



absolute india

NATION > 02

Mamata thanks people after resounding victory in ...



HOLLYWOOD > 06

Ariana DeBose to play Calypso in 'Kraven the Hunter'...



SPORTS > 07

Shreyas Iyer jumps to 18th after T20I success against Sri Lanka...

RUSSIA UNLEASHES HELL

MARIUPOL, A UKRAINIAN PORT CITY ON THE BLACK SEA, HAS COME UNDER HEAVY BOMBARDMENT BY RUSSIAN TROOPS SURROUNDING IT - WITH THE DEPUTY MAYOR SAYING THE BARRAGE HAS KEPT UP FOR 15 HOURS NON-STOP WITH HUNDREDS DEAD, WHILE THE MAYOR SAID A 'FULL-SCALE GENOCIDE' IS UNDERWAY, DAILY MAIL REPORTED. MEANWHILE KHARKIV, HUNDREDS OF MILES TO THE NORTH, ALSO CAME UNDER ATTACK BY MISSILES THAT DESTROYED GOVERNMENT AND POLICE BUILDINGS. THE CITY, UKRAINE'S SECOND LARGEST, WAS ALSO HIT BY HEAVY STRIKES IN THE NIGHT WHICH SEEMED TO BE TARGETING AN AIRFIELD. IT IS A DARK SIGN OF THINGS TO COME FOR CITIES SUCH AS KYIV AS VLADIMIR PUTIN'S TROOPS, WHO WERE HANDED A SERIES OF HEAVY DEFEATS CARRYING OUT PRECISION STRIKES IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE WAR, SWITCH TO BRUTE-FORCE TACTICS IN AN ATTEMPT TO CARVE OUT A BLOODY VICTORY. CHERNIHIV, IN THE NORTH EAST, AND SUMY, IN THE EAST, HAVE ALSO BEEN SURROUNDED AND ARE AT RISK OF BEING STRUCK WHILE KHERSON, ANOTHER CITY IN THE SOUTH, WAS CAPTURED BY RUSSIAN TROOPS AFTER GETTING CUT OFF.

AROUND 17,000 INDIAN NATIONALS HAVE LEFT UKRAINE BORDER

New Delhi: Around 17,000 Indian nationals have left war-torn Ukraine through its different borders since the Indian Embassy in Ukraine issued advisories, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Wednesday. Ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said, that the Embassy in Kiev has been asked to set up a temporary office in Lviv to facilitate border crossing by Indian nationals. Bagchi added that an advisory has been issued by the Indian Embassy urging Indian nationals to leave Kharkiv by 6 p.m. local time based on "information from Russia", adding that they should take any method to leave, including "on foot". "We have issued this advisory based on inputs from the Russian side. We haven't chosen the time. We haven't chosen the location," he said. He also expressed deep condolences over the death of Chandan Jindal, an Indian student from Barnala in Punjab, who died in Ukraine of natural causes.



RUSSIA CONTROLS EUROPE'S LARGEST NUCLEAR PLANT

New Delhi: Russia has informed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that its military forces have taken control of the territory around Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (NPP), Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi said on Wednesday. In an official letter to the Director General dated March 1, the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the International Organizations in Vienna also said personnel at the plant continued their "work on providing nuclear safety and monitoring radiation in normal mode of operation. The radiation levels remain normal." The Zaporizhzhia plant is the largest of Ukraine's NPP sites with six out of the country's 15 nuclear energy reactors.

DOMESTIC PETROL, DIESEL PRICES TO SKY ROCKET

New Delhi: The Russia-Ukraine crisis led global hike in crude oil prices is expected to push India's domestic prices of petrol and diesel by Rs 20-22 per litre. However, an excise duty cut may dampen the impact on petrol and diesel prices to an extent, but not entirely. The crisis as well as fears of lower supplies have pushed Brent crude oil price to nearly an 8-year high on Wednesday. On Wednesday, the Brent-indexed crude oil prices rose to over \$111 per barrel.

DOMESTIC WHEAT, SUNFLOWER OIL PRICES SET TO RISE

New Delhi: Continuing hostilities between Russia and Ukraine are set to impact the domestic selling prices of wheat and sunflower oil. Both countries produce massive quantities of wheat, while Ukraine is one of the world's largest sunflower seeds exporters. Though India is self-sufficient in wheat, it does import some quantities of high grade grain, analysts said. In terms of sunflower seeds, India is heavily dependent on Ukrainian and Russian imports. Imports are a relatively cheaper option as India's sunflower seed production is constantly hovering close to 60,000 tonnes for the last couple of years.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The mayor of Kiev has warned the residents that Russian forces are moving in on Ukraine's capital and has urged people to stay indoors and prepare to defend the city, BBC reported. So far Kiev has resisted Russian incursion attempts.

An armoured Russian convoy stretching 40 miles is approaching from the city's north, and analysts believe it could be there to provide support for an invasion attempt from the west, BBC reported. Military expert Dr Jack Watling says the

timing and manner of the Russian attack on Kiev is critical. He says Russians will want to "whittle down" the resistance before they commit their forces. Watling says there is evidence of low morale among Russian troops, citing lost and confused advance units - and their initial surprise at coming under fire from Ukrainians. But he says the effect of low morale will diminish as Russian troops come together to fight in larger formations, as their mission becomes clearer and as Ukrainians begin to run out of ammunition, BBC reported.

96.8% adults received first dose of Covid vax, 81.3% second, Centre to SC

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Centre on Wednesday informed the Supreme Court that 96.8 percent of India's adult population have been administered with first dose of the Covid vaccine and 81.3 percent have been administered the second dose. Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhatti, representing the Centre, submitted before a bench of Justices L. Nageswara Rao and B.R. Gavai that 177,50,86,335 (177.5 crore) total vaccines have been administered.



In the adult population, 96.8 percent of the population (90,92,27,350) has been covered with the first dose, and 81.3 percent of the population (76,35,65,779) has been covered with the second dose. For the population between 15-18 years of age, 74 percent (5,47,94,459) have been covered with the first dose, and 37.1 percent (2,74,87,370) with the second dose. The precaution dose numbers for the adult population amount to 2,00,11,377. The figures are based on data collated on February 28. The top court was hearing a plea by Jacob Puliyel challenging vaccine mandates issued

by various state governments and seeking direction to also disclose post vaccination data regarding adverse events. Advocate Prashant Bhushan, representing Puliyel, a former member of the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation, contended that a person's fundamental right to not take vaccine cannot be eclipsed by the government only by saying that person not taking vaccine will pose a clear threat to public health. Bhushan said: "Even, I had Covid. But, I have not taken the vaccine. I have decided not to take the vaccine, come what may."

CENTRE EXTENDS SCHEME UNDER REHABILITATION PROGRAM TILL 2026

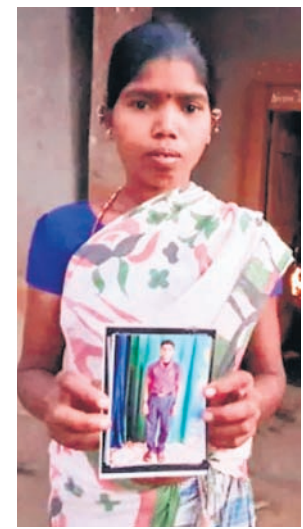
New Delhi: The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on Wednesday approved the proposal for continuation of the seven existing programmes under the umbrella scheme 'Relief and Rehabilitation of Migrants and Repatriates' till March 31, 2026 with a total outlay of Rs 1,452 crore. The approval will ensure that assistance under the umbrella scheme continues to reach beneficiaries through MHA. The scheme enables migrants and repatriates, who have suffered on account of displacement, to earn a reasonable income and to facilitate their inclusion in mainstream economic activities. These schemes provide economic relief to the displaced families of Pakistan Occupied Areas of Jammu and Kashmir and Chhamb, Sri Lankan Tamil refugees, Brus lodged in relief camps in Tripura and to enhance relief to 1984 anti-Sikh riot victims. With these schemes, the financial assistance and other facilities will be continued to provide economic reliefs to the families of affected civilian victims of terrorist violence including militancy, insurgency, communal, Left Wing Extremism violence and cross border firing and victims of mine and IED blasts on Indian Territory while the 'grants-in-aid' to the Central Tibetan Relief Committee (CTRC), the officials of the MHA said.

Body Of Tribal Man Preserved For 2 Years As Evidence Of "Fake Encounter"

Dantewada | Agencies

Two years after his death, the remains of 22-year-old Badru Madavi lie preserved in a village in Chhattisgarh in a large pit using herbs, salt and medicinal oil wrapped in white shroud and plastic. Badru was killed in a joint operation by the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the District Reserve Guards (DRG) of Chhattisgarh Police on March 19, 2020, NDTV reported.

Security forces claimed Badru was the in-charge of a Maoist division called the Gungalur Area Committee and an expert in Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) with a cash reward of Rs 2 lakh on his head. But the residents of Gampur village in Dantewada, about 360 km south of capital Raipur, believe otherwise and hope they will get justice someday after an official inquiry. Badru Mandvi's wife says she is still waiting for justice. And although much of his remains have now decomposed, the villagers are adamant about keeping the body preserved in a pit near the village crematorium. Sannu Mandavi, Badru's brother, said he was out with him to collect Mahua flowers that are used as food and make a country liquor when he was shot. But senior police officer P Sunderraj said on March 19, 2020, an encounter took place between Maoist cadres and a joint party of CRPF and DRG. Badru's family and other villagers, however, refute the allegation of Badru being a Maoist.



But the residents of Gampur village in Dantewada, about 360 km south of capital Raipur, believe otherwise and hope

TAMIL NADU TO RECEIVE VERY HEAVY RAINFALL ON THURSDAY: IMD

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The low pressure area that had formed over southeast Bay of Bengal and adjoining areas of south Andaman Sea and equatorial Indian Ocean has already formed into a well-marked low pressure area and is likely to intensify into a depression by Thursday, bringing heavy downpour in Tamil Nadu and neighbouring areas, the IMD said on Wednesday night. The well-marked low pressure area over central parts of south Bay of Bengal and adjoining equatorial Indian Ocean and the associated cyclonic circulation extending up to 5.8

kms above mean sea level continued to persist at 9 p.m. on Wednesday, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. It is very likely to concentrate into a depression by March 3 and very likely to move west north-westwards towards Sri Lanka coast during next 24 hours and towards Tamil Nadu coast during subsequent 24 hours, it added. Light to moderate rainfall/thunder shower at most places with heavy to very heavy rainfall at isolated places is very likely over Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, and Karaikal during March 3-5 with extremely heavy rainfall at isolated places on March 4.

Chola era bracelet unearthed at Maligaimedu in TN

▶ THE BRACELET WEIGHING 7.920 GM WAS FOUND AT A DEPTH OF 170 CM INSIDE THE A3/2 QUADRANT. THE BRACELET, WHICH MEASURED 4.9 CM IN LENGTH AND 4 MM IN THICKNESS, WAS FOUND IN A BROKEN CONDITION AND ONLY ONE-FOURTH OF THE ORNAMENT COULD BE EXCAVATED. IT IS THE FIRST PRECIOUS OBJECT UNEARTHED DURING THE SECOND PHASE OF EXCAVATION.

▶ AT KEEZHADI IN THE SIVAGANGA DISTRICT OF TAMIL NADU EXCAVATIONS HAD EARLIER UNEARTHED CREATIVE ARTWORK OF WELLS WITH MULTIPLE TERRACOTTA RINGS AND ARCHAEOLOGISTS HAVE STATED THAT THESE RING WELLS WERE MORE THAN 2000 YEARS OLD.

Chennai | Agencies

A Chola-period bracelet made of gold and copper has been unearthed during the second phase of excavation by the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology at Maligaimedu near Gangaikondacholapuram. Officials of the Department of Archaeology told reporter: "Only one-fourth of the bracelet could be found and the ornament clearly indicates the wealth of the Chola dynasty." The officials are confident that during further excavations during the coming months, more similar treasures would come out and that this would clearly authenticate the economic prosperity and cultural wealth of the Chola dynasty. Gangaikondacholapuram was the capital of King Rajendra Chola I.



lar treasures would come out and that this would clearly authenticate the

economic prosperity and cultural wealth of the Chola dynasty.

Gangaikondacholapuram was the capital of King Rajendra Chola I.

During the first phase of excavations at Maligaimedu in 2021, the structural remains of a royal palace in the form of a brick structure and a large number of decorated roof tiles were unearthed. The excavations at Maligaimedu near Gangaikondacholapuram had earlier unearthed copper coins, ivory and copper objects, iron nails, glass beads and bangles, decorated stones, and Chinese ware. Archaeologists attribute the presence of Chinese ware like porcelain from the site as an indication of the region's trade with China.



CONGRESS TO TAKE HELP OF RTI ACT TO CORNER BJP

The Madhya Pradesh Congress has decided to use the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005 as a tool to corner the BJP led state government and to strengthen its position ahead of the state Assembly polls to be held in 2023.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh Congress has decided to use the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005 as a tool to corner the BJP led state government and to strengthen its position ahead of the state Assembly polls to be held in 2023.



had brought to empower the citizens of the country. The party has decided to use this powerful Act to expose the BJP. Party workers will access the information through RTI from different departments and will raise the issue in the public to expose the corruption."

corruption in the state. Being the Opposition, it is the duty of the Congress to bring out the reality before the people and we will do it," said KK Mishra, another senior Congress leader in the state.

CM PAYS HOMAGE TO NAND KUMAR SINGH CHOUHAN

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan remembered former MP and former State President of Bharatiya Janata Party, Nand Kumar Singh Chouhan on his death anniversary. Chouhan paid floral tributes by garlanding his picture in the auditorium at his residence office.

CM Chouhan has said in his tweet that - "I pay my respects at the feet of ideal worker, efficient organiser, public leader who holds a special place in the heart of the masses late Nand Kumar Singh Chouhan 'Nandu Bhaiya' ji on his death anniversary. The true affection and respect of all of us for Nandu Bhaiya will be that we all fulfil his unfulfilled dreams. He is with us through his virtuous thoughts and deeds and will always remain so."

Disposal process of collected minor forest produce must be simplified: Vijay Shah



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Forest Minister Kunwar Vijay Shah has said that the process of disposal of Minor Forest Produce collected on Minimum Support Price should be simplified. This will not only increase the income of the state minor forest produce but also benefit the poor sections involved in this work.

Shah directed that powers should be delegated at the district level in the auction process of the collected minor forest produce, so that

the auction process of minor forest produce can be completed within the time-limit. Managing Director of State Minor Forest Produce Pushkar Singh told that the collection work of Minor Forest Produce is being done in the state under "Minimum Support Price Scheme" sponsored by Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs. So far, Minimum Support Price of 32 minor forest produce have been declared.

Processing and Research Center, Barkheda Pathani are very good. He directed that a workshop should be organized on a large scale after testing this new product. Shah said that the products should be launched after reliability testing of both these products and completion of other procedures. It was told in the meeting that with the launch of these two products in the market, its marketing will reach the top level. Principal Secretary Forest Ashok Varnwal and Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief of Forest Force RK Gupta and other members of the committee were present.

CM Shivraj Singh Remembers Sarojini Naidu

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan remembered Bharat Kokila Sarojini Naidu on her death anniversary. Chouhan paid floral tributes by garlanding her picture in the auditorium at his residence office.

Naidu led many national movements and also went to jail. Like a brave warrior, she roamed from village to village and kept igniting the spirit of patriotism. Her statements shook the hearts of the people and inspired them to sacrifice their everything for the country. She was a multilingual person and gave her speeches in English, Hindi, Bengali or Gujarati depending on the region. Speaking in English in the meeting at London, she had mesmerized all the audience present there. She passed away on 2 March 1949. The Government of India also issued a postage stamp in her honor.

Center is getting better cooperation in infrastructure development of the state: Gopal Bhargava

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Public Works Minister Gopal Bhargava said that the Government of India is continuously strengthening the state's infrastructure. In this sequence, on Wednesday, the Union Ministry of Road and Highways has approved Rs 594 crore for the upgradation of 119 km of national highways in the state.



section of National Highway 45, which is part of the proposed Narmada Expressway. In addition, an amount of Rs 353 crore has been approved for upgradation of about 59 km on the Jeerapur to Pachore

Principal Secretary Public Works Neeraj Mandloi informed that the construction of Narmada Expressway is the first priority of the state government for the all-round development of Mahakaushal area. He informed that 520 km area of National Highway 45 passes through Madhya Pradesh. In the proposed Narmada Expressway, approval has been given for the upgradation of 61 km stretch from Shahpura section to Dindori of National Highway 45 between Amarkantak to Jabalpur.

logical and tourism benefits from this. The Principal Secretary informed that approval has been given for upgradation of 59 km route on the Jeerapur to Pachore section of National Highway 752-C. 137 km part of National Highway 752-C passes through Madhya Pradesh, the upgradation work of which is going on in different sections. The approval of Pachore from Jeerapur has been given today. Work is being done from Pachore to Shujalpur, Shujalpur to Ashta and Ashta bypass. With its upgradation, the Agra-Mumbai corridor, Bhopal-Devas highway will be able to connect with each other. Rajgarh, Agar-Malwa and Sehore districts will get its benefit.

Work with determination in "Saghan Mission Indradhanush Abhiyan:" Choudhary

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Public Health and Family Welfare Minister Prabhuram Choudhary has said that like Covid-19, make a remarkable achievement in routine vaccination. Work with a pledge of success in the "Saghan Mission Indradhanush" campaign being conducted for the districts with less achievement in routine vaccination to vaccinate within the time-limit.



Choudhary on Wednesday launched the "Saghan Mission Indradhanush" campaign. He was addressing a workshop organised in connection with the preparations. Choudhary said that the State has made a remarkable achievement by achieving almost 100 percent target in Covid-19 vaccination. Its positive results are clearly visible in the third wave of Corona. Most of the infected got cured at home. Very few infected felt the need for treatment. Choudhary said that the Health Department did remarkable hard work in the second wave of the Corona epidemic. Under these adverse conditions, some dis-

employees of the Health Department as well as the common citizens to cooperate in the campaign. He said that on the day of the campaign, the common citizens must motivate their families and neighbourhood children and pregnant women for vaccination. Complete vaccination provides protection against 12 life-threatening diseases. He asked the 70 Block Medical Officers of the respective districts to fulfill the motto of the campaign "We will reach those who did not reach us". In the campaign, complete immunization of children and pregnant women who have missed or incompletely immunized in routine immunization is to be done.

CM PLANTED KARANJ SAPLING IN SMART GARDEN

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Wednesday planted a sapling of Karanj in Smart Garden. Chouhan is planting saplings every day as per his resolve. In February 2022, CM Chouhan completed one year while planting saplings every day. Continuing the sequence of plantation, Chouhan has continued to plant saplings every day in the subsequent days. The Karanj planted today is considered important in Ayurvedic medicine. Karanj is also used in religious works.

5-yr jail term to six for fraud in PMT-10 conducted by Vyapam

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A Special CBI Court in Madhya Pradesh has awarded five years rigorous imprisonment to six persons in a case related to the Pre-Medical Test 2010 conducted by Vyapam and also imposed a fine of Rs 3700 on them. The Special Judge, Vyapam cases, Gwalior (Madhya Pradesh), awarded the jail term to Parvez Khan, Pradeep Upadhyay, Rajesh Baghel, Awadhesh Kumar, Hari Narain Singh and Ved Ratan Singh. The CBI had registered the case on December 29, 2015 following a Supreme Court order.

Initially the case was lodged with the Cantonment Police Station in Guna area of MP. It was alleged that accused Pradeep Kumar Upadhyay and Parvez Khan alias Parvez Khan appeared in place of original candidates Awadhesh Singh and Rajesh Baghel respectively in the PMT examination held on June 20, 2010, at the Govt Post Graduation college, Guna. "Pradeep Kumar and Parvez Khan were caught by the investigators from the respective examination halls while they were appearing in place of the original candidates (Awadhesh Kumar and Rajesh Baghel) respectively," said the CBI official. The CBI learnt during the investigation that Rajesh Baghel and Awadhesh Kumar applied for PMT-2010 in offline mode through middleman Harnarain Singh giving a common address to facilitate delivery of the TAC (Test Admit Card). The CBI traced Parvez Alam and arrested him in 2017. He was examined. His specimen signature/handwriting and thumb impression as well as the specimen signature/handwriting and thumb impression of Pradeep Kumar Upadhyay were obtained and sent to the CFSL for an expert's opinion. It was found that the candidates Rajesh Baghel and Awadhesh Kumar did not appear in the examination. After investigation, a supplementary chargesheet was filed in August 2017 against the accused. The trial court found the accused guilty and convicted them.

BIODIVERSITY ORIENTATION PROGRAMME IN SCHOOLS OF CM RISE SCHEME

In a series of initial efforts in this direction, the Department of School Education and the World Wide Fund for Nature India (WWF India) are organising a Biodiversity Orientation Programme for the students of classes 6 to 8.



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Under the CM RISE scheme, various activities will be conducted for the all round development of the students along with world class facilities in the schools. In a series of initial efforts in this direction, the Department of School Education and the World Wide Fund for Nature India (WWF India) are organising a Biodiversity Orientation Programme for the students of classes 6 to 8 in selected 6 CM Rise Scheme schools of Bhopal district. In Government Higher Secondary School, Nishatpura, selected for the orientation pro-

gramme, students were explained about biodiversity and 50 students along with 4 teachers were taken on a tour of Van Vihar National Park. During the tour, everyone was explained the need of wildlife and the importance of conservation. Director of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh State Office of WWF India Sangeeta Saxena, District Education Officer Nitin Saxena, Principal of Government Higher Secondary School Govindpura Sandhya Namundiya, Ajay Mishra and Shashank Dubey of WWF Madhya Pradesh were present in the programme.

Main Objective of the National Education Policy Is to Strengthen the Skills of Students: Yadav

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Higher Education Minister Mohan Yadav said that the main objective of the National Education Policy is to strengthen the skills of the students along-with quality education. As well as promoting employability along with education, the education policy aims to encourage creative thinking and logical judgment and the spirit of innovation in the students. Yadav was reviewing the implementation of National Education Policy-2020 in Mantralaya on Wednesday with the officers of various departments. Yadav said that the National Education Policy provides a comprehensive framework for integrating vocational training with primary education to higher education in rural and urban India. For field projects, internship, apprenticeship and community engagement to students on vocational subjects, the coordination with Farmer Welfare



and Agriculture, Industrial Policy and Investment Promotion, Tourism, Cottage and Village Industries, Horticulture and Food Processing, Panchayat and Rural Development and Women and Child Development departments is essential. The Higher Education Minister said that such work should

be done so that the next session is completely organised. Additional Chief Secretary, Higher Education Shailendra Singh directed the officers present of various departments to prepare department wise portal and appoint departmental nodal officers. He said that this would facilitate the

students as to whom they would have to establish contact with. Shri Singh said that 8 to 10 industries of every district should be identified. Design courses for internships with the officials of the Higher Education Department. He said that all the departments should also mention on their portal which organization focuses on which works and on what subject. The concerned departments should also suggest what should be the subjects of the vocational courses. The Tourism Department should also tie up with private hotels. Additional Chief Secretary Shri Singh directed the officers of the Higher Education Department to collect all the information by creating a central portal. Commissioner, Higher Education Deepak Singh and officers of the departments of Panchayat and Rural Development, Women and Child Development, Micro, Small and Medium Industries, Farmers Welfare and Agriculture etc. were present.



EDITOR'S SPECS

Varanasi: Ready for final phase of polling

Rebel leaders of the Bahujan Samaj Party are posing a major problem for the party in the last two phases of elections in Uttar Pradesh. BSP president Mayawati has clearly instructed her party cadres to 'teach the rebels a lesson and ensure their defeat' but it is easier said than done. Most of the senior rebel leaders of the BSP are contesting on SP tickets now. Ambedkar Nagar, which is regarded as a BSP bastion, now has Lalji Varma, Ram Achal Rajbhar and Tribhuvan Dutt - all BSP rebels -- contesting elections from the district, known as the birthplace of socialist Ram Manohar Lohia, on a Samajwadi Party (SP) symbol. Lalji Varma, a Kurmi and five-time MLA, was the BSP's legislature party leader in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly. Ram Achal Rajbhar, also a five-time MLA, is a former BSP state president and a key OBC face in the region. Tribhuvan Dutt is a Dalit, is a former two-time MLA and a former Lok Sabha MP. The fourth SP candidate, Rakesh Pandey, is the father of sitting BSP MP from Ambedkar Nagar, Ritesh Pandey but he is contesting on a SP ticket. The defection of these BSP leaders to SP has undoubtedly bolstered the prospects of Samajwadi Party in the district. The SP hopes to challenge the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the cost of the BSP in Ambedkar Nagar, where four out of its five candidates are former BSP leaders. Mayawati, at a recent rally, explained to voters why she had to 'throw them out' of the BSP. She accused the rebels of encouraging factionalism in the party. The BSP, and the BJP, are now working overtime to ensure the defeat of Swami Prasad Maurya, another BSP rebel, who joined and quit the BJP.

GERMANY'S MILITARY RENAISSANCE

Asad Mirza

After a continuous barrage of criticism for overlooking the Russian aggression dubbed as itsnaivete, Germany has announced new military plans, which might change the regional and global geopolitics dimensions once again. In a historic announcement to the parliament, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced on Sunday additional funding of 100 billion euro to boost Germany's armed forces, besides a sustained increase in its defence spending over the coming years. The country, which one could say was at the centre stage of the flared up Russian-Ukrainian crisis, has taken the world community by surprise after its latest announcement to boost up its military power. Germany was at the centre of the flared-up conflict between Russia and Ukraine as the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia to Germany, bypassing Ukraine, played a major role in flaring up the sentiments on both sides. It was responsible for revenue loss for Ukraine in the first place and secondly it was giving sleepless nights to western and particular American political, geopolitical and military experts and advisers as they could foresee a future with increased Russian influence and it becoming one of the most dominant energy supplier to Germany and Western Europe. In fact Vladimir Putin's expansionist policies have unintentionally achieved what Western allies have long struggled for, to get Germany act with an assertive foreign policy and increase its military might despite its World War guilt. **German Plans** Olaf Scholz received a standing ovation from the Bundestag, when on Sunday he announced a dramatic hike in Germany's military spending after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The speech is being heralded as historic as it marks a paradigm shift in German foreign and defence policy. Scholz said Germany from now on would invest more than 2 per cent of its economic output on defence up from around 1.5 per cent currently, after years of resisting pleas from NATO allies to do so, and set up a 100-billion-euro (\$112 billion) fund to re-equip the military. More importantly, as per the American desire, he also outlined plans to reduce



Germany's dependence on Russia for its gas needs, thus increasing hopes that Berlin might consider geo-strategic concerns more in all its trade relations. On Sunday, he announced a 100-billion-euro fund - more than double than its last year's defence budget - to modernise its military, including buying armed drones and new fighter jets, obviously from America significantly. Scholz described the current conflict as "Putin's war", adding that "the requirement is as much diplomacy as possible without being naive". He also assured that Berlin would support its eastern NATO neighbours and stick "with-out ifs or buts to its alliance obligations". **German Renaissance** The latest German move could be termed as a German Renaissance as it has for decades faced calls for playing a more dominant role on the world stage commensurate with its size as Europe's largest economy. Its old policies were reviewed and scrutinised throughout the build-up of the Ukrainian crisis, and some leading commen-

tators, particularly among its strongest ally -- the United States -- used to describe Germany as the weakest link in NATO's western military alliance. The Nord Stream 2 Baltic pipeline from Russia to Germany despite Western allies' concerns that it would undermine the security of traditional transit country Ukraine was supported by the successive German governments. More recently, it resisted calls to cut Russia off the SWIFT global payments system as part of a Western sanctions package, saying it would then struggle to pay for Russian gas. However, in a 180-degree turnaround, Scholz on February 22 suspended the Nord Stream 2 agreement and on February 26 agreed to cut Russia off of SWIFT and said Germany would build up its coal and gas reserves and try to hasten its long-stalled plans to build more LNG terminals. In the past, German military generals had long pleaded for more equipment and the current army chief vented his frustration over the long-running neglect of military readiness on LinkedIn on February 24, a few hours after Russia invaded Ukraine.

German forces were drastically scaled down after the end of the Cold War -- with the number of battle tanks drawn down from more than 3,500 in the 1980s to 225 in 2015. Later, the forces were trained mainly for missions such as in Afghanistan where the adversary was poorly equipped and not an armed force with the most modern weapons. More recently, Germany's new three-way coalition vowed in December, after coming to power, to pursue a more values-based foreign policy reflecting growing anxiety over the rise in authoritarianism worldwide and threats posed by strategic rivals like China. Thorsten Benner of the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) has described the speech as a starting point for a further fundamental re-think as part of Germany's National Security Strategy that will also have to include challenges posed by China seen in tandem with Russia. As some other analysts have termed: Germany has just become a normal power, again.

international

KREMLIN PLANNING TO DECLARE EX-PREZ YANUKOVYCH AS NEW HEAD OF UKRAINE

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Fugitive former Ukraine President Viktor Yanukovich is currently in Minsk, and the Kremlin is currently preparing him for a special operation, according to Ukrainian intelligence. According to one scenario, the Kremlin will try to declare him the "President of Ukraine" there, Ukrainska Pravda reported. The information obtained indicated that the Kremlin may be preparing an informational operation or action to return former President Yanukovich to Ukraine or to publish an appeal on his behalf to the Ukrainian people in the near future, the report added. There are reports emerging that the Russian forces have been shelling Mariupol with various weapons continuously for 12 hours. Vadym Boichenko, Mayor of Mariupol, on the unified TV



and radio broadcast of the Ukrainian media said, "We have been flattened non-stop for 12 hours. The racist-fascist troops are razing my hometown to the ground." According to Boichenko, there has been total destruction of residential infrastructure. There are dead and wounded, but they cannot be taken from houses and apartments due to the ongoing shelling, Ukrainska Pravda reported. At the same time, the mayor thanked the Armed Forces, the National Guard and all defenders of the city who are holding their ground.

THOUSANDS FIGHT TO GET ON TRAINS OUT OF KIEV

New Delhi: A video has shown people's desperate bid to flee Kyiv overnight as explosions struck residential areas and as many as 15,000 troops -- an entire Russian army division -- bore down on Ukraine's capital, Daily Mail reported. Footage from Kyiv station showed hundreds of civilians, some with young children, trying to cram onto an already packed train amid fears that the city could soon be turned into a war zone, the report said. Airstrikes rocked residential suburbs of the capital on Tuesday night as a 40-mile long convoy of Russian military vehicles inched closer, with fears that President Vladimir Putin's troops will soon lay siege to the city. Another convoy was reported to be moving towards Kyiv from the south-east, with plans to encircle it, Daily Mail reported. On Tuesday afternoon, outrage followed an eruption of explosions around the capital's 1,300ft TV tower, built by a ravine where as many as 1,50,000 people were killed by the Nazis -- including 34,000 Jews in two horrific days in 1941 -- during Adolf Hitler's campaign against the Soviet Union. Five people, reportedly a single family walking together, were burned alive in the blasts.



N.Korea's reluctance to forgo nukes could increase amid Ukraine crisis'

Seoul | Agencies

Russia's invasion of Ukraine could further increase North Korea's reluctance to abandon nuclear arms, former US Forces Korea (USFK) chiefs have said, raising the need for Seoul and Washington to beef up their combined readiness. In its monthly newsletter, the Korea-US Alliance Foundation (KUSAF) released a summary of their recent comments on the Ukraine crisis and its ramifications on the Korean Peninsula without identifying them, Yonhap news agency reported. Their comments came amid a view that Russia's attack on the pro-West country last week could be a foretaste of what a weak nation could face in a world of power politics. "The Ukraine situation could further solidify the North's determination against abandoning nuclear arms," the USFK commanders were quoted by KUSAF as saying. The commanders also said

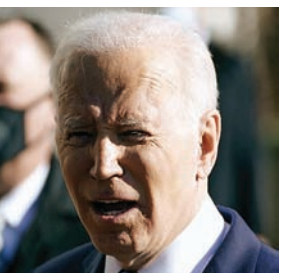


that the Ukraine crisis could be an opportune time for "mischief," stressing the need for South Korea and the US to strengthen their combined training and intelligence capabilities. For the North, the armed conflict in Ukraine could offer a lesson for modern-day warfare combining cyber incursions, information warfare and other maneuvers that proceed under multi-domain operations. But the commanders forecast the current situation in Ukraine will not directly affect the security of the peninsula, while offering a reassuring message: The US support for South Korea in a contingency will not weaken. "Rather, (the US) response to North Korean threats will be swift and sturdy," they said. The North, meanwhile, fired a ballistic missile on Sunday, marking its eighth missile launch since the start of the year. The test came amid concerns the North could fire a long-range rocket under the disguise of a satellite launch or conduct other provocative acts following its veiled threat last month to suspend its voluntary moratorium on nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile tests.

BIDEN ANNOUNCES CLOSURE OF US AIRSPACE TO RUSSIAN PLANES

Washington | Agencies

Washington: President Joe Biden has announced that the US will close its airspace to all Russian planes in response to Moscow's ongoing military operations in Ukraine. Biden made the announcement on Tuesday while delivering his State of the Union address, the first of his presidency, to a joint session of Congress, Xinhua news agency reported. "Tonight I'm announcing that we will join our allies in closing off American airspace to all Russian flights, further isolating Russia and adding additional squeeze on their economy," Biden said. The US move followed similar ones made by the European Union and Canada on Sunday. In retaliation, the Russian aviation authority said Monday that Russia will ban airlines from 36 countries, including the 27 members of the EU, from using the country's airspace. While condemning Russia and reaffirming US support for Ukraine, Biden reiterated in his speech that the US forces "are not engaged and will not engage in the conflict with the Russian forces in Ukraine."



IMF, World Bank to boost financial & policy support to Ukraine

Washington | Agencies

World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has announced that they are working together to support Ukraine on the financing and policy fronts and are urgently increasing that support. IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva and World Bank Group President David Malpass said in a joint statement that commodity prices are being driven higher and "risk further fueling inflation," which hits the poor the hardest, Xinhua news agency reported. "Disruptions in financial markets will continue to worsen should the conflict persist," they said, adding



that the sanctions announced over the last few days will also have a "significant" economic impact. The two institutions are assessing the situation and discussing appropriate policy responses with their international partners. The IMF is responding to Ukraine's request for emergency financing through the Rapid Financing Instrument, which the IMF Board could consider as early as next week. The World Bank Group, meanwhile, is preparing a \$3 billion package of support in the coming months, starting with a fast-disbursing budget support operation for at least \$350 million that will be submitted to the Board for approval this week, followed by \$200 million in fast-disbursing support for health and education.

UKRAINE URGES POLAND, FRANCE, GERMANY TO PROVIDE MORE WEAPONS, AID

Kiev | Agencies

Kiev: Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba has called on the foreign ministers of Poland, France and Germany to increase sanctions pressure on Russia and provide more weapons and financial support to Ukraine. "(I have) met online with Foreign Ministers of the Weimar Triangle of Poland, France and Germany. I urged (them) to step up sanctions pressure on Russia... and provide Ukraine with more weapons, financial and humanitarian support," Kuleba tweeted on Tuesday. Kuleba also said via an online briefing that Ukraine is working with its partners towards various solutions to close the airspace over the country, Xinhua news agency reported.





NCP TOUGHENS STAND, SAYS MALIK WON'T BE FORCED TO QUIT

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Toughening its stance, the Nationalist Congress Party on Wednesday made it clear that its Minister Nawab Malik "will not be forced to resign come whatever may", on the eve of the Maharashtra Legislature Budget Session starting on March 3 (tomorrow, Thursday). State NCP President and Minister Jayant Patil told media persons that the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) made it clear last month -- after Malik was arrested by Enforcement Directorate (ED) on February 23 in an alleged money-laundering case -- that he would continue in the ministry. "Let the Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party create any ruckus in the House... Our stand is unchanged -- No resignation means no resignation," a grim Patil said. Attacking the BJP, he said it has become habitual for the opposition party to hurl false allegations against the government prior to the legislative sessions, demand resignation and then



disrupt the legislature. Patil also said that the MVA is ready to hold the Speaker's election during the session and urged the Opposition to sit across the table and decide. "We shall invite them for the session-eve tea-party as always, but they will boycott it as usual. We appeal to the Opposition to join the tea-party, hold discussions with the to ensure all issues are resolved," Patil exhorted. His comments came against the backdrop of the BJP state President Chandrakant Patil's threat on Tuesday that they would not allow the legislature to function until Malik resigned. NCP President Sharad Pawar has convened a review meeting with all-party ministers this afternoon, followed by a MVA meeting to discuss the major issues likely to figure during the Budget Session. At the evening meeting, all ministers of the Shiv Sena-NCP-Congress will join the discussions even as the BJP sharpens its knives on various issues to corner the MVA government during the session.

CBI to grill Anil Deshmukh in Rs 100cr money laundering case

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has got the permission from a Special Court to record the statement of former Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh in connection with the Rs 100 crore extortion case involving former top Mumbai cop Param Bir Singh. The CBI had recently moved a plea before the special court requesting to grant them permission to record Deshmukh's statements. The CBI will have to visit Arthur Road Jail to record his statement. Deshmukh is currently lodged there. According to the information, the federal probe agency will record his state-

ment for three consecutive days -- March 3, 4 and 5. The CBI has so far recorded the statement of as many as seven persons in the matter. A source said that the seven persons whose statements were recorded were from police. They were reportedly deployed in the security of Anil Deshmukh. Singh had accused Deshmukh for missing his post. He had alleged that it was Deshmukh who was forcing him to collect Rs 100 crore every month from bars and restaurants in Mumbai. He made these allegations when he was removed from the police commissioner post. Deshmukh had denied all the allegations leveled against him. On April 21, 2021, the CBI

had filed an FIR against Deshmukh and had initiated a probe. The raids are in connection with this FIR. The source said that they were scanning the financial transactions of the last three years. The team is also gathering information about the business dealings of Deshmukh. The CBI wants to know about the business associates of Deshmukh. The transactions made between them will be scanned by the team. On November 1, 2021, Deshmukh was placed under arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with Rs 100 crore money laundering case pertaining to the alleged posting and transfer of the officials.

MAHARASHTRA NCP CHIEF MAKES BIG CLAIM

Nawab Malik being framed for calling Aryan Khan innocent'

A meeting with NCP chief Sharad Pawar and other leaders was conducted at Yashwantrao Chavan Centre in Mumbai before of the Maharashtra Budget session

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief and State Minister Jayant Patil on Wednesday said that Aryan Khan was framed in the Cordelia cruise ship drug case and this was brought up by NCP leader Nawab Malik who is now being framed by the central agencies. "Aryan Khan was framed and this was brought up by Nawab Malik and with that many other proofs as a result, now other agencies and people are trying to frame Nawab Malik," Patil told ANI. On Indian students stuck in Ukraine, he said, "I tweeted a while ago requesting the concerned officials to evacuate the students stuck in Ukraine but they are busy in UP Election so they must have forgotten." Ahead of the Maharashtra Budget session, a meeting was held with Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief Sharad Pawar and other leaders at Yashwantrao Chavan Centre in Mumbai.



Covid Restrictions Eased In 14 Districts: Cinema Halls & Restaurants To Function At Full Capacity

90 percent of the eligible population has taken at least one dose of anti-coronavirus vaccines in these districts, said a government notification.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Minister Uddhav Thackeray-led government on Wednesday eased Covid-19 pandemic-related restrictions and allowed shopping complexes, restaurants, cinema halls and theaters to operate at 100 percent capacity in 14 out of 36 districts in Maharashtra. 90 percent of the eligible population has taken at least one dose of anti-coronavirus vaccines in these districts, said a government notification, PTI reported. The government notification added that over 70 percent people are fully vaccinated in these districts. The Covid positivity rate in these areas is less than 10 percent and occupancy of oxygen-supported or ICU beds is less than 40 percent. Covid-19 pandemic-related restrictions have been eased in the districts of Mumbai city, Mumbai suburban district, Pune, Bhandara, Sindhudurg, Nagpur, Raigad, Wardha, Ratnagiri, Satara, Sangli, Gondia, Chandrapur and Kolhapur. The notification said social, sports, entertainment, academic, cultural, religious, political and



festival-linked events, including those related to marriages and funerals and other gatherings and congregations, are now permitted in these districts with attendance at 50 percent of the venue capacity. The District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) will have to be informed if a gathering is expected to be of more than 1,000 persons. The DDMA may impose reasonable restrictions. The attendance at such events for other districts will be capped at 50 percent of the capacity or 200, whichever is less. The notification said all shopping complexes, cinema halls, restaurants and bars, sports complexes, gyms, spas, swimming pools,

religious places, drama theatres, tourist places, entertainment parks etc are allowed to operate with 100 percent capacity in these 14 districts. The state government's decision comes as Maharashtra has witnessed a steady decline in new daily Covid-19 cases. Easing some restrictions, the state government had earlier on January 31 while issuing the guidelines said that swimming pools, water-parks, theatres and restaurants can operate with 50 percent capacity subject to permission of the competent authority in the districts of Mumbai, Pune, Bhandara, Sindhudurg, Raigad, Ratnagiri, Satara, Sangli, Gondia, Kolhapur and Chandrapur.

Maharashtra govt trying to appease a community, says Fadnavis as he demands Nawab Malik's resignation

Maharashtra Leader of the Opposition (LoP) Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday said that the state government is attempting to appease a specific community. Fadnavis also demanded Nawab Malik's resignation.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Opposition leader Devendra Fadnavis has said the state government's support for minister Nawab Malik - who has been arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with a money laundering case - is unfortunate and reiterated that Malik should resign. "For the first time in the country's history, a minister has remained in office despite being arrested for dealing with people accused of

bombings. The state government is supporting him. His transactions have been found with people associated with Dawood Ibrahim. He is being supported by a government whose chief minister is Shiv Sena's President," Fadnavis said. Fadnavis further said, "When allegations were made against Sanjay Rathod, he was asked to resign as a minister. However, Malik has been granted this privilege in order to appease a specific community. But how can we dismiss terror funding so casually? "There are numerous other issues that need to be addressed in the assembly, but the government must

also cooperate. We will protest if they refuse to discuss," he added. Malik was arrested by the ED in a money-laundering case related to a land deal with Sardar Shahwali Khan, convicted for life over the 1993 serial bomb blasts in Mumbai, and Mohammad Salim Patel, who was the driver of Dawood's sister Haseena Parkar. Malik is alleged to have bought 2.80 acres of land at LBS Marg in Kurla for Rs 30 lakh when the market rate was Rs 2,053 per square feet. He allegedly paid Rs 15 lakh to Khan and Rs 5 lakh to Patel. Fadnavis slammed the state government for failing to listen to people's concerns. "Maharashtra had an assembly session that lasted seventeen or eighteen days after a long delay. Our role is to raise the concerns of the people of Maharashtra. However, it is also the responsibility of the ruling party to hold a discussion," he said. Under pressure from the opposition, the university bill was with-

drawn. If the government does the same in this session, we will protest," Fadnavis stated. He had said in the previous session that the power would not be cut, but the power connections are being cut off as if there is a competition. As a result, the farmer is forced to watch the standing crop rot." Devendra Fadnavis also stated that the Sultani crisis has been plaguing farmers for over two years. "The way the Energy Minister is speaking about farmers' electricity bills is insensitive and gives the impression that we are under dictatorial rule. This government has only aided the alcohol industry," Fadnavis said. Farmers in the state have been protesting the Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Limited's suspension of power supply to agricultural consumers (MSEDCL). The farmers have also alleged that there are discrepancies in the power bills, which they claim could be reduced by up to half if corrected.

4 suffocate to death while cleaning septic tank

Pune | Agencies

Four labourers suffocated to death while cleaning a clogged septic tank at a residential complex in Loni Kalbhor on the outskirts of the city, police said here on Wednesday. The tragedy occurred at the Kalamvak Vasti's Malhar building around 11.30 a.m. when the four workers descended into the septic tank. Officials said that while two of the men went inside first, the other two followed to assist them, but following a commotion, they were pulled out. The deceased are identified as Rupesh Kamble, Padmakar Waghmare, Krishna Jadhav and Sikandar Kasabe, and it is suspected that the asphyxiation may be due to inhaling poisonous gases accumulated inside the septic tank, is the cause of death. The Loni Kalbhor Police have registered an accidental case and are probing the incident. The bodies of the four deceased have



been sent for autopsy, the reports of which are awaited, before they will be handed over to their families. Locals said it was not immediately clear whether the conservancy workers wore masks or safety gear for the work in septic tanks, considered a high-risk job as they are filled with toxic gases.

ARYAN KHAN 'NOT' CLEARED OF DRUG CHARGES -- FEW TAKERS FOR NCB DENIAL

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) on Wednesday dismissed as 'speculation' some reports suggesting that the agency has cleared Aryan Khan, son of Bollywood megastar Shah Rukh Khan, who was nabbed in a drugs case in October, though few found it credible. Soon after certain reports surfaced, NCB Deputy Director-General Sanjay Singh and the Special Investigation Team (SIT) issued a statement claiming that "the media reports are not true and they are just speculations", since "the investigation is not yet complete". Singh added that "these reports were not cross-checked with the NCB, and it would be premature to say anything at this stage". However, few in Maharashtra believed the agency's contentions, as state political leaders whacked the NCB, reiterating how "central probe agencies" are being "grossly misused" by the BJP against the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government. The ruling MVA allies -- Shiv Sena-Nationalist Congress Party-Congress -- said now it is clear that though there was no evidence against Aryan Khan, he was deliberately "framed" by the for-

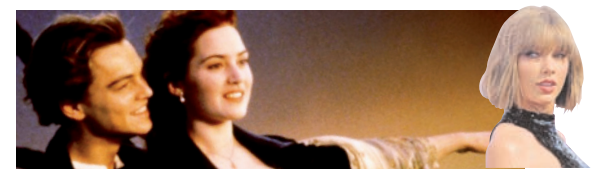


mer NCB Mumbai Zonal Director Sameer Wankhede. The media reports claimed that the NCB-SIT ostensibly found no evidence to link

Aryan Khan with the larger drugs conspiracy or an international drugs syndicate, besides pointing at the glaring lapses in the high-profile raids on the luxury ship Cordelia Cruise on October 2, 2021 in full media glare. Shiv Sena MP and chief spokesperson Sanjay Raut said this was "another case of abuse of the central agencies", and demanded to know who was behind it. "Those who are misusing the central probe agencies will go to jail. The NCB-SIT report has come and its proved that Aryan Khan was framed because he's Shah Rukh Khan's son. The truth has finally emerged, hasn't it," Raut asked. Referring to the case, NCP state President and minister Jayant Patil pointed out that a senior MVA minister, Nawab Malik, has been targeted with false charges because he had exposed the NCB last year. Congress state General Secretary Sachin Sawan said that the SIT has revealed how Aryan Khan didn't have drugs with him and has exposed the mistakes committed by Wankhede's team during the (ship) raids. Sawan said it's clear now that the allegations of an extortion racket were true, and demanded why no action has been taken against NCB officials for visible violation of the NCB's rulebook. "Since October last year, I have been saying

the NCB's claims that the action was taken as per the procedures when these were seriously violated while nabbing the so-called accused in the ship raid. Now it seems the NCB wants to shove the matter under the carpet," Sawant said. Sena farmer-face and MoS Kishore Tiwari said he smelt "something fishy" in the entire episode from the beginning and had demanded in October last year that the Supreme Court should appoint a sitting judge to probe the fundamental rights violation of Aryan Khan by the NCB. "The BJP is on a vendetta spree with the help of central probe agencies. Nawab Malik's exposure has proved to be correct... Even if the NCB denies its SIT report NCP spokesperson Mahesh Tapase said the NCB-SIT report has confirmed Nawab Malik's campaign for the past five months that the "whole Cordelia Cruise ship raid was a big 'farjivada' (hoax)" with the direct involvement of BJP activists working in tandem with Wankhede. "The SIT report has also exposed the NCB's style of functioning, the gross mistakes during the raids, why they were not videographed and help of BJP persons taken to trap innocent youngsters," Tapase said. Sena MP Priyanka Chaturvedi said

Maharashtra had exposed how CBI was mis-used by the Centre during the Sushant Singh Rajput case whose final closure report is still awaited. "Now, NCB is forced to admit wrongdoing on the part of its officials in the drugs case. Next will be exposing ED officials misusing their authority to please the Centre," said Chaturvedi, dropping broad hints. Pune-based RTI activist Prafulla Sarde said that akin to the Sushant Singh Rajput case probe delayed by the CBI, "the NCB is also dragging the Aryan Khan matter to please the BJP and help it politically". "After the report has been leaked, the NCB must be under pressure from its BJP 'masters'. I am filing an RTI plea seeking the SIT report in public interest and not for the vested interests of some politicians or officials," Sarde said. It may be recalled that former Attorney-General of India, Mukul Rohatgi, had labelled the NCB as "an Ostrich with its head buried in the sand" while the rich kid Aryan Khan was "paying the price for being a celeb". The sensational raids on Cordelia Cruise led to a total of 20 persons being arrested, including many from the glamour world like Aryan Khan. Later all were released on bail.



COURTENEY COX SOLD HER HAUNTED HOUSE!

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood actress Courteney Cox sold her house because it was haunted and faced multiple complaints about spirits from guests and former owner Carole King. While appearing on 'Jimmy Kimmel Live' and being asked about her experiences with ghosts, the 57-year-old actress told the host: "I have had one. I didn't believe at first, but I lived in this house in Laurel Canyon, which is in LA, obviously. It was Gypsy Rose Lee's house and Carole King."

Courteney shared how the 'Tapestry' singer-songwriter came over and did a seance with her and though she was too starstruck to be fully immersed in the experience, she listened as she explained about the people who had left a supernatural mark on the home, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

She continued: "So Carole King came over to my house and she said there had been a divorce that was really ugly, and there was a ghost in the house. And I was like, 'Yeah, whatever'. But other people who had stayed there with me, like friends of mine, said they felt an encounter with a woman who was sitting on the edge of the bed. And I was 'Yeah, whatever.'"

The 'Scream' star even did a seance with Carole but didn't pay attention to it because she was so "in awe" of the '70s music icon.

Cox said: "Carole King and I did a seance, but I was just so in awe of her that I didn't listen to a word." However, the former 'Friends' star was convinced to finally move out when a deliveryman told her "there is someone standing behind" her.

Jennifer Garner paid for a stranger's coffee

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Jennifer Garner paid for a stranger's coffee at a coffee shop and believes it "is always a worthwhile act of kindness". In a video she posted, the 49-year-old actress heard asking for a "mint mint tea grande" before handing over the money to pay for the person waiting next, adding: "If I give you this to pay for the people behind me, and then this for you guys. So, that's for you guys. This is just to pay for whomever is behind me. Thank you and pass it on." Garner loves to spread a little kindness and boasts an impressive track record of paying it forward, such as when she homebaked and hand delivered cookies to the LAC+USC Medical Center for employees working the emergency department, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

In a video of the process, which was given a soundtrack of the Bill Withers song 'Lovely Day', Jennifer wrote: "For a happy day - show your local (star emoji) First Responders (star emoji) some love. They are still in the thick of it and miles past burn out."

She added: "Thank you, @countyem_la Doctors and Nurses!" she added. "Keep going!"

Along with these one-offs, the 'Elektra' star launched the initiative 'A Million Meals', which seeks to give out one million free meals - in collaboration with the charity Save the Children - through her organic baby food company Once Upon A Farm, last September.

Garner said of the scheme: "Once Upon a Farm is small, but we wanted to really show that we are serious about making this impact and A Million (Meals) is a daunting, audacious goal, but why not? So that's what we're going with."



'The Batman' director Matt Reeves misses film premiere due to Covid-19

Los Angeles | Agencies

After several shifts around the release calendar due to the pandemic, 'The Batman' finally rolled out the red carpet for its world premiere at Lincoln Center in New York on Tuesday evening. Though Robert Pattinson, Zoe Kravitz and other stars in attendance, the evening was missing one key contributor. Matt Reeves, the director behind the new DC adaptation, could not attend the event after being diagnosed with Covid. After the cast was introduced on stage, Reeves explained his absence through a live video call ahead of the screening of the film, reports variety.com. "We were taking the film around and doing the press tour. Despite being double-vaccinated and boosted, I got Covid," Reeves said, sending a wave of disappointment through the crowd. "The good news is that I'm healthy, I'm good. But I'm not with you. It's a great heartbreak for me because this movie means so much to me. It was a five-year journey for me and I'm really excited that we're sharing it with you tonight." "I want to thank, from the bottom of my heart, the incredible crew that we made this movie with. They are such incredible craftsmen, artists... (It's) the best crew that we ever worked with. I know that so many of you are there tonight. I'm so sad that I'm not there with you," Reeves continued, before following up with a joke.



ARIANA DEBOSE TO PLAY CALYPSO IN 'KRAVEN THE HUNTER'

Los Angeles | Agencies

West Side Story' star Ariana DeBose has joined the cast of 'Kraven the Hunter', an upcoming superhero action-adventure featuring Aaron Taylor Johnson as one of Spider-Man's most deadly antagonists.

She will play Calypso, a voodoo priestess who is the on-and-off lover of Kraven. The character first appeared in 'Spider-Man' comics in the early 1980s as an adversary of Marvel's teen web-slinger. In the comics, she has the power of mind control and a costume that barely covers her body, reports variety.com.

J.C. Chandor, who previously tackled 'All Is Lost' and 'Triple Frontier', is directing 'Kraven the Hunter'. The film, which also stars Russell Crowe, will be released theatrically on Jan. 13, 2023. DeBose is currently the favourite to win best supporting actress at this year's Oscars, for her captivating turn as Anita in Steven Spielberg's remake of 'West Side Story'. Over the weekend, she took home the SAG Award for outstanding performance by a female actor in a supporting role.

'The Lost City', 'Sonic the Hedgehog 2' release halted in Russia

Los Angeles | Agencies



Paramount Pictures is the latest Hollywood studio to pause the theatrical release of its upcoming films in Russia following the country's invasion of Ukraine last week. "As we witness the ongoing tragedy in Ukraine, we have decided to pause the theatrical release of our upcoming films in Russia, including 'The Lost City' and 'Sonic the Hedgehog 2'."

"We stand by all those impacted by the humanitarian crisis across Ukraine, Russia, and our international markets and will continue to monitor the situation as it unfolds," a studio spokesperson said in a statement, reports variety.com.

Universal joined the boycott later on Tuesday, meaning the five major Hollywood studios have officially cut off their movies from Russia for the time being. Universal doesn't have a big release until Michael Bay's 'Ambulance' opens in April. "In response to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, Universal Pictures has paused planned theatrical releases in Russia," a Universal Pictures spokesperson said Tuesday afternoon. Earlier this week, Disney, Sony and Warner Bros similarly announced they will not allow new movies, such as 'Turning Red', 'Morbius', and 'The Batman', to play in Russian movie theatres "in light of the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine".



Break Up

Chris Pine and Annabelle Wallis 'have broken up and haven't been together for a few months'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Chris Pine and Annabelle Wallis have parted ways, reports dailymail.co.uk.

A source told Entertainment Tonight on Tuesday that the Star Trek Beyond actor, 41, and The Mummy actress, 37, 'have broken up and haven't been together for a few months.'

The celebrity pair, first linked in 2018, had kept a low profile in the years they were together.

They were snapped with one another in July of 2018 in London where Pine was working on the film Wonder Woman 1984, in which he played the role of Steve Trevor.

The couple did not appear together on any red carpets, according to the outlet, and had little social media exposure, as Pine doesn't have an Instagram account and Wallis has hers focused on her work endeavors. Wallis was formerly linked to Coldplay singer Chris Martin from 2014 to 2016. Pine was rumored to be seeing actress Sofia Boutella, who he appeared in Star Trek Beyond with, when they attended the Coachella Music Festival together in 2017.



Megan Fox



WHY PRABHAS IS SINGLE?

Hyderabad | Agencies

Prabhas at a grand event in Mumbai, revealed why he isn't married yet. When asked about predicting love, Prabhas' witty response made everyone laugh out loud.

As Prabhas interacted with the media on Wednesday in Mumbai, he was quizzed about dialogue from the recent trailer of 'Radhe Shyam'. Prabhas plays a famous palmist in the movie, who predicts the future accurately.

A media person questioned Prabhas, "There is a dialogue in the movie, which says your prediction about love is not so accurate. What about your prediction in real life?"

Prabhas, who gave a witty reply, said, "My love predictions have always been wrong. That is why I am not yet married."

This funny answer from the 'Baahubali' actor has drawn much attention, making everyone admire Prabhas' wit.

'Radhe Shyam' on the other hand, is inching towards its worldwide release soon, and hence the makers had organized a trailer launch event in Mumbai, kickstarting the promotions.

Pooja Hegde and Prabhas as Prerana and Vikramaditya, share lovely chemistry on screen. March 11 would be the D-day for 'Radhe Shyam', as it is releasing in Telugu, Tamil, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Chinese, and Japanese.



Ranbir, Shraddha's yet-untitled film to release on March 8, 2023

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Filmmaker Luv Ranjan's yet-untitled next featuring Ranbir Kapoor and Shraddha Kapoor will release on Holi next year. It will release in cinemas on March 8, 2023.

Initially, the film was supposed to release on 26th January, 2023. Sharing the official news on social media, Taran Adarsh mentioned: "Ranbir-Shraddha: Holi 2023 release finalise"

#LuvRanjan's next film e not titled yet e to release in cinemas on (Wed) 8 March 2023 #Holie Stars #RanbirKapoor and #ShraddhaKapoor Produced by #LuvRanjan & #AnkurGarge

#BhushanKumar presentatione."

After delivering back to back super hits like 'Pyaar Ka PUNCHNAMA' franchise and 'Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweety', Ranjan is currently busy finishing his next untitled romantic comedy starring Ranbir and Shraddha in lead roles.

While there has been a lot of speculations regarding the other cast of the film and its story, the details of the highly-anticipated project has been kept under wraps by the makers.

Produced by Luv Ranjan and Ankur Garg and presented by Bhushan Kumar, the untitled next starring Ranbir and Shraddha will also feature Dimple Kapadia and Boney Kapoor.



ALIA AND DEEPIKA ARE SIMILAR AS DANCERS: KRUTI MAHESH

Team Absolute | Mumbai

National Award-winning choreographer Kruti Mahesh is receiving many compliments for making Alia Bhatt dance to 'Dholida' in 'Gangubai Kathiawadi'. She is the same mind behind the choreography of 'Ghoomar', 'Ek Dil Ek Jaan' picturised on Deepika Padukone in 'Padmaavat'. Kruti analyses how both the actresses are different yet similar as dancers. In conversation with reporter, Kruti shares how as a choreographer she always keeps in mind the physicality of the actor and designs the dance accordingly so that it can look like a visual treat for the audience. Kruti said: "Firstly, Deepika and Alia are different in terms of their physicality. Deepika for instance has long limbs, a long torso and she is very tall. But interestingly she is also very well aware of her body so she knows there are few movements that look beautiful on-screen because of her body structure. As a dancer, it is important to have that understanding." She further added, "Maybe because she comes from a sports background, Deepika is very disciplined and anything that we choreographed she will practice a thousand times to get that right. 'Ghoomar' was a result of that." In the dance 'Dholida', according to Kruti, she amalgamated various elements to not only capture the character Gangubai but also her cultural background as she comes from Kathiawad, Gujarat.

Flora Saini enters the Metaverse, launches new app

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Flora Saini, who has worked in 'Stree', 'Inside Edge', 'Maid In India' and many more has recently jumped on the Metaverse bandwagon with an offering of her own which will be called the 'Floraverse'.

She also launched her new app that is all set to bring her closer to fans.

Flora says: "I am building my own virtual Metaverse which would be named as Floraverse. I would be also launching NFT which would be a part of my virtual world where my superfans can interact with me and know more about me. The idea is to build the 360 degree landscape of my ecosystem."

It's going to include her digital artwork NFT which she has created in collaboration with US based tech firm Fanory Inc. The Floraverse will give an opportunity to Flora's fans and superfans to interact with her in virtual meet and greet events. It will also give her superfans the chance to gift and buy exclusive Flora memorabilia.

This Metaverse will be integrated in her new app. The unique social feed of this application will provide exclusive content, contests and giveaways while also empowering fans to have meaningful conversations with her.

Flora says: "Every content creator nowadays is facing the challenge where they don't own their ecosystem. I thought about this idea a few months back. The idea originated from the international market where a lot of creators are doing the same. My idea was to complete the gap between my fans and me where owning my ecosystem for better engagement is a game for me."



Sukant Deepak | New Delhi

She studied music from the Royal Music Of London and acting at the prestigious Lee Strasberg Theatre & Film Institute in the US. Los Angeles based singer and actor Shannon K has also finished filming a movie 'The Big Feed' in the US and 'Chaal Zindagi' here. The fact that she is playback singer Kumar Sanu's daughter can wait, for she insists -- "I started my career by singing at cafes and restaurants. I remember getting rejected many times in auditions and coming back home crying from meetings by highly demeaning behaviour people in the industry."

"So, it hasn't been easy for me. I didn't get up one day and was offered projects. Time and again, I have had to prove myself," she says.

Of course, being surrounded by music forever did warm her up to the art form as she remembers asking her father to take her along to the studio even as a child. "When I decided to make it my career, it was made clear that considering it was my decision, I would have to deal with all the hurdles and fetch work just like any other newcomer."

I HAVE HAD TO PROVE MYSELF: SHANNON K

Shannon

tells correspondent.

Believing that training may be instrumental for understanding the theory of music in-depth and grasping the technical side of it, she feels that it is not really imperative. "Now, dad is not classically trained, his passion for the art form has been the driving force. It depends on the kind of effort you put into your work, it is about that thirst for learning."



AMIT TANDON TO RAISE FUNDS FOR THE UNDERPRIVILEGED GIRLS

Mumbai: Comedian Amit Tandon all set for a unique unscripted home-grown comedy special at the National Centre for the Performing Arts, proceeds of which will go to an NGO which works towards providing access to basic healthcare and education to the underprivileged, with a special focus on the eradication of child marriage and adolescent girl child trafficking from the society. Speaking about the same, Tandon says, "In such trying times, it's upon us individually to stand by one another. This is a small initiative on part of my team and I, to lend support to the scores of NGOs like Unbound Futures Foundation who are battling such societal menaces single-handedly." "The idea here is to come together as a society and help raise some funds for an NGO working tirelessly towards an important cause, and also try to bring smiles on people's faces while we're at it. I feel responsible as a thought leader/influencer for spreading awareness about these problems that everyone knows about, but no one works towards barring a few non-governmental bodies."

He added: "This is my small way of helping out in my own capacity, and I hope that I manage to get a good response on this initiative so that more and more of such non-profit events can be planned and executed by other comedians of our country as well!"



Vidisha Srivastava