

# absolute india

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## BOOSTER 85% EFFECTIVE AGAINST SEVERE OMICRON: REPORT

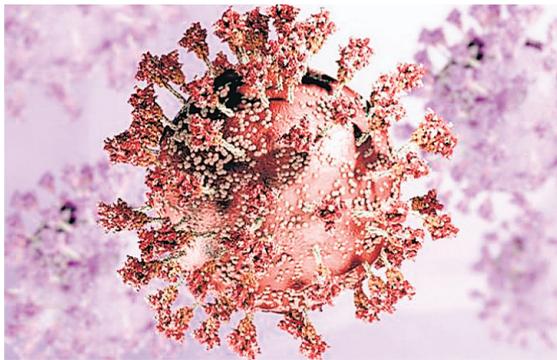
The protection is a bit less than vaccines given against earlier versions of Covid. But it means the top-up dose should still keep many people out of the hospital. The researchers said there is a high degree of uncertainty until more real-world information is gathered about this new variant that is spreading quickly.

LONDON | Agencies

A team of UK researchers has analysed the likely impact that a Covid booster shot will have on Omicron and says it could provide around 85 per cent protection against severe illness.

According to the BBC, the protection is a bit less than vaccines given against earlier versions of Covid. But it means the top-up dose should still keep many people out of the hospital.

The modelling, from the team at Imperial College London, is based on limited information on Omicron.



The researchers said there is a high degree of uncertainty until more real-world information is gathered about this new variant that is spreading quickly.

Experts are still trying to figure out how mild or severe Omicron will turn out to be, the report said.

Vaccines help teach the body how to fight Covid. But the current ones in use were not designed to combat the heavily-mutated Omicron variant, meaning they are not a perfect match.

To get around that, people in the UK are being advised to have a booster dose to build up higher antibody levels to fight the virus.

## Akhilesh Yadav alleges phone tapping by Yogi government



Team Absolute | Lucknow

Samajwadi Party (SP) President Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday alleged that phones of his party leaders were being tapped and the "Chief Minister listens to the recordings every evening".

He said that all landline numbers of his office were also being tapped. The allegations came a day after four of his close associates were raided by Income Tax officials in Uttar Pradesh.

Yadav said that the raids were an indication that the BJP was going to lose the election.

He said that Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath

was "unupoyogi" (unsuitable/useless) - a rejoinder to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statement in which he had said that 'UP Yogi' is equal to 'upyogi' (suitable). Akhilesh further said that the BJP had started working on the script handed down by the Congress when they were in power.

He said that the tactics of the BJP will increase as the elections get closer.

"Abhi to Income Tax Department aaya hai, Enforcement Directorate aayega, CBI aayega (Right now, now the tax department has come... the Enforcement Directorate will and the CBI will join soon), ut the cycle (the

Samajwadi Party's poll symbol) will not stop," Akhilesh added.

The SP leader said that the BJP had adopted similar tricks in West Bengal during the elections earlier this year and the results were there for all to see.

Akhilesh said that he was aware of the officers who were "playing dirty tricks" and would deal with them appropriately when he comes to power.

The Income Tax department on Saturday conducted a series of raids on SP leaders, including his private secretary Gajendra Yadav, spokesperson Rajeev Rai, party leader Manoj Yadav and a friend and businessman Rahul Bhasin.

## 3 PAK TERRORISTS KILLED IN KASHMIR WITHIN 33 DAYS



Team Absolute | Srinagar

Three Pakistani terrorists have been killed within 33 days in different encounters in Srinagar city, officials said on Sunday.

"Three Pakistani terrorists killed in Srinagar City within 33 days," police said. "They were involved in several terror crimes including attacks on Police/ Security forces and civilian killings. It shows that Pakistan is hell-bent to disturb peace in Valley espe-

cially in Srinagar City," the J&K Police quoting Inspector General Police Kashmir Vijay Kumar tweeted.

On Sunday, one Lashkat-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorist, a Pakistani national, was killed at Harwan on the outskirts of Srinagar. The killed terrorist has been identified as Saifulla alias Abu Khalid alias Shawaz, a resident of Karachi (Pakistan).

"He was affiliated with proscribed terror outfit LeT. He infiltrated in 2016 and was active in general area of

Harwan and involved in several terror crimes," J&K Police quoting Inspector General Police Kashmir Vijay Kumar further tweeted.

On December 13, the police neutralised two LeT terrorists, including a Pakistani terrorist in a brief chance encounter at Rangreth area of Srinagar. On November 16, police said four persons were killed in an encounter at Hyderpora in Srinagar. Among the four was a Pakistani terrorist named as Bilal Bhai.

## Govt calls meeting of party leaders of 12 suspended MPs

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In a bid to end the logjam in the Rajya Sabha, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi has called a meeting on Monday of opposition parties whose MPs were suspended last month for the Winter Session.

Joshi has called a meeting with the Congress, the Trinamool Congress, the Shiv Sena, the Communist Party of India-Marxist, and the Communist Party of India in a bid to end stalemate in the house which has been continuing since day 1 of the session.

Chairman, M Venkaiah Naidu had suggested that both the parties should resolve this issue as the Rajya Sabha could not function properly this week.

Leader of the House Piyush Goyal had sought an apology from the suspended MPs. Even after attacking marshals and misbehaving with the female marshals, senior Opposition members are unrepentant, he alleged.

"The government is ready to consider their request provided they apologise," he had



added. However, Leader of the Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge said: "We have been repeatedly telling you that the crime which we have not committed is being put on us," and accused the government of misleading the House about the incident.

The Congress has also convened a meeting to devise a common strategy in both the house and the strategy group met virtually. The Winter session slated to end on December 23.

## Eradication of illiteracy should become a people's movement: VP

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Pointing out that India still has the largest number of illiterate persons in the world, Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu on Sunday said that the literacy drive should become a people's movement. The Vice President urged all stakeholders, including the private sector, to come forward and supplement the government's work in the field of adult education and skills training. Stressing the need to make every adult literate, he also highlighted the need to focus on digital literacy and financial literacy among the masses. Addressing the gathering after presenting the prestigious Nehru and Tagore Literacy Awards in the national capital, Naidu said that it was disappointing that despite making great progress in various fields like IT and digitization, India still has the largest number of illiterate persons in the world.

Calling for urgent steps to address this challenge, he wanted the literacy drive to become a people's movement. "Every educated youth in vil-



lages and colonies should come forward and teach at least one person from their localities or communities how to write and, how to operate digital devices and how to avail themselves of benefits of government schemes," he said.

Terming it as their PSR (Personal Social Responsibility), Naidu said, "Each one-teach one" should not merely remain a slogan, rather it

should become a motivating force for the youth."

Naidu also advised schools to encourage their students to begin adult education drives in their areas on weekends. "Students should be given some extra marks for such activities," he said.

Praising all awardees for their noteworthy contribution to the cause of adult education, the Vice President

asked everyone to resolve to make India a fully literate and educated nation.

Apart from illiteracy, the Vice President also emphasized the need to address various other challenges on priority such as poverty, urban-rural divide, social discrimination and gender discrimination.

Terming literacy as a precondition for skill education, the Vice President said that it not only instils confidence in a person but also helps in making one's social life more active and dignified.

Praising the New Education Policy - 2020 for its due emphasis on various aspects of adult education, Naidu said that this approach opens new vistas of growth and development through availing lifelong opportunities of socio-economic and cultural development.

"It recommends multiple avenues including crowd funding and utilising online and app-based technology, satellite based television channels, online study resources and libraries for the development and promotion of adult education centres," he added.

## Will ensure scientific evidence sent to courts at earliest: Shah

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said that the government will try to ensure that scientific evidence is sent electronically to courts and police stations at the earliest.

On the second day of his Maharashtra visit, Shah formally inaugurated the Camp Complex of the 5th Battalion of the NDRF in Pune, inspected the new campus of the CFSL and inaugurated its new building.

Speaking on the occasion, Shah said that the Government of India has developed many softwares, which are also being linked to the courts and Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL), so that no person or prosecutor in the court will be able to say that the FSL report is yet to be received.

"The report will reach the court records directly and a copy will go to the police station and a copy will go to the Home Department of the state. The day this system is established, many delays will be eliminated and using science we will be able to increase proof of conviction," he said.

He pointed out that so far, there are seven Central Forensic Scientific Laboratories (CFSL) in the country and said, "If we have to strengthen the internal security and judicial system of a country like India in this area, then we still have to do a lot of work."

He mentioned that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, when he was the Chief Minister of Gujarat, had planned intensively to make the Forensic Science Laboratory of Gujarat world class and today the Gujarat FSL is known as one of the best in the world.

He pointed out that the biggest drawback in the spread of FSL was the lack of a specialised human resource force, there was no such course designed for this field.

"In the field of forensic science, not a single college, university was established in the country. The country's first forensic science university was established in Gujarat. Our target is that in every state, the state government should establish one college each and with this university they should be associated with the college of forensic science," he said.

He stated that the day at least one forensic science college will be set up in all the states, then there will be no dearth of human resource force in this country and experts from different fields of forensic science will be produced by these colleges and universities and fulfil

our needs.

"Thereafter, at least two mobile FSLs should be established in every district, which should cover every police station. If we can do this in the coming five to ten years, then a change can also be made in the country so that we can make the visit of the FSL team mandatory in the cases of punishment of six years or more," he said.

Expressing confidence that it will help in controlling crime and internal security, he said, "I am sure that the day we do this, the proof of conviction will increase tremendously and will be of great help in both internal security and crime control in the country. We will also enhance the manpower position of CFSL and along with this, efforts will also be made to ensure that scientific evidence is sent directly to courts and police stations electronically," the Home Minister said.

## PM LAUDS GOA FOR TOPPING GOOD GOVERNANCE PARAMETERS

Team Absolute | Panaji

Praising Chief Minister Pramod Sawant's governance, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said that apart from Goa's unique identity linked to its natural beauty, the coastal state had developed a new identity by trumping other states in fulfilling good governance parameters. "Goa's natural beauty has always been its identity. But the incumbent government is making Goa known for another identity. This new identity is staying number one in every task," Modi said on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the state's Liberation. "In other places, when work starts or there is some progress, Goa has already completed it. As a tourist destination, Goa has always been the choice of people, but now when it comes to good governance, Goa is at the top," the Prime Minister said. Modi also said that the state was on the top of the states' list when it came to good governance, per capita income, reining in open defecation,



making available separate toilets for girls in schools, door-to-door garbage collection, water tap connectivity, Aadhaar enrolment, food security, etc." I congratulate Chief Minister Pramod Sawant and his team. Whatever Goa has achieved is unprecedented. What the people of Goa have done is worthy of pride," Modi said. "I want to specially congratulate the Goa government and all residents of Goa for one new achievement -- to complete 100 per cent (Covid) vaccination. All eligible persons have been vaccinated in Goa. The second dose vaccination is going on. "You are among the first states in the country to have done this wonder. I congratulate you," Modi also said.



# SACRILEGE BID AT GOLDEN TEMPLE WILL BE PROBED THOROUGHLY: CHANNI

Amritsar | Agencies

Expressing anguish over the unfortunate incident to attempt sacrilege of Sri Guru Granth Sahib in the sanctum sanctorum of Sri Darbar Sahib here, popularly known as the Golden Temple, Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Channi on Sunday reiterated his government's firm commitment to thoroughly probe the entire matter to get into the bottom of the case.

Talking to the media here after paying obeisance at Sri Darbar Sahib, Channi, who accompanied by Deputy CM Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa, described it as the most heinous act, which has not only hurt religious sentiments but also tormented all, and should be condemned with the harshest possible words by one and all.



He appealed to the people to take due care and caution to protect the religious places, including gurdwaras, temples and institutions related to any religion or faith in

order to foil nefarious designs of any agency or anti-social element in wake of the forthcoming assembly elections in the state. At the same, the Chief Minister

exhorted the people to keep restraint during the prevailing sensitive situation by demonstrating their unflinching trust in the ethos of peace, harmony, brotherhood and religious tolerance.

Replying to a media query regarding recurrence of such incidents in coming days, Channi said the state intelligence agencies and the police force are pro-actively engaged to avert such acts of anti-social elements.

He also called upon the people to be vigilant and extend wholehearted support and cooperation to the state government in maintaining law and order.

Making firm resolve to preserve hard earned peace and harmony across the state, Channi said that no one would be allowed to disturb congenial atmosphere at any cost in the state.

Panaji | Agencies

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday offered five infrastructure projects worth nearly Rs 650 crore to the service of the nation, which includes a renovated Fort Aguada Jail Museum, a super speciality block at Goa Medical College, the new South Goa District Hospital, an Aviation Skill Development Centre at Mopa Airport and a Gas Insulated Substation at Dabolim-Navelim, Margao.

The re-development of



a Heritage Tourism destination under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme, has been carried out at a cost of over Rs 28 crore. Before Goa's liberation, the fort was used to incarcerate and torture freedom fighters. The Museum will highlight the contributions and sacrifices made by the prominent freedom fighters who fought for liberation of Goa and will be befitting tribute to them. Modi also virtually inaugurated a super speciality block at the state's

apex medical facility, the Goa Medical College and Hospital, which has been constructed at a cost of over Rs 380 crore under the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana scheme.

Among other projects, which the Prime Minister inaugurated includes the New South Goa District Hospital, built at a cost of around Rs 220 crore, the Aviation Skill Development Centre at the upcoming Mopa Airport, built at a cost of around Rs 8.5 crore, a Gas Insulated Substation at Dabolim-Navelim, Margao has been constructed at a cost of around Rs 16 crore under Integrated Power Development Scheme of the Ministry of Power, Government of India.

## Kerala turning into an unlawful state under Vijayan: Nadda

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Condemning the murder of Kerala state secretary of OBC Morcha, Renjith Sreenivasan, BJP chief J.P. Nadda on Sunday said that Kerala is turning into an unlawful state under Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. Nadda also said that such cowardly acts cannot be tolerated. On Sunday morning, a popular BJP leader Sreenivasan, was killed after attackers barged into his residence at Alappuzha. His wife and mother were at present at the time of the killing of the advocate. In a tweet, Nadda said, "The brutal murder of OBC Morcha State Secretary Advocate Renjith Sreenivasan by 'fundamentalist elements' is condemnable. Such cowardly



acts cannot be tolerated. Kerala is turning into an unlawful state under Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. They can't scare us with their cruelty." Renjith, a practising advocate at Alappuzha bar, was the BJP candidate at Alappuzha Assembly constituency. In-charge of BJP's national information and technology department, Amit Malviya alleged that Sreenivasan was hacked to death by the Social

Democratic Party of India (SDPI) cadre in Alappuzha. "BJP Kerala's OBC Morcha state secretary Renjith Srinivasan hacked to death by SDPI cadre in Alappuzha this morning. Along with West Bengal, Kerala has become a minefield of political murders. The Kerala CM just like Mamata Banerjee turns a blind eye to such ghastly killings," tweeted Malviya, also BJP co-in-charge of West Bengal.

## Cong demands SIT probe into 'land grab' by Assam CM's family

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Congress on Sunday demanded a time-bound SIT probe into an alleged land scam involving the Assam Chief Minister's family. It alleged that a company owned by Assam CM's wife and relatives has illegally grabbed government land.

Addressing a joint press conference, Congress leaders Gaurav Vallabh, Ripun Bora, Jitendra Singh and Gaurav Gogoi said: "Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, on one hand is showing hard-handedness in evicting poor and deprived families on the ground that no one has the right to illegally takeover the government land, but on the other hand he is handing over the government land worth crores of rupees to his family members on his own whims and fancies," they alleged.

The Congress alleged: "As per an investigation by leading media houses, a real estate company, RBS Realtors, Co-founded by the chief minister's wife, Riniki Bhuyan Sarma is allegedly occupying around 18



acres of government land intended for landless individuals and institutions." The party alleged that RBS Realtors Private Limited acquired most of the 18 acres in two stages, first in 2006-2007 and then in 2009.

Individuals, who are landless and needy, are granted ceiling surplus land by the Assam government and are prohibited from selling that land for a 10-year period. "In 2009, a total of 11 bigha three katha and four lessa (i.e. 3,01,674 square feet or 6.92 acres) of ceiling surplus land in Bongora intended for and allotted to supposedly needy individuals by the

government of Assam was bought by Himanta Biswa Sarma's wife's company, violating the 10-year lock-in period," it said. "A total of seven plots in North Guwahati were allegedly allocated to RBS Realtors between 2008 and 2009 Plot 1 - 4.37 acre land: Assam government allotted 4.37 acre ceiling surplus land to Lalmoti Talukdar on condition that it couldn't be sold for ten years. Barely two months later, on January 28, 2009, Talukdar sold 3.19 acres of the 4.37 acre to RBS Realtors Plot 2 - 1872 square feet land: Assam government allotted 1,872 square feet (0.042 acre)

ceiling surplus land to Basanta Nath with a 10-year lock-in period for sale," it said. "In 2017, 23.61 per cent of the Rs 100 face value shares of Vasishta Realtors were transferred to Meena Bhuyan, mother of Riniki Bhuyan Sarma and mother-in-law of the chief minister. On September 16, 2019 -- barely 18 days after Himanta Biswa Sarma's son Nandil Biswa Sarma became an adult -- Meena Bhuyan transferred her shares to him. As of FY-20, the chief minister's son owns 23.61 per cent shares of the company," the Congress alleged. Gaurav Vallabh said that a sitting CM, whose family is directly "involved in land grabbing", has no right to remain in power. Himanta Biswa Sarma should be sacked from his Chief Minister's post immediately, Gaurav Vallabh added. All unlawful land transfers to the aforementioned Realtors must be immediately cancelled and provisions must be made to provide alternate land to the landless and needy people whose land was unscrupulously taken away, the Congress demanded.

## KOLKATA MUNICIPAL CORPORATION POLLS TAKE OFF PEACEFULLY

Kolkata | Agencies

Despite some sporadic incidents, the much-hyped Kolkata Municipal Corporation elections took off peacefully recording a slow 9.14 per cent voting in the first three hours of polling.

According to the provisional data released by the state election commission only 9.14 per cent of polling was recorded in the first three hours of polling. Among the 16 boroughs of the Corporation, Borough 12 recorded the highest polling percentage of 13.1 and Borough 8 recorded the lowest voters' turnout of only 6.9 per cent. Though heavy police arrangements were made to ensure free and fair election -- as committed by the commission to the Calcutta High Court, but the opposition BJP alleged that the low turnout was only because the ruling Trinamool Congress threatened the opposition voters last night not to go to the polling stations. However, this has been strongly refuted by the ruling party. More than 23,000 police force is deployed for the election. Incidentally, around 9.30 a.m. two



bombs were hurled in front of Khanna school that falls under ward no 36. Though the BJP alleged that Trinamool Congress was responsible for this, the ruling party countered alleging that it was a plan of the opposition to disrupt the polling process. Meanwhile several BJP candidates, including Girish Shukla of ward no 16 alleged that the CCTVs -- that was to be mandatorily installed inside the polling premises -- were not functioning properly and the candidates were physically harassed when they tried to lodge a com-

plaint against it. In the KMC election 40,48,357 electors will decide the fate of 950 candidates. Voting will be held in 4,959 polling stations spanning across 1,676 premises. The total number of male and female electors are 21,17,840 and 19,30,444 respectively. Altogether 25,826 polling personnel, including 70 females are engaged in the election. The SEC has made an extensive security arrangement for ensuring peaceful elections. There will be CCTV surveillance in all the polling

premises with at least one-armed police in a polling premise. The total number of police force deployed will be 23,000 that includes 5,000 from the state police. There will be 286 sector mobiles, 72 RT mobiles, 35 Heavy Radio Flying Squad (HRFS), 78 Quick Response Team (QRT), 18 special QRT, six river patrols, 200 police pickets and 25 NAKA checking points.

The SEC will have special security arrangements for the 1,139 sensitive booths spread across 786 premises on the poll day with special QRT deployment, more deployment of armed police and an officer in the rank of inspector and above will be manning these booths. According to sources in the SEC, the highest number of sensitive booths 250 are located in Borough 7 followed by Borough 1 where there are 112 booths and Borough 3 with 100 booths. The lowest number of sensitive booths 22 are located in Borough 13. Considering the sensitivity of the election, the commission has arranged for CCTV cameras in all the booths and that will be monitored from the central office of the commission.

## 'Gadkari', 'Amit Sha', 'Pushyu Goyal' vaccinated in UP district

Etawah | Agencies

Covid vaccination certificates have been issued to 30-year-old 'Niten Gadkari', 33-year-old 'Amit Sha', 26-year-old 'Om Birla', and 37-year-old 'Pushyu Goyal' in Etawah district. These vaccine certificates were issued by a community healthcare centre in Sarsainawar village in Takha tehsil.

The names on these certificates are similar to the Union Ministers Nitin Gadkari, Amit Shah, Piyush Goyal and Lok Sabha speaker Om Birla. According to Bhagwan Das, chief medical officer of Etawah district, "Someone hacked the ID of our official and has done this to malign the vaccination drive of the district. These certificates are generated online and this is a conspiracy." The district administration has ordered a probe



into the matter and a three-member team has been sent to the village for investigation. The certificates were issued to people who were reportedly vaccinated with the first dose on December 12 at Sarsainawar community health centre in Etawah district. The date for the second dose has been fixed

between March 5, 2022, and April 3, 2022 -- after a gap of about 12 weeks and 16 weeks, respectively. In Etawah district, 236 sites, all government run, are conducting vaccination. More than 1.6 million Covid vaccine doses have been administered in the district so far.

## Kerala tense after SDPI, BJP leaders killed in retaliatory attacks

Thiruvananthapuram | Agencies

The Islamist organisation, Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI) and the BJP have entered into political clashes in Alappuzha district of Kerala with state-level leaders of both getting killed within a spate of hours.

The issues commenced when Nandu, an ABVP leader was killed a few months ago allegedly by the SDPI workers and on Saturday night the SDPI state secretary, Advocate K.S. Shan was hacked near his residence at Mannenchery in Alappuzha district while he was returning home. SDPI state president Muvattupuzha Ashraf Moulavi on Saturday night alleged that the BJP-RSS combine was behind the attack and the subsequent death of the SDPI state sec-

retary. He has in a press statement warned that there would be strong retaliation if the RSS, BJP leaders don't stop these attacks. On Sunday morning, a popular BJP leader, Renjith Sreenivasan, state secretary of the OBC Morcha was killed after attackers barged into his residence at Alappuzha. His wife and mother were at the residence at the time of the killing of the advocate.

Ranjith, who is a practising advocate at Alappuzha bar was the BJP candidate at Alappuzha Assembly constituency. The Islamist organisation, SDPI, and Popular Front of India have been consistently attacking the RSS and the BJP leaders for several years, and recently in November at Palakkad, RSS local level leader Sanjith was hacked to death while he was travelling on a two-wheeler

along with his wife. Senior Congress leader and former Kerala Home Minister, Ramesh Chennithala condemned the attacks. While speaking to IANS the senior leader said, "Both BJP and SDPI must stop these retaliatory killings and this is not politics. Kerala Police under the CPI-M has turned into a major failure and the state home department and police did not take any precautions even after there were local-level issues pertaining to both the organisations. Senior leaders of both the organisations have been killed and police are watching the game from the gallery." BJP Alappuzha district president, Gopakumar while speaking to IANS said, "SDPI is into a killing spree and Ranjith Sreenivasan was a popular advocate and a senior leader of the BJP at Alappuzha district.

## Reduce boys' marriage age to 18 to ensure gender equality: Brinda Karat

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Narendra Modi government's decision to increase the age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 years has come in for sharp criticism from several quarters, and the CPI-M has assailed the measure on various counts. CPI-M Politburo member Brinda Karat told IANS that the government's proposal is not going to help in the fight for empowerment of women. "It is absolutely wrong to criminalise the personal choice of adults. If the government wants to ensure gender equality, it should reduce the marriage age of boys from 21 to 18 years. The government should pay more attention to education and nutrition of girls," she said.

The CPI-M has lodged strong protest against the marriage age bill. Senior party leader Sitaram Yechury told IANS that the logic of the government for such a bill is not convincing at all. The Bill should be



referred to the Standing Committee of Parliament for in-depth examination and consultations with all stakeholders, he demanded. "A woman at the age of 18 is legally an adult. For the purpose of marriage, treating her as a juvenile is self-con-

tradictory and the proposal violates an adult's right to make personal choices of her partner. This proposal deprives a woman of deciding the course of her life," he said. Yechury said that even when the minimum age was 18, official figures show that the average age of marriage for women across India in 2017 was 22.1 years. "Therefore such a law is unnecessary. If the bill is for health reasons, as the government claims, there is a need to ensure nutrition and food security to prevent maternal and infant mortality. Raising the marriageable age of women is not the solution," he added. Samajwadi Party MP Shafiqur Rahman has also strongly objected to the government's bid to increase the marriage age for women, telling IANS that this will have a bad impact on the girls, and "they will become vagabonds".

However, BJP leaders support the move. Uttar Pradesh's Child Development and Women Welfare Minister Swati Singh said that the

Modi government wants to make a law in favour of women. "He gave rights to Muslim women by bringing a law on triple talaq. So, increasing the age of marriage of girls from 18 to 21 years will give women a feeling of equality. The marriage age of boys is already 21 years. As recommended by the National Human Rights Commission, the minimum age of marriage for boys and girls should be the same," she said. A task force headed by activist Jaya Jaitly had recommended to the Central government that the age of marriage of a girl should be increased from 18 to 21 years, as girls face problems in pregnancy at a young age. This recommendation was accepted by the government. Jaitly told IANS: "This decision has been taken keeping in mind the issue of gender equality and gender empowerment. Because it sends a very strange message that a girl can be fit for marriage at the age of 18, and boy at 21.



## IN EIGHT YEARS, GREEN ENERGY PRODUCTION HAS INCREASED 10 TIMES: CHIEF MINISTER

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh has always been working for environmental protection. This is the reason that our state has got the distinction of having the largest area of forests. We have been working in the field of environmental protection in various ways. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the state is progressing rapidly in the field of green energy generation. We have increased its production by more than 10 times in the last 8 years. Chouhan said that in the year 2012, our production in solar power, wind power, biomass power and small hydro power used to be 438.24 megawatt, which has increased to about 5500 megawatt in 2021.

Chouhan said that the future belongs to green energy, because the traditional resources of energy will definitely be exhausted gradually, the sound of which is already being heard, due to exploitation of coal reserves in energy production, there is a supply crisis. Chouhan said that we get renewable energy from the Sun. Energy from the Sun, wind and biomass is cheap and also



helps in environmental protection. More and more use of Sun, wind and solar energy will also be helpful in reducing carbon emissions in the world, for which continuous efforts are being made at the global level.

A target has been set by the Union Ministry of New and Renewable Energy to set up solar projects of one hundred Gigawatt (1 lakh megawatt) in the country by the year 2022. Out of this, Madhya

Pradesh has a target of 5 thousand 675 megawatt capacity solar projects by the year 2022. At present, solar projects of 2400 megawatt capacity are established in the state. Projects of about 5000 megawatt capacity are under installation. This target of the state government will make a significant contribution in achieving the ambitious green energy target of the country.

The state has set new bench-

marks of progress in the field of solar energy. So far, 2386 megawatt power is being generated from 128 solar power projects in the state. In the year 2012, 315 megawatt power was being generated in the state from wind energy, which has now increased to 5 thousand megawatt through 105 projects registered in wind energy. Various measures have been taken to develop biomass based power projects. According to the policy issued in October 2011, 33 projects of 117 megawatt have been established in the state. Two more projects totalling 16 megawatt are being set up.

The country's largest floating solar project of 600 megawatt is being set up in Omkareshwar, whose bidding is likely soon. This multipurpose project will be very important for tourism, land and water conservation. The power generated from the project will be adjusted from the external grid through a 400 kilowatt sub-station of the power grid at Khandwa. The work of development of 57 hydel power projects of 324 MW capacity in the state is in progress.

To promote green energy in the state, farmers are being encouraged to produce solar energy.

## The echo of activities of MP Anand Department reached other states

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Situations of tension and unrest arise in the search for material comforts. The peace and joy within man has its own importance. It is said that a calm person and a person living in a sense of joy plays an important role in building a happy and prosperous society. For this purpose, Anand Department and State Anand Sansthan have been established in Madhya Pradesh. Under this, about 60 thousand citizens have been voluntarily registered as Anandaks. There are 170 Anandam Kendras functioning in the state, which encourage the spirit of "Joy of Giving" (the pleasure of helping someone). It has presented examples of people leaving seemingly superfluous household items in their personal collections in designated public places. This stuff is taken by the person who needs it. These activities of Madhya Pradesh are getting appreciation at the national level.

In the development of the state, the thoughts and purity of feelings of the citizens have an important contribution. Many activities are being conducted to make the life of the citizens physically prosperous as well as blissful. In the state, 1.25 lakh citizens have been directly benefited by the Alpviram programme of the Anand Department. This is a happiness mantra. The participants have been made aware of the importance of a fulfilling and joyful life through 2300 programmes in various centres in the state.

In the conclave of Chief Ministers convened by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Varanasi last week, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan while making a presentation on the implementation of the innovations and

schemes gave information about constructive activities of the Anand Department started in Madhya Pradesh five years back and the efforts being made to make people happy while saving them from depression. The Chief Ministers of other states expressed their curiosity about the activities conducted to increase the atmosphere of happiness in Madhya Pradesh. Modi also listened carefully to the presentation given by Chouhan. It is noteworthy that Madhya Pradesh is leading among the states that have constituted the Anand Department.

The most important of the activities of Anand Department and State Anand Sansthan in Madhya Pradesh is "Alpviram Programme". This programme gives an opportunity to the individual to understand and rectify the inner shortcomings. Other activities include blood donation, food and material donation, support during disaster, education, environment, cleanliness, self-defence training to girls and helping the destitute. Three and a half thousand members of about 400 Anand Clubs become partners in conducting these activities. Apart from this, Anand Sabha, Anandam Kendra, Anand Utsav are also increasing the atmosphere of happiness. An Anand Calendar has also been prepared. The website and the mobile app as per this calendar have been made available on the Play-Store. The State Anand Sansthan has benefited interested people by entering into agreements for Ananda Camps through Art of Living Bangalore, Initiatives of Change Panchgani and Isha Foundation Coimbatore. Anand Utsavs are taking place continuously in urban and rural areas. A six-week online Anand course has also been started.

## BJP keeping a tab on dissenters

BJP SOURCES SAID AFTER REMAINING OUT OF POWER FOR ONE-AND-A-HALF YEARS, DAMOH AND RAIGAON BY-POLLS TAUGHT A BIG LESSON TO THE PARTY AS OTHER THAN THESE TWO BY-ELECTIONS, AT MANY PLACES IT WAS HARMED BY ITS OWN LEADERS DUE TO WHICH IT LOST.



Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Bharatiya Janata Party's MP unit, on the basis of experiences in the bypolls, has started political introspection and the party is keeping a close tab on its leaders who can harm its prospects in the next elections.

The BJP is laying strong emphasis on ground preparations for panchayat and urban body polls in the state as they give more strength to the party's base.

BJP sources said after remaining out of power for one-and-a-half years, Damoh and Raigaon by-polls taught a big lesson to the party as other than these two by-elections, at many places it was harmed by its own leaders due to which it lost.

On the one hand, the party is keeping a close watch on people who can harm it in the polls, while on the other hand it is also focusing on leaders who are often found sharing the stage with Congress leaders.

At present, BJP's MLA from Maihar in Satna district, Narayan Tripathi, is speaking against the party's line.

When former Chief Minister Digvijaya Singh raised the issue of illegal sand and stone mining, immediately after that Tripathi also wrote to the Chief Minister, flagging the issue.

The party is keeping a tab on insiders who can harm the party in the Panchayat polls also.

For the Panchayat elections, the party, in a meeting stressed on the fact that though the polls are being held on a non-party basis, two leaders should not enter the fray from the same place. It is the job of the divisional level office bearers of the organisation to take care of that.

The BJP's biggest concern is about a few leaders who are hand-in-glove with the Congress and are continuously trying to harm the saffron party. Their activities are directly impacting the organisation and the government.

Political strategists are advising the party to take strict action to control such people. Expressing concern over the increasing number of dissenters in the party, senior leaders said that if it fails to take action it can prove to be a big hindrance in the 2023 Assembly and 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

## FARMER SETS OWN GARLIC CROP ON FIRE BECAUSE OF LOW SELLING PRICE

Mandsaur: A farmer set his garlic crop on fire after he failed to get a good rate for it at an agricultural produce market in Mandsaur in Madhya Pradesh, officials said.

The incident occurred at Mandsaur Krishi Upaj Mandi Samiti on December 18 and the farmer has been identified as Shankar Singh, a resident of Mahidpur in Ujjain, they added. Mandi Inspector Jagdish Babar said the garlic crop of the farmer was auctioned at around Rs 1400 per quintal since the quality was poor, adding that over 8,000 sacks of garlic had arrived at the market on Saturday, which were sold between Rs 1,000 to Rs 12,000 per quintal depending on the quality.

## CM planted sapling with former minister Shri Rajendra Shukla

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Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted a sapling of Karanj along with former Minister Rajendra Shukla in Smart Garden. Chouhan also planted Gulmohar sapling along with famous mountaineer and sportsperson Anjana Yadav. Chouhan plants saplings every day as per his resolve. The Chief Minister is constantly appealing and making efforts to make tree plantation a people's movement. Anjana has won five national medals in sports like Kabaddi, Base Ball, Hand Ball, Soft Ball, Circle Kabaddi and Kho-Kho etc. Anjana is originally from



Diwananj in Raisen district. She is currently pursuing her B Tech from TIT Institute. Anjana has hoisted the tri-

colour on Mount Yunam Peak at 20 thousand feet, Friendship Peak at 16 thousand 345 feet and Patalsu

Peak at 14 thousand feet. Anjana plans to hoist the tricolour at Kilimanjaro in Africa and Elbros Peak in Europe. Sushri Anjana is also planning to hoist the tricolour on Mount Everest in 2023. Her sister Priya Yadav was also with her at the time of plantation.

Karanj plant is considered important in Ayurvedic therapy. Karanj plant is also used in religious works. Gulmohar is considered one of the most beautiful trees in the world. Flowers blooming in big bunches between the leaves of Gulmohar give a distinct attraction to this tree. In summer, instead of leaves, Gulmohar trees are laden with flowers. It is also rich in medicinal properties.



## CM pays homage to martyrs Ram Prasad Bismil and Ashfaq Ullah Khan

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Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan paid homage to the martyrs Ram Prasad Bismil and Ashfaq Ullah Khan on their martyrdom day. Chouhan paid floral tributes by offering garland at his residence office. Shaheed Ram Prasad 'Bismil' and Ashfaq Ullah Khan were the main fighters of the revolutionary stream of Indian independence movement. They were sentenced to death after the Kakori incident in 1925. Martyr Ram

Prasad Bismil was hanged on December 19, 1927 in district Gorakhpur jail and Shaheed Ashfaq Ullah Khan was hanged in Faizabad. Chouhan has tweeted that "The glorious saga of the brave sons Ram Prasad 'Bismil' ji and Ashfaq Ullah Khan, who made supreme sacrifice to break the shackles of subjugation of Ma Bharati, will always inspire the future generations to serve the nation. Humble tributes to the brave sons martyrs Ram Prasad 'Bismil' and Ashfaq Ullah Khan and their companions on their sacrifice day!"

## CM RELEASED THE SOUVENIR

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan released a souvenir published on the first death anniversary of senior public representative of Guna district Late Bhupendra Singh Raghuvanshi at his residence office. Chouhan said that on the basis of the values received by late Raghuvanshi from his father, he had dedicated himself in the service of the people of the area. He came in the field of public service with the inspiration of Late Kushabhau Thackeray. It is said that Late Bhupendra Singh Raghuvanshi left us untimely. Paying homage to Late Raghuvanshi, Chief Minister Chouhan said that it is expected that both his sons will continue the work of public service by following the path shown by their father. Late Bhupendra Singh's son Anand Raghuvanshi and Prabal Raghuvanshi were present along with Mahendra Singh Kiran on this occasion.

## REVOLVER AS POSTHUMOUS AWARD FOR RETIRED POLICE OFFICER

Team Absolute | Bhopal

On Friday, the Madhya Pradesh Police was celebrating its Foundation Day with enthusiasm and recalling the sacrifices and achievements of a number of police personnel in their services to the citizens. Among the thousands gathered at the Motilal Nehru Stadium, the wife of a retired Indian Police Service (IPS) officer sitting in the guests gallery was eagerly waiting for her turn to come on stage to receive a special award on behalf of her late husband.

The moment for which Jyoti Singh had travelled from Bihar's Samastipur district to Bhopal came and she went on the stage to receive the honour on behalf of her husband for which she had been waiting for the last several years. And this special award was a 'revolver' which she received from Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan in the presence of Home Minister Narottam Mishra and Madhya Pradesh Director General of Police Vivek Johari.

The revolver was handed over to Jyoti as a posthumous award for her husband and retired IPS officer of the 1987 batch from the Madhya Pradesh cadre, late Sanjeev Kumar Singh for successfully solving an abduction case in 2004. The incident for which Sanjeev Kumar Singh was awarded posthumously dates

back to 12th January 2004 when a leading industrialist of Satna in Madhya Pradesh, Tirath Prasad Gupta, was abducted from an area under Uchehara police station. This led to panic among the industrialists as the kidnappers demanded a whopping Rs 5 crore for his release.

The then chief minister, Uma Bharti, directed that the case should be handed over to the Special Task Force (STF) as the kidnappers were making calls from different states to confuse the investigating agencies about their location. The caller's location was being traced to Nepal, Eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. During the calls, they demanded the handing over of the ransom money through the hawala route at Dubai and other countries.

Due to this, it was becoming a difficult task for the police to locate the kidnappers and hence the STF was asked to come in.

Sanjeev Kumar Singh was at that time serving as Deputy Inspector General of Police with the Crime Investigation Department (CID) of Madhya Pradesh police. After activating his sources and employing his resources, he received vital inputs that revealed the involvement of hardcore criminals, Anil Singh alias Company Singh and Vikram Singh alias Mangal Singh, in the kidnapping. Their location was traced to Patna, the capital of Bihar. Interestingly, Singh himself was

born in Bihar's Samastipur district. On 29th February 2004, Singh got information that Anil Singh was reaching a specific point in Patna. Singh moved swiftly, arrested Anil Singh and started interrogating him to know the whereabouts of the abducted industrialist.

Based on the tip off provided by Anil Singh, officials and personnel from the STF and the Bihar Police stormed the hideout of the criminals in Aurangabad in Bihar and rescued Tirath Prasad Gupta.

The family members of Gupta later voluntarily handed over a cheque of Rs 10 lakh to the MP Police for the successful operation that Singh had meticulously designed to rescue Gupta.

After receiving the posthumous award (revolver), Singh's wife Jyoti Singh talking to IANS said, "It is not just a revolver but a dream come true for which we waited for years. As far as I know it has been awarded to him for a remarkable job, especially in the kidnapping case. I really don't know why it took so many years. It would have been better if Sanjeev himself was present to receive it."

Jyoti told IANS that around six months back she was informed that the Madhya Pradesh government has decided to confer a posthumous award for her husband's remarkable job in police service. "I can't express my feelings I am going through right now, but yes I am proud of my hus-



band and missing him a lot. I would like to thank DGP Vivek Johri and MP Chief Secretary Iqbal Singh Bains for making Sanjeev's dream come true with this award," Jyoti added.

On the significance of a revolver as an award, A Sai Manohar, former Additional Director General of Police, MP cadre, told IANS that "such awards like a revolver or a pistol are given in rare cases for a remarkable job and Sanjeev was one of them. As far as I know only 6-7 MP cadre police officers have been bestowed such an honour."

"For a police officer a pistol is not just a weapon but a symbol of honour. The police department or the state government confer such an award only on those police officers who have achieved a remarkable task during their service.

A decorated officer, Singh also played a significant role in establishing the country's premier anti-terror agency, the National Investigation Agency (NIA), before he passed away due to Covid-19 complications on October 16, 2020. He had also served as Additional Director General with the Border Security Force.



EDITOR'S SPECS

## Election Commission undermines itself

In the run-up to the coming round of Assembly polls, the red lines will need to be redrawn, with a renewed firmness. The EC will be closely watched. A constitutional democracy is held up as much by its individual and separate institutions as by the terms of their relationship with each other. The respect and dignity they give to, and demand from one another, may sometimes be intangible, but is nevertheless crucial. In India, the Election Commission discharges its constitutional mandate of conducting free and fair elections but it does more than just that. It also forms the core of a sprawling electoral system in which, except the odd aberration, even those who lose an election by a hair's breadth seldom question the results, or the credibility of the poll monitor. The EC's reputation for independence and fairness is not just its individual attribute, but also forms an inalienable part of the system's legitimacy, the people's trust in supervisory institutions, as winners and losers come and go. The EC, therefore, must especially be accorded its due dignity and respect - much depends on it. That is why there is reason to pause on the wording of a letter from an official of the law ministry to the poll panel last month. As this newspaper has revealed, it effectively summoned the CEC to a meeting chaired by an official in the PMO. There is reason, also, to ask why, after the CEC had made known his "displeasure" at the tone of the letter, and stayed away from the meeting, all three election commissioners bent immediately thereafter, joining an "informal interaction" with the PMO official. Questions must be asked of the PMO, law ministry and the EC not because any meeting between them is controversial, but because the lack of form and propriety in the entire exchange matters. It speaks of larger and disquieting things.

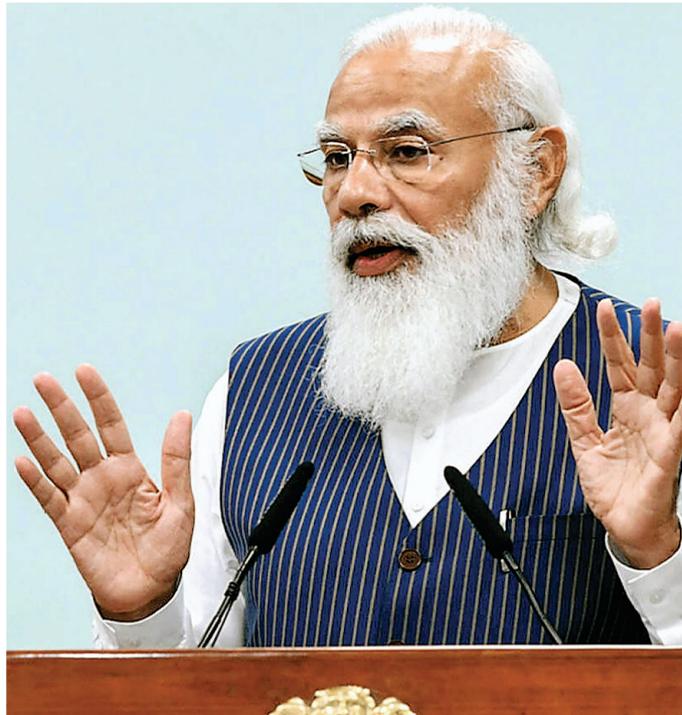
# NOT MUCH CHANGED IN UP UNDER 'DOUBLE-ENGINE GOVERNMENT'

The truth is that not much has changed in any real way in UP since the 'double-engine government' came into existence in 2017, and it is this reason why it is important to divide Hindus and Muslims for Yogi to win a second term..

The Prime Minister's visit to Varanasi last week was like a Bollywood film in slow motion. The melodrama, the exaggerated colours, the bright lights and religiosity reminded me of Ramanand Sagar's Ramayana. And it was as mesmerizing. I found myself glued to my TV from Modi's morning dip in the Ganga in a saffron tracksuit, to that late night stroll on the neon-lit platform of the railway station with Yogi Adityanath by his side. Every news channel covered every moment of the trip as if nothing else was happening in the world. Channels of bhakti bent began their coverage before he landed in Varanasi with breathless, sycophantic commentary on the corridor to the Vishwanath Mandir that he had come to inaugurate.

So, what did I conclude at the end of this day in which religiosity mixed seamlessly with politics and hyper-nationalism? What did the people of Varanasi make of it? To get a sense of this I rang a Mahant of the Vishwanath Mandir whose family home was requisitioned and torn down for the corridor. Two years ago, when we met, he was angry about the meagre compensation his family got in exchange for a home that was centuries old. He was not a fan of the corridor, so it surprised me when he said, "Let me tell you that they have built something wonderful. But, also let me say that people here do not like the way religion is being mixed with politics. This is wrong... people say that this will cost them the election. Akhilesh Yadav will win."

The political nature of this ostensibly religious project has escaped nobody, nor has the inauguration's timing. Attention to this was drawn even by the TV reporters in Benares who passed off paeans in praise of Modi as journalism. The Chief Justice was right when he said last week that investigative journalism had disappeared in the Indian media, but rarely has the media turned itself into a propaganda tool of the government the way that it did on Modi's visit that day. Having dealt with officials of the Press Information Bureau for a long, long time, I can tell you that not even they, whose job is government propaganda,



would have turned themselves into cheerleaders in the way that celebrated anchors did in Varanasi. So, no questions were asked, not even when the Prime Minister himself brought Aurangzeb up in his speech to remind everyone watching of who it was who had destroyed the Vishwanath Mandir and defiled it by building a mosque on its ruins. The Prime Minister has usually refrained from dog whistles. But, the elections in Uttar Pradesh draw closer by the day and polls by political parties appear to show that Yogi is not as popular as his massive advertising campaign indicates. So, the BJP

needs to bring into play their ultimate weapon: creating ugly divisions between Hindus and Muslims. The Lok Sabha election in 2019 was a defining moment for the BJP. It taught them that it was possible to win a full majority without needing a single Muslim vote. This explains why Modi no longer hesitates to remind Hindus that Aurangzeb destroyed many temples and that the wounds of history must never be forgotten. The problem is that when semi-literate, ahistorical Hindus are reminded of these wounds, the message they take home is that every living

Indian Muslim is to blame for what happened centuries ago. And, that all Muslims are Pakistanis in their hearts and did not leave in 1947 only because they could not afford to. It is these divisions that the BJP hopes to play on in Uttar Pradesh. This brahmastra is needed because people have not forgotten the total collapse of governance during Covid's awful second wave. Nor have they forgotten that despite the Chief Minister's vaunted claims of having brought lawlessness under control in this notoriously lawless state, it was not long ago that a teenage girl was cremated without proper rites by the police in Hathras, thereby destroying evidence of her rape. There are other horrors they find hard to forget. Expressways and airports are inaugurated almost daily these days in UP, but the people whose land and homes were appropriated for these projects continue to live in extreme poverty. In an excellent report on NDTV recently, reporters talked to people whose land was acquired for the new Jewar airport. They found them living in flimsy shacks and half-built houses because the compensation they were given allowed them to afford no more. The truth is that not much has changed in any real way in UP since the 'double-engine government' came into existence in 2017, and it is this reason why it is important to divide Hindus and Muslims for Yogi to win a second term. The damage this will do to the fabric of the state is incalculable, but for the moment there will continue to be religious events lit with disco lights. In Varanasi that day they reflected off Modi as he cruised on the Ganga. Incidentally, the waters of our most sacred river remain filthy, as do most of the streets of Varanasi whose name comes from two rivers that used to once exist. The Varuna has almost disappeared and the Assi river is a pitiable drain. It is the erasure of such ugly realities that is now being sought with religiosity and hyper-nationalism.

## international

# SHOWING SOLIDARITY WITH MIGRANTS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER: GUTERRES

United Nations | Agencies

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that showing solidarity with migrants is more important than ever in his message on International Migrants Day, marked annually on December 18. "Solidarity with migrants has never been more urgent," said the UN chief, adding that "we need more effective international cooperation and a more compassionate approach to migration". Guterres said that "on this International Migrants Day, we recognise the contributions of migrants across the world in the face of many struggles including the Covid-19 pandemic". Xinhua news agency reported. However, he said that "migrants continue to face widespread stigmatization, inequalities, xenophobia, and racism. Migrant women and girls face heightened risk of gender-based violence and have fewer options to seek support". "With borders closed, many migrants are stranded without income or shelter,



unable to return home, separated from their families, and with uncertain futures," Guterres noted. According to the UN, approximately 281 million people were international migrants in 2020, representing 3.6 per cent of the global population. The year 2021's theme for the International Migrants Day is "har-

nessing the potential of human mobility". For the UN chief, the world needs more effective international cooperation and a more compassionate approach to accomplish that goal. "This means managing borders humanely, fully respecting the human rights and humanitarian needs of everyone and ensuring that

migrants are included in national Covid-19 vaccination plans," he said. It also means recognizing pathways for regular entry and addressing the drivers of migration, such as deep inequalities and human trafficking. Next year, the International Migration Review Forum will take stock of progress in implementing the milestone Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. For the UN chief, this "is an opportunity to advance efforts to ensure the full inclusion of migrants as we seek to build more resilient, just and sustainable societies". On December 18, 1990, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Each year on December 18, the world body, through the UN-related agency International Organization for Migration, highlights the contributions made by migrants and the challenges they face.

Sydney | Agencies

The government of New South Wales (NSW) on Sunday announced that a large wetland area in the Australian state's northwest would be listed as an internationally important wetland. The proposed listing of Caryapundy Swamp is Australia's latest addition to the global 1971 Ramsar Convention agreement, and would add approximately 700 square km of protected wetlands in NSW, bringing the country's total listed area to over 8.37 million hectares, reports Xinhua news agency. The convention, to which Australia has already signed 67 sites, is designed to promote the conservation of wetlands, and establish nature reserves in areas

important for biological diversity. Australia's Minister for Environment Sussan Ley said the site would play "a critical role for species like the Australasian Shoveler, Grey Teal and Red-necked Avocet which use the site as a drought refuge". Floods represent an important factor in the life cycle of wetlands, and many Australian bird species require substantial flooding in order to trigger large-scale breeding events. The wetlands are also an important stop-off point for migratory shorebirds that fly to southern Australia during the winter. The status would prevent these waters from being rerouted to reservoirs or for use in agriculture. NSW Environment Minister Matt Kean said it was the first site that has

been nominated by the state government in over a decade. "This application is the result of close collaboration between NSW and the Commonwealth, as well as consultation with Aboriginal stakeholders and traditional owners on the significant cultural values the region has," said Kean. "This convention is the global gold standard for wetland conservation and will shine an international spotlight on the area driving economic opportunities, including tourism, for the local community." The listing coincides with the 50th anniversary of the Ramsar Convention. Kean said that there are a total of 2,400 wetlands listed worldwide, which protects over 254.6 million hectares of critical waterbird habitat.

## Rockets fired at Baghdad Green Zone



Baghdad | Agencies

Two Katyusha rockets were fired on Sunday on the heavily fortified Green Zone in Baghdad that houses the US Embassy, the Iraqi News Agency (INA) reported. One of the rockets was destroyed in the air by the C-RAM defence system, which protects the embassy site, and the other landed near the grand celebrations square in the

zone, damaging two civilian cars, Xinhua news agency quoted the INA report as saying. According to the INA, there were no immediate reports about casualties and that the security forces launched an investigation into the incident. The Green Zone, which also houses some main Iraqi government offices, has frequently been targeted by insurgent mortar and rocket attacks.

## MOON TO RECEIVE FINAL ANNUAL POLICY BRIEFINGS THIS WEEK

Seoul | Agencies

South Korean President Moon Jae-in will receive the government's annual policy briefings for the final time this week, his office said on Sunday. The 2022 briefings will begin Monday under the slogan, "Changes made with the people, a government fulfilling its responsibilities until the end", the presidential office or Cheong Wa Dae said in a statement. "Through the policy briefings, we plan to go through the achievements made during the five years of the Moon Jae-in administration and check the government's policy directions and main project plans up until May 2022," Yonhap News Agency quoted the statement as saying. Moon's single, five-year term is set to end in May



2022, and by law, he cannot seek re-election. This year, the briefings will be submitted by paper because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The government has chosen five top themes it will concentrate on until the end of the administration, and for each theme, scheduled a joint press briefing involving the rele-

vant ministries to explain its achievements and future goals to the public. On Wednesday, the Finance Ministry will be among the first to brief the nation on reviving people's livelihoods, along with the culture, labour, SMEs and agriculture ministries. On Thursday, the Unification Ministry will be joined by the Foreign and Defence

Ministries to give a press briefing on peace on the Korean Peninsula. The Land Ministry will give a presentation on stabilising the real estate market on December 27, followed by the Environment Ministry on carbon neutrality on December 28, and the Health Ministry on the Covid-19 response on December 30.

## GREEK PARLIAMENT APPROVED 2022 STATE BUDGET

Athens: The Greek Parliament has approved the 2022 state budget, which foresees strong economic growth for next year after 2021's overperformance. A year ago, the government had forecast 4.5 per cent growth for 2021, reports Xinhua news agency. Greece has registered a 9.3 per cent growth in the first nine months of 2021, one of the highest across the eurozone, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis noted, addressing the parliament shortly before the budget was approved by 158 lawmakers in the 300-member strong plenary. "This is the result of a policy which turned difficulties into opportunities and exceeded expectations. Our country moves forward with a dual growth, growth and social welfare," he said, according to Greek public broadcaster ERT. Despite the challenges, Greece has recovered all losses suffered due to the pandemic by focusing on innovation and extroversion, the Greek leader said, explaining the reasons of the positive outcome. So far, a minimum 4.5 per cent growth rate is expected for 2022. The unemployment rate is forecast to fall to 14.2 per cent next year from 15.9 per cent this year, while inflation rate is projected at 0.8 per cent in 2022. In order to help businesses and households cope with the increased energy costs, Mitsotakis also announced more relief measures during the debate, which include an increase in state subsidies for electricity bills and natural gas bills and additional aid for the agricultural sector.



# MAHARASHTRA WINTER SESSION SET TO BE STORMY

▶ THE SPEAKER OF THE MAHARASHTRA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY IS EXPECTED TO BE ELECTED DURING THE SESSION THROUGH A VOICE VOTE. THREE-TIME MLA FROM BHOR, SANGRAM THOPTHE, IS THE FRONTRUNNER FOR THE COVETED POST.

Zafar Alam Khan | Mumbai

The brief winter session of the Maharashtra legislature from 22-28 December is all set to be stormy with the opposition BJP ready to target the Maha Vikas Aghadi dispensation with a host of issues like Maratha reservation, political reservation vis-a-vis OBCs, Covid-19 pandemic situation and the Anil Deshmukh-Param Bir Singh row. The MVA, however, is planning to make the BJP uncomfortable on the issue of the October 2 Cordelia cruise ship raid in which 20 persons including Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan's son Aryan Khan was arrested. NCP chief spokesperson Nawab Malik, who is the Minority



Affairs Minister, has been targeting NCB's Mumbai Zonal Director Sameer Wankhede and has accused the BJP of protecting him. Malik's son-in-law Sameer Khan was arrested in a drugs case, however, he has been granted bail. The alleged desecration of a statue of legendary Maratha warrior Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in Bengaluru and the long-pending Maharashtra-Karnataka boundary dispute involving Belgaum is also expected to figure during the Vidhan Sabha proceedings.

For Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, who is back after surgery, it would not be easy sailing as the

BJP will target him on multiple fronts, particularly after the Supreme Court turning down political reservations for OBCs in local bodies.

The Speaker of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly is expected to be elected during the session through a voice vote.

The post of the Speaker has been vacant since the resignation of Nana Patole, who took over as the Maharashtra Congress President. "The election process for the post of Speaker takes at least three days, so the election could not take place so far. In the winter session, however, the Speaker of the Legislative

Assembly will be elected by voice vote," Patole said.

Three-time MLA from Bhore, Sangram Thopte, is the frontrunner for the coveted post.

The nearly two-month-old strike by the employees of the Maharashtra State Transport Corporation (MSRTC) will also figure as it has affected the common people badly including during the festive season of Diwali. State Transport Minister Anil Parab, who is a close aide of Thackeray, is facing severe criticism over the handling of the issue. The Shakti Bill, which has been drafted on the lines of the Disha Act, is also expected to come up for discussion.

The winter session of the Maharashtra Legislature is generally held in Nagpur, however, because of the pandemic situation, it is being held in Mumbai. Addressing a rally in Gondia on Saturday, Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnis has set the tone ahead of the sitting of the two Houses. "This MVA government is more interested in reducing liquor price than petrol, more interested in giving concessions to builders and bar owners than our farmers. Now, citizens of Maharashtra are trying to search for a Government who governs but people are unable to find any," he said.

## Minister compares roads to Hema Malini's cheeks, draws state women commission's ire

Commission says if the minister doesn't tender an apology, he will have to face legal action



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra minister and senior Shiv Sena leader Gulabrao Patil has kicked up a controversy by comparing the roads in his constituency in Jalgaon district to actor Hema Malini's cheeks, prompting the state women's commission to demand an apology from him.

The video of Patil's remarks, which he made recently while addressing an election meeting for the Bodhwad Nagar Panchayat polls in the dis-

trict, has gone viral on social media.

During the speech, Patil asked his opponents to visit his constituency to see how good the quality of roads there is.

"Those who have been MLAs for 30 years should come to my constituency and see the roads. If they are not like Hema Malini's cheeks, then I will resign," the minister said. Sanitation minister said, apparently targeting former BJP leader Eknath Khadse, who was an MLA

from Jalgaon for several years.

However, Rupali Chakankar, the chairperson of the Maharashtra State Commission for Women, took cognisance of the remarks and warned the minister of legal action if he did not tender a public apology.

"The commission has taken note of the comment. If the minister doesn't tender an apology, he will have to face legal action," Chakankar said in a video statement.

## Maharashtra reports six more cases of Omicron, India's tally rises to 151



Maharashtra reported 902 new Covid cases, 9 deaths and 767 recoveries in the past 24 hours. Now, the number of active cases stands at 7,068. With six more cases in Maharashtra, India's total tally rises to 151.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra on Sunday reported six more cases of infectious Omicron variant of Covid. This takes the total count to 54 in the state.

Overall, the state reported 902 new Covid cases, 9 deaths and 767 recoveries in the past 24 hours. Now, the number of active cases stands at 7,068.

So far Omicron cases have been detected in 11 states and Union Territories - Maharashtra (54), Delhi (22), Rajasthan (17) and Karnataka (14), Telangana (20), Gujarat (9), Kerala (11), Andhra Pradesh (1), Chandigarh (1), Tamil Nadu (1) and West Bengal (1).

With six more cases in Maharashtra, India's total tally rises to 151.

## Maharashtra government reacts sharply to Shivaji statue desecration in Bengaluru

Team Absolute | Mumbai

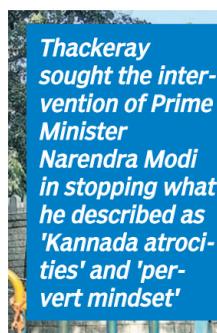
The Maharashtra government has reacted sharply to a viral video showing the desecration of a statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in the capital of neighbouring Karnataka, with Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray urging the Centre to take cognisance of the issue. The Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government also reiterated its support to members of the Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti (MES).

After the incident, there were protests in the state's bordering districts of Kolhapur and Sangli.

Thackeray sought the intervention of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in stopping what he described as 'Kannada atrocities' and 'pervert mindset'.

Thackeray said Modi should direct the Karnataka government to take action. He said the incident cannot be taken lightly. "For several years, the Marathi people in Karnataka have been facing atrocities and now the statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj is desecrated," he said in a statement.

Thackeray recalled a statement Prime Minister Modi made recently in



Thackeray sought the intervention of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in stopping what he described as 'Kannada atrocities' and 'pervert mindset'.



Varanasi that whenever the country's culture was crushed, warrior kings like Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj have emerged. "Just a few days after the statement, this incident occurred," he said. "People of the country will not forgive such an incident. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj is revered across the country," Deputy Chief Minister and NCP leader Ajit Pawar said. Pawar urged the Union and the Karnataka government to look into the issue seriously. "The accused must be

## Omicron, tightening global liquidity to squeeze Indian equities further

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Tightening global liquidity as well as concerns over the spread of Omicron will dent Indian equities during the trade week ahead.

Lately, FIIs outflows have pulled the equities lower and depreciated the Indian rupee. So far, the foreign institutions have sold over \$4 billion worth of equities in this quarter.

Consequently, the Indian market logged its second worst week in almost 10 months in the week ending Friday. Nevertheless, attractive valuations along with lower oil prices are expected to arrest the slide.

"From the top of 18,604, each of the Nifty's fall has been sharper than the preceding rises, with two weeks of rise getting nullified in just one week. This clearly shows the sell-on-rise behaviour of institutional investors and smart traders," said Deepak



Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

"In the process, Nifty logged its second worst week in 10 months. While the technical indicators are close to getting oversold, year-end selling pressure and fundamental macro concerns on the global front could postpone the bottom formation in the

near term," he added.

Besides, the commencement of holiday season is expected to lower the volumes during the upcoming week.

"The overall market remains in a tight range with bearish undertone, as selling pressure is intact at higher

levels. Negative global cues, continued FII selling, absence of any positive trigger and increasing cases of Omicron are likely to continue putting pressure on the market," said Siddhartha Khemka, Head of Retail Research, Broking & Distribution, Motilal Oswal Financial Services. "Next week, the market would eye

China's monetary policy outcome along with GDP data from the US and the UK," Khemka added.

According to Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services: "Since all major domestic macroeconomic data have been released, the week ahead will be driven by sentiments in the global markets. "Tightening liquidity in the global markets remains a concern, as this will tempt global investors to pull-out money from the emerging markets such as India."

On technical levels, Rohit Singre, Senior Technical Analyst at LKP Securities, said: "We may see more drag down towards the 17,100-17,000 mark, which is another support zone on the downside." On the higher side, immediate hurdle is formed near the 17,300-17,400 zone, and if we cross above the said levels, one can expect a positive breakout."

## Two arrested for assaulting police constable

According to the Mahatma Phule police, constable Swapnil Tajane was on duty on Thursday night when the truck driver along with his owner allegedly assaulted and pushed him on the floor.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In yet another shocking incident reported from Maharashtra's Kalyan region where a police constable was heckled while performing his duty. The incident came to light on Saturday when two men

assaulted a cop who stopped their truck over the suspicion of the illegal supply of sand.

The police filed a case against two accused who has been identified as Gautam and Govind Rathod. Reportedly, Gautam is the owner of the truck while Rathod works as his driver. As per the complaint, both manhandled constable Swapnil Tajane for doing his work.

In his complaint to the police department, Yogesh Patil, who is in charge of the Thane collector office revenue team. On Thursday night, the police team on patrolling stopped the truck over the doubt of illegal sand

supply.

When the police stopped the truck and enquired about the sand supply, the truck driver called up his owner. When police constable Tanjane tried to stop them, they started misbehaving with the cops. Both assaulted and mishandled the cop and pushed him on the floor.

A complaint has been filed with the Mahatma Phule police station in connection with the case. While commenting on the arrests made, police inspector Pradeep Patil said, "We have arrested both the accused and charged them for obstructing government servant from doing his duty," Patil added.

## 2 MONKEYS CAUGHT IN MAHARASHTRA IN 'REVENGE KILLING' OF 250 DOGS

The killings are said to be an act of revenge after an infant monkey was killed by dogs in the region.

Team Absolute | Nagpur

In a bizarre incident, two monkeys have been captured for allegedly being involved in the killings of nearly 250 dogs in a Maharashtra village. The killings are said to be an act of revenge after an infant monkey was killed by dogs in the region.

"Two monkeys involved in the killing of many puppies have been captured by a Nagpur Forest Department team in Beed," Sachin Kand, Beed Forest Officer, said.

The monkeys are being shifted to Nagpur and will be released in a nearby forest.

Locals said that the monkeys have been killing puppies for the last couple of months in Lavool village. As soon as they see a puppy, they would catch it and take it to place with



considerable height. The dog would then be thrown from there.

The villagers contacted Dharur's Forest Department after the monkeys attacked some school-going children as well, creating panic. The strange incident not only created a buzz among the villagers and authorities, but also meme creators on social media.

People on social media seemed to be taking sides in the 'Monkey vs Dogs gang war.'

Some users were concerned about the brutal conflict between the animals. "This #MonkeyVsDoge story is very disturbing, I have to say," tweeted actor Ranveer Shorey.

## WANTED CONMAN HELD FOR DUPING PEOPLE OF RS 2.5 CR IN PUNE

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Crime Branch of Delhi Police have arrested a wanted conman, who along with his associates cheated approximately Rs 2.5 crore from the gullible public by promising them freebies and bonus on their LIC policies, an official said on Sunday. According to the official, the accused's seven associates were earlier arrested by the police. The accused, identified as Sandeep Kumar Soni, carrying a bounty of Rs 25,000 on his head was arrested from Pune, Maharashtra.

Furnishing details about the case, DCP Manoj C. said in 2015, Executive Director, of LIC, New Delhi had filed a complaint, alleging that some culprits by impersonating as employees of LIC had duped people by offering lucrative benefits, i.e., freebies such as free credit card, mediclaim benefits of false claim like

direct transfer of commission to the policyholders' account.

"The policyholders were lured to make payments by cash/cheque in favour of some private agencies/companies such as Beyond Yatra Dream Come Pvt. Ltd., Light India Club Pvt. Ltd., Value Add Securities/Da Vision loyalty addition/Davis club etc.," the DCP said, adding, after receiving payment, the culprits stopped contacting policy holders, changed their mobile phones and thereby causing financial loss to customers.

On the said complaint, a case was registered and investigation of the case was taken up.

During the course of investigation, eight people were identified who were running a racket, and were targeting people of Delhi, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and MP and cheating them.

"They were using mobile numbers

which were procured on Fake Id's and were getting cheques in their firms or companies such as 'Beyond Yatra' 'Dreams come Pvt Ltd', 'Value Add Securities' and 'Light India Club Pvt Ltd', etc.," the official said.

Despite several efforts, accused Sandeep could not be arrested and a non-bailable warrant was issued against him by the court concerned.

A police team was constituted which collected details about the accused Sandeep and they found that he was a permanent resident of Bihar. However, he left Bihar and disguised himself in Pune, Maharashtra. The team collected the factual and technical information and raided all the possible hideouts in Delhi and Bihar.

"On specific information received by the team that he might be living in Pune under disguised identity, the police team raided locations in Pune and arrested him accordingly," the

official informed.

During interrogation, the accused Sandeep revealed that he along with his associates posed themselves as the officials of LIC and lured the victims to deposit money in different bank accounts opened on fake IDs on the pretext of offering incentive under their LIC policies.

He disclosed that he had opened offices and call centres in Mumbai, Maharashtra for cheating purposes under different names and firms. They called the victims to siphon off their hard-earned money by luring them on the pretext of higher bonuses and other freebies.

The police said that as per the investigation conducted so far, all the accused targeted people in Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, etc., and managed to cheat approximately Rs 2.5 crore.

"Further investigation into the case is still on," the police added.



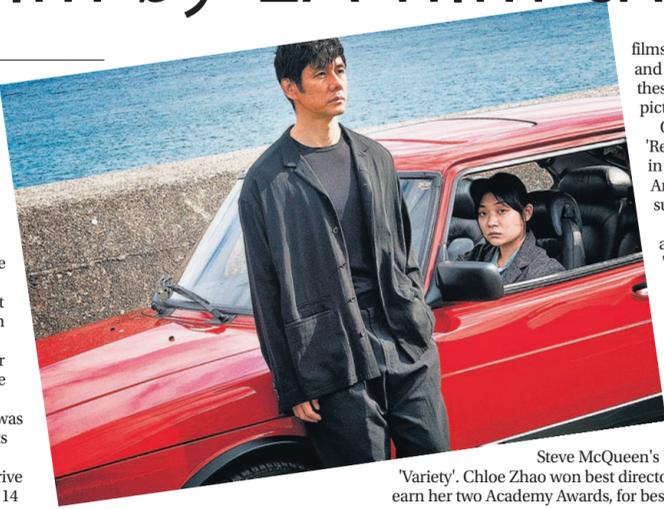
# 'Drive My Car' continues its winning spree, named best film by LA film critics

Los Angeles | Agencies

The Los Angeles Film Critics Association (LAFA) has named Ryusuke Hamaguchi's breakout drama 'Drive My Car' as the best film of the year, with Jane Campion's 'The Power of the Dog' taking the runner-up slot.

LAFA announced its list of best achievements in film in 2021 through its Twitter account. In the best director category, LAFA flipped the ranking, placing Campion ahead of Hamaguchi, who was voted the runner-up, reports 'Variety'.

With its best film win, 'Drive My Car' has become one of 14



Steve McQueen's 'Small Axe' best picture, according to 'Variety'. Chloe Zhao won best director for 'Nomadland', which went on to earn her two Academy Awards, for best director and best picture.

films to win the top prize from the LAFA and New York Film Critics Circle. Each of these films has gone on to become a best picture nominee for the Oscars.

Other big winners included Simon Rex in 'Red Rocket' for best actor, Penélope Cruz in 'Parallel Mothers' for best actress and Ariana DeBose in 'West Side Story' for best supporting actress.

The honour of being best supporting actor was shared by Vincent Lindon for 'Titane' and Australian actor Kodi Smit-McPhee for 'The Power of the Dog', who recently also won the same title at the 2021 New York Film Critics Circle Awards.

Mel Brooks received LAFA's 2021 career achievement award. This year's winners will be honoured alongside Brooks at a ceremony in 2022.

Last year, LAFA named director Mel Brooks as its 2020 best picture, according to 'Variety'. Chloe Zhao won best director for 'Nomadland', which went on to earn her two Academy Awards, for best director and best picture.



**BEN AFFLECK: I'M HAPPIEST WHEN I'M AROUND MY KIDS**

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Ben Affleck says he is happier the more time he spends with his children, as his life is the most fulfilled when he is spending time with his brood. Affleck told 'Good Morning America': "The only biography that needs anything is written on the hearts of your kids. I will be long dead, and someone will ask my kids 'What was your dad like' and that is when I will know what my life was worth."

"My life is better, and I am happier the more I am around my kids."

"We all want to pass on the best of ourselves to our children. I don't care who you are, I'm quite sure you feel at some point in your life you've taken missteps, nobody wants to transfer that to our children and that is a real task that everybody faces, whatever those issues are."

The 'Justice League' star recently landed himself in hot water when he made comments about his marriage to Jennifer Garner, as he said he would "probably still be drinking" if they were still married, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

He has since insisted his comments were taken out of context and during his interview on 'GMA', he said he feels "everybody needs second chances".

He added: "I feel like at the end of the day everybody needs second chances. I don't know anybody who does everything

right. We all fail. That's the truth. There aren't enough movies, there isn't enough success, not enough likes on Instagram. Those things will never fill you up or make you happy."

In his original comments, Ben said that had he not divorced Jennifer in 2018, he would feel "trapped".

He said: "We probably would've ended up at each other's throats. I'd probably still be drinking. It's part of why I started drinking because I was trapped."

"I was like 'I can't leave because of my kids, but I'm not happy, what do I do?' What I did was drink a bottle of scotch and fall asleep on the couch, which turned out not to be the solution."

And he later said his comments were taken out of context, as he clarified he had also spoken about how "proud" he is of the way he and Jennifer co-parent their brood.

He said: "We talked a lot about my family, you know, alcoholism, struggling with real things, how you have to be accountable and loving, how I work with my ex-wife, how I'm so proud of the way we work together for our kids, the best that we can for them."

"I was thrilled. I thought, 'Wow, I should do more honest, exploratory, self-evaluating things.' Then I start seeing all this stuff come up on Twitter. And I was like, what is this?"

## Keanu Reeves on 'Matrix' co-star: It's so special to work with Carrie-Anne Moss

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Keanu Reeves, who is gearing up for the release of his upcoming film 'The Matrix Resurrections', has talked about working with actress Carrie-Anne Moss once again in the film.

Reeves said: "It's so special and such a pleasure to work with Carrie-Anne and really to partner up, to be that kind of single element, but the duality of the characters being this one thing in their love."

"It's such a pleasure to play the connection that Thomas Anderson and Trinity have, and she's an exceptional artiste, a righteous soul. It was a real pleasure to work together again."

Talking about new talent such as Jessica Henwick, Yahya Abdul-Mateen II, Neil Patrick Harris, Jonathan Groff coming in, he said: "It was really cool just to be working with artistes who had such an affection and enthusiasm for the project, and then to work with them

and to experience all of their extraordinary, talented commitment. It's a real pleasure."

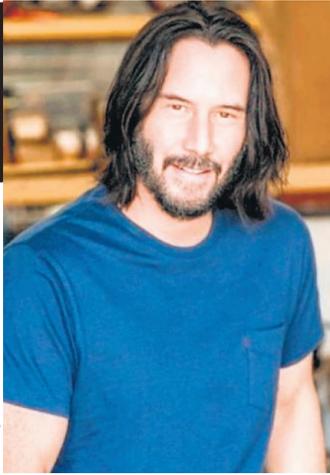
Directed by Lana Wachowski, 'The Matrix Resurrections', is a science fiction action film. It is the sequel to 'The Matrix Revolutions' (2003) and the fourth installment in 'The Matrix' film series.

Keanu Reeves, Carrie-Anne Moss, Lambert Wilson, and Jada Pinkett Smith reprise their roles from previous films in the series.

What did Reeves think about this new take on this iconic trilogy?

"I thought it was a beautiful script. I thought it was a beautiful love story, and I thought it was very up to date and important medicine for the days that we have."

"As I feel 'The Matrix', 'Reloaded' and 'Revolutions' had a cautionary tale and kind of inspiring messages, I felt like 'Resurrections' was embracing and speaking to where we are today and hopefully will be as inspiring."

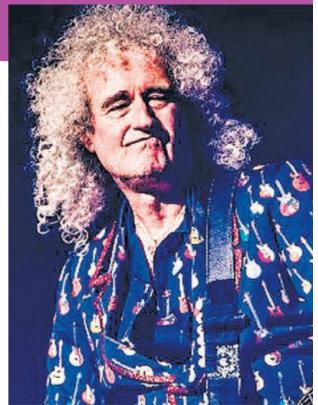


## Queen lead guitarist Brian May tests positive for Covid

Los Angeles | Agencies

Brian May, the lead guitarist of the rock band Queen, has tested positive for Covid-19. He shared the news on Instagram: "Yep. The shocking day finally came for me. The dreaded double red line. And yes - definitely NO sympathy please - it has been a truly horrible few days, but I'm OK." "And I will tell the tale. PLEASE take extra care out there, good folks. This thing is incredibly transmissible. You really do NOT want it messing up YOUR Christmas. With love - Bri." He also posted a photo of his test result, variety.com reported. The news comes as the number of Covid cases continue to rise. The new variant of the virus,

Omicron, continues to push the daily case-load to a new pandemic record. On Thursday, more than 88,376 Covid cases were confirmed in the UK, with over 11,000 cases of Omicron identified. Yet, without official government guidance asking businesses to close, cinemas and live theaters remain open and, as was the case throughout much of the pandemic, production of movies and television shows also continue following Covid safety protocols. Brian May co-founded Queen with lead singer Freddie Mercury and drummer Roger Taylor, and helped write some of their most anthemic songs including 'We will rock you', 'Hammer to Fall', 'Who Wants to Live Forever' and 'I Want It All'.



Los Angeles | Agencies

Tom Holland-starrer 'Spider-Man: No Way Home' has raked in a whopping \$121.5 million on Friday from 4,336 locations, putting itself on the path toward a projected \$242 million opening weekend.

That's a performance the likes of which haven't been seen since 2019's 'Avengers: Endgame', which hit a \$156.7 million opening day, months before the world had even heard about Covid, reports variety.com.

Not only is 'No Way Home' the first pandemic-era film to surpass the \$100 million mark in its first weekend of release, but its success measures out the parameters of a pandemic-era box office in general.

The film scored the second highest opening day in the history of the domestic box office. The \$121.5 million single-day total also measures up as the highest December opening ever and a franchise-best for Sony's 'Spider-Man' series, outperforming the three-day totals of 2017's 'Homecoming' and 'Far From Home' in just one outing.

Due to high anticipation and a spoiler-phobic culture among fans, Marvel films tend to skew front-

**'SPIDER-MAN: NO WAY HOME' SWINGING TO MASSIVE \$240MN DEBUT AFTER RECORD-BREAKING OPENING DAY**

loaded in their debut weekends, with many viewers making the effort to see a new release as quickly as possible.

However, when opening weekends get this big, the numbers can begin to snowball instead of trending down.

'Endgame' extended its \$156.7 million opening day to a \$357.1 million weekend, while 2018's 'Avengers: Infinity War' went from a \$106 million opening day to a \$257.6 million weekend.

'No Way Home' trends similarly to those monster performances, its final weekend total could exceed the projected \$242 million.

Directed by Jon Watts, 'No Way Home' picks up after Peter Parker's

superhero identity is revealed to the everyone, sending his world as well as those of his girlfriend MJ's (Zendaya), Aunt May's (Marisa Tomei) and best friend Ned's (Jacob Batalon) into spin.

In an attempt to return to normalcy, Parker confides in Doctor Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch) and asks the Sorcerer Supreme to cast a spell making the world forget that he is Spider-Man.

The incantation goes awry, unleashing a multiverse of villains from the universes of other Spider-Men, including Willem Dafoe's Green Goblin, Jamie Foxx's Electro and Alfred Molina's Doctor Octopus.

## BRIT AWARDS: ADELE, ED SHEERAN, DAVE, LITTLE SIMZ LEAD 2022 NOMINATIONS

Los Angeles | Agencies

The Brit Awards, one of Britain's biggest music events, have unveiled their 2022 nominees, with the likes of ABBA, Adele, Ed Sheeran, Måneskin and Olivia Rodrigo up for awards.

Adele and Ed Sheeran picked up four nominations each with both getting nods for album of the year, artist of the year, best pop/R&B act and song of the year. Also scoring four nominations were British rapper Dave (album and artist of the year, best hip hop/rap/grime act and song of the year) and British singer-rapper Little Simz, reports variety.com.

'Good 4 U' singer Olivia Rodrigo has been nominated for international artist and song of the year awards, while ABBA is up for international group of the year and Italian glam rock band Måneskin "the 2021 Eurovision Song Contest winners" received nods for international group and song of the year.

The awards courted controversy this fall after revealing plans to drop gendered categories and institute just single best British artist and best international artist awards.

The rule change prompted concerns that female artists, many of whom are already at a disadvantage in a male-dominated industry, are more likely to miss out on awards.

For two consecutive years, the



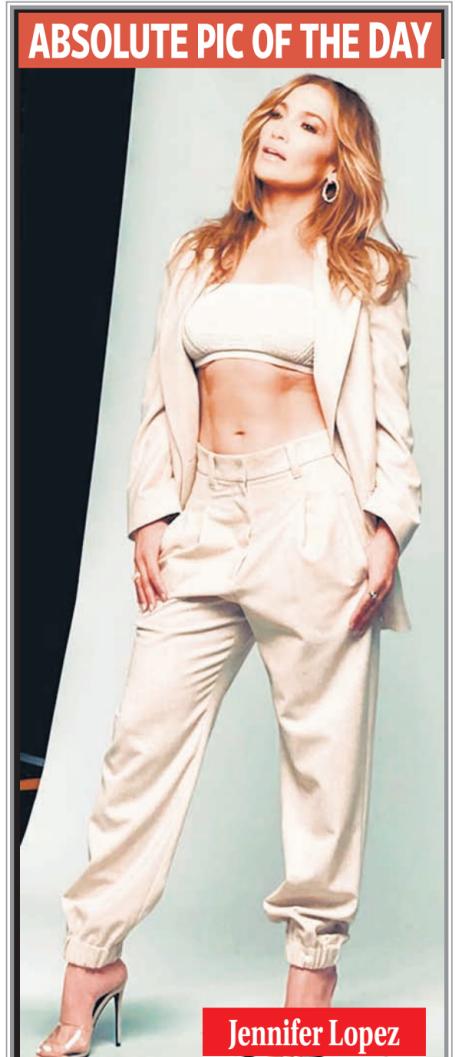
best song category, which is chosen from a shortlist of 10 nominees, has only fielded one female lead artist on a track: Dua Lipa in 2021 and Mabel in 2020. And in 2020, two supposedly gender-neutral award categories "best group and best album" didn't nominate a single female artist.

One vocal critic for the move was Queen's Brian May, who said the decision had been "made without a lot of thought."

"I don't know what the long-term consequences are," May said. "A lot of things work quite well and can be left alone. I think some things need to go back."

In a statement, Brit Awards organisers "under the new leadership of Polydor co-president Tom March" said the change was made to celebrate "artists solely for their music and work, rather than how they choose to identify or as others may see them, as part of the Brits' commitment to evolving the show to be as inclusive and as relevant as possible."

Last year's Brit Awards, held in May, were one of the first major live events to take place in Britain amid the pandemic, carried out as part of a government pilot project for live events.



Jennifer Lopez



## Yash Dhull to lead India in ICC U19 Cricket World Cup 2022

Mumbai | Agencies

Delhi lad Yash Dhull will lead the 17-member Indian squad in the ICC U19 Cricket World Cup 2022 to be played in the West Indies from January 14 to February 5 across four host countries. SK Rasheed of Andhra Cricket Association will be Dhull's deputy, the BCCI said in a statement on Sunday.

"The All-India Junior Selection Committee has picked India's squad for the upcoming ICC Under 19 Men's Cricket World Cup to be played in the West Indies from January 14 to February 5, 2022 across four host countries. The 14th edition of the tournament will see 16 teams competing for the trophy in 48 matches," the statement read. India are the most successful team having won four titles in 2000, 2008, 2012 and 2018. India have also been runner-up in 2016 and in the previous edition of the tournament held in 2020 in New Zealand.

The format will see the top two teams from each of the four groups advance to the Super League while the remaining teams feature in



the Plate across 23 days of competition. India U19 are placed in Group B.

India U19 squad: Yash Dhull (Captain), Harnoor Singh, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, SK Rasheed, Nishant Sindhu, Siddarth Yadav, Aneeshwar Gautam, Dinesh Bana (WK), Aaradhya Yadav (WK), Raj Angad Bawa, Manav Parakh, Kaushal Tambe, RS Hangargekar, Vasu Vats, Vicky Ostwal, Ravikumar, Garv Sangwan

Standby players: Rishit Reddy, Uday Saharan, Ansh Gosai, Amrit Raj Upadhyay, PM Singh Rathore. India's fixtures at ICC U19 World Cup 2022: India vs South Africa - January 15, Providence Stadium, Guyana (19:30), India vs Ireland - January 19, Brian Lara Cricket Academy, Trinidad and Tobago (19:30), India vs Uganda - January 22, Brian Lara Cricket Academy, Trinidad and Tobago (19:30).

## ASHES, 2ND TEST: AUSTRALIA IN FIRM CONTROL, NEED SIX WICKETS TO TAKE 2-0 LEAD IN SERIES

Adelaide | Agencies

Australia maintained their firm control on the second Ashes Test, taking out four England wickets before the fourth day of the second Test ended at the Adelaide Oval. After half-centuries from Travis Head and Marnus Labuschagne enabled the hosts to declare with a lead of 467 runs, Australia then took out England's top four, including captain Joe Root on the final ball of the day, to leave the visitors at 82/4 in 43.2 overs. With only the fifth day left, Australia now need six wickets to go 2-0 up in the five-match series while England need to bat three sessions to save the match. After setting a target of 468 for England, Australia took only 12 balls to take out the first wicket. Haseeb Hameed fell for a duck, gloving a ball behind to keeper Alex Carey that bounced off a length from Jhye Richardson. Rory Burns and Dawid Malan survived till tea break and 40 minutes after the interval, Nathan Lyon got one to turn away and take the outer edge of Malan's bat, to be put down by Steve Smith at first slip. But in the next over, Malan couldn't make the most of the dropped chance, trapped lbw on the front pad by Michael Neser, and burnt a review as well, ending the 44-run stand for the second wicket.

Burns, looking comfortable for the first time in the series, was given out caught behind against Cameron Green but got to change the decision



### Brief scores

Australia 473/9 dec in 150.4 overs and 230/9 dec in 61 overs (Travis Head 51, Marnus Labuschagne 51, Joe Root 2/27, Dawid Malan 2/33) against England 236 all out in 84.1 overs and 20/1 in eight overs (Rory Burns 34, Joe Root 24, Jhye Richardson 2/17), England need 386 runs to win the match.

as the ball flicked his back leg on the way to keeper Alex Carey. But Richardson, who troubled the opener with cross-seam deliveries, came back to take out Burns for a fighting 34, nicking to Smith for a low catch at second slip. Joe Root and Ben Stokes fought hard to survive till stumps but a blow to the abdomen, where he was hit during the practice session before the start of the day, caused Root a lot of discomfort. After the blow, Root wasn't moving well and nicked behind to Carey off Starc at the stroke of stumps. Earlier, Head and Labuschagne notched up half-centuries to help Australia recover from 55/4 to reach 230/9 and swelling the

lead beyond 450 in the process. The start of the day wasn't rosy for the hosts. In an action-packed first session, England bossed the first half while Australia took charge in the second hour. Resuming from an overnight score of 54/1, nightwatchman Neser was nearly run out on the first ball of the day. In the next over, Neser was bowled through the gate by James Anderson getting one to jag back in. England got their second wicket in just three balls as Stuart Broad extracted a thick outside edge from Marcus Harris' bat and keeper Jos Buttler took a flying one-handed screamer of a catch to his left. Broad almost had Smith dismissed for a

golden duck if not for Buttler dropping the catch to his right. On the very next ball, Broad rapped Smith on the pads, which was adjudged not out. England took the DRS but Smith survived as replays showed impact as umpire's call. But the Australia captain couldn't make the most of the twin lives as he glved behind to a diving Buttler off Robinson. Head and Labuschagne stitched a counter-attacking partnership for the fifth wicket to ensure Australia didn't lose any other wicket in a see-saw session. Head was the more aggressive of the two, striking boundaries while Labuschagne took his time to get going. Post dinner, Head began by smashing past Chris Woakes for four and then pulled for two through mid-wicket to bring up a half-century at his home ground. But in the next over, Head went for a pull against Robinson, only for a brilliant diving effort from Stokes at deep mid-wicket to send the left-hander back to the pavilion. Labuschagne continued to march and reached his half-century with a single through square-leg off Robinson for the second time in the match. Labuschagne fell as he slog-swept straight to deep mid-wicket off Malan. An arm ball from Root saw Carey chop onto his stumps. Richardson and Starc slammed a six each but when the duo got out in successive overs, Australia declared their innings for the second time in the match, ending England's agony on the field, only to pile more pain by the time stumps were called.

## India ease past Japan, maintain unbeaten run in Men's Asian Champions Trophy 2021

Dhaka | Agencies

The Indian Men's Hockey Team is on a roll as they continued their unbeaten run at the 2021 Asian Champions Trophy, with a brilliant 6-0 win over Japan in the round-robin stage, here on Sunday.

Harmanpreet Singh (10', 53'), Dilpreet Singh (23'), Jarnmanpreet Singh (34'), Sumit (46'), and Shamsher Singh (54') scored the goals as Team India picked up a big win. India are in contention for their third consecutive title at the Asian Champions Trophy, having won the prestigious tournament in 2016 and joint winners in 2018. Team India's dynamic frontline started troubling the Japanese defence as soon as the hooter blew, as they received a flurry of penalty corners early on in the first quarter. Defender Harmanpreet Singh made the most of the opportunity in the 10th minute, as he converted it into the 1st goal for India. India camped inside Japan's circle in



the final few minutes of the first quarter. Young forward Shilanand Lakra and experienced striker Lalit Kumar Upadhyay managed to get shots on target but were denied by Japan goalkeeper Takashi Yoshikawa. As soon as the second quarter started, Japan started working hard to find the equaliser. In the 21st minute, Japan received a penalty corner, but once again, the Indian defence was up to the task and denied Japan the equaliser. Dilpreet Singh continued his goal-scoring form, as he put the

ball back into the net in the 23rd minute to score the second goal for India. Japan bagged another penalty corner in the dying minutes of the second quarter but were yet again unable to breach India's defence. After half-time, Japan started showing attacking intent to cover up the deficit quickly and immediately attempted to make circle penetrations. But India continued to defend well, leaving no gaps for Japan forwards to get a shot away. Jarnmanpreet Singh scored from a reverse hit in the

34th minute to extend India's lead to 3-0. India goalkeeper Suraj Karkera made two important saves in the third quarter with Kenta Tanaka making threatening penetrations inside India's circle, and India maintained their clean sheet going into the final 15 minutes of play. Early on in the fourth and final quarter, Sumit scored the fourth goal in the 46th minute after India surprised Japan's defence with quick penetrations and passes. Japan's defence faltered, awarding India a late penalty corner, and Harmanpreet Singh converted it into a goal with ease, adding in the 5th goal for India in the 53rd minute. A minute later, Shilanand Lakra combined with Shamsher Singh as the latter scored the 6th goal for India in the 54th minute. Japan made penetrating runs in the final few minutes, but Team India maintained their calm and came away with another clean sheet, winning the match 6-0.

India will play in the semi-final on Tuesday.

Washington | Agencies

American tennis player Jennifer Brady has pulled out of next month's Australian Open due to a left foot injury, the tournament organisers said on Sunday.

The 26-year-old Brady reached her maiden grand slam final at last year's event at Melbourne Park, losing in straight sets to Naomi Osaka. "Our 2021 finalist @jennifurbrady95 has withdrawn from #AusOpen 2022 due to a left foot injury. Wishing you a speedy recovery Jen," the Aus Open said in a tweet. The world number 25 has not played since retiring from her second-round match against Latvia's Jelena Ostapenko at the Western & Southern Open in Cincinnati in August. She has now joined the list of



players - Karolina Pliskova, Serena Williams, Bianca Andreescu and Roger

Federer in missing the tournament, which is set to be played from January 17.

## India vs South Africa: Our fast bowlers are our strength, says Cheteshwar Pujara

Johannesburg | Agencies

Test specialist Cheteshwar Pujara has said that the Indian bowlers have always made the difference in overseas Tests, and now expects the best from them in the upcoming three-match series against South Africa.

India and South Africa will clash in the three-match Test series before the two sides meet in the limited-overs format. The Test series begins on December 26. The team has reached Johannesburg on Friday and have already started preparing for the Boxing Day Test.

"Our fast bowlers have been the difference between the two sides whenever we have played abroad. If you look at the Australia series, even if you look at the



England series, we have done exceptionally well as a bowling unit and I am sure that will be the case even in South Africa," Pujara was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo. "Our fast bowlers are our strength and I hope that they will be able to utilise these conditions and give us 20

wickets in every Test match," he added. Last month, India defeated New Zealand in the Test series 1-0 and the right-handed batsman feels this is the best opportunity for the squad to clinch the series in South Africa.

"The good thing is we played a couple of Test matches in India. So most of the guys are in touch, and when it comes to preparation, the support staff has been excellent. They have been supporting us well and we have five or six days more before we head into the first Test," said Pujara.

"I am sure there is enough time for us to prepare and guys are looking forward to this series. This is the best opportunity for us to win our first series in South Africa. So all of us are looking forward to it," he added.

## GURMAIL KAUR SHINES AS RAJA KARAN ACADEMY HOLD SAI B TO A 2-2 DRAW

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Gurmail Kaur wrested the attention with two goals that saw her claim a share of the leading scorers and help Raja Karan Hockey Academy, Karnal, pinch a 2-2 draw with Sports Authority of India (SAI) B in the Khelo India U21 Women's Hockey League here on Sunday. Gurmail Kaur's ball sense and opportunism stood her in good stead as she scored twice in the final quarter to deny SAI B full points. Her twin strikes saw her rise to the top of the goal scorers list with 10 goals. India Juniors' ace Deepika scored twice in her team's 12-0 win against Khalsa Hockey Academy to join Gurmail at the top. Looking for their fourth win, SAI B did well to score once in each of the first two quarters to go into the half-time break with the lead. But as the only Group A sides playing their fifth matches in a row, both SAI B and Raja Karan HA were getting weary in the second half at the Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium. Gurmail Kaur found the



energy and the openings to slot home twice, the second coming moments from time. India Juniors maintained their winning vein by recording their fourth straight victory, a 12-0 verdict over Khalsa Hockey Academy, Amritsar. Mumtaz Khan, who opened the scoring, finished with four goals to take her personal tally to nine. India

Juniors will meet Odisha Naval Tata HHPAC and Mumbai Schools Sports Association in the remaining matches. Har Hockey Academy fought long and hard to post a solitary goal win against Sports Authority of India A. It defender Saavi's third-minute goal till the very end to secure its fourth win in as many matches and top Group B with

12 points, ahead of Madhya Pradesh Hockey Academy, Bhopal, which has 10 points from four games. The two top teams will clash on Tuesday.

### RESULTS

Group A: India Juniors 12 (Mumtaz Khan 4th minute, 21, 33, 48, Deepika 15, 47, Priyanka 19, Sangita Kumari 25, Annu 28 and 24, Ishika Chaudhary 39, Rujuta Pisai 55) beat Khalsa Hockey Academy 0. Half-time: 6-0. Sports Authority of India B 2 (Mary Lotla 15, Vinamrata Yadav 30) drew with Raja Karan Hockey Academy 2 (Gurmail Kaur 48, 60). Half-time: 2-0. Him Hockey Academy 9 (Navjot Kaur 5, 13, 28 and 45, Taranpreet Kaur 11 and 56, Sarabdeep Kaur 24, Shivani Sahu 32, Raveen Rani 42) beat Mumbai School Sports Association 0. Half-time: 5-0. Group B: Har Hockey Academy 1 (Saavi 15) beat Sports Authority of India A. Half-time: 1-0.

## ROOT OVERTAKES COOK, BECOMES HIGHEST RUN-SCORER AS ENGLAND TEST CAPTAIN

Adelaide | Agencies

During his stay of 24 in the second innings of second Ashes Test at the Adelaide Oval, Joe Root overtook former skipper Sir Alastair Cook for the record of most runs by an England captain in Test cricket.

Root has surpassed Cook's tally of 4844 runs as the Test captain of the team in his 58th match as the skipper - completing the feat in one match and five innings quicker than his captaincy predecessor, to be at 4859 runs at an average of 47.63.

Root, currently ranked number one Test batter in the world, is enjoying a sublime run-making spree with the bat. He is the leading run-scorer in

Test cricket in 2021, amassing 1630 runs in 14 Tests and though his stay at the crease was cut short on Sunday, Root will get a chance to add more to his tally in the Boxing Day Test at Melbourne.

"Another one gone to Joe Root - I haven't got many left. He's slowly but surely edging his way into England's greatest batsman and he is pretty much there," said Cook on BT Sport.

Earlier, during his knock of 62 in the first innings at the Adelaide Oval, Root went past Indian legends Sachin Tendulkar (1562 runs in 2010), Sunil Gavaskar (1555 runs in 1979) and former Australia captain Michael Clarke (1595 runs in 2012) to be at fourth place for most Test runs in a year. He also became only the second



captain after Graeme Smith (1656 runs in 2008) to score 1600+ runs in a year in Test cricket. Root is just behind former Pakistan batter Mohammad Yousuf, who made a jaw-dropping 1788 in just 11 Tests in 2006 at an average of 99.33, followed by West Indies legend Viv Richards, who scored 1710 runs in 11 Tests at an average of 90.00 in 1976 and former South Africa skipper Graeme Smith, who amassed 1656 runs in 15 innings at an average of 72.

The 30-year-old Root is already the highest run-scoring England player in a single calendar year of Test cricket, having gone past former captain Michael Vaughan's 1871 runs in 2002 during the first Ashes Test in Brisbane.



# 'Spider-Man: No Way Home' beats 'Sooryavanshi'



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Tom Holland-starrer 'Spider-Man: No Way Home' has had a glorious first weekend (Thursday to Saturday) in India, grossing Rs 100.84 crore (Rs 79.14 crore after tax).

With the Sunday collection figures yet to come in, Spidey seems to be sitting pretty on top of the box-office, having

beaten the Akshay Kumar-starrer 'Sooryavanshi', which netted Rs 77.08 crore in its first three days.

Tweeting about this, senior trade analyst Taran Adarsh asked his followers to "expect another big day" on Sunday. The film, which is swinging past box-office records globally, has been released theatrically in English, Hindi, Tamil and Telugu.

Internationally, the film earned a

record \$121.5 million on Friday from 4,336 locations and it was projected to net \$242 million in its opening weekend worldwide.

For the cinema exhibition business, this calls for celebrations, because for the first time since 'Star Wars: Episode IX - The Rise of Skywalker' in December 2019, a movie will cross \$100 million in its opening weekend in the US.

The big question now is whether Spidey will be able to cross the total collection figures of 'Avengers: Endgame' (2019), which has netted Rs 446 crore thus far, to become the most successful Hollywood film in India.

'Avengers: Endgame' is at No. 6 on the list of 50 top grossing films in India, which is topped by the multi-language 'Baahubali 2: The Conclusion' (Rs 1,429 crore), followed by Rajinikanth's '2.0', Aamir Khan-starrer 'Dangal', 'Baahubali: The Beginning' and 'PK', which also had Aamir playing the lead role.

Three other Hollywood films figure in the Top 50 -- 'Avengers: Infinity War' (No. 21), 'The Jungle Book' (No. 28) and 'Lion King' (No. 47).

## DIVYANSHA KAUSHIK TO PLAY FEMALE LEAD IN 'MICHAEL'



Team Absolute | Chennai

Actress Divyansha Kaushik will play the female lead in director Ranjith Jeyakodi's multilingual action thriller 'Michael', featuring Sandeep Kishan in the lead. The film, which is being made in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Hindi, already has director Gautham Vasudev Menon and Vijay Sethupathy playing important roles in it.

Making the announcement on social media, director Ranjith Jeyakodi said, "Michael finds his 'Theera'! Welcoming the gorgeous Divyansha Kaushik as the mysterious Theera. Actor Sandeep Kishan too welcomed the actress by tweeting, "Welcoming the gorgeous and extremely hardworking Divyansha Kaushik as our mysterious Theera. Looking forward to watching you bring her magic to life." The film has generated quite a bit of interest right from the time director Ranjith first released its title poster. Along with the poster, Ranjith wrote in Tamil, "A wise man once said that man, by nature, is not a docile creature who prefers peace. He is a creature who is constantly expecting to be attacked and therefore ready to hit back hard!"



## 'PARTY SONG OF THE YEAR' SHOWCASES FUN SIDE OF AKKINENI DUO IN 'BANGARRAJU'

Team Absolute | Hyderabad

The makers of upcoming Telugu movie 'Bangarraju', starring Akkineni Nagarjuna alongside his son Naga Chaitanya, have released a cheerful number from the movie with the lyrics 'Vaasivaadi Thassadiyaa'.

The makers have termed the number as the "party song of the year", while they have roped in 'Jaathi Rathnalu' fame Faria Abdullah to jive with the Akkineni father-son duo.

The lyrics of the song are penned by the director by Kalyan Krishna Kurasala himself, while it is sung by Mohana Bhogaraju, Shahiti Chaganti, and Harshavardhan Chavali.

The music for the movie 'Bangarraju' is composed by Anup Rubens. The lyric video released by the 'Bangarraju' team features Naga Chaitanya in a rustic avatar, while he jives with Faria Abdullah.

Nagarjuna and Ramya Krishna join them in parts, making the song more

groovy. The video hints that the Akkinenis are to appear in perky roles in the movie.

Nagarjuna appeared in traditional dhoti, while Chaitanya is dressed in a colourful outfit, while Faria allures in a glitzy attire.

Nagarjuna and Naga Chaitanya are to share the screen for the second time after classic hit 'Manam'.

Slated for release in 2022, commercial entertainer 'Bangarraju' also stars Ramya Krishna and Krithi Shetty as the female leads.

Directed by Kalyan Krishna Kurasala, the film's promotions are in full swing.

'Bangarraju', which is billed as the sequel to Nagarjuna's blockbuster 'Soggade Chinni Nayana', is progressing with its shoot and the makers are to decide on the release date soon.

Zee Studios is co-producing the project with Annapurna Studios Pvt Ltd. Nagarjuna is the producer and Satyanand has penned the screenplay, while Yuvaraj handles the cinematography.

## Prakash Jha to direct web biopic on ex-PM Narasimha Rao

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Veteran Telugu film producer Allu Aravind has collaborated with National Award-winning filmmaker Prakash Jha for the biopic series of former Prime Minister PV. Narasimha Rao.

In conversation with IANS, Aravind shares the importance of making a biopic on India's first Prime Minister from the south and why Jha is the best choice to bring the story alive on screen. Aravind, also the father of Telugu star Allu Arjun, under his Aha Studio has collaborated with Applause Entertainment and with Samir Nair and Prakash Jha, he made the official announcement of the web series.

Aravind told IANS "There are many stories from the south that we feel deserve to come out on the national platform. We have identified around four to five such big stories that should be made and released on national platforms.

"The biographical web series of our former PM PV. Narasimha Rao is one such story. He was the only south Indian who became the prime minister in our independent India. He reformed the economy in a manner that we are still enjoying the results of it. But the audience does not know about his contribution to the economic transformation, because he did not take much credit for it. So people give credit to one of our other former PMs Dr Manmohan Singh.

The idea of making the web series is to put everything on the table. Bringing the fascinating political journey of Mr Rao. We will make it in multiple languages - Telugu, Tamil and Hindi because Rao himself was multilingual. He knew 16 languages."

On Prakash Jha as director of the web series, Arvind said, "I think we couldn't have had a better filmmaker than Prakash Jha saab to helm a political story. He is an expert in telling political drama series. Mr Rao was one of the very interesting and important political personalities in Indian politics. Prakash saab is the best to tell such stories." The story of the web series will be based on the book 'Half Lion' written by historian Vinay Sitapati.

Asked about the announcement of casting and who will be playing Rao in the web series, Arvind said, "I think it is too early to talk about it because now we have started the pre-production. Prakash saab is occupied in finishing his latest project and once that is sorted we will sit down to zero down on one actor for the lead role. That apart we need to plan for the casting of the entire show for which I will have a discussion with Samir saab, Prakash saab before making



the final announcement."

While the web series will be streaming on Aha OTT service for Telugu content, with this series, they have decided to expand the horizon with new content in a different language.

Asked if they have decided to release it on any other platform, Arvind shared, "Other than my platform Aha, on the national scale of its release, we understand that there are some of the prominent OTT platforms like Netflix, Amazon, Disney+ Hotstar, SonyLIV etc. But we will have to take a collective decision on that matter." You see this is not a commissioned project by any platform, it is an independent web series that will go on the platform once the product is ready. So, currently, our focus is pre-production and eventually, we will decide the platform for its nationwide release."



## Salman shakes a leg on 'Jumme Ki Raat'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A video of Bollywood superstar Salman Khan shaking a leg with fellow stars Anil Kapoor and Shilpa Shetty on the number 'Jumme Ki Raat' has been doing the rounds on social media. The actors were seen dancing on the number at senior politician Praful Patel's son's wedding function in Jaipur on Saturday. In the clip, the 'Dabangg' star looks dapper in a blue suit, Shilpa in a red ensemble and Anil in a black 'achkan' as they join Patel's family on stage.

Salman is seen doing the hook dance steps and even blows a kiss. Speaking about his upcoming slate of work, Salman is all set to shoot for the next instalment in the 'Ek Tha Tiger franchise' and Anil has wrapped up his upcoming film 'Jug Jugg Jeeyo' with Neetu Kapoor, Varun Dhawan and Kiara Advani.



## Alia Bhatt mouths Balakrishna's viral dialogue

Team Absolute | Hyderabad

The grand finale of 'Bigg Boss Telugu 5' saw an ensemble of stars on the dais as Bollywood actress Alia Bhatt wowed the audience when she mouthed Balakrishna's famous dialogue from 'Simhaa'.

As the winner of 'Bigg Boss Telugu 5' is to lift the trophy, India's biggest celebrities are to grace the event on Sunday.

The producers unveiled a promo featuring the stars on Sunday before the event starts. Alia Bhatt, who is to allure the audience in S.S. Rajamouli's 'RRR', is seen interacting with the finalists of 'Bigg Boss Telugu 5'.

As a part of the promo, Alia utters the viral dialogue from Nandamuri Balakrishna's hit 'Simhaa'. As Alia Bhatt utters 'Dhabidi Dhibide', the audience goes crazy in the promos. Ace director Rajamouli with Bollywood stars Ranveer Singh and Alia Bhatt are to appear on the show, while director Sukumar, Rashmika Mandanna, and Devi Sri Prasad from the 'Pushpa' team are also seen in the promos of the upcoming finale event. Shyam Singha Roy stars Nani, Sai Pallavi, and Krithi Shetty are also among the guests who enter the 'Bigg Boss' house at the grand finale event.

With many more performances by Shriya Saran, Rahul Sipligunj, Arun Kaundinya, and the ex-contestants of 'Bigg Boss Telugu 5', the promos have raised the buzz around the finale event. Ram Charan and Jr NTR are also among the guests who are expected to attend the Live event of 'Bigg Boss Telugu 5' grand finale. '83' actor Ranveer Singh is to be on the stage as well, while Deepika Padukone will interact on the show via video conference.

VJ Sunny, singer Sreerama Chandra and Shanmukh Jaswanth are in the race to win the title, as Siri and Manas are eliminated from the list.

## Parineeti Chopra: Don't want to do a project for the wrong reasons

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood actress Parineeti Chopra says she doesn't want to do a project for the wrong reasons and that she would want to be a part of work she believes in.

In 2021, Parineeti had three back-to-back releases such as 'The Girl On The Train', 'Saina' and 'Sandeep aur Pinky Faraar'.

Talking about the kind of work she is looking forward to doing now, the actress in a chat with IANS said: "Just want to do the kind of work I believe in. I don't want to do a project for the wrong reasons."

She added: "There are films that you do only for the hero that is attached, sometimes you do it for the song that you get or sometimes you do it because your days are free. There are so many wrong reasons... and I never want to do a film for the wrong reason." The 33-year-old actress says she always wants to "believe in a film, character and go with my gut." She added: "People have shown faith in me... Whether I am high or low... filmmakers have shown faith in me and they are the ones who have not given up on me and they are the ones who always gave me confidence. I have to make choices that live up to such expectations. And I never want to do a film for any other substandard reasons." Looking forward, Parineeti has several films lined up such as 'Animal' and 'Uunchai'.



Sai Pallavi