

absolute india

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TASKS OF UKRAINE 'SPECIAL OPERATION' WILL BE COMPLETED IN ANY CASE, PUTIN TO MACRON

DESPERATE TO FIGHT

INVASION WAS PLANNED A YEAR AGO: RUSSIAN MP

A Russian MP has said Moscow started planning for an invasion of Ukraine 12 months ago, BBC reported. "We did not prepare this, this operation spontaneously," State Duma member Rifat Shaykhtudinov said on state-controlled Channel One TV on Wednesday. "It had been in preparation for a year, maybe more. We understood what [was happening] and had been warning them in advance," he said in remarks on Channel One's daily talk show Time Will Tell. He suggested that Russia would have come under attack had it not invaded.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Russian President Vladimir Putin told his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron that the tasks of the Russian special operation in Ukraine would be fulfilled in any case.

It was emphasised that the tasks of the special military operation will be fulfilled in any case, the Kremlin said, RT reported. Putin also detailed the fundamental approaches and conditions in the context of negotiations with representatives of the Ukrainian side.

He confirmed that, first of all, they were talking about the demilitarisation and neutral status of Ukraine so that a threat to Russia never comes from Ukrainian territory.

In addition, Putin, in a conversation with Macron, warned that the Russian side would continue to uncompromisingly fight against militants of nationalist armed groups in Ukraine.

"It was noted that during the special

OVER 7K INDIANS TO BE EVACUATED IN NEXT 2 DAYS: CENTRE

New Delhi: Over 7,400 Indian nationals are expected to be evacuated under the 'Operation Ganga' in the next two days, the government said on Thursday. The Centre has initiated an airlift operation to evacuate Indians, who have found their way to the neighbouring countries of war-torn Ukraine. It has deployed a number of special charter as well as Indian Air Force flights to ferry back the citizens. On Friday, 3,500 are expected to be brought back, while over 3,900 will be ferried back on Saturday. As per a Ministry of Civil Aviation statement, a total of 17 flights are expected to land in India -- 15 in New Delhi and 2 in Mumbai -- on Friday. So far, the Centre has brought back over 6,200 citizens, including the 2,185 coming on Thursday alone through 10 special civilian flights, since the evacuation process began on February 22.

operation to protect Donbass, Russia intends to continue the uncompromising fight against militants of nationalist armed groups who commit war crimes, including placing military equipment in residential areas and using the civilian population as human shields," the Kremlin press service said.

In the telephone conversation, the Russian leader gave Macron "reasoned explanations about the significant role of neo-Nazis in the state policy of Kiev". According to French Prime Minister Jean Castex, Jean Castex, the heads of state also discussed humanitarian issues in connection with the situation in Ukraine.

US PROVIDES STINGER MISSILES UKRAINE

New Delhi: The US delivers anti-aircraft gun -- stinger missiles -- as military aid to Ukraine to take down Russian aircraft and helicopters what it did in Afghanistan 42 years ago to end USSR's presence over there. The stinger surface to air missiles will be a boost for Ukraine's air defence if Russian fighter aircraft bombs the cities. So far Russians have not involved its Air Force into the war. Apart from Stinger missiles, Javelin anti-tank missiles are also being sent to Ukraine.

10-YEAR HIGH: UKRAINE CRISIS PUSHES CRUDE PRICE

New Delhi: Continuing hostilities between Russia and Ukraine pushed crude oil price to a 10-year high of \$119.84 per barrel on Thursday. The global hike in crude oil prices led by the Russia-Ukraine crisis is expected to push India's domestic prices of petrol and diesel by over Rs 22 per litre. The crisis as well as fears of lower supplies along with robust global demand pushed the Brent-indexed crude oil price higher. Crude oil prices have surged by nearly 20 per cent in the last three days on fear of tight supplies. The Brent-index crude oil prices rose by 4 per cent to \$119.84 per barrel on Thursday. On the other hand, India is a major crude oil importer, and for it, the price range is a cause of concern as it may add Rs 20 to Rs 22 to petrol and diesel selling prices if the OMCs decide to revise the current rates.

ESCALATING TENSION BETWEEN RUSSIA AND WEST BRINGS NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN FOCUS

▶ RUSSIAN FOREIGN MINISTER SERGEI LAVROV, EARLIER ON THURSDAY, ACCUSED WESTERN LEADERS OF FIXATING ON NUCLEAR WAR. HE ALSO COMPARED THE US TO FRENCH EMPEROR NAPOLEON BONAPARTE AND GERMAN DICTATOR ADOLF HITLER.

▶ "IT IS CLEAR THAT WORLD WAR THREE CAN ONLY BE NUCLEAR. I WOULD LIKE TO POINT OUT THAT IT'S IN THE HEADS OF WESTERN POLITICIANS THAT THE IDEA OF A NUCLEAR WAR IS SPINNING CONSTANTLY, AND NOT IN THE HEADS OF RUSSIANS. THEREFORE I ASSURE YOU THAT WE WILL NOT ALLOW ANY PROVOCATIONS TO THROW US OFF BALANCE," LAVROV SAID IN MOSCOW.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The escalating tension between the United States and Russia over Moscow's ongoing massive military operation in Ukraine has brought nuclear weapons into focus with deliberations and debate over its usage and the disaster it could bring.

The world leaders have started talking about usage of nuclear weapons but if used, the world would witness disaster which no one could ever imagine.

Russia and the US together possess over 90 per cent of the global nuclear weapons. Both have extensive and expensive programmes under way to replace and modernize their nuclear warheads, missile and aircraft delivery systems, and production facilities. Both the countries have kept around 2000 of these, nearly all of which



belonged to them -- in a state of high operational alert.

According to a Swedish think tank -- Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) report released last year, the nine nuclear-armed states -- the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) -- together possessed an estimated 13,080 nuclear weapons at the start of 2021.

The report stated that the estimated number of nuclear weapons currently deployed with operational forces increased to 3,825 in 2021, from 3720 in 2020.

93% Indians live in areas with air quality below WHO's standards

New York | Agencies

A whopping 93 per cent of Indians live in areas where air pollution levels exceed WHO standards, according to a global report. The report revealed that life expectancy in India, as a result, has been shortened by about 1.5 years. The findings by Health Effects Institute (HEI) in Washington, US, is part of its annual State of Global Air annual analysis for 2020. The study showed that with an average annual population-weighted PM2.5 of 83 microgram/ cubic metre (mg/cu) in 2019, as many as 9,79,700 deaths in India can be attributed to PM 2.5.

It showed that almost 100 per cent of the world's population lives in areas where the PM2.5 levels exceeded WHO recommendations - which is average annual PM2.5 exposure levels of 5 mg/cu.

On average, more than 40 per cent of the world's population lives in areas where ozone levels exceeded the least stringent WHO interim target in 2019. Globally, India ranks ninth highest population exposure to ozone (98 per cent), following countries like Congo, Ethiopia, Germany, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey taking the top eight



positions and China ranking 10th.

"Air pollution is a leading risk factor for deaths and disability around the world; in 2019 alone, exposure to air pollution was linked to 6.7 million deaths," the authors wrote in the study.

The large exposure to PM2.5 has also reduced life expectancy for countries and regions -- Egypt (2.11 years), Saudi Arabia (1.91 years), India (1.51 years) China (1.32 years) and Pakistan (1.31 years).

The lowest impacts of pollution on longevity is in Norway, Sweden, Australia, and New Zealand.

92% COVID DEATHS IN 2022 DUE TO LACK OF VACCINATIONS: ICMR

New Delhi: As many as 92 per cent of Covid deaths so far this year have been due to unvaccinated individuals, Indian Council of Medical Research Director General, Dr Balram Bhargava, said on Thursday.

He also said that India is the second country which is having a vaccine tracker.

At a press briefing on current Covid situation in the country, the ICMR chief, about vaccine effectiveness in mortality prevention, said that the first dose is responsible for 98.9 per cent vaccine effectiveness, and if both doses are given, then it is 99.3 per cent effective. He said that vaccines development, deployment, and impact have been scientifically measured.

KCR meets Rakesh Tikait, Subramanian Swamy on anti-BJP mission

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao met BJP MP Subramanian Swamy and farmer leader Rakesh Tikait in the national capital on Thursday.

The three leaders discussed the current political situation in the country, party sources said. KCR, as Rao is popularly known, has been camping in the national capital for the past few days. He is due to visit Ranchi on Friday, party sources said. The Telangana CM has lately intensified efforts to take on the ruling BJP at the Centre. He has been reaching out to regional leaders in different states as part of his plans to forge an anti-BJP alliance at the national level. Ahead of his arrival in Delhi on Monday night, there were talks that KCR would meet leaders of opposition parties, including Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav. It was also speculated that he is likely to join West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool



Congress leader Mamata Banerjee at a Samajwadi Party election rally in Varanasi on Thursday. There have been no developments on this front so far. Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait had led the farmers' protests against the three Central farm laws, which have been since repealed by the government. Tikait has been critical of the BJP.

Of late, BJP's Rajya Sabha MP Subramanian Swamy has been critical of the Central government's handling of different issues.

As part of his exercise to reach out to political leaders in other parts of the country, KCR had recently travelled to Mumbai where he met Maharashtra Chief Minister and Shiva Sena leader Uddhav Thackeray. He had also met NCP chief Sharad Pawar on that occasion. With the BJP trying to emerge as an alternative to the ruling TRS in Telangana, relations between the two have taken a turn for the worse over the last few months.

India 'missing' 25.87 mn hectares forests

▶ OF THE 328.74 MILLION HA TOTAL GEOGRAPHICAL AREA, 23.5 PER CENT, I.E., 77.53 MILLION HA IS RECORDED FOREST AREA (RFA). IT COMPRISES 44.22 MILLION HA RESERVED FORESTS, 21.22 MILLION HA PROTECTED FORESTS AND 12.07 UNCLASSIFIED FORESTS.



Nimli (Rajasthan) | Agencies

India is "missing" 25.87 million hectares (Ha) of forests - combined together, the area would be equivalent to Uttar Pradesh - which is a result of the difference between recorded forest and the forest cover as per official data, Centre for Science & Environment (CSE) analysis showed on Thursday.

The CSE analysis was based on the

India State of Forest Report 2021 (ISFR2021) published a few weeks ago. Nowhere in the whole report is it explained, "where is this difference of 25.87 million Ha?" she said.

As, off the record, a very senior forest official told her that 11 million Ha is accounted for, including 3 million

Ha is encroached, 1 million Ha is inside villages and 2 million Ha is diverted. "But all this does not figure in the report," she pointed out.

Prior to 2015, when forest boundaries were not digitised, there was scope for such miscalculations but now that it is done, the Forest

"The State of the Forest Report does not explain what is the state of this forest land that India is 'missing' - as massive as 25.87 million Ha. This is the difference between what is 'recorded' as forest area and the actual forest cover on that recorded area. The recorded forest area is 77.53 million Ha but the forest cover on these lands is 51.66 million Ha. Which clearly means that as much as 34 per cent of the area classified as forests is missing in the assessment."

Sunita Narain, Director General, CSE

Department has exact digital coordinates of the forest land, which establish that 28 per cent of the forest cover in the country is on lands outside the control of the department.

GOVT ISSUES DRAFT RULES ON DISPLAY OF FITNESS CERTIFICATE, REGISTRATION MARK ON VEHICLES

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has issued a draft rule mandating the vehicles to display their fitness certificate and registration mark.

According to the draft rule, the vehicle owners will have to display the fitness certificate and the validity of the registration mark in a prescribed manner on the vehicles. As per the rules, the fitness certificate should be displayed in the 'DD-MM-YYYY' format.

For heavy and medium goods or passenger vehicles,



and light motor vehicles, the certificate has to be displayed on the upper edge of the left side of the wind screen. Similarly, for auto-rickshaw, e-rickshaw, e-cart, and quadracycle, it has to be displayed on the upper edge of the left side of the wind

screen, if fitted. In case of Motor cycle, it has to be exhibited on the conspicuous part of the vehicle.

As per the rule, the vehicles will have to display the information in yellow colour on blue background in 'Type Arial Bold' script.



'HAVE HIDDEN AGENDA', SC ON PLEA SEEKING FIRS AGAINST CONG, SP ON POLL FREEBIES

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday slammed a petitioner who sought registration of FIRs and also a direction to disqualify candidates fielded by the Congress and Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh and candidates representing Aam Aadmi Party in Punjab in this year's Assembly election, for offering freebies amid the ongoing polls.



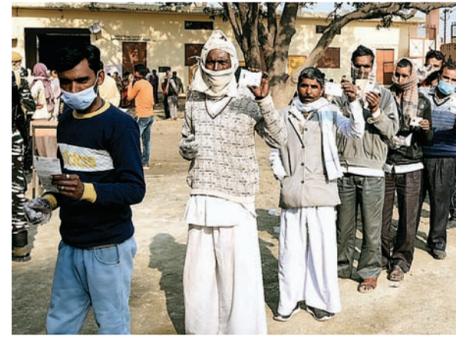
political parties, for offering freebies amid the ongoing polls in five states. The petition sought a direction to disqualify candidates fielded by the Congress, and Samajwadi Party (SP) in Uttar Pradesh and also the candidates representing Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Punjab in this year's Assembly election. The plea said: "An offer or promise by a political party, its leader, candidates set up in the elections, may be declared to be

indulging in corrupt practices and bribery in terms of provisions of Section 123 (1)(b) of the Representations of People Act, 1951 and the candidates set up by such political parties may be declared disqualified from contesting the election in that state." The petitioner said he has come across the offer of freebies made by the leaders of the Congress, SP and AAP during the Assembly elections, 2022 which are being held in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Goa, and Manipur. The plea urged the top court to issue directions to register FIRs against the political parties for inducing voters by making offer of gifts, goods, money from the public exchequer, if they are voted to form the government in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Goa and Manipur respectively for an offence committed under Section 123(1)(A) of Representation of People Act, 1951. "The petitioner has witnessed in the last five years that registered political parties to induce the voter in their favour have been making offer/promise of freebies like free water, free electricity, free Wi-Fi, free gifts like bicycle, laptop, mobile phones, etc., if voted to form the government," said the plea

Uttar Pradesh records 53.90% turnout in penultimate phase of Assembly polls

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A turnout of 53.90 per cent was registered in the sixth and second-last phase of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls on Thursday, involving 57 constituencies in 10 districts, the Election Commission said in its latest update. It also said that the voter turnout figure was approximate trend as the data from some polling stations take time to reach it. As per the EC data, in Ambedkar Nagar district registered 62.22 per cent turnout, Ballia 53.93 per cent, Balrampur 48.64 per cent, Basti 56.81 per cent, Deoria 52.30 per cent, Gorakhpur 55.17 per cent, Kushinagar 56.08 per cent, Maharajganj 59.28 per cent, Sant Kabir Nagar 54.39 per cent, and Siddharthnagar district recorded 50.19 per cent. Ambedkar Nagar



recorded the highest number of turnout, while Balrampur recorded the lowest. Over 2.14 crore voters exercised their franchise in this phase and the fate of a total of 676 candidates have been sealed in the EVM machines. Among the 676 candidates in the fray this time are Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath from Gorakhpur Urban, fighting his first Assembly polls, state Congress president Ajay Kumar Lallu from Tamkuhi Raj seat and Swami Prasad Maurya, who quit as minister and the BJP to join the Samajwadi Party, from Fazlunagar. he last phase will be held on March 7 and counting of the votes will be held on March 10.

Govt seeking publicity over humanitarian crisis: Congress

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Congress on Thursday attacked the government and alleged that it is seeking publicity over the humanitarian crisis due to the war in Ukraine. Congress Deputy leader in the Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi said, "It's a pity to see that the humanitarian duty of the government of India towards its citizens has become a self-seeking publicity drive for their supreme leader. The scripted speeches and the flashlight of a dozen cameras debase what is essential public service." Congress leader Rahul Gandhi too said that it is the duty of the government and is not a favour. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Thursday said that all members of the Parliamentary Consultative Committee on the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) gave strong and unanimous support to the government for its efforts to bring back all the Indians from Ukraine.



GMAIL HACKERS DEFRAUDING PEOPLE PAN-INDIA HELD

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A module of cyber crooks, who used to defraud people pan-India by hacking their Gmail accounts, has been busted by Delhi Police with the arrest of two M.Com students, an official said here on Thursday. The accused have been identified as Anurag Kumar Singh and Vikas Kumar Maddheshiya, both pursuing their M.Com in Prayagraj. The duo revealed that they were trained to compromise Gmail accounts by a pan-India gang over Zoom meetings. The police termed it as a "major internet security issue and a matter of concern". Furnishing details about the matter, DCP Brijendra Kumar Yadav said that a case was registered based on a complaint received on the NCRP portal, which said that a man was defrauded of Rs 89,100 in a clandestine manner. A transaction was made from his SBI account even though he did not share the OTP with anyone, as he was sleeping at that time. Accordingly, the police registered a case under Section 420 of the Indian Penal Code and took up the investi-



gation. "Information was sought from Flipkart which provided two email accounts that were used by the fraudsters to purchase Google gift cards. SBI Credit Card officials provided data of the transactions carried out by the fraudsters," the DCP said. From both the links, a common IP address was identified. Cyber-tracking conducted after information was received from Flipkart helped the police trace the accused persons to the ADA Colony in Prayagraj. A raid was conducted at the specified location from where both the accused were arrested. During interrogation, the duo revealed that they hacked the Gmail accounts of the victims, and once access was obtained, they committed financial fraud using the bank/credit/debit card details with the help of their associate, Prabhakar Vikram Singh, who is yet to be arrested.

5 KILLED IN ACCIDENT ON DELHI-JAIPIUR EXPRESSWAY IN GURUGRAM



Gurugram: Five people were killed in an accident on Thursday along the Delhi-Jaipur Expressway, police said. The deceased have been identified as Ashish (25) of Bhiwadi, Sandeep (25) of Kaithal, Parveen (30) of Uttar Pradesh's Devaria, Chandar Mohan (25) of Hisar and Bharat Bhushan (28) of Punjabi Bagh in Delhi. The accident took place at around 3 a.m. after a Celerio car rammed into a truck near Binola village. Police said that the five victims, in the car, were travelling towards Bhiwadi in Rajasthan. Complainant Rajesh Singh, relative of one of the victims, told the police that all the victims were returning to their respective homes when the incident took place. "When the victims in their car reached near Binola flyover on the Delhi-Jaipur Expressway they met with an accident due to negligence on part of the truck driver, who suddenly applied break on the expressway, and the car rammed into the truck from behind," the complainant alleged. A case under relevant sections of the IPC was registered at the Bilaspur police station against the truck driver. "We are tracing the accused truck driver based on the truck registration number. He will be arrested soon," Gajender Singh, the investigation officer said.

Centre asks states to ensure no vial of Covid vaccine is wasted

Team Absolute | New Delhi

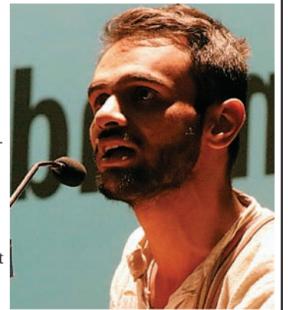
The Centre has asked all states and Union Territories to ensure that no vial of Covid-19 vaccine is wasted in hospitals. In a letter to states and UTs, Health Ministry's additional secretary Vikas Sheel said that the instruction was in reference to the issue of vaccines available at private vaccination centres that were nearing their expiry date. "Earlier also the directions have been issued to specific States of West Bengal, Karnataka, Kerala and Maharashtra," the letter further reads. The letter was issued to the states and UTs on February 23. "In this regard, it is reiterated to all the States/UTs that the MoHFV has no objection for the States/UTs to consider of near expiry vaccine vials of private CVCs with long expiry vaccine



vials available with government CVCs after due diligence. Kindly ensure that no vials of Covid vaccine in government CVCs as well as in private CVCs should be wasted," the letter added. As per the ministry's report, over 15.19 crore balance and unutilised Covid vaccine doses are still available with the states and UTs as on Thursday morning. The additional secretary also said that the provision of these exchanged vaccines is available on CoWIN. With the administration of over 21 lakh Covid vaccine doses in the last 24 hours, India's Covid inoculation coverage has reached 178 crore as of Thursday morning, the ministry said. This has been achieved through 2,05,41,983 sessions. At 6,561, India's daily Covid cases marginally declined. In the last 24 hrs, total 142 new Covid related deaths have been reported, pushing the death toll to 5,14,388. Active Covid cases has reduced to 77,152 which constitute 0.18 per cent of the country's total positive Cases.

DELHI RIOTS: COURT RESERVES ORDER ON BAIL PLEA OF UMAR KHALID

New Delhi: A court here on Thursday reserved its order on the bail application of former Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) student Umar Khalid in a case related to the alleged larger conspiracy behind the northeast Delhi riots. Additional sessions judge Amitabh Rawat of Karkardooma court reserved the order.



The order is likely to be pronounced on March 14. Opposing the bail plea, Special Public Prosecutor (SPP) Amit Prasad argued on the relevancy of the speech given by Umar Khalid in Amravati in February 2020. He said the bail application was rejected on February 11, pointing out that the announcement of Donald Trump visiting India came on the same day. During the course of the hearing, Khalid's counsel, opposing the charges under the Indian Penal Code and UAPA, termed the chargesheet a 'work of fiction'. He argued that the speech given by Khalid was about Gandhi, harmony, and the Constitution, and it is not a crime. After the submissions, the court reserved the order.

BJP govt 'bribed' militants to influence voters in Manipur: Jairam Ramesh

Imphal | Agencies

Former Union Minister and senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Thursday accused the BJP government in Manipur of "bribing" banned militant groups under "Suspension of Operation" to "influence the voters in the poll bound state". Ramesh, who is Congress' election in-charge in Manipur, claimed that in a "shocking and flagrant violation" of the Election Commission's Model Code of Conduct, BJP government in Manipur released over Rs 15.70 crore on February 1 and over Rs 92.65 lakh on March 1 to banned militant groups under the "Suspension of Operation". Both the payments have been released by the Union Home Ministry and made by the state government, he added. "These payments ensured that the elections in



Churachandpur and Kangpokpi districts in the first phase on February 28 could not proceed freely, fairly and peacefully. The bribes to banned militant groups under the 'Suspension of Operation' would also influence the elections in Tengnoupal and Chandel districts in the second phase on March 5," the Congress leader told the media. Sharing the cheque numbers and other bank details, he said: "This is how the BJP is buying elections in Manipur, spreading fear and intimidating voters. This is how the BJP is indulging in corruption to remain in power."

COURT DIRECTS FIR AGAINST BIHAR UNIVERSITY VC, 10 OTHERS

Patna: A court in Bihar's West Champaran district on Thursday directed local police to register an FIR against 11 persons, including the Vice Chancellor of the Bihar University, Muzaffarpur, and other varsity officials, on a complaint of financial irregularities. Bagha police station SHO Anant Kumar said: "Such a direction has come from the court and we are taking legal advice about this matter. The FIR is not registered yet." He said that the names of VC, Dr Hanuman Prasad Pandey, former VC Dr Rajkumar Mandal, Registrar Dr Ram Krishna Thakur, Principal Dr Arvind Kumar Tiwari, Prof Shyam Sundar Dubey, Ram Niranjan Pandey, Prof Dr Rajiv Kumar Pandey, Narvadeshwar Upadhyay, Prof Chandra Bhushan Mishra, and Umesh Yadav. The complainant of this case is Prof Arvind Kumar Tiwari, HOD, History of Pandit Umashankar Tiwari Women's College, Bagha which comes under the varsity.



Those above 25 yrs can possess 9 litres liquor, 18 litres beer: Delhi HC

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court has held that a person above 25 years can possess 9 litres of alcohol high-lighting Rule 20 of the Delhi Excise Rules, 2010. While dealing with a case in connection with illicit liquor recently, the court said those above 25 years can possess 9 litres of whisky, vodka, gin and rum, and 18 litres of beer, wine and alcopop. The Excise Department found a total of 132 bottles of liquor of Indian and Foreign brands from the ground floor of the petitioner's house at Panchsheel Park in the city. As the petitioner did not have a valid license pertaining to the stored liquor and beyond the permissible limit prescribed under the Delhi Excise Act, 2009 an instant FIR under Section 33 of the



Delhi Excise Act, 2009, was registered. However, petitioner's counsel Priyanka Sinha argued that there has been no infringement of Delhi Excise Rules, 2010 and informed the court that there are six adults above the age of 25 years and four children residing at the petitioner's residence, submitting that the maximum limit for individual possession of liquor for Indian Liquor and Foreign Liquor (whisky rum, gin, vodka and brandy) is nine litres, and for wine, beer, liqueur, cider and alcopop is eighteen litres.



SC REJECTS MAHA GOVT RECOMMENDATION ON OBC QUOTA IN LOCAL BODY POLLS

The Supreme Court on Thursday directed the Maharashtra government and the State Election Commission (SEC) not to act upon the interim report of Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission to reserve seats for Other Backward Classes (OBC) in the upcoming local bodies election.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday directed the Maharashtra government and the State Election Commission (SEC) not to act upon the interim report of Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission to reserve seats for Other Backward Classes (OBC) in the upcoming local bodies election.

A bench, headed by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar, said the election should be conducted without the OBC reservation. It also pulled up the Commission over its report, and declined to accept its argument that there is sufficient data to reserve the seats. The bench, also comprising Justice C.T. Ravikumar, said: "Where is the logic? There is not even a single logic



given." As senior advocate Shekhar Naphade, representing the Maharashtra government, submitted that the Commission may be able to justify the recommendation to reserve the seats, the bench wondered did it rely on the same data, which looked contentious to the court earlier. The top court said it cannot allow the Maharashtra government to move with such an interim report. It declined to accept the Commission's recommendation to restore 27 per cent reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBC) in the local body elections, noting that the report did not comply with an earlier Supreme Court direction, under which the Commission was required to conduct research before proposing any suggestions. The bench emphasised that the report filed by the

Commission must stand the test of judicial scrutiny, and there should be more authentic data. It said there is no date on the report and how could it know whether it was prepared with full understanding or not? "If this is how a Commission will work, then we doubt the recommendations of the Commission." Citing that report was not in compliance with its earlier order, the bench said: "We direct all the concerned not to act upon the recommendation." However, it permitted the Commission to continue with its exercise to study the empirical data local-body wise and submit its interim report. In December last year, the top court stayed the implementation of the 27 per cent quota, as it did not comply with the triple test principle laid down by the apex court. The Maharashtra government introduced the quota through an ordinance in 2021. The Commission was asked to prepare a report on OBC reservation in local body elections. The top court directed the SEC to notify the election process for the gram panchayats in accordance with its orders passed in December 2021 and in January 2022, against the implementation of the OBC quota. It had earlier ordered that the seats reserved for OBCs now be notified as general category seats. The top court made these observations while hearing an application moved by the Maharashtra government informing it about the Commission's report.

Amid heckling by MVA-BJP, Maha Guv 'walks out' of Legislature

In an unprecedented development, Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari 'walked out' of the state Legislature without completing his customary address to the joint House amid heckling by members of both the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi and Bharatiya Janata Party here on Thursday.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In an unprecedented development, Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari 'walked out' of the state Legislature without completing his customary address to the joint House amid heckling by members of both the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi and Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party here on Thursday. Soon after reaching the Legislature for the customary inaugural of the Budget Session, the Governor rose to deliver his speech, but ruling MVA legislators from the Shiv Sena-Nationalist Congress Party-Congress raised slogans against him for his recent utterances against the warrior king Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and on the child-marriage of social reformers



Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and Savitri Phule.

At this the Opposition BJP members raised slogans at the MVA demanding the resignation of Minority Affairs Minister Nawab Malik, who was arrested last month by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in an alleged money-laundering case arising out of a land deal with mafia links. The incident resulted in a bitter brawl between the MVA-BJP, each blaming the other for the Governor's sudden departure from the House amid uproarious

scenes. Irate MVA members termed Koshyari's step as "an insult" to the Legislature, the National Anthem, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Mahatma Jyotirao and Savitri Phule, and some demanded his immediate resignation. Hitting back, the BJP Leaders of Opposition Devendra Fadnis and Pravin Darekar, and BJP Chief Whip Ashish Shelar and others alleged that the MVA government was attempting to protect a 'mafia-tainted minister' and they would not rest till Malik quit his post. Several leaders like Nana Patole, Jayant Patil, Chhagan Bhujbal, Manisha Kayande, Amol Mitkari and others slammed the BJP and the Governor for the day's developments, saying they are not concerned about the peoples' welfare but on toppling the MVA government.

Nawab Malik's custody extended till March 7

A special court in Mumbai has extended the custodial remand of Maharashtra Minister and NCP leader Nawab Malik, arrested in connection with a money laundering case involving underworld Don Dawood Ibrahim, till March 7.



7. Malik was produced before the court after the expiry of remand. The ED officials told the court that Malik was required for further interrogation. The court after hearing their argument allowed his custody till March 7.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A special court in Mumbai has extended the custodial remand of Maharashtra Minister and NCP leader Nawab Malik, arrested in connection with a money laundering case involving underworld Don Dawood Ibrahim, till March

On February 23, the ED had arrested Malik and got his custodial remand till March 3. ED sources have claimed that they have established money trail linking Nawab Malik to people connected to the underworld. ED sources have also claimed that they have found details of benami

investments of Nawab Malik in a few real estate projects. On February 3, the NIA received an information that Dawood Ibrahim was raising terror funds and was working with Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and Al Qaeda (AQ). He was controlling criminal activities in India through close aides. The ED filed a PMLA case against Dawood. Another case was lodged against his brother Iqbal Kaskar, Iqbal Kasha, Iqbal Mirchi and 19 others. Later both the case were merged by the ED. The Central probe agency conducted nine raids and recovered incriminating documents from the premises of Dawood's aide. Chhota Shakeel's relative Salim Fruit told the probe agency that in 2006 he met Chhota Shakeel three-four times during his Pakistan visit.

First time in 2 years, zero Covid death in Maha, 14 districts opened up

In a significant development, Maharashtra recorded zero Covid-19 deaths - first time since April 1, 2020 - emboldening the state government to announce easing of curbs in 14 districts, including Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur, from Friday (March 4), as per an official notification.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a significant development, Maharashtra recorded zero Covid-19 deaths - first time since April 1, 2020 - emboldening the state government to announce easing of curbs in 14 districts, including Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur, from Friday (March 4), as per an official notification.

For the first time in two years of the Covid-19 pandemic, the state entered the Green Zone as far as fatalities are concerned but recorded 544 new

patients, besides 38 Omicron cases during the day, while active cases stood at 5,643. The cumulative Covid-19 cases recorded in the state now touched 78,66,924, and the total fatalities recorded are 143,706, besides 4,771 Omicron patients - all highest in the country - but the day's developments spread cheer among the health authorities. Given the favourable conditions, the state opened up all religious places, restaurants, bars, cinemas, theatres, shopping complexes, gymnasiums, spas, swimming pools, tourist places,

amusements parks etc in 14 districts, while 50 per cent restrictions will continue in the remaining 22 districts. These are Mumbai City and Mumbai Suburban, Raigad, Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg, Pune, Satara, Kolhapur, Sangli, Bhandara, Nagpur, Wardha, Gondiya and Chandrapur. The move to loosen the restrictions was taken at the State Executive Committee meeting on February 25, based on inputs from the Health Department and the Covid-19 Task Force, based on various parameters including the percentage of vaccina-

tion, positivity rate, bed occupancy with or without oxygen or ICU beds. In the 14 districts, the government has allowed resumption of physical classes in all academic institutions, from pre-primary to university levels, but they will be encouraged to leverage a hybrid model of imparting education through online-offline methods. Work From Home will no longer be mandatory as all government, private, industries, scientific institutions can now function with full attendance. Similarly, all social, sports, entertainment, academic, cultural, religious, political, festivals, marriages and funerals will be allowed upto 50 percent capacity, but if the attendance is over 1,000 people, the nod of the District Disaster Management Authority will be required. All deliveries, e-commerce, couriers have been permitted in the 14 districts, and restrictions on intra-district and inter-state travel for the fully vaccinated persons have been lifted, and the others would require valid negative RT-PCR test reports.

IIT-B's hydrophobic coating for face shields helps limit Covid spread

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Bombay, have developed a technique for coating face shields with a hydrophobic layer to improve their efficiency.



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Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Bombay, have developed a technique for coating face shields with a hydrophobic layer to improve their efficiency. Face shields act as primary barriers to airborne disease-carrying droplets. But these simple face shields are made from plexiglass plastic or polyethylene terephthalate. Plastic is hydrophilic; and tiny water droplets tend to stick to its surface. Studies have shown that the SARS-CoV-2 laden respiratory droplets can survive on different surfaces for a few hours to a few days. When individuals unwittingly touch such surfaces, they are susceptible to infection by fomite transmission. The hydrophilic nature of the face shield increases the chances of fomite transmis-

sion, which calls for frequent cleaning and sanitising them. A team of researchers from IIT-B's Mechanical engineering department, proposed a novel technique to enhance the efficiency of face shields by coating them with a hydrophobic (water repellent) layer. The resulting composite face shield acts as a barrier for airborne droplets and repels them; this reduces the risk of fomite formation from the surface of the face shield. The study is

published in the journal Physics of Fluids. Expelled droplets are tiny, about 50-200 microns in size (a micron is one-thousandth of a millimetre), and hence, unseen to the naked eye. To prevent the droplets from sticking on the surface, the team repurposed a commercially available and economical spray used to coat automobile windshields. The spray coating contains silica nanoparticles making the coating superhydrophobic thereby keeping the windshield clear during bad weather conditions. The researchers coated the face shield with this hydrophobic coating and demonstrated that the face shield could fend off tiny virus-laden droplets. They observed that water droplets falling on the face shield bounced off the surface, keeping the coated area free of water deposit and hence eliminating fomite accumulation. The team conducted laboratory experiments to establish the repelling properties of the composite coated face shield. "In our study, we show how individual droplets behave after coming into contact with the face shield's coated surface," said Rajneesh Bhardwaj, Co-author of the study. Their experiments also show that the coating does not affect the transparency of the face shield. The coated surface also had far less wettability than the uncoated surface.

I-T detects illegal properties worth Rs 130 Cr in Mumbai raid

The Income Tax (I-T) Department on Thursday said that the recent raid conducted by them against the BMC contractors and a Shiv Sena leader have exposed an international hawala racket. The BMC contractors allegedly evaded income to the extent of Rs 200 crore.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Income Tax (I-T) Department on Thursday said that the recent raid conducted by them against the BMC contractors and a Shiv Sena leader have exposed an international hawala racket. The BMC contractors allegedly evaded income to the extent of Rs 200 crore. The raids were conducted at more than 35 places in Mumbai belonging to certain contractors executing contracts of Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), and Shiv Sena corporator and Standing Committee chairperson of BMC, Yashwant Jadhav. The Income tax official said that particulars of about three

dozen immovable properties, worth Rs 130 crore have also been detected, which includes properties acquired either in their name or their associates or 'benamidars'. The preliminary investigation indicates that these contractors have evaded income to the extent of Rs 200 crore on account of the above malpractice. During the search operation, undisclosed cash of Rs 2 crore and jewellery of Rs 1.5 crore were seized. "During the course of the search operation, numerous incriminating documents, loose sheets and digital evidence have been found and seized. The evidence so seized strongly indicates a close nexus between these contractors and the said per-

son," said an I-T official. In the case of contractors, the seized documents revealed the modus-operandi adopted by them for large-scale suppression of taxable income by inflating their expenses. For this purpose, the prominent recourse is over-invoicing of sub-contract expenses through a maze of entities and by claiming non-genuine expenses. Certain instances show that cash has been taken out from these entities and the same has been utilised for obtaining undue favours for awarding of contracts and also for making unaccounted payments for investments in properties. Further investigations in the matter are underway.

Third flight with 183 Ukraine evacuees lands in Mumbai

An Air India Express flight from Bucharest, carrying 183 Indians from the war-torn Ukraine, landed here on Thursday, officials said.



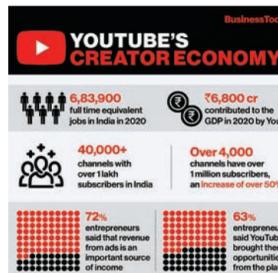
Team Absolute | Mumbai

An Air India Express flight from Bucharest, carrying 183 Indians from the war-torn Ukraine, landed here on Thursday, officials said. The flight IX-1202 with 183 passengers, including an infant, arrived at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport at

around 5.40 am. The evacuees were received by Union Minister of State for Railways Raosaheb Danve-Patil with flowers and words of solace as they trooped out lugging their belongings. Outside the airport, the returnees were given a warm welcome by their families, relatives and friends anxiously awaiting their arrival since midnight. This was the third flight of evacuees in the past six days to Mumbai and a few more

YouTube creators contributed Rs 6,800 cr to Indian economy in 2020

YouTube's growing creator ecosystem is generating considerable economic value for the Indian market and contributed Rs 6,800 crore to the country's GDP, while supporting 6.83 lakh full-time equivalent jobs in 2020, the Google-owned platform said on Thursday.



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YouTube's growing creator ecosystem is generating considerable economic value for the Indian market and contributed Rs 6,800 crore to the country's GDP, while supporting 6.83 lakh full-time equivalent jobs in 2020, the Google-

owned platform said on Thursday. With the number of channels in India with more than 100,000 subscribers now at 40,000, marking a growth of more than 45 per cent (on-year), more Indian creators are finding opportunities and audiences on YouTube, often leading to new door-

ways away from the platform, according to a new report by Oxford Economics that assessed YouTube's economic, societal and cultural impact in the country. "The creator economy in the country has the potential to emerge as a soft-power impacting economic growth, job creation and even cultural influence," said Ajay Vidyasagar, Regional Director, APAC, YouTube Partnerships. In addition to the revenue generated on YouTube, a creator's presence on the platform can help them get a global fanbase, push boundaries and explore multiple revenue streams through brand partnerships, live performance etc. In India, more than 80 per cent of creative entrepreneurs said the platform has had a positive impact on their professional goals. With eight

different ways to monetise content on the platform, the number of YouTube channels making six figures or more in revenue is up more than 60 per cent (on-year). "Our research shows that YouTube fosters significant positive impact for Indian creators in terms of helping them achieve their professional goals and grow their businesses, said Adrian Cooper, CEO, Oxford Economics. Nearly 92 per cent of small and medium businesses with a YouTube channel agreed that the platform helps them reach new audiences across the world. "As our creators and artists build the next generation of media companies that are connecting with a global audience, their impact on the economy's overall success will only continue to accelerate," said Vidyasagar.



EDITOR'S SPECS

FIGHT OF COLOURS

A day after social media went into a spin over the change of colour in an official signboard in Ayodhya from saffron to green by the district magistrate, the colour was again changed on Thursday -- this time to red. A huge controversy had erupted on Wednesday over the change in colour and many people saw it as symbolic of change in the government. "Red is not the colour of any party, so it is safer," said a junior official in Ayodhya and added that there was no intention to give a political angle to the change in colour. The District Magistrate of Ayodhya, Nitish Kumar, on Wednesday changed the signboard outside his residence from orange to green. Orange or saffron is the official colour of the BJP, while green is the colour that signifies the Samajwadi Party. As photographs of the orange signboard being brought down and the green one going up went viral on social media, ripples of speculation were palpable in the bureaucratic circles. "Signages are always changed to suit the colour of the party in power. During Mayawati's regime, all signages were blue, while in the SP regime, they turned green before turning saffron under the BJP's rule. However, in this case, it can be considered a blunder because a change of government is yet to take place," said a retired IAS officer, who had served in top positions in the BSP and SP regimes. Social media, meanwhile, has been filled with jokes and memes on the change in colour of the signage with many political soothsayers predicting the poll outcome on this basis. The District Magistrate of Ayodhya, however, was unavailable for comments.

The Russian Gambit: What drives Putin's actions?

Vikas Datta

Amid the turmoil following the conflict in Ukraine, and the actions and reactions of global powers presaging tensions and realignment for years to come, and raising questions about whether the West miscalculated Russian intentions, it is worth remembering the words of a prominent statesman who had declared that "it cannot be in accordance with the interest of the safety of Russia that Germany should plant itself upon the shores of the Black Sea." A Russian apologist? No, it was Winston Churchill in 1939. Of course, the Germany he was referring to was Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime, which had just kicked off World War II a month before, but the same sentiment persists for Russia, be it in connection with any other power, say NATO. Students of contemporary international relations may recall the extent that Russia negotiated -- and succeeded -- in keeping control over its sprawling naval base at Sevastopol, which fell in Ukraine, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It is debatable if Russia's actions now or earlier in Ukraine, or say, Georgia nearly a decade back, or in Chechnya even earlier, or the contrary stance to some policies of the US and its allies are good or bad (morally, that is -- and this is a sentiment more cited than followed in international politics), or if it is on the "right path" under Vladimir Putin, but it is important to know what and how its political leaders think, and what they want? And is Putin's Russia different from that of Boris Yeltsin, or the erstwhile Soviet Union, or even Tsarist Russia? For this, we need to head back to Churchill's speech, which is more famous for his referring to Russia, and its actions, as a "riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma". The British statesman, who was yet to become Prime Minister, however, provided a solution for understanding Russia's dynamics, motivations and intentions: "... but perhaps there is a key. That key is Russian national interest," he had said. And it is this Russian interest, which has persisted since its appearance as a major European power at the beginning of the 18th century under the Tsar Peter, and persisted since then under the Tsars, the Commissars, and the post-Soviet rulers down to President Putin, that governs Russia's actions. The first, and foremost, interest is security. No country would like an adversary on the



border, and while Europe, after centuries of conflict, including the all-encompassing devastation of the Second World War, created a durable inter-state institution (European Union) that prevents any attack on members by other members. The US was luckier, being on a continent by itself, and within two decades of its formation, formulating a strategy, the Monroe Doctrine, that regarded the entire Western hemisphere as its sphere of influence, not open to any other power -- as Arbenz's Guatemala, Castro's Cuba, Allende's Chile, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, and Venezuela under Chavez and Maduro, among others, found out. Others, like Russia, are not so lucky. While the Cold War saw the NATO and Warsaw Pact groupings facing each other, the latter is now a historical footnote, but NATO, which was founded to accomplish the three-fold objective of "Keeping the Germans down, the Americans in, and the Russians out", continues to flourish. It also incorporates all the Warsaw Pact countries as well as many of those whose presence in the European security architecture has been absent for centuries till now.

As these comprise those formerly in the Soviet Union -- no matter how incorporated and how unhappy -- and bordering Russian territory, Russian apprehensions can be understood. And with decades of the West, especially the US, taking "advantage" of a weakened Russia to advance its own interests -- the NATO expansion, the interventions in former Yugoslavia, the invasion of Iraq, and subsequent interventions in Libya and Syria, the US withdrawal from the landmark Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, and then recently, the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces treaty covering Europe, the "colour revolutions" in a number of former Soviet states across Eurasia, and so on, it seems fairly evident that Russia would retaliate eventually. Here, it must be stressed that attempting to understand the motivations and perceptions that influence any country's actions or govern its response to other countries' actions do not necessarily mean endorsing them. But, ignoring or overlooking them is "strategic blindness" that a number of thinkers have always warned against. Did the West fail on this count?

UN ENVIRONMENT ASSEMBLY ENDS WITH 14 RESOLUTIONS TO CURB POLLUTION, SAVE NATURE

Vishal Gulati

The fifth UN Environment Assembly concluded in Nairobi with 14 resolutions to strengthen actions for nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The Assembly is made up of the 193 UN Member States and convenes every two years to advance global environmental governance. The world's ministers for the environment on Wednesday evening agreed to establish an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee with the mandate to forge an international legally binding agreement to end plastic pollution. Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), said this was most significant environmental multilateral deal since the Paris accord. "Against the backdrop of geopolitical turmoil, the UN Environment Assembly shows multilateral cooperation at its best," said Espen Barth Eide, the President of UNEA-5 and Norway's Minister for Climate and the Environment. "Plastic pollution has grown into an epidemic. With today's resolution we are officially on track for a cure." Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the UN, added: "Today, no area on the planet is left untouched by plastic pollution, from deep-sea sediment to Mount Everest. The planet deserves a multilateral solution that speaks from source to sea. A legally binding global agreement on plastic pollution will be a truly welcome first step." Along with putting an end to plastic pollution, a second key resolution supports the establishment of a comprehensive and ambitious science policy panel on the sound management of chemicals and waste and preventing pollution. The Ministerial Declaration recognises humanity's failure to date to manage chemicals and waste, a threat that is further aggravated by the Covid-19 pan-

demical through widespread use of single-use plastics and disinfectant chemicals. Andersen said: "Having a universally agreed definition of nature-based solutions is important. When countries and companies claim that their actions are supporting nature-based solutions, we can now begin to assess whether this is accurate and what it entails. This is especially true given the just-released report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change on the need to scale-up adaptation, for which nature-based solutions will be crucial." A resolution on minerals and metals calls for the development of proposals to enhance their environmental sustainability along their full lifecycle. A resolution on sustainable and resilient infrastructure encourages member states to integrate environmental considerations in all their infrastructure plans. A concluding Ministerial Declaration recognised the risk

for future pandemics and other health risks if humanity doesn't overhaul its patterns of interaction with nature by adopting a holistic approach such as 'One Health'. In this context, a resolution on animal welfare calls on member states to protect animals, protecting their habitats and meeting their welfare requirements. Another resolution on biodiversity and health calls on member states to reduce health risks associated with trade in live wildlife captured for the purposes of food, captive breeding, medicines and the pet trade, through regulation and sanitary controls. The Assembly will be followed by "UNEP@50", a two-day Special Session of the build a resilient and inclusive post-pandemic world, as well as to endorse a draft Political Declaration.

international

MOSCOW CHOOSES TO LAY SIEGE TO MULTIPLE CITIES IN SOUTHERN UKRAINE

In the seven days since the conflict began, southern Ukraine has become a critical defensive front against Russia's advances, BBC reported. In the seven days since the conflict began, southern Ukraine has become a critical defensive front against Russia's advances, BBC reported.



the rest of Ukraine from the sea, it would also create a direct connection between Russia-annexed Crimea and the Russian-speaking Donbas region, BBC reported. Kherson has a population of 280,000 and is so far the largest city to fall to Russian forces. It sits on the banks of the Dnieper River, giving those in control access to critical canals supplying water to Crimea. Another large port is Mariupol with a population of 4,30,000, which is being shelled and encircled. If successfully seized, Russia will have established a direct link between eastern Ukraine and Crimea, both of which

are already Russian-controlled, BBC reported. Crimea is a Russian-speaking part of Ukraine that was annexed by Moscow in 2014. It's where Russia launched much of this southern offensive from one week ago. Odesa is Ukraine's third-largest city and the country's most important port on the Black Sea, as well as being a major oil terminus. So far its one million residents have escaped the worst of the fighting. This is because Russia has currently made no concerted effort to advance west of Kherson - beyond isolated reports of paratrooper landings, the report said.

RUSSIAN FORCES DISABLE RESERVE RADIO, TV CENTRE IN KIEV

Russian forces with high-precision weapons have disabled a reserve radio and television centre in Kiev, spokesman of the Defence Ministry in Moscow Igor Konashenkov claimed on Thursday.



Kiev: Russian forces with high-precision weapons have disabled a reserve radio and television centre in Kiev, spokesman of the Defence Ministry in Moscow Igor Konashenkov claimed on Thursday. He said the centre had been used by the Security Service of Ukraine for "psychological operations", reports Xinhua news agency. The Russian Armed Forces have destroyed 1,612 Ukrainian military infrastructure objects since the start of the military operation on February 24, said Konashenkov. More than 2,000 Ukrainian civilians have been killed in the conflict, the Interfax-Ukraine news agency quoted the State Emergency Service of Ukraine as saying on Thursday, adding that hundreds of transport infrastructure facilities, residential buildings, hospitals and kindergartens were destroyed.

Russia's Foreign Minister Lavrov likens US to Nazi Germany

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has repeated his warning that World War Three would be nuclear as he accused the West of fixating on his dire threats, Daily Mail reported.

Team Absolute | New Delhi



Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has repeated his warning that World War Three would be nuclear as he accused the West of fixating on his dire threats, Daily Mail reported. The Russian Foreign Minister also compared the US to Nazi Germany in his latest rant after Russian forces seized the Black Sea regional capital of Kherson in Ukraine, its first major city after a week of fighting. "I would like to point out that it's in the heads of Western politicians that the idea of a nuclear war is spinning constantly, and not in the heads of Russians. Therefore I assure you that we will not allow any provocation to throw us off balance," he said. On Sunday, Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered Russia's nuclear

forces be put on high alert, accusing the West of taking "unfriendly" steps against his country. Moscow has the world's largest arsenal of nuclear weapons and a huge cache of ballistic missiles which form the backbone of the country's deterrence forces, Daily Mail reported. The move was followed up by comments from Lavrov in which he warned another World War would be "nuclear and destructive". In separate comments, Lavrov accused the US of trying to conquer Europe. He told Sky News: "Napoleon and Hitler had the objective to have the whole of Europe under their control, now Americans have got Europe under their control." "We see the situation what role the EU is really playing in the context of the global situation, they are just fulfilling a role." "We see that there's a picture like in Hollywood of absolute evil and absolute good and this is unfortunate."

S KOREAN EMBASSY IN UKRAINE PREPARES TO RESUME OPERATIONS AFTER MOVING BASE

Seoul: South Korea's mission in Ukraine is preparing to resume operations in Chernivtsi, near Romania, after moving out of the capital city of Kiev in the wake of Russia's military assault, an official from the Foreign Ministry in Seoul said on Thursday. Ambassador Kim Hyung-tae and other embassy staff arrived in Chernivtsi on Wednesday night, along with six South Korean nationals who expressed intent to move out of the Ukrainian capital, Yonhap News Agency quoted the official as saying. The Ministry earlier announced the mission will be relocated as it became "difficult to continue embassy operations and guarantee the staff's safety due to heightening military threats in the city of Kiev". Chernivtsi is where the Seoul ministry has been running a temporary office to support South Korean residents in the European country, along with another office in Lviv, near the Polish border. As of Thursday morning, 40 Korean nationals remained in Ukraine, with 26 of them wishing to staying there.



S Korean prez candidate drops out, vows support for oppn

Ahn Cheol-soo of South Korea's minor People's Party on Thursday dropped out of the presidential race and declared his support for main opposition candidate Yoon Suk-yeol following a surprise last-minute agreement to merge candidacies.



Seoul | Agencies Ahn Cheol-soo of South Korea's minor People's Party on Thursday dropped out of the presiden-

tial race and declared his support for main opposition candidate Yoon Suk-yeol following a surprise last-minute agreement to merge candidacies. The deal came on the eve of early voting ahead of the March 9 election and is expected to boost Yoon's chances in a tight race where he is running neck and neck against Lee Jae-myung of the ruling Democratic Party, reports Yonhap News Agency. "Both of us, Ahn Cheol-soo and Yoon Suk-yeol, agreed to combine our minds for a better change of the government," Ahn said during a joint news conference with Yoon. "We will achieve a change of government without fail, and following only the wishes of the people, prepare for an era of grand transformation for change and innovation in the Republic of Korea," the two said in an agreement read by Ahn. Ahn said he will work to merge the two parties immediately after the election. The

agreement was reached when the two held a surprise meeting early Thursday morning. "The two candidates met for about two and a half hours from shortly after midnight until nearly 3 a.m. and agreed on these measures," a PPP official told Yonhap News Agency. "They agreed to merge candidacies and parties without any conditions to honor the wishes of the majority of the people who wish for a change of government," the official said. The two had been under pressure from conservatives to merge their campaigns but repeatedly clashed over the method, with Ahn initially proposing an opinion poll to pick a unified candidate.

HUMANITARIAN NEEDS IN SYRIA CONTINUE TO RISE: UN

Damascus: Humanitarian needs in Syria have continued to rise with 14.6 million people in need in 2022 and an estimated 6.9 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), said a UN spokesman on Wednesday. This is the largest number of IDPs in the world and they face high needs and limited access to basic services, said Stephane Dujarric, the chief spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. Ongoing hostilities, poor infrastructure and ever-decreasing purchasing power are undermining people's resilience. Some 90 per cent of the population is estimated to live below the poverty line. The worsening socio-economic trends are expected to further increase extreme poverty levels, Xinhua news agency quoted the spokesman as saying. Syria ranks among the most food-insecure countries globally, with over half the population being severely food insecure. A quarter of children under 5 face stunting in parts of Syria, which causes irreversible damage to their development, he said. In the face of rising needs, humanitarian assistance was delivered to an average of 6.8 million people per month in 2021. This includes an average of 2.4 million people reached per month through the cross-border operation from Turkey, as authorised by the Security Council, said the spokesman. The UN and partners are also ramping up efforts to support resilience and early-recovery programming to revitalize access to critical basic services alongside life-saving work. This will require more funding and more access to reach more people in need, he said.



CM CHOUHAN CHAIRS CABINET MEETING

SETTING UP OF SOLAR POWER PARK APPROVED

FORESTS WILL BE PROTECTED WITH PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A meeting of the Cabinet was held on Tuesday under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan.

According to the present scenario, public participation can be sought for the development and conservation of forests as per new resolution, 2021 of Madhya Pradesh government approved in October 2021 in order to strengthen the role of communities in forest management. The Revised Resolution, 2021 has been approved by incorporating the changes in the policy, legal and executive environment in the last two decades. According to the revised resolution, instead of three types of committees, now only one committee will be constituted, which will be called Community Forest Management Committee. One-third of the members of each Forest Committee shall be reserved for women. The Sarpanch of the Gram Panchayat shall be the ex-officio member of the Executive. If a male is selected for the post of the President of the Executive, the post of Vice President will be reserved for female. In order to ensure community empowerment and institutional accountability in the formation and operation of the committee, the Gram Sabha has been entrusted with the right to constitute the executive



and reconstitute it if the work is not done according to the expectations of the community. Provision has been made to audit the accounts of the committees. The Cabinet granted approval for the development of Omkareshwar Floating Solar Park 600 MW Chhatrapur Solar Power 950 MW approved under the Ultra Mega Renewable Energy Power Parks (UMREPPS) mode in the Solar Energy Park Scheme of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), Government of India.

The proposed 600 MW capacity floating solar project on Omkareshwar reservoir is the world's largest floating solar project in the present scenario. This project will be developed as a multipurpose project, in which it will also be possible to

fulfil the objectives of land conservation, water conservation etc.

The Cabinet has decided to amend the policy and guidelines issued in the year 2019 with the objective of expanding telecommunication infrastructure in remote forest areas and providing easy internet connectivity to the residents there. According to the amendment, the telecom service provider will inform the Department of Science and Technology by selecting a suitable place under the forest area in the shadow area for setting up the infrastructure. At present, the policy and guidelines for setting up of infrastructure for providing wire line or wireless based voice or data access services by telecom service providers / Internet service providers / infra-

structure companies in Madhya Pradesh are applicable in 2019 dated 23 February 2019.

The Cabinet gave its approval to create 50 posts for the newly constructed hostels for girls and boys of backward classes in Indore, Jabalpur, Agar Malwa, Shahajpur and Damoh. The sanctioned posts include 2 Superintendent (Lecturer level), 6 Assistant Superintendent (UDT level), 4 computer operator, 8 chowkidar, 10 cook, 10 pani wala and 10 sweeper.

The Cabinet approved the continuation of 1363 temporary posts from April 1, 2021 to March 31, 2026 by eliminating 38 vacancies of Class IV dyeing cadre out of 1401 posts of institutions of Bhopal Gas Tragedy Relief and Rehabilitation Department. Permission was given by the Council of Ministers to dissolve the capital project administration and merge it into Public Works Department, Forest Department and other departments.

The Cabinet decided to allow the District Collector to do the contract/registry proceedings for the disposal of land assets located at Gwalior bus depot at Transport Department Gwalior district, bus depot at Tarana district Ujjain of Transport Department and at Ratlam behind Mid Town Colony of Revenue Department after 100 per cent of the tender amount is deposited by the H-1 tenderer.

Agriculture Excellence Centres Will Be Set Up In the State with the Cooperation of Israel

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Consulate General of Israel Kobbi Shoshani today made a courtesy call on Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan at the Chief Minister's residence during his stay in Madhya Pradesh. He praised the natural beauty of the state. He was also delighted to see the view of the Upper Lake from the Chief Minister's residence.

Shoshani appreciated the development in agriculture sector in Madhya Pradesh. He assured full cooperation by Israel in the fields of irrigation, industry, trade and commerce including agriculture. At present, some establishments of Israeli companies are functioning in Malanpur and Mandideep in the state.

Chief Minister Chouhan said that Madhya Pradesh is ready for better work in these areas with the cooperation of Israel. The suggestion received by Israel will also be considered and implemented. He praised the initiative taken by Israel to join the orange and vegetable production projects in two districts of the state Chhindwara and Morena. In the irrigation sector, work is being done by India and Israel on water projects in Bundelkhand region of Madhya Pradesh. In par-



ticular, the two countries look forward to cooperation in other potential areas of water management. The possibilities of industrial investment in Madhya Pradesh will also be promoted with the help of Israeli companies.

Shoshani told Chouhan that out of 29 centres of excellence in agriculture in India, Israel proposes to set up two centres in Madhya Pradesh. In this, orange production in Chhindwara and vegetable production in Morena will be promoted. Officers of Madhya Pradesh's Agriculture and Horticulture Department will be benefitted through a fortnight's specialization course in Israel.

Chouhan said that the implementation of Ken-Betwa project will transform Bundelkhand region.

Madhya Pradesh is inspired by Prime Minister Modi's principle of 'Per Drop More Crop' and Israeli farming style. Every effort will be made to fulfil the resolve of Modi.

The Consulate General of Israel said that he was very delighted to visit Bhopur and Bhimbetka. It was also a pleasure to see the Tribal Museum located in Shyamla Hills, Bhopal. The Upper Lake of Bhopal is very beautiful.

The Consulate General of Israel said that this year is a year of celebration of 30 years of cordial relations between India and Israel. Efforts will be made so that more tourists from Israel come to Madhya Pradesh. The tourist places of Madhya Pradesh have that attraction which can draw tourists from all over the world.

CM mentions Ujjain's unique public participation in Cabinet meeting

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, while talking about the record of lakhs of diyas being lit in Ujjain on March 1 with public cooperation said, that this is a historic achievement of the state. An amazing example of public participation was witnessed in Ujjain on this day. Before the meeting of the Council of Ministers in Mantralaya on Thursday, Chouhan told that apart from more than 11 lakh diyas on the ghats of river Kshipra, lamps were also lit in every house. If the actual count of diyas is done, it will be more than twenty five lakhs. Entire Ujjain was lit up. He said that any work can be reshaped with public participation any-



where in the village and city. The festival of Mahashivratri was unique and beautiful in Ujjain.

Chouhan said that every village and city's Pride Day should be celebrated for which the ministers should prepare a roadmap. Every citizen must have this feeling of pride for his city and village, the pace of development should be accelerated, new dimensions of

public welfare should be established through public participation. For this, a programme should be organized with ministers leading the way. Chief Minister Chouhan said that he is excited by the experience of birthdays and Gaurav Diwas of Jait village and Ujjain. Similar programmes should be organized for other villages and cities also.

225 STUDENTS OF MADHYA PRADESH RETURN FROM UKRAINE: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Before the Cabinet meeting, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan told that 225 students of the state from Ukraine have returned to the state till this morning. Necessary coordination is also being ensured by the Residential Commissioner of Madhya Pradesh government based in Delhi regarding the return of the students. Chouhan said that I had also gone to New Delhi for a discussion and review with the officials in this regard. The state government is also continuously reviewing the matter. Public representatives and senior officials are also meeting families of Madhya Pradesh whose children are in Ukraine.

The Madhya Pradesh Cabinet congratulated Prime Minister Modi for his remarkable efforts in bringing back Indian citizens from Ukraine.

Chief Minister Chouhan informed that PM Modi is making every effort to bring back the Indian citizens trapped in Ukraine in the war situation safely. They are being brought back by C17 aircraft. Union Minister

for Civil Aviation, Jyotiraditya Scindia, Union Minister for Law and Justice, Kiren Rijju, Union Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs, Petroleum and Natural Gas, Hardeep Puri and Union Minister of State for Civil Aviation, Road Transport and Highways, VK Singh have been sent to the border countries.

Chouhan said that arrangements have been made to accommodate the students of Madhya Pradesh returning to New Delhi and Mumbai at Madhya Pradesh Bhawan, Madhyanchal and other places. Arrangements are also being made for their food and travel tickets if required.

Chouhan said that in the districts under ministerial charge, the families of whose children are currently in Ukraine should be contacted. Interacting with such families boosts their spirits. Chouhan said that by giving the information received from such families to the Housing Commissioner, New Delhi and the Home Department, the work of returning the children can be facilitated.

252 STUDENTS FROM MP STILL STUCK IN UKRAINE

A total of 252 students from Madhya Pradesh are stranded in Ukraine. This was revealed by state Home Minister Narottam Mishra on Thursday.

Bhopal: A total of 252 students from Madhya Pradesh are stranded in Ukraine. This was revealed by state Home Minister Narottam Mishra on Thursday. He said the state home department had received a list from the Ministry of External Affairs, which stated that as many as 454 students from Madhya Pradesh were stranded in Ukraine.

"The list of 454 students of Madhya Pradesh, who were trapped in Ukraine, was received from the MEA. Out of this, 202 students have returned to the state," said Narottam Mishra, who is also the spokesperson of the Madhya Pradesh government, during a press conference. Mishra also said that the officials



in the home department and the state police are in constant touch with the families whose children are still to return. "Police and other senior officials are in constant touch with 430 families out of 454 families. The state government is taking all possible steps to ensure safe return of each student," Mishra added.

The state government has set up a panel of officials comprising different departments who are looking after the entire arrangement to bring back the students. The state government has directed the officials to arrange food, travelling, stay, etc., for students who are coming to their homes via different cities.

CM PLANTS ALMOND AND CASSIA SAPLINGS IN SMART PARK

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted Almond and Cassia saplings in Smart Park today. Office bearers of Kadambini Committee, Kadambini Sharma, Prateek Kumar Sharma and Vikram Srivastava also planted saplings. Kadambini Education and Social Welfare Service Committee Karond Bhopal has been engaged in cleanliness, environment and social work since the year 1998. Also, 116 couples were married under Mukhyamantri Kanyadan Yojana. Painting competition on environment is being organized by the committee since last 15 years and the target of planting 111 saplings per year is being met regularly. The committee has received Bhaiya Shri Mishri Lal Award

from Madhya Pradesh government and Rs one lakh for environment and social work. Book festival is also being organized by the committee since last 10 years. Women and children are being given free computer and training in stitching etc. Till now, 1240 women have got jobs and self-employment by training 5,647 poor children. The almond tree has pink and white fragrant flowers. Almond being full of fiber aids in digestion. Consumption of almonds is considered useful in high blood pressure, constipation and heart disease. It is rich in potassium, magnesium, calcium and vitamin E. The bark and leaves of Cassia are used in making Ayurvedic medicines.

Political row erupts in MP after religious event cancellation

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A week-long Hindu religious programme in Sehore district, the hometown of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, was cancelled due to which the latter has received criticism from the Congress as well as senior BJP leaders.

Since the cancellation of the 'Rudraksh Mahotsav', Chouhan, who would often be seen participating in religious events and performing rituals at different occasions, is facing flak.

The development comes after a religious event was organised at Chitavalia Hema village in Sehore district, nearly 50 km from the state capital Bhopal, but the programme which was scheduled for a week, was called off within a few hours on Monday.

The event organised on February 28, a day before Mahashivratri, witnessed a massive footfall which resulted in an 18-hour traffic jam on the Indore-Bhopal highway. A number of VIPs, including State Minister Inder Singh Parmar, were stuck in the traffic congestion. The hours-long traffic snarls kept the district administration and local police on their toes.

Subsequently, Godman Pradeep Mishra, who was the 'katha-vachak', announced the cancellation of the programme. "I would urge you all to receive 'prasad' (offering) and leave the place and not come again," Mishra urged the gathering of devotees with tearful eyes. The district administration later said Mishra had informed the local authorities that he was expecting nearly 20,000 people at his katha-

A week-long Hindu religious programme in Sehore district, the hometown of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, was cancelled due to which the latter has received criticism from the Congress as well as senior BJP leaders.



National Workshop on Protection of Child Rights Will Be Held on March 4 and 5

Team Absolute | Bhopal

For the protection of child rights in the Amrit Mahotsav of Azadi, a national workshop is being organised by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights on March 4 and 5 at the Water and Land Management Institute (WALMI). Giving this information, Chairman, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, Priyank Kanungo said that the workshop will be addressed virtually by the Union Minister for Women and Child Development, Smriti Zubin Irani. Governor Mangubhai Patel will be the chief guest in the inaugural session. He informed that the Union Minister of State for Women and Child Development Munjpara Mahendra Bhai and Union Secretary, Women and Child Development Indevnar Pandey would also be present. Kanungo informed that the Chairpersons, Members and Member Secretaries of Children's Commissions of 26 State and Union

Territories will participate in the two-day workshop. Various topics will be discussed in the workshop. In this, the action plan of the Narcotic Control Bureau and National Child Protection Commission to prevent drug addiction in children and the harm caused due to it will be reviewed with the State Child Commissions. Apart from this, the Monitoring App for Seamless Inspection (MASI) has been prepared by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights for the purpose of digital monitoring of more than seven thousand children's homes in the country. It will have a session on dissemination through CWC. Shri Kanungo informed that apart from this, discussion for publication of hand-book on the role of Panchayat Raj Institutions in implementation of Right to Education Act, discussion on the report prepared by the Commission on National Child Labour Project and Special Training Centres, which are covered under Section-4 of the Right to

Education Act, to bring children who have left school into the mainstream, the child labour problem, education of children of denotified and nomadic tribes and facilities declared fit under Section-51 of Juvenile Justice Act will be discussed. Kanungo said that in the workshop, discussion with state commissions on compensation to victims under the POCSO Act, awareness against child sexual abuse would also be discussed. He said that the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights has prepared a report on Neonatal Intensive Care Units, Paediatric Units, equipment used for the treatment of children, their AMC, number of doctors and nurses etc. will also be discussed with the State Commissions. The screening of Divyang children across the country, carried out by the National Child Health Programme, a MIS has been prepared to track the equipment, pension etc. available to them, will also be discussed before the state commissions.

vachan programme called 'Rudraksh Mahotsav', but nearly one lakh people had gathered. Sehore District Collector Chandramohan Thakur later in a tweet said there was traffic congestion as more vehicles turned up than expected for the programme organised at Chitavalia Hema village along the Bhopal-Indore highway. He also denied any political pressure behind calling off the programme on Monday.

However, once the programme was cancelled, Congress leaders accused the district administration and the Shivraj Singh Chouhan-led BJP government of being insensitive to Hindu sentiments.

Congress leaders claimed that the Godman was threatened by the district administration to call off the event. Former Chief Minister Kamal Nath, who is the Leader of Opposition in Madhya Pradesh, has appointed a five-member committee (of Congress leaders) to visit Sehore and the organisers of the seven-day Rudraksh Mahotsav. "This is the first time in the history of Madhya Pradesh that a religious function was stopped under political pressure. This is against 'Sanatan Dharma' and religious sentiments have been hurt," Nath said.

Attacking the state government, Nath said, "A priest had to tell the truth (about the cancellation) to the devotees with tears in his eyes, and nothing can be more shameful for the state than this. This is happening under a government which calls itself religious."

BJP leaders, too, questioned their own government over the issue. BJP General Secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya wrote a letter to Chouhan, asking him why the Sehore administration had compelled the godman to call off the event and described the administration's act as criminal.

Senior BJP leader and former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Uma Bharti, too, demanded that both the Chief Minister and Home Minister Narottam Mishra must launch an investigation into the matter.

Hollywood star Sean Penn abandons car, leaves Ukraine on foot

Warsaw | Agencies

Actor-director Sean Penn who was in Ukraine to shoot a documentary has walked towards the Poland border after abandoning his car, according to reports. The Academy Award-winning took to Twitter and mentioned that he and two colleagues walked "miles" to the Polish border after abandoning their car on the side of a road, along with a photo from the situation.

Penn, in a tweet on Monday, wrote: "Myself & two colleagues walked miles to the Polish border after abandoning our car on the side of the road. Almost all the cars in this photo carry women & children only, most without any sign of luggage, and a car their only possession of value."

It was earlier reported a week ago that Penn has been working on a documentary in Ukraine after he was photographed at a news conference held at the Presidential Office in Kiev amid Russia's attack on Ukraine.

He had also shared a statement on Twitter, saying: "President Zelensky and the Ukrainian people have risen as historic symbols of courage and principle. Ukraine is the tip of the spear for the democratic embrace of dreams. If we allow it to fight alone, our soul as America is lost."



Jamie Lee Curtis avoids mirrors!

Los Angeles: Actress Jamie Lee Curtis checks her reflection when she's carrying out tasks that require her to do so, but she doesn't spend a lot of time scrutinising her appearance because she doesn't want to be critical of herself. Speaking with Vanessa Williams and Maria Shriver at 'The Radically Reframing Aging Summing', she said: "When I brush my teeth, of course, I look in the mirror. When I pluck my eyebrows, of course, I look in a mirror. But when I get out of a shower, I just don't stare at my now 63-year-old body in the mirror, I'm not denying what I look like, of course I've seen what I look like. I am trying to live in acceptance. If I look in the mirror, it's harder for me to be in acceptance. I'm more critical. Whereas, if I just don't look, I'm not so worried about it."

The 'Scream Queens' star is a fan of "natural beauty" but is concerned about how the idea has been destroyed in recent years, with even video conferencing program Zoom offering filters to touch up a user's looks, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

She said: "I do feel there has been a genocide of natural beauty. It is perpetuated by the media, it is perpetuated by magazines big time, and it is even in our life."

Lee Curtis is concerned about the impact this has on young people and the long term implications for natural beauty.



Pamela Anderson announces Netflix documentary

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Pamela Anderson is telling her story, her way, with a new documentary set to release on the streaming giant Netflix. Anderson announced the news on social media with a handwritten note on Netflix letterhead, which reads: "My life/ A thousand imperfections/ A million misperceptions/ Wicked, wild and lost/ Nothing to live up to/ I can only surprise you/ Not a victim, but a survivor/ And alive to tell the real story." Anderson's son Brandon Thomas Lee, who serves as a producer on the project, reposted the note on his Instagram story emphasising the phrase, "The real story", as did her younger son Dylan Jagger Lee,

reports variety.com. Dubbed the "definitive documentary about the pop culture icon", the film has been in the making for several years before landing at the streamer. Directed by Ryan White, the yet-to-be-titled documentary will feature exclusive access to Anderson, as well as archival footage and her personal journals.

The film's logline describes the project as "an intimate portrait embedded in the life of Pamela Anderson as she looks back at her professional and personal path and prepares for the next steps on her journey".

White will produce the project with Jessica Hargrave under their Tripod Media banner, alongside Julia Nottingham for Dorothy St Pictures and Lee. Josh Braun serves as an executive producer.

POLITICAL COMEDY SERIES BY ZELENSKY GETS NEW LIFE ON CHANNEL 4, OTHER GLOBAL NETWORKS



Los Angeles | Agencies

With Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky emerging as a global hero, global rights management company Echo Rights has licensed 'Servant of the People', the 2016 television series created by and starring him. 'Variety' reports that the rights have been sold to Channel 4 in the U.K., MBC in the Middle East, ANT 1 in Greece and PRO TV in Romania.

Echo Rights managing director Fredrik af Malmberg shared this news and said his company stood "in solidarity with our friends and partners in Ukraine". He added: "It is our position that the best support the global television industry can offer to Ukraine today is to share this story."

Three seasons of the political comedy series, presented by Zelensky's production house Kwartal 95, were aired on the Ukrainian 1+1 channel and was adapted into a feature film after its successful first season in 2016. The Belarusian TV channel, Belarus-1, has been airing it since November 2019. Nicola Soderlund, managing partner at Echo, said: "The series is a comedy but also an important document of where Zelensky comes from. His fictional president is a normal man, who grows into his role as a heroic and adored leader." Soderlund added: and 'Servant of the People' is a fascinating, important and historic piece of television." In a classic case of fiction prefiguring reality, Zelensky plays the lead character, Vasyl Petrovych Holoborodko, an absent-minded high school history teacher who is elected President of Ukraine after his profane rant about corruption in the country is recorded by one of his students, who uploads the footage to YouTube and turns him into an Internet sensation.



Los Angeles | Agencies

It was only a few months ago that actress Ivanna Sakhno had every reason to celebrate, when it was announced the 'Pacific Rim: Uprising' actor would be joining highly anticipated Star Wars limited series 'Ahsoka' opposite Rosario Dawson.

But last week Sakhno's world came crashing down when, during an evening out with friends in New York's East Village, she found out Russia had invaded her native Ukraine. Sakhno immediately called her mother, Ukrainian director Galina Kuvivchak-Sakhno, and her father Anatolii Sakhno, a cinematographer who remains in Kyiv, Ukraine's capital city.

Sakhno spoke to Variety about the devastating situation unfolding in her homeland, reports variety.com. Asked how her family is and where they are in Ukraine, she replied: "My father has been relocating children and their mothers from Kyiv to safer parts of Ukraine where they have created a base for orphans and families of soldiers. His mother is in Crimea, a part of Ukraine that has been occupied since March 2014 - I have not been able to see her ever since. My other grandmother is hiding in a bunker that was used in World War II and up until now functioned as a city gym. The rest of my extended family is in Kyiv."

TIFFANY HADDISH TO RETURN WITH 'THE AFTERPARTY' SEASON 2

Los Angeles | Agencies

American murder mystery comedy 'The Afterparty' has been renewed for a second season. Actress Tiffany Haddish is confirmed to return in the role of Detective Danner. In the series, which hails from Chris Miller and Phil Lord, each episode is told in a different genre and from a different character's perspective.

For example, Episode 1 is styled like a romantic comedy, as it follows the narrative of escape room designer Aniq (Sam Richardson), whose primary goal is to reconnect to his high school crush Zoe (Zoe Chao), reports variety.com.

Season 1 follows a group of adults attending an afterparty for their high school reunion when Xavier (Franco), the host of the party, is murdered.

Detective Danner, assisted by her partner Detective Culp (John Early), questions each attendee about how they recall the events of the night. The series also stars Ben Schwartz, Ike Barinholtz, Ilana Glazer and Jamie Demetriou.

The news comes ahead of the Season 1 finale, which debuts on March 4. Titled 'Maggie', the episode sees an unexpected witness emerge to help Danner piece together the true story behind Xavier's demise.

Chris Miller serves as director and showrunner of 'The Afterparty'. He and Lord executive produce through their Lord Miller banner. Anthony King also executive produces. Aubrey Lee, Lord Miller's senior vice president of television, serves as producer. The series is produced for Apple by TriStar TV and Sony Pictures Television as part of Lord and Miller's five-year overall television deal.

Lord and Miller are known for writing and directing 'The Lego Movie' and 'Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs', as well as directing '21 Jump Street' and '22 Jump Street' and producing 'Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse'. Along with Bill Lawrence, they created the animated satire series 'Clone High' and its upcoming revival on HBO Max.



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Tallia Storm



WOMEN'S WORLD CUP: NEW ZEALAND, WEST INDIES TO KICK-START THE TOURNAMENT

Tauranga | Agencies

After a year's delay caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup will finally commence from March 4. Hosts New Zealand will take on the West Indies at the Bay Oval in Tauranga. New Zealand head into the tournament off the back of a 4-1 series win against India and a thumping victory over Australia in their second warm-up match, including 161 not out for captain Sophie Devine. The last time New Zealand won the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup, it was in 2000 where the hosts saw off a thrilling challenge from Australia to win the trophy on home soil. Sophie is well aware of the same expectations



from her team to reach the final on March 3. West Indies captain Stafanie isn't concerned by the pressure New Zealand will be under. Instead, she feels it is about who will be the better team on the match day. West Indies had

reached the final of the 2013 Women's Cricket World Cup in India, but lost to Australia. Though they won the 2016 Women's T20 World Cup against the same opposition in the same country, West Indies can be giant killers on their day.

Mar 04, New Zealand vs West Indies
Mar 05, Bangladesh vs South Africa vs England
Mar 06, Pakistan vs India
Mar 07, New Zealand vs Bangladesh
Mar 08, Australia vs Pakistan
Mar 09, West Indies vs England
Mar 10, New Zealand vs India
Mar 11, Pakistan vs South Africa
Mar 12, West Indies vs India
Mar 13, New Zealand vs Australia
Mar 14, Pakistan vs Bangladesh
Mar 15, Australia vs West Indies
Mar 16, England vs India
Mar 17, New Zealand vs South

Africa
Mar 18, Bangladesh vs West Indies
Mar 19, India vs Australia
Mar 20, New Zealand vs England
Mar 21, West Indies vs Australia
Mar 22, South Africa vs Australia
Mar 23, South Africa vs West Indies
Mar 24, South Africa vs West Indies
Mar 25, Bangladesh vs Australia
Mar 26, New Zealand vs Pakistan
Mar 27, England vs Bangladesh
Mar 28, India vs South Africa
Mar 30, TBC vs TBC, 1st Semi Final
Mar 31, TBC vs TBC, 2nd Semi Final
Apr 03, SunTBC vs TBC, Final

1ST TEST MATCH: DOMINANT INDIA TO SQUARE OFF AGAINST SRI LANKA

Mohali | Agencies

At the start of this week, the stands at the IS Bindra PCA Stadium in Mohali were to be silent for the first Test between India and Sri Lanka starting from Friday. But with now 50% crowd being allowed into the stadium, the sounds of cheers and claps from the fans will be heard when Virat Kohli takes the field for his 100th Test, becoming the 12th Indian and 71st cricketer to achieve the landmark. Kohli's landmark 100th Test also marks the start of Rohit Sharma's stint as the Test captain of India. The hosts haven't been on the losing side in home Tests since the 2-1 defeat to England in 2012 and will be hoping to extend their streak against a visiting Sri Lanka side. Apart from keeping the winning juggernaut rolling



against Sri Lanka, India will have one eye on gaining some crucial World Test Championship (WTC) points. In the race to the final, India are in fifth place while Sri Lanka are the early toppler of the table. Sri Lanka, on the other hand, come into the series against India on the back of a series win against the West Indies at home in 2021. But, after being blanked 3-0 in T20s, comes the challenge to win a Test in the Indian conditions, which they are yet to achieve. But the motivation of

playing in their 300th Test will spur them to do well. Overall, with many entertaining subplots in the offing, expect India and Sri Lanka to play a more absorbing series with Kohli, Sharma and Indian batting order entering their respective new phases.

SQUADS:

India: Rohit Sharma (captain), Priyank Panchal, Mayank Agarwal, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, Hanuma Vihari, Shubman Gill, Rishabh Pant (wicket-keeper), KS Bharat, Ravindra Jadeja, Jayant Yadav, Ravichandran Ashwin, Kuldeep Yadav, Saurabh Kumar, Mohammed Siraj, Umesh Yadav, Mohammed Shami and Jasprit Bumrah (vice-captain).
Sri Lanka: Dimuth Karunaratne (captain), Dhananjaya De Silva, Charith Asalanka, Dushmantha Chameera, Dinesh Chandimal, Niroshan Dickwella (wicket-keeper), Lasith Embuldeniya, Vishwa Fernando, Praveen Jayawickrama, Lahiru Kumara, Suranga Lakmal, Angelo Mathews, Kusal Mendis, Pathum Nissanka, Lahiru Thirimanne and Jeffrey Vandersay.

NEVER THOUGHT TO PLAY 100 TEST MATCHES: VIRAT KOHLI

"I honestly never thought I would play 100 Test matches. It's been a long journey. We played a lot of cricket over the course of playing these 100 Test matches. A lot of international cricket. I am just grateful that I've been able to make it to 100. God has been kind. I have worked really hard for my fitness. It's a big moment for me, for my family, for my coach, who is also very happy and very proud of this Test match as long as I am concerned. It's a very, very special moment."



I-LEAGUE: SREENIDI DECCAN BEAT TRAU 3-1

Naihati | West Bengal

David Munoz starred for Sreenidi Deccan FC as the Andhra Pradesh-based franchise picked up a 3-1 win over TRAU in the Hero I-League 2021-22 at the Naihati Stadium on Thursday. While Munoz scored a brace (27, 41?), Louis Ugochukwu Ogana (30?) scored one goal, as Sreenidi Deccan registered their first win in the Hero I-League. TRAU did well to fight on till the final whistle, with Akobir Turaev (33?) getting a goal, but were unable to change the result. TRAU continued to search for another goal, showcasing tremendous fighting spirit till the final whistle. But Sreenidi Deccan kept hold of possession in the final few minutes to run the clock down, and clinched the three points. Sreenidi Deccan will next



playoff against Mohammedan Sporting on March 7, 2022, while TRAU will next face off against Neroca FC on the same day, in what promises to be yet another exciting Imphal Derby.

NEROCA, GOKULAM KERALA SHARE POINTS

Kalyani (West Bengal): All remained even between NEROCA FC and Gokulam Kerala FC at the Kalyani Stadium on Thursday as both sides settled for a point each after returning to action in the Hero I-League. The result puts both sides on four points from their opening two matches of the season. Gokulam Kerala will look to get back to winning ways when they take on Real Kashmir FC in their next encounter on March 7, while NEROCA FC will come up against TRAU in an exciting Imphal Derby, later on the same date.

Sr National Chess: Arjun Erigaisi crowned champion

Kanpur | Agencies

Second seed Telangana Grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi became the National Chess Champion after signing the peace treaty with Sethuraman S P of PSPB in the eleventh and final round of the 58th Senior National Championship, held on Thursday. Scoring 8.5 points out of a possible 11, Arjun tied for the title with Tamil Nadu Grandmasters duo D Gukesh and P Injyan but better Buchholz tie break score helped Arjun to lift the



champion trophy while Gukesh and Injyan finished as first and second runner up respectively. In the final round, Gukesh split the points with Delhi Grandmaster Aryan Chopra while Injyan produced a decisive result against Mitrabha

Guha of West Bengal. While Arjun got richer by Rs 6 lakh, Gukesh got Rs 5 lakh and Injyan took Rs 4 lakh from the total kitty of thirty lakh prize money. In a closing ceremony, BCCI vice-president Rajiv Shukla gave away the trophies and prize money in presence of Dr Sanjay Kapoor, president All India Chess Federation, Vijay Kapoor, chairman Ganges Club, Naresh Sharma, treasurer All India Chess Federation, AK Raizada, secretary UP Chess Sports Association.

India to host South Africa for five T20Is in June, venues finalised

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India are all set to host the South Africa team for the five T20 match series, which will be played across the country in June, shortly after the completion of IPL 2022. The BCCI has already confirmed that the IPL will be held in Mumbai and Pune from March 26 to May 29 and just about 10 days later, the T20 series against Proteas will begin. The Apex Council of the BCCI, which met on Wednesday decided on the schedule for the South Africa series and matches are likely



to be held from June 9 to 19. During the meeting, the venues were also finalised and Cuttack, Vizag, Delhi, Rajkot and Chennai will host the

matches, an Cricbuzz report said. The report also stated that Bengaluru and Nagpur were to get the games in the series but Cuttack and Vizag have been allotted the matches instead, presumably because the two centres missed out on the T20 matches during recent West Indies series. Notably, the BCCI conducted the six matches against West Indies in only two centres -- Ahmedabad and Kolkata -- with an aim to cut down on travel and Covid-19 threat. After the South Africa series, Team India will fly to England for an unfinished Test and six white-ball matches.

German Cup: Leipzig beat Hannover 4-0 to storm into semis

Berlin | Agencies

RB Leipzig showed no mercy to second division Hannover after a 4-0 victory courtesy of Christopher Nkunku's first-half brace in the German Cup quarter-finals. Leipzig needed time to gain a foothold into the clash as Hannover's well-positioned defence gave the Bulls a hard time in the opening stages. The visitors gained momentum and made it 2-0 just minutes later as Nkunku rounded goalkeeper Ron-Robert Zieler and tapped home into an empty net after benefiting from Josko Gvardiol's good build-up work. Leipzig dictated proceedings on the pitch and should have established a bigger advantage, but Zieler defused Gvardiol's shot from close range at



the half-hour mark, while Benjamin Henrichs hit the side netting just before half-time.

After the restart, Leipzig retreated with its two-goal lead and handed over control to Hannover, who couldn't do any damage. Hannover's resistance was broken but Leipzig wasn't done with the scoring and made it 4-0 six minutes later as Silva also got his name on the scoreboard, reports Xinhua. Elsewhere, Freiburg advanced into the next round after overpowering resilient Bochum 2-1 after an extra-time decider by Roland Sallai. Second division Hamburg rallied back from two goals down and edged Karlsruher SC 3-2 in a penalty shootout after a 2-2 draw in regular time. Last Friday, Union Berlin bounced back to see off second division St. Pauli, as Sheraldo Becker and Andreas Voglsammer were on target to book a berth in the semi-finals.

Guedes thunderbolt books Valencia spot in Copa del Rey final

Valencia | Agencies

Goncalo Guedes' 30-metre drive two minutes before half-time booked Valencia's place in the Copa del Rey final, with a 1-0 win at home to Athletic Bilbao giving them a 2-1 aggregate semi-final win. The Portuguese forward collected a headed clearance following a free-kick and unleashed an unstoppable shot to decide a game of few chances played on Wednesday night. The game was intense from the start, with both teams looking to pressure their rivals high up the pitch and force errors. With a lead, Valencia were able to disrupt Athletic with tactics to run down the clock in the second half, even though Oihan Sancet, Nico Williams and Unai Vencedor all came on to try and bring more life to the visitors'



attack. Valencia will play the winner of the second semi-final in which Real Betis defend a 2-1 first-leg lead at home to Rayo Vallecano.

BCCI CENTRAL CONTRACTS

Deepti Sharma, Rajeshwari Gayakwad set to be promoted to Grade A

Team Absolute | New Delhi

All-rounder Deepti Sharma and spin bowler Rajeshwari Gayakwad are set to be promoted to Grade A in the central contracts for women's cricketers for the 2021-22 season. For women cricketers, the BCCI has three categories -- Grade A, which have remuneration of Rs 50 lakh while B and C categories are valued at Rs 30 lakh and Rs 10 lakh respectively. The 24-year Sharma has shown good form in the recent and she merited pro-

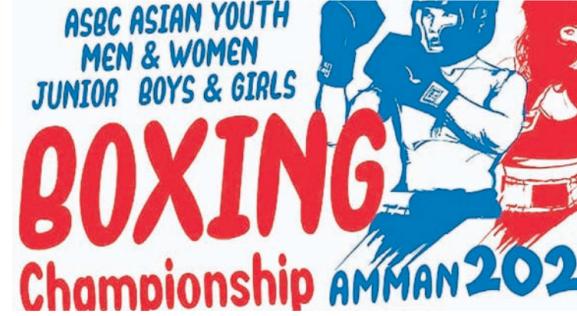
motion. Same way, the 30-year old Gayakwad from Karnataka gets the top grade in the contracts list. The likes of Harmanpreet Kaur, Smriti Mandhana and Poonam Yadav are also in Grade A. At the Wednesday's Apex Council meeting, the BCCI finalised 17 players for the annual contracts, with Sneha Rana becoming a new entrant, earning Grade C on the basis of consistent performances since making a comeback last June following five years on the sidelines. On the other hand, Pooja Vastrakar, who was in Grade C last year, is also set

to get promoted to the B category, a Cricbuzz report said. Notably, Vastrakar has been consistently good for India as an all-rounder and has particularly taken to the role of the finisher since making a comeback. Meanwhile, veterans Mithali Raj, Jhulan Goswami retain their positions in Grade B but Jemimah Rodrigues and Shikha Pandey, who were left out from the World Cup squad, have been downgraded to Grade C from B. Mansi Joshi and Radha Yadav, who were part of last year's 19-player contracts list, don't feature this time.

Anand Yadav enters quarterfinals at Asian Youth & Junior Boxing

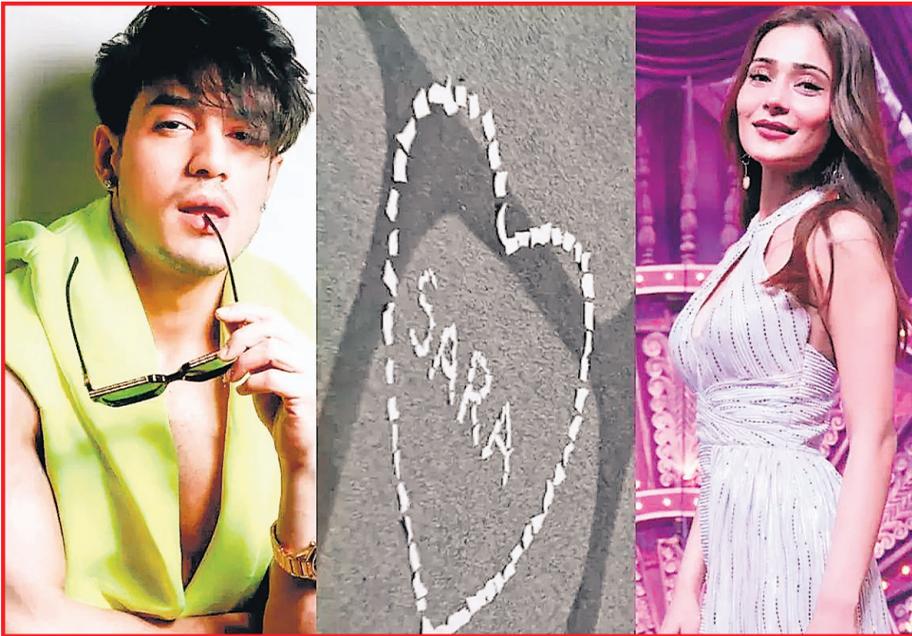
Team Absolute | New Delhi

Youth Indian boxer Anand Yadav produced a dominating show to progress into the quarterfinals at the 2022 ASBC Asian Youth & Junior Boxing Championships in Amman, Jordan on Thursday. According to information received here, Anand outclassed Kazakhstan's Aslan Aslanov in the 54kg youth men's preliminary round match by unanimous decision. In a bout that saw both the boxers exchanging heavy punches initially, Anand showcased a good defence technique as well as hit some sharp timely punches that not only earned



him points but also unsettled his opponent. As the bout progressed, the Indian boxer took charge of the game and dominated the Kazakh boxer before securing a comprehensive win. Later, the last edition's sil-

ver medallist Vanshaj will begin his challenge in the 63.5kg youth men category against the local boy Abdallah Almarhat. In the junior boys' section, Ravi Saini put up a strong show against United Arab Emirates' Alsedrani Ali Bader in the 48kg preliminary match, played late on Wednesday night. Ravi's aggressive intent and fierce attack forced referees to stop the contest in the second round of the match and declare him the winner as the Indian marched into the quarter-finals comfortably. On the other hand, in the 52kg intense opening round bout, John Lapung went down fighting 2-3 against Kyrgyzstan's lasynov Nizamedin.



Shivam Sharma, Sara Khan create love chemistry

Team Absolute | Hyderabad

The fearless reality show 'Lock Upp' hosted by Kangana Ranaut is seeing a special bond developing between contestants Shivam Sharma and Sara Khan. Shivam never misses an opportunity to impress her by reciting his shayaris and putting effort into it. Meanwhile, Sara has also started to develop feelings for him, they talk about their lives on a daily basis, share very intimate stories and have been there for each other since day one.

Sara also quoted: "Shivam is very cute!" while having a discussion with Tehseen Poonawalla.

In fact, last night, Shivam made a heart shaped paper art for Sara with her name written inside. When Sara woke up and saw it, she called him "crazy" and told him to sleep.

It will be interesting to see how their relationship turns out to be in the coming episodes.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Rohit Shetty signs reality show contestants for next film

Well-known film producer and director Rohit Shetty has signed contestants Divyansh and Manuraj to collaborate with Badshah for the theme song of his upcoming movie 'Cirkus' on 'India's Got Talent'. He is seen as a special guest on the show.

After looking at the performance of Divyansh and Manuraj on the songs 'Yeh Mera Dil Yaar Ka Deewana', 'Golmaal' and 'Aankh Marey', not only Rohit Shetty, but judge Kirron Kher also was impressed and have all the praises for them. She said: "You guys were so good that I wanted to give the golden buzzer after two minutes it started! I wanted to get up and dance, I wanted to come there and rock it with you! It was fantastic! I want to tell you that you've given us so many performances but each time it was never below par!"

"Each performance outdid the previous one, you are so fantastic I can't tell you. We are lucky that we get to witness and listen to you!"

Judge Shilpa Shetty will also be praising the duo by saying that it's a magical team that has been formed on the stage of 'India's Got Talent'.

'India's Got Talent' airs on Sony Entertainment Television.

'HAPPY AND GRATEFUL WHILE I HEAL': SHRUTI RECOVERING FROM COVID

Team Absolute | Chennai

Shruti Haasan, who is fast recovering from Covid, says that she is happy and grateful for all the love that's being showered with by her friends.

Taking to Instagram, Shruti wrote, "Happy and grateful while I heal!! I'm a few cups of medicinal tea away from being A ok... I hope!"

"This Covid fatigue is properly real. Vitamins, water, good thoughts and a dose of being that b will get you through anything it seems.

"Checking in to say 'Thank you' for all your love and I'm sending you mine. My friends have been beyond wonderful showing me that we truly choose friends as family -- so much yummy khaana and love and pampering. "p.s - I didn't realise my hair is so frizzy.. Also what should I expect post Covid? Dos and don'ts?? Lemme know." The actress, on Sunday, announced that she had tested positive for Covid.



AJAY DEVGN STEPS INTO METAVERSE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood star Ajay Devgn has stepped into the Metaverse universe with his virtual avatar inspired by 'Rudra - The Edge of Darkness'.

Talking about this new development, lead actor Ajay Devgn said, "The exciting and novel space of the metaverse is an all-new world. It goes beyond our wildest imagination. I have always wanted to be closer to my fans and today I can proudly say - I am there. With my avatar, inspired by my role in 'Rudra - The Edge of Darkness', I am marking yet another first by foraying into the metaverse with the Hotstar Specials' series that is so close to my heart now."

"From a digital series debut to my very first venture into the metaverse, this has been an incredible journey for me."

Exploring the emerging intersection of the digital and physical world, the platform, in an initiative, has associated with Hungama Digital's Web3 venture called Hefty Entertainment to create this Metaverse.

Commenting on the launch, Gaurav Banerjee, Head, Content Disney+ Hotstar, and HSM Entertainment Network, Disney Star, said, "We are thrilled to present Ajay Devgn in a never-seen-before digital avatar inspired by his character in a highly-anticipated series Rudra - The Edge of Darkness. It will be a unique presentation and an engaging content experience for our users."



INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Sonal Chouhan

JHUND: GRIPPING NARRATIVE PROPELLED BY HILARIOUS DIALOGUES

FILM REVIEW

AAKRUTI BAGLA

(Streaming on Zee5)

Director: Nagraj Popatrao Manjule

Cast: Amitabh Bachchan, Rinku Rajguru, Akash Thosar and others

Duration: 132 minutes

Ratings: 4/5

Filmmaker Nagraj Popatrao Manjule, who has mastered the art of bringing to life real and unvarnished stories, is back with yet another film titled Jhund. The director is well-known for his work in blockbuster Marathi films Fandry and Sairat. The film marks Manjule's debut in the Hindi film industry. Jhund is based on the life of Vijay Barse, the founder of Nagpur's NGO Slum Soccer. In the film Big B is seen essaying the role of a football Coach Vijay Borade. He spots a few youngsters in the neighbouring slum and decides to train them, and make a football team with them. He decides to change the life of these kids living in the slum



who resort to illegal activities. But attempting to make their life better wasn't easy! In this journey Vijay Borade faces many difficulties like lack of finances to convincing the society to accept these kids and let them play along. Beautiful portrayal of these instances through gripping narrative propelled by hilarious dialogues is what makes the movie a masterpiece to watch. There are times when the kids steal the show from Big B as well. Akash

Thosar and Rinku Rajguru, who played leads in Sairat, have cameos in Jhund, and while Akash is decent in his cameo, Rinku leaves a strong impact. Another character who will definitely leave an indelible mark is of Ankush Gedam. Peppy and fun songs composed by Ajay-Atul perfectly suit the theme of the film.

Manjule touches upon several subtexts during the course of the film. Religious bigotry, infidelity, casteism, and inequality are

woven into the plot organically through parallel conversations between supporting characters. While moments like 20-minute football match the kids play against a college team, Amitabh Bachchan's monologue and heart-wrenching struggle story of the kids will keep you glued, with the run time of 3 hours the movie gets is a bit exaggerated.

Whether you are a soccer fan or not, you will enjoy Jhund regardless.