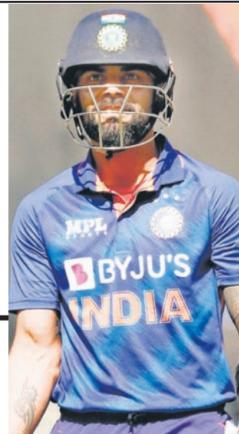


# absolute india

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PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM MUMBAI, BHOPAL AND NEW DELHI



**NATION** >02  
Centre ready to talk with the NE militants: Rajnath...



**HOLLYWOOD** > 06  
Adele's London home features 'a wine store and an energy centre'...



**SPORTS** > 07  
Vikram Rathour backs Kohli to 'bat well and score big runs' in T20Is...

## INDIA'S JAN RETAIL INFLATION RISES TO OVER 6%

# COSTLY COMMODITIES

As per the data furnished by the National Statistical Office, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose to 6.01 per cent last month from 5.66 per cent in December 2021.

- ▶ IN TERMS OF CPI INFLATION RATE, PULSES AND PRODUCTS' PRICES JUMPED BY 3.02 PER CENT IN JANUARY 2022 YOY. MEAT AND FISH PRICES ROSE BY 4.09 PER CENT. EGGS WERE DEARER BY 2.23 PER CENT. AND OILS AND FATS PRICES ROSE 18.70 PER CENT.
- ▶ THE OVERALL PRICE OF FOOD AND BEVERAGES CATEGORY WAS UP 5.58 PER CENT.
- ▶ VEGETABLE PRICES WERE UP BY 5.19 PER CENT.
- ▶ AS PER THE OFFICIAL DATA, THE INFLATION RATE FOR FUEL AND LIGHT WAS HIGHER BY 9.32 PER CENT.
- ▶ IN ADDITION, SUB-GROUP OF CLOTHING AND FOOTWEAR SHOWED A PRICE ACCELERATION OF 8.84 PER CENT.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Higher food prices, as well as rising commodity costs, lifted India's January 2022 retail inflation on a sequential as well as year-on-year basis, official data showed on Monday. Similarly, on a YoY basis, the rise in last month's retail inflation was faster than the 4.06 per cent increase in prices recorded for January 2021. The trend assumes significance as retail inflation rate crossed the target range of the Reserve Bank of India. The cen-

tral bank has a CPI target range of 2-to-6 per cent. As per the NSO data, the rate of rise in the Consumer Food Price Index, which measures the changes in retail prices of food products, increased to 5.43 per cent last month from 4.05 per cent in December 2021. ICRA's Chief Economist Aditi Nayar said: "As feared, an unfavorable base hardened the YoY CPI inflation to a seven month high, printing marginally above the 6 per cent upper threshold of the MPC's medium term forecast range for the first time since June 2021, and exceeding our forecast

of 5.9 per cent. "Interestingly, while the urban inflation remained unchanged at 5.9 per cent, the rural CPI inflation surged to 6.1 per cent in January 2022 from 5.4 per cent in the previous month, reversing the gap between the two metrics." Brickwork Ratings' Chief Economic Adviser M. Govinda Rao said: "The prices of food items have shown a steep rise from 4.05 per cent in December to 5.43 per cent in January, due to rising global commodity prices and continued supply bottlenecks.

"Higher food inflation has accelerated the overall inflation rate, in addition to higher core and fuel inflation which are already at elevated levels." India Ratings and Research's Principal Economist, Sunil Kumar Sinha, said: "Though, Covid cases are ebbing, heightened geopolitical risks will keep the energy prices and thus inflation at elevated levels. "Against this backdrop, Ind-Ra expects the wholesale inflation to be in double-digits and retail inflation close to the upper tolerance band of RBI during the rest of the current fiscal."

## ABGSL LOAN-FRAUD

# LIC grazed; ICICI, IDBI worst-hit in Rs 22,842 crore scam

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The sensational Rs 22,842 crore mega loan fraud allegedly perpetrated by the Gujarat-based ABG Shipyard Ltd (ABGSL) did not spare the IPO-bound Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) while the ICICI Bank and the IDBI Bank took the worst-hit among other government, private, foreign banks, NBFCs, as per official data.

The State Bank of India (SBI) which first reported the scam, has named ABG Shipyard Ltd, the corporate guarantor ABG Shipyard International Pvt Ltd. However, the private ICICI Bank has been duped of a staggering Rs 7,089 crore - the highest - followed by the IDBI Bank Ltd, ranking second with the fraud amount of Rs 3,639 crore. At the third position is the SBI which has admitted its exposure to the tune of Rs 2,925 crore. The giant IPO bound LIC has also been scraped by Rs 136 crore - with the sole consolation being the entire amount is said to be 'secured'.

The other notables defrauded are: Bank of Baroda (Rs 1,614-crore), EXIM Bank (Rs 1,327 crore), Punjab National Bank (Rs 1,244 crore), Indian Overseas Bank (Rs 1,228 crore). There's the international lender, Standard Chartered Bank (Rs 743 crore), Bank of India (Rs 719 crore), the erstwhile Oriental Bank of Commerce, now PNB (Rs 714 crore), SBI-Singapore (Rs 458 crore), the former Syndicate Bank, now Canara Bank (Rs 408 crore), the then Dena Bank, now Bank of Baroda (Rs 406 crore), and the defunct Andhra Bank, now Union Bank of India (Rs 350 crore). There are entities like: IFCI Ltd (Rs 300 crore), SICOM Ltd (Rs 260 crore), Phoenix ARC Pvt Ltd (Rs 141 crore), State Bank of Mauritius - SBM Bank Ltd (Rs 125 crore), DCB Bank Ltd (Rs 106-crore). In the sub Rs 100 crore group are: Punjab National Bank International Ltd (Rs 97 crore), Laxmi Vilas Bank Ltd (Rs 61 crore), Indian Bank Singapore (Rs 43 crore), Canara Bank (Rs 40 crore), Central Bank of India (Rs 39 crore), Punjab & Sind Bank (Rs 37 crore), and YES Bank (Rs 2 crore). Highlighting the scam, the SBI, has pointed accusing fingers at the ABGSL and its top brass for committing the 'criminal activities,' but has given a clean chit to its own staff.



## CONGRESS ACCUSES MODI GOVERNMENT

New Delhi: The Congress on Monday accused the Narendra Modi-led Central government of 'complicity, collusion and connivance' by those sitting in the highest echelons of power in what it called 'India's biggest fraud'. Addressing a press conference here, Congress leader Gaurav Vallabh said, "Shahenshah's' promise was \$5 trillion economy, but he gave us bank fraud of Rs 5.35 trillion in the last 7.5 years." "Average fraud in the banking industry per day in the last 7.5 years (2,737 days) is Rs 195.5 crores a day, as per an RTI reply, while RBI's recovery rate in 2020-21 of these frauds stood at 0.7 per cent. 'Loot and escape' is Modi government's flagship scheme for bank fraudsters." Vallabh said. The Congress also alleged that the biggest ever bank fraud of Rs 22,842 crore happened under Modi government's watch, and after a five-year delay, the CBI finally registered an FIR on February 7 against Gujarat-based ABG Shipyard owned by Rishi Agarwal and others for duping 28 banks.

## Bengaluru airport celebrates season of love with 5.15 lakh kg rose shipment



Bengaluru | Agencies

Enhancing its reputation as the airport of choice for perishables in India, the Bengaluru International Airport witnessed a near two-fold increase in rose shipments in the run-up to Valentine's Day this year amid the Covid crisis. Spreading the fragrance of roses across the globe, the Bengaluru airport facilitated the movement of approximately 5.15 lakh kg of roses to 25 international and domestic destinations as against 2.7 lakh kg

shipped in 2021, the Bengaluru International Airport Limited (BIAL) said in an official statement. The demand for roses during the Valentine season in the domestic market has seen a considerable rise this year. Domestic shipments witnessed a significant improvement, increasing to 3.15 lakh kg (6.5 million stems) as against 1.03 lakh kg in 2021, recording over 200 per cent growth. Around 2 lakh kg (7.3 million stems) were exported to international destinations this year as against last year's 1.7 lakh kg.

## WITH IPO, LIC SHAREHOLDERS TO GET HIGHER SHARE OF SURPLUS AT POLICYHOLDERS' COST

Chennai | Agencies

Holders of life insurance policies of Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) may see reduced return on their policies owing to the change in the sharing of the surplus, said the life insurer. In its Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP) filed with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), the LIC said reduction in the availability of surplus to participating policyholders following the amendment to Section 24 of the LIC Act might make its policies less attractive to some customers. Prior to amending the Section 24 of LIC Act, the life insurer had one single consolidated 'Life Fund'. The surplus in the Life Fund was distributed between the policyholders and the shareholder/Government of India in the ratio of 95:5. After the amendment, the LIC



Board was mandated to maintain two separate funds, i.e., a participating policyholders' fund and a non-participating policyholders' fund and from September 31, 2021 two funds were maintained. As on September 30, 2021, the participating policyholders' fund aggregated to Rs 24,57,995.21 crore and the non-participating policyholders' fund aggregated to Rs 11,36,966.07 crore. The surplus for the non-participating policyholders' fund was Rs 1,407.86 crore for the six

months ended September 30, 2021, all of which was transferred to the shareholders' account. Post segregation of the Life Fund, 100 per cent of the surplus generated out of the non-participating business is available for distribution to all of the shareholders. The surplus from the participating business shall be distributed in the ratio of 95:5 to policyholders and shareholders. This sharing ratio will be modified as 90:10 in a phased manner.

## HIJAB ROW: STUDENTS WERE TOLD TO REMOVE HIJAB IN K'TAKA

Bengaluru | Agencies

Even as the majority of Muslim students in Karnataka on Monday attended classes without wearing hijab as per the High Court's interim order, 13 students from the Government High



School in Shivamogga district refused to take the SSLC (Class 10) preparatory examination after being asked to remove hijab. The students of Government Public School of Shivamogga district were stopped by teachers and asked to remove their hijab. The students, however, outrightly refused to shun hijab and demanded that they be allowed to write exams. The teachers and school management tried to convince them by asking them to write exams in a separate room without a hijab. However, the students rejected the offer and decided to boycott the examination. Parents of the girls,

who reached school there, also supported their children and took them home saying that without hijab they can't attend classes. Aliya Mehat, a student who boycotted the exam for hijab, said, "The court is yet to give order, whatever it is we will not take off hijab. It is okay if we don't write exams. Exams are not important for me, religion is important. We will not come to school if hijab is not made mandatory. My parents have asked me to come back home, if asked to take off my hijab," she said. However, more than 100 other Muslim girls, who are studying in the school, attended the classes without a hijab.

## RUSSIA-UKRAINE CRISIS BOOSTS GOLD, CRUDE OIL PRICES

New Delhi: Heightened tensions between Russia-Ukraine accelerated gold and crude oil prices on Monday. As global equity indices slid, commodities, including crude oil, surged as geopolitical risks over Ukraine rippled through global markets. The Brent-indexed Crude oil prices crossed \$96 per barrel, the highest in seven years. Russia is one of the world's top producers of crude oil and gold, and any western sanctions against Russia will stiffen the global supply. Gold prices traded higher with Comex spot gold prices trading at days high near \$1,866 per ounce. The Gold April future contract at MCX was trading over 1.52 per cent near Rs 49,859 per 10 grams. Similarly, MCX Silver March futures rose by more than 2 per cent at Rs 64,470 per kg while spot silver prices at Comex were trading near \$23.92 per ounce in the evening session. IIL Securities VP, Research, Anuj Gupta, said: "Gold may test Rs 50,500 per 10 gram levels and silver may test Rs 66,500 per kg level soon. "In the international market, gold may test \$1,880 levels and silver may test \$25 levels."

## Channi's chopper not allowed to take off due to PM's visit



Chandigarh | Agencies

In the run-up to the February 20 Assembly elections in Punjab, Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi's chopper was not allowed to take off from Chandigarh on Monday owing to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's movement in the state. Channi was to join his party leader Rahul Gandhi's rally in Hoshiarpur.

Modi was scheduled to campaign in Jalandhar, his first visit to the state after a major breach in his security in Punjab last month. Officials said Channi's chopper was not permitted to take off from Chandigarh owing to imposition of a 'no-fly zone'. Reacting to the development, Channi said, "I am a Chief Minister, not a terrorist." At the public rally in Jalandhar, Modi questioned the security arrangements of the Channi-led state government. "I wanted to pay obeisance at Devi Talab Mandir (in Jalandhar) but the police administration asked me to go back by helicopter. This is the state of affairs of the Punjab government," Modi said. A day earlier, Home Minister Amit Shah took a swipe at Channi at an election rally in Ludhiana, saying how could he protect Punjab when he couldn't provide security to the Prime Minister of the country. Punjab will go to the polls in a single phase on February 20. The counting of votes will take place on March 10.

## DELHI: 87-YR-OLD WOMAN RAPED; SIT FORMED TO PROBE CASE

New Delhi: The Delhi Police on Monday said it has formed a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe into the incident of alleged rape of an 87-year-old woman at her residence in the national capital's Tilak Nagar area. According to the police, a written complaint of theft of mobile phone from a house in Tilak Nagar was received from the daughter of a senior citizen on Sunday after which an FIR was registered. However, the complainant on Monday reported that the senior citizen of the house, where the theft took place, was also allegedly raped. "Today, sexual assault has been further alleged by the complainant and subsequently, relevant sections of law have been added to the FIR and investigation taken up," the police informed. Sections 323 (punishment for voluntarily causing hurt) and 376 (punishment for rape) were the latest charges added to the FIR. It further said that the victim is being provided counselling and all necessary assistance. Meanwhile, the Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) also took note of the incident and termed it a 'very serious matter'.

## India bans 54 more Chinese apps including Free Fire

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India banned 54 Chinese apps that pose threat to the country's security, the ministry of electronics and information technology said today. "These 54 apps allegedly obtain various critical permissions and collect sensitive user data. These collected real-time data are being misused and transmitted to servers located in hostile country," the ministry said in a statement. The list of banned apps include - Sweet Selfie HD, Beauty Camera - Selfie Camera, Garena Free Fire - Illuminat, Viva Video Editor, Tencent Xrivr, Onmyoji Arena, AppLock and Dual



Space Lite. In June last year, India banned 59 Chinese mobile applications including the widely-used social media platforms such as TikTok, WeChat, and Helo citing a threat to the nation's sovereignty and security. The apps were banned under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology said. India has blocked 321 apps since border tensions with China in May 2020.



# UTTARAKHAND RECORDS 59.5% TURNOUT, GOA 77.9%, OVER 61% IN UP'S SECOND PHASE

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The final voting percentage for the second phase of Assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh on Monday was 61.06 per cent, while Uttarakhand and Goa, which had single-phase polling, recorded 59.51 per cent and 77.94 per cent, respectively.

As per the Election Commission data, North Goa registered 79.45 per cent while South Goa registered 76.92 per cent. In Uttar Pradesh, where 55 seats across nine districts saw polling, the highest voting was in Saharanpur, at 67.52 per cent, and the lowest in Shahjahanpur at 55.20 per cent.

Amroha district registered 66.15 per cent, Bareilly 58.82 per cent, Bijnor 62.11 per cent, Badaun 56.83 per cent, Moradabad 64.56 per cent, Rampur 62.31 per cent, and Sambhal 56.88 per cent. In Uttarakhand, the highest was in Haridwar 68.37 per cent and the lowest in Almora district at 50.65 per cent. Bageshwar saw 57.83 per cent, Chamoli 59.28 per cent, Champawat 56.97 per cent, Dehradun 52.93 per cent, Nainital 63.12 per cent, Pauri Garhwal 51.93 per cent, Pithoragarh 57.49 per cent,



Rudrapur 60.36 per cent, Tehri Garhwal 52.66 per cent, Udham Singh Nagar 65.13 per cent and Uttarkashi district 65.55 per cent. Uttarakhand is holding single phase polling for all its 70 Assembly seats, with a total of 82,66,644 voters deciding the fate of 632 candidates. In Goa, as many as 11,56,464 voters decided the fate of 301 candidates for its 40 seats.

In Uttar Pradesh, nearly 2.02 crore voters will decide the fate of 586 contestants in 55 Assembly constituencies across the nine districts are: Saharanpur, Bijnor, Moradabad,

Sambhal, Rampur, Amroha, Badaun, Bareilly, and Shahjahanpur.

NDA WILL FORM GOVT IN PUNJAB: MODI

**Jalandhar:** Promising to work on the teachings of Sikh gurus with principles of non-discrimination and equality for all, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday that the NDA would form the government in Punjab and would free the state from drugs. "You might have everything, including money and property, but if your son becomes a drug-addict, what will you do with money and property? I am indebted to Punjab and I want to make the state 'nasha mukt'. This battle is for you," Modi said at an election rally here, his first after the major security breach during his visit to the state last month.

PUNJAB TO SET UP CLUSTER OF FOOD PARKS: RAHUL

**Hoshiarpur:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday announced that if his party returned to the helm again in Punjab it will set up a cluster of food parks and the payment will be made directly to farmers for their produce. Addressing an election rally in this town, Gandhi said Hoshiarpur is a centre of agriculture and farm tools. "Our government will work to create a cluster of food parks and machine tools in Hoshiarpur. Whatever you grow in the food park, be it potato chips or tomato ketchup, everything can be manufactured by directly transferring your produce from farms to the food processing unit," Gandhi said, giving a swipe at the BJP-led Central government. Gandhi said farmers of Punjab protested against the farm laws for one year, braving the winter and Covid-19. "Why? Because Narendra Modi wanted to give away our farmer's toil to capitalists," he said. "He (Modi) couldn't give two minutes of silence in Parliament to farmers who died during the protest, didn't give compensation as Rajasthan and Punjab governments did."

# ISB bags top ranks in two global MBA rankings

Hyderabad | Agencies

The Indian School of Business (ISB) has topped the chart among the Indian business schools in two prestigious global rankings. ISB's Post Graduate Programme in Management (PGP) has been ranked 32nd globally in the Financial Times (FT) Global MBA 2022 ranking, and ISB has been ranked number 11 globally in the Poets & Quants (P&Q) composite ranking of the top international MBA programmes 2021-2022. In the FT Global MBA 2022 ranking, ISB has been ranked number one in India and fourth in Asia. Alumni from the PGP Class of 2018 were surveyed for this year's ranking. ISB is ranked number one globally in terms of salary percentage increase.

This top-ranking underlines that ISB offers students a fulfilling and rewarding career path. ISB's efforts and



initiatives in fostering gender diversity in all its programmes have started to shine as the 38 per cent of female students in the surveyed class is the highest number compared with other FT 2022 ranked schools in India, ISB said in the statement. The business school has been ranked 11th globally in the Poets & Quants (P&Q) composite ranking of the top international MBA programmes of 2021-2022. ISB ranks number one among Indian B schools. P&Q ranks programmes based on data gained from popular and

influential ranking sources. "ISB has carved a niche and stands tall as a much sought-after business school in India. The rankings awarded by Financial Times and Poets & Quants bear testimony to this fact. The career progression of ISB students has always been inspiring and has paved the way for new growth trajectories. FT ranks us as #1 globally in salary percentage increase, reiterating that ISB offers a fulfilling and rewarding career path," said Professor Ramabhadran Thirumalai, Deputy Dean - Academic Programmes, ISB.

# Two held for duping people on matrimonial sites

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Two persons who were involved in duping people through matrimonial websites have been arrested from Delhi and Greater Noida, Delhi Police said on Monday. The accused were identified as Huidrom Premjit Singh and Happy James Okhomina.

DCP, Southeast, Esha Pandey said on February 10, a woman lodged a complaint at the cyber police station stating that she has been duped of Rs 60,000 in the pretext of paying custom clearance by a person impersonating a foreigner and expressing willingness to marry her. The victim disclosed that she met him on a



matrimonial site.

"One day, she got a call from her friend that the accused was coming to meet her but he was stuck at the Chhatrapati Shivaji terminal as he was not having Indian currency to pay custom duty for carrying a parcel worth Rs 50 lakh. She was asked to pay Rs 60,000 on the pretext of releasing the detained par-

cel," the DCP said.

The complainant paid that amount but didn't get anything in return. She tried to contact but he switched off his phone and hadn't made any contact with her since then.

A case under section 420 of the IPC was registered at cyber police station and investigation taken up

# Cong slams party MLA's 'hijab protection against rape' remark

Bengaluru | Agencies

Karnataka Congress president D.K. Shivakumar on Monday criticised his party MLA B.Z. Zameer Khan for his "hijab will protect women from getting raped" remark, saying the party neither endorses nor agrees with the views expressed by the legislator.

Khan has stirred a controversy by stating that incidents of rape are on high in India and wearing hijab will protect women from getting raped. He made the remarks on Sunday night at Dharwad in Karnataka. Defending his statement, Khan stated that he has expressed his personal opinion on the issue. "The beauty of women is not supposed to be exposed. No one should set their eyes upon them. Muslim women have been wearing hijab since long ago," he said. Shivakumar, however, said: "We will ask him not to issue any statements in this regard in future. We condemn those statements."



Zameer, however, said he has not said anything for which he has to apologize. "I have stat-

ed that hijab should be allowed. I have also said how a helmet (headgear) protects motorists, hijab keeps women safe," he retorted. "I have not made any comments on women getting raped without hijab in the country. If the media is reporting something which I have not said, how can I be responsible?" He said that according to Islam, everyone should perform namaz five times a day but many don't do that. "If women wear hijab, the incidents of rape would come down," he said. "Why there is an increase in rape cases in the country? It is because women are not behind purda (hijab). Women should wear hijab to conceal their beauty," he said. Khan further said that wearing hijab is right of Muslim women. "They are wearing hijab since hundreds of years. The ruling BJP is using students for political gains." Meanwhile, Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai said that the country is being observant on "how appropriate Khan's comments are".

# Gujarat Freedom of Religion Act: SC notice on plea against HC order

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Monday issued notice on a plea by Gujarat government, challenging the state high court's order, staying the operation of certain sections of the Freedom of Religion (Amendment) Act, 2021, including the provision terming interfaith marriages as means for forcible conversion. A bench of Justices Abdul Nazeer and Krishna Murari, after hearing arguments from Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the state government, issued notice on the appeal by the state government. According to counsel involved in the matter, Mehta did not press for a stay on the order.

The Gujarat government contended that Section 5 of the Act, which was stayed, impacts cases where inter-religious marriages have been solemnised by a person without force, or



fraudulent means.

It was argued that there is no fundamental right to convert a person to another religion and the provision

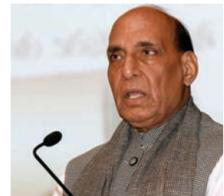
requiring permission from the District Magistrate for converting a person's religion, cannot be said to be affecting fundamental rights in any

manner. The two petitions - one filed by the Jamiat Ulama-e-Hind and the other by Ahmedabad resident, Mujahid Nafees - in the high court challenged the amended Act claiming the law is manifestly arbitrary and violates the right to privacy. The high court, in its order passed on 19 August last year, said: "We are therefore of the opinion that pending further hearing, the rigours of Sections 3, 4, 4A to 4C, 5, 6 and 6A, shall not operate merely because marriage is solemnised by person of one religion with another without force, or allurement or fraudulent means and such marriages cannot be termed as marriages for the purpose of unlawful conversion." The high court refused also refused to modify its earlier order, as state's counsel argued that Section 5 of the Act was unrelated to marriage and only related to permission for conversion.

# Centre ready to talk with the NE militants: Rajnath

Imphal | Agencies

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday said that the Centre is ready to talk with the militant outfits of the Northeastern region to resolve their problems as the government always wants to end the violence permanently. Addressing an election meeting at Langthabal Mandal in Imphal West district of Manipur, the Defence Minister said that the government is always prepared to talk with the extremist outfits for a lasting solution of the insurgency problem and to stop violence in Manipur and other Northeastern states permanently. "The terror outfits must come forward to talk with the government to



resolve their problems. Violence has to be stopped permanently to undertake the developmental projects and welfare schemes for the benefit of the people. The terror violence has been largely controlled in Manipur under the dynamic leadership of Chief Minister N. Biren Singh," Singh said. The senior BJP leader said that during the previous Congress regime, blockade and violence were the regular phe-

nomenon and the records of their (Congress) governance were broken. "The BJP wants to take Manipur's developmental status to a new height within 15 years. After Narendra Modi became Prime Minister, the face of Manipur has been changed and the state is going forward to achieve a new future. Modi has a new vision for the all round development of the Northeastern region. The projects relating to rail, road and air connectivity are being implemented with the mission mode," said the former National President of BJP. The Defence Minister said that the Northeastern region will be made a big tourism hub and Manipur's development through tourism would be tremendous.

# Trinamool Congress registers big win in Bengal's 4 municipal corporations



Kolkata | Agencies

The winning spree of Trinamool Congress continues in West Bengal as the party won four municipal corporations -- Siliguri, Asansol, Bidhannagar and Chandannagar with a thumping majority reducing the opposition to the minorities. The Trinamool Congress won the prestigious fight in Siliguri, snatching

away the corporation from the Left Front winning 37 of the 47 seats. Left Front won four, BJP five and Congress managed to get only one seat. The win was significant because during the green wave all through the state in the last civic body elections, Left Front had managed to hold back its fort in this North Bengal Municipal Corporation. Ashoke Bhattacharya -- the present mayor of the corporation --

lost to the Trinamool Congress candidate by a margin of over 300 votes. Announcing that Goutam Deb will be the mayor of Siliguri, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee asked the party workers to be modest and decent and work for the people. Dedicating the win to the people of the state, the chief minister said, "People could give their vote in a peaceful situation. We are happy with the result."

# KCR TOO SEEKS PROOF OF SURGICAL STRIKES

Hyderabad | Agencies

Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao has asked the Centre to show proof of surgical strikes. Defending Congress president Rahul Gandhi in asking for proof of surgical strikes, he said he is also asking for the proof.

"There is nothing wrong in Rahul Gandhi asking for proof of surgical strikes. What was wrong, I am asking now. Come on, let the government of India show (the proof)," he told a news conference here on Sunday night.

The Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) chief said it was the responsibility of the Centre to show proof. "There are apprehensions among people. The BJP makes false propaganda. That's why people are asking for proof. And in democracy you are not a monarch or a king. Rahul Gandhi being in the capacity of a MP asked for proof. He has a right to ask. You reply or keep quiet," Rao said, flaying BJP for targeting those asking for proof of surgical strikes carried out in Pakistan in response to the Uri



attack in 2016.

"It was definitely a political stunt. More than half of India believes that. There is popular apprehension in the country because what is happening is that whenever there is an election, there is some disturbance on the border and it is projected in a heavy manner," he said. He once again condemned the offensive remarks made by the Assam Chief Minister against Rahul Gandhi for asking for the proof of surgical strike. KCR, as Rao is popularly known, also said that the Indian

Army should get the credit and not the BJP.

"BJP wants to use surgical strikes for political gains. Definitely Rahul Gandhi and I will question. The whole country will question," he said and slammed BJP for using the photographs of former Chief of Defence Staff Bipin Rawat with BJP flags in Uttarakhand polls.

At his marathon news conference, the TRS chief launched a no-holds-barred attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi for what he called taking the country on the

path of disaster through his undemocratic approach and wrong policies in all sectors. KCR also alleged that there is rampant corruption under BJP rule and the government itself has admitted that 33 economic offenders who looted lakhs of crores from banks fled the country.

Stating that the Rafale deal was an example of huge corruption, he asked the Modi government to explain how India paid \$9.74 billion for 36 jets while Indonesia could buy 42 Rafale jets for \$8 billion. KCR declared that he will go to the Supreme Court over the Rafale deal to stop the country's loot.

The TRS chief called Modi's support to Donald Trump in the United States elections a strategic mistake and alleged that this dealt a blow to India's image. He ridiculed the 'Howdy Modi' event in the US before US Presidential elections. KCR played a video clip of Modi's speech in which he raised the slogan of 'Ab ki baar, Trump sarkar'. "It was the presidential election of a country and that too US and not municipal elections of Ahmedabad," remarked KCR.



# THREE AND HALF OF BJP LEADERS WILL SOON BE IN JAIL: RAUT

Raut claimed that the BJP had insulted the Thackeray family and must remember that there was a Maharashtra government too which could act.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Amid criticism from BJP and the inquiries by the central probe agencies against the Shiv Sena led Maha Vikas Aghadi government leaders, the Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut led a blistering attack against the erstwhile ally BJP saying that the party will expose its leaders at the press conference to be held on Tuesday at Shiv Sena Bhavan. Raut, who is personally targeted after the arrest of his close associate Pravin Raut in connection with an alleged floor space index scam and demand for the arrest of his son-in-law in that regard, threatened to destroy BJP and arrest its '3.5 leaders.' He added that he will reveal the names of BJP leaders at the press conference.



He claimed that the BJP had insulted the Thackeray family and must remember that there was a Maharashtra government too which could act. "We who have tolerated BJP will now destroy them. They have insulted Shiv Sena, the Thackeray family. They will get their reply at a press

conference tomorrow at 4 pm where all Shiv Sena leaders including party MLAs, MPs and ministers will be present," he said. "The BJP is making repeated claims that our leaders will be in the company of Anil Deshmukh (who is currently in jail due to corruption charges). I want to tell the BJP that in the next few days,

three and half of its leaders will be in jail. They will be where Deshmukh is lodged while Deshmukh will be out," he added. "The entire nation will get to hear what I say, what the party leaders say. I am not going to reveal today what is going to happen," said Raut. Raut's outburst came in the wake of attack by BJP leaders Ashish Shelar, Chandrakant Patil against the Shiv Sena led Maha Vikas Aghadi government on a number of issues. Raut's announcement to counter charges levelled by BJP at the press conference on Tuesday, came days after he wrote to Rajya Sabha Chairman Venkaiah Naidu alleging that he was approached to help in toppling the MVA government. He claimed that some persons had warned him that his refusal to assist in this mission will lead to the imprisonment of more Ministers and leaders of the ruling coalition to force midterm Assembly elections in the state. Moreover, Raut asserted that ED was trying to falsely implicate him in some cases after he turned down the offer to destabilise the Maharashtra government.

## Why Anna Hazare is mum on liquor policy in BJP states: Maha women's groups

Hundreds of women's Self Help Groups (SHG), activists and grassroots workers protested Maharashtra government's move to permit wine sale in supermarkets and walk-in shops, and also questioned why social crusader Anna Hazare is mum on several Bharatiya Janata Party-ruled states permitting liquor sale in grocery stores or even granting home-bar licences.

Yavatmal | Agencies

Hundreds of women's Self Help Groups (SHG), activists and grassroots workers protested Maharashtra government's move to permit wine sale in supermarkets and walk-in shops, and also questioned why social crusader Anna Hazare is mum on several Bharatiya Janata Party-ruled states permitting liquor sale in grocery stores or even granting home-bar licences. The SGHs' convenor and tribal leader Ankit Naitam, Shramik Elgar activist Paromita Goswami, Maharashtra MoS Kishore Tiwari and others unanimously passed a resolution urging Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray to roll back the policy of allowing wine sale in supermarkets/stores with a minimum area of 1,000

square feet. Attacking Hazare - who has postponed his proposed 'hunger strike' from Monday against the policy - Tiwari accused him of "double-standards" while opposing the rule in Maharashtra while being "absolutely silent" on BJP-ruled states like Goa, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh - where even home-bar licences have been allowed. "Before targeting his home state selectively, Anna Hazare should also look at the BJP-ruled states and launch a nationwide agitation against all states which are liberalising wine-liquor policies to earn more revenues, especially after the economic crisis caused by the two years of Coronavirus pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns," Tiwari said. Goswami said that such a policy "could ruin house-

holds and cause disaster for the society at large" as it could be easily misused, and in the long-run, not only wine, but all types of hard liquor and even country-made alcoholic brews would soon be available in neighbourhood retail outlets. On Sunday, Hazare had decided to call off his hunger strike after the Maharashtra government agreed to consider his suggestions, inviting suggestions/objections from the masses before implementing the new wine policy. In January, the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government had approved its new wine policy, permitting sale of wines produced in Maharashtra through a dedicated shelf in supermarkets and walk-in stores, subject to several conditions. The move is intended to help the fruit farmers and wine producers.

## Maharashtra Govt Allows 500 People to Attend Shiv Jayanti Ceremony

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has urged the people to celebrate the birth anniversary of the 17th Century warrior king adhering to public health-related norms.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

At least 200 people can take part in the 'Shiv Jyoti' run and 500 people can attend a ceremony to mark 'Shiv Jayanti' - the birth anniversary of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj - on February 19 in Maharashtra, the state

government said on Monday. Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray approved a proposal of the state Home Department in this regard, an official statement said. Thackeray has urged the people to celebrate the birth anniversary of the 17th Century warrior king adhering to public health-related norms. Minister of State for

Home Shambhuraj Desai had submitted the proposal to the chief minister as a special case in view of the Shiv Jayanti, the statement said. In normal times, Shiv Jayanti is celebrated with great fervour across Maharashtra. However, the celebrations remained low-key last year given the coronavirus-induced pandemic situation.

## EX-TURKISH AIRLINES HEAD AYCI NAMED AIR INDIA CEO-MD

Tata Sons has announced the appointment of Mehmet Ilker Ayçi as the new Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director of Air India, an official said here on Monday.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Tata Sons has announced the appointment of Mehmet Ilker Ayçi as the new Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director of Air India, an official said here on Monday. Expected to take charge on or before April 1, Ayçi (51) until recently was the Chairman of Turkish Airlines and was also on its Board of Directors prior to that. The key appointment was

finalised at the Air India board meeting on Monday, in which Tata Sons Chairman N. Chandrasekaran was a special invitee. Ayçi's appointment would be subject to regulatory approvals. "Ilker is an aviation industry leader who led Turkish Airlines to its current success during his tenure there. We are delighted to welcome Ayçi to the Tata Group where he would lead Air India into the new era," said Chandrasekaran. Acknowledging the appointment, Ayçi said he is "delighted and honoured to accept the privilege of lead-

ing an iconic airline and to join the Tata Group", which recently acquired the country's flag carrier. "Working closely with my colleagues at AI and the leadership of Tata Group, we will utilise the strong heritage of Air India to make it one of the best airlines in the world with a uniquely superior flying experience that reflects Indian warmth and hospitality," Ayçi added. Born in Istanbul in 1971, Ayçi was once the Advisor to the country's current President, R.T. Erdogan, when the latter was the Mayor of Istanbul. He served as the Chairman of Turkish Airlines from 2015 till he resigned last month. An alumnus (1994) of the country's first private university, Bilkent University, Ankara, he graduated from the Department of Political Science and Public Administration and is fluent in

Turkish, English and Russian. He continued his education with a research stay in political science from the Leeds University in the UK. In 1995, he completed his Master's in international relations from the Marmara University in Istanbul in 1997. During his successful career, he held several positions with the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, and for a period from 1994, served as Advisor to the then Mayor of Istanbul, Erdogan, who's now the country's President. Later, Ayçi served as the CEO of several insurance companies. In January 2011, he took over as the President of the Prime Ministry Investment Support and Promotion Agency of Turkey. In 2013, he was appointed Vice-President of the World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies of which he later became the Chairman and served till 2015.

## Munna Bhai MBBS: SC on allegations against Maha college having fake patients

The Supreme Court on Monday made strong observations against a Maharashtra-based private medical college, facing allegations of falsely representing patient admission records.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Monday made strong observations against a Maharashtra-based private medical college, facing allegations of falsely representing patient admission records. A Bench headed by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud told senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, representing the medical college, "This is a case where in a paediatric ward, all children were admitted without any problems. Have you seen the Munna Bhai MBBS movie?" The bench also comprising Justice Surya Kant further queried, how did the hospital have fake patients and pointed out this is a case of falsifying records. At this juncture, senior advocate Nidhesh Gupta, also appearing for the medical college, contended that the college was established in 1992 and allegations have been made against it following an anonymous complaint claiming that it belongs to a Congress MLA. The college had an annual intake of 100 MBBS students. On allegations of no



hostel rooms and nurse rooms, Gupta added that the authorities concerned have carried out inspections on the college premises for several years and no such issue was raised earlier. It was argued that the Medical Assessment and Ratings Board (MARB) of National Medical Commission (NMC), issued an order in November last year to increase admission capacity for 50 additional MBBS seats with effect from session 2021-2022. However, the MARB on January 19, this year, withdrew its previous order and also recommended stoppage of admission for session 2021-2022 of 100 recognised seats. Justice Chandrachud said it is shocking what the authorities found in the inspection, which was

carried out on January 14, where the nurses' charts had pre-recorded vitals of the patients and also treatment instructions as administered in advance till January 16. MARB, in its order, said the patients 'admitted' on January 14, were not genuine and they were looking healthy and gave evasive replies. Gupta pressed that the inspection conducted on January 14, was mala fide, contrary to the provisions of the NMC Act, 2019 and the Establishment of Medical College Regulations, 1999 adopted under Section 61 of the NMC Act, 2019 and in violation of the guidelines of assessment prescribed by the NMC. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta submitted that no X-ray machines were present and students from this college will be accommodated elsewhere. The top court was hearing an appeal filed by NMC against a Bombay High Court order, which allowed re-inspection of Annasaheb Chudaman Patil Memorial Medical College after the increased intake of medical students was cancelled by the Centre. The MARB order was challenged before the high court, which gave an option to the college to either go for re-inspection or avail appellate remedy, where college opted for the former. The NMC moved the top court challenging the high court order stating that it was passed without noticing the provisions of the NMC Act. After detailed hearing, the top court set aside the high court orders in the matter and asked it to decide the matter afresh.

## Woman Thrashed Over Daughter's WhatsApp Status, Dies

The woman's 20-year-old daughter had posted a message on her WhatsApp status, which her friend thought was directed towards her and took offence to it, police said.

Palghar | Agencies

A 48-year-old woman died after the family members of her daughter's friend allegedly beat her up over a petty dispute here in Maharashtra, police said on Monday. The woman's 20-year-old daughter had posted a message on her WhatsApp status, which her friend thought was directed towards her and took offence to it, Boisar police station's senior inspector Suresh Kadam said without divulging contents of the post. On February 10, the other girl's mother and siblings went to victim Lilavati Devi Prasad's house in Shivaji Nagar and allegedly thrashed her and other members of her family, he said. Prasad suffered serious



injuries and was rushed to a hospital where she died the next day while undergoing treatment, the official said. Her daughter told reporters on Sunday that her WhatsApp post was a general one and not directed towards her friend. Based on her complaint, the police arrested the other girl's mother and

two more family members and registered a case against them under Indian Penal Code Section 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder), the official said. The accused were produced before a local magistrate who remanded them in police custody till February 15, the police said.

## Few takers for Maharashtra ATS posting, top cop posts invite on Facebook

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The director-general of Maharashtra Police has posted on Facebook plugging the Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) and invited officers who would like a posting to meet him. The ATS chief has written to the state government seeking more manpower for the squad. The extraordinary push from the two officers last week attest to a crippling shortage of senior personnel at the ATS among the most high-profile units of the state police at one time, but where a posting no longer seems attractive. Sources informed that ATS chief Vineet Agarwal told Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Manu Kumar Shrivastava that several positions, including four key ones, had been lying vacant at his unit for quite some time,



and asked for them to be filled at the earliest. In his post on Facebook, DGP Sanjay Pandey said that a posting with the ATS could get an officer 25 per cent extra salary by way of allowances. He asked officers to express their willingness on his wall, or to meet him or

Agarwal. But there has not been much enthusiasm to join the ATS. Several current and former ATS officers said the state anti-terror unit has lost some of its sheen over the past few years as the federal National Investigation Agency (NIA) has taken over some of the most

sensitive and talked-about cases it was investigating. Also, senior officers said, the constant tussle between the governments at the Centre and the state has cast a shadow, and complicated the functioning of the ATS. Agarwal, who heads the ATS, is an officer of the rank of additional DG. The post occupied by former ATS IG Suhas Warke has been vacant ever since the officer was transferred almost a year ago. DIG Shivdeep Lande was repatriated to Bihar on November 26; his position too is yet to be filled. There are two vacancies for posts of superintendents of police (SP) as well. Rajkumar Shinde, an SP-rank officer, is holding charge of all four positions. "Shinde was transferred to the Anti Corruption Bureau some time ago, but he has not been relieved as there are hardly any senior officers in the unit," an official said. Agarwal declined to comment on the

vacancies in his unit. A senior Maharashtra Police official, however, said the vacant positions would be filled soon. In recent years, the ATS has seen its cases related to the Islamic State terrorist organisation - including those involving youths from Kalyan in 2014 and Malwani in 2015 - transferred to the NIA within days or weeks. The ATS had completed investigations in the 2006 and 2008 bombings in Malegaon, and filed chargesheets before the cases were taken from it. "Even in the Ambani terror threat case and the case where uranium was retrieved from accused persons, the investigations passed to the NIA, in spite of good work by the ATS," a former ATS officer said. "It is highly demotivating for officers who have put in effort to have to simply hand over these cases (to the central agency)." According to this officer, the charter of the NIA and

ATS being broadly similar, they operate in the same space of terrorism and fake currency. Also, he said, "when the same party is in government in both the Centre and the state, there is a level of understanding - this is currently not the case". A former ATS chief pointed out that given officers do not interact much with the public, the levels of enthusiasm of senior officers generally play a role in determining how enthusiastic juniors are about joining the unit. Another former ATS officer said that earlier, the squad had a crunch of assistant commissioners as well, but that situation has now improved. Maharashtra was the first state to have an ATS following the blasts of 1998, 2000, and 2002 in Mumbai, and serial bombings elsewhere in the country. A similar unit that had been set up earlier in the 1990s was revived on August 22, 2004 with KP Raghuvanshi as its chief.



## EDITOR'S SPECS

## Global droughts are threat to humanity

**D**roughts occurring simultaneously across different regions of the world could place an unprecedented strain on the global agricultural systems threatening the water and food security of millions of people, recent collaborative research has found out. Continuing fossil fuel dependence will increase the probability of co-occurring droughts 40 per cent by the mid-21st century and 60 per cent by the late 21st century, relative to the late-20th century. That comes out to an approximately nine-fold increase in agricultural and human population exposure to severe co-occurring droughts unless steps are taken to lower carbon emissions, said the study. The elevated risk of compound droughts estimated by the research team is a result of a warming climate coupled with a projected 22 per cent increase in the frequency of El Niño and La Niña events—the two opposite phases of the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO). La Niña refers to the large-scale cooling of the ocean surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean, coupled with changes in the tropical atmospheric circulation. It usually has the opposite impacts on weather and climate as El Niño. The researchers' projections show that nearly 75 per cent of compound droughts in the future will coincide with these irregular but recurring periods of climatic variation in the world's oceans, which have played a large role in some of the greatest environmental disasters in world history. The study results also indicated that areas of North and South America are more likely to experience compound droughts in a future. Moving forward, the researchers plan to take a closer look at how co-occurring droughts will affect various aspects of the global food network, how vulnerable communities are affected by and adapting to such climate extremes, as well as how society can be better prepared to manage the risk of increasing simultaneous disasters.

## THE GREAT AMERICAN HEIST

Asad Mirza

**U**S President Joe Biden last week signed an executive order, splitting \$7 billion Afghan funds deposited with the Federal Reserve. Afghanistan will now only get \$3.5 billion as part of the humanitarian aid while the remaining \$3.5 billion will be given to 9/11 victim families in the US. Afghanistan has about \$9 billion in assets overseas, including the \$7 billion in the US. The rest is mostly in Germany, the United Arab Emirates and Switzerland banks. International funding was stopped and Afghan money was frozen after the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan last August. The Taliban expectedly have expressed anger over United States' move and have sought to unfreeze all funds. Taliban spokesman Mohammad Naeem said on Twitter that the theft and seizure of money held or frozen by the US of the Afghan people represents the lowest level of human and moral decay of a country and a nation.

On February 12, the Afghan central bank, Da Afghanistan Bank, demanded in a statement that the Biden administration reverse its decision. The move has also elicited angry responses from the Afghan public; there have been a series of angry demonstrations in Kabul, with common Afghani seething in anger over the US move.

## Expert's criticism

The decision has also drawn criticism from human rights groups, lawyers and financial experts who have warned that the move could gut the country's central bank for years to come, crippling its ability to establish monetary policy and manage the country's balance of payments.

Experts also said that the \$3.5 billion set aside for humanitarian assistance would do little good unless the United States lifted restrictions on the Afghan banking system that have obstructed the flow of aid into the country.

John Sifton, the Asia advocacy director at Human Rights Watch, said in a statement that the decision would create a problematic precedent for commandeering sovereign wealth and do little to address underlying factors driving Afghanistan's massive humanitarian crisis.

Torek Farhadi, a financial adviser to Afghanistan's former US-backed government, questioned the UN managing Afghan Central



Bank reserves. He said those funds are not meant for humanitarian aid but "to back up the country's currency, help in monetary policy and manage the country's balance of payment". He also questioned the legality of Biden's order and said that these reserves belong to the people of Afghanistan, not the Taliban... Biden's decision is one-sided and does not match with international law, no other country on Earth makes such confiscation decisions about another country's reserves.

Some analysts also took to Twitter to question Biden's order. Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Asia Programme at the US-based Wilson Centre, criticised the scheme to divert funds from Afghanistan in a tweet.

Pakistan has also condemned the decision. Pakistan Foreign Office spokesperson Asim Ifukhar has called for the complete unfreezing of Afghanistan's assets.

As reported by GeoTV, he said it is impera-

Bank reserves. He said those funds are not meant for humanitarian aid but "to back up the country's currency, help in monetary policy and manage the country's balance of payment". He also questioned the legality of Biden's order and said that these reserves belong to the people of Afghanistan, not the Taliban... Biden's decision is one-sided and does not match with international law, no other country on Earth makes such confiscation decisions about another country's reserves.

## The Debt

The Taliban, after taking control of Afghanistan had immediately claimed a right to the money. But what complicates the matter further is that a group of relatives of victims of the September 11 attacks, one of several groups who had demanded compensation for those killed in 9/11, have sought to seize this money to pay off their debt.

This debt is based on a default judgement titled 'Havish vs Laden' of 2011, awarding \$6 billion to a group of 9/11 victim families, as per a federal judge in New York. The

parties named in the case, the Taliban, Hezbollah, Al Qaeda and Iran, never showed up (hence a default judgement). In its defence the Biden administration claims that this will open doors for expediting humanitarian aid to Afghan people, who are facing a lot of hardships.

The American media has lauded the decision, with Washington Post commenting in an article that though the issues, moral and legal, are extremely complex, with the ultimate disposition of the money up to a federal court in New York, the administration is surely right about one thing: Despite the desperate needs of the Afghan people, many of whom are at risk of starvation, it would be a mistake to put the money back at the disposal of Afghanistan's central bank, with no strings attached - as the Taliban demands.

Pakistan's Dawn in its editorial has commented that President Biden's decision is simply appalling and lacks moral ground. It says further that for one, these assets belong to Afghanistan and not to the Taliban rulers. How can Washington justify inflicting collective punishment on the Afghans to penalise the Taliban? It raises a legal question as well. The money belongs to the Afghan central

bank and therefore, should not be commandeered to pay the Taliban's judgement debt. None of the 19 hijackers involved in the horrific terrorist attacks on that tragic day were Afghans. True, the plotters used Afghan soil and were under the Taliban's protection, but to penalise the entire population implies that the attack had the sanction of the entire nation. The decision compels one to compare this action to the colonial mind-set or colonial thievery of the past. The absurdity is that the richest country in human history is mistreating one of the poorest, for compensating the victims of and redressing a crime committed 20 years, in which the Afghan people had no role.

Further the Biden decision also gives birth to another quagmire, if it's ready to transfer money to the Taliban administration, than doesn't it mean that it is tacitly recognising the Taliban government, leading other countries to engage with Taliban without its formal recognition?

(Asad Mirza is a political commentator based in New Delhi)

## international

## EUROPE CLOSER TO WAR THAN IT'S BEEN FOR 70 YEARS

James Heapey, the UK's Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces, said that he believes Europe is closer to war than it has been for 70 years, the BBC reported.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

James Heapey, the UK's Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces, said that he believes Europe is closer to war than it has been for 70 years, the BBC reported.

"There's 130,000 Russian troops around the borders of Ukraine, thousands more on amphibious shipping in the Black Sea and the Azov Sea," he told the BBC. "All of the combat

enablers are in place and my fear is that if all of this was just about a show to win leverage in diplomacy that doesn't require the logistics, the fuel,

the medical supplies, the bridging assets, the unglamorous stuff that actually makes an invasion force credible, but doesn't attract head-

lines. Yet all of that is now in place too. "That's why there's real urgency to the diplomatic negotiations that continue," he says. But he adds there are still "lots of opportunities" for "compromise" and "diplomacy".

Ukraine is calling for a meeting with Russia and other members of a key European security group as tensions grow.

It says Russia has ignored formal requests to explain the build-up of troops, the BBC reported. Russia has denied plans to invade despite massing 100,000 soldiers on Ukraine's borders. Some nations warn an invasion could be imminent, with the US saying aerial bombardments could begin "at any time." More than a dozen countries have urged their citizens to leave Ukraine, and some have pulled embassy staff from the capital, the report said.

## Imran Khan dismisses China inclination impression

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has dismissed the impression that the country is inclined towards China more than any other country, insisting that Pakistan desires for maintained relations with everyone.

Islamabad | Agencies

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has dismissed the impression that the country is inclined towards China more than any other country, insisting that Pakistan desires for maintained relations with everyone. "We do not want to be in a position that implies as if we are part of a certain

camp. Pakistan's strategic direction is to maintain relations with everyone," he said. Khan added that Pakistan's strategic policy of having relations with all is also part of the country's powerful military establishment position. It should be noted that Pakistan has shifted closer to China, as it becomes a partner to the multi-billion dollar China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), coupled with many other financial requirements and bailouts, which have been facilitated by China. It is believed that Pakistan's all-weather friend China has helped it get out and away from the financial dependency on the West and the United States, with whom Pakistan was an ally in the war against terrorism and the two-decade-long war in Afghanistan. However, with China, Pakistan looks into

geo-economic parameters of progress and development and has been visibly inclined towards Beijing for its financial and economic needs.

Pakistan's economic crisis have been a major challenge for the Imran Khan-led government and China has been among the main facilitators of maintaining the country's economy through various financial projects and strategic partnerships. Khan said that the previous governments and rulers were more interested in pushing their own interests while being in power, which, he said, was not aligned with the national interest. Recalling what he called a 'remarkable' visit to China, Khan said, "Ties between the two countries are stronger than ever."

"The world is rapidly undergoing changes. My visit was very much relevant in that context," he said.

## Confidence in Australian govt falls to 2-yr low: Poll

Voter confidence in the Australian government has fallen to its lowest level in two years, a new poll published on Monday revealed.

Canberra | Agencies

Voter confidence in the Australian government has fallen to its lowest level in two years, a new poll published on Monday revealed. Researchers from the Centre for Social Research and Methods at the Australian National University (ANU) on Monday published their survey tracking the attitudes and experiences of citizens during the Covid-19 pandemic, reports Xinhua news agency. It found that of more than 3,400 respon-

dents, or 34.5 per cent, said they hold a "great deal or quite a lot" of faith in the federal government's performance. It is the lowest level of confidence in the government during the Covid-19 pandemic. "This is down from a peak of 60.6 percent in May 2020 and lower than in October of last year (41.4 per cent)," Nicholas Biddle, co-author of the study, said in a statement. "In fact, this is only slightly above the level of confidence prior to the pandemic and during the Black Summer bushfires, when only 27.3 per cent of Australians had confidence in the federal government."

Biddle said the survey also revealed a "decline in confidence in hospitals and the health system, the largest we have seen during the pandemic". "Although

people are still quite confident in the health system, clearly the handling of the pandemic and the ongoing wave of Omicron infections is starting to take a real toll on how all major institutions are viewed by Australians." The latest NewsPoll, which was published by News Corp Australia on Sunday night, corroborated the ANU findings. It revealed that the opposition Labor party leads the governing Coalition 55-45 on a two-party preferred basis. Labor leader Anthony Albanese maintained a better net satisfaction rating than Prime Minister Scott Morrison. However, 43 per cent of respondents identified the incumbent Morrison as their preferred Prime Minister compared to 38 per cent for Albanese.

## Japan govt, IAEA discuss plan to dump radioactive water into Pacific Ocean

The Japanese government and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on Monday met to discuss the country's controversial plans to release radioactive water from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant into the Pacific Ocean, despite local and international opposition.

Tokyo | Agencies

The Japanese government and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on Monday met to discuss the country's controversial plans to release radioactive water from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant into the Pacific Ocean, despite local and international opposition. The discussions were held between representatives from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, the Foreign Ministry, the stricken plant's operator Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc (TEPCO) and the IAEA task force headed by Gustavo Caruso, director and coordinator at the IAEA's Department of Nuclear Safety and Security, reports Xinhua news agency. The task force is due to stay in Japan through Friday and on Tuesday is slated to conduct safety reviews at the plant that had its key cooling func-



tions knocked out by a massive earthquake-triggered tsunami in 2011, causing multiple core meltdowns in what continues to be the worst nuclear catastrophe since the Chernobyl nuclear crisis in 1986.

Caruso, in the meeting said that the task force will conduct its survey in an "objective, credible and science-based manner and help send a message of transparency and confidence to the people in Japan and beyond".

Keiichi Yumoto, director general for

nuclear accident disaster response at the Industry Ministry, added: "We would like to ask for a strict and transparent evaluation. "It is crucial to receive the evaluation from the objective international body, as there is safety concern among the public over the planned discharge of treated water." The IAEA has said that the results of its survey will be made into a report by the end of the year, with a Ministry official stating that the results will also be shown in the discharge plan's deliberation, which will be submitted by Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority NRA from TEPCO. Much to the chagrin of the international community, Japan unilaterally decided in April last year that it plans to release radioactive water that has accumulated at the crisis-hit plant into the Pacific Ocean. The toxic water, stored in tanks at the plant in Japan's northeast, is expected to soon reach capacity. The tainted water the Japanese

government plans to release into the Pacific Ocean contains radioactive tritium as a result of being used to cool down melted nuclear fuel at the plant in Fukushima Prefecture. The government's plan is to release the radioactive water through a tunnel under the seabed into the Pacific Ocean roughly 1 km away from the stricken plant. The controversial plan is proposed to begin in the spring of 2023, much to the consternation of local fisheries and the international community. Japan's fisheries industry has voiced its ardent opposition to the plan, as it will almost certainly further damage the industry's reputation. Moreover, some of Japan's closest neighbours have voiced strong concerns over the plan as have a number of worried countries from further afield. Japan's government had been considering a number of feasible alternative than unilateral proposal to just dump radioactive water into the Pacific.



### Kundalpur Panch-Kalyanak Pratishtha Mahotsav will be held with full dignity, grandeur and divinity: CM

- ▶ POLICE ADMINISTRATION SHOULD REMAIN ALERT AND SENSITIVE
- ▶ THE EVENT IS A MATTER OF PRIDE FOR US
- ▶ CHOUHAN SEEKS INFORMATION ABOUT PREPARATIONS FOR KUNDALPUR PANCH-KALYANAK MAHOTSAV



of 200 small houses in Damoh. Necessary health arrangements have been made at District Hospital along with 10 bedded Primary Health Center at Kundalpur, Hospital at Patera, Hatta and Hindoria. A team of private, government and AYUSH doctors will be available 24 hours a day. There is a provision of 5 ambulances and 4 additional 108 ambulances for emergency facilities.

For security arrangements, a police control room and a temporary police post have been set up at the venue. 600 police personnel will be deployed in the system. In addition, better arrangements have been made for traffic and parking. 200 CCTV cameras and 200 fire fighting equipment will be available at the venue. In order to provide round the clock power supply, a temporary power station of 1225 KV (980 KW), 13 transformers of 200 KV and one transformer of 100 KV has been arranged. It may be noted that the Panch-Kalyanak festival and the Mahamastabhishek of the idol of Lord Adinath is being held from February 16 to 23 at Kundalpur in Damoh district.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the Kundalpur Panch-Kalyanak Pratishtha Mahotsav is a matter of pride for all of us. It should be organized with full dignity, grandeur and divinity. All necessary arrangements should be made to maintain discipline and order at the venue. Awareness and sensitivity are necessary for facilities like cleanliness, safety, drinking water, housing, health etc. at the venue. Param Pujya Acharya Vidya Sagar Maharaj

is the center of our reverence. Make the programme grand by coordinating with the committee. Chouhan was addressing a meeting in connection with Kundalpur Panch-Kalyanak Pratishtha Mahotsav in Damoh district from the residence office. Union Minister Prahlad Patel took part in the meeting virtually. Chouhan sought information regarding necessary arrangements.

He was told that 20 lakh liters of water is being arranged twice daily at the venue. Arrangements have been made for 30 water tankers at the venue and fire brigade at 6 places. 500 workers, 25 mobile toilets and 10 large containers are available for cleaning. Apart from temporary arrangement of 9298 houses in 8 cities adjoining Kundalpur area, there is a provision

### SLEEMNABAD TUNNEL ACCIDENT

## 2 Labourers Dead In Tunnel Collapse, 7 Rescued Earlier

### CM Expressed Condolences: announces ex-gratia

Rescuers pulled out the bodies of the two labourers on Sunday night. Earlier in the day, seven other labourers had been rescued.



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Two people were killed after an under-construction tunnel in Madhya Pradesh caved in on Sunday. The tunnel was a part of the Bargi canal project caved in at Sleemnabad, about 450 km from the state capital Bhopal. Rescuers pulled out the bodies of the two labourers on Sunday night. Earlier in the day, seven other labourers had been rescued by the State Disaster Emergency Response Force (SDERF).

After rescuing seven people, rescuers pulled out the bodies of Goralal Kol (30), hailing from Singrauli district in MP, and Supervisor Ravi

Masalkar (26), a native of Nagpur," said Rajesh Rajora, Madhya Pradesh Additional Chief Secretary (Home).

The seven rescued workers were admitted to the Katni district hospital after being pulled out of the debris. All of them are doing fine, an official said. Earlier, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan spoke to the Katni district collector and the superintendent of police about the incident. Chouhan directed officials to make arrangements for providing treatment to the injured labourers. Chouhan has

expressed profound grief over the death of two workers in the under construction tunnel accident in Bargi project in Sleemnabad area of Katni. Chouhan has said that even after tireless efforts, we could not save the lives of two labourers trapped in the tunnel. Chief Minister has prayed to God to give peace to the departed souls and strength to the bereaved family members to bear this loss. A sum of Rs 50,000 each will be provided to all the workers injured in the accident and Rs 4 lakh each to the next of kin of the deceased.

### "BHAGAWATI DURGA" IS FEBRUARY'S SECOND EXHIBIT OF THE WEEK AT IGRMS

Bhopal: Under the Latest and popular online series of Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (IGRMS) entitled 'Exhibit of the Week' the "Bhagawati Durga" A scroll painting (Pata chitra) collected from 2015 is on display. The Community of Chitrakar, West Midnapur, West Bengal. It's Measurement Max. Length-11ft 04 inch, width- 22inch, displayed in the audience as the second Exhibit of the month of February, 2022 through official website, Facebook, Instagram and twitter page of the IGRMS.

In this regard Praveen Kumar Mishra, Director, IGRMS said that Chitrakars are traditional folk painters of West Bengal. They are also well known as patuas who paints and recites their own scrolls pata chitra. They wonder from village to village carrying scrolls and unroll the scroll bit by bit unfolding the story by singing songs. Most of the stories are taken from epics, religious texts, and folklores. The scroll painting depicting the story of Bhagawati Durga is taken from Chandī Mangal. Dhanapati was a wealthy merchant and a devotee of Lord Shiva. Attracted with the beauty of his sister-in-law Khullana, he marries her. Once he set forth on a journey to Singhal leaving his wife Khullana at home in the care of his first wife Lahana. Before journey he made a mistake by opposing Chandī worship being done by Khullana. As a result during his journey, he met with misfortune and imprisoned by the king of Singhal. Meanwhile his wife gave birth to a son Shrimanta. When Shrimanta grew up, he also went to Singhal and imprisoned by the king. By the grace of Chandī he was free and rescued his father from the prison. He married Sushila princess of Singhal. From then Dhanapati started worshipping Chandī(Durga).

Patua use hand made paper, cloth, gum and colours prepared from different herbs. On both the ends of the painting two bamboo strips are attached which help to wind up the Pat.

### IT IS NECESSARY TO MOTIVATE CHILDREN FOR ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AND PLANTATION: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that there is a need to motivate children for environmental protection activities and plantation. Children's literature can play an important role in this direction. Chouhan was planting saplings at Smart Garden on Monday along with Mahesh Saxena, Anil Agarwal and Sudha Dubey of Bal Kalyan evam Bal Sahitya Shodh Kendra. Chief Minister planted saplings of Moulshree and Saptarni on Monday. It is noteworthy that in the year 2007, litterateur Mahesh Saxena had established Bal Kalyan evam Bal Sahitya Shodh Kendra at Jawahar Chowk in Bhopal. A large library was established in it. 22 books including children's literature were published by Saxena. The organisation works for the promotion-research work of children's literature besides supporting new talents in writing children's literature and to find talents among children by visiting settlements. Three



books by Anil Agarwal and one by Sudha Dubey have been published. Moulshree is also called Kesava in Sanskrit, Moulshari or Bakool in Hindi. It is a tree of medicinal importance, which has been used in Ayurveda for centuries. Saptarni plant is an evergreen medicinal tree, which has great importance in Ayurveda. This plant is used in the manufacture of various medicines.

### CM pays tribute to Sushma Swaraj

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, paid tribute to former Union Minister and MP from Madhya Pradesh, Late. Sushma Swaraj on her birth anniversary. Chouhan garlanded the portrait of Late. Swaraj at the auditorium located in the office at his residence.

Remembering Swaraj, Chouhan has tweeted that "When respected Sushma didi spoke, it seemed as though Maa Saraswati herself was speaking. She shared a sisterly and motherly love with all of us. You will live on in our hearts forever. Today is the birth anniversary of respected didi Sushma Swaraj, the former External Affairs Minister, Varad Putri of Maa Saraswati, who won the hearts of the people of the country and the world with her actions and thoughts. Today her confident and smiling face is flashing in front of our eyes repeatedly. I pay obeisance to her on her birth anniversary today."

Late Sushma Swaraj was born on 14 February, 1952 in Ambala Cantonment, Haryana. She was a former Supreme Court advocate. She was elected 7 times as Member of Parliament and 3 times as Member of Legislative Assembly. Late Smt. Swaraj was also elected from the Vidisha-Raisen parliamentary constituency of Madhya Pradesh. She has also served as the fifth Chief Minister of Delhi from 13 October 1998. In addition, she



was the Minister of Information and Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs in Atal ji's government. She was also the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha tenure from 2009 to 2014. Late Sushma Swaraj became the first woman External Affairs minister of India from the year 2014 to 2019. She has been associated with many social and cultural bodies in various capacities. Smt. Swaraj was posthumously awarded the Padma Vibhushan by the Government of India. She passed away on 6 August, 2019.

### Bharat Bhavan is the patron and promoter of art and culture of MP: Usha Thakur

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Culture, Tourism and Spirituality Minister Usha Thakur said that Bharat Bhavan is the protector and promoter of the art and culture of Madhya Pradesh. Increasing its role further, Kalagram will be established based on the vision of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan. Thakur was addressing the various arts festival organized on the 40th anniversary of Bharat Bhavan. She said that Kalagram is a very important and unique initiative for the expansion of Bharat Bhavan. For the establishment of Kalagram by the government, 1 acre 5 decimal land has also been allotted to Bharat Bhavan.

Thakur said that Kala Gram would become a center for collection and display of traditional paintings of the state, study focused on folk styles based on Mahabharata and Ramayana, dialogues, lectures, film screenings and documentation on various aspects of the state's culture. Thakur said that the old heritage Rang Mandal of Bharat Bhavan would



be started again. Rang Mandal has given many eminent and famous artists to the state. With this, the artists of the state will get a prestigious and suitable platform for their practice, as well as the talents of the state will raise the name of the state in the country and abroad.

Thakur inaugurated the ceremony by lighting the lamp along with eminent artists and litterateurs. In the ceremony, She decorated the artists, litterateurs and theatre artists in various categories with the National Kalidas and Shikhar Samman. Thakur also visited the paintings of Durga Bai Vyam selected for Padma Shri, Illustration Art Exhibition-Surekha and exhibition of works of emi-

nent artists.

Principal Secretary Culture and Tourism and Trustee Secretary of Bharat Bhavan Sheo Shekhar Sukla said that 40 years for a person indicate the slope of his life, on the other hand the more time passes after the establishment of an institution, its respect increases more. During the 40-year journey of Bharat Bhavan, this institution has got the support of many eminent artists and creators. Taking inspiration from this, Bharat Bhavan will continue to make an important contribution in enriching it further while preserving the cultural and creative heritage of the state.

Artists, litterateurs and theatre artists were honoured in various categories with National Kalidas Samman and Rajya Shikhar Samman at Bharat Bhavan Muktaakash Manch.

Cultural activities like smooth music, engaging dance, slide show, dance drama and poetry recitation will be there till 17th February 2022 in the function organised at Bahukala Kendra Bharat Bhawan.

### SARANG PERFORMED BHOOMI-POOJAN FOR DEVELOPMENT WORKS



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Medical Education Minister Vishwas Kailash Sarang today performed bhoomi-pujan of roads in Ward 38 Ektapuri Maidan and Ward 59 Annanagar in Narela assembly constituency, CC Road in Ward 58 Rachna Nagar and roads in Ward 37 Durga Mandir Rajendra Nagar.

Sarang said that before 2008 there were no pucca roads, no drains and drinking water was available from tankers. Today every road of Narela has become paved.

Narela has its own drainage system. Channelization of drains has been done, due to which now rainwater does not fill in the habitations of Narela area. He said that every effort is being made for the overall development of Narela.

Development is a continuous process, so development work goes on continuously in different areas according to the needs of the people. Sarang said that a lot of work has been done in the area regarding roads, electricity, water and drainage. Parks, gymnasiums, community buildings and sports grounds have also been developed. He said that theme based parks have been developed in Narela area of Bhopal. Narmada Park and Swami Vivekananda Park are prominent among them. Sarang said that in view of the increasing traffic pressure, flyovers are being constructed in the area, traffic has started on two flyovers. Subhash Nagar flyover has been inaugurated recently. The construction work of flyover is going on in Devki Nagar Karond, that too will be ready soon. A large number of activists and dignitaries were present on the occasion.

## Bajrangis threat alone youngster on Valentine's Day at cycle repair shop

Bajrang Dal denies responsibility as the issue escalates, files complaints against State Information Commissioner for spreading fake news.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A dozen of goons with saffron sashes around their neck and 'Bajrang Dal' etched on their bikes allegedly threatened an 11-standard boy in Char Imli area to stay away from obscenity on Valentine's Day when the latter was at a shop getting his bicycle repaired on Monday morning. The State Information

Commissioner (SIC) of Madhya Pradesh, Rahul Singh, took to Twitter and informed that his son was threatened by goons with canes in their hands, saffron sash wrapped around their neck and Bajrang Dal etched on their bikes.

After he tweeted the incident, he received a call from a member of Bajrang Dal, identifying himself as Dinesh Yadav, to know his entire story. Singh said that Yadav threatened to register a complaint against him for spreading fake news and that no member of his group was involved in any such activity.

Later in the afternoon, about 15 members of Bajrang Dal reached Habibganj police station and submitted a complaint against Singh, said the station in charge Bhan Singh Prajapati.



Prajapati said, "We have received a complaint against Singh. We are probing the matter and yet to take any action." Singh, on the other hand, said, "Soon after the Bajrang Dal goons submitted the complaint, I received a call from the police station. They asked me to 'appear' in front of the TI

immediately as there was a complaint against me." He said, "I am surprised that these goons have stooped to such a level that they have no regard of the law or the constitution. Despite my son being alone at the spot, he was targeted for no reason. It happened in an area where the commis-

sioner of police resides. I got their phone call where they threatened to file case against me."

"We are living in a society that generates and nurtures fear. My son is still a kid and I am ashamed that he has to grow up in an atmosphere of fear and in a society where personal choices or privacy has no place at all," he added.

Rahul's tweet (@rahulreports): "Today my son went to the shop located in Bhopal Char Imli to get the punctured tire of his bicycle fixed. The goons of Bajrang Dal surrounded him with canes in his hand and said that it is #ValentinesDay, don't do anything 'wrong'. Anyone knows what the police are doing? And yes, Happy Valentine's Day to those goons from my side."

## Sarang inspects New Market Subway

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Medical Education Minister Vishwas Kailash Sarang inspected the subway located at New Market in Bhopal. Sarang also listened to the problems of the traders. After the inspection, Sarang said that unfortunately a fire broke out last night due to short circuit in the sub-way of New Market, due to which two shops were gutted. Instructions have been given to MPEB to resume power supply here by adopting all safety measures.

Sarang said that one thing has come to notice that if there is a fire accident in such basements, smoke fills up, due to which it is difficult to control the fire. Instructions have been given to the administration that after conducting a safety audit of all such structures, expert engineers should be consulted after ensuring the arrangement of ventilation. Sarang interacted with the traders of New Market who pointed out their



grievances. Sarang assured to provide all possible help to the traders and to redress their grievances at the earliest.

Sarang lauded the district administration and fire brigade personnel for their promptness in controlling the fire after reaching the accident site. District Collector Avinash Lavania, senior officers of Municipal Corporation and district administration were present along with Sarang during the inspection.



Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress-singer Jennifer Lopez's wedding dress in the upcoming film 'Marry Me' weighed over 43 kg and she needed an "entourage" of people to help her get dressed.

Costume Designer Caroline Duncan revealed to Variety: "The dress weighed 95 pounds and required five people to transport it and an entourage to get Jennifer in and out of it, but it gave the dress that volume."

The dress was deliberately designed to be so heavy as it was meant to represent the impending burden of Kat marrying Bastian, who she ultimately discovers was unfaithful before they exchange their vows, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

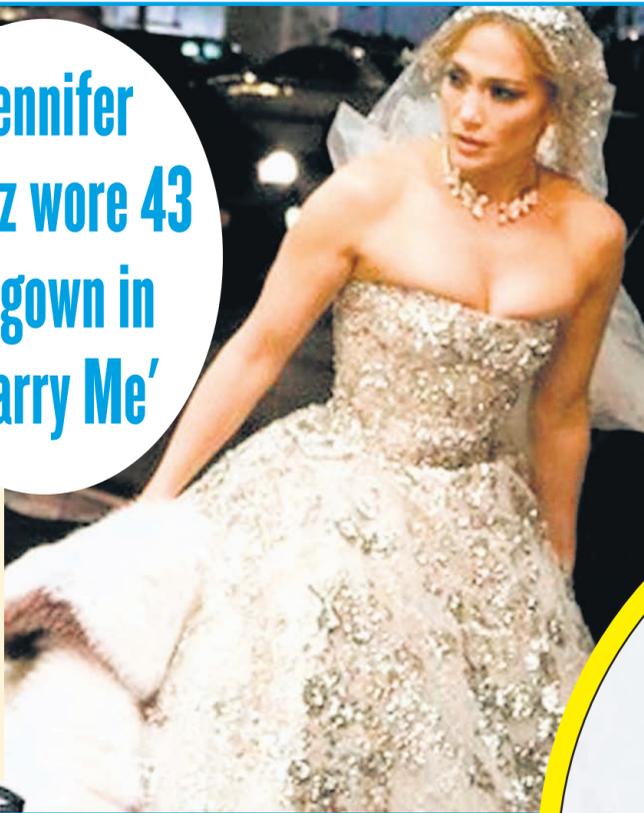
Caroline explained: "First, you see her get into the car, and it's a symbol of how that wedding had gotten too big, and it wasn't honest and has taken over her ability to see who she was marrying."

"Later, you see her in the bedroom alone on what should have been her wedding night, and here she is trapped in this claustrophobic dress that's like the concert bigger than she is. It's the loneliest shot in the movie."

Although Kat's wardrobe features a number of designer pieces Caroline obtained from Net-a-Porter, Versace, Neiman Marcus and Bergdorf Goodman, the costume designer also dressed Jennifer in more affordable streetwear so her character could feel "aspirational".

She said: "Some of the stuff was not incredibly expensive. When Bastian shows up at Charlie's school, Kat's outfit is from Naked Wardrobe. We were not afraid to mix higher and lower brands, because we wanted her to feel aspirational."

## Jennifer Lopez wore 43 kg gown in 'Marry Me'



## ADELE'S LONDON HOME FEATURES 'A WINE STORE AND AN ENERGY CENTRE'

London | Agencies

Singer Adele's three-bedroom flat in London boasts some spectacular features. Asked about her plans after the show, Adele said: "I'm going straight back to my flat. Then I'm going to McDonald's. I might crack open a bottle of white wine."

The modern development boasts a 24-hour

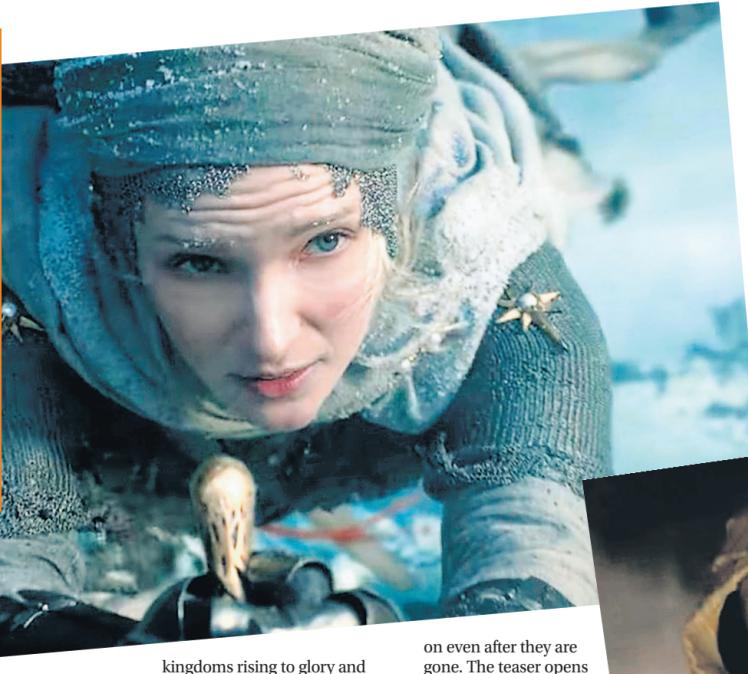
concierge team, as well as an energy centre, a swimming pool, a sauna and a gym, reports femalefirst.co.uk. The three-bedroom flat is also extremely secure and private, according to the Daily Mail newspaper. The London-born star is now based in the US but she flew her team to the city ahead of the BRIT Awards.

Adele subsequently made an appearance on 'The Graham Norton Show', where she promised fans that her Las Vegas residency - which was postponed in January - will take place later this year. She said: "We are now working our a\*\*\*\* off, but I don't want to announce a new set of dates until I know everything will definitely be ready." The sooner I can announce the better, but I just can't in case we are not ready in time. It is absolutely 100 per cent happening this year. It has to happen this year because I've got plans for next year."

The Grammy-winning star was previously forced to postpone her residency after Covid hit the production.



## 'THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RINGS OF POWER' TEASER UNVEILED AT SUPER BOWL



Los Angeles | Agencies

The first official teaser of 'The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power' was released during Super Bowl LVI here on Sunday.

The 60-second teaser offered Super Bowl viewers glimpses of J.R.R. Tolkien's fabled 'Second Age', which is set thousands of years before the events of 'The Hobbit' and 'The Lord of the Rings' books, reports 'Variety'.

The series promises to take viewers back to an era, which saw great powers getting forged,

kingdoms rising to glory and falling to ruin with hope hanging by the finest of threads, and one of the greatest villains that ever flowed from Tolkien's pen threatened to cover all the world in darkness.

It boasts of an ensemble cast of characters, both familiar and new, as they confront the long-feared re-emergence of evil to Middle-Earth, according to 'Variety'.

Spread over a wide range of physical settings of the Misty Mountains, majestic forests of the elf capital of Lindon, breathtaking island kingdom of Númenor, and the farthest reaches of the map, these kingdoms and characters are set to carve out legacies that linger

on even after they are gone. The teaser opens with a dialogue familiar to anyone who has been following 'The Hobbit' and 'The Lord of the Rings': 'Haven't you ever wondered what else is out there? There's wonders in this world beyond our wandering. I can feel it!' The dialogue appears to be spoken by an ancient ancestor of the hobbits -- a harfoot played by Markella Kavenagh.



## OSCAR ISAAC FEATURES IN SECOND TRAILER OF 'MOON KNIGHT'

Los Angeles: The second trailer of the Oscar Isaac starrer 'Moon Knight' was released during the Super Bowl LVI. The limited series from the house of Marvel Studios stars Isaac as the eponymous character, which was first created by Doug Moench and Don Perlin in 1975 for the comic series 'Werewolf by Knight', reports Variety. As per Variety, the character of Moon Knight, who is known for his dissociative identity disorder, is the secret identity of Marc Spector. Spector, a former CIA operative turns into a mercenary, who dies during a job in Sudan but is revived and turned into the conduit of the Egyptian moon god Khonshu.

In addition to Isaac, the series also stars Ethan Hawke as Arthur Harrow the mysterious cult leader, the late Gaspard Ulliel (who died in a skiing accident in January) as the villain Anton Mogart, a.k.a. Midnight Man. May Calamawy will also appear in an undisclosed role. The series, created and written by Jeremy Slater, has been directed by Mohamed Diab, Justin Benson and Aaron Moorhead. Isaac, Slater, Diab, Kevin Feige, Louis D'Esposito, Victoria Alonso and Brad Winderbaum will serve as executive producers. The series will premiere on Disney+ on March 30.

## 'Interview with the Vampire'

Los Angeles | Agencies

The Super Bowl LVI saw the teasers from AMC Network wherein they give first look of their upcoming slate of releases: The Anne Rice series 'Interview with the Vampire' along with footage from the sixth and final season of 'Better Call Saul', the middle third of the final season of zombie series 'The Walking Dead'. In addition, the teaser slate also featured the footage from the upcoming anthology 'Tales of the Walking Dead', the final season of 'Killing Eve'. The 60-second online version of the teaser featured glimpses from '61st Street', 'Dark Winds', 'Moonhaven' and 'That Dirty Black Bag'. 'Interview with the Vampire', which has been adapted from Anne Rice's novel of the same name, follows the story of a vampire Louis de Pointe du Lac essayed by Jacob Anderson. The second part of 'The Walking Dead's' final season will debut on linear channel AMC next Sunday. Season 4 of 'Killing Eve' will premiere on February 27 on BBC America and AMC Plus.

Part 1 of the sixth and final season of 'Better Call Saul' starring Bob Odenkirk will debut on April 18 at 9 p.m. Eastern Standard Time on AMC, with the second batch of episodes set for the release from July 11.



## MICKEY GUYTON SETS TONE FOR SUPER BOWL LVI

Los Angeles | Agencies

Country singer Mickey Guyton performed the Francis Scott Key classic 'The Star Spangled Banner' as a run-up to Super Bowl LVI in Los Angeles.

The other two performers R&B singer Jhene Aiko and gospel duo Mary Mary, performed 'America the Beautiful' with Aiko unexpectedly delivering the classic less with the not-so-R&B-leaning spin of a harpist, reports Variety.

As per Variety, Mary Mary performed outside SoFi Stadium for a scenic rendition of the song, 'America the Beautiful', which started in 2009. She was accompanied by the L.A. Phil's Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles (aka YOLA), conducted by Thomas Wilkins. Talking about 'The Star Spangled Banner', last year the song was performed by Eric Church and Jazmine Sullivan. Guyton, who performed the anthem this year, has also been nominated for three awards at the upcoming Grammys. She has said that she was known as "the national anthem girl" growing up in Texas, singing it regularly from the time she was 13.

"The national anthem is my song," she told the Los Angeles Times, noting that she'd first been prompted to think about tackling music by seeing LeAnn Rimes deliver it before a pro game, and been further inspired to follow her dream as a person of colour by seeing Whitney Houston's now-legendary version.



## ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Bryonce



## INDIA PREMIER LEAGUE 2022

# SWOT ANALYSIS OF KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS, LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS AND GUJARAT TITANS

### KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS

The franchise entered the IPL Mega Auction with four retentions in Venkatesh Iyer, Varun Chakravarthy, Andre Russell and Sunil Narine. On the first day of auction, they brought back players like Pat Cummins, Nitish Rana and Shivam Mavi and found a possible captain in Shreyas Iyer (INR 12.25 crore). On day two, they bought foreign players like Alex Hales, Sam Billings, Mohammad Nabi, Tim Southee, Chamika Karunaratne apart from Indian players Ajinkya Rahane and Umesh Yadav.



**Strength:** Seven of their core members from the last year's season, including the retention, are now back with them. Shreyas Iyer coming in makes the batting order strong.

**Weakness:** Doubt over whether Ajinkya Rahane can bat aggressively as an opener with no Shubman Gill around. Absence of a proficient Indian pacer (Umesh Yadav hasn't been a regular choice in playing eleven) and a domestic batting option may hurt them big time. **Opportunity:** Re-create and retain their dynamic self from the previous seasons and go a step far from their 2021 finish as the runners-up.

**Threat:** Lack of flexibility in balancing the playing eleven, especially in deciding the four overseas options.

### Team Absolute | New Delhi

Over two days of 2022 IPL mega auction, 204 players out of 600 in the final list were acquired by the ten franchises. Here's a look at how two-time champions Kolkata Knight Riders and the newcomers, Lucknow Super Giants and Gujarat Titans now stack up after the auctions were done and dusted.

### LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS

In its first appearance at the IPL Mega Auction, Lucknow was the only team to utilise their full purse. After picking KL Rahul, Marcus Stoinis and Ravi Bishnoi from the draft, they acquired excellent choices of Indian and overseas players to be one of the possibly strongest sides after the auction ended. **Strength:** Their bowling attack has the ingredients to be well-rounded. Mark Wood, Avesh Khan and Jason Holder will handle the pace department while Bishnoi along with K Gowtham and Krunal Pandya offer lots of variety in the spin arena. **Weakness:** Though they have batting strength in KL Rahul and Quinton de Kock, the lack of another experienced Indian batter may hurt them. Manish Pandey didn't have a good time in IPL 2021 while Manan Vohra, with sporadic appearances in the tournament, hasn't shined on a consistent basis. **Opportunity:** With three all-round options in Pandya, Stoinis and Holder, Lucknow will have some striking depth, giving them a chance to rotate bowling options and have lots of batting too. Gowtham can also hit the ball hard and Deepak Hooda can chip in with some off-spin too. **Threat:** Injuries to any of the five all-round options can hamper Lucknow's chances of doing well in the tournament.

### GUJARAT TITANS

The other newbie in the auction alongside Lucknow, Gujarat snapped experienced players like Jason Roy (a steal at INR 2 crores), Mohammed Shami, Lockie Ferguson, Alzarri Joseph, David Miller and Matthew Wade among others after picking Hardik Pandya, Rashid Khan and Shubman Gill from the draft. **Strength:** Their bowling combination in Rashid Khan, Lockie Ferguson, Alzarri Joseph and Mohammed Shami looks settled. At the top, they were lucky to get Jason Roy, one of the explosive openers alongside Shubman Gill at the top. **Weakness:** Apart from Gill and Hardik Pandya, they don't have an experienced Indian batter to boost the duo in the middle order. They need to see if Vijay Shankar or uncapped Abhinav Manohar can step up to that job or not. **Opportunity:** If Gujarat are able to find the right balance and click in unison, then they can pose a stiff challenge in the IPL. For that to happen, they need everything from the build-up to the last ball of every match going their way. **Threat:** The fitness of Hardik Pandya, especially on the bowling front, can go either way for the team. If he's fit to bowl, the balance of the eleven will be sorted. Otherwise, they will have to look around for another option to fill his quota of overs.



# Vikram Rathour backs Kohli to 'bat well and score big runs' in T20Is against West Indies

Kolkata | Agencies

India batting coach Vikram Rathour has backed senior batter Virat Kohli to 'bat well and score big runs' in the upcoming three-match T20I series against the West Indies, starting from Wednesday. Kohli, going through a lean patch with the bat, registered scores of 8, 18 and 0 in the ODIs against the West Indies in Ahmedabad.

"No specific conversations. I don't think he is going through a lean phase. I mean, at least in this format, T20s and ODIs, he's done really well, lately. I understand he had a relatively poor series against the West Indies. But no conversations as such."

"I mean he's batting really well in the nets and we are really happy with the kind of preparations he has been putting in. So, no conversations, I am certain that one of these innings (in the T20 series), he will bat well and score big runs," said Rathour in the virtual press conference.



## BENGALURU OPEN 2

# Prajnesh goes down to top seed, Dimitar upsets Grenier in first round

Bengaluru | Agencies

Prajnesh Gunneswaran, India's main hope in singles, came up with an error-filled performance to lose to top seed Aleksandar Vukic in the first round of the Bengaluru Open 2 ATP Challenger event here on Monday. Prajnesh went down rather tamely 4-6, 2-6 in the Round of 32 match at the KSLTA Courts here.

Dimitar Kuzmanov of Bulgaria caused the biggest upset of the day when he ousted second seed Frenchman Hugo Grenier in straight sets 6-4, 6-3 to advance to the pre-quarterfinals. Also advancing to the next round was Pune's Arjun Kadhe, who brushed aside the challenge of compatriot Adil Kalyanpur 6-2, 6-2.

Although the match between Vukic and Prajnesh seemed to be going on an



even note, the 25-year-old Australian achieved a crucial break in the third game which eventually helped him to win the first set. Vukic, who achieved his career-best ranking of 135 here in Bengaluru, raced to a 2-0 lead after a break in the very first game and repeated the feat in the fifth game for a decisive 4-1 lead. He closed out the match with a superb down-the-line winner.

In another interesting match of the day, after an early break in the second game, 28-year-old Dimitar dominated the proceedings.

However, Grenier showed signs of a comeback with a break in the seventh game to narrow the lead to 3-4 but lost his serve again in the 10th to lose the set. The games went with the serves in the second set, each of them fiercely contested with longer rallies. A double fault in the sixth game followed by another unforced error cost Grenier his serve, which paved the way for Dimitar's win. Earlier in the day, Nitin Kumar Sinha toiled his way into the main draw by ousting third seed Rio Noguchi of Japan 6-4, 6-7(5), 6-1 in the final qualifying round. Joining him was the top seed in qualifiers Mukund Sasikiran who was stretched by fellow Indian Manish Suresh Kumar before prevailing 7-5, 1-6, 6-3.

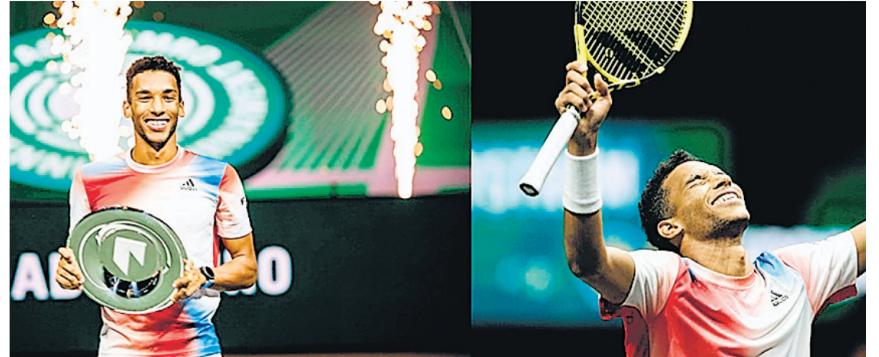
With Prajnesh's exit, a total of five Indians are in the fray in the main draw.

Rotterdam | Netherlands

Canadian 21-year-old tennis player Felix Auger-Aliassime, competing in his ninth tour-level final, finally broke the jinx, winning his maiden ATP Tour title at the ABN Amro World Tennis Tournament by defeating Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-4, 6-2 in 78 minutes to win in Rotterdam.

World No.9 Auger-Aliassime, who defeated Russian Andrey Rublev in three sets to reach the final at the ATP 500 event, was relentless from the start against the Greek world No. 4. The Canadian slammed aggressive groundstrokes and targeted the Tsitsipas's backhand from the baseline to great effect to earn the biggest win of his career.

"It has not been the smoothest road since my first final three years ago," Auger-Aliassime was quoted as saying by atptour.com after the in. "It is an amazing day for me to get my first title and especially here. I played my first ATP main draw here a couple



of years ago, so it is right I won my first title here."

Prior to his title clash with Tsitsipas, Auger-Aliassime held a 0-8 record in tour-level finals and had not won a set in any of those matches.

However, following title match defeats in Melbourne and Stuttgart last season, Auger-Aliassime had

showed signs he was close to crossing the threshold. The world No. 9 helped guide Canada to the multi-nation ATP Cup title in January in Australia, before he reached the quarterfinals at the Australian Open, where he pushed Russian world No. 2 Daniil Medvedev to five sets.

With the win, Auger-Aliassime has

reduced his head-to-head deficit against Tsitsipas to 3-5. It is the first time the third seed has defeated the world No. 4 since 2019, when he downed the 23-year-old on grass at The Queen's Club. With his victory, Auger-Aliassime has also gained revenge for his defeat to Tsitsipas in the final in Marseille in 2020.

# Sri Lanka fined for slow over-rate in second T20I against Australia

Sydney | Agencies

Sri Lanka have been fined 20 per cent of their match fee for maintaining a slow over-rate against Australia in the second T20I held in Sydney, said the International Cricket Council (ICC) on Monday. In the second T20I, the match went to Super Over, where Josh Hazlewood eventually took Australia to victory.

"David Boon of the Emirates ICC Elite Panel of Match Referees imposed the sanction after Sri Lanka were found to be one over short of the target after time allowances were taken into consideration. In accordance with Article 2.22 of the ICC



Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel, which relates to minimum over-rate offences, players are fined 20 per cent of their match fees for every over their side fails to bowl in the allotted time," said the ICC in a statement.

ICC further reprimanded Sri Lanka batter Pathum Nissanka for 'using audible obscenity' during the match. "In addition, batter Pathum Nissanka of Sri Lanka was also given a warning after being found to have breached Article 2.3 of the ICC code, which relates to 'use of an audible obscenity during an International Match'," said the ICC.

Beijing | Agencies

The Executive Board (EB) of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has decided not to have a medal ceremony for the women's figure skating team event at the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games till the case of Russian participant Kamila Valieva is finally settled by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).

Kamila Valieva, 17, was part of the Russian Olympic (ROC) Committee team that won the figure skating team event in Beijing a few days back. It was later revealed that she had returned a positive test for a banned substance on a sample collected in December 2021, following

which the medal ceremony for the event was postponed.

Kamila was provisionally suspended from the Winter Olympics but the Russians took the matter to CAS, which ruled that she can't be suspended till the full process in the anti-doping case is not followed after the positive test on her 'A' sample. The Russian Anti-Doping Agency (RUSADA) has claimed that the analysis of Valieva's sample was delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic and she was allowed to travel to Beijing. The IOC also said that though it will accept the decision by the ad-hoc division of CAS at Beijing and will allow Kamila to participate in the Women's Single Skating competition on Tuesday, (February 15) he finals on Thursday (February 17).

# Deepak Chahar, Shardul Thakur work really hard on their batting: Vikram Rathour

Kolkata | Agencies

India batting coach Vikram Rathour acknowledged that all-rounders Shardul Thakur and Deepak Chahar have been working very hard on their batting skills. He added that the advantage with enhanced batting credentials of Chahar and Thakur helps the team management in flexibility of structuring the playing eleven. In the absence of Hardik Pandya and Ravindra Jadeja in the white-ball side, Chahar and Thakur have stepped up with the bat, scoring half-centuries as part of lower-order in different times during ODIs against South Africa and West Indies. "Both of them are batting well. The reason for that is both of them work really hard on their batting. It's not now but in the past few years, they have been working and practising hard on their batting. Now, you can see the result. So, really good to have two all-rounders. That gives us a lot of flexibility in



what kind of team you want to play with. It's good to see the competition happening in the team as well. They will be competing and are batting well," said Rathour in the virtual press conference. In the recent ODI series against the West Indies, India had players like Suryakumar Yadav, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul and Rishabh Pant get runs in the middle order. Rathour was pleased that different batters in the middle-order stepped up after the top-order fell early.

# Keegan Petersen, Heather Knight ICC players of the month for Jan 22

Dubai | Agencies

The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Monday announced South African batter Keegan Petersen and England's Heather Knight as the winners of the ICC Players of the Month Award for January 2022, in men's and women's categories respectively. Petersen, who was nominated alongside South Africa Under-19 star Dewald Brevis and Bangladesh pacer Ebadot Hossain, took home the award after a phenomenal Test series against India. Petersen played a pivotal role as South Africa came back from 1-0 down to win the three-match series 2-1. In the second Test, he scored 62



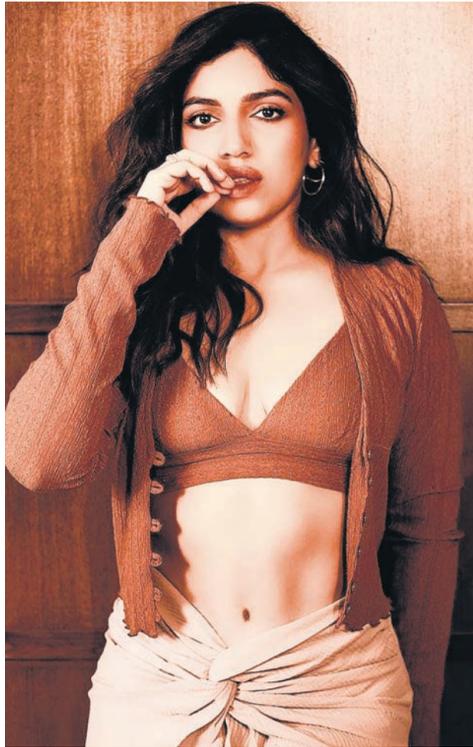
in the first innings, helping the Proteas gain a slender lead. In their

chase of 240, he scored a crucial 28 runs. In the final Test, Petersen

scored a fifty in each innings, including a superb 82 in a challenging fourth-innings chase of 212 that helped South Africa complete their comeback. He ended the series as the highest run-scorer with 276 runs and was named the Player of the Series.

For the women's award, England skipper Knight beat off competition from Sri Lanka captain Chamari Athapaththu and West Indies star Deandra Dottin to be named ICC Player of the Month for January 2022.

Knight captained England in the one-off Ashes Test against Australia in Canberra and finished as the highest run-getter.



## Bhumi on playing sensitive characters

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Bhumi Pednekar, who plays a lesbian in the recently released 'Badhaai Do', says when one chooses a sensitive film or a character, you want a large cross-section of the audience to enjoy the film because that's how one brings positive change in the society. The versatile actor said: "When you choose a sensitive film or a character like 'Badhaai Do', you want a large cross-section of the audience to enjoy the film and be entertained because that's how you bring about positive change in society. It is so heartwarming to see that the media has appreciated my performance and the film so much. It is overwhelming to see the review of audiences pouring in after watching this special movie."

"In the digital age, you get feedback in an instant because of social media and my phone hasn't stopped buzzing due to all the lovely praise for the film and my performance from people who are getting moved by the subject of Badhaai Do. We wanted to highlight a reality that exists so that people can rally together and request for a necessary change to happen."

Bhumi is happy that 'Badhaai Do' has started a conversation about the need for change and is hopeful that it will create a positive impact on the minds of audiences.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

'Bigg Boss OTT' fame

Zeeshan Khan opens up about his plan on getting married to popular model and actress Reyhna Pandit.

He says: "Right now I'm still working on myself. I still have a very long way to go. And even Reyhna right now is focused on her career. So, I think for now we both are building each other up. But yes if things go this way in future then she is the girl I will definitely love to get married with."

The actor started dating his 'Kumkum Bhagya' co-actor Reyhna

## ZEESHAN KHAN ON MARRIAGE PLANS WITH REYHNA PANDIT

Pandit in May 2021, when the two were shooting in Goa for their show.

Zeeshan says he loves her because she is full of positivity and optimism.

He says: "The best thing about her is that she gives me peace of mind, she never lets my mind or the atmosphere around me be

stressed. She never allows any doubts or negative vibes to come around. She always lifts me up with so much positivity and love. She always makes a way to impress me. If there is a problem she helps me find a way to sort that out. She always makes me smile irrespective of the situation or my mood."

## A VILLAINOUS CHARACTER BECOMES ONE FOR A DARK REASON: BOBBY DEOL

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood actor Bobby Deol will soon be seen portraying a pivotal character in the upcoming film 'Love Hostel'. As the trailer of the film releases on Monday, unveiling more details, Bobby shares that even a dark character becomes dark for a reason.

The film is set in the northern part of India where a young couple elopes and gets married. How their decision put them in a life-threatening situation, the story

unveils.

Sharing the insight of his character, Bobby told reporter, "It is a very interesting character that has quite a twisted journey. Of course, I cannot reveal that but I must say that even a dark character has a darker backstory. There is a reason why the character's actions are brutal. He was a regular man with whom something happened one day that changed him completely. So now whatever he does, he does it in his righteous way. Once the film is out, people will get to know really."

This is not the first time that Bobby is playing a grey character as one of his recent successes is the Prakash Jha directorial web series 'Ashram'.

Decoding his process to tap into the dark side of his mind, the actor said, "Well, some extreme emotions we all have in our mind but we only become a better version of ourselves by controlling the negative emotions and focusing on the positive ones because honestly speaking, we are emotionally flawed people."



## Want to deliver strong performances on screen: Vaani Kapoor

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Vaani Kapoor says she wants to deliver strong performances on screen and feels that her upcoming film 'Shamshera' is that perfect vehicle for her.

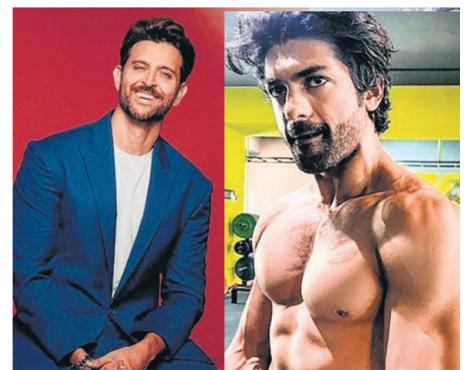
Vaani, who will be seen in a drop dead gorgeous avatar in 'Shamshera' in which she plays the role of a performer, says, "Shamshera is a theatrical experience like no other and I'm really happy that we have a release date that tells audiences that we are coming to entertain them with a story and a spectacle that will hopefully touch the hearts of every cinema lover across the country."

She adds, "Shamshera is a film that is extremely close to my heart and each one of us have given our best to make it a film that everyone, across all age-groups, will enjoy."

"Coming out of 'Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui', I wanted to give audiences a performance that they will again hopefully love. I want to deliver strong performances on screen and 'Shamshera' is that perfect vehicle for me."

About her character in the much-awaited action entertainer 'Shamshera', Vaani says, "I'm really excited to play the role of a performer who dances her way into the hearts of people and I have some amazing songs to perform on. I'm hoping that all the songs of 'Shamshera' become a huge success too. It's a product of our love, sweat and hard work."

Vaani is paired opposite superstar Ranbir. The Karan Malhotra action extravaganza that has been produced by Aditya Chopra, is set to release in Hindi, Tamil and Telugu on July 22.



## 'My inspiration for a picture perfect body is Hrithik Roshan,': Taha Shah Badussha

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Taha Shah Badussha says the inspiration behind his chiselled body is Bollywood actor and fitness icon Hrithik Roshan. From training in martial arts, calisthenics, gymnastics, to taking dance lessons, along with cardio workouts, he loves to do it all. Taha, who is known for his work in 'Luv Ka The End' and giving some hit numbers such as 'Ekk Vari' with Daisy Shah and 'Aaj Sajeya' with Alaya F, talks about his inspiration to be fit and have a perfect body.

He says: "My inspiration for a picture perfect body is Hrithik Roshan. He is incredible and an epitome of fitness. The way he has maintained and worked upon himself is phenomenal. I really look up to him when it comes to fitness."



Nusharratt Bharucha

## RAKHI SAWANT DECIDES TO 'PART WAYS' WITH HUSBAND RITESH

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Reality TV star Rakhi Sawant has announced her separation from husband Ritesh, whom she had introduced in "Bigg Boss 15". She took to her Instagram handle to make this announcement. Rakhi wrote: "Dear fans and well-wishers, just wanted to say that Ritesh and I have decided to part ways." Rakhi further asserted that a lot had happened between her and Ritesh and she had to take the decision as things matters beyond her control after "Bigg Boss 15". "After 'Bigg Boss' a lot has happened and I was unaware of certain things which were out of my control. We have tried to work out our differences and tried to make things work but I think it's best we both move on amicably and we both enjoy our lives separately," Rakhi noted. She expressed her pain and agony over separating just before Valentine's Day. She also gave her best wishes to Ritesh for a happy life. "I'm really sad and heartbroken that this had to happen before Valentine's Day, but the decision had to be made. I wish Ritesh the best in life, but for me at this stage in life, I have to focus on my work and my life and keep myself happy and healthy," the "Bigg Boss" regular said.

