

absolute india

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PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM MUMBAI, BHOPAL AND NEW DELHI



NATION > 02

Kejriwal announces Rs 10 lakh assistance to Delhi rape survivor...



HOLLYWOOD > 06

Rihanna expecting first baby with A\$AP Rocky...



SPORTS > 07

Bopanna aims for better show at Tata Open Maharashtra...

SITHARAMAN CHOOSES GROWTH WITH A BUDGET FOR INDIA@100

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday announced that Union Budget 2022-23 seeks to lay the foundation and give a blueprint to steer the economy over the 'Amrit Kaal' of the next 25 years - from India at 75 to India at 100.

NO TAX RELIEF FOR MIDDLE-CLASS, PEOPLE DISAPPOINTED

New Delhi: A middle-class family living in east Delhi's Laxmi Nagar says that there was nothing special in this year's Union Budget failing to provide any tax relief for household kitchens. The middle class says that there was fear among the majority of the people that the Union government may increase direct taxes which ultimately did not happen. The family says that Tuesday's Budget was a "normal one" but said that a lot more could have been done by the Union government. Saroj, a housewife, says that there is no reduction in cooking gas, oil and vegetables prices. The prices of pulses and food-grains have not been reduced so being a housewife, she is not satisfied with this year's budget. R.C. Joshi, a senior member of the family, says that he is a retired army officer and was expecting some exemption in the tax slab for senior citizens but this year's Budget did not provide any tax exemption. There have been no changes announced in the income tax slabs for the Budget 2022-23.



MARKETS CHEER HIGHER CAPEX OUTLAY; SENSEX RISES OVER 800 PTS

Mumbai: The massive capital expenditure push in the Union Budget 2022-23 cheered the investors and led the key domestic indices -- S&P BSE Sensex and NSE Nifty50 -- to make substantial gains on Tuesday. Initially, the market opened gap up, rose in the early part of the day's trade but fell sharply post the Budget speech. Nevertheless, it recovered to close to intraday high. At the end of the day, Sensex settled at 58,862 points, up 1.5 per cent, whereas Nifty settled at 17,576 points, up 1.4 per cent, from their previous close. Globally, stock markets around the world started the new month on firmer ground as a slew of reassuring comments from Federal Reserve officials helped calm the rate-hike jitters even as strong US tech earnings lifted the market mood. On the domestic front, volumes on the NSE were subdued. Among sectors, metals, capital goods, realty, IT, healthcare and FMCG indices rose the most, while auto and oil and gas indices fell.

CRYPTO PARTY OVER IN INDIA WITH 30% TAX ON DIGITAL ASSETS

New Delhi: Hitting hard private cryptocurrency exchanges and apps which are luring millions, especially the young, into investing their hard-earned money in Bitcoin and other digital tokens, the government on Tuesday announced a 30 per cent tax on any income from the transfer of virtual digital assets, specifying that no deductions and exemptions will be allowed. Stressing that since there has been a phenomenal increase in transactions in virtual digital assets, FM said that the magnitude and frequency of these transactions have made it imperative to provide for a specific tax regime. In order to capture the transaction details, she also proposed to provide for TDS on payment made in relation to transfer of virtual digital assets at the rate of 1 per cent of such consideration above a monetary threshold. "Gift of virtual digital assets is also proposed to be taxed in the hands of the recipient," the Finance Minister said.



WHAT GETS COSTLIER, WHAT BECOMES CHEAPER

| COSTLIER | CHEAPER |
|-----------|---|
| Umbrellas | Clothes, Gemstones & Diamonds, Imitation Jewellery, Custom duties on chemicals needed for petroleum products, Steel scrap, Mobile Phones, Mobile Phone chargers |

IMPETUS TO HEALTH CARE SECTOR MISSING IN BUDGET

Hyderabad: Fresh impetus to the healthcare sector was missing in the Union Budget 2022-23 presented in the Parliament on Tuesday, healthcare sector players and experts said. D.V.S. Soma Raju, Executive Director, SLG Hospital, feels that while the existing healthcare machinery in India stood up to the challenge posed by Covid-19 pandemic and did its best to keep a possible disaster under check, this sector needed a fresh impetus to enhance and strengthen the healthcare net across the country. He was also of the view that the government must encourage digital health avenues to spread operations across the length and breadth of the country.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The outlay for capital expenditure in the Union Budget is once again being stepped up sharply by 35.4 per cent from Rs 5.54 lakh crore in the current year to Rs 7.50 lakh crore in 2022-23. This has increased to more than 2.2 times the expenditure of 2019-20. This outlay in 2022-23 will be 2.9 per cent of GDP.

With this investment taken together with the provision made for creation of capital assets through Grants-in-Aid to States, the 'Effective Capital Expenditure' of the Central Government is estimated at Rs 10.68 lakh crore in 2022-23, which will be about 4.1 per cent of the GDP.

As against a total expenditure of Rs 34.83 lakh crore projected in the Budget Estimates 2021-22, the Revised Estimate is Rs 37.70 lakh crore. The Revised Estimate of capital expenditure is Rs 6.03 lakh crore. This includes an amount of Rs 51,971 crore towards settlement of outstanding guaranteed liabilities of Air India and its other sundry commitments.

Coming to the Budget Estimates, the total expenditure in 2022-23 is estimated at Rs 39.45 lakh crore, while the total receipts other than borrowings are estimated at Rs 22.84 lakh crore.

The revised Fiscal Deficit in the current year is estimated at 6.9 per cent of the GDP as against 6.8 per cent projected in the Budget Estimates. The Fiscal Deficit in 2022-23 is estimated at 6.4 per cent of the GDP, which is consistent with the broad path of fiscal consolidation announced last year to reach a fiscal deficit level below 4.5 per cent by 2025-26.

Sitharaman said this Budget continues to provide impetus for growth. It lays a parallel track of a blueprint for the Amrit Kaal, which is futuristic and inclusive. This will directly benefit our youth, women, farmers, the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes and big public investment for modern infrastructure, readying for India at 100.

NO HIKE IN TAXES, CAPEX TO PROVIDE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

New Delhi: The Centre's big capital expenditure push in FY23 will create employment and growth opportunities in the economy. Accordingly, the Union Budget FY23 provided a massive outlay of Rs 7.50 lakh crore for capital expenditure to sustain the high growth rate. The Budget 2022-23 proposed to increase the capital budget outlay by over 35 per cent from Rs 5.54 lakh crore in FY22. In the post-Budget press conference held here, Sitharaman cited that a sharp rise in capital expenditure outlay will have a positive impact on job creation. Besides, she pointed out that the 'Production Linked Incentive' scheme for 14 sectors will also be a trigger for job creation.

RS 2.37 CR PROVISION FOR DIRECT PAYMENT OF MSP

New Delhi: On the backdrop of the almost year-long agitation against the three contentious farm laws that were repealed, and the continued demand for increasing MSP for all farmers, the Centre on Tuesday announced a provision of Rs 2.37 crore for direct payment for MSP value in the Union Budget 2022-23. The provision for Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana has been decreased to Rs 15,500.00 crore in Budget 2022-23 from Rs 15,989.39 crore in the Revised Estimate of 2021-22. The provision for Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-Kisan) is Rs 68,000.00 crore, slightly up from Rs 67,500 crore in the Revised Estimate of 2021-22. Another highlight of the Budget provisions under agriculture is the use of 'Kisan Drones' that will be promoted for crop assessment, digitisation of land records, spraying of insecticides and nutrients etc. Further introducing and promoting digitisation in the agri sector, a scheme in public private partnership (PPP) mode will be launched for delivery of digital and hi-tech services to farmers with the involvement of public sector research and extension institutions along with private agri-tech players and stakeholders of the agri-value chain, she said. The Finance Minister also announced the creation of a fund with blended capital, raised under the co-investment model that will be facilitated through NABARD.

WAIT FOR INDIAN MASSES TO USE 5G SMARTPHONES GETS LONGER

New Delhi: India, which is the third-largest 5G smartphone market globally, is yet to use the 5G technology and the wait only got longer with that mobile services for the masses will be available in 2023. India will get commercial 5G services as early as this year. Spectrum auctions will be conducted in 2022 to facilitate the roll-out of 5G mobile services within 2022-23 by private telecom providers. Even though India is yet to use 5G bands for communication, people are gearing up for it with new smartphones that are 5G-ready sans the technology. According to the IDC, India was the third-largest 5G smartphone market globally with 7 per cent of worldwide 5G shipments, shipping 10 million units at an ASP (average selling point) of \$401 in the third quarter of 2021. From January-September 2021, 17 million 5G smartphones were shipped to India and the number was expected to reach 30 million for the full year.



OPINION

"India's economic growth in the current year is estimated to be 9.2 per cent, the highest among all large economies."

Nirmala Sitharaman, Finance Minister



"If we continue to retain the path of 8 per cent of real GDP growth and if we extrapolate it, we should be a \$5 trillion economy in terms of nominal GDP in the Financial Year 2025-26 or 2026-27."

V. Anantha Nageswaran, Chief Economic Advisor



"This will further open the green job sector. This year's Budget not only solves the contemporary problems but also ensures a bright future for the youth."

Narendra Modi, Prime Minister



"M0di Government's Zer0 Sum Budget! Nothing for the Salaried class, Middle class, The poor & deprived, Youth, Farmers and MSMEs."

Rahul Gandhi, Congress Leader



"It is the usual budget full of decorative words. It will be apt to call the budget as the one that forgot people's welfare."

M.K.Stalin, CM, TN



"Budget has zero for common people who are getting crushed by unemployment and inflation. The govt is lost in big words signifying nothing - A Pegasus Spin Budget."

Mamata Banerjee, CM, WB

Foreign varsities to set up campuses in Gujarat's GIFT city

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Centre on Tuesday said that world-class universities and institutions will be allowed to set up their campuses in Gujarat's International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City). Finance Minister said that path has been eased for reputed foreign universities to establish their campuses to offer courses in financial management, fintech, science, technology, engineering and mathematics in the GIFT City.

These universities and institutes will be exempted from domestic regulations except for courses run by International Financial Services Centre (IFSC). This will provide world-class training in financial services and technology. Sitharaman said that 750 virtual



laboratories in courses like science and mathematics and 75 skilling e-labs for synchronous learning environment will be established in 2022-23. This will help promote critical thinking skills and place creativity under the vocational curriculum. A competitive mechanism would be set up to empower and equip teachers with digital tools of teaching to generate quali-

ty e-content and achieve better learning outcomes.

The Digital Ecosystem for Skilling and Livelihood -- The DESH-Stake e-portal will also be launched. The objective of this portal is to empower the citizens in such a way that they can develop their skills through online training. Under this, API-based trained skill credentials will be provided.

BATTERY SWAPPING TO BOOST EV ADOPTION IN LAST-MILE DELIVERY SPACE

New Delhi: Despite Tesla CEO Elon Musk still not entertaining a bevy of Indian ministers to manufacture its electric



cars in the country, the government on Tuesday said it will soon bring an EV battery swapping policy and interoperability standards will be formulated for EV automakers -- a move that has been hailed by the industry players.

Finance Minister said the private sector will be encouraged to develop sustainable and innovative business models for 'Battery or Energy as a Service'. Electric vehicle battery swapping is a place at which an electric vehicle's discharged battery or battery pack can be immediately swapped for a fully charged one, eliminating the delay involved in waiting for a vehicle's battery to charge.

The global electric vehicle battery swapping market was valued at \$100.1 million in 2020, and is projected to reach \$852.6 million by 2030, registering a CAGR of 24.4 per cent, according to Allied Market Research.



DELHI HC QUESTIONS NEED TO WEAR MASK IN CAR WHILE DRIVING ALONE

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday questioned the city government on the order making it mandatory to wear a mask while a person is driving in a car alone, asking why it is still followed.

The court's query came when it was dealing with various issues relating to Covid-19.

A bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Jasmeet Singh asked: "Why don't you withdraw it? It is absurd actually. You are sitting in your own car and you must wear the mask."

Counsel said that the situation was different when the DDMA issued this order and now the situation is improving, and the order should be revisited.

During the course of the hearing, the April 7, 2021 order, related to issuing challans for not wearing a mask while driving a private car alone, was raised. On April 7, last year, the High Court had said it is mandatory to wear a mask in a vehicle during the pandemic, even if its driver is the only one in the vehicle.



A single judge bench of Justice Pratibha M. Singh said that if vehicles pass through public places, there is a possibility that they may come in contact with other people.

"It is mandatory for one or more persons on board to wear a mask or face covering during the pandemic,"

the court said. Apart from this, the court had dismissed the petition challenging the imposition of fine by the Delhi government against those wearing masks while traveling alone in private vehicles, saying that it is necessary to wear a face mask whether a person has been vaccinated

or not. It termed the mask similar to "suraksha kavach" (protective shield) to prevent the spread of coronavirus. It also said that "not only does it protect the person wearing the mask but it also protects others. Wearing a mask is a measure that has saved millions of lives".

Kejriwal announces Rs 10 lakh assistance to Delhi rape survivor

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday announced an assistance of Rs 10 lakh to help the Kasturba Nagar rape victim, whose horrendous ordeal had shaken the city.

"I have ordered Rs 10 lakh assistance amount to help this daughter. Delhi government will do everything possible to get justice for this daughter. We are hiring a good lawyer for her. We will also fast-track this matter so that the daughter can get justice as soon as possible," he said in a tweet.

Later in the day, Revenue and Law Minister Kailash Gahlot, along with Delhi Commission for Women chief Swati Maliwal, met the 20-year-old survivor, who informed them that she was abducted from her home and gang-raped by three men who are involved in illicit trade of liquor and drugs locally. While they were gang-raping her, the women present therein were



instigating the men to rape her.

She further informed that they beat her up brutally, shaved her head, blackened her face and made her walk around the neighbourhood with a garland of slippers and shoes. A video of the unfortunate incident was also received by the Commission which clearly showed the sad plight of the victim. Maliwal had earlier issued notice to Delhi Police seeking immediate arrest of all the culprits, both men and women. She had also

recommended that the girl and her family be shifted to a safe house and be provided protection. She said that the application in the court for interim compensation has been filed and a DCW team is present with the survivor 24x7, adding: "We will also rehabilitate the girl. Strongest punishment must be given to the culprits so that no one will dare to do such a crime again." On Friday, a total of 11 people, including nine women, were arrested in connection with the incident.

Road rage: 3 shot at near Red Fort

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In an apparent road rage incident, three persons were shot at and injured by armed assailants near Red Fort area in North Delhi, police said on Tuesday.

According to a senior police official, three persons suffered gun shot injuries in the incident on Monday evening, while the assailants fled the spot.

"Abid, Aman and Difaraz suffered bullet injuries. They were rushed to a nearby government hospital where their condition is stated to be critical," he said.

The incident took place when one Mohammed Shahid, an automobile spare parts dealer, was returning from dinner with his wife on a motor-cycle. When the couple reached Angoori Bagh



area, their two-wheeler met with a small collision with another bike.

Shahid's bike got damaged and he demanded compensation from the bikers which led to an argument.

The bikers were soon joined by another person, who reached with few more people. Though the locals tried to intervene, but the men took out a gun and opened fire at the public

India needs to rewrite its Constitution: KCR

HYDERABAD | Agencies

Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrababhan Naidu on Tuesday said that India needs to rewrite its Constitution to fulfil people's expectations and to ensure that the country progresses to its full potential.

Alleging that both the Congress and the BJP have miserably failed in addressing the basic needs of people in the last 75 years, he called for a qualitative change in the country and declared that he would contribute in whatever manner possible to bring the change.

At a marathon news conference here, the Chief Minister announced that a meeting of retired IAS, IPS, and IFS officers will be held in Hyderabad soon to discuss the new agenda for the country.

The Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) chief said he would visit Mumbai in a couple of days to meet Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray to discuss his plans. He also hinted at meetings with several other leaders including his West Bengal and Odisha counterparts, Mamata Banerjee and Naveen Patnaik, respectively.

KCR, as Rao is popularly known, called for



uprooting the BJP government at the Centre and "throwing it into the Bay of Bengal". "Unless it is done, this country can't progress," he said slamming the BJP for what he called spoiling the country by dividing people in the name of religion.

The TRS chief called on people, especially youth, to wake up to make their future

bright. "Shortly, we will start working for the country. We will tell the country how the change can be brought. It is time for the country to react and liberate itself from senseless parties and leaders.

"We need to draft a new Constitution of India. Many nations, whenever they felt the

need, have rewritten their constitutions. We also need to pursue a new Constitution as 75 valuable years have gone," he said, calling for a thorough debate on the proposal.

KCR pointed out that the Constitution has given certain powers to states, certain powers to the government of India while there are some subjects in concurrent list, "but the Congress and BJP governments have stolen powers of the states". He said their policy is unitary which is not good and desirable for Indian democracy.

"In fact, as maturity level increases in a democracy, more powers should be delegated to states but the reverse is happening in the country," he said.

"The Centre has miserably failed in maintaining cooperative federalism. These fellows (BJP) have doubled stealing away powers of the states," he added.

KCR termed the BJP government's call of 'one nation one registration' and the move to take over powers relating to postings of IAS and IPS officers a conspiracy against the states. During his more than two-hour-long news conference, the TRS leader repeatedly referred to Telangana's achievements in the last seven years and projected it as a model for the entire country.

RAIN LIKELY OVER NORTHWEST INDIA FEB 2-4

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Northwest India, including Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh, will witness light to moderate rainfall during February 2-4, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said Tuesday. "Scattered light rainfall very likely over Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh on February 2, fairly widespread to widespread light/moderate rainfall very likely over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh on February 3 and 4 with its peak intensity on February 3," it said.

The IMD also said that an isolated hailstorm is

likely over Himachal Pradesh on February 2-3 and over Uttarakhand on February 3-4.

The rainfall is likely to occur due to the influence of a fresh active Western Disturbance and its induced cyclonic circulation. As per the IMD, due to confluence between lower levels westerlies associated with the Western Disturbance and lower level southeasterlies from the Bay of Bengal at lower tropospheric levels, scattered to fairly widespread light or moderate rainfall with thunderstorm or lightning is likely over Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Sikkim and Odisha on February 3-4 with possibility of isolated hailstorm

over the region on February 4. The IMD said that gradual rise in minimum temperatures by 2-3 degree Celsius is very likely over most parts of northwest and central India during next 2 days and fall by 3-5 degree Celsius thereafter.

"Cold day to severe cold day conditions in isolated pockets very likely over north Uttar Pradesh, and Cold day conditions over Punjab, Haryana next 48 hours and abate thereafter," it said. The national capital witnessed a clear sky on Sunday with minimum temperature being recorded at 7 degree Celsius and maximum at 20.8 degree Celsius.

Punjab: Three-time Cong minister joins AAP after serving it 47 yrs

CHANDIGARH | Agencies

Three-time Punjab cabinet minister Jagmohan Kang, who was denied party nomination for contesting the February 20 assembly polls, parted ways with the Congress on Tuesday after serving it 47 years and joined the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

Earlier, Kang, who is known for proximity with Congress leader Ambika Soni, announced to field his son from Kharar.

Kang faced defeat in the 2017 Assembly polls by a slender margin of 2,000 votes from journalist-turned-politician Kanwar Sandhu, now



AAP rebel. Since the code of conduct, two veteran Congress leaders have joined AAP. Kang joined AAP along with his two sons -- Yadvinder Kang and Amarinder Kang.

The three leaders joined in the presence of AAP's national convener Arvind Kejriwal and Punjab affairs co-in-charge Raghav Chadha. Kang was Vice

President of Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee. He has been elected MLA thrice -- 1992-97, 2002-2007 and 2012-2017 -- and was a minister in the Congress government from 1992 to 1995. Kang is an influential leader in Punjab and has a deep hold among the people of Kharar and Anandpur Sahib region. His younger son

Amarinder was the state general secretary of the social media wing of the Congress. He has been active in the politics of Kharar and Anandpur Sahib. His elder son Yadvind is a member of the Zilla Parishad (Khijrabad) and has been an active Congress leader. After joining AAP, Jagmohan Kang said the people of Punjab are fed up with the mutual discord between the Congressmen. The Congress has now become a party of opportunists and power-greedy people. The poor and common people have to bear the brunt of their tussle for the power.

THREE MINOR SISTERS KILLED IN ROOF COLLAPSE IN UP

Baghpat (UP): Three children were killed after the ceiling of a room at a brick kiln, fell on them in this district of Uttar Pradesh on Tuesday morning. Raj Kamal Yadav, district magistrate, Baghpat, said: "Three sisters died after the ceiling of the room collapsed. While two of the children were aged 15 and 12 years, the third was two months old." The official further said: "They are survived only by their mother. Her financial situation is not good. We will try to get her all the help possible from administration." The bodies have been sent for post-mortem and an investigation in the matter has been started.

WOMAN ATTACKED WITH ACID IN SRINAGAR, BEING OPERATED UPON

Srinagar: A 24-year-old woman faced an acid attack in Srinagar on Tuesday and is being operated for her injuries, police said. Police sources said the woman was attacked in the evening with acid in Usmania colony of Wantpora in Hawal area of Srinagar.

"The woman was attacked outside her business unit this evening. She was immediately shifted to S.M.H.S hospital where Dr Kanwaljeet Singh, the medical superintendent of the hospital said her face had got damaged," a police source said. "The girl is being operated upon to ascertain whether her eyes have been damaged or not," Dr Singh said. Police has taken cognisance of the heinous crime and the assailants are being traced, sources said.

K'TAKA HIJAB ROW: STUDENTS TO ATTEND CLASSES WITH HIJAB DEFYING GOVT ORDER

UDUPI, (KARNATAKA) | Agencies

Karnataka hijab row is likely to continue as the students have decided to attend the classes wearing a veil despite the state government banning it in the college campus.

The issue is more likely to be blown into a major controversy as February 1 (Tuesday) is celebrated as the World Hijab Day.

Sources said that students will come to the college but won't shun hijab to attend classes. Police have been informed and no outsider will be allowed into the campus as the hijab row has put the academic career of 1,000 students at stake as they have to prepare for examinations which are going to be held in another two months.

On Monday, MLA Raghupathy Bhat, after holding a meeting at the Government Girls Pre-University College in Udupi, said the students who are protesting for wearing hijab to classrooms are being told to come to the college campus only if they shun it.

"Otherwise, we have clearly told them not to come to the college and spoil the academic environment," he said. On the other hand, the students have moved a petition to the High Court seeking relief in this regard.

"We have told them clearly that they can come to college only if they shun the hijab. You can't come to the premises of the college and spoil the college academic environment. We have also informed police regarding entry of media and other organisations into the campus," he stated. "In another 2 months exams will be held.



Parents are complaining that every day, international media besides various Muslim and Hindu organisations are visiting. There will be no entry to the college from Tuesday. They can submit the memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner, he said. "There is a government order. The future of 1,000 college students is at stake. It has been said that if the students are coming to college, they can come if they are willing to attend classes without a hijab. Otherwise do not come to college itself. There is no room for confusion anymore. Whoever follows discipline let them come to college," he stated. Meanwhile, one among the students who are protesting demanding permission to attend classes with hijab has moved to the state High Court seeking relief. Resham Farooq, the student has requested a declaration of the wearing of hijab as a fundamental right under articles 14 and 25 of the Indian constitution. The student has sought interim order from the High Court regarding students attending classes wearing hijab.

CHANGE OF NAME

I am mohammad Eshaan Ansari S/O Mohammad Sajid resident of H.N. HIG 61 Old Subhash Nagar Bhopal, My earlier name was Mohammad Eshaan which is mentioned on my passport, my present name is Mohammad Eshaan Ansari which is mentioned on my educational documents, Aadhar card, PAN card etc. In future I am Mohammad Eshaan Ansari To be known by name.



AS COVID WANES, CURBS EASED FOR MUMBAI, 10 DISTRICTS

▶ WITH COVID-19 CASES AGAIN DROPPING, THE MAHARASHTRA GOVERNMENT ON TUESDAY FURTHER EASED CURBS IN MUMBAI AND 10 OTHER DISTRICTS, INCLUDING PERMITTING RESTAURANTS AND THEATRES TO OPERATE AT 50 PER CENT CAPACITY.



Team Absolute | Mumbai
With Covid-19 cases again dropping, the Maharashtra government on Tuesday further eased curbs in Mumbai and 10 other districts, including permitting restaurants and theatres to operate at 50 per cent capacity. The districts given relief are those

which have completed over 90 per cent first dose of vaccination against Covid-19 and 70 per cent full inoculation till January 31 for the eligible population above 18 years, and the same would be updated every week to undo restrictions.

All national parks and tourism sites with online booking have opened with reasonable people allowed at any time, while spas have been permitted with the same 50 per cent capacity as for beauty salons and hair-cutting saloons. While the number of people per-

mitted for marriages has been increased to 200 or 25 per cent of any open/closed venues now, the limits on mourners at funerals has been done away with.

The state has permitted all amusement parks, restaurants, cinemas and theatres at 50 per cent capacity but opened up beaches, gardens, grounds as per normal timings, and district weekly markets shall be opened.

Additionally, District Disaster Management Authorities have been asked to decide on continuing restrictions on public movement during 11 p.m.-5 a.m., 25 per cent capacity in sporting arenas including horse-racing. The districts are: Mumbai, Pune, Raigad, Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg, Satara, Sangli, Kolhapur, Bhandara, Chandrapur and Gondiya, as per the guidelines issued by Chief Secretary Debashish Chakrabarty.

For the other 25 districts, similar easing of curbs shall be permitted only with the explicit approval of the State Disaster Management Authority, since a large section of the populace remains unvaccinated, with efforts to spur the inoculation drives.

MVA allies join hands to edge BJP out of nagar panchayats

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A day after state NCP president Jayant Patil, Shiv Sena leader Subhash Desai and state Congress chief Nana Patole reached a consensus on joining forces for the nagar panchayat (municipal council) polls, it appears that the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) banner will gain control over maximum councils in Maharashtra. "As state government, MVA's performance was impressive. In the nagar panchayats too, we will have to ensure that the BJP is kept out of power. We must ensure that only MVA nominees are elected as presidents," said the joint statement issued Patil, Desai and Patole on Sunday.

Elections to the 106 nagar panchayats were held a fortnight ago. Shiv Sena, Congress and NCP

won the majority of seats under the MVA banner, but the BJP emerged as the single largest party. Of the 1,802 seats in the 106 nagar panchayats, BJP won 420, NC, Congress 355, Shiv Sena 298, Independents 218 and others 111.

NCP spokesperson Nawab Malik said it would not be difficult for the MVA to win at least 75 councils. "The NCP has secured a clear majority in 28 councils, Congress in 18 and Shiv Sena in eight. Further, in some councils, NCP, Congress and Shiv Sena had contested independently and won. They are now keen to support the MVA banner," he added.

Malik further said it would be wrong to compare NCP's performance with BJP as the latter had contested on 1,700 seats and won 420, while his party had bagged 370 of the 945 seats it had contested.

"In terms of strike rate and percentage, NCP's performance was best," he insisted.

It was expected that BJP, which secured a clear majority in 30 municipal councils, would get support from Independents and even a few NCP and Shiv Sena candidates who had contested independently to reach the magic figure of 50. But now it seems difficult for BJP to achieve this target with the three allies teaming up again.

In view of chief minister Uddhav Thackeray's clear message, Shiv Sena members said will ensure that MVA nominees are elected president in most of the councils. "Thackeray had recently expressed displeasure over the poor performance of Shiv Sena in the nagar panchayat polls and said that he would not tolerate laxity," a Sena leader said.

Murder bid case:

COURT REJECTS BJP MLA NITESH RANE'S BAIL PLEA

The case pertains to alleged attack on Shiv Sena activist Santosh Parab during campaigning for the Sindhudurg District Co-operative Bank elections in December 2021.



Co-operative Bank elections in December 2021. The MLA had on multiple occasions claimed he was being targeted by Maharashtra's ruling party (Shiv Sena, which heads the MVA government) as it felt insulted and hurt by an alleged incident of mocking outside the state legislature complex last month. A Shiv Sena MLA had alleged Nitesh Rane had made 'meow meow' sounds looking in the direction of Maharashtra minister Aaditya Thackeray, while he was going inside the Vidhan Bhavan building in Mumbai on December 23, 2021, during the winter session of the legislature. The Kankavli police in Sindhudurg had earlier opposed Nitesh Rane's application, stating that it was fallacious to say that he was being targeted due to political reasons or because of a 'dhar-na' he had held outside the Vidhan Bhavan on December 23, 2021. The Rane family was associated with the Shiv Sena for long before falling out with the party.

of Union minister Narayan Rane, had asked him to surrender before the trial court in the meanwhile, and seek regular bail in the matter. Earlier, the Bombay High Court had on January 17 refused to grant pre-arrest bail to Nitesh Rane in the case, noting that a balance was needed between conflicting considerations of personal liberty and a proper investigation in the matter. The case pertains to alleged attack on Shiv Sena activist Santosh Parab during campaigning for the Sindhudurg District

Team Absolute | Mumbai
A court in Sindhudurg district of Maharashtra on Tuesday denied bail to BJP MLA Nitesh Rane in an attempt to murder case. District and Additional Sessions Judge R B Rote rejected Rane's bail application. The Supreme Court had last Thursday directed Maharashtra Police not to arrest Rane for 10 days in the attempt to murder case registered in Sindhudurg district. The apex court, while disposing of the pre-arrest bail plea of the MLA, who is the son

Maharashtra student protests:

YOUTUBER 'HINDUSTANI BHAI' IN POLICE CUSTODY TILL FEB 4

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Youtuber Vikas Phatak (41) alias 'Hindustani Bhai' was on Tuesday afternoon produced before a magistrate court in Bandra and remanded in police custody, along with his aide Ikrar Khan (25), till February 4. Phatak was brought to the Bandra magistrate court amid heavy police bandobast. Speaking on behalf of Dharavi police, public prosecutor Prasad Joshi argued before the court, "The accused is a habitual offender. He had done a protest on the similar issue in Shivaji park. In this case too he made a video on Instagram and asked students to come to Dharavi. He was arrested

from a luxurious hotel where he was staying in a room booked under someone else's name." "Also, it's not possible that over 800 students came on their own. We want to find out who paid for his hotel stay and we suspect some organisation is behind sending the students," Joshi said. Phatak, seated at the back, expressed his willingness to speak, which the magistrate Komal Singh Rajput allowed. He said, "I made the video and gave a call to students to come to the protest, but some miscreants committed violence.



There is no student involved. They caught one man with me (Khan), but he is not a student. No organisation or political party is behind me. I am ready to undergo any punishment you give if

it's proven that I am associated with any group." His lawyer added, "My client issues an unconditional apology. He is also ready to bear all the expenses for the damage caused in the incident. We request for a short custody." After listening to both sides, the court sent the two accused to police custody till February 4. Earlier in the day, police arrested Phatak and

Khan for orchestrating the riots in Dharavi where over a thousand students, mostly minors, choked the roads and some of them took to violence on Monday demanding the cancellation of offline board exams for Class 10 and 12 in view of the pandemic.

An FIR has been registered against Phatak and several others under IPC sections 353 (obstructing public servant from discharging duty), 332 (causing hurt to public servant), 427 (mischievous causing damage), 109 (abetment) and 114 (abetter present when offence committed), 143, 145, 146, 149 for unlawful assembly and rioting and 188, 269, 270 for violating Covid-19 guidelines.

Budget 2022-23 failed to meet expectations of common people: CM Thackeray

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Among rising unemployment, inflation and falling incomes that had caused uneasiness among common people, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Tuesday said the annual budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman was quite disappointing. "It is a disappointment to employees and the general public. There is no concrete answer to rising unemployment in the country. Without realizing how many of these dreams have actually been fulfilled, new dreams have been presented to the people in the budget of 2022-23. But the budget shows no direction to fulfil the dreams of the past and the present, he said.



"The budgetary provision for rural development and NREGA has been reduced. This will not only create difficulties in the development of rural areas but will also affect various schemes implemented for farmers through NREGA. How can farmers' income be doubled in such a situation?" asked Thackeray. He observed that no major announcement has been made in the budget for the farmers other than payment of minimum basic price to the farmers in their bank accounts. Corona has increased dependence on agriculture. Against this backdrop, concrete measures for farmers were needed in this budget. The development of agro-processing industries beyond sustainable irrigation and employment generation was expected from this budget which is missing," he opined.

The finance minister said she would discuss with private developers affordable housing in the housing sector, which has huge employment opportunities. There is no mention of it in the budget. The budget seems to have turned a blind eye to the fact that 80 lakh houses will be built but the purchasing power should come to the masses. Thackeray said the govern-

Budget will make India modern, self-reliant, strong: Fadnavis

Former Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said on Tuesday that the new Union Budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will lay the foundation for a modern, self-reliant and strong India.

Panaji | Agencies

Former Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said on Tuesday that the new Union Budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will lay the foundation for a modern, self-reliant and strong India. Speaking to reporters in Panaji, Fadnavis also said that the budget would put India on the global digital map with its strong initiatives in the digital currency sector and use of improved technology for governance and popular benefit.



"The budget is aimed at making India a modern, self-reliant and strong country," said Fadnavis, who is the Goa in-charge for the February 14 Assembly polls. "It is an inclusive budget and one which will take the country on the path of development. The most important thing is that even after the pandemic, the budget has estimated growth of 9.2 per cent, which shows that India can become the fastest growing economy. This is proof of a self-reliant and strong India."

The Budget has given a boost to the digital ecosystem. India will be formally issuing its first digital currency. "The business done through cryptocurrency will now be conducted with a digital rupee, which will put an end to underhand dealings. The concept of digital university will help a lot of people," Fadnavis said.

The senior BJP leader also said that the introduction of a 5G technology will reduce the geographical location difference between Indian villages and cities. "The biggest advantage is that with this technology, is that the present 4G technology lag will be wiped out. The government will be able to provide healthcare to ensure that such facilities could reach the last person. The most important announcement is digital gateways will be available in cities as well as villages." He also underlined the announcement of the allocation of Rs. 2.37 lakh crore to the farming sector as the biggest

'Looks like election manifesto': Maharashtra minister Aaditya Thackeray on Budget 2022

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra minister Aaditya Thackeray on Tuesday slammed the Union Budget, calling it an 'election manifesto' ahead of upcoming assembly elections.



Speaking to the media, the minister asked as to what will the states get from the increase in GST? Meanwhile, the Shiv Sena on Tuesday dubbed the Union Budget as "very depressing", saying it has neither given any relief to the middle class nor it has any reference to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of making India a "USD 5 trillion" economy.

The NCP, which shares power with the Shiv Sena and NCP in Maharashtra, said the budget was a huge "disappointment" for the common citizens, who are reeling under high inflation and expected some tax relief. Shiv Sena MP Vinayak Raut said the Union Budget 2022-23 only has jargon of words like the PM-Gati Shakti, Atmanirbhar Bharat, while old schemes are presented as new. "The budget is very depressing. During the coronavirus pandemic, people of the country paid Rs 1.40 lakh crore as GST but, unfortunately, the schemes that were to be implemented with regard to taxes do not find a place in the budget," Raut told reporters. He claimed the budget has misled people. "The budget has given no relief to the middle class with regard to the Income Tax. There is no reference to the prime minister's vision of making India a USD 5 trillion economy," Raut said.

After the 2019 Maharashtra Assembly elections, the Shiv Sena snapped ties with long-term ally BJP. The Uddhav Thackeray-led party has since then severely criticised policies of the BJP-led Centre Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday presented the budget in Parliament. Later, NCP MP Supriya Sule tweeted: "A 'futuristic ICT budget', in which we hope the deliverables are a reality, not

just VR?! Good luck." Maharashtra minister and NCP's chief spokesperson Nawab Malik said the Union budget has come as a huge disappointment for the common citizens, who are facing high inflation and expected some tax relief.

"This budget has nothing to offer to the youth, farmers or the middle class. This is a big disappointment," Malik told reporters. He also expressed concern over the Union government's increased focus on Information and Technology.

"I wonder whether it was a technology-oriented budget or that of the country which should have covered other areas as well." Before the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had promised generation of two crore jobs every year. However, today's budget talks about generating 60 lakh jobs. Was the earlier announcement a mere jumla (rhetoric)? the minister asked.

The Union government had promised to double the income of farmers by 2022. Now, it says it would take steps to increase the income of farmers, he pointed out.

He said the Modi government has also proposed issuing an initial public offering (IPO) of the LIC, which has been one of the most trusted state-run organisations in the country.

"It seems this Union government wants to raise funds by selling state assets," Malik claimed.

Maharashtra NCP president Jayant Patil in a tweet said it was an "election manifesto" and not the country's budget.



EDITOR'S SPECS

HI-B visas for FY23 in US

The US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has announced that the initial registration period for the coveted HI-B visas for FY2023 will run through March 1-18. The USCIS said that during the above mentioned period "prospective petitioners and representatives will be able to complete and submit their registrations using our online HI-B registration system". The USCIS will assign a confirmation number to each registration submitted which will be used solely to track registrations. This number however, cannot be used to track the case status online, the statement said. It further said that prospective HI-B cap-subject petitioners or their representatives are required to use a myUSCIS online account to register each beneficiary electronically for the selection process and pay the required \$10 registration fee. "Prospective petitioners submitting their own registrations will use a 'registrant' account. Registrants will be able to create new accounts beginning at noon on February 21." US employers and agents are collectively known as "registrants". The USCIS said that once enough registrations are received by the March 18 deadline, there will be a random selection after which selection notifications will be via users' myUSCIS online accounts. The HI-B visa allows companies and other employers in the US to temporarily employ foreign workers in occupations that require the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialised knowledge and a bachelor's degree or higher in the specific specialty, or its equivalent, according to the USCIS. Every year the US gives 65,000 HI-B visas open to all and 20,000 to those with advanced US degrees. Indians are the biggest beneficiaries of the HI-B visas getting about 75 per cent of them, according to the US government.

Budget plugs loophole where after tax search, income was being set off

Sanjeev Sharma The Union Budget has plugged a loophole as it was noticed that in some cases, assessee claim set off of losses or unabsorbed depreciation, against undisclosed income corresponding to difference in stock, undervaluation of stock, unaccounted cash payment etc, which is detected during the course of search or survey proceedings. Currently there is no provision in the Act to disallow such set-off and no distinction is made between undisclosed income which was detected owing to search & seizure or survey or requisition proceedings and income assessed in scrutiny assessment in the regular course of assessment though for incomes falling in section 68, section 69, section 69B etc, such restriction is there. Allowing the adjustment of undisclosed income detected as a result of search or requisition or survey against the loss or unabsorbed depreciation is resulting in short levy of tax. The provision of non-adjustment of loss or unabsorbed depreciation against undisclosed income detected as a result of search or requisition or survey would help in ensuring that proper tax is paid on income detected due to a search or survey and also result in increased deterrence against tax evasion. It is proposed to insert a new section 79A in the Act to provide that notwithstanding anything contained in the Act, where consequent to a search initiated under section 132 or a requisition made under section 132A or a survey conducted under section 133A, other than under sub-section (2A) of section 133A, the total income of any previous year of an assessee includes any undisclosed income, no set off, against such undisclosed income, of any loss, whether



brought forward or otherwise, or unabsorbed depreciation under sub-section (2) of section 32 shall be allowed to the assessee under any provision of this Act in computing his total income for such previous year. Further, the term "undisclosed income" is proposed to be defined for the above purpose as -- (i) any income of the previous year represented, either wholly or partly, by any money, bullion, jewellery or other valuable article or thing or any entry in the books of account or other documents or transactions found in the course of a search under section 132 or a requisition made under section 132A or a survey conducted under section 133A, other than that conducted under sub-section (2A) of section 133A. This amendment will take effect from April 1, 2022 and will accordingly apply in relation to the assessment year 2022-23 and subsequent assessment years.

BUDGET SPECIFIES CUSTOMS DUTY CHANGE ON SEVERAL ITEMS

There have been a host of changes in Customs duty on several items in the Union Budget for 2022-23. This would mean that imports become more expensive or cheaper usually depending on the change in customs duties. On the customs duties that have gone up, in the edible oils category, microbial fats and oils and their fractions have gone up from 30 per cent to 100 per cent, umbrellas has gone up from 10 per cent to 20 per cent, single or multiple loudspeakers has gone up from 15 per cent to 20 per cent, headphones and earphones, whether or not combined with a microphone, and sets consisting of a microphone and one or more loudspeaker has also gone up from 15 per cent to 20 per cent. The tariff changes will come into effect from May 1, 2022, as per the Finance Bill 2022-23. Cashew nuts will become cheaper as import duties have been cut from 30 per cent to 2.5 per cent. Duties on coral has been reduced from 30 per cent to free. Bovine semen has been reduced from 30 per cent to 5 per cent, pistachios is down from 30 per cent to 10 per cent, and soft dates is reduced from 30 per cent to 20 per cent. Fruits that are imported have also become cheaper. Oranges, Lemon and limes down from 40 per cent to 30 per cent, fresh grapes down from 35 per cent to 30 per cent, fresh pears, fresh quinces down from 35 per cent to 30 per cent. In spices, pepper is reduced from 70 per cent to 30 per cent while clove is down from 70 per cent to 35 per cent. Sweet Biscuits, Waffles and wafers is down from 45 per cent to 30 per cent, dog or cat food, put up for retail sale, is down from 30 per cent to 20 per cent in customs duties.

Zuckerberg's cryptocurrency dream gets over

Facing regulatory hurdles, the cryptocurrency dream of Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg is officially over as the company has sold its digital coin known as Diem for around \$200 million to Silvergate, a crypto-focused bank. Originally launched as Libra and later renamed as the Diem Association, the cryptocurrency initiative faced regulatory backlash, and the US Federal Reserve was a key opponent to Diem launching. "Despite giving us positive substantive feedback on the design of the network, it nevertheless became clear from our dialogue with federal regulators that the project could not move ahead. As a result, the best path forward was to sell the Diem Group's assets, as we have done today to Silvergate, a said Diem Networks CEO Stuart Levey.

"We remain confident in the potential for a stablecoin operating on a blockchain designed like Diem's to deliver the benefits that motivated the Diem Association from the beginning," he said in a statement late on Monday. Over the coming weeks, the Diem Association and its subsidiaries expect to begin the process of winding down. The Libra



Association in December 2020 decided to change its name to Diem Association in a bid to reinforce its organisational independence. The Diem Association (Diem means day in Latin) also had its subsidiary called Diem Networks to serve as the payment system operator.

Facebook and 20 partner organisations formally joined the digital currency project during a meeting in Geneva in October 2019. In a move to win regulators' hearts, the association had announced that its cryptocurrency will offer stable coins backed by just one national's currency, meaning some coins offered would serve as the equivalent value of a dollar or a euro. However, several heavyweights pulled out of the Libra project, like PayPal, Mastercard, Visa, Mercado Pago, eBay, Stripe and Booking Holdings and Vodafone over privacy concerns.

international

SENIOR UN OFFICIAL CALLS FOR DIALOGUE TO DEFUSE RUSSIA-UKRAINE TENSIONS

United Nations | Agencies

UN Undersecretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo has called for dialogue to defuse the current tensions between Russia and Ukraine.



Addressing the Security Council on Monday, DiCarlo said that over 100,000 troops and heavy weaponry from Russia are positioned along the border with Ukraine and unspecified numbers of Russian troops and weaponry are also reportedly being deployed to Belarus ahead of large-scale joint military exercises in February on the borders with Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic states, reports Xinhua news agency.

"NATO members are reportedly planning additional deployments in Eastern European member states, and NATO has advised that 8,500 troops are now on high alert.

"Accusations and recriminations among the various actors involved in the ongoing discussions have created uncertainty and apprehension for many that a military confrontation is impending," she said. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has made clear that there can be no alternative to diplomacy and dialogue to deal with the complex, longstanding security concerns

and threat perceptions that have been raised. He has expressed his strong belief that there should not be any military intervention in this context and that diplomacy should prevail.

"We, therefore, welcome the steps taken so far by all involved to maintain dialogue. We urge and expect all actors to build on these efforts and to remain focused on pursuing diplomatic solutions by engaging in good faith," she said. "We further urge all actors to refrain from

provocative rhetoric and actions to maximize the chance for diplomacy to succeed. Achieving mutual understanding and lasting, mutually acceptable arrangements is the best way to safeguard regional and international peace and security in the interests of all." The UN is closely following the ongoing diplomatic discussions on the future of European peace and security architecture among representatives of Russia, the US, NATO members, the European Union, and the Organization for the Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The UN hopes the outcome of these talks will strengthen peace and security in Europe, including for Ukraine, she said. No one is watching the current diplomatic efforts more than the people of Ukraine, they have endured a conflict in eastern Ukraine that has taken over 14,000 lives since 2014 and that tragically is still far from resolution. It is painfully obvious that any new escalation in or around Ukraine would mean more needless killing and destruction, said DiCarlo. She stressed the UN Secretary-General's appeal to all concerned to take immediate steps to de-escalate tensions and continue on the diplomatic path, saying the UN stands ready to support all efforts to that end.

'MOST OF ARMS SEIZED IN MEXICO MADE IN US'

Mexico City | The

US manufactured most of the weapons seized by authorities in Mexico over the last two years, according to a report released by the Foreign Affairs Ministry here.



Mexican security forces seized 18,091 US-made weapons between January 1, 2020 and November 18, 2021, an average of 812 guns or other firearms a month, Xinhua news agency reported citing the Ministry as saying in a report.

Of the weapons seized, over 10,500 were handguns and more than 7,300 were shotguns, it said. Mexico estimates that at least half a million pieces of weapons are brought to the country illegally each year from the US and fall into the hands of criminals south of the country's border. More than 3.9 million crimes are committed in Mexico each year by criminals using US-made weapons, 70 per cent of which can be traced to America, according to the Ministry. In a bid to decrease US arms entering Mexico, the Mexican government filed a lawsuit against 11 American manufacturers and distributors in August last year.

Israeli PM's remarks incitement to violence: Palestine

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Ishtaye said that the remarks of his Israeli counterpart Naftali Bennett on rejecting the establishment of a Palestinian state are "an incitement to violence and proof of the Israeli government's anti-peace stance."

Ramallah | Agencies

Ishtaye made the remarks in an official statement issued after the weekly meeting of the Palestinian Authority cabinet held in the West Bank city of Ramallah, reports Xinhua news agency.

Bennett on January 28 said that as long as he is the Prime Minister of Israel, there will be no Oslo, referring to the peace agreements signed between Israelis and Palestinians in 1993.

He also said that he opposes the establishment of a Palestinian state and that he wouldn't allow any political negotiations that would lead to a Palestinian state.

In response, Ishtaye said rejecting to negotiate the establishment of a Palestinian state "proved to us and the world the scale of extremism of Bennett's government and its positions hostile to peace and negotiations."

He called on the US and the European Union to intervene to put an end to



Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem. Direct peace talks between the Israelis and Palestinians stopped in 2014 following disputes on Israeli settlements and the establishment of a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders.

ECOWAS-UN JOINT MISSION VISITS BURKINA FASO

Ouagadougou | A joint

mission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the UN met leaders of Burkina Faso's military following a coup in the country late last month.



"The heads of state have requested that the mission come and exchange with the authorities here to examine the situation and see what the future holds for Burkina Faso," Xinhua news agency quoted Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey, the Foreign Minister of Ghana who leads the ECOWAS delegation, as saying. During the visit, the joint delegation held discussions with Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, chief of the Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration (MPSR) that took power in the Western African country. "It's about seeing how we can work with Burkina Faso so that the country can get out of this situation," said Botchwey. The members of the joint mission also visited President Roch Marc Christian Kabore, who's in good health, according to Botchwey. The delegation will submit its report to an ECOWAS summit scheduled for Thursday in Accra. On January 23, the military of Burkina Faso announced on national television that they had seized power and put an end to the functions of President Kabore and the MPSR led by Damiba took over from the civilian government.

Blinken, Abbas discuss bilateral issues

Washington | Agencies

In a phone call with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed the importance of strengthening bilateral relationships.

In a tweet early Tuesday morning, Blinken said: "Good discussion with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. We discussed strengthening the US-Palestinian relationship, and the need for Palestinian Authority reform and for Palestinians and Israelis alike to enjoy equal measures of freedom, security, and prosperity."

According to the statement, Blinken and Abbas on Monday also discussed the challenges facing the Palestinian Authority and



the need for reform. "Secretary Blinken reiterated that Israelis and Palestinians alike deserve to live safely and securely, and enjoy equal measures of security, freedom, and prosperity, and reaffirmed

the US administration's commitment to a two-state solution," the Department added.

Meanwhile, Palestinian state media said that Abbas reiterated to Blinken that the "current

situation is not sustainable and stressed the need to end the Israeli occupation of the land of the State of Palestine".

Abbas asked Blinken to put pressure on Israel to stop settlement activities, the expulsion of Palestinians from Jerusalem's neighbourhoods, abusing prisoners, and deducting the tax revenue dues that weakened the Palestinian economy, it added.

The Palestinian President stressed the need to stop Israel's unilateral practices that undermine the two-state solution and implement the agreements signed between the two sides, the state media report said.

It added that Abbas also pointed out the importance of strengthening relations with the US.

2 suspects arrested after police officers shot dead in Germany

Two male suspects were arrested on suspicion of shooting two police officers dead in Germany during a routine traffic check, according to local authorities.



Xinhua news agency. The two police officers "were fatally injured by gunshots", according to the joint press release by the local public prosecutor's office and the local police headquarters. "This terrible act leaves you stunned," tweeted Justice Minister Marco Buschmann. The manhunt for possible accomplices continues while the motive of the attackers remains unclear, said the authorities.

Berlin | Agencies

Two male suspects were arrested on suspicion of shooting two police officers dead in Germany during a routine traffic check, according to local authorities. The shooting occurred at around 4.20 a.m. on Monday in Kusel in the state of Rhineland-Palatinate, after the two police officers had pulled over the car during the routine check, reports



ANNUAL EXAMINATION OF CLASS XTH AND XIITH WILL BE HELD AS PER SCHEDULE: MINISTER PARMAR

Bhopal: Minister of State for School Education (Independent Charge) and General Administration, Inder Singh Parmar said that the annual examinations of Class Xth and XIth in the state would be held as per the examination schedule. In all the schools affiliated to the Board of Secondary Education, the Class Xth examination will be conducted from February 18 and the annual examination of Class XIth will be held from February 17, 2022. All the students should prepare for the exam with full dedication, enthusiasm and hard work.

Parmar took a meeting today in Mantralaya in connection with the preparation of the Board of Secondary Education. Parmar directed to make arrangements keeping in mind the present circumstances of Corona. Keeping in mind the safety of the students, the number of examination centers should be increased to ensure social distancing. Secretary Board of Secondary Education Shrikant Bhanot informed that the Board of Secondary Education has completed all the preparations for the examination. Registrar Umesh Kumar Thakur and others were present. The Board of Secondary Education has already declared the examination schedule of Class Xth, XIth, XIIth Vocational Course Examination / Physical Education Training, Diploma in Pre-School Education (DPSE) for the year 2022. All the exams will be held between 10 am to 1 pm. Practical examinations of regular students of Class Xth and XIth will be conducted from February 12 to March 25 in the school and from February 17 to March 20 for private students at the examination center allotted to them. The examination schedule can also be seen on the Board website www.mpse.nic.in.

CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan thanks Centre for Ken-Betwa river project fund allocation

CHIEF MINISTER SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN ON TUESDAY EXPRESSED HIS GRATITUDE TO THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AFTER RS 1,400 CRORE WAS ALLOCATED FOR KEN-BETWA RIVER LINKING PROJECT.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Tuesday expressed his gratitude to the Central government after Rs 1,400 crore was allocated for Ken-Betwa river linking project.

The project in the drought-prone region of Bundelkhand, spread across 13 districts of two states -- Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, is expected to benefit nearly 10 lakh hectare of agri-



cultural lands.

"Expressing my gratitude towards the Central government for generous allocation, this will speed up the project and bring prosperity and growth for lakhs of people in Bundelkhand region," Chouhan said. "Implementation of Ken-Betwa linking project at estimated cost of Rs 44,605 crore to be

taken up with irrigation benefits to 9 lakh hectare farmland, a budget of Rs 1,400 crore has been allocated in the financial year 2022-23," the Union Finance Minister said during her Budget speech in the Parliament on Tuesday.

Besides water for irrigation, the project is expected to provide drinking water supply to more

than 60 lakh population living in 13 districts of the two border-sharing states Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

It will also provide water for generating 103 MW of hydropower and 27 MW solar power, a Sitharaman said.

The Union Cabinet had on December 8, 2021 approved the project and had estimated that the project will be completed in the next eight years.

The Ken-Betwa river linking project will provide benefit to the water starved districts Panna, Tikamgarh, Chhatarpur, Sagar, Damoh, Datia, Vidisha, Shivpuri and Raisen in Madhya Pradesh. While, districts such as Banda, Mahoba, Jhansi and Lalitpur in Uttar Pradesh.

It is the first project under the Central government's National Perspective Plan for inter-linking of rivers. The ambitious project envisages transferring of water from Ken river to Betwa river, both tributaries of the river Yamuna.

CM PLANTS GUAVA SAPLING



Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted a guava sapling in his residence premises on Tuesday. Chouhan plants saplings every day as per his resolve. Chief Minister had taken a pledge to plant saplings every day after planting saplings in Amarkantak on February 19-Narmada Jayanti last year. The ancient Sanskrit name for the guava plant is Amrit or Amrit Phal. Guava is delicious and full of medicinal properties.

CM Released the Book "Ram Van Gaman Path Punravlokan"

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan released the book "Ram Van Gaman Path Punravlokan" at the residence office. The author of the book Ram Gopal Soni and publisher Pushkar Baheti of Ujjain were present. Soni is a retired officer of the Indian Forest Service. He has retired from the post of Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests.



religion tourism in these areas. The 316-page book, divided into 11 chapters, covers the journey of Ram-Laxman to the forest with Vishwamitra, Ayodhya to Chitrakoot, Chitrakoot to Amarkantak, Amarkantak to Dandkarany, Panchavati to

Kishkindha, departure from Pravarshan Parvat to Lanka, Setu Bandh along with a detailed mention of arrival in Ayodhya from Lanka by Pushpak Viman. The book also contains description of various Ashrams.

OUR COUNTRY IS A HUGE FAMILY: GOVERNOR PATEL

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Volunteers of National Service Scheme, who participated in the Republic Day Parade, New Delhi, presented a courtesy call on Governor Mangubhai Patel at Raj Bhavan. The awarded volunteers informed the Governor about the experiences of the one month Republic Day camp under the National Service Scheme. Principal Secretary to Governor DP Ahuja was also present.

Patel has said that our country is like a huge family. The members of this family are part of a culture with differences in dialects, languages, geography, physical structure, form. He said that whatever good they saw and understood during the camp, they must include it in life. On being informed about the efforts of public awareness towards Sickle Cell, the Governor said that the goal of the efforts being made should be



to achieve the best. Our work must inspire others. The volunteers of the National Service Scheme informed the

Governor about their experiences. Students including Shobhit Dubey and Anchal Sharma of Barkatullah University Bhopal, Ankit Lakhre

and Rahul Patle of Rani Durgavati University Jabalpur, Khushi Yadav and Apoorva Mishra of Jiwaji University Gwalior shared their experiences of the camp and parade.

They told that during the camp, they came in direct connect with the culture and civilization of the states from East to West and North to South included in the 15 zones. They felt that language does not become a barrier in the intimacy of feelings. They said that the feeling of pride and joy as a member of the civilian contingent of the National Service Scheme in the Rajpath Parade is wonderful and unforgettable. State NSS Officer RK Vijay, Youth Officer NSS Regional Directorate Rajkumar Verma, Programme Coordinator Barkatullah University Anant Kumar Saxena and Training Assistant NSS Training Institute Barkatullah University Rahul Singh Parihar were present.

Covid on the wane in Madhya Pradesh? Not quite, say numbers in 44 districts

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Contrary to the perception that the third wave is weakening in MP, Covid numbers show that infections have risen sharply on a week-on-week basis in 85% districts.

Data of the last two weeks of January shows that 44 of 52 districts reported an increase in average daily cases between January 23 and January 30 over the previous week, the highest being 762% in Agar Malwa. To add to the concern, deaths rose by around 30% between the third week and the fourth.

At least 20 districts saw more than 100% jump in average daily cases. It's a sign that the infection is spreading to newer areas and indicates that it's too early to believe that the third wave is on the wane.

Contrary to the apparent perception that the third wave of Covid-19 is on the wane, numbers show that the cases have in fact increased on a week-on-week basis in at least 44 of the 52 districts of Madhya Pradesh.

The 44 districts have reported an increase in average daily cases in the last week (January 23 to January 30), compared to the daily average cases reported in previous week (January 16 to January 22). The increase is between 750% and 3% respectively.

Only eight districts have shown a decline in the average daily cases reported in the week (January 23 and January 30). Average daily cases reported in a week is sum of total cases reported in a week divided by 7. These districts are Burhanpur, Bhind, Sagar, Gwalior, Anuppur, Alirajpur Ujjain and Morena. Gwalior and Ujjain dis-

tricts are also among one of the top 10 districts of the state which have maximum active patients.

The maximum increase in average daily cases reported in the previous week has been observed in smaller and far away districts like Agar Malwa (762% increase); while in the week from January 16 to January 22, only 29 cases were reported in Agar Malwa, that average to around four cases per day. This increased exponentially to 250 cases reported in the week from January 23 to January 30, averaging to around 31 cases a day. Thus average increase was from just four cases to whopping 31 new cases per day. In Seoni district too, a massive increase in the average weekly cases reported per day was witnessed. It increased by 350% this week compared to the previous week.

CM OFFERS PRAYERS AT MAHALASA NARAYANI TEMPLE IN GOA

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Tuesday offered prayers at Mahalasa Narayani Temple situated at Verna in Goa. Chouhan prayed to Maa Mahalasa for the progress of Madhya Pradesh and for the happy, healthy and prosperous life of the people of the state. Describing the darshan of Mahalasa Narayani Devi as his good fortune, Chief Minister Chouhan said that in this temple the mind gets peace and the heart gets wonderful joy.

"I am blessed to come here today to have the darshan of Mahalasa Devi." Chouhan said that the temple was demolished by Portuguese invaders in the 16th century, after which the devotees rebuilt the grand temple. Along with religious faith, the temple is also the centre of education, rituals and harmony. "I am filled with energy and inspiration after darshan of Maa here." He offered respect to the Maa and expressed gratitude to the devotees.

CM Chouhan will interact with Jal Jeevan Mission beneficiaries

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan will interact with rural families benefited from Jal Jeevan Mission through video conferencing from Kushabhau Thackeray Auditorium, Bhopal on February 4. Chouhan will also interact with villagers, public representatives and members of Village Water and Sanitation Committee regarding proper supply of water through taps and proper operation and maintenance of the schemes of Jal Jeevan Mission.

In order to communicate with Chief Minister Chouhan, in the Jal Jeevan Mission, one village each in 16 districts has been selected out of the districts where water has been supplied to the rural households.

Under the National Jal Jeevan Mission, works of water supply schemes are going on in the rural areas of almost every district of the state. So far more than 46 lakh 11 thousand rural families have been supplied water from taps. There are 4 thousand 44 villages in the state where availability of water has been ensured in every household. The imple-

mentation of the mission is being done by Public Health Engineering Department and Jal Nigam. Chouhan will interact with the beneficiaries of Bilkhira of Bhopal district, Satpaliya of Sehore, Barkheda Kayam of Dewas, Chakeri of Sagar, Rainagar of Panna, Neemkheda of Jabalpur, Bhanvarda of Mandla, Mungapur of Seoni, Judmunian Murla of Rewa, Umaidpura of Neemuch, Sehrai of Ashoknagar, Mau of Chhindwara, Harratola of Anuppur, Ranayrapur of Ujjain, Simrishukla of Damoh and Bavai village of Niwari district.

I did the bhoomi-pujan, I am dedicating it: Singh

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Urban Development and Housing Minister Bhupendra Singh dedicated a commercial shopping complex constructed on 36 platforms at a cost of Rs. 2 crore 78 lakh in New Market. Singh performed bhoomi-pujan of the commercial shopping complex to be constructed at a cost of 2 crore 84 lakh and development works of various streets of New Market at a cost of Rs 95 lakh 89 thousand. Singh said that it was I who performed the bhoomi-pujan of the shopping complex built on 36 platforms and today I am dedicating it. He congratulated the officials of the Municipal Corporation for working within the time limit.



soon. Bhopal will be developed as a metro city. Metro will start in the year 2023. Like Indore, there should be a sense of cleanliness among the citizens of Bhopal, so that like Indore, Bhopal also comes number-1 in the Swachh Pratishtan survey is going on in the urban bodies. The cleanest establishment will be awarded. He said that proper management of waste is being done.

Singh said that the compounding of houses has been increased from 10 to 30 percent. Unauthorized colonies formed before the year 2016 are being legalised. This will provide many facilities to the residents. He also listened to the problems of the traders.

Municipal Commissioner KVS Chaudhary said that 59 shops have been constructed in place of 36 platforms. He said that 50 shops and two halls would be constructed in the shopping complex to be built in place of Nagarik Sahakari Bank. She-lounge will be constructed along with paver blocks in various lanes of New Market. Apart from this, other development works will also be undertaken.

Thanks to PM Modi for presenting the budget for building a new India: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for presenting the budget for building a New India. Reacting to the Union Budget 2022-23, Chouhan said that this budget presented to build a prosperous, powerful and developed India will give impetus to infrastructure development. For infrastructure development, 35 percent amount has been increased in the budget. This will create employment opportunities along with infrastructure development. Arrangements have also been made to provide more funds to the states in the budget. This amount will be used in the infrastructure development of the states, due to which employment opportunities will be created in the states as well. Chouhan gave his response to the media after listening to the budget for the year 2022-23 presented in Parliament by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman at his residence.

Chouhan said that Madhya Pradesh has got a big gift in the budget. In the river interlinking project, an amount of more than Rs 44 thousand crores will be spent on the Ken-Betwa link project. This will give a new look to Bundelkhand.

Chouhan said that this is a budget to double the income of farmers. Necessary provisions have been made in the budget to connect agriculture with technology. By making agriculture



hi-tech, the way has been paved for providing its benefits to the farmer. Natural farming will improve the health of the general public and it will also improve the health of the earth.

Chouhan said that this is a common man's budget, in which efforts have been made to bring prosperity in the lives of poor, low and middle class families. There is sufficient provision in the budget to implement the new education policy. Necessary arrangements have

also been made to improve the health infrastructure in the country after the Covid period. Chouhan said that the Union Budget for the year 2022-23 is for women empowerment, employment to youth, welfare of poor and farmers and building a powerful India, in which adequate provision has been made for the security of the country. Defense budget has been increased by 25%. Adequate resources have been made available in the budget for the direction in which PM Modi wants to take the country on the occasion of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav. Chouhan congratulated the Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for the budget.

Chouhan has tweeted that - 'In one sentence, this historic budget is, "Totally inclusive, that will bring a positive change in the life of every Indian." Chouhan has thanked PM Modi for giving approval for the Ken-Betwa link project and tweeted that - "This project will boost facilities of drinking water, irrigation, electricity supply in the drought-affected districts of Bundelkhand, besides employment, industrialization and investment." Chouhan has tweeted in relation to the budget that - "Under the leadership of Modi everyone will get the opportunity for progress in a progressive India. The unprecedented decision of 'One Station One Product' will prove to bring about a historic change in the lives of small farmers and entrepreneurs.



Playing Kenneth Branagh's dad was 'easy': Jamie Dornan



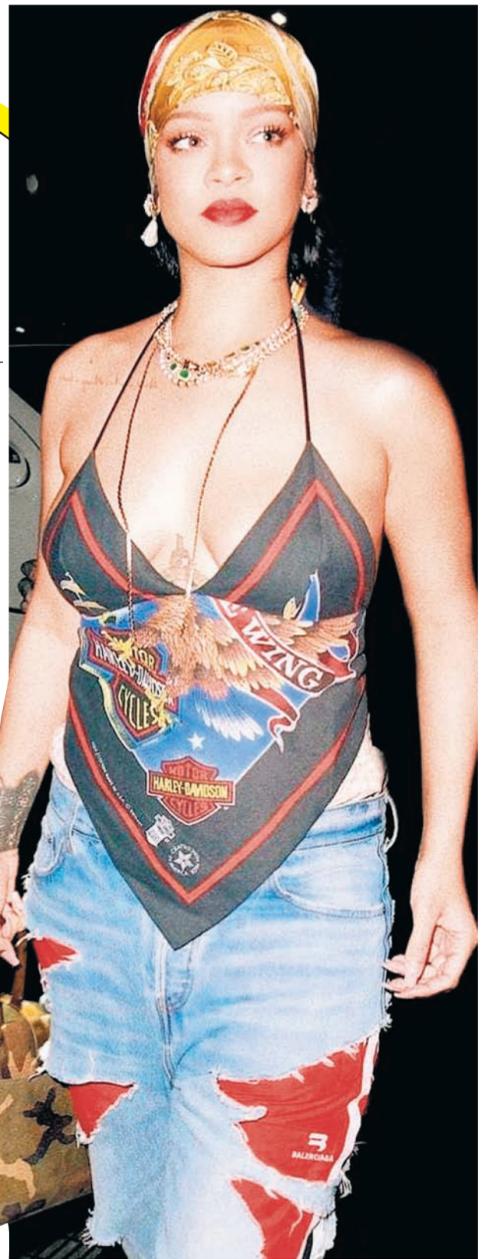
Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor Jamie Dornan played the director Kenneth Branagh's real-life dad in the semi-autobiographical movie 'Belfast', which centres on The Troubles in Northern Ireland. Dornan admits the filmmaker made his job surprisingly easy. Asked about the role, Jamie told Variety: "We had this brilliant introductory discussion. He was making me feel that I was the only person he wanted to be portraying his father. And we're talking about his life story. "I had so many questions for him in the beginning about his father and how he really would have responded in these scenarios, trying to get a sense of his dad beyond the page. It's not like he wouldn't answer them, but he was very much like: 'I want you to do your own thing with it.' "That's massive to be given that confidence, rather than trying to be this idealised version of who his father was. So it ended up being easy, because I've never felt such freedom on a set. I've never felt so confident on a film set before." Meanwhile, Kenneth recently claimed he found a "fresh perspective" on The Troubles amid the Covid lockdown, reports femalefirst.co.uk. The filmmaker spent "about 50 years" agonising over how to approach the subject, before he directed 'Belfast'.

RIHANNA EXPECTING FIRST BABY WITH A\$AP ROCKY

Los Angeles | Agencies

The 'Diamonds' singer and fashion mogul Rihanna is pregnant and expecting her first baby with rapper A\$AP Rocky. The couple was photographed out in New York City over the weekend, where Rihanna flaunted her baby bump while wearing a long pink jacket, reports people.com. Her oversized outerwear was unbuttoned at the bottom to reveal her growing bump adorned in a gold cross with colorful jewels. In one of the photos, where A\$AP Rocky grew up, the rapper kisses the soon-to-be mom on her forehead as they enjoy a snowy walk outdoors. Back in May, A\$AP Rocky told GQ about his romance with Rihanna, calling her the "love of my life." When asked what it felt like to be in a relationship, he said, "So much better. So much better when you got 'the One.' She amounts to probably, like, a million of the other ones. I think when you know, you know. She's the One." In regards to fatherhood, A\$AP Rocky, 33, said starting a family is "in my destiny, absolutely". As he put it at the time, "I think I'd be an incredible, remarkably overall amazing dad. I would have a very fly child. Very." A source confirmed in November 2020 that Rihanna and A\$AP Rocky were dating after years of friendship. The couple had sparked romance rumours since Rihanna split from her boyfriend of three years, billionaire Hassan Jameel, in January 2020.



'We Don't Talk About Bruno'

It is first Disney song to top Billboard Hot 100 in 29 years



Los Angeles | Agencies

'We Don't Talk About Bruno', the surprise hit off the 'Encanto' soundtrack, has become the first song from a Disney movie to reach No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart since 'A Whole New World' from 'Aladdin' did it in 1993. It joins the 'Encanto' album itself as a chart-topper, as the animated film's soundtrack remains atop the Billboard 200 chart for the third time in the last four weeks, reports variety.com. Some other stats Billboard pointed out: 'Bruno', solely penned by Lin-Manuel Miranda, becomes the first Hot 100 chart-topper to have been written by a solo writer in more than four years, Ed Sheeran's 'Perfect' having been the last. It's the first time a Miranda tune has topped the chart. And it's only the second time a Disney song has reached

the top, since 'A Whole New World' was the only one to ever do it previously. And it did this with close to no radio play, which is highly unusual for a chart in which spins play a considerable factor. The ascent of 'Bruno' made things hard on Adele's 'Easy on Me', which was finally forced to relinquish the No. 1 spot on the Hot 100 after a 10-week run at the top. 'Easy on Me' slipped to No. 2. 'Bruno', meanwhile, drew 34.9 million US streams which is more than twice as many as Adele's long-running hit, but a paltry 1.5 million radio airplay audience impressions about 1/62nd the number of Adele's radio power. Still, with a radio increase of 239 per cent for the week, it's clear that at least a few more stations are starting to try 'Bruno' out for a spot in their playlists. The Nos. 3-8 songs from last week remain frozen in place, led by Glass Animals' 'Heat Waves' at No. 3.

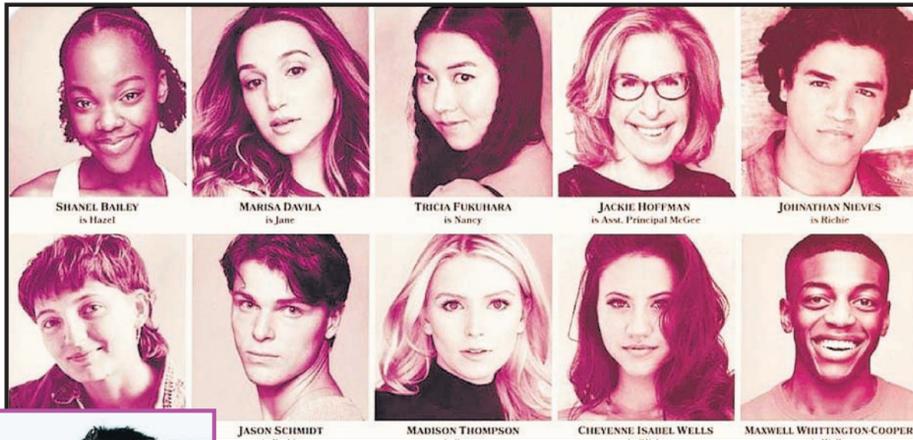
PETER ANDRE'S WIFE PLANS 'NAKED' BIRTHDAY GIFT

Los Angeles | Agencies

'Mysterious Girl' hitmaker Peter Andre's wife Emily wants to get him a "naked person to draw" for his birthday. She wrote in her column for OK! magazine: "I recently spent the afternoon doing arts and crafts with the kids after Theo asked me to draw him a giant Spider-Man and help him colour it in. "This sounds hilarious, but it made me realise how therapeutic I find it and it has made me want to look into going to some art classes. I've always thought it would be great to do a life-drawing class with Pete as he also finds drawing really relaxing. "We tease him about it but he will sit down and colour with the kids and then they will get up and walk off and he'll still be there hours later. "I might buy him a life-drawing class for his birthday this month - we just need to find someone to be the model. There must be an agency where you can hire someone to come to your house. Can you imagine? 'Happy Birthday, here's a naked person to draw!' " Meanwhile, Emily is very impressed by her daughter's gymnastics skills and would love to see her turn her hobby into something more serious in the future, reports femalefirst.co.uk. She said: "Millie is getting so good at gymnastics and she did a front walkover for the first time the other day.



'Grease: Rise Of The Pink Ladies': Prequel series sets cast



Los Angeles | Agencies

Streaming service Paramount+ has announced its cast for 'Grease: Rise of the Pink Ladies' as the principal photography gets underway in Vancouver. The prequel series stars Marisa Davila, Cheyenne Isabel Wells, Ari Notartomaso, Tricia Fukuhara, Shanel Bailey, Madison Thompson, Johnathan Nieves, Jason Schmidt, Maxwell Whittington-Cooper and Jackie Hoffman. The musical series takes place in 1954, four years before the original Grease, before rock 'n' roll ruled and before the T-Birds were the coolest in the school. It follows four fed-up outcasts who dare to have fun on their own terms, sparking a moral panic that will change

Rydell High forever. "We are thrilled to unveil our new original series that will introduce an incredible cast of young stars in the making and electrifying musical numbers you will fall in love with," said Nicole Clemens, President, Paramount Television Studios and Paramount+ Original Scripted Series. Clemens added: "Annabel and Alethea have managed to brilliantly capture the spirit of the iconic beloved classic film which like Rise of the Pink Ladies, is both set in the past but relevant to the present." 'Grease: Rise of the Pink Ladies' is written and executive produced by creator Annabel Oakes, who also serves as showrunner, reports deadline.com.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Nina Dobrev



IPL 2022 AUCTION

IYER, WARNER, RABADA, ASHWIN IN MARQUEE SET; ARCHER AVAILABLE FROM 2023 SEASON

A total of 10 star cricketers -- David Warner, R Ashwin, Trent Boult, Pat Cummins, Quinton de Kock, Shikhar Dhawan, Faf du Plessis, Shreyas Iyer, Kagiso Rabada and Mohammed Shami -- will be part of the marquee set that will ring in the 2022 IPL mega auction, scheduled on February 12 and 13 in Bengaluru, the BCCI confirmed to the franchises on Tuesday.

- The IPL on Tuesday released its final auction pool, which has been pruned to 590 from the original list of 1214 players, which was compiled and distributed on January 22.
- This final list includes 44 new names that were registered in the auction pool upon the request of the 10 franchises.
- Amongst 590 players (370 Indian, 220 overseas) who have registered for the auction, 228 are capped players, 355 are uncapped players and seven belong to Associate Nations.
- There are 20 players in the auction list with a reserve price of Rs 1.5 crore while 34 players are in the list of cricketers with a reserve price of Rs one crore.



by a full round of capped players by specialism -- batsmen, all-rounders, wicket Keeper/batsmen, fast bowlers and spin bowlers and then move into a full specialism round of uncapped players." Those 44 also include England fast bowler Jofra Archer, who the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) recently said is in the final stages of his recovery from elbow surgery with a planned return to all cricket in June. In the email sent to franchises, IPL chief operating officer Hemang Amin said Archer would be part of the accelerated set of players, which will commence from player No 161. Amin also added the

ECB had made it clear that Archer was "unlikely" to play in IPL 2022 and if any franchise picks him up they will not be able to get a replacement. Another notable addition in the new list is Usman Khawaja, who had not enrolled initially. Apart from Archer and Khawaja, new additions include one from Afghanistan, five more from Australia, 11 from India, two Ireland, six from New Zealand, two from Scotland, four more from Sri Lanka and West Indies each, and seven more from South Africa. A notable absentee from the additions is Chris Gayle. It has been learnt that at least a couple of franchises had

requested for Gayle's inclusion, however, the West Indian legend has decided to stay away from the IPL this year. There were also requests for the recall of Ben Stokes and Mitchell Starc, but no success was there on that front. "Rs 2 crore is the highest reserve price and as many as 48 players have chosen to place themselves in this bracket," the BCCI said in a statement. A fierce battle among 10 franchises to acquire the services of some of the finest Indian and world cricketing talent is on the cards during an action-packed IPL 2022 player auction in Bengaluru.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The BCCI has informed the franchises that the auction process, "will commence with the marquee set followed

India v WI ODI series in Ahmedabad to be played behind closed doors



Ahmedabad | Agencies

The three-match One-day International series between India and West Indies will be played behind closed doors, Gujarat Cricket Association (GCA) confirmed on Tuesday. "Considering the current situation, all the matches will be played behind closed doors," the official handle of Gujarat Cricket Association tweeted. "We are all set to host the West Indies Tour of India ODI Series 2022. 1st ODI on 6th of Feb will be a very special and historic match as India will be playing its 1000th ODI. The Indian team will be the first cricket team in the world to achieve this feat," it added. India will play three ODIs at the Narendra Modi Stadium, Ahmedabad from February 6 followed by the T20I series at the Eden

Gardens, Kolkata from February 16. Meanwhile, the West Bengal government has allowed 75 per cent crowd attendance for the three-match T20I series, scheduled to be played at the Eden Gardens, Kolkata. The Cricket association of Bengal (CAB) president Avishkek Dalmiya thanked West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for allowing 75 per cent attendance in the stadium. "We are thankful to the honourable CM Mamata Banerjee, chief secretary and Government of West Bengal for announcing the resumption of sporting activities as well as for allowing 75 per cent of the capacity of spectators back to the stadium. We feel that it will give a fresh lease of life to the sportspersons of the state," CAB president Avishkek Dalmiya said in a statement.

NATIONAL EQUESTRIAN: SHAURYA ON TOP IN NEC NOVICE SHOW JUMPING ROUNDS

Mumbai: Shaurya Rai has secured the first position in the NEC Novice Show Jumping Rounds of the National Equestrian Championship 2021-22 at Amateur Riders' Club, Mahalakshmi here. Shaurya rode on his horse Scotch and finished his jumps in 66.46 seconds without committing any penalties on Monday.



Yashan Khambatta and Maj Kunal Malik secured second and third positions, respectively. Both the riders finished their rounds of jumps in 69.10 and 81.48 seconds with no penalties. While Yashan rode on his horse Cadiz and Maj. Kunal performed on his horse Chrispin 14. Harsha Daggubati being positioned fourth in the competition. Harsha has committed 8 penalties while finishing his jumping rounds 68.42 seconds. Category: NEC Novice Show Jumping, Shaurya Rai/Scotch/66.46 seconds, Yashan Khambatta/Cadiz/69.10 seconds, Maj Kunal Malik/Chrispin 14/81.48 seconds, Harsha Daggubati/Delano W/68.42 seconds.

Bopanna aims for better show at Tata Open Maharashtra

Pune | Agencies

Having started the season with a title in Adelaide, the star Indian duo of Rohan Bopanna and Ramkumar Ramanathan will be eager to add one more to their name in Pune as the second-seeded pair gears up for its campaign at the Tata Open Maharashtra taking place at the Balewadi Stadium. The former world No. 3 in doubles feels Ramkumar's energy and passion allows him to play his best tennis and is looking forward to having another great week in Pune. "I have watched him grow as a player, whether it's in Davis Cup or other tournaments. If there was some advice I could give him, I have always helped him trying to see where he can improve. I know him off the court really well and that camaraderie being on the court just helped us really do well," Bopanna said during a virtual press conference on Tuesday as he gears up for his fourth appearance at the tournament. Bopanna and Ramkumar clinched the title in Adelaide earlier in January in



their maiden outing together and will play against American duo of Jamie Cerretani and Nicholas Monroe in the opening round at the fourth edition of South Asia's only ATP 250 Tour event.

The 41-year-old experienced campaigner also commented on more participation of singles players in doubles, saying it helps them improve their game in singles.

WOMEN'S ASIAN CUP

TRIO CONFIDENT OF SEALING FIFA WORLD CUP TICKET

Navi Mumbai: Their defeat in the quarter-finals may have ended their hopes of winning the AFC Women's Asian Cup title, but three-time champions Chinese Taipei have a lot of play for in the round-robin playoffs to determine the fifth team to earn an automatic slot of the FIFA Women's World Cup to be held in Australia and New Zealand in 2023. Chinese Taipei start the favourite to clinch the spot via the playoffs that also include Thailand and Vietnam as the other teams in the fray. The teams will have no margin for error when they clash in a round-robin playoff as any complacency will result in the World Cup berth slipping away. The three losing quarter-finals in the AFC Women's Asian Cup 2022 square off with the first fixture pitting Thailand against Vietnam on Wednesday with the Thais playing Chinese Taipei two days later. The playoff will conclude with Chinese Taipei facing Vietnam on Sunday. Despite their heartbreaking penalties defeat to the Philippines in the quarter-finals, Chinese Taipei head coach Echigo Kazuo is hopeful of his team's chances in the playoffs. The winner of the playoffs will join the four qualified teams -- China PR, Japan, Korea Republic and the Philippines in the Finals, with Australia also through as the co-hosts. The remaining two teams can still qualify for the FIFA Women's World Cup through the Inter-Confederation playoffs.

ICC ODI RANKINGS

MITHALI MOVES UP ONE SPOT TO SECOND, MANDHANA AT SIXTH

Dubai | Agencies

India's One-day International skipper Mithali Raj has risen one spot to second in the ICC Women's ODI Player Rankings for batters announced on Tuesday, closing the gap on Australia's Alyssa Healy.

Mithali has displaced South African batter Lizelle Lee, who is now third on the list with 731 points, while the Indian stalwart is on 738. India opener Smriti Mandhana, who was recently named 'ICC women's Cricketer of the Year for 2021', continues to maintain her sixth spot in the rankings with 710 points. West Indies all-rounder Hayley Matthews has progressed four places to 11th position in the latest rankings for bowlers after a fine show in the first two matches of their four-match against South Africa. India's pace bowler Jhulan Goswami continues to hold on to her No.2 spot in the ranking behind Australia's Jess Jonassen in the category. Matthews, who grabbed two wickets each in



both matches, is the highest-ranked bowler from the West Indies with other off-spinner Anisa Mohammed in 25th place and Shakera Selman 26th. Seam bowler Shamilia Connell has moved up nine slots to 29th after taking three wickets in the two matches. South Africa captain Sune Luus has advanced seven places to joint-34th among bowlers and is up two places to 44th in the batting list. The all-rounders' list also sees changes at the top with Marizanne Kapp of South Africa slipping to third after missing the matches against the West Indies. Nat Sciver of England and Elisse Perry of Australia are ranked first and second.

Chedean Nation (up five places to 51st) of the West Indies and opener Tazmin Brits (up 25 places to 64th) of South Africa are others to move up the batters' list in the latest update that sees Sri Lanka's players drop out of the rankings tables as they have not played ODIs since October 2019 and will make a return once they play an ODI.

World Swimming Championships in Fukuoka postponed due to Covid-19

Lausanne | Agencies

The 19th edition of the World Swimming Championships, scheduled to be held in Fukuoka, Japan from May 13-29, 2022 have been postponed to July 14-30 next year, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the International Swimming Federation (FINA) confirmed on Tuesday. Subsequently, the 20th FINA World Championships in Doha, Qatar, originally scheduled for November 2023, will be held in January 2024.

FINA said that it will continue to prioritise the welfare of competition participants and take decisions as early as possible given the circum-



stances, in order to provide a measure of certainty to aquatics athletes and those who support them.

The global governing body also mentioned that it is in constant dialogue with athletes and coaches on the international competition calendar due to the potential health impact of the Omicron coronavirus variant.

India to take on Australia in Commonwealth Games cricket opener

London | Agencies

The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Tuesday confirmed its complete line-up for the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games after Sri Lanka became the eighth teams to qualify following their win in the ICC Commonwealth Games Qualifier 2022 in Kuala Lumpur last week.

Besides Sri Lanka, the other seven women's teams which will compete in the quadrennial games scheduled to begin on July 28, are Australia, Barbados, England, India, New Zealand, Pakistan and South Africa. The cricket curriculum at the Commonwealth Games will be a league-cum-knockout affair, with Australia and India, the finalists of the



2020 ICC Women's T20 World Cup, set to clash in the opener on July 29. The medal matches will be played on August 7.

Along with Australia and India, Group A also comprises of Barbados and Pakistan, while England, New Zealand, South Africa and Sri Lanka will fight for supremacy in Group B.

This will only be the second time that cricket is going to be part of the

Commonwealth Games. The last time was in 1998 in Kuala Lumpur, when the men's teams battled it out with South Africa winning gold under Shaun Pollock's leadership, defeating Steve Waugh's Australia by four wickets in the final. The Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games will be the first major multi-sport event in history to award more medals to women than men.

ISL 2021-22

Chennaiyin look to get mojo back against wooden-spooners SC East Bengal

Vasco (Goa) | Agencies

Reeling from the heartbreaking derby defeat, SC East Bengal will have nothing to lose when they take on Chennaiyin FC in the 2021-22 Indian Super League match at the Tilak Maidan Stadium on Wednesday.

Placed bottom of the table with just nine points from 14 outings, the Mario Rivera-coached side have all but lost their chance to stake a claim for the semi-finals but will look to improve their tally with their second win of the campaign against Chennaiyin. SC East Bengal have conceded 28 goals in their 14 matches so far, the second-most by a team this season. They suffered a 1-3 loss against ATK Mohun Bagan in the last match. Since Riviera's arrival, they've been even more compact and narrow and forced teams to play from



out wide. The number of crosses put in by the opposition in the last three matches highlights this playing style. In his three games in charge, the opposition have put in a total of 80 crosses.

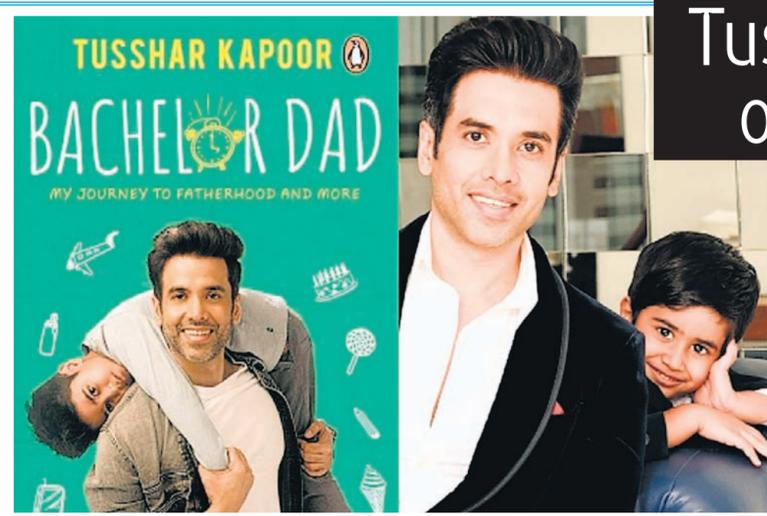
Brazilian striker Marcelo Ribeiro started for the first time for SC East Bengal in the last game, and Rivera opened his link-up play with Antonio Perosevic is one to look out for and it

would have helped had he been there from the start. For Chennaiyin, placed seventh in the table with 18 points from 13 games, a win will catapult them back to the top-four.

Lallianzuala Chhangte joined Mumbai City FC on loan on transfer deadline day but head coach Bozidar Bandovic would like to believe he has other options to fill in his boots.

Right-back Reagan Singh is set to make his 100th ISL appearance if he features for Chennaiyin FC on Wednesday. Bandovic would also want his team to get back among goals.

No team has scored fewer goals in the league than Chennaiyin FC (12). The club has scored six open play goals this season, the fewest in the league after SC East Bengal (4).



Tusshar Kapoor: Pre-conceived notion on single fatherhood must change

Team Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor-Producer Tusshar Kapoor, who is gearing up to release his book titled 'Bachelor Dad', on his journey of single parenthood, says that it is high time for our society to look at single fatherhood differently, away from its earlier pre-conceived notion.

He told IANS: "One of the reasons I wrote this book is, while single motherhood is celebrated and rightfully so, thinking that a single man cannot be a good father and raise a child properly is wrong."

"Nurturing a child emotionally and providing every need so that they can grow up as a happy child is very universal. I am saying it

from my experience and that is why I thought it will open the doors to many who are thinking of single fatherhood."

The offer to write the book came from the publication house -- Penguin Random House India.

Tusshar says penning down thoughts in the form of a book is quite a different experience as opposed to bringing life to a written material through acting that he has done in movies.

He shared, "Firstly writing is time-consuming and also my journey as a father is still on, so how to share everything from the ocean of emotions was a little challenging. I sat down and was constantly going back and forth to how to put everything on paper."

"When I decided to have my child, there

were a series of thoughts in my mind because I have never done it before."

He continued: "On one hand, I do not want to compromise on my life only for the child but I also wanted to be part of every milestone of the child...his first smile, first walk everything. So, time management and how I still can give equal attention to my child as well as to my work was a question. But I think I am managing it well now."

Tusshar is the brother of celebrated TV producer Ekta Kapoor and he appeared in several Bollywood films like 'Mujhe Kucch Kehna Hai', 'Kya Kool Hai Hum', 'Golmaal', 'The Dirty Picture', 'Shor in the City' and 'Laxmi'.

He became a single father of Lakshya Kapoor in 2016 through IVF.

Pratik Sehajpal: I don't care about Tejasswi winning as I wanted to win the show

Team Absolute | New Delhi

'**B**igg Boss 15' contestant Pratik Sehajpal, the first runner-up of the show, is over-the-moon with the love that he is receiving after coming out even though he did not lift the trophy. Pratik said he doesn't really care about actress Tejasswi Prakash winning as he wanted to win the 15th season of 'Bigg Boss'. Is he happy with Tejasswi winning the show? Pratik told reporter: "I wanted to win the show. I don't really care about her winning as I wanted to win. I don't believe in making someone a loser to win. I just believe in winning."

"Aesa nahi tha ki mujhe Karan Kundrra ko harana tha ya Tejasswi ko harana tha. I just believed in winning the show... I didn't know what was happening but when I came out I saw so much love. That's when I realised that I have already won the show." Talking about people being upset about Tejasswi's win, Pratik said: "Sometimes what happens in a show is that somebody else wins the trophy but someone else wins over love and heart. Sometimes the love and trophy is won by the same person." "If people are giving me so much love... It is because of my mothers prayers and my good karma... The love that I am getting right now... I genuinely appreciate it. It doesn't matter... It's their (audience's) choice who they are happy with and who they are not. However, he praised Tejasswi's hardwork in the Colors show, hosted by Bollywood superstar Salman Khan.



Yashika Aanand pens emotional post about late friend

Team Absolute | Chennai

Missing her friend Pavani, who passed away in a car crash last year, actress Yashika Aanand said that the fact that she is no longer there is eating her up from the inside and has left her broken.

Taking to Instagram, Yashika said on her friend's birthday: "You were sunshine in a human form. I am always grateful to have known you for these many years. It's your birthday and my heart breaks to digest the fact that you are no longer here and I feel so regretful for everything that has caused this."

"I miss your smile. By this time, I would have called you and got to see your beautiful face. While you were working there at USA. I miss our spineless conversations, our momo cravings, your smiling face and kiddo talks. I don't know if I've ever trusted someone as much as I've trusted you. You have literally sat down with me for my tenth board exam revisions and put sense into this dumb head. You were a pillar in my life though I've seen and been around people who use me and are fake to me, who have betrayed me in many ways. You were my true genuine bond for years."

"We never had one fight between us (touchwood) but all these things seem to look possible from one end. You're up in the sky like a star watching me and guiding me in my life. Sometimes, the fact you're no more eats me up from inside and breaks me. Every dream of yours I want to fulfill. I miss you so much that I myself can't imagine the pain that your family will be going through."

"You've seen me from (the time I was) a 16-year-old kid to (becoming) an adult woman. You've been with me from the time where I was nothing. You've seen the mistakes I've made. You've seen my growth as an individual. You knew me in and out and so did I. I would speak a word and you would complete my sentence. This kind of pure love I don't know if I'll ever find. Happy birthday my Scooby Dooby."



Richa Chadha thankful to Ajay Devgn for upcoming Web show

Team Absolute | Mumbai

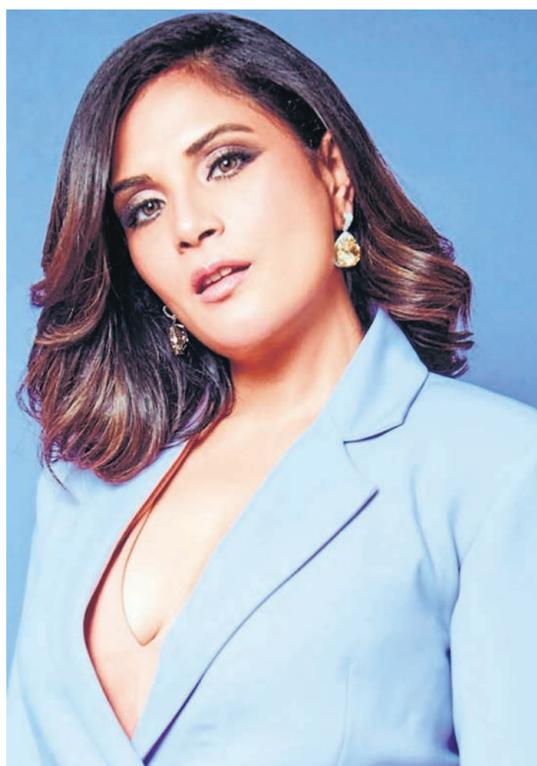
Actress Richa Chadha, who is gearing up for the release of her upcoming web show 'The Great Indian Murder', has lauded its Producer Ajay Devgn for his foresight on the booming culture of OTT and bringing together the show.

Talking about the same, Richa Chadha, who plays the role of an investigating officer named Sudha Bhardwaj in the show, said, "Audiences can engage in OTT content from anywhere, the internet is a global village. I feel, Ajay Devgn sir has the foresight and understood the advantages the platform brings in."

She commented, "Would like to thank Ajay Devgn, for setting up and supporting our show -- 'The Great Indian Murder'. There is an added advantage for the show because of his name attached to it. Some of the great actors have been cast in the show like Raghuraj sir, and so many more. He is supporting all of us and the content."

The 'Great Indian Murder' helmed by Tigra Dhanraj is a screen adaptation of Vikas Swarup's second novel 'Six Suspects'. It revolves around murder of the son of a high-profile minister and promises an intriguing mystery with a talented cast that includes Pratik Gandhi and Richa in the lead, along with Raghuraj Yadav, Ashutosh Rana, Paoli Dam, Jatin Goswami and Shashank Arora.

'The Great Indian Murder' will be available to stream exclusively on Disney+ Hotstar from February 4 in Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and Bengali.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Producer Ekta Kapoor is all set to produce a new show through her digital production house, ALTBalaji. It will be on the lines of a reality show for digital entertainment for which the banner has partnered with MX Player. The title and the concept of the show will be soon revealed.

On Tuesday, ALTBalaji took to their Instagram handle to share a creative which read: "Ekta Kapoor to announce the biggest and most fearless reality show". The caption read: "It's showtime! It's drama time! Are you ready to tune into excitement? It's going to be intense!"

ALTBalaji, which was founded in 2017, has been an important part of the OTT system in India and their collaboration with MX Player is being touted as one of the groundbreaking content strategies through the said show.

In November 2021, Ekta was conferred the Padma Shri, the fourth highest civilian award along with Kangana Ranaut, Karan Johar, Adnan Sami and late singer S.P. Balasubrahmanyam in a ceremony held in Rashtrapati Bhavan.

EKTA KAPOOR TO PRODUCE NEW DIGITAL REALITY SHOW

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Nashratt Bharuccha