

# absolute india



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AMRITPAL STILL ABSCONDING, NSA SLAPPED ON FOUR OF HIS AIDES, FOREIGN KHALISTAN SUPPORTERS RUN

## ANTI INDIA CAMPAIGN

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) late on Sunday summoned the senior-most UK diplomat in India to convey its strong protest after some pro-Khalistani groups allegedly took down the Tricolour at the Indian High Commission in London. The MEA, in a statement, said an explanation was demanded for the complete absence of the British security that allowed these elements to enter the High Commission premises.

Team Absolute | Chandigarh

Khalistan ideologue and 'Waris Punjab De' chief Amritpal Singh is still absconding while so far 114 people have been arrested in connection with the March 18 crackdown, Punjab Police's Inspector General Sukhchain Singh Gill said here on Monday.

In a major development, the National Security Act (NSA) has been imposed on four aides of Amritpal Singh. Amritpal Singh's uncle Harjit Singh, who was arrested on early Monday, is also likely to be booked under the stringent law.

While the four aides of Amritpal Singh -- Daljeet Singh Kalsi, Bhagwant Singh, Gurmeet Singh, and Pradhanmantri Bajeka -- have been kept in Assam's Dibrugarh jail, his uncle is also being taken there.

Addressing the media, Gill clarified that Amritpal Singh continued to be absconding and a manhunt was on to arrest him at the earliest. He, however, did not rule



against Amritpal Singh and his associates include causing disharmony and obstruction in police working and attack on police, besides possessing illegal weapons.

Gill clarified that there was total normalcy in Punjab and the cordon and search operation is underway.

### Indian consulate building in San Francisco also attacked

Washington: Even as the brouhaha over the incident of the tricolour being pulled down at the Indian High Commission building in London had barely died down, videos of a mob attacking the Indian consulate in the US city of San Francisco have surfaced.

As per reports, with loud music playing in the background, a large mob is seen in the video, attacking the Indian consulate, spray-painting a huge graffiti on its outer wall, saying "Free Amritpal".

Employees of the consulate were later seen removing the flags in the videos, when suddenly a mob can be seen breaking through a barricade from behind which they were shouting slogans. The employees can be seen running inside the building with the protestors trying to follow them.

### MAN ARRESTED AFTER VANDALISM AT INDIAN HIGH COMMISSION IN LONDON

London: A man has been arrested after some pro-Khalistani groups vandalised the Indian High Commission in London and detached the Indian flag from the first-floor balcony of the building. Videos on social media showed a crowd waving yellow "Khalistan" banners and a man detach the Indian flag from the first-floor balcony of the building, the BBC reported. Two security guards were injured in the violent protest and an investigation has been launched.

Officers were called to the Indian High Commission at about 13:50 GMT on Sunday. Upon arrival "the majority of those present had dispersed prior to the arrival of police", Metropolitan Police (Met) was quoted by the British broadcaster as saying. Responding to the incident, London's mayor Sadiq Khan said in a tweet: "I condemn the violent disorder and vandalism that took place at the Indian High Commission today (Sunday). There is no place in our city for this kind of behaviour." The British High Commissioner to India Alex Ellis described the incident as "disgraceful" and "totally unacceptable".

## Clear all OROP dues by Feb 28, 2024, SC tells Centre

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Monday noted that Centre is facing difficulties in clearing the pension arrears of retired defence personnel under One Rank One Pension (OROP) scheme in one go, but emphasised that it is duty-bound to comply with its 2022 judgment on the payment of arrears and asked it to pay dues for 2019-2022, amounting to nearly Rs 28,000 crore, by February 28 next year.

Attorney General R. Venkataramani submitted before a bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud that the budget outlay was not sufficient to meet the expenses and the total pensioners are over 20 lakh, and the OROP arrears would be in the range of Rs 28,000 crore. The Centre has proposed to pay the arrears by April 30, 2024.

The bench, also comprising Justices P.S. Narasimha and J.B. Pardiwala, noted that out of 25 lakh pensioners, four lakh did not qualify for the OROP scheme as they were getting enhanced pensions. It said the arrears should be cleared by February 28, 2024, and formulated the schedule for payment of arrears to different groups of pensioners under the OROP scheme. The bench directed that the six lakh family pensioners and gallantry award winners should be paid their OROP dues by April 30, 2023, and retired servicemen aged 70 years and above, who are nearly 4-5 lakh, should get their dues in one or more instalments by June 30.

The bench further added in three equal instalments by February 28, 2024, the dues should be paid to the remaining 10-11 lakh pensioners.



### SC junks PIL seeking registration of live-in relationships with Centre

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday junks a PIL seeking framing of norms for registration of every live-in relationship with the central government, saying it is a "hare-brained" idea.

Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud told the counsel, representing the petitioner, "What does the Centre have to do with registration of live-in relationships? What kind of hare-brained idea is this?"

The bench, asked the petitioner's counsel if she wanted to foster the security for these people or she does not want them to get into live-in relationships. The plea was filed by lawyer Mamta Rani.

The petitioner's counsel submitted that the petitioner wanted the relationship to be registered, which would enhance their social security.

The bench said, "It is high time this court starts imposing costs on petitioners who file these kinds of PILs. Dismissed."

The plea had cited the recent killing of Shradha Walker allegedly by her live-in partner Aaftab Amin Poonawala. The petitioner sought framing of rules and guidelines for registration of such relationships.

## GOLD IS BANKABLE, SHINES MORE THAN SOME WESTERN BANKS

Chennai:

Gold has turned into a more bankable asset and its prices going up as several American banks are going down, say experts. On Monday, the yellow metal shone brighter at the markets with gold at the MCX crossing the Rs 60,000 mark.

Gold prices hitting a fresh high is a sign of slower economic growth and lower interest rates with ample liquidity to help the system steer of the current situation. The current situation globally may take some time to clear out. Globally, central banks have been adding gold reserves. "We expect gold to gain further and touch new highs in the next few months. Domestically, it is expected to trade in the range of Rs 61,000-62,000/10gm. Internationally, it may scale levels of \$2,050-2100/oz," Colin Shah, MD, Kama Jewelry, said.



## Cong promises Rs 3K dole for unemployed graduates if voted to power in K'taka

Bengaluru | Agencies

In a big announcement, senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi promised to provide Rs 3,000 allowance for unemployed graduates in Karnataka if voted to power in the state.

Addressing the Yuva Kranthi Convention at Belagavi on Monday, Rahul also announced Rs 1,500 allowance for unemployed Diploma holders. The allowance will be provided for two years. "The Congress government will provide 10 lakh jobs in the state," he said.

Rahul Gandhi further stated that his party's government in Karnataka would also fill up 2.50 lakh jobs that are vacant.

"During Bharat Jodo Yatra, women have poured out their sufferings. To reciprocate them, under the Gruha Lakshmi scheme every woman house owner will get a Rs 2,000



allowance as promised and poor families are assured of giving 10 kilograms of rice free of cost. Under the Gruha Jyothi scheme, the Congress party has decided to provide 200 units of free electricity to every house," he stated.

"The government should complete the process of increasing

the reservation for scheduled castes and tribes from 15 to 17 per cent and three to seven per cent respectively. "We should unite to fight the corrupt BJP and root out the BJP government. I will come to whichever district you invite. We all should defeat BJP," Rahul Gandhi stated.

## SISODIA'S JUDICIAL CUSTODY IN CBI CASE EXTENDED TILL APRIL 3

New Delhi: A Delhi court on Monday extended Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and former deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia's judicial custody till April 3, by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in connection with the now-scrapped excise policy case.

On March 17, the court extended Sisodia's Enforcement Directorate (ED) custody in the same case till March 22.

After the CBI arrested Sisodia on February 26, the ED also arrested him in the same case on March 9.

On March 6, Special Judge M.K. Nagpal of the Rouse Avenue Court sent Sisodia to 14 days of judicial custody in CBI case, which expired on Monday. He is lodged in the national capital's Tihar jail.

The court will also hear Sisodia's bail application on Tuesday, in the same case being probed by the CBI.

## INDIA LOGS 918 FRESH COVID CASES, 4 DEATHS IN LAST 24 HOURS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India recorded a single-day rise of 918 new Covid cases in the past 24 hours pushing the active cases to 6,350, according to the Union health ministry data on Monday.

Meanwhile, the country also reported four Covid deaths -- two in Rajasthan, and one each in Karnataka and Kerala. With this, the total death toll stands at 5,30,806.

Recovery of 479 patients in the same period took the cumulative tally to 4,41,59,182.



Consequently, the recovery rate stands at 98.80 per cent.

Meanwhile, the Daily Positivity rate has been pegged at 2.08 per cent, while the Weekly Positivity Rate stands at 0.86 per cent.

## PORN CLIP PLAYED AT PATNA RAILWAY STATION FOR 3 MINS

Patna: Hundreds of passengers waiting to board trains at the Patna railway station faced an awkward situation when a porn clip played at all the TV screens installed across the 10 platforms for three minutes.

The incident took place on Sunday night.

The contract of telecasting videos and films on the railway stations of Danapur division is given to a private company.

Railway Protection Force (RPF) officials immediately contacted them and stopped the telecast. Confirming the incident, Prabhat Kumar, official spokesperson of the DRM office in Danapur, said: "We have initiated an inquiry into the incident and started the process of cancellation of contract. We have registered an FIR against the company officials... It is an intolerable incident. We will blacklist this company." Sources said that a similar incident had taken place on Sunday morning as well in the same railway station.

## LS ADJOURNED FOR THE DAY AMID PROTESTS BY TREASURY BENCHES OVER RAHUL'S REMARKS



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Lok Sabha was on Monday adjourned for the day till Tuesday after noisy protests by treasury benches over Rahul Gandhi's remarks on democracy. As soon as the House convened at 2 p.m., BJP MPs rose from their seats and started shouting slogans against Gandhi, saying "Rahul Gandhi Shame! Shame!" and "Rahul Gandhi Maafi Maango (Rahul Gandhi apologize)". The Congress mem-

bers initially shouted slogans seeking the JPC probe in Adani issue, however in a change of strategy, neither did they enter the well of the House nor did they indulge in noisy protests, and after a few minutes, took their seats, even as the BJP members kept up the tempo of protests.

Kirit Solanki, who was in the Chair, adjourned the House at 2.15 p.m. after allowing papers to be laid. This was the sixth consecutive day when the Lok Sabha proceedings were washed out without transacting any business.

## Marriage ended even before it began

Kanpur (UP) | Agencies

A groom had to return home without his bride when the latter realised that he belonged to Rajasthan, and not Prayagraj, as claimed earlier. The newly-wed bride refused to go that 'far' to live with her in-laws and called up the police.

According to the woman's family, the man had claimed to be from Prayagraj. Chakeri ACP Amarnath Yadav said that the woman had approached policemen deployed at a Police Response Vehicle (PRV) Dial -112 on the Varanasi-Kanpur highway, seeking their help to go back to her parents' house.

"I have been travelling for the last seven hours from Varanasi, and yet have not reached my in-laws' place. I am feeling completely exhausted and now I do not want to go to Rajasthan. I will not go that far," she told the ACP when he visited the spot. The girl's marriage had been fixed with the man, a resident of Bikaner, Rajasthan.

The baraat reached Varanasi where the wedding was solemnised. After the wedding, the newly-wed couple and the 'baraat' were returning home in a bus.

When the bus stopped at a highway petrol pump in Kanpur, the bride started crying, saying that her in-laws' house could not be reached even after seven hours of journey.

She called up the police and narrated her problem after which the ACP told the sub-inspector on



duty to interrogate the groom.

The groom Ravi told the police that the girl's family members were aware of everything.

On the other hand, when the police contacted the bride's mother, she, too, denied any knowledge

that the groom belonged to Rajasthan.

Subsequently, her mother asked the police to send the bride back to Varanasi.

The police sent the bride to Varanasi and the groom returned to Bikaner without her.



# INFLATION LIKELY TO BE DETERMINED BY HEATWAVES, EL NINO PROSPECTS: MONTHLY ECONOMIC REVIEW

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Government has said that the inflation trajectory is likely to be determined by extreme weather conditions like heat waves and the possibility of an El Nino year, volatility in international commodity prices and pass-through of input costs to output prices.

In its monthly economic review for the month of February 2023, released on Monday, the finance ministry, quoting forecasts by various international organisations, has said that inflation in India will moderate in 2023-24 compared to 2022-23, and is likely to remain in the range of 5 per cent to 6 per cent, with risks evenly balanced. "The Russia-Ukraine conflict and tightening of monetary policy have again brought the issue of corporate debt vulnerabilities to the fore. This is after the Covid-19 pandemic had directly impacted the balance sheets of the corporate sector globally, which were already highly leveraged," it noted.



With back-to-back shocks, the risk of a spillover of the stressed balance sheets of the corporate to the balance sheets of financial institutions has risen, the review said. "With a manageable current

account deficit and a growth rate highest among the major economies in 2022-23, the Indian economy has shown a new-found resilience in sailing through the turbulence caused by the pandemic and geopolitical

stress," the document noted. "Analysis, however, reveals that India is one of the few countries that have a lower corporate debt as a percentage of the GDP in the third quarter of 2022 as compared to the corresponding quarter in 2008. Apart from the lowering of debt coinciding with the deleveraging phase in the credit cycle, a declining trend observed since mid-2021 is a reflection of a relatively less debt-financed strong recovery of India's economy. Consequently, the quality of corporate debt has been showing steady improvement as assessed by an improvement in the CareEdge Debt Quality Index (CQDI) since November 2021. India's corporate sector credit-GDP ratio is also below its historical trend, indicating ample space for the corporate sector to enlarge its debt burden," the finance ministry's review said.

The strong debt profile of the corporate sector has proven to be key in maintaining the macroeconomic stability of the economy, it said further.

# Kerala CPI(M) permits MLA disqualified by HC to move SC

Thiruvananthapuram | Agencies

The Kerala unit of CPI(M) on Monday permitted its legislator A. Raja disqualified by the High Court for contesting Devikulam Assembly constituency reserved for Scheduled Caste despite not belonging to the community to challenge the verdict in the Supreme Court.

A decision to this effect was taken during a top leadership meeting at the state party headquarters who asked Raja to file the appeal on Tuesday itself. Responding to the development, Leader of Opposition V.D.Satheesan said that the CPI(M) should first publicly apologise to the entire SC community for giving the seat to someone who is not from the community but became a member by producing fake documents. "The issue was brought to the notice of the Returning Officer when the nomination papers were filed but he failed to take action. The CPI(M) is primarily responsible for this fraud and now appropriate criminal cases should be filed against their candidates for filing fake documents," said Satheesan.

The case against Raja was filed by D. Kumar, the Congress-led UDF candidate. Kumar lost to Raja by 7,848 votes in the April 2021 Kerala Assembly elections.



Kumar had alleged that Raja is from a converted Christian community and had submitted fake certificates to make himself eligible to contest for the Assembly seat which is reserved for Scheduled Castes.

Consequent to the verdict, Raja cannot take part in the ongoing Assembly session besides the strength of the ruling Left Democratic Front has come down from 99 to 98 seats in the 140-member Kerala Legislative Assembly.

While Raja said he will react after studying the verdict order, Kumar said he was very confident about the verdict as everything was against Raja and "is now happy that the truth has come out".

# SC declines to stay Karnataka HC order on board exams for class 5, 8

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Monday declined to stay a Karnataka High Court order, which allowed the government to conduct board exams for students of Classes 5 and 8 in schools affiliated to the Karnataka state board.

Counsel, representing the associations of unaided private schools, mentioned the matter before a bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud and comprising Justices P.S. Narasimha and J.B. Pardiwala, seeking an urgent hearing. The bench said it would not like to interfere with the high court order, adding: "The high court's know what is best in that state". Counsel contended that the examinations are scheduled to begin on March



27, and the matter could be taken up on an earlier date. The top court said it does not want any uncertainty to prevail.

After hearing submissions, the top court agreed to examine the plea against the high court order on March 27. A division bench of the high court on March 15, had stayed the single judge bench order passed earlier this month, quashing the

government circulars on the ground that they were issued in violation of the procedure under the Right of Children To Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009.

The high court, last week, allowed the state government to go ahead with the new method of assessment similar to board exams for classes 5 and 8 and to reschedule the examinations from March 27.

# TN GOVT ANNOUNCES RS 75,000 ASSISTANCE FOR CIVIL SERVICES ASPIRANTS

Chennai: With a decline in number of persons from the state clearing the civil services exams, the Tamil Nadu government will provide financial assistance for 1,000 civil services aspirants every year, Finance Minister Palanivel Thiaga Rajan announced on Monday.

Presenting the state's budget for FY24, he said that the Tamil Nadu Skill Development Corporation (TNSDC) will implement the scheme in coordination with Anna Staff Administrative College to help civil services aspirants to access better coaching facilities and materials.

"Every year 1,000 civil services aspirants will be short listed through a screening test. Each aspirant will be provided Rs 7,500 per month for 10 months to prepare for the preliminary examination. Those students who clear the preliminary examination will be provided a lumpsum amount of Rs 25,000," he said.

Rajan said a sum of Rs 10 crore has been allocated to the TNSDC in the budget.

# Excise policy case: Delhi court sends bizman Arun Pillai to judicial custody

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi court on Monday sent Hyderabad-based businessman Arun Ramchandra Pillai to judicial custody in connection with the 2021-22 Delhi excise policy case being probed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

Last week, Special Judge M.K. Nagpal of the Rouse Avenue Courts had extended Pillai's ED remand till Monday after noting that the probe agency has gathered some new details after confronting Pillai with Butchi Babu Gorantla, a Hyderabad-based chartered accountant, on March 15.

The ED had earlier informed the court that Pillai needs to be confronted with Magunta Reddy, also an accused.

On March 16, the agency's request for prolonged remand was contested by Pillai's lawyer, Manu Sharma, who argued that such con-



frontations between the accused are a never-ending process.

The ED had arrested Pillai on March 6 after questioning him for hours in connection with the case. His arrest marked the 11th arrest in the matter by the ED.

The probe agency has alleged that Pillai was involved in forming a cartel of manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers which controlled more than 30 per cent of the liquor business in the national capital.

The ED named the cartel 'South Group', which includes BRS leader K. Kavitha; Sarath Reddy, the promoter of Aurobindo Pharma; YSRCP MP from Ongole Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy; his son Raghav Magunta and others.

The South Group was represented by Pillai, Abhishek Boimpally and Babu, the agency claimed. Pillai is a partner in Indo Spirits with a 32.5 per cent stake and he represented Kavitha's interests, said the ED.

Kavitha, the daughter of Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrababu Naidu, also arrived at the ED headquarters here on Monday for a second round of questioning in connection with the case.

# BRS QUESTIONS PM OVER FUEL PRICES, BJP HITS BACK

Hyderabad | Agencies

Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) Working President K.T. Rama Rao on Monday asked a "straight question" to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Telangana BJP chief Bandi Sanjay on skyrocketing fuel prices despite crude oil price dropping in the international market.

Rama Rao said that in May 2014 when crude per barrel was \$107, petrol price was Rs 71 per litre but in March 2023 when crude oil per barrel is \$65, the price of petrol is Rs 110 per litre.

"If fuel prices had to be hiked when price of crude oil went up, should they also not be brought down when prices drop? Who is benefiting from the hike," asked KTR, as the BRS leader is popularly known.

KTR, who is also a state minister, took to Twitter to pose the question to the PM. "To those who want petroleum products to be brought under GST to curb Fuel Price Hike; LPG is already under GST. But the price increased from Rs 400 to Rs 1200 in 8 years," he said.

He asked how can a "Non-performing Alliance (NPA)" that cannot control LPG cylinder prices be entrusted with petroleum products?



Telangana BJP president Bandi Sanjay hit back at KTR.

He tweeted that BRS is a party of bald-faced liars, people will not believe anything that KTR says anymore because KCR is not reducing VAT. "Telangana people are forced to pay one of the highest rate for Petrol in India Rs 109.66/litre which is downright loot. In BJP ruled state UP it costs Rs 96.57/litre," Sanjay said. The BJP leader said that VAT on petrol

and diesel in Telangana is 35.2 per cent and 26 per cent, respectively, while in UP, it is 26.8 and 17.48 per cent. Sanjay said that the Narendra Modi government cut central excise duty twice - in May 2022 and November 2021 - amounting cumulatively to Rs 13 per litre of petrol and Rs 15 per litre on diesel, at a cost of Rs 2.2 lakh crore a year to the Central exchequer. Prices of petrol & diesel in India (New Delhi) have declined by 5 per cent and 3.71 per cent, respectively between March 2022 & March 2023. These prices have gone up by 38 per cent and 104.02 per cent in Sri Lanka, 22 per cent and 45.16 per cent in Pakistan, 28 per cent and 20.23 per cent in Bangladesh and 22 per cent and 36.09 per cent in Nepal, he said.

"Their fabricated lies cannot conceal the fact that Global energy analysts and commentators are astonished at the fact that India, despite the sheer scale of its population - 50 lakh LPG cylinders are delivered by OMCs and 6 crore consumers visit OMC petrol pumps every day - has managed to ensure accessible and affordable energy to 1.4 billion people at a time when its immediate neighbourhood is facing dry-outs and massive price hikes," said the BJP leader.

# Child marriages will be eliminated in Assam by 2026: Himanta

Guwahati | Agencies

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma stated on Monday that his government is determined to eliminating the child marriage menace by 2026 from the state.

Samra, while replying to a question by Congress MLA Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha, said, "The state government has taken a series of measures to stop child marriages."

"Child marriage must be stopped in Assam by 2026. To put an end to it, our government will take decisive measures in coming days," he continued.

The Chief Minister further said that the state government has set aside Rs 200 crore in this budget to oppose each case of child marriage. There will be a mission against child marriages.

"We will start a campaign against child marriage in the state, and we will make arrests around once every two to three months. A helpline will be set up. Thus far, charge sheets were given in 900 cases and the



police followed the law," stated Himanta Biswa Sarma.

He added that his government had taken steps to spread awareness against child marriages. "Our government will strive towards the victim's rehabilitation by offering scholarships, free schooling, and free rice programmes," Sarma added.

# K'taka elections will send out a message to the nation: Kharage

Belagavi (Karnataka) | Agencies

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharage said on Monday that the upcoming Assembly elections in Karnataka is very crucial as it will send out a message to the entire nation.

Addressing the 'Yuva Kranti Samavesh', a youth convention, here, Kharage said, "We need to face the elections collectively. Belagavi is a sacred land. The 39th session of AICC was held here in 1924, which was the only session presided over by Mahatma Gandhi."

Stating that the Congress used to register victory in 15 to 16 constituencies out of the 18 in Belagavi, Kharage said that considering the present scenario, the party will sweep all the seats in the district this time.

"The state has never witnessed corruption at this scale as it is seeing now. Why did Amit Shah not order a probe into the allegations levelled by contractors' associations? The police have been sent to Rahul Gandhi's residence for his statement made in Kashmir 46 days back. In Karnataka, even after proofs are provided, no probe is ordered," Kharage said.

The state and the Centre are quoting double the amount for tenders and getting 40 per cent commission on each, he claimed.

"PM Modi had spoken about me during his visit to Belagavi. He had said that my remote control is with someone else. Can you tell who has the remote control of BJP President



J.P. Nadda? If Rahul Gandhi asks questions about Adani in the Parliament, the questions are removed. There is no democracy in the country, but there is casteism. Is it wrong to say that there is caste discrimination in the country," Kharage asked.

"This is the land of Kittur Chennamma, Sangolli Rayanna and Belawadi Mallamma. This is the land of valiant individuals, and they can't be defeated by the ED or CBI. Rahul Gandhi is not afraid of BJP's threats. Let them torture us as much as they want, we are prepared for everything. No matter how hard the BJP tries to bury us, we are like seeds and we will take birth again and again," Kharage said.

# Gold chains worth Rs 4.90 lakh stolen in Bageshwar Dham godman's congregation

In a bizarre crime spree, thieves apparently lurked freely among thousands of devotees, including women, at a 2-day spiritual congregation addressed by self-styled 'guru', Dharendra Krishna Shastri at Mira Road town and targette

Thane | Agencies

Many women attending. According to the Mira Road police, after the 26-year-old Shastri's discourses ended, at least three dozen women have lodged complaints of their gold chains being stolen during the two-day congregation.

As per the complaints, the victims have lost their gold chains, mostly 'mangalsutras', weighing between 5 gm to 25 gm, either made in pure gold or with other metals.

The Mira Road Police have pegged the total value of the stolen booty at a staggering Rs 4.87,000!

The event of Shastri - which had sparked off a political row here - was held at the sprawling Salasar Central Park grounds, attracting more than 200,000 devotees, including a large number of women.

At one point, due to poor management, it led

to a near-stampede on Saturday in which one woman devotee was injured after which the local police had started security checks and crowd control at the entry points to the venue.

Many women had been lured by Shastri's purported "miracles" and "healing powers", and had come in hopes of some cure, but some returned not only disappointed but minus their gold chains/mangalsutras, said an official.

The organisers, the Shantaben Mithalal Jain Charitable Trust, had invited Shastri - the head priest of Bageshwar Dham in Madhya Pradesh's Chhatrapur - for the event even as some rationalist groups had opposed it and written to police not to grant permission.

Besieged with so many complaints, the Mira Road Police have lodged a common FIR for the first three dozen women victims, and are scanning the CCTV footage of the venue to identify the chain-snatchers in the huge crowds and catch the culprits.





MP REPORTS FOUR NEW COVID CASES

Team Absolute | Bhopal

As many as four new Covid-19 cases were recorded in Madhya Pradesh, of which three were reported in Indore and one in Jabalpur district, according to a bulletin issued by the state health department.



reported after testing 436 Covid samples in a span of 24 hours.

Fresh cases reported in the last 24 hours have pushed the number of active cases in the state up to 29, and most of the active cases were reported in Bhopal and Indore.

The reports suggested that till Sunday evening, a total of 20 active cases of Covid-19 were registered in Indore, and Bhopal has been at the second spot with a total of five active cases. Jabalpur has one active case, which was reported on Sunday, while one active case was also reported in Sagar district. The state Health department claimed that the four fresh cases registered on Sunday were

The report also suggested that a total 96 Covid cases were registered in Madhya Pradesh from January 1 to March 20, and most of these cases were reported in Indore and Bhopal.

Currently, Covid protection norms issued by the Centre are not being properly followed in the state, except in some hospitals where the doctors have mandated that they won't allow patients without masks. But this is also only in some hospitals like AIIMS and some others.

As per the reports, a total of 10,777 people have died in Madhya Pradesh since early 2020.

State government stands with the farmers in the crisis caused by hailstorm: Chief Minister Chouhan

Survey work started in affected districts, every affected farmer will get relief. Chief Minister reviewed the situation created due to hailstorm in the state.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that the state government is standing with the farmers in the crisis caused by hailstorm. Survey work has been started in the hailstorm affected districts. After completing the survey work in a week, immediate relief will be provided to the farmers. Joint teams of Revenue, Agriculture and Panchayat and Rural Development departments have been formed for the survey. There should be no negligence in the survey, the survey should be done with honesty and sensitivity and every affected farmer should get relief, special care should be taken that no farmer's field is left out of the survey. Chief Minister Chouhan gave these instructions in the meeting held at the residence office. Principal Secretary Revenue Manish Rastogi along with officials of Revenue Department were present. Chief Secretary Iqbal Singh Bains joined virtually.

Farmers will also get the benefit of crop insurance scheme along with the relief amount

Chief Minister said that along with the sur-



vey, the list of affected farmers and losses suffered by them should be posted in the panchayats. After resolving the objections received from the farmers, the loss should be assessed with full sensitivity and transparency. Farmers will be provided the benefit of crop insurance scheme on the basis of

crop cutting experiment done with updated technology along with relief amount. Parallel to the survey, necessary action should be taken for crop insurance scheme to compensate the farmers for the loss in time. Due to this, the amount of immediate relief given in RBC 6-4 and the crop insur-

ance scheme will be available to the farmers. In addition to loss of crops, relief will be provided commensurate with the enhanced amount for animal loss.

Preliminary information about crop affected in 520 villages of 51 Tehsils

It was told that in 520 villages of 51 tehsils of the affected districts, preliminary information has been received that crops of 33 thousand 758 hectares of 38 thousand 900 farmers have been affected. In 12 districts of the state, 22 people have died due to lightning. During March 16 to 19, the Meteorological Department had issued a warning of lightning and rain with hailstorm, thunderstorm and strong winds in all the divisions of the state. Rainfall was recorded on March 17 and 18 in the districts of Narmadapuram, Shahdol, Jabalpur, Chambal, Ujjain, Sagar, Indore, Gwalior, Rewa and Bhopal divisions. Rainfall was recorded on March 19 in Mandla, Balaghat, Narmadapuram, Chhindwara, Narsinghpur, Katni, Seoni and Shahdol districts. Information about untimely rain and hailstorm has been received in total 20 districts.

Aviation regulator to probe aircraft crash in Balaghat that killed 2 pilots

Team Absolute | Balaghat

An Air Safety Team (AST) of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation reached Birsai airport in Gondia district of Maharashtra on Sunday to investigate the aircraft crash which killed two pilots in neighbouring Madhya Pradesh a day before, an official said.



Authorities have not yet found the black box of the ill-fated aircraft belonging to the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Uran Akademi (IGRAU), sub-divisional officer of police (SDOP), Balaghat, said.

On Sunday, the bodies of flight instructor pilot Mohit Thakur and trainee pilot Vrikshanka Maheshwari who were killed in the aircraft crash in Balaghat district were handed over to their families. "The bodies of both the deceased have been handed over to their families after completing formalities and the reason for the crash could only be ascertained after the probe," IGRAU spokesperson Ramkishore

Dwivedi said.

Thakur (24) was a resident of Brungal in Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh and trainee pilot Maheshwari (19) hailed from Gandhidham in Kutch district of Gujarat, he said.

The trainer aircraft had taken off from the Birsai airstrip in Gondia district bordering Balaghat at around 3.06 pm on Saturday. It lost connection with the Air Traffic Control (ATC) at 3.11 pm and

crashed in the hills near Bhukkutola village in Balaghat, and caught fire, officials had said.

Meanwhile, a police officer from MP denied the claim that the aircraft might have crashed due to bad weather in the hilly area, about 40 km off the Balaghat district headquarters. The weather was clear, he said. An IGRAU official had said on Saturday that bad weather could have caused the crash.

CLERK SUSPENDED FOR EMBEZZLEMENT OF OVER RS 1 CRORE



Indore: A clerk employed in the Indore collector's office was suspended for allegedly misappropriating more than Rs 1 crore and transferring the sum to his wife's bank account, an official said.

The clerk posted in the account's branch had over a period of three financial years transferred more than Rs 1 crore with different government heads to his wife's account, Indore collector Dr Ilayaraja T said.

The clerk has been suspended with immediate effect, he said. A committee has been constituted to conduct a detailed inquiry into the embezzlement case and appropriate legal action will be taken based on its report, the official said. The embezzled sum will also be recovered from the clerk, he said.

Celebration of World Sparrow Day

Painting Competition & Artificial Nest Distribution on the Occasion of World Sparrow Day

Team Absolute | Bhopal

On the occasion of World Sparrow Day 20th March, 2023 Bhopal Birds Conservation Society, Bhopal organized a Painting Competition on the topic "Conservation of House Sparrow in Urban Area" in collaboration with Madhya Pradesh Tiger Foundation Society and Regional Museum of Natural History, Bhopal. 37 Students from various colleges participated in the competition.



Participants created paintings of house sparrow with the help of various colors and also express their views as

the importance & conservation aspects of house sparrow through paintings.

After the competition, artificial nests of house sparrow and participation certificates were distributed to the participants. Dr. Manoj Kumar

Sharma, Scientist-in-Charge of RMNH; Dr. Beenish Rafat, Scientist-C of RMNH; Dr. Sangeeta Rajgir from Bhopal Birds were present during the nests & certificates distribution.

CHIEF MINISTER CHOUHAN PLANTED SAPLINGS AT THE GOVERNMENT AIRPORT



Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted a sapling of Ixora at the Government Airport today. It is a popular ornamental plant planted in gardens. Chief Minister Chouhan is planting saplings everyday as per his resolution taken on February 19, 2021 to plant saplings everyday. Along with this, he is also motivating the people of the state to plant saplings on their birthdays, marriage anniversaries and in the memory of their relatives. Due to the initiative of Chief Minister Chouhan, many social organizations have also become active in the state for plantation. As a result, public participation is continuously increasing in plantation activities and taking care of planted plants in the state.

Doctors from AIIMS Bhopal conducted Cancer awareness program

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Cancer is a dreaded disease but completely curable. Due to lack of knowledge and awareness patients come to hospitals at very late stages when it becomes difficult to cure them. To achieve optimum results in treatment of cancers, early diagnosis is paramount. Director AIIMS Bhopal Prof (Dr) Ajai Singh encourages all the faculty members to conduct cancer awareness and outreach activities so that the AIIMS can reach to the doorstep of patients and make them aware of implications of coming late to hospital as well as inform them regarding treatment facilities available at AIIMS Bhopal.

In that direction radiation oncology doctor, Dr. Rajesh Pasricha, Professor and head



along with his team including senior residents Dr Rashmi, Dr Sheena and junior resident Dr

Shrinivas Reddy conducted a cancer awareness workshop at Government Girls collage Betul.

The workshop focused on early detection of cancer, common signs, symptom of disease and common female cancers.

The workshop was very well attended with more than 100 participants. The Principal of government Girls College Vidya Chaudhary, faculty of the collage, Faculty from Om Ayurvedic Medical collage Betul, Government district hospital doctors beside all their staff and students were present to attend the awareness program. Several cancer survivors also participated in workshop.

The speakers also highlighted the facts that AIIMS Bhopal has all the latest treatment facilities required for cancer treatment like surgery, Radiation treatment including IGRT, IMRT & Brachytherapy, chemotherapy and targeted treatments.

LEOPARD THAT ATTACKED IN NEEMUCH FOREST DIES DURING RESCUE OPERATION

Jawad: A leopard which was trapped by the forest team on Monday from Jawad forest area in Neemuch district died during the rescue operation. Before this, a leopard attacked one elderly citizen while was taking at the kund (pool) constructed on the outskirts of Singoli village.

Followed by this, the forest team swung into the act and trapped a big cat from Jawad forest region near Jaat gram panchayat area.

Jawad forest region officer Teerthraj Singh confirmed the death of leopard saying that the forest department team reached the spot after they came to know that one leopard attacked an elderly citizen on the outskirts of Singoli village. Immediately team began searching for the leopard, the animal was scared due to the commotion of the villagers.

A special rescue team was also called and with the help of the villagers, the staff of the Forest Department caught the leopard, but after some time the leopard died.

The cause of death is yet to be ascertained and the actual reason behind the death will come out only after the post-mortem.

Narottam Mishra responds to Cong's 'Savarkar Samjha Kya' tweet, says Rahul defames India abroad

Bhopal: Madhya Pradesh Home Minister Narottam Mishra on Monday took a jibe at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi over a photo of Gandhi shared on twitter by the official handle of Indian National Congress (INC India). INC India on Sunday evening tweeted a photo of Rahul Gandhi with a Hindi caption "Savarkar Samjha Kya...Naam Rahul Gandhi Hai (Did you think as Savarkar...the name is Rahul Gandhi)".



Reacting to the tweet, minister Mishra told reporters here that one could understand the mentality of the Congress from this. What kind of people were there and what was the mentality of the Congress party. "We understand Rahul Gandhi to be the same who goes abroad and defames our India. We understand him as the one who supports the Tukde Tukde gang and goes to JNU," Mishra said. "We understand him to be that Rahul Gandhi in whose yatra those who defame India walk with him. We understand him to be that Rahul Gandhi who debates on Ram and Sita, Hindutva and Hinduism," the minister said.

Veerangana Rani Avantibai sacrificed for the motherland - CM Chouhan

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the Veerangana Rani Avantibai sacrificed her life for the motherland fighting with all her might for her existence. She presented a wonderful example of war skills, leadership ability and patriotism by continuously fighting against the British in the freedom struggle of 1857. Chief Minister Chouhan also mentioned the wars fought by Rani Avantibai in Jabalpur, Mandla and Dindori areas. He said that their heroic stories will also be included in the curriculum so that the future generation remembers Rani Avantibai, Raja Shankarshah-Raghunath Shah and tribal leaders. Along with this, a grand memorial and park of Veerangana Rani will be built at Mankedi, the statue site. Heroic stories of Rani Avantibai will also be engraved in the



memorial. Chief Minister Chouhan attended the Martyrdom Day programme of Veerangana Rani Avantibai at Mankedi in Bargi of Jabalpur district today. He said that I am feeling proud by paying floral tributes at the birthplace of Veerangana Avantibai. Describing the bravery saga of Veerangana, the Chief Minister said that British officers and prominent historians also admired her strategic skills. Chief Minister Chouhan thanked the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and said that memorials of brave martyrs

and tribal leaders are being built in the Amrit Utsav of Independence being celebrated under his leadership. Along with this, the sequence of making memorials is going on in Madhya Pradesh as well. He recalled from the stage the great personalities and revolutionaries who made invaluable contribution to the freedom of the country through their sacrifice during the freedom struggle.

Chief Minister Chouhan said that I am happy to say that today you have talked about renaming the college after Raja Raghunath Shah-Shankar Shah.

Earlier we have named Chhindwara University after Raja Raghunath Shah-Shankar Shah. In the beginning, Chief Minister Chouhan paid floral tributes to Rani Avantibai's statue and picture. The Chief Minister inaugurated the programme by performing the Kanya Puja.

Boat ambulance starts in tribal areas to provide better health services

Team Absolute | Dhar

'Boat ambulance' initiative has been started in the districts of Dhar, Alirajpur and Barwani with the aim to provide better health services to tribal population living on the banks of Narmada river in Madhya Pradesh. The boat ambulance will run between hilly regions of Vindhyachal and Satpura to ensure that the tribal people living on the banks of Narmada in these districts can get the emergency health facilities.



The initiative has been started by an organisation Narmada Samagra Nyas and it has been working continu-

ously for the last 15 years to provide health, education, and agriculture related services. The aim of the organisation is to provide better health services to every person.



EDITOR'S SPECS

## Modi vs Rahul narrative suits BJP

What Rahul Gandhi says, the BJP magnifies. From his alleged anti-India remarks in London to the length of his beard and the T-shirt he wore during his yatra -- the BJP takes note of it all and TV debates hover on the issues. And it is not entirely without reason. The BJP wants the 2024 Lok Sabha campaign to turn into a Modi versus Rahul battle where Modi will undoubtedly emerge as the winner. All other opposition leaders, meanwhile, can bear the political winter for some more years and wait for their spring. The BJP strategy is clearly to divert public attention from core issues and turn the polls into a personality-oriented campaign. It does not matter that the Congress is in disarray in most states because the BJP wants to prop up Rahul as its adversary, instead of taking on the party as a whole. Other opposition parties, meanwhile, are fretting on their own turf. The battle was fought by Akhilesh and won by the BJP at the state level because not a single national leader of the BJP even took cognisance of the same. A dejected Akhilesh has no other option but to welcome the Ramayana recitation and even demand a higher allocation of funds for it. Other issues raised by the opposition like inflation, law and order, police atrocities and corruption have fallen by the wayside and it is now a case of what the BJP wants, the BJP gets. Opposition leaders fear that an alliance with the Congress could make these vote banks shift back to the Congress. Talking about the Rahul Gandhi factor, political leaders feel that Rahul Gandhi is apparently a threat for regional satraps who feel that they would be overshadowed if Rahul was asked to head any forum against the BJP.

# THE PAK MISCHIEF IN PUNJAB

D.C. Pathak

It is not surprising at all that militancy in the name of Khalistan is being revived in the border state of Punjab, by some groups based abroad and working under the operational guidance of Pakistan's ISI. India's Intelligence set-up is fully aware that in the '80s and '90s, terrorism was pushed to a peak in the state largely because of this external input - till a determined Intelligence-based counter-terror drive by the Central and the state police forces gradually got over the threat. Operation Black-Thunder, which was meticulously planned and executed under the close oversight of the Centre - the head of IB's regional set-up at Chandigarh having been designated as the Centre's design 'Mo'itor' of the operation, was based on two fundamental conditionalities to the effect that the seizure of the Golden Temple where the top Khalistan militants had taken shelter, would not permit any armed person to enter the premises and would not allow any bullet to be fired towards the latter. The surrender of the terrorists after many days that the operation lasted gave a blow to the armed Khalistan movement, but significantly Pak ISI in the meanwhile opened a second front in the other border state of Jammu & Kashmir by giving a call for Jihad to intensify cross-border terrorism there. At the beginning of the '90s, when the terror in Punjab was fading out, Pakistan planned to replicate the success of Afghan Jihad in Kashmir and despatched the first group of Taliban Mujahideen to the valley under the dreaded Harkat-ul-Ansar. Pak ISI even asked its loyalist Hizbul Mujahideen of the Jamaat-e-Islami to help out the new group with logistic support thus revealing the frontal role of the former in upscaling terrorism in Kashmir to make up for its loss of ground in Punjab. Indian Intelligence agencies were aware of this K2 plan of the adversary. While normalcy returned to Punjab, the terrorist violence in

Kashmir touched a new high. With the arrival of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the scene, India's stand against a hostile Pakistan toughened with his government declaring that there would be no talks with Pakistan unless the latter will stop the cross-border terrorism against India - this seemed to be in contrast with the tepid response of the UPA government even to 26/11. Modi government demonstrated its political will in ordering a surgical strike at Balakot in the interior of Pakistan in February 2019 to punish those who were behind the terror attack on a CRPF convoy, carried out at Pulwama earlier. Cross-border terrorism in Kashmir was countered more effectively after the Indian Parliament removed Articles 370 and 35A from the Constitution and declared J&K and Ladakh as Union Territories to bring them under direct Central rule in August 2019. This enabled the Centre also to take direct responsibility for the development in the state that had been marred by the highly corrupt regimes of Kashmiri leaders who used to heavily bank on the separatist Hurriyat Conference in elections. In the new situation, Pak ISI - finding it difficult to infiltrate militants - took to the tactics of recruiting youth for organised stone pelting on the security forces to destabilise the state and stepping up covert use of social media to intensify radicalisation for 'raising lone wolves' to carry out terror acts in Kashmir mostly on local policemen and Kashmiri Pandits. The Sino-Pak axis also became active against India as was evident from the use of Chinese drones by Pakistan for dropping arms and ammunition in the valley to keep up terrorism. These two hostile neighbours also intensified the anti-India campaign 'against the 'annexation' of Kashmir by India. Gradually but steadily India has succeeded in bringing down the level of violence in Kashmir and implementing the development agenda of the state. For some time now, however, Pak ISI has understandably, reverted to the familiar strategy of reviving terror activity in Punjab on the issue of

Khalistan to make up for the loss of ground in Kashmir. India's Intelligence agencies kept close track of this known move of the adversary and advised the Punjab police to step up vigilance. It is in this context that the anti-India lobbies abroad led by Pakistan, instigated stray Khalistani elements in the US, UK, Canada, Australia and other places first to step up Sikhs for Justice movement and revive the Bhindranwale cult and then got Amritpal Singh a self-styled Khalistan protagonist based in Dubai, to launch a militant movement to demand a separate homeland for Sikhs. Amritpal Singh landed in Punjab last year to take over the leadership of 'Waris Punjab De' - an organisation floated in 2021 by some elements connected with the farmer's movement - and at a ceremony held at Rode in Moga district, the native village of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, started an 'Amrit Parchaar' campaign. The modus operandi of Pak ISI is evident again in the planning of initial steps that are meant to gradually create the environment for militancy in Punjab. Drones have been used to drop arms and drugs in the border districts to exploit the vulnerability of Sikh youth and stray incidents of terror are beginning to occur in which enemy agents were using grenades and IEDs to target Police and foment public scare. The state authorities should in particular be vigilant against any activity designed to create Hindu-Sikh schism - in the days of Khalistan terrorism in Punjab in the '80s, targeting of Hindu passengers in buses and terror attacks on Hindu leaders had become particularly pronounced. Amritpal Singh has talked of justice to the state under a 'Hindu regime'. State Intelligence must spread to the ground for detecting mischief makers in time for deterrent action. A new challenge is the scanning of social media and covert online communications used by the adversary for recruiting agents of terror. Border districts of Punjab need closer attention and it is to be borne in mind that the facility of the

Kartarpur corridor could be misused by Pak ISI for increasing its outreach. It should be remembered that the end to terrorism in Punjab came last time when Hindus and Sikhs showed unity against the forces that had shattered the communal harmony for serving the narrow agenda of Khalistan. Security of the border state must be kept above domestic politics. Guru Nanak is revered by both Hindus and Sikhs and Sikhism is known to have safeguarded the larger Indian society. Amritpal Singh has incidentally talked of freeing Punjab of drugs to protect the youth there - he is using that to give a positive spin to his subversive movement - but the learning is to have the menace of drugs tackled firmly without letting it create any communal ripples. The concerned agencies of the Centre and the state have to work in a coordinated way and, in appropriate cases, explore the route of rehabilitation of the affected youth, as well. It is instructive to recall how in the terror-affected Punjab in the '80s, there was talk of families witnessing the phenomenon of one brother getting seconded to the Khalistan movement while the other would take care of the land or traditionally join the Indian Army. There is no question of this kind of thing happening again as Sikhs have a pride of place as a martial race and as a saviour of the nation. Separatism injected from outside cannot succeed but the mischief of the adversary has to be guarded against. Against the backdrop of the narrative of authoritarianism and intolerance built by anti-India lobbies against the Modi government, inter-community goodwill must be maintained in the border state and a service-oriented administration was provided to the people in general. It is also a fact that the state of unemployment in Punjab makes the youth vulnerable to subversive propaganda. A strategic measure would be to place Punjab in the care of a national security profession-

al who had past experience of serving the state in difficult times, as Governor for a few years so that the elected government could benefit from this arrangement. The emerging scene of militancy being restarted in Punjab in the name of Khalistan, by some elements manoeuvred by Pakistan, needs to be taken cognisance of and analysed as a more element of the multi-prong 'proxy war' conducted by India's adversaries - more so by the Sino-Pak axis. India's determined move to carry out the military build-up on the LAC in Ladakh to take on any aggressive activity of PLA and simultaneously enhance its collaboration with Quad partners to check Chinese designs in the Indo-Pacific is also the reaffirmation of the Modi government of its right to carry out a surgical strike against Pakistan to counter cross-border terrorism, have together proved to be a sound strategy for India. This has, of course, resulted in deeper collusion between Pakistan and China in stepping up activities that might internally destabilise this country - ranging from civil society groups being floated to sustain anti-India narratives to the use of social media channels covertly to recruit terrorists. Attacks on strategic targets representing India's economic strength are a definite threat considering how national security had become inseparable from economic security. Prime Minister Modi aided by NSA and the External Affairs Minister has, however, worked out an effective policy framework to neutralise these two prime adversaries of India geopolitically, on land and in the sphere of global economic cooperation and trade promotion. What India needs the most at the moment is strong national unity and it is important that our domestic politics must not do anything that would detract from it.

(The writer is a former Director of the Intelligence Bureau. Views are personal)

## international

## CLIMATE MINISTERS MEET IN COPENHAGEN FOR FIRST HIGH-LEVEL MEETING SINCE COP27

Copenhagen | Agencies

Climate ministers and envoys are set to convene at the two-day Copenhagen Climate Ministerial that starts on Monday and hosted by the incumbent Egyptian and incoming UAE Presidencies of the Conference of the Parties (COP), and Denmark's minister of energy and climate Dan Jorgensen. Egypt's Foreign Minister and COP27 President Sameh Shoukry, and COP28 President-Designate Sultan Al-Jaber will co-chair the meeting with Simon Stiell, Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC, other UN senior officials and non-governmental stakeholders in attendance. The political high-level meeting in the Danish capital will focus on catalyzing the implementation of the outcomes from COP27. The meeting will tackle the main issues of adaptation, finance, mitigation and loss



and damage through a three-fold agenda that addresses: Implementing the Sharm El-Sheikh Implementation Plan (SHIP) and building on COP27 outcomes, commitments and pledges, setting the course for a successful COP28 in the UAE, and cementing Paris Agreements targets through the first Global Stocktake exercise. "I am very pleased to co-lead once again the Copenhagen Climate Ministerial. Last year, Minister Dan Jorgensen and

the Danish government provided a dynamic and constructive platform for ministerial climate conversations. The ministerial is an opportunity for us to reflect on the instrumental breakthroughs, as well as key achievements that came out of Sharm El Sheikh and consolidate the unity of purpose in fighting climate change and driving further implementation and action through 2023, on the road to COP28 in the UAE," said Shoukry. "I continue to urge more

ambitious climate action, remind us of the perils of backsliding, and to stay focused on implementation and outcomes." For the first time since COP27, ministers of climate and prominent political figures will meet in person to advance the COP process. They are expected to push for further robust climate action that meets COP27's milestone achievements and ambitions, and maintains the momentum for delivering at COP28, where the priorities will include: Operationalizing the loss and damage funding arrangements and fund; finalizing the outcome on Global Goal on Adaptation; Implementing the Mitigation Work Programme; launching the Just Transition Work Programme; and keeping the 1.5 ambition alive. The ministerial agenda will comprise plenaries and breakout sessions, on climate adaptation, finance, loss and damage, mitigation, as well

as the 'Global Stocktake', which will take place at the COP28. The Global Stocktake is part of the ambition mechanism built into the Paris Agreement and will take stock of its implementation to assess the common progress of succeeding with the long-term goals of the Agreement. "As we approach the midpoint of this critical decade, the Global Stocktake will underscore the paramount importance of a continuum of progress, identification of opportunities and challenges, and supporting further action and ambition across all themes in a transparent, participatory, and inclusive manner. This vital and long anticipated milestone of the Paris Agreement architecture will highly benefit from continuous and consistent political leadership, engagement, and support," mentioned the invitation to the ministerial meeting.

## S.Korea lifts years-long mask mandate for public transportation



Seoul | Agencies

Amid a stable Covid situation, South Korea on Monday finally lifted its years-long mask mandate for public transportation. Wearing a mask is no longer mandatory on public transportation, such as buses, the subway or taxis, as one of the last-remaining Covid-19 restrictions came to an end in the country's efforts to return to pre-pandemic normalcy, reports Yonhap News Agency. The decision came two years and five months after the government made it mandatory to wear a mask on public transportation in

October 2020 at the height of the pandemic. The mandate however, remains in place for medical facilities, pharmacies and other vulnerable facilities, such as nursing homes. Pharmacies at open public spaces, such as discount stores or train stations, will be exempt from the mask requirement. The first day of the mask mandate's lifting on transportation coincided with a fine dust advisory issued across Seoul, causing some to give up or delay enjoying life without a mask. Government and health authorities have "actively

recommended mask wearing for public transportation users during rush hour, high-risk groups, and those having symptoms. Also on Monday, South Korea's new Covid-19 cases fell to the lowest daily tally in about nine months. The country reported 3,930 new infections, including 14 cases from overseas, bringing the total caseload to 30,702,960, the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) said. The figure is the lowest since June 27, 2022, when the tally stood at 3,419. The KDCA reported nine Covid fatalities, raising the death toll to 34,171.

## IMF denies linking loan with Pakistan's nuclear weapons

Islamabad | Agencies

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has rubbished claims that the global lender had attached any strings to the revival of a loan programme for Pakistan stalled for months despite the two sides engaged in talks for weeks. IMF resident representative in Islamabad Esther Perez Ruiz denied attaching any strings to the External Fund Facility (EFF), Geo News reported. "Regarding recent speculation that programme discussions with the authorities for the ninth review under the IMF supported programme may have covered Pakistan's nuclear



weapons programme, I want to be categorical that there is absolutely no truth to this or any insinuated link between the past or current IMF supported programme and decision by any Pakistani government over its nuclear programme," the official said. She further said that the discussions have exclusively focused on economic policies to solve Pakistan's economic and balance of payments problems, in line with

the Fund's mandate for promoting macroeconomic and financial stability. On March 16, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar promised that there would be no compromise on the country's nuclear and missile programme. He made the statement in the Senate in response to Senator Raza Rabbani's questions about the delay in signing the agreement with the IMF. Rabbani regretted that the upper House of the Parliament had "neither before nor today been taken into confidence on what are the conditionalities of the IMF" for extending the loan facility to Pakistan, Geo News reported.

## Oil from capsized tanker spreads to Philippines' vital marine reserves

Manila | Agencies

The massive oil leak from a tanker that capsized off the Philippines' Oriental Mindoro province last month has reached one of the country's marine reserves and sanctuaries, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) said on Monday. PCG Batangas station commander Captain Victorino Acosta said the oil slick was sighted on Monday morning in the Verde Island Passage between Batangas province and the northeastern tip of Mindoro island, reports Xinhua news agency. The area is a body of water with the highest concentration of coastal fishes, corals, crustaceans, molluscs, sea grasses and mangroves, which is described as one of the global centres of marine biodiversity. It is also home to endangered and threatened species, including the critically endangered hawksbill turtle,



whale sharks, manta rays, dugongs, humphead wrasses, giant groupers and giant clams. Verde Island Passage is also a

favourite spot for divers attracted by the "wall" of beautiful corals, sea fans and anemones billowing in constantly moving water.

The MT Princess Empress was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial oil when it sank off Oriental Mindoro on February 28, causing a widespread oil spill in Oriental Mindoro and the neighbouring areas. The ill-fated oil tanker was sailing to Iloilo province in the central Philippines from Bataan province, northwest of Manila when it experienced engine trouble and sank. According to government data, the spill affected nearly 152,000 residents in 131 villages. Dozens of people have also fallen ill. Pola town in Oriental Mindoro is the most affected of the nine municipalities of Mindoro province. Pola town official Lysander Fetizanan told a forum that the disaster has affected the livelihood and the environment of the town people. "The sea disaster has affected our way of life and living," Fetizanan said.



MAHARASHTRA GOVT 'READY' FOR OPS, EMPLOYEES CALL OFF WEEKLONG STRIKE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The 18 lakh government employees in Maharashtra called off their weeklong indefinite strike on Monday after successful negotiations on the contentious issue of implementing the Old Pension Scheme, a top leader said.

The striking unions coordination committee's convener Vishwas Katkar said that the state government has agreed "in principle" to consider the issue of bringing back the OPS, which was discontinued in 2005.

The much-awaited discussions were held this afternoon with Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and top state officials, and Katkar and other unions' representatives on the other side.

"The government has assured that the OPS will definitely be implemented and also given the same in



writing. They will also withdraw the show cause notices issued to the strikers. We shall also fully cooperate with the government on this issue," Katkar told media persons.

In view of the positive outcome, he said that the strike has been called off immediately and all employees will resume normal duties from Tuesday.

Katkar also thanked the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) for supporting the strikers and raising their issue in the state legislature and appreciated the government for positively considering the staffers' pending demand on OPS.

Shinde is likely to make a statement on the outcome of the OPS negotiations in the legislature shortly.

MAHA NOTCHES 'SEASONAL' SPIKE IN COVID-19, 1K-PLUS 'ACTIVE CASES'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Since the past few weeks, Maharashtra has been experiencing a gradual increase in Covid-19 infections, but health authorities said there is no cause for alarm as this is owing to the seasonal fluctuations, here on Monday.

From the lowest of one case on February 6, the infections have now shot up to three-digit figures with the highest 249 notched on March 18, and 236 on Sunday (March 19), as per official data.

There are sporadic deaths due to Covid-19 but in single digits, though health officials say there is no need to worry.

Till date, the number of 'active cases' in the state shot past the 1K-mark to touch 1,308 - up from 107 (February 19) and 123 (January 19).

A senior health department officer Dr. Pradip Awate said that Covid-19 has now become 'endemic', similar to influenza or other viral diseases, and will exhibit a spike in cases as per seasonal variations especially with wide



fluctuations in daily minimum-maximum temperatures.

"Currently there is an average 5 per cent increase in Covid-19 cases, in post-winter and post-monsoon climatic conditions, and precautions must be taken," Dr. Awate said, ruling out the recent spike as any kind of

'wave', as apprehended.

The fresh developments come exactly three years after India went into the first lockdown (March 25, 2020), and had emerged out of the lockdown in stages over the past more than a year.

He explained that for influenza,

there are vaccines specified by the WHO every year depending on its type or severity and are administered every year for certain targeted sections of the population based on the age or with co-morbidities, with an effectiveness for one year.

"Since Covid-19 is still a new virus, and mutating into various strains since the past three years, there is no specific vaccine developed for regular use, but it will happen in due course," Dr Awate said optimistically.

Currently, Maharashtra has recorded a cumulative total of 81,39,737 Covid-19 cases and 148,428 fatalities - both highest in the country.

Mumbai and Pune districts remain the worst-hit in the state in terms of cumulative infections and deaths.

Sou far Mumbai has recorded 11,54,903 cases and 19,747 deaths, compared with Pune's 15,06,257 infections and 20,608 fatalities.

Meanwhile, last week the WHO hinted that it may soon end the Covid-19 global pandemic - declared in January 2020 - though a time-frame has reportedly not yet been finalised.

ED raids 9 locations in Maharashtra in PMAY scam

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday said that it raided nine locations in Maharashtra in connection to a money laundering investigation into the irregularities in tender allocation of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) scheme at Aurangabad.

The raids were carried out in Aurangabad, Pune and Akola.

The ED initiated investigation on the basis of the FIR registered by Aurangabad Municipal Corporation against firms -- Samarath Construction & JV, ndo Global Infrastructure Services, Jaguar Global Services and their respective partners -- for forgery and formation of a cartel to illegally win the tender of the Aurangabad Municipal Corporation for constructing 40,000 PMAY houses in the city.

The PMAY scheme was to be implemented at seven plots in Aurangabad and it was found that all the three e-tenders were uploaded from a single IP address.

The FIR was registered after the PMAY regulators identified the anomaly that the winning firm was not at all financial-



ly capable of implementing such a big project.

"The ED investigation has also revealed that the three JV firms applied for the e-tender from the same IP address. Tender was allotted to one Samarath Construction & JV, but out of the performance Bank Guarantee of Rs 46.24 crore they had deposited BG of only Rs 88.60 lakh. Also, Samarath Construction & JV subverted the due procedure by getting the extension of the initial tender for 19.22 hectares to 120 hectares without a fresh tender process. The amount of government subsidy involved in this scam is to the tune of around Rs 1,000 Crore. Searches

were conducted at all the three tender applicants," the ED said.

It has been learnt that in the case of the two losing e-tender applicants, the major JV partners have completely denied their involvement in the tender process and are claiming forgery of their credentials by the LI applicant.

The ED has seized various incriminating documents including the note-sheet of the tender file of Aurangabad Municipality from the applicant.

Authorities of the Aurangabad Municipal Corporation are extending their cooperation and are sharing all documents in relation to this tender process.



CAN TAKE OVER PRIVATE SCHOOLS IF NEEDED: SCHOOL EDUCATION MINISTER

Mumbai: The Maharashtra government can take over private institutions if required to protect the interest of students, state Minister Deepak Kesarkar told the legislative council on Monday. The school education minister was responding to a query by MLC Kiran Samaik of the Amaravati teachers' constituency who sought to know from the government about clearing non-teaching grants to unaided institutions. "No need to only raise the issues of teachers in the House. The interest of students should also be protected. We can take over private schools if needed. It has been done in Rajasthan," Mr Kesarkar claimed. Angered by the minister's comments, NCP legislators Eknath Khadse and Vikram Kale raised objection. If the government wants to take over private educational institutions, then it needs to pay them first, Mr Khadse said.

MAHARASHTRA MAN TRICKED INTO INVESTING IN BITCOINS, LOSES OVER RS 33 LAKH

Team Absolute | Thane

A 37-year-old businessman from Mira Road in Thane has been cheated of Rs 33.65 lakh after he was tricked into investing in bitcoins on the false promise of lucrative returns, police said on Monday.

Police have registered a case against two persons under section 420 (Cheating and dishonestly inducing delivery of property) of the Indian Penal Code. An official said the complainant came into contact with the accused persons through a WhatsApp group. In February 2022, he received a message from two persons, including the group administrator, asking him to become a bitcoin investor if he wants lucrative returns.

"The businessman agreed and invested money. He got good returns initially, but later he suffered losses and stopped trading. But the accused contacted him and assured him that he will get guaranteed returns and demanded a 20 per cent commission. Later, he saw an amount of USD 2,47,210 in his bitcoin



account but couldn't withdraw due to technical issues," the official said.

After a couple of days, he received a message that the bitcoin application was frozen as the "contract has expired".

The accused duo also became incriminated, following which the businessman lodged a complaint with the police.

No arrest is made so far and further investigation is underway.

Bitcoin, a virtual currency, is not regulated in India and its circulation has been a cause for concern among central bankers the world over for quite a while now. The Reserve Bank of India has also cautioned users, holders, and traders of virtual currencies, including bitcoins.

Man arrested for hitting woman on morning walk with car

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Hours after the CEO of a technology firm was killed by a speeding SUV in Mumbai's Worli area on Sunday morning, Worli Police arrested the accused driver.

"The accused driver, Sumer Merchant (23) was arrested after registering a case under Section 304 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)," police said.

Police will present the accused driver in court tomorrow.

Earlier in the day, Rajalaxmi Ram Krishnan, the CEO of a technology firm, died after she was hit by a speeding SUV in Mumbai's Worli area, the official said.

The woman, a resident of the Dadar-Matunga area, was out for a morning jogging when the incident occurred, the Worli police



said. The incident occurred at 6:30 am near Worli Dairy, just a few meters away from the Worli-Bandra sea link when the woman returned from her morning jog with her husband.

The police further said that the car's driver identified as Sumer Merchant also got injured and has been detained.

The police have also registered a case against the driver in several sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

"The blood test of the accused has also been taken so that it can be known whether the accused had consumed alcohol. The car driver works in a private company and lives in the Tardeo area of Mumbai," police said.

Further investigation into the matter is underway.

SC agrees request seeking CBI probe in Palghar mob-killing case

Team Absolute | New Delhi/ Mumbai

The Supreme Court Monday agreed to list for hearing pleas seeking a CBI probe into the alleged lynching of three people in Palghar district in April 2020, after it was apprised that the Maharashtra government has consented to the investigation by the agency.

A bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices PS Narasimha and JB Pardiwala was told by a lawyer appearing for one of the petitioners that the state government has also agreed for a CBI inquiry.

The lawyer mentioned the matter saying the case can be heard and disposed of on any Friday or Monday.

"We'll list it," the bench said.

Earlier, in a change of stance, the Maharashtra government had told the Supreme Court it was ready to hand over to the CBI the investigation



into the alleged lynching of three people, including two seers.

The state government had earlier told the Supreme Court that the Maharashtra Police has punished

"delinquent" policemen for dereliction of duties in the alleged lynching incident and sought dismissal of pleas seeking a CBI probe.

The affidavit was filed in response

to a batch of petitions, including one by seers of Shri Panch Dashban Juna Akhara and relatives of the victims.

Their plea alleged the investigation by the state police was being conducted in a biased manner.

The other pleas have been filed by advocates Shashank Shekhar Jha and Ghanshyam Upadhyay.

The three people from Kandivali in Mumbai were travelling in a car to attend a funeral in Surat in Gujarat amid the COVID-19-induced nationwide lockdown when their vehicle was stopped and they were attacked and allegedly killed by a mob in Gadchinchile village on the night of April 16, 2020 in the presence of police.

The victims were identified as Chikne Maharaj Kalpavrukshagiri, 70, Sushil Giri Maharaj, 35, and Nilesh Telgade, 30, who was driving the vehicle.

Cabinet nod for cow service commission to implement beef ban law

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra cabinet has cleared a proposal to set up a cow service commission to strictly implement a 2015 law to ban beef and take measures for the overall betterment of livestock, an official said.

The decision was taken in the state Cabinet meeting held on March 17.

The Maharashtra Gau Seva Ayog (Maharashtra Commission for Cow Service) will supervise the rearing of livestock and assess which of them are unproductive and rendered unfit for milking, breeding, and carrying agricultural works etc, said the animal husbandry department official.

The Cabinet has approved funds of Rs 10 crore for set-

ting up the commission and a draft bill for its formation as a statutory body is likely to be placed before the state legislature this week. According to the official, the state government has estimated that the population of livestock will go up owing to the beef ban.

The cow service commission is being formed by the Eknath Shinde-BJP government on the lines of similar bodies set up by other BJP-ruled states such as Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

"The commission is expected to coordinate with various government agencies to stop non-productive cattle from going to slaughterhouses, which is now illegal under the Maharashtra Animal Preservation (Amendment) Animal Act, 1995, passed in March 2015," the official said. He said the commission



will also monitor all gaushalas (cowsheds) formed to shelter stray and unproductive cattle and has the power to provide them financial assistance wherever required. The commission



will be a 24-member body and its chairman will be nominated by the state government. "It comprises 14 senior officers from various government departments including commissioners

from animal husbandry, agriculture, transport, and dairy development departments, a deputy inspector general of police, and nine nominated members who are associated with either cow protection

organisations or NGOs involved in running gaushalas," said another senior official. He said the commission will not only execute all the existing schemes for gaushalas in the state but will also introduce new schemes and programmes for the betterment of the livestock.

"The cow commission has also been mandated to take up the cultivation of improved breeds of cattle with the help of gaushalas and launch research schemes to increase local varieties.

"It is expected to take up schemes for generating bio-gas and power from cow dung and their urine and coordinating with universities and other research institutes that are working in the field of cattle and cattle development among others," the official added.

'THREATS' TO DYCM'S WIFE - MUMBAI POLICE NAB ABSCONDER BOOKIE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

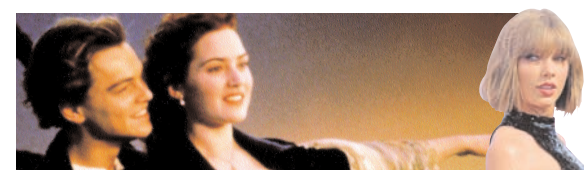
In a big catch, the Mumbai Police have tracked and arrested a bookie from Ahmedabad - absconding for over five years - in connection with the case pertaining to threats, blackmail and bribe offer to the state Deputy Chief Minister's wife, a top official said here on Monday.

The accused is Anil Jaisinghani whose daughter and fashionista Aniksha was arrested last week after a complaint lodged by the banker-singer Amruta Fadnavis, wife of Deputy CM Devendra Fadnavis.

"We put him under technical surveillance for the past five days, but he was constantly on the move in different towns of Gujarat. Finally



we tracked him to Kalol in Gujarat. He was caught just before midnight and brought to Mumbai. The accused has at least 15 cases registered against him and he will be handed over to the Malabar Hill Police today," said a top officer. Last week, Amruta created a sensation when she lodged a police complaint accusing attempts by the Jaisinghani father-daughter to frame her, threaten, blackmail and bribe her Rs one crore, after which Fadnavis - who holds the home portfolio -- ordered a probe.



# 'I EVEN BECAME ALMOST UNPROFESSIONAL'

Jenna Ortega admits to changing lines on sets of 'Wednesday'

Los Angeles | Agencies

'Wednesday' star Jenna Ortega recently shared that her behaviour at work was "unprofessional". The actress made the revelation on Dax Shepard's 'Armchair Expert' podcast.

But Ortega wasn't on a teary-eyed apology tour atoning for her sins, rather she was extolling her behaviour as a virtue, reports 'New York Post'.

On the podcast, the actress, who's also in 'Scream VI', discussed how, like an authoritarian dictator, she was a self-appointed script doctor on 'Wednesday' and that she deserves the utmost thanks from the actual paid, unionised writers for bettering their thoughtless schlock.

"There were times on that set where I even became almost unprofessional in a sense where I just started changing lines," Ortega said proudly.

"The script supervisor thought I was going with something and then I had to sit down with the writers, and they'd be like, 'Wait, what happened to the scene?' And I'd have to go and explain why I couldn't go do certain things," she was quoted as saying by 'New York Post'. Some of those things: "(Wednesday) being in a love triangle? It made no sense. There was a line about a dress she has to wear for a school dance and she says: 'Oh, my God, I love it. Ugh - I can't believe I said that. I literally hate myself.' I had to go, 'No!'"



# ALICIA SILVERSTONE IS READY FOR 'BLAST FROM THE PAST' SEQUEL

Los Angeles | Agencies

It has been over two decades since 'Blast From The Past' was released and actress Alicia Silverstone is ready for a sequel with Oscar winner Brendan Fraser.

During a 'Clueless' reunion panel at '90s Con, the actor answered a fan question about whether she'd ever revisit the film, reports 'Variety'.

"With Brendan? I would do anything with Brendan. It was so much fun," Silverstone said.

"I just saw Brendan after he won his Oscar and he's so cute. He talked in his speech about how we all go through this really hard time and you have to grow and its part of life that you struggle and then look what happened to him! So yes, I'm happy to do that."

The romantic comedy was released in 1999, starring Fraser, Silverstone, Christopher Walken, Sissy Spacek and Dave Foley.

Silverstone attended the Vanity Fair Oscars party on March 12, as did Fraser, who won the Academy Award earlier in the evening for his role in Darren Aronofsky's 'The Whale'. In the film, he portrayed Charlie, a 600-pound English teacher trying to salvage his relationship with his estranged daughter.

"I started in this business 30 years ago, things didn't come easy to me but there was a facility that I didn't appreciate at the time, until it stopped. I just want to say thank you for this acknowledgement," Fraser said in his acceptance speech.

"It couldn't be done without my cast. It's been like I've been on a diving expedition and the air on the line to the surface is being watched over by some people in my life like my sons."



# Lance Reddick spoke about relationship between Charon & Winston

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor Lance Reddick, who died from natural causes at the age of 60 recently, had spoken about the relationship between his character Charon and his boss Winston before his demise. Lance played the role of Charon, the concierge of the infamous Continental Hotel in the 'John Wick' franchise. Charon, even though Winston's man at work, shares a deep bond of friendship and loyalty with him. Talking about his character's relationship with Winston in 'John Wick: Chapter 4', Lance had said: "The supremely capable, dignified, and helpful concierge, Charon, is Winston's right-hand man. There is a bond that transcends employer-employee and even friendship." The actor added: "One of the things that is so interesting about Winston and Charon's relationship is that it is so close. You get a sense that they've been together for many years, probably even before their tenures at the New York Continental. You feel there's affection between them, and this film confirms it." Directed by Chad Stahelski, 'John Wick: Chapter 4' also stars Donnie Yen as Caine, Bill Skarsgard as Marquis, Laurence Fishburne as Bowery King, Rina Sawayama as Akira, Ian McShane as Winston, Shamier Anderson as Tracker, Hiroyuki Sanada as Shimazu, Clancy Brown as The Harbinger, and Scott Adkins as Killa. The film is a direct sequel to the 2019 film 'John Wick: Chapter 3 - Parabellum' and will be the longest film in the series.

Chapter 4, Lance had said: "The supremely capable, dignified, and helpful concierge, Charon, is Winston's right-hand man. There is a bond that transcends employer-employee and even friendship." The actor added: "One of the things that is so interesting about Winston and Charon's relationship is that it is so close. You get a sense that they've been together for many years, probably even before their tenures at the New York Continental. You feel there's affection between them, and this film confirms it." Directed by Chad Stahelski, 'John Wick: Chapter 4' also stars Donnie Yen as Caine, Bill Skarsgard as Marquis, Laurence Fishburne as Bowery King, Rina Sawayama as Akira, Ian McShane as Winston, Shamier Anderson as Tracker, Hiroyuki Sanada as Shimazu, Clancy Brown as The Harbinger, and Scott Adkins as Killa. The film is a direct sequel to the 2019 film 'John Wick: Chapter 3 - Parabellum' and will be the longest film in the series.



# BILLIE EILISH'S CREEPY 'SWARM' CHARACTER IS INSPIRED BY A REAL CULT

Los Angeles | Agencies

The episode of 'Swarm' featuring Grammy-winning Billie Eilish has delivered one of the series' buzziest appearances.

'Swarm', co-created and co-executive produced by Janine Nabers and Donald Glover, features a slew of celebrity cameos, including Rory Culkin and Paris Jackson, reports Hollywood Reporter.

Set between 2016 and 2018, Swarm follows Dre (Dominique Fishback), a fan of the fictional Beyonce-esque music icon Ni'jah, whose love for her favourite singer crosses the line from obsessive to murderous. After setting off on a cross-country journey, she meets a slew of characters and commits a slew of crimes.

Alongside killing a string of haters in the name of her icon, Dre hits the road to see her favourite star at Bonnaroo despite not having a wristband, but gets pulled over in Tennessee by a racist cop.

While trying to get him off her tail at a gas station, a young white woman comes to her rescue, with Dre following her back to a compound full of more seemingly friendly women. It's a group led by Eilish's Eva, whose warm and inviting nature hides something more sinister underneath.

Eilish, who is in her acting debut, was suggested by Swarm casting director Carmen Cuba,

Nabers told The Hollywood Reporter.

"When she pitched (Billie Eilish) for the role of Eva, we were like, 'Oh, she's really cool! Let's go with it!' And it worked out," said Nabers.

"She was great," he added.

While Eva said she "feels so drawn" to Dre and suggests she's "part of the tribe now," it becomes clear as Dre spends more time that Eva's setup is less a commune and more a cult.

The women wear the same colours and share the same body brands. Eva, the "female empowerment" group's executive director, hosts training and healing sessions with Dre, who gets lured in following a hike.

It's reminiscent of several Hollywood-adjacent cults, most clearly the NXIVM cult, which involved actresses like Alison Mack, who is currently serving a three-year prison sentence.

Nabers has said Eilish's character was inspired by that cult and its leader Keith Raniere, who was sentenced to 120 years in prison and fined \$1,750,000 in the high-profile sex-trafficking case.

"There is a cult that existed in the world that was very prominent during that time," said Nabers referencing NXIVM.

"And that is the kind of true-crime element to that episode. And I think that when people think of the idea of artists or celebrities, there is this idea of thinking about the cult of Taylor Swift, or the cult of the Beatles or whatever. What we were really interested in was just seeing someone who worships at the altar of 'something', and (exploring) this idea of what is the cult of the mind."

# JANE FONDA OFFERED A BRUTAL ADVICE FOR GETTING OVER A BREAKUP

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood actress Jane Fonda has offered some expert advice for anyone going through the end of a relationship. She admits she still uses her world-famous exercise video, has had her fair share of lovers and husbands although she said she did stop dating when she turned 80, reports Mirror.co.uk. The star and activist recently revealed she was in remission for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma after undergoing gruelling treatment that left her struggling to keep up with her normal routine.

Speaking about her upcoming film '80 for Brady', which stars Fonda, Oscar-winning actress Sally Fields, 'West Side Story' sensation Rita Moreno, and her 'Grace and Frankie' co-star, Lily Tomlin, she shared a method to help get over heartbreak.

"For anyone going through a painful break-up, let me give you a piece of advice my therapist gave me," she said in an interview with the Mail on Sunday's You magazine.

She said, quoted by Mirror.co.uk: "Put a rubber band around your wrist, and every time you feel like sticking a knife into the p\*\*\*er, snap it hard."

"It snaps you out of it - it works," she added.



# ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Gigi Hadid



## WPL 2023: DELHI CAPITALS SURGE TO TOP OF THE TABLE WITH DOMINANT 9-WICKET WIN OVER MUMBAI

Navi Mumbai | Agencies

Powerful knocks from Meg Lanning, Shafali Verma and Alice Capsey helped Delhi Capitals boss a chase of 110 from start to finish to defeat Mumbai Indians by nine wickets in Match 18 of Women's Premier League (WPL) 2023 at the Dr. D.Y. Patil Stadium on Monday.

After a stellar performance by their bowlers restricted Mumbai to a below-par 109/8, Delhi chased down the target in just nine overs. Finishing the chase off early has propelled them to the top of the points table and go past Mumbai in terms of net run rate.

In chasing 110, Meg and Shafali dealt exclusively in boundaries, bringing up a half-century mark in just four overs. Meg began with a drive past mid-off and brought out her trademark square cut against Nat Sciver-Brunst in the opening over.

Shafali was in a cat-and-mouse battle with Issy Wong in the second over, but man-



aged to pull, chip and drive to take three boundaries. Nat came under more attack as Meg and Shafali took a four each through the leg side.

While Meg got a four off Saika Ishaque through a misfield by point, Shafali danced down the pitch to loft over mid-off, before driving between extra cover and mid-off to make it three boundaries off the fourth over. Shafali welcome Hayley Matthews with a smack over deep mid-wicket for six in the fifth over. But on the third

ball, Hayley had the last laugh by deceiving Shafali with flight and getting her stumped for 33.

Despite that setback, there was no stopping Delhi as Meg ended the Power-play with a superb wristy flick over deep mid-wicket for a six off Issy. Post Power-play, Alice Capsey upped the ante by hitting Hayley for sixes on both sides of park and straight down the ground.

A fumble at the cover on the last ball of the over allowed Meg and Alice to go

for the second run and complete a chase with 11 overs to spare, with the duo unbeaten on 32 and 38 respectively.

### Brief scores

Mumbai Indians 109/8 in 20 overs (Pooja Vastrakar 26, Issy Wong 23; Marizanne Kapp 2-13, Shikha Pandey 2-21) lost to Delhi Capitals 110/1 in nine overs (Alice Capsey 38 not out, Shafali Verma 33; Hayley Matthews 2-27) by nine wickets

## Women's World Boxing C'ships

# Lovlina, Sakshi cruise into quarterfinals

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Tokyo Olympics bronze medalist Lovlina Borgohain and 2021 Asian Championships bronze medalist Sakshi Choudhary registered impressive victories to advance to the quarterfinals of the Mahindra IBA Women's World Boxing Championships at the Indira Gandhi Sports Complex here on Monday.

Living up to her name, Lovlina dominated proceedings by unleashing her attacking prowess on her opponent Vanessa Ortiz of Mexico before registering a statement 5-0 victory in the 75kg Round-of-16 match. Ultimately, Lovlina emerged victorious in the thoroughly one-sided contest to kickstart her campaign with an effortless victory.

"The opponent (Vanessa) was short in height and was attacking aggressively which is difficult to contain so I planned to attack by keeping a distance. I am not that happy with my performance today as I think I could have done much better and I will definitely improve in my next bout. As this is my first World



Championships in the 75kg category, it is a bit tough as all other boxers have been playing in this category since before but I believe that I can do well," Lovlina said after the match. Sakshi pugilist from Haryana hardly put a foot wrong in her commanding 5-0 win against the 2022 Asian Championships bronze medalist Zhazira Urakbayeva of Kazakhstan in the

Last-16 contest at the Indira Gandhi Sports Complex here.

Six Indians, including the reigning world champion Nikhat Zareen (50kg), Nitu Ghanghas (48kg), Manisha Moun (57kg), Jaismine Lamboriya (60kg), Shashi Chopra (63kg) and Manju Bamboriya (66kg), will compete in the pre-quarterfinals on Tuesday.

## Man United, Brighton, Sheff Utd continue in FA Cup, Arsenal go 8 clear in Premier League

London | Agencies

Manchester United kept their hopes of winning three cup competitions alive after beating Fulham 3-1 in their FA Cup quarter-finals.

Fulham were the better side, but everything changed in the 72nd minute when William handled a goal-bound shot from Jadon Sancho on the goal-line and was sent off, with Mitrovic following him into the dressing room for his complaints, along with Fulham coach Marco Silva, a Xinhua report said.

Bruno Fernandes scored the resulting penalty and Marcel Sabitzer put United against nine-man Fulham in the 77th minute, before Fernandes scored a third for his side in the 96th minute.

Fourth-tier Grimsby Town's brave cup run came



to an end after they lost 5-0 away to Brighton, who gave them little option and scored four goals in the second half.

Deniz Undav put Brighton ahead after just six minutes, and after the break, 18-year-old Ewan Ferguson scored twice, along with Solly March and Kaoru Mitoma as football logic made itself felt.

Sheffield United qualified for the FA Cup semi final for the second time in 10 years with a thrilling 3-2 win at home to Blackburn Rovers in an all-second tier tie.

Ben Brereton Diaz's 21st-minute penalty put

Blackburn ahead, only for Sam Gallagher's own goal to level the scores in the 28th minute. Sammie Szmodics looked to have put Blackburn into the last four with his 60th minute goal, but Oliver McBurnie equalized nine minutes from time, and Thomas Doyle scored a 91st-minute winner to put United through.

In the Premier League, Arsenal took advantage of City's cup exploits to open up an eight-point lead at the top of the table with a 4-1 win at home to Crystal Palace.

## WPL 2023 UP WARRIORZ BOOK PLAY-OFFS BERTH WITH 3-WICKET WIN OVER GUJARAT GIANTS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

UP Warriorz was reeling at 39 for 3 after five overs, in pursuit of Gujarat Giants' 178-6, when Grace Harris walked in. With her compatriot Tahlia McGrath at the other end, Harris had the daunting task of rebuilding the innings.

The duo once again lived up to the expectations at the Brabourne Stadium on Monday and forged a crucial 78-run stand, paving the way for a three-wicket Warriorz' win and ensuring a spot in the Women's Premier League playoffs.

While this victory meant the end of the road for Gujarat Giants and Royal Challengers Bangalore, McGrath and Harris once again proved why they are considered vital cogs in the Warriorz' wheels.

After putting up a mammoth total, riding on half-centuries by Dayalan Hemalatha and Ashleigh Gardner, the Giants bowlers provided the team with a perfect start, dismissing



Warriorz captain Alyssa Healy, Kiran Navgire and Devika Vaidya inside the Powerplay. But, the Aussie duo ensured that there were no further slip-ups. Dealing in boundaries, both Harris and McGrath scored their fifties in style as the Giants bowlers slowly lost their grip over the game.

The Warriorz needed seven off the

final over, and a calm Ecclestone sealed it with a boundary, with a ball to spare. As she jumped in joy and tossed her bat in the air, there was a pall of gloom in the Giants' dugout.

Despite starting aggressively after winning the toss and batting first, the Gujarat outfit lost momentum.

They raced away to 41 in four overs, with Sophia Dunkley and

Laura Wolvaardt slamming boundaries at will. But they lost three wickets in the powerplay, but eventually bounced back with a 93-run partnership between Gardner and Hemalatha.

The talented Hemalatha brought up her fifty in just 30 balls with a six off Deepti, before falling off Parshavi Chopra, who claimed a couple of wickets. But even after Hemalatha's departure, Gardner stayed on and breached the 50-run mark in just 35 balls with a boundary off Deepti. However, Gardner's innings was cut short by Parshavi as the Giants failed to go past 180.

### Brief scores

Gujarat Giant 178/6 in 20 Overs (Dayalan Hemalatha 57, Ashleigh Gardner 60; Parshavi Chopra 2-29, Rajeshari Gayakwad 2-39 lost to UP Warriorz 181/7 in 20 overs (Grace Harris 72, Tahlia McGrath 57; Kim Garth 2-029) by 3 wickets.

## Indian Wells

# Alcaraz clinches title, returns to World No. 1

Indian Wells (USA) | Agencies

Continuing his dominant run, Carlos Alcaraz won his maiden Indian Wells title with an easy 6-3, 6-2 win over Daniil Medvedev in the final.

The 19-year-old Spaniard, who did not lose a set in six Indian Wells matches, will return to World No. 1 in Monday's ATP Rankings behind his trophy triumph.

Now a three-time ATP Masters 1000 champion as the reigning titlist in Miami and Madrid, Alcaraz is the ninth and youngest man to win both legs of the Sunshine Double -- Indian Wells and Miami -- in his career. He joins countryman Rafael Nadal as the only players to



win at least three Masters 1000 titles as a teenager, with Nadal having won six before turning 20.

Alcaraz hit 18 winners to Medvedev's five and won 10 of 13 net points in an all-action victory.

## RYBAKINA TOPS SABALENKA TO CLINCH TITLE

Indian Wells (USA) |

Elena Rybakina won her first title of the season, and the first WTA 1000 title of her career by defeating Aryna Sabalenka in the Indian Wells Masters finals.

In a reversal of this year's Australian Open championship match, the No.10 seed Rybakina defeated No.2 seed Aryna Sabalenka 7-6(11), 6-4 in the summit clash on Sunday, triumphing at the first event of 2023's Sunshine Double. With this, Rybakina picked up her fourth career WTA singles title. It is her first title since her breakthrough Grand Slam singles title at Wimbledon last summer.



## La Liga

# Barca goes 12 clear in Spain, Betis & Real Sociedad bounce back with wins

Madrid | Agencies

FC Barcelona go into the international break with a 12-point lead over Real Madrid at the top of La Liga after a dramatic 2-1 win over their eternal rivals in the Camp Nou Stadium.

Franck Kessie's 92nd-minute goal gave Barca the win at the end of a thrilling game which either team could have won.

Thibaut Courtois had already made good saves from Robert Lewandowski and Raphinha in the first five minutes, but it was Real Madrid who opened the scoring in the ninth minute, a Xinhua report said.

With the game wide open, Kessie won it for Barca as he



side-footed home to finish a move that also involved Lewandowski and Alejandro Balde.

A first-half goal from Borja Iglesias helped Real Betis forget their midweek UEFA Europa League exit as they beat Mallorca 1-0. Mallorca

defended well but created little in attack and rarely looked like getting back on level terms.

Second-half goals from Takefusa Kubo and Ander Barrenetxea gave Real Sociedad a 2-0 win at home to bottom side Elche.

## Mushfiqur Rahim slams the fastest ton by a Bangladesh batter in ODIs

Sylhet | Agencies

Veteran wicketkeeper-batter Mushfiqur Rahim on Monday made a 60-ball hundred, the fastest century by a Bangladesh player. Rahim reached the landmark on the final ball of Bangladesh's innings in the second ODI against Ireland in Sylhet.

His 60-ball hundred, laced with 14 fours and two sixes at a strike-rate of 166.66, was enough to better the previous best record of a 63-ball ton by Shakib Al Hasan, which came against Zimbabwe in Bulawayo in 2009.

Rahim's hundred came from number after he walked in to bat in the 34th over of the innings. The wicketkeeper-batter remained unbeaten on 100 as Bangladesh made 349/6 in 50 overs, which is their highest total in ODIs, bettering the 338 they had made in the



previous match of the series.

As Sylhet witnessed another high score, Rahim also got to 7000 ODI runs, becoming the third Bangladesh batter after Shakib and Tamim Iqbal to reach the landmark. Rahim now has nine ODI centuries, standing equal with Shakib in a list led by Iqbal, who has 14 tons to his name.

## Bundesliga

# Bayern drop second with loss to Leverkusen

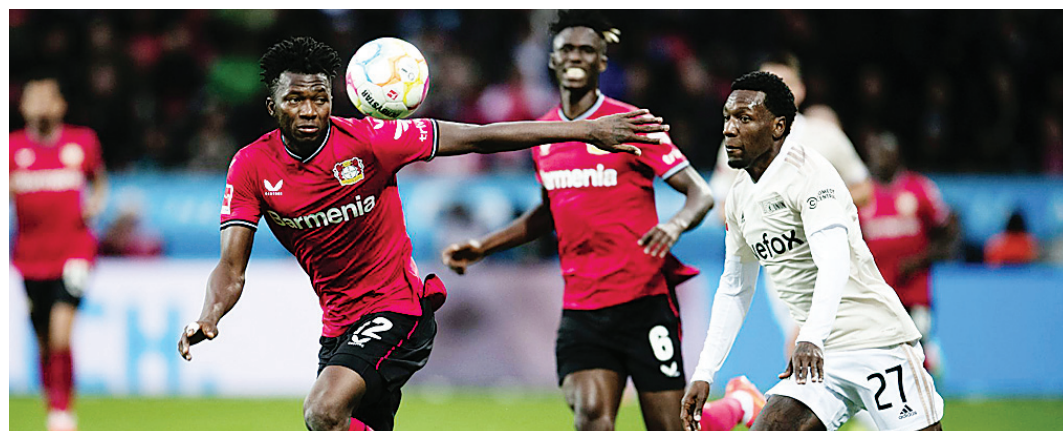
Berlin | Agencies

Bayer Leverkusen's Exequiel Palacios scored twice from the penalty spot to upset Bayern Munich with a 2-1 comeback win in the Bundesliga.

The Werkselt staged a lively opening period and kept Bayern goalkeeper Yann Sommer busy, but neither Kerem Demirbay nor Jeremie Frimpong was able to break the deadlock.

Palacios kept his cool from the spot and sent Sommer the wrong way before slotting the equalizer into the bottom-left corner.

Leverkusen were awarded another penalty in the 73rd minute when VAR penalized Dayot Upamecano's foul on Adli. Palacios stepped up again and drilled the



ball into the bottom-left corner to turn the tides.

The record German champions pressed frenetically, knowing that a draw would keep them atop the

Bundesliga standings, but Leverkusen's well-positioned defence held firm to secure all three points on home soil.

With the result, Bayern dropped

to second place in the standings, one point behind Borussia Dortmund, whom they play in Munich on the next matchday on April 1.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Chitrangda Singh, who is gearing up for her upcoming streaming film 'Gaslight', worked extensively on her voice modulation for her part. Taking a different approach, she focused on the bass of her voice rather than the treble.

She worked with acting coach Rupesh to understand thriller as a genre and work on her character development to understand it better. The actress said: "I handed myself to them (acting coach) to look like Rukmini and sound like her. I worked on my voice so that it didn't sound happy and got a low base and tone."

The film, which is a psychological thriller, also stars Sara Ali Khan, Vikrant Massey, Akshay Oberoi and Rahul Dev.

The actress further mentioned: "We worked on it a lot to bring out the authority and mystery in my voice. I have never done this kind of detailed work."

Produced by Ramesh Taurani, Tips Films Ltd and Akshai Puri,

## CHITRANGDA SINGH

**FOCUSED ON VOICE MODULATION FOR HER CHARACTER IN THE FILM**

12th Street Entertainment, and directed by Pavan Kirpalani, the film is set to release on March 31, 2023 on Disney+ Hotstar.

## HOPE TO BE BACK ON THE RAMP SOON: BIG B



Amitabh Bachchan shares health update after suffering an injury

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Megastar Amitabh Bachchan has shared a health update after suffering an injury to his ribs during the shoot of 'Project K'. Big B even thanked his fans for wishing him a speedy recovery and hoped that he will be 'back on the ramp soon'. Taking to Instagram, Amitabh posted a photo of himself walking on the ramp of a show. He captioned it: "Thank you for all the prayers and wishes for my recovery... I repair... Hope to be back on the ramp soon." It was earlier in March, when Amitabh suffered an injury during the shoot of 'Project K', in Hyderabad. The actor shared his health update on his blog.

After consulting a doctor and CT scan at AIG Hospital in Hyderabad, he left for Mumbai, where he is taking rest at his home. Big B suffered a muscle tear to his right rib cage during an action sequence of the film. He wrote that after the incident the film shoot was postponed. 'Project K' is science fiction film written and directed by Aswhini Dutt. Being shot simultaneously in Telugu and Hindi, it features Amitabh, Prabhas, Deepika Padukone and Disha Patani.

Good films will surely pull audience towards the big screen:

## Rani Mukerji

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Rani Mukerji, who is enjoying the response to her recently released film 'Mrs. Chatterjee vs Norway', feels that a content-driven film has the ability to pull audience to theatres in a post-pandemic world, provided it engages them and has something novel to offer. She points out that her recent release is a prime example of this.

The actress said: "I'm glad that 'Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway' is showing us that a content film can be a theatrical film in a post-pandemic world. I feel as an industry we just need to make films that touch people's hearts and not focus on which genre will work on the big screen and which won't. If we make a film that's good, there will always be an audience who will come to the big screen to have a unique community viewing experience."

She further mentioned: "As a society, we want to celebrate and experience things together. So, I have never

believed that people are turning their backs to theatres after the pandemic. People just want to see new, fresh and disruptive content that is engaging enough for them to step out and invest their time and money over it."

Chuffed with the response to the film, Rani shared that a good film will always resonate with the audience at large.

"I'm really happy to see the response from audiences because they have been giving the film with overwhelming amounts of love and I can't thank them enough. I have always believed that a good film will always resonate with people and they will come out to the theatres to get an experience that is uplifting," she concluded.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

'Nagina 4' actress Nia Sharma shared her experience of working with Bollywood actor Suniel Shetty and being part of the latest track 'Daiyya Daiyya', sung by Neha Kakkar from the web series 'Hunter- Tootega Nahi Todega'.

Nia shared that she enjoyed working with Suniel and was impressed to look at his fitness. She said: "The song is full of energy and is one of the most fun and challenging projects I have been a part of. Working with the legendary actor Suniel Shetty was definitely a pleasure, the aura that he has is simply impressive and I was awestruck by his fitness, and its total goals. I hope the audience loves the track and

shows their love for it." Suniel, who plays ACP Vikram Sinha in the web series said: "Daiyya Daiyya, as a song, plays a

**NIA SHARMA SHARED HER EXPERIENCE OF WORKING WITH SUNIEL SHETTY IN THE LATEST TRACK**



pivotal part in the show and I have enjoyed being a part of it. The dance steps and the music is enigmatic and I'm sure the audience will love it."

On the other hand, Neha also talked about the song and why the audience will like it.

She said: "The track itself has a fun element; it teases you and has the power to make you start grooving. I'm very impressed with how the song has turned out."

'Daiyya Daiyya' is a track from the upcoming show 'Hunter-Tootega Nahi Todega'.

The song stars Suniel Shetty and Nia Sharma together with its lyrics penned by Siddhanth Kaushal, and music by Haroon-Gavin. It is released on Saregama's YouTube channel.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Dancer-turned-actor Shantanu Maheshwari, who got a lot of appreciation for his work in 'Gangubai Kathiawadi', will be soon seen playing a dentist in the upcoming streaming series 'Tooth Pari: When Love Bites'. The series brings forth a realm where both vampires and humans exist.

The story follows Rumi (played by Tanya Maniktala) the vampire, who has broken one of her fangs during a hunt. Roy (played by Shantanu Maheshwari), the faint-hearted, boy-next-door human dentist is confident he can fix it for her. Sparks fly, and one can't miss this love story, however impossible it may seem.

The story is set in Kolkata and promises romance, mystery, human obstacles, and inhuman hurdles. Additionally, the romantic fantasy thriller series will also see Sikander Kher, Adil Hussain, Revathy, Saswata Chatterjee and Tilotama Shome amongst others.

Produced by Endemol Shine India, created & directed by Pratim Dasgupta, 'Tooth Pari: When Love Bites' will drop on OTT giant Netflix on April 20, 2023.

**SHANTANU WILL BE SEEN TOGETHER WITH TANYA MANIKTALA IN THE UPCOMING SERIES**



**INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY**



**Nikki Tamboli**