

# absolute india



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## ENEMY KNOWS THIS IS NEW INDIA: PM MODI

## Military leaders need to adapt to changing character of war: CDS Gen Anil Chauhan

Jaipur | Agencies

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday launched a scathing attack on the opposition, saying the Congress never permitted soldiers to get even with the enemy. Addressing a mammoth rally in Rajasthan's Churu in support of paralympic Devendra Jhajhria, PM Modi said that things have changed now as "the enemy knows that this is New India, which enters into enemy territories to give a befitting reply to them (Yeh Naya Bharat hai jo ghar mein ghus ke marta hai)." "As long as the Congress people remained in power, they kept the hands of our soldiers tied... The enemy would attack and leave but they did not allow the soldiers to respond. The soldiers kept demanding one rank one pension, but they did nothing... When our government came, we gave them open permission to give befitting replies to enemies on borders. Today even enemies know that 'This is Modi; This is New India which attacks after entering into territories of enemies.' PM Modi recalled his visit to Churu on February 26, 2019, which came soon after the Balakot airstrikes. "We had taught the terrorists a lesson," he said. He repeated the words he shared in Churu last year and said, "Main desh nahin jhukne doonga, saugandh mujhe hai mitti ki..." "When our Army carried out the surgical strikes,



the Ghamandiya Ghatbandhan demanded proof of bravery from the Army. Insulting the Army and dividing the country is the identity of the Congress party," he said. PM Modi attacked the opposition's alliance and said the people of the 'Ghamandiya Ghatbandhan' had called Lord Ram "imaginary." "Just a few months ago, the dream of Ram temple in Ayodhya was fulfilled. The Congress party was openly insulting our faith," he said, adding, "The country has always paid the price for the sins of Congress." He further said that a journalist told him that the Congress Party has issued an advisory out of fear in which they have asked their workers to stay tightlipped if there is any discussion about the

Ram temple. "Our country now cannot tolerate this grave insult to our faith," he added. Speaking on the bold steps taken by the NDA government, the PM said, "Today Article 370 has been abolished from Kashmir. The law on triple talaq is helping our Muslim sisters. Entire families used to live in tension in fear of triple talaq. Modi has saved not just Muslim sisters but all Muslim families." PM Modi further said that a lot of work has been done in the last 10 years, but this is very little. "What Modi has done till now is only like the starter available in big hotels, a lot needs to be done yet," he added. He further mentioned the guarantees given by him which have been fulfilled. "The guarantees given by Modi have been fulfilled. Unlike other parties, the BJP does not just release its manifesto. We come with a resolution letter. Most of the resolutions that we had issued in 2019 have been fulfilled." Speaking on pandemic times, he said, "We worked honestly. A crisis like corona came. The world was thinking that India would be ruined and the world would also be ruined. In this crisis, India made its country the fifth-largest economy in the world." "We too could have said that it is a disaster, what should I do? But Modi did not choose that path. To challenge the challenge is the strength of our soil. In Rajasthan, it is said -- Apni Karni, Paar Utarni. We worked hard and gave results, he

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan on Friday made a strong pitch for military leaders to upgrade themselves in view of the changing character of war. The officers also need to understand the importance of inter-services synergy, he said. General Chauhan made these observations while addressing Future Leaders of the Indian Armed Forces at Defence Services Staff College, Wellington in Tamil Nadu. During his address, the CDS dwelled on the transformative reforms undertaken in the Indian military in the backdrop of emerging security challenges. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) said that CDS was briefed by the Commandant on the ongoing training activities at the College wherein due



emphasis was laid on fostering jointmanship and inter-services awareness, which was well appreciated. The 79th Staff Course is presently underway at the College. The course is of 45 weeks duration. The present course comprises 476 student officers to include 36 students from 26 Friendly Foreign Countries. For the first time, eight women officers are also participating in the course, the MoD added.

## India's forex reserves surge to lifetime high of \$645.58 bn

## Cong manifesto for 2024 polls: Mahalakshmi for women, MSP guarantee for farmers, pledge to abolish Agnipath scheme

Team Absolute | Mumbai

India's foreign exchange reserves rose for a sixth consecutive week to hit a historic high of \$645.58 billion for the week ended March 29, according to RBI data released on Friday. The forex kitty increased by \$2.95 billion during the week, after notching a cumulative \$26.5 billion rise in the previous five weeks. RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das on Friday referred to the record foreign exchange reserves as a reflection of the strength of the Indian economy. "It is our prime focus to build a strong umbrella, a strong buffer in the form of a substantial quantum of forex reserves, which will help us when the cycle turns or when it rains heavily," Das said while unveiling the first monetary policy review of the current financial year on Friday. Rising foreign exchange reserves are a positive sign for the economy as they reflect an ample supply of dollars that



help strengthen the rupee. An increase in foreign exchange reserves gives the RBI more headroom to stabilise the rupee when it turns volatile. This is because the RBI intervenes in the spot and forward currency markets by releasing more dollars to prevent the rupee from heading for a free fall. Conversely, a declining forex kitty leaves the RBI less space to intervene in the market to prop up the rupee. India's forex reserves, including the central bank's forward holdings, can now cover more than 11 months of imports, which is close to a two-year high. The RBI

Governor also said that the rupee has remained largely range-bound, as compared to both its emerging market peers and a few advanced economies during 2023-24, and was the most stable among major currencies during this period. "The depreciation of rupee at 1.4 per cent against the US dollar in 2023-24 was lower as compared to the emerging market peers like Chinese yuan, Thai baht, Indonesian rupiah, Vietnamese dong and Malaysian ringgit and a few advanced economy currencies like the Japanese yen, Korean won and New Zealand dollar," Das said.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Congress party launched its manifesto for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections at the party headquarters on Friday, making a slew of promises for diverse sections of society including women, farmers, youths and the elderly. The caste Census remains one of the biggest highlights of the party's manifesto, reinforcing one of its major poll planks 'jiti abadi utna haq', for which Rahul Gandhi has been galvanising public support. Other key features of the manifesto include restoration of Jammu and Kashmir's statehood and MSP guarantee on crops. The party also promises to scrap the GST law and abolish Agnipath scheme brought in by the Modi government, if voted to power. Describing its manifesto as 'Nyay Patra', the party has also promised "to review and undo anti-people laws" and "help media re-discover its freedom." Key highlights of the Congress party's manifesto are as follows: To conduct nation-wide Socio-Economic and Caste Census to enumerate the castes and sub-castes and their socio-economic condi-



tions To pass a Constitutional amendment for raising 50 per cent cap on reservations for SC, ST and OBCs Reservation of 10 per cent in jobs and educational institutions for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) to be implemented for all castes and communities Enhancing National Social Assistance Programme (for senior citizens, widows and persons with disabilities) from existing Rs 200-500 per month to Rs 1,000 per month

Rajasthan Model of cashless insurance up to 25 lakh to be adopted for universal healthcare across the country To provide one-year apprenticeship to every diploma holder or college graduate below the age of 25, under Right to Apprenticeship Act. Apprentices to get Rs 1 lakh a year. To provide sports scholarships of Rs 10,000 per month for talented and budding sportspersons below the age of 21 To amend RTE Act to

make education compulsory and free, from Class I to Class XII in public schools Mahalakshmi scheme for women, under which Rs 1 lakh per year will be given to every poor Indian family as an unconditional cash transfer. Amount to be transferred in the bank account of the oldest woman of the household To reserve 50 per cent of Central government jobs for women starting in 2025. 'Same Work, Same Wages' to be enforced to prevent discrimination in wages for women A legal guarantee of MSP for crops, as recommended by Swaminathan Commission To establish farmers' retail markets in large villages and small towns to enable farmers to bring their produce to sell to consumers. Fishing communities to be issued credit cards (like Kisan Credit Cards) by banks Wages under MGNREGA to be increased to Rs 400 per day Doubling the number of Anganwadi workers and creating an additional 14 lakh jobs Abolish the Agnipath programme and direct Armed Forces (Army, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard) to resume normal recruitment to achieve full sanctioned strength.

## Big boost for Mumbai Indians as Suryakumar Yadav joins squad

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Struggling to put their campaign back on the rail following three successive defeats, Mumbai Indians received a boost on Friday as Suryakumar Yadav joined the squad to strengthen his batting. Suryakumar Yadav joined his teammates at the Wankhede Stadium for an afternoon practise session ahead of their match on Sunday. He is likely to boost Mumbai Indians' batting lineup in the match against Delhi Capitals on Sunday. On Friday, the middle-order batter came to the stadium earlier than the team and spent close to an hour batting in the nets, playing his trademark shots all across the ground. Following his long batting session, Surya then did some training and mobility drills followed by catching up with his teammates and speaking with Mark Boucher, head coach, and Kieron Pollard, batting coach, during the practise. The 33-year-old Mumbai batter was declared



fit to play by the National Cricket Academy (NCA) following surgery to treat a sports hernia in Munich, Germany. Suryakumar, one of the most prominent T20 batters in the world-renowned for his 360-degree short-making, last played competitive cricket in December 2023 during the T20I leg of India's tour of South Africa. He picked up an ankle injury while fielding in the third T20I at Johannesburg, where he scored 100 off 56 balls, his fourth century in the format. India completed a series win in South Africa under his captaincy.

## Range-bound rupee most stable among major currencies: RBI

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Indian rupee (INR) has remained largely range-bound as compared to both its emerging market peers and a few advanced economies during 2023-24 and was the most stable among major currencies during this period, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said on Friday. "The depreciation of Indian rupee (INR) at 1.4 per cent against the US dollar in 2023-24 was lower as compared to emerging market peers like Chinese yuan, Thailand baht, Indonesian rupiah, Vietnamese dong and Malaysian ringgit and a few advanced economy currencies like Japanese yen, Korean won and New Zealand dollar," he explained. In the previous three years, the INR exhibited the lowest volatility in 2023-24. The relative stability of the INR reflects India's sound macroeconomic fundamentals, financial stability and improvements in the external position, he added. India's foreign exchange reserves reached an all-time high of \$645.6 billion as of March 29, 2024, which has helped in reducing the volatility in the rupee. Latest data on various external



vulnerability indicators suggest improved resilience of India's external sector, the RBI Governor explained. "We remain confident of meeting our external financing requirements comfortably," Das said. He said that during the first three quarters of 2023-24, India's current account deficit (CAD) narrowed significantly on account of a moderation in merchandise trade deficit coupled with

robust growth in services exports and strong remittances. India's merchandise and services exports have grown at a healthy pace in Q4:2023-24 and the country continues to be the largest recipient of remittances. The cost of receiving remittances stood at 4.9 per cent in Q3:2023, significantly lower than 9.6 per cent in Q1:2013 and also vis-a-vis the global average of 6.2 per cent; During Q3: 2023-24, the CAD stood at \$10.5 billion (1.2 per cent of GDP) as compared to \$11.4 billion (1.3 per cent of GDP) in Q2. Overall, the CAD for 2024-25 is expected to remain at a level that is both viable and eminently manageable, the RBI Governor said. On the external financing side, India's foreign portfolio investment (FPI) flows saw a significant turnaround in 2023-24. Net FPI inflows stood at \$41.6 billion during 2023-24, as against net outflows in the preceding two years (\$14.1 billion in 2021-22 and \$4.8 billion in 2022-23). This is the second highest level of FPI inflow after 2014-15, Das said. However, net foreign direct investment (FDI) moderated to \$14.2 billion in April-January 2023-24 from \$25.0 billion a year ago.

## ED cracks down on Pune ponzi kingpin, seizes Rs 24.41 cr in bank accounts

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate has issued a 'provisional attachment order' attaching movable assets worth Rs 24.41 crore of various individuals, entities and firms which are used by Vinod Khute, owner of the Pune-based VIPS Group of Companies and Global Affiliate Business Company, in an alleged money laundering case, an official said on Friday. According to ED, the attached assets, under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) of 2002, are in the form of balance in 58 bank accounts amounting to Rs 21.27 crore and deposits of Rs 3.14 crore. The probe agency has commenced an investigation following an FIR lodged by the Bharti Vidyapeeth Police Station in Pune. The FIR, filed under various sections of the Indian Penal Code, 1860, implicates Vinod Tukaram Khute, Santosh Khute, Mangesh Khute, Kiran



Pitamber Anarase, Ajinkya Badadhe, and unidentified others. They are accused of deceiving individuals and conspiring to entice them into a Ponzi scheme and forex trading with promises of high returns. This resulted in the collection of over Rs 100 crore in the bank accounts of numerous fraudulent firms and entities. "ED investigation revealed that Vinod Khute who is absconding and suspected to be presently residing in Dubai, is the mastermind of various illegal trade, crypto exchange, wallet services, and forex trading through Dubai-based firm M/s Kana Capital Limited," said ED in a statement issued on Friday.



## Some are deliberately trying to equate Sandeshkhali with Singur and Nandigram: CM Mamata Banerjee

**Team Absolute** | Kolkata

Some people are deliberately trying to equate the recent developments at Sandeshkhali with the movements in Singur and Nandigram that took place during the rule of the Left Front government in West Bengal, observed Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee on Friday.

"Sandeshkhali cannot be equated either with Singur or with Nandigram. Some events took place locally at Sandeshkhali. The accused were arrested also. We have arrested people like Sheikh Shahjahan," CM Mamata Banerjee said while addressing a rally at Tufanganj.

Tufanganj comes under Alipurduar Lok Sabha constituency which is going for polls in the first phase of the general elections on April 19.

To recall, during the previous Left Front regime, the Trinamool Congress spearheaded a movement against land acquisition for industry at Singur in Hooghly District and Nandigram in East Midnapore.

While at Singur, the movement was against the proposed small car project of Tata Motors Limited there, at Nandigram the stir was against the proposed chemical hub by Indonesia-based Salim Group. However, at Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas, which was on the boil for quite some time in the recent past, the movement was by women against a section of the local Trinamool Congress leadership, who were accused of land grabbing and sexual harassment.

Earlier, speaking at the Tufanganj rally, the CM, without naming anyone, also targeted the former judge of Calcutta High Court, Abhijit Gangopadhyay, who is contesting as a BJP candidate from Tamuk Lok Sabha constituency in East



Midnapore District.

"You are responsible for termination of services of several individuals. Now you will be tried in the people's court," CM Banerjee said.

She once again issued an appeal to the people not to apply at the CAA portal.

"Remember, once you apply there you will no

longer be a citizen of the country. I am determined to stop implementation of the CAA and NRC in West Bengal," CM Banerjee said.

On Thursday while addressing a rally at Cooch Behar, Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, accused Opposition parties, including the Trinamool Congress of misleading people on the CAA issue.

## SC stays Allahabad HC order striking down UP Madarsa Act, 2004



**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

In an interim direction, the Supreme Court on Friday stayed a decision of the Allahabad High Court which had struck down the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madarsa Education Act, 2004 as unconstitutional and violative of the principles of secularism.

A Bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI), DY Chandrachud, observed that the Allahabad High Court misconstrued the provision of the law in its March 22 order and the view taken by it

was prima facie not correct.

Issuing a notice, the Bench, also comprising Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, asked the Centre, Uttar Pradesh government and other respondents to file their counter affidavits by May 31.

The matter has been listed for further hearing in the second week of July, 2024.

Delivering a verdict on a plea filed by an advocate challenging vires of the Madarsa Act, 2004, a Bench of Justices Subhash Vidyarthi and Vivek Chaudhary of the

Allahabad High Court held the law violative of the principles of secularism, Articles 14, 21 and 21-A of the Constitution of India and Section 22 of the University Grants Commission Act, 1956. The High Court had asked the state government to take steps to accommodate madrasa students in regular schools, adding that if required, new schools would be established to ensure that children between the ages of 6 to 14 years are not left without admission in duly-recognised institutions.

## National boxer-turned-sharpshooter of Lawrence Bishnoi syndicate nabbed in Delhi



**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Former national boxer, who became an active sharpshooter of the infamous Lawrence Bishnoi syndicate and used to execute crimes, including murder, on directions of the gang leaders sitting in Dubai, has been arrested by the Delhi Police's Special Cell, a police official said on Friday.

The gangster identified as Abhinav Verma a.k.a. Boxer, a resident of Vikaspuri, was wanted in two cases of firing at businessmen in the national capital to extort money.

Deputy Commissioner of Police, Special Cell, Amit Kaushik said that on March 27, specific input was received that a member of Rohit Godara, Hasim

Baba & Kala Jatheri (Lawrence Bishnoi gang) would be coming near DDA Sports Park, Sector 3, Rohini, Delhi to meet his associates for next course of action. Acting on the inputs, a trap was laid and Verma was apprehended.

"During his cursory search, a country-made pistol and two bullets were recovered from his possession. Further on his instance, two more sophisticated pistols, one revolver and 10 live cartridges were also recovered," the DCP said.

The DCP said that Verma was arrested in a murder case of his schoolmate at Paschim Vihar in 2012. "He remained in jail for 6 years and came in contact with Hasim Baba and his close associate Ashish aka Kalu (dismissed constable

having a criminal record) and joined their gang," he said. After coming out on bail, Verma started committing crimes for this gang. "After the arrest of other sharpshooters of the gang, he became the main sharpshooter of this gang and used to remain in contact with the main kingpins and their associates through certain app-based numbers," the DCP said. In 2021, Verma again went to jail and after coming out, started working for Ashish, Hasim Baba and Kala Jatheri (Lawrence Bishnoi Gang).

"During further course of interrogation, it was revealed that one person namely Aashish is running the infamous Goldy Brar/Lawrence Bishnoi gang from Dubai," the DCP added.

## Bengal Guv orders judicial probe into alleged violence, corruption at state universities

**Team Absolute** | Kolkata

Bengal Governor C.V. Ananda Bose on Friday ordered a judicial probe into the complaints of rampant corruption and violence in the different state universities in West Bengal. The move by the Raj Bhavan came a day after the Governor recommended the removal of Bratya Basu as the state Education Minister on charges of violating the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) by attending the meeting of a Trinamool Congress-affiliated body on the premises of a state university in Malda district.

Sources in the Raj Bhavan said the Governor decided to order a judicial probe into the affairs of the state universities after several complaints were received alleging that the educational institutions were being used for political activities.



The Raj Bhavan has also communicated that the allegations will be looked into by a one-member committee comprising a retired judge from the Supreme Court or the Calcutta High Court. The affairs of the state universities, where the Governor is the Chancellor by virtue of his Chair, have been a contentious issue between the state secretariat and the Governor's House. The tiff broke out after the Governor appointed interim vice-chancellors at some state universities, which had been running headless for quite some time. On March 30, a convention of the Trinamool-affiliated West Bengal College & University Professors' Association (WBCUPA) was held at the Gour Banga University in Malda district, which was attended by Education Minister Basu, who is also the WBCUPA President.

## Free ration scheme to prove a game changer in UP again during LS polls: Yogi Adityanath

**Team Absolute** | Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has said that the free ration scheme will prove a game changer in the state again during Lok Sabha polls. With 3.60 crore ration cardholders and their families set to cast their votes in the upcoming elections, the state's commitment to transparent governance is poised to resonate positively with the electorate, fostering confidence in the double-engine government and sparking a search for the Lotus symbol on the EVMs, the Chief Minister said. Yogi Adityanath said that amid challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pro-active measures to provide free rations offered immense relief to the nation's underprivileged. He said that under the guidance of PM Modi, Uttar Pradesh witnessed the expansive execution of this scheme, benefiting a staggering 15 crore individuals.

The scheme which played a pivotal role in the 2022 Assembly elections by garnering significant support for Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, is poised to once again sway the electorate in the upcoming 2024 Lok Sabha elections, political observers believe.

An official, meanwhile, said that the



Chief Minister has put the focus on the beneficiary class.

These are the same beneficiaries who have been provided with rations with complete transparency.

Those who already had ration cards were immediately provided with the benefits of the scheme, while new cards were issued to other eligible individuals based on priority. By November 28, 2023, there were a total of 3.60 crore cardholders in Uttar Pradesh through which a total of 15.06 crore people were benefiting from free rations.

This includes 40.87 lakh Antyodaya cardholders (a total of 1.32 crore units) and 3.19 crore eligible household cardholders (a total of 13.73 crore units).

Moreover, between January 2023 and November 2023, 5,47,652 new cardholders have also been added. The gov-

ernment has paid special attention to transparency in ration distribution to ensure that no eligible person is left out. For this purpose, distribution is arranged through e-POS machines. Distribution through e-POS machines ensures up to 94.68 per cent allocation compliance. Installation of e-POS machines is being ensured in all 79,138 eligible fair price shops in rural and urban areas. Furthermore, Aadhaar seeding of 99.93 per cent of ration cardholders' heads and 99.94 per cent Aadhaar seeding of ration cards has been completed. Additionally, Aadhaar seeding of units present in ration cards has been done up to 99.26 per cent, and Aadhaar seeding up to 99.55 per cent has been achieved.

Distribution has been ensured through Aadhaar authentication by October 2023 which is 99.82 per cent. The state has also ensured the implementation of the One Nation One Ration Card scheme. Under this, from May 2020 to October 2023, at least 43,392 cardholders from other states have received free ration in the state.

On the other hand, the process for Uttar Pradesh's 34,83,906 cardholders to receive ration in other states has been successfully advanced.

## DJB case: Delhi court issues notice to ED on bail plea of accused in money laundering case

**Team Absolute** | New Delhi

Delhi court on Friday issued notice to the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on a bail application filed by CA Tejinder Pal Singh, a key accused in the money laundering case related to the alleged irregularities in the tender awards by the Delhi Jal Board (DJB).

Special Judge Bhupinder Singh of Rouse Avenue Court directed the agency to respond to the bail application and scheduled the matter for a hearing on April 8.

The court had on Thursday directed the probe agency to furnish a copy of the charge sheet to the accused in connection with the case. The ED, in its charge sheet filed at a court here, claimed that over Rs 2 crore was transferred for election funding of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

Those named in the charge sheet are former DJB's Chief Engineer Jagdish Kumar Arora, contractor Anil Kumar Agarwal, former NBCC general manager D.K. Mittal, Tejinder Pal Singh, and NKG Infrastructure Ltd, whose director has passed away and has not been named an accused in the case.

Arora and Aggarwal, who are presently in judicial custody, were presented before the court by the authorities following directives issued by the court on Wednesday, while Tejinder Pal Singh appeared before the court in response to a summons issued earlier. Meanwhile, the fourth accused, Mittal, filed an application seeking an exemption from personal appearance for the day.

The court, scheduling the next hearing for April 20, has put up the matter for scrutiny of documents related to the case.

The case pertains to alleged corruption in the tendering of flow metre procurement.

"Investigation revealed that the remaining proceeds of crime (bribe) to the tune of Rs 2,00,78,242 which had been acquired by Jagdish Kumar Arora, was transferred by him through Tejinder Pal Singh to various persons including other officers of Delhi Jal Board. The investigation also revealed that Jagdish Kumar Arora and other officers of Delhi Jal Board further transferred part of the said proceeds of crime for election funding of the AAP," the chargesheet, accessed by IANS, read.

It stated that the investigation into the roles of Arora, Aggarwal, Mittal, Tejinder Pal Singh and NKG Infrastructure Ltd in the offence of money laundering and proceeds of crime



utilised by them is complete, but the probe with respect to the final utilisation of the proceeds of crime amounting to Rs 2,00,78,242, which was transferred to various persons including officers of Delhi Jal Board and for election funding of AAP, is underway.

Initially, the CBI had filed an FIR in December 2021 implicating Arora in a conspiracy with NKG Infrastructure Ltd. to secure a Rs 38 crore contract in 2018 for the supply, installation testing, and commissioning (SITC) of electromagnetic flow metres. According to a CBI FIR filed in 2022, it has been alleged that despite complaints about NKG Infrastructure's non-compliance with contract eligibility criteria, the contract worth approximately Rs 38 crore was awarded to them.

The FIR claims that Arora, along with three subordinates, conspired to issue false certificates to NKG Infrastructure.

In July 2022, the CBI booked Arora and others under various sections, including criminal conspiracy and cheating. The ED also filed a case in September 2022 and later also conducted raids. In January, Arora and Aggarwal were arrested by the ED for alleged bribery related to the contract. Aggarwal is accused of transferring Rs 3 crore in bribes to Arora's relatives and associates.

## Akali Dal alone can bring Punjab back on road to development: Sukhbir Badal

**Team Absolute** | Fatehgarh Sahib (Punjab)

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) President Sukhbir Badal on Friday said his party alone could bring Punjab back on the road to development even as he appealed to Punjabis to compare the work done by the successive SAD governments with that of the Congress and present AAP governments "which had taken the state back by 20 years".

The SAD president, who led the Punjab Bachao Yatra into Fatehgarh Sahib and Amloh constituencies, said: "Punjabis should decide whom they want to elect to power. A regional party with a proven track record of speedy development and unique social welfare schemes which cater to all



sections of society, or scam-ridden Congress and AAP governments which have made life hell for them."

"SAD is known to fulfill all promises made to the people -- be it free power for farmers, old-age pension scheme,

'aata-daal' scheme or 'shagun scheme' -- all of which were initiated by it. In comparison, the Congress government promised a complete loan waiver to farmers but failed to keep its promise," he added.

He said the present AAP government had promised to eradicate the menace of drugs in weeks but only had presided over the expansion of the drug trade in the state. "Punjab does not need such anti-Punjab governments who take their orders from Delhi," he said.

Claiming that Punjabis had seen through the conspiracies hatched to weaken the state's only regional party, Badal said: "This is the reason why they are thronging in such large numbers to welcome the Punjab Bachao Yatra".

He said Delhi-based parties would never stand for or address the core issues of Punjab. "SAD on the other hand has taken a principled stand to safeguard the interests of Punjabis at all costs."



# Sanjay Raut says, 'All 48 seats in Maharashtra belong to MahaVikasAghadi'

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut asserted on Friday that all 48 Lok Sabha seats in Maharashtra belong to MahaVikasAghadi and not exclusively by any single constituent. His comments came in response to Congress leader BalasahebThorat's worry about the Uddhav Thackeray faction releasing candidates for seats that were still being debated, including the Sangli seat.

Raut told reporters in Mumbai, "All the 48 seats in Maharashtra belong to MahaVikasAghadi and not particularly to Shiv Sena (UBT) or Congress. Shiv Sena (UBT) has a clear vision of winning all the seats in the MVA."

Commenting on Thorat's statement, Raut, a member of the MVA negotiation committee, said, "Some people could be furious about Shiv Sena having a Sangli seat... Amravati and Kolhapur were our seats, but we explained to our workers... If



some Congress people are furious in Sangli, then it is the responsibility of top leadership to explain them...We will try our best to win Sangli's seat." Thorat previously claimed in March that the Sena should not have announced candidates for Mumbai South Central and Sangli. "These were still being discussed."

According to the report, the Uddhav Thackeray faction of Shiv Sena has nominated Anil Desai for the Mumbai South Central parliamentary seat and ChandrabharPatil for Sangli. Meanwhile, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), led by SharadPawar, announced seven Lok Sabha candidates on Thursday.

The party has nominated Suresh Mhatre for the Bhiwandi seat, and BajrangSonawane will run for Beed in the Lok Sabha Elections 2024.

SupriyaSule has been nominated for the BaramatiLok Sabha constituency, where she will contest against SunetraPawar, wife of Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister AjitPawar. Sule has been the MP for the seat since 2009, the report added.

Maharashtra's Lok Sabha Elections 2024 will be held in five phases: on April 19, April 26, May 7, May 13, and May 20. Vote counting will take place on June 4.

# Confusion in Amravati LS seat as Ambedkar brothers bicker in letter war



Team Absolute | Amravati

A letter-war has erupted between VanchitBahujanAghadi (VBA) President Prakash Y. Ambedkar and his younger sibling Republican Sena chief Anandraj Y. Ambedkar over the Amravati (SC) Lok Sabha constituency, creating uncertainty as to which party will contest the reserved seat. The 'tutu-main main' style of bickering has raised a question mark -- and eyebrows -- on the entry of the so-called 'third factor' in Amravati (SC) seat which is being hotly contested by actress-turned-politician, the sitting MP Navneet Kaur-Rana on a MahaYuti-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ticket, and the MahaVikasAghadi-INDIA bloc's Congress MLA Balwant B. Wankhade.

The Republican Sena President AnandrajAmbedkar abruptly jumped into the fray and filed his nomination three days ago, irking the VBA. Suddenly, on Thursday AnandrajAmbedkar had a change of heart and announced he was withdrawing in favour of Prakash Ambedkar's VBA to avoid the opposition vote-split.

In a statement, he revealed how he had sought the support of VBA which has a common agenda with the Republican Sena of fighting the BJP-RSS ideology and the alleged moves by the current government to change the Constitution by aiming for 400-plus LS seats. However, since the VBA did not respond to his friendly overtures, he decided

to contest solo in Amravati (SC), against the VBA's nominee PrajaktaT.Pillewan and the other candidates. Hours after AnandrajAmbedkar's decision to contest and withdraw from the race, the VBA state President Rekha Thakur issued a statement extending its support to him and asked him not to withdraw his candidature.

The present situation has turned embarrassing for both groups -- while AnandrajAmbedkar claims he has withdrawn his nomination papers, the VBA's nominee Prajakta T. Pillewan did not file her nomination forms before the last date (April 4). "Since we decided to support the Republican Sena, our candidate did not file the nominations. The ball is now in the court of AnandrajAmbedkar so he has to decide," VBA vice-president SiddharthMokle told IANS. "There's still no decision whether I shall contest this seat or not... My party will decide what's to be done," AnandrajAmbedkar said.

In another letter, the VBA and Republican Sena have pointed accusing fingers at each other for the scenario arising out of a purported miscommunication between the Ambedkar siblings.

However, the BJP's headaches are still not over as a ruling MahaYuti ally, the Praharjanshakti Party (PHP) chief Omprakash B. Kadu, alias BachhuKadu has publicly vowed to defeat Kaur-Rana at all costs and is campaigning furiously against her.

# After 16 years, life convict ArunGawli likely to walk free

Team Absolute | Nagpur

In a politically significant development, the dreaded ex-mafia don-turned-politician ArunGulabGawli is expected to be freed prematurely from the life term he is undergoing in Nagpur Central Jail, as per a Bombay High Court order, here on Friday. A division bench comprising Justice Vinay Joshi and Justice Vrushali Joshi has allowed a criminal application filed by ArunGawli challenging the rejection of his previous plea claiming premature release given a government notification of January 10, 2006. "Gawli's application was rejected on grounds that the state government had come up with a fresh notification on December 1, 2015, by which a convict under the MCOCA Act was



held entitled to the benefits of the policy decision," his lawyer Mir Nagman Ali told IANS shortly afterwards. After hearing both sides, the court directed the state to decide on Gawli's release within four weeks from Friday, paving the way for his premature release from the jail where he has spent 16 years, said Adv. Ali.

The well-known criminal lawyer added that unless the state plans to appeal against the order, Gawli is likely to walk out of jail within a month (early May).

The state had registered Gawli's petition on the ground that the 2015 notification specifically excludes the convict under MCOCA from the ben-

efits of the policy. It contended that even the 2006 notification makes it clear that convicts under stringent laws like the NDPS, TADA, MPDA, etc., are not entitled to the 2006 policy benefits, explained Adv. Ali. Reacting to the development with political ramifications, Council for Protection of Rights (CPR) President Barrister Vinod Tiwari said that the government failed miserably to give advantage of its own GR to release senior citizen convicts languishing in jails in cases similar to ArunGawli.

"However, considering the politically sensitive scenario at present, the Maharashtra government should ensure that for security reasons, Gawli is not set free at least till the Lok Sabha election results are declared," cautioned Tiwari.



# BJP leader ArchanaPatil joins NCP in Maharashtra, gets LS ticket from Dharashiv

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The NCP on Thursday fielded ArchanaPatil from the DharashivLok Sabha constituency in Maharashtra after she quit the BJP and joined the AjitPawar-led party. ArchanaPatil will take on Shiv Sena (UBT) nominee OmrajeNimbalkar in Dhaashiv, which was until recently known as Osmanabad in the Marathwada region. Wife of BJP legislator Rana Jagjit Singh Patil, Archana was welcomed into the party by state NCP chief Sunil Tatkare, who said she will be the MahaYuti candidate from Dharashiv.

In a show of unity, BJP leaders BasavrajPatil and Abhimanyu Pawar, along with Shiv Sena legislator DyanrajChougule, were present when Archana formally joined the NCP. The former President of DharashivZillaParishad, Archana and her husband parted ways with the NCP and joined the BJP in 2019. Incidentally, Rana Jagjit Singh Patil is the nephew of NCP nominee from BaramatiSunetraPawar, the wife of Deputy Chief Minister AjitPawar. Incidentally, Rana Jagjit Singh was the NCP nominee who lost to OmrajeNimbalkar in the 2019 general elections from Dharashiv. Both are estranged brothers and

their family rivalry is known, especially in the wake of the death Nimbalkar's father PawanrajeNimbalkar, who is the brother of Rana Jagjit Singh's father and former minister PadmasinhPatil.

After the split in the Shiv Sena last year, Nimbalkar remained with Uddhav Thackeray and continued to work in Dharashiv district.

Meanwhile, Tatkare said the NCP is still in talks with the BJP and Shiv Sena, especially since the party has not yet withdrawn its claim on the Satara and Nashik seats. "The picture will be clear in a day or two," he added.

# BJP made bow-and-arrow symbol disappear from many parts of Maharashtra, says Shiv Sena (UBT)

The Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) has accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of making the bow-and-arrow symbol disappear from many parts of Maharashtra. The Shiv Sena (UBT) alleged that it was done after the saffron party started claiming the seats that were earlier contested by the undivided Shiv Sena. In an editorial in party mouthpiece 'Saamana', the Shiv Sena (UBT) said that the undivided Shiv Sena used to contest in 23 of the 48 seats in Maharashtra on its bow-and-arrow symbol.

"But the Shinde camp (Shiv Sena) is not even getting half of the seats now (in the seat-sharing agreement) and the BJP has made the bow-and-arrow symbol disappear in four-five seats," the editorial said.

Shiv Sena (UBT), which is a part of the



opposition alliance MahaVikasAghadi (MVA), also claimed that the BJP high command was behind the move not to repeat many sitting Shiv Sena MPs.

The EknathShinde-led Shiv Sena has not renominatedBhavanaGawli, KrupaTumane and Hemant Patil, sitting MPs from Yavatmal-Washim, Ramtek and Hingoli.

Shiv Sena, BJP and AjitPawar-led NCP are part of the ruling Mahayuti alliance in the

state. The Shiv Sena (UBT) alleged that the BJP also made the bow-and-arrow symbol disappear in Sindhudurg-Ratnagiri, a seat traditionally represented by the Bal Thackeray-founded party but is now being claimed by the saffron outfit. The editorial wondered if Shiv Sena's symbol will endure in Kalyan and Thane, the bastions of Maharashtra Chief Minister EknathShinde. His son ShrikantShinde is the sitting MP from Kalyan. "There is a remote possibility that those being nominated for the Lok Sabha elections 2024 will win. So the BJP has erased the historic bow-and-arrow symbol from the political scene of Maharashtra," the editorial added. The Shiv Sena (UBT), which got the 'flaming torch' symbol, has so far announced candidates for 21 seats.

# Peon held for sexually assaulting 7-year-old on school premises

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A peon of a Mumbai-based school was arrested for allegedly sexually assaulting a 7-year-old girl on the premises of the institute in the Santacruz area, an official said on Friday. As per report, the official said that the peon had been repeatedly sexually assaulting the minor for the past few months but the crime came to light only last

week after she informed the parents about it. On the basis of the parents' complaint filed last Friday, the police registered a case against the peon for rape and sexual assault and charged him under relevant sections of Indian Penal Code and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and arrested him. Reportedly, the peon was produced before a court and he was remanded to police custody till April 5.



# BJP aims for hat-trick in the den of Reds and tigers in Gadchiroli-Chimur

Team Absolute | Gadchiroli-Chimur

A hotbed of Maoist-infested belts and the tiger territories of central India, the reserved Gadchiroli-Chimur (ST) constituency came into being after the delimitation exercise of 2008 and is going for its 4th election this year.

As the new Gadchiroli-Chimur (ST) seat which saw its maiden LS polls in 2009, the Congress' Marotrao S. Kawase, a former 3-time MLA and ex-minister in the state government, was elected with a huge margin.

However, all was washed away in the BJP wave of 2014 led by Narendra Modi and Kawase was defeated by BJP's Ashok Nete, who repeated the feat with ease in 2019 and is now targeting a third consecutive win.

Nete will lock horns for his hat-trick with the MahaVikasAghadi-INDIA bloc's Congress nominee Namdev D. Krisan and Prakash Ambedkar-led VanchitBahujanAghadi (VBA)'s Hitesh P. Madavi, plus, the Haryana-based AkhilBharatiyaBhimSena (ABBS) in the April 19, Lok Sabha elections.

Given various factors that might play out, besides anti-incumbency, in the constituency, plus the Congress and VBA's support boroughs, Nete is unlikely to experience a cake-walk for his third attempt in the seat via Gadchiroli-Chimur.

In 2019, Nete bagged 5.19 lakh votes against Congress' NameoUsendi who got 4.42 lakh ballots, but a huge chunk was bagged by the 'vote-splitters' -- VBA's Ramesh Gajabe plus BSP's H.S.



Mangam, securing 1.11 lakh votes and 28,000 votes respectively.

This time also, the two main rivals and other parties plus one more (ABBS), are present with their 'vote-cutting knives' that could slash either way.

Before the delimitation, from 1967 onwards, the seat was won five times by the Congress, four times by the Bharatiya Janata Party and once by the People's Republican Party of India (PRPI).

In its previous 'avatar' as part of various neighbouring seats, the most prominent personality elected from the region was Vilas B. Muttemwar, a

7-time MP who worked twice as a Union Minister under ex-PMs P. V. NarasimhaRao and Dr Manmohan Singh, besides the PRPI President Prof.Jogendra L. Kawade.

The Gadchiroli-Chimur (ST) LS seat is made up of six Assembly segments of which three are held by the BJP, two by Congress, including the Leader of Opposition in Maharashtra Legislative Assembly and one by AjitPawar-led Nationalist Congress Party (NCP).

They include Chimur (BJP, MLA Bunty Bhangdiya), Armori (ST) (BJP, MLA Krishna Gajbe), Gadchiroli (ST) (BJP, MLA Deorao Holi), Aheri (ST) (NCP, MLA DharamraobabaAtram), Amgaon (ST) (Congress, MLA SahasramKorote), and Brahmapuri (Congress, MLA and Leader of Opposition Vijay Wadetiwar).

Notorious for the Reds menace, Gadchiroli came into prominence last year when teakwood of supreme quality from the district and adjoining Chandrapur was sent for the construction of the Lord Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

Chimur is famed for its annual 249-year-old GhodaYatra held in January - February, at least two major tiger sanctuaries, jungle safaris and resorts, and other attractions.

The village of Chimur blazed into history and national limelight in August 1942 when it was among the first ones to respond to Mahatma Gandhi's historic 'Quit India Movement' from Bombay (Mumbai), and the people then suffered hugely at the hands of the British rulers.

# Alibaug Be Renamed Maynagnagri: What Assembly Speaker Said

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar has urged the state government to rename Alibaug as 'Maynagnagri' in memory of Maynak Bhandari, who played a crucial role in the naval prowess of ChhatrapatiShivajiMaharaj.

The coastal town of Alibaug near Mumbai is a tourist attraction and a municipal council in the state's Raigad district. Mr Narwekar made the demand after a delegation of the All India Bhandari Federation recently met him with a request for the name change. Mr Narwekar on Thursday wrote to Chief Minister EknathShinde, stressing that during the reign of Maratha warrior king Shivaji, coastal security and coastal war campaigns were crucial to prevent foreign invasions. "ShivajiMaharaj laid the foundation of a strong naval force, which Maynak Bhandari led from Konkan. The British had to retreat



from the fort at Khanderi-Underi harbour in Alibaug after a bitter struggle and due to the bravery of Maynak Bhandari," he wrote. Mr Narwekar also said that a statue of Maynak Bhandari should be erected in Alibaug.

The speaker said a delegation of the All India Bhandari Federation led by NavinchandraBandivdekar met him with the demands. "The demands are justified and I urge the government to look into them," Mr Narwekar said.

# Gutka worth Rs 50 lakh seized; one held

Team Absolute | Thane

The Thane Police in Maharashtra has seized gutka worth nearly Rs 50 lakh from a truck and arrested its driver, an official said on Friday. The government has prohibited the manufacturing, sale and distribution of gutka in the state over health concerns. The Narpoli police intercepted a truck on Dapoda Road in the Bhiwandi area on Thursday afternoon and found it to be loaded with gutka of various brands, collectively valued at nearly Rs 50 lakh, the official said. The consignment and the truck were seized and the driver, AjaykumarShaympal Singh (28), was arrested, he said, adding that they are trying to ascertain the origin of the consignment and its destination.





EDITOR'S SPECS

RBI projects GDP growth at 7 pc for 2024-25, retail inflation seen at 4.5 pc

India's GDP growth for 2024-25 is projected at 7 per cent while the forecast for inflation for the year has been retained at 4.5 per cent, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das explained.

"Growth has continued to sustain its momentum, surpassing all projections. India presents a different picture on account of its fiscal consolidation and faster GDP growth. Domestic economic activity continues to expand at an accelerated pace, supported by fixed investment and an improving global environment. The second advance estimates placed the real GDP growth at 7.6 per cent for 2023-24, the third successive year of 7 per cent or higher growth," Das said while unveiling the first monetary policy review for the current financial year in which the key policy rates were left unchanged to keep inflation in check.

The RBI Governor said, "Headline inflation has eased to 5.1 per cent during both January and February, and this has come down to 5.1 per cent in these two months from the earlier peak of 5.7 per cent in December. Looking ahead, robust growth prospects provide the policy space to remain focused on inflation and ensure its descent to the target of 4 per cent." The central bank now sees inflation for Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4 of this fiscal year at 4.9 per cent, 3.8 per cent, 4.6 per cent and 4.5 per cent, respectively. In the February policy, the monetary authority had pegged the inflation readings at 5 per cent, 4 per cent, 4.6 per cent and 4.7 per cent respectively, assuming a normal monsoon. Das pointed out that two years ago, around this time, when CPI inflation had peaked at 7.8% in April 2022, the elephant in the room was inflation. The elephant has now gone out for a walk, and appears to be returning to the forest.

INSIDE STORY OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL INDIAN FINE-DINING RESTAURANT: BUKHARA@45

**Sourish Bhattacharyya**

It is difficult to imagine a restaurant that has not changed over the past 45 years. It has the same seating (which some find uncomfortable), the same crockery and cutlery (you get to use the latter only if you insist on going against its fingers-only policy), and the same menu presented on the same wooden boards by waiters dressed just the way they were when it first opened its door in 1979.

Even the name -- Bukhara -- is inappropriate for a restaurant that has built its reputation and fortunes on North-West Frontier cuisine. Rightly, it should have been named Peshawari, which is what it is called outside Delhi.

Bukhara at the ITC Maurya, the luxury hotel located on Delhi's busy Sardar Patel Marg, has also not seen its profit-and-loss figures change in the last 45 years -- it continues to be the country's highest-earning restaurant and its waiting period is the stuff of legends about the palms that need to be greased and strings that have to be pulled to be able to jump the queue. A friend once confessed that even a call from the PMO did not help him.

The man who conceptualised Bukhara was the brilliant Ajit Narain Haksar, who as chairman of the tobacco giant, ITC, was responsible for its diversification into hotels. He was quick to figure out that none of the handful of five-star hotels operating in Delhi in those days had a restaurant that could match the popularity of Moti Mahal, where the Capital's elite went to satisfy their cravings for tandoori chicken and 'maaki dal'.

Close to Moti Mahal, at the now-defunct hotel, The President, there was a popular haunt for kebabs called Tandoor, and The Oberoi, which was then an InterContinental hotel, had The Mughal Room, which got lost because of its location in the basement.

Haksar set his sights on Madan Lal Jaiswal of Tandoor and from the front of the house, he poached the colourful maitre d' of The Mughal Room named Tadar Mal. They were joined by Imtiaz Qureshi, who later became an institution in himself and was awarded a Padma Shri (the first chef to be so honoured), and invented one of Bukhara's standouts, the Sikandari Raan. Together, they put together a menu that remains unchallenged till this day, its stars being Dal Bukhara, Barrah Kabab, Tandoori Prawns and the unique Tandoori Phool with cauliflower florets.

And if the restaurant has been able to



maintain its unassailable lead, it's because of its anal obsession with consistency.

Bukhara's Executive Chef, J.P. Singh, who took over from Jaiswal after he died tragically in a road accident in 1991, told IANS that if the prawns are not within the range of 80 to 100 gms, or the chicken for the Murgh Malai Kebabs do not weigh between 60 and 70 gms apiece, the pieces are dispatched to the other restaurants of the hotel.

Even the humongous Naan Bukhara, which easily fills up half a table, has been made with one kilo and 300 gms of dough, and is heated in the tandoor for eight to ten minutes for as long as people working at the restaurant can remember. And like all else at Bukhara, both Singh, and the majority of the staff, have been constants in the restaurant.

In 'Bite the Bullet', his autobiography, Haksar, who, incidentally, was related to Indira Gandhi's powerful private secretary, P.N. Haksar, says he got the idea of people eating with their hands and wearing aprons, instead of spreading a serviette on the lap, after seeing a BBC TV series on the life of King Henry VIII. If English royalty could eat with their hands, why couldn't we, he reasoned with himself, and the practice has been in vogue since the day Bukhara opened. The practice even survived one of the early (and rare at the Maurya) European manager's attempts to do away with it!

According to Haksar, the seating (conspiracy theorists insist the design is driven by the idea of making people leave as soon as they finish eating!) and decor were inspired by a World War II film set partly in the North-West Frontier.

There was a scene in it, Haksar writes, where British officers were seen dining at a rugged local eatery. The image stayed in Haksar's mind when he was conceiving Bukhara with Rajinder Kumar, the architect who became famous after the Maurya came up. Haksar also borrowed the idea of the glass-fronted kitchen (which was a novelty in its time) from Rama International, a hotel in Aurangabad, Maharashtra, that ITC managed for Iqbal Ghehi and Pishori Lal Lamba (who became better known in Delhi for the Connaught Place restaurant, Kwality).

In fact, Kumar, the architect, had designed Rama International and therefore knew about how difficult it was to have a glass-fronted kitchen with two flaming tandoors belching out liberal quantities of smoke and emitting unwelcome smells. In his memoir, 'Borders to Boardroom', Habib

Rehman, who headed the Maurya and then ITC Hotels in their formative years, talks about the challenges posed by the innovation, the biggest being insulating the glass front from the scalding heat of the tandoors.

Despite these many challenges, Haksar's vision prevailed and Bukhara continues to be run the same way as it was in 1979, barring a couple of significant changes.

Bukhara started as a 60-seater (it has 130 seats today) and its entry was through Amrapali, the coffee shop that was subsequently renamed Pavilion (and was famous in its time for its 'chaat trolley'). The strange layout had an adverse effect on the image of Amrapali, for there would always be a little crowd of Bukhara diners hanging about, awaiting their turn or even ordering starters from their favourite restaurant.

Thanks to the 1982 Asian Games, when the hotel underwent a major refurbishment, this layout was altered -- and little has changed since then. It doesn't have to, for at Bukhara, there's never a dull day, and as they say, if it ain't broke, why fix it?

international

EARLY VOTING FOR SOUTH KOREA PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION UNDERWAY

**Seoul | Agencies**

Early voting began Friday ahead of next week's parliamentary elections in South Korea, with turnout reaching a record high amid high interest in the vote seen as a midterm referendum on the administration of President Yoon Suk Yeol.

Voters began casting ballots at 3,565 polling stations nationwide at 6 a.m. in the two-day early voting taking place ahead of Wednesday's main vote to elect a new 300-member National Assembly. Voting hours are from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., Yonhap news agency reported.

As of 1 p.m., more than 3.54 million people out of some 44.28 million eligible voters had cast their votes, recording a turnout of 8 per cent, compared with 5.98 per cent in the 2020 general elections. It marks the highest turnout for parliamentary elections since the early voting system was adopted in 2012.

The turnout, however, is slightly lower than 8.75 per cent in the 2022 presidential election.

The quadrennial race holds significant importance for the ruling People Power Party (PPP) as failure to regain a majority could potentially render President Yoon a lame duck for the remaining three years of his single five-year term.

The main opposition Democratic Party (DP), which had secured a landslide victory in the previous elections, aims to retain its parliamentary



majority.

After calling on the nation to exercise their voting rights, Yoon cast an early vote in the southeastern port city of Busan. Rival parties have also stepped up calls for voters to cast their ballots in the early voting, recognizing the potential impact of the advance voting turnout on determining the final election outcome.

Leaders of both parties visited polling stations, urging voters to exercise their rights.

"If you go to the polling station, (we) win, and if

you don't go to the polling station, the Republic of Korea will fail," PPP leader Han Dong-hoon told reporters after casting a ballot at a polling station in Seoul.

Citing the high turnout rate, DP Chairman Lee Jae-myung said it shows the public's interest in politics.

"I ask that people actively participate in the voting today and tomorrow," Lee said after voting in the central city of Daejeon while on the campaign trail. The early voting turnout was 26.7 percent and 36.8 percent in the previous elections in 2020 and 2016, respectively.

The DP has said it aims to achieve an early voting turnout of 31.3 percent and a total turnout of 71.3 percent for this year, assuming that a high turnout will lead to victory for the party.

In the previous election, the total turnout reached 66.2 percent, and the DP won 180 out of 300 seats.

The PPP, however, has refuted the assumption, arguing that high turnout does not necessarily favor the DP. According to a survey conducted jointly by Yonhap News Agency and Yonhap News TV earlier this week, 80 per cent of respondents expressed a definite intention to cast their votes.

Among those intending to vote, 39 per cent plan to visit polling stations during the early voting period, while 58 per cent intend to vote on Election Day next Wednesday.

Thieves steal \$30 million from Los Angeles vault

**Los Angeles | Agencies**

Police and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) are investigating the theft of as much as \$30 million from a money storage facility in Los Angeles, according to local media.

Law enforcement sources told local KABC television station that the burglary happened at a GardaWorld facility in Sylmar, a suburban neighbourhood in the San Fernando Valley, on Easter Sunday.

The thieves broke into the facility undetected -- without setting off alarms -- by going through the roof and somehow getting into the money storage area, which may have been a vault, said the report, citing officials briefed on the investigation.

The company that owns the building did not discover the massive theft until Monday morning, the report added.



Law enforcement sources were quoted as saying by the major local newspaper, Los Angeles Times, that the break-in was among the largest burglaries in city history when it comes to cash, and the total surpassed any armoured-car heist in the city as well. The burglary occurred Sunday night at the facility where cash from businesses across the region is handled and stored, said the report, adding that the

break-in was described as elaborate and suggested an experienced crew of burglars who knew how to gain entry to a secure facility unnoticed.

The prior largest cash heist in Los Angeles was on September 12, 1997, with the robbery of \$18.9 million from the former site of an armoured facility in the city, according to the report of the newspaper.

**RUSSIA'S MURMANSK GOVERNOR IN SERIOUS CONDITION AFTER BEING STABBED IN STOMACH**

**Moscow:** Governor of Russia's Murmansk region Andrei Chibis, who was stabbed in the stomach after a meeting in the town of Apatity on Thursday, is in a "serious condition".

Chibis, 45, is in a serious condition and is being operated on in the intensive care unit, Yuri Shiryayev, chief doctor of the Apatity-Kirov Hospital, was quoted by Xinhua news agency as saying on Friday. The attacker, identified as Alexander Bydanov, was detained by security guards on the spot. According to the governor's spokesperson, the attack happened suddenly and the perpetrator did not make any demands or shout any slogans. He was quickly apprehended by a Russian National Guard (Rosgvardiya) officer.

Investigation is underway to determine the causes and motives.

Medical professors in South Korea to file constitutional petition over quota hike

**Seoul | Agencies**

Medical professors in South Korea plan to file a constitutional appeal over the government's decision to raise medical school admissions, claiming the increase violates their basic rights, officials said on Friday.

The Medical Professors Association of Korea is scheduled to file the petition with the Constitutional Court before the April 10 general elections against the government's plan to raise the number of medical students by 2,000 starting next year from the current 3,058 seats to address a shortage of doctors, Yonhap news agency reported.

The plan has caused a massive walkout by junior doctors since February 20, as well as major disruptions to the country's medical serv-



ice. The professors' association earlier filed an appeal with the Seoul Administration Court seeking the suspension of the government's execution of the plan, but the court dismissed the case without deliberation. "The government's exercise of

authority to raise the admissions by 2,000 violates the basic rights of professors, including their autonomy of education," a lawyer of the group said. "Following the dismissal, we cannot expect any redemption of our rights by lower courts so we are

entitled to bring the case to the Constitutional Court. We will file the petition before the elections next week," he added.

The association also plans to apply for a court injunction this month before the government announces detailed plans and requirements for college entrance next year. Meanwhile, the government is determined to accomplish medical reform, Second Vice Health Minister Park Min-soo said on Friday. He made the remarks at a government response meeting, a day after President Yoon Suk Yeol met a leader of a group of trainee doctors, Yonhap reported.

"The government is determined to accomplish medical reform in a flexible, inclusive, but unwavering manner that upholds principles," Park said.

Voting underway in Kuwait's National Assembly elections

**Kuwait City | Agencies**

Kuwaiti voters began casting their ballots on Thursday to elect members of the National Assembly, in the first parliamentary elections held after Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah assumed power in the country.

Polling stations opened at 12:00 p.m. local time, pre-

pared to accommodate approximately 844,000 eligible voters, with voting scheduled to continue until midnight, Xinhua news agency reported.

The first hour of voting witnessed a good turnout across the country's 123 polling stations, according to Ahmed Al-Hajri, director of the Elections Affairs Department at the Ministry of Interior.





## NOT DEMOCRACY, CONGRESS IS IN DANGER: SHIVRAJ CHOUHAN'S REPLY TO RAHUL

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Friday said that not democracy but the Congress party is in danger of 'disappearing into oblivion'.

Chouhan, speaking to the Press, said that Congress leaders are making weird statements out of desperation and over failure to drum up public support despite canvassing. Taking objection to Rahul's 'nation will be on fire if BJP wins' remarks, the senior BJP leader asked, "What does he want to convey, does Congress party want to set the country ablaze, does Sonia Gandhi support Rahul's statement?"

He said that Congress has nothing left on the ground, hence it is resorting to such unwarranted remarks. Further shredding the grand old party over its charges of 'democracy being diminished and weakened', Chouhan said that democracy was getting strengthened under the Modi government.

"Today, if any entity that feels threatened or finds itself in dire straits, it is the Congress. And that is



the reason why they are crying hoarse," he said.

Notably, Rahul Gandhi has repeatedly accused the Modi government of destroying the institutions and coercing the election

machinery to suit its political agenda.

During the party manifesto launch at AICC HQs on Friday also, Rahul described the ensuing 2024 Lok Sabha polls as an 'election to

save democracy'.

Lashing out at the government, he said that the upcoming elections are between the two forces, one who wants to destroy the democracy and the other who are striving to protect it.

The senior Congress leader had stirred a major controversy during the INDIA bloc rally at Ramliya Maidan when he said that the nation will be lit up in fire if BJP gets elected to power again.

Addressing the 'Loktantra Bachao' rally on March 31, Rahul in a no-holds-barred attack on the Modi government said, "They are eyeing 400 mark and that can be possible only if match-fixing happens."

He also urged the citizens to hit the streets against this 'match-fixing' attempt, failing which the BJP will ride to power again.

Shivraj Chouhan also asserted that the Modi government will storm to power with a thumping majority on the back of good governance in the past 10 years.

"The 'Abki baar, 400 paar' pledge will turn into a reality because it's not just us, people of the country are also backing it, he stated.

## SP candidate Meera Yadav's nomination from Khajuraho cancelled

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh's Khajuraho Lok Sabha constituency witnessed yet another twist as Samajwadi Party (SP) candidate Meera Yadav's nomination was cancelled on Friday.

Panna district electoral officer, Suresh Mishra, cancelled Yadav's nomination citing multiple reasons, including the missing signature from a page.

Former MLA Meera Yadav had filed her nomination papers on Thursday.

SP had earlier fielded Manoj Yadav from the Khajuraho seat against Madhya Pradesh BJP president and sitting MP VD Sharma, however, he was replaced by Meera Yadav.

Meera Yadav, who was born in Jhansi and is married to a local SP leader in Khajuraho, started her political career in Madhya Pradesh with SP in Uttar Pradesh. She was elected to the state Assembly as an SP candidate in 2008. Notably, of



the 29 Lok Sabha seats in Madhya Pradesh, Congress has vacated one -- Khajuraho for INDIA bloc partner -- Samajwadi Party.

The Khajuraho seat, comprising eight assembly segments -- Chandla (SC), Rajnagar, Pawai, Gunnaor (SC), Panna, Vijayraghavgarh, Murwara and Bahoriband -- spanning three districts of Chhatrapur, Panna, and Katni of Bundelkhand region, was once a Congress stronghold.

Congress veteran Vidyavati Chaturvedi was elected as MP from Khajuraho twice (1980 and 1984), while her son and ex-Rajya Sabha MP Satyavrat Chaturvedi was the last Congress MP from this seat in 1999.

BJP leader and former MP CM Uma Bharti also represented Khajuraho Lok Sabha seat four times from 1989 to 1998, and her party has been unbeaten in Khajuraho since 2004.

## Congress Again Approaches CEO, Files Complaint: Mass Marriage in Chhindwara

Team Absolute | Chhindwara

Congress has objected to the proposed mass marriage programme to be organised on April 6 in Chhindwara. The Congress leaders have approached the chief electoral officer (CEO) seeking removal of the district collector Sheelendra Singh for overlooking the violation of the poll code. Congress leaders have submitted a complaint in this connection to CEO. The Congress is regularly attacking the district collector on different issues ever since the election model code of conduct came into force.

Congress leader JP Dhanopia said that on April 6, a mass marriage programme is going to be held in the city in which chief minister Mohan Yadav, BJP candidate Vivek Banti Sahu and other senior leaders of the party will remain present.



In the mass marriage, the newly-wed couple will be given a motorcycle worth around Rs 1.50 lakh and the household items worth Rs 1 lakh, said Dhanopia. On the day, around 1 lakh voters have been called and they will be given mass fest. All the provisions made in the mass marriage function are in violation of EMCC, but the

collector Chhindwara is not taking action in the matter, alleged the Congress leader. He urged the CEO to add the amount spent on the programme in the expenditures of Chhindwara Lok Sabha BJP candidate Sahu. He also demanded to remove the collector for allegedly not following the EMCC norms.

## Neelam Mishra vs Janardan Mishra: Rewa's history gives hope to Cong candidate pitted against BJP stalwart

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Although Rewa may not be rated as among the high-profile Lok Sabha seats of Madhya Pradesh, the upper caste-dominated constituency will witness a tough fight between the ruling BJP and the Congress.

While the BJP has retained its two-time sitting MP, Janardan Mishra, the Congress has fielded former BJP MLA, Neelam Mishra against him.

Neelam, wife of MLA Abhay Mishra, was elected as MLA from the Semariya seat in 2013, however, the couple shifted into the Congress ahead of the Assembly elections in November last year.

Though Janardan Mishra won two consecutive elections (2014 and 2019) from Rewa, however, he could not make an impact among the people.

He will once again be dependent on a BJP wave and Prime Minister, Narendra Modi's aura, to win the Lok Sabha election for the third time.

On the other hand, Neelam and Abhay Mishra are trying to give a



tough challenge to the sitting MP on their own steam because the Congress is yet to bounce back from the stunning defeat it suffered in the Assembly elections.

Notably, Abhay Mishra was the only Congress candidate to win the Assembly election from Rewa (Semariya), while the BJP bagged seven seats in 2023.

The BJP had won all eight Assembly seats of Rewa in 2018 and the victory in the Assembly election made Abhay Mishra emerge as a



promising politician. Perhaps this was the reason the Congress picked his wife Neelam as a candidate. Rewa Lok Sabha constituency is known for its inconsistency in electing members for the Lower House of Parliament. Since the beginning it has been a Congress and BJP stronghold, but independent candidates were elected twice and the BSP also won three Lok Sabha elections in 1991, 1996 and 2009 here. Aware of the constituency's electoral history, Madhya Pradesh

Congress President, Jitu Patwari, while addressing a rally on Thursday said, "Politics is in the blood of Rewa's citizens and they have always shown the door to those who failed to meet their expectations. Rewa has always experimented in electing Lok Sabha MPs. "When many fear the BJP's ruthless politics, I believe that the people from the White Tiger's land will support the Congress."

Sundarlal Tiwari, son of former Assembly Speaker, Srinivas Tiwari, was the last Congress candidate to win the Rewa Lok Sabha seat in 1999. The Congress fielded his son Siddharth Tiwari in 2019, however, he lost against the BJP's Janardan Mishra, and now Siddharth is a BJP MLA from the Teonthar Assembly seat.

Rewa's erstwhile maharaja, Martand Singh had won two Lok Sabha elections as an Independent candidate (1971 and 1980) and once on the Congress' symbol in 1984, while, renowned social worker Yamuna Prasad Shastri won Rewa Lok Sabha seat for the Janata Party in 1977.

## SUPREME COURT DELIVERS SPLIT VERDICT ON APPOINTMENT OF SHIKSHA KARMI'S IN MADHYA PRADESH

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Supreme Court on Thursday delivered a split verdict in a case concerning the appointment of Shiksha Karmis in the State of Madhya Pradesh. Before the Supreme Court, the appellant/Shiksha Karmis challenged the decision of the Madhya Pradesh High Court's Division Bench whereby the High Court canceled their appointment based on the appellants' relationship with the members of the selection committee.

The Bench comprising Justices JK Maheshwari and KV Viswanathan delivered a split verdict.

Justice JK Maheshwari upheld the High Court's decision to cancel the appointment of the Appellants, whereas Justice KV Viswanathan reversed the High Court's order canceling the appointment of the Appellants.

In the instant case, it was alleged by respondent no.4 that from the final selection list of 249 candidates, a total of 14 candidates i.e., appellants herein are the close relatives of the selection committee members, hence, due to bias such appointments stood vitiated. The allegation levelled by respondent no.4 was that the appointment was not done fairly due to the involvement of personal bias on the part of the selection committee while favoring the appointment of the appellants.

The respondent no.4 i.e., the complainant filed a representation before the Collector without impleading the appellants and members of the selection committee. Moreover, the Collector without noticing the non-impleading of the appellants and selection committee members held in favor of respondent no.4, thereby cancelling the Appellant's appointment on the

post of Shiksha Karmi. The point of consideration in the present matter was whether non-impleading of the Appellants and members of the selection committee would amount to a violation of the second limb of the principle of natural justice i.e., audi alteram partem (right to be heard).

While upholding the collector's decision to cancel the appellant's appointment, Justice Maheshwari stated that since the 'rule against bias' was established against the appellant's therefore, non-impleading of the appellants and selection committee's members wouldn't violate the principle of audi alteram partem. The judge termed the plea of non-impleading of the appellants as a useless formality.

"In the sequel of above factual narration, first limb of natural justice that is 'rule against bias' was proved as reasonable likelihood of

bias was fully established irrefutably. The violation of another limb i.e. audi alteram partem, which is procedural, has been prayed by the appellants on the pre-text of their nonjoinder at the initial stage; in my opinion, without showing prejudice mere nonjoinder even at initial stage does not violate the natural justice doctrine in the case at hand.", Justice JK Maheshwari said. On the other hand, Justice KV Viswanathan opined that the non-impleading of the appellants would amount to providing 'no opportunity at all' to the appellants to put their defence against the allegations leveled by respondent no.4 and thus, violates the principle of audi alteram partem.

"It is well settled that in service matters when an unsuccessful candidate challenges the selection process, in a case like the present where the specific grievance was

against 14 candidates under the category of relatives and when the overall figure was only 249, at least the candidates against whom specific allegations were made and who were identified ought to have been given notices and made a party.", Justice KV Viswanathan said. "It has been held that the principle that no one can be inflicted with an adverse order without being afforded a minimum opportunity of hearing was a constant lode star that has lit the judicial horizon of this country.", Justice Viswanathan added.

Based on the above premise, due to divergent views expressed by the Bench, the court directed the Registry to place the matter before Hon'ble the Chief Justice of India for the constitution of a larger Bench. In the meantime, the interim order passed earlier shall remain in operation.

## Former Bank Manager Held In Connection With RGPV Financial Embezzlement Case

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In connection with the ongoing probe into alleged financial irregularity of Rs 19.48 crores in Rajiv Gandhi Proudyogiki Vishwavidyalaya (RGPV), the Special Investigation Team (SIT) of police reached Pipariya (Narmadapuram) and picked up a former manager of Axis Bank.

The name of the accused is said to be Ram Raghuvansi and he is being interrogated in connection with opening of the university's fixed deposit account and distribution of money in the form of a commission. "Our team reached Pipariya's Axis Bank. They are also on toes to search for the members of



Dalit Sangh (Sohagpur). The teams are yet to return hence I cannot give any further information," the head of SIT, Malkit Singh, said. Notably, Dalit Sangh is also named as accused in the financial embezzlement case as it stands one of the beneficiaries of the scam. Sources said even after issuance of a look-out notice against the former vice-chancellor of RGPV, Dr Sunil Kumar and ex Registrar RS Rajput, there is no specific information about the accused.

## TOURISTS FLOCK TO TAKE GLIMPSE OF MAGNIFICENT CHEETAHS AT KUNO NATIONAL PARK

Team Absolute | Sheopur

With the movement of Cheetahs increasing in the wild at Kuno National Park located in Madhya Pradesh's Sheopur district, tourists are flocking to take a glimpse of it.

Recently, tourists got to see Pawan Cheetah here at Kuno and they were quite happy to have the glimpse of the big cat. The gates for the tourists were opened in October last year and on weekends a huge number of tourists visit here in hope to see the cheetah.

The park management have also made adequate arrangements and facilities for the tourists visiting here. There is also a fixed time slot for tourists to go inside the Kuno park in the morning as well as in the evening.

One of the tourists, Adarsh, a resident of Sheopur, said, "I am fortunate and very happy that I saw one of the cheetahs named Pawan here. There is a proper facility here in the park. We are having Gypsy safaris and there are forest camps inside the park. Water arrangements and washrooms are available at the gate.

Guides also give us proper information and make us aware about rules and regulations here." Chief Conservator of forests (CCF) at Kuno National Park, Uttam Kumar Sharma also said that they were trying to provide all the facilities for the tourists at Kuno and their objective was the tourists should also enjoy seeing the Cheetahs.

"We are trying to provide all the facilities, including wash-



rooms for the tourists in Kuno National Park. We have three tourist gates which include Ahera Gate, Tiktoli Gate and

Bawadi Gate from where the tourists enter inside the park. The fixed time slot in the morning as well as in the evening

from 6:30 to 11:00 am and from 3:30 to 6:30 pm, keeping in view of the heat. During this time, tourists can come and visit the forest," Sharma said.

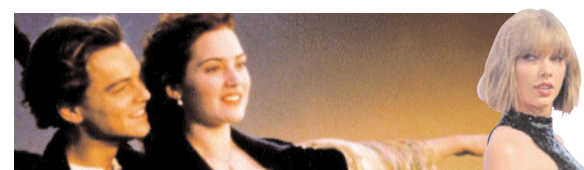
"Our objective here is that when the cheetahs are in the open wild, the tourists should also enjoy talking glimpses of it. Recently, there was a time when Pawan cheetah wandering in the tourist area and the tourists were able to see it. It is a good thing that the primary objective of protecting Cheetahs in India and the experience that the tourists gain are here in Kuno," he said.

The CCF further said that the possibilities of more Cheetahs to be seen by the tourists would increase in the coming days and that would increase the number of tourists.

"Be it any parameter, number or generation, the project that was started by the PM, we are in a better situation and we are continuously moving towards the objective. It shows a better future for Cheetahs in India," he said.

"Tourists come to Kuno Park with great desire to see the cheetah. Sometimes, tourists have good experiences of seeing the cheetah and sometimes tourists also have disappointing experiences in which they are not able to see the cheetah. So, we tell them not to be disappointed, they should see the habitat and wild area of Cheetah here and see other animals as well," he added.

One of the objectives of the Kuno project is that the tourists in this area and the regional people who are taking care of the forest and the cheetahs should benefit from the development that takes place here, the CCF said.



# Angelina Jolie claims Brad Pitt's physical abuse

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Angelina Jolie is claiming that her former husband Brad Pitt's physical abuse toward her "started well before" the 2016 plane incident that led her to file for divorce. The claims are as per documents obtained by Page Six. The actress' legal team made the claims in an attempt to release communications that would prove the Pitt refused to allow his ex-wife to sell her portion of their Chateau Miraval French winery unless she signed an "onerous" and "expansive" NDA.

"While Pitt's history of physical abuse of Jolie started well before the family's September 2016 plane trip from France to Los Angeles, this flight marked the first time he turned his physical abuse on the children as well. Jolie then immediately left him," the document reads.

According to the filing, the NDA Pitt reportedly asked Jolie, that she would cover his "personal misconduct, whether related to Miraval or not," in an attempt to prevent her from speaking on his alleged abuse.

Her lawyers also claimed that Pitt wanted her to "contractually bind herself" to silence after he discovered in 2021 that she submitted a sealed filing, consisting of "emails, summaries of the family's expected testimony and other evidence" to help settle their child custody dispute.

At the time, Pitt agreed to purchase Jolie's shares of the French winery but backed out as he feared his ex's sealed documents "could eventually become public," the documents continue. "Pitt refused to purchase Jolie's interest when she would not be silenced by his NDA," Jolie's attorney Paul Murphy said in a statement.

"By refusing to buy her interest but then suing her, Pitt put directly at issue why that NDA was so important to him and what he hoped it would bury: his abuse of Jolie and their family," he continued, referencing Pitt's



2022 lawsuit against Jolie for selling her shares of the winery to another party. The documents also claim that Jolie "never pressed charges" against her "Mr. & Mrs. Smith" co-star because "she believed the best course was for Pitt to accept responsibility and help the family recover from the post-traumatic stress he caused." However, a source familiar with Pitt said that Jolie "continually tries to distract from legal losses by offering irrelevant or inaccurate information" in further court filings. "There's a pattern that every time she loses, she continues to come back to this... there's nothing new here," the source added.



Shakira lost lyrics when her suitcase went missing at an airport

Los Angeles | Agencies

Grammy winner Shakira lost an entire album when her suitcase disappeared from an airport in Bogota and had to start from scratch. The pop star had written enough lyrics for her fourth album when she was 21-year-old in the 1990s which she kept in her suitcase. "When I was like, 21, I had written a whole body of work. And it got lost at an airport in Bogota. I had all my lyrics in my dad's briefcase because I used to travel with my parents back in the day. And I think that it just disappeared at the airport," she said on 'The Hot Ones' YouTube series. "So that's why I named our album 'Where are the Thieves?' After that story, I had to reconstruct all of the lyrics in my head. When I was able to, like after a great deal of effort." The 'Hips Don't Lie' hitmaker doesn't think she was the target of an attack and feels she was just put in an "unfortunate" situation at the time, reports femalefirst.co.uk. She said: "I wasn't targeted specifically. I know, I think just you know, the bag just disappeared. The suitcase disappeared with my lyrics. I was unfortunate. It was so painful." The 47-year-old songstress recently said that her voice is "so much better" now than when she first hit the music scene.

## When Danny McBride heard Robert Downey Jr. 'talking to himself' to stay in character

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor and comedian Danny McBride recalled accidentally hearing Hollywood star Robert Downey Jr. going method on himself and staying in character as he went to take a bathroom break in between takes. Downey Jr. played a method expert and was given an earpiece to communicate with the set as his character was perched in a watchtower above the production.

The earpiece was connected to the microphones of several of the cast and crew down below. "I guess during one of the takes, they had left Downey's mic on, and so I'm sitting up there, and I'm like, 'Oh, I can hear what he's saying,'" McBride said in a GQ video interview, reports variety.com.

"He was talking to people, and he was in character the whole time. And then I even watched him walk back to his trailer and saw it from down there, and he was talking to himself..." he said. "He made up a song about how he was gonna go p\*\*\* in character for no one else's benefit except for his own," McBride added. Downey starred in the film as an egotistical Australian thespian, who takes method acting to an extreme by undergoing "pigmentation alteration" surgery to darken his skin in order to play a soldier in a war movie.



## Nick Cannon revealed that his son Zillion was diagnosed with autism

Nick Cannon is a loving father to many children. While his very large family of 12 kids from six different mothers has inspired many memes and jokes, he has still shown that he's a present dad to his kids. He posted some adorable photos from his second youngest child Rise's first birthday on Instagram on Tuesday, October 3. In the adorable photos, he smiled with Rise's older sister Powerful Queen, and both of their mom Brittany Bell. "Big Rizzy Day," he wrote in the caption. The comedian welcomed his 12th child, Halo, with Alyssa Scott in Dec. 2022 just a few weeks after he and Abby De La Rosa gave birth to their third child, Beautiful Zeppelin. While this might raise an eyebrow for some, the 42-year-old musician and host has previously stated that all of his pregnancies — including having multiple in one year — have been planned. In a July 2021 interview on his podcast, Nick told the rap duo City Girls that he was having children "on purpose." He confirmed, "Trust me, there's a lot of people I could've gotten pregnant that I didn't," he said. "The

ones that got pregnant are the ones that were supposed to get pregnant." In an August 2021 appearance on The Breakfast Club, the Wild 'N Out host revealed his views on marriage and defended his large and growing family. "Just the idea that a man should have one woman, we shouldn't have anything. I have no ownership over this person. If we're really talking about how we coexist and how we populate, it's about what exchange can we create together? I've never really subscribed to that mentality," he said.

## Suki Waterhouse Shares First Photo of Her & Robert Pattinson's 'Angel' Baby

Suki Waterhouse is giving us a glimpse at her and Robert Pattinson's baby! The 32-year-old shared a photo of their "angel" newborn on Thursday, April 4, which featured the new mom cradling the child, who was swaddled in a blanket. "Welcome to the world, angel," Suki captioned her Instagram post. Neither she nor Rob, 37, has revealed the sex of the baby yet, and the child's face was turned away from the camera. Countless famous friends commented on Suki's post. Paris Hilton wrote, "Congratulations, love! So happy for you both!" Alyssa Milano then cheekily added, "Now the fun really begins." Halsey also chimed in by writing, "ROCKSTAR MOM!" Last week, a video surfaced online of Suki and Rob walking through Los Angeles with a pink baby stroller. The two were reportedly accompanied by Suki's mother. The sighting confirmed that the model had welcomed her and the Batman star's first child together four months after revealing she was pregnant in November 2023. Rob and Suki started dating in 2018



and initially kept their relationship shielded from the public eye. However, over time, they opened up about their romance in various interviews and gradually made public appearances together. In 2023, the pair attended the Met Gala and posed for pictures.

## Did Hailey Bieber & Justin Bieber Break Up?

Justin Bieber and Hailey Bieber are no strangers to baseless gossip and social media rumors. As one of the most famous couples in Hollywood, they've seen their fair share of fan speculation over their relationship — from breakup rumors to feuds. However, after Hailey's father asked fans to pray for her and her husband, Beliebers grew concerned that they might be heading for a divorce. "There's no divorce and no truth to that whatsoever," a source told the publication, adding, "They are very, very happy." One month prior, Hailey's dad, Stephen Baldwin, posted — then deleted — an Instagram post asking for fans to send his daughter and son-in-law a "little prayer." "Christians, please when you think of Justin [and] Hailey, take a moment to offer a little prayer for them to have wisdom, protection and to draw close to the lord," Stephen wrote. Stephen then pointed out that there "are special challenges that folks in high visibility positions face and also the enemy doesn't want them to draw closer to Jesus. So, often



regardless of the material things or the accolades they often face spiritual warfare that intense and seeks to ship-wreck their faith, marriage and life in general. So, thank you." Shortly after Stephen shared his public statement, a report surfaced claiming that Hailey was "not pleased" that her dad was "drawing attention to" her and Justin's relationship.

### ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Gia





## IPL 2024: KULDEEP YADAV DOUBTFUL FOR DELHI CAPITALS' MATCH AGAINST MUMBAI INDIANS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Delhi Capitals might miss the services of Kuldeep Yadav in their match against Mumbai Indians on Saturday as the star bowler is doubtful due to injury concerns and has been advised rest by the medical team of the franchise. Kuldeep took three wickets in the two away games he played for Capital this season against the Rajasthan Royals and Punjab Kings. However, he missed their subsequent games against the Chennai Super Kings and Kolkata Knight Riders.

"He didn't attend training on Wednesday and Thursday and as a precautionary measure, we are keeping him away from cricket. He was not feeling well before Chennai's match as he addressed discomfort while running and bowling," sources told IANS.

Before the start of the IPL, BCCI advised all franchises to report injury concerns of the central contract holder Indian players eyeing the T20



World Cup. The sources also confirmed that Kuldeep is under the supervision of the National Cricket

Academy (NCA) medical team and franchise medical staff. The reason for the injury is still not

known but IANS understands that it is due to Chennai's hot and humid weather.

## Nadal withdraws from Monte Carlo Masters, French Open in doubt

Paris | Agencies

Spanish tennis legend Rafael Nadal has announced his withdrawal from the upcoming Monte Carlo Masters due to health reasons.

The withdrawal casts a shadow over Nadal's hope to return to Roland Garros in late May for his 15th French Open title, reports Xinhua.

"These are very difficult moments for me," Nadal wrote on social media. "Unfortunately I have to tell you that I am not going to be playing in Monte-Carlo. My body simply won't allow me. And even if I am working hard and making the maximum effort every day with all the will to play and compete again at tournaments that have been very important for me, the truth is that I can't play today."

The 22-time Grand Slam winner went through hip surgery last summer and has played only three matches, all in Brisbane, after his return to action at the beginning of this year. He defeated Dominic Thiem and Jason Kubler before losing in the quarterfinals to Jordan Thompson, when he felt a hip injury flare-up which prompted his withdrawal from the Australian Open.

"You have no idea how hard this is for me to not be able to play these events. The only thing I can do is to accept the situation and try to look at the immediate future keeping the



excitement and will to play in order to give me a chance for things to get better," the Spaniard wrote.

Nadal, the best tennis player on clay ever, has clinched a record 11 titles in Monte Carlo, of which the last was in 2018 -- he fell at the semifinals in 2019, the quarters in 2021 and missed the 2020, 2022 and 2023 editions.

On nine of the 11 occasions, Nadal went on to lift the trophy at Roland Garros as well.

## Premier League: Liverpool regain top spot with 3-1 win over Sheffield

Liverpool (UK) | Agencies

Liverpool returned to the top of the Premier League table with a 3-1 victory over Sheffield United at Anfield on Thursday night.

Darwin Nunez gave the Reds an early lead when Ivo Grbic's attempted clearance from a backpass crashed into him and spun over the line with 17 minutes on the clock.

The hosts dominated possession, but were pegged back when Gustavo Hamer headed a cross against Conor Bradley and into the back of the net shortly after the break.

Nevertheless, fears of points being dropped were allayed when Alexis Mac Allister thumped Liverpool back in front with 13 minutes of normal time remaining after a clearance had been deflected into his path on the edge of the box.

Cody Gakpo put the seal on the victory when he headed in an Andy Robertson cross from 15 yards out in the 90th minute as the Reds regained top spot in the standings, two points ahead of Arsenal.



After a loss Sheff Utd remain at the bottom, 10 points behind 17th-placed Nottingham Forest.

## Hockey: Indian men gear up for epic showdown against Australia in 5-match Test series

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Indian men's team is primed and ready to embark on a thrilling hockey showdown as they gear up to face Australia in an eagerly anticipated five-match Test series, which kicks off from Saturday in Perth, marking a crucial juncture in India's preparations for the Paris Olympics 2024.

With the other four matches scheduled on April 7, 10, 12, and 13, fans are in for a treat as they witness a display of raw talent and unwavering determination.

Fresh from their commanding performances in the FIH Pro League 2023-24, where they exhibited sheer dominance in Bhubaneswar and Rourkela, the Indian squad, which is led by Harmanpreet Singh, enters this series with a formidable reputation.

Their exceptional skill and unwavering resilience, culminating in victory in three out of four matches in Bhubaneswar (in regulation time) and maintaining an unbeaten streak in Rourkela (in regulation time), have raised the bar for their performance



against Australia. Chief Coach Craig Fulton expresses the significance of this tour, stating, "This series serves as a litmus test for our team's preparedness ahead of the Paris Olympics. We aim to fine-tune our strategies and identify areas for improvement to ensure we are in peak form for the

mega event. Our focus will be on executing our game plan effectively and adapting to the challenges posed by the Australian side."

Captain Harmanpreet Singh echoes this sentiment, declaring, "We are geared up for the challenge that lies ahead. Every match is an oppor-

tunity for us to showcase our skills and make our nation proud. We are aware of the tough competition Australia presents, but we are confident in our abilities and our preparations. As a team, we are united and determined to give our best on the field. Our goal is to not only perform well in this series but also to learn and grow as a unit, laying a strong foundation for our campaign in the Paris Olympics." Moreover, with Australia drawn in the same Group B as India in the Paris Olympics, the stakes are higher than ever. The Test series provides the perfect platform for both teams to gauge each other's strengths and weaknesses before the ultimate showdown in Paris.

Furthermore, history beckons for the Indian team as they aim to end a decade-long drought in a Test series won against Australia. Notably, India won the last Test series against Australia on their own soil back in 2014. Reflecting on their head-to-head encounters, India and Australia have clashed on the hockey field a total of 43 times since 2013, according to data from the FIH Data Hub.

## Olympic Champion shot putter Valerie Adams named International Event Ambassador

Bengaluru | Agencies

Dame Valerie Adams, the iconic shot putter, a four-time World Champion and two-time Olympic medallist has been named the International Event Ambassador for the 16th edition of the World 10K Bengaluru road running competition to be held on April 28.

The 39-year-old from New Zealand is arguably the most successful female shot putter of all time. Across her five appearances in the Olympics, she has won two gold medals (in 2008, and 2012), a silver (in 2016) and a bronze medal (in 2020).

Notably, Valerie also boasts an impressive record of four consecutive gold medals in the World Championships, as well as being a four-time world indoor champion and a three-time Commonwealth Games winner.

Speaking on her association with the 16th edition of the World 10K Bengaluru, Valerie said, "The power of sports to unite us for a greater purpose is truly remarkable. I am thrilled to participate in the Tata Consultancy Services World 10K Bengaluru, an event that embodies this spirit of unity and community. The increasing enthusiasm for running in



India is both motivating and inspiring, and I am excited to witness the boundless energy and passion that participants will bring to the race."

Among her other accolades, the New Zealander is only the third woman to win world championships at youth, junior, and senior levels. She is also the first woman to win four consecutive individual titles at the WA World Championships. In 2014 Valerie was honoured with the IAAF World

Athlete of the Year title.

Since retiring from competitive athletics, Valerie has passionately taken on the role of a spokesperson for women in sports, addressing various pertinent issues. Currently, she holds the esteemed position of Chair of the World Athletes Commission, where she continues to champion the rights and welfare of athletes globally.

Additionally, Valerie has immersed herself in coaching. She has been closely involved in the Paralympic sphere, collaborating with her sister, Lisa Adams, and other athletes to provide support and guidance, thus contributing to the development and success of athletes beyond her remarkable career.

"As one of the most accomplished athletes in the world, Valerie embodies determination, perseverance, and excellence. Her remarkable achievements in the field and her commitment to the advancement of sports, particularly for women and para-athletes serve as an inspiration to athletes worldwide. We look forward to together celebrating athleticism and our community spirit at the TCS World 10K Bengaluru," said Vivek Singh, Jt MD, Procram International.

## Squash: Senthilkumar stuns eighth seed Parker to enter German Open quarterfinal

Hamburg | Agencies

National champion Velavan Senthilkumar advanced to the quarterfinals of the German Open with a 3-1 upset win over eighth seed George Parker of England.

The 2023 Asian Individual silver medalist Senthilkumar scored an impressive 3-1 (11-5, 11-8, 9-11, 11-9) win in 61 minutes over the higher-ranked Englishman in the second round of the USD 50,000 prize money PSA World Tour Bronze event.

Senthilkumar started the match in good form, surging into the lead, with the Englishman struggling to keep up with the pace of the Indian as Senthilkumar took the first game 11-5, according to PSA tour website. Parker came closer in the second,



fighting on every point and scoring some pin-point accurate drops, but it was the Indian who took a two-game advantage from maintaining consistency throughout the first two games. Parker looked focussed on the court for the third game, and showed his quality as he pushed the Indian to another close phase of play, this time edging the game to halve the deficit.

In the end Senthilkumar held his nerve and converted his 2-1 lead, maintaining a narrow lead over the Englishman and claiming a spot in the quarter-finals where he faces No.4 seed Eain Yow Ng.

Earlier, southpaw Senthilkumar, ranked No 59 in the world, beat Yassin Elshafei of Egypt 6-11, 7-11, 11-6, 11-3, 11-9 in 62 minutes in the first round.

## THE BOY FROM MADHYA PRADESH WHO JUSTIFIED WHAT BEING IMPACT PLAYER MEANS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

With 41 runs required off 18 deliveries, Punjab Kings' hopes of winning the match against Gujarat Titans on Thursday night were almost over. Shashank Singh was batting on 46 but the Kings needed a special innings from debutant Ashutosh Sharma, who was introduced as an Impact Substitute, to clinch the match for them.

The debutant, who came in as a substitute for pacer Arshdeep Singh, left no stone unturned and went on to seal victory for the Kings with a brilliant cameo. Ashutosh came into bat after Jitesh Sharma had smoked two back-to-back sixes off Gujarat Titans' premier bowler Rashid Khan before getting out. Ashutosh got off the mark with a single and only scored seven off the first seven deliveries he faced.

At that juncture, no one would have

thought Punjab would go on to seal victory with three wickets and one ball left, especially with Mohit Sharma bowling the 19th over. Azmatullah Omarzai who bowled the 18th over of Punjab's inning was the second most expensive bowler for Titans in the match. He had conceded 16 runs and the match shifted to Punjab's favour. Ashutosh struck three boundaries in the over and reached a personal score of 22 in 12 deliveries. It was a big over that fetched 18 runs for Punjab, leaving them needing 25 off the last 12 deliveries.

In the 19th over, Ashutosh smoked Mohit for a six off the second ball before ending it with a few more lusty hits, taking off 18 runs. Ashutosh got out on the very first delivery of Darshan Nalkande's final over, but it was an impactful inning that PBKS needed in the moment. Ashutosh eventually scored 31 off 17 deliveries and stitched together a match-winning partnership



of 43 with Shashank Singh. "I prefer playing attacking shots and

when I reached the crease, the team needed that from me. We (Ashutosh

and Shashank Singh) both were talking about how to get closer to the target and we started to take our chances. There was nothing in the plan to attack any particular bowler, with every loose delivery we were trying to collect as many runs as possible. Omarzai was not bowling with pace and was continuously bowling outside off so it was easy to collect boundaries off his deliveries. After three boundaries in his over we realised that we could take the game deep and can win from here," Ashutosh Sharma told IANS in a roundtable interaction. However, making it to the IPL is never easy. Ashutosh's selection was on the back of good domestic performances, which included the 16-year-old record for the fastest fifty by an Indian back in October 2023, smashing an 11-ball half-century in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20 tournament Group C clash against Arunachal Pradesh in Ranchi.

Born in Ratlam in Madhya Pradesh, Ashutosh admired local boy Naman Ojha and had a close relationship with him. Ashutosh made his List A debut for M.P. back on October 2018 against Rajasthan and represented M.P. in 2019 for the last time. It took him four years from there on to make his First-Class debut -- not for his home state but for the Railways. In his debut match, Ashutosh scored 123 against Gujarat in the Ranji season 2024.

Ashutosh revealed that, despite his strong performance in the previous season and the selection trials, he was unhappy when he was left out of MP's squad. He revealed that despite his strong on-field performances, the new coach, Chandrakant Pandit did not like him and left him out. In 2020, Chandrakant Pandit, the current IPL coach for Kolkata, became MP's coach. In 2021-2022, MP went on to win the Ranji Trophy.



## Unbothered, Unserious and always effortless Orry about his style

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Orry, whose real name is Orhan Awatramani, not only makes news for partying with the bigwigs of tinsel-town but also his fashion, which he defines as "unbothered, unserious and edgy".

Defining his own style, Orry, who is currently flaunting blonde hair colour, told: "Unbothered, Unserious and always effortless (but only in appearance) yet edgy and aesthetically depressed."

He then shared some words of wisdom on fashion trends that Gen-Z set should be followed as "that's what hip, hot and that's what's cool".

Orry, 24, said: "I learnt at a young age... Only teenagers can decide what is cool and no one else. And so the trends Gen-Z set, are the trends to follow and abide by, that's what hip that's what's hot and that's what's cool."

He loves the "Zoomers" fashion because "it's young, it stresses on one expressing their own true individuality without burden of who's watching and commenting, it's immune to criticism."

Orry, who is setting up a meet and greet for his "friends, fans, minions and potential minions, on April 15, added: "I also love that Gen-Z fashion emphasises the importance of sustainability always, they know the importance of being eco-friendly and bringing the earth back to what it once was."

Talking about who are the most stylish Gen-Z stars according to him, Orry replied "Vedang Raina and Tania Shroff".



## Disha braves chilly winds, poses with Prabhas in Italy

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Disha Patani, who will be seen in the multi-starrer upcoming science fiction film 'Kalki 2898 AD', shared a glimpse of the behind-the-scenes of the movie's shoot in Italy, and it has a happy sneak peek of the lead actor Prabhas.

The movie is set in a post-apocalyptic world in 2898 AD, directed by Nag Ashwin and produced by C Aswani Dutt, under Vyjayanthi Movies.

It stars Prabhas in the lead role, alongside Amitabh Bachchan, Kamal Haasan, and Deepika Padukone.

Taking to Instagram, Disha, who enjoys 61.1 million followers, dropped a string of photos and videos from the movie's shoot schedule in Italy.

The first video shows Disha wrapped in a thick purple coloured blanket, while she braves chilly winds near the seaside.

The second picture is a random picture with director Nag Ashwin and Prabhas.

There is a picture of Disha getting her makeup done in the car. A selfie with Prabhas is just so heartwarming. It shows Disha in a black hoodie, while Prabhas is sporting a grey hoodie and a black bandana on his head.

Disha also dropped some picturesque glimpses of the mountainous landscape. The post is captioned: "Italy photo dump... @kalki2898ad it was (chilly face, wind emoji)."



## Preity Zinta shares post-match selfie with 'deadly duo'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Preity Zinta, who is the co-owner of Indian Premier League (IPL) team Punjab Kings (PBKS), shared a "post-match selfie" with all-rounders Shashank Singh and Ashutosh Sharma, whom she tagged as "deadly duo" after they guided PBKS to three-wicket win over Gujarat Titans.

After the victory, on Friday, the actress took to X (formerly called Twitter) and shared a picture posing with the stars of the team. In the picture, Preity and the cricketers are seen making a victory sign and smiling at the camera.

For the caption, Preity wrote: "When the going gets tough, the tough get going. Post-match selfie with the deadly duo Shashank Singh and Ashutosh Sharma."

She added: "Absolutely love the way they dominated the game in a thrilling run chase. Wow!!! #ShashankSingh #AshutoshSharma #PunjabKings #Manofthematch #Impactplayer #Whatagame #JazbahaiPunjabi #GTvsPBKS #Tatalpl #ting."



## Ali Fazal post for Richa Chadha: 'Do jaan, ek makaan..nahi tha aasaan'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Ali Fazal on Friday hinted at finding a gift for his ladylove and soon-to-be mother, Richa Chadha, by dedicating a mystery-laden poem to his wife.

In an affectionate and creative gesture that has captured the hearts of his fans online, Ali turned to Instagram and shared a Reel video, wherein he can be seen narrating a poem in his unique, quirky style.

The actor is wearing a black kurta and a red bandana on his forehead.

Ali said: "Ek tohfa, do tarfa, Do jaan ek makaan ji.. nahi thha aasaan nahi thha aasaan Mohabbat ke bazaar mein, deewana chala dhoondne, Ek tohfe ki dukaan, 'toh uspe likha hai ki- zidd ke aage jhug gai aazmaish-e-wafaa o ashiqui, parakh liya mere tohfe ne uski nigaah ko."

As the couple eagerly anticipates the arrival of their first child, Ali's words resonate with the warmth and depth of their shared journey.

The post is captioned: "Haha the quest of finding the gift for Richa. Here's my build up poem to arrive at the Sher that encapsulates my feeling when I replayed this gifting in my head. 'ZIDD KE AAGEY JHUG GAYI AAZMAAISH-e-



WAFAA O AASHIQUI, PARAKH LIYA MERE TOHFE NE USKI NIGAAH KO'. Wait for the glimpse of this search on MONDAY! P.S. : yes, the night before an insect has bitten my eye so aankh sooji

hui hai. #tohfa #gift #artofgifting". Ali and Richa are expecting their first child together. They got married under the Special Marriage Act in 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Director Ali Abbas recalls how some stunt shoots cost Rs 3-4 cr per day

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The pulse-pounding action entertainer guarantees jaw-dropping action stunts that have never been seen before in Indian cinema. From deadly car chases to knife combat and shooting arrows, 'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan' promises a visual extravaganza like no other. Director Ali Abbas Zafar recently opened up about how he shot the movie in the old school style and in real locations to give the audience an unforgettable cinematic experience. He also shared how the movie has been made on a humungous budget. Zafar said, "The budget is the biggest pressure that the actors and the makers of a film always experience because when you want your product to look classy, international and at a level where people say it's a visual spectacle, you need to spend that much money."

Giving examples, Zafar noted: "If you want to do motorbike stunts and each bike costs Rs 4 lakh, and if the stunt goes wrong, you immediately lose Rs 4 lakh. If you are blowing up a car worth Rs 30-40 lakh and if the stunt doesn't go as planned, you lose that much money straightaway."

He added: "There are stunts in 'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan' where the spend on one day was Rs 3-4 crore, with all the paraphernalia, all the technicians and all the choppers, everything together was very expensive."



## Neha Kakkar's 'good morning' is all about 'head banging, Korean hearts' in car



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Singer Neha Kakkar on Friday morning was seen doing "head banging" and making Korean hearts in the car, while she was going to pick her husband Rohanpreet Singh, whom she lovingly calls "Rohu".

Neha took to Instagram stories and shared a video.

In the clip, she was seen grooving to some reggaeton music and then suddenly started hilariously head banging, which means shaking one's head in rhythm with music.

Dressed in a white fluffy crop top paired with sweatpants, Neha said: "Goodmorning... Bhangra paao.... aa rahe hai Punjabii aa rahe hai... We are going to pick Rohu."

Neha, who has belted out hits such as 'Second Hand Jawaani', 'Sunny Sunny', 'Manali Trance', 'London Thumakda', 'Dilbar', 'O Saki Saki', started her journey in singing by participating in the second season of the singing reality show, 'Indian Idol'.

## INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Sonam Bajwa