

absolute india

VOL. 9, ISSUE 169, MUMBAI | FRIDAY, APRIL 01, 2022 | ₹5 | PAGE 08

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LIFE GETS EXPENSIVE FROM TODAY

Team Absolute | New Delhi
The financial year 2022-23 is starting from 1st April i.e. today. With this, many rules will also change. These will have an impact on our earnings, expenses, and investments. From midnight on Thursday, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has increased the toll tax from 10 to 65 rupees. It has been increased by Rs 10 to 15 for small vehicles while Rs 65 for commercial vehicles. State employees will be able to claim a higher deduction on the NPS contribution of their employer. An individual will be able to file updated income tax returns after two years. Tax will not be levied on the amount up to Rs 10 lakh received for the treatment of corona. Investment in mutual funds can be done only through UPI or Netbanking. Exemption for senior citizens above 75 years of age from filing returns.



CRYPTOCURRENCY Clear tax rules will be applicable on virtual currency as well from April 1. Virtual digital assets or crypto will be taxed at 30%. If a person gains from selling cryptocurrency, then he will have to pay tax. 1% TDS will also be deducted from July 1 on sales.

PAN Linking PAN with Aadhaar will now attract a penalty. It will be Rs 500 till 30 June 2022. After this, a penalty of 1000 rupees will have to be paid. PAN number will become inactive if it is not linked even after March 31, 2023.

AFFORDABLE HOUSE If you have bought an affordable house for the first time, then the interest paid will not get the benefit of an additional deduction of 1.5 lakh under section 80EEA. If the value of the house is less than 45 lakhs, then till now interest payment could have claimed a deduction of up to 1.5 lakhs. This deduction or exemption was in addition to the exemption of Rs 2 lakh available under section 24B. This benefit was only for those taxpayers who had taken a loan between April 1, 2019, and March 31, 2022, to buy a house.

MEDICINES Healthcare will also become costlier in the new financial year. The price of about 800 life-saving drugs will increase by 10%, which will increase the cost of treatment.

GST Businesses with more than 20 crore turnover will come under the purview of mandatory e-invoicing. E-invoices will be issued for every business-to-business transaction. Failure to do so may result in confiscated goods during transport. The input tax credit that the buyer will get will also be in jeopardy.

TRAVELING HAS BECOME EXPENSIVE Travelling on national highways could become a little more expensive as the Central government has decided to increase the toll tax from April 1, Friday. As per a report, the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) has hiked the toll tax between Rs10 to Rs65. While the cost of commercial vehicles has been increased by Rs65, light vehicles have to pay Rs10 more per vehicle for one way. NN Giri, NHAI Project Director confirmed that a notification regarding a hike in toll tax has been issued for the FY 2022-23.

PROVIDENT FUND (PF) Employees who have deposited more than Rs 2.5 lakh in the PF account will have to pay income tax on interest. The amount will be divided into two parts for tax calculation. Exempt contribution in one, and contribution of more than Rs 2.5 lakh in the other, which will be taxable. For government employees, this limit will be Rs 5 lakh.

TVS, ACS SET TO GET COSTLIER BY UP TO 10%
New Delhi: Consumer electronics manufacturers on Thursday said that the prolonged Russia-Ukraine war and China lockdowns will result in significant price hike in the prices of electronic goods by up to 7-10 per cent next month. Smartphones, laptops, TVs, ACs as well as imported watches are set to get costlier in the next few weeks. Industry experts said prices of these consumer goods could go up to 10 per cent. The electronics sector has already been raising prices by 2-3 per cent every quarter owing to the Covid-19 pandemic. With supply chain disruptions, fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies have also been forced to increase the prices of daily-use products.

FUEL PRICES: 9TH HIKE IN 10 DAYS
New Delhi: Fuel prices continue to rise with petrol and diesel rates rising by another 80 paise per litre each on Thursday, netting an increase of about Rs 6.40 a litre in nine revisions in 10 days so far. In the national capital, petrol now costs Rs 101.81 per litre, while diesel is selling at Rs 93.07 per litre. In Mumbai, the petrol and diesel prices have gone up by 84 paise, thus costing Rs 116.72 and Rs 100.94 per litre.

Russian Foreign Minister lands in Delhi, to hold talks on Friday



Team Absolute | New Delhi
Ukraine. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov arrived in Delhi at 6 pm. Lavrov would be meeting Jaishankar on Friday afternoon and by 5.50 p.m. he would be flying for Moscow. As the US-led sanctions and a few Russian banks being removed from the SWIFT messaging system, Lavrov will deliberate upon the rupee-ruble denomination payment method for crude oil which Russia has offered to India. New Delhi is not averse to buying Russian oil at a discounted rate. It is also stated that the Reserve Bank of India senior officers are meeting their Russian counterparts to discuss the rupee-ruble payment. Since the start of war, India has been facing pressure from the West and its allies to take a stronger stand against Russia. As the war between Russia and Ukraine cost India's military capabilities dearly with delivery of many platforms like nuclear powered submarines, Grigovich class frigates, Fighter jets, Triumf S-400, AK 203 assault rifle and others were expected to delay. Indian leaders will hold discussion with Lavrov over the issue.

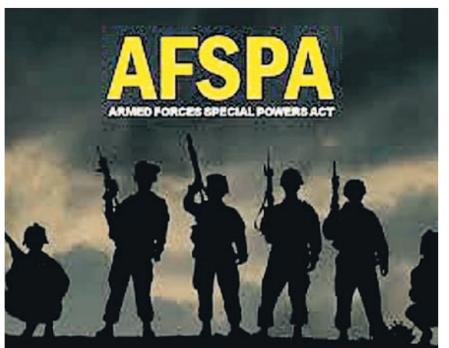
ed payment method for crude oil which Russia has offered to India. New Delhi is not averse to buying Russian oil at a discounted rate. It is also stated that the Reserve Bank of India senior officers are meeting their Russian counterparts to discuss the rupee-ruble payment. Since the start of war, India has been facing pressure from the West and its allies to take a stronger stand against Russia. As the war between Russia and Ukraine cost India's military capabilities dearly with delivery of many platforms like nuclear powered submarines, Grigovich class frigates, Fighter jets, Triumf S-400, AK 203 assault rifle and others were expected to delay. Indian leaders will hold discussion with Lavrov over the issue.

Serial blast bid foiled; 3 held, 12 kg explosives seized

Jaipur: Rajasthan Police have arrested three persons in Chittorgarh district's Nimbahera town and seized 12 kg explosives and other materials used for making bombs from them, officials said on Thursday. A preliminary investigation revealed that the arrested individuals -- Zubair, Altmas and Saiful, are associated with the Al Sufa organisation that operates near Ratlam and Dewas in Madhya Pradesh. They were arrested while they were moving in a Bolero car that had a Madhya Pradesh registration number plate. It is being said that they were going to Jaipur along with explosive materials from Ratlam (Madhya Pradesh). An FIR has been registered in this regard at the Sadar police station of Nimbahera. After interrogation of the accused, three more persons from Tonk and Chittorgarh have also been detained in this case. It was revealed during the questioning that there was a conspiracy of a serial blast in Jaipur, and the arrested individuals were supposed to hand over the explosives to other members of their group. On the basis of this investigation, five other persons have also been taken into custody from Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. Officials suspect there were probably plans to carry out serial blasts at three places.

Armed Forces (Special Power) to reduce in Nagaland, Assam, Manipur

Team Absolute | New Delhi/Guwahati
Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday announced that the Central government has decided to reduce the disturbed areas under Armed Forces (Special Power) Act, 1958 (AFSPA) in three northeastern states -- Nagaland, Assam and Manipur. Shah announced the long awaited decision in three separate tweets when most of the political parties and NGOs have been demanding to repeal the AFSPA. The demand intensified after the security forces killed 14 people and injured 30 others in Mon district of Nagaland in December last year. Almost all Chief Ministers of the northeastern states welcomed the Central government's announcement to



reduce the disturbed areas under the AFSPA. According to the officials in the three northeastern states, in Nagaland, the AFSPA would be removed from the jurisdiction of 15 police stations in seven districts. After the Central government's latest decision, in Manipur, 15 police station areas of six districts would be excluded from the Disturbed Area Act while in Assam, the AFSPA would be removed completely from 23 districts and it would remain enforced partially in one district. The fresh decision on the AFSPA will be effective from April 1.

UKRAINE CONFIRMS PARTIAL WITHDRAWAL OF RUSSIAN TROOPS FROM KIEV, CHERNIHIV DIRECTIONS

Kiev: Ukrainian Defense Ministry's spokesman Olexandr Motuzanyk on Wednesday confirmed that Russia has been withdrawing some troops from Kiev and Chernihiv directions, in central and northern Ukraine respectively, the Interfax-Ukraine news agency reported. "The General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine notes a certain partial relocation of individual units from the Kiev direction, as well as from the Chernihiv direction," Motuzanyk told a media briefing. However, there was no mass withdrawal of Russian troops from those areas, he was quoted as saying Xinhua news agency. Motuzanyk suggested that Russian forces may renew their offensive against Kiev and Chernihiv after replenishing the units that suffered the biggest losses in the battles. On Tuesday, Russia's Defense Ministry announced that Russia has decided to significantly reduce military activity in the Kiev and Chernihiv directions.

ABOVE NORMAL TEMP TO CONTINUE IN APRIL: IMD

HEAT WAVE LIKELY TO CONTINUE IN CENTRAL, WEST INDIA FOR NEXT 4-5 DAYS
New Delhi: Even as Delhi-NCR continued to witness maximum temperatures hovering between 39-41.2 degrees Celsius while Chandrapur in Maharashtra topped with maximum temperature of 44.2 degrees Celsius, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Wednesday said the heat wave spell is likely to continue over Central and West India during next 4-5 days. Heat wave to severe heat wave conditions were observed in most parts of West Rajasthan, in many parts of Himachal Pradesh and in some parts of Haryana while heat wave conditions were observed in some parts of East Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and isolated pockets of Jammu Division and Uttar Pradesh. Heat wave to severe heat wave conditions in most parts are very likely to continue over in many parts on March 31 and in some parts over West Uttar Pradesh, East Rajasthan & West Madhya Pradesh on March 31. Heat wave to severe heat wave conditions in isolated pockets over south Haryana & Delhi on March 31.



Team Absolute | New Delhi
Riding on the second heat wave continuing over large parts of northwest and central India, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Thursday said for April, similar above normal maximum temperatures are likely to be recorded in most parts of northwest and central India and some parts of northeast India. Normal to below normal maximum temperatures are likely over remaining parts of the country, the IMD said, adding that above normal minimum temperatures are likely over most parts of northwest, central and northeast

India while normal to below normal temperature are likely over most parts of northwest, central and northeast India. Normal to below normal minimum temperatures are likely over the south peninsular India, eastern parts of central India and extreme southern part of northeast India, IMD Director General Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said while announcing the Outlook for Temperature and Rainfall for April. March witnessed two spells of heat waves, first between March 11-21 while second started on March 26 and is still continuing. Meanwhile, except coastal peninsular areas, almost all of India received deficit rainfall in March. IMD said, the rainfall in April averaged over the country is most likely to be normal (89-111 per cent of Long Period Average). Below normal rainfall is most likely to occur over most areas of northwest and central India and some parts of northeast India. Normal to above normal rainfall is likely over many parts of south Peninsula, adjoining areas of west central India and some parts of northeast India, he said.

SC ORDERS FRESH MOP-UP ROUND COUNSELLING FOR NEET-PG 2021-22

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Thursday cancelled the mop-up round counselling held for All India Quota (AIQ) of the NEET-PG courses for year 2021-22, and ordered a fresh mop-up round. A bench, headed by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud and comprising Justices Surya Kant and Bela Trivedi, said: "The All India Quota mop-up round of counselling shall stand cancelled. For the 146 additional seats which became available after AIQ round 2 on March 16, 2022, a fresh round of counselling shall be conducted as a special case. Students who have joined in round 2 either of the state quota or of the AIQ, will be at liberty to participate in the fresh round of counselling without any financial penalties." The bench noted that pursuant to its order on March 30, the Union Government - the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's Directorate General of Health Services - has proposed to set right the anomalies which were noticed in the order. It said in order to facilitate the expeditious completion of the process, the DGHS should invite options from students for the 146 new seats within 24 hours of the uploading of the notification and the process shall be completed within a period of 72 hours after the cut off for receipt of options.



OVER 1.33 LAKH INDIANS WENT ABROAD THIS YEAR FOR HIGHER STUDIES: GOVT

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A total of 1,33,135 Indian students went abroad for higher studies this year, as on March 20, the Parliament was informed on Thursday.

As per information received from Bureau of Immigration (BoI), the number of Indian students, who departed India for higher education in the current year, is 1,33,135 so far while there were 4,44,553 students in 2021 and 2,59,655 in 2020, Minister of State for External Affairs V. Muraleedharan told Rajya Sabha in a written reply.

He also said that according to information received from the BoI, the top preferred countries for education in 2021 were the US, Canada, and the UK.

He also said that granting visas is the sovereign right of a country and various countries have been granting visas to Indian students for studying in universities of their countries. However, if there is temporary restriction or delay in the grant of visa then the Ministry and the respective Indian Mission take it up proactively



with the country concerned.

Responding to a query from CPI-M member K. Soma Prasad, Muraleedharan said that the Student Module of the MADAD portal, launched on July 15, 2016 enables Indian students studying abroad or aspiring to study abroad to register voluntarily and provide information on their course, institutions, contact details, emergency contact etc.

His Ministry, through its missions/posts abroad have been regu-

larly interacting with Indian students studying abroad to register their details on the student module and also encouraging Indian student organisations and Indian community associations for the same including through social media platforms.

In response to another question, Minister of State for External Affairs Meenakshi Lekhi informed the House that overall, 22,500 nationals have returned to India since February 2022 after the Russia-Ukraine war broke

out in February.

"Around 40-50 Indian nationals are still in Ukraine, of which only a few are willing to return to India and their return is being facilitated by the Embassy."

She also informed that during the global Covid-19 pandemic, the government had launched the Vande Bharat Mission to repatriate Indian nationals and to facilitate the movement of passengers between India and other parts of the world.

"Around 2.97 crore passengers (inbound and out-bound) have been facilitated in the flights operated under the Vande Bharat Mission and Air Bubble Arrangements till date," Lekhi said Under Operation Devi Shakti, a total of 669 people were evacuated from Afghanistan. This included 448 Indian nationals, 206 Afghans (including Hindu and Sikh community members) and 15 people of other nationalities (Nepal, Lebanon and Uganda) in seven flights (six flights operated between August 16 to 25, 2021 and the last flight on December 10, 2021). All Indian nationals who had sought repatriation to India were evacuated, she added in her reply.

Avian flu scare in Bihar's Supaul after bird carcasses found

Patna | Agencies

The fear of avian influenza has spread in Bihar's Supaul district after a large number of crows and ducks were found dead on Thursday.

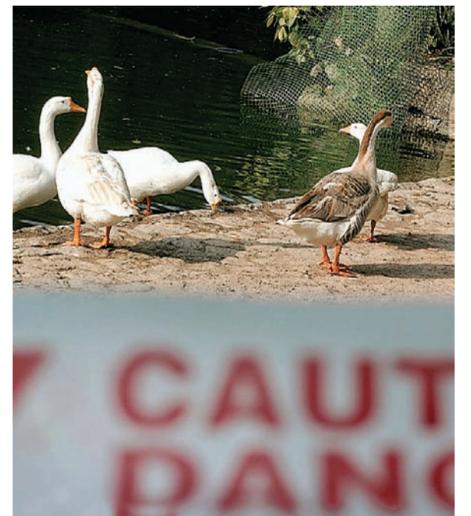
District Forest Officer Sunil Kumar Sharan said the dead birds were found in large numbers in Chapkahi village under Sadar police station of the district.

"The villagers informed us about a large number of birds found dead in the Chapkahi village. Accordingly, we sent a team of Forest and Animal Husbandry Departments to ascertain the situation.

During preliminary investigation, we have detected the symptoms of a disease in the crows and ducks," he said.

The villagers, after seeing birds were restless, had initially given medicines and injections of veterinary doctors but the birds did not recover.

"We have collected the samples of birds and sent them to the lab for testing. The process of burying the



birds is currently underway," Sharan said. "So far, there is no symptom of bird flu in the dead birds. Still, we have taken precautionary measures and alerted poultry forms to take precautions," he said. "In case any person

cooked it for food, the bird which died due to a disease may not affect human health but if birds died 2 to 3 days ago, it may affect human health as the virus may enter into the blood of a person who consumed it," he added.

NHAI planning cashless treatment for road accident victims

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In what may be a big relief to road accident victims, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) is planning cashless treatment for the victims, including drivers, passengers, pedestrians and cyclists, on identified national highway stretches between Delhi-Mumbai, Mumbai-Chennai, Chennai-Kolkata, Kolkata-Agra and Agra-Delhi corridors of the Golden Quadrilateral for treatment of bodily injuries caused due to road accidents.

The scheme will cover the immediate needs of hospitalisation of the victims for the first 48 hours from the time of hospitalisation or providing necessary treat-



ment, whichever occurs earlier, up to a cost of Rs 30,000 starting from the time of the ambulance reaching the accident site as recorded in the control room. The tender for the cashless treatment facility has been invited from the insurance companies registered with IRDAI or enabled by a Central legislation to undertake insurance-related activities for at least the last five years having a claim settlement ratio of not

less than 85 per cent in the last three years. Union Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari said in the Lok Sabha that the lessons from the implementation of this scheme may be extended to other national highways as well, and the success of the scheme may be assessed only after it is implemented on the ground following conclusion of the bidding process and on-boarding of the selected insurance company.

7 OF MARRIAGE PARTY KILLED IN ROAD ACCIDENT IN J&K'S POONCH

Hyderabad | Agencies

Jammu: Seven persons were killed and several others injured on Thursday in a road accident in J&K's Poonch district, officials said. Official sources said a Tata Sumo carrying guests of a marriage ceremony was going to Buzliyaz from Surankote when it went out of the driver's control and fell into a deep gorge at Tarran Wali.

"Initial reports said seven persons have died in this accident and many others injured. Rescue teams have rushed to the spot. Further details are awaited," a source said.

Gold bars weighing 700 grams seized at Hyderabad Airport

Hyderabad | Agencies

Customs officials at Rajiv Gandhi International Airport here seized nearly 700 grams of gold from a passenger who arrived from Dubai on Thursday.

Six gold bars weighing 699.5 grams and valued at Rs 37.30 lakh were detected and seized from a male passenger who arrived by Air India flight AI-952 from Dubai, Customs officials said.

He had concealed the gold in his check-in baggage. Further investigation was on. This is the third gold seizure by Customs at Hyderabad Airport this week. On Tuesday, Customs officials had detected and seized 231.5 grams of gold, valued at Rs 12.33 lakh, from a male passenger who arrived by AI-952 from Dubai. The gold was coated with rhodium and concealed as small rings



between beads of two neck chains hidden in garments in check-in baggage.

Earlier, on March 26, 255.6 grams of gold, valued at Rs 13.63 lakh, was seized from a male passenger who

arrived by 6E-25 from Dubai.

According to Customs officials, the gold was coated with silver and concealed inside the supporting metal frame of the trolley bag.

ABOUT 1/3RD OF INDIA'S COASTLINE FACES EROSION

Team Absolute | New Delhi

About 33.6 per cent of the coastline is under varying degree of erosion, an analysis of the total 6,632 kms long Indian coastline of the mainland from 1990 to 2018 has found, the Rajya Sabha was informed on Thursday.

The National Center for Coastal Research (NCCR), an attached office of the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) has been monitoring the shoreline erosion since 1990 using remote sensing data and GIS mapping techniques.

On the western coast, Kerala with 275.33 kms shoreline has lost 46.4 per cent to erosion while on the eastern coast, West Bengal



with 323.07 coastline, has lost 60.5 per cent to it. The reasons for coastal erosions include increase in

frequency of cyclones and sea level rise and anthropogenic activities such as construction of harbours,

beach mining and building of dams, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Earth Sciences Jitendra

Singh said in a written reply to a question in the House.

There are 526 maps prepared for the entire Indian coast for identifying areas vulnerable to coastal erosion in 1:25000 scale along with 66 district maps, 10 state/UTs maps. A Report on 'National Assessment of Shoreline Changes along Indian Coast' was released in July 2018 and shared with various Central and state government agencies and stakeholders for implementing shore line protection measures. The MoES had successfully demonstrated innovative coastal erosion mitigation measures at two pilot locations: Pudukcherry Beach Restoration Project, Pudukcherry and Kadalur Periyar Kuppam, Tamil Nadu.

Delhi HC dismisses plea seeking Bharat Ratna for Ratan Tata



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Thursday turned down a plea seeking conferment of Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian award, on former Tata Sons chairperson and philanthropist Ratan Tata for his service to the nation.

The Public Interest Litigation (PIL) came before a division bench headed by Acting Chief Justice Vipin Sanghi and also comprising Justice Navin Chawla.

However, the bench asked the petitioner's

counsel to withdraw it or else will impose cost, stating it is not for the court to interfere in the matter. The bench told the petitioner to approach the government if he wants. "Is it for us to decide who the Bharat Ratna should be awarded to? You either withdraw or we will impose cost," the bench said.

Highlighting the philanthropic work of Tata and his company, the petitioner Rakesh, who claimed to be a social activist said in the plea: "Ratan Tata is a great businessman and under his leadership, the business focused on global expansion. After retiring as Chairman of Tata Sons in 2012, Ratan Tata has been active in investing, in a personal capacity, in startups and encouraging young entrepreneurs." It also stated that in March 2020, Ratan Tata had pledged Rs 500 crore from Tata Trusts to fight the Covid-19 pandemic.

The revenue of Tata Group's 30 companies in FY20 was \$106 billion. "The 30 companies spread across 10 clusters operates in over 100 companies and collectively employ more than 7.5 lakh people," the petition read.

Nitish Kumar's comments on Rajya Sabha wish triggers speculation

Patna | Agencies

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has expressed his desire that he would like to serve as a Rajya Sabha member one day, triggering massive speculation about his political future.

While interacting with media persons in Patna, Kumar said he has served as a Lok Sabha member and became a cabinet Minister at the Centre. He also became an MLA and was elected as a Member of Legislative Council in Bihar and held the responsibility of Chief Minister of the state.

"I served in Lok Sabha, Vidhan Sabha and Vidhan Parishad in Bihar but never served as a Rajya Sabha member. It is my wish that I would serve as Rajya Sabha member one day. At present, I would not think of it," the



Janata Dal-United supremo added.

Kumar wants to match his political rival Lalu Prasad and friend Sushil Kumar Modi,

who have served in both the Houses of Parliament and state Assembly.

The political analysts believe that Nitish Kumar never says anything without reason. He knew that the post of Vice-President will be vacant in the next few weeks. Therefore, he wants a respectful exit from the politics of Bihar.

During the 2020 Assembly election, Nitish Kumar's party JD-U managed to win only 45 seats, at the third number in the ranking of number of seats. Still, he managed to bargain with the BJP and retained the position of Chief Minister of Bihar.

The alliance with the BJP is not that smooth in Bihar. The BJP has been targeting him on the issues of deteriorating law and order situation, poor implementation of the liquor ban, among many other issues for quite some time.

World's biggest banks 'continue' to pour billions into fossil fuel

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The 13th annual Banking on Climate Chaos report, the most comprehensive global analysis on fossil fuel banking to date, underscores the stark disparity between public climate commitments being made by the world's largest banks, versus the reality of their largely business-as-usual financing to the fossil fuel industry.

The report, released on Thursday, documents that in the six years since the Paris Agreement was adopted, the world's 60 largest private banks financed fossil fuels with \$4.6 trillion, with \$742 billion in 2021 alone. 2021 fossil fuel financing numbers remained above 2016 levels, when the Paris Agreement was signed.

Of particular significance is the revelation that the 60 banks profiled in the report funneled \$185.5 billion



just last year into the 100 companies doing the most to expand the fossil fuel sector. 'Banking on Climate Chaos' was authored by Rainforest Action Network, BankTrack, Indigenous Environmental Network, Oil Change International, Reclaim Finance, Sierra Club, and Urgewald,

and is endorsed by over 500 organisations from around the world.

The report shows that overall fossil fuel financing remains dominated by four US banks, with JPMorgan Chase, Citi, Wells Fargo, and Bank of America together accounting for one quarter of all fossil fuel financing

identified over the last six years. JPMorgan Chase remains the world's worst funder of climate chaos, while JPMorgan Chase, Wells Fargo, Mizuho, MUFG, and all five Canadian banks were among those that increased their fossil financing from 2020 to 2021. As global oil and gas markets are rocked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the data reveal JPMorgan Chase to be the biggest banker covered in this report for Russian state energy giant Gazprom, both in terms of 2016-2021 totals and when looking only at last year. Chuck Blagden, 350.org Regional Finance Campaigner said: "While China may have begun to lead the way on low-carbon development, their banks are lagging far behind. If banks like ICBC truly want to be global leaders, they need a robust fossil fuel financing exclusion policy that is on par with China's goals for carbon neutrality."



AFTER RAIDS, ED DETAINS LAWYER WHO TARGETED DEVENDRA FADNAVIS

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) early on Thursday raided the homes of well-known lawyer Satish Uke and his brother Pradeep Uke at Parvati Nagar. Later, the ED detained Satish Uke and whisked him for questioning.

Team Absolute | Nagpur

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) early on Thursday raided the homes of well-known lawyer Satish Uke and his brother Pradeep Uke at Parvati Nagar. Later, the ED detained Satish Uke and whisked him for questioning.

A team of ED along with a posse of the CRPF and local police, landed at the Uke residence around 5 a.m., and launched the search operations.

Uke is famed for running a campaign against Bharatiya Janata Party's Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnavis, and filing at least two election petitions against him.

Earlier, he represented a RTI activist Mohnish Jabalpure who had lodged two complaints with the ED in August-September 2019, demanding a probe against Fadnavis for various



alleged actions favouring his wife Amruta, working for the private sector entity, Axis Bank.

Among other things, Jabalpure had accused Fadnavis of allegedly misusing his position as the (then) chief minister to transfer the salary accounts of various government departments from public sector

banks to the Axis Bank ostensibly to favour his wife and the Axis Bank.

"Its nearly 3 years now since my complaints, but the ED has not taken any action in the matter, although I have provided all evidence to them," Jabalpure said. Prior to that, in 2018, Uke had filed a plea in the Bombay High Court seeking compensation

for the family of the CBI Judge B. H. Loya who died in Nagpur on December 1, 2014.

Subsequently, Uke was arrested for certain alleged offences committed over 17 years ago. Only last week, Uke was engaged as the lawyer of Congress state President Nana Patole in a Rs 500-crore defamation case filed against IPS officer Rashmi Shukla in the sensational phone-tapping case. However, it is not immediately clear for which particular case Uke is being probed by the central agency, though there's speculation over a property transaction that is reportedly under the ED scanner. Shiv Sena Chief Spokesperson and MP Sanjay Raut slammed the ED raids at Uke's home and said since he is the lawyer of the state Congress chief, "it wouldn't be surprising if Patole is also raided." Raut - who met Uke last week here reiterated how the Centre and BJP are blatantly misusing official machineries especially in Maharashtra, in their attempts to topple the Maha Vikas Aghadi government with the help of the central probe agencies. "A strange situation is witnessed in which those who provide information and evidence are being punished while the guilty are getting away scot-free. In my complaint, nobody from the PMO has taken any action despite furnishing evidence against the ED," Raut told media-persons in New Delhi.

After 2 yrs of pandemic, Maha to breathe free of all Covid curbs

In a major decision, the Maharashtra government has decided to lift all Covid-19 restrictions exactly two years after the coronavirus pandemic curbs were clamped, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said here on Thursday.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a major decision, the Maharashtra government has decided to lift all Covid-19 restrictions exactly two years after the coronavirus pandemic curbs were clamped, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said here on Thursday. From April 2 -- the Maharashtra New Year day -- the provisions of the stringent Disaster Management Act and Epidemic Diseases Act, enforced in March 2020, shall no longer be implemented in the state.

Accordingly, there will be no curbs on public movement, social, religious or political gatherings, weddings, funerals, visits to malls, cinemas, shopping plazas, hotels, restaurants, swimming pools, gyms, sports activities, travelling by trains, buses or other public modes of transport, to and from workplaces, parties, picnics, vacations, etc. The decision was taken unanimously at a Cabinet meeting presided over by Thackeray this afternoon in view of the huge decline in Covid-19 cases as the third wave is on its last legs after four months.

However, the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government has recommended physical distancing and voluntary wearing of face-masks as a precaution, though there will be no penalties for defaulters. Ministers and top Leaders of the MVA allies, Shiv Sena-Nationalist Congress Party-Congress like Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, Eknath



Shinde, Anil Parab, Dilip Walse-Patil, Jayant Patil, Prof. Varsha Gaikwad, Aslam Shaikh and others warmly welcomed the move.

It may be recalled that the state had gone into a lockdown on March 24, 2020, followed by the nationwide lockdown, and after the first few months of stringent restrictions, the curbs were lifted in stages during the first, second and third waves.

Health Minister Rajesh Tope said that while visiting crowded venues, it is advisable to wear face-masks and Minister of State for School Education Omprakash alias Bacchu Kadu said school students must continue with face masks as a precaution.

Commoners across the state greeted the government step heartily and expressed relief that now they would not be subjected to arbitrary fines, penalties or cases for flouting the Covid-19 norms, and can freely move around anywhere at any time without any fear as they did prior to March 2020. It may be recalled that Maharashtra remains the worst-hit in the country notching 78,74,024 cases in the past two years and a staggering 147,783 deaths -- higher than countries like France and Iran.

'SC, Bombay HC must suo motu intervene to stop misuse of central agencies'

The Maharashtra Congress has appealed to the Supreme Court and Bombay High Court to intervene suo motu and stop the misuse of central investigative agencies by the BJP, here on Thursday.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra Congress has appealed to the Supreme Court and Bombay High Court to intervene suo motu and stop the misuse of central investigative agencies by the BJP, here on Thursday.

State Congress President Nana Patole flayed the manner in which the central probe agencies are being

deployed "to silence voices raised against the BJP and the Centre" and now the courts must intervene on their own to protect the country's democratic system.

The comments came while referring to the raids on prominent Nagpur-based lawyer Satish Uke by the Enforcement Directorate (ED), who is fighting Patole's Rs 500 crore defamation suit against IPS officer Rashmi Shukla in the infamous phone-tapping case. "He is our lawyer in this (defamation) case. He filed the petition. Now suddenly the ED has raided his house and confiscated the case file, laptops, mobiles, etc, and detained him. Adv Uke was also working on other cases including the suspicious death of Judge B.H. Loya and this action is to suppress all who speak out against the BJP," Patole said. He said the

central probe agencies are straying from their functions like probing international money-laundering scams, drug trafficking, FEMA, FERA violations, terror funds, human trafficking or flesh trade. Patole accused the Centre of using the central agencies to intimidate the Opposition parties by such actions and attempting to topple duly elected state governments. "Democracy has been overthrown and replaced by a dictatorship, an undeclared state of Emergency exists in the country. We humbly appeal to the courts to step forward and help save democracy," Patole implored. To a query whether he would be targeted next by the ED, the Congress chief said he "would welcome" the probe agency, but it is time for all to unitedly oppose and fight the pressure mechanism of the BJP.

Cruise ship drug raids: NCB gets 2-months extension to file chargesheet

A Special NDPS Court here granted two months' extension to the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) to file the chargesheet in the sensational raids aboard the Cordelia Cruise ship in which Aryan Khan, son of Bollywood mega-star Shah Rukh Khan, and other celebs are accused, here on Thursday.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A Special NDPS Court here granted two months' extension to the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) to file the chargesheet in the sensational raids aboard the Cordelia Cruise ship in which Aryan Khan, son of Bollywood mega-star Shah Rukh Khan, and other celebs are accused, here on Thursday.

Special NDPS Judge V.V. Patil accepted the plea by the Special Public Prosecutor Advait Sethna that there were certain compelling reasons for seeking extra time to file the chargesheet. These include non-cooperation by

the accused in revealing their passwords, the need to record afresh the statement of a 'witness' K.P. Gosavi who is himself accused of corruption and cheating, and currently in custody of Pune Police, and time to record the statements of 15 suspects. Sethna further argued that since the NCB application has been filed within the 180-day period after the raids, the accused (two, who remain in custody) would not be entitled to default bail even if the order came later.

It may be recalled that on October 2, 2021, the NCB sleuths led by the then Mumbai Zonal Director Sameer Wankhede had swooped on the

Cordelia Cruise ship off Mumbai harbour and detained over half a dozen persons, including Aryan Khan and other celebs.

Later, on October 3, the NCB arrested Aryan Khan though nothing was recovered from him, his friends Arbaaz Merchant, Munmun Dhamecha, and another 17 persons including guests and drug peddlers were also nabbed (total 20).

Four weeks later, on October 28, the Bombay High Court granted bail to Aryan Khan observing that there was no prima facie evidence to show that he and Merchant had conspired to commit offences under the NDPS Act.

Subsequently, Minister Nawab Malik -- arrested by the ED in February -- had made a serial expose questioning the alleged 'farzi' (fake raids) which were intended to seek publicity and extort money, plus ran a huge campaign against Wankhede.

The NCB was further embarrassed when a witness Prabhakar Sail made stunning allegations of extortion and pay-offs involving another 'witness' Kiran Gosavi, alleged Bharatiya Janata Party activists present during the raids, etc.

Following these developments, the case was taken over by a NCB Delhi's Special Investigation Team which is currently probing.

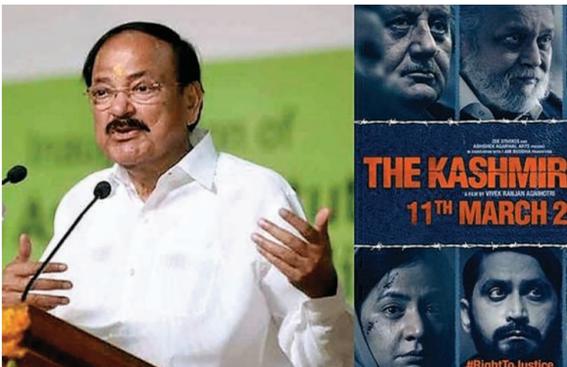
Vice President Venkaiah Naidu joins legion of 'The Kashmir Files' fans

Vivek Ranjan Agnihotri's 'The Kashmir Files' is making headlines for its story and the issue of exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. Now Vice President Venkaiah Naidu has also come out in support of the movie.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Vivek Ranjan Agnihotri's 'The Kashmir Files' is making headlines for its story and the issue of exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. Now Vice President Venkaiah Naidu has also come out in support of the movie.

While some are appreciating the movie, some are criticising it too.



Naidu has emphasised the fact that the movie has nothing to do with politics and nothing is controversial.

He says: "The public will receive it positively, we have seen that documentation of the picture 'The

Kashmir Files'. There is a tremendous amount of enthusiasm among the people and it has nothing to do with politics."

"Unfortunately, in our country, people have the tendency to make everything controversial and also try to give it a political colour. What is political colour, factual, actual and textual. Things being presented to the people why should there be any politics?" he added. Written and directed by Vivek Ranjan Agnihotri, the exodus drama features actors such as Anupam Kher, Mithun Chakraborty, Darshan Kumaar, Pallavi Joshi, Bhasha Sumbli and Chinmay Mandlekar. Produced by Zee Studios and Tej Narayan Agarwal, Abhishek Agarwal, Pallavi Joshi and Vivek Ranjan Agnihotri, 'The Kashmir Files' released in theatres on March 11.

Axis Bank's stocks rise day after Citibank's consumer biz deal

Scrip of Axis Bank rose during the post-noon session on Thursday, a day after the lending major said it will acquire Citibank's consumer businesses in India.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Scrip of Axis Bank rose during the post-noon session on Thursday, a day after the lending major said it will acquire Citibank's consumer businesses in India.

The deal is subject to regulatory approvals. Accordingly, the share price of Axis Bank rose to Rs 757.90 per stock, up Rs 7.70 or 1.03 per cent at 1.15 p.m. from its previous close.

On March 30, Axis Bank said it will acquire Citibank's consumer businesses in India, subject to regulatory approvals.

The boards of Axis Bank and Citibank have approved the deal, comprising the sale of the consumer businesses of Citibank India, which

includes credit cards, retail banking, wealth management and consumer loans, as well as sale of consumer business of Citi's non-banking financial company, Citicorp Finance (India) Ltd, comprising the asset-backed financing business, which includes commercial vehicle and construction equipment loans, as well as the personal loans portfolio.

Post the acquisition, Axis Bank will have 28.5 million savings accounts, over 2.3 lakh 'Burgundy' customers and 10.6 million cards.

The acquired portfolio would increase Axis Bank's credit card customer base by 31 per cent with an additional 2.5 million cards.

Axis Bank is presently the third largest private sector bank in India.

RS 4 CRORE SEIZED FROM CAR NEAR LONAVALA

The Pune rural police said that the seizure had been referred to the Income Tax department and an initial probe suggested that cash belonged to a bullion trader from Sangli district.

Pune | Agencies

The Pune rural police have said they seized cash worth Rs 4 crore from a car intercepted on the Pune-Mumbai Expressway near Lonavala in the early

hours of Tuesday. The police said that the seizure had been referred to the Income Tax department and an initial probe suggested that cash belonged to a bullion trader from Sangli district.

Superintendent of police for Pune rural jurisdiction, Dr Abhinav Deshmukh said: "We had received information that some weapons and cash were being transported in a car. Based on the specific input, a checkpoint was set on the expressway in Lonavala and a car was intercepted in the early hours of Tuesday. In the thorough search of the car, we seized cash worth Rs 4 crore. Two people were in the car."

Deshmukh added: "As per the procedure, a record of the seizure was made at the local police station and the case has been referred to the Income Tax department for further inquiry. The probe suggests that cash belongs to a bullion trader from the Sangli district. In such cases, the owner has to present proof of the legitimacy of cash transport to the IT department. If the IT officials are satisfied with the reasoning, then the cash is released. Otherwise, action is initiated as per the legal provisions. In case it comes to light if the cash is from the proceeds of a crime, the case is referred back to us."

IN VIRAL AUDIO, BJP MLA 'THREATENS' MSEDCL OFFICIAL WITH I-T RAIDS

The alleged foul language used by the BJP leader prompted state Energy Minister Nitin Raut to ask authorities to lodge a complaint against him.

Jalna | Agencies

An audio clip has surfaced on social media, in which Maharashtra BJP MLA Babanrao Lonikar is purportedly heard threatening an MSEDCL official with Income Tax raids for allegedly disconnecting the power supply of his residence located in Aurangabad.

The alleged foul language used by

the BJP leader prompted state Energy Minister Nitin Raut to ask authorities to lodge a complaint against him.

However, Lonikar, a former Maharashtra minister, issued a denial claiming that the audio clip was fake and there was an attempt to tarnish his image through it. In the audio clip of the purported phone conversation, Lonikar, who currently represents the Partur Assembly constituency in Jalna district of the state, is heard asking the Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Ltd (MSEDCL) engineer that the power supply of his bungalow in Aurangabad was snapped and the meter box was taken away although he has paid Rs 10 lakh outstanding bill amount this year.

During the conversation, Lonikar also asked why the MSEDCL officials

do not cut the electricity supply in slum areas, where people steal power by putting hooks on the overhead transmission lines. "The audio clip is fake and it has been created with the aim of tarnishing my image. I have one residence in Aurangabad, but the MSEDCL did not disconnect its power supply and its meter was not seized, hence there is no question of me threatening any official. This is a bogus recording and it is a conspiracy to defame me," he claimed. He, however, said that he was opposed to the MSEDCL's drive of the recovery of outstanding power bills from the poor and farmers. "The MSEDCL officials are doing it under the pressure of the government. They should stop of the recovery bills from the poor and farmers," he

said. "The kind of language he used while talking to the official is shocking. He has been in public life for 30 years and has been state cabinet minister. His behaviour has exposed the party (BJP) that claims to be civilised," Raut, a Congress leader, said. "Lonikar's claim of paying Rs 10 lakh arrears is misleading. The dues of his both the houses are still as high as Rs four lakh. He has not even paid the bill for more than a year," he said. On being contacted, MSEDCL's joint managing director in Aurangabad, Mangesh Gondavale, told PTI, "All the consumers are expected to pay their bills. I have sought the details of this matter (Lonikar's conversation). I will examine it and accordingly we shall act on it."



EDITOR'S SPECS

MEGHALAYA'S ROOT BRIDGES ARE WORLD HERITAGE NOW

Meghalaya's Living Root Bridges, a unique natural phenomenon shaped by human ingenuity, has been included in the UNESCO world heritage site tentative list, officials said. Locally known as "Jingkieng Iri", there are around 100 known living root bridges found in 72 villages in the East Khasi Hills district and West Jaintia Hills district of the mountainous state. A living root bridge is like a suspension bridge formed by guiding the flexible roots of the rubber fig tree across a river or a rivulet and allowing the roots of big trees to grow and strengthen over a period of many years. Most of these root bridges are made by stretching roots of a single tree, planted on one side of a stream or river. It takes about 15 to 20 years to build such a bridge and it has a lifespan of several centuries. Some of these bridges are claimed to be over 200 years old, outliving the bridges made through modern technology. Meghalaya's double-decker living root bridge, also a bio-engineering wonder, earlier showcased in various national events including in the tableau for the Republic Day parade. The Living Root Bridges, which range in span from 15 feet to 250 feet, can survive storms and flash floods and demonstrate a sacred relationship between humans and nature. These root bridges span across rivers connecting one village to another. Environmentalists said that the Living Root Bridges showcased the indispensable human value of living with sensitivity, protection and respect for all life. There are no credible records to suggest when the indigenous tribals developed this living architecture. Meghalaya is often likened to Scotland for its topography, scenic beauty and vegetation.

Sujit Chakraborty

India and Bangladesh share 54 trans-boundary rivers and earlier these rivers greatly supported the livelihoods of millions of riverine communities in both countries and facilitated the locals in numerous ways. However, over the years the condition of these rivers worsened, adversely affecting the economic condition of lakhs of people.

Though the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) and the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) have been jointly trying to boost trade and transportation using National Waterway-1 (Ganga river) and National Waterway-II (Brahmaputra river), the condition of the riverine communities has not improved.

India's Jaipur-based think-tank and NGO -- CUTS International -- under a regional programme "Transboundary Rivers of South Asia (TROSA)" studied the rivers' condition, the dwindling economy of the riverine communities and the forest and environmental situation along the rivers.

Senior Programme Officer of CUTS International, Sumanta Biswas said that increasing urbanisation, deforestation, intensive agricultural processes besides the effect of climate change have adversely impacted the normal course of many rivers leading to unpredictable floods, siltation, declining navigability and increasing erosion and pollution.

"Several dams were constructed for different purposes including power projects and irrigation and these have also stifled the downstream flow of waters. Due to heavy siltation during floods, the rivers have become shallow and wide causing erosion of their banks every year," Biswas told correspondent.

He said: "Due to scarcity of fish in



these rivers, the fisherfolk are compelled to work elsewhere as labourers. For many decades, the riverine communities shared close cultural ties and similar lifestyles and depend on the rivers for agriculture, fisheries and navigation."

Biswas said that the communities living upstream and downstream of the rivers have their diverse perceptions and interests to utilise the rivers and these dissimilar objectives often affect them and the rivers.

"Mutual misperceptions among the upstream and downstream communities need to be defused through consultative dialogue," he observed and suggested that to save and secure the river centric livelihoods the rivers should be protected.

CUTS International officials said that the TROSA aims to reduce poverty in vulnerable river basin communities through increased access and control over water resources in the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) basin of Bangladesh, Nepal and India, and in the Salween basin of Myanmar.

To highlight the concerns of the river communities along the trans-

RIVERS OF SORROW:

Livelihoods of people living along India-B'desh trans-boundary rivers in peril

and their tributaries and distributaries for their livelihood," Chatterjee said.

Arati Bala Das in Khowai (western Tripura) said that when fish were plentiful in the rivers, the men were busy in fishing but with the gradual sinking of the rivers, there is no fish available in the rivers, enormously affecting their livelihood.

"We had also earned money through weaving of the fishing nets but now all these have been ruined, forcing us to look for new avenues," she told correspondent.

Bamboos were also once transported through the rivers to cater to the local bamboo based industries, but scarcity of water in the rivers stopped this.

CUTS International's studies found that till the 1980s the Kushiya, Barak, Gomti and other rivers of the Meghna river basin were frequently used for carrying on trade in stones, tea, jute and other products through the waterways.

However, due to excessive siltation, most river routes have become obsolete over the years.

One of the main challenges in both the river-based routes of Karimganj-Ashuganj and Sonamura-Daudkandi, notified by the Indian and Bangladesh governments, is poor navigability and river depth which makes movement of vessels difficult during the greater part of the year and especially during the lean season.

While small vessels of 500-600 MT can operate in a few of the riverine stretches of the Meghna river basin, larger vessels of around 1,000 MT can operate only during the four month rainy season.

"This is one of the key challenges faced by traders or businessmen in their endeavours to conduct waterways based cross-border trade in this basin.

Dredging for expanding existing

channels or creating new navigation channels, has been used from time to time by both India and Bangladesh as a stop gap solution," the studies said.

"However, it is not a sustainable long-term solution. One of the reasons for that is frequent course changes of the rivers. Short term solutions for enhancing trade through these waterways could be through the use of smaller vessels which can easily navigate through these routes.

"However, long-term solutions would require a more comprehensive approach by both countries to tackle the issue of siltation through a combination of dredging, channel creation and fortification of riverbanks amongst others."

According to the India State of Forest Report 2021 (ISFR 2021), released earlier this year, forest cover in the 140 hill districts of the country has shown a decrease of 902 sq km (0.32 per cent) with all eight states of the northeast region also showing a decline.

Arunachal Pradesh, that has 16 hill districts, has shown a loss of 257 sq km forest cover compared to the 2019 assessment, Assam's three hill districts (- 107 sq km), Manipur's nine hill districts (- 249 sq kms), Mizoram's eight hill districts (- 186 sq km), Meghalaya's seven hill districts (- 73 km), Nagaland's 11 districts (- 235 sq km), Sikkim's four districts (- 1 sq km), and Tripura's four districts (- 4 sq kms).

The total forest cover in the northeastern region is 1,69,521 sq km, which is 64.66 per cent of its area.

The ISFR 2021 assessment shows a decrease of forest cover to the extent of 1,020 sq km (0.60 per cent) in the region.

international

Imran Khan terms no-trust move a 'huge international conspiracy'

Islamabad | Agencies

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday said he will show the 'threatening letter', that he referred to in his public rally in Islamabad on March 27, to senior journalists and government allies later on Wednesday, Express Tribune reported.

The premier made these remarks during a ceremony in Islamabad marking the launch of the e-passports facility.

During the ceremony, the prime minister talked about the no-confidence motion, especially the existence of the alleged letter, which warned of 'dire consequences' if he continued to stay in power.

However, the opposition has rejected the premier's claims; and concerned quarters did not find any evidence



of an external plot to remove Imran Khan from power.

Imran Khan said that the no-confidence motion was a "democratic" right in a parliamentary democracy, but as per him, the current no-trust move was "funded by foreign powers."

The PM said foreign powers could not accept leadership that worked for the people of Pakistan and criticised the United States' War on Terror, saying Pakistan "sacrificed its interest" for foreign powers but they never "valued" its sacrifices.

In an allusion to the alleged letter, Imran said he would show it to senior journalists and allied parties to show that it was "real".

"I will show this document to the top journalists as its details could not be shared in public," he said, calling the move to remove him a part of a "huge international conspiracy."

UKRAINE SETS UP 3 HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS

Kiev | Agencies

Kiev: Ukraine established three humanitarian corridors on Wednesday, the country's Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said on Telegram.

Two corridors were set up to allow Ukrainian civilians to flee the cities of Melitopol and Enerodar in the southern Zaporizhzhia region, which were captured by Russia's forces, Xinhua news agency reported citing Vereshchuk.

Another humanitarian route was established in the eastern Donetsk region to evacuate people from the city of Mariupol, where active hostilities are underway, she added.

Last Thursday, Ukraine established seven humanitarian corridors, following nine corridors the previous day, according to Ukraine's government-run Ukrinform news agency.

OVER 7,000 CONGO REFUGEES CROSS INTO UGANDA AFTER INTENSE FIGHTING BACK HOME

Kampala | Agencies

Over 7,000 people from the eastern part of Congo have crossed into Uganda after intense fighting back home, authorities in Uganda's border district of Kisoro said on Wednesday.

The Congolese are fleeing fighting that started on March 28 between Congolese troops and rebels, Kisoro Chief Administrative Officer Manasseh Rukundo said in a statement, Xinhua news agency reported.

He called for an emergency response, saying the district is overwhelmed by the refugee influx. Some schools have been closed to students to house the refugees, Rukundo said.

"There is pressure on Bunagana Health Center II for first aid, water and latrine usage. The available water in a single water tank at the health facility got used up. The pit latrines for the health centre and Bunagana market were filled up," he said.



"There is also lack of food and non-food items. Most of the refugees are elderly, children and women, and others who are not physically okay and cannot walk easily," Rukundo said in the statement.

The district authorities called for help to screen the newcomers for Ebola and Covid as well as provision of other first-aid services.

The Uganda military on Tuesday said troops are on standby at the Bunagana border point to prevent negative elements from crossing into the country.

Last month, at least 7,000 refugees crossed into Uganda following attacks by Allied Democratic Forces rebels in eastern Congo.

3 PAK SOLDIERS KILLED, 18 INJURED IN MILITANT ATTACK IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

Islamabad: Three Pakistan security personnel were killed and 18 others injured in an overnight attack on a Frontier Corps (FC) fort in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Tank district, Dawn reported.

The injured were shifted to the district hospital where an emergency was declared while more troops had been dispatched to the area.

In a statement, the police said three terrorists were killed in the exchange of fire that began late on Tuesday night and continued till Wednesday morning.

The incident comes days after four soldiers were killed in North Waziristan's Hassan Khel area during an exchange of fire with terrorists who attempted to infiltrate into Pakistan from Afghanistan in the night between March 23 and March 24.

According to a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), a group of terrorists had tried to infiltrate Pakistan at midnight, but their attempt was foiled due to the "alertness and timely response of army troops."

"The terrorists, having failed, fled... and as per intelligence reports, suffered heavy casualties," the statement had read.



GCC SECRETARY-GENERAL APPEALS FOR CEASEFIRE IN YEMEN

Riyadh | Agencies

Riyadh: Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary-General Nayef Falah Al-Hajraf appealed for a ceasefire in Yemen to pave the way for the Yemeni talks. The call went for the Saudi-led coalition involved in a war in Yemen and all Yemeni parties to stop military operations in Yemen, Xinhua reported citing the Saudi Press Agency.

He also renewed the invitation to Ansar Allah, also known as the Houthis, to attend the talks to alleviate the suffering of the Yemeni people.

The talks commenced on Tuesday and will continue until April 7 in Riyadh as part of the efforts to end the Yemeni crisis through political solutions. All previous talks failed to achieve consensus between the parties in the dispute to end the civil war in Yemen. The UN-sponsored talks will review military, political, humanitarian, and social recovery aspects of the crisis in Yemen.

Egyptian president vows support for efforts to hold Libyan polls

Cairo | Agencies

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi has expressed Egypt's "unwavering support" for Libya to hold presidential and parliamentary elections, said the Egyptian presidency.

The Egyptian leader on Tuesday made the remark during a meeting with Mohamed al-Menfi, head of the Libyan Presidential Council, during which they discussed the latest developments of the Libyan crisis.

Sisi expressed "Egypt's unwavering support for the Libyan state institutions to undertake their responsibilities and role, leading to holding the presidential and parliamentary elections," said Egyptian presidential spokesman Bassam Rady in a statement, Xinhua news agency reported.

The Egyptian president also stressed his country's support for the efforts to achieve Libya's greater



interests and preserve its territorial integrity.

For his part, al-Menfi praised Egypt's "vital role" and tireless efforts to restore security and stability in Libya by supporting comprehensive reconciliation efforts among the Libyans and reunifying Libya's state institutions.

He also appreciated Cairo's support for the implementation of the withdrawal of all foreign forces and mercenaries from Libya in order to preserve Libya's unity, security, and sovereignty.

The talks came amid rising tensions between Libyan political forces, which have led to the indefinite postponement of the general elections that were supposed to be held in late 2021.

Libya has been suffering insecurity and chaos since the fall of its late leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, with mercenaries and foreign fighters reportedly operating for years in the country.

On February 10, the Libyan parliament unanimously voted for Fathi Bashagha as the country's new prime minister, replacing Abdul-Hamid Dbeibah who vowed that his government will remain in office until the general elections are held.

Palestinian president condemns killing in Tel Aviv

Ramallah | Agencies

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has condemned the shooting in the Bnei Brak neighbourhood of Tel Aviv that killed at least five Israelis.

In a press statement on Tuesday, Abbas warned that killing Israeli or Palestinian civilians "only leads to further deterioration," adding that "everyone is striving to achieve stability, especially as Muslim, Christian and Jewish holidays are coming."

He also warned of exploiting the shooting attack in Tel Aviv "to carry out aggressions and reactions against the Palestinians by settlers and other Israelis," Xinhua news agency reported.

Abbas said that the cycle of violence "confirms that permanent, comprehensive and just peace is the shortest and correct way to provide security and stability for the Palestinian and Israeli peoples and the people of the region."



Meanwhile, the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) said that the shooting attack was "a response to the Israeli actions and measures against the Palestinians, their properties, and holy places."





CM Chouhan chairs Cabinet meeting

PROVISION OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT SERVICE IN RURAL AREAS APPROVED

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A meeting of the Cabinet was held in Mantralaya on Thursday under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan. The Cabinet has approved the proposed RTC model for providing public transport service in rural areas of the state.



The Cabinet granted administrative approval for Semaria Micro Irrigation Project costing Rs 158 crore 6 lakh, with an irrigation potential of 9 thousand hectares in Rewa district.

mentation of emergency/temporary arrangements to ensure the availability of sand in the state. In such districts sand mines where the contracts have been surrendered/cancelled in the Sand Rules 2019, will be disposed by the Collector by forming small groups from a 10-day e-auction.

the tender of the canceled/dedicated contract of the concerned district. This auction will be done for 3 months or for contract execution by the new contractor of the group, whichever is earlier.

creating value chain for production, storage, marketing of medicinal and aromatic plants by identifying 11 special plant producing areas in the state and developing these areas.

The Cabinet decided to start a new scheme "Programme Planning and Management" to establish communication with the beneficiaries of various schemes of the Chief Minister and to organise programmes for distribution of benefits.

The Cabinet approved the draft of Madhya Pradesh Private University (Establishment and Operation) Amendment Bill, 2022. In the bill, the ordinance to establish Prestige University Indore, Times University, Bhopal, Dr. Preeti Global University Shivpur and LNCT Vidyaapeeth University Indore has been reinstated.

The Council of Ministers has fixed the reserve price for the year 2022-23 for retail sale shops of Bhang, Bhangghota and Bhang sweets by increasing the fixed annual price for the year 2021-22 by 10 percent.

Prepare future generation as per the needs of the future: Governor

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Governor Mangubhai Patel has said that teachers are nation builders. It is their responsibility to prepare the future generation according to the needs of the future.



Patel was addressing the 23rd Foundation Day celebrations of the Infotech Education Society group. The Governor was felicitated with a shawl, shripal and memento. Governor awarded the associates of students, alumni, meritorious students in employment placements. He also unveiled the Unnat tree.

Commission Bharat Sharan Singh said that it is necessary to emphasize on academic and non-academic activities for the integrated education. He said that special attention has been given to this in the new education policy.

In his welcome address, Chancellor Engineer BS Yadav said that efforts started with a noble cause gets selfless support. The progress of IES is proof enough. Efforts have been made to provide educational facilities to the underprivileged and needy children.

IES University Chancellor Prof. Sunita Singh informed that the organization is working with the goal of hi-tech education with value. Group director Manisha presented the report of the development of the institution.

Religious storyteller Mahant Sitaram Das accused of raping minor in Rewa, arrested

MAHANT SITARAM DAS, ALIAS SAMARTH TRIPATHI, ONE OF THE ACCUSED IN RAPE OF A 17-YEAR-OLD GIRL IN MADHYA PRADESH'S REWA DISTRICT HAS BEEN ARRESTED, POLICE SAID ON THURSDAY.

brought to Rewa. According to police, Das's mobile was put on surveillance and his last location was traced in Singrauli, around 150 km from Rewa.

district told IANS over phone.

The development came hours after Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, who during a visit to Rewa on Wednesday, asked Superintendent of Police (SP) Navneet Bhaseen to take strict action against those involved in the case.

Chouhan had also directed district collector Manoj Pushp to use bulldozers to demolish houses of all accused in involved in rape case. The incident allegedly took place in circuit house - a government-run luxury guest house -- located at the district headquarters on March 28.

"We have arrested two of the accused. One was arrested earlier and another called Mahant Sitaram Das, alias Samarth Tripathi was arrested this morning. We are searching for two others who are absconding. Further investigation is underway," a senior police official in Rewa

The victim, a student at Government Degree College for Girls (GDC) in Rewa, was allegedly taken to circuit house by one of her known friends saying that a person would help her score well in the exam. There she was forced to consume liquor and was gang-raped.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Mahant Sitaram Das, alias Samarth Tripathi, one of the accused in rape of a 17-year-old girl in Madhya Pradesh's Rewa district has been arrested, police said on Thursday.

Das, who was absconding after the incident, was arrested from Singrauli district and

CM PLANTED GULMOHAR AND KARANJ SAPLINGS IN SMART CITY PARK

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted Gulmohar and Karanj saplings in Smart City Park along with Water Resources Minister Tulsiram Silawat, MLA Prithvipur Shishupal Yadav and representatives of Gram Prabhat Sanstha.



Cooperation and guidance is also being provided to the farmers to take organic farming and organic products door-to-door. The organisation is also working to train Kalyanis, Divyangs and unemployed villagers self-reliant by making products of cow dung and cow urine in modern cow rearing and providing market for selling the products.

this institution run by doctors and the work of planting saplings and plants in barren and vacant land is being done.

Now Farmers Will Be Able To Repay Kharif Crop Loan by April 15: CM

Bhopal: The meeting of the Council of Ministers under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan began with the recitation of Vande Mataram in Mantralaya. Chief Minister Shri Chouhan said that the last date for repayment of Kharif crop loan for farmers is being extended from March 31 to April 15.

Chouhan said that many farmer brothers and sisters have not been able to deposit this amount. After the expiry of the period, they will become defaulters and they will have to pay more interest after they become defaulter.

MAN GOES TO POLICE AS BOTH WIVES VANISH WITH KIDS

A FARMER IN THE VIDISHA DISTRICT OF MADHYA PRADESH APPROACHED THE POLICE AS BOTH HIS WIVES WENT MISSING, ALONG WITH THEIR CHILDREN. BOTH THE WIVES AND CHILDREN DISAPPEARED ON TUESDAY NIGHT.

Team Absolute | Vidisha

In what can be said to be an unusual case, a man in Madhya Pradesh reached

out to police to help him find his two missing wives. According to a report published in The Times of India (TOI), the complainant, Rajendra Ahirwar, has reached out to the police to find his two wives who have been missing along with their kids since Tuesday.

However, they did not return till late evening and have been unreachable since leaving their home. Registering a missing person's FIR, police have begun an investigation and are questioning the husband and other possible leads.

MADHYA PRADESH CONGRESS PRESIDENT, KAMAL NATH ON THURSDAY CLAIMED THAT DISSIDENTS OF 'G-23' GROUP ONLY DEMANDED ORGANISATIONAL POLLS IN THE PARTY AND NEVER DEMANDED A LEADER OUTSIDE GANDHI FAMILY TO HEAD THE PARTY.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh Congress president, Kamal Nath on Thursday claimed that dissidents of 'G-23' group only demanded organisational polls in the party and never demanded a leader outside Gandhi family to head the party.

Former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, who is very close to Gandhi family, made a statement on G-23 group to the press probably for the first time. Nath made this statement during a press conference at his home at Shyamla Hills in Bhopal on Thursday.

He said that their (G-23 group) demand of organisational polls has been met as elections will be held within three months. He said that all Congress leaders, who are in G-23 group, are his friends with whom he has worked for the party for several years. Replying to demand of Congress president outside Gandhi



going to be held." Nath further stated that they have asked for party elections and they are going to be held. "Polls can't be held without membership, so that process is also going on and elections will be held in the next three months," he added. The veteran Congress leader also said that those sitting in cities

family, Nath said, "This G-23 group is very close to me. They have been my colleagues for years. They have never made any such demand. In fact, all their demands have already been met. The party elections are

like Delhi, Bhopal, Mumbai and Bangalore and talking about the country do not understand towns and villages. The G-23 leaders, who are seeking organisational reforms, had held meetings earlier this month following Congress' dismal performance in the Assembly elections in five states.

Meanwhile, Nath targeted the BJP governments at the Centre and in Madhya Pradesh over rising inflation. "Milk is getting costlier while liquor is becoming cheaper. Rising petrol and diesel prices have a spiralling effect on the prices of edible items including milk, vegetables, medicines and other items of daily need," he said.

Women carry body on cot in MP's Rewa, hospital says no vehicle available

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Four women carrying the body of their relative walked from a community health centre to their village to perform the last rites in Madhya Pradesh's Rewa district. While the women carrying the body were heading towards their village on a national highway, a passerby made a video and uploaded it on a social media site.

and Health Officer, Dr B L Mishra said the health centre staff were trying to arrange for a hearse or an auto, but the family decided to carry the body on the cot and left in a hurry. "It's not a big deal, we don't have a hearse van in the area," Dr Mishra said. According to district administration officials, the lack of vehicles to ferry patients to the Community Health Centre has caused problems in the past as well.

This kind of an incident, where people carry patients, pregnant women or bodies on a cot, cycle or two-wheelers is common in Madhya Pradesh's rural areas. For instance, two days back a woman delivered a baby boy on the side of a road after a 108 Ambulance, the state government-run Janani Express, failed to take the woman to the hospital in Khargone district.

कार्यालय नगर पालिका ब्यावसा जिला राजगढ़ (ब्यावसा) म.प्र.
प्रमाणंक/492 / लो.नि. /2022
व्यावसा दिनांक : 30/03/2022
एतद द्वारा नवीन केन्द्रीकृत प्रणाली में पंजीकृत डेकेदारों से नगर पालिका ब्यावसा जिला राजगढ़ द्वारा वित्तीय वर्ष 2021-22 में नीचे लिखित निर्माण कार्य हेतु (निविदा विनांक एक लाख नवौंलाख संशोधन लाख है) प्रतियोगिता आधार पर निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है।





STRICTLY PRO LINE-UP CONFIRMED

Nadiya Bychkova, Katya Jones and series winner Giovanni Pernice are among returning stars - as new dancers are teased after Oti Mabuse and Alja Škorjanec quit the show



London | Agencies

The Strictly Come Dancing 2022 professional line-up has been announced ahead of this year's series.

Nadiya Bychkova, Katya Jones and series winner Giovanni Pernice are the dancing stars returning to the hit ballroom show for another spin on the dancefloor, as the bill was revealed during Thursday's BBC Morning Live.

Following the exits of two-time winner Oti Mabuse and Alja Škorjanec -

who both recently revealed they were quitting the programme - Strictly bosses have not yet added any new professionals to this year's line-up, but teased that new arrivals

may still be announced, reports dailymail.co.uk.

Other returning pros include Dianne Buswell, Graziano Di Prima, Amy Dowden, Karen Hauer, Neil Jones, Nikita Kuzmin, Cameron Lombard and Gorika Marquez.

The complete line-up concludes with Luba Mushluk, Giovanni Jowita Przystal, Johannes Radebe, Kai Widdrington and Nancy Xu.

Sarah James, Executive Producer, says: "We could not be more proud of the Strictly professional dancers and we are so happy to have so many returning for 2022."

"The world-class skill and extraordinary care they bring to everything they do, from working with their celebrity partners to choreographing and performing remarkable and

unforgettable routines, never ceases to amaze us."

'Game of Thrones' prequel 'House of the Dragon' to debut in August

Los Angeles | Agencies

'House of the Dragon', the first spin-off series of record-breaking juggernaut 'Game of Thrones', will premiere on August 21.

While announcing the premiere date, HBO Max also revealed a new poster for the series and additional images from the show, reports 'Variety'.

Set two centuries before the events of 'Game of Thrones', the ten-episode prequel series will depict how the House of Targaryen fell into a bitter and brutal civil war known as the Dance of the Dragons -- presaging the beginning of the end of the ruling family of Westeros.

The series was created by author George R. R. Martin and Ryan J. Condal, based on Martin's novel 'Fire & Blood'.

Condal and director Miguel Sapochnik are executive producers and co-showrunners on the series; Martin and Vince Gerardis are executive producing as well alongside Sara Hess, Jocelyn Diaz, Ron Schmidt, Clare Kilner, Geeta V. Patel and Greg Yaitanes.

Much like the original series, 'House of the Dragon' boasts a sprawling cast, with a smaller core set of characters including Paddy Considine (as King Viserys I), Emmy D'Arcy (as Princess Rhaenrya, Viserys' first child and his heir apparent), Matt Smith (as Prince Daemon, Viserys' younger brother), Rhys Ifans (as Ser Otto Hightower, the Hand of the King), Olivia Cooke (as Lady Alicent Hightower, Otto's daughter) and Fabien Frankel (as Ser Criston Cole, a knight with eyes for Rhaenrya).

The show will also co-star Steve Toussaint, Eve Best, Sonoya Mizuno, Ryan Corr, Jefferson Hall, David Horovitch, Graham McTavish, Matthew Needham, Bill Paterson and Gavin Spokes.

The premiere date means 'House of the Dragon' has a bit of a head start on the year's other massive fantasy series that serves as a prequel to a widely popular and acclaimed original adaptation: 'The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power'.



Academy starts disciplinary proceedings against Will Smith

Los Angeles | Agencies

Just few days after Hollywood star Will Smith slapped comedian Chris Rock during the 94th Oscars telecast, the Board of Governors held an emergency meeting to discuss the consequences for the best actor winner.

He now faces "suspension, expulsion, or other sanctions permitted," reports 'Variety'.

The statement from the Academy is highly damning, citing the standards of conduct and Smith's violations of "inappropriate physical contact, abusive or threatening behaviour, and compromising the integrity of the Academy".

Smith, who won the Oscar for best actor for 'King Richard' not long after the slap, has been given 15 days notice of a vote regarding his violations and sanctions, and has the opportunity to provide a written response.

The next board meeting is scheduled for April 18, when the Academy may take disciplinary action.

One notable new bit of information is the Academy stating they asked Will Smith to leave the Dolby Theatre but Smith refused to do so.

One of the biggest bits of scrutiny regarding the handling of the moment was Smith not being removed from the auditorium. The Academy has offered clarification saying Smith was asked to leave but refused. "We also recognise we could have handled the situation differently," the Academy statement read. The organisation also offered a formal apology to Rock, the other nominees who attended the ceremony and the viewers at home and in person who witnessed the event.



BRUCE WILLIS STEPPING AWAY FROM ACTING FOLLOWING APHASIA DIAGNOSIS

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Bruce Willis' family has announced the actor is retiring from the profession after being diagnosed with aphasia, a language disorder caused by brain damage that affects a person's ability to communicate.

Willis' family members posted a joint statement to social media announcing the actor's retirement, reports 'Variety'.

"To Bruce's amazing supporters, as a family we wanted to share that our beloved Bruce has been experiencing some health issues and has recently been diagnosed with aphasia, which is impacting his cognitive abilities," the statement reads.

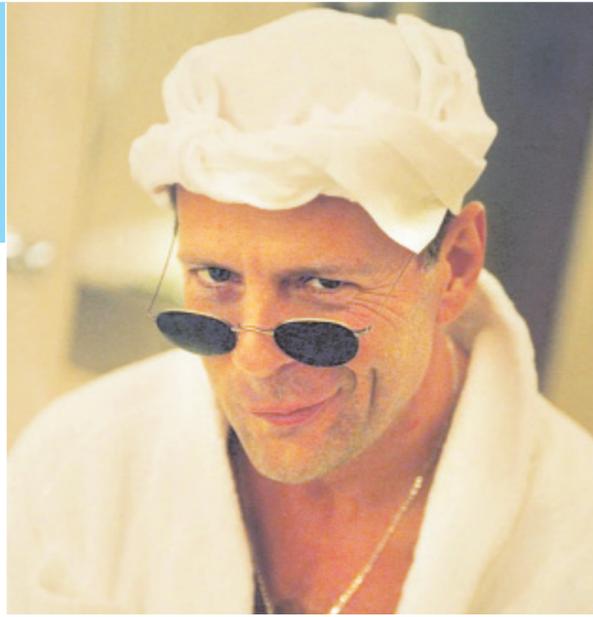
"As a result of this and with much consideration, Bruce is stepping away from the career that has meant so much to him."

"This is a really challenging time for our family and we are so appreciative of your continued love, compassion and support," the statement continues.

"We are moving through this as a strong family unit, and wanted to bring his fans in because we know how much he means to you, as you do to him. As Bruce always says, 'Live it up' and together we plan to do just that."

Willis' acting career started in the early 1980s with uncredited roles in films such as Sidney Lumet's 'The Verdict'.

His career exploded later that decade thanks to his starring role opposite Cybill Shepherd in the series 'Moonlighting' and his performance as John McClane in the 1988 action movie 'Die Hard', which gave Willis his first major film franchise. He's been nominated for five Golden Globes and three Emmys.



Los Angeles | Agencies

Comedian Chris Rock has finally broken his silence and addressed the Will Smith slap topic publicly at a standup show in Boston.

"Whoa, OK!" he exclaimed upon entering the stage at the Wilbur Theatre in an all-white ensemble. Audience members in the 1,000-seat venue greeted the 57-year-old with a rock star's welcome, reports 'Variety'.

Rock basked in the standing ovation, which thundered on for nearly two minutes, before he made another effort to get the ball rolling for the evening: "Yo, let me do the show!"

Chris Rock responds to Will Smith's Oscars slap at standup show

According to 'Variety', after a few additional moments of applause, Rock addressed the elephant in the room.

"How was your weekend?" he began with a knowing wink, drawing a wave of laughter.

"I don't have a bunch of shit about what happened, so if you came to hear that, I have a whole show I wrote before this weekend. I'm still kind of processing what happened. So, at some point I'll talk about that shit. And it will be serious and funny."

An audience member then chanted "F*** Will Smith!" but Rock ignored the comment and began his hour-long set.

"I'm going to tell some jokes," he said. "It's nice to just be out."

Ahead of the 7:30 p.m. show, there was a small media frenzy that grew increasingly hectic outside the relatively inconspicuous theatre. There were at least a dozen broadcast journalists set up as early as two hours before showtime, bundled up in the 30-degree New England weather.

"This is insane," one onlooker shouted as he walked by troves of cameras and on-air reporters.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Jenifer Lopez



IPL 2022: DE KOCK, LEWIS GIVE SUPER GIANTS FIRST WIN, CSK LOSE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

West Indies star Evin Lewis blazed to the fastest half-century -- of the IPL 2022 -- off just 23 deliveries and helped Lucknow Super Giants chase down a stiff target to beat defending champions Chennai Super Kings by six-wicket defeat at the Brabourne stadium here on Thursday.

Lewis exploded into action in the last five overs. He and Ayush Badoni, who struck a half-century on debut against Gujarat Titans, blasted 25 runs off the penultimate over bowled by spinner Shivam Dube as Lucknow reached 211/4 in 19.3 overs.

Lucknow skipper KL Rahul had decided to field first as he wanted to avoid bowling in the dew. But when Chennai Super Kings rode on a 25-ball half-century by veteran Robin Uthappa and 30-ball 49 by Shivam Dube, it looked like they had a match on their hands.

But Rahul and Quinton de Kock raised 99 for the opening wicket, which in the end proved



a good platform for Lewis (55 of 23), Deepak Hooda (13 off 8) and Ayush Badoni (19 of 9) to guide Lucknow Super Giants over the line for their maiden win in IPL.

Lewis then completed his fifty as the West Indies batsman guided Lucknow to victory.

Earlier, defending champions Chennai Super Kings rode on a breezy half-century by veteran Robin Uthappa and a fine 49 by local lad Shivam Dube to post 210/7 in their 20 overs, the fourth time a team posted a 200-plus score in IPL 2022 so far.

In the end the platform set up by Uthappa and Dube helped CSK cross the 200-run mark with skipper Ravindra Jadeja and his predecessor M.S Dhoni landing a few lusty blows towards the end.

Brief scores :

Chennai Super Kings 210/7 in 20 overs (Robin Uthappa 50, Moeen Ali 35, Shivam Dube 49; Bishnoi 2/24, Andrew Tye 2/41, Avesh Khan 2/38) lost to Lucknow Super Giants 211/4 in 19.3 overs (K.L. Rahul 40, Quinton de Kock 61, Evin Lewis 55 not out; Dwaine Pretorius 2/31) by six wickets.

WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

England reach final after a superb 137-run victory over South Africa

Christchurch | Agencies

On the back of a magnificent 129 from opener Danni Wyatt and a career-best 6/36 by left-arm spinner Sophie Ecclestone, defending champions England on Thursday reached the final of ICC Women's Cricket World Cup with a superb 137-run over South Africa at Hagley Oval.

It continues the remarkable upward swing of England, who began their title defence with three losses but fought back to win next five matches in a row, including Thursday's semi-final, to storm into their second straight World Cup final. They will now meet Australia in the final at the venue of their semifinal win on Sunday. Chasing a mammoth 294 in a high-pressure knockout match, South Africa were never in the chase from the word go. Pacer Anya Shrubsole removed both openers, Laura Wolvaardt and Lizelle Lee, cheaply in her first two overs. Wolvaardt, the leading run-scorer in the tournament, departed without



troubling the scorers. Lara Goodall and captain Sune Luus tried to resurrect the South Africa innings. But England struck back as Kate Cross cleaned up Luus while Goodall tried to scoop against Charlie Dean, but the ball shattered her stumps. From 67 for 4, Ecclestone ran through the rest of the batting line-up with all six wickets as South Africa crumbled to 156 all out in 38 overs. Earlier, England posted an imposing 293/8, thanks to Wyatt's knock laced with 12 boundaries. She had plenty of luck on her side as she was roped five times in the

innings (22, 36, 77, 116 and 117), including twice in an Ayabonga Khaka over. The reprieve meant Wyatt took the attack to South Africa's bowlers and put their usually tight fielders under pressure in a rematch of a thrilling 2017 World Cup semi-final.

Brief scores :

England 293/8 in 50 overs (Danni Wyatt 129, Sophia Dunkley 60; Shabnim Ismail 3/46, Marizanne Kapp 2/52) beat South Africa 156 all out in 38 overs (Mignon du Preez 30, Lara Goodall 28; Sophie Ecclestone 6/36, Anya Shrubsole 2/27) by 137 runs

Santosh Trophy: National Football Championship for to be held from April 16

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The 75th National Football Championship for Santosh Trophy will be held in Malappuram, Kerala from April 16, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) announced on Thursday.

All the matches in the tournament are set to be held at two venues in Malappuram -- the Manjeri Payyanad Stadium and the Kottappadi Stadium.

A total of 10 teams will be participating in the National Football Championship for Santosh Trophy, with old foes West Bengal and Punjab set to kick-off the proceedings. The 10 teams have been divided into two groups of five each, with the top two teams from each group set to proceed to the semi-finals,



which will be played on April 28 and 29.

The final of the tournament is set to be held on May 2 at the Manjeri Payyanad. "The Hero 75th National Football Championship for Santosh Trophy is being hosted in Malappuram, Kerala, with logistical and infrastructural aid from the

Government of Kerala," the AIFF said in a release.

GROUPS:

Group A: Meghalaya, Punjab, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Kerala
Group B: Gujarat, Karnataka, Odisha, Services, Manipur

MIAMI OPEN SWIATEK BEATS KVITOVA, ENTERS INTO SEMIFINALS

Miami | Agencies

World No.2 seed Poland's Iga Swiatek advanced to the Miami Open semifinals after defeating Petra Kvitova 6-3, 6-3 in the quarterfinals on Wednesday (IST).

The 20-year-old is into her tour-leading fifth semifinal of the season and third straight at the WTA 1000 level. Swiatek joins Caroline Wozniacki, Victoria Azarenka, and Jelena Ostapenko as the only players to have made four or more WTA 1000 semifinals before their 21st birthdays. The Polish star, who is set to rise to World No.1 after Miami, will face 16th seed Jessica Pegula on Friday night for a spot in her third consecutive WTA 1000 final.

Swiatek's run to her first Miami semifinal has been nothing short of dominant. Coming off her back-to-back titles in Doha and Indian Wells,



Swiatek has lost a total of 15 games over four matches and has not dropped more than three games in a set in Miami. Her victory over No.28 seed Czech Kvitova was her tour-leading 24th of the season (24-3). Swiatek continued to pressure

Kvitova's serve through the second set. The Czech buckled down to save four break points to hold 2-1. Swiatek went on to grab a third and final break after 1 hour and 17 minutes to seal her eighth consecutive win over a left-handed opponent.

CASPER RUUD DEFEATS ALEXANDER ZVEREV, ENTERS INTO SEMIS

Miami: The Norwegian Casper Ruud earned his first win against second seed Germany's Alexander Zverev 6-3, 1-6, 6-3 in the Miami Open on Wednesday (IST) to advance to a semifinal showdown against Argentine Francisco Cerundolo. Now the 23-year-old will have a big opportunity against World No. 103 Cerundolo, who had never previously competed in a Masters 1000 main draw or won a tour-level match on hard court. This will be the pair's first ATP clash. When the Norwegian received treatment on his right foot, which he later said was because of taping on his toe, the momentum was firmly in Zverev's corner. Ruud never panicked, though.

Powerlifters Sudhir, Jaideep shine as Haryana top with six gold medals in Nationals

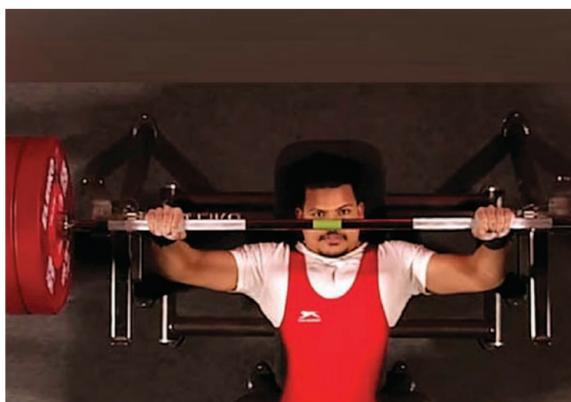
Team Absolute | New Delhi

Asian Para Games medallist Sudhir and Jaideep, who represented India at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics, clinched gold medals as Haryana topped the medals table with six gold medals at the 19th Senior and 14th Junior National Para Powerlifting Championship 2022 held at Netaji Subhas Eastern Centre, Kolkata.

Overall Haryana won 11 medals that also included three bronze and two silver. Haryana was followed by Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Delhi and UP with three gold medals each.

In the men's under 88kg category, Sudhir lifted an impressive 232kg enough to take the gold way ahead of Delhi's Joginder Singh (150kg) and Bihar's Mahan Aditya (145KG).

Jaideep, competing in men's under 72kg, lifted 151kg for the gold finish-



ing ahead of Gujarat's Ramubhai Bambhava (150kg) and Delhi's Kuldeep Kumar (146kg).

The other gold medallists for Haryana were Ashok (men's -65kg), Deepak (men's -80kg), Pradeep Joon

(men's -107kg) and Geeta (women's -73kg).

In men's under 49kg finals, World Championships medallist Paramjeet Kumar from Punjab came out with one of his best shows lifting 165kg for the gold. His lift was way ahead of his Worlds bronze medal effort as he finished ahead of Gujarat's Dilip Shukla (118kg) and Delhi's Gulfam Ahmed (118kg).

Seasoned powerlifter Farman Basha, an Asian Para Games medallist, was also in action representing Karnataka claiming the gold in men's under 54kg event.

In the women's event, Asian Para Games silver medallist Shakina Khatun of Karnataka took the under 50kg event gold with her third successful lift of 95kg. Tamil Nadu's Gomathi (58KG) and Sapna Shah of Gujarat (52kg) finished second and third, respectively.

IPL 2022: Big boost for Mumbai Indians as Suryakumar Yadav returns from injury

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Five-time champions Mumbai Indians got a boost in its middle-order when India batter Suryakumar Yadav joined the squad's bio-bubble after recovering from a finger injury and completing the mandatory quarantine period.

Yadav on Wednesday participated in a strength and conditioning session with some other Mumbai Indians stars and will now be available for their match against Rajasthan Royals on Saturday (April 2) at the DY Patil Stadium here.

Suryakumar had suffered a hairline fracture during a fielding attempt in the third



and final T20I against the West Indies in Kolkata on February 20. He was undergoing rehabilitation at the National Cricket Academy and has recently recovered from the injury. Suryakumar Yadav exited his mandatory quarantine and joined the

team for the gym session in the company of his mates Kieron Pollard, Ishan Kishan and Jasprit Bumrah," the franchise informed in a statement on Thursday. In Yadav's absence, the Mumbai Indians' middle-order had struggled to build on the good start provided by openers Rohit Sharma (41) and Ishan Kishan (81), who raised 67 for the opening wicket in their four-wicket defeat against Delhi Capitals. Mumbai Indians had posted a below-par 177/5 that Delhi chased in 18.2 overs.

If Yadav returns to action against the Royals on Saturday, the pressure on Tilak Verma and Kieron Pollard in the middle order will be eased a bit.

HOCKEY WOMEN'S JUNIOR WORLD CUP

CONFIDENT INDIA EYE WINNING START

Potchefstroom | Agencies

The Indian Junior Women's Hockey team led by Salima Tete is all geared up for the FIH Hockey Women's Junior World Cup which gets underway here from April 1.

Having patiently waited for this moment, after the coveted quadrennial tournament was postponed from December 2021 due to the omicron-threat in South Africa, the Indian team's dressing room is filled with excitement ahead of their first match in Pool D against Wales on 2nd April. Reflecting the team's sentiments, Captain Salima Tete who had led the U-18 team to a historic Silver medal at



the Youth Olympic Games in 2018 said, "There is a lot of excitement among the players. Everyone has worked so hard for this moment and used the postponement to gain better exposure, prove

as a team so we can put up our best performance here." She further highlighted the team's preparations in the lead to the tournament, having landed in Potchefstroom almost a week ahead of their first match. It definitely helped to have our last camp before coming here in Bhubaneswar, Odisha where we trained in quite hot conditions." The Indian team will begin their camp on April 2 followed by their second Pool D match against Germany. They will take on Malaysia in the third match and will hope to play the quarter final on April 8 while the Semifinals and final will be held on April 10 and 12 respectively.

IPL 2022: Knight Riders to clash with Punjab Kings on Friday

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The 15th edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL) is just five days into its over two-month schedule and the Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) are getting ready to play the third match of their campaign.

Having started with a stunning victory against defending champions Chennai Super Kings on the opening day, KKR slumped to a three-wicket defeat to Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) at the DY Patil Stadium on Wednesday.

On Friday, the Shreyas Iyer-led KKR will take on Punjab Kings at the Wankhede Stadium, with both teams looking to register their second win in the event. Punjab Kings had started their campaign with a five-wickets win against RCB in their first match. KKR, in contrast, have won the IPL twice -- 2012 and 2014 and also hold a huge



advantage in head-to-head encounters, having won 19 of their 29 clashes. Though they had won a match each in the last edition, KKR had finished runner-up while PBKS ended sixth, missing the playoffs once again. This time both franchises have assembled strong squads and will be hoping to

make a good start in IPL 2022. Chasing 206 for victory against RCB, PBKS rode on useful contributions by skipper Mayank Agarwal (32), fellow opener Shikhar Dhawan (43), Bhanuka Rajapaksa (43) and some quick runs by Odean Smith (25 off 8) to romp to victory. Punjab Kings skipper Aggarwal will be looking forward to a better performance from his bowlers who had conceded 200-plus score in their opening match. While their batters carried PBKS to victory in a high-scoring encounter, KKR were all out for 128 in 18.5 overs against RCB and skipper Shreyas Iyer will be hoping their batting to click in their next match. He himself will be hoping to fire in Friday's match and will also be expecting that the likes of Venkatesh Iyer, Nitesh Rana and Sunil Narine too come good early in the tournament. All in all, Iyer will be happy if KKR manage to capitalise on their head-to-head record against PBKS and record another win.



'I DECLUTTER MY INSTAGRAM ALWAYS'

Alia Bhatt clarifies alleged rumours of being upset with director S.S.Rajamouli

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood actress Alia Bhatt who is riding high on success these days with her two blockbuster releases Gangubai Kathiawadi and RRR.

A few days back, rumours were rife that the actress is upset with RRR director S.S. Rajamouli over her brief screen time in the film since she had deleted posts related RRR from her social media handle. There were also reports that she has unfollowed the director. However, the actress has now cleared the air and issued a statement clarifying the same. Here is what Alia's statement reads,

"In today's randomness I've heard that I apparently deleted my RRR posts because I'm upset with the team. I sincerely request everyone not

to make assumptions based on something as random as an Instagram grid. I ALWAYS realign old video posts from my profile grid because I prefer it to look less cluttered. I am eternally grateful for I got to be a part of the world of RRR. I loved playing Sita, I loved being directed by Rajamouli Sir, I loved working with Tarak and Charan - I loved every single thing about my experience on this film.

The only reason I'm bothering to clarify this is because Rajamouli Sir and the team have put in years of effort and energy to bring this beautiful film to life and I refuse to let any misinformation around the film and experience slide."

For the unversed, the film is reigning at Box office. She also recently wrapped up shoot of her upcoming film Brahmastra.



Team Absolute | Hyderabad

CHIRANJEEVI: I REGRET I WAS UNABLE TO WORK WITH TAAPSEE

Megastar Chiranjeevi, who attended the pre-release event for Taapsee Pannu-starrer 'Mishan Impossible', had showered praise on the actress. Stating that he regrets not having worked with Taapsee, Chiranjeevi spoke highly of the 'Pink' actress. "I was surprised at Taapsee's appearance in the movie 'Jhummandi Naadam'. By the time I could work with her, I had become busy in politics. I regret being in politics, without having worked with actresses like Taapsee", Chiranjeevi said on a witty note.

Chiranjeevi, who is always on the supporting side of the budding artistes also hailed actor Suhaas for his outstanding performance in 'Colour Photo'. Chiranjeevi then had briefly addressed the other budding directors, as he wished Sandeep Raj ('Colour Photo' director), Swaroop RSJ ('Mishan Impossible' director),

'Arjun Reddy' fame Sandeep Reddy Vanga, and many others on this occasion.

Chiranjeevi's generous compliments at the event had given much encouragement to the budding artists, as they were visibly moved.

The movie 'Mishan Impossible' is produced by Niranjan Reddy and Anvesh Reddy on Matinee Entertainment, while it is directed by 'Agent Sai Srinivasa Athreya' fame Swaroop RSJ. Billed as a comedy-thriller, 'Mishan Impossible' surrounds the life of three children, who are on the hunt to find the underworld don Dawood Ibrahim. With comedy as the core essence, this thriller is one of the most hyped upcoming movies. 'Mishan Impossible' will hit the screens on April 1, with Taapsee Pannu in the lead role.



'GONNA BE ONE MAD FUN RIDE', SAYS NUSHRRATT ON HER UPCOMING FILM

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Nushratt Bharuccha now has started the shoot for 'Selfiee' in Bhopal on Thursday. Speaking about kickstarting the shoot, Nushratt said, "I am super excited to be a part of the Selfiee cast and looking forward to be working on one more film with Akshay sir.. And that too right after Ram Setu, which makes it even more special!" 'Selfiee' is helmed by director Raj A Mehta, with whom Nushratt had worked with on 'Ajeeb Daastaans'. On reuniting with him, Nushratt said, "Of course my director Raj Mehta, who I have last done Ajeeb Dastaans with, he is one crazy fun director! And him and Akshay sir on set, it will definitely be a laugh riot all day everyday! Selfiee is going to be one mad fun ride!"

Adding to it, she said, "I'm also really looking forward to working with Emraan sir and Diana. I've enjoyed watching their movies and excited to be working with them on Selfiee."

On the work front, Nushratt currently has 5 films in her kitty, namely - 'Ram Setu', 'Janhit Mein Jaari', 'Chhorii 2', 'Hurdang' and 'Selfiee'.



SHUBHAAVI CHOKSEY: STRONG WOMEN DON'T PUT DOWN EACH OTHER

Team Absolute | Mumbai

'Bade Acche Lagte Hai 2' actress Shubhaavi Choksey talks about women empowerment and how strong women don't put down each other.

She says: "The most inspirational women are those who give strength to others apart from themselves. They are those who don't put others down when they rise."

"They are those who are fearless to take up a challenge and even more courageous to admit that they need help if at all required."

She concludes by naming the two most influential women in her life.

The actress adds: "My grandmother and mother are the women who symbolise strength, truth, discipline, valiance and above all compassion. I hope I have imbibed these in my life."



I'M A BOLLYWOOD ACTOR, WON'T DO ANY REGIONAL FILMS: JOHN ABRAHAM

Team Absolute | Hyderabad

Bollywood actor John Abraham, who is busy publicising his upcoming movie 'Attack', was quizzed about his appearance in a south Indian movie, which apparently irked the actor.

John, who was visibly irked with the question, asserted his choice not to act in regional movies.

Of late, there have been reports that John will be seen in an important role in Prabhas's upcoming multi-lingual action movie 'Salaar'.

When quizzed about the same, John said, "I am not acting in any regional films. I don't know where this speculations started. I will never do supporting roles in regional films. I am a Bollywood actor."

With this, it is confirmed that John isn't a part of Prabhas's upcoming magnum opus 'Salaar', but John's way of answering the question has raised eyebrows.

While some south Indian websites reported the incident, they have raised a question on what was so offensive that John had reacted in that way.

John Abraham, was earlier quizzed regarding the box office clash of his movie 'Attack' with Ram Charan, NTR-starrer 'RRR'. John's cold reply to that question was discussed among fans as well.

Abhishek Bachchan on the enduring power of the big screen

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Abhishek Bachchan is an actor with an impeccable sense of humour and wit. While he may be known for serious or intense roles, the actor is set to bring in a new flavour with his soon to be released social comedy 'Dasvi', which also stars Yami Gautam and Nimrat Kaur. In a recent conversation with, Abhishek spoke about collaborating with a first-time director for the film, the changing space of content industry courtesy OTT and his liking towards the genre of comedy.

For him, the script of 'Dasvi' is what did the trick, something that he would love to watch on screen as a part of the audience, "I think it's predominantly the script and the story was very unique. It was so new and fresh and it was all about how you were saying that and it is a film which I really wanted to watch. That is the reason I signed up for it."

The film has been helmed by debutant director Tushar Jalota. The actor opines that it's always great to work with first-time directors as they bring a whole different energy to the table.

Abhishek says, "They have a very unique voice and a very unique outlook on life. I feel they don't come with any preconceived notions and that's exciting because it gives you a fresh perspective."

Ask him how would he define his character in the film or if there's someone in the history of cinema that he has modelled this character on and pat comes the reply, "I don't think there is anybody like him. I like to think he is very unique. He was a very fun character to play, I had the most fun in front of the camera."



Sophie Choudry