmade eco-friendly paper kites, use cotton threads to fly them to avoid hurting birds or other aerial creatures, she added. The women who will assemble on Saturday for the fest are Gram Panchayat members, daily wagers, orphans, girls with special needs, tribals and ordinary housewives who would 'celebrate life, and express their aim to be liberated like a high-flying kite', said Patil.

Rahul-led 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' to launch from Thoubal instead of Manipur's capital

Imphal | Agencies

After the BJP Government gave limited permission to use the Hapta Kangjeibung Palace ground in Imphal for launching the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' led by former party President Rahul Gandhi on January 14, the Congress on Friday announced that the yatra would be flagged off from Manipur's Thoubal district instead. The Congress' Manipur President Keisham Meghachandra Singh said that permission was sought on January 2 to start the yatra from the Hapta Kangjeibung ground in the state Capital but the Manipur Government gave consent with certain conditions, forcing the party to move the venue to Thoubal district's Khongjom War Memorial. The Imphal East district administration in an order earlier said, ".....considering the prevailing law and order situation and circumstances, only flagging off of the yatra with a limited number of participants, is hereby allowed on January, 14, 2024 to prevent any untoward incident and disturbance in law and order. The number and names of the participants shall be provided in advance to this office to enable this office to take all necessary precautionary



measures." "We met Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Wednesday but he, referring to the prevailing law and order situation, told us that the permission would not be given to use the Hapta Kangjeibung ground. Later in the night (on January 10), the district administration issued an order giving permission for the ground but with a limited number of participants," the Congress leader told the media. Singh said that a team of the state Congress again met Chief Secretary Vineet Joshi in presence of Director General of Police Rajiv Singh, and the Deputy Commissioner (DC) and Superintendent of Police in Imphal East

district. "But the officials told us that not more than 1,000 people would be allowed at the Imphal venue and this is a very, very small number of participants for this mega event. On Thursday night, Thoubal Deputy Commissioner gave permission for flagging off the yatra from a private place in Khongjom area of the district. Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge will flag off the yatra from the Khongjom area," he said. Terming the Manipur Government's decision as murder of democracy and violation of peoples' right, the Congress leader said that the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' will be launched as scheduled by the AICC. He said that on January 14 several leaders of the party, including Chief Ministers and MPs from across the country will gather in Manipur for a peaceful rally. AICC General Secretary KC Venugopal (Organisation) earlier said that from Manipur, the yatra will go to Nagaland, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya and will culminate in Mumbai on March 20 after covering 6,713 km through 110 districts in 15 states in 66 days. Venugopal had said that the yatra would demand justice for the women, youth, farmers and poor and it would be historic as well.

SC refuses to restore FIR against SAD chief Sukhbir Singh Badal

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to interfere with an order passed by the Punjab and Haryana High Court quashing a criminal case lodged against Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) chief Sukhbir Singh Badal for allegedly obstructing mining operations in Amritsar's Wazir Bhullar and not wearing a mask. A bench of Justices Abhay S. Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan dismissed the special leave petition filed by the Punjab government challenging the High Court order passed in August 2023, questioning the state government's counsel for filing an appeal when the case was lodged at the instance of a private mining company. It said that no offence registered under FIR was made out against Badal. In the special leave petition filed before the apex court, the Punjab Police contended that the allegations levelled against Badal required trial but the High Court itself conducted a mini-trial while hearing the application filed by Badal under 482 CrPC.



Quashing the FIR and all subsequent proceedings, the High Court had said that continuation of criminal proceedings against the political leader will amount to an "abuse of the process of law". It had said no offence of disobedience to orders duly promulgated by public servants was made against Badal and there was no occasion for him to cause their wrongful restraint of the workers of the complainant firm. "It remains undisputed that the place where the petitioner had gone on hearing the complaints of illegal mining was a riverbed, which was not at all habited, and the workers had fled away on noticing the presence of the petitioner. Thus, there was no occasion at any time for the employees of the complainant to have any infection, even if the petitioner is hypothetically taken as infected with Covid-19," said a bench of Justice Anoop Chitkara in its order.



PM MODI SAYS INDIA'S MOOD & STYLE TODAY 'YOUTHFUL', URGES YOUNGSTERS TO DILUTE DYNASTIC POLITICS

Nashik (Maharashtra) | Agencies

Hailing India as a young nation raring to break boundaries in all spheres, Prime Minister Narendra Modi here on Friday called upon the youth to join politics and serve the country, as their participation could 'dilute dynasty politics'.

Opening the 27th National Youth Festival-2024, the PM said that the world has reposed faith in India these days as India is the Mother of Democracy, and the greater the participation of the youth in democracy, the better will be the future of the nation.

While asking the youngsters to join nation-building and dilute dynastic politics, he also urged them to express their opinion through voting, especially the first-time voters who can bring energy and strength to our democracy.

"Today, the mood and style of the country are youthful. The youth of today don't lag but lead, India has become a leader in technology. The advent of 'Amrit Kaal' is filled with pride for India," said PM Modi, exhorting the youth to take India forward in this Amrit Kaal to make India a 'Viksit Bharat'.

"The upcoming 25 years of Amrit Kaal is a period of duty for you. When you keep your duties paramount, the society will progress and the country will also progress."

In this context, he reiterated the youth to



promote the use of local products, make use of only 'Made in India' products, shun any kind of drugs and addiction, raise their voices against using abusive words in the name of mothers, sisters and daughters and put an end to such evil. Emphasising that the current

period of 'Amrit Kaal' is a unique moment for the youth, he recalled the contributions of legends like Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and Savitri Phule, Bhagat Singh, Chandrashekhar Azad, Batukeshwar Dutt, Major Dhyan Chand, M. Visveswaraya and others and pointed out that

youth have similar responsibilities for which they must work to take the nation to new heights.

"I consider you the most fortunate generation in the history of India. I know the youth of India can achieve this goal. The government has provided a sea of opportunities and obliterated all obstacles for the youth of India as the government completes 10 years in power," said PM Modi.

He said the world looks at India as a new skilled force and the mobility agreements established by India with countries like France, Germany, the UK, Australia, Italy, Austria etc., are hugely benefiting the youth of the country.

The Prime Minister said that its time for the young generations to 'give wings to their dreams', not just overcome challenges, but set new challenges for ourselves, listing the goals of a \$5 trillion economy, becoming the third largest economy in the world, striving to be a hub of manufacturing and the responsibility to prevent Climate Change and promote natural farming. Present on the occasion were Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, Deputy Chief Ministers Devendra Fadnis and Ajit Pawar, Union Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs, Anurag Singh Thakur and Union Minister of State for Sports and Youth Affairs, Nisith Pramanik.

Invest in Kashmir: Amit Shah to Gujarat's business community



Gandhinagar | Agencies

Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday asked the Gujarati industrialists to consider expanding their businesses to the northern parts of the country, with a special focus on Kashmir.

"I invite Gujarati entrepreneurs to invest in Kashmir and support Prime Minister Narendra Modi's initiative to integrate Kashmir into the mainstream," Shah said while speaking at the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit.

Shah said that the 'Vibrant Gujarat' model has inspired similar initiatives across various Indian states and brought attention to Gujarat's key projects like Gift City and Dholera Smart City.

He also highlighted the potential for growth in India's space sector, predicting a significant increase in its market value by 2040.

Jammu and Kashmir's L-G Manoj Sinha was also present in the audience during the summit. Sinha said that investors should explore the opportunities in Jammu and Kashmir, saying his administration has signed seven MoUs for the investment in the region and also highlighted the significant developments like Emaar Group's project and UAE-based Lulu Group's retail mall venture.

The 10th edition of the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit, inaugurated by PM Modi, focused on the theme 'Gateway to the Future.'

Drugs valued at Rs 68.41cr seized in Mizoram, three held

Aizawl | Agencies

Drugs valued at Rs 68.41 crore were seized and three drug peddlers were arrested in two separate operations in Mizoram by the Assam Rifles, officials said on Friday.

The officials said that acting on specific information the Assam Rifles troopers raided Bualpui village in Saha district and seized 225 gram of heroin, valued at Rs 1.75 crore. They said that two drug peddlers were arrested in connection with the seizure. In another operation, the para-military forces seized 20 packets of highly addictive methamphetamine tablets valued at Rs 66.66 crore and weighing 22.2 kg, from the Zokhawthar-



Melbuk Road in Champhai district. The officials said that the drugs were handed over to the Excise and Narcotics Department for further legal proceedings. "A person was also apprehended in connection with the seizure," the officials said. They said that these drugs were smuggled from Myanmar, which shares a 510 km unfenced border with Mizoram. The Assam

Rifles, in a statement, said that the ongoing smuggling of illegal drugs is a major cause of concern for the state of Mizoram and India.

"Assam Rifles, christened as the 'Sentinels of Northeast' have continued their efforts against illegal drug trafficking and has also doubled its efforts to nab the kingpins of the drug racket in Mizoram," the statement said.

Two arrested by Bengal Police in ED attack case

Kolkata | Agencies

The West Bengal Police nabbed two men in North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal, the first arrests made after a week when an ED team was attacked in Sandeshkhali, said officials on Friday.

The arrests were made by the cops of Nazat Police Station in the district. State police sources said that the two arrested persons are Sukamal Sardar and Mehboob Molla. They are identified from the video footage of the attack on the ED and CAPF personnel. Sources said that they had been arrested from a secret hideout within one of the innumerable pisciculture farms in the area. However, the principal mastermind behind the attack and the local Trinamool Congress leader Sheikh Shahjahan, at whose residence ED sleuths attempted raid and search operations on January 5, is still absconding.

ED has already issued a lookout notice against Shahjahan. The border outposts of the Border Security Force



(BSF) have also been alerted in anticipation that the absconding ruling party leader might escape to neighbouring Bangladesh, whose international border with India is very close to the place where the attack on ED sleuths took place.

The arrest of the two accused happened just a day after Calcutta High Court's single-judge bench of Justice Rajasekhara Mantha ordered an inter-

im stay on any investigation by West Bengal Police against ED officials based on an FIR filed at the Nazat Police Station against those sleuths who were attacked along with CAPF personnel on January 5.

Justice Mantha while passing the order had also questioned whether the police of Nazat Police Station had conducted even a basic ground investigation before registering the FIR

against the ED officials. Meanwhile, the state BJP has described the first two arrests as mere eye-wash since the principal mastermind behind the attack is still absconding. The leader of the opposition in West Bengal Assembly, Suwendu Adhikari said the police were well aware about him and were also providing protection to the absconding leader.

INTERNATIONAL CAMEL FESTIVAL STARTS IN RAJASTHAN



Jaipur | Agencies

The three-day International Camel Festival started on Friday with the Heritage Walk in Bikaner district of Rajasthan.

On the first day of the festival, domestic and foreign tourists were seen engrossed in this celebration of folk culture.

The celebration started from Rampuriya Haveli with the decorated camels, robes and women

dressed in traditional colorful costumes and folk artists participated in the Heritage Walk.

Local folk artists presented folk songs along with songs sung during Ramrats and dances to introduce the local culture. During the heritage walk, the city residents warmly welcomed the guests by showering flowers and decorating rangoli at various places.

A festive atmosphere was created in the city park. A large number of

tourists and local people arrived early morning to see the heritage walk. The walk started from Rampuriya Haveli, passed through the main roads of the city and ended at Rao Bikaji ki Tekri.

Rangoli, Mehndi and drawing competitions were organized for the participants by the Tourism Department at Bikaji ki Tekri, along with which the winning participants were rewarded with mementos.

RSS CHIEF BHAGWAT IN HARYANA TO STRENGTHEN ORGANISATION

Chandigarh: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat on Friday reached Haryana's Jind on a three-day tour to strengthen the organisation.

According to sources, the RSS chief will meet Sangh campaigners to discuss strategies ahead of the Lok Sabha and Assembly expected to be held in May and October, respectively. Bhagwat will participate in the three-day programme at Gopal Vidya Mandir Senior Secondary School where he's staying. Security

arrangements have been tightened across Jind on his arrival. There is a plan to establish 1,200 new RSS branches about which brainstorming will be done with activists, source said. During the stay, Bhagwat will have no programme with mediapersons.

The school premises and the room where he will stay have been surrounded by security personnel. The sources said only selected people will be allowed to meet him.



Planning to bring UG books in 12 Indian languages: UGC

Team Absolute | New Delhi

University Grants Commission (UGC) on Friday said that they are working on providing textbooks at undergraduate level in arts, science, commerce and social sciences in 12 Indian languages.

The UGC said these books in different regional languages, will be available and implemented in universities across the country. However UGC said that it will be completely optional for the students to choose their desired languages.

"We are identifying nodal universities in different states who will coordinate the exercise of forming teams of authors who can write high quality textbooks in Indian languages," UGC Chairman Prof Mamidala Jagadesh Kumar said.

He said that this effort is in tune with NEP2020's goal



to provide learning opportunities to students in universities in Indian languages.

He said that UGC has written a letter to identify interested authors to register with UGC so that they can participate in the endeavour.

The UGC chairman said the letter invites Expression of Interest (EOI) from interested authors, critics and faculty members of higher educational institutions

(HELs) for writing original text-books in 12 Indian languages for the undergraduate (UG) level courses in the different subjects of arts, science and social sciences.

He said that the interested authors, critics and faculty members of HELs should send their acceptance to the commission and furnish their Expression of Interest (EOI) through the form available at the following link latest by January 30 (midnight).

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15 kilometers of new railway lines being laid every day in Rajasthan: Ashwini Vaishnaw

Jaipur | Agencies

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Friday said that at least 15 kilometers of new railway lines are being laid every day in the desert state.

"At least 400 kilometers of new railway lines are being laid in a year in Rajasthan, and around 15 kilometers of railway lines are being laid every day. In the coming time, all the projects of Amrit Station Scheme in Rajasthan will be completed within the stipulated time," the Railway Minister said.

He said that the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme was launched in 2023 and under the scheme work is going on to make more than 1300 railway



stations across the country world

class.

The central government had passed a railway budget of Rs 9500 crore for Rajasthan and under this, work is going on to make 83 railway stations of the state world class under Amrit Station Scheme.

"Out of which the work of about 25-30 railway stations has been completed," the minister said. He said that he inspected Jaipur Railway Station and gave instructions to the officials.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma proposed to include Sanganer Railway Station in the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme.

Bhajan Lal Sharma has also proposed to form a review committee of railways under the direction of the Chief Secretary.



PM Modi says India's mood & style today 'youthful', urges youngsters to dilute dynastic politics

Team Absolute | Nashik

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mount, the society will progress and the country will also progress."

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Maha Speaker disposed off 34 petitions, Goa Speaker continues to keep petitions pending: Congress

Team Absolute | Mumbai/Panaji

Congress leader Girish Chodankar on Friday said that while Maharashtra Speaker Rahul Narwekar has disposed off 34 disqualification petitions, the Goa Speaker Ramesh Tawadkar is unable to hear the disqualification petitions pending before him.

Chodankar said that the Speaker is working at the behest of the BJP and is trying to satisfy them for his personal political agenda.

"Ramesh Tawadkar must resign as speaker as his conduct has failed to justify the Constitutional office which he presides over. While the Maharashtra Speaker has disposed of 34 disqualification petitions within the same time frame, Tawadkar has not only failed to hear the pending disqualification petitions but has not even initiated the adjudication process in most of the petitions," he said.

Chodankar said that the BJP leader holding the



Constitutional post of the Speaker has brazenly and conveniently ignored the SC's directions to

dispose of disqualification matters with promptitude and within a time bound manner.

"Maharashtra Speaker disposed of 34 petitions in 18 months after intervention of SC, while Goa Speaker is wasting time with just 4 petitions, which continue to be pending since the last 16 months. With all due respect to the high office of the Hon'ble Speaker, the present Goa Speaker's deliberate dilatory tactics seemingly to avail political benefits reeks of political malafide and is unacceptable in a democratic nation like ours," he said.

He said that he was forced to approach the HC and SC as Tawadkar has failed to perform his constitutional duties.

"It is evident that he is proceeding to adjudicate disqualification petitions at his whims and fancies merely to protect his political party," he said.

He said that Tawadkar is guilty of "murdering" democracy by favouring his political party despite holding an inherently neutral, Constitutional office.

Thackeray faction MLAs have to follow whip issued by Gogavale: Rahul Narwekar

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Speaker Rahul Narwekar on Friday said there is only one Shiv Sena legislative party in the state legislature and Thackeray faction MLAs will have to adhere to the whip issued by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde-led camp's whip Bharat Gogavale, recognised by him, reported news agency.

Speaking to a news channel, Narwekar said he has diligently followed the Supreme Court's guidelines while giving his judgment on the cross-petitions by Sena factions seeking disqualification of each other's MLAs following a split in the party in 2022, and his decision is "tenable".

Narwekar has come under intense criticism from the opposition, especially the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) for recognising the Shinde outfit as the "real" Shiv Sena. Thackeray has termed the verdict a "murder of democracy" and said his party will move the Supreme Court against it.



"I had to decide which of the two groups in the legislature represents the original political party. No party can have two whips. So Thackeray faction MLAs have to adhere to the whip recognised by me," Narwekar

said, reported PTL.

Whip is binding to party MLAs failing which it can attract disqualification.

When asked whether the Shiv Sena (UBT) group exists before him, Narwekar said, "There is only Shiv Sena legislative party before the speaker."

Defending his decision to not recognise the 2018 constitution of the Shiv Sena, Narwekar said those who have been elected to the national executive were communicated to the Election Commission of India, but their letter does not mention that a copy of the party constitution has been attached to it.

He said according to the state legislature rules, after a political party gets recognition as the legislative party, it has to submit a copy of its constitution and organisational structure to the speaker's office in 30 days.

"But unfortunately, neither Uddhav Thackeray nor Eknath Shinde communicated it to the speaker's office," Narwekar said.

Navi Mumbai international airport to become operational from this year-end: Jyotiraditya Scindia

Team Absolute | Nagpur

Union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Friday said the Navi Mumbai international airport will become operational from November or December this year, and also announced that in the next 10 to 15 years, at least 10 cities in India will have two airports each, reported news agency.

He was speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the inauguration of AAR-Indamer MRO (maintenance, repair and overhaul) facility at the MIHAN SEZ in Nagpur.

"The country had been waiting since the last 60 years to see Mumbai getting connected to Navi Mumbai, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi is today bringing to reality the dreams of people," he said, referring to the Mumbai Trans Harbour Link (MTHL) scheduled to be inaugurated by the PM later in the day.

"The Navi Mumbai international airport will start its operations in November or December this year. This airport's first flight will land in November or December. The airport will pave the way for the big development of Navi Mumbai," the Civil Aviation Minister said.

"In the next 10 to 15 years, there will be at least 10 cities which will have two airports each," Scindia said.

The minister also said that he would inspect the airports in Kolhapur, Pune and Navi Mumbai later in the day and on Saturday.

AAR-Indamer is a joint venture between AAR, a major MRO of the USA, and Indamer Technics Private Limited.

Scindia inaugurated their world-class facility aimed at providing maintenance services to the



fleet of aircraft operating in India and the nearby region.

AAR-Indamer's greenfield facility is a result of combined efforts of AAR Corp and Indamer Aviation. Indamer Aviation is India's oldest and largest general aviation MRO, the company said in a release.

PM Modi is on a daylong visit to Maharashtra,

where he will inaugurate the 27th National Youth Festival in Nashik and later launch development projects worth over Rs 30,000 crore in the state. The PM will inaugurate the Mumbai Trans Harbour Link (MTHL), named Atal Bihari Vajpayee Sewee-Nhava Sheva Atal Setu constructed at a cost of over Rs 17,840 crore. He will also address a public meeting in Navi Mumbai after the inauguration.

Mumbai Sanskriti Festival's 32nd edition to amplify message of universal peace through classical music

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The 32nd edition of the Mumbai Sanskriti Festival is set to captivate audiences with the harmonious melodies of renowned Indian classical musicians, including flautist Rakesh Chaurasia, vocalists Ashwini Bhide Deshpande, and Sanjeev Abhyankar. Organized by the Indian Heritage Society, two-day cultural extravaganza, Mumbai Sanskriti Festival, is scheduled to take place at Mumbai's iconic Town Hall (Asiatic Library) on January 13-14.

On the inaugural evening, Rakesh Chaurasia will kick off the festivities with his performance titled 'Confluence - Music for Peace and Harmony.' Starting with a foundation of Indian classical music, Chaurasia will seamlessly integrate elements of fusion and folk into his musical tapestry. The performance aims to convey a powerful message of universal peace through the language of music.

Expressing his enthusiasm, Chaurasia stated, "This platform provides an ideal stage to spotlight Indian Classical Music, an integral part of our cultural heritage. I commend the Indian Heritage Society for this impactful initiative, poised to resonate with a diverse audience and extend the cultural richness of our her-



itage to as many as possible." Accompanying Chaurasia are accomplished artists, including Sridar Parthasarathy on mridangam, Ojas Adhya on tabla, Shikhar Naad Qureshi on percussion, Sanjoy Das on guitar, and Ritik Chaurasia on flute.

The second day of the Mumbai Sanskriti Festival promises performances by acclaimed exponents of Hindustani classical music. Ashwini Bhide Deshpande will showcase the musical traditions of her Jaipur-Atrauli gharana, while Sanjeev Abhyankar of the Mewati gharana will present 'Bhakti Ganga,' a confluence of devotion embedded in their unique styles, gharanas, and various musical genres such as khayal, bhajans, stotras, and stutis.

To enhance the cultural experience and ensure inclusivity, entry to the Mumbai Sanskriti Festival is free of cost. Attendees can obtain free passes from Chetana Book Centre in Kala Ghoda and Dadar Matunga Cultural Centre.

Anita Garware, chairperson of IHS, emphasized the importance of heritage adapting to changing times. "IHS plays a pivotal role in rejuvenating heritage landmark structures in the city. Committed to fostering a continual understanding of Mumbai's history and culture through the medium of music, IHS strives to raise awareness about our rich heritage," she said. "What we have inherited is held in trust by the present generation to carry forward to the next."

Thai woman arrested with cocaine worth 40 crore at Mumbai Airport

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a significant operation led by the Directorate of Revenue (DRI), a 21-year-old Thai national was apprehended at Mumbai Airport on Friday on charges of cocaine trafficking.

The DRI, acting on reliable information, detained the woman upon her arrival from Addis Ababa.

According to the Directorate of Revenue, dur-

ing an extensive search, the individual's examination yielded no suspicious findings. However, a closer inspection of her trolley bag uncovered multiple packets containing a white powder-like substance. Subsequent testing confirmed the substance as cocaine, boasting an estimated international market value of a staggering 40 crore. The arrested woman has been booked under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act.

Further information is awaited.

Akshay Kumar beats Mumbai traffic with metro ride

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Ditching the comfort of his luxurious cars, Bollywood star Akshay Kumar was spotted travelling in the Mumbai metro to beat the traffic.

A clip of Akshay taking the public transport has been doing the rounds on social media. A video on X, formerly called Twitter, shows Akshay dressed in a T-shirt paired with pants. He went incognito with a baseball cap and a facemask as he sat next to producer Dinesh Vijan.

This is not the first time Akshay has taken the Mumbai metro to reach his destination on time. In 2023, he was seen interacting with passengers, although he was promoting his film 'Selfie' with co-star Emraan Hashmi.

A string of celebrities have been using the metro to avoid the traffic. Vidyut Jammwal was seen taking the metro after a hard day at work from his shoot for 'Crakk'. Hema Malini too was seen taking the metro.

On the work front, Akshay will next be seen sharing screen space with Tiger Shroff in 'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan', which will release on Eid.



No relief to Rakhi Sawant in estranged husband's case for leaking videos

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A court in Mumbai has denied anticipatory bail to Bollywood actor Rakhi Sawant in a case filed against her by her estranged husband for allegedly leaking their private videos.

Additional sessions judge (Dindoshi court), Shrikant Y Bhosale, rejected Sawant's bail plea on January 8. The detailed order was made available on Friday.

The case against Sawant was registered under relevant sections of the Information Technology (IT) Act at the suburban Amboli police station based on the complaint lodged by her estranged husband Adil Durrani.

Durrani accused Rakhi Sawant of showing their private videos on several online platforms to defame him.

In the pre-arrest bail plea, filed through advocate Ali Kaashif Khan Deshmukh, Ms



Sawant submitted that the FIR was registered against her with the sole intention of harassing, pressuring and implicating her in a false and bogus case.

The FIR is nothing but a pure abuse of the process of law and lacks any merit, her application said.

The court held that the material allegedly "transmitted or published" by the actor "is not only obscene but sexually explicit." "Having considered the facts, allegations and circumstances of the incident, it is not a fit case to grant anticipatory bail," the court added.



EDITOR'S SPECS

From NY's Times Square to Lucknow's Chowk, it is Ram all the way

From the Times Square in New York to Chowk in Lucknow, the Pran Pratishtha ceremony of the Ram temple is set to resonate globally. UP officials are collaborating with national agencies and the Union ministry of information and broadcasting and are identifying the key locations for coverage on January 21 and 22. A senior official said meticulous preparations include live streaming of the ceremony across the various cities for comprehensive coverage. Rallies and shows supporting the temple are scheduled in California, Washington, New York, Chicago, and various European and Canadian cities. The Times Square billboard will also feature the event to attract a vast audience. Iconic global landmarks like the Eiffel Tower in Paris and Times Square in New York are expected to draw large crowds tuning into the ceremony. Parisian viewers will experience the event in the early morning, while those in New York will gather around midnight for this grand spectacle. The live broadcast of the celebrations will be disseminated worldwide. In Lucknow, traders' associations led by the UP Adarsh Vyapar Mandal (UPAVM) have decided to embellish the city with Hindu-themed banners, hoardings, and flags. The initiative, known as 'Shri Ram Campaign', will extend to various markets in the city and along the routes connecting Lucknow with Ayodhya. Traders aim to instill a sense of festivity reminiscent of Diwali, to celebrate the "homecoming" of Lord Ram. UPAVM president and UP head of CAIT, Sanjay Gupta, emphasised the collective effort of traders to adorn major markets with flags and banners depicting their devotion to Lord Ram. In addition to beautifying markets with large cutouts of Lord Ram and replicas of the Ram temple, traders plan to install LED screens at various locations. These screens will broadcast live coverage of the grand Pran Pratishtha ceremony scheduled for January 22, including the Saryu River 'aarti'.

Union Home Minister's Internal Security strategy paying rich dividends

D.C. Pathak

It is a mark of the present Union Home Minister's farsightedness and dedicated leadership that in his direct guidance a three-fold strategy of strengthening the internal security of the country has already produced good results.

In a nutshell, this can be described as combining development with security in dealing with Maoists, taking the zero tolerance approach to terrorism beyond 'policy' to the turf of 'action' and integrating internal security with border security and law & order management to ensure total handling of the task of securing the nation.

With his hands-on approach, Amit Shah has lent speed to the efforts initiated in multiple spheres towards this objective and pursued them on an untiring note. This was reflected in his prompt visit to Sukma in Chhattisgarh in April 2021 to make an in-depth examination of the circumstances in which CPI (Maoist) had ambushed security forces led by CRPF on Sukma-Bijapur road and caused the death of 22 personnel, his address at the All India Police Science Congress at Dehradun in October this year, and the follow up directed by him on Police Technology Mission earlier announced by Prime Minister Modi at the DGPs Conference held at Lucknow in 2021.

The crucial details of this strategy need to be highlighted to get a proper understanding of what all was being done.

The Home Minister has formulated a comprehensive strategy for tackling Left Wing extremism. While putting down the violence with all the might at the government's command, modernising police forces, providing them with helicopters and UAVs for surveillance and upgrading some 250 police stations in the Maoist-affected regions, had been given priority.

The Centre has funded the development of road infrastructure, opened post offices, bank branches and ATMs and tried to enhance the financial inclusion of people there. To improve connectivity, mobile towers have been installed in 34 districts affected by the Maoist problem.

Ministry of Home Affairs has created a separate Left Wing Extremism Division to monitor the implementation of the new policy framework evolved by the present regime to deal with the problem.

Tribal communities and Economically Backward groups were being exploited and even threatened by the Maoists to sustain the Protracted People's War against the Indian nation.

The extremists take to targeting schools, health centres, railways, roads, and bridges to



thwart the development schemes of the government.

The Home Minister has highlighted the need for CRPF and other security forces to adopt a people-friendly behaviour, handle welfare schemes for the locals and keep avenues for talks open wherever possible taking the help of civil society groups if available.

It is the multi-prong responses combining counter-insurgency operations and development work, that have enabled the government to drastically curb the violence of Maoists and wean the population from the ideological influence of CPI (Maoist) in the Dandakaranya hinterland of the country.

The Ministry of Home Affairs has been working on a 'National Policy and Action Plan' since 2015 to deal with Left Wing Extremism through a collaborative approach between the Centre and the states and there is no doubt that the leadership of the Union Home Minister has made all the difference.

Addressing the Anti-Terrorism Conference organised by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in October last, Shah perceptibly underscored the importance of dismantling not just terrorism but the entire 'terrorist ecosystem' involving cryptocurrency, hawala, terror funding, organised crime and narco-terrorism.

He lauded the compilation of data regarding terrorism in the last few years and emphasised that the fight against terrorism would require collaboration from global to local levels including various states.

He called upon the NIA and the IB to stan-

daralise training programmes for all Central and state counter-terrorism agencies to ensure uniformity in their methodologies.

The Centre's initiative in building data finds reflection in the success of the National Automated Fingerprint Identification System in bringing over 90 lakh fingerprints on record.

On the occasion of Police Commemoration Day on October 21, the Home Minister said that while maintaining a zero-tolerance policy against terrorism, the government had framed strong laws to curb its spread.

In the context of the modernisation of Police forces, he gave out that a Police Technology Mission had been established with the aim of creating the "world's best anti-terror force".

The focused attention given to the task of countering terrorist activities in the country, under the direction of Shah, has already resulted in a nearly 65 per cent decline in incidents of terrorism, insurgency and Maoist violence.

In what should be considered a move of great strategic importance in the area of national security, the Home Minister told the 49th All India Police Science Congress at Dehradun in October last year that internal security, border security and good law & order management were the integral components of the system that made the country secure. The Ministry of Home Affairs has taken several measures to improve law & order throughout the country.

The Home Minister has made a significant observation that "as we move towards becoming a robust economic power our police and

security agencies must assume a more substantial role in safeguarding our economic institutions". This is an astute understanding of the reality that 'national security was inseparable from economic security' and that in the era of 'proxy wars' the adversary could take to attacking economic targets to weaken the opponent.

The Prime Minister, who interacted recently with Army, BRO and ITBP personnel in the border region of Uttarakhand, said that India attached top priority to the development of border regions through infrastructure creation and provision of services there to establish an 'environment of fearlessness' as a defining feature of 'new India'. This is an extremely farsighted strategy of making the people living in the border belt feel like they were on the frontline of a strong nation and freeing them of any sense of vulnerability borne out of 'remoteness'.

In the period ahead, India will continue facing the threat of 'radicalisation' emanating from the Pak-Afghan region because of the reinstatement of the Taliban Emirate at Kabul in 2021, a deepening Sino-Pak axis determined to step up cross-border terrorism in J&K and instigating revival of militancy in Punjab, and cyber attacks designed to damage the economic lifelines of the country.

Deeper cooperation among Intelligence agencies and a system of coordinated response to a threat cutting across the various wings of the government are needed even more and this all is being ensured by an extremely competent National Security Advisor available to both the Prime Minister as well as the Home Minister.

The geopolitical situation is somewhat unstable because of the military conflicts in Eastern Europe and West Asia, signs of a new Cold War appearing on the horizon involving the US and China and economic rivalries driving the global scene. India has done well to pursue the strategy of becoming self-sufficient in economic, military and security spheres, adopting a proactive stance on issues of war and peace and opting for bilateral and multilateral relationships that were mutually beneficial without prejudicing the cause of world peace and global economic advancement.

In the age of proxy wars, external threats to internal security have multiplied and it is a matter of great satisfaction that the Home Minister has taken the task of safeguarding internal security directly in his hands and made sure that all concerned handled their responsibilities with full application and determination.

(The writer is a former Director of the Intelligence Bureau. Views are personal)

international

Australia confirms support to US-UK airstrikes against Houthi sites in Yemen

Canberra | Agencies

Australia on Friday confirmed its support to the US and UK airstrikes targeting sites belonging to the Houthi rebels in Yemen, in response to the Iran-backed militia's continued attacks against commercial shipping in the Red Sea.

Addressing reporters here, Defence Minister Richard Marles said that Australian personnel were present in operational headquarters during the strikes but stopped short of elaborating on the nature of their involvement, reports Xinhua news agency.

"On January 4, Australia was part of 14 countries which issued a statement warning the Houthi rebels that if they continue to attack maritime activity in the Red Sea, there would be consequences," Marles, who is also the Deputy Prime Minister, said.

"They have continued their attacks on maritime and naval assets. As a result the attacks today have occurred."

Australia in December 2023 had rejected a request from the US to send a Royal Australian Navy warship to the Red Sea to "help secure international shipping lanes".

The government instead committed to deploying additional Australian Defence Force officers to the 39-nation Combined Maritime Forces command in Bahrain.

The Minister's statement came hours after the US and UK launched the airstrikes on Houthi military sites around the Yemeni capital of Sanaa before dawn on Friday.

According to the Houthi-controlled



Saba news agency, strikes were also carried out in the governorates of Hodeidah, Saada, and Dhamar.

The strikes "targeted Al-Dailami air base in Sanaa, areas in Zabid District of Hodeidah province, the vicinity of the airport of Hodeidah port city, Kahlan Camp in the east of northern Saada city, and the airport of Abs district in the northwestern governorate of Hajjah", it said.

At least four powerful airstrikes hit the mountains around Sanaa, shaking windows of houses and cutting off lights in many areas, residents said.

The Houthis have also evacuated many camps adjoining the residents' neighborhoods at the centre of Sanaa.

Loaded vehicles were seen departing the camps throughout the night and Houthi fighters were also seen deployed at checkpoints along the streets.

Residents in Hodeidah said they saw the Houthis evacuate their fighters from camps in and around the coastal city.

Meanwhile, US media confirmed sever-

al airstrikes on Houthi sites across several cities in the north.

Late Thursday night, Houthi leader Abdulmalik al-Houthi warned in a televised speech that "any American aggression will not go without response".

The allied airstrikes came hours after the Houthi fighters launched a ballistic missile at a cargo ship in the Gulf of Aden, according to the US Central Command (CENTCOM).

"This is the 27th Houthi attack on international shipping since Nov. 19," it said in a post on X.

On Wednesday, the Houthis claimed responsibility for launching 18 bomb-laden drones and three missiles at US Navy ships stationed in the Red Sea in retaliation for the killing of 10 Houthi fighters on three small boats last week.

The US Navy said it intercepted the attack with no injuries or damage.

The attack on the cargo ship on Thursday came hours after the UN Security Council adopted a new resolution condemning the Houthi attacks on the international shipping lines, calling on the group to immediately cease attacks on commercial ships in the international maritime lanes.

The Houthis control much of northern Yemen, including the capital Sanaa and the strategic Red Sea port city of Hodeidah.

The Houthis said they only attack those Israel-linked or Israel-bound ships to press Israel to stop its war on the Palestinian enclave of the Gaza Strip.

Brutal Arctic blast to drop temperatures in US to minus 30s

Washington | Agencies

A brutal Arctic blast in the US is expected to plunge temperatures to as low as 20 to 30 degrees below zero in the northern Plains on Friday and Saturday night.

As a result, more than 15 million people in the central US are under wind chill alerts where frostbite could occur in as little as 10 minutes on exposed skin, reports CNN.

The cold will spread south and east across the country and eventually envelop Texas and other parts of the South by the weekend, lasting into the middle of next week.

Afternoon high temperatures on Friday



will likely fail to reach zero degrees across much of Montana and North Dakota.

High temperatures in the single digits and 10s will then spread east into parts of the central Plains and Midwest.

During the weekend, the coldest air will stretch from Denver to Indianapolis, with temperatures at least 30 degrees below normal.

ERCOT, Texas's power grid, has issued a weather watch for January 14, warning of the impending surge in electricity demand and a potential dip in reserves, reports CNN.

On Thursday, ERCOT said there was expected to be enough power to avoid outages.

More than 200 people died -- most of them from hypothermia -- during a historic bout of cold and an ice storm in February 2021.

Russia to use nuclear weapons if attacked by Western missiles: Medvedev

Moscow | Agencies

Russia could resort to the use of nuclear weapons if its launchers are attacked by Western missiles, Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council Dmitry Medvedev said.

Medvedev made the remarks on Thursday in a Telegram post in response to recent proposals by the Ukrainian side to use US-supplied long-range missiles to destroy Russian launchers on Russian ter-



ritory, Xinhua news agency reported. He added that this wouldn't be a right to self-defence, but a direct and obvious basis for Russia to use nuclear weapons against such a state. He said this move would be in accordance with Russia's nuclear doctrine, which stipulates the right to nuclear weapons in response to "aggression against the Russian Federation with conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is threatened".

35 arrested over Iran twin bombings

Tehran | Agencies

The Iranian Intelligence Ministry announced the arrest of 35 people from six provinces in the country in connection with the January 3 twin bombings in the southeastern city of Kerman that resulted in the death of more than 90 persons.

In an official statement on Thursday, the Ministry provided additional details about the terrorist attack which occurred near the tomb of Iranian general Qassem Soleimani on January 3, which also resulted in some 280 injuries, reports Xinhua news agency.

The provinces where the arrests were made are Kerman, Sistan and Baluchestan, Khorasan Razavi, Isfahan, Tehran and West Azarbaijan.

The statement also mentioned the identification of some individuals involved in the attack who are currently based abroad, with ongoing efforts to apprehend them.

It said investigations were actively underway to identify others responsible for planning and ordering the terrorist attack, which marked one of the deadliest attacks on Iran in decades.



According to the Ministry's findings, a Tajik national, named Abdollah Tajiki, played a central role in designing the attack and providing support for the operation. Tajiki, an expert in making homemade bombs, entered Iran illegally through the southeastern border on December 19, 2023, and left the country two days before the carnage.

Jerusalem | Agencies

The Israeli government's expenses for the conflict with Hamas amounted to 24.7 billion shekels (\$6.59 billion) in 2023, the Finance Ministry said.

The expenses were incurred between October 7, the day when Hamas attacked Israel, and December 31, with 17 billion shekels of the amount spent on defense and the rest on civilian purposes related to the fighting, reports Xinhua news agency.

In December alone, the conflict expenses amounted to 17.2 billion shekels out of a monthly total government expenditure of 71 billion shekels.

The month's deficit stood at 33.8 billion shekels, reflecting



an increase of 82.7 per cent year-on-year.

The Israeli government's annual deficit amounted to 77.5 billion shekels in 2023, or 4.2 per cent of the GDP, compared to a surplus of 9.9 billion shekels registered in 2022.

The Ministry explained that alongside the spending increase, the conflict also caused a decrease in revenue, with tax collection dropping due to reduced activities in Israel.

Israeli government revenues decreased by 6.4 per cent last year compared to 2022, while expenditures rose by 12.5 per cent year-on-year.

The Bank of Israel estimates the war will cost about \$58 billion and that the economy shrank by 2 per cent in the final three months of 2023.



MADHYA PRADESH TEMPLE TO SEND 5 LAKH LADOOS FOR RAM TEMPLE INAUGURATION

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Friday said the state will send five lakh ladoos from Ujjain's Mahakaleshwar shrine to Ayodhya for the consecration of the Ram temple on January 22.

The chief minister and other ministers performed 'Surya Namaskar' and yoga during an event at a school to mark the National Youth Day observed on the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekanand.

Speaking to reporters, Yadav said, "We are going to send five lakh ladoos from the famous Mahakaleshwar Mandir, Ujjain, to Ayodhya for the consecration ceremony of the Ram temple on January 22."

Yadav said Mughal emperor Babar demolished the temple in Ayodhya. Now that it has been rebuilt, how can Madhya Pradesh be left behind in celebrating the occasion, he asked.

People will be sent to Ayodhya from different states for darshan at the Ram temple on specific dates, which the Centre will provide, he said. The chief minister said Swami



Vivekanand's life was inspirational. "We are privileged that Bharat has the highest youth population in the world," he said, adding that a hundred years ago, Swami Vivekanand

declared that the 21st century would belong to India, he said.

India is transforming and achieving numerous milestones, from Chandrayaan to Gaganyaan, and

even Aditya L-1 spacecraft, India's first space-based mission to study the Sun, Mr Yadav said. "India is crafting its destiny with various accomplishments," he added.

Cong in MP criticises BJP, VHP ahead of Ram Mandir inauguration

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The opposition Congress in Madhya Pradesh has criticised the ruling BJP, and the VHP, ahead of the Ram Mandir inauguration at Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh on January 22, saying the saffron party was trying to make the occasion "an event".

The leaders of the BJP have appealed to people to celebrate the occasion on the scale of Diwali.

On Thursday, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav along with some of his cabinet ministers and the state BJP leaders joined a meeting with RSS functionaries in Sehore to look into the state's preparations on the occasion of the 'pran-pratishtha'.

Meanwhile, senior Congress leader Kantilal Bhuria has claimed the BJP and VHP were "misusing funds" collected for Ram temple. "A huge amount of money was donated for building the Ram temple and the BJP and VHP misused it for their own purpose,"



Bhuria, a former Union Minister, said on Thursday.

He said the BJP should provide details of every single rupee collected as a donation for the same.

Former Madhya Pradesh CM and Rajya Sabha MP Digvijaya Singh has accused the BJP and the VHP of insulting the Shankaracharyas, who have objected to the consecration ceremony of Ram temple in Ayodhya.

Referring to VHP leader

Champat Rai, who was made the head of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teertha Kshetra trust, the Congress leader questioned why Nirmohi Akhada's rights were taken away.

"We object to the fact that Shankaracharyas are being insulted. What is VHP's right on Ram temple? We have made donations for Ram temple. (Former PM) Narasimha Rao had made 'Ramalay Nyas' with all four Shankaracharyas," he said.

Puppy run over by car in Indore, FIR registered on basis of CCTV footage

Team Absolute | Bhopal

An FIR has been registered against an unidentified motorist in Madhya Pradesh's Indore for killing a puppy by running it over with his vehicle, police said on Thursday.

The case was registered on the basis of a viral video provided to the police a week after the incident occurred.

In the video, a puppy, along with its siblings, was seen playing on a road in front of Jamma Apartment located in the posh Greater Tirupati Colony of the city. As a car approached, the mother of the puppies moved away but the driver did not apply brakes to stop and ran over the puppy, which soon succumbed on the spot.

This entire heart-wrenching incident was captured in a CCTV camera installed outside Jamma Apartment, and



the basis of which an FIR was registered at Palasia police station under Section 429 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860, and Section 11 of The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act, 1960.

A copy of the FIR, revealed that the complaint was registered by Priyanshu Jain, a resident of Indore, who is associ-

ated with PETA India. "This incident highlights the importance of responsible driving and stopping should an untoward incident occur. We commend Indore police for sending a message that careless driving and leaving animals to suffer won't be tolerated," PETA member Sunayana Basu said.

MP CM Mohan Yadav meets Kamal Nath

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has met with Congress leader Kamal Nath at latter's residence in Bhopal's Shyamla Hills.

The meeting was held between the two leaders on Thursday night. Yadav's office called it a formal meeting.

Earlier, a formal meeting between the two leaders had taken place after Yadav took oath as chief minister of the state and Kamal Nath had assured him of full cooperation in development of the state.

Kamal Nath's residence is located hardly 500 meters away from Chief Minister's residence - B6 Shyamla Hills.

This meeting came hours after leaders of the ruling BJP along with the representatives of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chalked out plan for the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections, and a special plan was prepared to win Chhindwara seat.

In Chhindwara, the bastion of



Kamal Nath, the Congress had won all seven seats in the assembly elec-

tion held in November. Moreover, Chhindwara was the only Lok Sabha

seat in the state, the Congress could win in 2019.

Kamal Nath was elected Lok Sabha MP for record nine time from Chhindwara and when he became Chief Minister in 2018, his son Nakul Nath won the said seat.

The state has 29 Lok Sabha seats, of which, the BJP won 28 in 2019 and this time, it is planning to make a clean sweep. The meeting between the two leaders comes at time when the Congress' central leadership has refused to attend the 'pran-pratishtha' of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya on January 22, calling it a "BJP-RSS event".

Here in Madhya Pradesh, Kamal Nath and his son Nakul Nath wrote Lord Ram's name 4.31 crore times on a paper, which is to be sent to Ayodhya. Speaking to media persons on Wednesday, Nakul Nath has said that he will distribute papers to the people to write 'Ram'. These papers will be dispatched to Ayodhya in two buses, he said. "I want to tell the Ram devotees of Chhindwara that the city is going to make a record," he had said on Wednesday.

Various events will be organized in the state on Lord Shri Ram's Prana Pratishtha ceremony in Ayodhya

Ram Kirtan, lighting of lamps in temples and earthen lamps to be lit in every house. Instructions issued to all collectors of the state

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In view of Lord Shri Ram's Prana Pratishtha proposed to be held on January 22 in Ayodhya, instructions have been issued to the collectors to organize various programmes in all the districts of the state. Additional Chief Secretary Religious Trust and Endowments Dr. Rajesh Rajoura has said that necessary instructions have been given to organize various social and cultural programmes from 16 to 22 January with grace. Arrangements will be made to welcome the pilgrims going to Ayodhya by special trains and road routes with the cooperation of local bodies and local people.

Ram Kirtan will be organized in every temple of the state from January 16 to January 22 with public participation. Lamps will be lit in all the temples. General public will be motivated to participate by lighting up their houses. Ram Mandalis present in the cities and villages of the state will be motivated to organize local programmes in the localities and villages. Bhandaras will be organized on January 22 by trust committees in major temples of the state in coordination with religious leaders.

Lord Shri Ram Prana Pratishtha in Ayodhya will be telecast through TV in prominent temples of the



state. Special invitation will be given for participation of the general public in programmes to be organized in the temples, necessary arrangements will also be made. Along with cleanliness, lighting of earthen lamps, decorative lighting etc., cultural events based on Lord Shri Ram-Janaki will also be organized through the Trust Committee in the major temples of the district.

A special cleanliness campaign will be launched between January 14 and 21 in the cities by the Urban Development and Housing Department and through the Panchayat and Rural Development

Department in the villages. All government buildings, schools and colleges will be decorated. A special cleanliness campaign will be launched in all the government offices of the state from 16 to 21 January. All government offices will be lit up from 21st to 26th January.

Shri Ramcharit Leela celebrations will be organized by the Culture Department in Ratlam, Mandasaur, Ujjain, Indore, Khandwa, Agar-Malwa, Dewas, Sehore, Chhindwara, Jabalpur, Anuppur, Tikamgarh, Chhatarpur, Panna, Satna, Gwalior, Datia, Niwari Rewa and Damoh from January 11 to 21, 2024. Responsibilities for organising programmes have been assigned to various departments in the districts of the state. Among other programmes to be organized at different places from 11th to 22nd January in coordination with Jan Abhiyan Parishad are Prabhath-Pheris and Kalash-Yatra, Deepdana and lighting arrangements in temples, holy rivers, reservoirs on 22nd January, Shri Ramcharit Leela Samaroha along with special activities at 28 pilgrimages of the state including in Chitrakoot and Orchha between 11th to 22nd January and spiritual and cultural seminars with related pictures, crafts, rangoli related to Shri Ram-Janaki ji with the help of local artists and institutions.

Miniskirts and torn jeans banned in Ganesh temple of Ujjain

Team Absolute | Ujjain

There is a ban on visiting the famous ten-armed Ganesh temple situated in the crematorium of Ujjain wearing miniskirts, torn jeans and short clothes. Devotees will not be able to take even selfies here. The temple committee has pasted a poster in this regard on the gate.

The Ganesh temple located at Chakratirtha crematorium is famous across the country. A large number of women and men reach the temple for darshan. On Wednesday, there is a huge crowd in the Ganesh temple throughout the day. The temple committee says that people coming wearing indecent clothes will be able to have darshan from outside only. Temple priest Hemant Ingle says that girls sometimes do not wear clothes as per traditional attire. They come wearing ripped jeans and mini skirts.



Regarding such devotees, we have put up a poster outside the temple, in which there is a ban on taking photographs in the temple, taking care of cleanliness, wearing clothes as per Sanatan Dharma and sitting unnecessarily in the temple. Especially girls have been asked to use traditional attire. You can take photos of Lord Ganesha: Priest Hemant Ingle said that on Ganesh Chaturthi, we had banned taking selfies in the temple,

after which many girls started following the rule. Girls have been told that they can take photos of Lord Ganesha in the temple, but there is a ban on selfies from mobile phones. Girls have been asked to enter the temple wearing saree or suit only. If they come to the temple wearing clothes like jeans or skirt, then they are requested to come next time wearing clothes as per Sanatan Dharma.

SUCCESSFUL STEM CELL TRANSPLANT AT AIIMS BHOPAL

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A 54 year old male patient underwent matched sibling donor stem cell transplant at AIIMS Bhopal on 22 December 2023. He was suffering from a grave blood cancer, cure of which is next to impossible in the absence of stem cell transplant.

A resident of Bhopal came to know about his disease in the month of July 2023 at other hospital. He received chemotherapy initially after which his disease came into remission. He was planned for stem cell transplant. Patient and his family were counselled in detail about the need, procedure, complications and duration of the procedure. After their consent further work up was done. He was admitted in the month of December. Stem cell donor was his 50 year old sister. She was given growth factors for four days after which stem cells were collected from her body through apheresis machine (just like blood donation). Apheresis was done for 2 consecutive days as required stem cell dose was not obtained on 1st day of apheresis. These collected stem cells were given (just



like blood transfusion) to patient. Donated stem cells started multiplying and working in his body during 1st week of January. Patient is absolutely fine at the time of discharge. He needs to be closely followed up for next 1 year. This entire procedure was conducted using all aseptic precautions. A dedicated team comprising of doctors from Dept of Medical Oncology/Hematology, Dept of Transfusion Medicine, Dept of Pathology and Dept of Radiotherapy was involved in this procedure. Visionary Executive Director of AIIMS Bhopal Prof. (Dr.) Ajai Singh supported the team in every way, needed for this procedure.

Swami Vivekanandas life and philosophy ignites the spirit of youth: Mangubhai Patel

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Governor Mangubhai Patel said that the youth should read about the life and philosophy of Swami Vivekananda. They should learn about his life and ideology, understand them and take inspiration to work for the upliftment of oneself and the society. The youth should endeavour to utilise their energy, capability, fortitude and vigour for nation building. He said that educational institutions should teach students about the ideology of Swami Vivekananda and other great personalities to motivate them to come forward and work.

The Governor said that Swamiji was remarkable and multifaceted. He was a scholar in religion, philosophy, history, art, music, literature and sports. This is the reason why his Guru Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa called him a 'complete' man. Shri Patel was addressing the gathering at the inauguration of "Youth for Nation Madhya Pradesh Chapter". On this occasion, he paid tributes to



Swamiji on his birth anniversary.

Governor Patel calls upon the youth to actively engage in shaping the nation's future through their innovations and ideas, emphasising their crucial

role as a bridge connecting our illustrious past to a magnificent future. India is the youngest country in the world. It is youth's responsibility for India's holistic development and transforming it into a world leader.

Youth should regularly practice yoga

Governor Patel said that the process of transforming India into a developed nation has begun. He said that the first need of a strong nation is strong youth. When dreams are huge, hard work is must. Youth should exercise, practice yoga and meditation regularly. Eating nutritious food, including whole grains in one's diet, good sleep, adequate water and plenty of exercise are the basic mantras to stay healthy. Healthy youth will ensure the development of the nation. Governor Shri Patel said that the next 25 years is the testing period of the strength and potential of the youth. The youth should adopt the thoughts of Swami Vivekananda "Get up, wake up and do not stop till you achieve your goal".



JULIA ROBERTS REVEALS WHY SHE ALMOST PASSED ON HER 'NOTTING HILL' ROLE



Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Julia Roberts almost passed playing the role of famous actress Anna Scott in the 1999 classic 'Notting Hill'.

In a new interview with British Vogue and conducted by Notting Hill screenwriter and Roberts' friend of 25 years, Richard Curtis, the 56-year-old actress

expressed that she hesitated taking on the role opposite Hugh Grant.

The topic came up when Roberts shared that she still envies people she works with who "are very technical" in their craft as actors, reports etonline.com.

She added that she finds it "really fascinating, and I envy it so much" because "there's so many different ways to approach" a role.

Curtis then says that technique can sometimes get in the way of an actor, where as with Roberts she's giving more of her authentic self, as in she brings more of herself and less craft. She shared that she thinks "it's dangerous to overanalyze these things" but admits, "I never feel like I'm playing myself."

And therein lies the issue with Notting Hill, in which she portrays a famous actress.

"One of the hardest things I've ever had to do was your movie (Notting Hill, 1999), playing a movie actress," she said.

"I was so uncomfortable! I mean, we've talked about this so many times, but I almost didn't take the part because it just seemed -- oh, it just seemed so awkward. I didn't even know how to play that person."

Dua Lipa is dating British actor Callum Turner

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer Dua Lipa is dating British actor Callum Turner.

The singer and the actor were spotted dancing at an afterparty in LA for the premiere of his show 'Masters of The Air' Wednesday night, sparking speculation they are dating, reports pagesix.com.

Now a source has confirmed the news. "It's new, but they're mad about each other," the insider said.

Even though it's early days, they're clearly serious enough for her to come to his big event.

"She was at the premiere to support him," the source said.

The 'Dance the Night' singer appears to have no other connection to the Apple TV+ limited series.

As well as the war series, which is produced by Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg, Turner is also starring in George Clooney's latest, 'The Boys in the Boat', right now. He previously appeared in two installments 'Fantastic Beasts' series.

He dated Vanessa Kirby, who played Princess Margaret on 'The Crown' from 2016 until 2017. Lipa, meanwhile, dated Gigi and Bella Hadid's brother, Anwar, from 2019 until 2021. She's also been linked to Jack Harlow and Trevor Noah.



Kristen Stewart says 'Twilight' is 'such a gay movie'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Kristen Stewart has a very different perspective on the Twilight series over a decade after the franchise premiered.

While the films center around a heterosexual love triangle between Bella Swan (Stewart), Edward Cullen (Robert Pattinson) and Jacob Black (Taylor Lautner), Stewart, 33, said that she can "only see" the series as gay now.

"I don't think it necessarily started off that way, but I also think that the fact that I was there at all, it was percolating," Stewart told Variety.

"It's such a gay movie. I mean, Jesus Christ, Taylor and Rob and me, and it's so hidden and not OK. I mean, a Mormon woman wrote this book. It's all about oppression, about wanting what's going to destroy you. That's a very Gothic, gay inclination that I love."

Amid the film's success, Stewart and Pattinson, 37, began romancing from 2009 to 2013. Years later, Stewart came out during her monologue on Saturday Night Live when she called herself "so gay" while talking about former President Donald Trump tweeting about her relationship with Pattinson, reports usmagazine.com.

"It was cool to frame it in a funny context because it could say everything (about my sexuality) without [my] having to sit down and do an interview," she said.

"So what platform is that going to be on? And who's going to make money on that? And who's going to be the person that broke it? I broke it, alone."

Stewart noted that "it wasn't even like [she] was hiding." She continued that she "was so openly out" with her girlfriend "for years at that point," adding: "I'm like, 'I'm a pretty knowable person.'"

Months after coming out on SNL, Stewart explained that she's "been deeply in love" with everyone that she has dated. As for where she stands in her current love life, Stewart announced her engagement to Dylan Meyer in 2021 but the pair haven't walked down the aisle just yet. In June 2023, it was reported that the couple's nuptials will "probably happen this year."



MARK RUFFALO PRAISES 'MAGICAL' JENNIFER GARNER: WE HAD JUST A WONDERFUL CHEMISTRY TOGETHER



Los Angeles | Agencies

Ahead of the 20th anniversary of their film '13 Going on 30', Hollywood star Mark Ruffalo has nothing but incredible things to say about co-star Jennifer Garner.

The actor explained what initially brought him to the project and why it was the "wonderful chemistry" he had with Garner, 51, that hooked him, reports etonline.com.

"It was my first kind of studio film and, you know, I'd been doing pretty small indies up to that point and Gary Winnick, our director, said 'I want to -- I want to do a small indie but in a rom-com studio film,'" he said, adding that the Winnick told him he would be opposite the Alias actress.

"It was Jen Garner, who is just magical, and we had just a wonderful chemistry together," the Avengers star said.

The film released in April 2004 and became an instant classic, boosting Ruffalo and Garner's own careers astronomically. Garner went on to star in Elektra, Juno, and Ghosts of Girlfriends Past while Ruffalo took on roles in Collateral, Zodiac and Shutter Island.

He credits '13 Going on 30' with helping him to reach the next stage in his career and being cast in "elevated roles."

"I think people started to see me in a lot more different kinds of elevated roles than what I'd been playing up to that time," Ruffalo said.

As for what he would consider his favorite scene from the movie, Ruffalo said it's the tender moment between his character and Garner's on a swing set outside of New York City that comes to mind.

"Probably the Razzle scene on the, out on the swings in the park," Ruffalo said. "Yeah, beautiful, sweet scene."

The iconic film was released in April 2004 and also starred Judy Greer and Andy Serkis.

George Michael to be brought to life via hologram show

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer George Michael, who passed away from natural causes at the age of 53 in December 2016, is expected to return to the stage as a hologram next year.

Documents filed by the star's Nobby's Hobbies Holdings firm at Companies House and obtained by MailOnline show The 'Careless Whisper' singer's estate made over \$60,000 (£50,000) a day last year and added, "Activity at the group will

broaden in the next one to three years to include live public performances."

Michael's Wham! bandmate Andrew Ridgeley said last year he'd love to see the group back on stage in an Abba Voyage-style show, but admitted the prospect of using his late friend's likeness raised "ethical questions," reports aceshowbiz.com.

He told 'Newsnight': "My thinking would be, 'Fantastic! To have Wham! at its pomp, playing live. Of course, there are ethical questions. And that decision would be a mutual decision

between myself and (George Michael's) estate, should it ever come to it. And I can't speak for them, I don't know how they would feel about it. But I think it could be done, and I think it could be done exceptionally well. I'd pay to go and see it!"

The singer's former-manager, David Austin, previously revealed the 'Freedom' singer had been in talks to use a hologram replica while he was still alive but the idea was scrapped because the technology wasn't deemed to be good enough.

Speaking at a screening of the documentary film 'Freedom Uncut' in London in June 2022, David responded when asked if a hologram tour was a possibility, "Never. A few years ago, way before all that started happening while George was with us, we were thinking about doing something at the Royal Albert Hall."

"So around the release of 'Listen Without Prejudice' [anniversary set] that we initially made this film for, we were going to do a live event, it was going to be orchestral or something like that, we were trying to work out how we could do this."

"We had an idea that in the middle of 'Fastlove', that bit where the rain comes down, we were going to see if we could do a hologram idea in the middle of the RAH which we thought would blow people away."

"We went around and had all these people sort of courting me - they did Tupac, they did this, they did that. I went to look at a load of them and they were s***. They were really, really poor. There were some people who were ahead of the game with it, some who weren't but it just didn't work."



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Rita Ora



MALAYSIA OPEN: SATWIK-CHIRAG STORM INTO SEMI-FINALS, ASHWINI-TANISHA BOW OUT IN QUARTERS

Kuala Lumpur | Agencies

In a display of badminton brilliance, the dynamic Indian duo, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, stormed into the semi-finals of the Malaysia Open by convincingly defeating the Chinese pair of Ren Xiang Yu and He Ji Ting, here on Friday.

The second-ranked Indian pair, known for their impressive track record and six titles from the previous year, including an Asian Games gold medal, showcased their dominance on the court with a commanding 21-11, 21-8 victory in just 35 minutes.

From the outset, Satwik and Chirag asserted their control, surging to a 7-0 lead in the first game. Their aggressive play and strategic net presence left their Chinese opponents, ranked 32nd in the world, struggling to find their rhythm. The Indians continued their relentless assault, securing an 11-2 lead at the interval.

The second game mirrored the first, with Satwik and Chirag maintaining their dominance and extending their lead to 11-4 at the interval. The synergy between the Indian shuttlers was evident, blending speed, precision, and tactical acumen to keep their opponents at bay. The Chinese pair found it challenging to counter the relentless attacks and strategic play of Satwik and Chirag.



The match concluded with the Indian duo earning a dozen match points, and they secured their victory at the second opportunity.

With this impressive win, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag

Shetty advance to the semi-finals, where they await the outcome of the match between Korea's Kang Min Hyuk and Seo Seung Jae and the third-seeded Malaysian pair of Aaron Chia and Soh Wooi Yik.

However, on the women's side, India's Ashwini Ponnappa and Tanisha Crasto faced a setback, bowing out in the quarter-finals after a 15-21, 13-21 loss to Japan's Rin Iwanaga and Kie Nakanishi.

Avani edged to the second place at Australian Master of Amateurs golf

Melbourne | Agencies

Avani Prashanth was edged into second place despite a fine round of 3-under 70 at the Australian Master of Amateurs Championships. She was one shot behind Rianne Mikhaela Malixi of the Philippines.

Avani (70) finished with a total of 6-under and Malixi, 16, shot 4-under 69 to grab the title. Avani had rounds of 71-68-77-70 for a 6-under 286 at the Par-73 while Malixi with 70-72-74-69 for a total of 7-under 285. Malixi was consistent through the week and deservedly won the title.

Japan's Nika Ito, the first and second round leader, was third with 68-70-78-71 at 5-under 287, and the third-round leader, Australia's Lion Higo was fourth with cards of 71-71-70-76.

Avani said, "Well, I think it was a good week. I can't complain too much. But I didn't have the best day in the third round which I think caused the issue. But there's always next week." In 2023 Avani won at Queen Sirikit Cup, where Malixi was third. Avani also won the Ahlsell Final for professionals on the



Ladies European Tour Access Series and was fourth in the individual section at the World Amateur Team Championships in Abu Dhabi. She was also in Top-10 at LET's pro events, the Magical Kenya Ladies Open and the Hero Women's Indian Open.

The other Indian participant in women's section

Heena Kang missed the 54-hole cut, as did Rohit Narwal and Sandeep Yadav. Avani and the other three Indians selected by the Indian Golf Union, are also due to play in another major amateur event, the Australian Amateur at the Yarra Yarra Golf Club and Keysborough Golf Club from January 16 to 19.

Babar Azam surpasses Guptill to become third highest run-getter in T20I

Auckland | Agencies

Pakistan star-batter Babar Azam etched his name in T20I history by surpassing Martin Guptill to claim the third spot in the all-time list for the highest run-getters during the first match of the series against New Zealand on Friday.

Babar's valiant knock of 57 runs during the first match of the series against New Zealand propelled his career T20I tally to 3542 runs in 105 matches.

The accomplished batsman now stands only behind India's dynamic duo, Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, who hold the top two positions with 4008 and 3853 runs, respectively. Babar's ascent in the rankings showcases his consistency and prowess in the shortest format of the game.

Despite his individual brilliance, Pakistan faced a formidable challenge at Eden Park, succumbing to a 46-run loss against New Zealand. The Kiwis set an imposing target of 226 runs, highlighted by explosive performances from Daryl Mitchell (61) and the ever-reliable Kane Williamson (57). Babar, batting in an altered position at number three, led the charge for Pakistan with a resilient innings comprising six boundaries and two sixes. Saim Ayub and Mohammad Rizwan provided a fiery start, contributing 27 and 25 runs, respectively.

However, the rest of the batting lineup faltered, and Pakistan found themselves bundled out for 180 in 18 overs.



New Zealand's bowlers proved effective, capitalizing on the wickets secured by Tim Southee (4-25) and Ben Sear (2-42). Despite Babar's individual milestone, the collective effort fell short, leaving Pakistan trailing 1-0 in the five-match series.

Mandya Open: Karan ousts top seed Kris Van Wyk enroute to semifinals

Mandya | Agencies

Karan Singh scripted the biggest upset of the tournament when he showed the top seed Kris Van Wyk of South Africa the door to enter the semifinals of the PET ITF Mandya Open.

In the first quarterfinal played at the PET Stadium here on Friday, the 20-year-old won in straight sets 6-3, 6-3 to set-up a last-four clash with Jelle Sels of The Netherlands.

Sels quelled the challenge of his country mate Thijmen Loof 6-7 (4), 6-1, 6-4 in the longest match of the day that lasted a little over two hours.

Following Karan's footsteps was Siddharth Vishwakarma who also registered an upset victory over fifth seed Nam Hoang Ly of Vietnam in straight sets 6-1, 6-4.

The lanky Indian will meet third seed Orel Kimhi in the other semifinal. The Israeli stopped the dream run of Madhwin Kamath with a 7-6 (5), 6-0 win.

Meanwhile, Karan and his Korean partner Woobin Shin upset the third-seeded pair of Tsung-Hao Huang of



Taipei and Kris Van Wyk with a scoreline of 1-6, 6-3, 10-7 to enter the finals of the doubles event. Karan and Woobin will meet the fourth seeded all Indian pair of Parikshit Somani and Manish Sureshkumar who breezed past the top seeded duo of Grigoriy Lomakin of Kazakhstan and Austrian David Pichler 6-3, 6-2. The quarterfi-

nal match between Karan and Van Wyk was a see-saw battle as both the players played well and had bad shots, all at the same time. Breaking the top seed's serve in the 1st and third games, Karan, using a strong forehand went 3-0 up. However, the visitor returned the favour, achieving two breaks in the 4th and the 6th

game to restore parity. A similar pattern followed during the last three games, where the lad from Haryana broke Van Wyk's serve in the 7th and 9th games to take the first set. The second set saw the players holding on to their respective serves until the seventh game where Karan held a 4-3 edge over his rival.

The visitor suddenly lost focus and cool and committed a series of unforced errors to lose his serve in the eighth game, which helped Karan wrap up the match in 53 minutes.

In another quarterfinal tie, the 29-year-old Vishwakarma made it look a one-sided affair as the left-hander served with aplomb and returned with fervour. After both the opponents held their respective serves in the first two games, Vishwakarma raced away to grab the first set at 6-1 with breaks in the fourth and the sixth game. The second set saw Hoang claw back in the match going 4-2 up with a break in the sixth game. However, the Indian struck back strongly and didn't give much of a chance to his fancied rival in the next four games, which he won in a row to win the set and the match.

Second half goals give Barcelona win in Super Cup SF, set up Clasico final

Riyadh | Agencies

FC Barcelona will play Real Madrid in the final of the Spanish Supercup on Sunday after beating Osasuna 2-0 in Thursday's second semifinal.

Second half goals from Robert Lewandowski and Lamine Yamal gave Barcelona the result that will no doubt please TV rights holders and organizers as it gives the second 'Clasico' of the season after Real Madrid's 5-3 win over Atletico Madrid on Wednesday, reports Xinhua.

Barcelona were far from brilliant, but created more chances than their rivals. The first half began at a ferocious pace, with Jose Arnaiz almost setting up Ante Budimir in front of the Barcelona goal, while at the other



end Ferran Torres shot just wide from outside of the penalty area. Osasuna responded quickly with right back Jesus Areso shooting

across the face of goal, before Lewandowski shot tamely at keeper Sergio Herrera as Barca launched a quick break.

All of that happened in the first 15 minutes, after which Barca took control of the ball and began to build up possession, but without the speed to cause problems to a well-organized Osasuna defense.

Lewandowski headed wide from a corner, before Yamal had to replace Raphinha, who pulled up with a muscle problem, with the young winger setting Lewandowski up for another chance that was blocked by Herrera on the stroke of halftime.

There was little change to the script in the second half, but Barca took the lead after Ilkay Gundogan's through ball for Lewandowski to score. After Raul Garcia was inches away from volleying in a spectacular equalizer, Joao Felix showed his quality with a run to set up Yamal to beat Herrera for Barca's second goal.

Australian Open: Sumit Nagal enters Grand Slam main draw after 3 years

Melbourne | Agencies

India Sumit Nagal made his way through to the Australian Open men's singles main draw after beating Alex Molcan of Slovakia 6-4, 6-4 in the final round of the qualifiers here on Friday.

Nagal, currently 139th in the singles world ranking, entered the main round of a Grand Slam event for the first time since 2021, marking his fourth overall grand slam main draw appearance.

The Indian marked his grand slam main draw debut in 2019 US Open, when he faced Roger Federer in his opening round match and managed to take first set against the Swiss legend before losing the match 6-4, 1-6, 2-6, 4-6. At 2020 US Open main draw, Nagal won his opening round match against Bradley Klahn, becoming first Indian since Somdev Devvarman (2013 US Open) to win a singles match in the main draw of a Grand Slam. However, he was defeated by eventual champion Dominic Thiem in the second round.

Nagal's last appearance in the main draw



took place at the Australian Open in 2021, where he faced an opening-round defeat with a scoreline of 2-6, 5-7, 3-6 against Lithuania's Ricardas Berankis.

'WANTED TO APPLY WHAT I LEARN FROM MS DHONI...', SAYS SHIVAM DUBE AFTER MATCH-WINNING SHOW IN MOHALI

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Shivam Dube has attributed the change in his attitude and approach to Chennai Super Kings (CSK) captain MS Dhoni, following a match-winning performance of 60 off 40 balls in India's six-wicket victory against Afghanistan in the first T20I.

Dube, who returned to the T20I XI for the first time since the Asian Games in October last year, showcased stellar performance with a half-century and bowling figures of 1 for 9 to headline India's 1-0 lead in three-match series.

"When I came to bat, I wanted to



implement what I have learnt from MS Dhoni about finishing games. I keep speaking to Mahi bhai. He tells me about how to tackle different situations. He has given me two-three tips and rated my batting. So, I feel if he rates my batting then I'll keep playing well. My confidence went up because of that," Dube was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo.

Dube mentioned that the support from both Dhoni and the Indian captain, Rohit Sharma, provides him with the confidence to excel in his performances.

"Both allow me to bat higher in the order. There's a lot of work to be done and I know they will back me and want

me to do well. So, that makes me feel a lot more positive," he said.

Dube bowled the ninth and 12th overs and scalped a crucial wicket, dismissing Afghanistan's captain Ibrahim Zadran with finesse.

Speaking about his bowling performance, the 30-year-old all-rounder said: "The changes have not come suddenly," Dube said of his bowling. In the off-season, I worked a lot on my fitness.

"After that, I bowled a lot in domestic cricket too so things kept improving. I was able to find the right areas and also generated decent pace."



Salman Khan: My only job is to entertain people

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood superstar Salman Khan said that as an actor, his biggest and only job is to entertain people thoroughly.

Salman's latest release 'Tiger 3' is now streaming on a digital platform. Talking about the same, he said: "The Tiger franchise has got unanimous love right from the first film be it theatrically, on satellite or on streaming!"

"So, it feels amazing to see how the third instalment of Tiger 3 was first a hit in theatres and now on streaming."

He added: "I'm in close contact with my audience through my social media and I can see the outpouring of love now that Tiger 3 has dropped on OTT."

"As an actor my biggest and only job is to entertain people thoroughly and I'm happy that Tiger 3 is being enjoyed by people across the world."

Salman further said: "Tiger 3 is a film that is very close to my heart. So, it felt extremely personal when it became a hit in theatres and now that it is a hit on streaming within days of its drop."

"Tiger will always be there to entertain people."

"Tiger 3" also stars Katrina Kaif and Emraan Hashmi.



Randeep's presence. Randeep seeing his sturdiness, graceful athleticism and nature at just 4 months of age named him Veer (Brave) after revolutionary Veer Savarkar.

When asked if the name was inspired by his latest film 'Veer Savarkar', Randeep shared: "Finally got the time to see my Dream Girl's new baby boy.. he's so cute, athletic and shy.. named him Veer.. My other ray of Hope has grown up so much and turned out so Grey and so beautiful.. my retired warrior Rommel is having a good retired life on the farm too.. feeling blessed."

Randeep Hooda names his newborn stallion Veer

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Randeep Hooda combined work with pleasure when he met his horses at the stables located between Mumbai and Lonavala, on his way back from Pune where he had gone to flag off the Savarkar Release centenary Bike Rally.

Randeep met his old riding horse Rommel, his mare Dream Girl, whose kid Hope is named after Randeep's mother Asha, had an infant male horse which Randeep saw for the first time.

Randeep tried playing with the shy foal, who began to familiarise itself with

I also want to go to Ram temple and have darshan, says Abhishek Bachchan

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Jaipur Pink Panthers team owner and actor Abhishek Bachchan was in Jaipur on Thursday and expressed his willingness to visit the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya and have 'darshan' there.

Speaking to the media here, Abhishek said: "I also want to go to Ram temple and have darshan."

"Papa (Amitabh Bachchan) does not come to the stadium and watch Pro Kabaddi League matches. He feels that the day I come to watch the match, our team loses," he added.

Abhishek said: "The way the general public is enthusiastic about the Ram temple in Ayodhya. This kind of enthusiasm is in my mind also. I also want to see how the temple is built. I also want to go to Ram temple and have darshan."

"I did not have much interest in Kabaddi. In my childhood, Papa's film 'Ganga Ki Saugandh' was released. In this he plays Kabaddi. Then I asked him, Papa, what game is this? Then he took me to the garden of the house and taught me to play Kabaddi. Since then I had inherited my passion for Kabaddi from my father. When I was in the school in Delhi, I used to play Kabaddi," he added.

I lost my connection with Kabaddi when I went to boarding school, Abhishek said.

"After this I went to boarding school. I broke my connection with Kabaddi. However, after becoming the owner of Jaipur Pink Panther team, I got a chance to play Kabaddi again. I also practice with the team players many times. I am also a little scared to play with them."



HINA KHAN PERFORMS UMRAH; SAYS 'IT BRINGS PEACE AND CALMNESS'



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Hina Khan, who is on a pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, has shared glimpses of her Umrah. She reflected upon the emotions she has at the majestic Kaaba, saying it brings her so much peace and calmness. The TV star, who had recently shared the news of her being hospitalised because of high grade fever, is now on a visit to the Islamic pilgrimage Mecca.

Known for her work in 'Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai', Hina shared pictures and videos on her Instagram, where she enjoys 18.9 million followers.

Giving a glimpse of her journey, the 'Kasautii Zindagii Kay' actress wrote a note: "It was not my first time.. But the anxiety, nervousness, emotions are exactly like the first time.. you weep and weep and only weep like a little girl.. you feel hypnotised, your lips freeze, you get chills when you look at the majestic Kaaba.. you just can't take your eyes off, it's so overwhelming.. This place brings so much peace and calmness in me.. Alhamdulillah."

A picture features Hina wearing a burqa and reading the holy book. She captioned it: "A peaceful corner in safa-marwa and my zamzam that's all u need.."

Another video shows the actress praying to the Almighty. It was captioned: "It's so difficult to find a place in Mataf area in Haram sharif to offer namaz coz it's 24/7 fully packed and busy.. Especially for women.. Alhamdulillah, offered all my salah's in the first row in mataf.. Blessed." She dropped some close snapshots of the religious place, and wrote: "Jumma Mubarak Blessed Alhamdulillah MAKE DUA." The geotag location was "Makkah Masjid-al-Haram."

SONAM KAPOOR: WANT TO EXPLORE STREAMING IF I'M HEADLINING A TENTPOLE PROJECT

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Sonam Kapoor is ready to explore streaming platforms if she is approached with a tentpole film or series.

Sonam said: "For me, being a part of good content and good cinema is all that matters. The platform where it's releasing is immaterial because the world has changed. I'm excited to lead a project on streaming that bowls people over. I'm thoroughly loving the diversity of content out there."

Sonam is an avid watcher of content on streaming and is happy how the platforms have changed the content appetite of people.

She shared: "I have always been wanting to make my foray into streaming, provided I'm headlining a tentpole film or a series on a global streaming platform. I have been a binge watcher of the outstanding content that streaming platforms have been creating for years now."

The actress, who is back at filming after her pregnancy, added: "I believe streaming platforms have pushed the content envelope of our country, have made it more creatively disruptive and dynamic."

"The bar that streaming content has set globally as well as in India is incredible. Streaming allows you to experiment a lot as an artiste. It is a very exciting medium for me. So, I'm all game to make my debut on streaming."

Sonam concluded: "I know my debut on streaming has been a long time coming and I hope people will really love what I'm going to offer."



INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Neha Malik