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ERA OF LOW INTEREST & EASY CREDIT OVER, INFLATION PRONOUNCED IN INDIA: REPORT

According to S&P Global Ratings, inflation remains pronounced in some Asia-Pacific economies, including Australia, India, and the Philippines. Global commodity and energy prices have retreated lately, but with domestic currencies still soft against the US dollar, import prices could remain elevated.

- ▶ Banks, which dominate the region's funding channels, could turn selective.
- ▶ Financing costs have already been rising in Asia-Pacific on the back of volatile global markets.
- ▶ Combined with the ongoing banking turmoil, the region's borrowers could see funding access squeezed, the report said.



Chennai | Agencies

The era of low interest rates and easy credit is over in the Asia Pacific region. Amid greater market volatility and slower Asia-Pacific economies, funding access could tighten sharply, said S&P Global Ratings in a report.

"Risk aversion among lenders, investors, and depositors is growing," said Eunice Tan, S&P Global Ratings Head - Credit Research, Asia-Pacific. "Domestic funding channels (including bank loans) remain available, but the risk remains that banks could turn increasingly selective and curtail lending, given uncertain economic outlooks," Tan added.

"Weak demand is making it difficult for corporates to pass higher input costs onto customers -- particularly in the building materials, capi-

tal goods, consumer products, and metals and mining sectors. Coupled with costlier borrowings, non-financial corporates could face higher stresses and default pressures," Tan said.

The undoing of energy price controls previously provided by some governments (to support households and businesses) could exacerbate inflation. Such inflationary pressures could constrain consumer sentiment and dent demand in the auto, consumer products, media and enter-

tainment, real estate development, and retail sectors, S&P Global said.

Weaker global demand stemming from economic slowdowns would be a drag on Asia-Pacific's export-centric economies.

Capital investments could contract as business confidence wanes. Concurrently, second order effects from the banking turmoil -- tighter financing access and higher risk premia -- could become more pronounced should contagion spread more widely.

CAIT SEEKS EMPOWERED REGULATORY AUTHORITY TO MONITOR & REGULATE E-COMMERCE

New Delhi: The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) has demanded an empowered Regulatory Authority to monitor and regulate the e-commerce trade in the country.

The CAIT has strongly pitched for six basic fundamentals needed for e-commerce policy and the rules under the Consumer Protection Act.

In a communication sent to Union Commerce & Consumer Affairs Minister Piyush Goyal, the CAIT said six fundamentals are necessary for a robust growth of e-commerce which include transparent operations of e-commerce platforms; easy accessibility and adequate grievance redressal by e-commerce entities; non-discriminatory access of marketplace platforms to all stakeholders of the value-chain; avoidance of conflict of interest between marketplace platforms; sellers and various service providers on the platform and formation of an empowered Regulatory Authority to monitor and regulate the e-commerce trade in India.

The CAIT further opined that it is extremely important for an e-commerce marketplace platform to act as a neutral platform for third party sellers where every such seller has a non-discriminatory access in the context of Logistics service provider, payment gateway system and each seller must have a non-discriminatory access to every customer and every customer must have such access to every seller on the platform. The traders' body suggested that to avoid any conflict of interest, the e-commerce marketplace or its related entities should not act as a seller on such marketplace platforms.

India reports 40% jump in new Covid cases



Team Absolute | New Delhi

At 3,016 cases, India registered a 40 per cent jump in the new Covid cases in the last 24 hours, said the Union Health Ministry on Thursday. In view of the rising cases, the Delhi government has called an emergency meeting.

The daily positivity rate has been recorded at 2.7 per cent and the weekly positivity rate stands at 1.71 per cent.

There were 1,396 recoveries in the last 24 hours and active case-load stood at 13,509.

The Delhi government has called an emergency meeting after the Covid cases spiked on Wednesday. A total of 300 new Covid infections in the last 24 hours were recorded in the national capital, which is a rise over Tuesday's 214 cases, as per the Delhi government health bulletin.

Meanwhile, two Covid-19 related deaths have also been reported in the same time span.

The positivity rate of the national capital city has risen to 13.79 per cent. The number of active cases stands at 806 out of which 452 patients are being treated in home isolation.

With 163 patients recovering in the last 24 hours, the total number of recoveries so far has gone to 19,82,029, while Delhi's total case-load is 20,09,361 and the death toll in the city has risen to 26,526.

A total of 2,160 new tests -- 1490 RT-PCR and 670 Rapid Antigen - were conducted in the last 24 hours, taking the total to 4,07,85,433 while 141 vaccines were administered - 27 first doses, 34 second doses, and 80 precaution doses.

The total number of cumulative beneficiaries vaccinated so far stands at 3,74,04,636 according to the health bulletin.

13 dead, girl still missing after stepwell collapse in Indore temple

Team Absolute | Bhopal

At least 13 people, a majority of them women, were killed after they fell into a deep stepwell at a temple in Indore on Thursday, while one minor girl was also missing, Madhya Pradesh Home Minister Narottam Mishra said.

Out of the 13 fatalities so far, 10 were women. The death toll are likely to go up as some people are still missing. "There was water into the well, which has turned into mud. A girl is reported missing. NDRF team is trying to find out some more people. So far, 13 dead bodies have been recovered," Mishra added.

He said this unfortunate incident, which occurred at around 12.30 p.m. at the Baleshwar Mahadev temple as people came to offer prayers on the occasion of Ram Navami, has sent shock waves across Madhya Pradesh. The incident occurred after the roof over the the stepwell, said to be at least 50-60 feet deep and full with water, collapsed as



over 25 people were standing on it. "An inquiry has been ordered under into the matter. Rescue operation was started soon after the roof of the well collapsed, but narrow space at the accident spot created hindrance in quick rescue operations," Mishra added. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Madhya Pradesh Congress president Kamal Nath has express their grief over death of people in the incident. Senior BJP leader Kailash Vijayvargiya and Indore Mayor Pushymitra Bhargava have reached the spot.

LOANS DISBURSED DIGITALLY ROSE 12-FOLD BETWEEN 2017 AND 2020

New Delhi: There was a 12-fold increase in the volume of loan disbursement through digital mode by banks and non-bank finance companies (NBFCs) between 2017 and 2020, a RBI panel report said. According to the findings by a working group constituted by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), between 2017 and 2020, the quantum of loans disbursed, rose from Rs 11,671 crore to Rs 1,41,821 crore, i.e. a 12-fold rise. A bulk of loans disbursed by these entities were personal loans, followed by loans to small and medium enterprises (SMEs), the report further said.

Also as per the findings of the report, there were approximately 1,100 lending apps in the country, between January 1, 2021 and February 28, 2021.

Lalit Modi threatens to sue Rahul Gandhi in UK

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Days after Rahul Gandhi's disqualification from the Lok Sabha following his conviction in a 2019 criminal defamation case, Lalit Modi, the former chief of the Indian Premier League (IPL), took a dig at him by saying that unlike the Congress leader, he has not been convicted in any case.

In a series of tweets, Lalit Modi, who lives in London since 2010 after facing allegations of financial irregularities in the IPL, said, "I see just about every Tom dick and gandhi associates again and again saying I am a fugitive of justice. Why? How? And when was I to date ever convicted of same. Unlike #Papu aka @RahulGandhi now an ordinary citizen saying it and it seems one and all opposition leaders have nothing else to do so they too are either ill informed or just vendetta prone."

He added: "I have decided to take @RahulGandhi to court in UK right away. I am sure he will have to come-up with some solid evidence. I look forward to seeing him make a complete fool of himself. #rkdhawan #sitaramkesri #motilalvohra #satissharna all bag men of #gandhi family. Not to forget #narainduttewari. How do u all have overseas assets. Ask #mrkamal Nath."

Lalit Modi also said that he can send addresses and photos to support his claims. "#Gandhifamily who have made it as if they are the entitled ones to rule our country. Yes, I will return as soon as I pass stringent liable laws," he said. Lalit Modi also said that nothing has been proven against him, adding that "What is clearly proven is I created the greatest #sporting event in this world that has generated close to 100 billion dollars".

SC ORDERS RELEASE OF FOUR CONVICTED IN 1989 MURDER CASE

New Delhi: The Supreme Court has acquitted four men convicted in a 1989 murder case, saying the prosecution has not come forward with fair and honest version of the case -- with a sketchy FIR, role of police officers at the crime spot in witnesses' statements, loopholes in the investigation etc. - while terming the case "a possible set-up by police".

The top court emphasised that the prosecution's job is not to accept the complainant's version as gospel truth and the investigation must be made in a fair and transparent manner and must ascertain the truth.

The bench, noted that the evidence in the case creates a very serious doubt on the entire prosecution story and it is quite possible that the police personnel were there to arrest the Pradip Phukan and his brother and in that process, some resistance may have resulted into the incident causing his death.

TRIPURA BJP MLA WATCHES OBSCENE VIDEO ON MOBILE PHONE IN ASSEMBLY

Agartala: A legislator of the ruling BJP in Tripura, Jadab Lal Debnath was caught on camera watching obscene video on his mobile phone during the just concluded Assembly session.

BJP Tripura state President Rajib Bhattacharya told IANS that the party would soon issue a notice to him and seek clarification. A video of Nath watching a video while the session was on has gone viral on social media leading to a sharp criticism and demanding action against the lawmaker. Netizens termed the act as 'shameful'. According to the reported viral video, the MLA was watching some obscene content on his mobile phone. The first three-day session of the newly constituted Tripura Assembly was held on March 24 and March 27-28.

IRCTC introduces millet dishes in trains



Lucknow | Agencies

The Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) is planning to introduce nutritious additions in its menu which will include millet-based dishes.

IRCTC's chief regional manager Ajit Kumar Sinha said that all the vendors in Uttar Pradesh -- including 78 static units at railway platforms -- have been asked to add millet-based food items in their menu.

"Along with them, mobile units of railways, pantry cars, and IRCTC

restaurants in the government buildings have also been given the same direction," he added.

The IRCTC official further said, "The measures are being undertaken in line with 2023 being declared by the United Nations as the International Year of Millets." According to IRCTC, food items such as millet laddoo, bread and roti made of bajra, jowar, ragi, millet kachori, millet khichdi, millet dalia, millet biscuits, ragi idli, ragi dosa, and ragi uttapam, among others will be served to train passengers.

Hotel owners ask Joshimath disaster-hit people to vacate rooms by March 31

The "ultimatum" by hotel owners has been issued in view of the forthcoming Yatra season for Chardham pilgrimage in the state.

The administration, however, has said that it has written to the government for extending the "deadline" for keeping the affected people in hotels. To which, the government is yet to respond.

The government had made arrangements for the disaster-affected people to stay in hotels till March 31. As the last date nears, hotel owners have started asking the affected to vacate the rooms.

Joshimath | Agencies

People, who were shifted to hotels by the administration after cracks developed in houses due to land subsidence in Joshimath of Uttarakhand's Chamoli district, have now been asked by hotel owners to vacate their hotel rooms by March 31.

In the first week of January, people were displaced in hotels, dharamshalas and rented houses after the land submergence increased in Joshimath. In hotels, the government is paying a rent of Rs 950 for a room. Those who are living in rented houses are being given five thousand rupees. There are 694 members of 181 families staying in various hotels, dharamshalas in Joshimath Municipality area. Arrangements have also been made for their food and drink.

Hotel owner Govind Singh says that there are 10 rooms in his hotel. Two of these rooms have been given to the disaster-affected. The administration had asked to keep affected till March. Now they need rooms for the Chardham Yatra. Many times large groups of pilgrims come. In such a situation, if the disaster-affected people are kept here, they will not be able to provide rooms to the pilgrims.

Sri Lanka re-creating Ramayana and Sita trails, may permit INR for transactions

Team Absolute | Mumbai

On the auspicious occasion of Ram Navami, the Sri Lankan High Commissioner to India, Milina Moragoda, said that the island nation is developing the legendary Ramayana and Sita trails, here on Thursday.

Moragoda, along with the Sri Lankan Consul-General in Mumbai Valsan Vethody, informed Maharashtra Governor Ramesh Bais on their country's plans.

It was in Sri Lanka that Lord Ram's wife Sita was kidnapped and held captive by Ravana for a year. Later, Lord Ram, along with his army led by Lord Hanuman, fought a war for seven days to finally vanquish and kill the 10-headed demon king. The visiting envoy also revealed that Sri Lanka is considering the possibility of allowing the use of Indian rupee (INR) for economic transactions in the island nation to boost tourism from India.

"We are discussing the possibility of allowing the use of Indian rupee for economic transactions and hope



that the move will help increase the flow of Indian tourists to Sri Lanka. The country is also considering developing the Ramayana trail and a separate Sita trail," Moragoda said on the planned tourist circuits. According to Moragoda, Sri Lanka has at least 40 places associated with Ramayana spread across the country. "There are five Shiva temples in Sri Lanka, and the one in Trincomalee is believed to have been established by Ravana," he said.

He told the Governor that there is also a Buddhist temple in Sri Lanka where Vibhishana is worshipped, and many Sri Lankans believe that Lord Buddha had visited Sri Lanka.



AAP LAUNCHES 'MODI HATAO, DESH BACHAO' POSTER CAMPAIGN

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Thursday launched a nationwide 'Modi Hatao, Desh Bachao' poster slogan in 11 languages against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Earlier, AAP workers had put up posters of, 'Modi Hatao, Desh Bachao' all over the national capital.

Taking cognisance of the matter, the police had filed 49 FIRs and had arrested six people, including owners of two printing press firms.

Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai stated that all the state units of the party have been asked to paste the posters in their respective areas.

Rai added, "I want to know if this poster is objectionable? If the Prime Minister is failing to fulfill people's aspirations,



then he is attacking the country's constitution."

Criticising the arrests, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said that even the British did not arrest those who put posters against them during the Freedom movement. He said, "Even before independence, when freedom fighters used to put up posters, no FIRs

were filed or actions taken against them by the British. Bhagat Singh had pasted many posters during British rule, not a single FIR was registered against him."

BJP supporters, on the other hand put up posters of, 'Arvind Kejriwal Ko Hatao, Delhi Bachao', in several areas.

AFSPA EXTENDED IN ASSAM'S 8 DISTRICTS FOR 6 MONTHS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Guwahati: Assam government has decided to extend the 'disturbed area' tag under the Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA) in eight districts of the state for a period of another six months from April 1. The districts - Tinsukia, Sivasagar, Charaideo, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Golaghat, Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao will be considered under the 'disturbed area' category for next six months, according to an official statement issued by the state home and political department.

For Lakhimpur sub-division in Cachar district, 'disturbed area' tag has been withdrawn, the notification mentioned.

It said, "Whereas, a review of the law and order and security scenario in Assam in the recent past indicates that there is continued requirement for keeping Tinsukia, Sivasagar, Charaideo, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Golaghat, Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao except the Lakhimpur Sub Division of Cachar district as 'Disturbed Area' for a period of six months w.e.f. April 1, 2023."

In November 1990, Assam was declared as a 'disturbed area' under the AFSPA; since then, it has been extended every six months.

CBI arrests Safdarjung Hospital neurosurgeon, 4 others for illegal practices

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Thursday arrested five persons, including a neurosurgeon of Safdarjung Hospital here, for their alleged involvement in illegal activities and accepting bribe in exchange for medical advice.

The CBI had lodged a case against neurosurgeon Manish Rawat, Avnesh Patel, Manish Sharma, Deepak Khattar (proprietor of Kanishka Surgical, Delhi), and Kuldeep, the five persons arrested on Thursday.

It was alleged that Manish Rawat in conspiracy with others (acting as middlemen), including private persons and the proprietor of a surgical shop in Delhi, was indulging in illegal practices and taking money for giving medical advice and conducting surgery by bypassing the laid down rules with regard to treatment at the Safdarjung Hospital.

Rawat allegedly directed the



patients through these middlemen to purchase instruments required for surgery only from the surgical shop of Khattar.

Rawat also allegedly compelled the patients to pay higher rates for the prescribed equipment and take commission from the said shop.

"Bribes of Rs 1,15,000, Rs 55,000 and Rs 30,000 were taken recently from the attendants of the patients

of Rawat through middlemen in the bank accounts of other persons. The same was allegedly done at the behest of Rawat," the CBI said. Rawat was laundering the illegally-earned money through companies managed by a private person. Searches were conducted at various places, including in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, which led to the recovery of incriminating documents, digital devices etc.

JIH welcomes court decision to acquit Jaipur serial blasts accused

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (JIH) on Thursday welcomed the Rajasthan High Court's decision to acquit all the four men who were sentenced to death in 2019 for the 2008 Jaipur bomb blasts that killed 71 people and injured 185 others.

The court also upheld the acquittal of a fifth accused besides accepting the plea of one of the accused stating that he was a minor.

The JIH also demanded compensation for the acquitted persons besides seeking action against the police team that framed 'false' charges in the case.

In a statement issued to the media, JIH vice-president Salim Engineer said, "Jamaat welcomes the Rajasthan High Court judgment in the 2008 Jaipur bomb blasts case. The judgment by Justice Pankaj Bhandari and Justice Sameer Jain has overturned the ruling of the trial court that awarded death sentence to the four accused in the case."

However, the statement said the judgment raises some disturbing questions. As the accused have been pronounced innocent, it implies that the real perpetrators of the crime are still at large.



"Will the government set up a new team to inquire into and trace the criminals who planned and executed the blasts? It must do so as justice has evaded the relatives of those who died in the blasts. The issue of justice for the victims of the blasts is

very important and should not be ignored," Engineer said.

The high court has identified various flaws and gaping holes in the investigation that led to the accused being falsely implicated in the case, he said. Engineer said, "JIH agrees with the court that the guilty police officers who framed false charges should be identified and punished. Jamaat-e-Islami Hind demands that compensation be given to the five acquitted persons as they lost 15 years of their precious lives in jail because of the false cases built against them."

The high court on Wednesday acquitted the four accused persons who had filed 28 appeals before the court. In its verdict, the bench reportedly said that the investigating officer did not have legal knowledge. Therefore, instructions have been given to the DGP to take action against the investigating officer as well. The court also asked the Chief Secretary to conduct an inquiry into the investigating officer.

Syed Sadat Ali, the lawyer representing the accused, said that the high court has termed the entire theory of ATS as wrong, which is why the accused have been acquitted.

Amit Shah to attend two BJP events in Bihar on April 2

Patna | Agencies

Union Home Minister Amit Shah will reach Bihar on April 1 to participate in two BJP events, newly-appointed state President Samrat Chaudhary said on Thursday.

Shah will attend two events in Sasaram and Nawada districts on April 2 with the aim of strengthening the party structure in Bihar ahead of Lok Sabha election 2024.

"Amit Shah will come to Patna on April 1. He will stay the night and go to Sasaram city in Rohtas district the next day. After that event, he will also go to Nawada as well. Ahead of the Lok Sabha election, his visit is important and it will give fresh energy to the BJP workers," Chaudhary said.



After the formation of Mahagathbandhan government in Bihar, this is Amit Shah's fifth visit to Bihar. "We are preparing a plan to win all 40 seats. The visit of the Home Minister is related to it. He will come from time

to time and assess the situation," Chaudhary said.

"We are organising an event to celebrate Emperor Ashoka's birth anniversary in Sasaram. Amit Shah is coming here to participate in this event. We are expecting a large number of people to come to the event," he said.

Chaudhary also slammed Chief Minister Nitish Kumar for taking credit for making a convention hall in the name of the Emperor in Patna.

"I want to say that the Emperor Ashoka Convention Hall was constructed due to the BJP. We have planned to construct a Samrat Ashok convention hall in every district headquarter but when Nitish Kumar separated from us, he changed the name. Whatever he said on Samrat Ashok was absolutely false," he claimed.

Case against suspected bodyguard of fugitive Amritpal Singh in J&K

Jammu | Agencies

J&K Police said on Thursday that it has booked a suspected bodyguard of fugitive 'Waris Punjab De' leader, Amritpal Singh under the Arms Act in Kishtwar district.

Varinder Singh was booked under the Arms Act in connection with a gun licence issued to him in 2014 by the District Magistrate of Kishtwar, police said.

The Kishtwar district administration has cancelled Varinder Singh's licence, and decided to probe as to how the former army jawan, who was sacked in 2015, obtained the licence and then kept renewing it from different districts of Jammu and Kashmir.

Police said Varinder Singh, also known as Fauji, was part of a private security set up of Amritpal Singh, and a video clip recently showed Varinder Singh opening fire in the air.

After the clip appeared, the Punjab Police arrested him last week under the National Security Act and lodged him in a jail in Assam.

Kishtwar Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Khalil Poswal said: "We have lodged an FIR number 52/2023 under section 3/25/30 Arms Act and the provisions of IPC in police station Kishtwar.



"The details of the case have been sent to Punjab Police and we have sought documents from them. We will seek the presence of Varinder Singh, who will be brought here to conduct investigation and to find out how he reached here and how he got licence from here.

"He was a soldier and was terminated in 2015. After issuance, his gun licence was getting renewed. The licence has been validated till 2025 from Ramban, Reasi, Baramulla and Kathua districts."

CBI APPREHENDS 3 DELHI COPS FOR DEMANDING BRIBE

New Delhi: The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Thursday conducted raids at GTB Enclave Police Station and apprehended three police personnel including an inspector rank official for allegedly demanding bribe to cancel bail.

No comment was made by the CBI in this respect while the senior police officers confirmed the incident.

A senior police official said that a raid was conducted by the CBI officials at around 12:30 p.m. at Police Station GTB Enclave. The CBI had lodged an FIR in which inspector Shiv Charan Meena was accused of corruption. "Meena allegedly demanded bribe for bail cancellation of one accused Ravinder alias Titu who was released on bail in an Arms Act case. Meena has been apprehended by the CBI team, though no recovery is made," the police said.

The police said that the CBI team conducted search at police station premise including adjoining rooms, gallery, corridor etc but recovery could not be effected.

"The CBI team has taken inspector Shiv Charan Meena, ASI Trilok Chand Dabas and DHG Rishi with them for further interrogation. In this regard, a case has been registered by the CBI," the police said.

Seven held for forcing woman to remove hijab in TN

Chennai | Agencies

The Tamil Nadu Police arrested seven persons including a juvenile for allegedly forcing a woman to remove her hijab at the Vellore Fort Complex in Tamil Nadu.

S. Rajesh Kannan, Superintendent of Police, Vellore said that the seven people are arrested for intentional insult and wanton vilification. He said that the arrested persons acted against individual freedom. The arrested are, K. Santosh (23), Imran Pasha (24), Mohammed Faisal (21), Ibrahim Basha (24), Mohammed Faisal (23) and C. Prasanth (23). The arrested juvenile is sent to child care home. Police said that most of those arrested are local auto-rickshaw drivers.

According to police, the incident happened on March 27 at noon when the woman wearing a hijab reached the fort along with a friend. The arrested men also reached there and asked her to remove the hijab. One of them shot the incident on the phone and uploaded it in social media platforms which went viral.

A case was filed by the North Police of Vellore on a complaint given by the Village Administrative Officer (VAO) on Wednesday. Police constituted five special teams and nabbed the culprits on



Thursday. The seven were arrested on charges of endangering public safety, threat to personal freedom, intention to create enmity between two sections of people and also acting against the modesty of women.

Police have directed people not to share the video clipping on social media platforms. Those indulging in the same would be charged under the Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Harassment of Woman Act and Information Technology (IT) Act.

Vellore Superintendent of Police said that further investigations are on.

LEGAL TEAM WORKING ON RAHUL'S CASE: KHARGE

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday said that a legal team is working on the case in which former INC chief Rahul Gandhi was convicted by a Gujarat court following which he was disqualified from the Lok Sabha.

Kharge said that the party is ready to face the matter "politically and legally", and also criticised the Central government for disqualifying Rahul Gandhi "in haste".

The Congress president termed the disqualification "vengeance".

As a mark of protest against the disqualification of Rahul Gandhi from the Lok Sabha, and to press its demand for a probe into the allegations of fraud levelled against the Adani Group, the Congress has launched 'Jai Bharat Satyagraha' across the country against the Centre.

The party has set up a war room to monitor the 'Satyagraha', which will culminate in Delhi with a rally. Congress General Secretary K.C.



Venugopal had said: "The 'Jai Bharat Satyagraha' is a protest against the erroneous conviction and disqualification of Rahul Gandhi, and to express the party's strong resolve to keep raising the voice of the people

against the blatant lot of people's money and nation's wealth." As part of the programmes planned to be organised during the protest, all block/mandal units of the Congress will hold 'nukkad sabhas'

and address the public on relevant issues. Social media campaigns focusing on Rahul Gandhi's message to the people will also be carried out to appeal for public support for the 'Satyagraha'.

Two soldiers die after rope snaps during training exercise in Bengal

Kolkata | Agencies

Two Indian Army soldiers have been killed during a routine river crossing exercise at Barrackpore near Kolkata.

While Lt Gen R.P. Kalita, GOC-in-C, Eastern Command, along with officers of other ranks paid tributes to Naik Lengkhohal and Sepoy Aldrin Hmingthanzwala, the Army has set up a court of inquiry (CoI) to probe the incident that took place on Wednesday.

The tragic incident occurred at the Sarovar Lake within the Barrackpore Cantonment, about 40 km north of Kolkata. According to an Eastern Command official, assault river crossing

exercises are held at the lake on a routine basis. The soldiers are expected to cross the water body with the help of a rope that stretches across the lake.

On Wednesday morning, six soldiers were participating in the exercise. While the first three made it across safely, the rope apparently snapped when the remaining were crossing. While one soldier could be rescued, the other two drowned.

Such exercises are usually held with all the trappings of a real-life situation, including 'enemy posts' maintaining watch. This means that the soldiers participating in the exercise are in full battle gear. It is a 'touch and go' situation if a soldier loses his grip on the rope, unless he is an

expert swimmer.

"Unfortunately, that is how it is. The Army needs to train its personnel for all situations. We have been part of such exercises. Life jackets are not an option, given the weight a soldier carries. Such incidents are unfortunate but rare. A probe is certainly required to know why the rope snapped. If somebody is found responsible, he should be punished," said a source.

While Naik Lengkhohal was from Nagaland, Sepoy Hmingthanzwala belonged to Mizoram. Both were from the Assam Regiment. Their mortal remains are being flown back to their respective homes after completing the necessary formalities, including autopsies conducted to ascertain the cause of death.



SECOND TIME IN A ROW, MUMBAI RANKS AMONG WORLD'S TREE-RICH CITIES 2022

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Chidied as a concrete jungle, India's commercial capital Mumbai has been included in the World Tree City 2022 list, for the second consecutive year, a BMC official said here on Thursday.

The Arbor Day Foundation Chief Executive Dan Lambe has awarded the TCW certificate signed by Hiroto Mitsugi to the BMC authorities, according to an official Spokesperson.

The United Nations Food & Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and ADF conduct the TCW programme and in the past 50 years, the ADF has planted more than 35 crore trees worldwide, with a target of 50 crore more trees by 2027.

Since 2019, the TCW was implemented to recognise efforts of cities globally that strive to balance the trees and environment and are included in the TCW list.

Mumbai fulfilled the five ADF criteria for the



award like determining responsibilities for tree

care, setting rules to govern urban forests and tree management, maintaining an up-to-date inventory or assessment of local tree assets, allocating resources for a tree management plan, and organizing an annual tree festival to educate citizens.

With this accolade, Mumbai is once again part of cities worldwide promoting best practices in urban forestry for the second time - in 2021, it shared the honour with Hyderabad.

BMC Commissioner I. S. Chahal said that "due to efforts like proper maintenance of trees in Mumbai, continuity for planting new trees, extensive implementation of urban forests, the fact that Mumbai city is rich in trees has once again been highlighted in the eyes of the world".

Mumbai's Park Superintendent Jitendra Pardeshi termed it a "matter of pride" for all people of Mumbai that the city has bagged the award with the BMC's efforts and public support to maintain the environmental balance through tree wealth.

Bombay HC quashes criminal plea against Salman Khan

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bombay High Court Justice Bharati Dange on Thursday quashed proceedings against Bollywood superstar Salman Khan in a complaint filed by a journalist alleging criminal intimidation in 2019.

The actor had challenged a summons based on the complaint by Ashok Pandey, claiming that when the actor was cycling on the road, he got into a scuffle and snatched the latter's phone.

The Magistrate Court had earlier sought a report from the D.N. Nagar police station where the complaint was filed against Khan and his bodyguard Nawaz Shaikh.

Based on the "positive police report" under CrPC Sec. 202 and other material, the Magistrate found there was sufficient ground to proceed against the actor.

In March last year, the Magistrate observed



that offences were made out against the accused (Khan) under IPC Sec. 504 and 506 and summoned him to remain personally present in court on April 5, 2022.

The Bollywood star challenged the Magistrate's order in the high court which stayed the order in April 2022, and also sought for quashing the complaint lodged against him, said his lawyer Aabad Ponda. Ponda and his team of Agsthya Desai and Vikram Sutari of DSK Legal, contended that Khan had only asked his bodyguards to stop the journalist from shooting videos/photos of him at that time. Allowing Khan's plea, Justice Dange quashed the 2019 complaint and also the Magistrate's summons issued against the actor and his bodyguard for personal appearance.

Attack on cops in Aurangabad unfortunate: Devendra Fadnavis

Team Absolute | Nagpur

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis today said the incident of a mob allegedly attacking police personnel in Aurangabad city, now named Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, was unfortunate and appealed to leaders to avoid making provocative statements and giving political colour to it.

A mob of more than 500 people allegedly attacked policemen on Wednesday night after some youth clashed among themselves. The incident, which lasted around an hour, took place in Kiradpura locality, which has a famous Ram temple where a huge crowd is expected to celebrate the Ram Navami on



Thursday, police officials said.

Speaking at his residence in Nagpur on the violence, Fadnavis, who also holds the home portfolio, said, "The incident that happened in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar is very unfortunate and

efforts are on to maintain peace in the area. However, some people are trying to vitiate the atmosphere there by giving provocative statements."

"I feel that political leaders should know how to behave in such situations. Hence, if anyone is giving such wrong statements they should refrain from it. Everyone should maintain peace. If anyone is trying to give political colour to this incident, then it is unfortunate," he said in response to a query about some leaders accusing him of being responsible for the episode.

According to police, some vehicles were damaged in the violence in Aurangabad and a combing operation was underway to nab those involved.

After SC's 'impotent' remarks, Congress guns for Maha CM's resignation

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Day after the Supreme Court's scathing remarks against the Maharashtra government as being "impotent" for failing to curb hate speeches, the state Congress on Thursday demanded the resignation of Chief Minister Eknath Shinde.

"The Shinde government has given a big blow to the image of Maharashtra in the past nine months. Communal clashes are on the increase due to the inflammatory speeches made by certain organisations, but no action is taken against them," said state Congress President Nana Patole.

Now, even the apex court has expressed its anger by calling the state government as "impotent" and "powerless" as it does not act promptly, and asked "why do we have a state at all if it is remaining silent", he added.

"This is a big slap on the government of Shinde (Deputy Chief Minister Devendra) Fadnavis and they have forfeited the right to remain in power. Owing to their inaction, religious disputes are getting out of hand. They must immediately step down," Patole demanded.

Endorsing the SC's ire, he alleged that the state's



law and order has totally collapsed and the MPs and MLAs of the ruling Shiv Sena-Bharatiya Janata Party openly bully the people and the Opposition leaders.

"A notorious bookie's family has open access to the Home Minister (Fadnavis)'s residence but he is unaware of it, elected leaders, former ministers and legislators are being threatened and attacked in the state but no action is initiated. A ruling party MLA fires bullets from his gun but he escapes police action," Patole said.

Referring to the Sakal Hindu Samaj (SHS)'s recent rallies which earned the SC's wrath, he pointed out that they have been making extremely provocative and inflammatory statements which have created a threat to social peace.

Some organisations have opposed and lodged police complaints, but the law-enforcers hands are tied down as the government is blatantly supporting the fanatic group, he added.

Patole said that the government is expected to curb such groups "but it lacks willpower" that allows these outfits to flourish, and tarnish the fair image of Mumbai and Maharashtra before the world.

"The word ('impotent') that the apex court used for the Maharashtra government has never been applied for any government till date... this itself shows how serious the deterioration is," said Patole.

Nawazuddin Siddiqui, Ex-wife, children summoned by Bombay High Court

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bombay High Court told actor Nawazuddin Siddiqui and his ex-wife Zainab Siddiqui to appear before it along with their two minor children on April 3 to explore the possibility of settling their issues amicably for the sake of the children.

A division bench of Justices Revati Mohite Dere and Sharmila Deshmukh was hearing a habeas corpus (produce the person) petition filed by the actor seeking a direction to his former wife to reveal the whereabouts of their 12-year-old daughter and 7-year-old son. The actor had claimed his wife had brought the children from Dubai to India without informing him and this was affecting their education as they were not attending school. The bench on Thursday asked the actor, his former wife and



their two children to appear before it on April 3 in the judge's chamber for an in-camera hearing.

"We are concerned for the children...let's explore the possibility of an amicable settlement," the court said. Nawazuddin Siddiqui's lawyer Adnan Shaikh told the bench a proposed consent term was sent as

directed by the high court earlier. "We have sent the proposed consent terms.

It has been six days but we have got no reply. Don't think they want to settle," Shaikh said. Advocate Chaitanya Purankar, appearing for Zainab, however argued she too wants to settle the matter.

MAN KILLS FATHER-IN-LAW AFTER WIFE RUNS AWAY WITH BOYFRIEND

Team Absolute | Jalna

A man allegedly shot dead his father-in-law in Maharashtra's Jalna district after the former's wife ran away with her boyfriend, a police official said on Thursday.

The incident took place in Sharda Nagar in Ambad on Wednesday, the official said.

"The accused is a resident of Adool in Paithan. His wife eloped with her boyfriend and moved to Aurangabad. Enraged, he confronted his father-in-law. An argument ensued during which he shot dead his father-in-law. Efforts are on to nab the accused," Inspector Shirish Humbe said.

Cop found dead on railway tracks

Team Absolute | Thane

A police constable, who was a bodyguard of a former Maharashtra minister, was found dead on railway tracks at Taloja in Thane district on Wednesday morning, with officials suspecting it to be a case of suicide.

The Government Railway Police (GRP) have identified the constable as Vaibhav Kadam, who was a bodyguard of ex-minister and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Jitendra Awhad, said an official.

Kadam was also one of the

accused in a case where a man, Anant Karmuse, had alleged that he was beaten up at Awhad's Thane residence over a Facebook post.

It is suspected that Kadam jumped before a speeding train and died, the official said.

A team of three doctors later conducted a post-mortem on the body of the police constable.

Thane Civil Surgeon Dr Kailash Pawar told the media the doctors conducted post-mortem on the totally mutilated body and the entire process was videographed.

"It is a case where the vic-

tim was hit by a speeding train and several parts of the deceased's body were detached...it is a case of multi-trauma. We looked for injuries, but did not find any. We also examined if it was a case of sabotage, but did not get any indication," said Pawar.

The civil surgeon added viscera (internal organs) has been sent for forensic examination. Inspector Pandhari Kandhe of the Thane GRP said as of now a case of accidental death has been registered and further probe was on. The police did not find any suicide note, he stated.

FATHER OF IIT BOMBAY STUDENT WHO DIED ALLEGES HARASSMENT BY COPS



Team Absolute | Mumbai

The father of dead IIT Bombay student Darshan Solanki has written to Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde alleging that his family was facing harassment from the police in the registration of an FIR into the death of his son, an official said.

The letter, written on Wednesday, also said the family was "completely shocked and disheartened" by the attitude of the police and the members of the Special Investigation Team (SIT), who have been "refusing" to register the FIR for almost two weeks now.

A copy of the letter is also addressed to Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, who handles the home portfolio, and Mumbai Police Commissioner Vivek Phansalkar, the official said. Darshan Solanki, who hailed from Ahmedabad in Gujarat and was a first-year student of the B Tech (Chemical) course, allegedly committed suicide by jumping off the seventh floor of a hostel building located on the campus on February 12 this year.

His family has claimed he faced discrimination at IITB for belonging to a Scheduled Caste (SC) community.

However, the inquiry committee set up by the institute had ruled out caste-based discrimination and hinted at deteriorat-

ing academic performance as a possible cause of suicide.

In his letter, Darshan's father Ramesh Solanki said, "This is to inform you that I along with my family had travelled from Ahmedabad to visit the Powai police station for registration of FIR on the basis of my complaint dated March 16 in the case of my son's death. However, in spite of our requests the Powai police station refused to register the FIR stating that since the SIT has been constituted to investigate the case, they cannot register the FIR and they will forward the complaint to the SIT for necessary action." A DCP present at that time was non-cooperative and refused to entertain their request for registration of the FIR, he said.

The dead student's father alleged that when the family approached the SIT with the same demand on March 16, it also did not cooperate.

"We are completely shocked and disheartened by the attitude of the police and the members of the SIT, who have been refusing to register the FIR for almost two weeks and are now forcing us to write their version. Their demeanour does not inspire any confidence in us and is suspect to say the least," the letter said.

"We are apprehensive that the SIT is attempting to sideline and divert the investigation from the angle of caste discrimination faced by Darshan," it added.

"We request you to please take stock of the matter and ensure that the FIR is registered on the basis of our complaint and the investigation is carried out independently and fairly without any foul play...Please act urgently in the matter to ensure justice to our son, who met his untimely death due to caste discrimination faced by him on the IIT Bombay campus, and uphold the truth," Solanki said.

On Monday, the SIT of Mumbai police probing Solanki's death said it has recovered a note that mentions the name of his hostel mate, an official said on Monday. The purported suicide note, written on a piece of paper, was recovered from Solanki's hostel room some days ago, he added.

Medical student dies by suicide, Police suspect exam stress



Team Absolute | Pune

A 21-year-old student of the government-run B J Medical College here allegedly ended life by jumping from the terrace of the hospital attached to the college on Wednesday morning, police said.

The young woman was disturbed for the past few days due to the stress of studies and examinations, said an official, adding that they have not recovered any suicide note.

The woman allegedly jumped from the terrace of the Sassoon General Hospital.

"She was a first-year medical student and was appar-

ently under stress due to the pressure of studies. She had been crying often in the last three-four days. Her parents had advised her to appear for the exam even if she had not prepared well," said Deputy Commissioner of Police Smartana Patil.

Her parents had even taken her to a psychiatrist for consultation and stayed by her side for the last three days, the official said.

"Today they accompanied her to the college, but she somehow went to the terrace of the hospital and jumped down. She was admitted to the ICU but succumbed during treatment," DCP Patil said, adding that further probe was on.



EDITOR'S SPECS

RELIGION TO PLAY A ROLE DURING CAMPAIGNING, FEEL VOTERS

C voter conducted an exclusive survey-cum-opinion poll in Karnataka ahead of the May 10 Assembly elections. As per the poll, potential voters feel that religious polarisation could be a significant factor that could significantly affect the Assembly elections in the southern state. The CVoter poll projects the Congress to win between 115 and 127 seats in the 244-member Karnataka Assembly and form a majority government in the state. Aware of this, BJP strategists could try to use the religion and minority card to stage a comeback as campaigning heats up for the elections. As per the CVoter survey-cum-poll, 34 per cent of the respondents feel that religious polarisation could significantly affect the elections. Another 30 per cent feel that the hijab controversy (along with minority status for the Lingayat community) could play a big role. The survey was conducted in late March, just before the elections were announced, and interacted with around 25,000 respondents across demographics, age groups and identities. The elections are scheduled for May 10 and the results will be declared on May 13, as per the Election Commission. Surprisingly, when CVoter asked potential voters to identify the most important issues that worry them in Karnataka, religious polarisation and hijab were barely mentioned. Unemployment, infrastructure and corruption were identified as the major issues. Yet, the same set of respondents also feel that there is a high possibility of religion being used extensively during the campaign. Sometime before the Karnataka elections were announced, the BJP government had removed the 4 per cent quota for Muslims. The hijab issue has been festering for more than one year and the Supreme Court is yet to deliver a final verdict on the matter. Besides, the Tipu Sultan controversy has been raked up many times even before the elections were announced.

HAS BJP CENTRAL LEADERSHIP TAKEN CHARGE BY NAMING CP JOSHI AS RAJ PARTY PRESIDENT?

According to sources in the state BJP, the central leadership has taken the reins in its hands in Rajasthan for the ensuing assembly polls by appointing Chittorgarh MP CP Joshi as the state BJP president.

Archana Sharna

This fact emerges by looking at the huge show of strength at the party office during Joshi's anointment as state party chief. The crowds coming from different parts of the state along with central leaders with their followers and bouncers being deployed was something which surprised the party workers. MP Rajyawardhan Rathore drove Joshi to the party office in Jaipur from Delhi, which again indicated a change of equations in state politics. Addressing the workers, Joshi was clear that hoardings and banners with his photo will not be put up anywhere in Rajasthan, rather the public welfare schemes run by Prime Minister Narendra Modi should be highlighted through these hoardings.

It was clear that before the assembly polls, the central government schemes will be promoted and elections will be held on PM Narendra Modi's face, said party sources. Also, Joshi spoke about the Udaipur terror incident in which BJP supporter Kanhaiyalal was killed and said, "Kanhaiyalal of Udaipur was massacred due to the appeasement policies of the Congress. I say that his neck was cut by the Rajasthan Congress government." The other point which became clear from his speech was that the policy of 'appeasement' and the Hindutva issue will figure prominently in the assembly polls, confirmed party officials. Earlier, the BJP's former state president Satish Poonia had been vocal against the state government's policies. However, sources said that chief minister Ashok Gehlot's welfare schemes were difficult to criticise and hence the central leadership is



pushing for the promotion of welfare schemes being launched by the central government, leading to the change in banner and hoarding subjects. The second important issue will be the policy of appeasement and the Hindutva issue, they added. Joshi assumed charge of the state BJP on Monday. He said, "We will reach out to the worker sitting at the end of the line to promote the schemes of the central government. For the first time in the country, the central government is doing such

work, that the countrymen feel proud in calling themselves Indian citizens." Joshi added that now "I am sure that in the 2023 assembly elections, the workers of Rajasthan will work to overthrow the indolent, corrupt and autocratic Congress government. I appeal to the workers that for the coming 6 months we have to fight shoulder to shoulder and ensure that the Congress government is thrown out of Rajasthan forever, under whose rule the farmers have to shed tears."

Karnataka: Corruption a big issue after unemployment and infrastructure



Compared to many other states ruled by the BJP in the country, corruption seems to have emerged as a major issue among the potential voters in Karnataka, which goes to the polls on May 10, according to an exclusive survey conducted by ABP-CVoter in the state in late March 2023. The most important issue flagged by potential voters in the survey is unemployment (29.1 per cent), followed by infrastructure problems like electricity, roads and water (21.5 per cent). Corruption is the third most important issue with 12.7 per cent respondents singling it out. The number may not appear very big, but looks significant in the context. In Gujarat too, voters had identified unemployment and infrastructure as the two most important issues before the Assembly elections held late last year. Corruption was way behind with just about 6.5 per cent of the voters flagging it. Even in Tripura, which went to the polls recently, corruption was not considered to be a very serious issue. The ABP-CVoter survey, which interacted with around 25,000 respondents across demographics, age groups and identities, reveals that persistent allegations of rampant corruption against the BJP government seem to have struck a chord with the voters. Just recently, BJP MLA Madal Virupakshappa was arrested by the Karnataka Lokayukta police on bribery charges after the high court denied him anticipatory bail. His son Prasanth Madal was caught red-handed accepting a bribe of Rs 40 lakh. Over the last two years, many private contractors and businessmen have publicly accused officials and ruling party functionaries of demanding bribes. The Congress seems to have mounted a successful campaign against the BJP on this issue with the use of catchy slogans and innovative political tactics. Perhaps the last time a BJP government in a state faced serious allegations of corruption that resonated with the voters was in Jharkhand in late 2019, when Raghubar Das was the Chief Minister. He had lost his own Assembly seat in the fallout during elections. As per the survey, Congress will probably win a majority of seats in the 224-seat Karnataka Assembly. According to an analysis of the survey data, the vote share of the Congress could rise from 38 per cent in 2018 to 40.1 per cent this time. Compared to 80 seats in 2018, the survey projects the Congress to win between 115 and 127 seats. The survey also reveals that the party is leading over rivals BJP and JD(S) in all regions of Karnataka. Even in the old Mysore region, which has been a stronghold of the JD(S), the Congress is projected to edge ahead of its rival, while the BJP is projected to perform very poorly in this region.

international

'Putin may attend nuclear power plant inauguration in Turkey'



Ankara | Agencies Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said that his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin may travel to Turkey on April 27 to attend the inauguration ceremony of the Akkuyu nuclear power plant. Erdogan told news channel ATV-A Haber in an interview that Putin may either travel to Mersin in person or attend the ceremony via teleconference, Xinhua news agency reported. The project, located in the

southeastern Turkish province of Mersin, is Turkey's first nuclear plant. It is expected to produce 35 billion kilowatt-hours (kWh) of electricity annually and will meet about 10 per cent of domestic electricity needs. It is the world's first nuclear power plant project implemented through a build-own-operate model. Under a contract, Russia's Rosatom firm has agreed to provide the power plant's design, construction, maintenance, operation and decommissioning.

Spouses of H-1B Visa holders in tech sector can work in US: Judge

New York | Agencies

In an immigration-friendly move, a judge has ruled that spouses of highly-skilled H-1B visa holders in tech sector can now work in the US, thus upholding an Obama-era rule under which partners were issued H-4 visas. US District Judge Tanya Chutkan on Tuesday dismissed arguments by Save Jobs USA, who claimed that the Congress never granted the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) authority to allow foreign nationals, like H-4 visa-holders, to work during their stay in the US. "That contention runs headlong into the text of the (Immigration and Nationality Act), decades of executive-branch practice, and both explicit and implicit congressional ratification



of that practice," Chutkan wrote in her ruling. She further said that the DHS has authorised employment not just for students, but also for their spouses and dependents. The lawsuit was also opposed by big tech firms like Amazon, Apple, Google, and Microsoft. H4 visas are issued to dependent spouses and children who accompany H-1B, H-2A, H-2B, and H-3 visa holders to the US. The spouses of H-1B visa holders tend to be highly educated, many of them in STEM fields, and previously had careers of their own or worked to support their families. In 2021, Google filed a legal brief with over 40 companies to protect the work

authorisation programme that allows the spouses of H-1B visa holders to work in the US. As part of his anti-immigration policy, former President Donald Trump had proposed to end the issuing of work authorisation (H-4 EAD) for certain spouses of high-skilled talent who came to the US on H-1B visas. According to a National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP) analysis, 90 per cent of the spouses of H-1B visa holders are female, two-thirds are from India and 6 per cent from China. "The US can reap significant economic benefits, ease labor shortages, and attract more workers in the global competition for talent if it expanded current rules on work eligibility for the spouses of H-1B visa holders," the 2022 study by NFAP said.

28 killed in Philippine ferry fire, 230 rescued

Manila | Agencies

At least 28 people were killed and 230 others rescued after the ferry they were travelling in caught fire in the Philippines, authorities said on Thursday. Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) Commodore Marco Antonio Gine said the M/V Lady Mary Joy 3, a passenger and cargo vessel, was headed to Jolo from Zamboanga City when it caught fire in the waters off Baluk-Baluk Island at around 10 p.m. on Wednesday, reports Xinhua news agency. Nixon Alonzo, the chief of disaster reduction and management office in Basilan province, told a local radio that authorities were verifying reports that seven more passengers who jumped into the sea are missing. At least 195 passengers and 35 crew members have been rescued. He said rescuers found four bodies on the vessel, while six were recovered



from the sea. "The passengers died from drowning after jumping into the water. Some suffered burns," Alonzo said. Hadji Muhtamad Mayor Arsina Kahing-Nanoh posted pictures of the vessel on the beach of Baluk-Baluk Island and some of the rescued passengers on social media. Authorities are looking into the cause of the fire, which reportedly started in an air-conditioned cabin in the vessel. Most of the passengers were asleep when the fire broke out. The PCG said it deployed personnel and its vessel to help in the search and rescue operation, which continues at the time.

US Senate passes bill to end national Covid emergency

Washington | Agencies

The US Senate has passed a bill to end the national Covid-19 emergency which was declared by former President Donald Trump on March 13, 2020. The 68-23 vote on Wednesday was overwhelmingly bipartisan and the joint resolution, which cleared the House earlier this year, now heads to President Joe Biden, reports CNN. A White House official told CNN that while the President "strongly opposes" this bill, the administration is already winding down the emergency by May 11, the date previously announced for the end of the authority. "If the Senate passed the



measure and it heads to Biden's desk, he will sign it, and the administration will continue working with agencies to wind down the national emergency with as much notice as possible to Americans who could potentially be impacted," the official was quoted as saying. The White House said in January that Biden "strongly opposes" the Republican res-

olution to end the Covid-19 emergency, but did not threaten a veto. House Democrats largely voted against the bill when it was brought to the floor in February except for 11 Democrats who joined Republicans in support. With the highest number of cases and fatalities, the US remains the worst-hit country by the Covid pandemic.

S.Korea's instant noodles exports hit record high in 2022

Seoul | Agencies

South Korea's exports of instant noodles reached an all-time high in 2022, boosted by the global popularity of Korean food and culture, data showed on Thursday. The country exported \$862 million worth of noodles, including instant noodles, or "ramyeon" in Korean, and udon noodles, last year, up 12 per cent from a year earlier, according to the data from the Korea Customs Service. It marked the highest ever global sales for South Korean noodles, surpassing the previous record set in 2021, reports Yonhap News Agency. By volume, outbound shipment of noodles grew 10.3 per cent on-year to 260,000 tonnes in 2022, also a record



figure. South Korea was the world's second-largest exporter of noodles last year following China that sold 460,000 tons of the products, the data showed. The brisk shipment was

attributed to the global popularity of Korean food, along with the popularity of Korean movies, dramas and music that boosted overseas demand. The Covid-19 pandemic also brought up the demand for ready-to-eat food products around the world. Among South Korean noodle exports, ramyeon was the No. 1 export item with \$765 million in sales last year, up 13.5 per cent from a year earlier. By nation, China was the largest overseas market for South Korean noodles, with exports reaching \$191 million, followed by the US with \$120 million and Japan with \$68 million. The South Korean noodle products were sold at 143 nations, or the largest ever figure, last year, the data showed.

STRONG PACIFIC STORM BRINGS MORE RAIN, SNOW TO CALIFORNIA

San Francisco: A powerful Pacific storm has continued to bring more rain, snow and damaging winds to California, said the US National Weather Service (NWS).

According to the NWS, the storm will move south along the West Coast through on Thursday, bringing rounds of heavy coastal and low elevation rain, mountain snow, and high winds to Oregon and California, reports Xinhua news agency. Nearly four million people in California and Oregon were under strong wind alerts on Wednesday. California has been hammered by at least 12 atmospheric rivers so far this season, which led to heavy persistent storms, record rainfall, snowfall, flooding, among other forms of damage. Cities including Oakland and Monterey are on track to hit records for rain in March by the end of this week. "Preceding storms have saturated soils which will result in trees coming down and the potential for more power outages," NWS meteorologist Roger Gass told CNN.





Ram Navmi celebrated with Zest & Zeal



Governor Mangubhai Patel offered prayers at the temple on Ram Navmi, and performed Kanya-Pujan. People of the town visited temples, offered prayers and participated in the procession of the Shobha Yatras. Chief Minister Chouhan offered prayers and wished for the prosperity of the people of the state.

SMART CITY EXPO IN NEW DELHI, M.P. KEY SMART CITIES GOT 7 OUT OF 16 AWARDS

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In the 8th Smart City Expo held in New Delhi, out of total 16 categories, smart cities of Madhya Pradesh have received awards in 7 categories. Smart cities Indore and Jabalpur got 2-2 and Bhopal, Sagar and Ujjain got one award each. Urban Development and Housing Minister Bhupendra Singh has congratulated the officers and employees of the Smart City who received the award. Commissioner Civil Administration and Development Shri Bharat Yadav said that Smart City Indore has received award in Best Startup and Best Water Management category, Jabalpur in Governance and Economy (311 Apps) and



City Leader (Best Smart City CEO) category. Similarly, Smart City Bhopal has received a special award for Smart Parking Category, Sagar for Clean City Category

and Ujjain for Ujjain Mahakal Mahalok.

It is noteworthy that the 8th Smart City India-2023 Expo took place from March 27 to 29 at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi. Nominations were taken from January to February 2023 in 16 categories for the award. Governance and Economy Award in the nomination categories, Smart Urban Mobility, Best Water Management, Best City Leader, Best Health Care Initiative, Clean City, Digital City, Public-Private Partnership, Safe City, Smart City of the Year, Smart Energy Project, Smart Waste Disposal, Special Category, Best Startup Initiative, Smart Parking Initiative and PPP Initiative Category.

IISER Bhopal team develops AI-based tool to probe gut bacteria



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) Bhopal have developed an Artificial Intelligence (AI) based method to predict how the bacteria in the gut break down the various types of food and medication, the institute said on Thursday.

This AI-based tool called "GutBug" provides information about the specific bacterial enzymes, reactions, and bacteria involved in the process of digestion and absorption of nutrients by the human gut.

The human gut microbiome is made of over a thousand different species of bacteria, which have more than 3.3 million unique genes. These bacteria secrete enzymes to process what a human eats and provide the body with various metabolites that are essential for health and body functions. However, studying the

complex host-microbial relationships is a challenge because of the vastness of the microbiome and the fact that the collection of bacteria varies among individuals.

But the tool GutBug, detailed in the Journal of Molecular Biology, can potentially predict all possible bacterial enzymes that act on bioactive dietary molecules as well as oral drugs, the researchers said.

"GutBug uses a combination of machine learning, neural networks, and chemoinformatic methods. We used a curated database of 363,872 enzymes from about 700 human gut bacterial strains and a substrate database consisting of 3,457 enzymes to train the AI model," said Dr Vineet K. Sharma, IISER Bhopal, in a statement.

"GutBug can help us better understand how the food we eat or medicines we consume orally are processed by our gut bacteria and how this affects our health. Such

understanding can be useful in designing diets, developing new probiotics, creating nutraceutical products, and improving drug design depending on the nature of the gut bacteria each individual has, leading to personalised medicine," Sharma said.

To train the AI model the study used the largest enzyme substrate database. It contained information on the gut bacterial species from eight populations to understand how drug and food metabolism varies across populations due to gut bacteria activity.

GutBug was able to identify the specific enzymes involved in the breakdown of various molecules and the bacterial strains that carry them.

The tool was tested with 27 different molecules, including complex carbohydrates, flavonoids, and drugs, and was shown to be highly accurate, with success rates ranging from 0.78 to 0.97.



CHIEF MINISTER CHOUHAN PLANTED PEEPAL, KACHANAR AND MANGO SAPPLINGS

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted saplings of Peepal, Kachanar and Mango in the Smart City Garden today. Along with the Chief Minister, social workers of Sehore district

Abhishek Patel and Gaurav Chauhan planted saplings. Social media journalists Siddharth Sonavane and Yogita planted saplings on the birth anniversary of their daughter Parm. Abhiman Sonavane and Kamal Sonavane also attended.

PM TO VISIT BHOPAL ON APRIL 1

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Prime minister Narendra Modi will reach Bhopal on April 1 on a day-long visit, where he is scheduled to attend the combined commanders' conference 2023.

He will also flag off the Bhopal-New Delhi Vande Bharat Express train during the visit.

The three-day conference of military commanders began this morning and will continue till April 1. It is being held on the theme "Ready, Resurgent, Relevant".

During the conference, deliberations will be held over a varied spectrum of issues pertaining to national security, including jointness and theaterisation in the Armed Forces. Preparation of the Armed Forces and progress in the defence



ecosystem towards attaining self reliance will also be reviewed.

The conference will witness participation of commanders from the three armed forces and senior officers from the defence ministry.

Assembly elections are due in the politically crucial state of Madhya Pradesh in December and there is a likelihood of the prime minister visiting the state on quite a few occasions in the coming months.

ON-DUTY DOCTOR, NURSING STAFF MANHANDLED IN BADNAWAR FOR DECLARING ONE DEAD ON ARRIVAL AT HOSPITAL

Badnawar: Over 10 to 15 villagers who came along with one unconscious person vandalised the civil hospital here in Badnawar village of Dhar district after on-duty doctors at the hospital declared the person dead on arrival. The incident was reported on Wednesday at 11 pm. Acting on Dr Sandeep Srivastava's report, the police registered a case in the matter. According to duty doctors and the nursing staff, who were frightened after the incident, informed that it was around 11 pm, when 10 to 15 villagers from Semaliya village brought one Arjun Singh Chavda, 42, in an unconscious state. During the preliminary examination, it was confirmed that Chavda suffered a massive heart attack and died before he reached the hospital. As soon as Dr Shrivastava declared him dead, villagers started manhandling Dr

Srivastava, nursing staff members as well as the security guard. They vandalised the doors and window panels of the hospital. Out of fear, the nurses and other women staff doing duty also ran away to the second floor. The commotion went on for about 10 minutes. On receiving the information, Badnawar police station in-charge Vishwadeep Singh Parihar and his team reached the spot. Meanwhile, before police reached the hospital, villagers along with the body moved out of the hospital and went to Barnagar, where doctors once again declared Chavda dead on arrival. While taking the patient, the people also pushed the police vehicle apart and left without stopping. Villagers who came along with Chavda claimed that the doctor was not on duty and they called him from home.

CM CHOUHAN DESCRIBED INDORE INCIDENT AS UNFORTUNATE, ISSUES INSTRUCTIONS FOR PROBE

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has today expressed deep sorrow over the untimely death of 11 persons due to the collapse of the old private stepwell (bawdi) in Indore. CM Chouhan said that the incident is unfortunate. Eleven civilians could not be saved after several attempts. Instructions have been given to investigate the incident. The government is sensitive and stands with the families of the victims. As soon as the information about the incident was received, information about the rescue operations was taken by being in constant contact with the Indore administration. Chief Minister Chouhan said that a relief amount of Rs. 5 lakh each will be provided to the relatives of those who died in the incident. Along with free treatment of the injured, an amount of Rs 50 thousand each will be provided.

'Rahul's LS disqualification will be a key issue in 2024 polls'

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Former Maharashtra Chief Minister and senior Congress leader Prithviraj Chavan, said former INC president Rahul Gandhi's disqualification from the Lok Sabha will be one of the key issues to corner the Narendra Modi-led BJP government in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Chavan said this here while addressing a press conference on the recent political developments following the disqualification of Rahul Gandhi from the Lower House of Parliament.

"The matter will not end... and the Congress will take this issue to the people during the general elections," he said. Notably, the All India Congress Committee on Wednesday organised as many as 35 press conferences in all states and major cities.

The former Maharashtra Chief Minister said Rahul Gandhi was targeted for questioning the relationship between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and business tycoon Gautam Adani. "If Rahul Gandhi raised ques-



tions and demanded an investigation into the Adani group, did he do anything wrong? The entire episode is happening at the behest of PM Modi. Even BJP leaders accept that wrong things are happening... but they are unable to express their thoughts openly," Chavan said.

The senior Congress leader also asserted that Rahul Gandhi is likely to face more attacks from the BJP in coming days.

Chavan said that "first, the BJP got Rahul Gandhi disqualified and to justify its decision, the party has created a false impression that Rahul Gandhi

has insulted the OBC community with his Modi surname comments".

"The defamation case in which Rahul Gandhi was convicted was closed. The complainant had himself written to the district court to put a stay on his complaint in a Surat court. However, the case was reopened with the permission of Gujarat High Court just nine days after Rahul Gandhi exposed PM Modi," Chavan claimed.

Meanwhile, the Congress' Madhya Pradesh unit criticised Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan for "suddenly" calling a press conference at 3 a.m. -- the same time when Chavan's interaction with the media was scheduled to begin. State Congress' media head K.K. Mishra said: "CM Chouhan should respect the protocol of a former chief minister who is also from another state. What CM Chouhan did today, proved that there is no respect for Constitutional values. We condemn his act of calling a press conference at the time when a former CM was already scheduled to address the press. The Congress will also write a letter to him on this matter."



EKIN-SU CULCUGLU LEAVES FANS IN HYSTERICIS AS SHE MISPRONOUNCES IRISH CITY LIMERICK

Los Angeles | Agencies

Ekin-Su Culcuglu left her Irish fans in hysterics as she mispronounced the name of the city Limerick ahead of a visit there on Saturday. The Love Island winner told how she will be in Ireland this week to do a series of meet and greets with fans for the cosmetics company BPerfect. But it appears Ekin-Su wasn't entirely familiar with where she is going as she butchered the pronunciation of Limerick, a city in Ireland's Mid-West. Sharing a video on social media, she said: 'Hi guys I'm extremely excited to meet you all for the meet and greet with BPerfect in Ireland this weekend. 'So, Thursday I'm in Belfast, Friday I'm in Wexford and Saturday I am at Lime-ri-ck. I cannot wait to meet you all, I'm super-excited, I love Ireland and I love you all so I'll see you there soon.'

Limerick is actually pronounced lim-ri-ck. Ekin-Su later shared another video where she acknowledged her mispronunciation, but still didn't manage to get it quite right the second time around. She said: 'Here's an interesting fact. Apparently Lime-ri-ck is called Lim-er-ick in Irish. I apologise, I said Lime-ri-ck, but it's called Lim-er-ick!'

Several fans couldn't resist poking fun at the star for the video, with one writing: 'Girls I need you to hear how Ekin-Su pronounces Limerick.'

Another said: 'I tried variations of what I thought it might be, but my mind was still blown.'

I'VE BEEN SOBER FOR FIVE WEEKS TODAY: KATY PERRY AFTER PROMISING HER FIANCÉ

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer-songwriter Katy Perry hasn't tasted a drop of alcohol in over a month after making a promise to her fiancé Orlando Bloom. The 'Firework' singer revealed she wanted to quit drinking and made a pact with the Pirates of Caribbean actor, reports 'Mirror.co.uk'. She made the admission while attending a curated cocktail event of all things. However, she didn't participate in trying out any of the drinks in New York - instead leaving that part of the night to fellow American Idol judges Lionel Richie, Luke Bryan and the show's host Ryan Seacrest. She proudly told reporters at the event: 'I've been sober for five weeks today.' Then, pretending to cry, she added to 'People' magazine: 'I've been doing a pact with my partner (fiance Orlando Bloom) and I want to quit.' As per 'Mirror.co.uk', Luke then chimed in to ask if she was caving at such an event. However, she defiantly slapped back: 'No, girl! I can't cave. I made a promise. Three months.' Thankfully for the star, her range of non-alcoholic drinks, which she released last year, were at the ready throughout the night. It remains to be seen how Orlando is supporting the star in her sobriety journey, but the pair are known to be very supportive of each other.



Popular OTT action thriller series 'The Night Agent' to get a sequel

Los Angeles | Agencies

Streaming show 'The Night Agent' has earned a speedy Season 2 renewal at Netflix, reports 'Variety'. The second season will also consist of 10 episodes.

The action thriller series debuted on the streaming service less than a week ago, on March 23. It proved to be popular immediately, rocketing up to the top of Netflix's weekly Top 10 chart with 168.71 million hours viewed. "The last week has been a whirlwind as we've finally been able to share 'The Night Agent' with the world," said series creator Shawn Ryan.

"To see the tremendous reaction to the show has been a great joy and is a credit to our cast, our writers, our directors, our crew and our partners at Sony Pictures Television and Netflix. We couldn't be any prouder or more excited to get cracking on Season 2 to share the further adventures of Night Action with our newfound fans."

'The Night Agent', according to 'Variety', is based on the novel of the same name by Matthew Quirk. The official logline states



that the show centres "on a low-level FBI Agent who works in the basement of the White House, manning a phone that never rings -- until the night that it does, propelling him into a fast moving and dangerous conspiracy that ultimately leads all the way to the Oval Office."

"We're proud to see 'The Night Agent' deliver a breakout performance and become instantly embraced around the

world," said Jinny Howe, Netflix's vice president of drama series.

He added: "Shawn Ryan has created a spy thriller sensation that viewers cannot get enough of, with a stellar cast featuring Gabriel Basso, Luciane Buchanan and Hong Chau, and we're here to bring them more of the action and suspense they love."

Jonah Hill & Olivia Millar are going to be parents

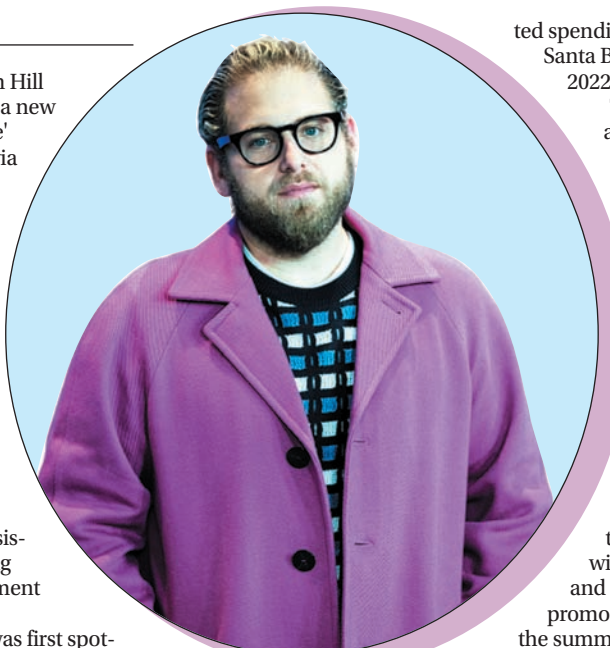
Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood actor Jonah Hill will be stepping into a new role. The 'You People' actor and his girlfriend, Olivia Millar, are expecting their first baby together, reports 'People' magazine.

The couple was seen together at Hawaii children's store Kokonut Kids in January. Then Millar was spotted in California with what appears to be a baby bump covered by overalls, in photos published by 'The Daily Mail'.

Millar "who co-owns the online vintage shop Chasseresse with her older sister" was also spotted wearing what looks to be an engagement ring.

As per 'People', the pair was first spot-



ted spending time together in Santa Barbara in September 2022.

The Oscar-nominated actor was previously engaged to Gianna Santos before calling it quits in October 2020. Hill was then linked to surfer Sarah Brady and shut down claims that the two were engaged in February 2022.

Hill, "who has become increasingly private in recent years", revealed in an open letter to fans that he has long dealt with anxiety and panic attacks and explained why he would not promote his documentary 'Stutz' in the summer of 2022.



'WASN'T WHAT I WAS EXPECTING' Rebel Wilson recalls when she was 'dumped' by a woman 'in the public eye'

Los Angeles | Agencies

'Pitch Perfect' star Rebel Wilson revealed that she was "dumped" by a woman who is "in the public eye" before embarking on her fairytale relationship with her now-fiancee Ramona Agruma, reports 'Mirror.co.uk'. The actress admitted her earlier romance helped her to open her heart up to a same-sex relationship and said it "wasn't what I was expecting," adds 'Mirror.co.uk'. Speaking on the 'U Up?' podcast, Rebel said she wouldn't name the woman she was involved with "out of respect" for their privacy, but described their time together as "very important". She recalled: "I met a woman and had, like, feelings for her, which totally came as a blindside. It wasn't what I was expecting."

According to 'Mirror.co.uk', the mum-of-one admitted she had a "hard" time telling the person she was "attracted to them".

She explained: "I said the words, 'I don't want to offend you, but are you interested in women?'"

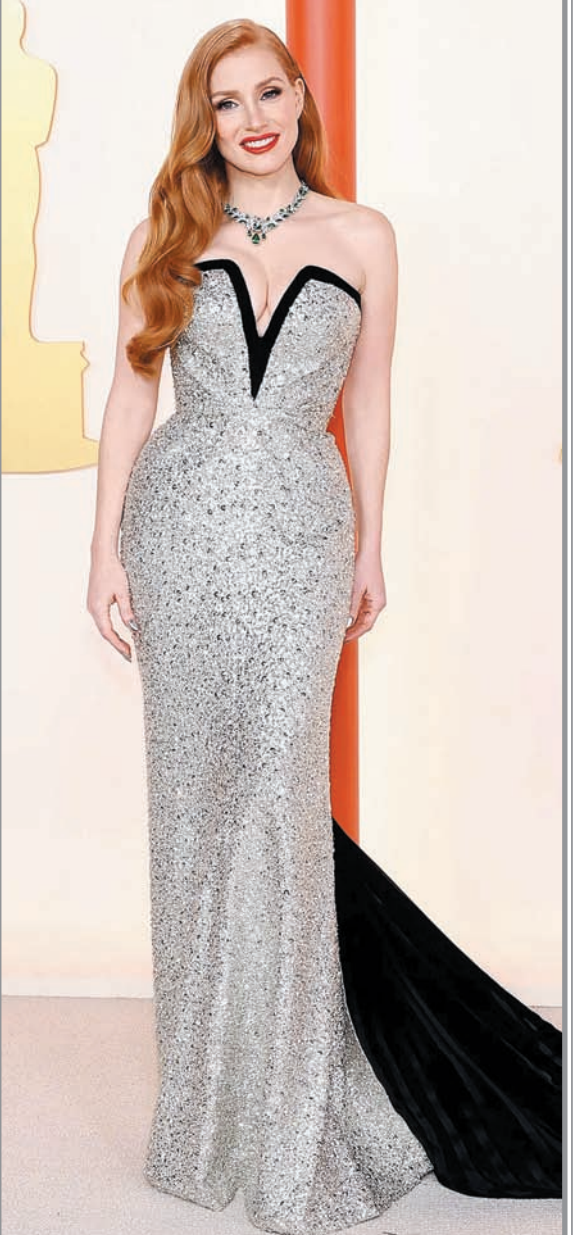
"I've never had a conversation like that (before) because I was dating dudes and never had to talk about sexuality."

Rebel continued: "She was like, 'I have feelings for you as well.'" She said their connection "didn't end up going anywhere really" and revealed she "got dumped".

The actress, though, credited the experience with opening (her) heart up for a same-sex relationship and said Ramona was "the next woman (she) felt that way about".

Rebel and Ramona got engaged last month in front of Cinderella's castle in Disneyland and are reportedly looking at the theme park to provide a fairytale backdrop to their big day.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Jessica Chastain



IPL 2023

Gujarat Titans aim to start title defence on a bright note against CSK

BHUVNESHWAR TO CAPTAIN SRH IN THEIR OPENING MATCH: REPORT

Hyderabad| India's senior fast-bowler Bhuvneshwar Kumar will be captaining Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) in their opening match of IPL 2023 against Rajasthan Royals at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium here on April 2, in absence of newly-appointed regular skipper Aiden Markram.



A report in ESPNcricinfo says Markram is in South Africa for the upcoming two-match ODI series against the Netherlands and is expected to arrive in India along with his other IPL-bound national side teammates only on April 3. "The series is crucial for South Africa's direct qualification for the ODI World Cup, to be played in India later this year. They need to win both ODIs against the Netherlands (without over-rate penalties) and then hope Ireland lose at least one ODI against Bangladesh in a three-match home series in May," it added.

With Markram to miss SRH's opening game in IPL 2023, Bhuvneshwar will be the captain. Bhuvneshwar has been part of the Sunrisers squad since their inception in 2013 and captained the side in six games in the 2019 IPL and once in the 2022 edition, with the team winning twice out of seven occasions. The report added that apart from Markram, Marco Jansen and Heinrich Klaasen will also be unavailable for the first match for SRH due to South Africa's ODIs against the Netherlands. It leaves Sunrisers with only five overseas players -- Harry Brook, Glenn Phillips, Adil Rashid, Fazalhaq Farooqi and Akeal Hosein -- to choose from for their opening game of IPL 2023.

Ahmedabad | Agencies

Gujarat Titans were the flavour of IPL 2022. The newly-created franchise, in its debut season, ran all the way to the trophy, making for a delightful story as all departments of the game clicked in unison throughout the tournament.

Now, Hardik Pandya & Co would be eager to begin from where they left off at their home ground Narendra Modi Stadium last year -- secure wins in emphatic fashion. IPL 2023 opener will see the Titans face off against four-time champions Chennai Super Kings in Ahmedabad.

The Titans enter the competition by retaining a major part of their core, apart from adding players like Kane Williamson, Shivam Mavi, K.S Bharat, Odean Smith, and Joshua Little. Their bowling looks sorted with Mavi, Mohammed Shami, Alzarri Joseph, Jayant Yadav, Rashid Khan and R. Sai Kishore in their ranks.



With David Miller unavailable for the first game due to his commitments with the South Africa ODI team, Hardik, along with Williamson, Shubman Gill, Rahul Tewatia, and Wriddhiman Saha will require to step up with the bat. For Chennai, it is also a time to take a fresh guard after the captaincy swap and a ninth-place finish last year. With many people expecting this season to be the last for M.S Dhoni as a player-cum-captain in the CSK yellow, it will make the team more determined to give its best on the

field.

The return of Deepak Chahar, who missed last year due to a back injury, will serve as a huge boost for Chennai, especially when it comes to bowling in the Power-play. But they need to figure out who will be their death-overs bowlers, especially with away matches like Friday's game.

In terms of batting, Ruturaj Gaikwad's opening with Devon Conway is a no-brainer. With Robin Uthappa retiring, it will be interesting to see who will be the Indian batter in the line-up apart from Dhoni himself. Ben Stokes, Ravindra Jadeja and Moeen Ali are fine all-rounders who can win matches on their batting abilities.

Overall, IPL 2023 is set for a glittering start through a highly-anticipated clash between a captain aiming to prove that last season's triumph wasn't a fluke and a senior statesman calmly going about his way with an eye on glory and make the potential last-dance a memorable one.

LIVINGSTONE TO MISS PUNJAB KINGS' FIRST GAME: REPORT

New Delhi| Punjab Kings will miss the services of England all-rounder Liam Livingstone in their opening match of the IPL 2023.



The Shikhar Dhawan-led side will open their campaign by taking on Kolkata Knight Riders at home on April 1. However, Livingstone won't be able to reach Mohali in time for that game.

According to a Cricbuzz report, an England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) official has confirmed that the 29-year-old cricketer, who was on an off-season tour to Dubai, will reach India next week, likely before their second game against Rajasthan Royals in Jaipur on April 5. Livingstone, who is a key member of the Kings squad for his all-round abilities, has not played competitive cricket since picking up the knee injury on his Test debut in Pakistan.

His absence will increase the problems for coach Trevor Bayliss and captain Dhawan as the team is already without wicketkeeper-batsman Jonny Bairstow, who has been ruled out of the season, and Kagiso Rabada, who is only arriving in India on April 3 due to his international commitments.

HAZLEWOOD TO MISS EARLY STAGE, MAXWELL TOO UNCERTAIN FOR RCB OPENER

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) has faced major blow ahead of their 2023 Indian Premier League (IPL) opener with pacer Josh Hazlewood missing the initial stage of the tournament as he is recuperating with his Achilles problem.

Hazlewood has endured Achilles strain after bowling on damp run-ups at the SCG Test in January that saw him sidelined from Border-Gavaskar Trophy in India.

According to cricket.com.au, the pacer remains at home having been sent back



to Sydney after missing the first two Tests in India, and will consult with Cricket Australia's medical staff before making the journey to the IPL. However, the 32-year-old Australian is hopeful of joining the franchise later in the tournament. In another major blow, Glenn Maxwell, who

missed Australia's final two ODIs against India earlier this month, is uncertain for RCB's opening game of the IPL as he is recuperating from a leg injury. Maxwell, who missed Australia's final two ODIs against India earlier this month, suffered a freak that snapped his fibula in half at a friend's birthday party last November. According to national selector George Bailey, Maxwell found his return to ODI cricket "more demanding than he had expected". The all-rounder has been working hard on strength and conditioning in the gym with RCB in a bid to be fit for their opening match against the Mumbai Indians on April 2.

Spain Masters 2023

P.V. Sindhu, Kidambi Srikanth progress to the quarterfinals; Malvika gives walkover to Marin

Madrid | Agencies

Ace Indian shuttlers P.V. Sindhu and Kidambi Srikanth advanced to the quarterfinals of the Madrid Spain Masters badminton tournament with straight-game victories in their respective singles matches on Thursday.

Two-time Olympic medallist Sindhu, moved passed Putri Kusuma Wardani of Indonesia 21-16, 21-14 in 36 minutes of play. She will next face Mia Blichfeldt of Denmark, who she defeated in the Tokyo Olympics Round-of-16.

The Indian ace holds a healthy 5-1 head-to-head record against the Danish shuttler. Friday's quarterfinal will be the pair's first meeting since their Tokyo Olympics encounter.

Sindhu has been struggling for form this season since making a comeback after a long injury lay-off following her



gold medal win in the women's singles at the Commonwealth Games 2022 in Birmingham. The former world champion, who recently parted ways with her South Korean coach Park Tae-sang, has slipped out of the top 10 in the women's singles BWF rankings for the first time since November 2016. On the other hand, Srikanth trounced compatriot Sai Praneeth 21-15, 21-12 to enter the last-eight stage. Srikanth, seeded fifth in the tournament, have a tough task on the

card in the quarterfinal where he will meet the top seed Japanese shuttler Kenta Nishimoto, who was handed a walkover by Frenchman Arnaud Merkle in the second round.

In other actions, Kiran George, Priyanshu Rajawat and Sameer Verma, Ashmita Chaliha crashed out after suffering second-round losses.

George suffered a 17-21, 12-21 loss at the hands of Denmark's Magnus Johannesen in 31 minutes, while Rajawat was beaten by eighth seed Toma Junior Popov of France 14-21, 15-21. Verma lost 15-21, 14-21 against second-seeded Japanese Kanta Tsuneyama in the men's singles.

In the women's singles, Chaliha went down to Singapore's Yeo Jia Min 15-21, 15-21, while Malvika Bansod gave a walkover to home favourite and Rio Olympic champion Carolina Marin.

Was important to get the two wins under our belt: Chhetri on India's Tri-nation triumph

Imphal | Agencies

Two all-round performances by the Blue Tigers rounded off a successful March FIFA international window for Sunil Chhetri and his men, as they lifted the Tri-nation international football tournament trophy at the Khuman Lampak Stadium.

Not only did India win both their matches against a never-say-die Myanmar (1-0) and a higher-ranked Kyrgyz Republic (2-0), but they also kept two clean sheets. Watched by a capacity crowd of almost 30,000 each on both days, the dominance Igor Stimac's wards displayed came

as a pleasant surprise for the Indian fans.

"It felt good to play these two matches, and it was important for us to get the two wins under our belt. It's the first time I played in Manipur, so that was an extremely special occasion," India captain Sunil Chhetri said.

"We also kept two clean sheets, which was very important for our defence," added Sunil, who struck his 85th goal in international football from a well taken spot-kick against the Kyrgyz Republic. His tally would definitely have been bigger but for a couple of close saves the Myanmar goal had in the first outing.



The way we are playing at the moment, we'll win the Ashes comfortably: Robinson

London | Agencies

Fast bowler Ollie Robinson believes the way England have been on a huge upswing in playing Test cricket since last year, they can fancy their chances of winning the Ashes comfortably at home.

"I think the cricket we're playing at the moment makes it such an exciting time to play them. We've been dominating teams in all conditions for 12 months now. In England we dominated, in Pakistan we dominated and in New Zealand we played most of the cricket for nine days and lost on the last day because we probably weren't quite there.

"But I think the way we're playing cricket; we feel like we can really stick one on them and win the series comfortably. There's definitely a desire there still, a hunger to put it right. I felt when I got back from that trip I didn't leave it all out there and I'd let



myself down and the side down a little bit.

So there are a lot of hungry boys this summer to beat the Aussies again," Robinson was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo to reporters in England.

So there are a lot of hungry boys this summer to beat the Aussies again," Robinson was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo to reporters in England.

Jaipur | Agencies

Vedanta's Hindustan Zinc Limited (HZL) has signed a MoU with the Rajasthan Cricket Association (RCA) for the development of the world's third largest cricket stadium in Chomp village in Jaipur.

Vedanta's HZL will spend Rs 300 crore on the stadium, one of the largest corporate investments in India's sports infrastructure. The international stadium will be named after Anil Agarwal, the founder and chairman of Vedanta Resources Limited.

To be spread over 100 acres of land with a seating capacity of 75,000 people, it will be the third largest stadium in the world after the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad and the Melbourne Cricket Ground in Australia. In



terms of the size of the playing field area this stadium would be the largest in the world.

The stadium will be completed in phases. A 40,000 capacity is set to be completed by October, 2023. The overall project of first phase will cost Rs. 400 crores, out of which Rs. 300 crores will be borne by Hindustan Zinc Limited and the remaining amount of Rs. 100 crores will be taken care by RCA.

The stadium will have an indoor games' facility, training centers for other sports, a clubhouse, and parking for three and a half thousand vehicles.

The Anil Agarwal International Cricket Stadium will host national and international matches, including games of the IPL. The stadium and its facilities will help the development of Rajasthan as a major hub for cricket and other sports.

Miami Open

Alcaraz-Fritz, Kvitova-Alexandrova quarterfinals rescheduled due to rain



Miami | Agencies

The men's and women's singles quarterfinal clash between Carlos Alcaraz-Taylor Fritz and Petra Kvitova-Ekaterina Alexandrova at the Miami Open was postponed due to rain.

The World No. 1, Alcaraz, who must successfully defend his debut ATP Masters 1000 title in Miami this week to remain atop the ATP Rankings, will continue his quest for the 'Sunshine

Double' against Fritz on Thursday night now.

On the other hand, the last remaining singles quarterfinal between No.15 seed Kvitova and No.18 seed Alexandrova never got started and will be also held on Thursday.

Defending champion Alcaraz is aiming to become the youngest player to win the 'Sunshine Double'. If the Spaniard can defeat Fritz and go all the way, he will also remain at No. 1 in the ATP Rankings. Any slip up, however, and Novak Djokovic will return to the top.

Chasing his 10th consecutive win, the Spaniard will look to maintain his level and overcome Top 10 star Fritz. The American is no stranger to the big stage, having lifted the trophy in Indian Wells last year.

Fritz would rise to No. 6 in the ATP Rankings if he lifts his second ATP Masters 1000 crown on Sunday.

Meanwhile, the last remaining women's doubles quarterfinal, pitting No.2 seeds American pair Coco Gauff and Jessica Pegula against No.6 seeds Australian-Belgian duo of Storm Hunter and Elise Mertens, was also interrupted and postponed as well.

Hunter and Mertens lead that match 3-1 in the first set when rain played spoilsport.

CIRSTEA UPSETS SABALENKA, REACHES FIRST WTA 1000 SEMIFINAL IN A DECADE

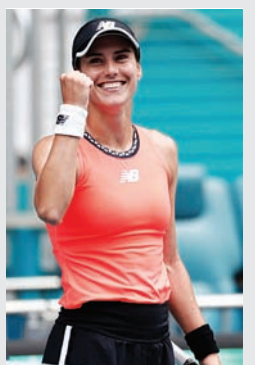
Miami (USA)| For the first time in 10 years, Sorana Cirstea will play in the semifinals of a WTA 1000 event after the unseeded Romanian upset No.2 seed and reigning Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka in the quarterfinals at the Miami Open.

In their first career meeting, Cirstea beat Sabalenka 6-4, 6-4 in the last eight on Wednesday night to move into the penultimate round of a tournament of this size for the first time since finishing runner-up to Serena Williams in Toronto in 2013.

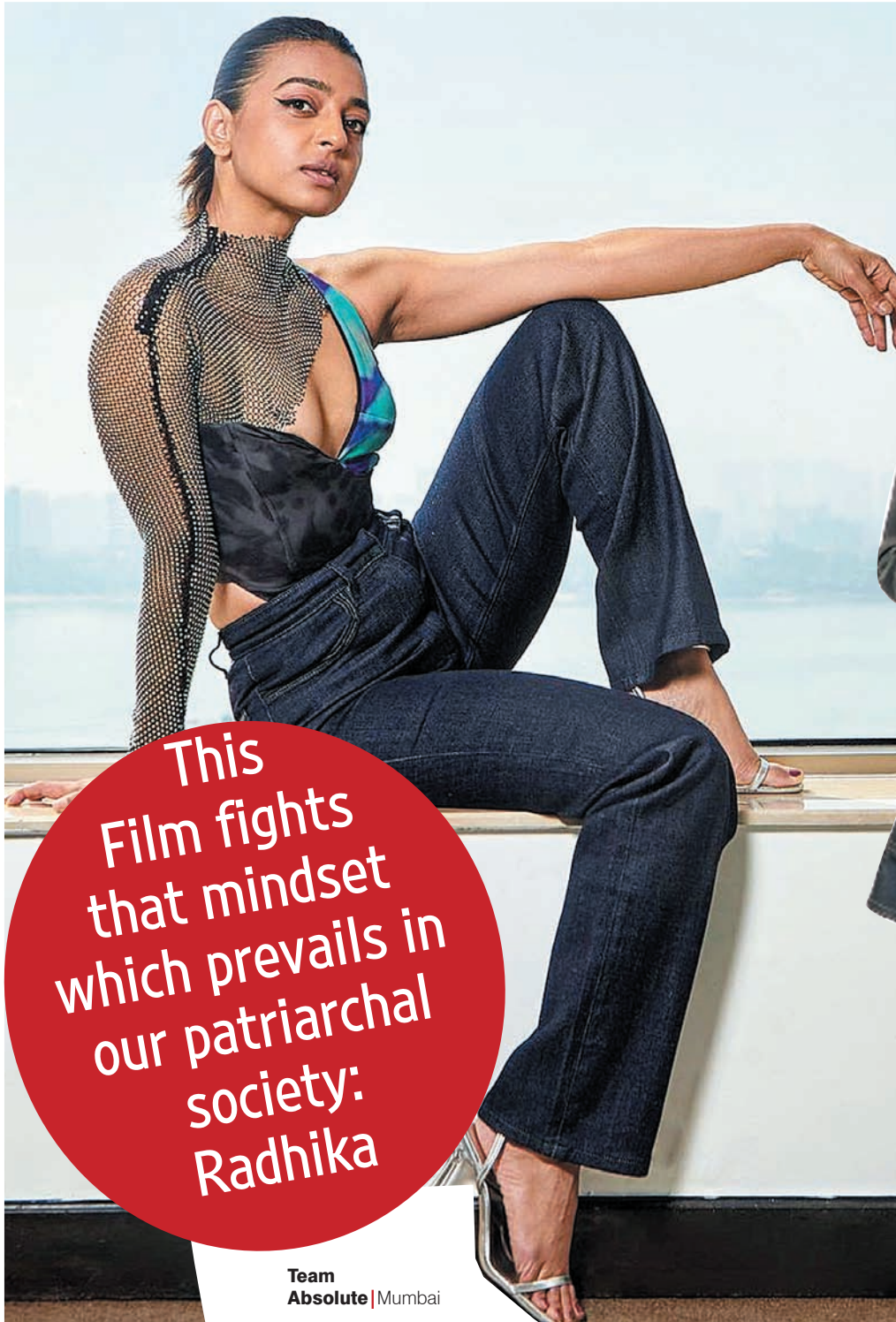
It's been a resurgent tournament for 32-year-old Cirstea in more ways than one, as she hasn't dropped a set in five victories. She's also beaten No.5 seed Caroline Garcia this week (after beating her in Indian Wells, too) and former Top 20 players Karolina Muchova and Marketa Vondrousova.

She took the next step in her second quarterfinal in this Sunshine Double: The 85-minute win over Sabalenka was her first victory over a player ranked in the Top 2 of the WTA rankings.

For a place in the final, Cirstea will face the winner of the evening quarterfinal between two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova, the No.15 seed, and unseeded Ekaterina Alexandrova.



World's third largest cricket stadium to come up in Jaipur



This Film fights that mindset which prevails in our patriarchal society: Radhika

Team Absolute | Mumbai

KHUSHI DUBEY GETS INJURED WHILE SHOOTING



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Naaginn' actress Khushi Dubey, who is now seen playing the role of 'Chikki' in the third season of the web show 'Aashiqana', shared her experience of getting injured on the sets while performing an action sequence with co-actor Zayn Ibad Khan.

She said: "There was a very difficult sequence where Zayn and I had to come down along a building under construction using a harness. We had to keep our body balanced and were completely dependent on the ropes and the harness. I have not done this before. This was the most fun sequence because it gave me vibes like the ones in 'Khatron ke Khiladi'."

Khushi, who is known for her work in 'Kaisa Ye Pyar Hai', 'Baa Bahoo Aur Baby', 'Kasamh Se' and 'Rakhi, Atoot Rishtey Ki Dor', added that even after getting a deep cut on her skin, she was so involved in the scene that she continued to shoot without taking a break. "Accidentally, a rope pierced through my flesh, near my upper arms. Zayn and I were being pulled up, which is why the rope tore my skin and I got a cut. Still, I was so much into the scene that I didn't realise it. I didn't feel the pain at that time, but later I could feel it. The pain was worth it. I am glad it worked out well."

Aclaimed actress Radhika Apte talks about playing a housewife and undercover agent in the spy comedy 'Mrs Undercover'. Radhika will play the role of Durga, a former undercover agent who turns homemaker, and is called back on duty after ten years. She discovers that getting back is not easy because after marriage she has forgotten everything, having devoted all her time to her family. The actress said: "For me, 'Mrs Undercover' is special for many reasons. Not only is spy comedy an unexplored genre in India, but at the very first narration of this film I fell for my character. Durga is funny, kind, sincere, she is also clumsy and unsure of herself, and this film is her journey of discovering her own strength." Radhika said that every woman will relate to her on-screen character Durga as it is a story of every housewife who gives up her dreams of a career for family. "Every household has a Durga, a woman who quietly goes about her work and doesn't get her due because she is considered 'just' a housewife," Radhika pointed out. "This film fights that mindset which prevails in our patriarchal society, and it's done beautifully in the guise of humour." Directed and written by debutant director, Anushree Mehta, 'Mrs Undercover' features Radhika Apte in the lead role. It also stars Sumeet Vyas, Rajesh Sharma and Saheb Chatterjee.

CHOREOGRAPHER GEETA SAYS SONALI BENDRE IS VERY FOCUSED & COURTEOUS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Ace choreographer Geeta Kapur recalled the time when she coached Bollywood actress Sonali Bendre. Praising Bendre on 'The Kapil Sharma Show', Kapur said she is very focused and well-mannered, and believes in giving her 100 per cent to her work.

Kapur, who joins Bendre and Terence Lewis as a judge on the dance reality show 'India's Best Dancer Season 3', said: "We have worked together before. I have seen her in a very serious phase. When she is on set, she is very focused and courteous. As soon as she arrives, she starts rehearsing because she wants to be perfect."

Kapur added: "Even now that I am sitting next to her as a judge, I still feel like I am sitting beside Sonali ma'am."

When Kapil Sharma asked the ace choreographer what is the best thing about the dance reality show, Kapur replied: "I enjoy auditions the most. I look forward to the excitement of getting to see and bond with such talented dancers at the start. It's a lot of fun."

She added: "It is bound to get serious later when the competition intensifies, but auditions are my favourite phase of the show."

Eliminations are very painful and I do not like them. But, more than me there is another person who is very emotional on the panel, Sonali Bendre ma'am. She is too cute when she gets emotional."



I find it challenging to work in formulaic films: Manoj Bajpayee

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Actor Manoj Bajpayee has shared what motivated him to come on board the documentary 'The Vial', which is all about the development of the Covid vaccine. The celebrated actor also talked about the kind of cinema he preferred to be a part of and how excited he is about his upcoming movie 'Banda'. Bajpayee said: "There were three reasons that inspired me to become a part of 'The Vial'. First, it was the unwavering conviction of the producers, director, and channel that impressed me. Second, the documentary aimed to shed light on the pandemic that we all have experienced, and I wanted to pay homage to the health workers, frontline workers, and scientists who worked tirelessly to develop vaccines across all regions. "And third, I was keen to work in this field as a way of showing my support and appreciation for these individuals." Discussing the most difficult aspect of creating this documentary, Bajpayee said: "As for me, the most challenging part was memorizing all the information and lines that were required of me as an actor and narrator. Having already worked on two documentaries, 'Secrets of Sinauli' and 'Kohinoor', I was familiar with the narration aspect, but memorizing all the necessary information was a significant challenge." When asked if he prefers commercial cinema or independent cinema, Bajpayee elaborated: "I don't prefer one over the other. For me, what matters most is the story. I find it challenging to work in formulaic films where I already know the beginning, middle, and end. I believe the story must be unique, and the character should be something that audiences have not seen before." He concluded by sharing his excitement about his upcoming movie 'Banda' and said: "The film is directed by Apoorv Singh Karki. Its story is unique and inspired by true incidents. It revolves around a lawyer's journey as he fights a difficult case. It's a character that I've never played before, and I'm looking forward to the challenge."

BHOLA TURNS OUT TO BE JUST ANOTHER TEPID REMAKE



FILM REVIEW

AAKRUTI BAGLA

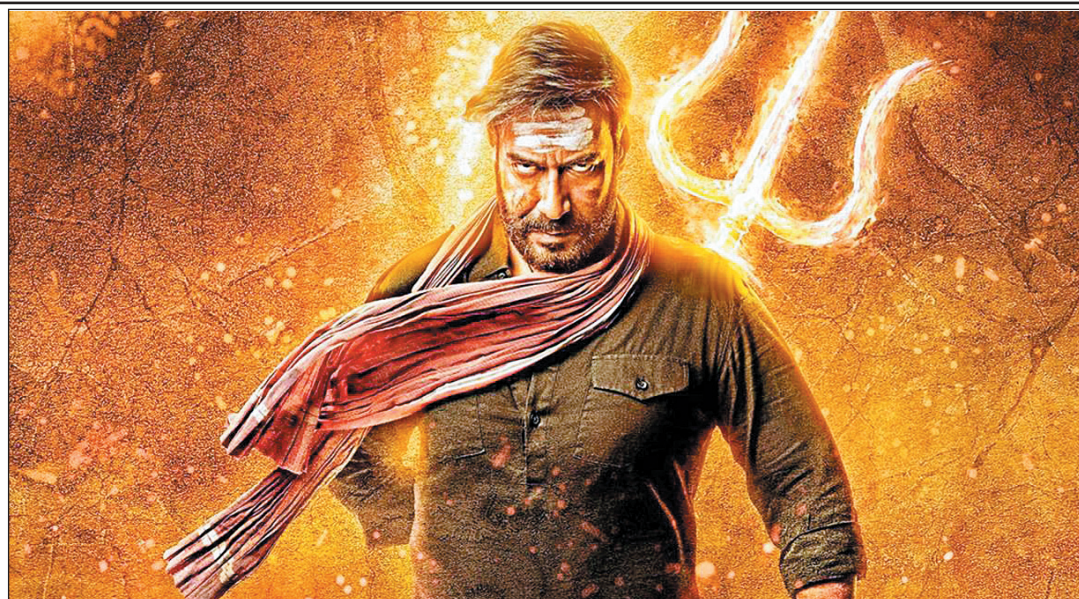
Directed by: - Ajay Devgn
Cast: - Ajay Devgn, Tabu, Sanjay Mishra, Deepak Dobriyal
Runtime: - 143 minutes
Rating: - 2/5

Story: Sica Gang, comprising of Ashwatthama and his brother Nithari are under the radar of cops as they supply 900 kgs of drugs worth 1000 crore illegally. In pursuit to make sure that the shipment is away from the gang while also trying to save the lives of 40 police officers who got drugged, IPS Diana Joseph takes the help of Bhola. Convicted felon Bhola, tries to meet his daughter for the first time after being released from prison after 10 years. He aids the gang as they get ambushed by the gang on the way to the police station. How Bhola combats the goons and reaches his daughter lies in the rest of the film.

Review: Bhola is the official Hindi-language remake of Lokesh Kanagaraj's 2019 Tamil film, Kaithi. It also marks Ajay Devgn's fourth directorial outing.

Bollywood's tryst with the remaking of south films looks never-ending. And Bhola was just seen joining the bandwagon of tepid remakes Bollywood recently offered to the audience. Right from the word go, you get a hint that the film is high on action, which turns out to be all gory but no glory.

Bhola begins with a group of cops, lead by IPS Diana confiscating



a record amount of cocaine, which is hidden in a secret cell under the commissioner's office. The drug mafia manages to put almost every police officer in the place under sedation by spiking their drinks. For help, the injured IPS Diana turns to Bhola, a life-term prisoner who has just been released on parole and is eager to see his daughter for the first time. A few college students who are stuck in the commissioner's office with a line constable stop the criminals from breaking in and freeing their boss in the interim.

Well, reading so you may think that with too much going on in the film, it might be full of twists and turns offering an edge-of-the-seat experience. But unfortunately, it turns out to be a disappointment.

Although Ajay Devgn's directorial is effective, his story falls flat. Ankush Singh and Shreedhar

Dubey's screenplay failed to evoke any sense of emotion. A few developments are half-baked which also makes us feel dissected from what is going on in the proceedings. The first half of the film was quite slow while the second half was a drag.

Except for one or two scenes, every sequence is redundant and seems like they are lifted off from other commercial films. Even the dialogues are not particularly strong, barring the narration by Makrand Deshpandey.

However, DOP Aseem deserves praise since his cinematography flawlessly captures high-octane action scenes.

Talking about the music, the background score turns out to be colossal disappointment as it's all screeching in the ears. The songs are situations, but don't have recall value.

Speaking of performances, Ajay Devgn and Tabu are a delight to watch everytime they team up. But, with Bhola their performances seemed restricted. While Tabu delivers what is expected, Ajay Devgn's efforts are palpable. He undoubtedly aces the action sequences; it fails to strike the right chord when it comes to emotional scenes.

Of the ensemble cast, one actor that blew our mind is Deepak Dobriyal as vicious Ashwatthama aka Ashu, the drug dealer. While Sanjay Mishra, Gajraj Rao, Vineet Kumar manage to leave an impact.

Overall, Ajay Devgn and Tabu's punch falls flat. Just like Gajraj Rao says in the film, 'tumko thoda patience rakhna padega, dhairya, dheera', despite doing so, all we get is an average fare that is short of expectations.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Bhavika Sharma