

# absolute india

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CENTRE RINGS ALARM AMID COVID COMEBACK IN CHINA, CALLS FOR GENOME SEQUENCING AND

## INTENSIFIED SURVEILLANCE

The Ministry source said that Health Minister has directed the senior officials to maintain alertness, active genome sequencing and high level surveillance across the country in the view of again rising cases of Covid 19 in some countries.

► THE MEETING COMES AS CHINA IS SEEING A COMEBACK OF COVID-19 CASES LED BY AN OMICRON-LED OUTBREAK WITH THE COUNTRY ON WEDNESDAY REPORTING 3,290 FRESH INFECTIONS. CHINA ALSO HULDED TO FREE UP HOSPITAL BEDS AS THE HIGHLY TRANSMISSIBLE OMICRON VARIANT IS POSING A STERN CHALLENGE TO ITS ZERO-COVID STRATEGY, RESULTING IN THE 17.5 MILLION RESIDENTS OF THE SOUTHERN TECH HUB OF SHENZHEN BEING LOCKED DOWN AND OTHER CITIES ALSO UNDER TIGHT RESTRICTIONS.

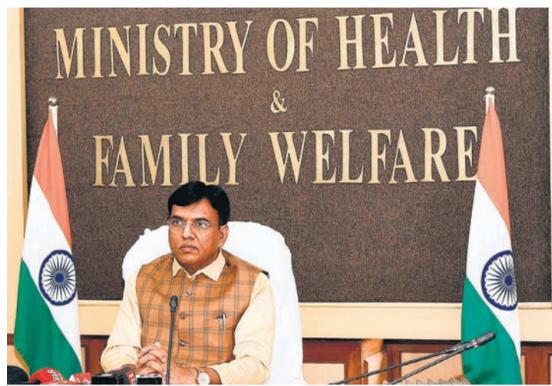
► IN UNDER THREE MONTHS, SINCE THE HIGHLY TRANSMISSIBLE VARIANT BROKE THROUGH, HONG KONG HAS RECORDED NEARLY A MILLION INFECTIONS AND MORE THAN 4,600 DEATHS - THE BULK OF THEM FROM THE CITY'S UNVACCINATED ELDERLY POPULATION. A FUNERAL INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVE TOLD LOCAL MEDIA THE SOARING DEATH TOLL HAD SEEN A CRUNCH IN THE CITY'S COFFINS SUPPLY, WITH ONLY 300 REMAINING AND EXPECTED TO BE GONE BY THE WEEKEND.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Wednesday chaired a high-level meeting in the wake of a humongous rise in the Covid-19 cases in China and South East Asia. As per official sources, Mandaviya asked for a high level of alertness, aggressive genome sequencing and intensified surveillance. The meeting was attended by top health officials, including the health secretary, pharma secretary and the principal scientific adviser to the Government of India, sources added.

Meanwhile, mortuaries in Hong Kong are overflowing with Covid victims as the country is reeling under a deadly outbreak led by the Omicron variant. In India, the third Covid wave, triggered by Omicron, had plateaued and the number of cases started declining after January 21 when 3,47,254 infections were reported. Experts even said that India may not see a fourth wave unless another variant emerges. Eminent virologist Dr T Jacob John had said it can be confidently concluded that the third wave has ended and the country has entered an endemic phase once again.

India on Wednesday reported 2,876 new infections, taking the country's total Covid tally to 42,998,938,



**CORBEVAX VAX TO COST RS 990 IN MARKET, RS 145 FOR GOVT**

New Delhi: Biological E produced Corbevax vaccine shot for children between 12 to 14 age group will cost Rs 990 in the private market including all taxes and Rs 145 at government hospitals and facilities. India on Wednesday expanded its Covid-19 vaccination drive with the inclusion of children in the age group of 12-14. As per the health ministry report, children in this age group will be administered Corbevax vaccine manufactured by Hyderabad-based Biological E. Corbevax is India's first indigenously developed Receptor Binding Domain (RBD) protein sub-unit vaccine against Covid-19.

while the number of active cases dipped to 32,811, the health ministry said. The death toll stood at 516,072. India today also began administering doses of the Covid vaccine to children aged 12 to 14 years as public and pri-

ate schools re-opened. The government aims to swiftly expand vaccine coverage by also dropping a restriction on booster doses for those older than 60 only if they had a co-morbidity condition.

## If exam paper leaks, Maharashtra to 'derecognise' school

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a tough and unprecedented measure, the Maharashtra government has decided to cancel the recognition of any school from which examination paper leakages come to light, School Education Minister Prof. Varsha Gaikwad said on Wednesday.

After the SSC Marathi exam paper allegedly leaked earlier this week, the state government clamped down and derecognised the Laxmibai Secondary and Higher Secondary School, Nilajgaon, where there were allegations of mass-copying.

Announcing the strong decisions in the Maharashtra Legislature, Prof. Gaikwad said that henceforth, all students must reach their examination venues at least one hour before the scheduled paper.

The candidate must compulsorily be seated inside the exam hall 10 minutes before the start of any exams - at 10.20 a.m. for the 10.30 a.m. paper, and at 2.50 p.m. for the 3 p.m. paper.

"Under no circumstances shall any candidate be permitted to enter the exam halls after the examinations begin at 10.30 a.m. or 3 p.m. All parents and students must take note of this and cooperate with the authorities," she said.

However, those entering the exam hall after 10.20 a.m. or 2.50 p.m. - owing to circumstances beyond their control - would undergo a complete check before they are permitted to write the exams to ensure their future is not affected, the Minister assured.

Simultaneously, all schools have been ordered to ensure that students do not misuse their mobile phones, click pictures of the question paper distributed at 10.30 am and



2.50 p.m. (for reading) and strictly prohibit the use of phones in the exam halls.

Reacting to the government decision, Maharashtra English Schools Trustees Association (MESTA) Founder-President Sanjayrao T. Patil said that though welcome, the move appears to be misdirected.

"During the SSC/HSC exams, the schools are taken over by the Maharashtra State Board of Secondary & Higher Secondary Examination, with their own examiners, invigilators, vigilance officers, etc., students are outsiders, and the schools merely act as facilitators to help them conduct the exams. So, in case of a paper leakage, how can the schools be held liable?" Patil told reporter.

The MESTA founder-head urged that the government should keep a check on all the authorities engaged in conducting the exams to ensure the rules are stringently followed by all to prevent paper leakage or mass-copying instead of targeting the schools which are only 'exam centres' offering their premises for the conduct of exams.

## Encouraged by US, Ukraine purposefully prepared for military scenario: Putin

MOSCOW | Agencies

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday that the West is pushing Kiev to bloodshed. "It is also clear to us that Western patrons are simply pushing the Kiev authorities to continue the bloodshed," Putin said, RT reported.

He noted that the supply of weapons and the dispatch of mercenaries continued.

"Ukraine, encouraged by the United States and a number of Western countries, purposefully prepared for a military scenario. To the bloody massacre and ethnic cleansing in the Donbass. A massive attack on the Donbass and then on the Crimea was only a matter of time," Putin said.

The Russian armed forces thwarted these plans, he claimed.

"In Kiev, they were not only preparing for war, for aggression



against Russia, against the Donbass, they were waging it. Attempts to organise sabotage and terrorist underground did not stop. In recent years, hostilities have continued in the Donbass, with shelling of peaceful settlements. During this time, almost 14,000 civilians died, including children," Vladimir Putin said.

### KREMLIN PROPOSES POSSIBLE COMPROMISE

Moscow: Press Secretary of the President of Russia Dmitry Peskov said that the proposal to create in Ukraine the format of a non-bloc state with its own army, following the example of Austria or Sweden, can be considered as a compromise. "This is an option that is really being discussed now and which can be considered as a real compromise," he answered a question from journalists, RT reported. The head of the Russian delegation, Vladimir Medinsky, said that at the talks Kiev was proposing to create in Ukraine an Austrian or Swedish version of a demilitarized state with its own army. Medinsky specified that this is being discussed at the level of the leadership of the ministries of defence of the two countries.

## HUGE JAPAN EARTHQUAKE TRIGGERS TSUNAMI ALERT, TWO MILLION HOMES LOSE POWER

TOKYO | Agencies

A powerful 7.3-magnitude quake jolted eastern Japan on Wednesday night, rattling the capital Tokyo and prompting a tsunami advisory for parts of the northeast coast, the Japan Meteorological Agency said.

The quake, which cut power to more than two million households, was centred off the coast of the Fukushima region at a depth of 60 kilometres (37 miles).

Shortly after it hit at 11:36 pm (1436 GMT) an advisory for tsunami waves of one metre was issued for the coasts of northeastern Fukushima and Miyagi regions. Japan's nuclear authority said no abnormalities were detected at the stricken Fukushima plant that went into meltdown 11 years ago after a huge 9.0-magnitude quake off the eastern coast on March 11, 2011, triggering a deadly tsunami and nuclear disaster.

A 20 centimetre tsunami wave was recorded in Ishinomaki in Miyagi prefecture, according to public broadcaster NHK, which showed images of some structural damage in Fukushima.

### 5.2-MAGNITUDE EARTHQUAKE HITS LADAKH

Leh: A moderate earthquake of 5.2 magnitude jolted the Union Territory of Ladakh on Wednesday, but there was no report of any damage, officials said. The tremor struck at 7.05 pm and lasted for a few seconds, an official of the Meteorological department said. He said the depth of the earthquake was 110 km below the surface of the earth at latitude 36.01 degrees north and longitude 75.18 degrees east. No damage reported yet.

At least two million households were left without power in the central Kanto region, including 700,000 in Tokyo, electricity provider TEPCO said.

In the northeast, 156,000 households had no power, regional energy company Tohoku Electric Power said.

## MANN TAKES OATH IN BHAGAT SINGH'S ANCESTRAL VILLAGE

Khatkar Kalan (Punjab): Amid a wave of 'basanti' and chants of 'Rang De Basanti', a revolutionary song, AAP leader and Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, who donned his traditional 'basanti' turban, took oath of office on Wednesday in this village of legendary freedom fighter Bhagat Singh, who laid down his life for the country's Independence, amidst a mass gathering of some 400,000 audience.

Governor Banwarilal Purohit administered the oath of office and secrecy to Mann. After the oath-taking, which was delayed by an hour, Mann in his address said he along with all the residents of the state also took oath as Chief Ministers. "You all will be the Chief Ministers," he said. Soon after taking the charge of his office, Mann, in a short but clear message to the officers and employees present on the occasion, said the people of the state have given a historic mandate and his government would work for pro-people policies. The Chief Minister also assured the officers and employees would work in tandem for the betterment of the lives of the people.

## ELEVEN WINNERS OF EATSMART CITIES CHALLENGE ANNOUNCED

New Delhi: The Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry on Wednesday announced eleven winning cities for the EatSmart Cities Challenge.

These cities - Chandigarh, Indore, Jammu, Jabalpur, Panaji, Rajkot, Rourkela, Sagar, Surat, Tumakuru, and Ujjain will now enter the deep engagement stage of the challenge wherein projects undertaken in pilot stage will be scaled up in a sustainable manner.

The challenge was launched by Ministry in collaboration with Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to scale up the Eat Right India approach to the city level.

Housing and Urban Affairs Secretary Manoj Joshi announced the names of the winning cities of the pilot phase. FSSAI CEO Arun Singhal as well as global and Indian officials from partner organisations who had supported the challenge including evaluation committee experts from Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP), The Food Foundation, UK, representatives from winning cities, officials from Central and state Governments, including Municipal Commissioners and CEOs of 100 Smart Cities were present at the event.

## SONIA GANDHI APPOINTS FIVE LEADERS TO ASSESS POST-POLL SITUATION

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Six days after the Congress' near washout in five Assembly elections, Congress President Sonia Gandhi on Wednesday appointed five senior leaders to assess the post-poll situation in these states.

The leaders would suggest organisational changes after interacting from MLA candidates and important leaders.

Rajya Sabha MP Rajani Patil will oversee Goa, Jairam Ramesh Manipur, Ajay Maken Punjab, Jitender Singh Uttar Pradesh and Avinash Pandey Uttarakhand.

The development comes just one day after the state unit chiefs of these states were asked to tender resignation by the Congress president. The step came even as the Congress dissenters, called the 'G23 group', are meeting at senior party leader Ghulam Nabi Azad's residence to chalk out their strategy after the humiliating defeat of the party.

Sonia Gandhi in the meeting of the Congress Working Committee - the party's highest decision-making body -- on Sunday offered to step back from the leadership along with Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, but her offer was rejected by the CWC members.



## Heat wave continues: Akola, Barmer register max of 42.9 degrees C

► HOSHANGABAD IN MADHYA PRADESH RECORDED MAXIMUM TEMPERATURE OF 42.3 DEGREES CELSIUS, WHICH IS 2ND HIGHEST VALUE FOR THIS MONTH FOR THAT STATION WHILE JAISALMER IN RAJASTHAN RECORDED THE MAXIMUM TEMPERATURE OF 42 DEGREES CELSIUS, WHICH IS 2ND HIGHEST VALUE FOR THIS MONTH FOR THE STATION, THE EVENING BULLETIN OF INDIA METEOROLOGICAL DEPARTMENT (IMD) SAID ON WEDNESDAY.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

As a heat wave continued over large parts of the country, Akola in Maharashtra and Barmer in Rajasthan recorded a maximum temperature of 42.9 degrees, the highest across India on Wednesday, the IMD said. Jammu recorded 35 degrees

Celsius, nine notches above normal, while Shimla recorded 25.1 degrees Celsius, 9.6 notches above normal. In the eastern side, Mohanbari (Dibrugarh) recorded the maximum temperature of 34.3 degrees Celsius while Tezpur recorded 36 degrees Celsius.

The IMD said Jammu, west Rajasthan and small pockets of

Gujarat are experiencing severe heat wave, there is a heat wave to severe heat wave over isolated pockets of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand and there is a heat wave condition over many pockets of Vidarbha, isolated pockets of Madhya Pradesh, and interior Odisha.

Jammu, Western Rajasthan, small pockets of Gujarat, pocket-

ets of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, pockets of Vidarbha and isolated pockets of Madhya Pradesh, interior Odisha and Telangana will witness heat wave conditions on Thursday while on Friday, it will be west Rajasthan, interior Odisha, and Telangana that would experience heat wave conditions, it said.



# NO CONSTITUTIONAL INFIRMITY IN ONE RANK ONE PENSION SCHEME: SC

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said the One Rank-One Pension (OROP) scheme is a policy decision and the court finds no constitutional infirmity in the principle as defined by the communication issued by the government on November 7, 2015.

A bench headed by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud said: "We find no constitutional infirmity in the OROP principle as defined by the communication dated 7 November 2015."

The bench, also comprising Justices Surya Kant and Vikram Nath, added, "Since the OROP definition is not arbitrary, it is not necessary for us to undertake the exercise of determining if the financial implications of the scheme is negligible or enormous". Justice Chandrachud, who authored the judgment on behalf of



the bench, said that element of the policy cannot be challenged on the notion that there is an inflexible notion of OROP couched in an original understanding. "OROP is itself a

matter of policy and it was open to the makers of the policy to determine the terms of implementation. The policy is of course subject to judicial review on constitutional parameters, which is a distinct issue", said Justice Chandrachud. The bench said the definition of OROP is uniformly applicable to all the pensioners irrespective of the date of retirement. It added that since the uniform application of the last drawn salary for the purpose of calculating pension would put the prior retirees at a disadvantage, the Union government has taken a policy decision to enhance the base salary for the calculation of pension. The bench noted that all pensioners who hold the same rank may not for all purposes form a homogenous class and the benefit of a new element in a pensionary scheme can be prospectively applied. However, the scheme cannot bifurcate a homogenous group based on a

cut-off date, it added.

"The Union government decided to adopt the average. Persons below the average were brought up to the average mark while those drawing above the average were protected. Such a decision lies within the ambit of policy choices", said the bench.

The bench noted that in terms of the communication dated 7 November 2015, the benefit of OROP was to be effected from July 1, 2014, and para 3 (v) of it states that "in future, the pension would be re-fixed every five years". Concluding the judgment, the bench said: "We accordingly order and direct that in terms of the communication dated 7 November 2015, a re-fixation exercise shall be carried out from July 1, 2019, upon the expiry of five years. Arrears payable to all eligible pensioners of the armed forces shall be computed and paid over accordingly within a period of three months".

# Muslim bodies in K'taka call for bandh opposing hijab verdict

Bengaluru | Agencies

Muslim organisations in Karnataka have given a call for a 'bandh' in the state on Thursday (March 17) opposing the verdict of the Karnataka High Court on the hijab row.

The high court had on Tuesday dismissed all the petitions seeking direction to the government for allowing hijab inside classrooms. The court had also stated that wearing hijab is not an essential part of Islam.

The Amir-E-Shariat of Karnataka, Maulana Sagir Ahmad Khan Rashadi, on Wednesday gave a call for a state-wide bandh on Thursday, which has been supported by hundreds of organisations across the southern state.

"Expressing our anger against the sad order of the Karnataka High Court regarding hijab, a state-wide bandh will be observed on Thursday," Rashadi stated, as he appealed to the entire Muslim community to support the bandh between 6 am and 6 pm on Thursday.

The Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI) and the Campus Front of India (CFI) have also supported the bandh call. Both the organisations maintained that the high court



verdict is against the constitutional rights of an individual. CFI office-bearers said that the high court verdict is against individual and religious rights.

# 'India far behind in defence R&D expenditure compared to China, US'

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Amid increasing threat perception, India is far behind in terms expenditure on defence research and development compared to countries such as China and the US, a parliamentary panel said in its report on Wednesday. The standing committee report on demands for grants for DRDO presented in the Parliament on Wednesday expressed concern that the percentage of expenditure for defence research and development in the overall GDP during the past years has seen no growth.

"In fact, the percentage was 0.088 per cent in 2016-17, which came down to 0.083 per cent in 2020-21," the report stated.

The panel analysed the expenditure on R&D with the total defence expenditure of India and other developed countries. The report stated: "Analysing the expenditure on R&D vis-a-vis total defence expenditure, it was found to be far less than other developed countries such as China, which is spending 20

per cent and the USA at 12 per cent of their respective budget on R&D in comparison to their defence budget." The committee is of the view that given the current international scenario, where the threat perception is increasing due to the ongoing conflicts world over, it is essential to keep national security interest paramount.

Therefore, the panel recommended that adequate funding should be provided to defence research, so that strategic projects are taken up with full vigour.

Looking at the budgetary allocation of DRDO, the panel expressed its unhappiness. In 2022-2023, there is a shortfall of Rs 1659.80 crore in budgetary allocation to DRDO, the parliament panel pointed out in its report, stressing that it should lead to compromises in the operational needs and research and development activities of the organisation. The report highlighted that over the years, the budget of DRDO has been around 5-6 per cent of the defence budget.

However, it is not increasing and is commensurate with

the cost of inflation and also keeping in view the fact that a major amount goes towards expenses for strategic schemes and CCS projects and programmes, pay and allowances and other non-salary revenue expenditure, each of which essentially keeps growing every year.

In 2021-22, DRDO had projected an amount of Rs 23460.44 crore while the final allocation made was Rs 18,227.44 crore, which is short of the initial projection by Rs 5122.56 crore. This allocation is even lesser than the Budget Estimate allocation for the year 2021-22. In the Budget Estimate for 2022-23, DRDO has sought Rs 22,990 crore, whereas the allocation made is Rs 21,330.20 crore. Thus, there is a shortfall of Rs 1659.80 crore in allocation.

The panel said that cuts in budget allocation to DRDO should not lead to under compromises in the operational needs and R&D activities of the organisation. The panel recommended that DRDO should seek additional funds at revised estimates, so that its research and development activities progress as per the timeline set

# J&K: 3 neutralised LeT terrorists were involved in killing of sarpanch

Srinagar | Agencies

Three wanted terrorists belonging to proscribed outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) have been neutralised by the police and security forces in Srinagar, officials said on Wednesday.

As per the officials, the three were involved in the recent killing of Khanmoh sarpanch Sameer Ahmad Bhat.

The police said that based on a specific input regarding the presence of terrorists in the Nowgam area of Srinagar, a joint cordon and search operation was launched by the police and the army. During the search operation, as the search party proceeded towards the suspected spot, the hiding terrorists fired indiscriminately, which was retaliated effectively, leading to an encounter. Later on, the CRPF also joined the operation. "In the ensuing encounter, three categorised terrorists were killed and their bodies were retrieved from the site of the encounter," the police said. The slain terrorists have been identified as Adil Nabi Teli from Galchibal Chandhara, Pampore; Shakir Ahmad Tantray from Ronipora Shopian; and Yasir Ahmad Wagay from Kujer Frisal,



Kulgam. "As per police records, the slain terrorists were affiliated to Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and were active since last year. They were part of groups involved in several terror crime cases, including attack on police/security forces and civilian atrocities," the police said. Earlier, J&K Police quoting IGP Kashmir zone, Vijay Kumar, tweeted: "Terrorists of proscribed terrorist outfit LeT/LeT/LeT involved in the recent killing of

Khanmoh's sarpanch Sameer Bhat trapped in Nowgam encounter." "Pertinently terrorist Adil Teli along with his associates was also involved in the killing of Inspector Pervaiz Ahmad Dar at Manganwari Nowgam on 22/06/2021, and the killing of Javaid Ahmed Malik at Lurgam Tral. Besides, he was also involved in a grenade attack on a joint party of police and CRPF at Barbarshah Srinagar in which one civilian was killed and three civil-

ians were injured," the police said. "Similarly, terrorists Shakir Ahmad & Yasir Ahmad were involved in several terror crime cases including killing of ASI Mohammad Ashraf near PS Bijbehara, Anantnag, on 22/12/2021," they added. Incriminating materials, arms and ammunition, including one AK rifle, three AK Magazines, 14 AK rounds, two pistols, four pistol magazines, and six pistol rounds, were recovered from the site of the encounter.

# 'Golden Baba' goes missing in Kanpur, probe starts

Kanpur (UP) | Agencies

Manoj Sengar, popularly known as Golden Baba, has gone missing from his house under mysterious circumstances.

The family members, after a frantic search, have informed the local police.

The police, however, said that there is no apprehension of any untoward incident, and going by the preliminary findings it appears that he had gone somewhere on his own will.

The police said that the incident is being investigated by scanning the CCTV footage procured from various junctions.

"Golden Baba", a resident of Kakadeo, is known for his hobby of flaunting heavy gold jewellery. According to the family members, he left home on Tuesday morning and did not return.

DCP West BBGTS Murthy, ADCP



Brijesh Kumar Srivastava and ACP

Dinesh Chandra Shukla reached

Golden Baba's house and collected information from the family members.

"He is seen walking, wearing saffron colour clothes. A bag is on his shoulder. As of now, there is no apprehension of any untoward incident because 'Golden Baba' had left home without jewellery," said the DCP. Golden Baba made headlines when he had got a mask of gold worth around Rs 5 Lakh made for himself during the pandemic.

Golden Baba, because of his penchant for jewellery, is often referred to as 'Bappi Lahiri of Kanpur'. He wears around two kg of gold every day.

He also carries a revolver in a case made of silver. Sengar came into limelight 10 years ago when he reached court wearing gold worth lakhs of rupees. There was an unsuccessful attempt made to kidnap him about four years ago and he has been receiving threats.

# GOVT PLANS TO DEVELOP ROAD NETWORK AT PAR WITH US BY 2024: GADKARI

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Union Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari on Wednesday in the Rajya Sabha said that the government is working on the plan to develop India's road infrastructure at par with the USA by the end of 2024.

Responding to a question in the Upper House, he said it was really unfortunate that nearly 1,50,000 people die in road accidents every year and this figure is higher than the deaths due to Covid-19 or in any war. He said that expanding road infrastructure is not the only problem but also includes other aspects such as road engineering, automobile engi-



neering and education. He also admitted that India has one of the easiest methods to obtain a driving licence despite all the mandatory provision of the motor driv-

ing training institutes and other measures. Gadkari sought more efforts to create awareness among the public about road safety.

# Servitor of Jagannath temple in Puri shot dead

Bhubaneswar | Agencies

Krushna Chandra Pratihari, a senior servitor at the Jagannath temple in Puri, was shot dead on Wednesday morning, the police said.

Pratihari was shot dead by unidentified miscreants near the Barabati area in Puri. Soon after the incident, the servitor was rushed to the hospital where a doctor declared him dead.

Puri SP Kanwar Vishal Singh said that the murder of the senior servitor is a challenging case and four teams have been formed to nab the accused.

On January 20, Pratihari, the secretary of Suar Mahasuar Nijog of the temple, was acquitted along with five others in the sensational murder of former BJD councillor and servitor Taluchha Bhagaban Mohapatra alias Guna Singhari.



The murder of Guna Singhari occurred in a similar manner in August 2012 in Puri.

# AgustaWestland case: CBI charge sheet names ex-Defence Secy, 4 others

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Central Bureau of Investigation has filed a charge sheet against five accused, including former Defence Secretary Shashi Kant Sharma and four Indian Air Force personnel, in connection with the alleged corruption in the Rs 3,600 crore AgustaWestland VVIP chopper deal.

Sharma was the Defence Secretary between 2011 and 2013 before being appointed the Comptroller and Auditor General.

The Air Force personnel are Air Vice Marshal Jasbir Singh Panesar (retd), former deputy chief test pilot S.A. Kunte, Wing Commander Thomas Mathew (retd), and Group Captain N Santosh (retd).



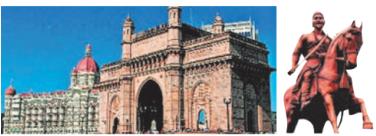
The case pertains to buying of 12 AgustaWestland helicopters built by Italian defence manufacturing giant

Finmeccanica at an estimated cost of Rs 3,600 crore for ferrying VVIPs. In the deal, cleared in 2010 by the

then UPA government, bribes were allegedly paid to middlemen and others. On January 1, 2014, India cancelled the contract with Finmeccanica's British subsidiary AgustaWestland for supplying 12 AW-101 VVIP choppers to the IAF, over alleged breach of contractual obligations and on charges of paying kickbacks amounting to Rs 423 crore.

On September 19, 2020 the CBI had filed a supplementary charge sheet against 15 accused, including alleged middleman and British citizen Christian Michel and accused-turned-approver Rajiv Saxena, in connection with the scam.

The CBI had earlier filed a charge sheet in this case on September 1, 2017 against then IAF chief S.P. Tyagi and 11 other accused.



Disha Salian case

COURT GRANTS PRE-ARREST BAIL TO NARAYAN RANE, NITESH RANE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A Dindoshi Sessions Court on Wednesday granted anticipatory bail to Union MSME Minister Narayan Rane and his MLA son Nitesh Rane in a complaint lodged by the Malvani Police Station.

The Ranesh -- both of Bharatiya Janata Party -- had moved the Sessions Court after the Mumbai Police lodged a complaint against them in the Disha Salian case.

Soon after the anticipatory bail order was passed, Nitesh Rane accused the ruling Maha Vikas Agadhi government of hatching a conspiracy to pressurise them, but the court ruled in their favour.

"In a democracy, it's the duty of elected representatives to raise their voice wherever there is injustice. We shall do whatever that is required to ensure justice to Disha Salian," Rane Jr. said. Disha Salian, a business associate of the late Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput, is said to have committed suicide on June 8, 2020. A week later, Singh was also found



dead at his Bandra home, triggering a major political row.

Nitesh Rane alleged that things started moving against them after Shiv Sena's Mumbai Mayor Kishori Pednekar visited her parents Satish and Vasanti Salian at their Mumbai home on February 22. "We are told that the Mumbai Police has prepared a list targetting several BJP

leaders... Our demand is -- probe the CDR records of Mumbai Police Commissioner Sanjay Pandey," he urged.

He added that during their 9-hour interrogation, the Mumbai Police team wanted to know from where they got the evidence and why it was not being handed over to the police. "However, we told the police that

we shall provide all the evidence to the Central Bureau of Investigation," Nitesh Rane said.

Last month, BJP state President Chandrakant Patil, and the Ranesh had threatened to make a 'mega-expose' to solve the mystery behind Disha Salian's death. Prior to that, Narayan Rane had claimed that Disha Salian was eliminated as she knew certain 'secrets' and raised doubts on her death probe, but the Salian family hit back saying that the Mumbai Police had completed its probe, and the family is now trying to move ahead.

Taking strong umbrage at the manner in which their daughter's death was being exploited by "certain leaders" (of the BJP), the aged Salian couple warned that if this does not stop, they would "take some drastic steps" for which only the politicians would be responsible.

They submitted a complaint to the Maharashtra State Commission for Women (MSCW) Chairperson Rupali Chakankar who assured a probe and later the Malvani Police lodged a case against the Rane duo.

MNS activists damage IPL team bus in Mumbai, 5 nabbed

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Activists of Raj Thackeray's Maharashtra

Navnirman Sena smashed the windows of at least one of the luxury buses parked outside a five-star hotel to ferry players for the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL) matches, officials said here early on Wednesday.

Moving swiftly, the Colaba Police Station rushed a team there and arrested five persons in connection with the incident.

Taking serious cognizance of the development, the police have beefed up security around the Hotel Taj Mahal Palace, an official said.

Shortly before midnight, around half-a-dozen activists of the MNS-Vahatuk Sena (Transport Wing) sneaked near the bus, pasted posters of their demands on the front of the bus, raised slogans and started smashing the windows.



The police have arrested five senior MNS-VS leaders including Prashant Gandhi, Santosh Jadhav, Bharmu Nandurkar, and they will be produced before a Magistrate Court later on Wednesday. MNS-VS President Sanjay Naik later said that they were protesting in the manner in which buses from outside the state were hired for the pur-

pose of IPL tourney, depriving the locals of employment opportunities though they can provide similar vehicles as needed. "Despite our protests, they have allowed several buses and other smaller vehicles here from Delhi and other parts, which is affecting the livelihood of the local Marathi people," Naik told reporter.

Hawkers should not create congestion near railway stations: Mumbai police chief

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Newly-appointed Mumbai Police Commissioner Sanjay Pandey has said that hawkers should not do business within 100 meters of 'No Hawking' zones outside railway stations in the city.

Pandey held a meeting with police officials, officials of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), members of NGOs and representatives of the Federation for Retail Traders Welfare Association, among others, on Tuesday.

Hawkers should follow the directions of the Supreme Court and High Court, he said in the meeting, official sources said.

The police commissioner observed that the presence of hawkers near railway stations, hospitals, on overbridges, and under the bridges causes traffic congestion.

In many places, hawkers also occupy both sides of roads, Pandey said, adding that action should be taken against licensed shop owners who rent out, illegally, the place in front of a shop to hawkers.

Incidents like chain-snatching increase because people can not walk freely in crowd-



ed markets, and hawkers and shopkeepers should be alert about such crimes, the police commissioner said. Hawkens and shopkeepers will get cooperation from police but they will face action if they break the law, Pandey warned.

MAOIST COUPLE WITH RS 2 MN BOUNTY SURRENDERS

Team Absolute | Gadchiroli (Maharashtra)

In a significant development, two hardcore Maoists, a married couple, carrying a total reward of Rs 2 million on their heads and the husband responsible for the deaths of at least 31 security personnel in ambushes, surrendered before the authorities, police said here on Wednesday.

They are Dipak alias Munshi Ramsu Ishtam, 34, of Maharashtra and his wife Shambatti Navaru Alam, 25, of Narayanpur in Chhattisgarh, said Gadchiroli Superintendent of Police Ankit Goyal.

While Dipak worked as a deputy commander of Platoon No. 21, his wife Shambatti was a member in the same unit, and the couple carried rewards of Rs 16 lakhs and Rs 4 lakhs, respectively.

Dipak faces charges of 3 murders, 8 encounters and 2 arsons committed along with his Maoist gangs, and



Shambatti was with the Jan Militia and involved in two major encounters with the security forces, Goyal added. In his Maoist career, Dipak carried out half a dozen deadly ambushes against the security forces in Chhattisgarh, killing a total of 31 policemen.

He was recruited in the Kasansur Dalam as a LOS Member in July 2001, worked as a Protection Guard

of Central Committee Member named Devji, and was promoted as a Deputy Commander in 2004, onto Platoon Commander in 2009 and was currently working as a Divisional Committee Member of Platoon No. 21. Shambatti joined the Maoist militia in 2015 with Platoon No. 16 and then shifted to Platoon No. 21, where she worked till her surrender on Wednesday.

Given their bloody reputation, the government had announced bounties of Rs 16 lakhs and Rs 4 lakhs on their heads, said Goyal, flanked by his team of Additional SPs Somay Munde, Sameer Shaikh, Anuj Tare, and API Babasaheb Dudhal.

As per the government's surrender policy, the couple will get Rs 10 million, and other benefits to ensure they are fully rehabilitated.

Goyal added that in the past 3 years, a total of 45 dreaded Maoists have laid down arms, including seniors like 5 DVCs, 2 Commanders, 3 Deputy Commanders, 34 Members and one Jan Militia Member. In the past over a decade around 650 Maoists have surrendered and have been fully rehabilitated with homes, farming plots, official documents, benefits under various government welfare schemes, education, etc., and Goyal appealed to the other Maoists to give up violence and take advantage of a normal life in society.

PUNE AIRPORT TO GET SWANK NEW INTEGRATED TERMINAL BUILDING IN 18 MONTHS

Team Absolute | Pune

The new Integrated Terminal Building with world-class facilities and enhanced capacity is 55 percent ready and scheduled for completion in 18 months, officials said here on Wednesday.

Being built by the Airports Authority of India (AAI) at a cost of Rs 475 crore, it will be spread over 750,000 square feet, including the existing terminal building that has 250,000 square feet.

This will increase and nearly double the capacity handling of the Pune Airport Integrated Terminal Building from the existing 70 lakhs to 1.60 crore per annum (or 16 million pax per annum).

The gleaming new facility will be centrally air-conditioned with provision for 10 passenger boarding bridges, 72 check-in counters and in-line baggage handling system.



The energy efficient terminal with a four-star GRHA rating, with a huge canopy on the city side of the present building and the new Integrated Terminal would impart a magnificent look to the Pune Airport from the city side. An area of nearly 36,000 sq. ft has

been earmarked for retail, food and beverages outlets for the passengers, a 36-metre long verandah and other amenities. The strongest intention of the project was a search of unity and continuity between the old and new structures, with the verandah serving

as the 'unifying facade' besides giving protection from sun-rain, and a grand urban fresco telling the story of the rich social, historical, artistic and culture of both Maharashtra and Pune - the latter already renowned as the cultural, academic and IT capital of the state, and symbolic of the 'Peshwai Pride', according to a Punekar.

The public area below the great verandah is supported with stunning Maratha style arches, decorated columns with a finish of local dark stone that is common in most heritage structures of the state.

The new forecourt garden design of Pune Airport is directly inspired from one of the most recognisable landmarks - the famed Shaniwarwada Gardens, around the fort built between 1730-1732 by Peshwa Bajirao I, and remained the epicentre of power during the heydays of the Maratha Empire founded by

Assembly Speaker's election can't be held as matter sub-judice: Governor

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The rift between the Maharashtra government and Governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari has further escalated as the latter has refused to give nod for holding the state Assembly Speaker's election.

An official from the Raj Bhavan informed the state government on Tuesday that the date for holding the election cannot be fixed as the matter is sub-judice, sources said. The Speaker's post has been lying vacant since February last year, after incumbent Nana Patole resigned to take charge as Maharashtra Congress president. The state Maha Vikas



Aghadi (MVA) government, comprising the Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress, had initially demanded that Koshiyari allow to hold the election on March 9, and later sought that the election be allowed on March 16, during the on-going budget session of the legislature.

"The secretary in-charge of the state's parliamentary affairs department was informed by the governor's principal secretary on Tuesday that the date for

holding the election cannot be fixed since the matter is sub-judice," the sources said. Patole on Tuesday slammed Koshiyari for the "delay" in approving the schedule for holding the Speaker's election.

He said the Congress has finalised its candidate for the post of Speaker and will announce the name once the election schedule is announced. In the last winter session of the Maharashtra legislature in December 2021, the state government amended rules for Speaker's election from ballot system to voice vote. The new rules envisage the 'open voting method' to elect the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Assembly.

Elderly woman, nephew committed suicide

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The bodies were taken to the Rajawadi Hospital, where the post-mortem was conducted. The preliminary autopsy report doesn't indicate any foul play and cites death by hanging as cause of death.

Elderly woman, nephew found hanging in Mulund flat; suicide notes recovered

The deceased were identified as Pramodini Raghunath Kambli (88) and Rajesh Vitthal Kambli (54)

An octogenarian woman and her 54-year-old nephew were found dead in their Mulund flat on Monday afternoon, the police said. On March 14, the duo's house help contacted the landlord, Sandeep Chandratrey, after she noticed a foul smell emanating from the house. Chandratrey was told that his tenants in Uma Society

were not opening the door since the past two days. He rushed to the building and immediately informed the Navghar Police.

Upon searching the house, the police recovered hand-written suicide notes by both the deceased in a notebook. The notes claimed that the duo was reeling under health and financial problems.

The deceased were identified as Pramodini Raghunath Kambli (88) and Rajesh Vitthal Kambli (54). "Old age has become more torturous now. I am ending my life as per my own free will. Nobody should be held responsible for my death," read Pramodini's note accessed by Mid-day.

Her nephew Rajesh, in his note, wrote, "I have incurred losses in the share market, forcing me to end my life. Nobody should be held responsible for my death."

India Pavilion to showcase business opportunities during 'Media & Entertainment' fortnight

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The India Pavilion at EXPO2020 Dubai is set to host the 'Media & Entertainment fortnight' starting March 18th and showcase vast business and investment opportunities across India's media & entertainment industry to global audience.

Apurva Chandra, Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (I&B), Government of India will inaugurate the sector floor at the India Pavilion on March 18th. As part of the fortnight, the Ministry of I&B will organize various events covering areas including Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, and Comics (AVGC), Film, Broadcasting, Events, and OTT among others. During the fortnight, India's prowess in the sector will be showcased to global audience and discussions on possible collaborations of the Indian industry with their global counterparts would be organized.

The delegation will organize and attend various B2B, G2B and G2G meetings and the

startups from the sector will showcase their innovative ideas at the Elevate pitching series.

There will also be performances by Padamshree Kailash Kher and Kailasha Live on the inaugural day, apart from several other cultural programs planned for the fortnight. Senior officials from the Ministry of I&B along with industry representatives will participate in various sessions covering emerging themes like opportunities in media startups, Indian gaming ecosystem, animation and VFX, content production and creation between India



and the UAE, and India as the most favorable shooting destination.

The scale of the Indian market and the Government's nod to 100% FDI has enabled various global media companies to invest and capitalize on the country's fast-growing digital consumption. With the view of attracting investments, the M&E delegation at EXPO2020 will showcase opportunities in areas like shared content creation between India and the UAE, and VFX and post-production. The fortnight will also host a conference on 21st March to highlight the journey of Indian M&E Industry@75 which will see participation from various industry leaders and government officials from the sector.

The conference will also announce the launch of 'FICCI-EY Report on Media and Entertainment and Overall Presentation on Media and Entertainment Industry'.

The screening of National Award-winning films will also be organized during the fortnight at the India Pavilion.

Several renowned celebrities including Kangana Ranaut, R Madhavan, Tovino Thomas, Ketan Mehta, Shekhar Kapur, S S Rajamouli, Ram Charan, N T Rama Rao Jr. (RRR team) and Producer Deepak Mukut (Mulk, Dhaakad) among others will be visiting the India Pavilion during the M&E fortnight. Many international dignitaries and speakers including Mr. Mohamad Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman, Department of Culture and Tourism, Abu Dhabi are also expected to participate in the fortnight. The M&E fortnight will conclude on 31st March. Earlier Salman Khan, Sohail Khan, Ranbir Kapoor, Janhvi Kapoor, Boney Kapoor and Mammooty along with few others have visited the Expo that started in October last year.



EDITOR'S SPECS

Priyanka to take stock of poll debacle in UP

Amid a call for leadership change in the party, Congress General Secretary in-charge of Uttar Pradesh Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has called a meeting of party leaders on Tuesday to find out the reasons for the defeat. The meeting has been called in Delhi which will be attended by the office-bearers and important leaders of the party. The Congress has faced a massive loss in all the five states though Priyanka tried hard to make the party relevant but could not get support of the people. The Congress Working Committee on Sunday reposed faith in interim party chief Sonia Gandhi after its marathon meeting to discuss the outcome of the Assembly polls and authorised her to undertake "necessary and comprehensive" organisational changes. Party General Secretary K.C. Venugopal and chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said that the CWC endorsed holding of a 'Chintan Shivir' (brainstorming session). It said that the Congress "represents the hopes of millions of Indians against political authoritarianism prevailing in the country today and the party is fully conscious of its immense responsibility." "The resolution said that "humbly accepting the electoral verdict of the latest round of Assembly elections, the Congress party assures its workers and the people of India that it will continue to remain a vigilant and vibrant opposition. The Congress Party will be fully prepared to face the electoral challenges in the election going states in 2022 and 2023 as well as in the Lok Sabha elections 2024. "The CWC unanimously reaffirms its faith in the leadership of Sonia Gandhi and requests the Congress President to lead from the front, address the organisational weaknesses, effect necessary and comprehensive organisational changes in order to take on the political challenges."

Fill yourself into true colours of Holi

Lalit Garg

The ultimate and immortal goal of this life is merging between devotee and God and becoming one color. That's why Holi is the unique confluence of this soul and spirituality. Holi is a unique festival of getting drenched in the colours of love, mutual harmony and fun. Whether the colours of this festival have faded due to the Corona pandemic or because of unsocial spirit, runaway, selfishness and narrow-mindedness, there has been a change in the tradition of Holi. The storm of circumstances has also affected the happiness of Holi, yet when life seeks an excuse to present the fun and happiness in itself, then nature gives us a colourful festival like Holi. The biggest feature of Holi is that by celebrating it, we increase love, unity and goodwill among the people by establishing human qualities in the society. The spirit behind celebrating this festival is to enrich the dignity of human relationships, to give a new dimension to the recognition of life values. Holi is such a festival, for which not only the mind but also the atmosphere is ready. Holi has special significance not only from a religious point of view but also from a cultural point of view. Keeping the glorious tradition of this festival intact, let us create a conscious atmosphere where we are all one and remove the dirty layers of the mind so that all the faces reflected in the mirror of the undivided mind are ours. Despite the polluted environment, all the colours of life did not fade away. How naive are we that we are erasing our culture and ideal traditions. By burning their own house, they themselves are creating a spectacle. After all, we are those people who have spread the gunpowder of their selfish interests on them by laying deep and long tunnels of hideous elements like violence, injustice, exploitation, terror, insecurity, kidnapping, corruption,



anarchy, atrocities under the holy land of the country, without any thinking about the consequences, without looking at the possibilities of the future. Then how will the common man's ideal be able to remain safe. In the midst of these dark and complicated situations, festivals like Holi make us ready to wait for our light and fulfill our wish for light. The question is, how permanent is this state of happiness, which becomes an obsession during the days of Holi? The melodious mentality in the melody of Dafli (musical instrument) and the chimes of Dandiya Raas limited the usefulness of a festival like Holi to only this scope, which can be called instant happiness, while it is expected that this tradition of colours should be given a long life. The main aim of this festival is to create affection and respect, love for others, friendship and harmony. This should be built on which human beings can be inspired to do something new, communicate love and energy in mutual relationships. It is said that love and hate are two sides of the same coin. Love is a feeling full of positivity and energy; on the contrary hate is

full of negativity and anger. Why does it happen that those whom we love at one time, we end up hating after some time? We have a loving relationship with many; the festival of Holi gives new dimensions and new colours to these relationships. We always want the happiness of those we love; there is no grudge or annoyance in our heart. Having them in our life is enough for us. American author and thinker Daniel Cardwell says, 'We always love with our hearts. On the contrary, the feeling of hatred emanates from the mind.' Holi is a festival of feelings attached to the hearts. It refines the mind and soul. Holi of Braj is unique in the cultural tradition of Holi festival. Braj's Holi is special and unique. In other parts of the country Holi is celebrated for one or two days but in Braj Holi is celebrated for 50 days. In Braj, on the day of Basant Panchami, Holi sticks are planted at the places where mass Holi burns and wood, sticks etc. start gathering there. From Basant Panchami itself, Abir-Gul is used in the decoration of God in the temples and the voices of drums start resonating. The drums start

thumping on the Chaupals of the village, the cymbals and the strings are chirped and the reverberations of Holi are heard. Holi has a special significance in the tradition of Indian classical music and folk music. The songs of Hindi films have also not remained untouched by the colours of Holi. A unique confluence of seven notes is seen with the colourful colours of Holi! While playing with colours, happiness, love and enthusiasm fills the mind and automatically the body and mind get excited to dance. It becomes difficult to stop the foot with the rhythm and cadence. The colours tell their effect, the melody and the rhythm go on immersing everyone in their melody! Dhamar is closely related to Holi in classical music. The beauty of Holi songs can be seen in Dhrupad, Dhamar, Chhote and Bade Khayal and Thumri too. Many beautiful bands performed on Holi, Dhamar and Thumri along with Kathak dance are very popular even today - Chalo Guinaya Aaj Khele Hori Kanhaiya Ghar. Similarly, beautiful descriptions of Holi are

also found in Dhrupad, another part of music. Various rich colors of Holi are also seen in literature. Muslim poets like Sufi saint Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, Amir Khusrau and Bahadur Shah Zafar have also written beautiful compositions on Holi which are popular even today. In modern Hindi stories, Premchand's Raja Hardol, Prabhu Joshi's different matchsticks, Tejendra Sharma's Holi once again, Om Prakash Awasthi's Holi is auspicious and Swadesh Rana's Holi will see different forms, dimensions and perspectives of Holi. Various types of sports are played in the festival of Holi, children bring wood and sticks from outside the village and pile them up. Holika is worshipped dutily with full material, the sinful demons are destroyed by the hymns, and chanting of mantras. Holika Dahan removes all evils. The huge adjustment of the festival of Holi has become a confluence of diversities in the changing environment, while celebrating this festival, it seems that after losing everything, the divided mind is standing alone in the hope of getting everything again. Because on this occasion, there is a tradition to drench your favourite friends, loved ones with colourful atmosphere by pouring color, gulal, which has been going on for years. In a way, this festival is a unique occasion to share happiness. Hiranyakashipu's sister Holika had the boon of not burning in the fire. So she entered the fire with her nephew Prahlad in her lap. But by the grace of the Lord, Prahlad came out alive safely and Holika was burnt to ashes. Therefore, the festival of Holi symbolizes the 'Victory of Truth over Untruth' and 'Victory of Virtue over Wickedness'. Thus the festival of Holi symbolizes the victory of truth, justice, devotion and faith and also the destruction of injustice, sin and demonic tendencies.

international

US putting pressure on India, China, Egypt because of cooperation with Russia: Lavrov

Moscow | Agencies

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that the US is putting pressure on China, Turkey, and a number of other countries because of cooperation with Russia. "It's just the rudeness that is erupting from Washington, I don't know, it's beyond," Lavrov said, commenting on US actions against other countries in a TV interview, RT reported. "It is even more striking that this kind of blackmail is used against such ancient civilisations as China, India, Egypt, the demands were made on the same Turks," he said. "This is a fateful moment, this is an epochal moment in modern history, because



it reflects the 'battle' in the broadest sense of the word for how the world order will look," he said in an interview with RBC TV channel. The West did not want to

solve the situation around Ukraine by peace, Lavrov said in response to the question why the Ukraine matter could not be resolved peacefully.

11 KILLED, 486 INJURED DURING FIRE FESTIVAL CELEBRATIONS IN IRAN

Tehran | Agencies

At least 11 people have been killed and 486 injured in Iran during the celebrations of Chaharshanbe Suri, or Fire Festival, the Iranian state TV has reported. Among the wounded, 49 people were amputated following severe injuries on Tuesday, Xinhua news agency reported citing Mojtaba Khaledi, spokesman of Iran's Emergency Organisation. Most of the casualties, up by 47 per cent from last year, occurred in the past four or five days, Khaledi said. The Fire Festival is celebrated by Iranians on the eve of the last Wednesday before Nowruz, the Iranian new year, which begins on March 21 this year. The celebrations this year started days ago and reached their climax on Tuesday evening. Iranians celebrate the Fire Festival by jumping over bonfires and using firecrackers in public places, which are the rites performed to bid farewell to the old year and welcome the new year.



Brazil confirms first two cases of Deltacron coronavirus variant

Brasilia | Agencies

Brazil has confirmed two cases of infection with the new Deltacron variant of the coronavirus, which combines genetic characteristics of the Delta and Omicron variants, Brazilian Health Minister Marcelo Queiroga said. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has been monitoring the spread of Deltacron since early March, after it was first identified in France, Xinhua news agency reported. "Our genomic surveillance service has already identified two cases in Brazil. One in Amapa, another in Para," said Queiroga, referring to two northern states, on Tuesday. Despite a decline in the



number of new cases of Covid in Brazil, health authorities must remain vigilant, said Queiroga, urging the public to get fully vaccinated. Brazil on Monday reported 11,287 new cases of Covid and 171 more deaths from the disease in 24 hours, accumulating 29,380,063 confirmed cases and 655,249 deaths since the onset of the pandemic, according to the latest data from the Health Ministry.

WESTERN COUNTRIES LIFT COVID BANS AMID FLUCTUATION OF PANDEMIC

Beijing | Agencies

Over two years into the Covid-19 pandemic, the global infections and deaths have waxed and waned in different parts of the world. As the Omicron variant of the Coronavirus appeared more contagious and less lethal, several Western countries, where cases have been falling in recent weeks, decided to lift their restrictions. In its latest report issued on Tuesday, the World Health Organization (WHO) said the number of new weekly Covid cases increased by 8 per cent last week, as compared to the week prior to it, after "a consistent decrease" in the caseload since the end of January. "The number of new deaths continued a decreasing trend," globally down by 17 per cent last week as compared to the week from February 28 to March 6, the WHO added. In the US, the worst-hit country with the highest caseload and the most deaths in the world, President Joe Biden called on Americans to return to the office and "fill our great downtowns again" in his state of the Union Address earlier this month. The US has recorded around 79 million cases and over 960,000 deaths, while daily cases continue to drop, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. We expect some fluctuation, especially at this relatively low level, and, certainly, that to increase," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said at a press briefing on Monday. cross the Atlantic, the British government said Monday that all remaining Covid international travel restrictions will end Friday to make going on holiday easier for the Easter school vacation.



ALARM BELLS FOR PAKISTAN PM IMRAN KHAN

Hamza Ameer | Islamabad

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan is faced with a major challenge by opposition political parties, who have not only joined together to oust his government, but also have started to get nods from ally parties and members of the ruling benches, who now seem to be sliding in support of the no-confidence motion against him in the National Assembly. One of the major political parties, Pakistan Muslim League - Quaid (PML-Q), which is in alliance with the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has revealed that Prime Minister Imran Khan was 100 per cent in trouble because of the no-confidence motion against him. Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi, speaker of the Punjab provincial assembly and leader of PML-Q criticised Imran Khan for opting the revenge policy, which he said was not the



way to govern a country. "Imran Khan is 100 per cent in trouble, as his allies are on the opposition side. The government 100 per cent lacks wisdom and understanding. The prime minister has a great desire for revenge, which is evident from the fact that he puts everyone in National Accountability Bureau (NAB). There are no such ways to govern," he said. "When Moonis Elahi (son of pervaiz elahi) delivered his speech... we started receiving threats from NAB. There are a lot of inexperienced people among the rulers. They should have learned first. If they come down, they would learn. The government is under threat from its own

people," he added. Elahi said that the opposition alliance, led by Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan People Party (PPP) and Jamiat-Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) have resisted the government orchestrated and maneuvered pressure, adding that today, the alliance is strong and lasting. "When opponents are united against one person, bitterness among them is forgotten." It is pertinent to mention here that the current ruling government of Imran Khan has been formed through many alliances with other political parties and electables, who had won their respective seats in independent capacity. Now, with opposition parties joining in and becoming stronger; the same independent members and parties are sliding towards the opposition benches, ringing serious alarm bells for the Imran Khan-led government.

S. KOREA REPORTS RECORD HIGH OF OVER 400,000 NEW COVID-19 CASES

Seoul | Agencies

South Korea reported a record high of 4,00,741 new Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours, raising the total number of infections to 7,629,275, the health authorities said on Wednesday. The daily caseload was sharply up from 362,329 in the previous day, topping 400,000 for the first time, according to the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA). The recent resurgence was driven by infections in the Seoul metropolitan area amid the Omicron variant spread, Xinhua news agency reported. Of the new cases, 81,395 were Seoul residents. The number of newly infected people living in Gyeonggi province and the western port city of Incheon was 94,806 and 28,453 respectively. The virus spread also raged in the non-metropolitan region. The number of new infections in the non-capital areas was 204,654, or 51.1 per cent of the total local transmission. Among the new cases, 117 were imported from overseas, lifting the total to 30,475. The number of infected people who were in a serious condition stood at 1,244, up 48 from the previous day. A total of 164 more deaths were confirmed, leaving the death toll at 11,052. The total fatality rate was 0.14 per cent. The country has administered Covid vaccines to 44,914,731 people, or 87.5 per cent of the total population, and the number of fully inoculated people was 44,443,726, or 86.6 per cent of the population. The number of those who received booster jabs was 32,185,393 people, or 62.7 per cent of the population.





# 'EMPLOYMENT IS THE BIGGEST NEED, EFFORTS SHOULD BE STEPPED UP'

### Rozgar Diwas will be celebrated on March 29. Chief Minister Chouhan will review in the meeting of the Bankers Committee

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that today employment is the biggest need for the youth. Rozgar Diwas (Employment Day) is being celebrated every month to connect maximum number of needy youths with self-employment schemes. This month the state level programme will be held on March 29. The review work will also be done by convening the meeting of the State Level Bankers Committee every month, so that the implementation of self-employment schemes should not be lacking. In the meeting of the State Level Committee on March 24, the fulfillment of the targets of this financial year will be reviewed in detail. Chief Minister directed that district-wise review of self-employment schemes should be done at the end of the financial year. With the achievement of the target of the cur-



rent financial year under Mukhyamantri Udyam Kranti Yojna, maximum efforts should be made from the beginning of the financial year for good results in the context of setting the target to benefit one lakh beneficiaries of the coming financial year. With the joint efforts of Panchayat and Rural Development, Urban Development, Micro, Small

and Medium Enterprises, Village Industries Department and State Level Bankers Committee, necessary preparations are being made for this month's Employment Day. Chief Minister said that as a result of the State Level Employment Day held in Shahdol on February 25, 36 thousand youths in Indore district got the benefit of self-employment,

23 thousand in Jabalpur district, 21 thousand in Satna district and 20 thousand each benefitted in Gwalior and Sagar districts of the state. Chouhan directed that efforts should be stepped up in districts like Singrauli and Alirajpur to benefit the beneficiaries under other schemes including Mudra Yojana. From last month's employment day till now in this month, one lakh beneficiaries have been benefitted in a period of three weeks. Earlier, as a result of Employment Day on 12 January, employment was provided to 5.25 lakh youths. In this way, in a span of about two months, more than 11 lakh people have been successful in getting employment. Secretary Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises P. Narhari informed that all necessary preparations are being made for the employment day. After examining the applications received under Mukhyamantri Udyam Kranti Yojana, the process of distribution of funds is being done.

# State Budget session adjourned sine die

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Budget session of the Madhya Pradesh assembly on Wednesday was adjourned sine die, nine days ahead of its schedule. After completing the business listed for the day, assembly speaker Girish Gautam adjourned the house till the next session.



After the Question Hour was completed and the House finished its listed business, including passage of the budget on demand of grants related to various departments by a voice vote, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Narottam Mishra moved a resolution proposing that the Assembly be adjourned sine die.

Mishra said it was decided in a Business Advisory Committee meeting that House should be adjourned sine die after transacting the business listed for Wednesday. However, the opposition Congress members, including Jitu Patwari, Sajjan Singh Verma and P.C. Sharma, rushed to the well

of the House and strongly protested the decision, demanding that the house function as per its original schedule.

The Congress MLAs protested in the house accusing the BJP government and the speaker of 'murder of democracy' for the House passing demands of grants without any discussion.

Responding to it, Mishra said the government was ready for a discussion and to run the House as scheduled, but Congress members should take up the

matter with their leader first.

Amid pandemonium, ministers presented papers related to their departments and Speaker Girish Gautam continued presiding over the proceedings. After completing the listed business, the Speaker adjourned the House sine die.

The budget session of the Assembly, which commenced on March 7, was originally scheduled to run till March 25. Thirteen sittings of the Assembly were planned, but only eight took place.

# Govt gives Rs 1 cr ex-gratia to kin of martyred Jitendra Verma, PSO to Gen Rawat

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh government on Wednesday provided ex-gratia of Rs 1 cr to the family of martyr Jitendra Singh Verma, who had died along with India's first Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat and his wife Madhulika Rawat and 11 others in a helicopter crash in Tamil Nadu's Coonoor on December 8, 2021.

The family of the martyr was invited by the state government to the Assembly on Wednesday, during which chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan handed over a cheque of Rs one crore as ex-gratia.

The 32-year-old Lance Nayak Jitendra Kumar Verma of Dhamanda village of Sehore district in Madhya Pradesh was the PSO of CDS Bipin Rawat. An announcement about the ex-gratia was made by chief minister Chouhan during a visit to the martyr's village to pay hom-



age. General Bipin Rawat, his wife Madhulika and 11 others including officers and soldiers were on board the M-17 helicopter that crashed in Kunnur area in Nilgiri district of Tamil Nadu because of foggy weather.

Jitendra Verma, who joined the Army in 2011, was the son of Shivraj Singh Verma and Dhapi Bai. He was married in 2014 and had a one and a half year old son and a four year old daughter.

# "Jeetenge Hum-Jeetega Madhya Pradesh" in Cleanliness Survey 2022: CM

### CM Chouhan Appealed To the People of the State to Keep Their City and Village Clean. State Has to Be Made "Number One" Again

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the cleanliness survey 2022 has started. Chief Minister Chouhan has appealed by tweeting and through electronic media to all the citizens to extend full cooperation in keeping their city and village clean. Chief Minister Chouhan said that the state has created new records in cleanliness due to the hard work and diligence of all the citizens and the dedication of the Safai Mitras. The position of the state in cleanliness is very high. We have to make Madhya Pradesh number one again in cleanliness. All citizens should continuously cooperate in keeping their city and village clean. "Jeetenge Hum-Jeetega Madhya Pradesh" (we shall win- Madhya Pradesh will win).

# Covid vaccination for 12-14 age group in MP after March 22

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Vaccination for children in the age group of 12-14 years, earlier scheduled from Wednesday, will now begin after March 22 in Madhya Pradesh.

According to the state health administration, the date for inoculation was extended due to Holi and delay in training programme to the frontline workers.

A national-level seven-day training to the all frontline workers at district and block level is scheduled to begin from March 16. Therefore, the vaccination process for these children will begin only after March 22. The state health adminis-



tration informed that some necessary changes will be carried out in the Cowin portal.

"Vaccination for children aged between 12 and 14 will start after necessary training is provided to the frontline workers. A schedule for nec-

essary training for health workers for all block and district level has been prepared and the process will begin today," said a health official.

After the national-level training to be held on Wednesday, necessary

training to the all-frontline workers at the district and block level will be completed by March 22 after which the children's inoculation will begin.

There are around 43 lakh children aged between 12 and 14 years eligible for inoculation in Madhya Pradesh. Vaccination for them would be held on school premises only.

In many other states, inoculation for this age group is set to start from Wednesday.

Meanwhile, precaution doses will be made available to all eligible persons above 60 years from Wednesday. They will not be required to submit any medical certificate for getting inoculated, Shukla added.

# Chief Minister Chouhan Planted Saplings of Moulshree and Pink Cassia

### Representatives of Prakriti Yoga and Naturopathy Institute also Planted Saplings

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted saplings of Moulshree and Pink Cassia in Smart Udyan today. TS Bawal, Sanjay Pathak and Virendra Dhawan of Prakriti Yoga and Naturopathy Institute also participated in the plantation. The representatives of the organisation presented giloy and munga saplings to the Chief Minister Chouhan. Chief Minister Chouhan said that munga is helpful in removing malnutrition and giloy increases immunity. The state government will encourage both of them.



Along with regular yoga classes, the institute is doing public awareness work about tree plantation especially

ayurvedic herbs and medicinal plants for environmental protection. Through yoga classes and yoga camps,

information about natural diet, diagnosis of diseases naturally, benefits of natural juices to children and its distribution are being done. Seminars are also organised by the institute on yoga and asanas, nature conservation and prevention of diseases. Moulshree is a well-known tree, it is called Kesava in Sanskrit, Molsari or Bakul in Hindi. Moulshree is a medicinal tree. It has been used in Ayurveda for centuries. The bark and leaves of Pink Cassia javanica are used in the preparation of Ayurvedic medicines. Medicines prepared from it are used to treat constipation, colic, urinary disorders.

# CONGRESS LEADER ARUN YADAV'S 'WHO CARES ABOUT CLAN' TWEET CREATED PANIC

Bhopal: In the politics of Congress in Madhya Pradesh, a tweet of former minister Arun Yadav 'Kisko Fikr Hai qabile ki' has created a stir in the political circles. This tweet has come on the occasion when Congress leaders are face to face with the party leadership. Arun Yadav is recognized as a leader who keeps his point of view by staying calm in the politics of the state. He has a long list of supporters and fans. Not holding any position, but there are many who stand behind him. Congress leaders are saddened by the tussle over the national leadership in the Congress. Meanwhile, a tweet by Arun Yadav has come, in which it is clearly indicated that the leaders are only concerned about getting the post, not the party. Yadav wrote in a tweet, 'Who cares what will happen to the clan! Everyone fights on 'who will be the Sardar'. In this tweet, Yadav has tagged Madhya Pradesh Congress, All India Congress and Rahul Gandhi. Former minister Yadav is counted among close relatives of Rahul Gandhi. He has also been the state unit president. He is recognized as a leader who has direct communication with the workers. He has been sidelined in the party for some time now.

# DOCTOR COUPLE IN JABALPUR, OWNERS OF PROPERTY WORTH RS 5.5 CRORES

Team Absolute | Jabalpur

In the raids conducted on Wednesday morning by the team of Economic Offences Cell (EOW) at Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Medical College professor couple in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, assets worth about five and a half crores have been unearthed. EOW has registered a case and search is on. According to the information received from the EOW, the EOW team raided the place of Medical College Professor Ashok Sahu and his wife Professor Tripti at Dhanwantri Nagar. The documents that have come in hand in this raid show that they have acquired assets apart from legitimate sources. This total asset is more than 5 crore 44 lakhs.

In the information made available officially, it has been told that the property available with both of



them was investigated, then it was found that the property of three crore 15 lakh has been acquired from legitimate sources, while the total assets are more than 5 crore 44 lakh.

It has been told that prima facie the property acquired by the accused from other than legitimate sources has been proved to be 72 percent more and a case has been registered against them. Two plots have been found from them in the COD Colony of Jabalpur and one in Dhanwantri Nagar. Apart from this, details of investment and vehicles in LIC have also been found. Still the action of EOW is going on.

# CABINET CHINTAN MEETING ON MARCH 26-27 IN PACHMARHI



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Ensure all preparations for the Cabinet Chintan meeting on time. Urban Development and Housing Minister Bhopendra Singh reviewed the preparations for the Chintan meeting to be held at Pachmarhi on March 26-27. Medical Education Minister Vishwas Sarang and Backward Classes and Minorities Welfare (Independent Charge) and Minister of State

for Panchayat and Rural Development Ramkhelawan Patel gave important suggestions. Minister Singh said that all the ministers would leave for Pachmarhi by bus to attend the meeting on the evening of March 25. The Chintan meeting will begin on March 26 at 10 am with the address of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan. There will be sessions on various important schemes and topics on both the days in the Chintan meeting. After the end of the session, the ministers will come back to Bhopal by bus. It may be mentioned that Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has constituted a sub-committee for the preparations for the meeting. The committee includes Urban Development and Housing Minister Bhopendra Singh, Medical Education Minister Vishwas Sarang and Backward Classes and Minorities Welfare (Independent Charge) and Minister of State for Panchayat and Rural Development, Ramkhelawan Patel.

# Griha Pravesh of more than 5 lakh women under PM Awas Yojana (Rural) on March 28

### CM Chouhan to address beneficiaries of the state from Seoni. Prime Minister Modi will also join virtually

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that it is a special moment of joy for any person to own a house. On March 28, five and a half lakh women will enter their new homes under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Rural) in a state-level programme. District collectors, public representatives and beneficiary families should try to make this occasion memorable. Chief Minister Chouhan discussed the preparations for the programme with the collectors of the state through video conference from his residence today.

Chouhan will be present in this state level programme to be held at Seoni on March 28. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will also join the programme virtually.

Chief Minister directed that continuous atten-



tion should be paid to the implementation of this important scheme run by the Central and State Governments for the benefit of homeless citizens. The outcome of the efforts made in the past on other states should be maintained for effective implementation of the scheme in Madhya Pradesh. Chouhan has given instructions to invite

public representatives including MPs, MLAs, and MPs to the programme at all district, district and village levels.

Beneficiaries of each gram panchayat are taking advantage of the scheme, therefore, the work of lighting a lamp and decorating it with rangoli should also be done where griha pravesh has to be organized. In villages, the Sarpanch or village elders or eminent persons should be invited as chief guest. Arrangements should also be made to broadcast the programme.

Principal Secretary Panchayat and Rural Development Umakant Umrao gave details of the preparations being made for the programme. Chief Secretary Iqbal Singh Bains, Principal Secretary to Chief Minister Manish Rastogi, Principal Secretary Public Relations Raghavendra Kumar Singh and other officers were present in the meeting.



**CATE BLANCHETT DREAMS OF MAKING HER OWN CHEESE**

Los Angeles | Agencies

The two-time Academy Award winner Cate Blanchett is still passionate about acting but she has a yearning to do something completely different and dreams of creating her own delicious dairy delight. During an appearance on the 'Smartless' podcast, the 'Lord of the Rings' star was asked to name one thing she hasn't done yet that she'd like to do, and Cate answered: "Honestly, I want to make cheese. I just want to learn to do something (different)."

The 52-year-old actress enjoys taking up new hobbies and other pastimes that she has turned her hand to include pottery, and she is currently learning about bee-keeping with her husband, 56-year-old screenwriter-and-director Andrew Upton, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

She said: "You know, I tried the pottery thing, we've got bees, I just want to try something completely away. I'm being totally serious."

The 'Thor: Ragnarok' star also made it clear that she's not comfortable with success, despite boasting a filmography that is in its fourth decade and a slew of awards.

She revealed: "Comfortable with success? No, I've clearly led you down the wrong path... My husband said to me - and he's so supportive - in dog years, I was over the hill by the time I made a movie. I was 25. And my husband said, "It's great that this is happening now, but you've got five years, you know that. But it's okay! You can go back to the theatre."

Even though she enjoys acting in movies, her true professional love is treading the boards in the theatre.

The 'Ocean's 8' star added: "And that's what I've always said to myself. I'll take it when it comes and then I've got this other thing that I love. My real job is always waiting for me."



**ISLA FISHER JOINS ANIMATED COMEDY 'STRAYS'**

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Isla Fisher has signed on to star alongside Will Ferrell, Jamie Foxx, Will Forte and Randall Park in animated comedy 'Strays', 'Deadline' can confirm. The film from Barb and Star Go to Vista Del Mar director Josh Greenbaum combines CGI and live-action elements to follow an abandoned dog (Ferrell) who teams up with other strays, including one portrayed by Foxx, to get revenge on his former owner (Forte), reports deadline.com.

Details with regard to the character Fisher is playing have not been disclosed. American Vandal's Dan Perrault penned the script. Greenbaum is producing alongside Picturestart's Erik Feig, Louis Leterrier, Phil Lord, Chris Miller and Lord Miller President of Film, Aditya Sood, with Jessica Switch and Lord Miller's Nikki Baida exec producing, and Picturestart's Julia Hammer serving as co-producer.

SVP of Production Development Jeyun Munford and Director of Development Tony Ducret are overseeing the project for the studio. The film is slated for release on June 9, 2023. Fisher currently exec produces and stars alongside Josh Gad in the Peacock miniseries 'Wolf Like Me'.

The actress has also appeared in 'Arrested Development' and other series, as well as such films as 'Back to the Outback', 'Greed', 'The Beach Bum', 'Tag',

'Keeping Up with the Joneses', 'Nocturnal Animals', 'The Brothers Grimsby', 'The Great Gatsby' and 'Wedding Crashers', to name a few.

**Matt Bomer in talks to join Bradley Cooper's 'Maestro'**

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor Matt Bomer is in talks to join the cast of the upcoming Netflix Leonard Bernstein movie 'Maestro', which has Bradley Cooper directing and starring as the iconic composer. If a deal closes, Bomer joins Carey Mulligan, who will play Bernstein's wife Felicia. The film will be produced by Martin Scorsese, Steven Spielberg, Kristie Macosko Krieger and Fred Berner and Amy Durning, reports deadline.com. According to 'Deadline', it is a Netflix film but the streaming giant had no comment. In his directorial follow up to 'A Star Is Born', Cooper will star as Bernstein, and produce from the script he co-wrote with Oscar-winning



Spotlight scribe Josh Singer. The drama spans over 30 years. Bernstein's career is enough to fill a miniseries: his conducting debut at the New York Philharmonic at 25 when the conductor took ill; without even rehearsing, Bernstein did so well his star was launched the next day when his feat made the front page of The New York Times. He was blacklisted before being cleared of being a communist just before he composed the Oscar-nominated score for On the Waterfront; and he was an activist in the civil rights movement, and outspoken on issues including ending the Vietnam War. But the through line for the movie is the beautifully complex story of the marriage between Bernstein and his wife. On the film side, Bomer was recently seen in the Netflix movie 'The Boys in the Band'. On the TV side he's stayed active appearing in the anthology series 'American Horror Stories' and 'Max's Doom Patrol'.

**'DEEP WATER': INTRIGUING BUT FAR FROM THRILLING**



TROY RIBEIRO

(Streaming on Prime Video)

**Duration:** 115 minutes

**Director:** Adrian Lyne

**Cast:** Ben Affleck, Ana de Armas, Tracy Letts, Lil Rel Howery, Dash Mihok, Finn Wittrock, Jacob Elordi, Rachel Blanchard, Michael Braun

**Rating:** \*\*\*



Directed by Adrian Lyne, who had earlier given us 'Fatal Attraction', 'Indecent Proposal', and 'Unfaithful', this film anchored by strong performances from Ben Affleck and Ana de Armas, is based on author Patricia Highsmith's fifth novel, 'The Dog in the Manger', which was first published in 1957.

Its narrative sways between a domestic drama and a psychological thriller, inside the marriage of picture-perfect Vic and Melinda Van Allen to discover the dangerous mind games they play and what happens to the people who are caught between them.

Ben Affleck plays Vic, a successful software developer, and Ana de Armas essays his wife Melinda, a stunted housewife who misses her freedom. They portray themselves as an ideal couple but beneath their glossy veneer lies the fact that their loveless marriage is held together only by a precarious arrangement, whereby to avoid the messiness of divorce, Melinda is allowed to indulge in extra-marital activities, as long as she does not desert her family.

Vic accepts this without fault, and their relationship starts to strain when Vic begins to resent the guys his wife dates.

When Vic becomes fascinated with the unsolved murder of one of Melinda's former lovers, he takes credit for the killing to discourage her current fling. While Vic's claims are interpreted by his friends and the community as a dark joke, Melinda is wary, especially when her lovers inexplicably desert her.

Her doubts magnify when her current boyfriend Terry the Pianist, dies in their friend's swimming pool during a house party. How their marriage crumbles under the weight of resentment, jealousy, and mistrust, forms the crux of the narrative.

The film works on a superficial level where it is fascinating to watch this unique couple go about their lives. They are a good-looking couple, but their souls are as dark and dank as the bottom of a snail's terrarium.

The low-key Affleck portrays Vic in the similar masculine ambiguity that worked so well for him in the first half of his film 'Gone Girl'. Similarly, Ana de Armas is persuasive as the self-centered wife who lives the life of a singleton who drifts through her domestic life when it seems to suit her and may or may not be aware of the potential danger she is provoking.

The duo is aptly supported by the promising supporting cast, which includes Tracey Letts as the aspiring screenwriter Lionel, Jacob Elordi as the Pianist Terry, Lil Rel Howery as Vic's buddy Nash. But the one who steals the show is the little girl who plays Vic and Melinda's daughter. She is truly adorable.

Mounted with decent production values the film is enjoyable as a popcorn thriller, with intermittently erotic, tense, and creepy scenes, but unfortunately, never is there a moment of nail-biting tension.



**'Elvis' to have its world premiere at Cannes Film Festival**

Los Angeles: Actor Austin Butler's upcoming movie 'Elvis' on the rock-and-roll legend is all set to have its world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival, according to 'Variety'. Directed by Baz Luhrmann, the drama film also stars Tom Hanks.

The movie currently has a June 24 release date, which means it could not open the festival unless Warner Bros. Pictures decides to have it bow on May 17 to kick off the milestone 75th edition. Cannes introduced a new rule several years ago that require every opening night movie to be released on the same day in French theatres. Luhrmann previously opened the French Riviera festival with a bang with 'Moulin Rouge!' in 2001 and 'The Great Gatsby' in 2013. Besides Butler, who stars as the King, and Hanks, who stars as Col. Tom Parker, Presley's all-controlling manager, the cast also boasts Olivia DeJonge and Natasha Bassett. The trailer was released last month and garnered positive buzz. Luhrmann's first movie since 'The Great Gatsby', 'Elvis' explores the life and music of Elvis Presley, seen through the prism of his complicated relationship with his enigmatic manager. The story delves into the complex dynamic between Presley and Parker spanning over 20 years, from Presley's rise to fame to his unprecedented stardom, against the backdrop of the evolving cultural landscape and loss of innocence in America. Central to that journey is one of the most significant and influential people in Elvis's life, Priscilla Presley (DeJonge). Luhrmann wrote the script with Craig Pearce. Variety had predicted the film will play at Cannes, along with 'Top Gun' and George Miller's new film 'Three Thousand Years of Longing', David Cronenberg's 'Crimes of the Future', Hirokazu Kore-eda's 'Broker' and Park Chan-wook's 'Decision to Leave', among others.

**ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY**



Zoey Deutch





## SUSPENSION, FINE, POINT DEDUCTIONS: BUBBLE BREACH TO ATTRACT STRICT SANCTIONS IN IPL 2022

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Covid-19 might be perceived as a lesser threat around India at the moment than it was even a few months ago, but BCCI seems to be in a mood to not take it lightly and is set to put some strong measures and serious sanctions in place for the upcoming IPL 2022.

The breach of protocols by players and team officials during IPL 2022 will attract serious sanctions. It could range from one-match suspension to seven-day quarantine, to ostracisation from the tournament.



On the other hand, the bubble breach by a family member of a player or match official will have even more serious sanctions. More

stringently, if a team wilfully allows an outsider into the team bubble, it could face punishment up to Rs 1 crore for the first lapse and subsequent lapses could lead to deduction of one or two points from the team's tally, a Cricbuzz report said. "The COVID-19 pandemic poses a serious threat to the health of individuals and the cooperation, commitment and adherence by each Person Subject To These Operational Rules to the measure put in place to provide a safe environment is of paramount importance," the BCCI said in

its operational rules for the IPL 2022.

There are also sanctions prescribed for those missing the Covid tests. The first offence will attract a warning and subsequent offences will lead to a fine of Rs 75,000 per offence. The offenders in this category will also not be eligible for entry into a stadium or training facility until the missed test is performed. The 15th season of the IPL will start on March 26 at the Wankhede stadium with a clash between Chennai Super Kings and Kolkata Knight Riders.

### The board has listed a few other sanctions as well. Others sanctions are:

**Breach:** If a franchisee is unable to field a team for any match due to having less than 12 Players available - 11 in the playing XI (of which at least 7 must be Indian) plus 1 substitute fielder **Sanction:** BCCI, at its discretion, will attempt to reschedule the match for later in the season. If this is not possible, the issue will be referred to the IPL Technical Committee. The decision of the IPL Technical Committee will be final and binding. **Breach:** Wilfully allowing any person into the Bio-Secure Bubble to have contact with the Players &/or Support Staff without that person going through the 7-day quarantine or such period as provided in the Health & Safety Protocols during IPL 2022 and negative test protocols as provided in the Health and Safety Protocols during IPL 2022 or failing to put in place adequate procedures to control unauthorised access to the Bio-Secure Bubble. **Sanctions:** First offence - a fine payable by the Franchisee to BCCI of INR 1,00,00,000 (Rupees One Crore Only) Second offence - deduction of 1 point Third and subsequent offences - each a deduction of 2 points.

**Breach:** Unauthorised departure from the Bio-Secure Bubble of a Player, or a family member of the same, resulting in a need for the Player to re-quarantine for 7 days or such period as provided in the Health & Safety Protocols during IPL 2022. **Sanctions:** A fine payable by the Franchisee to BCCI of the pro-rata League Fee that would have been paid to the Player if he had been available for the match(es) during the re-quarantine period. **Breach:** Other breaches of the Health and Safety Protocols during IPL 2022 (e.g. non-provision of the "must have" facilities in the hotels, training facilities & ground transportation). **Sanctions:** BCCI will work with the franchisee to effect compliance. If there are further persistent breaches, the BCCI will make a Complaint to be heard under section 6 of these Operational Rules.

### TWO KINDS OF SANCTIONS FOR THE FAMILY MEMBERS AS WELL

**First offence:** 7-day quarantine for the family member or such other period re-quarantine as may be provided in the Health & Safety Protocols during IPL 2022 and 7-day quarantine for the relevant Player, Team Official or Match Official or such other period re-quarantine as may be provided in the Health & Safety Protocols during IPL 2022 (without pay for the number of matches missed) **Second offence:** Permanent removal of the friend or family member from the bubble for the rest of the season and 7-day quarantine for the concerned Player, Team Official or Match Official or such other period re-quarantine as may be provided in the Health & Safety Protocols during IPL 2022 (without pay for the number of matches missed).

### IN THE TABLE A OF PUNISHMENTS, IT HAS STATED THAT THE SANCTIONS FOR THE BUBBLE BREACHES BY A PLAYER, TEAM OFFICIAL OR A MATCH OFFICIAL WILL BE:

**First offence -- 7 day re-quarantine or such other period as may be provided in the Health & Safety Protocols during IPL 2022 (without pay for the number of matches missed) Second offence -- One match suspension (without pay) to take effect after the completion of the 7 day quarantine or such other period re-quarantine as may be provided in the Health & Safety Protocols during IPL 2022 (without pay) Third offence -- Removal from the Registered Squad for the rest of the season - no replacement allowed.**

## Bumrah jumps six spots to fourth in ICC Test Rankings; Kohli drops to ninth

Dubai | Agencies

India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, who bagged eight wickets, including his maiden Test five-wicket haul at home in the second India versus Sri Lanka Test at Bengaluru, has jumped six spots to attain fourth ranking in the latest ICC Test Rankings for bowlers released on Wednesday.

The 28-year-old speedster leapfrogged Pakistan's Shaheen Afridi, New Zealand's Kyle Jamieson and Tim Southee, England's James Anderson, South Africa-born Kiwi cricketer Neil Wagner and Australia's Josh Hazlewood in the table. On the other hand, former India skipper Virat Kohli has slipped from fifth to ninth among batters.

India's pace bowling stalwart Mohammed Shami has climbed a spot to displace fellow countryman Ravindra Jadeja to 17th, while Sri Lanka's Lasith Embuldeniya and Praveen Jayawickrama jumped five positions each to 32nd and 45th slot respectively.

Australia Test skipper Pat



Cummins, India spinner Ravichandran Ashwin and South African pace bowler Kagiso Rabada have retained the top three spots.

Sri Lankan batter Dimuth Karunaratne too has made significant gains in the latest Test Rankings, breaking into the top-5. Karunaratne jumped to a career-best No.3 after his fighting 107 in the second innings in Bengaluru.

## Ajax dominate but Benfica score to advance in Champions League

The Hague | Agencies

Portuguese side Benfica took a shock 1-0 win at Ajax in Amsterdam to advance to the quarterfinals of the UEFA Champions League, after a 2-2 in the first leg in Lisbon in February.

Ajax dominated the match at the Johan Cruyff Arena from the start on Tuesday night and had some opportunities. However, Erik ten Hag's team lacked sharpness in front of goal, with Antony, Edson Alvarez, Steven Berghuis, Jurrien Timber and Lisandro Martinez all missing the target, and Benfica goallie Odysseas Iachodimos saving attempts by Antony and Ryan Gravenberch, Xinhua reports. In the second half, Ajax continued to push Benfica back. However, in the 77th minute, Benfica



scored in a rare attack. After a free-kick by Alex Grimaldo, Uruguayan striker Nunez

and goalkeeper Andre Onana to score the game's only goal and see his team advance 3-2 on aggregate.

## WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

# ENGLAND BEAT INDIA BY 4 WICKETS

Mount Maunganui | Agencies

Captain Heather Knight led the way with an unbeaten 53 as England beat India by four wickets in a crucial match of the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup at Bay Oval on Wednesday.

After Charlie Dean's four for 23 and a much-improved fielding show bowled out India for a paltry 134, England's batting came to the party after an early wobble as the defending champions broke their winless run in the tournament.

Meghna Singh and Jhulan Goswami struck in quick succession as England lost openers Danni Wyatt and Tammy Beaumont in the first three overs.

Knight and her deputy Nat Sciver joined forces to get England's innings back on track. While Knight got off the mark with a drive through cover point off Meghna, Sciver hammered Goswami for two boundaries and was



even lucky in bails not falling off despite the ball hitting the stumps.

The 65-run partnership for the third wicket ended as Sciver was foxed by a short ball from Pooja Vastrakar and leading edge on pull flew to mid-on. Knight, sedate till then, began to dispatch anything full to the boundary rope with drive, steer

and reverse-sweep through the off-side. One brought two for India as Meghna bounced out Katherine Brunt with Ghosh taking the catch off top-edge. Sophie Ecclestone finished off the chase with a pulled four through deep mid-wicket off Meghna, giving England their first two points in the tournament.

### Brief scores:

India 134 all out in 36.2 overs (Smriti Mandhana 35, Richa Ghosh 33; Charlie Dean 4/23, Anya Shrubsole 2/20) lost to England 136/6 in 31.2 overs (Heather Knight 53 not out, Nat Sciver 45; Meghna Singh 3/26, Jhulan Goswami 1/21) by four wickets.

## India beat Nepal 7-0 in SAFF U-18 Women's Championship opener

Jamshedpur | Agencies

The India U-18 girls kicked-off their SAFF U-18

Championship campaign with a 7-0 win over Nepal at the JRD Tata Sports Complex here. India next play Bangladesh on March 19. In a late evening game on Tuesday, the first goal was scored by Priyanka Sujeesh in the 15th minute while Lynda Kom scored two more in the 17th and 35th minutes, respectively. In the second-half, India scored back-to-back goals -- Apurna scoring in the 69th minute, followed by Purnima in the 77th minute. In the 87th minute, Sunita Munda made it 6-0, while Nitu Linda completed the score-line in added time. The first half saw India dominate possession, and the hosts surged into the lead in the 15th minute when Priyanka went past the goal-



keeper to slot it home. Two minutes later, Lynda Kom scored the second off a brilliant pass from Anita Kumari from the left.

Lynda Kom scored her second in the 35th minute -- this time off another magnificent cross from outside the box by defender Ritu Devi.

Lynda almost completed a hat-trick in the 42nd minute but it narrowly missed the target, as India headed into half-time enjoying a three-goal cushion.

Changing over, the storyline remained the same with India dominating the proceedings. Head coach Thomas Dennerby made his first change in the 46th minute when Martina and Lynda were replaced by Apurna and Shubhang, respectively. Apurna netted the fourth goal as she curled it with her left foot. Substitutions followed -- Priyanka and Naketa were replaced by Nitu Linda and Poonam. The fifth goal came in the 77th minute -- Purnima Kumari heading it in off Aastam's free-kick. Sunita Munda made it 6-0 in the 87th minute, while Nitu Linda scored the last one of the day in 90+6 when she tapped in Anita Kumari's cross.

Mount Maunganui | Agencies

Veteran India pacer Jhulan Goswami on Wednesday added another milestone to her already illustrious career in international cricket. With the lbw dismissal of England opener Tammy Beaumont in the league match of the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup at Bay Oval, Goswami became the first woman cricketer to take 250 ODI wickets.

The right-arm pacer had recently become the leading wicket-taker in the history of World Cups against the West Indies and with Beaumont's dismissal, she also reached the mark of 350 wickets in international



cricket. Goswami, happy with the achievement against her name, stated that all she wanted to do was to express herself on the field and didn't think much about individual achievements in ODI cricket. "I am

happy that I was able to take 250 wickets but never thought about that in my life. Secondly, I would have been happy if we had won this match," said Goswami in the post-match virtual press conference.

## Hyderabad FC script history with win over ATKMB

Bambolim (Goa) | Agencies

Despite their 0-1 loss to ATK Mohun Bagan in the second leg of the Hero Indian Super League semifinal, Hyderabad FC made history by qualifying for the final with a 3-2 victory on aggregate over two legs at the Athletic Stadium, here on Wednesday.

Roy Krishna scored in the 79th minute to give ATKMB a glimmer of hope and make for an end-to-end last ten minutes but in the end, it was not enough for the finalists of last season as the men in yellow booked a final date with



Kerala Blasters at the PJN Stadium in Fatorda on Sunday. In the first leg, Bartholomew Ogbache, Yasir Mohammad and Javier Siverio netted for Hyderabad. Hyderabad head coach Manolo Marquez played the same team that won the first leg 3-1 while Juan Ferrando made a few changes to the

ATKMB side from the last game with the ever-dependable centre-back Tiri being a forced one as he picked up an injury in the last game. Kiyann Nassiri -- who scored a memorable hat-trick in the Kolkata derby earlier this season -- got a start. ATKMB looked the likelier of the two teams to nod ahead in the opening exchanges, the Mariners needing two goals at least to make a comeback.

ATKMB threw in the towel in the last ten minutes but it proved to be too tall an order for them in the end as they succumbed to a semifinal exit.

## INDIAN WELLS TENNIS

# Rublev overcomes home favourite Tiafoe, enters 4th round

Indian Wells | Agencies

World No. 7 Andrey Rublev of Russia overcame home favourite Frances Tiafoe 6-3, 6-4 in a potentially tricky matchup to secure a place in the fourth round of the BNP Paribas Open here on Wednesday (IST). The 24-year-old Rublev crashed 21 winners during the 70-minute match to extend his winning streak to 11 after he took the titles in both Marseille and Dubai.

Rublev also avenged the loss to Tiafoe in the five-set thriller at the 2021 US Open. He will now take on 2021 Miami champion Hubert Hurkacz of Poland in the fourth round. The world No. 11 beat American Steve Johnson 7-6(7), 6-3 earlier in the day, and will be looking to reach the quarterfinals for the third time in three appearances in Indian Wells when he faces Rublev.



Indian Wells has been a happy hunting ground for Hurkacz, who reached the quarterfinals here on his first two appearances in 2019 and 2021. A win in the fourth round will make it three consecutive trips to the quarters for the Pole at the Masters 1000 event. Grigor Dimitrov of Bulgaria, the 33rd seed, defeated 31st seed Alexander Bublik of Kazakhstan 6-3, 6-4 in a 69-minute performance. Dimitrov next meets 23rd seed John Isner of the US, who was a 7-5, 6-3 winner over 14th seed Diego Schwartzman of Argentina 7-5, 6-3. Isner will try to reach the Indian Wells quarterfinals for the first time since 2014, when he made the semifinals. Sixth seed Matteo Berrettini of Italy survived a mid-match slump to reach the fourth round of the tournament for the first time, moving past Lloyd Harris of South Africa 6-4, 7-5.



## Aakanksha Sareen all set for her singing debut

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Model and actress Aakanksha Sareen, who hails from Punjab and has been doing films and music videos is set to make her singing debut soon. She is currently working on an untitled song which is under post production and set to release soon. Talking about how did the idea of making a singing debut came up she says, "I have been waiting for this opportunity since long. I was very hesitant about it but then I gathered courage and gave my vocal to a song. Making an attempt is itself success for me. Currently working on it which will be out soon. I have given my best and hope it turns out to be the same." She briefs about the song, saying, "It's a soulful melody which is very catchy and strike a chord in your heart. The tune is so beautiful that will keep everyone humming the song. Hope audiences will give the love and support. Anxious waiting for the same."

Sharing about her journey in the industry she says, "To be very honest, I didn't face any big challenge as such. I have been god's blessed child that ways. My debut song was Happy Raikoti's 'Jaan' and from that I got the chance to do Roshan Prince's 'Dil Farda' which was a major hit, followed further by Ranjit Bawa's 'Paune Atth' and Gurnam Bhullar's 'Shaniwar'. After all these projects I never looked back. I have always been respected and I'm blessed to be working in this Punjabi industry."

Giving her thoughts on gender equality in the showbiz, she adds, "I believe we are getting there with time. Women in showbiz are now getting the respect they deserve. They are getting women centric films as well. The pay scale is also becoming equal to men. The industry is evolving with time. It is a very positive change in the showbiz industry and society in general."

## Ranbir shares heartwarming message about dad Rishi Kapoor's last film

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood actor Ranbir Kapoor recently shared a heartwarming message with regards to his father, the late Rishi Kapoor's upcoming film 'Sharmaji Namkeen', for his fans.

The film happens to be Rishi Kapoor's last film and Ranbir took a moment to speak with his fans through the special video to talk about how this film was very close to his father's heart.

In a video that sees the actor speak straight from the heart, Ranbir reveals how his father, a man so full of life and positivity, wished to complete the film at all costs despite his health deteriorating.

The actor states in the video that the veteran actor's unfortunate demise resulted in the makers trying VFX, which made him try prosthetics to complete the film with no luck. It was veteran actor Paresh Rawal who stepped in and ensured Rishi Kapoor's swansong gets a fitting conclusion, a gesture Ranbir is extremely grateful for.

Ranbir remembers his father with a phrase saying, "You must have heard 'The show must go on', but I've seen Papa live his life", before he added, "Sharmaji Namkeen' will always be my one of the most fondest memories of my father. Up on screen, bringing a smile to his countless fans." He urged the viewers to shower their love for the film like they always did for Rishi Kapoor and requested them to watch the film's trailer that releases on Thursday.



## Kareena to make OTT debut with film based on Japanese murder mystery

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Kareena Kapoor Khan is all set to make her streaming debut in a murder mystery based on Japanese author Keigo Higashino's novel, 'The Devotion of Suspect X'.

The yet-to-be-titled film will be directed by Sujoy Ghosh ('Kahaani', 2012; 'Badla', 2018) and also stars Jaideep Ahlawat and Vijay Varma. Streaming platform Netflix announced the film through a video of Kareena, Jaideep and Vijay during a script reading session for the film led by the director.

Sharing her thoughts on the announcement, Kareena said, "I can't wait to begin work on this exciting project. It's one that has all the right ingredients: a great story, a visionary director and a super talented cast and crew. It is the beginning of an electrifying journey and I can't wait for audiences worldwide to see this global bestseller book come to life."

'The Devotion of Suspect X', the third novel in Higashino's Detective Galileo series, is considered to be his most acclaimed work. It fetched him the Naoki Prize, a highly regarded literary honour in Japan. The novel won the prestigious Honkaku Mystery Award as well.



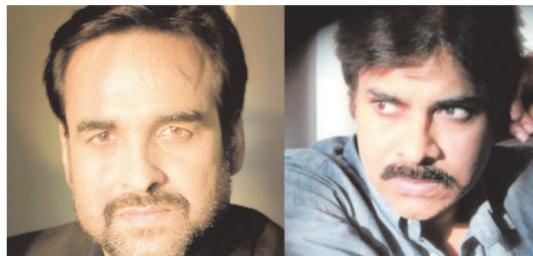
## PANKAJ TRIPATHI'S TOLLYWOOD DEBUT ALONGSIDE PAWAN KALYAN ON THE CARDS

Team Absolute | Hyderabad

Actor Pankaj Tripathi, who is well known for 'Mirzapur' as well as other OTT projects, will apparently feature in his Tollywood debut opposite superstar Pawan Kalyan. It is reported that actor Pankaj Tripathi is approached to play a pivotal role in Pawan Kalyan's upcoming movie titled 'Bhavadeeyudu Bhagat Singh'.

Though the makers have kept all things related to this movie under wraps, sources suggest that Pankaj, who appeared delighted to be

a part of Pawan's movie, has given his nod. If the above news turns out to be true, 'Bhavadeeyudu Bhagat Singh' will mark Pankaj Tripathi's Tollywood debut. Pawan Kalyan, who bagged a massive success with his recent release 'Bheemla Nayak', will be seen next in 'Bhavadeeyudu Bhagat Singh', which will be helmed by Harish Shankar. Pooja Hegde is in talks to play the love interest of Pawan Kalyan in the so-called mass entertainer. On the other hand, a song was already composed by Devi Sri Prasad. Mythri Movie Makers are producing this movie on a grand scale.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Raashi Khanna recently made her OTT debut with 'Rudra: The edge of darkness', where she played the role of Dr Aliyah Choksi, a sociopath. She says her family was shocked to see her in the series, but in a good way.

Talking about her role, Raashi said, "Pulling off an eccentric character like Aliyah was the only thing that mattered to me, I guess I had always been looking for something that threw me out of my comfort zone and this character did just that. I gave it my best and was selected and that's how I got on board."

She adds, "It was a wonderful experience working with all the actors in the series. Especially Ajay sir and Atul sir. Ajay sir was a pillar of support from day one. He is such a good actor and I learnt a lot from him. Atul sir also is a brilliant actor and working with him was a blessing too."

Raashi received all kinds of praises for her role, people on the sets feared seeing her in the character, her family was surprised too when they saw her in Rudra. "My family and friends were shocked but yes, in a good way. The way I am, they

## Raashi Khanna: My family was shocked to see me

must have never thought I could pull a character like this off. Come to think of it, I never thought I could pull it off! But, They are all happy and proud" adds Raashi.



## Aparna Dixit: My new song will change the way people view Bhojpuri content

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The right connection and a different perspective of Bhojpuri content is what makes actress Aparna Dixit very excited about her upcoming music video 'Dildaar'.

While not revealing too much, the actress says that she connects with the song on a personal level and is sure that other people will do too.

"This music video that I am doing with Vishal Aditya Singh, we have actually shot in Banaras. It will be released very soon and is connected with my roots where we bring the taste of our kind of music. He is from Bihar and I am from UP. The song has been sung by Manoj Tiwari ji who is very famous over there."

"The music is by Vishal Mishra and I am very fond of his music. Such talented people have come together to make something nice and different and we just want the audience to accept it."

"Bhojpuri content has this reputation that it is only for fun and in Bollywood movies, we generally see Bhojpuri lines or music in item songs and that is wrong, we are trying to give a different perspective to all of it. This music video will change the way people view Bhojpuri content. The music is amazing and we felt connected to it."

## INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Esha Gupta