

## Lifestyle | Features

## Bollywood star Aishwarya Rai discharged from virus ward



Aishwarya Rai

**B**ollywood star and former Miss World Aishwarya Rai Bachchan and her daughter have been discharged from a Mumbai hospital where they were being treated for coronavirus, her actor husband Abhishek Bachchan said Monday. The pair was admitted to hospital a week ago, several days after Abhishek and his superstar father Amitabh Bachchan, making then the highest-profile family to contract the virus in India, which has recorded more than 1.4 million cases. "Aishwarya and Aaradhya have thankfully tested negative and have been discharged from the hospital. They will now be at home," her husband tweeted, thanking fans for "continued prayers and good wishes".

"My father and I remain in hospital under the care of the medical staff," he added.

The actress and her eight-year-old daughter Aaradhya were initially quarantined at home before being moved to the same hospital where her 77-year-old father-in-law and his son are being treated for the illness. Aishwarya Rai Bachchan won the Miss World crown in 1994, and since then became one of Bollywood's most famous faces. She is a regular on the red carpet at the Cannes Film Festival. The elder Bachchan and his 44-year-old son Abhishek are both in the hospital's isolation ward. No health update has been issued since they were admitted more

than two weeks ago but Amitabh, an avid social media user, has been dispensing regular messages to his millions of fans on Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr. "I couldn't hold back my tears", he tweeted late Monday, recounting his reaction to the news that his granddaughter and daughter-in-law could now go home.

A blog entry posted earlier on Saturday touched on the mental trauma and stigma suffered by novel coronavirus patients, referring to "the stark reality that the CoVID patient, put in hospitalised isolation, never gets to see another human". Recovered patients "are afraid to be in public for fear or apprehension of being treated different-

ly .. treated as one that has carried the disease .. a pariah syndrome .. driving them into deeper depression", he wrote. Amitabh Bachchan, idolised in India and affectionately known as "Big B", has worked for more than half a century in the film industry.

He was voted "actor of the millennium" in a BBC online poll in 1999 and became the first Indian actor to be showcased at Madame Tussaud's celebrity wax museum in London. Mumbai, India's financial and film capital, has now recorded over 100,000 cases, with more than 6,000 deaths attributed to the virus.—AFP

## Johnny Depp's blockbuster libel trial wraps up

**J**ohnny Depp's blockbuster libel lawsuit wrapped up yesterday after three weeks of graphic testimony in which the star admitted to years of drug abuse but denied beating ex-wife Amber Heard. The "Pirates of the Caribbean" franchise hero is suing the publisher and executive editor of Britain's The Sun tabloid in London's High Court over a 2018 story calling him a "wife beater". The 57-year-old rejects accusations of repeatedly hurting the 34-year-old actress over a three-year span that ended with Heard's 2016 decision to get a restraining order and file for divorce. Depp's former American fiancée Winona Ryder and long-term French partner Vanessa Paradis both testified on his behalf.

But The Sun's lawyer called Depp a "Jekyll and Hyde" character who was "controlling and physically abusive towards Ms Heard"—especially when he was on drugs. "The defendants have established that many more than one incident of wife-beating took place over the course of the relationship," defence lawyer Sasha Wass said in her closing submission Monday.

Depp's legal team will make its closing statement on Tuesday. Judge Andrew Nicol is then expected to take some days poring over 12 bulging volumes of evidence submitted in a case that was born at the height of the #MeToo movement.

## 'The damage is done'

Some legal experts say Depp's reputation will have trouble recovering even if The Sun is forced to retract its claim. "I



File photo shows US actor Johnny Depp gestures holding a bunch of flowers as he leaves after a hearing in his libel trial against News Group Newspapers (NGN), at the High Court in London.—AFP

think the damage is done," said London PR agent and crisis consultant Mark Borkowski. "Even if he wins, it's going to be a Pyrrhic victory." The odds favour Depp because England's strict libel laws put the burden of proof on the media.

That puts one of Britain's most popular newspapers in danger of having to cover huge court expenses and pay damages in the middle of a media industry crisis made even worse by the coronavirus pandemic. The Sun's defeat could also imperil Heard's Hollywood career. "If The Sun wins, Heard will likely be viewed as a brave crusader in the domestic violence and #MeToo arena," said defamation case lawyer Emily Cox. "If The Sun loses, Heard could well find herself ostracised by those



File photo shows US actress Amber Heard arrives at the High Court for the libel trial by her former husband US actor Johnny Depp against News Group Newspapers (NGN) in London.

movements and by Hollywood." Judge Nicol is at liberty to award his own damages figure in what UK media have dubbed "the biggest English libel trial of the 21st century".

## 'Cinderella to Quasimodo'

The trial kicked off with three days of grueling cross-examination in which Depp admitted only hazily recalling some episodes because he was high and drunk. Depp revealed at one stage that he started snorting cocaine to kick his addiction to prescription painkillers. He argued that he was suffering "uncontrollable spasms" during withdrawal and was in "no physical condition" to hurt Heard in one alleged incident. The Sun's lawyers also

produced a statement from Depp's doctor concluding that the actor "romanticises the drug culture" and was only going through rehab for show. "We are a crime scene waiting to happen," Depp told Heard after one fight. But he also portrayed his wife as a manic aggressor who was making up the allegations for money and personal fame. Depp said Heard's claims turned him "from Cinderella to Quasimodo in 0.6 seconds".

## Fatal attraction

Heard countered that Depp's drug habit made him an unrecognisable "monster" who would go on days-long binges in which he lost control. She accused him of throwing bottles at her "like grenades" and striking her in the face with a phone. "Some incidents were so severe that I was afraid he was going to kill me, either intentionally or just by losing control and going too far," she said in a witness statement.

"He explicitly threatened to kill me many times, especially later in our relationship." Yet both Heard and Depp acknowledged loving each other deeply on their good days. "We had had a wonderful year together where he was sober," she said. "I loved him and I didn't want to lose that." Depp conceded that Heard did her best trying to get him off drugs in 2014. "She does have a heart and she understands the pain I was experiencing," he told the court.—AFP



This rare file photo taken in the 1930s shows Egyptian diva Umm Kulthum.—AFP

## Israel city's bid to honour Egyptian diva stirs anger

**S**he was one of the Arab world's most revered singers, praised by Bob Dylan and sampled by Beyonce: the late Egyptian legend Umm Kulthum seems worthy of having a street named in her honour. But when that street is in Israel, a country she condemned while championing the Palestinian cause, a decision to honour the vocalist branded "the Star of the East," has triggered controversy. Haifa—Israel's third largest city, where roughly 10 percent of its 300,000 residents are Arab—decided earlier this month to honour the woman whose deep, resonant voice was also adored by many Jews.

The decision highlights the diversity of the city, "which represents a model of co-existence between Arabs and Jews," Haifa town council head Einat Kalisch-Rotem said. Umm Kulthum, who died aged 76 in 1975, performed in Haifa in the 1930s when the city was in British-mandated Palestine before Israel's creation in 1948. Haifa councillor Raja Zaareh said honouring Umm Kulthum is an appropriate way of recognising the "presence and roots" of Israel's Arab community, which regularly faces discrimination.

## 'Shameful?'

After the Umm Kulthum honour was announced, Haifa newspaper Kol Po published a front page black-and-white picture of the singer with some of her lyrics scrawled across the image. "Now I have a gun, take me in, Palestine, with you," were the printed lines from one of her songs dedicated to the Palestinians. During the 1967 Six Day War, the artist sometimes dubbed Egypt's "Fourth Pyramid", also performed a song that willed her nation to victory against Israel. Writing in Kol Po, a lawmaker from the right-wing Likud party, Ariel Kallner, said he was "saddened" by Haifa's decision to honour a woman "who called for the destruction of the Jewish state".

He vowed to find ways to block the street-naming. And Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's son Yair, a vocal and often bombastic social media commentator, tweeted that the honour was "shameful and crazy". Despite Netanyahu's outrage, his father's government supported a festival in 2013 that included a night devoted to Umm Kulthum's work. And Haifa is not the first Israeli city to honour "the Lady of Cairo".

In 2011, the mainly Arab Beit Hanina neighbourhood in east Jerusalem named a street after her and a similar move is planned in the central city of Ramla. But as the trend has spread, Jewish outrage appears to have grown. Writing in the Israel Hayom newspaper, commentator Eldad Beck sounded an alarm about the string of Umm Kulthum honours. "It started with Jerusalem, then Ramla and has ended up in Haifa," Beck wrote, blasting the push "to commemorate one of the biggest and most influential enemies of Israel, who wanted to annihilate the state".

Reducing the controversy surrounding Umm Kulthum to tensions between Arabs and Jews underestimates her wide array of devotees, said Jonathan Mandel, an Arabic language and culture researcher at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. He stressed that Mizrahi Jews, meaning those from North Africa and the Middle East, are equally attached to her music.—AFP

## Main points from bitter Johnny Depp libel trial

**H**ollywood star Johnny Depp's libel case against British tabloid The Sun saw three weeks of claim and counter-claim, as it pored over his two-year marriage to actress Amber Heard. Here are five stand-out revelations from London's High Court.

## The severed finger

Depp released a graphic photo showing a severed fingertip that he claimed Heard caused by throwing a vodka bottle at him during a violent row. His former estate manager said he found the 57-year-old actor's fingertip shortly after the fight, which took place while the couple were staying in Australia.

Heard claimed Depp injured his fingertip, which was later reattached, when he smashed a telephone into the wall during the row. Depp admitted writing a message to Heard on the wall and floor with flowing blood, and then dipping his finger into a can of paint to continue writing when the bleeding stopped. He admitted being drunk and on drugs at the time.

## Drugs and alcohol

Court testimony reinforced Depp's reputation as one of Hollywood's wild men, with several witnesses testifying to binges on drink and drugs. Heard showed the court a photograph of a pint of whisky, four lines of cocaine and her ex-husband's skull and crossbones "pill box". Depp claimed Heard was an enabler, despite his well-documented battles with addiction.

She "poured me the whisky and cocaine was visible in front of her, and I have experienced many times with Ms Heard that she would in fact chop the cocaine up for me so that I could do the line and then she would press her finger into it and ingest it orally," he alleged. Heard denied the claims. The court was also shown a photo of Depp apparently passed out on the floor. The actor said he began using cocaine to help break his addiction to powerful prescription painkillers.

## Whodunnit?

One of the most surprising aspects of the case was a photograph of faeces in

the couple's bed after the couple had another huge fight on the night of Heard's 30th birthday party in April 2016. Depp said it was left there as a sick joke by either Heard or one of her friends. It was discovered by the couple's maid. Depp admitted laughing about it when a friend texted him photos of the faeces with the inscription "Amber Turd". Depp said he knew then that his marriage was effectively finished.

Heard blamed the incident on the couple's dog, which Depp said was "physically impossible" because the turd was too large. Heard filed for divorce in May 2016, obtaining a temporary restraining order against Depp. The divorce was settled in January 2017.

## Violence

Heard alleged Depp headbutted her the night before she appeared on James Corden's "The Late Late Show" in 2015, and he subjected her to "punching, slapping, kicking, headbutting and choking". The "Pirates of the Caribbean" star also "explicitly threatened to kill me many times," Heard alleged in written testimony. Depp strongly denied hitting her or any woman, and submitted counter-evidence claiming she physically abused him during the marriage, including hitting him with a "haymaker" punch. His former partners, the French actress and singer Vanessa Paradis, and Hollywood star Winona Ryder, both submitted statements defending him, saying he was kind and non-violent.

## Infidelity claims

Heard denied Depp's claims that she had affairs with the Hollywood actor James Franco, and the billionaire Tesla and SpaceX founder Elon Musk. She dismissed suggestions that Musk visited her regularly at night from March 2015, not long after the couple wed. "I wasn't even in communication with Elon until 2016," she told London's High Court. Depp admitted to piques of jealousy, which Heard said fuelled many of their fights.—AFP

## Johnny Depp: Loveable loner tarnished by lurid claims

**J**ohnny Depp made his name and fortune playing off-beat characters from Willy Wonka to Captain Jack Sparrow, all the while beating an increasingly destructive off-screen path like his hero Marlon Brando. Pouring out his own pain and eccentricities into his roles, Depp earned a reputation as a versatile star and teen heartthrob through sensitive performances in early films such as "Edward Scissorhands" and "What's Eating Gilbert Grape". He cemented his status as Hollywood's talismanic maverick with blockbuster hits including the "Pirates of the Caribbean" saga.

But his bitter London court libel battle over newspaper claims that he beat his ex-wife Amber Heard laid bare the 57-year-old's turbulent private life involving rows, drink and drugs. Born June 9, 1963 in Owensboro, Kentucky, Depp set out trying to be a musician as a teenager and sold ballpoint pens before dabbling in acting. He made his big-screen debut in the cult Wes Craven thriller "A Nightmare on Elm Street" in 1984.

From there, he launched into a successful television career as a baby-faced undercover police officer in the popular series "21 Jump Street." In 1990, he played "Edward Scissorhands," a sheering creature with a heart of gold who brings a bit of magic and joy to a small town with fanciful topiaries and cutting-edge hairdos. He brought a similar sense of whimsy to his Oscar-nominated role as "Peter Pan" creator J.M. Barrie in 2004's "Finding Neverland," in which he tries to create fantasy worlds for four boys and their widowed mother to find refuge in.

## Oscars nearly-man

Depp also portrayed his hero, the renegade journalist and drug aficionado Hunter S. Thompson, in "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas." It was on set of one of Thompson's lesser-known works, "The Rum Diary" that he met and starred opposite Heard in 2011. But he has also taken on heavier roles in dramas like 2001's "Blow," in which he portrayed a big-time drug dealer and 1997's "Donnie Brasco," where he plays an undercover detective who infiltrates the mob.

In recent years, Depp has emerged as the star of Disney's billion-dollar blockbuster "Pirates of the Caribbean", as the rum-swilling sea dog Captain Jack Sparrow in all five films. The role earned comparisons to another of his heroes, Rolling Stones hard-living guitarist Keith Richards. He has been nominated three



File photo shows US actor Johnny Depp arrives to attend his libel trial.—AFP

times for an Oscar, including his leading role in 2007's "Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street", but has yet to win one. Depp has also frequently returned to his first love of music, collaborating with Oasis, Alice Cooper and Aerosmith's Joe Perry.

He is estimated to be worth around \$200 million, earning \$20 million per film, according to CelebrityNetWorth.Com, and lives between homes in France, Los Angeles and an island he owns in the Bahamas. But he told London's High Court he had made \$650 million thanks to the "Pirates of the Caribbean" franchise and then lost it, claiming his former business managers stole it. He once claimed he was spending more than \$30,000 a month on wine alone, and spent lavishly on art and property.

## Over-indulgence

Depp has dated a string of high-profile celebrities including Hollywood actress Winona Ryder and the British supermodel Kate Moss. He was with the mother of his two children, the French singer and actress Vanessa Paradis, for 14 years.

Before settling down with Paradis and into fatherhood, Depp displayed an infamous wild streak that once again emerged after their break up in 2012. The actor's over-indulgence, echoing the middle-aged decline of screen icon Brando whom Depp "worshipped", was revealed in painful detail in the London court. He married Heard in 2015, but their relationship quickly fell apart amid accusations of drunkenness, substance abuse and physical assault. They split in 2016 and divorced in 2017. Depp admitted taking drugs but denied he was ever violent towards his wife or any other woman.—AFP