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BUDGET 2022: THERE IS GOOD AND BAD NEWS ON THE JOBS FRONT

UNEMPLOYMENT CRISIS

In the absence of any vision document (for example, a five-year plan) put out by the current Union government, the annual budget is supposed to provide direction to the country and the government's own departments about the priorities of government policy. The budget's direction (or vision) becomes even more important in a global pandemic, in which the world economy contracted by 3.1% in 2020 but India's economy contracted by 7.3% - the worst among major economies. And that is probably understating the actual full GDP contraction since it does not adequately measure the unorganised sector, which accounts for roughly 30% of the GDP, 40% of exports, but 90% of employment, The Wire reports.

THE GOOD NEWS

First, most public investment in India is undertaken by state governments and much less by the Union government. It seems that finance minister realised that the states are in no position to increase public investment this year, since they have borne the responsibility of managing the second wave of COVID-19. In any case, they have strict commitments on borrowing on account of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act.

Second, an increase in public investment was required to crowd in private investment - a typical Keynesian measure. This is rather contrary to the Union government's policy stance for the last two years, when the size of the fiscal stimulus was barely 2.1% and 1.9% of the GDP. However, the good news on jobs in the budget stops there, and the bad news begins.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Open unemployment was already at a 48 year high in 2019-20 at 8.8%, by the internationally recognised measure of current weekly status (CWS). There has been no change in open unemployment over three years, 2017-2020, by the current weekly status of the worker - hardly surprising, given that the economy was slowing each quarter over that period. That implies under-employment was increasing, but the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) measures that poorly. That is one reason that many of us on the National Statistical Office (NSO)'s Standing Committee of Economic Statistics are attempting to get the office to switch the PLFS to the internationally comparable CWS as opposed to usual status (which uses a 365 day reference period). The only serious intervention that finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman's budget for FY 2023 has made for jobs is the increase in capital investment. From its normal level of 1.3% of the GDP, it plans to continue the FY 2022 Budget's commitments to capital investment to increase it to 2.9% of the GDP.



THE BAD NEWS

First, the FM implicitly recognised the problem of joblessness when she said early in her speech that the Union government plans to create six million jobs over the next five years. Recognising a problem, however, is not the same as understanding the scale of the problem, which has three dimensions.

One, about five million young people, mostly educated, join the labour force looking for work each year. Two, there were already 30 million unemployed in 2019 - and at least 10 million have been added to that number since the COVID-19 pandemic began. And three, 32 million semi- and unskilled migrant labourers went back to agriculture between 2019 and 2020 and received little succour. The last development is a

reversal of the trend of the absolute reduction of workers in agriculture between 2004-05 and 2019.

The reverse migrants have come to depend upon Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) since their return to their villages. The programme is a life-saver at a time of desperation. The Union government had allocated Rs 60,000 crore in FY21, then increased it to Rs 1.1 lakh crore but still, there were arrears left to be paid to states in FY22. In FY22, it allocated Rs 70,000, to which another Rs 15,000 crore was added, but has not sufficed. Millions of workers were denied work.

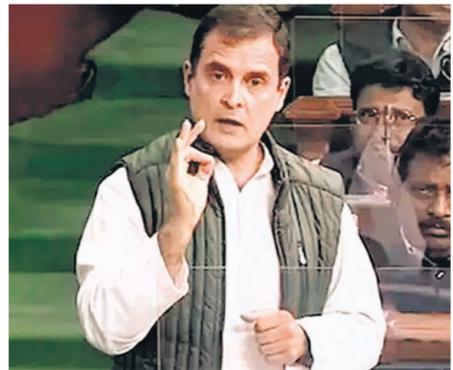
Worse, notified MGNREGA wage rates increased by 4% between FY

2020-21 and FY 2021-22, but actual wages paid remained lower than the notified wage rates for most states till December 31, 2021. Finally, from the jobs perspective, Budget 2023 has given more funds to the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (EGLS) for MSMEs: Rs 50,000 crore in FY23. This takes the total allocation to the scheme to Rs 5 lakh crore between FY'21 and FY'23. This might have some uncertain implications for saving some jobs in MSMEs that fear closing down, because of lack of aggregate demand in the economy.

In any case, the Union government in general does not seem to recognise that FY'21-FY'23 saw a crisis in aggregate demand. This is what has driven rising poverty and increasing inequality in India.

There are two Indias, rich and poor: Rahul Gandhi

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi launched a scathing attack on the BJP government in Lok Sabha on Wednesday, saying the gap between the rich and the poor is widening in the country, noting that 10 people in the country have more wealth than 40 per cent Indians.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Speaking in the lower house a day after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented a Rs 39.45 lakh crore budget, he claimed that the earnings of 84 per cent Indians have dwindled, pushing them towards poverty. "One India is for the extremely rich people-for those who have immense wealth, immense power, for those who do not need a job, those who do not need water connection, electricity connections, but for those who control the heartbeat of the country. And then

another India is for the poor. The gap between these two Indias is widening, Prime Minister should start uniting these two Indias at the earliest," Rahul said. Claiming that the unemployment rate in the country is the highest in 50 years, the Congress leader said campaigns like 'Make in India' and 'Start-up India' would not be possible unless the youth got the jobs they were supposed to. "I am very worried about my country standing where it's standing. You're putting this nation and its people at huge risk. You (the government) have brought China

and Pakistan together. We have made huge strategic mistakes in Jammu and Kashmir," he also alleged. "I'll speak on emergency as well. I don't fear talking about it. There are two visions of India. No power has been able to challenge this bouquet of flowers. The idea of king has come back which the Congress removed in 1947. Now there is a 'Shehanshah'. Now the instruments of the conversations between our state, people are being attacked by one idea. Farmers protested for one year, the King doesn't listen," he added in his speech.

Too early to talk about end of Covid pandemic: WHO

MOSCOW | Agencies

It is "far too early" to talk about the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, WHO Regional Director for Europe Hans Kluge has said. "Definitely, we cannot say that this is the end of the pandemic. This is far too early. This virus has surprised us greatly more than once - for example, the Delta virus. But yes, this is a cause for optimism. But, we should not relax," Kluge told TASS news agency in an interview. However, the current wave of infections with the Omicron variant of the novel coronavirus will be strong but brief,



he said. According to Kluge, there are five pandemic stabilisers: vaccination, boosters, masks, ventilation, particularly of classrooms, increase in access to treatments. "These are the five pandemic stabilisers, but we see based on the experience in countries, which have already reached the peak, that the wave will be strong but short, and the priority is to protect (shield) the vulnerable people," he said. The WHO Regional Director also said that although those infected with the Omicron variant have a milder form of the disease, it still causes post-Covid syndrome like any other strain.

'JAIL TERM CAN'T EXCEED 25 YEARS', SC SEEKS CENTRE'S RESPONSE ON ABU SALEM'S PLEA

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday asked the Centre to consider a plea by gangster Abu Salem that his imprisonment cannot extend beyond 25 years, according to the terms of his extradition from Portugal by the Indian government.

Advocate Rishi Malhotra, representing Salem, submitted before a bench headed by Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul that the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) court did not agree with the contention that it was bound by assurance given by the



Indian government to the Portugal government during his client's extradition. He emphasized that the apex court has the power to grant him relief in the matter. After hearing arguments, the bench also comprising Justice M.M. Sundresh sought Centre and

Maharashtra government's response on Salem's plea. The plea contended that the 2017 judgment of a TADA court, sentencing Salem to life imprisonment, was contrary to the terms of the extradition treaty.

According to the plea, Indian government, on December 17, 2002, gave a solemn sovereign assurance through Deputy Prime Minister to the Portugal government that if Salem is extradited for trials in India, he would neither be conferred with death penalty nor be subjected to imprisonment for a term beyond 25 years.

Fake call centre duping US nationals busted in Delhi

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In a major operation, the Delhi Police busted an international fake call centre which was duping US nationals on the pretext of providing technical support in the name of Microsoft Technical Support executive and arrested four people. The accused were identified as Saurav Pahwa, a resident of New Delhi, Arun Kumar, a resident of Bulandshahar, UP, Neeraj Mehra, a resident of Delhi and Vishnu Vardhan, a resident of Hyderabad.

Furnishing details about the operation, Dy. Commissioner of Police (North West District) Usha Rangnani said on February 1, credible information about an illegal call centre at Hudson Lane was received after which they conducted an enquiry into the matter and local sources were deployed to check the authenticity of the information.



The official said on sustained interrogation they disclosed that they had opened the call centre recently and started duping innocent persons, mainly US nationals on the pretext of providing technical support using the name of Microsoft Technical support team. The police, after registering an FIR under sections 419, 420 and 34 of the Indian Penal Code, arrested all the four accused persons.

SUPREME COURT COLLEGIUM APPROVES ELEVATION OF 6 JUDICIAL OFFICERS AS JUDGES AT DELHI HC

New Delhi: The Supreme Court Collegium has approved the proposal for elevation of six judicial officers as judges in the Delhi High Court and five judicial officers and seven advocates as judges of Telangana High Court.

The collegium, which is headed by Chief Justice N.V. Ramana, in a statement said: "The Supreme Court Collegium in its meeting held on February 1, 2022 has approved the proposal for elevation of the following Judicial Officers as Judges in the Delhi High Court: Poonam A. Bamba, Neena Bansal Krishna, Dinesh Kumar Sharma, Anoop Kumar Mendiratta, Swarana Kanta Sharma, and Sudhir Kumar Jaina. The collegium also approved the proposal for the elevation of seven advocates and five judicial officers as judges in the Telangana High Court. The advocates are -- Kasaju Surendhar @ K. Surender, Chada Vijaya Bhaskar Reddy, Surepalli Nanda, Mummineni Sudheer Kumar, Juvvadi Sridevi @ Kuchadi Sridevi, Mirza Safiulla Baig, and Natcharaju Shrawan Kumar Venkat. The judicial officers are: G. Anupama Chakravarthy, M.G. Priyadarshini, Sambasivarao Naidu, A. Santosh Reddy, and Dr D. Nagarjun.

CRIMINALISING MARITAL RAPE WILL END THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE: BJP MP IN RS

New Delhi: BJP MP Sushil Kumar Modi on Wednesday said in the Rajya Sabha that the criminalisation of marital rape will end the institution of marriage. During the question hour, the BJP lawmaker also asked if the government was in favour of criminalising marital rape.

Responding to the query, the Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani said that this matter is sub-judice, so she cannot elaborate on the matter.

The CPI MP Binoy Viswam had asked a question about the sexual violence within marriages during the Question Hour. Responding to the CPI Member, the Minister said that to condemn every marriage in the country as violent and every man as a rapist is not advisable.



CLASS 12 EXAM HELD UNDER HEADLIGHTS OF VEHICLES IN BIHAR'S MOTIHARI

The incident took place in Maharaja Harendra Kishore Singh college where over 400 students were made to write Hindi papers in the second sitting examination under the lights of vehicles.

AS THERE WAS NO ELECTRICITY SUPPLY IN THE COLLEGE, THE ADMINISTRATION ARRANGED A GENERATOR BUT IT DID NOT CATER TO ALL THE PLACES. FINALLY, PARENTS WHO CAME ON THEIR FOUR WHEELERS SWITCHED ON THE HEADLIGHTS OF THEIR VEHICLES TO COMPLETE THE EXAMINATION.

Team Absolute | Patna

On the first day one of the examination of class 12 (Intermediate) in Bihar, mismanagement was reported from one of the centres of East Champaran's Motihari town on Tuesday evening when students were forced to write papers of Hindi in the lights of vehicles.

The examination for the second sitting was scheduled at 1.45 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Tuesday. As the seating arrangement of students was not made properly in advance, the examination was delayed till 4 p.m.

The students and their parents got angry and they shouted slogans against the college and district administration.

Following the incident, Saurabh Suman Yadav, the SDO of Motihari (Sadar) and DSP Arun Kumar Yadav, reached the examination centre and brought the situation under control.

"We convinced the students and their parents for the examination which finally started at 4 p.m. and continued till 7 p.m.," Saurabh Suman Yadav said.

"We have constituted a team headed by a district education officer to investigate the matter. We have suspended the centre superintendent," said S. Kapil Ashok, district magistrate of East Champaran. The class 12 examination started on Tuesday.





DHANKHAR VOWS TO RESIGN IF MAMATA'S ALLEGATIONS ARE PROVED CORRECT

Kolkata | Agencies

West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee again got engaged in a bit of a debate on Wednesday after the constitutional head of the state vowed to resign if the allegations levelled against him by the Chief Minister are proved correct.



Dhankhar was reacting to Banerjee's allegation that the Governor orders food from Taj Bengal every day. "I have read the statement of the Chief Minister. This is unfortunate. This is a challenge to democracy. The statement that I get my food from Taj Bengal is 100 per cent incorrect. It doesn't behold the Chief Minister to make such wild allegations. If it is proved correct, I shall resign," Dhankhar said.

al allocation made by the state government for Maa Canteen. The canteen was operational from Mid-February 2021 but the constitutional allocation was made from April 1. As the constitutional head of the state, it is my duty to see that all the norms are followed according to the Constitution and no one can stop me from doing that," Dhankhar said. After being elected unopposed as the chairperson of Trinamool Congress on Wednesday, Banerjee again raised her tirade against the Governor, alleging that files are not released from the Raj Bhawan.

Refuting the allegation, Dhankhar said, "What has been talked about the files has no credibility. There is not a single file pending on my table. If there are issues pending, her government will have to reply. But the government has failed to reply. It doesn't behold that the hon'ble chief minister will make such wild allegations."

"There have been abuses and invectives directed against me, but I want to make one thing very clear that nothing will deter me from prosecuting my constitutional path. I am not elected, it is true, but I am bound by the Constitution and it is my duty to see that the constitutional norms are followed. It is my constitutional duty to see that the govern-

nance of the state is in accordance with the rule of law, and when I have taken the oath, I shall continue to do so," Dhankhar said.

The Governor also criticised the Chief Minister for comparing him to a 'stable of horses'.

Speaking after the organisational polls, Banerjee, while referring to an incident during Republic Day parade when one horse of the Kolkata Mounted Police went out of the line and showed its back, said without naming the Governor that a stable of horses has been sent from Delhi. "It is very unfortunate of her to speak like this. Being the Chief Minister of the state, this kind of a language is not expected. I have been in the state for two-and-a-half years and I have made more than 900 tweets, but never did I show my disrespect for the Chief Minister. I still have high regards for her," the Governor said.

Taking a dig at the bureaucracy, Dhankhar said, "The bureaucracy of the state has forgotten the rule of law they are guided by. They outrage the constitutional norms. There is no rule of law in the state. It is only the rule of the ruler."

Four more arrested in Shahdara sexual assault case

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi Police have made four fresh arrests in connection with the horrific sexual assault of a 20-year-old woman in the city's Shahdara area.



The police have so far arrested 16 people in connection with the case, including the four women held on Wednesday who have been identified as Komal, 25, Rekha, 36, Gudiya, 21, and Reena, 32 -- all residents of Kasturba Nagar, Delhi.

The incident, which sent chills down the spine of the people of the national capital, occurred on January 26 when the victim woman was allegedly attacked by a group of people, including women, who chopped off her hair, tore her clothes, blackened her face, and then paraded her on the streets of Shahdara area with a garland of slippers.

Apart from extreme humiliation, the woman was also allegedly gan-

graped by three minor boys. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Shahdara) R. Sathiyasundaram had earlier told IANS that a 10-member Special Investigation Team (SIT) under an ACP rank officer has been formed for speedy and proper investigation of the crime.

Soon after the incident, a video of the victim woman being paraded on the streets with a blackened face and a mob cheering in the background went viral on social media, forcing the Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) to take suo motu cognisance of the matter.

Don't want to become Hema Malini: RLD chief

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) chief Jayant Chaudhary on Wednesday said he does not want to be Hema Malini, while claiming that Union Home Minister Amit Shah had asked his party member to join the BJP promising him that he will be made Hema Malini (a Lok Sabha MP).



Addressing a rally in Mathura, Jayant said that the BJP is trying to make those people happy from whom it will not get anything.

"Those people (BJP) are saying end number of things to me too. They do not love us and I am saying that I do not want to become Hema Malini. What will you get by making me happy. What will you do for public and the farmers' families," he asked.

Jayant said: "Your party worker and one who had fought the polls last time -- Yogesh Nauhwar -- was lured by BJP heavyweight Shah. The Minister had said that if Yogesh goes into the saffron party's fold, he will be made Hema Malini. But, Yogesh proved his loyalty and refused Shah's offer."

Jayant also questioned why Union Minister

of State for Home Ajay Misra Teni has not been sacked.

"What has the BJP done for the farmers' families. Why does Teni still enjoy a ministerial post," he asked.

Refusing the BJP's offer for an alliance for the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls, Jayant had said: "Invitation should not be extended to me but to those 700 farmers' families which have been destroyed."

Earlier, Shah had held a meeting at BJP MP Parvath Verma's residence where he met several Jat leaders and appealed to them to support the saffron party.

TRINAMOOL TO FIELD CANDIDATES IN UP FOR 2024 LOK SABHA POLLS

Kolkata: Cautioning the party workers not to indulge in infighting, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said on Wednesday that Trinamool Congress will field candidates in Uttar Pradesh for the next Lok Sabha polls scheduled in 2024.

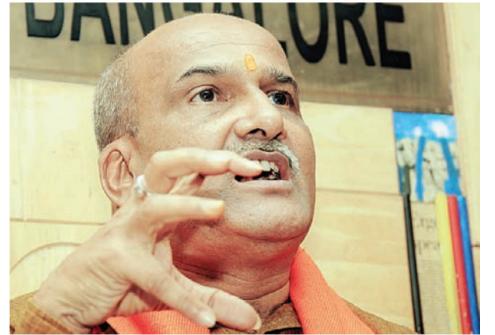
Speaking at the Netaji Indoor Stadium after the party's organisational polls in which she was elected unopposed as the chairperson of the party, Banerjee said, "Remember, the party is one and hence all of you should work together to make it even stronger in West Bengal. If you do that, I will be able to concentrate outside Bengal. Remember, if we are really serious about ousting the BJP-ruled Union government in the next Lok Sabha elections, Trinamool will have to win from all the 42 Lok Sabha constituencies in the state." "I request all of you to take care of the party organisation with all sincerity. If you can do that, I will be able to concentrate more on my work outside the state and spread the network of Trinamool Congress throughout the country."

Making it clear that the party is seriously trying to make inroads outside the state, the Chief Minister said, "We will not field any candidate in the forthcoming Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections as an 'expression of solidarity' towards Samajwadi Party and its chief Akhilesh Yadav. Trinamool will, however, contest from Uttar Pradesh in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections." She also asked the disgruntled and rebel BJP leaders in West Bengal to join the Trinamool.

Shri Ram Sena chief's remarks on kicking out students wearing hijab stirs controversy

HUBBALLI, (KARNATAKA) | Agencies

Shri Ram Sena Chief Pramod Muthalik's statement that students insisting on wearing a hijab to the classroom showed their terrorist mindset and they should be kicked out of the schools, has triggered a controversy in the state.



Muthalik had stated on Tuesday that this stubborn mindset on wearing a hijab to the classroom will take students to terrorism. Now, they start with the hijab, later they ask for burqa and afterwards they will demand namaz and mosque. Is this your religious centre or school? Muthalik questioned. He urged the government not to allow any public debate or discourse on the issue. The students who are insisting on wearing a hijab should be issued transfer certificates and be kicked out. This mindset is dangerous, he maintained. "You have freedom

to wear clothes of your choice at home. But, once students enter the school premises, one has to abide by regulations. "Are you making India, a Pakistan or Afghanistan? If you demand a burqa or a hijab you can go to Pakistan," he said.

The statements have stirred a controversy in the state which is already coping with the hijab row. The students

agitating over wearing a hijab to class in Udipi Pre University College have approached the High Court seeking relief. The government has set up a committee to decide the issue. Until then the government has asked students not to wear a hijab. However, the students have defied the order and say that wearing a hijab is their constitutional right.

Suicide attempt by model reveals honeytrap bid to frame Raj Minister

JAIPUR | Agencies

The recent suicide attempt by a model in Rajasthan has led to the shocking revelation of a conspiracy framed to implicate Rajasthan Revenue Minister Ram Lal Jat in honeytrap.

The female model of Jodhpur, who jumped from the seventh floor of a hotel, was 'influenced' by Udaipur's beautician Deepali, who took her into confidence and shot her videos while bathing. Later the beautician with her friend forced her to stay with a state minister in Bhillwara.

The model refused her offer, and then the beautician and her friend started blackmailing her. The model finally escaped to Jodhpur and jumped from a seventh floor building to commit suicide. However, she fell on a car due to which she sustained critical injuries and now is in hospital. Jodhpur's DCP Mohan Bhushan Yadav said that accused Deepali and Akshat met Minister Ram Lal Jat at Circuit House in Bhillwara in the guise of journalists. This meeting took place on the pretext of discussing some problems. Some papers were shown to Jat. After seeing these papers, Jat clearly said that this is not a matter related to them. It could not go any further than this. Both the accused were staying in a hotel located opposite the Circuit House. So far, the police have arrested three persons, including two women from Udaipur in this connection. Of these, two have been iden-



tified as Deepali and Akshat Sharma. It was informed that Deepali did the make-up of the model during Diwali. After Diwali, the model was called to Udaipur for a shoot. About five girls were kept in Udaipur for 15 days. Payment was made to the model after the shoot, after which the model started trusting the beautician.

TERRORIST KILLED IN J&K ENCOUNTER IDENTIFIED

SRINAGAR | Agencies

A terrorist who was killed in an encounter between terrorists and security forces at Nadigam area in Jammu and Kashmir's Shopian district on Wednesday has been identified, officials said.



Police said based on a specific input generated by Shopian police regarding the presence of terrorists in Nadigam area of Shopian, a joint cordon and search operation was launched by the police, army and the CRPF.

During the search operation, as the joint search party proceeded towards the suspected spot, the hiding terrorist fired indiscriminately upon the joint search party which was retaliated effectively leading to an encounter.

"In the ensuing encounter, one terrorist was killed and his body was retrieved from the site of encounter. He has been identified as Umar Ishaq Malik alias Musa son of Ab Ahad Malik resident of Bongam Shopian linked with

proscribed terror outfit HM," police said. As per police records, Ishaq Malik was a categorized terrorist, and he was active since 2020.

He was involved in several terror crime cases including

attacks on security forces and civilian atrocities including recent attack on ASI Shabir Ahmad at Amishijipora Shopian while he was returning back from nearby mosque after offering prayers.

Father alleges replay of Hathras incident, UP Police deny

▶ IN A HORRIFYING REPLAY OF THE 2020 HATHRAS INCIDENT, THE FAMILY OF A 16-YEAR-OLD GIRL WHO WAS ALLEGEDLY GANG-RAPED AND KILLED, HAS ALLEGED THAT THE POLICE FORCED THEM TO CREMATE THE MINOR BEFORE THEY COULD EVEN ARRANGE FOR HER LAST RITES.



BULANDSHAHR (UTTAR PRADESH) | Agencies

The incident led to massive protests on Tuesday. The incident, according to reports, took place on January 21 but the family kept quiet after police threatened them and asked them not to talk about the crime.

It was only when word spread and some people tweeted about it that the incident came out in the open.

Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Bulandshahr, Santosh Singh, said that the police 'never forced the family to cremate their daughter' and that the matter was being 'politicised' by vested interests. He further said, "The girl was friendly with the boy.

The main accused thought that she was cheating on him so he took her out and shot her. He also slashed his own arms and neck with a blade. The family demanded that the case be transferred to another police station and we have agreed." The father of the minor girl in Bulandshahr, meanwhile, said that the police 'forced us

to cremate her in the night without giving us an opportunity to conduct proper rituals'. The victim's father, an OBC, said his daughter was friends with an upper-caste boy.

The boy allegedly came to the girl's village and asked her to come with him for an outing. She went with him.

Chinese PLA tortured Arunachal youth in its custody: MP Tapir Gao

ITANAGAR | Agencies

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) that handed over Arunachal Pradesh youth Miram Taron to the Indian Army on January 27 -- nine days after he was allegedly abducted, had tortured the teenager while he was in its custody, Lok Sabha member Tapir Gao claimed on Wednesday.



Gao, who represents the Arunachal East constituency, said that the PLA had tortured Miram, and kept him blindfolded, tied his hands, gave electric shocks, adding the teenager was also subjected to other inhuman treatments.

"Violating the international law, the PLA cruelly tortured Miram Taron in their custody. Earlier, several PLA personnel, Chinese citizens including woman were captured in the Indian territory, but the Indian Army immediately handed over them to the Chinese authority with full dignity," the parliamentarian told reporter.

He said that the Indian authority must

look into the matter and take appropriate action and resolve the border dispute with China.



'PM MODI HAS TRACES OF GOD IN HIM:' CM CHOUHAN

HAVE BECOME CHIEF MINISTER ONLY TO SUPPORT IN CRISIS
RELIEF OF 30 THOUSAND RUPES PER HECTARE WILL BE GIVEN FOR MORE THAN 50 PERCENT CROP LOSS



Team Absolute | Panaji

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is "super-human and there are traces of God in him", Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said. "I see in Narendra Modi... there are traces of God in him. He is a repository of unending powers. How can one person work so much?"

Congress ran a government for years before this. Were there development works everywhere you went?" Chouhan said at a BJP election rally in the Dabolim Assembly constituency in poll-bound Goa. "I am not saying this because I am a Chief Minister and a BJP worker. I am saying what I feel in my heart. It is fortunate that the country has a Prime Minister like Narendra Modi. He has an incredible personality," Chouhan added. Chouhan went on to

describe Prime Minister Modi as a super-human. "Narendra Modi is super human. He is a man of ideas." The Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister also said that Prime Minister Modi had restored India's pride overseas. "When the Congress was in power, people abroad used to ignore us when we say we come from India. There was no respect. They would not look at us with pride. India used to be discussed vis-a-vis issues related to corruption."

TWO MINOR SIBLINGS DROWN IN DRAIN IN SHAJAPUR

Bhopal: Two minor siblings drowned in a drain while playing outside their house in Shahjapur district, police said on Wednesday.

The victims have been identified as Poonam (7) and her younger sister Ayushi of Aala village in Shahjapur district. As per the police, while playing along with other children in the locality, Ayushi fell into a drain. Poonam too jumped into it to save her sister but they both drowned.

On being alerted by other children, the family members of the girls and locals rushed to the spot and took them out of the drain. They were rushed to a nearby hospital where they were declared brought dead. A police official in Shahjapur told IANS that post-mortem has been conducted and bodies handed over to their parents. An investigation has been launched into the matter.

Centre approves renaming of three places in Madhya Pradesh

Zafar Alam Khan | Bhopal
www.absoluteindianews.com

The Centre has approved renaming of three places in Madhya Pradesh namely Hoshangabad Nagar as "Narmadapuram," Shivpuri as "Kundeshwar Dham" and Babai as "Makhan Nagar." Babai has been renamed after the renowned journalist and poet Makhanlal Chaturvedi, officials said.

According to officials, the proposals were received from Shivraj Singh Chouhan government in 2021. Located on the south bank of River Narmada, Hoshangabad was named after Hoshang Shah, the first ruler of Malwa, more than six hundred years ago. Officials said renaming of Babai and Shivpuri has been pending with the Centre since 2020-21 due to clearances from central agencies. A freedom fighter, the government has named a national university of journalism and communication at Bhopal

after Makhanlal in 1992.

Babai, the place where Makhanlal was born is nearly 80 kilometers from Bhopal. Under the government guidelines for renaming railway stations, villages, towns and cities, it is mandatory for the state government to obtain a no-objection certificate (NOC) from the union home ministry. The NOC ensures that other institutions in the district names, including railway station, high court and university, are also changed, officials added.

"The NOC is issued after seeking reports from field units of Intelligence Bureau (IB), Geographical Survey of India (GSI) and Department of Post and Ministry of Earth Sciences," said the home ministry official.

In November 2021, PM Narendra Modi inaugurated the revamped Rani Kamalapati railway station, earlier known as Habibganj in Madhya Pradesh. The approval for the name change

was granted by the MHA along with another request from the Uttar Pradesh government where the name of Jhansi railway station was changed to Veerangana Rani Laxmibai station, officials added.

The ministry had earlier approved the renaming of the British-era railway station Robertsganj as Sonbhadra, Farah Town railway station near Mathura as DDU Station, Allahabad town as Prayagraj and iconic Mughalsarai junction after Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay (DDU), the founder of Bhartiya Jana Sangh. The renaming of a state requires amendment of the Constitution with a simple majority in Parliament. For changing the name of a village or town, an executive order is needed.

The proposal to change the name of West Bengal to 'Bangla', as suggested by the state government, is frozen as the proposed name sounded similar to the name of neighbouring country Bangladesh, another official added.

NCC cadets are dedicated to the nation and full of humane feelings: Governor

NCC ENABLES US TO FACE CHALLENGES BOLDLY
NCC CADETS AT HOME PROGRAMME AT RAJ BHAVAN

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Governor Mangubhai Patel has said that the National Cadet Corps creates humane feelings and dedication for the nation in citizens. NCC training is not just training but it is the creation of youth power full of the spirit of courage, dedication, sacrifice, discipline towards the nation. He has appealed to the parents to encourage participation in NCC training in children.

Patel was addressing the At Home Programme of NCC Directorate Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh at Raj Bhavan. Principal Secretary to Governor DP Ahuja, NCC Officers, women and the contingents who had returned from Delhi were present.

Patel said that NCC training of cadets enables them to face tough situations and challenges through adventurous activities. By introducing them to the priceless cultural heritage of our country, it strengthens the sense of nationalism in them.

Along with this, the cadets bring pride to the country by displaying strength, brotherhood and unity of Indian culture in camps and programmes organized abroad. Appreciating the cadets, he said that in times of crisis, disaster, environmental problems, and for building national consciousness through public awareness about any subject NCC cadets are always ahead in all works of social service. Expressing gratitude towards the initiative of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he



said that he has given new opportunities to the girl child to participate in the army. Girls are now getting selected in NDA. He also appreciated the cooperation being given by the cadets of

Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh in the fight against Corona. Additional Director General in-charge Brigadier Rajiv Gautam informed that the 'At home programme has been organized in honour of the cadets who participated in the Republic Day Parade in New Delhi. The participants are also being awarded with certificates of appreciation by the Governor. He said that 57 cadets participated in the Republic Day programme under the Directorate. Samuel David of the

Naval Wing was awarded the Second Best Command Award. In the year 21-22, 8 cadets have been selected in the Armed Forces. He informed that 12 cadets selected under the Youth Exchange Program, will travel to different countries. The target is to engage 952 boys and 452 girls under the programme to work with the Army. He said that during the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, an initiative has been taken to honor 264 families of martyrs of the 1971 war at their homes between Republic Day and Independence Day.

Harshit Raghuvanshi and Malika Parikh, cadets of Senior Division Boys and Senior Wing Girls shared their experiences. They told that wonderful qualities of responsibility, self-confidence, unity, concentration and passion towards the goal have been developed in the activities of the camp. The programme was conducted by cadets Shrutika Sharma and Chinmay Joshi. The programme ended with the Governor being presented by the NCC Directorate with a memento.

Congress to prepare report over death of cows

After a large number of cows were found dead at a gaushala run by a local BJP worker in Bhopal, the opposition Congress has decided to take up the issue to corner Shivraj Singh Chouhan government. The Congress, which has started its campaign - 'ghar chalo, ghar chalo', has decided to highlight the issue of cows during its campaign.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

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local BJP worker in Bhopal, the opposition Congress has decided to take up the issue to corner Shivraj Singh Chouhan government. The Congress, which has started its campaign - 'ghar chalo, ghar chalo', has decided to highlight the issue of cows during its campaign.

Senior Congress leader Jitu Patwari addressing a press conference at party office at Bhopal on Wednesday, accused the BJP of doing politics over cows. "BJP always claimed to be cow protector but in the last five years, 5,577 cows were killed in Madhya Pradesh. These numbers are from government's record," Patwari said.

Meanwhile, the Congress has formed a committee under former minister P.C. Sharma to prepare a report on killing of cows in the state. The committee has been tasked to collect reports on reasons that are resulting

in death of cows. The committee will also find the amount allocated to different cowsheds from the government.

On Sunday, several cows were found dead at a private gaushala located around 40 km from Bhopal. Along with dead cows, a large number of skeletons of cows were also found at a place adjoining the gaushala.

The Bhopal district administration has booked a BJP worker - Nirmala Devi Shandilya, the proprietor of the cowshed in Bairasia.

Shandilya had been running a cow shelter in Bairasia for the past 30 years. The matter came to light on Sunday after some villagers shot videos of the carcasses that were left abandoned in a dry well near the cowshed and posted them on the social media. Later, a team led by district collector Avinash Lavaniya visited the shelter.

CM Planted Almond and Moulshree Saplings

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted saplings along with Shiv Kumar Kataria, Pooja Kataria and Prachi Patharia of Shiv Socio Cultural Society at Smart Garden on Wednesday. Chouhan planted saplings of Almond and Moulshree today.

Shiv Socio Culture Society has been doing social work, providing free theatre and painting training to children through theatre for the last five years. Through street plays, the general public is also being made aware about education and health. Children are constantly motivated by the organisation to plant saplings for environmental protection.

Almond is a fruit. Technically, it is the seed of the fruit of the almond tree. The almond tree bears pink and white fragrant flowers. It flourishes more in mountainous areas. Almonds are helpful in digestion as they are full of fiber. Almonds are useful in the treatment of high blood pressure, constipation and heart diseases. It is rich in potassium, magnesium, calcium and vitamin E. Moulshree is



also called Kesava in Sanskrit, Molsari or Bakool in Hindi. It is a tree of medicinal importance, which has been used in Ayurveda for centuries.

Tribal Development Works Should Be Done In Inclusive Form: Governor

Efforts Should Be Made To Identify, Polish and Groom the Originality and Talent of the Tribes
Governor Discusses With the Officials of the Tribal Affairs Department

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Governor Mangubhai Patel has said that originality is a unique talent gifted to the tribal society. All tribes have distinctive originality and talent. Recognising their originality and talent, it is necessary to make efforts to refine, groom them. He said that tribal development works should be conducted in an inclusive manner, in which development of all tribes takes place.

Patel was discussing with the officials of Tribal Affairs Department and Tribal Research Institute at Raj Bhavan on the efforts to promote traditional craftsmanship of the tribes of the state.



Principal Secretary to Governor DP Ahuja was also present.

Patel said that efforts for sustainable livelihood of the tribes of the state should be made in a planned and inclusive manner. It should be ensured that the works of livelihood development are carried out in all the 89 tribal-dominant blocks. To preserve and expand tribal craftsmanship, Patel said to organise training programmes, orientation workshops, identify demand centres and markets for tribal artefacts, handicraft products, ensure availability of products, explore new

opportunities for display and sale. Patel stressed on efforts to encourage budding craftsmen and artists of tribal crafts and arts. Along with this, he has told to encourage the creations and products of budding artists in the purchase of government requirements. He said that tribal products should be included in the fairs organised by small and cottage industries. Provide them stalls at concessional rates. Emphasising on the participation of community leadership in tribal conferences, he said that they should be made a medium to disseminate infor-

mation about the efforts of social welfare and development. In community radio, programmes giving information regarding sickle cell anaemia disease should be organised in a simple and clear format. Public awareness should be created about the disease through subject experts. The Governor has asked for more focus on efforts to promote products of Tribal Self-Help Groups. Principal Secretary Pallavi Jain Govil informed about the departmental activities and innovative initiatives. She said that in the upcoming Bhopal Literature Festival, effort is being made to focus one day on tribal literature. Fifty two forts of the state are being identified and developed as tourist destinations. The income from these tourist centres will be given to the local tribal societies. A proposal for food parks at Betul, Khandwa has also been prepared to provide arrangements for the sale of tribal products by processing them. She told that efforts are on to get GI tag for eight tribal arts and Kodo Kutki food grains.

ANGANWADI CENTERS WILL START FROM TODAY

Bhopal: Director, Women and Child Development Ram Rao Bhosle has informed that all the Anganwadi centers of the state will be reopened from Thursday, February 3, 2022. All the District Collectors have been instructed to ensure that the operation of Anganwadi centers is started by following the protocol of prevention of Covid-19 infection.

It is noteworthy that in view of the situation of covid transition, the state government had suspended the operation of Anganwadi centers till 31 January 2022.

STATE-OF-THE-ART INDOOR SHOOTING RANGE OF INTERNATIONAL STANDARD TO BE BUILT IN THE STATE SHOOTING ACADEMY CAMPUS

Team Absolute | Bhopal

International level state-of-the-art indoor final shooting range will be constructed in Madhya Pradesh State Shooting Academy. Once this range is built, the World Cup can be organized in Madhya Pradesh. It is noteworthy that Madhya Pradesh has sent a proposal to host the Shooting World Cup. This information was given by Sports and Youth Welfare Minister Yashodhara Raje Scindia on Tuesday at TT Nagar Stadium during the review of the preparations being made for the Asian Games in the rifle category shooting event.

Scindia said that talent search should be done again in the entire state for shooting. Discover and nurture new talents not only from

Bhopal, Indore but also from remote areas. She said that with the help of high performance trainers of Madhya Pradesh Shooting Academy, we are capable enough to sculpt new talent and prepare them for medals in Olympics. The Sports Minister said that the coach should continuously monitor the positive and weak side of the game of every player. If there is a shortage in administrative and arrangements, then inform the Director Sports. Smt. Scindia said that only hot food should be provided to the players of the academy. There should be no laxity in the facilities of the players. High Performance coach of Rifle Shooting Suma Shirur and Director Sports and Youth Welfare Ravi Gupta were present.

Chitra Bharati Short Film Festival from March 25

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In view of ongoing pandemic, the fourth edition of Chitra Bharati National Short Film Festival, organised by Bharatiya Chitra Sadhna every two years, has been postponed for the new dates - 25 to 27 March 2022. Earlier it was scheduled to be held from 18 to 20 February 2022. Venue of the event will remain the same at the newly constructed Bisankhedhi campus of MCRP University, Bhopal. A good number of cine celebrities will be the part of this three-day mega event to guide the new talent and participants. CBFF has received as many as 712 entries in 15 languages from 18 states out

of them 120 movies make entry into the final round which will be screened at the event.

On the side-line, open forum and master classes will be held during the festival.

The opening ceremony of the festival is scheduled on March 25 at the new campus of the university while the closing ceremony will be held on March 27 at Ravindra Bhavan.

The fourth edition of CBFF is being organised at Bhopal in co-association by Satpuda Chalchitra Samiti and Vishv Sanvad Kendra, Madhya Pradesh. Previously this festival has been organised at Indore, Delhi and Ahmedabad.

FIR against man for posing as Minister's kin in MP

The Madhya Pradesh Police has registered a case against a person for posing as state Panchayat minister Mahendra Singh Sisodia's relative and abusing police personnel in Pachor town of Rajgarh district.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh Police has registered a case against a person for posing as state Panchayat minister Mahendra Singh Sisodia's relative and abusing police personnel in Pachor town of Rajgarh district.

The accused, who was identified as Udairaj Singh Sisodia, had on Sunday, abused the cops when they

stopped loud music from being played at a wedding ceremony. Acting on a complaint, the police had reached the marriage venue when Udairaj, posing as Madhya Pradesh Panchayat Minister Mahendra Singh Sisodia's nephew abused them.

In a video that has gone viral, Udairaj can be seen abusing the cops and threatening them of dire consequences if they stop the music.

The police came into action after the minister denied having any relation with the man. "He (Minister) has denied being related to the accused," said a senior police official.

The incident had occurred in the wee hours of Sunday when a head constable Suresh Mewada and two other constables had gone to stop DJ music from being played at a marriage garden.



EDITOR'S SPECS

Lakhimpur Kheri don't want any MLA

After residents of a village in Shamli district, it is now the farmers in Lakhimpur Kheri who have decided to use the NOTA option in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls. The farmers, who have yet to come to terms with the October 3 incident, in which four farmers were allegedly mowed down by an SUV belonging to Union Minister Ajay Misra Teni's son Ashish Misra, said that they feel 'cheated' by various political parties on the issue. According to local residents "Some parties have cheated us while others have proved ineffective. We have no hope from any political party. The BJP, SP, Bahujan Samaj Party and Congress gave them false assurances and want to "use us as commodities" during the elections. Rashtriya Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan, alleged that the SP and the BJP had "cheated" the farmers. Farmers constitute the bulk of the population in Lakhimpur Kheri district located in the Terai belt. They said that they will not support the BJP after the October 3 incident and neither do they want to support the Samajwadi Party which had waived off Rs 2,000 crore interest amount payable by sugarcane mill owners to the cultivators. According to the Cane Control Order 1966, in case of non-payment of the outstanding cane price within 14 days, sugar mill owners will have to pay an interest of 15 per cent to the farmers. However, the then SP government waived off this interest amount, which swelled up to about Rs 2,000 crore citing that the industry was going through a lean phase. About 75 per cent of the farmers in Lakhimpur Kheri district cultivate sugarcane. Nine sugar mills, run by co-operative organisations and the private sector, crush about 15 lakh quintals of sugarcane here.

To solve the organ shortage, we need more awareness, not more animals

As a scientist and researcher, I am deeply opposed to xenotransplantation the Frankenscience of transplanting organs from one species to another as everyone should be.

Dr Ankita Pandey

Reports that animal experimenters at the University of Maryland-Baltimore have implanted a pig's heart into a man are extremely disturbing. Animal-to-human transplants are nothing more than vanity projects that seek to grab sensational headlines, and they are fraught with danger. First, the shortage of organ donations is largely a result of the lack of public education about the donation process and the lifesaving potential of every donor. Reluctance among family members to allow their loved one's organs to be donated is another key hurdle. Instead of squandering time and resources trying to genetically manipulate animals' body parts into functioning like human ones, we could invest in initiatives that increase awareness such as public service announcements and donor drives that would result in far more people choosing to donate their organs upon their passing. Many countries have also had success with simple policy changes such as mandated choice laws, which require adults to choose whether to donate their organs, or presumed consent, which assumes that everyone wants to be an organ donor unless otherwise stated. And xenotransplantation is far riskier for the patient than a proven human-to-human transplant. The troubling history of these procedures reads like the script for a sci-fi horror flick. Pigs' kidneys and hearts implanted in baboons, a baboon's heart implanted in a human baby, a pig's kidney attached to the outside of a brain-dead human on a ventilator, a pig's lung and heart implanted in an economically disadvantaged Indian man every one of these experiments involved extreme cruelty and suffering. And every one was a complete failure. Then there are the risks to public health. Both the World Health Organization and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have sounded the alarm about the potential of animal-to-human transplants to introduce infections across species barriers. Swine influenza and porcine endogenous retrovirus are just two



viruses that have been identified in pigs that are transmissible to humans. We're entering year three of a global pandemic. Have we learned nothing about the devastation that can result when viruses cross the species barrier? Xenotransplantation is also unethical: The vast majority of us oppose cruelty to animals. Animals bred to be used in these futile experiments endure a lifetime of confinement, genetic manipulation, and painful surgeries before ultimately being killed all without their consent. Treating sentient animals like warehouses full of spare parts only reinforces the notion that humans should not be thinking about organ donation from animals, it only exacerbates the problem. Animals aren't discount bins at the organ outlet mall. They are complex, intelligent individuals who experience pain, love, loneliness, fear, and joy just

as we do. Pigs, for example, are highly social, playful animals who form close bonds, make nests, sun themselves, and often sleep nestled together in "pig piles". They dream, can recognise their own names and learn "tricks" like sitting for a treat, and show empathy for others. They, too, love their families and want to live. Junk science experiments rob them and other sentient beings of their freedom, their body parts, and their very lives. This issue doesn't come down to a choice between saving the lives of animals or saving the lives of humans. A safe, proven, ethical solution to the organ shortage is right in front of us. Instead of focusing on pigs' hearts, we need to focus on our own. (Dr Ankita Pandey is a noted toxicology researcher and the science policy advisor to PETA India)

LONG ROAD AHEAD FOR RBI TO LAUNCH ITS DIGITAL CURRENCY

With the government announcing its own digital currency by 2023, industry experts on Wednesday welcomed the move, albeit with caution as there is no formal Crypto Bill in place that clears the air around its use, and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is yet to take concrete steps on the long-haul journey. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman introduced the Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) in her Union Budget 2022-23 speech, saying that it will give a big boost to the digital economy. "I said that the reserve bank (RBI) will be issuing a digital currency... a currency is a currency only when it is issued by a central bank, even if it's a crypto. So, let's understand that we are not taxing currencies which are yet to be regularised," Sitharaman said later during the press briefing on Tuesday, while clarifying the government's stance on crypto currency. According to former Union Finance Secretary Subhash Chandra Garg, a key figure behind drafting the original Crypto Bill, the digital rupee announcement is just a formal one as of now. "The RBI has not prepared its model or tested it. The government has also not indicated when it will bring out enabling laws for it. It is a long journey to take," Garg said. The Central Bank has already been deliberating upon various aspects relating to the central bank digital currency and private crypto currencies. It has been working on modalities for central bank digital currency. CBDCs are presently mostly in the hypothetical stage, with some in proof-of-concept programmes. However, more than 80 per cent of central banks are now looking at digital currencies. According to Aniket Jindal, Co-founder of developer platform Bicommy, Such a Blockchain-based digital rupee has the potential for being a big step in onboarding hundreds of millions of Indians into the Blockchain economy. "It will also help open one of the largest economies to new innovations in the Web 3.0 ecosystem," he said. China's digital RMB was the first digital currency to be issued by a major economy. On September 27, 2021, Tajikistan announced the creation of a CBDC with the Fantom Foundation, and Nigeria was the first African country to launch its CBDC on October 25. The Bank of America said in its recent report that a US CBDC would differ from the digital money currently available to the public because it would be a liability of the US Federal Reserve, not a commercial bank, and so would have no credit or liquidity risk. The US Fed has also published a discussion paper on the benefits and risks of a CBDC. According to Aishwarya Shivakumar, CEO of Oddz Finance, a decentralised finance crypto derivatives trading platform, with the announcement of RBI launching its own digital currency using Blockchain in 2023, the awareness of the technology and the economics surrounding it is only bound to increase. "This announcement also implies a positive outlook of the government towards this technology and its potential," Shivakumar said.



international

Gunshots reported near Guinea-Bissau Government palace, president safe

Bissau | Agencies Several automatic weapons shots were reported near the Palace of the Government of Guinea-Bissau where an extraordinary meeting of the Council of Ministers was being held. The incident took place on Tuesday afternoon, when the president, Umaro Sissoco Embalo, and the Prime Minister, Nuno Gomes Nabiam, were inside the building, Xinhua news agency reported. The situation is completely under the control of loyalist forces. President Embalo and Prime Minister Nabiam are safe, according to a security source. There were reports of unidentified dead inside the government palace. Around 1 p.m. local time, the crackling of automatic weapons triggered panic among the population. So far, there is no news from the government palace, and no one has come out of this place. At the moment, there are constant movements of patrols of armed soldiers in military vehicles in the streets of the capital Bissau. Since the news spread in the capital, in the city centre, all the shops, restaurants and banks have closed. Officials and students have gone home. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), issued a statement on Tuesday evening, saying the regional bloc is following developments in Guinea-Bissau with great concern characterized by military fire around the Palace of the Government. ECOWAS condemns this coup attempt and holds the military responsible for the physical integrity of Umaro Sissoco Embalo and the members of his government, it said. ECOWAS calls on the military to return to their barracks and maintain a republican posture, it added.

FIRE IN US SOUTHERN STATE FORCES THOUSANDS TO EVACUATE

Washington | Agencies A fire at a fertiliser plant in Winston-Salem, southeastern US state of North Carolina, forced thousands of people to evacuate. The blaze reportedly started at the plant on Monday evening and was still active as of Tuesday morning. At least 6,000 residents within a one-mile (1.6 kms) radius of the Weaver Fertilizer Plant have been mandated to leave their homes over the potential of an ammonium nitrate explosion. Nearby Wake Forest University cancelled classes for Tuesday, Xinhua news agency reported. There were about 600 tons of ammonium nitrate, a chemical compound used widely in fertilisers and explosives, at the scene of the fire, according to officials. Dozens of firefighters and up to about 150 emergency personnel have been working on the fire and evacuating the area. Governor of North Carolina Roy Cooper tweeted on Tuesday that his office is in communication with state emergency agencies and local officials "regarding the dangerous fire in Winston-Salem." "I appreciate the work of firefighters and the state will continue to provide any assistance necessary to get this fire under control," Cooper added. With a population of roughly 250,000, Winston-Salem is in the northwestern part of North Carolina.

Ukrainian president, British PM meet on security issues

Kiev | Agencies Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and visiting British Prime Minister Boris Johnson met in Kiev on Tuesday to discuss security issues, in particular Russian military buildup on the Ukrainian border, the presidential press service said. In a joint statement after their talks, Zelensky and Johnson warned that any further Russian incursion in Ukraine would be a massive strategic mistake and have a stark humanitarian cost, Xinhua news agency reported. The leaders said that Ukraine and Britain agreed to work together to strengthen Ukraine's security and the ability to defend itself. They also expressed their commitment to strengthen Ukraine's energy security and support its efforts toward a green transition. At the briefing after the talks, Zelensky said that although he does not support all the provisions of the Minsk agreements,



it is the "only format that works." "We must do something that can de-occupy our territories in particular, protect our state in one form or another," Zelensky said. He also said that Britain will allocate some 2 billion British pounds (around \$2.7 billion) for joint infrastructure and energy projects with Ukraine. For his part, Johnson

announced that Britain will also provide 88 million pounds (around \$119 million) of new funding for Ukraine to help it reduce the reliance on Russian energy supplies. Johnson arrived in Kiev earlier in the day for a working visit. According to local media reports, later this week, he will hold phone talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Since November, Kiev and

some Western countries have accused Russia of assembling heavy troops near the Ukrainian border with a possible intention of "invasion." Russia denied the accusation, saying that Russia has the right to mobilize troops within its borders to defend its territory as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's activities constitute a threat to Russia's border security.

Blinken condemns N. Korean missile launch in call with Japanese counterpart

Washington | Agencies US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has condemned North Korea's recent missile tests in a telephone conversation with his Japanese counterpart Hayashi Yoshimasa. The top US diplomat on Tuesday also vowed cooperation with South Korea and Japan to completely denuclearise the Korean Peninsula, Yonhap news agency reported citing state department spokesperson Ned Price. "Secretary Blinken condemned the DPRK's recent ballistic missile launches, which were in violation of multiple UN Security Council resolutions, and committed to trilateral cooperation with Japan and the Republic of Korea towards the complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula," Price said in a press release. The Blinken-Hayashi call came after North Korea launched an intermediate range ballistic missile on Sunday (Seoul time) that it later identified as a "Hwasong 12-type ground-to-ground intermediate- and long-range ballistic missile." The launch marked the North's seventh missile test this year. Price on Monday said the US will continue to seek diplomacy with North Korea but also steps to



hold the North accountable for its actions. Earlier reports said the US has called for a UN Security Council meeting to be held this week to discuss North Korea's recent series of missile tests. US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman also denounced the North's recent missile launches as "escalatory" and "destabilising" in a three-way conversation with her Japanese and South Korean counterparts on the day. "Deputy Secretary Sherman denounced the DPRK's recent and escalatory ballistic missile launches as violations of UN Security Council resolutions and destabilising to the region and discussed ongoing efforts to achieve the complete denuclearisation of the Korean

Peninsula," Price said of Sherman's call with South Korea's First Vice Foreign Minister Choi Jong-kun and Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Mori Takeo. "The Deputy Secretary highlighted the US' continued readiness to engage in serious and sustained diplomacy with the DPRK in order to make tangible progress," he added in a press release. DPRK stands for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the North's official name. Sherman and her Japanese and South Korean counterparts highlighted the importance of cooperation between their countries in dealing with regional challenges, according to the department spokesperson. "The Deputy Secretary and vice foreign ministers reaffirmed the importance of trilateral cooperation between the US, the ROK, and Japan in tackling pressing challenges in the region and across the globe," he said, referring to South Korea by its official name, the Republic of Korea. In a separate press release on the trilateral talks, Seoul's foreign ministry said that Choi, his US and Japanese counterparts urged the North to stop escalatory actions and take a "path of dialogue and diplomacy." The three-way conversation also came after US special representative for North Korea, Sung Kim, held discussions with his South Korean and Japanese counterparts, separately, over the weekend.

Turkish President, Lebanese PM vow to enhance cooperation

Istanbul | Agencies Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said that his country intends to strengthen cooperation and solidarity with Lebanon in a wide range of fields. Erdogan's remarks came at a joint press conference on Tuesday with visiting Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati in Ankara, Xinhua news agency reported. The Turkish President noted that his country considers the Lebanese people's problems and achievements as its own, and is ready to lend support to the Lebanese government's reform efforts. The trade volume between Turkey and Lebanon increased by around 80 per cent worth \$1.8 billion in 2021 despite the pandemic, he stressed.



"We discussed the steps that can be taken to boost that figure," Erdogan added, noting that Turkish companies are ready to undertake major infrastructure projects in Lebanon, including reconstruction of the Beirut Port. "I believe that Turkish products are suitable and attractive for the Lebanese market in many aspects such as price, quality, and transportation costs," Erdogan added, noting that his country also wants to diversify the products it imports from Lebanon. According to Erdogan, Turkey's flag carrier Turkish Airlines has been offering a 20 per cent discount on all Beirut-bound flights valid until the end of February to boost tourism activities. On his part, Mikati said bilateral ties would continue to expand on solid foundations. He noted that Turkey and Lebanon would take strong steps to improve relations in a wide range of fields, including political, economic, trade, and tourism.



MAHA BJP MLA NITESH RANE SURRENDERS BEFORE SINDHUDURG COURT

▶ IN A HUGE LOSS OF FACE, BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY MLA NITESH RANE SON OF UNION MSME MINISTER NARAYAN RANE SURRENDERED BEFORE A SINDHUDURG COURT, HERE ON WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a huge loss of face, Bharatiya Janata Party MLA Nitesh Rane son of Union MSME Minister Narayan Rane surrendered before a Sindhudurg Court, here on Wednesday afternoon.

The development came hours after his lawyer Satish Maneshinde said that Nitesh Rane's bail application before the Bombay High Court was withdrawn with a statement that he would give himself up to the Sindhudurg Police.

Soon afterwards, Nitesh Rane said at his home in Kankavali, that he was shortly proceeding to surrender before the court and slammed the Maha Vikas Aghadi government for allegedly trying to arrest him illegally.

"The bail application is withdrawn with a statement that the applicant (Nitesh) Rane is surrendering before the Investigating Officer (IO), even though 5 more days of protection by the Supreme Court are left, as he wants to face the investiga-

tion," Maneshinde added.

The surrender came - amid tight security - a day after Sindhudurg Court Additional Sessions Judge RM Rote rejected Nitesh Rane's bail application citing various grounds and saying his custodial interrogation was necessary.

Observing that Rane was not "falsely implicated due to political reasons", Judge Rote said that he is the 'main accused' and his prima facie involvement has been shown, a conspiracy was hatched to teach (Santosh M. Parab, complainant) a lesson, and hence his "custodial interrogation" was necessary for proper and effective investigation.

Rane Jr is charged with the alleged Dec 18, 2021 attack on a Shiv Sena activist Santosh M

Parab while campaigning for the Sindhudurg District Cooperative Bank polls though the BJP leader has consistently denied any involvement.

According to Parab's police complaint, when he was returning home that evening, his motorcycle was hit by a SUV without number plates, one person stepped out and assaulted him with a paperknife.

Later, the assailant allegedly was overheard saying that Gotya Sawant and Nitesh Rane should be informed of (this) incident, called up someone and sped off in the SUV. The police subsequently arrested 6 accused - Chetan Pawar, Karan B Kamble, Anil Nakka, Karan D Kamble, Deepak N Waghode and Sachin Satpute - all from Pune, while two other accused Dnyaneshwar D Devnir and Dheeraj Jadhav are still absconding.

As per the probe, Karan B. Kamble revealed the weapons used in the offence which were recovered and the attack was commissioned by Devnir and Jadhav for Rs 150,000 of which they were paid Rs 20,000. The probe revealed that Satpute and Nitesh Rane had hatched the conspiracy on Aug 28 last year with the latter wanting to teach Parab a lesson for targeting the Rane family.

Remaining 'incommunicado' for several days earlier, Nitesh Rane reacted to today's fast-paced happenings by posting a picture showing how Amit Shah was arrested by the CBI in 2010 when P. Chidambaram was the union home minister, and in 2019 the CBI arrested Chidambaram when Shah is (currently) the Union Home Minister.

Alongside is a telling caption: "Time is Powerful, Humans are unnecessarily arrogant."

Where was Maha FM in pre-budget meeting: MoS Finance Karad

Minister of State (MoS) for Finance Bhagwat Karad made a sensational revelation that Finance Minister of Maharashtra Ajit Rao Pawar, who is also the deputy Chief Minister of the state, was absent in state finance ministers' pre-budget meeting called by Union Minister of Finance Nirmala Sitharaman to know the budget expectations from the state governments.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Minister of State (MoS) for Finance Bhagwat Karad made a sensational revelation that Finance Minister of Maharashtra Ajit Rao Pawar, who is also the deputy Chief Minister of the state, was absent in state finance ministers' pre-budget meeting called by Union Minister of Finance Nirmala Sitharaman to know the budget expectations from the state governments.



from Maharashtra. Karad specially pointed out the pre-budget consultations with the Finance Ministers of States and Union Territories (with Legislature) for Union Budget 2022-23, chaired by the Union Minister for Finance & Corporate Affairs Nirmala Sitharaman on December 30. The meeting was attended by

Union Minister of State for Finance, Chief Ministers, Deputy Chief Ministers, Finance Ministers, Ministers and Senior Officers from the States and Union Territories (with Legislature) and the Union Government. "He (Ajit Pawar) is the finance minister of Maharashtra, why didn't he come when he had an opportunity to convey his state's expectations before the Union finance ministry regarding the union budget-22? They sent an IAS officer, who didn't have any idea about the budgetary expectation of the state, what is the use?" added Karad. Karad also mentioned one more meeting, where Ajit Pawar was invited as the deputy CM of Maharashtra, called by the Union Minister for Finance & Corporate Affairs Nirmala Sitharaman via virtual conference on November 15, with a view to enhance the investment climate in the country in the wake of strong recovery and the opportunities accorded by a shift in geo-political realities post pandemic.

"He (Ajit Rao Pawar) was not present in the pre-budget meeting of all the finance ministers of state governments. We sent invitations to all, others were there, sans Maharashtra's finance minister. This was an important meeting as the union finance minister wanted to know the budget expectations from all the state governments, it's the platform where all state governments participate and let the union finance ministry know about their financial requirements, but unfortunately Maharashtra's finance minister Ajit Rao Pawar didn't attend the meeting, even after repeated calls", revealed Karad. This verbal spat started after Ajit Pawar commented that his state got nothing in this union budget-22, despite having a Union minister of state for finance from Maharashtra. This was actually a direct comment Karad, who hails

BJP promoted beer, country liquor stores in Maha villages: Nana Patole

Country liquor outlets and beer vends were promoted in rural Maharashtra when the then Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis-led BJP government was in power in the state, Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee president Nana Patole has said.



Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee president Nana Patole has said.

Asked about Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar's indicative comment on the Maharashtra government's decision allowing sale of wine in supermarkets, in which the veteran politician suggested that he would be okay if the decision was reversed, Patole said on Tuesday that it was up to the government to take a call on the issue. "The government can take the decision.

Mumbai dance bars which were shut down during the alliance government, were reopened when the Fadnavis government came to power. Country liquor and beer shops in villages were opened under Fadnavis regimes. This is BJP's culture," Patole said. Patole is in Goa to campaign for the Congress party ahead of the February 14 polls. The Maharashtra state Congress chief also said that the state government there had allowed sale of wine in supermarkets following a central government norm, which had allowed sale of wines in supermarkets.

"According to the central government directives, wines could be sold in malls. The state government followed it. It will not make a difference if the decision is reversed," he said.

'Jail term can't exceed 25 years', SC seeks Centre's response on Abu Salem's plea

The Supreme Court on Wednesday asked the Centre to consider a plea by gangster Abu Salem that his imprisonment cannot extend beyond 25 years, according to the terms of his extradition from Portugal by the Indian government.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday asked the Centre to consider a plea by gangster Abu Salem that his imprisonment cannot extend beyond 25 years, according to the terms of his extradition from Portugal by the Indian government. Advocate Rishi Malhotra, representing Salem, submitted before a

bench headed by Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul that the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) court did not agree with the contention that it was bound by assurance given by the Indian government to the Portugal government during his client's extradition. He emphasized that the apex court has the power to grant him relief in the matter. After hearing arguments, the bench also comprising Justice M.M. Sundresh sought Centre and Maharashtra government's response on Salem's plea. The plea contended that the 2017 judgment of a TADA court, sentencing Salem to life imprisonment, was contrary to the terms of the extradition treaty.

According to the plea, Indian government, on December 17, 2002, gave a solemn sovereign assurance through Deputy Prime Minister to the Portugal government that if Salem is extradited for trials in India, he would



neither be conferred with death penalty nor be subjected to imprisonment for a term beyond 25 years.

Pointing at another error committed by the TADA court, the plea said: "Error committed by the TADA Court was with regard to the issue of 'Set Off'. According to the appellant though he was in custody for some offences of passport violation in Portugal since September 18, 2002 and was undergoing a sentence of 4 and half year, yet, the appellant was detained also on September 18, 2002 in pursuance to the Red Corner Notice issued by the Designated

Courts, Mumbai." The plea added that even if the said date is not to be taken into consideration for the purposes of "set off", the ministerial order of March 28, 2003, of the Ministry of Justice, Portugal by which it had admitted the extradition request of the Indian government to be tried for various offences ought to have been taken into consideration. "The TADA Court however, held that since the appellant was released in the Portugal case on October 12, 2005, therefore, the custody for the purposes of Set Off would be counted from October 12, 2005. The error lies in not taking custody from the Ministerial Order dated March 28, 2003." Malhotra submitted that his client as per the imprisonment certificate has undergone around 17 years of sentence by counting his set off period from November, 2005 whereas his set off period should be counted from March 28, 2003.

Mamata Banerjee directed to appear before Mumbai court

▶ A MUMBAI COURT ON WEDNESDAY DIRECTED WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER MAMATA BANERJEE TO APPEAR BEFORE IT ON MARCH 2 IN CONNECTION WITH A CASE LODGED AGAINST HER BY A BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY FUNCTIONARY.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

A Mumbai court on Wednesday directed West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to appear before it on March 2 in connection with a case lodged against her by a Bharatiya Janata Party functionary.

BJP Mumbai secretary Adv Vivekanand Gupta had filed a complaint with the Magistrate Court, Mazagaon, seeking a first information report against Banerjee for allegedly disrespecting the National Anthem. "In a public event, on Dec 21, 2021,

Banerjee sang the first two verses of the National Anthem sitting, and later stood up and sang the rest. Thus she committed offence under Prevention of Insult to National Honours Act, 1971, Section 3 and Home Ministry orders of 2015," Gupta told IANS.

Following his complaint, Metropolitan Magistrate P.I. Mokashi issued the process against the West Bengal Chief Minister and asked her to appear before the court on March 2, he added.

The alleged incident happened at the YB Chavan Centre in Mumbai where Banerjee was seen sitting and singing the National Anthem, then stood up to sing the remaining verses and abruptly stopped singing.

Gupta said he had lodged a complaint with the Cuffe Parade Police Station but since no cognisance was taken, he moved the Magistrate Court.

"It is a prima facie evident from the complaint, verification of statement of the complainant, video clip in the DVD and video clips on YouTube links, that the accused (Mamata Banerjee) sang national anthem and stopped abruptly and left the Dias which prima facie prove that the accused has committed offence under section 3 of the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971," said Magistrate Mokashi's order issuing the process.

Ex-MP Nilesh Rane booked for 'misbehaving' with Maha cops

▶ THE MAHARASHTRA POLICE HAVE BOOKED FORMER MP NILESH RANE, THE SON OF UNION MSME MINISTER NARAYAN RANE, FOR ALLEGED 'MISBEHAVIOUR' WITH THE POLICE A DAY BEFORE IN THE SINDHUDURG COURT PREMISES, OFFICIALS SAID HERE ON WEDNESDAY.

Sindhudurg | Agencies

The Maharashtra Police have booked former MP Nilesh Rane, the son of Union MSME Minister Narayan Rane, for alleged 'misbehaviour' with the police a day before in the Sindhudurg Court premises, officials said here on Wednesday.

Among other things, he and at least four others have been slapped with charges for arguing with the police, illegal gathering in the court precincts, violating prohibitory orders, and disturbing peace in a public place.

The Sindhudurgnagari Police Station at Orose late on Tuesday booked Rane and others hours after they reached the court with many supporters when the Sindhudurg Court Additional Sessions Judge

R.B. Rote was hearing the bail application of Bharatiya Janata Party MLA Nitesh Rane in an attempt to murder case.

The police had reached the court in riot gear and managed to evacuate scores of supporters of the Rane siblings after the court rejected Nitesh Rane's regular bail plea.

Shiv Sena MLA from Kudal-Malvan constituency, Vaibhav Naik also shot off a letter to the District Superintendent of Police saying Nilesh Rane and over two dozen of his supporters had gathered at the courtroom around 3 p.m. Tuesday.

Contending that they had prevented public servants from doing their duty and abused the police, a probe should be conducted and action must be taken against the accused.

Chhota Rajan discharged in MCOCA case by Mumbai Court

Underworld Don Chhota Rajan was discharged by a Special Mumbai court in connection with a MCOCA case lodged against him and others.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Underworld Don Chhota Rajan was discharged by a Special Mumbai court in connection with a MCOCA case lodged against him and others.

Five persons and a girl was shot at in Bandra west area of Mumbai out of which five later died on March 1, 1999. In this case Chhota Rajan was made as an accused along with others and MCOCA was slapped on them.

Tushar Sail the counsel of Chhota Rajan told IANS that he moved a discharge application before the Special Court. Tushar argued that there was no direct evidence against his client, Chhota Rajan and he was being framed.

"In the charge sheet filed by the prosecution there was no specific role assigned to the accused. The investigation is full of doubts and there is no cogent evidence collected against the applicant," Tushar argued. The discharge plea moved by Tushar read that "the Prosecution is taking advantage of some cases wherein name of Chhota Rajan is shown along with other accused persons. It is very easy for the investigating officer to show association with other co-accused showing them as



absconding. However, there is no evidence to show that the present applicant was the person mentioned in the charge sheet as Chhota Rajan. The entire charge sheet is silence about the identity of the accused."

The court after hearing the contention of both the sides, the prosecution and the defence, discharged Chhota Rajan.

On March 1, 1999 five persons and one girl were shot at near Pahalvi Hotel in Bandra. A police team reached the crime scene and found blood scattered all over. The victims were then taken to Bhabha Hospital for the treatment. Five persons succumbed during the course of treatment.

Initially the FIR was against unknown persons. It was lodged by one Ganga Ram Babulal Gupta. Later police identified the accused on the basis of their investigation. Those who were made accused in the case were Ajay Suresh Mohite alias Ajay Surabhan Shreshtha alias Ajay Nepali, Rajan Sadashiv Nikalje alias Chhota Rajan, Hemant Ramanna Pujari, Kundansingh Narsingh Rawat, Sammer Ashok Manik and Vikrant alias Vicky Malhotra. Suresh Mohite was acquitted by the Special Court in 2004. Case against Chhota Rajan was showing as pending. The trial began against him after his deportation.

The defence counsel argued that the investigating officer had not added any material to show the involvement of the present applicant.



NICOLE KIDMAN ON GETTING PAST THE TIMES SHE FELT 'PUT OUT TO PASTURE' BY HOLLYWOOD

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Nicole Kidman's career has spanned nearly four decades. Her trophy shelf includes an Oscar, two Emmys, a SAG Award and a BAFTA. She is a favourite to pick up her fifth Academy Award nomination next week for her work as Lucille Ball in 'Being the Ricardos', reports variety.com.

Even so, Kidman acknowledges the road to today has also included some bumps.

"I had that sort of in my early thirties where I was like, 'Right, I think this is kind of going to be it,'" the Aussie actor tells me on today's episode of the 'Just for Variety' podcast.

"And then I had it again at 40. And so I've run that gamut where you just go, 'Now's the time that I'm going to be put out to pasture.'"

It wasn't the fear of losing fame that scared Kidman during the down times, but the thought of not being able to pursue her art. "That feels at times like a gut wrenching," says Kidman.

"And then going, 'Okay, well I got to find other things that interest me that I love'. That's the journey of life, isn't it? And then suddenly going, 'This has blossomed ... or this has opened up, and now I have this chance to do something.'"

"So it's always been like this, and I know it will always be like that. I'm on the ride."

In the Aaron Sorkin-written and directed 'Being the Ricardos', she plays Lucille Ball during a week-long production of one episode of "I Love Lucy" Javier Bardem plays Desi Arnaz.

In one flashback scene, Ball is shown losing her contract at RKO Pictures. She was 39 at the time, but she gets her career back after doing a hit radio show. At the time, radio felt like a step down.

"She turns that failure into a success, which then leads to 'I Love Lucy', which then leads to her being able to say, 'You give Desi this job'. And the only reason he's not a movie star is because he's Cuban and I'm going to advocate for him to get it because he deserves it."

"Not because he is my husband, but because he's so talented and we are great together."

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor Sebastian Stan watched Tommy Lee and Pamela Anderson's sex tape "for research" ahead of his role as the drummer in 'Pam & Tommy'.

Asked if he'd seen the tape, he said:

"Well... It was research. I think your job as an actor is to find as much as you can possibly find on whoever you're playing, especially if they're real life people."

"But certainly not when it came out, I think I was 12, so I was a little too young for that."

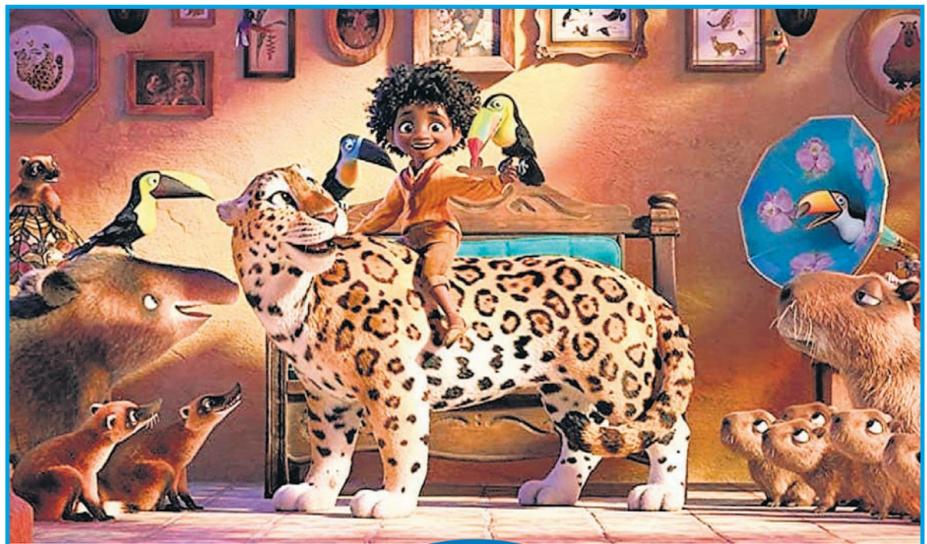
Sebastian and his co-star Lily James, who plays the 'Baywatch' actress, spend hours studying real-life footage of the former couple, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

Lily said: "Unfortunately (Pamela) wasn't involved but I watched all her interviews, read her books, watched her movies, a lot of 'Baywatch', I watched a lot of 'Baywatch' on the running machines."

Sebastian added in the interview with UK TV show 'This Morning': "Fortunately there are a lot of photographs of the two of them and every day when I was in the make-up trailer and getting the tattoos, I was playing these playlists of interviews."

"The whole story itself, we're learning about it in a new way, there are many facts about this invasion of privacy that we didn't know about."

The pair spent hours being transformed into Pamela and Tommy before filming every day.



Los Angeles | Agencies

"Encanto" co-writer Jared Bush reveals the animated movie had a post-credits scene scrapped because it didn't fit the mood of the ending.

The writer shared a clip of the funny moment on Twitter and explained they decided not to include it because of the "emotion and joy" of the film's ending, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

He wrote: "We considered an after credit joke to end the movie, but ultimately felt going out on the emotion and joy of the family coming back together was the way to go... but the hilarious @darrinbutter animated it!"

"So here you go! THANK YOU EVERYONE FOR WATCHING WITH US!! #ENCANTO

'Encanto' writer reveals film's scrapped post-credits scene

(sic)" Meanwhile, Bush also responded to news the movie's song "We Don't Talk About Bruno" has hit the top of the Billboard charts.

This means it's tied with "Aladdin" classic "A Whole New World" as the highest charting Disney animated song ever.

Replying to an article about the achievement, he wrote: "This headline is overwhelming! Huge congrats to our incredible cast for their unforgettable performances (literally unforgettable) @Lin_Manuel, Mike Elizondo and our brilliant team of musicians, editors, brilliant musical minds, support staff & ALL OF YOU AMAZING FANS! (sic)"

Sebastian Stan watched Pamela Anderson, Tommy Lee tape 'for research'



TOM HOLLAND BAFFLED BY GIFT FROM MARK WAHLBERG



Los Angeles: Hollywood actor Tom Holland thought Mark Wahlberg had given him a "self-pleasure" device as a gift - but it was just a massage gun.

Holland told 'Access Hollywood': "Essentially Mark Wahlberg was kind enough to give me a massage gun after I left his house in LA and he drove me back to my hotel. I was confused as to what kind of massage gun this was having never seen one before and I thought it was the type of self-pleasure."

"I thought Mark Wahlberg was driving me back to my house for other reasons than just being a gentleman. I didn't know, it's Hollywood baby... who knows what's going to happen." The 50-year-old actor insisted there was nothing sexual about his gift, he simply owns a stake in a company named Power Plate, which he believes make "the best massage guns out there", so he wanted to introduce them to his new friend, femalefirst.co.uk. Meanwhile, Holland recently revealed while he "will" wait to start a family, he is excited at the idea of being a parent in the future because he loves being around children.

'Reacher': A gritty, action thriller worthy of binge-watch



TROY RIBEIRO

(Streaming on Amazon Prime)

Direction: Eli Goree, Kingsley Ben-Adir, Aldis Hodge, Leslie Odom Jr.

Cast: Alan Ritchson, Malcolm Goodwin, Willa Fitzgerald, Hugh Thompson, Chris Webster, Bruce McGill, Maxwell Jenkins, Gavin White, Leslie Fray, Jonathan Koensgen, Willie C. Carpenter

Duration: Average 48 minutes per episode
Ratings: * * * and 1/2 (three and a half stars)



the killing, given his past reputation - and this being the town's first homicide in 20 years. The situation gets complicated when an accountant called Paul Hubble confesses to the murder. He is put in the same detention room, along with Reacher, where an attempt is made on their lives.

But when Chief Detective Oscar Finlay (Malcolm Goodwin) and the young police officer Roscoe Conklin (Willa Fitzgerald) investigate the situation, they exonerate Reacher.

Given Reacher's background, he soon allies with them to prove his innocence. Together the three of them visit the morgue, and on realising whose body is lying there, Reacher makes it his agenda to unravel the deep-seated conspiracy that's plaguing the town. With the increasing number of people getting killed, the plot and the pacing of the series

are taut and intense. Narrated in a non-linear manner, it's an investigation you'd not want to miss witnessing. The dialogues are crisp to the point and intelligently shrewd. But then there are a few moments when Reacher reveals some implausible expositions with precision. The justification given then is lame and dismissible, given this is an exceptional heroic series.

There are several dramatic as well as action sequences that are astutely designed and delicately handled. Some of the murder scenes and bone-breaking acts are gruesome but not over-the-top. On the performance front, every actor is natural and at ease with the characters they play.

Topping the list is Alan Ritchson. He essays - Jack Reacher's confidence and presence, to perfection, with his big, well-chiselled frame. When his mother

Josephine (Leslie Fray) says: "Reacher has the strength of three men," you believe her, given his over-powering screen presence and formidable demeanour.

Ritchson is aptly supported by the swift and agile Willa Fitzgerald as Roscoe Conklin - his colleague and love interest in the series, Malcolm Goodwin, who essays the strong-minded and defensive by the books-Chief Detective Oscar Finlay, together the trio make a formidable team, difficult to defeat.

Technically, the series is mounted with good production values. The cinematography adds to the intrigue value of the narrative. It captures the setting and the performances of its talented cast with precision. Overall, the series is a gritty, action thriller worthy of binge-watching.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Kim Kardashian



OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALIST NEERAJ CHOPRA NOMINATED FOR LAUREUS WORLD SPORTS AWARDS

THE WINNERS WILL BE REVEALED IN APRIL, FOLLOWING A VOTE BY THE LAUREUS WORLD SPORTS ACADEMY, THE WORLD'S ULTIMATE SPORTS JURY, MADE UP OF 71 OF THE GREATEST SPORTING LEGENDS OF ALL TIME.

London | Agencies

Neeraj Chopra, India's first ever winner of an Olympic athletics gold medal, has been nominated for the

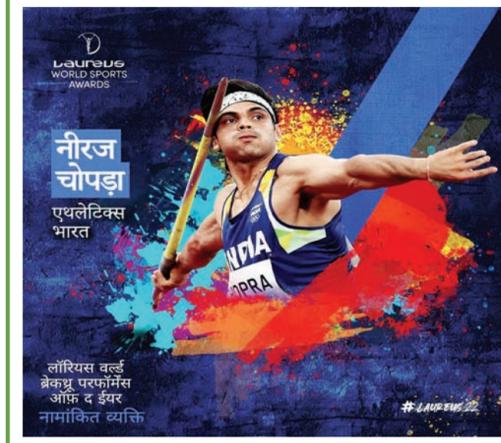
2022 Laureus World Breakthrough of the Year Award. He is one of the six nominees for the prestigious Award.

With his second throw measuring 87.58 metres, Chopra became the first Indian track and field athlete to win an individual Olympic gold medal during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, the other being Abhinav Bindra in air rifle in 2008. He is only the third Indian athlete to be nominated for a Laureus Award, after wrestler Vinesh Phogat in 2019 and cricket maestro Sachin Tendulkar, who won the Laureus Sporting Moment Award 2000-2020, which marked the emotional moment during the 2011 ICC World Cup, when his team carried him on their shoulders in a lap of honour after India's win. Apart from Neeraj, the other five

sportspersons who have been nominated for the Breakthrough Award are -- Britain's Emma Raducanu, who became a global tennis sensation when she won the US Open at the age of 18, Russia's Daniil Medvedev, who won the men's title at Flushing Meadows, FC Barcelona's football prodigy Pedri, aged 19, voted best young player at the Ballon d'Or, Yulimar Rojas, who broke the 26-year-old triple jump world record, and swimmer Ariarne Titmus, aged 20, who twice beat champion Katie Ledecky at 200 and 400m in Tokyo.

A panel of more than 1,300 of the leading sports journalists and broadcasters in the world have selected the nominees in each of seven categories for this year's Laureus World Sports Awards.

"I'm delighted to be nominated for this Laureus Award and it's a great honour for me to be recognised in the wider sporting world for what I achieved in Tokyo."



KL Rahul moves up to 4th in ICC T20 rankings; huge gains from Hosein, Holder

Dubai | Agencies

Indian batter KL Rahul has moved up one place, to fourth, displacing England's Dawid Malan in the latest ICC Men's T20I Rankings for batters released on Wednesday. Rahul, with 729 points, is behind Pakistan skipper Babar Azam (No. 1, 805 points), Mohammad Rizwan (798 points) and South Africa's Aiden Markram (796 points).

Former India captain Virat Kohli and the new white-ball skipper Rohit Sharma continue to hold on to their 10th and 11th spots, respectively among batters in the latest rankings update.

Meanwhile, left-arm spinner Akeal Hosein and fast bowler Jason Holder have achieved career-best rankings for bowlers after helping



the West Indies to a series-deciding 17-run victory in the fifth and final T20I against England in Bridgetown. No Indian bowler figures in the top-10 in the category, with Bhuvneshwar Kumar slipping one spot to 20th.

In the latest weekly update to the men's rankings, which considers performances in the last three matches of the series, Hosein has moved up

15 places to 18th position after a haul of 4/30 that helped him finish with six wickets in three matches.

All-rounder and former captain Holder, who grabbed four wickets in four balls to finish with match figures of 5/27 and a tally of nine wickets in those three matches, has advanced three places to 23rd with a huge gain of 20 rating points.

ISL 2021-22: SC EAST BENGAL HOLD CHENNAIYIN FC

Vasco da Gama (Goa) | Agencies

SC East Bengal played out a 2-2 draw with Chennaiyin FC in the 2021-22 Hero Indian Super League (ISL) at the Tilak Maidan Stadium, here on Wednesday.

Chennaiyin FC raced into a two-goal lead through goals from Hira Mondal (2 OG) and Ninthoi (15') in the early stages of the match. Darren Sidoel (61') pulled one back with a well-hit free-kick and the equaliser finally came through Lalrinliana Hnamte (90+1') which ended the game in a draw.

Chennaiyin FC went into the lead in the second minute of the match after Suhail Pasha's header took a deflection from Hira Mondal and went inside the net for an own goal. The left-back's night became worse at the stroke of the 15th-minute after his individual error led to the second goal. Ninthoinganba Meetei made the interception on the right flank, made room for himself and smashed the



ball in the top-left corner to extend the lead to two.

At the half-hour mark, Antonio Perosevic had a chance to reduce the deficit after beating his marker but the forward sent his shot wide. A minute before the halftime whistle,

Marcelo Ribeiro's diving header went off-target from close range. The Red & Gold Brigade pushed with more intensity in order to score in the first half but the CFC defence gave them no room to enjoy.

The restart saw SC East Bengal

continue their push for the first goal with the first shot on target coming through Mahesh Naorem Singh. At the hour mark, the goal finally came through Darren Sidoel who scored from a direct free-kick which was hit with a lot of power. The last ten minutes of the game saw both teams majorly cancelling each other out without creating scoring opportunities.

The relentless pressure from SC East Bengal finally paid dividends with Lalrinliana Hnamte scoring the equaliser with a header. The forward was left unmarked inside the box and punished Chennaiyin FC with an accurate headed goal. There wasn't enough time for either team to find the winner, leading to the points being shared between them.

Chennaiyin FC will next face defending champions Mumbai City FC at the P.J.N Stadium on Sunday whereas SC East Bengal will lock horns with Odisha FC at the Tilak Maidan Stadium on Monday.

World Cup qualifier

COUTINHO WONDER STRIKE HELPS BRAZIL TO 4-0 ROUT OF PARAGUAY



Belo Horizonte | Agencies

Philippe Coutinho struck a superb second-half goal as Brazil overcame Paraguay 4-0 in

their World Cup qualifier here on Wednesday.

Leeds United midfielder Raphinha gave the hosts an ideal start by cutting inside his marker before beating goal-

keeper Antony Silva at his near post with a low left-footed finish.

Aston Villa loanee Coutinho then provided the highlight of the match when he ran onto a Marquinhos pass before rifling an unstoppable 30-yard drive past Silva just after the hour mark.

The result means Brazil maintain their four-point lead over second-placed Argentina in the 10-team South American group. Paraguay dropped to ninth and can now no longer qualify for football's showpiece tournament in Qatar later this year.

Sanchez nets brace as Chile keep Qatar hopes alive

La Paz: Alexis Sanchez scored twice as Chile kept their World Cup qualification hopes flickering with a 3-2 away win over Bolivia.

The Inter Milan forward opened the scoring in the 14th minute at the Hernandes Silo stadium on Tuesday night with a curling free-kick that dipped late to beat goalkeeper Carlos Lampe. Marc Enoumba equalised just before halftime by heading in from Juan Arce's corner.

Chile regained the lead when Marcelino Nunez side-footed home following a slick Mauricio Isla cross from the right side of the penalty area. The top four teams in the South American group will automatically qualify for the World Cup later this year in Qatar while the fifth-ranked side will advance to an intercontinental playoff.



Dubai | Agencies

New Zealand all-rounder Daryl Mitchell was named the winner of ICC Spirit of Cricket Award 2021 after his gesture in the Men's T20 World Cup semi-final against England in Abu Dhabi.

Mitchell was given the award for refusing to take a single in the high-pressure T20 World Cup semi-final against England in Abu Dhabi on November 10.

Chasing 167, New Zealand were on course for acing the run chase with a well-settled Mitchell establishing a partnership with James Neesham. The incident occurred on the first ball of the 18th over bowled by Adil Rashid, with the score at 133/4. Neesham bashed the ball down the ground and it



would have been an easy single. But Mitchell, at the non-striker's end, refused to take the run, conceding that he had impeded Rashid. In a high-pressure chase, with a place in the World Cup final at stake, Mitchell's gesture

oozed class. Mitchell becomes the fourth New Zealand player to win the Spirit of Cricket award after Daniel Vettori (2012), Brendon McCullum (2015) and Kane Williamson (2018).

Prajnesh keen to regain title at Bengaluru Open ATP Challenger



Bengaluru | Agencies

Prajnesh Gunneswaran is keen to regain the Bengaluru Open ATP Challenger title, which he won in the 2018 edition as the Karnataka State Lawn Tennis Association gears up to host two back-to-back ATP Challenger events starting on Sunday with the qualifiers.

"I have great memories of Bengaluru. I practiced at the KSLTA for a fairly long period and I have had a good outing at the Challengers," Prajnesh said. "I have many titles here and it is like a second home for me in India other than Chennai. I am looking forward to coming back to the City which is very familiar to me and winning would definitely add to my joy," said the 32-year-old in an interview from Pune.

Currently ranked 228 in the world, Prajnesh who got into the main draw of the Bengaluru Open yesterday expects a stiff competition during the weeks to come.

"Definitely it is going to be tough. I'm sure there are a lot of good players, especially because it's right after Pune and then the two Challengers are in a row. So a lot of the higher ranked players end up staying, which is not necessarily good for the Indians, but it is good to have an event with quality players. It's always nice to watch and be a part of it," he said.

Prajnesh who has two ATP Challenger titles and nine ITF titles to his credit was not in the best of shape during last year which also saw Covid-19 curtailing most of the efforts of the players across the world.

WEST INDIES ARRIVE IN AHMEDABAD FOR WHITE-BALL SERIES

Ahmedabad | Agencies

The West Indies men's side, led by swashbuckling all-rounder Kieron Pollard, arrived in Ahmedabad on early Wednesday morning ahead of the upcoming white-ball series against hosts India. The visitors will now serve a three-day quarantine period before hitting the ground running for practice sessions.

"After a long couple days of travel from Barbados, the #MenInMaroon have arrived in India," tweeted the official handle of Cricket West Indies.



Another tweet had the video of the team arriving at the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International

Airport. "WI arrive safely in Ahmadabad! The #MenInMaroon have a quick

turnaround, as WI get ready to play @BCCI in 3 ODIs here, starting on February 6 #INDvWI," read the caption.

The white-ball series between West Indies and India will begin with three ODIs at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad from February 6. It will be followed by three T20Is at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata starting from February 16. Earlier, the Gujarat Cricket Association said that the ODI series will be played behind closed doors due to the COVID-19 situation in the country.

Tata Open Maharashtra Myneni-Sasikumar cruise into second round, beat Sharan and Bhambri

Pune: India's Saketh Myneni and Sasikumar Mukund kick-started their campaign at the 2022 Tata Open Maharashtra with a resounding 6-3, 6-4 win over compatriots Divij Sharan and Yuki Bhambri in the doubles opening round match at the Balewadi Stadium here on Wednesday.

Myneni and Sasikumar were awarded a main draw entry as an alternative pair after the pair of Denis Novak and Joao Sousa pulled out with the former suffering a thigh injury. The South Asia's only ATP-250 event, is being organised by the Maharashtra State Lawn Tennis Association and will be played till February 6.

Teaming up for the first time, Myneni and Sasikumar pair looked in great touch as they pocketed the first set quite comfortably. However, Divij and Bhambri, who had registered a semi-final finish during their maiden appearance at the tournament in 2018, regrouped again quickly in the second set to take the early lead, but Myneni and Sasikumar did not let the momentum slip by securing successive points which put them 5-4 ahead in the second set and went on to bag the match comfortably in straight sets.

PKL 8: Sachin, Mohamadreza Shadloui shine as Patna Pirates beat UP Yoddha

Bengaluru | Agencies

Patna Pirates defeated UP Yoddha 37-35 in the Vivo Pro Kabaddi League Season 8 match, here on Wednesday. Pirates' Sachin got a Super 10 (12 points) and was aptly supported by left corner defender Mohamadreza Shadloui who secured a High 5.

The three-time champions started the match brightly but lost their way in the middle to give Yoddha an opportunity. Surrender Gill scored a Super 10 for UP Yoddha, but Patna Pirates defenders dominated the final 10 minutes of the match to ensure they clinched an important



win in the race for a playoff spot. UP Yoddha started the

second half with a 2-point raid by Surrender Gill. That

helped the team clinch an early ALL OUT and level scores at 21-21. The momentum clearly shifted and U.P. used that to open a narrow lead. Surrender Gill got his Super 10 in the 8th minute after the interval, but Patna stayed within touching distance through Sachin's raids. They levelled the score with 7 minutes on the clock.

But Iranian left corner Mohamadreza Shadloui produced two consecutive tackles in a pressure situation to give Pirates some breathing space in the dying minutes. The Pirates clung to the lead to ensure they walked away with all 5 points.



Amitabh Bachchan is a 'doll': Rashmika

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Rashmika Mandanna is super excited about her two Bollywood films, Mission Majnu and Goodbye. She stars opposite Sidharth Malhotra in the spy thriller, Mission Majnu, which is slated to release on May 13. In her next release Goodbye, Rashmika will share screen space with Amitabh Bachchan. In a recent interview with IndiaToday.in, the actress spoke about working with Shahenshah of Bollywood.

For the first time, the actress will be sharing the screen space with Amitabh Bachchan. Speaking to IndiaToday.in, Rashmika called Bachchan a 'doll' and added, "Mr Bachchan has been an absolute doll, he is such an amazing person and a legend. He made all of us feel extremely comfortable. From every rehearsal to shoot, he made it absolutely fun and amazing. Any words for him would be too little to describe him." Goodbye is directed by Vikas Bahl and also stars Neena Gupta and Pavail Gulati in pivotal roles. The release date of the movie has not been announced yet. However, the actress hopes that it releases this year. "I am super excited about both my films and I can't wait for you to watch them. I think people are going to love the films," she said. Apart from Mission Majnu and Goodbye, Rashmika will also be seen in the sequel of Pushpa, which is titled Pushpa: The Rule.



Deepika loves Goa

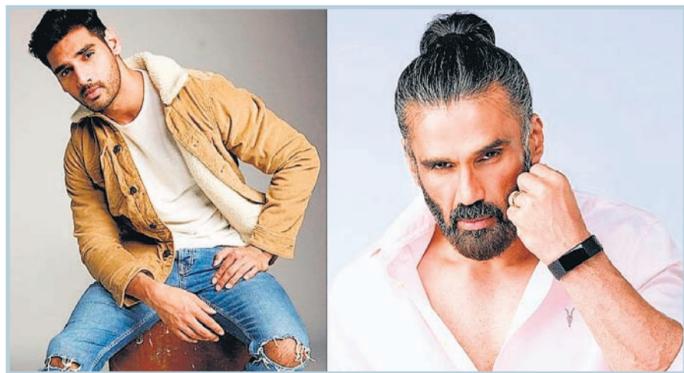
Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Deepika Padukone along with her Gehraiyaan co-stars Ananya Pandey, Siddhant Chaturvedi and Dhairya Karwa will be seen talking about their upcoming film in 'The Kapil Sharma Show'. The cast along with the director Shakun Batra also share about the fun experience they had on and off camera much to the delight of the viewers.

During an engaging banter with the cast, host of the show Kapil Sharma asks Deepika to reveal her reason behind her love for Goa.

Kapil asks Deepika if she actually wanted to take the cast to Goa to bond or in reality she wanted to go on a holiday to which, Deepika jokingly says, "Nahi bus aise hi holiday pe jana chahati". Kapil then adds that Deepika has a special place for Goa and she really enjoys being there, she even shot for the film, 'Finding Fanny' in the pristine state.

Deepika adds, "Ha bachpan mai mein bahaut mein goa jaati thi toh mujhe laga ki hum sab saath mein challenge." 'The Kapil Sharma Show' airs on Sony Entertainment Television.



AHAN SHETTY WANTS TO STAR IN FATHER SUNIEL SHETTY'S 'DHADKAN' REMAKE

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Actor Ahan Shetty says he would like to star in a remake of his father Suniel Shetty's films such as 'Dhadkan' and 'Border'.

'Dhadkan', was a hit when it was released in 2000. The romantic drama film also stars Shilpa Shetty and Akshay Kumar. The movie was inspired by the novel 'Wuthering Heights'.

'Border', a mega hit, released in 1997, was set during the India-Pakistan War of 1971. It is an adaptation of real life events that happened during the Battle of Longewala in 1971.

Talking about the remake culture and a film of his father he would want to star in,

Ahan in a conversation with IANS said: "I absolutely love border so I think 'Border' would be a fantastic film to remake and be a part of. I think 'Dhadkan' would also be an interesting film to be a part of."

Ahan made his Bollywood debut last year with 'Tadap', which follows the story of a guy hopelessly in love, who turns vindictive along the course of the film after being abandoned.

Asked what he has planned next, Ahan said: "There are a few interesting things that we have planned. There should be an announcement within a month... Other than that I can say that I have a four-film contract with Sajid Nadiadwala. So I will be working with him again."

Marathi actor Gayatri Datar makes Hindi debut

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Gayatri Datar, who is a popular actor in the Marathi entertainment space, has made her Hindi TV debut with the show 'Mere Sai: Shraddha Aur Saburi', where she is seen portraying the pivotal role of Sumitra.

Elaborating on her role and her debut, Gayatri said: "I am very happy to be debuting with a show like Mere Sai which is a viewer favourite. When I was approached to play the role of Sumitra, I was really convinced to play the part and couldn't say no."

"The character has an amazing graph through-out as she goes through myriad emotions ranging from trauma to gratitude and then conflict."

She adds, "The look is also very different from what I have donned before. It takes courage to be in front of the camera without any makeup. I am very happy with the role and I hope viewers enjoy watching the episodes."

In the ongoing track, Sumitra suffers the loss of a child and goes into trauma. Her sister-in-law, who has two sons, cannot see her state and gives her younger child to Sumitra. But soon enough, elder son of Sumitra's sister-in-law goes missing and she wants her younger one back, leading to clashes between them.



I'm deeply humbled: Ayushmann Khurrana

Team Absolute | Mumbai

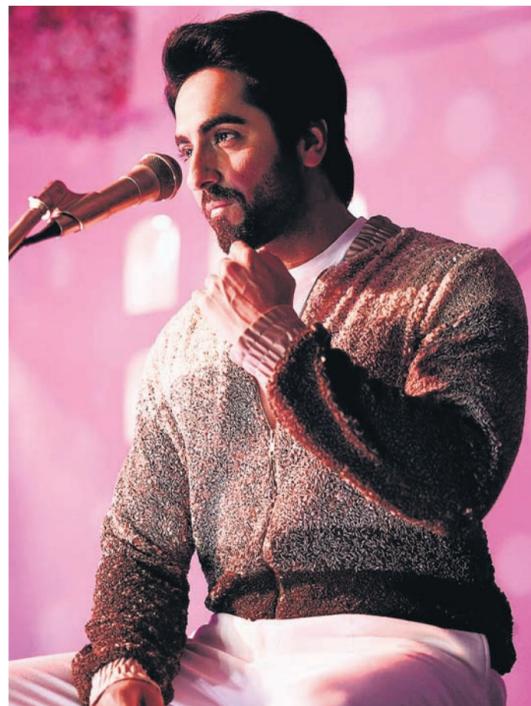
Bollywood actor Ayushmann Khurrana, who has never shied away from touching upon taboo subjects, says he feels humbled if he has set an agenda for content in the country.

Ayushmann has played gay man on screen (Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan), a sperm donor (Vicky Donor), tackled how every body type should be celebrated (Dum Laga Ke Haisha), backed a film about the inclusivity of the transgender community in India through Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui.

Asked to comment on how he has been the only star driving important social conversations in the country for the last five years through his content-pole cinema, Ayushmann says, "have always felt that films that not only entertain people to their fullest but also leave a message for everyone to ponder over in the most unique and fun way, are movies that are the most engaged with and discussed heavily."

"So, maybe, subconsciously I have found myself pulled towards scripts that have radiated this novelty."

He adds, "In my pursuit to find the best scripts that the Hindi film industry can make, if I have found myself projects, directors and film-makers to set an agenda for content



in my country, then I'm deeply humbled."

"I have been a fortunate actor who has been trusted by outstanding film-makers with their visionary scripts. So, if I have set agenda for

content over the years, I share that honour with my creative collaborators who have punted on me and also approached me with such disruptive content that hasn't been made by Hindi cinema before."



Ananya Pandey

SHAAN'S FIRST INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION OF 2022 IS AN EARWORM WITH DANCEHALL VIBE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Playback singer Shaan released his first international collaboration of 2022 titled 'Bom Billi' with international sensation Delsol. The track, which will see four different versions over the next few weeks, will showcase Shaan creating groundbreaking music with global talent from Delhi, Argentina and America.

Commenting on his latest single that released on Monday, Shaan said: "I'm quite excited for 'Bom Billi'. It has the dancehall vibe, the Punjabi/Hindi/English mix and that earworm hook. This song will give the audiences a completely different experience, which I am sure they would love."

Talking about the collaboration part of the song, the singer said: "Bom Billi' is an exciting international collaboration with Nick Rajsakha's X3 Ent and its music team. I thoroughly enjoyed working with the super talented Delsol and the artists and rappers from across the globe."

The project is the brainchild of Nick Rajsakha and Nawaz Modi Singhania who have jointly co-produced the project and brought together the power team of Shaan, Delsol and Grammy winner Jason Goldstein.

