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Troubled Bollywood star Sanjay Dutt 'diagnosed with cancer'

Bollywood star Sanjay Dutt, whose life has been so colorful and tragic that it became the subject of a biopic, has been diagnosed with lung cancer, Indian media reports said Wednesday. The Hindi-language actor, nicknamed "Deadly Dutt", served time in prison for possessing guns supplied by gangsters responsible for bombings in Mumbai in 1993 and has also battled drug addiction. On Tuesday Dutt issued a statement on social media saying he was "taking a short break for some medical treatment". Press reports later quoted a tweet from respected film trade journalist Komal Nahla saying that the 61-year-old has been diagnosed with lung cancer and would travel to the US for treatment.

Dutt shot to fame in the mid-1980s in a string of action movies in which he performed his own stunts, earning him his nickname. But the star was also struggling with substance abuse, including heroin and cocaine, that was said to have been sparked by the pain of losing his mother, Indian screen icon Nargis Dutt, to cancer. After a break he returned with a string of hits in the late 1980s and early 1990s



This file photo shows Indian Bollywood actor Sanjay Dutt during the wedding reception party of actress Priyanka Chopra and US musician Nick Jonas in Mumbai. —AFP

including "Jeete Hain Shaan Se" ("We Live with Style"), "Saajan" ("Beloved") and "Khal Nayak" ("Villain"). But his life took a dramatic turn when he was arrest-

ed following the orchestrated bombings in Mumbai, then called Bombay, in March 1993 that killed 257 people.

Dutt was eventually convicted in 2006 of holding guns supplied by mafia bosses who carried out the blasts. The attacks were believed to have been staged by Muslim underworld figures in retaliation for religious riots in which mainly Muslims died, following the razing of an ancient mosque in north India. He was originally given a six-year term and spent 18 months in prison before being released on bail in 2007, pending an appeal.

In 2013, his conviction was upheld but his prison term was cut to five years, and he was sent back to jail before being released early in 2016. Dutt has also been married three times. His first wife Richa was diagnosed with a brain tumour in 1987 and died in 1996. In 2018 a film about his life, "Sanju", was released covering the period from just before Dutt's Bollywood debut with romantic drama "Rocky" in 1981 to his release from jail in 2016. His new film "Sadak 2" ("Road 2") is due to release on Disney+ Hotstar later this month. —AFP

R. Kelly associates charged with intimidating singer's accusers

Federal prosecutors on Wednesday announced the arrests of three alleged associates of R. Kelly, saying that they used harassment and threats to try to silence women accusing the disgraced singer of sex crimes. For more than a year the artist born Robert Sylvester Kelly has been awaiting trial in several states for alleged wrongdoings including sex crimes against minors and child pornography. He has pleaded not guilty to all charges, which range across the states of Illinois, Minnesota and New York. In filings released Wednesday, prosecutors say three members of the artist's circle—Richard Arline Jr., Donnell Russell and Michael Williams—



In this file photo singer R. Kelly leaves the Leighton Criminal Court Building after a hearing on sexual abuse charges, in Chicago, Illinois. —AFP

have been engaged in separate bids to silence Kelly's accusers in the New York racketeering case against him through intimidation, harassment and bribery.

They say tactics have included the burning of a car outside a residence where one accuser was staying, threats to release sexually explicit photographs of one woman, and a scheme to compensate one accuser to the tune of \$500,000 to influence her testimony. "These crimes shock the conscience," said Homeland Security Special Agent in Charge Peter Fitzhugh in a statement. "The men charged today allegedly have shown that there is no line they will not cross to help Kelly avoid the consequences of his alleged crimes—even if it means revictimizing his accusers." Kelly faces federal charges in two separate cases—in Chicago and in New York—linked to his alleged sexual abuse of minors.

The singer known for hits like "I Believe I Can Fly" has a decades-long history of abuse allegations, especially of underage girls. The Chicago federal charges say Kelly filmed himself having sex with minors and that he paid potential witnesses in his 2008 trial—in which he was acquitted—to ensure their silence. He also faces bribery charges in New York that are believed to be linked to his marriage to the late singer Aaliyah when she was just 15 years old. That charge expanded on an earlier New York indictment that includes racketeering, accusing Kelly of systematically recruiting girls for sex while touring and coercing them into sexual activity. The artist is set for trial first in New York, with jury selection currently slated to begin September 29. Restrictions preventing in-person trials due to the coronavirus pandemic will likely see that date postponed. —AFP



Paris Combo singer dies of cancer

Belle du Berry, the lead singer of the cult French swing band Paris Combo, has died of cancer aged 54, the group announced Wednesday. Du Berry, whose real name was Benedicte Grimault, was "taken from us suddenly by cancer", the group said in a statement to AFP. She had just finished recording a new album for the group, which built up a large following in the US, Australia and Brazil on the back of their hit 1999 album "Living Room". Paris Combo rode the wave of the swing revival in the early 2000s with their mix of jazz, French traditional chanson, North African, punk and Roma influences fusing into a unique retro sound.

Du Berry's creative partnership with Australian trumpeter and pianist David Lewis helped drive its success and establish a fiercely loyal fan base for their live concerts. The couple also toured as a duo after their debut album "Quizz" in 2009. Lewis described in a 2018 video how he fell for Du Berry after seeing her perform at the Cabaret Sauvage in Paris. "I was under her charm immediately. What more can I say?" A gifted songwriter and accordionist, Du Berry studied cinema before diving into the punk and alternative music scene in the multicultural Paris district of Belleville, first fronting the post-punk band the Pervers Polymorphes Inorganiques.

She later worked with French choreographer Philippe Decouffe on a ballet for the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics at Albertville in 1992. But it was her songwriting and magnetic stage presence with Paris Combo that brought worldwide fame. The group re-formed in 2011 after a five-year break to play the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles and began touring and recording again. Their last album "Tako Tsubo" was released in 2017. Du Berry took her stage name, which means "The beauty from Berry", from her home region in north central France. —AFP

Bill Cosby files new appeal over sexual assault conviction

US comedian Bill Cosby, who is serving three and a half years in jail, has filed a new appeal against his conviction for drugging and sexually assaulting a woman 15 years ago. In court documents filed Tuesday with Pennsylvania's Supreme Court, Cosby's lawyers argue that five women should not have been allowed to give evidence at his trial as witnesses. They say that their "decades-old" allegations, which were not part of the charges, had prejudiced the jury. The attorneys also argue it was "fundamentally unfair" that deposition testimony Cosby gave in a civil case regarding his use of sedative drugs and his sexual behaviors in the 1970s was heard in court. They argue that Cosby believed the testimony was immune from prosecution when he gave it. The 83-year-old actor shattered racial barriers with his Emmy-winning role on "I Spy" in the 1960s, and then as a dad and doctor on the hit TV series "The Cosby Show" two decades later. But he fell from grace as allegations of sexual misconduct emerged against him, and was found guilty in 2018 of assaulting Andrea Constand at his Philadelphia mansion. —AFP



Bill Cosby