

absolute india



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IMF forecasts 'soft landing' for global economy, upgrades India

Yashwant Raj | Washington

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Tuesday forecast a "soft landing" for the global economy hampered in recent years by a deadly pandemic, skyrocketing inflation and high interest rates, and protracted wars.

It also upgraded the growth forecast for the India economy by 0.2 percentage points to 6.5 percent for both 2024 and 2025, citing resilient domestic demand.

The IMF in a World Economic Outlook report, said that the global recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the cost-of-living crisis is "proving surprisingly resilient".

Inflation is declining more rapidly than expected from its 2022 peak. At the same time, it added, high interest rates aimed at fighting inflation and a withdrawal of fiscal support amid high debt are expected to weigh on growth in 2024.

"With disinflation and steady growth, the likelihood of a hard landing has receded, and risks to global growth are broadly balanced," it said in the report titled "Moderating Inflation and Steady Growth Open Path to Soft Landing".

"The clouds are beginning to part. The global economy begins the final descent toward a soft landing, with inflation declining steadily and growth holding up," said the fund's Chief Economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas in an accompanying blog.



"But the pace of expansion remains slow, and turbulence may lie ahead.

"Global activity proved resilient in the second half of last year, as demand and supply factors supported major economies. On the demand side, stronger private and government spending sustained activity, despite tight monetary conditions. On the supply side, increased labor force participation, mended supply chains and cheaper energy and commodity prices helped, despite renewed geopolitical uncertainties."

The fund attributed the upbeat forecast to "greater-than-expected resilience in the United States and several large emerging market and developing economies, as well as fiscal support in China".

One of these emerging markets is India.

"Growth in India is projected to remain strong at 6.5 per cent in both 2024 and 2025, with an upgrade from October of 0.2 percentage point for both years, reflecting resilience in domestic demand."

China's growth prospects have also been upgraded from the previous forecast by 0.4 percentage points to 4.6 per cent in 2024 but then, it dips to 4.1 per cent in 2025.

The 2024 upward revision is a "carryover from stronger-than-expected growth in 2023 and increased government spending on capacity building against natural disasters", the fund said in the report.

SETBACK TO INDIA BLOC, BJP RETAINS MAYOR'S POST IN CHANDIGARH



Chandigarh | Agencies

In a major setback to INDIA bloc's Congress-AAP alliance, the civic body ruling BJP on Tuesday retained the Chandigarh mayoral seat for the ninth time in a row by winning the post with just four votes.

The AAP-Congress alliance lost the seat despite having maximum councillors.

Congress and AAP councillors accused the presiding officer of rigging and not following the due electoral process. The mayoral poll row has reached the high court again and the hearing is likely to take place on Wednesday.

Eight out of 36 votes were declared invalid by presiding authority Anil Masih, a nominated councillor, with no voting right. The BJP got 16 votes, while the AAP-Congress alliance had 12 votes despite they had 20 councillors.

BJP's Manoj Sonkar defeated AAP's Kuldeep Tita, the candidate of the AAP-Congress combine.

After the mayor's election, both the Congress and AAP boycotted the elections of senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor. BJP's Kuljeet Singh and Rajinder Sharma won the post of senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor, respectively.

In a 35-member house of the Municipal Corporation, the BJP has 14 councillors, with another vote of member of Parliament and ex-officio member Kirron Kher. The AAP has 13 councillors, while the Congress holds seven. The Shiromani Akali Dal has one councillor in the House.

The ruckus erupted after the BJP mayor was elected. All 36 votes were polled, comprising the vote of local MP Kirron Kher, who was the first to cast a vote.

The election, initially scheduled on January 18, was postponed to February 6 after the presiding officer fell ill. After Opposition councillors moved the Punjab and Haryana High Court over the postponement, the court directed that the polls be held on January 30.

"This shows the BJP for a mayor election can use all illegal tactics which would they do during the Lok Sabha elections seeing their loss. Does the BJP want to make this country North Korea?"

Raghav Chadha, MP AAP

"That the INDI Alliance fought their first electoral battle and still lost to BJP shows that neither their arithmetic is working nor their chemistry."

J.P. Nadda, President, BJP

"The manner in which dishonesty has been done in broad daylight in the Chandigarh mayor election is very worrying. If these people can stoop so low in a mayor election, then they can go to any extent in the elections of the country. This is very worrying."

Arvind Kejriwal, CM, Delhi

"we (INDIA alliance) came together to save our democracy. In Chandigarh it was the beginning of INDIA vs BJP, but the unnerved BJP took unimaginative actions to win this election when they were clearly losing".

Pawan Bansal, Congress Leader

IMRAN KHAN SENTENCED TO 10 YEARS JAIL IN CIPHER CASE



Islamabad: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan and leader Shah Mahmood Qureshi have been sentenced to 10 years in jail in the cipher case, local media reported.

The order was announced by special court Judge Abul Hasnat Zulqarnain during the hearing held at the Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi, Geo News reported.

Earlier, talking to media persons, Khan said the speed of the trial suggested that the "match is already fixed".

Khan alleged that every effort is being made to save US Assistant Secretary of State Donald Lu, Dawn reported. He expressed his willingness to hold dialogue with the establishment, saying the recent events had discredited the general elections.

Now, Indian pilgrims can take mountain flight across Kailash Mansarovar

Kathmandu | Agencies

With Nepal's Shree Airlines commencing operation from Nepalgunj Airport to Kailash Mansarovar, now Indians devotees can fly across Mount Kailash and the Mansarovar lake enjoying a magnificent close view of the holy places.

Nepal's Shree Airlines on Monday operated Mount Kailash and Mansarovar aerial tour with 38 Indian tourists on board.

The Indian tourists were from New Delhi, Mumbai, Gujarat, and Uttar Pradesh.

With the resumption of chartered flights, now it is expected that Indian devotees can undertake the mountain flights from Nepal and take a tour across Mansarovar.

China had banned visiting Indian pilgrims after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 9N-AMB registration Bombardier CRJ-700 flew from Nepalgunj airport with 44 passengers, including foreigners and five crew members.

According to Shree Airlines, the flight was arranged in coordination with Temple Trip Group, India, Siddhartha Hospitality Group, Nepalgunj and Pathil Holidays, Kathmandu.

Thousands of Hindus visit Mansarovar via Nepalgunj - Humla, Nepal which is considered as shortest and cheapest route.

Tourism entrepreneur Keshav Neupane said the mountain flight would help recover declining business and help identify tourism destinations for Indian tourists.



"At least one flight for Indian tourists in the season will contribute to boosting tourism activities," he believed, adding that the view of the Kailash Mansarovar is an alluring site indeed.

The flight time from Nepalgunj to Kailash Mansarovar is 75 minutes, according to the organisers. The flight commanded by Captain Prafull Vaidya and Captain Rajesh Shrestha flew at a height of 27,000 ft to provide a view of Mansarovar, a holy lake, and Kailash, the mountain revered as Lord Shiva's abode.

"We are hopeful that the aerial flight of Mount Kailash and Mansarovar in Tibet will promote Nepal's religious tourism," the airline said in a statement.

The airline is planning to launch a package of Kailash-Mansarovar yatra from Nepalgunj and Pashupati in Kathmandu shortly.

Indian tourists who reached Kailash Mansarovar on a mountain flight from Nepalgunj felt happiness. A hotelier in Nepalgunj, Punam Bhusal, said, "It certainly helps augment the tourism industry."

The Kailash Mansarovar, located in Tibet, is a common holy site of Hindu and Buddhist people. It is visited largely by the Hindus from Nepal and India.

Mount Kailash is a sacred Hindu pilgrimage site and most of the devotees either use the route of Uttarakhand, India, or via Nepalgunj.

10 Manipur MLAs reiterate demand for separate administration for tribals in memo to PM

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Ten tribal MLAs of Manipur, including seven from the ruling BJP, on Tuesday reiterated their demand to constitute a separate administration (equivalent to separate state) for the tribals in a memorandum submitted to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In their memorandum to the Prime Minister, the tribal legislators said that the ongoing "conflict situation in Manipur has turned from bad to worse as is evident from the bizarre incident in Imphal Kangla Fort on January 24 wherein the Meitei community Ministers, MLAs and MPs were compelled to take oath of allegiance for the so-called Meitei Militia-Arambai Tenggol in contravention to the oath taken under the Constitution of India as elected



representatives".

They said that on that day, three Meitei community MLAs were publicly humiliated and physically assaulted inside Kangla Fort by the Arambai Tenggol amidst heavy security deployment inside, outside and at all gates of the complex.

However, the Chief Minister has maintained eloquent silence on the public harassment of his lawmaker colleagues, they said in the memorandum, adding: "One can only imagine the fate of minority tribals, Muslims, Nepalis, Marwaris, Biharis and

others under such harrowing circumstances where a parallel government is run by the Arambai Tenggols". Three Manipur MLAs -- including state Congress President Keisham Meghachandra Singh and two from the ruling BJP -- were reportedly "beaten up" and "compelled" to take an oath by the members of Arambai Tenggol at the Kangla Fort in Imphal on January 24. Union Minister of State for External Affairs and Education, Rajkumar Ranjan Singh, Rajya Sabha member Leishemba Sanajaoba, former Chief Minister and veteran Congress leader Okram Ibobi Singh and all 37 Meitei community MLAs, including ministers, two MPs and opposition legislators, signed a resolution including six charters of demands put forth by Arambai Tenggol.

Rahul Gandhi attacks Nitish for succumbing to BJP's pressure

Patna | Agencies

Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday attacked Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar for succumbing to BJP's pressure and leaving INDIA bloc.

"After BJP applied a little pressure on Nitish Kumar, he again took a U-turn and left the INDIA bloc," Rahul Gandhi said.

Rahul Gandhi, while sharing an anecdote, said that former Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel once shared a joke with him: "Baghel said that Nitish Kumar took the oath of Chief Minister in Raj Bhawan along with some other leaders. BJP leaders were also present. After the swearing-in ceremony, Nitish was returning home, stopped midway and



asked the driver to take him back to Governor House as he had forgotten his shawl.

"When he reached the Governor's House, the Governor told him 'Itni Jaldi Wapas Aa Gaye,'" Rahul Gandhi said while addressing a rally in Rang Bhumii ground in Purnia. He said that Nitish Kumar was trapped between INDIA bloc and BJP. "INDIA bloc alliance will bring social justice in Bihar. We do not require Nitish Kumar. Our alliance will work in Bihar too," Rahul Gandhi said.

After Maratha quotas, Jarange-Patil eyes reservation for Muslims, Dhangars

Raigad (Maharashtra) | Agencies

Rattling Maharashtra's political landscape, Shivba Sanghatana leader Manoj Jarange-Patil on Tuesday said that he favours reservations for the Muslims and a change of category for Dhangar community.

Fresh from his victory over the Maratha quotas issue on January 27, Jarange-Patil visited the historic hilltop Raigad Fort, the capital of the Maratha Empire and paid respects to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.

Interacting with media persons, he said that presently, the Maratha quota is still a burning issue, and after it is resolved, he would pay attention to Muslim and Dhangars. The Muslim community has been demanding a revival of the 5 per cent quota given over 10 years ago, but stuck up owing to certain legal-technical issues, and opposition leaders like state Congress Working President M. Arif Naseem Khan, Samajwadi Party state President Abu Asim Azmi and others Muslim groups raising it regularly with the government.

Interestingly, during his long march from



Jalna to Navi Mumbai from January 20-26, en route, the Muslim community had warmly welcomed and hosted Jarange-Patil at various locations, including once in a 'madrasa', and even took good care of the large number of Marathas marching with him.

The nomadic shepherds, Dhangars, who get reservation under Nomadic Tribes (C) category of 3.5 per cent, have been clamouring to be categorised as Scheduled Tribes which are entitled to 7 per cent, and have organised several agitations in the past.



ED QUESTIONS TEJASHWI YADAV FOR 8 HOURS IN LAND-FOR-JOB CASE



Patna|Agencies

ED questioned the former Bihar deputy chief minister Tejashwi Yadav for at least eight hours at their Patna office on Tuesday. Tejashwi reached the ED office at 11 am and left at 7 pm. After walking out from the ED office, Tejashwi Yadav showed the victory sign to his supporters and then headed toward his residence. Sources have said that 12 ED officials have asked around 60 questions to

Tejashwi Yadav for eight hours. ED had already filed a chargesheet in the Rouse Avenue Court in New Delhi against him and other members of the Yadav family. While he was inside, his eldest sister and Rajya Sabha MP Misa Bharti and elder brother Tej Pratap Yadav were present outside the ED office for the entire day. A number of MLAs, MLCs and supporters of RJD were also present outside the ED office, shouting slogans against Nitish Kumar and the central gov-

ernment. Misa Bharti said that PM Modi is afraid of the 2024 Lok Sabha election and that is why he is harassing the opposition leaders. "Similar action is being carried out in Jharkhand and targeting the Chief Minister Hemant Soren. We are not afraid of such tactics. The people are watching everything and will respond during the upcoming elections," Misa Bharti said. On Monday, ED officials questioned Lalu Prasad Yadav (76) for 10 hours in the land-for-job case.

WILL FILE SUPPLEMENTARY CHARGE SHEET WITHIN A MONTH, CBI TO DELHI COURT

New Delhi: The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Tuesday informed a Delhi court that it will file a supplementary charge sheet within a month in connection with the alleged land-for-job scam involving Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) chief Lalu Prasad and his family members. Before Special Judge Vishal Gogne of the Rouse Avenue Court, the agency assured that the final report would be submitted by the end of February. This disclosure was made during the court's consideration of an application by RJD leader Ahmed Ashfaq Karim, seeking the release of Rs 13 lakh cash seized during the investigation. The court has deferred its decision on the application until the filing of the supplementary charge sheet, with the matter scheduled for further hearing on February 27. Last week, the court had issued summons to Lalu Prasad's wife and former Bihar Chief Minister Rabri Devi, her daughters, and others in the money laundering case, asking them to physically appear in the court on February 9. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) recently filed its first charge sheet in connection with the case of the which the court took cognisance.

MVA expands with VBA, CPI, CPI-M, etc; seat-sharing talks on 'smoothly'

Team Absolute| Mumbai

Maharashtra's opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) on Tuesday took on board several other parties including Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi, Communist Party of India, Communist Party of India-Marxist, Aam Aadmi Party and others, senior leaders said here on Tuesday. The new parties joined the MVA alliance of Congress-Shiv Sena-UBT-Nationalist Congress Party-SP at the crucial round of talks for seat-sharing in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections held this evening. SS-UBT MP Sanjay Raut said that the discussions are progressing "smoothly" in a cordial atmosphere and the final decisions on the seat-sharing aspects are expected to be taken soon. In a significant development, the VBA led by Prakash Ambedkar officially joined the MVA alliance and Tuesday's talks after a written invitation from the MVA leaders, said a Congress leader. The VBA comprising Dalits, Dhangars, tribals, Agris, Banjaras, Kolis, Malis, Kaikadis and other communities has also confirmed that Ambedkar would attend the next MVA meeting scheduled later this week. The MVA's letter said that the country is passing through a critical phase and its great democratic traditions are turning to a dictatorship. "People apprehend that in 2024, if there is a different result in the country (with



Bharatiya Janata Party returning to power), this will probably be the last election. The MVA was formed to change this situation and bring about a difference in the state and country," it said. "The inclusion of VBA into the MVA will definitely boost the anti-dictatorship struggle in the country... The Constitution and democracy are at risk, we have to work together and save them," said Raut. The VBA could play a vital role for the MVA's prospects in the next elections, given its track record of the 2019 Lok Sabha polls when it was in alliance with the All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM). The VBA-AIMIM severely hid the vote-banks of the Congress and undivided NCP in at least a dozen of the 48 Lok Sabha seats in the state, which proved beneficial to the BJP and the undivided Shiv Sena.

RS Chairman revokes suspension of 11 members

Team Absolute| New Delhi

Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankar has revoked the suspension of 11 members on Tuesday. The Committee of Privileges of Rajya Sabha has held that the 11 members breached the privilege and contempt of the council. It recommended that the period of suspension already suffered by the members be treated as sufficient punishment for the transgression. Rajya Sabha MPs Shrimati Jebi Mather Hisham, L. Hanumanthaiiah, Neeraj Dangi, Rajmani Patel, Kumar Ketkar, G. C. Chandrashekhar, Binoy Viswam, Sandosh Kumar P, M. Mohamed Abdulla, John Brittas, and A.A. Rahim. Chairman Rajya Sabha has



invoked the authority vested in him including under Rules 202 and 266 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Council of States (Rajya Sabha) to revoke the suspension enabling the members to attend the Special address by the Hon'ble President to be held on January 31.

No relief from bad air quality, AQI at 'severe' levels at several stations in Delhi

Team Absolute| New Delhi

There seems no relief from bad air quality in Delhi as the Air Quality Index (AQI), on Tuesday evening, plummeted to severe levels at several monitoring stations across the city. However, experts suggest that with two Western Disturbances in quick succession, the air quality is likely to improve in the coming days. On Tuesday, the air quality at Anand Vihar plummeted in the "severe" category with PM2.5 at 458 and PM10 at 459 while NPO2 reached at 155 or "moderate", as per the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). The AQI monitoring station at Dwarka sector 8 recorded PM2.5 at 432 and PM10 at 415, in the "severe" category. At IGI Airport station, the PM 2.5 was at 408, or "severe" while PM 10



was at 386, in the "very poor" category and CO was at 109 or "moderate". The AQI at Jahangirpuri was also in "severe" levels with PM2 10 reach-

ing 408 and PM 2.5 at 399, or "very poor". The CO was recorded at 100 or "satisfactory". The PM2.5 at Punjabi Bagh also reached 446, in the "severe" category while PM10 was at 417 and CO was at 126 or "moderate". The PM2.5 at Okhla Phase-II was recorded at 496 and PM10 at 486 -- both in the "severe" category. The NO2 was at 119 and CO was at 117, in the "moderate" levels. The air quality at Mandir Marg station was also in "severe" category with PM 2.5 at 411 and PM 10 at 352 or "very poor". At Mundka, the AQI remained in the "severe" category with PM2.5 at 405 and PM10 at 294 or "poor". The AQI between zero and 50 is considered "good"; 51 and 100 "satisfactory"; 101 and 200 "moderate"; 201 and 300 "poor"; 301 and 400 "very poor"; and 401 and 500 "severe".

Gandhi gave message of peace, Godse's followers disturbing peace: Siddaramaiah

Bengaluru|Agencies

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said that Mahatma Gandhi had wanted that all castes and religions should live in harmony. Providing justice to all and treating everyone equally was Gandhi's concept of Ram Rajya. He was speaking to the media after garlanding the statue of Mahatma Gandhi at the Vidhana Soudha on Tuesday on his death anniversary. Today is the day when Mahatma Gandhi was martyred on January 30, 1948 after being shot by Godse. When Gandhiji was a little late in going for the Bhajan after his conversation with Vallabhbhai Patel, the assassin Godse shot him on the pretext of touching Gandhi's feet. This country gained independence under Gandhi's leadership, the CM said. Gandhiji chanted 'Hey Ram' even as he breathed his last. He had great



devotion and faith in Shri Ram. That is why 'Raghupathi Raghava Raja Ram' was his favourite hymn. Shri Ram was an obedient son and went into exile for 14 years. Godse, who was a fanatic, killed Mahatma Gandhi, who worshipped Shri Ram, who gave ideal governance, he maintained. "We should all follow his example and treat all religions as equal. Gandhiji who showed the path of truth and non-violence is called the Father of the Nation. There are people among us who worship

Godse, the killer of such a great man. On behalf of the people of the state and the government, I pay our respects to Mahatma Gandhi," the CM said. Responding to MP Sumalatha's accusation that the Hanuman flag row happened due to the failure of the district administration, the CM said that permission was given to hoist the national flag or the Kannada flag, the flag of any religion, caste or party was not allowed to be hoisted. An attempt has been made to create unrest in the society with the malicious intention of gaining political advantage, he added. Responding to former CM Kumaraswamy's call for a Mandya bandh on February 8, the CM said that people will decide whether to accept the bandh call or not. They first took permission to hoist the National Flag and instead hoisted the saffron flag, he said.

3 CRPF personnel killed in encounter with Maoists in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur

Raipur|Agencies

At least three CRPF personnel were reportedly killed and 14 others sustained injuries during a gun battle with Maoists in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Tuesday, officials said. The incident occurred when a joint team of security personnel was out on a search operation in Tekalgudem village, which is a bordering area between Bijapur and Sukma districts, Inspector General of Police, Bastar Range, Sundarraaj P. said. The CRPF team was working in the area to establish a Forward Operating Base (FOB), or a remote camp meant to facilitate security forces operating in core Maoist areas, when the exchange of fire began in the afternoon. As per the infor-



mation, Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) personnel were present in the area at the time and swiftly retaliated to effectively counter the attack. The number of personnel killed and sustained injuries are expected to be higher, officials said. This was the same place where 23 CRPF personnel were killed and 33 were injured in the deadliest ambush attack by the Maoists in April 2021. The area is a stronghold of dreaded Maoist commander Madvi Hidma, whose name has cropped up in every major attack in these parts since the massacre of Congress leaders in Jhiram Ghati in June 2013.

SP announces first list of 16 Lok Sabha candidates for UP

Lucknow|Agencies

The Samajwadi Party (SP) on Tuesday announced its first list of 16 candidates in Uttar Pradesh for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. The party has fielded sitting MP Dimple Yadav from Mainpuri again, while party MP Shafiqur Rahman Barq will seek re-election from Sambhal. Ravidas Mehrotra, sitting MLA from Lucknow Central, has been named as the party candidate from the Lucknow Lok Sabha seat. SP MLA from Katehari in Ambedkar Nagar district, Lalji Verma, has been named fielded from Ambedkar Nagar Lok Sabha constituen-



cy. Akshay Yadav, the son of senior SP leader Ramgopal Yadav, has been named as the candidate from Firozabad, while Dharmendra Yadav has been fielded from the Badaun parliamentary constituency. Annu Tandon will be the SP candidate from Unnao, Kajal Nishad will contest from Gorakhpur, Ram Prasad Chaudhary from Basti, while Avadhesh Prasad will contest from Faizabad.

INDIA HOME TO 718 SNOW LEOPARDS; 241 CAUGHT ON CAMERA

Team Absolute| New Delhi

There are 718 snow leopards in India, as per a report on the Status of Snow Leopards in India released by Union Minister of Environment and Forest Bhupender Yadav on Tuesday. The Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAI) Programme is the first-ever scientific exercise that reports a snow leopard population of 718 in India, an official added. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change said that 241 unique snow leopards were photographed. Based on data analysis, the estimated population in different states is: Ladakh (477), Uttarakhand (124), Himachal Pradesh (51), Arunachal Pradesh (36), Sikkim (21), and Jammu and Kashmir (9), the official said. The Ministry said that the SPAI systematically covered over 70 per cent of the potential snow leopard range in the country, involving forest and wildlife staff, researchers, volunteers, and contributions from knowledge partners. Covering approximately 120,000 km of snow



leopard habitat across the trans-Himalayan region, including the UTs of Ladakh and J and K, and states such as Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh, the SPAI exercise was conducted from 2019 to 2023 using a meticulous two-step framework. The Ministry said that the first step involved evaluating snow leopard spatial

distribution, incorporating habitat covariates into the analysis, aligning with the guidelines of the national population assessment of snow leopards in India by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) in 2019. During the SPAI exercise, the total efforts included: 13,450 km of trails surveyed for recording snow leopard signs, while camera traps were deployed at 1,971 locations for 180,000 trap nights. The snow leopard occupancy was recorded in 93,392 km, with an estimated presence in 100,841 km. Until recent years, the snow leopard range in India was undefined due to a lack of extensive nationwide assessment for this vulnerable species. Before 2016, approximately one-third of the range (around ca. 100,347 km2) received minimal research attention, reduced to just 5 per cent in pockets like Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, and Himachal Pradesh, the official added. The Ministry said that recent status surveys have significantly increased understanding, providing preliminary information for 80 per cent of the range (about 79,745 km), compared to 56 per cent in 2016.



Mumbai pre-polls 'shock' - Tata Power proposes 201% tariff hike for low-end users

Quaid Najmi | Mumbai

In a bolt from the blue ahead of the elections, Tata Power Co. Ltd. has proposed a huge increase in the power rates for Mumbaiers, particularly the lower-end users as part of a tariff rationalisation initiative. The average hike proposed is 12 per cent across all consumer groups in 2024-2025 but the worst-hit would be low-income residential consumers and below poverty line users with proposed hikes of a staggering 201 per cent and 89 per cent, respectively, though high-end users and certain public service users will be getting some relief.



hike; 0-100 units: 201 per cent; 101-300 units: 66 per cent; 301-500 units: 10 per cent; and Group Housing Societies: 41 per cent.

Other sectors that could witness increases are: EV charging stations: upto 71 per cent tariff hike; Commercial consumers: 8-25 per cent; Industrial consumers: 25-38 per cent; and Public services: upto 82 per cent, barring some categories.

Certain categories could see some relief: High-end Residential users with more than 500 units consump-

tion per month: 5 per cent cut in tariff; Large public service clients within the HT Public Service Category: up to 18 per cent reduction in tariff; and Metro and Monorail: up to 29 per cent slashed tariffs.

The massive hikes and partial reliefs come less than a year after the company secured an average hike of 11.88 per cent (2023-2024) and 12.19 per cent (2024-2025) in April 2023.

Tata Power's previous tariff hike approval last year (April 2023) was challenged before the Appellate

Tribunal for Electricity (APTEL), which ruled in the company's favour this month (Jan. 2024), paving the way for the latest tariffs proposal.

The Maharashtra Electricity Regulatory Commission (MERC) has sought public suggestions/objections for the new proposals with a public hearing scheduled on February 27 before its final decision in the matter.

Tata Power presently serves around 7.50 lakh consumers in Mumbai, with 5.5 lakhs being residential users who usually consume less than 300 units per month.

If cleared, the proposed steep revision in tariffs is expected to add a significant load on the consumers' bills from April - at the height of the election season.

Coming just ahead of the parliament and assembly elections this year in the state, the tariff hikes move is expected to get a thumbs down from consumer groups as well as political parties. Moreover, there is the likelihood of its potential impact on the consumers of other power distribution companies operating in the country's commercial capital.

Supriya Sule accuses BJP of misusing probe agencies, breaking parties to cling to power

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Nationalist Congress Party working president, Supriya Sule, on Tuesday accused the Bharatiya Janata Party of exploiting investigative agencies to target rivals and dismantle political parties and families in order to cling to power.

Sule claimed that the ruling Bharatiya Janata party has weaponised central probe agencies, specifically citing the Income Tax, Central Bureau of Investigation, and Enforcement Directorate, while the nation grapples with pressing issues such as quotas, inflation, and unemployment.

Speaking to reporters, the Nationalist Congress Party leader Supriya Sule asserted that these agencies are being misused to break parties and families solely for the purpose of political consolidation. "They are misusing agencies, breaking parties and families only to remain in power," the Baramati MP said.

Responding to queries about the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections and the six vacant seats in Maharashtra, the Nationalist Congress Party leader Supriya Sule highlighted the state's tradition of avoiding direct elections for the Upper House, preferring discussions to determine representation.

"Maharashtra has a tradition of not holding any elections (for Rajya Sabha) but finding a way through discussion. But if an invisible power (read BJP) is at work, it will bring down the stature of the state," Sule added.

Responding to a query on the opposition unity, Sule expressed hope that West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee will remain in the INDIA bloc "as her decision to go solo



in West Bengal in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections is state-centric".

Sule claimed the decision taken by Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar to join the National Democratic Alliance fold seems to be guided by personal reasons.

"Unlike the pre-2014 period, the BJP has become the most corrupt political party in the last ten years. The party seems to have lost its moral compass," she alleged.

Also read: How Maharashtra's Devendra Fadnavis & Vinod Tawde crippled INDIA alliance even before the battle

Queried on seat-sharing talks and the role of Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) leader Prakash Amedkar, Sule said, "Amedkar is an important leader and his views will be taken note of. He can help and guide us even at the national level".

CBI files closure report in extortion case against ex-CP Parambir Singh

Team Absolute | Thane

The Central Bureau of Investigation has filed a closure report in an eight-year-old extortion case involving the former Thane and Mumbai Commissioner of Police Parambir H. Singh and others. The CBI closure report, signed by CBI's Additional SP, New Delhi R.L. Yadav was submitted to the Chief Judicial Magistrate, Thane Court, on December 30, 2023.

The probe agency has provided a detailed report of its deep investigations into the case, plus all the documentary evidence and list of 23 witnesses therein as part of the closure report.

"The above discussed facts and circumstances do not substantiate the allegations or disclose any incriminating evidence for launching prosecution against any of the accused persons. Therefore, Closure Report is being submitted before this



Hon'ble Court," said the CBI.

The report also said that "the allegations made against Parambir Singh were found to lack corroborative evidence, relying solely on the oral statement of the complainant."

According to the FIR, the alleged crimes took

place between November 2016-May 2018 in which a Mumbai-based builder, his associates and two police officers - DCP Parag S. Manere and CP Parambir H. Singh - were allegedly involved in the purported extortion.

Besides the two senior police officers, the others named in the FIR were Sanjay Mishrimal Punamiya, Sunil Mangilal Jain and Manoj Ramu Ghotkar.

In the complaint lodged by Sharad Agrawal, his uncle Shyamsunder Agrawal was arrested in an alleged Urban Land Ceiling Act scam case and the accused persons had connived to extort money of around Rs 9 crore from him, and a part of the money was paid up.

Shyamsunder Agrawal was a business partner with Punamiya in a realty development company, Tirupati Balaji and Rajaram Dev Enterprises, but owing to some dispute, their partnership ended.

NTPC inks pact for green hydrogen project in Maharashtra

Team Absolute | New Delhi/Mumbai

NTPC Green Energy Limited (NGEL) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Maharashtra Government for the development of Green Hydrogen and derivatives (Green Ammonia, Green Methanol) of up to 1 million tonnes capacity per annum, the public sector power giant said on Tuesday.

The plan includes Pump Hydro Projects of 2 GW and development of renewable energy projects with or without storage up to 5 GW in the state. NTPC has plans to build renewable energy capacity of 60 GW by 2032, according to the company



statement.

The MoU forms part of Green Investment Plan of the Maharashtra government in the next five years and envisages a potential investment of approximately Rs 80,000 crore.

NGEL is a wholly-owned subsidiary of NTPC and aims to be the flag bearer of NTPC's renewable energy

journey with an operational capacity of over 3.4 GW and 26 GW in pipeline including 7 GW under implementation.

The MoU was exchanged between Mohit Bhargava, Chief Executive Officer, NGEL and Narayan Karad, Deputy Secretary (Energy), Maharashtra in the presence of the Chief Minister, Deputy CM and other senior officials.

Leopard injured seriously in road accident, treated at Pune facility

Team Absolute | Pune

A five-year old male leopard who met with a serious accident on the Pune-Nashik Highway has been rescued and is undergoing treatment at a specialised medical facility here, officials said on Tuesday.

The incident was reported late on Monday when a speeding vehicle knocked the leopard which lay badly injured in Kalambar area of the Manchar Forest Range.

Wildlife SOS rushed to the spot after a distress call from the Maharashtra Forest Department and shifted the injured and bleeding feline to the Manikdoh Leopard Rescue Centre in Junnar.

When the Wildlife SOS team reached the Kalambar area, they



encountered a tough scenario as a huge crowd gathered to watch the leopard, blocking the road.

Even the injured feline was extremely agitated by the noisy

crowds around and his own suffering, but finally the SOS team tranquilised him with a dart gun.

They gently lifted the leopard into the trap cage and sped off to the

Junnar facility.

The vets there subjected him to the thorough medical examination and found serious trauma (head injuries), a broken mandible (lower jaw), cracked canines and incisors and other external bruises.

According to Dr. Chandan Sawane of Wildlife SOS, the leopard is now in a state of lateral recumbency (lying on side), put on oral medication and antibiotics, supportive therapies and is eating well.

Wildlife SOS co-founder and CEO Kartick Satyanarayan said the incident highlighted the harsh realities of road accidents involving wild creatures, an outcome of the expanding urban landscape and shrinking habitats as highways keep cutting through their natural habitats.

Ex-Mumbai board chairman, other officials sentenced to 5 years in jail

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Principal Special Judge for Central Bureau of Investigation cases in Hyderabad has pronounced a five-year rigorous imprisonment (RI) and imposed hefty fines totaling Rs. 7,87,000/- on ten persons, including the former Chairman of the Railway Recruitment Board, Mumbai, and the former CEO of Assan-Mangalore Rail Development Corporation in Railway Exam Paper Leak Case.

The ruling stems from a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) investigation into Railway Exam Paper Leak Case in which officials were accused of leakage of examination papers for Assistant Station Master and Assistant Loco Pilot positions in 2010.

The verdict outlines the sentences for key accused, with Satendra Mohan Sharma, the former Chairman of the Railway Recruitment Board, Mumbai, receiving a five-year sentence and a fine of Rs. 1,75,000/- . A.K. Jagannadham, the former



CEO of Assan-Mangalore Rail Development

Corporation, also faces five years of RI, coupled with a fine of Rs. 1,31,000/-. Other convicted individuals, identified as agents involved in luring aspirants, have been sentenced to five years of rigorous imprisonment, facing fines ranging from Rs. 50,000/- to Rs. 75,000/-. These include Jagannadham Shareen Kumar, Jagannadham Ramesh, Jagannadham Tirupathaiiah, Vivek Bharadwaj, P. Ashok Kumar, Mandarama Seshu Narayana Murthy, Shrirama Vijay Shankar, and Srujan Jagannadham.

The CBI had registered the case on June 15, 2010, against public servants and private individuals, alleging the leakage of question papers before the Railway Recruitment Board's examination scheduled for June 6, 2010. The conspiracy involved Sharma and Jagannadham collaborating with private individuals to leak question papers through agents, who received monetary payments ranging from Rs. 3.5 to Rs. 4 lakhs (approx).

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra heritage lovers welcomed the Centre's decision to nominate 12 Maratha forts for the UNESCO World Heritage List 2024-2025, as 'Maratha Military Landscapes of India', announced by the Ministry of Culture.

The list includes forts at: Raigad, Salher, Shivneri, Lohagad, Khanderi, Rajgad, Pratapgad, Suvarnadurg, Panhala, Vijaydurg, Sindhudurg (Maharashtra) and one Gingee Fort in Tamil Nadu, all representing the extraordinary fortification and military system envisioned by the Maratha rulers.

These forts -- included in the UNESCO's tentative list of 2021 -- are distributed across diverse geographical and physiographic regions and showcase the strategic military prowess of the Maratha rule, between the 17th-19th centuries.

"This extraordinary network of forts, varying in hierarchies, scales and typological features, is a result of

integrating the landscape, terrain and physiographic characteristics distinctive to the Sahyadri mountain ranges, the Konkan Coast, Deccan Plateau and the Eastern Ghats in the Indian Peninsula," said the Ministry of Culture.

A majority of these are linked with the life and times of the legendary Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj (1630-1680), whose 350th anniversary of Coronation (June 6, 1674) is being celebrated this year.

Experts and fort lovers like Umesh Zirpe, the President of Akhil Maharashtra Giryarohan Mahasangha (AMGM), Ramnath Amberkar, Sunil Deodhar and others warmly welcomed the Centre's decision.

Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis expressed his gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Ministry of Culture for the UNESCO nomination.

"The Government of India has submitted a proposal to UNESCO to include the area of the Maratha military landscapes, forts during the time

of our idol Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in the UNESCO World Heritage List. This proposal has been submitted for the year 2024-25," Fadnavis said.

Maharashtra has more than 390 forts, of which only 12 have been selected under the cultural category and of these eight are under the protection of Archaeological Survey of India.

India presently has 42 World Heritage Sites of which 34 are cultural, 7 are natural and one is a mixed location.

From the 42, Maharashtra has six sites - five cultural and one natural - comprising Ajanta Caves (1983), Ellora Caves (1983), both in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, the Elephanta Island Caves (1987), Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (formerly Victoria Terminus) (2004), Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai (2018), all in Mumbai, and the Western Ghats of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, which falls in the natural category (2012).





EDITOR'S SPECS

NDA-INDIA bloc will lock horns in Rajya Sabha polls in UP

With elections to 10 Rajya Sabha seats from Uttar Pradesh, scheduled to be held next month, the stage is set for an interesting contest between the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and the INDIA bloc, before the Lok Sabha election. Among the 10 Rajya Sabha members from state retiring in April, nine belong to the BJP and one to the Samajwadi Party. The February 27 biennial election has set the stage for an interesting contest between the NDA and INDIA constituents. In 2018, when Rajya Sabha polls were held, the BJP had purportedly engineered cross-voting by opposition MLAs. The scenario has changed after the 2022 assembly election as the SP's tally in the Uttar Pradesh assembly has increased from 47 MLAs (2017) to 108 MLAs currently. The strength of the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), an INDIA bloc member, has also increased from a single MLA to nine. The Congress' numbers have come down from seven to two MLAs. In all, the INDIA bloc has 119 MLAs in Uttar Pradesh. A candidate will require 37 first-preference votes to secure a seat in the Rajya Sabha and the INDIA bloc is in a comfortable position to send three members to the Upper House of Parliament. In the NDA camp, the BJP has 252 MLAs, Apna Dal (S) 13, and the Nishad party and the SBSP six each. With a strength of 277 MLAs, the NDA is in position to send seven candidates to the Rajya Sabha. It will be left with 18 extra votes and even if two votes of the Jansatta Dal Loktantrik and a one BSP vote are combined, the NDA will not be in position to bag the additional seat.

RAM, HINDUTVA, NATIONAL PRIDE, VIKAS: FOUR PLANKS OF BJP'S MISSION 400

Santosh Pathak

The extensive ceremony of the inauguration of the Ram Temple at Ayodhya on January 22, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the principal invitee performing all the religious duties pertaining to the installation of the deity of Ram Lalla, has proved to be a national event that electrified the belief system of Hindus across India - including those who were living abroad. This happened in a manner not seen in this country's history before.

The Prime Minister was at Ayodhya both as a Hindu and as the chief of the political executive governing the nation and this established, in the Indian context, the principle that holding a high political office did not mean that a leader should shy away from his or her religious commitments.

Secularism means that India granted complete freedom of worship and did not put a denominational stamp on the national or state government - it also at the same time, did not deny people in power their right to publicly own their faith.

Apart from the basic democratic concept of 'one man one vote' - that was in play regardless of caste, creed or gender - the only other secular requirement of governance would be that policy should not discriminate between sections of the citizenry.

The address of Prime Minister Modi was free of any suggestion of religious 'exclusivism' and it effectively countered the narrative of 'majoritarianism' and allegation of any other form of bias and largely focused on the importance of socio-cultural unity as a powerful instrument of national advancement.

The extraordinary turnout of people associating with the ceremony was no doubt driven by the historicity of the event - but they also had a clear perception that it is precisely the Hindu faith that alone had remained unacknowledged even after Independence. The fact that the temple construction was started only after the Supreme Court gave its judgement in its favour through a constitutional Bench - this was highlighted by the Prime Minister - freed the event of any communal projections. If the inauguration of Ram Temple at Ayodhya enhances the political status of Prime Minister Modi in the eyes of the people, nobody can grudge it - the voter it should be remembered is an astute judge of the merit of the rulers.

In his scintillating address on the occasion, Prime Minister Modi declared that Lord Ram was the 'spirit of the Constitution' and Ram Temple a 'symbol of national consciousness' that liberated the people from 'slavery' and a 'colonial mindset'. This latter was a reference to the historical subjugation of the Hindu religion as also to the British game of dividing India into communities and creating a minority-majority issue in politics. He validated the place of glory that Hinduism enjoyed in India's nationalism by affirming that 'Ram is the faith of India, the foundation of India and the idea of India' and went on to add that 'Ram was also the law of India, the leader of India as well as the policy of India'. He put a stamp of eternity on it by saying that Ram was not only the present but also the future of India. The speech was remarkable for steering clear of any sectarian overtones and for emphasising how the story of Ram established that differences between 'high' and 'low' did not exist for him.

Prime Minister Modi emphasised that "there should be humility in victory", that Ram was "a solution, not a problem" and recalling how the



opponents of Ayodhya temple warned of catastrophic consequences, asserted that "Ram was not a source of fire but of energy". Many leaders in India have misled the minorities into believing that giving respect to the religion of the majority amounted to encouraging 'majoritarianism' - they knew only too well that the Constitution would not permit any political moves in that direction. They in fact injected religion into politics by demanding "a share in governance on the basis of community identity".

So long as the minorities had religio-cultural freedom and the same political rights and economic opportunities that others had, they should have no problem about being a part of the political umbrella that the nation provides through the universal adult franchise. If because of numbers the majority sends more members to Assemblies and Parliament it does not violate the intrinsic strand of secularism that runs through a democratic state like India.

It is time the Hindu majority of India was consciously involved in building nationalism which is a sentiment to be shared by all communities here. Communal politics in India was pushed to a point where 'nationalism' was considered a 'diminishing' concept if not a politically 'abusive' word - all in the name of 'sensitivity' of the minorities - and there was even an endorsement of the suggestion that saluting the national flag or standing during the singing of national anthem should be made optional. India no doubt had to suffer the unfortunate partition on communal lines in the process of achieving freedom - that was bound to pro-

duce a spill over - but many minority leaders of India continued to base their politics on the Hindu-Muslim divide which came in the way of national advancement and reconstruction.

A sense of belonging to the cultural heritage of the nation and adherence to the human value system shared by all Indians, should not be impeded by politics and it goes to the credit of Prime Minister Modi that he has been able to legitimise the concept of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' within India and at the global level as well. The Prime Minister has taken this idea from the esoteric to the level of practicality in the international arena at a time when the world was marked by divisions, stealth attacks and disregard for human values and it is no surprise that he has emerged as a global leader whose influence mattered on the issues of war and peace. Prime Minister succeeded in turning the inauguration of Ram Temple into a starting point for a new nation-building effort, in this light. The civilisational content of a nation today is a factor of newfound importance working for its strength. In a composite scenario marked by a multi-religious and multi-lingual setting, people need to have a deeper sense of unity on the strength of a shared value system, the historical sense of ups and downs and an idea of friendship and adversaries in the present. 'Religion' defines the relationship of an individual with his or her God and presumably makes a positive contribution to 'culture' that determines how the individual would treat others in society.

A collectively acceptable code of ethics can run through the nation provided notions of 'supremacism' were not flaunted by the followers of any faith - the assimilative character of Hinduism stood out in this context, for its adherence to the idea that "God was one but the paths to reaching Him could be many". Prime Minister Modi's advocacy of this approach in his Ayodhya address befitted the occasion and was timely as well. India should set an example of how nationalism strengthens democracy and vice versa. We should take notice of how China under President Xi Jinping has evolved a new doctrine of 'Marxism with Chinese characteristics' which has been acknowledged as 'Xi's Thought' in the CPC constitution - like the Mao's Thought was in the party's history - but also how he has called for realisation of the 'civilisational strength' of China for national advancement.

India can more than match China on the point of civilisational history in terms of its vintage and richness on all fronts and it is a matter of great satisfaction that Prime Minister Modi in his address at Ayodhya brought out in adequate measure, the civilisational gift that India was able to offer to the entire world. In going through the rigorous practices prescribed for his duty as the principal invitee at the religious ceremony at Ayodhya, Prime Minister Modi was conducting himself as a pious Hindu in his own personal right but it is in his public address that he stood out as the leader of a diverse nation, a torch bearer of nationalism and as a Prime Minister who was totally dedicated to carrying India forward towards prosperity and peace. He talked of the demographic dividend of India accruing from the population of the young, exhorted people to have optimism and expressed his confidence that the installation of Ram Temple was a transformative moment that marked the advancement of a united India 'for a thousand years ahead'. He mandated all Indians to follow the mission of 'Ram to Rashtra'.

international

GOP TELLS BIDEN TO 'STRIKE BACK' TO JORDAN DRONE ATTACK THAT KILLED THREE US TROOPS

Washington | Agencies

Republicans in Congress are pressuring President Joe Biden to "strike back" at Iran to retaliate against the drone attack on Tower 22 in Jordan in which three US troops were killed and over 34 personnel injured.

Out of 150 missile attacks so far on US bases in the Middle East, this is the first time the militants broke through Pentagon's defence shield killing military personnel.

The Republican response comes a day after the front running 2024 GOP candidate former President Donald Trump criticised Biden's "foreign policy of weakness and surrender" to Iran, citing the unfreezing of \$6 billion of oil revenues of the Islamic state last year as one of the instances.

Trump alleged the funds were being misused for military purposes while Biden asserted there were checks and balances against that.

Even as President Biden and Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin vowed to hit back at a time and place of their choosing, an inevitable US response to the attack has raised the spectre of the middle east war escalating further.



Tensions in the region are already growing as the Israel-Hamas war prolongs without any solution to achieving a ceasefire or return of the remaining hostages. Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin on Monday vowed action during an appearance at the Pentagon before a meeting with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg. "The president and I will not tolerate attacks on US forces and we will take all necessary actions to defend the U.S. and our troops," Austin was quoted by the media as saying. President Biden has also pledged to respond. But GOP lawmakers are sure to be critical of the president as a rematch of Biden and former President Donald Trump appears imminent in the 2024 election. And nothing less than a direct strike on Iran would appease some Republicans in Congress, says report

from US News and World Report. Republican House Majority Leader Steve Scalise said that the "tragedy was avoidable."

"For years now Biden has emboldened Iran - sending them billions & tolerating their aggression against our troops," he posted on social media. "America must show strength," Scalise said.

Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina was more direct, mocking Biden: "I am calling on the Biden Administration to strike targets of significance inside Iran, not only as reprisal for the killing of our forces, but as deterrence against future aggression."

Senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas talked in a similar vein. "The only answer to these attacks must be devastating military retaliation against Iran's terrorist forces, both in Iran and across the Middle East," Cotton said. "Anything less will confirm Joe Biden as a coward unworthy of being commander-in-chief."

Senator John Cornyn of Texas originally posted: "Target Tehran" before clarifying that he was not calling on the Biden administration to bomb Iranian civilians.

King Charles' charity leads initiative to focus on education of 4 million Indian kids

London | Agencies

The British Asian Trust, a charity founded by King Charles III, is leading an educational initiative that will impact the lives of up to four million children in India across five years.

The initiative LiftEd -- Learning and Innovation in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy to Transform Education -- aims to strengthen India's education ecosystem and was launched on International Day of Education last week.

Targeting public school children across grades 1-3, LiftEd brings together a diverse mix of education experts to improve Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) in India, raising up to USD 20 million (INR 166 crore) from a consortium of 26 partners.

Notable names include Atlassian Foundation, Bridges Outcomes Partnerships, Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, Reliance Foundation, Standard Chartered Bank, UBS Optimus



Foundation, and USAID. The initiative comes after the Indian government identified FLN as an 'urgent and necessary prerequisite to learning' and in 2021, launched the landmark NIPUN Bharat Mission to equip every child aged 4-10 with FLN skills by 2026-27.

"Applying our learnings from previous successes in education in India, we recognised the

value of aligning with the Government of India's goals, embedding a systems-change approach, and unlocking the power of technology early on," said Bharath Visweswariah, Executive Director India, British Asian Trust.

FLN is understood as the ability to read and understand basic text and solve basic mathematical problems by the end of grade three.

Six militants killed in Pakistan's Balochistan



Islamabad | Agencies

Six militants were killed in a clash with security forces in Pakistan's Balochistan province, local media reported. Balochistan Interim Information Minister Jan Achakzai said security forces on Monday night thwarted three

"coordinated attacks" launched by terrorists using rockets and sophisticated weapons in Mach town on Monday night, Dawn reported. The minister posted on X: "The security forces thwarted the terrorists' attempt to create lawlessness in Mach town of the province by taking swift action."

IDF RAIDS HAMAS CHIEF YAHYA SINWAR'S OFFICE IN KHAN YOUNIS

Tel Aviv | Agencies

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has in a statement on Monday night said that it had raided the office of top Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar in southern Gaza's Khan Younis area.

The Israel army said that troops from IDF's 98th Division raided the office of Yahya Sinwar, who is the most wanted Hamas leader.

Earlier, Israel Defence Minister Yoav Gallant had publicly said that the Israel army would search and find out the hideout of Yahya Sinwar and kill him.

The Israeli military also said that raids were conducted at many terror infrastructures in the Khan Younis area, including an intelligence network of



the banned terror organisation, Hamas.

The IDF said that raids were conducted in an office that

functioned as the Hamas' intelligence office.

Israel has all along been maintaining that Hamas lead-

ers, Yahya Sinwar and Mohammed Deif, were mainly responsible for the October 7 massacre in southern Israel leading to the killing of 1,200 people who were mostly civilians.

As many as 250 people were also kidnapped from the communities and taken as hostages in Gaza.

Of this 105 were released during the one-week ceasefire between the warring parties from November 24 to December 1.

Around 324 Palestinian prisoners were also released from Israeli jails.

The IDF and Israel's military intelligence have confirmed that of the remaining hostages, 28 were killed.

Three of the hostages were killed accidentally by the IDF.

Australia sees 40% rise in sexual assault cases since 2013

Canberra | Agencies

Australia has recorded 40 per cent rise in sexual assault cases since 2013, a government report said.

In an annual report published on Monday, the federal government's principal review body, the Productivity Commission, said that 123.7 out of every 100,000 Australians reported being sexually assaulted to police in 2022, an increase of 42.8 percent from 86.6 out of every 100,000 people in 2013, Xinhua news agency reported.

The highest numbers of such cases were reported from New South Wales, the largest of Australia's states and territories, with 152.2 out of every 100,000 people having made

complaints to police in the state in 2022, more than double the 71.2 out of every 100,000 people in the Australian Capital Territory. The national rate of armed robbery reports fell from 24.3 out of every 100,000 people in 2013 to 18.1 in 2022, and homicide rate fell slightly from 1.9 victims per 100,000 people to 1.6 in the same period, the report said. Mark Dreyfus, Australia's attorney-general, said the inquiry would look into how the government can improve the justice system experiences of victims and survivors of sexual assault.

In January, the federal government announced an Australian Law Reform Commission review into justice system responses to sexual violence.



Roads of the state are increasing the prestige of the country in the world: Chief Minister Dr. Yadav

CONSTRUCTION OF SMART VILLAGE ALONG WITH SMART CITY WILL MAKE INDIA SELF-RELIANT: UNION MINISTER GADKARI

Minister of Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari on Tuesday inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of nine national highway projects worth Rs 2,367 crore covering a total length of 225 km in Madhya Pradesh's Jabalpur district. The state will develop through construction of roads. Farmers move from being food givers to energy givers. India will become an energy exporting country and not an energy importing country. Foundation stone laid and inauguration of various National Highway projects in Jabalpur.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Union Road and Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari said that self-reliant India can be created by building smart villages along with smart cities. Jabalpur is the growth engine of Madhya Pradesh. It is important from tourism point of view. Also, the name of Jabalpur is known in the entire country in the field of education. The government is working for the construction of roads and bridges and social, cultural and economic development in Jabalpur.

Gadkari said that during the construction of National Highway and Ring Road in the state, water storage tanks and ponds can be built in place of the soil and mud dug from the ground. This will not only lead to water conservation but will also provide water to the farmers for irrigation. If 75% of the land in every village is irrigated, then farmers and villages will be prosperous and the income of farmers will increase.

He said that methanol is made from coal. The experiment of running 25 buses in Bengaluru by mixing 15% methanol in diesel has been successful. Abundant reserves of coal are available in Madhya Pradesh. The rate of methanol is Rs 22 per liter and that of diesel is Rs 93 per liter. In this way, methanol is a cheaper fuel than diesel. Use machines and trucks running on methanol in coal mines. All these things will reduce the import of fossil fuels in the country. Pollution caused by use of diesel and petrol will reduce. Madhya Pradesh has the potential to conduct such experiments and be a leader in this direction. The farmers of the country will produce energy for the country and the country will not become an energy importer but an energy exporter. Agricultural products including



Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the roads of the state are increasing the prestige of the country in the world. Earlier there used to be potholes on the roads in the state, but now the roads of the country and the state are writing a new chapter of easy and quick transportation. Till the year 2013-14, there were only about one thousand kilometers of roads in the country. Which has increased to 1 lakh 61 thousand kilometers in 10 years. The speed of road construction from 11.6 kilometers per day has now increased to 29.6 kilometers. Its speed is no less than a miracle. The whole world is stunned by the pace of India's development.

crops and fruits are produced in abundance in Madhya Pradesh. Pre-cooling plant, cold storage and logistics park etc. can be developed on government land adjacent to the National Highway and Ring Road. With this, the vegetables, fruits and other products of the state will reach other countries of the world. With this, farmers will get the right price for their crops and the area will develop. Union Minister Gadkari also assured all possible help from his ministry in the development of the state.

Two Congress workers clash at party office in Bhopal, show-cause notices issued

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Two Congress workers engaged in a clash at party headquarters in Bhopal, prompting the Madhya Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) to issue show-cause notices to them. The incident occurred on Monday, and a video of the shameful act of the Congress workers went viral on social media. The dispute broke out after spokesperson Shaharyar Khan made allegations against Pradeep Ahirwar, claiming that the latter had been verbally abusing former Chief Minister Digvijaya Singh over ticket distribution in the last Assembly polls.

The viral clip shows that some other party office-bearers attempted to stop the fight, but their efforts were unsuccessful. Additionally, an officer-bearer, who tried to intervene and pacify the violent groups, was eventually kicked out. The MP Congress vice-president (organization) Rajiv Singh, acting on the instructions of the state party chief Jitu Patwari, has issued show-cause notices to both the leaders involved in the abusive and physical battle



within the MP Congress headquarters.

"Your shameful act is against the party's discipline and you both (Pradeep Ahirwar and Shaharyar Khan) are asked to submit your response in the next one week, and if the reply isn't found satisfactory, you may be removed from the party," the notice issued by MPCC stated.

In the Madhya Pradesh assembly polls held on November 17 last year, BJP won 163 out of 230 seats in the state, while the Congress party won 66 seats and the Bharatiya Adivasi Party won

one seat.

The Congress fought the election under the leadership of former Chief Minister Kamal Nath, while Digvijaya Singh played an integral role.

It came days after national Congress spokesperson Alok Sharma during an interaction with a news channel, had made certain derogatory remarks against Kamal Nath, wondering whether he was aligning with the BJP during elections, and said there should have been introspection by the party leadership into his actions during the Madhya Pradesh assembly elections.

World Leprosy Day Celebrated at AIIMS Bhopal

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Department of Dermatology at AIIMS Bhopal today commemorated World Leprosy Day with a series of enlightening activities aimed at raising awareness, dispelling myths, and fostering a sense of community. The event served as a platform to underscore the importance of eradicating stigma associated with leprosy while emphasizing the need for comprehensive outreach

efforts, especially in rural areas. The occasion was graced by Prof (Dr) Ajai Singh, Executive Director and CEO of AIIMS Bhopal, who commended the department's unwavering dedication and compassionate care towards patients. Dr. Singh urged dermatologists to intensify their outreach activities, particularly in rural areas, to combat stigma and ensure equitable access to healthcare services. He expressed optimism that the department would strive

towards achieving national standards in patient care and advocacy.

Dr. Singh also presented prizes to the winners of various competitions held in conjunction with World Leprosy Day, recognizing their commitment to raising awareness and promoting inclusivity.

The ceremony was further enriched by the presence of Dr. Devendra Singh Tomar, WHO State Coordinator for the Society of Neglected Tropical Diseases, and Dr. Nidhi Sharma, Deputy Director (Leprosy) at the National Health Mission state branch. Both esteemed guests shed light on ongoing initiatives and emphasized the pivotal role of public health interventions in addressing the challenges posed by leprosy. As a token of appreciation for their dedicated contributions, key figures in the fight against neglected tropical diseases were felicitated during the ceremony, underscoring the collective effort required to overcome barriers and achieve meaningful progress.

Dr. Prashansa Jaiswal, Associate Professor, Dermatology, extended a warm welcome to the gathering, setting the tone for an engaging and insightful discourse on leprosy awareness and advocacy.

World Leprosy Day serves as a poignant reminder of the imperative to uphold dignity, combat stigma, and promote inclusivity in healthcare delivery. The Department of Dermatology at AIIMS Bhopal remains committed to advancing these principles and championing the cause of leprosy eradication.

Employees may get a big gift in the cabinet meeting on January 31..?

Team Absolute | Bhopal

There will be an important meeting of Madhya Pradesh Cabinet on January 31, in this meeting employees can get gifts. Along with this, many important proposals will be approved.

It has been reported from sources that more than 10 proposals will be discussed in this meeting being held just before the end of the month and the budget. This cabinet meeting is also considered very important from the point of view of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

In this cabinet meeting, there will be discussion regarding dearness allowance of government employees. Because the proposal has already been prepared and it is expected that the decision will be taken in the interest of government



employees. Apart from this, decisions related to employment and self-employment can be taken for the youth. Apart from this, there will be a discussion on how to make the loan process simple and quick through the schemes run by the state and central government. Employees have also prepared for agitation regarding allowances.

However, news is also coming that the state government is in no mood to give increased 4 percent dearness allowance to employees and pensioners at present. The special thing is that since the assembly elections, the dearness allowance file was sent twice, but it was returned from the office of Chief Secretary Veera Rana.

NATURE CAMP ORGANIZED IN VAN VIHAR

Bhopal: One day nature event for the students of government schools of Bhopal city and surrounding villages with a view to develop awareness about forests, wildlife and environment among the students and sensitivity towards nature conservation in Van Vihar National Park, Zoo, Bhopal. Camps are being organized. In the same sequence, on January 30, 2024, 42 students and 02 teachers of Government Higher Secondary School, Chunabhatti, Bhopal participated in the said nature camp. Dr. Sangeeta Rajgiri Bhopal Birds was present as a resource person in the program. The participants were given interesting activities related to bird watching, butterfly, wildlife watching, film show, information about forestry activities existing at the site, interesting activities related to forest, wildlife and environment and their curiosities were quenched by providing information to the participants by the subject expert.

BJP government is not fulfilling its promises: Patwari

Team Absolute | Bhopal

State Congress President Jitu Patwari, taking a jibe at the Congress, has asked that in 2014, BJP had given the slogan, enough of inflation, this time Modi government has been hit, but so many days have passed, did the people of India get relief from inflation or did they get employment?

After paying homage to Mahatma Gandhi on his death anniversary, Patwari, while discussing with the media, said - Whatever road is built by Union Minister Nitin Gadkari, it is not built without toll tax. A person has to pay toll tax after traveling 60 kilometers on every road, toll has to be paid when crossing a bridge, the central government makes its budget by collecting GST tax from the general public, while Gadkari builds roads by collecting toll tax, if in reality the public if any development work is done to provide relief, the Congress Party stands with it.

He told that a committee has been formed for Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra which will hold meetings in Morena and Ujjain and review it. On the question of Congress veterans contesting the elections, he said that only the one who is ordered by the high command will contest the elections. Observers have been



appointed for candidate selection, everyone will submit their respective reports, after which the names will be decided by the screen committee. Jitu Patwari said that there will be a meeting of Congress Legislature Party on 6th February, in which there will be discussion on raising issues related to the public in the Assembly. The state government had promised to give a support price of wheat at Rs 2700, but in the notification issued today, it has been said that wheat will be purchased at Rs 2250 only. There was talk of giving up to Rs 3000 to women but till now the government has not moved beyond Rs 1250. He said - Mohan ji should fulfill the promises he had made to his people, Congress will fight for the people from the streets to the House.

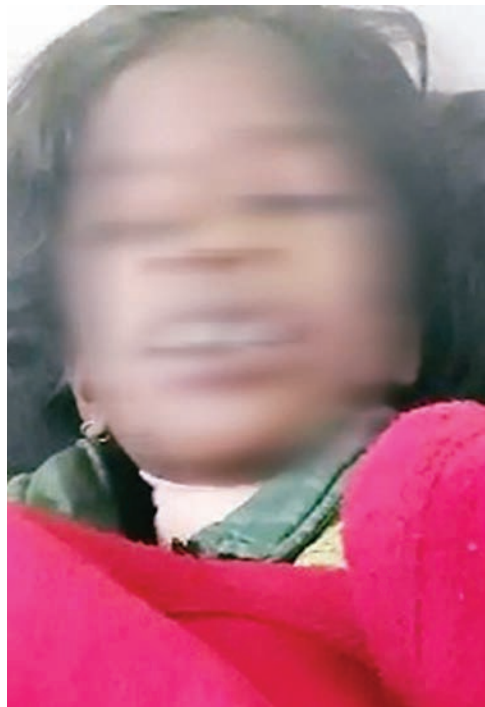
Father's brutality, 8 year old daughter's throat cut and thrown in the bushes to die

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In the capital Bhopal, a Kalyugi father turned savage, cut the throat of his 8 year old daughter with a sharp weapon, threw her in the bushes to die and ran away. Since her throat was not cut too much, the innocent girl came out of the bushes and came onto the road. The people passing by were stunned to see the girl covered in blood and upon receiving the information, the police reached there and admitted her to Hamidia Hospital for treatment, where her condition is said to be stable.

The police have arrested the father who became a beast. According to the information received from the police, Tej Singh, originally a resident of Sagar, lives on rent in Lodhi Tilajamalpara and works as a tent maker in the marriage garden. He is survived by his wife and 8 year old daughter Preeti Lodhi. At around 9 pm, some people saw Preeti in a bloody condition on the road near Milan Wedding Hall near Safia Ground and immediately informed the police.

As soon as the team reached the spot after receiving the information, they saw that Preeti's throat had been slit and she was soaked in blood. The police took the innocent child to Hamidia Hospital for treatment, he was admitted there and his treatment was started. Doctors told the police

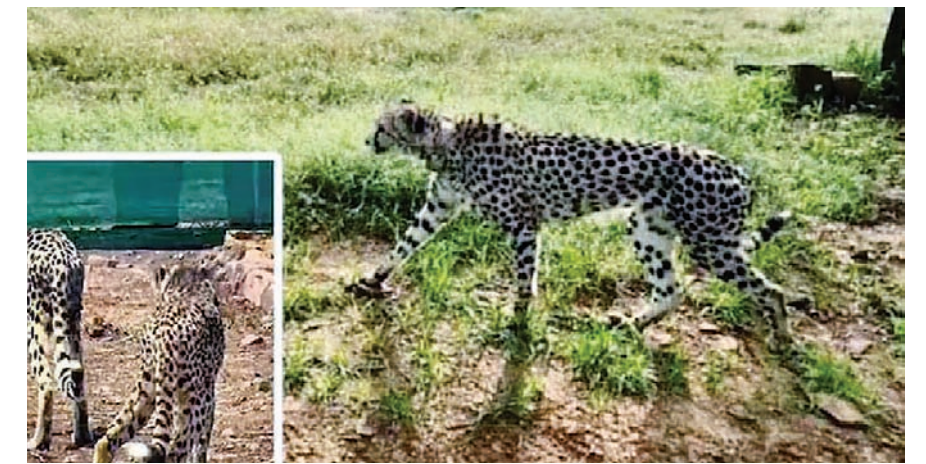


that the girl's condition is stable as her jugular vein has not been cut and she is out of danger. Later, the police team interrogated Preeti in which she told that her father Tej Singh had brought her to this isolated place on a bike, asking her to go from the Lodhi house to her elder father's house.

After bringing him here, the father pressed his mouth, cut his throat with a knife, attacked his throat with a knife and then threw him in the bushes and ran away. Tej Sinar had thought that his daughter Preeti would die soon due to her throat being cut. The girl had become unconscious due to her throat being cut, she remained unconscious for some time and later she somehow got up and came out of the bushes and onto the road.

Seeing the seriousness of the matter, on the complaint of the injured innocent person, the police registered a case of attempt to murder against the accused father Tej Singh Lodhi and laid siege and detained him. The first wife of the accused father Tej Singh had died during the Corona period, after which he got married for the second time. The injured Preeti is the daughter of his first wife, while he also has a son from his second wife. Officials say that Tej Singh will be interrogated in detail, only after which it will be clear why he wanted to kill his own daughter by slitting her throat.

FEMALE CHEETAH CAME OUT OF KUNO PARK



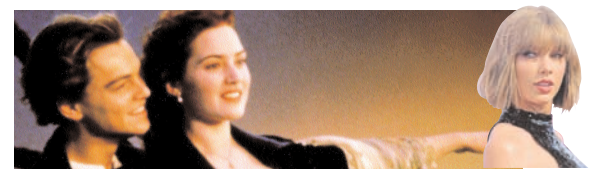
Team Absolute | Sheopur

Veera, a female cheetah from Africa, has gone out of Kuno National Park. The location has been found to be in Veerpur tehsil of Veera. The forest department team is continuously searching for Veera.

Veera, a female cheetah from Africa, has gone out of Kuno National Park. The location has been found to be in Veerpur tehsil of Veera.

The forest department team is continuously searching for Veera. It is also said that a female cheetah has been seen in Konade drain near Veerpur police station. The forest department is continuously tracking the female cheetah. According to the information, female cheetah Veera has been out of Kuno National Park for two days. Its location is being seen near a residential settlement near Veerpur tehsil. It is said

that on Monday, it was seen near Konde drain near the boundary wall of Veerpur police station. After this, Veera Chak was seen behind the house of the Sarpanch of Shyarda Panchayat near Sitaram village. A crowd of people gathered at the Sarpanch's house to see this. Forest department staff is also roaming around Veerpur tracing the location of the leopard.



X ends ban on Taylor Swift searches after explicit fake images spread

San Francisco | Agencies

Elon Musk-run X has lifted the ban on searches for Taylor Swift that blocked queries of her name for several days following the spread of explicit, digitally altered photos of her.

Joe Benarroch, head of business operations at X, told the Wall Street Journal on Monday, that "search has been re-enabled and we will continue to be vigilant for any attempt to spread this content and will remove it if we find it."

The company blocked searches for Swift after her AI-generated explicit images went viral on its platform last week. The popular singer's images were seen by millions before X removed those. The company was criticised for a slow action on those images.

After blocking, searches for Swift's name yielded the error message: "Something went wrong. Try reloading."

The social media platform had called the measure a temporary action done with an "abundance of caution."

A ban on search results came after the White House weighed in last week, calling the fake images "alarming" and emphasising that social media companies have a responsibility to prevent the spread of such misinformation.

Microsoft Chairman and CEO Satya Nadella said that the explicit Swift AI fakes are "alarming and terrible."

Swift was reportedly weighing possible legal action against the website responsible for generating the deepfakes.



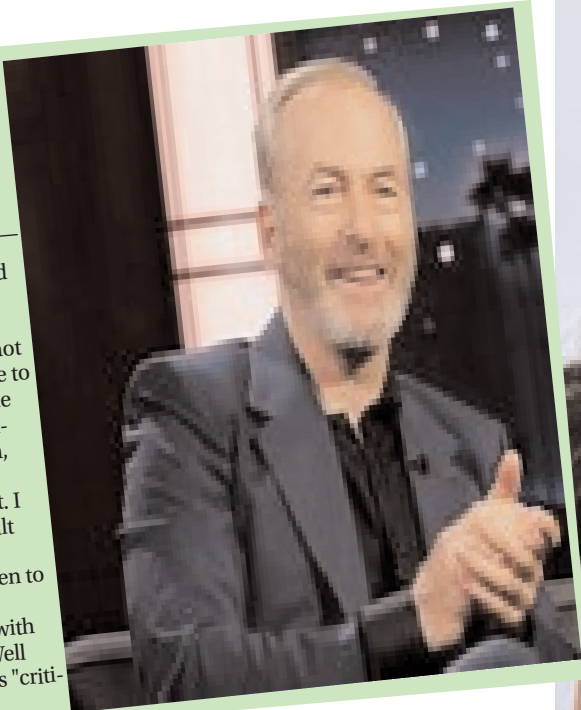
Bob Odenkirk stunned to discover he's related to King Charles

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor-comedian Bob Odenkirk was left gobsmacked after his family line was confirmed to be linked to that of King Charles III. The 'Better Call Saul' star appeared on the US genealogy series 'Finding Your Roots' when he was told of the shocking discovery, reports Mirror.co.uk. The revelation awkwardly came after the American insisted he was "not a monarchist". The show's host Henry Louis Gates Jr, made the connection after being able to trace Odenkirk's family roots back five generations to Friedrich Carl Steinholz, who was the actor's fifth great grandfather born in Plon, Germany in 1755. As per Mirror.co.uk, the findings showed how Steinholz's mother conceived him out of wedlock with the Duke of Plon, who was in fact tied to other royal families across Europe thanks to intermarriage.

Prior to the reveal, Odenkirk said on the show: "I'm an American. I'm not a monarchist. I don't believe in that. You know, I feel like it's a little twisted. I understand why society built itself around monarchs and leaders, and they passed them down through generations. I understand that goes through every society, every civilisation. But I think that we've gotten to a better place with democracy and we should keep going down that road."

That's when Gates jumped in to give him the huge surprise that he was 11th cousins with King Charles, which led to Odenkirk jokingly changing his tune immediately. He laughed: "Well maybe I'll change my mind on that." The pair got into a jovial back and forth, with Gates "criticising" Odenkirk for "trashing" his newfound family.



Adele is working out 'three times a day' in gruelling weight loss bid

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer-songwriter Adele has revealed that she is now working out two or three times a day after losing a whopping 44 kgs. The 'Someone Like You' singer, 35, has shared an insight into her gruelling workout routine as she aims to maintain a "rock solid" derrière after completely overhauling her lifestyle and diet a number of years ago and transforming her appearance, reports 'Mirror.co.uk'.

While she remains strict with her routine six days a week, the British singer allows herself to indulge on Sundays when she orders her favourite takeaway and insists on not stepping foot in the gym to make the most of her rest day.

However, from Monday to Saturday, Adele doesn't sway from her strict diet and exercise schedule as she aims to look and feel the best she ever has.

Having previously gone teetotal, Adele now drinks on occasion - and makes the most of it when she does after admitting that she loves nothing more than getting "hammered" on her favourite alcoholic beverage - white wine.

As per 'Mirror.co.uk', Adele has another six months to look forward to in Las Vegas as she finishes off her residency, but the singer is allowing herself to indulge in more fun when it comes to her lifestyle outside of work. Opening up about her new routine, the 'Hello' hitmaker revealed, "I have done absolutely nothing since last weekend. I am back at my gym grind like nobody's business. I am doing two or three sessions a day. My a*** is getting rock solid again. I can move mountains with my bottom. That is all I have done". It's all about balance for the singer though, as she enjoys nothing more than pigging out on Sundays. She told Desert Island Discs: "I gave up drinking, coffee and all the fun things being an adult allows you to do. I was so boring. So on my last break I was like, 'I will have a glass of wine and four espressos'. So now I am back on shows, I am only allowing myself to drink on Sundays."

"But it is okay. Four or five white wine spritzers get me absolutely hammered and also I order McDonalds and forget the next day so it doesn't really count," she added.

Sophie Turner goes Instagram official with new man after split from Joe Jonas

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Sophie Turner has gone Instagram official with new boyfriend as she moves on from Joe Jonas. The actress split from her husband in September 2023 when he filed divorce papers before a messy back-and-forth ensued as rumours spread while their warring camps battled it out in the public, reports Mirror.co.uk.

But now it seems she is putting more distance between them after getting close to British aristocrat Peregrine Pearson.

As per Mirror.co.uk, the mega rich 29-year-old, eldest son of Michael Pearson, the 4th Viscount Cowdray, is heir to his \$284 million family fortune.

They were seen kissing in London recently and after the PDA, it seems Sophie is now in no mood to hide their romance after Joe confirmed his relationship with model Stormi Bree.

The 'Game Of Thrones' star, said to be worth \$12 million herself, shared a series of photos from the new couple's cute ski trip. They were partying with friends on the slopes and she didn't shy away from uploading a bikini snap.

Fans rushed to tell her how happy she looked in the shots with the Peregrine, who is known as Perry.

She is reportedly dropping "child abduction" claims against ex, according to new legal documents. Filed back in September last year, Sophie alleged that Joe wasn't letting their two daughters, Willa and Delphine, fly from the US to see her in the UK, allegedly withholding their passports, an incident that quickly escalated to a federal level.

But after reaching a rough custody agreement in their still ongoing bitter divorce battle, it appears Sophie wants to drop those claims, per TMZ. The two are thought to be in a much bet-



ter place and have decided when the kids will travel to England and New York.

Court documents obtained by The Mirror initially claimed a desire to co-parent their children, it was later revealed that the children were a primary point of contention.



Geraldine Viswanathan replaces Emmy-winning actress Ayo Edebiri in 'Thunderbolts'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Geraldine Viswanathan has joined the cast of 'Thunderbolts', replacing Ayo Edebiri in an undisclosed role after the Emmy-winning 'The Bear' star dropped out of the project due to scheduling.

Geraldine Viswanathan joins a massive ensemble cast of actors playing some of the Marvel Cinematic Universe's best known anti-heroes, including Sebastian Stan as Bucky Barnes, Florence Pugh, David Harbour, Wyatt Russell, Hannah John-Kamen, Olga Kurylenko and Julia Louis-Dreyfus, will effectively serve as Marvel's version of the DC's anti-hero team the 'Suicide Squad', with the characters brought together to do the dirty jobs the Avengers can't do.

As per 'Variety', Jake Schreier is directing from a script by Eric Pearson. Since Geraldine Viswanathan's career launched in the 2018 teen-comedy 'Blockers', she's appeared opposite Hugh Jackman and Allison Janney in 'Bad Education', opposite Dacre Montgomery in the 2020 romcom 'The Broken Hearts Gallery' and opposite Zach Galifianakis, Elizabeth Banks and Sarah Snook in 'The Beanie Bubble'.

She also starred in the comedy anthology series 'Miracle Workers' with Daniel Radcliffe, Steve Buscemi and Karan Soni. Edebiri is the second star to depart 'Thunderbolts' in recent months; Steven Yeun left in January, telling 'Variety' that "time passing and things shifting kind of pulled me out of it."

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Ariana Madix



TENNIS: PLAYERS FROM 31 COUNTRIES WILL BE IN ACTION AT WTA MUMBAI OPEN

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Players from 31 countries will be seen in action at the Maharashtra State Lawn Tennis Association (MSLTA) and Cricket Club of India (CCI)-organised Mumbai Open Tennis Championships, which returns to the tennis calendar after a gap of six years.

This is the third edition of the WTA Mumbai Open with past singles champions including world No 2 Aryna Sabalenka (2017) and Thailand's Luksika Kumkhum (2018).

An exciting line-up at the third edition of the tournament will include three top 100 players in the singles and six top 100 players in the doubles event, which is a part of the WTA \$125K series. The tournament will be played at the newly-laid tennis courts at the Cricket Club of India. Qualifying matches will be played starting February 3 and 4 while the main draw action will start on February 5. The finals will be played on February 11. American Kayla Day, the 2016 US Open girls singles champion and



world No. 82, will lead the 32-player field, along with Japan's Nao Hibino, winner of three WTA Tour singles

titles, and former French Open semi-finalist Tamara Zidansek, ranked 97th in the world.

Other players in the field include American Katie Volynets, Australians Arina Rodionova and Kimberly Birrell and Brazil's Laura Pigossi.

Sixteen-year-old Russian Alina Korneeva, who was the top-ranked junior in the world last year, and reached the third round of the 2024 Australian Open women's singles event just 12 months after winning the girls singles title, will also be seen in action in Mumbai.

India's top-ranked doubles player Prarthana Thombare and Dutch partner Arianne Hartono have a direct entry into the doubles event. Wild cards for the tournament are expected to be announced in the coming days. "We are delighted to bring back world class tennis to Mumbai after a gap of a few years. The WTA Mumbai Open has attracted some big names and rising stars in the past, including two-time Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka, who won her first WTA \$125K title right here in Mumbai in 2017," Sanjay Khandare and Pravin Darade, both IAS and members of the Organising Committee said.

KIYG 2023

Weightlifter Keerthana sets new National Youth records; Maharashtra crosses 50-gold mark

Chennai | Agencies

Tamil Nadu weightlifter R. P Keerthana broke the National Youth record in Snatch, Clean & Jerk and overall to clinch the gold in girls' 81kg category while table-toppers Maharashtra touched the half-century mark in gold medals in the 6th Khelo India Youth Games 2023 here on Tuesday.

Keerthana lifted a total of 188 kgs, including 85kg in snatch and 103kg (rpt 103kg) in Clean & Jerk to finish ahead of state-mate Oviya K. (184kg) with Uttar Pradesh's Santushti Choudhary taking home the bronze with a total lift of 162kg. The earlier record in Snatch (81kg), Clean & Jerk (104kg) and overall (185kg) were held by Ch. Srilakshmi of Adhra Pradesh. Meanwhile, Maharashtra added six gold medals to their tally in the morning session, bagging three in archery, two in Kho-kho and the girls' doubles



title in badminton.

World champion and 2022 Asian Games bronze medalist Aditi Gopichand Swami led the Maharashtra charge at the archery venue in Nehru Park, winning the compound girls and mixed team gold medals while Pruthviraj Ghadge and Sharvani Shende won the recurve mixed team final. Shende also won the silver medal in the girls' recurve category while Tejal Salve won the silver medal in compound girls and Mihir Apar took home the bronze

from the boys' compound event.

In Madurai, the Maharashtra Kho-kho team lived up to their favourite tag to clinch both the gold medals. The boys defeated Delhi 40-10 while the girls got the better of Odisha 33-24. Taarini Suri and Shravani Walekar then took Maharashtra to 50 gold medals when they defeated Odisha's Pragati Parida and Vishakha Toppo 21-13, 20-22, 21-16 in the girls doubles final at the TNPSU badminton hall.

Hockey5s Men's WC INDIA LOSE 4-7 TO NETHERLANDS IN QUARTERS

Muscat | Agencies

India suffered a 4-7 loss to the Netherlands in the quarterfinals of the FIH Hockey5s Men's World Cup on Tuesday.

Mohammed Raheel (1', 7', 25') scored a hat-trick, while Mandeep Mor (11') netted a goal for India. For the Netherlands, Sander de Wijn (4', 15'), and Alexander Schop (10', 26') scored a brace each with Lucas Middendorp (12'), Jamie van Aart (13'), and Pepijn Reyenga (20') netting a goal each.

The match unfolded with a promising start for India, as Mohammed Raheel (1') showcased his skills with a remarkable field goal in the very first minute, setting the tone for an intense competition. However, the Netherlands swiftly responded to India's early lead, with Sander de Wijn (4') levelling the score. Undeterred by the quick equalizer, India intensified their offensive strategies, leading to another goal by Mohammed Raheel (7'). Despite the renewed lead, the Netherlands, demonstrating resilience, managed to equalize once again, courtesy of a goal by Alexander Schop (10'). The back-and-forth nature of the



match continued, with Mandeep Mor (11') reclaiming the lead for India. Nevertheless, the Netherlands countered with a rapid succession of goals, as Lucas Middendorp (12') and Jamie van Aart (13') skillfully found the back of the net, swinging the momentum in favour of the Netherlands. Heading into halftime, Sander de Wijn (15') delivered a crucial challenge goal, leaving India trailing. The second half witnessed the Netherlands asserting their dominance, as Pepijn Reyenga (20') and Alexander Schop (26') further extended their lead.

'He can play in unorthodox fashion' Aakash Chopra backs Sarfaraz to replace injured Rahul in 2nd Test

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Former Indian cricketer Aakash Chopra has thrown his weight behind Sarfaraz Khan to replace the injured KL Rahul in the playing XI of the second Test against England in Vizag, starting on February 2.

With injuries sidelining both Ravindra Jadeja and KL Rahul, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Monday named Sarfaraz, spinner Sourabh Kumar, and all-rounder Washington Sundar as their replacements for the second Test.

Chopra, expressing his views on his YouTube channel, highlighted Sarfaraz's unorthodox style of play and his proficiency against spin, making a strong case for the Mumbai-based batter to make his debut for the national team in Vizag.

"Sarfaraz Khan and Rajat Patidar are available with this team. Rituraj Gaikwad and Virat Kohli are still not



there. They will have to play either Rajat Patidar or Sarfaraz. You can go

towards Sarfaraz because he can play in an unorthodox fashion and is a

very good player of spin," said Chopra.

Sarfaraz, a prolific run-getter in the last three seasons of domestic cricket for Mumbai, recently smashed a brilliant 161 as India A defeated England Lions by an innings and 16 runs in the second four-day match in Ahmedabad.

Commenting on Rahul's unfortunate injury, Chopra highlighted the wicketkeeper-batter's recurrent struggle with injuries throughout his career and said: "This has been the biggest problem in KL Rahul's career. Injuries or illnesses have come at the wrong time and they have come many a time. The way he played in the first innings, and to be fair, he was batting assuredly in the second innings as well." "There are very few people in our team who play the sweep. Rohit Sharma and KL Rahul play the sweep, and KL Rahul will now not be there in this game," he added.

'Serena told me I'm not allowed to quit': Venus Williams targeting return for Indian Wells and Miami

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Former World no. 1 Venus Williams is gearing for a comeback during the North American hard-court tennis season. Drawing inspiration from her sister Serena Williams, she is determined to make a successful return to the sport.

In a recent video shared on her YouTube channel, the seven-time Grand Slam singles champion expressed her aspirations to participate in the WTA 1000 events in Indian Wells and Miami, considering them "big goals".

"One of my big goals is to play United States, to play in the Miami Open and at Indian Wells," Williams said. "I have not played there since 2019 due to injuries. It's a long time... It's a lot of years not to play at home. So that's of course one of my big goals on the horizon, is to be there, prepare to do that. Amongst many goals on



the court, too.

"My little sister, Serena, told me I'm not allowed to quit, and of course, I would never quit. But it's the mandate. She said no, so I will be back on the court," Venus was quoted by WTA

website. In the video, the 43-year-old Williams revealed the challenges she has faced with injuries over the past year and discussed the knee injury that left her hobbling off Centre Court at Wimbledon last summer (she took

a fall in the second game of her first-round match against Elina Svitolina) at length for the first time.

"I don't talk a lot about my injuries because I hate complaining," she said, but called the cartilage damage she suffered as one of the "craziest" injuries she's tried to play through in her long and storied career.

After the early exit at Wimbledon, Williams said the lingering swelling and pain impacted her ability to train and even, sometimes, walk -- in advance of events in Montreal and Cincinnati, as well as the US Open. Despite that, she scored what was then a Top 10 victory over Veronika Kudermetova in Cincinnati, her first Top 10 win in four years.

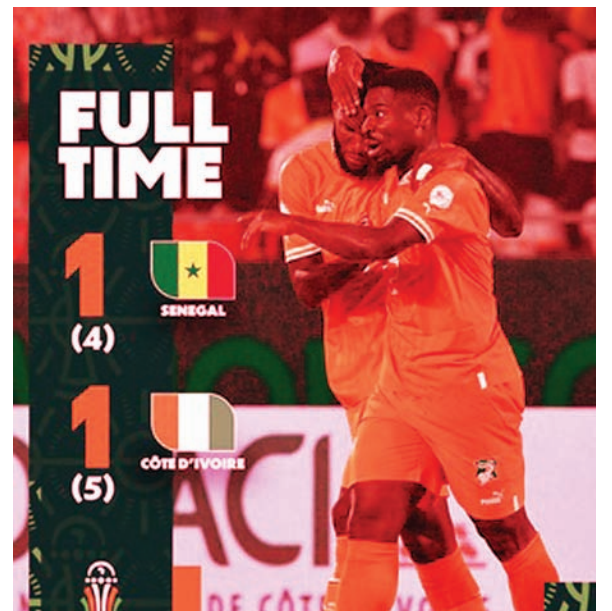
But after that tournament, the swelling in her knee blew up and she was forced to withdraw from the WTA 250 event in Cleveland, where she had intended to play as a wild-card entry.

Abidjan | Agencies

Hosts Cote d'Ivoire roared into the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) quarterfinals, beating defending champions Senegal 5-4 on penalties with a 1-1 draw after extra time.

In the round-of-16 match in Yamoussoukro, 230km from Abidjan, Senegal's Habib Diallo opened the scoring in the fourth minute. Cote d'Ivoire equalized by Franck Kessie through a penalty on 86 minutes. The scores remained tied after 120 minutes of play, and in the penalty shootout, Cote d'Ivoire managed five against four for Senegal, reports Xinhua.

Cote d'Ivoire will meet the winners between Mali and



Burkina Faso on Saturday in the quarterfinal.

National Rowing C'ship Services rowers set the early tone; M.P. dominate women's section

Punes | Agencies

Hosts Services Sports Control Board men and Madhya Pradesh women set the early pace, booking themselves berths in the next round on the opening day of action in the 41st Senior and 25th Open Sprint National Rowing Championship at the Army Rowing Node in the CME campus, here on Tuesday.

Mid-afternoon results turned in had the Services book a quarterfinals berth in the single sculls event and likewise semifinal spots in three events -- double sculls, quadruple sculls and coxless pairs, respectively. Salman



Khan with 07 minutes 31.2 seconds did well over the 2000-metre run with the best time in his heats thus taking off from where he left off last year. In the double sculls event, Services duo Kulwinder Singh and Karamjit Singh clocked 06:59.3 to emerge top in their heat. In quadruple sculls, Services with Ashish Phugat, Jakar Khan, Karamjit Singh, and Kulwinder Singh with 06:26.7 to their name topped and moved up into the draw.

The fourth place was grabbed by the coxless pair of Sameer Kumar and Iqbal Singh who managed 07:21.8. Likewise in the women's section, Madhya Pradesh rowers worked into the last four stage in the light-weight double sculls, quadruple sculls and single sculls events respectively. Manipur, Kerala, Orissa and Tamil Nadu were close behind winning two places each in the last four. Madhya Pradesh duo Poonam and Rukmani Dangi (08:07.0s) rolled into the light-weight double sculls semis. Later, in the quadruple sculls event it was Vindhya Sankit, Poonam, Kushpreet Kaur, and Rukmani Dangi clocking 07:32.8).

Badminton Asia Team C'ships India men's and women's teams placed in same groups with China

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Indian men's team, led by H.S Prannoy in singles and the formidable pairing of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty in doubles, finds itself placed in Group A alongside Hong Kong and Asian powerhouse China in a challenging draw for the upcoming Badminton Asia Team Championships.

The fifth edition of the championship is scheduled to take place in Shah Alam, Malaysia, from February 13-18, 2024. With only the top two teams progressing to the knockout stage, India faces a tough challenge in a group that includes some of the region's strongest badminton nations.

Similarly, the Indian women's team, captained by the iconic PV Sindhu, has been drawn into Group W alongside China. Unlike the men's group, the



women's group comprises only two teams, assuring both India and China a place in the knockout stage. Sindhu, who has been out of action for nearly three months due to an injury sustained at the French

Open, will make her comeback in this tournament. The women's team also features experienced players like Ashwini Ponnappa, Gayatri Gopichand, and debutant Anmol Kharb.

The Badminton Asia Team Championships serve as qualifiers for the prestigious Thomas Cup (men's team world cup) and Uber Cup (women's team world cup). The Indian teams, aiming for podium finishes, have a chance to better their performances from the last edition where both the men's and women's teams were eliminated in the group stages. The men's team, looking to defend its Thomas Cup crown, boasts a strong lineup featuring Prannoy, Satwik, and Chirag. Meanwhile, the women's team seeks to surpass its previous quarter-final finish. With a blend of experienced players and emerging talents, India will aim for a standout performance in this edition of the championship.



Veteran actor Ashok Saraf to be conferred with 'Maharashtra Bhushan' award

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Veteran Marathi and Bollywood films, television and theatre actor Ashok Saraf will be conferred with the coveted 'Maharashtra Bhushan' Award-2023, Chief Minister Eknath Shinde said here on Tuesday.

Saraf, 76, has been selected for his substantial contribution to the field of arts. He has straddled from comedy to serious to villainous roles through his acting and won the hearts of the audiences.

Saraf started his acting career in 1969 with the Marathi film 'Janaka'. Since then, he has worked in over 250 Marathi films, mostly in comic roles, besides acting in more than 50 Bollywood movies and 10 television serials, along with a dozen theatre productions. He has



teamed with up actors like Laxmikant Berde and Sachin Pilgaonkar in different films.

Some of the prominent Bollywood films in which Saraf could be seen include

'Damaad', 'Pratigat', 'Benaam Badshah', 'Aa Gale Lag Ja', 'Karan Arjun', 'Army', 'Koyla', 'Gupt', 'Yes Boss', 'Pyar Kiya To Darna Kya', 'Khubsoorat', 'Joru Ka Gulam', 'Jodi No. 1' and

'Singham', among others.

Saraf was also seen prominently on various channels in teleserials like 'Hum Paanch', 'Professor Pyarelal', 'Aa Bail Mujhe Maar', 'Ye Chhoti Badi Batein', 'Don't Worry Ho Jayega', and many more in both Hindi and Marathi.

Over the years, he has been decorated with several awards and honours, including Maharashtra State Film Award 'Pandu Havaladar', 10 State Government Awards for acting in Marathi films, Marathi Filmfare and Screen Awards, and now the latest feather of Maharashtra Bhushan Award-2023.

Born, bred up and educated in south Mumbai, Saraf is married to actress and producer Nivedita Joshi. The couple has a son, Aniket, who is a chef.

Ananya Panday is lit up as she shares moments with 'god son' Pablo

Team Absolute | Mumbai

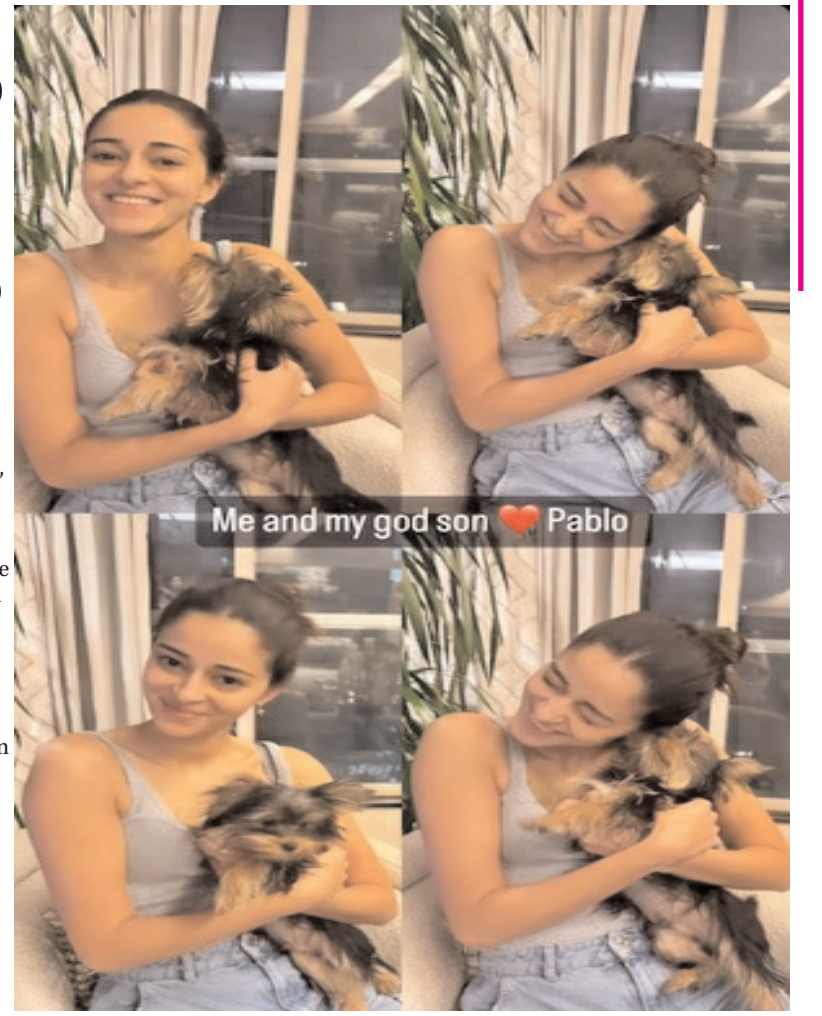
Bollywood diva Ananya Panday has shared a sneak peek with her "god son," dog Pablo, flaunting her bright smile. Taking to Instagram Stories, Ananya, who enjoys 24.6 million followers on the photo sharing application shared a collage with her furry friend.

In the picture we can see the 'Liger' fame actress wearing a grey tank top, and paired it with blue denims. She is cuddling the dog.

Ananya flashes her beautiful smile for the lenses, and gave the music of 'Never Grow Up' by Taylor Swift to her post. It was captioned as: "Me and my god son Pablo."

Meanwhile, Ananya was last seen as Ahana in the coming-of-age drama 'Kho Gaye Hum Kahan'. Directed by Arjun Varain Singh, the flick also stars Siddhant Chaturvedi and Adarsh Gourav.

The film revolves around three friends who navigate their goals and relationships against the pressures of social media.



'It calm my nerves': Parineeti on Raghav's blessings for her first singing gig

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Parineeti Chopra, who recently gave her first ever live singing performance, on Tuesday has shared a glimpse into the day of a debutante musician, and it has a sweet sneak peek of her husband Raghav Chadha.

Parineeti had performed at the Mumbai Festival 2024. Giving a glimpse into how her first live performance was, Parineeti shared a series of videos wherein she can be seen on a video call with her hubby Raghav.

In the video, Parineeti says, "Raghav has called to ask me my well-being."

Raghav is heard saying, "How are you? Are you excited?"

Parineeti says, "No, I am not excited dude", to which Raghav replies, "The stage is set. I want to say you have my blessing."

Other video features Parineeti checking the mikes, and sound. There is also a glimpse of Parineeti getting ready for the performance, while her hair is being done in the vanity.

The post is captioned as: "A day in the life of a debutante musician 1. Got a call from @raghavchadha88 to calm my nerves, and it really helped 2. First time on-stage in-ear experience 3. Nope, I was nervous..... and it was hot 4. Can't stress on this enough, MUSIC lifts my mood like nothing else. Is that true for



anybody else?"

"5. In a world full of trends, I love my pink fuzzy chappals / shoes. Comfort >>> 6. A bundle of nerves as we got into hair and makeup for the first show 7. I believe in my comfortable chappal shoes, I guess not everyone did 8. Right before we walked on stage," the post added. On January 25, Parineeti had announced her singing debut. She has earlier sung the female version of the patriotic song 'Teri Mitti', which is written

by Manoj Muntashir and composed by Arko. It featured in 2019 war movie 'Kesari', starring Akshay Kumar and Parineeti. The 35-year-old actress also has the unplugged track 'Matlabi Yariyan' in her discography. This song is from the mystery thriller film 'The Girl on the Train'. It stars Parineeti, Avinash Tiwari, and Aditi Rao Hydari.

The actress, who has married AAP MP Raghav Chadha in September 2023, also sang her wedding song 'O Piya'.

A. R. Rahman clarifies using AI to recreate voices of late singers Bamba Bakya, Shahul Hameed

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Oscar-winning music composer A. R. Rahman, who used the artificial intelligence for recreating the voices of late playback singers Bamba Bakya and Shahul Hameed for the song titled 'Thimiri Yezhuda' from the Rajinikanth-starrer 'Lal Salaam' has issued a clarification with regards to the usage of the AI tool and the compensation to the singer's families.

The 'Rang De Basanti' composer took to his X, erstwhile Twitter and penned a note for his followers who questioned the dependence on AI for recreation of the voices of the departed singers.

He shared Sony Music South's post highlighting how an AI tool was used to recreate the late singers' voices. He wrote, "We took permission from their families and sent deserving remuneration for using their voice algorithms...technology is not a threat and a nuisance if we use it right."

He also added the hashtags respect and nostalgia in the post. Bamba Bakya, who collaborated with Rahman on many songs, passed away in 2022 due to a cardiac arrest. Shahul Hameed died in a car crash in 1997, near Chennai.

many users on the Internet supported the use of AI, a section of users also



called the gesture disrespectful as they felt that over-dependence on AI reduces

opportunities for upcoming talents in the industry.

Sunny Leone: I love to cook and bake



Team Absolute | Noida

Even though she's in an industry where eating right matters, actress Sunny Leone said she is a "foodie" and added that she loves to cook and bake.

"I love to cook and bake. Baking is my forte. So anything that I can put together and put in an oven and bake is something that I enjoy," Sunny told IANS.

The actress, who has turned restaurateur, said that she enjoys the process of baking.

She said: "I enjoy the process of baking whether it's the breads, crusts or pizza dough or different types of desserts... the last thing I made was spinach spanakopita. I also make pizza dough from home."

Sunny added: "Then creating different things for my kids to eat and watching them eat is the best."

Sunny is a different kind of a foodie. She loves to try different flavours.

The actress said: "Yes, I am a foodie but I believe there are two different types of foodies. There's one who just eat, eat and eat then there are foodies who really enjoy the idea of flavours of foods."

She added: "So for me, I might not finish an entire plate but I would want to try different foods and different flavours and how those different combinations taste great. That's the type of foodie that I am. I really would like to eat an entire pizza by myself."

Vishal Dadlani lauds 'Indian Idol 14' contestants for singing 'Vande Mataram' for Hrithik's 'Fighter'



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Singer and music composer Vishal Dadlani spoke about the 'Indian Idol 14' contestants, who have lend their voices to the song 'Vande Mataram' from Hrithik Roshan-starrer movie 'Fighter', saying it not only showcased their vocal prowess but they have also stepped into the realm of playback singing. In a groundbreaking collaboration, the contestants of the singing reality show, 'Indian Idol 14' were offered an opportunity to lend their unique voices to the iconic song, 'Vande Mataram' (The Fighter Anthem) from the film 'Fighter'.

This evocative track is composed by Vishal - Shekhar and contestants Vaibhav Gupta from Kanpur, Subhadeep Das Chowdhury and Dipan Mitra from Kolkata, Obom Tangu from Tutting, Utkarsh Wankhede from Nagpur, and Piyush Panwar from Balotra, Rajasthan, were given the chance to sing in this powerfully rousing rendition, marking the beginning of their journey in the Hindi music industry.

Vishal said: "Seeing the Indian Idol contestants lend their voices to the Fighter Anthem, 'Vande Mataram', fills me with immense pride. These talented individuals have not only showcased their vocal prowess on the stage but have now stepped into the realm of

playback singing for a blockbuster movie like 'Fighter'."

"We (Vishal - Shekhar) believe that their passion, dedication, and raw talent were evident throughout the competition, and now, they have what it takes to captivate audiences on the big screen. This opportunity not only validates their hard work but also signifies a remarkable milestone in their musical journey," he further shared. Vishal added:

"Thanks to Hrithik (whose idea this was) and Siddharth Anand being so encouraging of new and genuine talent, our upcoming Idols have taken the first steps towards leaving a mark with their rendition of 'Vande Mataram' in the album of Fighter." Speaking about this opportunity, contestant Vaibhav said, "I am hugely grateful to receive such an opportunity from Vishal - Shekhar sir, for having faith in us and allowing us to be a part of Vande Mataram, The Fighter Anthem. It all started when we performed 'Sujalam Sufalam' for the grand entry of Hrithik Roshan Sir, who graced our show to promote the film."

"He liked the performance and expressed his wish as a request to Vishal Sir to get us to perform in the film. This is how we landed our biggest project to sing for Vishal - Shekhar Sir, who called us to the studio to record the most anticipated song of 2024," he added.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Aamna Sharif