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UAE LEADERS EXPLORE WAYS TO ENHANCE CITIZENS' WELLBEING

President His Highness Shaikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Al Nahyan met with His Highness Shaikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of UAE and Ruler of Dubai, at Al Marmoum in Dubai yesterday. They explored topics related to national affairs and the wellbeing of citizens, as well as the nation's developmental vision aimed at sustaining progress and prosperity while fulfilling the aspirations of the people of the UAE.

Israel set for nationwide strike after Gaza hostages found dead

Remains of six recovered from underground tunnel in Rafah area

GAZA STRIP

Israel's main union yesterday ordered a nationwide general strike after soldiers recovered the bodies of six dead hostages from the Gaza Strip where the military is battling Palestinian militants. The remains of the six were recovered Saturday "from an underground tunnel in the Rafah area" in southern Gaza, the military said.

They were among 251 hos-

tages seized during Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel, 97 of whom remain captive in Gaza including 33 the army says are dead.

Not enough being done

Scores were released during a negotiated one-week truce in November, but relatives of those still held believe not enough is being done to free them.

Campaign group the Hostages and Missing Families Forum said a negotiated "deal for the return of the hostages" was urgently needed.

The families called for a nationwide general strike to force the government to reach a deal to secure the release of the remaining captives.

Shortly afterwards, the head of Israel's powerful Histadrut trade union ordered a "complete strike" today in support of the hostages.

"I have come to the conclusion that only our intervention can shake those who need to be shaken," Histadrut chairman Arnon bar David said in a statement yesterday. "Starting tomorrow at six in the morning, the entire Israeli economy will go on complete strike. A deal is not progressing due to political considerations and this is unacceptable."

Qatar-based Hamas official Izzat Al Rishq said the six were "killed by Zionist (Israeli) bombing".

—AFP

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Kerala #MeToo scandal: Now, big stars speak out

Mammootty and Mohanlal deny existence of power groups in state cinema

DUBAI
BY MANJUSHA
RADHAKRISHNAN
Entertainment Editor

After nearly two weeks of silence, Malayalam superstars Mammootty and Mohanlal have finally spoken up about the #MeToo movement in Kerala films, denying any power groups that exist in their field. They also implored their fans to not destroy their industry through such scandals.

These actors were under fire for their collective silence on the #MeToo storm in the Kerala film industry, ignited

after the incriminating Justice Hema Committee Report that was made public on August 19.

Support for abuse report

Taking to Facebook, Mammootty expressed his support for the report's findings of rampant sexual abuse but refuted the idea of select groups controlling the industry. "There's no power centre in Malayalam cinema. Cinema is not a place where such things can exist," wrote Mammootty.

Mohanlal, a star of similar stature and a beloved matinee idol, also toed a similar line and narrative. He denied the existence of powerful groups dictating Malayalam cinema, casting decisions, and unofficial boycotts of actresses who spurned the sexual advances of their male colleagues.

SEE ALSO P14

Hundreds avail of UAE amnesty offer on day 1

PRIVATE FIRMS OFFER THOUSANDS OF JOBS TO THOSE AMENDING STATUS

ABU DHABI/DUBAI
BY SAJILA SASEENDRAN
Chief Reporter
ABDULLA RASHEED
Abu Dhabi Editor

From ending their unlawful stay to getting fines waived and receiving new job offers, hundreds of illegal residents and visitors in the UAE received a new lease of life yesterday as the authorities began implementing a two-month visa amnesty for undocumented individuals.

Hundreds of expat men and women, many with children, flocked to amnesty centres across the UAE as the grace period allowing violators of residency laws to regularise their status without facing penalties began. The initiative, which runs until October 31, allows individuals to either leave the country without a ban or fines or legalise their stay in the UAE.

In Dubai, the General Directorate of Residency and Foreigners Affairs (GDRFA) also tied up with 15 private companies to offer thousands of job opportunities to amnesty seekers once they correct their legal status. The amnesty tents for men and women in Al Awir welcomed

applicants with positive messages and free refreshments. GDRFA reported completing the procedures of more than 100 applicants in the first half an hour itself.

Smart system in place

In Abu Dhabi, amnesty centres reported a steady flow of applicants seeking to amend their status, with officials providing facilities to streamline the process through the smart system of the Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship, while addressing inquiries and tailoring procedures based on the nature of each violation.

The amnesty initiative brought relief to many, including Pakistani cleaner Hamza Gul, who arrived at Al Awir seeking an exit pass but left with a job offer from the Transguard Group. "When I came here, I just wanted to get an exit pass and go back to Pakistan. But, I was surprised to hear that they were offering jobs here," Gul said. His situation, which had become dire after losing his job and being duped by an agent, took a positive turn as he secured employment with a salary of Dh900 and accommodation.

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