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PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM NEW DELHI, MUMBAI AND BHOPAL

NATION >02
PM Fasal Beema Yojana to be delivered at doorsteps...



HOLLYWOOD > 06
Robert Pattinson studied bats to play Batman...



SPORTS > 07
Kohli, Pant, bowlers help India win series against West Indies ...



2008 Ahmedabad serial blasts case: 38 convicts sentenced to death, 11 get life imprisonment

MAXIMUM PENALTY

► The punishment was awarded under section 302 (murder) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), and Sections 10 and 16 (1) (a) (b) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). A fine of Rs 25,000 was also imposed on each of the 38 for each of the three offences.

► Besides these provisions, all the 49 convicted have been sentenced to life imprisonment under four provisions of the law UAPA Section 20, Explosive Substances Act section 3 and IPC sections 124 A (sedition), 121 A (waging war against the state). All the sentences will run concurrently.

► On February 8, the court had convicted 49 persons out of a total of 77 accused in connection with this incident. Another 28 were acquitted and one accused Ayaz Saiyed, who had turned approver in the case in 2019, was acquitted of all charges.

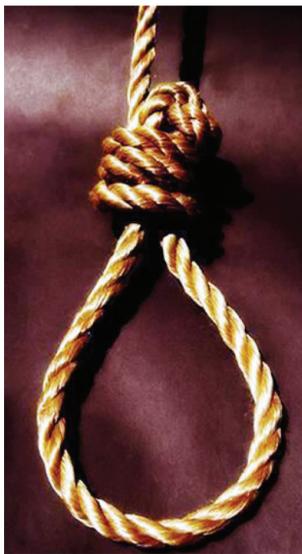
► As many as 20 bombs went off in different parts of the city on July 26, 2008, killing 56 people and injuring 246 others.

Gandhinagar | Agencies

A special court designated for the speedy trial of the 2008 Ahmedabad serial bomb blasts case on Friday sentenced 38 convicts to death and 11 to life imprisonment. Fifty-seven people were killed and hundreds injured in the bombings, which took place in Ahmedabad, the commercial capital of Gujarat. The court in Ahmedabad also sentenced 11 other convicts to life in prison until death. The accused can challenge their sentences in a higher court.

Judge Ambalal R Patel announced a compensation of Rs one lakh for the families of the deceased, Rs 50,000 for the seriously injured and Rs 25,000 for those who suffered minor injuries. Besides, the court imposed a fine of Rs 2.85 lakh each on the convicts and directed the Gujarat government to award the compensation from the amount collected from the guilty. On 26 July 2008, around 20 bombs exploded in the space of an hour across residential areas, market places, public transport and hospitals in Ahmedabad. Several unexploded bombs were also found.

The Indian Mujahideen - then an unknown Islamic militant group - had claimed responsibility for the attacks in an email sent to some media outlets. The Indian government declared the group a terrorist organisation and banned it in 2010 after it was accused of



an attack on a German bakery in Pune in which 17 people were killed and scores injured.

In the Ahmedabad blasts, 78 people had faced trial - one of the accused, Ayaz Saiyed, later helped investigating agencies. The prosecution examined 1,163 witnesses over the course of the trial, according to The Indian Express.

KEY CONSPIRATOR IS REMORSELESS AFTER DEATH PENALTY

Safdar Nagori, one of the 38 convicts sentenced to death in the 2008 Ahmedabad serial bomb blasts case by a Gujarat court on Friday, appeared remorseless after the sentencing for a terror act that killed 56 people, and was heard saying the Constitution does not mean anything to him. Nagori (54), a native of Madhya Pradesh who was associated with the banned Students' Islamic Movement of India, was a key conspirator of the blasts, according to the prosecution. He is currently lodged in the Bhopal Central Jail, from where he took part in sentencing proceedings in the Ahmedabad special court via video conferencing.

"The Constitution does not count for me. For me, the decisions of the Quran are supreme," Bhopal Central Jail Superintendent Dinesh Nargawe quoted Nagori as saying soon after he was sentenced to death. The other convicts in the case who are lodged with him in the Bhopal jail are Qumaruddin Nagori, Shivli, Shaduli, Amil Parvez, Hafiz and Ansab. All his accomplices have been sentenced to death except Ansab, who has been handed down life imprisonment till death. Three other accused lodged in the Bhopal Central Jail -- Ahmed Beg, Yasin and Kamran -- have been acquitted in the case.

Supreme Court to UP Government

Refund recoveries made from anti-CAA protesters



► The Uttar Pradesh government has issued two government orders (GOs) on February 14 and 15, withdrawing all show cause notices, which were issued in 274 cases in the destruction of public and private properties during the anti-CAA protest.

► The new law -- Uttar Pradesh Recovery of Damages to Public and Private Property Act, 2020 -- empowers the state government to set up tribunals to decide claims for damage to property.

► On February 11, the top court had told the Uttar Pradesh government to withdraw these notices, otherwise it would quash them. Citing the top court's verdicts in 2009 and 2018, the bench said judicial officers should have been appointed in claim tribunals, but the state government appointed Additional District Magistrates.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday directed that properties of anti-CAA protesters, which were attached by Uttar Pradesh government should be restored to them, and also if they had paid money to the authorities concerned for the alleged damages should be also refunded.

At the outset, the Additional Advocate General Garima Prashad, representing the Uttar Pradesh government, informed the top court that the state government has withdrawn notices sent to the anti-CAA protesters to recover damages to the properties.

A bench comprising Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and Surya Kant said if recoveries have been made following the notices, then those have to be paid back, as the government has withdrawn the notices. Advocate Nilofar Khan, representing the petitioner, said there were many people, including vegetable sellers, rickshaw pullers, etc., from whom recoveries have been made following these notices and the state government should issue refunds, after withdrawal of these notices.

Justice Chandrachud said there shall be a refund of the damages recovered in the meantime, however it will be subject to the claim's tribunal, under new law.

Prashad said this order of the top court will have an impact on the deterrence and cited there has been no incident in the state in the past two years. However, the top court was not convinced with Prashad's arguments. She further submitted that the court is looking at small vendors, etc., but that is not the case and the entire law will be frustrated if refund is ordered.

"No, law cannot be frustrated... as you bought a new law. All deference against the evasion of law has to be within four corners of law and it cannot lie outside the four corners of the law," said Justice Chandrachud.

'YOGI' FRAUD CASE: CBI GRILLS NSE EX-CEO RAMAKRISHNA



Mumbai: The CBI, speeding up the probe in the alleged fraud case at the NSE involving the influence of a "yogi" living in the Himalayas, on Friday recorded the statements of the bourse's former MD and CEO Chitra Ramakrishna, who has learnt to be alleging that she is being "framed".

Ramakrishna, who reached the Mumbai office of the CBI in the afternoon to record her statements, is being questioned by a team of senior officials, including one woman.

According to sources, the CBI has asked her around 50 questions, including how long she had been sending mails to the "yogi", she was given any cut for sharing classified information, if so, where she invested this money. Ramakrishna also tried to play victim card, claiming she didn't know a lot of things, a source said. She also has claimed that she is innocent and somebody is trying to frame her, the source added.

A CBI official close to the investigation said that Ramakrishna was evasive and was frequently changing her statements. The CBI had lodged an FIR against the former NSE chief on the basis of a report of market regulator SEBI, in which she has been accused of leaking classified information to a yogi who lived in the Himalayas between 2014 and 2016. This yogi had access to the email ID - rigyajursama@outlook.com - on which the emails were sent. The SEBI had imposed a fine of Rs 3 crore on her.

AAP'S 'LINKS WITH SEJ' WILL BE SCANNED: AMIT SHAH

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In a major setback to Arvind Kejriwal-led Aam Aadmi Party days ahead of Punjab assembly polls, Union Home Minister Amit Shah has acceded the request of Charanjit Singh Channi government to probe the alleged connection between proscribed terror outfit Sikhs For Justice with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). In a letter on Friday, Shah said "any political party seeking help from a terrorist outfit in polls is against the sovereignty and integrity of the nation."

In the letter, Channi, the Punjab CM further stated, "Such elements are acting in tandem with enemies of the nation. It is reprehensible that for seeking power some people can go to the extent of seeking help of separatists and can go the extent of breaking Punjab and the country."

The home minister has assured CM of thorough investigation into the



alleged connection of separatists and AAP. "I assure you that I will not allow anyone to play with the sovereignty and integrity of the country. Government of India has taken it very seriously and I am myself looking after the issue," stated Shah. The AAP has been

under attack by various parties including Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) over its alleged links with the separatist sikh elements. Former AAP leader Kumar Vishwas had recently also levelled allegations of links between Sikh separatist elements and AAP.

EX-NIA SP NABED FOR LEAKING SECRET DOCUMENTS TO LET

Jammu: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Friday arrested its former Superintendent of Police, Arvind Divvijay Negi for allegedly leaking secret documents to an over-ground worker of the banned Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). The NIA spokesperson said that Negi, a police officer who was promoted to the IPS batch of 2011, was arrested in connection with a case registered by the NIA on November 6 last year. The case pertains to the spread of a network of over ground workers (OGWs) of the banned LeT for providing support in planning and execution of militant activities in India. The NIA had earlier arrested six people in the case.

Hijab row: Lecturer quits job over alleged bar on her hijab

Tumakuru | Agencies

An English lecturer working as a guest faculty has resigned from her post as she was asked to shun the hijab while teaching in Tumakuru district of Karnataka on Friday. "It is a matter of my self-respect. I can't teach without the hijab," the lecturer Chandini said after quitting.

"Since three years I am working in Jain PU College as



a guest lecturer. In these three years I did not have any problem and I worked normally with ease. But, yesterday my Principal called me and told me that classes must be conducted without a hijab or any

religious symbols. Since the last three years, I am lecturing wearing a hijab, it hurt my self-respect and I didn't want to work in that college anymore. Hence, I resigned voluntarily," she stated. The college authorities refused to comment on the issue. Meanwhile, many netizens who came across her resignation letter have raised questions over the lecturer's language skills.

TATA-LED AIR INDIA TO RUN SPECIAL FLIGHTS TO UKRAINE

New Delhi: As tensions between Russia and Ukraine remain high, the Tata Group-led Air India will run three direct flights to Kyiv to bring back stranded Indians from the East European country.

Accordingly, Air India will operate three flights between Delhi and Kyiv on its Boeing 787 Dreamliner aircraft. The flights to the Boryspil International Airport from India will be operated on February 22, 24 and 26. On Thursday, the Centre removed the restrictions on the number of flights and seats between India and Ukraine, evidently to facilitate the return of students and professionals stranded in the East European nation due to the ongoing tensions with Russia. Thus, any number of flights, including charter flights, can operate between the two countries.

'Committed crime, face it' SC declines urgent listing of plea by Sulli Deals app accused

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday declined to entertain a plea seeking urgent listing of petitions seeking clubbing of various FIRs across the country in connection with offences related to the app 'Sulli Deal of the day' in which scores of Muslim women were put on "sale".

Advocate Sahil Bhaliak mentioned the plea before a bench, headed by Chief Justice N.V. Ramana, submitting that multiple FIRs have been filed against his client and sought urgent listing of the plea. "It is covered by T.T. Anthony's judgment," he said.

At this, the Chief Justice said: "If you have committed a crime. You'll have to face it. Covered or uncovered will be decided at the date of hearing."

The plea by accused Aumkeshwar Thakur, filed on January 24, prayed for clubbing of various FIRs filed throughout the country with respect to offences relating to the app. The petitioner is accused in 3 FIRs registered in New Delhi, Noida, and Mumbai.

The app had created a major uproar last year for targeting Muslim women and uploading their images without their consent. The 'Bulli Bai' case appears to be a clone of the 'Sulli Deals' app.



The plea said: "The relief sought in the present writ petition is in terms of the judgment passed by this court in T.T. Anthony vs. State of Kerala for quashing of all the same or similar FIRs except the first one and that a single investigation may be proceeded with. In the alternative, the petitioner prays for clubbing of all the subsequent FIRs with the first FIR, registered at PS Special Cell, Delhi."

HC DIRECTS KARNATAKA GOVT NOT TO VIOLATE INTERIM ORDER

Bengaluru: The Karnataka High Court bench, hearing petitions on hijab row, on Friday directed the state government to see to it that its interim order is not violated. The bench, headed by Chief Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi, gave this direction after an advocate, appearing for students, brought to the notice of the bench that Muslims are being troubled over the interim order. The bench asked the advocate to give a written submission on the matter and directed the government to see to it that interim orders are not violated.

RAJNISH SETH APPOINTED AS NEW TOP COP OF MAHARASHTRA

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra government on Friday appointed IPS officer Rajnish Seth as the new Director General of Police (DGP) of the state. The 1988 cadre IPS officer has replaced Sanjay Pandey, who held the additional charge of the post since April 9, 2021. Seth is currently the director general



of the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB). Seth's appointment has come after the Bombay High Court recently pulled up the state government for favouring acting DGP Pandey for the post. Pandey, who is the managing director of the Maharashtra State Security Corporation, held the post of DGP as additional charge since April 9 last year, after the then state DGP Subodh Jaiswal was transferred to the CBI.



PM FASAL BEEMA YOJANA TO BE DELIVERED AT DOORSTEPS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Centre is set to launch a doorstep distribution drive for the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Beema Yojana (PMFBY) that entered its seventh year on Friday.

"The PMFBY will be launching a doorstep distribution drive to deliver crop insurance policies to the farmers under 'Meri Policy Mere Hath' in all the implementing states," the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare said in a release.

The campaign aims to ensure that all farmers are well-aware and equipped with all information on their policies, land records, the process of claim and grievance redressal under PMFBY.

The launch announcement was made on February 18, 2016 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Sehore, Madhya Pradesh. The implementation started with the Kharif season that year and has entered its seventh year with the 2022 Kharif season. "A flagship scheme of the government of India, PMFBY aims to provide financial support to farmers suffering crop loss/damage arising out of



Pradhanmantri Fasal Bima Yojana

natural calamities. Over 36 crore farmer applications have been insured under PMFBY, with over Rs 1,07,059 crore worth claims already been paid as on February 4, 2022," the release said.

Launched six years ago, the scheme was revamped in 2020, enabling voluntary participation of the farmers. It also made it convenient for the farmer to report crop loss within 72 hours of the occurrence of any event -- through the Crop Insurance App, CSC Centre or the nearest agriculture officer -- with claim benefits getting transferred electronically into the bank accounts of the

eligible farmer.

Integration of land records with the PMFBY's National Crop Insurance Portal (NCIP), Crop Insurance mobile app for easy enrollment of farmers, remittance of farmer premium through NCIP, a subsidy release module and a claim release module through NCIP are some of the key features of the scheme, it said.

Through its state/district level grievance committees, the scheme also enables farmers to submit their grievances at the grassroots level. This includes acknowledging and resolving farmer grievances through IEC activities such as Crop Insurance Week, which is celebrated twice bi-yearly, PMFBY Paathshala, social media campaigns, a toll-free helpline and email communication.

The recent announcement by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her 2022-23 Budget speech on the use of drones for crop insurance will further strengthen the integration of technology for smooth implementation of the scheme on the ground, the release added.

Insult to freedom fighters, says Cong as Kejriwal compares himself to Bhagat Singh

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Congress on Friday slammed Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal for comparing himself to legendary freedom fighter Bhagat Singh and called it an insult to the freedom fighters.

Congress spokesperson Jaiveer Shergill said: "While Shaheed Bhagat Singh sacrificed his life for the nation, Arvind Kejriwal is not willing to give up even one of his posts. He is both CM and National Convenor of AAP due to his lust for power. Kejriwal comparing himself to Bhagat Singh is an insult



to our freedom fighters & reflects his desperation for votes." Earlier in the day, dismissing as "comedy", allegations levelled by former party leader Kumar Vishwas that he had made "separatist" comments, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday described himself as "world's sweetest terrorist who builds roads, hospitals and send elderly people to pilgrimage."

"Hundred years back, Bhagat Singh was called a terrorist by the British and I'm his staunch follower. Today, history is repeating itself. All these corrupt people have teamed up to brand the disciple of Bhagat Singh a terrorist, but people know the truth," Delhi CM said. Former AAP leader Kumar Vishwas had alleged that Kejriwal had spoken about becoming PM of a separate state. In a video, Kumar is seen saying, "One day, he (Kejriwal) told me he would either become CM (of Punjab) or first PM of an independent nation... he wants power at any cost."

CHANNI HAS NO KNOWLEDGE OF BIHAR, SAYS NITISH KUMAR

Patna | Agencies

Continuing his attack on Punjab Chief Minister Charanjeet Singh Channi, Bihar CM Nitish Kumar on Friday said that Channi has no knowledge of Bihar.

Nitish Kumar claimed that the Congress party gave a chance to a person who has no knowledge of Bihar and Bihar people. "Sikh's 10th Guru Shri Guru Govind Singh Maharaj birthplace is in Bihar. A large number of Punjabi community people come from across the world to Patna Sahib and every Bihar welcomes them. We always showed respect to the Punjabi people. We have also organised a grand programme during the 350th lights festival (Prakash Utsav) in 2017 in Patna Sahib. He (Channi) has no



knowledge of it," Kumar said. "We have lots of love and respect for Punjabi people. We have begun a place of worship out of respect for

Shri Gurunank Dev Ji Maharaj in Rajgir and I personally look after the development of the place," he said. "The contribution of Bihar people

in Punjab is immense. When Punjabi people go abroad, the people of Bihar look after their properties and farming. Bihar people have huge contribution in the agriculture sector, construction sector and industries which Channi does not know. I am surprised at how the Congress party made him chief minister of the state. With that statement, he has damaged his own party position in Punjab," Kumar said. Addressing a rally for the Punjab Assembly polls scheduled to be held on February 20, Channi had said Priyanka Gandhi is the daughter-in-law of Punjab and people of the state should give her a chance. Punjabis should unite and oust the 'bhaiye' who come from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi to rule in the state. Meanwhile, Channi claimed that his statement has been twisted by the opposition parties and the media.

TELANGANA CONGRESS LEADER ARRESTED FOR STEALING DONKEY

Hyderabad: In a bizarre incident, a Congress leader in Telangana was arrested for stealing a donkey.

Venkat Balmoor, the President of NSUI's Telangana unit was taken into custody after he led a protest with a donkey on Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao's birthday on Thursday. A First Information Report (FIR) was registered at Jammikunta Police Station in Karimnagar on Friday. Venkat Balmoor was named as accused number one. Six other accused in the case were shown as absconding. They were booked for unlawful assembly, provocation with intent to cause riot, theft and showing cruelty to animal. The FIR was booked under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections 143, 153, 504, 379 read with 149, Section 67 of IT Act and Section 11 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960. The FIR was registered on a complaint by Tangutoori Rajkumar, a resident of Jammikunta about theft of his donkey.



PM hosting prominent Sikhs will benefit in Punjab polls, feels BJP

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The BJP believes that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's interaction with prominent Sikhs from across the country might help the party in the Punjab assembly polls. Two days before the polling for the Punjab Assembly, Modi on Friday hosted them at his official residence here.

The BJP claimed the Prime Minister hosting the prominent Sikhs will help the party by sending a message to the people of Punjab that he is deeply connected with the community and understands their concerns and issues.

"First of all let me make it clear that it was an 'apolitical' meeting and it has nothing to do with the Punjab assembly polls. But meeting prominent citizens of any community helps the government and the



party to reach out to them. A Prime Minister hosting prominent Sikhs from across the country would most probably

help the BJP to win the support of the community and might help in the assembly polls. But the political benefit

of the interaction will only be known after the declaration of results," a BJP leader said.

Another party leader aware of Punjab politics said that the interaction will help the BJP to dispel the anti-Sikh misconception built around it.

"Some people with vested political interests created a perception that the BJP is anti-Sikh. We hope that meetings of prominent Sikhs from across the country will help in clearing the misconception. It might also help the party in the Punjab assembly polls," he said.

Some in the BJP, however, doubt any major political benefits from the meeting. "We don't really know what will be the political benefits of meeting prominent Sikh citizens just two days before the polling," another BJP leader said.

CALCUTTA HC REJECTS PIL SEEKING REMOVAL OF BENGAL GOVERNOR

Kolkata: The Calcutta High Court on Friday dismissed a public interest litigation (PIL) seeking removal of West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhanekar for indulging in unconstitutional activities.

The division bench of Chief Justice Prakash Srivastava and Justice Rajarshi Bharadwaj said the court has no right to seek clarifications from the Governor on any of his actions. Chief Justice Srivastava observed that Article 361 of the Constitution provides that the Governor shall not be answerable to any court for the exercise and performance of the powers and duties of his office or for any act done or purporting to be done by him in the exercise and performance of those powers and duties. He added that counsel for the petitioner in this case was not able to state the exact reasons behind filing the petition.

The PIL was filed by lawyer Rama Prasad Sarkar seeking removal of the Governor as he was indulging in unconstitutional activities. Counsel for the petitioner also appealed for the transfer of the hearing to any other state.



NEW REPORT OFFERS SOLUTIONS FOR PLANETARY CRISIS LIKE WILDFIRES

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Deadly wildfires, noise pollution, and other looming environmental threats could cause widespread ecological damage, and need to be urgently addressed, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) said in a new report.

"The Frontiers Report identifies and offers solutions to three environmental issues that merit attention and action from governments and the public at large," said UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen.

"Noise, Blazes and Mismatches: Emerging Issues of Environmental Concern" draws attention to emerging environmental concerns with the potential to wreak regional or global havoc, if not addressed early.

The report released late Thursday night India time, days before the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) resumes early in March, spotlights growing public health threats that are disrupting natural life cycles and having profound ecological consequences worldwide.

"Urban noise pollution, wildfires and phenological shifts - the three topics of this Frontiers Report - are issues that highlight the urgent need to address the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss," said Andersen.



Termining noise pollution "a raucous killer", it said that unwanted, prolonged, and high-level sounds from road traffic, railways, or leisure activities, impair human health and well-being.

Chronic annoyance and sleep disturbance caused by traffic can result in severe heart diseases and metabolic disorders with the very young, and mostly affect the elderly and marginalised communities near busy roads.

The report encourages urban planners to prioritise noise reduction by investing in urban infrastructure that creates positive soundscapes such as tree belts, green walls, and more green spaces in cities - also offering diverse health benefits. Phenology is the timing of recurring life cycle stages, driven by environmental forces, and how species interacting within an ecosystem, respond to changing conditions.

Plants and animals in terrestrial, aquatic and marine ecosystems use temperature, day length or rainfall as cues for when to bear fruit, migrate or transform in other ways.

However, climate change disrupts these natural rhythms as plants and animals are being pushed out of sync with their natural rhythms, leading to mismatches, such as when plants shift life cycle stages faster than herbivores, the report said.

Meanwhile, local climatic cues that trigger migration for birds may no longer accurately predict conditions at their destination and resting sites along the route. And in crops, phenological shifts in seasonal variations challenge food production.

The report flags the crucial importance of conservation goals, such as maintaining suitable habitats and ecological connectivity, strengthening the integrity of biological diversity, and coordinating international efforts along migratory routes.

The report also outlined that between 2002 and 2016, an average of 423 million hectares of the land surface - about the size of the European Union - burned, projecting that the dangerous wildfires will likely become more frequent, intense, and longer lasting, including in areas previously unaffected by fires.

17-year-old girl gang raped in Bihar's Sitamarhi

A 17-year-old girl was gang raped by two youths in Bihar's Sitamarhi district, an official said on Friday.

PATNA | Agencies

The incident happened on Monday but the victim reached Sitamarhi's Sonbarsha police station on Thursday evening.

In her complaint, she said that she went to a farm to look after the crops when two persons named Sushil Mandal and Chabila Mandal, both residents of Rohua village, overpowered her and then raped her at knife point.

However, when some women reached the field, they panicked and fled from the scene. However, before leaving, they threatened the victim with dire consequences if she revealed the incident to the police.

The women who witnessed the incident, informed her parents.

Although, at first, the victim and her parents were



afraid of the accused, they finally decided to lodge a complaint against them on Thursday.

"We have registered an FIR on the statement of the vic-

tim. She underwent medical examination which confirms rape. We have constituted a team to nab the accused," said KL Yadav, investigating officer in the case.



Cabinet meeting chaired by CM Chouhan

APPROVAL TO DECLARE PROPOSED 906 KM NARMADA EXPRESSWAY AS NARMADA PRAGATI PATH

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A meeting of the Council of Ministers was held today under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan. The cabinet has approved to rename the proposed Narmada Expressway as Narmada Pragati Path in Madhya Pradesh. Along with this, sanction was given to the proposal of construction of feeder routes to connect the category, width and major areas of the routes in different sections according to the alignment proposal of Narmada Expressway in the state and in-principle approval was given to authorise the Public Works Department to obtain approval in coordination with the Government of India. Along with this, approval was given to authorise the Department of Industrial Policy and Investment Promotion to implement an action plan for the development works of industrial areas on the Narmada Pragati Path for the purpose of financing and investment promotion. The alignment of the proposed Narmada Expressway starting from Kabir Chabutra (Amarkantak) to Dindori-Jabalpur-Obedullaganj-Budhni- Nasrullaganj-Sandulpur-Karnawad- Indore- Dhar-Sardarpur-Jhabua (MP/Gujarat border) is proposed, with a total length of about 906 km.



Corporation. Toll rates have been fixed on these 17 routes according to per kilometer per trip. Approval has been given to fix toll rates on light commercial vehicles at Rs 1.4704, trucks at Rs 3.6501 and multi axle trucks at Rs 7.2830. The above rates at each toll plaza will be increased every year on the basis of Wholesale Price Index and will be rounded off to the nearest five rupees. This increase will be made effective from September 1 at the rate of Wholesale Price Index (WPI) announced by the Government of India for the financial year ending March 31 every year. For this, the wholesale price index of 31 March 2007 will be taken as the basis.

The cabinet approved the collection of consumer fee for five years through a contracting agency on 17 previously constructed roads under Madhya Pradesh Road Development

Parliament and Legislative Assembly, all such vehicles which are on duty of Indian Army, Ambulance, Fire Brigade, vehicles of the Department of Indian Post and Telegraph, tractor trolleys used for agricultural purposes, auto rickshaws, two wheelers and bullock carts, freedom fighters and accredited journalists and in addition passenger vehicles such as buses, cars, jeeps, etc. will be exempted from toll. Before the actual toll starts on these 17 routes, it will be certified by the corporation that necessary improvement works have been completed on the routes and approval has been given to prepare an action plan for improvement/upgradation for the next three years.

MP Start-up Policy and Implementation Plan 2022 cum Process and Guidelines was approved by the cabinet to encourage start-ups in the state. Under the policy, provision has been made for financial and non-financial facilities, assistance and facilitation to start-ups and incubators.

For the establishment of new ITI in the development block Badwaha, district Khargone, the cabinet approved the creation of 19 proposed posts of instructor and 11 administrative posts and approved the financial provision for the expected recurring expenditure. Along with this, approval was given for creation of 8 posts (4 posts financial year 2022-23 and 4 posts financial year 2023-24) for starting a new civil facility in Government Polytechnic College Anuppur and for financial provision of about Rs 488 lakh 3 thousand for expected recurring expenditure.

Vyapam renamed as MP Karmachari Chayan Board

The Madhya Pradesh cabinet on Friday renamed the State Professional Examination Board or 'Vyapam' as 'Karmachari Chayan Board' or 'Employee Selection Board'.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh cabinet on Friday renamed the State Professional Examination Board or 'Vyapam' as 'Karmachari Chayan Board' or 'Employee Selection Board'.

The decision to rename the examination was taken after a proposal for it was approved by Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan.

It is the second time since the Vyapam scam was exposed in 2013 that it has been renamed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led Madhya Pradesh government.

Earlier, it was renamed as Professional Examination Board (PEB) from its original name 'Vyapam'.

The cabinet has not only decided to rename PEB but also transfer its authority from the Technical Education to the General Administration department.

The department is the sole agency for conducting recruitment exams for the appointment of grade-3 employees of all departments in the state.

"The decision to change the name of Madhya Pradesh PEB was taken in a meeting by the state Cabinet on Friday. The Aayog will now work under the General Administration department," Home Minister and government spokesman Narottam Mishra said after the cabinet meeting.

The Vyapam scam was unearthed in 2013 wherein candidates had allegedly



bribed officials and rigged exams by deploying imposters to write their answer sheets.

Some politicians, senior officials and businessmen were also allegedly involved in the irregularities. The CBI had taken over the probe following the Supreme Court's judgement in 2015.

Several people, including Vyapam officials, data analysts and computer operators, apart from the former Technical Education Minister Laxmikant Sharma, middlemen, imposters and students who fraudulently made others appear in exams, were named in the Vyapam scam probe which is under the CBI's supervision.

Interestingly, the decision to rename

the board was taken two days after the CBI has filed a chargesheet against 160 more accused, including the chairman of three medical colleges in Madhya Pradesh, for allegedly rigging the 2013 pre-medical test in the multi-crore Vyapam examination and recruitment scam. Therefore, the total number of accused who have been charge-sheeted in the case has reached 650.

The scam involved 13 different exams conducted by Vyapam for selection of medical students and state government employees including food inspectors, transport constables, police personnel, school teachers, dairy supply officials and forest guards where the final results were rigged.

Congress targets to enrol 50L new members in MP before 2023 Assembly polls

In a bid to rejuvenate the party in the run-up to the 2023 Assembly polls, as well as the Lok Sabha elections due in 2024, the Congress has set a target to enrol at least 50 lakh new members in Madhya Pradesh.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In a bid to rejuvenate the party in the run-up to the 2023 Assembly polls, as well as the Lok Sabha elections due in 2024, the Congress has set a target to enrol at least 50 lakh new members in Madhya Pradesh.

A decision in this regard was taken during a meeting on Thursday to chalk out a plan to kick-start the party's digital membership cam-

campaign in the state. Congress General Secretary and in-charge for Madhya Pradesh, Mukul Wasnik, who was present in the meeting, said that very little time is left for the upcoming Assembly elections and through the digital membership campaign, the party has decided to enrol 50 lakh new members.

"The Congress has been engaged in an ideological clash with the BJP and the RSS for decades, and it will continue the battle in the times to come. Through a real and authentic membership drive, we will defeat the BJP in the next Assembly elections," Wasnik said.

All-India Congress Committee (AICC) membership in-charge K. Raju was also present in the meeting.

During the party's organisational meet, Madhya Pradesh Congress chief Kamal Nath expressed anguish over the slackness in the party membership drive

and asked the district heads concerned to complete the campaign. Nath also expressed dissatisfaction over the pending appointments at different levels, and ordered the district party heads to expedite these. "All district heads are directed to complete the appointments of block-level party workers by February 25. If you are not capable of doing so, tender your resignation to pave the way for able persons," Nath said. Speaking to the media after the meeting, Nath said the party headquarters have instructed for a digital membership campaign which will be implemented in Madhya Pradesh shortly.

Nath also underlined that such a digital initiative has been a success in Telangana.

However, factionalism was yet again visible in the party meeting with senior leader Digvijaya Singh, former minister Ajay Singh and prominent OBC leader Arun Yadav giving it a miss.

CM PAYS HOMAGE TO SWAMI RAMKRISHNA PARAMHANS



Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan paid homage to Swami Ramkrishna Paramhans on his anniversary. Chouhan paid floral tributes by garlanding his photo in the auditorium at his residence office.

Swami Ramkrishna Paramhans was a great saint, spiritual master and thinker. He emphasised the unity of all religions. As a result of spiritual practice, he came to the conclusion that all the religions of the world are true and there is no difference in them. They are just different means of reaching to God. A nurturer of human values, Ramkrishna Paramhans was born on February 18, 1836 in Kamarpukur village in the Bengal state. Swami Ramkrishna Paramhans passed away on August 16, 1886.

CM Chouhan completes one year of resolve to plant trees daily

Team Absolute | Bhopal

With the coconut sapling planted by Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan today, he has completed one year of his resolve to plant saplings every day on February 19, 2021. Chouhan has planted saplings every day of the year. Social organizations, voluntary organizations and people active in the field of environmental protection have also taken part in the plantation. Chief Minister Chouhan had planned to plant saplings with the organizations and individuals associated with him in the tree plantation campaign from February 19, 2021 till now but due to being affected by Covid, this programme has been changed.

Chouhan has tweeted in this regard - "A year ago, on February 19, 2021, I took a pledge to plant a sapling in Amarkantak every day to protect the environment and serve Mother Earth. There I had planted a sapling with my wife. Since the last Narmada Jayanti, on 19 February 2021 to 18 February 2022, a full year has been completed by planting saplings every day. I made sure to plant a sapling from where ever I stayed. People continued to join this campaign of tree plantation. Many organizations and prominent people of the society also planted saplings with me. At least two saplings were planted daily, sometimes more



too. Today I am satisfied. People are getting involved in this holy work. I was about to plant saplings on February 19, 2022 in Bhopal along with the organizations who also engage in this plantation work with me. But being Covid affected, now instead of February 19, I will plant a sapling with them on February 24. While planting saplings, I become one with them. Trees not only give life to humans, they also give shelter and life to animals, birds, animals, insects and moths. To ensure that the earth remains habitable for the coming generations, it is necessary to plant trees. This tree plantation drive will continue next year as well. Not one but at least two trees will be planted daily. Everyone must unite and plant trees on every auspicious occasion.

Khajuraho Dance Festival to be held from Feb 20-26

THE WEEK-LONG KHAJURAHO DANCE FESTIVAL IN MADHYA PRADESH WILL BE HELD FROM FEBRUARY 20 TO 26.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The week-long Khajuraho Dance Festival in Madhya Pradesh will be held from February 20 to 26.

The 48th edition of the festival will be part of the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav initiative to celebrate the 75th anniversary of India's Independence.

Renowned artistes from across the country and the world will perform at the festival, which will be inaugurated by Madhya



Pradesh Governor Mangubhai C Patel, said Sheo Shekhar Shukla, Principal Secretary in

the Tourism and Culture Department, here on Thursday. The festival will be next to the

famous Khajuraho group of temples, which is also a world heritage site. Besides showcasing the cultural landscape of Indian dance styles, the festival will also feature art and travel-related exhibitions, as well as films based on various artistes, the official said.

Also, a 5-km 'Dil Khol Ke Ghoome' marathon will be organised on February 20 for women under the Safe Tourism Project for Women. The event aims to inculcate a sense of security among women in tourist destinations with the slogan 'Hindustan Ke Dil Mein Aap Safe Hain'. During the event, the National Kalidas Award will be presented to eminent dancers for the years 2019-20 and 2020-21. The state Rupankar Kala Award will also

CM PLANTS COCONUT SAPLING



Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted a coconut sapling in the residence premises today. Chouhan has been planting saplings every day since the last Narmada Jayanti in order of his resolve. Coconut planted today is not only important from religious point of view but also useful for health.

Vyapam scam: CBI FILES CHARGE-SHEET AGAINST 160 MORE ACCUSED

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has filed a charge-sheet against 160 more accused, including the chairmen of three medical colleges in Madhya Pradesh, for allegedly rigging the 2013 Pre-Medical Test (PMT) in the multi-crore Vyapam examination and recruitment scam. This took the number of accused who have been charge-sheeted in the case to 650 so far.

"The charge-sheet was filed on Thursday in the special CBI court of Nitiraj Singh Sisodia hearing Vyapam-related cases, against 160 new accused, including Pankaj Trivedi, former controller of Madhya

Pradesh Vyavasayik Pariksha Mandal (Vyapam) and two officials of state Directorate of Medical Education (DME)," CBI's special prosecutor Satish Dinkar said.

Those charge-sheeted include Ajay Goenka, SN Vijaywargiya and Suresh Singh Bhadoria, chairmen of Chirayu Medical College and Hospital, People's Medical College and Hospital (both in Bhopal) and Indore-based Index Medical College and Hospital respectively, he confirmed. The CBI had earlier said that the accused candidates had adopted a unique engine-bogie system or method of cheating in the exam by engaging intelligent students (engines) as solver

candidates for allowing copying of their answers by the beneficiaries (bogies), who would sit behind them.

Dinkar said 56 candidates referred to as 'bogies', 46 persons referred to as 'engines', 13 guardians of the medical course aspirants and nine middlemen were also charge-sheeted.

He said that the charge-sheet was filed against the accused under sections 120 (criminal conspiracy), 419 (cheating by personation), 420 (cheating), 467 (forgery of valuable security) 468 (forgery for the purpose of cheating) and other relevant counts of Indian Penal Code (IPC), Prevention of Corruption Act and MP Examination Recognition Act.

Deploy Vande Bharat flights to rescue stranded Indians from Ukraine: Tankha

Senior Congress leader and Rajya Sabha member from Madhya Pradesh, Vivek Tankha, on Thursday urged the Centre to deploy special Vande Bharat flights to evacuate over 20,000 Indian students stranded in Ukraine in view of the growing border tensions with Russia.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Senior Congress leader and Rajya Sabha member from Madhya Pradesh, Vivek Tankha, on Thursday urged the Centre to deploy

special Vande Bharat flights to evacuate over 20,000 Indian students stranded in Ukraine in view of the growing border tensions with Russia.

Tankha said that he has written to External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia, stating that thousands of students from Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh are pursuing engineering and medical courses in Ukraine.

In his letter to Jaishankar, the Congress MP mentioned that several families from Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh are worried about the



safety of their children who are studying in Ukraine.

"Many international airlines have suspended their flights to Ukraine capital Kyiv, and the fares of the few airlines that are operating are very high. The government of India should make all efforts to ensure the safe return of its citizens," Tankha wrote. "Appeal to Dr S Jaishankar and JM Scindia to facilitate the earliest return of Indian students from Ukraine. Tickets are very expensive. Subsidise or allow one-time free travel. As an MP and lawyer, me and many others can

help GOI for short falls in special cases," Tankha tweeted on Thursday. Responding to his tweet, Scindia, who is also a Rajya Sabha MP from Madhya Pradesh, said, "Sure, will look into it."

As per reports, at least 25 students from Indore are stuck in Ukraine and their family members have urged the Centre to help them bring them back home safely at the earliest.

"In the last two-three days, about 25 people from Indore have contacted me and informed that their children are stranded in Ukraine. These students want to return to their homes at the earliest," Lok Sabha MP from Indore, Shankar Lalwani, said on Wednesday.



EDITOR'S SPECS

Third phase crucial for SP, BJP

As elections in Uttar Pradesh move into the third phase, the battle becomes increasingly crucial for the BJP as well as Samajwadi Party. Polling in the third phase will be held on February 20 on 59 seats spread across 16 districts. These include five districts from western UP -- Firozabad, Mainpuri, Etah, Kasganj and Hathras. Six districts of the Avadh region, namely Kanpur, Kanpur Dehat, Auraiya, Kannauj, Etawah and Farrukhabad, will go to polls along with five districts from Bundelkhand region-Jhansi, Jalaun, Lalitpur, Hamirpur and Mahoba. The region, known as Yadav belt, was once a stronghold of the Samajwadi Party but majority of the Yadav votes went with BJP in 2017. Even the Yadav stronghold, which includes Firozabad, Kasganj, Etah, Mainpuri, Farrukhabad, Kannauj and Auraiya did not vote for SP which got only six seats in these districts. The third phase is also crucial for the BJP, which is seeking to retain the 49 seats it won in 2017. This phase has the Hathras constituency where a gang-rape tore UP apart in September 2020. Akhilesh Yadav has kept the Hathras issue alive in his campaign. He has been observing 'Hathras ki Beti Smriti Divas' every month. Then there is Kasganj where the custodial death of one Altaf in November last year had become a major embarrassment for the Yogi Adityanath government. Kanpur is also going to polls in this phase and the murder of a city businessman Manish Gupta during a police raid in Gorakhpur last year, is being raised at every opposition meeting. The phase also has five districts Bundelkhand that was once a stronghold of the BSP but it was swept by the BJP in 2017. While the BJP is claiming massive development in this region while seeking votes, the Samajwadi Party is exposing areas that have remained untouched by development.

SANDHYA MUKHERJEE - THE VOICE OF BENGALI ROMANTIC HEART

Saibal Gupta

The piper of Bengali music industry - Sandhya Mukherjee who gave birth to a cascade of never-heard-before musical melodies that became the lyrical language of millions of romantic hearts - passed away in a city hospital at the age of 90 leaving behind a legacy of unforgettable songs that will be remembered even after her death. The last of the living legend in 'Modern Bengali Songs' after Hemanta Mukherjee, Manna Dey, Shyamal Mitra - Mukherjee not only had a lyrical spectrum of musical rainbow that cast a spell on the romantic dreams of Bengali audience for more than four decades but she had a fearless and undeterred voice even till the end of her life when she could boldly refuse the 'Padma Shri Award' by the central government saying 'Mera dil nahi chahti/ Mein nahi lungi' (My heart is not giving consent. I won't receive it). A couple of days after refusing the presti-



gious award she was admitted to SSKM hospital with breathlessness and lung infection. Later she was shifted to a private hospital where she was tested Covid positive and after a battle of 19 days the legendary singer passed away. Mukherjee left singing in 2003 but she was respected and honoured till the last day of her life. Born on October 4, 1931 at Dhakuria in South Kolkata of Railway employee Narendranath Mukherjee and Hemprabha Devi, Mukherjee the youngest of the six sib-

lings recorded her first song at the age of only 13 years. She took her initial education of music from Santosh Kumar Basu and after that she honed her skills from A.T. Kanan and Chimoy Lahiri. Later she got Ustad Bade Golam Ali Khan and his son Ustad Manwar Ali Khan as her Guru (Teacher). The experts have always said that though Mukherjee has sung numerous songs for films but she never ignored Indian Classical Music. The Indian classical Music and Modern Bengali Songs melted in her. Though she has sung numerous songs, she will always be remembered for her songs that she had sung for the Bengali films. It has occasionally been said that the box-office hit films of Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen had never been complete without those of Hemanta Mukherjee and Sandhya Mukherjee. Songs like 'Gane mor Indradhanu' or 'Ei poth jodi na sesh hoi' or 'Ke tumi Amare Dako' still tickle every Bengali heart. Despite her musical career

Mukherjee never left her sense of freedom and self-esteem. During the liberation war of Bangladesh, she joined the mass movement and raised money for thousands of refugees. She created 'Swadhini Bangla Betar Kendra', a radio station of that time in Bangladesh with Bangladeshi musician Samar Das through which she recorded and transmitted patriotic songs that inspired thousands of Bangladeshi freedom fighters. After the release of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, he sang the song 'Bangbandhu Tumi Phire Ale' in the evening. Her sense of patriotism and self-respect was evident even on her last days when she refused and said - 'My country loves me. I left singing in 2003. This is my pursuit. That's what I have done all my life. I didn't look at anything. I never thought of taking Padma Shri in my life. When the people of my love me, be it Padma Shri or anything, I don't need. I don't want anything more than the love of my countrymen'.

NAGARJUNA ADOPTS 1,080 ACRES OF FOREST LAND NEAR HYDERABAD

Popular Tollywood actor Akkineni Nagarjuna and his family on Thursday adopted 1,080 acres of forest land on the outskirts of Hyderabad. Nagarjuna along with his family members and Rajya Sabha member J. Santosh Kumar laid foundation stone for Akkineni Nageswara Rao Urban Forest Park. The Park will come up in Chengicherla forest area on the outskirts of Hyderabad in memory of Nagarjuna's father and well-known actor Akkineni Nageswara Rao. Nagarjuna's gesture came on the birthday of Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrababhan Rao. Inspired by the Green India Challenge of Rajya Sabha MP J Santosh Kumar, the actor kept his word to adopt the urban forest. He had declared recently that he will adopt the forest land on

KCR's birthday. Nagarjuna laid the foundation stone along with his wife Amala, sons Naga Chaitanya and Nikhil and other family members. For the development of forest region, they have donated Rs 2 crore to the Haritha Nidhi or Green Fund announced by the Chief Minister. Nagarjuna said Santosh Kumar launched Green India Challenge programme "to make the environment in the state and the country greener and eco-friendly". Nagarjuna said he participated in the programme and planted several saplings. He said in the last Big Boss season final programme, he discussed the adoption of forestland issue with Santosh Kumar and declared on the dais that he would adopt forestland. He said he felt happy that he had laid the founda-

tion stone for the Urban Forest Park as announced by him in the programme. This forest area park would immensely help the people living in the colonies. Santosh Kumar appreciated Nagarjuna for coming forward to take part in the Green India Challenge programme. The MP announced that along with the setting up of Urban Park in the name of Nageswara Rao, in the vacant areas, one-lakh saplings will be planted. This programme also began on Thursday. The MP said no other city has the advantage which Hyderabad has. The city has 1.50 lakh acres of forest land around it. This would be protected, preserved and developed as part of the Green India Challenge programme. The MP said businessmen, entrepreneurs and organisations are welcome to take up this social

responsibility. In this programme, ministers, Special Chief Secretary (Forests) Shanta Kumari, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests R Shobha, PCCF (SF) A R M Dobrial, Rachakonda Police Commissioner Sri Mahesh Bhagwat, Hyderabad Chief Conservator MJ Akbar, Medchel Forest Officer Venkateswarlu, GIC Co Founder Raghava and others participated. Chengicherla Forest Block is in Uppal-Medipally area on Hyderabad Warangal highway consisting of 1,682 acres of forestland. Nagarjuna took 1,000 acres on adoption. An Urban park will be developed in part of the land and in the rest; revival of the forest areas will be taken up. Officials

those residing in Medipally to Chengicherla, Cherlapally, and ECIL areas. Under the leadership of Santosh Kumar and inspiration from the Green India Challenge, three forest blocks were taken on adoption and Nagarjuna took the fourth block. In the three areas, setting of an urban park, reviving the forest area works are going on. Santosh Kumar himself had taken on the adoption of 2042 acres in Keesara and developing an eco-park. Actor Prabhas took 1,650 acres in the Khajipally forest area and Pharma giant Hetero has adopted 2,543 acres in the Mambapur forest area on Narsapur road and are developing as eco-friendly areas.

international

UKRAINE AND RUSSIA TRADE ACCUSATIONS OF SHELLING

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Ukrainian government forces and Russian-backed rebels in the country's east have traded fresh accusations of shelling and other ceasefire violations, The Guardian reported. Ukraine's ministry of defence says it has recorded 60 ceasefire violations by separatists in the Donbas region over the past 24 hours, with one soldier injured, according to its ministry of defence. Ukraine's commander of the Joint Forces, lieutenant general Alexander Pavlyuk, claimed Russia-backed troops have increased provocative actions in a bid to provoke Ukraine's armed forces to fire, the report said. Russia's defence ministry claims to have withdrawn several infantry units from



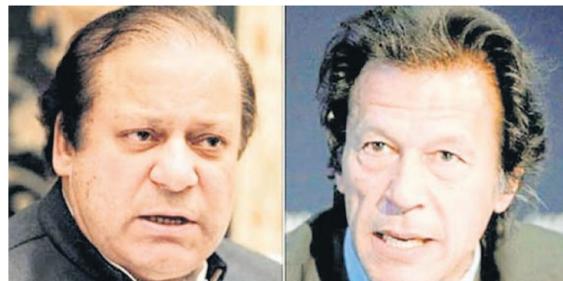
Crimea. The tanks are said to have returned to their bases in the regions of Dagestan and Chechnya after completing drills in Crimea. Russia's Interfax news agency said the Luhansk self-proclaimed rebel republic reported several incidents of mortar fire on Friday morning. However, the Kyiv government hit back saying the rebels fired artillery or mortars four times on Friday, The Guardian reported.

Separately, the Ukrainian military said in a statement late on Thursday that it had no plans to launch an offensive on the rebels' positions or shelling of civilians and would "strictly adhere to the Minsk agreements and norms of international humanitarian law". "Our actions are purely defensive," said Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces of Ukraine, Lieutenant General Valery Zaluzhny.

Perceptible drop in Imran's popularity, Nawaz Sharif leads in Pak provinces

Team Absolute | New Delhi

There is a perceptible drop in the popularity of Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan in an opinion survey, which also revealed that opposition PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif is leading in popularity ratings in Punjab province at 58 per cent, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) 46 per cent and Sindh 51 per cent, The News reported. According to the survey conducted by Gallup Pakistan, Khan ranked second in popularity in KP with 44 per cent and third with 33 per cent popularity in Sindh and Punjab. These opinion survey conducted from December 22, 2021 to January 31, 2022 solicited views of 5,000 people from across the country about the popularity of PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif, Khan, PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif and PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. In KP, Shehbaz Sharif's popularity stood at 43 per cent, while Bilawal



Bhutto Zardari and Asif Ali Zardari were tied at 24 per cent. There was a significant reduction in the level of satisfaction with Khan in KP which has dropped from 67 per cent in February 2020 to 44 per cent in the current survey, while that of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari dropped from 26 per cent to 24 per cent. However, in the case of Nawaz Sharif, his approval ratings increased from 33 per cent to 46 per cent and that of Shehbaz

Sharif rose from 31 per cent to 43 per cent in KP. In the case of Punjab, 58 per cent respondents approved Nawaz Sharif and Shehbaz Sharif, while 33 per cent approved Prime Minister Khan, 24 per cent Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and 21 per cent Asif Ali Zardari. According to Gallup Pakistan, this was the first time that the popularity of the former Prime Minister rose after December 2018 and Nawaz Sharif managed similar

ratings as that of Shehbaz Sharif. But the popularity of Khan that rose to 51 per cent in 2018 has now dropped to 33 per cent. While that of PPP Chairman increased to 24 per cent from 18 per cent then. About the response in Sindh, the pollster recorded 51 per cent popularity for Nawaz Sharif, 41 per cent for Shehbaz Sharif, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari secured 37 per cent, Khan 33 per cent, and Asif Ali Zardari managed 31 per cent. In comparison to the 2018 Gallup Survey, the popularity of Nawaz Sharif and Shehbaz Sharif rose from a mere 12 per cent to 51 per cent and 41 per cent, whereas that of Khan dropped from 33 per cent in 2018 to 10 per cent in February 2020, which has again risen to 33 per cent in the current survey. But in the case of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the popularity ratings dropped in the home province from 54 per cent to 39 per cent and has now further dropped to 37 per cent, the report said.

Nuke weapons can be deployed in Belarus in case of threats: Lukashenko

Houston | Agencies

If the West takes actions that threaten Belarus, nuclear weapons can be deployed in the country to protect it, President Alexander Lukashenko said. He made the remarks on Thursday at the Osipovichi training ground, where the military exercises "Allied Resolve 2022" are taking place, reports Xinhua news agency. Lukashenko noted that if there are no threats to Belarus, no nuclear weapons will appear in the country. He said that he wants an Iskander missile systems training centre to be created in Belarus. According to the President, three military training centres have been created in cooperation with Russia. The Belarusian side is also interested in training sailors in Kaliningrad or Murmansk, and in deploying Russian S-400 missile systems. During the trip to the Osipovichi training ground,



Lukashenko observed the course of the drills, which will continue on Friday and Saturday. Lukashenko is scheduled to visit Russia and meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday. He said they would discuss next steps for Russian-Belarusian integration and the issue of recognizing self-proclaimed "Donetsk People's Republic" and "Luhansk People's Republic" in eastern Ukraine. Russia and Belarus began joint military exercises "Allied Resolve 2022" on the territory of Belarus on February 10, which will continue until February 20. Military units from Siberia and the Russian Far East, as well as troops of the Armed Forces of Belarus, are taking part in the drills.

Humanitarian situation in northern Ethiopia continues to deteriorate: UN

Addis Ababa | Agencies

The humanitarian situation in the northern Ethiopian region of Afar continues to deteriorate due to the ongoing conflict, with large-scale displacement driving increasing needs, said the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Due to insecurity, the UN and nongovernmental organization partners are unable to access many of the sites where those displaced by the fighting took shelter, it said. Assistance is being provided in accessible areas of Afar. Nearly 80,000 children and pregnant and lactating women in seven districts are currently benefiting from blanket supplementary feeding programs to address malnutrition, and mobile health and nutrition teams are providing assistance in 14 districts, Xinhua news



agency quoted the Office as saying. In the neighbouring Tigray region, additional medical supplies were airlifted to the capital of Mekelle during the past week. On February 11, the World Health Organization airlifted 10 metric tonnes of medical supplies, including medical equipment, antibiotics, and medicine for

malaria, diabetes, and reproductive health. However, the amount of supplies that can be airlifted remains limited, OCHA said. In addition, many of these supplies cannot yet be distributed to health facilities across Tigray due to the continued lack of fuel. The continued suspension of truck convoys into Tigray, includ-

ing fuel tankers, continues to limit humanitarian assistance more broadly, said OCHA. In the past weeks, fewer than 7,000 people received food assistance, and this was at reduced rations. As part of the recent measles vaccination campaign in Tigray, more than 60,000 children under 5 and about 11,000 pregnant and lactating women were screened for malnutrition. Over 20 per cent of children and 55 per cent of the women were found to be acutely malnourished, it said. Humanitarian assistance continues in the northern Amhara region. During the past week, more than 127,000 people were provided food assistance, while some areas in northern Amhara are still inaccessible to humanitarians due to security concerns, and some new displacement continues to be reported, said OCHA.

Texas police officers indicted over excessive force in 2020 protests

Houston | Agencies

A grand jury in Austin, Texas, has indicted multiple police officers for using excessive force during anti-racism protests in 2020, local authorities said. Speaking at a press conference, Travis County District Attorney Jose Garza said that "multiple indictments will be forthcoming in the days ahead" for police officers suspected of criminal conduct during the May 2020 protests, spurred by the murder of African-American George Floyd by a white police officer in Minneapolis, reports Xinhua news agency. Garza said a special grand jury had completed its work, without revealing how many police officers would be indicted. According to local media reports, which quoted anonymous sources, 19 Austin police officers would be indicted on aggravated assault charges over the protests. According to Garza, the facts discovered through his office's investigations were

"disturbing," and the investigators believed that many protesters injured by police during those protests were "innocent bystanders". The protesters suffered "significant and serious injuries to the head, face and body", and some may never recover, said the district attorney. Meanwhile, Austin Police Chief Joseph Chacon said on Thursday that he was "extremely disappointed" in the announcement of indictments. Chacon argued that police officers had "to work under the most chaotic of circumstances" during the protests, facing rocks, frozen bottles of water, bottles containing bodily fluids, commercial-grade fireworks and other objects being hurled at them. According to Garza, his office had also prosecuted 33 cases against civilians who engaged in criminal conduct at the time. Also on Thursday, Austin City Council reportedly approved \$10 million in settlements for two people hurt by Austin police officers during the protests.



PM Modi inaugurates two additional local railway lines between Thane and Diva

Speaking via video link, Modi said his government is committed to improving railway infrastructure in the country.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday inaugurated two additional railway lines connecting Thane and Diva in Maharashtra and also flagged off two suburban trains.

PM Modi also flagged off two suburban trains of the Mumbai Suburban Railway. Out of the four tracks between Kalyan and CSTM, two tracks were used for slow local trains and two tracks for fast local, Mail Express, and Goods trains. To segregate



suburban and long-distance trains, two additional tracks were planned. In his address after the inauguration, he said that the modernization of local trains is a part of the Central government's commitments. He also claimed that the metro networks in Mumbai are also being spread at a faster rate.

Speaking via video link, Modi said his government is committed to improving railway infrastructure in the country.

"Infrastructure projects used to drag on earlier due to lack of coordination in planning and execution but we have changed that approach," Modi said. With the commissioning of the two new lines, 36 additional suburban services will be introduced on the main line of Central Railway and the air-conditioned local train services will increase from 10 to 44, an official said.

ED arrests Iqbal Ibrahim Kaskar in money-laundering case

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday arrested Iqbal Ibrahim Kaskar -- the brother of absconder mafia don Dawood Ibrahim Kaskar -- from Thane Jail in a money laundering case.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday arrested Iqbal Ibrahim Kaskar -- the brother of absconder mafia don

Dawood Ibrahim Kaskar -- from Thane Jail in a money laundering case.

The development came after a Mumbai Court granted permission to the ED to interrogate Iqbal Kaskar, who was arrested by Thane Police's Anti-Extortion Cell in 2017 and remains in custody since then. The ED will produce him before a Special PMLA Court for remand and further investigations.

Iqbal has been nabbed by the ED in a fresh money-laundering case lodged against him and others three days ago after it raided around 10 properties linked to the Kaskar clan in Mumbai.

The ED has recorded the statements of six persons in connection with the money-laundering cases and a few more including builders and politicians are likely to be questioned.

The central agency is probing how the money laundering racket involved the use of digital wallets and darknet, and re-invested in realty sectors in certain foreign locations to avoid detection.

The agencies suspect that the money may have been extorted or collected through ransoms, settlement of cases, narcotics and routed through hawala for which the entire money trail is being probed as also terror links.

SHEENA BORA MURDER CASE

SC notice to CBI, Maharashtra government on Indrani Mukerjea's bail plea

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi appeared for Mukerjea, currently lodged at the Byculla women's prison in Mumbai following her arrest in August 2015.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday sought response from the CBI and the Maharashtra government on bail plea of Indrani Mukerjea who is the prime accused in the Sheena Bora murder case.

A bench of Justices L. Nageswara Rao and PS Narasimha issued notice to the CBI and the state government Mukerjea's appeal challenging the Bombay High Court order of November 16, 2021, denying her bail. "Issue notice. Returnable in two weeks," the bench said. Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi appeared for Mukerjea, currently lodged at the Byculla women's prison in Mumbai following her arrest in August 2015. She had been denied bail on multiple occasions by a special CBI court, which is conducting the trial in the murder case. Mukerjea is facing trial for allegedly killing her daughter Sheena Bora. Bora (24) was allegedly strangled to death in a car by Mukerjea, her then driver



Shyamvar Rai and former husband Sanjeev Khanna in April 2012. The body was burnt in a forest in neighbouring Raigad district. Bora was born out of Mukerjea's previous relationship. Former media baron Peter Mukerjea was also arrested for allegedly being part of the conspiracy. He was granted bail by the high court in February 2020. His marriage to Indrani Mukerjea ended during the period of incarceration.

BIRD FLU SCARE

100 chickens found dead at poultry farm in Maharashtra's Thane, District Collector issues statement

Thane District Collector Rajesh Narvekar also assured that there was no cause for concern in other parts of the district in Maharashtra.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

As many as 100 chickens were found dead at a poultry farm in Vehloli village of Shahapur tehsil in Thane district, said Thane District Magistrate and Collector Rajesh J Narvekar on Friday. Considering the bird flu threat, the samples have been sent to a lab in Pune. He further said that around 25,000 birds falling in a kilometre radius of the affected poultry farm will be killed within the next few days. The district animal husbandry department has been ordered to take measures to control the infec-



tion. Meanwhile, Thane District Collector Rajesh Narvekar also assured that there was no cause for concern in other parts of the district in Maharashtra. Speaking to the

media, Collector Narvekar said the district administration has issued a notification for the culling of birds in the farms within a one-km radius of the affected farm. Apart from bird

flu cases reported from Shahapur, no cases have been detected in any other part of the district, he said, assuring people there was no cause for panic. Meanwhile, at least 15,600 broiler birds had been culled in Shahapur in compliance with the standard operating procedure till Friday morning, the PRO of the Thane Zilla Parishad Pankaj Chavan said. Apart from this, 7,962 layer birds, 20 ducks, 980 eggs, litter feed, etc have also been culled, he said, adding that the process of culling is underway. The district administration is monitoring the situation closely to prevent the spread to other locations, the official said.

Avian influenza, commonly called bird flu, is an infectious viral disease of birds (especially wild waterfowl such as ducks and geese). Wild birds can carry the virus without showing symptoms of it and transmit it to poultry through their feathers or feces.

MAHA SEEKS RAMSAR STATUS FOR THANE CREEK, ABODE OF FLAMINGOS

The Maharashtra government has sought the coveted 'Ramsar' site status for the sprawling Thane Creek - the annual abode of the magnificent Flamingos and other migratory birds - on the northern and eastern coast of Mumbai.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra government has sought the coveted 'Ramsar' site status for the sprawling Thane Creek - the annual abode of the magnificent Flamingos and other migratory birds - on the northern and eastern coast of Mumbai.

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Thursday cleared a proposal to the effect which will be sent to the Centre for sanction to accord the Ramsar status for the mangroves, plus the surrounding swamps and wetlands that abound in rich marine life. An official said that once the Ramsar status is granted it will boost tourism and conservation efforts besides creating jobs for the people in the region.

The proposal was first mooted at the State Mangrove Authority meeting in December 2021 chaired by Environment Minister Aadiya Thackeray and finally approved on Thursday by the CM.

The Thane Creek Flamingo Reserve Forest covers around 17 sq km and attracts hordes of migratory



big and small birds from different parts of the world, with the prime attraction being the Flamingos.

The state government has proposed a total area of around 65 sq km of the Thane Creek including

the 17 sq km reserve forest, with the remaining already notified as an eco-sensitive zone since October

2021, to protect the flocks of migratory birds and the biodiversity of the entire swampy region, once visited

by Prince Charles.

If accepted by the Centre, this will be Maharashtra's 3rd Ramsar site, after the lush-green Nandur Madhmeshwar Forest in Nashik (Jan 2020), followed by the centuries old world-famous Lonar Crater Lake in Buldhana district (Nov 2020).

Thane Creek is a sanctuary for over 200 species of birds, butterflies (80), spiders (80), other insects (over 75), reptiles (30), fish (two dozen), crabs (dozen plus), mammals (04), etc, making it a favourite with the annual avian visitors.

The region also prevents soil erosion, flash floods and helps eliminate over 60,000 tonnes of carbon-dioxide from the neighbourhood dumping grounds, making them extremely critical to the city's environment and the atmosphere in these times of global warming.

After the first Ramsar Conference in Iran in 1971, India became a signatory in 1982 to help protect lakes, rivers, ponds, swamps, creeks, coasts and even paddy fields in the global mangrove protection efforts, including 49 protected wetlands in India.

Girls' risky commute to Satara school: Bombay HC seeks Maharashtra govt's response to PIL

On Friday, the bench appointed advocate Sanjeev Kadam as Amicus Curiae in the case and asked the state government to file its reply to the suo motu PIL within a week

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bombay High Court on Friday asked the Maharashtra government to respond to a suo motu PIL wherein the court took cognisance of a news report about the "adventurous journey" of girls from a village in the state's Satara district who have to row a boat across the Koyna dam every day to reach their school.

On Friday, the bench appointed advocate Sanjeev Kadam as Amicus Curiae in the case to assist the court and file a proper petition. The high court asked the state government to file its reply within a week. A divi-



sion bench of Justices Prasanna B Varale and Anil Kilar had on January 31 initiated the suo motu PIL and said it came across a report on a digital news portal "which reflects the adventurous journey of children in general and girl child in particular in a village namely, Khirvandi" in Javali taluka of the district. The news report referred to the girls' daily routine as part of which they have to undertake a journey by boat to reach school. The high court went on to note the "shocking reality that a small boat is being plied by the girl stu-

dents themselves. This particular village comes under a protected area. The girl students are supposed to take up the journey in a boat to cross from one end of Koyna Dam to the other end firstly and thereafter, from the other end, a nearly 4 km journey through dense forest. This area is inhabited by wild animals including bears, tigers etc."

The court had then asked the state government to take all measures to provide necessary assistance to the children. The next hearing in the case will be held after three weeks.

Mall developers, operators approach CM seeking shoppers' entry rule relaxation

According to industry association Shopping Centre Association of India (SCAI), the government's aggressive vaccination drive has ensured that more than 80% people above the age of 18 years have taken two shots of the vaccine against Covid-19 in Mumbai.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Retail mall developers and operators have reached out to the Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray seeking relaxation in the rule that mandates that only fully vaccinated people will be allowed entry

inside shopping malls. According to industry association Shopping Centre Association of India (SCAI), the government's aggressive vaccination drive has ensured that more than 80% people above the age of 18 years have taken two shots of the vaccine against Covid-19 in Mumbai. The country's financial capital is the first among major cities to reach the milestone and over 90% have received single dosage in the state. SCAI, in its letter to the Chief Minister, has stated that its members remain committed to ensuring that all standard operating procedures are followed and will ensure that visitors are provided with the safest environment. "Post the second lockdown restrictions have been lifted in almost all states. Most of the larger cities have been able to vaccinate large populations with both the doses. Covid cases are also on

decline and hospitalisation is almost negligible. This has prompted many states to remove the protocol of checking the vaccination certificate before entering the mall," said Mukesh Kumar, Chairman, SCAI. Mumbai and Pune are among the key consumption centers and contributed a major part of revenue for most retail mall entities. Maharashtra has also completed more than 80% vaccination in most of the urban areas and therefore SCAI has made a similar request to the state government to remove the protocol of checking the certificate at the entry. At present, the restriction is resulting in reduction in footfall and thereby revenue losses to the retailers. Hecking the documents at entry every time visitors enter the mall takes a lot of time and discourages them to visit the mall frequently and this is also adding to the costs, SCAI.

Post-Nashik trek tragedy, crackdown on shady adventure groups

The Maharashtra Directorate of Tourism (M-DoT) has slapped a notice on a private, 'unregistered' adventure sports outfit in connection with the deaths of an uncle-nephew duo on February 2 at the famed Hadbichi Shendi hillock in Nashik.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra Directorate of Tourism (M-DoT) has slapped a notice on a private, 'unregistered' adventure sports outfit in connection with the deaths of an uncle-nephew duo on February 2 at the famed Hadbichi Shendi hillock in Nashik. Simultaneously, all unregistered, unauthorised, ill-equipped, formal/informal groups engaging in such activities have come under the scanner of the state government, officials said. The tough trek on

Hadbichi Shendi hillock was organised by Indraprastha Trekkers Group (ITG), Ahmednagar, with around 17 participants, including some girls.

Two of the trekkers -- Anil S. Wagh, 35, and his nephew Mayur D. Mhaske, 22 -- had a fatal fall during descent, and a person named Pravin Pawar was injured while attempting to rescue them. The M-DoT has taken serious cognisance of the double-tragedy which sent shockwaves among adventure sports lovers and organisers in the state. The authorities have now learnt that the ITG was not a 'registered' or 'recognised' group, but yet it went ahead and organised the potentially hazardous trek on the Hadbichi Shendi hillock in Nashik. "From August 2021, we had opened compulsory registration for all such adventures sports/tours/activities with a six-month deadline. Till date, the ITG has not registered itself," said M-DoT Joint Director Dhananjay D. Sawalkar. He pointed out that a total of 25 adventure activities related to aerial, terrestrial and water sports have been

listed for which registration is compulsory. "However, though the deadline has passed, many organisations or groups have not yet registered themselves for conducting such adventure sports activities. We shall take stringent necessary action against them," Sawalkar said. The M-DoT has demanded the ITG to provide its registration details, whether there are trained operators for their adventure treks, what kind of safety and security equipment/measures were in place during the February 2 trek and whether it follows the government norms. Tourism department officials said that several popular adventures sports activities are undertaken in different parts of Maharashtra, but many of them are run by unregistered, unrecognised operators without proper trained personnel or safety protocols, with the sole intention of making a quick buck. "Most such operators charge heavily for some of these approved adventure activities like hot-air ballooning, paragliding, jungle-treks, watersports, river rafting, snorkelling,

parasailing, rappelling, rock-climbing etc., plus it is not clear if their personnel are adequately trained/certified for such sports, whether they provide insurance/medical cover in case of accidents, etc," said an official, preferring anonymity. Some unscrupulous, fly-by-night operators indulge in such thrilling but dangerous activities to make a quick buck while avoiding registration, insurance, medical or other fees, he pointed out. A Mumbai private tours consultant, T. Asher, said that a new trend has emerged in recent years with hundreds of such big and small groups thriving via social media platforms or sheer word-by-mouth publicity. "Most are unknown, unregistered or have shady credentials, they openly solicit thrill-seekers and adventurers through Facebook, WhatsApp, and other modes, with online payment options, often non-refundable, without proper accounting or approvals," Asher said. On February 11, a young trekker, R. Babu, fell during an unsupervised climbing jaunt on the teacherous Cherad Hill in Palakkad, Kerala.



AMANDA SEYFRIED TO STAR ALONGSIDE TOM HOLLAND IN 'THE CROWDED ROOM'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Pop star Willow Smith suffered anxiety attacks after releasing the hit single 'Whip My Hair' in 2010, and she has confessed to feeling overwhelmed by the situation at the time.

Willow said: "That was crazy. I was brain-washed into thinking, 'No, you're being a brat, suck it up'. Then I grew up, and I realised it was something that needed to be dealt with."

However, the 21-year-old pop star found that exercise helped to improve her mental health amid the coronavirus lockdown, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

She told The Independent: "I became a little obsessive with physical exertion, I didn't allow myself to feel (anxiety), I just wanted to run it out. Sometimes the body is so intelligent."

Willow's parents, Will Smith and Jada Pinkett Smith, have both been candid about their personal struggles over recent years.

The singer doesn't have any worries about them oversharing. Willow, who has co-hosted the Facebook Watch talk show 'Red Table Talk', said: "Everyone is going through something and the biggest disservice you could do (to yourself and others) is put up a facade and be like, that's not the case (here). That sounds wrong to me."

Asked if she ever feels as though her family are too open with the public, Willow replied: "I feel I've always understood that my parents are their own people. A lot of kids think of their parents like 'Your whole identity is for me'."

"(But) seeing them in this lifestyle we had, from a very young age it was clear to me they weren't just my parents. They're full, other people who have their own emotions."

Robert Pattinson studied bats to play Batman



Hollywood star Robert Pattinson has revealed that he studied real-life bats ahead of shooting 'The Batman'.

Los Angeles | Agencies

Pattinson shared on 'Jimmy Kimmel Live!': "There was one thing I said to Matt (Reeves, the director), because I was talking to Zoe Kravitz, who plays Catwoman, she's great, and she was saying, to see the way she's moving and stuff, she's looking at these videos, big cat videos, and how big cats fight and stuff."

"So I looked up how a bat fights and there was this one video on 'Planet Earth' of the technique of a vampire bat with a chicken in a cage and how it fights the chicken, it flaps around the cage for like an hour, just flap-banging on the cage until the chicken's been scared for so long the chicken falls asleep. And then the bat sneaks into the cage and bites it on its anus. I said that to Matt, and he's like, 'I've got an idea.'"

Kravitz, 33, has relished the challenge of playing Catwoman, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

The Hollywood star recently revealed that she's focused on creating "a real human being" - rather than an "idea".

CHANNING TATUM: I'VE NEVER HAD A CAREER GRAND PLAN



Los Angeles: Hollywood actor Channing Tatum has said that he previously struggled to "sustain" his intense schedule - but he's now regained his enthusiasm for work after a four-year hiatus from Hollywood.

He shared: "I'm just (living) in the moment of it. I don't have this grand plan, I don't think I ever really did have a grand plan."

Before I took some time off, I was on a pace that just was untenable. It was not something that I could really sustain. I don't even know if some of the last stuff that I was making, if I was really and truly my best in it in some of the movies. "I wanted to make sure that I still had something to offer, and I wasn't just doing it just for a career." Tatum believes the break came at the right time in his career, as it allowed him to reevaluate his priorities, reports femalefirst.co.uk. He told People: "Right now, I feel really in the pocket. I'm having fun." Earlier this week, Channing revealed he wants 'Magic Mike's Last Dance' to be the "Super Bowl of stripping".



Los Angeles | Agencies

Popular names such as Nathan Lane, Megan Mullally, Bowen Yang and Megan Thee Stallion have joined the cast of 'F***ing Identical Twins' an R-rated musical comedy that puts a subversive spin on 'The Parent Trap'.

Titled 'F***ing Identical Twins', comedians Aaron Jackson and Josh Sharp are adapting the film from their two-man stage show, which premiered at Manhattan's Upright Citizens Brigade in 2014.

In addition to writing the script, Jackson and Sharp will co-star as the eponymous identical twins. They will be joined by a star-studded ensemble includes Lane, Mullally, Yang and Thee Stallion. It is not clear who those actors will play.

Featuring original songs by Jackson, Sharp and composer Karl Saint Lucy, 'F***ing Identical Twins' takes inspiration from Hallie and Annie's mischievous exploits in 'The Parent Trap' and follows two business adversaries who realise they're identical twin brothers. They decide to switch places in order to reunite their divorced parents and become a fam-

ily again. Larry Charles, who previously directed 'Borat' and worked as a staff writer on 'Seinfeld' for several seasons, is directing 'F***ing Identical Twins', which is currently in production.

Chernin Entertainment, one of the backers of 2017's hit song-and-dance spectacle 'The Greatest Showman', is producing and co-financing the film with A24. The project has been in the works for some time; 20th Century originally acquired the rights to turn the stage show into a movie back in 2016, but it never got off the ground.

Bowen Yang, Megan Thee Stallion to star in R-rated musical

'UNCHARTED': DESPITE FLAWS, A POPCORN BLOCKBUSTER



TROY RIBEIRO

(Running in Theatres); Duration: 116 minutes

Director: Ruben Fleischer
Cast: Tom Holland, Mark Wahlberg, Sophia Ali, Tati Gabrielle, Antonio Banderas, Patricia Meeden, Sarah Petrick, 33 Rudy Pankow
Ratings: **1/2



'Uncharted' is an action-packed adventure film based on a video game series - of the same name. It is an origin story that introduces us to treasure hunter Nathan Drake. At the same time, it is an action thriller about two lethally competing scavenger-hunt teams.

Squeezing action sequences from the multiple games series, 'Uncharted' ironically does not waste any time - in explaining the backstories of any of its characters or unnecessary exposition. It directly plunges into action and adventure that takes place, in the air, on the water, and in the tombs.

Tom Holland plays Nathan Drake, an orphan whose only close relative is his brother Sam (Rudy Pankow), who he has not seen in years. Now older, Nathan works as a bartender and petty thief who snatches jewellery off his customers while waiting for them.

Then one day, he meets Victor "Sully" Sullivan (Mark Wahlberg), who recruits him to find the legendary stash of gold, which essentially is pirate booty that was dumped - by the survivors of the Magellan expedition in 1522. Sully also assures Nathan that they might find his long-lost brother Sam. The two of them soon plan an auction-house heist which does not go

as planned. It does not take long for them to meet other mercenaries and henchmen, whether they are allies or adversaries. Topping the list are; Santiago Moncada (Antonio Banderas) - the pair's chief rival whose ancestors had funded the Magellan mission, Chloe Frazer (Sophia Ali) - an associate of Sully with whom Nathan shares a relationship, Jo Braddock (Tati Gabrielle) - an associate of Moncada, and the Scottish hooligan (Steven Waddington) whose brogue is so thick that it is virtually difficult to understand him. They all keep everyone in this world spinning on their toes.

The narrative navigates through a razor-thin script overloaded with mad-dash caper, propelled by actors you wish after a while had more meaningful things to exhibit. On the performance front - Tom Holland pulls off Nathan Drake with aplomb. In a rough and beefed-up mode, Tom exhibits physical flair as well as the same boyishly ingratiating persona that he displayed as Peter Parker, but with a hint of darkness added. On the other hand, Sully, Mark Wahlberg does a decent job of playing the wise-cracking mentor to Holland. Making his eyes go opaque,

he has a funny way of simultaneously making you want to trust and distrust him that balances well with Holland's goofy, clumsy nature. Nevertheless, both display a fair amount of chemistry as their characters - try to solve clues leading to the treasure. However, very often, their banter seems forced to generate a laugh or distract the audience from the lacklustre, cat-and-mouse plot. Antonio Banderas is spot-on as the ruthless Spanish tycoon who would do anything, even eliminate the members of his own family, who might come in his way of finding the loot. So is Tati Gabrielle as the sexy Jo Braddock, who has a penchant for using knives in combat. Sophia Ali is competent as the unreliable Chloe Frazer, an off-and-on ally of Nathan. Mounted with ace production values, the absurdity of the action set-pieces proves more exhilarating than exhausting. There is a breathless chase through Barcelona's tourist sites, a flamboyant plane sequence that also involves - a falling car, helicopters in an action explosion, and a fair number of fights.

Overall, 'Uncharted' despite its flaws, is a popcorn blockbuster that you will enjoy if you keep your mind aside.

TOM HANKS, ROBERT ZEMECKIS, ERIC ROTH TO REUNITE FOR FILM BASED ON GRAPHIC NOVEL

The legendary team of the 1994 hit 'Forrest Gump' - actor Tom Hanks, filmmaker Robert Zemeckis and screenwriter Eric Roth, is set to reunite after 30 years for an upcoming movie based on the innovative graphic novel, 'Here', reports Variety.



Los Angeles: The novel, which was published in 2014 by illustrator and comics innovator Richard McGuire, is set in one room and chronicles the events that have occurred in that space over the course of hundreds of thousands of years. As per Variety, the new project would mark the first time where all three will reunite since they came together for the 1994 classic, which clinched six Oscars, with Hanks (best actor), Zemeckis (best director) and Roth (best adapted screenplay) each taking home a statuette, in addition to the film's best picture win. News of the developing projects comes hours after the Hanks-starring comedy 'A Man Called Otto' bagged a \$60 million acquisition deal by Sony Pictures making it the largest deal to date at the virtual European Film Market. Hanks was also in the headlines earlier following the trailer release of Baz Luhrmann's 'Elvis'.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Olivia Rodrigo



2ND T20I

KOHLI, PANT, BOWLERS HELP INDIA WIN SERIES AGAINST WEST INDIES

Kolkata | Agencies

Fluent 52 from Virat Kohli followed by a rapid 76-run partnership between Rishabh Pant (52 not out) and Venkatesh Iyer (33) coupled with Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Harshal Patel keeping their calm in the last two overs helped India seal the T20I series against the West Indies with a narrow eight-run win in the second match at the Eden Gardens on Friday.

Set 186 to win, Kumar and Deepak Chahar kept Brandon King and Kyle Mayers in check till the former drove down the ground. King and Mayers slammed a boundary each till Yuzvendra Chahal separated the duo in the final over of power-play. Chahal cramped Mayers for room, leading in the attempted flick giving a top-edge back to the leg-spinner for an easy catch.

Pooran, who slammed a fifty in the first match, hit boundaries off Chahal and Patel and was fortunate in surviving a run-out attempt from Kohli. West Indies' struggle against



spin continued as King skipped down the pitch to loft but holed out to long-on off Ravi Bishnoi.

Powell reached his fifty in 28 balls as Pooran snatched a four off Patel to bring the equation to 29 runs off the last two overs. Pooran misused the

slog off Kumar and Bishnoi, under pressure at cover, held on to the catch. Kumar gave away just four runs in a brilliant 19th over. But Powell hammered back-to-back sixes, including a 102-m hit, over long-on, to keep Patel under pres-

sure. Patel held his nerve to concede two singles in the last two balls to seal India's 100th T20I win.

Earlier, Kohli, Pant and Iyer played sizzling knocks to give India an impressive 186 to defend. Sheldon Cottrell troubled Ishan Kishan with swing. The effort succeeded as Kishan's struggle ended with the left-handed batter trying to flick but gave a leading edge to point.

Pant and Iyer amassed 29 runs from 15th and 16th overs collectively to set India up for a big flourish in the last four overs. The left-handed duo ran hard for their singles while slamming some lovely shots all around the ground.

Brief scores :

India 186/5 in 20 overs (Rishabh Pant 52 not out, Virat Kohli 52, Roston Chase 3/25, Sheldon Cottrell 1/20) beat West Indies 178/3 in 20 overs (Rovman Powell 68 not out, Nicholas Pooran 62, Bhuvneshwar Kumar 1/29, Ravi Bishnoi 1/30) by eight runs

BENGALURU OPEN

Saketh-Ramkumar duo in doubles final; Vukic, Enzo advance to semis

Bengaluru | Agencies

India's Saketh Myneni and Ramkumar Ramanathan will look to do an encore of their last week's performance when they take on the Indian-Austrian duo of Arjun Kadhe and Alexander Erler in the final of the doubles event after their 6-1, 7-6 (3) victory over the French-Australian pair of Enzo Coucaud and Andrew Harris in the Bengaluru Open 2 ATP Challenger here on Friday.

The top-ranked Kadhe-Erler won a hard fought 6-4, 4-6, 10-3 battle against the all Indian pair of N Sriram Balaji and Vishnu Vardhan. 'Gud luck mite' said the Australian Max Purcell to his country mate Aleksandar Vukic as the coin went up during the toss. The latter did need luck as the Australian Open finalist Purcell gave him a run for his money, stretching the top seed to three sets before caving in. Vukic walked



away as a 6-4, 2-6, 6-4 victor and will meet last week's finalist Borna Gojo in the first semifinal. Gojo quelled the challenge of Swiss qualifier Antoine Bellier 6-4, 7-6 (3). The only other seed left in fray - third seeded Frenchman Enzo Coucaud and Bulgarian Dimitar Kuzmanov will face off in the other semifinal after registering almost similar victories against their opponents - Johan Nikles of Switzerland and Frenchman Mathias Bourgue respectively in the quarterfinals played at the KSLTA Stadium here on Friday. While Enzo won 6-1, 6-2, Kuzmanov was 6-4, 6-2 winner. Vukic-Purcell match

was hard fought from the word 'go' as both tested each other's serve and were involved in long rallies before Vukic achieved a crucial break in the fifth game and won the first set. The second set saw both the players holding their serve until the fifth game before Purcell, stepped up his game and broke his rival's serve in the 6th and 8th games to wrap up the set. After struggling to hold his serve in the second game of the decider, the top ranked player in the tournament sent down three of his 21 aces in the fourth game and earned a break in the next to cruise through the set and the match.

New Zealand Women manage record run-chase; clinch ODI series vs India

Queenstown | Agencies

India came up with their highest WODI total of the ongoing series against New Zealand but still lost the third of the five-match rubber by three wickets, thanks to Lauren Down who smashed an unbeaten 64 at the John Davies Oval here on Friday. With this win, New Zealand Women have taken an unassailable 3-0 lead in the five-match series, and will be going into next month's ICC Women's World Cup full of confidence. Three fine half centuries from Indian batters saw the tourists amass 279 in 49.3 overs but the hosts were equally impressive and managed to overhaul the target with five balls to spare. Requiring 128 from inside 20 overs, Down compiled a 52-ball unbeaten 64,



smashing a six from the first ball of the last over to seal the victory with five deliveries to spare. Down was assisted by Katey Martin (35) and Frankie McKay (17 not out from 12 balls), recovering from 171/6 to complete the unlikely chase. It was New Zealand's highest successful chase in Women's ODI history and second-highest overall. Earlier, New Zealand's reply to India's 279 was

brought to a crashing halt after the loss of Amy Satterthwaite (59) and Amelia Kerr (67), who put on 103 for the third wicket, recovering from the loss of Sophie Devine (0) and Suzie Bates (5). Despite Jhulan Goswami continuing to bowl with the world-class quality shown in last year's tour of Australia in claiming 3/47, Down stood her ground. The fourth ODI of the series will be played on February 22.

Brief scores :

India Women 279 in 49.3 overs (Sabbhini Meghana 61, Shafali Verma 51, Deepti Sharma 69 not out; Hannah Rowe 2/52) lost to New Zealand Women 280/7 in 49.1 overs (Amelia Kerr 67, Amy Satterthwaite 59, Lauren Down 64 not out; Jhulan Goswami 3/47) by three wickets.

Barca, Real Sociedad have work to do; good outings for Sevilla, Betis

EUROPA LEAGUE

Madrid | Agencies

FC Barcelona have plenty of work to do if they want to reach the last-16 of the Europa League after being held to a 1-1 draw at home to Napoli.

Barca were without Sergio Busquets, who began the game on the bench, and with Dani Alves' absence for European commitments, Oscar Mingueza played at right-back, while Eric Garcia partnered Gerard Pique in central defense.

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang started in an attack made up of Barca's three January signings, with Adama Traore and Ferran Torres, but apart from a shot from Pedri over the bar and a poor control from Torres when set through by Aubameyang, nothing worthwhile came out.

Napoli opened the scoring in the 28th minute when Piotr Zielinski beat Marc Andre Ter Stegen after the Barca keeper had saved his original shot. The rest of the half saw Barca control the ball, but fail to create



clear chances, partly thanks to the excellent defensive work of Koulibaly. Barca equalised in the 57th minute

after the VAR saw a hand blocking a cross by Traore and Torres made no mistake from the spot. Barca coach Xavi Hernandez made a triple

change soon afterward with Traore, Nico and the ineffective Frenkie de Jong replaced by Busquets, Gavi and Ousmane Dembele, who was greeted by a chorus of boos after his failure to sign a new contract. Torres had another chance to win the game three minutes from the end but sent the ball over the bar as his side's Europa League debut ended in disappointment. In the second early kick-off, Betis won a thrilling game 3-2 away to Zenit St. Petersburg thanks to goals from Guido Rodriguez, Willian Jose and Andres Guardado. Sevilla defeated Dinamo Zagreb 3-1 with an Ivan Rakitic penalty and strikes from Lucas Ocampos and Anthony Martial, with the last two coming rapidly after Mislav Orsic had briefly levelled for the visitors. Real Sociedad drew 2-2 away to RB Leipzig with Robin Le Normand and Mikel Oyarzabal (from the penalty spot) scoring for the Basque side, while Leipzig twice pulled level with goals from Christopher Nkunku and Emil Forsberg.

CLINICAL AUSTRALIA BEAT SRI LANKA BY SIX WICKETS, GO 4-0 UP IN SERIES

Melbourne | Agencies

Continuing their domination, a clinical Australia thrashed Sri Lanka by six wickets in the fourth T20I to go 4-0 up in five match series at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, here on Friday.

Chasing a modest target for victory, Ashton Agar and Ben McDermott opened the batting for Australia. But McDermott (9) once again fell prey to Maheesh Theekshana.

After taking the first wicket the Lankans were desperate to take another wicket. Aaron Finch who had just come out to bat got one hit straight onto the pads which forced



Sri Lanka to take an unsuccessful review. Finch and Agar struggled to score runs and Australia finished the powerplay with only 30 runs on the board.

Finch became victim of a short ball from Lahiru Kumara as he lost his wicket in the seventh over. Agar (26 from 31) on the other end was struggling to find boundaries and in

a desperate attempt to find one, he top-edged one straight into the hands of the mid-off fielder.

After taking wickets of the top three, the Sri Lankans looked to have control of the game and once again the responsibility came on the shoulders of the Australian middle-order batters to take their team across the line.

Brief scores :

Sri Lanka 139/8 in 20 overs (Pathum Nissanka 46, Kusal Mendis 27; Jhye Richardson 2-20) lost to Australia 143/4 in 18.1 overs (Glenn Maxwell 48 not out, Josh Inglis 40; Lahiru Kumara 2-22) by 6 wickets

PVL: Ajithlal's power-packed performance helps Calicut Heroes clinch thriller in Kerala Derby

Hyderabad | Agencies

The Calicut Heroes kept their semi-final hopes alive after defeating Kochi Blue Spikers 15-12, 15-9, 9-15, 9-15, 15-11 in the Prime Volleyball League at the Gachibowli Indoor Stadium here on Friday. Calicut picked up two points from this match and Calicut Heroes' Ajithlal C was adjudged the Player of the Match.

The two sides played out a hard-fought contest as they were locked at 7-7 in the final set. However, Abil



Krishnan MP effected two crucial spikes to help the Heroes take the lead at 13-10. Ajithlal pulled off a mag-

nificent spike as the Heroes closed out the final set at 15-11 and walked off the court as winners of the match.

ICC MEN'S T20 WC QUALIFIER A

NEPAL, CANADA EMERGE VICTORIOUS IN OPENING MATCHES



Oman: Nepal and Canada got off to an impressive start in their respective opening Group A matches of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup Qualifier A, here on Friday.

Nepal got the better of hosts Oman in a low-scoring game at the Oman Academy 1 ground while Canada beat Philippines in another clash of the tournament. Canada's Matthew Spoons stroked a 66-ball century (108 not out) and shared a 149-run opening wicket stand with Rayyan Pathan, who hit a 44-ball 73, to lead their side to an imposing 216 runs for the loss of one wicket. Captain Navneet Dhaliwal stayed unbeaten on an 11-ball 26 that was studied with three maximums as they challenged Philippines who are making their debut at the global qualifiers.

In the second match of the day, bowlers had a field day as a low-scoring match between hosts Oman and Nepal. Defending a total of 117, Nepal bowlers, led by their skipper and leg-spinner Sandeep Lamichhane, had the hosts batters at sea as they collapsed to 78 in 17 overs.

Ranji Trophy: Sakibul Gani's triple ton, Sarfaraz Khan double century highlight Day 2

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Bihar batter Sakibul Gani's historic triple ton and Sarfaraz Khan's superb double century were the highlights on Day 2 of the 2021/22 Ranji Trophy on Friday.

With his sensational knock (341 runs off 405), Gani became the first triple centurion of the ongoing Ranji season. He was involved in a mammoth 538-run partnership with Babul Kumar as Bihar posted 686/5 decl against Mizoram.

Babul was unbeaten on 229 when Bihar declared their innings. In reply, Mizoram were 40/3, trailing by 646 runs at the end of day's play.

In another solid batting display of the day, Lalit Yadav's knock of 177 off 287 put Delhi in a position of strength against Tamil Nadu. Starting Day 2 at 45 not out, with Delhi on 291/7, Lalit was involved in a 92-run stand with Vikas Mishra for the ninth wicket, with the latter contributing only 7 of those runs as Yadav faced most of the deliveries to lead Delhi towards a good total.

Meanwhile, Sarfaraz Khan's superb innings of 275 put Mumbai in a strong position in their game against Saurashtra. Starting the day at 263/3, Ajinkya Rahane



and Sarfaraz extended their partnership to 252 before the former was dismissed by Chirag Jani.

On the other hand, Pavan Shah's 219 and useful contributions from the lower order helped Maharashtra post 415 against Assam. Maharashtra started the day at 278/5 with Pavan not out on 165. The 22-year-old opener, making his debut, went on

to notch up a double hundred, with No 8 Satyajeeet Bachhav (52) giving him good support. Assam ended the day at 81/2, trailing by 334 runs. Prabhsimran Singh (123) and Abhishek Sharma (98) were the stars for Punjab on Day 2 as they posted 393/4 after restricting Himachal Pradesh to 354. Himachal, who started the day at 324/6, could only add 30 runs to their overnight

total as Baltej Singh's five-wicket haul helped keep the tail quiet.

In another match of the day, a 213-run opening stand between Faiz Fazal and Sanjay Raghunath helped Vidarbha reply strongly after Uttar Pradesh were restricted to 301. UP started the day at 268/7 and could add only 34 as Aditya Sarwate bagged a fiver. Fazal (142 not out) and Raghunath (96) provided a strong start with their double-century stand, helping Vidarbha end the day at 256/2.

In another match of the day, Atit Sheth's five-wicket haul powered Baroda's comeback against Bengal on Day 2. Bengal started the day at 24/1 having restricted Baroda to 181 on the opening day. But Seth's fine bowling, well-backed by Lukman Meriwala's three wickets, helped Baroda shoot down Bengal for 88. Baroda went into stumps at 144/5, leading by 237 runs.

Meanwhile, Arzan Nagwaswalla's five wicket haul helped Gujarat restrict Madhya Pradesh to 274 at the Saurashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Rajkot. Gujarat were 244/6 in reply, with Priyank Panchal, Het Patel and Manprit Juneja scoring half-centuries while Ishwar Pandey bagged three wickets. Needing 129 for victory, Jhathishgarh were well-placed at 62/2 at stumps.



I'VE NEVER APED ANYONE: AJAY DEVGN

He has ruled the silver screen for over three decades and is now set to step into the digital world with the upcoming series 'Rudra - The Edge of Darkness', an Indian adaptation of the Idris Elba-starrer 'Luther'.

Durga Chakravarty | New Delhi

Bollywood superstar Ajay Devgn does not worry about comparisons between the two as he says he has never aped anyone.

The 52-year-old star revealed the reason to correspondent on why he chose 'Rudra - The Edge of Darkness' by Rajesh Mapuskar for his digital debut.

Helmed by ace director Rajesh Mapuskar, this riveting psychological crime drama. The six-episode series is an Indian rendition of the globally successful British series, 'Luther'.

The series has a dark and complex narrative that is an idiosyncratic race-against-the-



clock thriller delving into the psyche of highly-intelligent criminals and the detective who hunts them. Since it is a remake of 'Luther', comparisons would follow.

Does that come as an added pressure?

Ajay said that it is a "re-imagined Indian version" of 'Luther'.

The actor added: "I like the original and I liked Idris Elba in it. As far as comparisons go, I have never aped anyone. After 30 years of acting, you can only be yourself. So, it's ridiculous to draw parallels. But I can hardly change the way people think. It's their prerogative."

Ajay feels no pressure about his work in the upcoming series.



Nushratt Bharuccha on 'living a suitcase life'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Nushratt Bharuccha has been juggling between the sets of her upcoming projects and has a tight-packed schedule. She says she literally has been living a suitcase life since the past few months.

Her upcoming projects include 'Ram Setu', 'Janhit Mein Jaari', 'Chhorii 2', 'Hurdang' and 2 unannounced projects. The actress even took to her social media recently to share a behind-the-scene picture and video from her song shoot. Speaking about her packed schedule, Nushratt says, "I've literally been living a suitcase life since the past few months. I recently had finished dubbing for 'Janhit Mein Jaari' in Mumbai, after which I went to Hyderabad, for shooting for a song sequence, following a brief shoot schedule for 'Ram Setu'. Post that I'm back to another set, of an unannounced project."

GREAT TO SEE FEMALE CHARACTERS BEING WRITTEN WITH EMPATHY: SANYA MALHOTRA

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Ever since her debut in Bollywood with 'Dangal' in 2016, Sanya Malhotra has played myriad roles on-screen which are close to reality. She says unless new generation of actresses question 'stereotype' and demand to change the image of women in cinema, the shift will not happen. After her debut, Sanya has appeared in films like 'Pataakha', 'Photograph', 'Pagglai' and 'Meenakshi Sundareswar' to name a few. In a conversation with reporter Sanya said: "I think the kind of character I have acted on-screen so far, as an audience I want to see them because they are the women I have grown up seeing! Whether it is Jyoti, Sandhya, eenaakshi...we are those women. The good thing is, writers are now writing them with empathy and not with sympathy." She added that as an audience, she is "demanding the right representation of women on-screen." "Sanya will next be seen in 'Love Hostel', which revolves around a young couple Ashu and Jyoti who got married in an inter-faith relationship. As it was against the will of their parents, they had to elope, and eventually, the parents of the girl's family decided to run after their lives



'MITHYA': PRETENTIOUS BUT ENGAGING NOIR THRILLER

FILM REVIEW

TROY RIBEIROY

(Streaming on Zee5)

Direction: Rohan Sippy
Duration: Approximately 35 min
utes per episode (Six episodes)

Cast: Huma Qureshi, Avantika Dassani, Parambrata Chatterjee, Rajit Kapoor, Avantika Akerkar, Samir Soni, Naina Sareen, Krishna Bisht, K.C. Shankar, Bishakha Thapa

Ratings: **1/2



This six-episode series meaning, "false or lies," is an intriguing noir crime thriller that depicts the aftereffects of trauma taking place within the mind of a troubled woman.

Leaden and bleak like the winters in a hill station, Mithya appears gloomy and trite but beneath its surface is an engaging thriller mounted in a pretentious manner.

With its characters quoting from literature and poetry, there are many a line that appears superfluous, a by-product of contrived dialogues in the screenplay. This is especially evident when Juhi, a professor of Hindi literature, before giving an assignment to her students on "Tathya, Satya and

Kathya," which means Fact, Truth and Fabrication (Story), tells them, in science and history, there are only lies and truth, but in literature, the truth has many facets.

The facts begin with; while lying in bed with her husband Neil (Parambrata), after a dispassionate session of what was supposed to be an intimate moment, Juhi looks into the ceiling only to notice a spider weaving a web. The spider and its web are subtle metaphors to Juhi and her universe.

Juhi's web gets complicated when she accuses her student Rhea Rajguru, the daughter of one of the college trustees, of plagiarising.

Rhea's plagiarised assignment is just a Macguffin that allows Rhea to manipulate Neil and Juhi so that she can reveal the dark hidden truth that has been haunting her.

Most of this series pleasures come from its innate taut story, but the many feints and dodges are a killjoy. Leading in the first episode with Juhi fascinating about her colleague Vishal (Indraneil Sengupta) before going to her class, seems like a half-baked subplot. At the start of the second episode, the doctor suggests that Juhi can not conceive because of Neil. But later on in the same episode, the blame game inadvertently shifts gear on Juhi, and by the

end of the series, Juhi miraculously conceives without an IVF treatment.

Also, later on, somewhere in the fifth episode, an unwarranted, misleading telephonic conversation between Sharmistha (Naina Sareen) and Juhi seems like an afterthought of the series' creative team, to throw the audience off-balance. Similarly, scenes between Rhea and Arun, aka Ronnie (Krishna Bisht), the guard of her hostel, are a tease.

There's some good casting. With an author-backed noir role, Avantika Dassani, in her debut performance, is sincere and projects the right mix. As Rhea, a figure dependent upon control, Avantika plays her part of menace, intrigue, and scheming minx with gusto- and conviction. She holds her steed amongst ace colleagues. Huma Qureshi as the traumatised Juhi, Parambrata Chatterjee as her concerned densely mindless husband, Rajat Kapoor and Avantika Akerkar as Juhi's parents - Anand and Sudha, Samir Soni as Rhea's father Rajguru, Indraneil Sengupta and Naina Sareen as Juhi's colleagues, K.C. Shankar as the investigating police officer Ajeet and Bishakha Tapa as his assistant Sunanda, are all fabulous actors living in the skin of their characters.

The series ends on a cliff-hanger subtly promising to return with season 2.

Krystle D'souza on sharing screen space with Big B, Emraan Hashmi



Krystle D'souza got an opportunity to star alongside Bollywood personalities Amitabh Bachchan and Emraan Hashmi in the film 'Chehre', which is all set to have a television premiere.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The actress says she would have never thought that she would do her debut film with the cine icon.

Directed by Rumi Jafry, 'Chehre' is a suspense thriller. It narrates the story of a young man who meets his fate in a series of butterfly effects. The courtroom drama also stars Annu Kapoor, Raghuvir Yadav and Dhritiman Chatterjee in pivotal roles. Speaking about her experience of work-

ing with Big B and Emraan Hashmi, Krystle said: "I would have never thought that I would do my debut film with the legend Amitabh Bachchan himself. It was an absolute dream come true for me as there is so much to learn from him. He had a very warm and welcoming demeanour and even introduced himself to me on our first shoot day.

The actress revealed that she "still gets goosebumps thinking of that day".

DHARMENDRA, KIRRON KHER ENACT A SCENE FROM 'SHOLAY'



Mumbai: Bollywood's 'He-Man' Dharmendra will be seen teaching actress Kirron Kher how to act like Basanti from 'Sholay' on the talent-based reality show 'India's Got Talent'.

During the show, the veteran actor, Dharmendra and Kirron enact a scene where Veeru flirts with Basanti in 'Sholay'. The actress blushes and says that she is always shy in front of Dharmendra.

Talking about the moment, Kirron says: "I was shy when I worked with him (Dharmendra) back in the old days and I am still the same 'shy Kirron' now. Nothing's changed and it felt like I was reliving those past."

'India's Got Talent' judged by Shilpa Shetty Kundra, Kirron Kher, Badshah and Manoj Muntashir airs on Sony Entertainment Television.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Ananya Pandey