

# absolute india

VOL. 9, ISSUE 148, MUMBAI | SATURDAY, MARCH 12, 2022 ₹5 | PAGE 08

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM MUMBAI, BHOPAL AND NEW DELHI

**NATION** > 02

UP poll results not verdict of people: Mamata Banerjee...



**HOLLYWOOD** > 06

Jisoo recollects sprinting with camera attached to her for 'Snowdrop'...



**SPORTS** > 07

India search for batting returns while West Indies aim...



**GLOBAL COVID DEATHS 3X HIGHER THAN REPORTED, INDIA ACCOUNTED FOR 22%**

## VERY SOBERING

According to official Covid death records, 5.9 million people died between January 1, 2020, and December 31, 2021. But the new study estimates 18.2 million excess deaths occurred over the same period, and India alone accounted for an estimated 22 per cent of the overall global fatalities.

▶ **EXCESS DEATHS, THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE NUMBER OF RECORDED DEATHS FROM ALL CAUSES AND THE NUMBER EXPECTED BASED ON PAST TRENDS, ARE A KEY MEASURE OF THE TRUE DEATH TOLL OF THE PANDEMIC.**

▶ **AS PER THE UNION HEALTH MINISTRY UPDATE ON FRIDAY MORNING, THE TOTAL DEATH TOLL IN INDIA STANDS AT 5,15,714.**

▶ **BECAUSE OF ITS LARGE POPULATION, INDIA ALONE ACCOUNTED FOR AN ESTIMATED 22 PER CENT OF THE GLOBAL TOTAL DEATHS, THE FINDINGS SHOWED.**



NEW YORK | Agencies

The global Covid-19 death toll may be three times higher than what the official pandemic fatality records suggest, according to an analysis published in The Lancet.

The study, however, showed that 4.1 million excess deaths occurred in India till December 31, 2021, and the country topped the list of about seven nations that accounted for more than half of global excess deaths caused by the pandemic over the 24-month period.

The other countries are the US (1.1 million), Russia (1.1 million), Mexico (798,000), Brazil (792,000), Indonesia (736,000), and Pakistan (664,000).

Among these countries, the excess deaths rates were highest in Russia (375 deaths per 100,000) and Mexico (325 deaths per 100,000), and were similar in Brazil (187 deaths per 100,000) and the US (179 deaths per 100,000). With 5.3 million excess deaths, South Asia had the highest

number of estimated excess deaths from Covid-19, followed by North Africa and the Middle East (1.7 million) and Eastern Europe (1.4 million). These numbers suggest that the full impact of the pandemic may have been far greater, said researchers from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), an independent global health research centre at the University of Washington.

Calculating the difference between excess death estimates and official reported deaths provides a measure of under-counting of the pandemic's true death toll, the researchers added.

Further, the analysis showed that the ratio of excess deaths to reported deaths was found to be much greater in South Asia (excess deaths 9.5 times higher than reported deaths) and sub-Saharan Africa (excess

deaths 14.2 times higher than reported) than other regions.

"The large differences between excess deaths and official records may be a result of under-diagnosis due to lack of testing and issues with reporting death data," the researchers wrote in the paper.

The new study provides the first peer-reviewed estimates of excess deaths due to the pandemic globally and for 191 countries and territories (and 252 subnational locations such as states and provinces) between January 1, 2020, and December 31, 2021.

Weekly or monthly data on deaths from all causes in 2021, 2020, and up to 11 prior years was obtained for 74 countries and 266 states and provinces through searches of government websites, the World Mortality Database, Human Mortality Database, and European

Statistical Office.

Distinguishing between deaths caused directly by Covid-19 and those that occurred as an indirect result of the pandemic (such as suicide or drug use due to behavioural changes or lack of access to health-care) is crucial, the researchers noted.

"Understanding the true death toll from the pandemic is vital for effective public health decision-making. Studies from several countries including Sweden and the Netherlands, suggest Covid-19 was the direct cause of most excess deaths, but we currently don't have enough evidence for most locations. Further research will help to reveal how many deaths were caused directly by Covid-19, and how many occurred as an indirect result of the pandemic," said lead author Dr Haidong Wang, from the IHME.

## Russia bombs nuke facility in Ukraine's Kharkiv

KIEV | Agencies

Ukrainian authorities said on Friday said Russian troops have bombed a nuclear research facility in the country's second largest city of Kharkiv.

In a Facebook post, Ukraine's State Nuclear Regulatory Inspectorate said the bombing of the Kharkiv Institute of Physics and Technology on Thursday night has caused a power outage at the Source of Neutron Nuclear Research Subcritical Unit.

According to the state regulator, the unit has completely lost power and the exterior of the building has also been damaged. It added that authorities were still assessing further damages at the site.

The regulator said the Source of Neutron is designed to conduct scientific and practical studies in the fields of nuclear physics, radiation material science, biology, chemistry and for the production of medical radioisotopes. Russia has been targeting nuclear sites in Ukraine since it started the war on February 24.

## BIDEN RULED OUT "WORLD WAR 3"

Washington: President Joe Biden again ruled out any direct intervention by the United States to halt Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Friday, warning that such conflict pitting the NATO alliance against the Kremlin "is World War III." "We will not fight a war against Russia in Ukraine," Biden said in a speech at the White House, refuting increasingly desperate calls from Kyiv for NATO to intervene against the Russian assault.

## US AND ALLIES TO ABOLISH MFN TRADE STATUS FOR RUSSIA

New Delhi: US President Joe Biden has said that the American side, together with the G7 and the European Union, will abolish the most favoured nation treatment in trade with Russia. "Each of our countries will take measures to deny Russia the most favoured nation status, which means that the two countries have agreed to trade with each other on the best possible terms," RIA Novosti quoted him as saying, RT reported. The United States has banned imports from Russia of goods from its "characteristic sectors of the economy", including the import of seafood, alcohol, including vodka, and non-industrial diamonds. This was announced by the White House following President Joe Biden's speech on new anti-Russian measures.

## TIME HAS COME TO DECLARE TRIBUNALS DEFUNCT: SC

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday pulled up the Centre on vacancies in various tribunals during the hearing of the Delhi Gymkhana Club case, saying that there are no officers to man the tribunals, and names are recommended but no one knows why they are not cleared.

A bench comprising



Justices A.M. Khanwilkar and C.T. Ravikumar told Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the Centre, "You

keep vacancies, there are no officers to man the tribunals. That is the problem. Names are recommended, why they are not cleared no one knows... no timeline. Time has come to declare tribunals defunct."

The top court made these strong observations after learning that the tribunal could not complete the hearing in the DGC matter, due to the vacancies.

## Don't Take New Customers; Conduct I-T Audit: RBI to Paytm

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has asked Paytm Payments Bank Ltd to halt the onboarding of new users.

According to the order issued by the central bank, it was stated that the decision is based on "certain material supervisory concerns observed in the bank".

The order by the central bank states: "RBI has today, in exercise of its power, inter alia, under section 35A of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949, directed Paytm Payments Bank Ltd to stop, with immediate effect, onboarding of new customers."

It also clearly stated that



the Vijay Shekhar Sharma-led Paytm Payments Bank must also hire an income tax (I-T) audit firm to undertake a full system audit of its IT system.

Additionally, the order, authorised by chief general manager, Yogesh Dayal, stated that Paytm Payments Bank Ltd's onboarding of new customers will be subject to specific permission from the RBI after reviewing the I-T audit.

Paytm Payments Bank has previously stated that it received over 926 million UPI transactions in December, making it the country's first beneficiary bank to do so. Moreover, it was reported that it processed 2,507.47 million beneficiary transactions between October and December last year, compared to 964.95 million in the same quarter in 2020. This represents a 159.85% growth year over year (YOY).

## Indian missile lands in Pak 'accidentally', probe ordered

Team Absolute | New Delhi

An unarmed supersonic missile "accidentally" took off from Sirsa and landed at a place 124 km within Pakistani territory on Wednesday evening, the Indian Defence Ministry said on Friday, "regrettably" explaining it was "a technical malfunction".

The ministry in a statement said: "On March 9, 2022, in the course of a routine maintenance, a technical malfunction led to the accidental firing of a missile."

The Indian government has taken a serious view and "ordered a high-level court of inquiry".

"It is learnt that the missile landed in an area of Pakistan. While the incident is deeply regrettable, it is also a matter of relief that there has been no loss of life due to the accident," said the ministry.

Earlier in the day, the Pakistan foreign office summoned India's charge d' affaires and lodged a protest over what it termed as unprovoked violation of its airspace. In a

statement it has warned New Delhi of "unpleasant consequences" over what it claims was an Indian originated, but unidentified high-altitude supersonic object that crashed in its territory.

In its statement it has urged India to take effective measures to avoid such violations in the future.

## NW, Central India set to witness higher max temperatures from Saturday

New Delhi: Maximum temperatures are likely to rise by 2-5 degrees Celsius over northwest and central India from Saturday, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) predicted on Friday. Incidentally, maximum temperatures above 35 degrees Celsius were already recorded over



many parts of Gujarat, Vidarbha, Odisha, Kerala, Mahe, Telangana, Rayalaseema and Tamil Nadu on Friday, IMD data showed. "Gradual rise in maximum temperatures by 2-4 degrees Celsius is very likely over Gujarat during next five days. Heat Wave very likely to prevail in isolated pockets over Saurashtra-Kutch during next two days," the IMD bulletin said. The maximum temperatures are very likely to gradual rise by 2-5 degrees Celsius over most parts of northwest and central India while rest of Maharashtra will witness gradual rise by 2-4 degrees Celsius. "Light rainfall with thunderstorm and lightning that continued at isolated places over south Konkan & Goa, southern parts of Marathwada till Friday is likely to decrease from Saturday," the IMD said. Isolated light rainfall is likely over coastal and north Karnataka during next 24 hours and over Kerala and Mahe on March 14-15 and over Tamil Nadu during March 13 to 15.

## ONE PILOT KILLED, ANOTHER HURT IN J&K CHOPPER CRASH



SRINAGAR | Agencies

One pilot of an army helicopter that crashed in the Gurez border area in J&K's Bandipora district on Friday was killed while the other sustained injuries, officials said. The helicopter

had gone to airlift a sick BSF trooper, but it crashed in the Gujran Nallah in Gurez tehsil before it could land. Officials said one pilot has been killed while the other was injured in this crash. The injured pilot has been shifted to the hospital for treatment. Air reconnaissance teams and rescue teams on foot were despatched immediately after the news about the crash was received. The cause of the crash is not known yet. According to an official, the chopper was about to land, but drifted away because of adverse weather conditions.

## UN-backed report flags concern over link between social media and drug use

▶ This development is particularly important for young people, who are the main users of social media platforms and an age group with high rates of drug use, it said.

▶ The report called for "special attention and scrutiny" of illicit financial flows generated from drug trafficking, which can have a wide negative impact on society, diverting money from the economy, leading to social and political instability.

"Social media not only promotes negative behaviour related to drug use by glamorising those behaviours, but also offer users the opportunity to buy cannabis, prescription pain killers and other controlled substances on many platforms."

Jagjit Pavadia, INCB President

VIENNA | Agencies

Social media platforms are offering new opportunities to buy cannabis and are glamorising negative behaviour related to drugs, reveals a report calling on



governments to address such platforms links with illicit drugs.

The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), an independent and a UN-backed body, in its Annual Report 2021 released on Thursday, addressed the increasing evidence of a link between exposure to social media and drug use.

Besides, calling on governments to take a more active role in regulating these platforms, the report also asked the private sector to moderate and self-regulate their platforms and limit the advertisement and promotion of the non-medical use of drugs. The INCB emphasised that balanced and proportionate responses to drug-related offences should be a guiding principle in

criminal justice matters with respect for human rights and public welfare. The report also raises concern about regional disparities in the availability of pain relief medication. It noted that nearly all consumption of opioid analgesics is concentrated in the developed countries of Europe and North America while consumption in other regions of the world is often insufficient, and the medical needs of those populations cannot be met.

The world narcotics control board urge governments to do more to make medications sufficiently available and asks countries with greater resources to help countries with fewer resources in ensuring access to narcotic drugs.



## G-23 SEEKS SPEEDY ELECTION OF NEW CONGRESS PRESIDENT, SUMMONING OF AICC SESSION

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Congress 'G-23' leaders, at their meeting held on Friday after the party's debacle in the latest round of Assembly polls, are understood to have sought that there be no more delay in electing the new party President while an AICC session should be called to discuss the poll results, sources said.

The meeting was held at senior Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad's residence here, and was attended by Kapil Sibal, Manish Tewari, Anand Sharma and Akhilesh Prasad Singh while some other leaders joined virtually.

As per sources, the leaders sought accountability for the poll debacle be fixed and changes be made in the composition of the Congress Working Committee, the party's highest decision-making body.

The issue of organisational polls was also discussed.

The meeting was held a day after results came out for Assembly elections



held in five states, with the party losing its stronghold Punjab, failing to mount a serious challenge in Goa, Manipur and Uttarakhand, besides getting virtually demolished in Uttar Pradesh.

There is simmering tension within the Congress after the poll debacle, and the G-23 leaders are reportedly miffed with the style of functioning of the party leadership.

One prominent leader said that "it is

time that the first family of Congress steps aside and paves the way for a new leadership or act in tandem with the party leaders and be available 24x7 for party work, or else there won't be a revival of the Congress in the country".

The leaders pointed out that the present set-up is non-performing and it has to be changed as the party is not "someone's fiefdom" and everyone has a stake in it.

## MAOIST KILLED, TROOPER INJURED IN CHHATTISGARH ENCOUNTER

New Delhi: A Maoist, carrying a reward of Rs 3 lakh on his head, was killed while a District Reserve Guard (DRG) trooper sustained a minor injury in a gun fight in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Friday morning, officials said.

Inspector General, Bastar range P. Sundarraj also said that the gunfight broke out when the DRG and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) were carrying out a joint operation in the jungle under Naimed police station area.

CRPF officials said that the gunfight started at around 8.30 a.m. near Kaika and Mosla villages when the security forces came under fire and retaliated. When the exchange of fire stopped, the body of a male Maoist along with a .12 bore rifle and Maoist-related material were recovered from the spot.

On February 12, a CRPF official was killed and a trooper injured in an exchange of fire with Maoists at Putkel village under Basuguda police station limits in Bijapur when a team of CRPF's 168th battalion was out on a road domination duty.

## Modi asks Gujarat Panchayati Raj leaders to undertake village upliftment work

GANDHINAGAR | Agencies

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday asked the Panchayati Raj elected representatives in Gujarat to carry out at least 75 village upliftment tasks by August 15, 2023, when the nation will be celebrating the 75th year of freedom. He was addressing more than 1.25 lakh elected representatives gathered in Ahmedabad.

The PM congratulated the villages of Gujarat as well as the country for sustaining during the Covid-19 pandemic. "I congratulate the people of the villages for tackling the Covid-19 situation very wonderfully. The awareness and preparedness shown by the villages of Gujarat as well as country, prevented the global pandemic from entering. I also bow down to the smallest of the farmers, who during such challenging times, continued producing, harvesting food for the country," said Modi.

The prime minister asked the elected representatives gathered in Ahmedabad to carry out work for the upliftment of villages.

"I am only asking each of you to carry



out small works which you can do. Can you carry out programmes to celebrate the birthday of the village school? Where the leaders of the village and other communities come together at the school and carry out the birthday celebrations, carry out work required in the school?" asked the PM.

Modi said that he wanted to see at least 75 such works of village upliftment by August 15, 2023, when the entire nation will be celebrating 75 years of the country's freedom.

## Nine including five women die in separate road accidents in K'taka

BENGALURU | Agencies

Nine persons, including five women, died on Friday in two separate road accidents at Koppal and Kalaburagi districts in Karnataka.

Four persons, including a woman, died in the accident at Navali near Kanakagiri town in Koppal district when the tractor they were travelling in turned turtle after the driver lost control. The victims were travelling to attend an engagement ceremony.

The deceased have been identified as Yamanurappa, Ambamma, Shehappa and Yamanappa, all aged above 50 years.

Yamanurappa and Ambamma died on the spot, while Yamanappa and Shehappa succumbed to their injuries at the hospital.

The others who were critically injured in the accident are being treated at the Karatagi hospital.

In another incident, four women and the



car driver died on the spot after their vehicle lost control and hit a tree near Afzalpur in Kalaburagi district on Friday.

The victims were travelling towards Maharashtra after visiting the Dattatreya temple in Ganagapur. The identities of the deceased are yet to be ascertained.

## UP poll results not verdict of people: Mamata

KOLKATA | Agencies

A day after BJP registered a comfortable victory in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said on Friday that the results do not reflect the verdict of the people, as she demanded forensic test of the electronic voting machines (EVMs) used in the polls.

Speaking to the media in the Assembly, Banerjee said, "This is not the verdict of the people. BJP manipulated votes and won in four states (Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur)."

"There have been incidents of EVM loot in Uttar Pradesh. The District Magistrate of Banaras has been transferred. That is what I have come to know from the newspapers. Why were there no forensic test of the



EVMs after that?

"Akhilesh (Yadav) has been forced to accept defeat. But this is not the verdict of the people. This is the verdict of mechanical manipulation," said Banerjee, who had campaigned in Uttar Pradesh in favour of Samajwadi Party's Akhilesh Yadav.

The Chief Minister also consoled Yadav and asked him not to be disappointed. "This is not the end of everything. They have won some states and are behaving in such a way that they have won the Lok Sabha elections. This is not correct. The 2024 elections will not be that easy," the Trinamool Congress leader said.

Inviting all the like-minded parties to form an alliance to fight the BJP, Banerjee said, "There is no reason for depending on Congress any more. We will have to look for a better alternative to defeat the BJP."

## SC to hear on March 15 plea against bail to Ashish Misra in Lakhimpur Kheri case

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to list on March 15 a plea filed by the family members of the farmers, moved by a car belonging to Ashish Misra, in Lakhimpur Kheri challenging bail granted to him by the Allahabad High Court. Misra is the son of Union Minister and BJP MP Ajay Kumar Misra.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, representing the family members, mentioned the plea before a bench headed by Chief Justice N.V. Ramana and comprising Justices A.S. Bopanna and Hima Kohli. Bhushan said the matter was supposed to be listed on Friday for hearing, but it was not on the list. The Chief Justice said: "listing it on Tuesday". Bhushan, insisting on an urgent hearing on the plea, said: "there was an attack on a prime-witness in the case".

On March 4, the Supreme Court agreed to hear on March 11 a plea filed by the family members of the farmers. Bhushan had submitted that



other accused in the matter are also moving the high court seeking bail, citing the order granting bail to Misra. He urged the top court to pass an order against the bail order of the

high court. The Chief Justice said: "I can list on the 11th only..."

The plea contended that family members were forced to move the apex court since Uttar Pradesh has

failed to file an appeal challenging bail granted to Misra. The plea argued that the high court granted bail without considering the heinous nature of the crime and also in the backdrop of overwhelming evidence against the accused in the charge sheet. The plea further argued that there is likelihood of the accused tampering with the witnesses and causing obstruction in justice.

In November last year, the Supreme Court appointed justice Rakesh Kumar Jain, a former judge of Punjab and Haryana High Court, to monitor the Lakhimpur Kheri violence probe. The top court also reconstituted the SIT investigating the incident and appointed IPS officer S.B. Shiradkar, as its head.

Misra was arrested on October 9 last year in the case. On October 3, 2021, eight people, including four farmers, were killed in Lakhimpur Kheri in clashes during a farmers' protest.

## DELHI POLICE NAB 5 SHARPSHOOTERS OF SONU DARIYAPUR GANG

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi Police said on Friday that they have arrested five sharpshooters of Sonu Dariyapur Gang, who were involved in a number of criminal cases.

A country made pistol, a Scooty and Rs 39 lakh looted cash were recovered from their possession.

The accused have identified as Narender, Naseeb, Vicky, Sagar and Deepak Sharma. Recently, they had committed a robbery in central Delhi's Desh Bandhu Gupta Road area.

Central Delhi DCP Shweta Chauhan said that on March 7, a person named Manoj Kumar had lodged a complaint with the police alleging that he was robbed of Rs 91 lakh by some unknown robbers. "Manoj was returning to office after collecting Rs 91 lakh from a party in Chandni Chowk area. When he



crossed the Faiz Road traffic signal, some unknown persons came from behind and kicked the Scooty he was riding. After that, the accused held Manoj at gunpoint and sprayed pepper spray in his eyes and took away the bag containing money," said the DCP.

After receiving the com-

plaint, an FIR of robbery was lodged and a special team was formed to look into the matter. The police scanned the CCTV footages of the nearby areas and learnt that one of the accused was following Manoj from the Karol Bagh area. As they were wearing masks, their identity could not be ascertained.

## 42 students fall sick after mid-day meals at Andhra school

As many as 42 students of a government-run primary school in Andhra Pradesh took ill on Friday after eating food provided under mid-day meal scheme.

AMARAVATI | Agencies

The incident occurred in Nandyal town of Kurnool district. According to officials, students suffered from vomiting and stomach ache a few minutes after taking the meals.

The school authorities and parents immediately shifted the students to Nandyal Government Hospital. District Education Officer Ranga Reddy and other senior officials also rushed to the hospital and directed the medical staff to immediately provide medical aid to the affected children.

The DEO said due to the timely treatment, the condition of students did not deteriorate. Hospital superintendent Vijay Kumar said all the students were stable and they will be discharged after completing the treatment.

A total of 92 students were served sambar, rice, and eggs as part of mid-day meals. Parents complained that rot-



ten eggs were served which led to the children falling sick. The DEO said he has

ordered a probe and will take action against those responsible for the incident.

## BIHAR GOVT TO PROVIDE ARMS LICENSE TO EVERY PANCHAYAT LEADER

Patna: Bihar's Panchayati Raj Ministry has decided to provide an arms license to every panchayat representative in the state.

Samrat Choudhary, the Panchayati Raj Minister in the Nitish Kumar government, said the decision was taken after many public representatives were killed during the recently concluded panchayat elections in Bihar.

"Following several attacks on panchayat leaders and elected members, we have made 13 points pertaining to investigation of cases followed by provision of speedy trials in the court in six months. Now we have decided to provide them arms licenses as well so that they can protect themselves," Choudhary added.

"The Home department has directed District Magistrates of all 38 districts to implement the same. The public representatives have to apply for the arms license before the District Magistrate and the same will be recommended to the Home department for the license," he said.

"If any public representatives say that they are facing a bigger threat, we will provide them armed guards," the minister added. In Bihar, 2.57 lakh public representatives have been elected in the recently concluded panchayat elections.

## Gurugram: Drones, patrol bikes on E-way to check traffic violation

GURUGRAM | Agencies

Commuters violating traffic rules on the Delhi-Jaipur Expressway between the Delhi-Gurugram border and Kherki Daula toll plaza will soon be spotted by drones and bike patrols.

The Gurugram traffic police in collaboration with the Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) will soon introduce drones in the skies of Gurugram to spot traffic violators. These drones will be connected to the GMDA's Integrated Command & Control Centre (ICCC) to keep a close watch on traffic violators and issue traffic fines.

In the first phase, around four to five drones and five bike patrols will be introduced to keep a vigil on traffic violators, especially lane violators who often cause accidents on the E-way. Giving more details about the initiative, DCP (Traffic) Ravinder Kumar Tomar told IANS, "We have noticed that wrong lane driving causes acci-



dents on the carriageway. So to avoid this, we had requested the GMDA officials to introduce drones on the E-way which has been accepted. Soon these drones will be introduced."

However, Tomar mentioned that there were some issues on the height of drones as the air pressure affects the stability of drones, along with some other technical reasons, which will be taken care of by the GMDA engineering wing.

Tomar said, "Apart from drones, we will also deploy police riders on the expressway between Delhi-Gurugram border to Kherki Daula toll plaza which will include two patrolling vehicles and four motorcycle riders equipped with a walkie-talkie to keep a close watch

on the violators." The Gurugram traffic police have already deployed 10 teams to monitor wrong lane driving, he added.

### CHANGE OF NAME

I BHALEEN SOY is legally wedded spouse of No. 4570407P HAV KIRAN SOY presently residing at Vill JAMBAHAL Kustuna Sundergarh. Odisha Pin-770016, have changed my name from SMT CHHRIST BHALEEN SOY to BHALEEN SOY Vide affidavit no.74AA313946 and date 11/03/2022.

### CHANGE OF NAME

I SUMITRA KANDARI is legally wedded spouse of No. JC 730156Y SUB PADMENDRA SINGH presently residing at 14 rapid Ordnance Unit, C/O 56 APO, have changed my name from SUMITRA BISHT to SUMITRA KANDARI And DOB from 06/03/1980 to 06/03/1979



# MAHA DEFICIT BUDGET CUTS VAT ON NATURAL GAS, AMNESTY FOR GST-STAMP DUTY

**Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Ajit Pawar on Friday presented the state Budget 2022-2023 with a revenue deficit of Rs 24,353 crore, with a slew of major announcements like an amnesty scheme for GST and stamp duty and reduction in VAT for natural gas.**

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Ajit Pawar on Friday presented the state Budget 2022-2023 with a revenue deficit of Rs 24,353 crore, with a slew of major announcements like an amnesty scheme for GST and stamp duty and reduction in VAT for natural gas.

The government estimates revenue receipts of Rs 403,427 crore against a revenue expenditure of Rs 427,780 crore, of a shortfall of Rs 24,353 crore, in the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government's third annual budget. Pawar unveiled a 'Panchasutri' (5-Point) development programme encompassing agriculture, health, human resource, transport, and industry, for the state with a total outlay of Rs. 115,215 crore, besides other sops and proposals.

Under this, the government proposes to spend Rs 23,888 crore for agriculture and allied sectors, Rs 5,244 crore for health, Rs 46,667 crore for human resources, Rs 28,605 crore for transport infrastructure and Rs 10,111 crore for industry and energy sectors, with plans to spend over Rs 400,000 crore in the



next three years, said Pawar. Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, MVA leaders of Shiv Sena-Nationalist Congress Party-Congress including Eknath Shinde, Hasan Mushrif, Nana Patole and others lauded the budget as "visionary" while the Bharatiya Janata Party Leaders of Opposition Devendra Fadnavis and Pravin Darekar and Union MOS for Finance Bhagwat Karad slammed it as "direction-less". Pawar has introduced a first-ever Amnesty Scheme 2022 for the Goods & Sales Tax Department which will be applica-

ble from April 1-September 30 this year.

Under this, there will be a complete waiver of the arrears of Rs 10,000 or less per year as per any statutory orders for various tax laws in the state, which would benefit around 100,000 small dealers.

Another aspect of the amnesty scheme for those having arrears of Rs 10 lakh or less till March 31, 2022, can pay a lump sum of 20 per cent of their total arrears and the remaining 80 per cent shall be waived, benefitting over 220,000 such cases of medium dealers.

The government has announced steep reduction in VAT on natural gas - from 13.5 per cent to just 3 per cent - which will hugely benefit households with piped natural gas connections and CNG power vehicles, while the state will incur a revenue shortfall of around Rs 800 crore. Pawar also announced an Amnesty Scheme under the Stamp Act from April 1-November 30, for pending penalties dues to the government whereby there will be a shortfall of around Rs 1,500 crore.

For any land donations free to any local government bodies, Pawar has announced a complete exemption of the 3 per cent stamp duty on the gift deed or 5 per cent on sale deed, by which the state exchequer will lose around Rs 21 crore.

For gold-silver delivery order documents imported in Maharashtra which currently attract a 0.1 per cent stamp duty, Pawar announced a complete waiver leading to a revenue shortfall of Rs 100 crore. To boost water transport in the state, he announced a 3-year tax holiday from January 1, 2022 on the tax levied by Maharashtra Maritime Board on passengers, animals, vehicles, goods ferried by boats or roll on-roll off vessels in the state.

# AFRICAN SAFARI COMING UP IN NAGPUR

In a significant step, Maharashtra plans to set up an African Safari Project in Nagpur with an outlay of Rs 100 crore, besides tiger and leopard safaris, Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Ajit Pawar said here on Friday.



A 171-acre jungle in Chandrapur and a Leopard Safari in Pune, on a 90-hectare forest at a cost of Rs 60 crore, on the lines of similar ones in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka, and a Wildlife Rescue Centre in Chandrapur. Pawar said detailed proposals are being sent to UNESCO to declare Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's forts and his guerrilla warfare as World Heritage.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a significant step, Maharashtra plans to set up an African Safari Project in Nagpur with an outlay of Rs 100 crore, besides tiger and leopard safaris, Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Ajit Pawar said here on Friday.

Presenting the state Budget 2022-2023 in the Assembly, Pawar announced a series of tourism-related projects in the state. "The government intends to conduct the country's first experiment to display wildlife from the African continent. For this, an African Safari is proposed at the Balasaheb Thackeray Gorewada International Zoological Park," he said. Besides, there are plans for a Tiger Safari on

popular hill-stations of Lonavala in Pune and Mahabaleshwar in Satara.

The government will provide Rs 100 crore during 2022-2023 for development of Raigad Fort and its vicinity, Rs 14 crore for Rajgad, Torna, Shivneri, Sudhagad, Sindhudurg, and Vijaydurg forts, and Rs 7 crore for the preservation of Sewri Fort and St. George Fort in Mumbai. Giving a major boost to infrastructure development, the government will provide Rs 7,500 crore for 10,000 kms roads under the Mukhya Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana-II, and launch 6,550 kms roads under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana-III.

The Hindu Hriday Samrat Balasaheb Thackeray Super Expressway connecting Mumbai-Nagpur, which is 75 per cent complete, will be extended till Bhandara-Gondiya-Gadchiroli.

Pawar also announced sanction of the Rs 16,000 crore Nashik-Pune medium high speed railway project, and a network of more Metro lines in Pune. The upcoming Mumbai Metro (3) from SEEPZ-Bandra-Colaba will be extended southwards to Navy Nagar. Pawar said Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation will get 3000 new eco-friendly buses and modernise 103 bus stands.

## Maharashtra Budget:

**MVA CLAIM IT WILL GIVE IMPETUS TO GROWTH; OPPOSITION SAYS IT NEGLECTED FARMERS, DALITS AND COMMON MAN**

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, who was present for 1 hour 10 minutes during the presentation of the budget by Pawar, said that the implementation of Panchasutri will help the state become a \$1 trillion economy.

budget also focuses on protecting the interest of weaker sections of the society," he noted.

Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnavis said that the state budget is against farmers, Dalits and will not give anything to the common man. "This budget is against farmers, Dalits and will not give anything to the common man. We were expecting that like the Central government and other states, the state government will give relief to people by decreasing VAT on petrol and diesel, but nothing has been done," he added.

State NCP chief and Water Resources Minister Jayant Patil, who had in the past held the finance department, said that Rs 10,111 crore has been earmarked to consolidate Maharashtra's pre-eminence in attracting investments and its investor-friendly status. Energy Minister Nitin Raut said that the budget has set a target of providing electricity to 60,000 agricultural pumps in 2022-23. "The allocation of Rs 9,926 crore for the energy department will help speedy implementation of the slew of projects. Five projects will be implemented with the outgo of Rs 11,530 crore to strengthen Mumbai Transmission network from the budgetary allocation," he added.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The annual budget for 2022-23 presented by the Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on Friday has evoked mixed reactions. The ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi partners including Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress claimed that the budget will give a further impetus to the development while the opposition claimed it has neglected farmers and Dalits. Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, who was present for 1 hour 10 minutes during the presentation of the budget by Pawar, said that the implementation of Panchasutri will help the state become a \$1 trillion economy. "The government has given a much-needed booster dose to the industry, agriculture, health, transport and human resources. The

# For 3rd consecutive time BJP bags Goa, Fadnavis gets a hero's welcome

**► CREDITED AS THE ARCHITECT OF THE BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY'S UNEXPECTED VICTORY IN THE GOA ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS, MAHARASHTRA'S LEADER OF OPPOSITION DEVENDRA FADNAVIS WAS ACCORDED A HERO'S WELCOME, AT THE PARTY HEADQUARTERS HERE ON FRIDAY.**

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Credited as the architect of the Bharatiya Janata Party's unexpected victory in the Goa Assembly elections, Maharashtra's Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnavis was accorded a hero's welcome, at the party headquarters here on Friday.

Top state BJP leaders, including President Chandrakant Patil, Ashish Shelar, Atul Shah, Atul Bhatkalkar, Prasad Lad, Chandrashekhar Bawankule, legislators, women leaders and other activists broke out in spontaneous dance to the drums playing behind them.

Sweetmeats were distributed to all who joined the revelry amid slogans of "After Goa, Now Maharashtra" renting the air, sounding ominous to the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA). Fadnavis was received and felicitated with garlands, bouquets and screams of 'Badhai Ho' and warm hugs by the party lead-



ers, which he acknowledged with smiles and waving his hands.

However, he appealed for humility in victory and the need to work still harder, starting from tomorrow.

"Now, such a political battle will take place in Mumbai, let's not sit on our laurels and start work from tomorrow," Fadnavis said, aiming to capture the country's biggest and richest civic body BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), from the ruling Shiv Sena.

Giving full credit to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the string of victories notched in Thursday's results for five states, Fadnavis said the effect of

'Modi Magic' and the trust reposed by the common masses in him was evident from the results in Manipur, Uttarakhand, Goa and Uttar Pradesh.

"That belief translated into votes and the victory in Goa really belongs to Modiji," Fadnavis said magnanimously, adding that the party should remain humble in victory.

On the upcoming battle for Mumbai, he said it was not against any party but vowed that "the BJP would free Mumbai (BMC) from corruption, and after capturing the BMC, work for the return of BJP with majority in Maharashtra in 2024 elections."

As all eyes are now on Fadnavis on his 'Maharashtra Strategy', leaders like Patil and Bawankule have officially ruled out any immediate plans to topple the MVA government and said their target would be wrest it from the ruling Shiv Sena-Nationalist Congress Party-Congress combine with fully majority in 2024.

Taking a swipe at its erstwhile ally and now bitter rival, Fadnavis said that the combined votes of Shiv Sena and Nationalist Congress Party were less than the NOTA votes notched in Goa. Congress won 11 seats there, down from 17 in 2017 elections.

An old Goa hand, after being appointed in-charge for the Assembly polls in January, Fadnavis got down to brass-tacks, invited that state Chief Minister Pramod Sawant and other BJP leaders to Mumbai, and juggled his time between Maharashtra and Goa in the past couple of months.

He addressed more than four dozen political meetings/rallies in the tiny state, a series of small meetings with groups of party leaders and grassroots activists during the run-up to the polls. At these meetings, micro-level political strategies were chalked out carefully, responsibilities assigned, consistent follow-ups taken and other aspects were fine-tuned which resulted in the BJP's handsome return to power for the third consecutive time with 20 seats.

This unexpected outcome stunned the Opposition, comprising the MVA allies of which Congress bagged 11 seats, Aam Aadmi Party (2), West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee's All India Trinamool Congress (nil), but local parties and independents getting 7 seats in the 40-member Assembly.

# MVA SOMBRE, BJP BUOYANT OVER POLL RESULTS IN 5 STATES

The ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) leaders said the election results in the five states on Thursday would have no impact on Maharashtra while the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) erupted in celebrations at the poll results.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) leaders said the election results in the five states on Thursday would have no impact on Maharashtra while the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) erupted in celebrations at the poll results.

Nationalist Congress Party President Sharad Pawar said the poll results would not have any impact on the future of the MVA government led by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray.

"There will not be any impact here (Maharashtra)," Pawar said, reiterating the need for the non-BJP opposition parties in the country to unite and provide a credible alternative.

"I am not saying this will happen tomorrow. The Parliament session will resume on March 14. We will attend it for nearly a month. So we will sit together, discuss and decide the future course of action," the NCP supreme said.

Stating that the Punjab poll results have come as a shock to the ruling Congress there, Pawar felt the change (where the Aam Aadmi Party has swept the election) is not favourable even for



the BJP.

"It is the AAP's governance in Delhi (under Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal) that has helped it in Punjab as the common man living in the national capital has accepted his party," he added.

Shiv Sena's Chief Spokesperson and MP, Sanjay Raut said no election results are final and the party will continue its

political fight in the future.

"The BJP used money power, where we fell short and so we lost. Yet we (Shiv Sena) fought Uttar Pradesh and Goa in our own way. Our fight will continue," Raut added.

Taking a swipe at the BJP, he said it should learn to "digest both victory and defeat" and work in a democratic man-

ner, serving the interests of the people and the country. Maharashtra Congress President Nana Patole said the people's verdict "must be accepted by all", adding that though the results belied their expectations, they would not be disheartened.

"We had gone to the elections with people's issues such as high inflation, unemployment, farmers' problems, but all these fell by the wayside. We will continue our fight as the BJP is trying to destroy democracy and sell the country," Patole added. The BJP leaders, including State Party President Chandrakant Patil, Leaders of Opposition Devendra Fadnavis (Assembly) and Pravin Darekar (Council) and others welcomed the poll results in the four states and attributed it to the "pro-people" and "pro-development" agenda of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Party activists erupted in gushy celebrations in Mumbai, Thane, Pune, Nagpur and other cities as the poll results showing the BJP on a winning streak in Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Uttarakhand and Manipur emerged by Thursday evening with dancing, sound of drums, distribution of sweetmeats and throwing 'gula' (colours).

# AFTER BJP'S MASSIVE WIN IN 4 STATES, FADNAVIS'S MAHARASHTRA GUARANTEE

**On the Assembly poll results in four states - Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Manipur and Goa - where the BJP retained power, Devendra Fadnavis said "Modi magic" turned the much-hyped anti-incumbency into pro-incumbency.**

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Senior BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis on Friday expressed confidence that his party will return to the helm in Maharashtra with full majority after the 2024 assembly polls as the state is "destined to see change of power."

On the Assembly poll results in four states - Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Manipur and Goa - where the BJP retained power, Fadnavis said "Modi magic" turned the much-hyped anti-incumbency into pro-incumbency.

The former Maharashtra Chief Minister, who was BJP's election in-charge for Goa, was speaking to reporters at the Vidhan Bhavan, state's legislature complex in Mumbai, on his return to Maharashtra. "Maharashtra is now destined to see change of power. BJP will form its own government with full majority in 2024," he said. The Shiv Sena, which was

one of the oldest allies of the BJP, had forged an unlikely alliance with the NCP and the Congress after the 2019 Maharashtra polls to form the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government, after parting ways with the BJP over the issue of sharing the chief minister's post.

"The results in four states have once again proven that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the only leader in the country. Uttar Pradesh has a population of 25 crore and in the last 37 years, for the first time, a party has retained power in the state... Modi magic turned the much-hyped anti-incumbency into pro-incumbency," he said.

When asked about the BJP's next goal, Fadnavis said, "Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) is the target for us now. We want to rescue the civic body from the clutches of corruption." The Mumbai civic body is currently ruled by the Shiv Sena.



EDITOR'S SPECS

POLL DEBACLE OF CONGRESS

The Congress' disgruntled group is likely to convene a meeting on Saturday or Sunday to discuss the poll results as the leaders are upset with the party's performance in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Goa and Manipur. The G-23 group has been sidelined in the party since they raised the issue of reforms in the Congress and election for the top post. Some G-23 leaders refused to speak during the day after results -- that turned out to be disappointing, were declared, and said that they will formalise a strategy. The group admits that the people have lost confidence in Rahul Gandhi, and his team as since 2019, his team has failed him, and now Priyanka Gandhi's team has also failed to perform. Meanwhile, Congress leader Randeep Surjewala said that they will analyse the poll loss. This is not the first loss. The party has already lost crucial polls in Kerala and Assam where the party could have won. Congress MP Shashi Tharoor tweeted: "All of us who believe in @INCIndia are hurting from the results of the recent assembly elections. It is time to reaffirm the idea of India that the Congress has stood for and the positive agenda it offers the nation. Rahul Gandhi on Thursday said he accepted the people's verdict and congratulated the winning parties. The disgruntled group has pointed fingers at the teams and leadership of Rahul and Priyanka. Rahul Gandhi's team of K.C. Venugopal, Randeep Surjewala and the state in-charges could not deliver the states which went for polls. The seasoned leaders have been ignored. Similarly, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's reliance on Sandeep Singh, Ajay Kumar Lallu and Mona Mishra has failed to fetch any good performance. In Uttarakhand, which had the "tradition" of changing government every five years, the Congress failed to make a repeat. The party appeared to be divided into two sub-parties, who were unwilling to work in tandem.

MANIPUR SEES HIGHEST NUMBER OF WOMEN ELECTED TO ASSEMBLY

Sujit Chakraborty

Five women were elected to the 60-member Manipur Assembly in the 2022 polls, the highest-ever in the electoral history of the state, where 10,57,336 women voters (52 per cent) outnumbered the male electorate of 9,90,833.

S.S. Olish (Chandel), former Minister Nemcha Kipgen (Kangpokpi), Sagolshem Kebi Devi (Naoriya Pakhanglakpa), all BJP, and Irengbam Nalini Devi (Oinam seat) and Pukhrambam Sumati Devi of National People's Party (NPP) won their seats, defeating their male rivals.

Firebrand women leader and JD-U candidate Thounaojam Brinda, who was the Additional Superintendent of Police (Headquarters), also contested the elections from the Yaikul constituency but came third, bagging 4,574 votes (18.93 per cent).

In all, 17 women candidates, or 6.42 per cent of the total 265 contenders, from various parties, were in this fray -- again the highest. They included four from the Congress, three each from the ruling BJP and NPP, two of the Nationalist Congress Party, one each from the Communist Party of India, Janata Dal-United and a local party and



two are independent aspirants.

In 2017 Assembly polls, 11 women candidates had contested but only two had won, down from three in the 2012 elections. In 2017, firebrand rights activist Irom Sharmila Chanu drew the attention of every one when she contested the polls on behalf of the People's Resurgence and Justice Alliance party breaking her 16 year-long fast against the Armed Forces (Special Power) Act, but lost. Manipur has had less than 10 women legislators and just one woman MP - Kim Gangte in the 12th Lok Sabha - since 1972 when it became a full-fledged state. Various organisations, researchers, and political analysts said that political parties and leaders are always talking about the significant role of women in the Manipuri society but they nominate a negligible number of women in the elections, especially in the parliamentary and assembly polls.

Imphal-based writer and political commentator Iboyaima Laithangbam said: "Unless women become a part of the policy making bodies, their actual empowerment is not possible. By allowing fewer numbers of women to contest the elections, the political parties are depriving the women from the equal rights' terms."

"In the Manipur economy, women are playing a very crucial role. Since the British period, the unique 'Ima Keithel' has become a symbol of women's empowerment and independence. Ima Keithel is not only a simple marketplace or trading centre, but these are apex hubs for campaigns on various societal issues and institutions against anti-social activities," Laithangbam told correspondent.

The century old and world's largest all-women run market 'Ima Keithel' or the 'Mother's Market', located in Imphal and other smaller all-women markets functioning in different parts of the northeastern state boost the local economy to a large extent and are a source of livelihood for thousands of women.

"Muscle power and money power dominated Manipur politics leading to the insignificant women's participation in the state politics and electoral fray. Gender bias is very strong in the mindset of most leaders of the political parties," Mainsnam told correspondent.

APNA DAL SCORES BETTER SUCCESS RATE THAN BIGGER PARTIES IN UP POLLS

While the major political parties in Uttar Pradesh have been facing hiccups in maintaining their performance, it is the Apna Dal, led by Union Minister Anupriya Patel, that has steadfastly maintained its success rate in elections in the past decade. The Apna Dal contested 17 seats in Uttar Pradesh, and as per the latest data issued by the Election Commission, it won 12 of them. Patel made her debut in the 2012 Assembly elections when her party contested two seats and won both. In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the party contested two seats in alliance with the BJP and won both -- a success rate of 100 per cent. Patel went on to become a Minister of State at the Centre. In the 2017 Assembly elections, the Apna Dal contested 11 seats in alliance with the BJP and won nine. It is noteworthy that a national party like the Congress could manage to win only seven seats in Uttar Pradesh in 2017. The path to success continued in 2019 when the Apna Dal again contested two seats and won both. In between, the Apna Dal split into two factions -- one led by Patel and the other by her mother, Krishna Patel, who allied with the Samajwadi Party in these elections. The Apna Dal, a Kurmi-centric party, was founded by Anupriya Patel's father Sonelal Patel in 1995. It is one of the most reliable allies of the BJP -- one that does not make demands or drives a hard bargain. "It is the love of the people that keeps us going. On our part, we remain loyal to the ideology on which my father founded this party," says Anupriya, beaming at her new found success.



KAIRANA GIVES A HAT-TRICK FOR WINNER AND LOSER

Kairana that has remained a political hotbed since 2016 when BJP MP Hukum Singh had alleged Hindu migration from the township, has created a record of sorts this time.

The constituency has ensured a hat-trick for both, the winner and the loser.

Samajwadi Party's (SP) Nahid Hasan won his third election from behind the bars in Kairana while for BJP's Mriganka Singh, this was her third defeat in a row.

Nahid Hasan won by a margin of 26,333 votes late on Thursday. "Kairana has rejected the poli-



tics of so-called 'exodus' and it is better for the BJP to bury this issue once and for all. It didn't work the last time, and neither this time.



They failed to monetise it politically," said Iqra Hasan, Nahid's sister, who campaigned extensively on behalf of her brother whose name

was repeatedly used by senior BJP leaders in speeches to target the SP on the law-and-order issue.

Kairana has witnessed a political battle between the two families -- the Hasans and the Singhs for years now.

The late Hukum Singh, BJP leader and MP from Kairana, had raised the issue of 'Hindu exodus' in 2016 when he had pulled out a list of '250 families' who, he claimed, had left the place due to poor law and order. The issue had kicked up a political storm and the BJP

made it a poll plank in 2017 when Hukum's daughter Mriganka Singh was fielded from the seat.

Though BJP won 325 seats in the state at that time, Mriganka lost to Hasan. In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the party again made exodus an issue and repeated it in these polls. Hukum Singh died in 2018 and Mriganka was nominated as the BJP candidate for the Lok Sabha bypoll, but was defeated by Hasan's mother Tabassum Hasan, who fought on an RLD ticket.

international

LARGE RUSSIAN CONVOY NEAR KIEV REDEPLOYED

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Satellite images taken by a US firm of a large Russian military convoy near Ukraine's capital Kiev show that it has been "largely dispersed and redeployed", BBC reported. The convoy was last seen near Antonov Airport, north-west of Kiev, and its movement could signal a renewed push towards the city.



ed in Lutsk, in the north-west.

The firm that took the photos -- Maxar Technologies -- said parts of the convoy were in position in the surrounding towns. Other parts are further north, with artillery now in firing positions, BBC reported. The apparent redeployment came as Russian forces in Ukraine began attacking new targets in different parts of the country. An airfield and jet engine factory were target-

Explosions also hit airfields at Ivano-Frankivsk in the south-west, according to Russian defence officials. In Dnipro, a major stronghold in central-eastern Ukraine, one person was reported dead in air strikes. "Ukrainian big cities are again subjected to devastating blows," said Ukrainian presidential advisor, Mykhaylo Podolyak. He added that the

shelling in Lutsk has shut down two central heating compounds. "Russia's destructive war against civilians and major cities continues," he said.

Russian state media reported that the Ukrainian city of Volnovakha has been captured by Russian-backed separatist forces.

There is no independent confirmation of the capture of the city, which is a northern gateway to the besieged port city of Mariupol.

INTERNATIONAL BANKS OWED MORE THAN \$121 BILLION BY RUSSIAN ENTITIES

New Delhi: Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan Chase are the first major Western banks to get out of Russia following the invasion of Ukraine. More are likely to follow at a cost of tens of billions of dollars, CNN reported. Goldman Sachs said Thursday that it is "winding down its business in Russia in compliance with regulatory and licensing requirements". JPMorgan Chase, America's largest bank, followed within hours, saying it was "actively unwinding" its Russian business. The departures follow a scramble by Western banks to tally their exposure to Russia after President Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine, triggering punishing sanctions that cover most of the country's financial system, including its central bank and top commercial lenders - VTB and Sberbank, CNN reported. The exits also come after a stampede of Western businesses out of just about every other sector of Russia's economy, and as ratings agencies warn that a Russian debt default is imminent. International banks are owed more than \$121 billion by Russian entities, according to the Bank for International Settlements, which suspended Russia's membership on Thursday. and US banks owed \$14.7 billion, CNN said. Goldman Sachs earlier disclosed that it had credit exposure to Russia of \$650 million in December 2021. JPMorgan Chase said its current activities in Russia are "limited." Other banks with more to lose could soon follow Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan Chase out of Russia. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Thursday that the economic situation in Russia is "absolutely unprecedented" and blamed the West for an "economic war."



Prices of essential items soar in SL after currency depreciation

Colombo | Agencies

The prices of a number of essential items in Sri Lanka increased on Friday after the country's central bank allowed the country's rupee (LKR) to devalue to 230 per US dollar.

On Friday, the All Ceylon Bakery Owners Association increased the price of a loaf of bread by 30 LKR, and the new price of a loaf of bread is between 110 to 130 LKR, reports Xinhua news agency.

The country's biggest wheat importer PRIMA increased the price of a kg of wheat flour by 35 LKR.

Meanwhile, Lanka Indian Oil Corporation, the country's second-largest retail fuel distributor, increased the selling price of diesel by 75 LKR per liter and petrol 50 LKR per liter on Thursday midnight. Three-wheeler and bus owners' associations claimed that there will be drastic increases in fares with the hike in fuel prices by



Lanka India Oil Corporation, demanding a fuel subsidy.

Anjana Priyanjith, chairman of the All Ceylon Private Bus Owners Association, warned that the minimum bus fare will be between 30 and 35 LKR, urging the government to provide a diesel subsidy for private bus owners. The price of airline tickets was increased by 27 per

cent, said Sri Lanka's Civil Aviation Authority.

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka on Monday allowed the LKR to devalue considering the severity of the external shocks and recent developments in the domestic front. The LKR on Thursday depreciated to 260 per US dollar from 200 per dollar before depreciation.

RUSSIA STRIKES UKRAINE'S DNIPRO CITY FOR 1ST TIME, ONE KILLED

Kiev: One person was killed on Friday after three Russian airstrikes hit Dnipro, an inland city located on the Dnieper river deemed as a major stronghold in central-eastern Ukraine, the country's State Emergency Services (SES) reported.



This is the first time that the city has been struck by Russian strikes since the war began 16 days ago.

In a social media post, the SES said at about 6.10 a.m., two strikes hit a kindergarten and an apartment building in the city. The third strike hit a two-storey shoe factory building at around 7.45 a.m., it added. Besides Dnipro, the city of Lutsk, located in the north-western region of Ukraine has also come under aerial bombardment for the first time. Lutsk Mayor has confirmed that the blasts took place near the city airfield. "Everyone into shelter!" he wrote in a Facebook post where he also urged local residents not to publish any photos, addresses or coordinates.

HOUTHISHELLING IN YEMEN KILLS 6 KIDS

Sanaa | Agencies

Shelling carried out by the Houthi militia in different areas of Yemen in the past 24 hours has led to the deaths of six children, a security official said.

"In two separate incidents, the Houthis launched shelling and killed six children in southwestern province of Taiz and in Sanaa's countryside within the past 24 hours," the official told Xinhua news agency. On Wednesday, the Yemen government's National Committee for Investigating Alleged Violation of Human Rights said that a total of 56 women were killed as a result of shelling carried out by the Houthi militia during the past several months. Due to shelling and



bombing of houses, about 280 families were forcibly displaced, the committee said. The UN Security Council adopted a resolution at the end of February that imposes an arms embargo on the Houthi militia in Yemen as an entity. The move was welcomed by the

internationally-recognized Yemeni government and several other Arab countries. The Houthi militia currently controls the capital Sanaa and most key northern provinces. Yemen has been mired in a civil war since the Houthi militia overran much of the coun-

try militarily and seized all northern provinces, including the capital Sanaa, in 2014. Saudi Arabia has been leading an Arab military coalition that intervened in Yemen in 2015 to support the government of Hadi after Houthis forced him into exile.

GLOBAL COVID CASELOAD TOPS 453 MN

Washington: The global coronavirus caseload has topped 453 million, while the deaths have surged to more than 6.02 million and vaccinations to over 10.65 billion, according to Johns Hopkins University. In its latest update on Thursday morning, the University's Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) revealed that the current global caseload and the death toll stood at 453,464,764 and 6,029,827, respectively, while the total number of vaccine doses administered has increased to 10,651,051,043. The US continues to be the worst-hit country with the world's highest number of cases and deaths at 79,454,920 and 965,464, according to the CSSE.

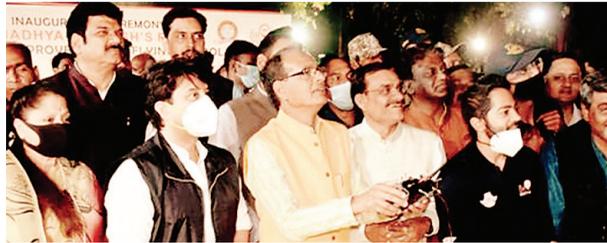


The second worst hit country in terms of cases is India (42,984,261 infections and 515,714 deaths), followed by Brazil (29,259,206 infections and 654,380 deaths). The other countries with over 10 million cases are France (23,492,815), the UK (19,600,293), Russia (16,943,915), Germany (16,814,429), Turkey (14,488,373), Italy (13,214,498) and Spain (11,204,125), the CSSE figures showed. The nations with a death toll of over 100,000 are Russia (351,776), Mexico (320,607), Peru (211,364), the UK (163,203), Italy (156,493), Indonesia (151,413), France (140,904), Colombia (139,220), Iran (138,572), Argentina (127,009), Germany (125,276), Poland (113,186), Ukraine (112,459) and Spain (101,077).



## DRONES WILL BE USED TO MAKE MADHYA PRADESH NUMBER ONE: CM

► CHIEF MINISTER SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN SAID THERE'S HUGE EMPLOYMENT POTENTIAL IN THE DRONE INDUSTRY AS DRONES CAN BE USED FOR VARIOUS PURPOSES. CHOUHAN INAUGURATED THE STATE'S FIRST DRONE SCHOOL BY FLYING A REMOTE DRONE AT MITS GROUND.



Team Absolute | Gwalior

Union Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia and Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Thursday inaugurated the first drone school in Gwalior.

The chief minister said that drone technology opens huge technology opportunities for youngsters.

"First drone school in the state has been inaugurated in Gwalior. There's huge employment potential in this industry as drones can be used for various purposes," Chouhan told media persons in Gwalior. Chouhan said that the government is working in all directions to make Madhya Pradesh self-reliant. In this direction, drone technol-

ogy has also been adopted prominently in the state. We will make Madhya Pradesh the number one state in the use of drone technology. Chouhan inaugurated the state's first Drone School and newly constructed Boys Hostel of MITS along with Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Narendra Singh Tomar and Union Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia at Madhav Institute of Technology and Science (MITS) in Gwalior. Chouhan said that it is good that on the initiative of Scindia, five drone schools are going to open in the state. Of these, today the first school has been started in Gwalior. The state government has formulated a new startup policy, in which the government will provide full financial and technical assistance to the innovations of the youth. He said that the students of

Indore have developed companies worth Rs 800 to Rs 1000 crores by initiating new startups. The youth of Gwalior can also initiate new startups by taking advantage of the government's startup policy. Chouhan reiterated its resolve to ensure that the youth of the state should become job givers, not job seekers.

In addition, Madhya Pradesh was also the first state in the country in advancing the use of drone technology at a big scale by organising drone fair in Gwalior in December last year. The programme was the biggest congregation of drone manufacturers, service providers, drone enthusiasts and user communities, especially students, farmers and common man of the city. The programme included drone exhibition, demonstration, industry-user interactions and launches.

## CM INSTRUCTS DGP AND CP FOR INVESTIGATION IN THE NLIU CASE

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has called a high-level meeting in the National Law Institute University (NLIU) case and directed strict action against the concerned professor. Chouhan held a meeting at the residence office and gave instructions to Director General of Police Sudhir Kumar Saxena and Commissioner of Police Makrand Deuskar.

Chief Minister said that woman police officer must necessarily be included in the investigation. Misbehaviour with students will not be tolerated. Chouhan said that if needed, the matter will be discussed with the Chief Justice of Supreme Court and Judge of the High Court. It is noteworthy that Chief Minister, taking cognizance of the news published in a newspaper regarding misbehaviour with students by the professor of National Law Institute University (NLIU), called an urgent meeting this morning and gave instructions to the officials to investigate the matter and take action.

## Anganwadi is Multidimensional Humanitarian Service Center: Governor Mangubhai Patel

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Governor Mangubhai Patel has said that Anganwadi centers are centers of multidimensional humanitarian service. The future of the country is created by the services being provided by the Anganwadi centers. Governor Patel was addressing the completion of training programme of Anganwadi workers in Vidisha on Friday.

Patel said that Anganwadi workers have an important role to play in laying the foundation for the future of the nation. He said that Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas and Sabka Sahyog is necessary for the welfare of the state. In this the cooperation of Anganwadi workers is important. Patel also described the role of Anganwadi Centers as important for the prevention of genetic diseases. He said that if children suffering from sickle cell come to the center, then their parents must also be tested. This disease is genetic. In the training, he told to hold tests of innova-



tions for children and pregnant women at the implementation centers. The Governor said that there is no age to learn. The work of giving a new direction to the society is being done by those who give and receive training, which will reap benefits. He told the Anganwadi workers, Sahayikas that as soon as the information of a woman being pregnant is received, she should be provided care, so that the newborn and his mother are safe and healthy. Governor Shri Mangubhai Patel also distributed certifi-

cates to the Anganwadi Supervisors and workers. Rekha Chudasama also addressed the 5-day Anganwadi training programme organized in collaboration with Vidya Bharti and Seva Bharti. Anganwadi workers shared their experiences. Bhopal Commissioner Gulshan Bamra, IG Irshad Wali, Collector Umashankar Bhargava, Superintendent of Police Monika Shukla, District Panchayat CEO Yogesh Bharsat, Anganwadi Supervisors, workers were present.

## CM plants saplings with differently abled children

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted saplings of Cassia and Gulmohar accompanied by differently abled children of Aarushi Sanstha in Smart Udyan today. The Chief Minister was accompanied by Shubham Tiwari, Rahul Gaikwad, Shivani Sen and Karishma while planting saplings. Anil Mudgal, Sapna Gupta and Meghna Jaiswal of the organization also participated in the plantation. The organization has been working especially for physically challenged children for the last 30 years. Plants in pots made by children were presented to the Chief Minister.

A nursery named Mitti Maa has been set up by the differently-abled children in the Shivaji Nagar campus of the institution, for environmental protection. Plants are prepared here by physically challenged children. Around 5000 saplings have been planted in the premises of schools, colleges, factories etc. The



organization also makes people aware about cleanliness. The main objective of the organization is to connect the differently abled people with the mainstream of the society and make the society aware of their capabilities. Along with this, the organization is also working for children affected by mental problems, vision and hearing impairment, down syndrome etc. The bark and leaves of Cassia planted in the park today are used in making Ayurvedic medicines. Gulmohar is considered one of the most beautiful trees in the world.

## TRAINING IN MAINTENANCE AND OPERATION OF PSA OXYGEN PLANT GIVEN

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Bhopal: Training has been given in operation and maintenance of PSA Oxygen Plant to 599 ITI trainees and 421 hospital staff by the Skill Development Department. On Friday, Director Skill Development Shri Jitendra Raje distributed certificates to the trainees of PSA Oxygen Plant of Bhopal division in Government ITI, Govindpura. He said that most of the trainees are engaged in PSA Oxygen plant operation and maintenance established in District Hospitals, Community Health Centers and Primary Health Centers of the central and state governments. It may be noted that the NCVET exam was conducted by the Government of India on February 15, 2022.

## Cyber security will be provided to the national heritage STATE LOAD DISPATCH CENTER OF MPTC IS 'HERITAGE' OF THE NATION

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In order to secure the systems of state-of-the-art information technology operating at the State Load Dispatch Center, Jabalpur, controlling the power supply in entire Madhya Pradesh, the Central Government has considered it as a critical and protected system. This will be provided cyber security in the form of national heritage. National Center for Protection of Important Information Infrastructure, Delhi (NCIIPI) has also issued instructions to get it notified in the Gazette of Madhya Pradesh.

Energy Minister Pradyuman Singh Tomar has said that after the implementation and approval of this system, now the people of Madhya Pradesh will not



have to face any interruption in power supply due to any cyber attack. The Central Government held 15 meetings with the National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Center (NCIIPI), Mumbai, to recognize the cyber security system developed by the State Load Dispatch Center, Jabalpur. It is after this, that it has been a success. Chief Engineer of State

The four systems of load dispatch SCADA, Renewal Energy Management System, Unified Real Time Dynamic System and Web based Energy Scheduling System will be restricted by this cyber security system.

After the approval of the Central Government, there will be a dual system of security for the power system of the state. This system is being further protected from cyber attacks with the Honey Pot device. Under the law of the Central Government, if someone makes any attempt to tamper or hack the system of Load Dispatch Center through the Internet, then it will be considered as an attack on the security of the nation. Along with this, action will be taken against him under the Information Technology Act.

## CM CHOUHAN TO LAUNCH PMAY SAHARIYA SPECIAL PROJECT

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan will launch 'Sahariya Special Project' under PM Awas Yojana in Karahal of Sheopur district on March 12 at 12.30 pm. Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Narendra Singh Tomar will be specially present in the programme. will inaugurate development works worth about Rs.11 crore and will also perform bhoomi-pujan for development works worth Rs.138 crore.

As many as 19 thousand 166 beneficiaries will be given a benefit of Rs 260 crore in Sahariya Special Project. In Sheopur district, out of the total eligible beneficiaries listed in the Socio-Economic Caste Census Survey 2011 under Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awas Yojana, so far 22 thousand 333 houses have been approved. Of these, 7 thousand 956 are families of Sahariya tribe. After listing 19 thousand 166 families of Sahariya tribe who were left out in the survey, they are being given the benefit of the scheme by being registered on Awas Plus App. Of these, 4 thousand 223 beneficiaries are of Vijaypur tehsil, 11 thousand 380 of Karahal tehsil and 3 thousand 563 of Sheopur tehsil.

The Sahariya families of this project will be able to run smoothly and with a permanent residence, the problem of migration will also end.

## Study well, work hard and be a partner in the progress of the country: Thakur

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Culture, Tourism and Religious Trust and Endowment Minister Usha Thakur said that knowledge, penance and sacrifice are the core values of student life. Students must study and work hard and be a partner in the progress of the country. Thakur was addressing a seminar of youth preparing for competitive exams at Pratigya IAS Academy, MP Nagar. Thakur advised the youth to adopt Vedic way of life. She said that the Vedic way of life was the basis of a healthy and happy life in Sanatan culture. Kuchha houses are more useful and healthier than today's concrete houses that has been confirmed on sci-



entific basis too. Inculcate small things of Vedic way of life and contribute to the progress and preservation of the glorious culture of the country. This is true patriotism. Thakur also encouraged the youth by reciting the poem 'Desh ki swadheenta par aanch tum aane na

dena'. Thakur said that youth should have a sense of respect for India and Indian culture. Help the poor, weak and exploited section of the society. Take away the sorrows of the afflicted. This is the biggest service to the nation and the biggest ideal of human life. Thakur called

upon the youth to put up pictures of great men and revolutionaries in their houses. She said that this picture will create sense of nationalism among the members of the house. Thakur was honoured by the Academy by presenting a shawl and a memento. The founder and director of the academy, Dr. Anil Kumar Upadhyay, said that the Pratigya IAS Academy is run by the Pratigya Samaj Seva-Kalyan Samiti. Here youth are prepared for competitive examinations free of cost. A large number of youth have been selected in the government sector after preparing from the academy. A large number of youth including the teachers of the Academy were present in the seminar.

## 879 CRORE SANCTIONED BY THE CENTRE FOR TWO IMPORTANT ROADS: BHARGAVA

Bhopal: Public Works Minister Gopal Bhargava said that Rs 879 crore has been sanctioned by the Government of India for two roads important from the point of view of tourism in Madhya Pradesh. With the upgradation of these roads, better road connectivity will be available from Sanchi to Chanderi and from Kanha National Park to the origin of Narmada river Amarkantak and to the tourists visiting the Fossil Park Raipura (Dindori). Bhargava has expressed his gratitude to the Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari for this approval.

Principal Secretary Public Works Neeraj Mandloi informed that for upgradation of two important roads of the state Rs 386 crore has been sanctioned for Kurwai to Mungawali-Chanderi 81 km road and Rs 493 crore for 93 km road from Dindori to Mandla by the Standing Finance Committee of the Government of India today.

Mandloi said that with the upgradation of Kurwai-Mungawali-Chanderi road, tourists visiting Sanchi and Chanderi in the state would get better road facilities. Along with this, it will be easy for the residents to reach the East-West Corridor located in Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh. Similarly, with the upgradation of Mandla-Dindori, the residents of this region will have easy access to the state of Chhattisgarh through the North-South Corridor.

# Grand Celebration of "Hriday Drishyam" Music Festival

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Under the joint aegis of Madhya Pradesh Tourism and Madhya Pradesh Culture Department, a grand event of the fifth edition of "Hriday Drishyam" music festival is being organised from March 12. Principal Secretary Tourism and Culture Sheo Shekhar Shukla informed that in this four-day festival, which will continue till March 15, the country's famous artists along with foreign artists will give musical performances in four major cities including Bhopal. This festival is organised every year to display and collect national and international musical art. Keeping in view the popularity of the function and the attitude of the people towards it, presentations will be organised in Bhopal and Indore along with Bateshwar district Morena and Mandu district Dhar.

The grand opening of the music festival will be held on March 12 at the Kushabhau Thakre International Auditorium at 4:45 pm. Along with this, presentations will also be given on the iconic places of historical and artistic importance of Bhopal, Bharat Bhavan, Ravindra Bhavan, Tribal Museum and Drive-in Cinema Complex (Hotel Lakeview). On the first day of the ceremony, there

will be a sarod recital by renowned artist Amaan Ali Bangash at 5:30 pm at Kushabhau Thakre International Auditorium, Spanish folk music by Almudena (Spain) at 6:45 pm. On the same day Sitar recital by Purbayan Chatterjee at Bharat Bhavan from 6:45 pm, Kabir Vocal & Sufi Sangeet by Padma Shri Bharti Bandhu from 8 pm at Ravindra Bhavan and Pop-Rock music will be presented by Pop Singer Shefali at Drive In Cinema at 9 pm.

During the Hriday Drishyam celebrations, a Zardozi Pattern Design Competition is being organised on March 12 at Kushabhau Thakre International Auditorium from 3 pm onwards. In this, the participants will upload their pattern design through Google form. A certificate will be given to each student participating in the competition. The student who makes the best pattern design will be honoured at the Tribal Museum on March 13, 2022. Simultaneously, on March 12 and 13, an exhibition of Gond art, jewelry and decorative handicraft products made of jute by local artisans will be held in the Ravindra Bhavan premises from 5 to 8 pm.

On the next day of the function, on March 13 at 5:30 pm, a presentation will be made by Vijay Ghatge in the Tribal Museum. On the same day, Santoor

player Rahul Sharma will give presentation at Bharat Bhavan at 6:45 pm, Fusion Music by Matteo Fraboni (Italy) along with Padma Shri Soma Ghosh and Joe Alvares at 8 pm at Ravindra Bhavan. Liron Meyuh (Israel) will give a performance of ethnic music and artists of Dhruva Band will give performance at 8.30 pm at the Drive In Cinema.

In the ceremony, Santoor recital by artist Rahul Sharma and sitar recital by Purbayan Chatterjee will be presented on March 14 at 6:30 pm at Ravindra Natya Griha, Indore.

Spanish Folk Music by Almudena longares (Spain) and Sarod and Tabla by Amaan Ali Bangash will be performed on 14 March at 6 pm in the famous Bateshwar Temple Complex of Morena. An exhibition will also be organised in Bateshwar.

On the last day of the ceremony, from 6 pm in Mandu, Liron Meyuh (Israel) will give musical performance of ethnic music in the Asharfi Mahal complex. Along with this, flute recital by artist Rakesh Chaurasia and percussion by Matteo Fraboni (Italy) will be performed. In the event, the local artists of the state are also given an opportunity to show their skills. In the last years also a large number of international tourists had attended the festival in large numbers.

## Placement of 8 Trainees of GSP City Campus

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Eight trainees of Precision Engineering from Global Skills Park City Campus, Govindpura, Bhopal, have been selected at Jindal-Shaw Gulf (JSW) of Abu Dhabi. It is worth mentioning that on February 21 and 22, an open placement drive was organised by the international company JSW at Global Skills Park City Campus. In the placement drive, Atul Parmar, Hariom Rajput, Harendra Suryavanshi, Mohit Vishwakarma, Saurabh Mistry, Sunil Jharia, Suyash Srivastava and Yogesh Shakya from City Campus have been selected for JSW Abu Dhabi. Selected students have got an annual package of Rs 4 lakh 32 thousand.

Congratulations to the selected students, Global Skills Park Project Director Shri Harjinder Singh has said that it is a matter of pride for us that the placement of the third batch of Global Skills Park City Campus has started at international

level. The main objective of the Global Skills Park is to enhance the technical skills of the students of the technical fields of the country, so that the youths can easily adapt themselves to the new advanced machines being used globally and become employable.

Along with this, they can prove their talent at the national and international level as well. To fulfill these objectives, the course of Advanced Certificate in Precision Engineering was started in July 2019 at Global Skills Park - City Campus Bhopal. It is the first training institute in India, in which training is provided to the students by expert trainers in a high level workshop equipped with international level standards according to the prescribed syllabus as per the demand of the industries. After the training, the institution has played a key role in getting the placement of trainees in national and international companies.



**REBEL WILSON CAN'T WAIT TO CELEBRATE JAMES BOND AT THE BAFTAS**

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Rebel Wilson is excited to celebrate the 'James Bond' and 'Harry Potter' franchises at the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTAs) as she takes to the stage to front the upcoming awards ceremony. Appearing on Thursday's episode of 'This Morning', she said: "I have presented awards at the BAFTAs before and it's gone pretty well... but it's hard when you're the host because you're in charge of the whole show and you've got the whole responsibility, so I don't know whether they were wise asking me!"

"But I want to be a good host and I want everyone to have a good time because we've got massive stars coming...we are also celebrating 'Bond' at the BAFTAs. Dame Shirley Bassey is going to be singing with a 'Bond' banger! 'Harry Potter' is

twenty... there's so much to celebrate.

"Sunday is going to be a big party," reports femalefirst.co.uk. The 'Pitch Perfect' star was appearing during a special segment on the daytime show when host Alison Hammond jokingly asked whether she would like to 'Bond' with 007 star Daniel Craig, with Rebel hoping that - despite him being married to 'Black Widow' star Rachel Weisz - she might get away with some "cheeky flirting." Alison teased: "I heard you want to bond with Daniel Craig, is that right?" Wilson quipped: "Well.. shall we make that public? I think he is married technically... I can still do a little cheeky flirt or something?" The 'Bridesmaids' actress was then handed a BAFTA statue by Alison and joked that she would "do an acceptance rap" as a speech if she ever won one.

## Katy Perry wins appeal in 'Dark Horse' copyright suit

Los Angeles | Agencies

A federal appeals court ruled in singer Katy Perry's favour in the 'Dark Horse' copyright lawsuit against Christian rapper Marcus Gray. Gray, whose stage name is Flame, first sued Perry in 2014, claiming her hit 'Dark Horse' was substantially similar to his song 'Joyful Noise'. In 2019, a Los Angeles jury found Perry liable for infringement, but the verdict was overturned a year later when a judge ruled that the eight-note "ostinato" Perry allegedly copied lacked the "quantum of originality" to warrant copyright protection, reports variety.com. Gray appealed the decision in October 2020, writing in a brief about the incriminating similarity of timbre between the songs, and arguing against the musicologists' use of databases of melodies to determine instances of similarities in previous works. On March 10, 2022, the Ninth Circuit affirmed the District Court's overturning the initial jury verdict. Perry's win in 2020 marked a rare occasion in which a court overturned a jury verdict in a copyright infringement case. That same year, Led Zeppelin defeated plaintiff Michael Skidmore over a factually similar suit over 'Stairway to Heaven'. Since the infamous 'Blurred Lines' case -- in which the court ruled that Robin Thicke and Pharrell Williams had infringed upon Marvin Gaye's 'Got to Give It Up' with their 2013 hit 'Blurred Lines' -- musical artists have been increasingly wary about taking copyright disputes before a jury, often opting to settle outside of court instead.

## 'Elvis' star Austin Butler in talks to join 'Dune: Part 2'

Los Angeles | Agencies



'Elvis' star Austin Butler is in talks to join the cast of Denis Villeneuve's 'Dune: Part 2' as the antagonist Feyd-Rautha, the sadistic nephew of Baron Vladimir Harkonnen and the heir to the Harkonnen empire.

The role is one of the most important new characters appearing in 'Dune: Part 2'. A source close to the project told variety.com that Butler is in "the very early stages" of joining the film. Butler joins the franchise alongside Florence Pugh, who was announced earlier this week as being in final negotiations as Princess Irulan. With his casting in 'Dune: Part 2', Butler joins the

returning ensemble of Villeneuve's franchise that includes Timothee Chalamet, Rebecca Ferguson, Josh Brolin, Stellan Skarsgard, Dave Bautista, Zendaya and Javier Bardem. Production on the sequel is expected to start this summer, and the film is slated to hit theaters on October 20, 2023. Butler's role of Feyd-Rautha was played by Sting in David Lynch's infamous 1984 film adaptation. Butler is the star of Baz Luhrmann's upcoming 'Elvis', which also comes from 'Dune' studio Warner Bros. The musical biopic is rumoured to be world premiering at Cannes ahead of its June 24 theatrical release. Butler's additional credits include a supporting role in Quentin Tarantino's 'Once Upon a Time in Hollywood.' He first broke out as a cast member on the ABC Family series "Switched at Birth." Butler's upcoming projects also includes a role in the Apple TV Plus limited series 'Masters of Air.'



## JISOO RECOLLECTS SPRINTING WITH CAMERA ATTACHED TO HER FOR 'SNOWDROP'

Seoul | Agencies

BLACKPINK's Jisoo, who made her acting debut with the character of Eun Yeong-ro in the currently streaming South Korean drama series 'Snowdrop', recently shared an anecdote from the sets where she had to run with a camera attached to her. The director decided to keep the cinematographer and the focus puller away from Jisoo's vicinity and rigged the camera to her front to lend authenticity to the shot. A 'snorricam', (a camera attached to the subject) gives a unique perspective to the audience as it closely follows every minor body mechanism and movement.

While talking about the best anecdotes from the set that made it a memorable experience, Jisoo said, "I have different answers to this question every time it's asked. What comes to mind right now is the scene from the first episode where Yeong-ro runs to receive a phone call, which is supposed to be a big deal at dormitories. I enjoyed filming that scene."



## RAMY YOUSSEF GETS TWO-SEASON ANIMATED SERIES ORDER AT AMAZON

Los Angeles | Agencies

Streaming portal Amazon has ordered two seasons of an animated comedy from actor Ramy Youssef. 'Variety' has learned exclusively. The series is part of new first-look deal Youssef and his Cairo Cowboy production banner have signed with the streamer, reports variety.com. Youssef leads Cairo Cowboy with Andy Campagna, the former senior vice president of television for Sam Esmail's Esmail Corp.

"Ramy has only scratched the surface of his incredible creative gifts," said Vernon Sanders, head of global television for Amazon. "With perfectly measured and heartfelt



comedic candor, his work penetrates culture, and we are so fortunate to be working with him and his team." "Family comedies have long tackled some of the most

uncomfortable and difficult societal topics, but through animation and Ramy's creative voice, we are so excited to bring this one to audiences." The animated series will explore the experiences of a Muslim-American family that must learn how to code-switch as they navigate the early 2000s: a time of fear, war, and the rapid expansion of the boy-band industrial complex. Youssef co-created the series with Pam Brady. Both serve as executive producers along with Mona Chalabi, a journalist and illustrator whose work has been featured in publications like The New Yorker and The New York Times among others. A24 and Amazon Studios will co-produce.

Los Angeles | Agencies

The talk about the awards season is nearing an end, with Oscar voting getting underway on March 17. So every contender is looking to gain an advantage, and the BAFTA and Critics Choice Award (CCA) ceremonies, which take place March 13, provide that opportunity. At CCA, Kenneth Branagh's 'Belfast' and Steven Spielberg's 'West Side Story' lead the tally with 11 nominations apiece, including best picture, reports 'Variety'. At BAFTA, 'Belfast's' six-nom tally isn't as robust as Focus Features would have liked, but prospects look strong for the film to pick up wins for original screenplay, outstanding British film and possibly supporting actor Ciaran Hinds, who is a legend across the pond.

However, the momentum for 'CODA' has been palpable since its cast won the ensemble trophy at the Screen Actors Guild Awards: The family drama is a dark horse for the best picture prize at CCA and is even more likely to add another statuette to supporting actor nominee Troy Kotsur's shelf. The safest place for 'West Side Story' to find love has been Ariana DeBose's performance as Anita in the supporting actress category. She seems to be the one sure-fire bet to sweep the televised awards, given that the film may struggle to win in other categories, although it's competitive in many. The front-runner for both ceremonies is Jane Campion's 'The Power of the Dog'.

**BAFTA, Critics Choice, DGA Awards bring final contenders out to play**



## ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Sofia Vergara



## PINK-BALL TEST

# INDIA EYE CLEAN SWEEP AGAINST SRI LANKA

Bengaluru | Agencies

After winning the first match convincingly, India will look for a 2-0 sweep against Sri Lanka, when the two sides meet in the second and final Test, which will be played under the lights, here from Saturday.

A dominating win by an innings and 222 runs in the first Test in Mohali consolidated India's fifth position in the World Test Championship standings but they will be looking to move further up with a win in Bengaluru. It will be India's third day-night pink-ball Test at home, following matches in Kolkata against Bangladesh (November 2019) and Ahmedabad against England (February 2021). India won both those Tests inside three days.

Though India won the last match easily, the pink-ball Test presents a whole different set of challenges and will also keep hosts on their toes. The Rohit-Sharma-led side can't afford a home slip-up at this juncture of the Test Championship cycle and it should motivate them to maintain their intensity.

The likes of Rohit Sharma, Mayank Agarwal, Virat Kohli and Shreyas Iyer -- who all got starts in the previous game but failed to convert them into big innings -- will try to make a big impact with their bats. On the other hand, the lower-order trio of Rishabh



Pant, Ravindra Jadeja and Ravichandran Ashwin, who all had brilliant out with the bat, will look to continue their rich vein of form.

India played three spinners and two pacers in the first Test in Mohali. But it will be interesting to see whether there could be a change in the team's strategy for the pink-ball game considering the different playing conditions. Speaking at the pre-match press conference, India vice-captain Jasprit Bumrah mentioned that the team management will take the call about the playing eleven after today's practice session. "We had a look at the surface yesterday but it's too early to say much because today is the day we access the wicket when we go for the practice session. After that we'll have a clear idea if we want to go into the match with three seamers or three spinners," said Bumrah.

In the first pink-ball Test in Kolkata, Indian spinners came away empty-handed while in the next one (Ahmedabad), the trio of Axar, Ashwin and Washington Sundar took 19 of the 20 wickets to fall. India have made one change to the squad with Axar Patel replacing Kuldeep Yadav. Patel, who last played against New Zealand in November, has recovered from his shin injury as well as Covid-19 and could slot right into the playing XI in place of Jayant Yadav. On the other hand, the struggling Sri Lanka team suffered a massive blow going into the match. Meanwhile, Dushmantha Chameera, who sat out the first Test in Mohali, is also not available for selection as he continues his recovery from an ankle injury. As per Sri Lanka captain Dimuth Karunaratne, Chameera's workload was being managed till the T20 World Cup, which is scheduled for October this

year, and the pacer would be available only for limited-over games in the interim period after his recovery.

Given the relative success that Embuldeniya had in the first match, Sri Lanka are set to throw in another left-arm spinner in Praveen Jayawickrama, who has two fifers and 18 wickets from three Tests so far. The Test will be Suranga Lakmal's final game for Sri Lanka and the Islanders will be hoping to give the veteran bowler a farewell to remember.

### SQUAD

**India:** Rohit Sharma (captain), Priyank Panchal, Mayank Agarwal, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, Hanuma Vihari, Shubhan Gill, Rishabh Pant (wicketkeeper), KS Bharat, Ravindra Jadeja, Jayant Yadav, R. Ashwin, Saurabh Kumar, Mohd. Siraj, Umesh Yadav, Mohd. Shami, Jasprit Bumrah (vice-captain), Axar Patel **Sri Lanka:** Dimuth Karunaratne (captain), Lahiru Thirimanne, Dhananjaya de Silva (vice-captain), Kusal Mendis, Angelo Mathews, Dinesh Chandimal, Charith Asalanka, Niroshan Dickwella (wicketkeeper), Chamika Karunaratne, Lahiru Kumara, Suranga Lakmal, Vishwa Fernando, Jeffrey Vandersay, Praveen Jayawickrama and Lasith Embuldeniya.

## WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

# India search for batting returns while West Indies aim for hat-trick of wins

Hamilton | Agencies

After a crushing 62-run defeat to hosts New Zealand, India's search for batting returns continues when they take on an undefeated West Indies in their third league match of ICC Women's Cricket World Cup at Seddon Park on Saturday. In both matches, India's top-order batting hasn't fired, resulting in lack of urgency in the first 10 overs. Now at fifth place in the points table, India need to get their wrongs right with matches against defending champions England and six-time winners Australia coming in the upcoming week. But it is easier said than done as West Indies have been the surprise giant killers of the tournament, defeating New Zealand and England by three and seven runs respectively in their first two matches. Smriti Mandhana hasn't been in her usual stroke-play self in both matches while it will be a toss-up between a struggling Shafali Verma and out of sorts Yastika Bhatia for being her partner. Deepthi Sharma will have to get more runs at number three, so as captain Mithali Raj.

The decision to get an all-left top-order without being experimented before in international cricket didn't give the desired runs for India.

In the bowling department, there has been some cheer due to Pooja's pace and left-arm spin of Rajeshwari Gayakwad.

West Indies, on the other hand, have been on a roll in the World Cup. Defending scores of 259 and 225 to pull off nail-biting victories against New Zealand and England means the Stafanie Taylor-led side is riding high on confidence in all three departments of the game. Hayley Matthews, Deandra Dottin, Shemaine Campbelle and Anisa Mohammed have been the major architects of the winning juggernaut for the West Indies. With West Indies gearing themselves up for tougher challenges, the path to victory for India won't be easy. For that, they will need their batting to click in unison.



## SOUTH AFRICA BEAT PAKISTAN BY 6 RUNS

Mount Maunganui (New Zealand): South African right-arm pace bowler Shabnim Ismail held her nerve while bowling the crucial last over, conceding just four runs to help her team win a thriller against Pakistan Women by six runs, in the ICC Women's World Cup at the Bay Oval here on Friday. Defending 223/9, the Proteas bundled out Pakistan for 217 runs in 49.5 overs to keep South Africa's perfect record intact in the World Cup. Earlier in the day, Wolvaardt compiled 75 at the top of the order and Luus (62) was instrumental in holding the innings together, as South Africa overcame an excellent spell from Pakistan spinner Ghulam Fatima to post 223/9. Fatima picked up three wickets in two overs to help put the clamps on South Africa during the middle overs and Pakistan's victory target would have been much greater if not for her intervention.

### Brief scores

Brief scores: South Africa Women 223/9 in 50 overs (Laura Wolvaardt 75, Sune Luus 62; Fatima Sana 3/43) beat Pakistan Women 217 in 49.5 overs (Nahida Khan 40, Omaima Sohail 65, Nida Dar 55; Shabnim Ismail 3/41, Marizanne Kapp 2/43) by six runs.

# Chelsea overcome Abramovich problems to win at Norwich

London | Agencies

Chelsea reacted well to Thursday's news of sanctions against Russian owner Roman Abramovich with a comfortable 3-1 win at bottom side Norwich City.

Chelsea's Trevoh Chalobah nodded in just three minutes into the match on Thursday night, and Mason Mount's decisive finish in the 14th minute doubled their lead. Teemu Pukki's 69th-minute penalty gave Norwich hope of a fightback, but Kai Havertz assured the win for Chelsea with his late strike into the top corner after N'Golo Kante had injected



more energy into the Chelsea midfield, Xinhua reports. Newcastle United can probably forget their relegation fears after goals from Chris Wood and Bruno Guimaraes helped them overturn Stuart Armstrong's 24th-minute opener for Southampton, bringing the Magpies their sixth win in seven games. The win lifts Newcastle 10 points

clear of the relegation zone, while direct rivals Leeds United and Watford both lost in the fights against the drop. Leeds improved at Jesse Marsch's debut at the weekend following Marcelo Bielsa's sacking, but that improvement didn't last very long as Philippe Coutinho helped inspire Aston Villa to a 3-0 win at Elland Road.

# Bonner's patient century gives West Indies the edge in opening Test

North Sound (Antigua) | Agencies

West Indies middle-order batter Nkrumah Bonner scored a patient century as the hosts took a morale-boosting 62-run lead on Day 3 of the opening Test against the Joe Root-led England at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium here on Friday (IST). At stumps on Day 3, the West Indies, thanks to a 355-ball 123 from Bonner, were 373/9 in reply to England's first-innings total of 311 all out. The hosts added 171 runs on a slow-paced day, with Bonner anchoring the effort almost all the way through the day, reaching his second century in Test cricket off his 257th delivery by sweeping Jack Leach to the boundary shortly after tea. England's travails caught the eye,



but the brilliant Bonner who was the story of the day. It was Lawrence, bowling his first and England's 155th over, who finally ended Bonner stay at the crease, drawing a feather of an edge down the leg side that was expertly pouched by Foakes. But the late-blooming 33-year-old, who was only capped for the first time in Test cricket last year, departed having given West Indies the upper hand in the game and posing a number of unanswered questions of England's bowling unit.

### Brief scores:

England 311 vs West Indies 373/9 (Kraigg Brathwaite 55, John Campbell 35, Nkrumah Bonner 123, Jason Holder 45, Joshua Da Silva 32, Ben Stokes 2/42, Craig Overton 2/85)

# KOCHI STARS CLINCH 3BL WOMEN'S LEAGUE ROUND 2 TITLE

Chandigarh | Agencies

Defending champions Kochi Stars clinched the Round 2 title of 3BL Women's League after beating Pune Panthers, here on Friday.

Under the leadership of Indian national team centre Stephy Nixon, Kochi Stars survived a stiff challenge from Pune Panthers. The Panthers were willed to the finals by its young Maharashtrian star Durga Dharmadhikari. However, in the title game, it was Nixon who stamped her class.

The much-taller Nixon was unstoppable in the paint. From the get go, Kochi Stars built up a sizable 14-7 lead. Nixon was well-assisted by



guard Divyani Gangwal's outside shooting and tough layups. Panthers were kept afloat by the tireless

Dharmadhikari who was all over the floor despite the searing afternoon heat. Her long two-pointers cut down

Kochi's lead to within four, but in the end, it was a comfortable 19-15 victory for the team from down south.

# Rajasthan Royals appoint Malinga as fast bowling coach

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Rajasthan Royals on Friday appointed former Sri Lankan pacer Lasith Malinga as their fast-bowling coach ahead of the upcoming IPL 2022 season. The 38-year-old T20 World Cup-winning captain Malinga, who represented Sri Lanka in 340 matches across the three formats and picked up 546 wickets, will oversee the preparation of bowling strategies in the build-up and during the season. The pacer, who has only ever represent-



ed one team -- Mumbai Indians in the IPL and grabbed 170 scalps in 122

matches -- said he's looking forward to making new memories with a new franchise.

# National shooting: Meghana Sajjanar wins Women's 10M Air Rifle T1 trials

New Delhi | Bhopal

Railways' Meghana Sajjanar won the T1 Women's 10M Air Rifle trials, defeating West Bengal's Mehuli Ghosh 16-10 in the gold medal match on Friday.

Meghana, a former India international, finished sixth in the first qualification round with a score of 628.8 after 60-shots, as the top eight moved to the final stages. Olympian and former world No. 1 Elavenil Valarivan had topped qualifications with 631.1, while Mehuli finished second with 630.9.

Thereafter the trio again met in the medal match along with Mehak Jatana of Punjab after the four had finished top-two in the two semi-finals. Mehuli topped the medal match with a score of 44.5 and Meghana followed her to the gold medal match with 42.5. Mahek won bronze with

35.5 while Elavenil bowed out in fourth with 22.5 points. Arya Rajesh Borse of Maharashtra overcame Kiran Nandana of Karnataka 16-8 to clinch the Junior Women's 10M Air Rifle T1 trials. Karnataka bagged a double gold when Tilottama Sen defeated Mridvika Bhardwaj 17-9 in the Youth Women's decider. Over 3300 shooters, including all top shooters of the country, are participating in the year's first National trials in Bhopal, after they had to be postponed from January this year, because of the raging pandemic. The first results of the National Shooting T1 & T2 Rifle/Pistol trials, being conducted by the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) at Bhopal's M.P. State Shooting Academy ranges from March 08-30. Indian teams for the upcoming World Cup in Baku and Junior World Cup in Suhle are to be selected on the basis of these trials.

# Osaka edges past former top-5 player Sloane Stephens at Indian Wells

Indian Wells | Agencies

Former world No. 1 Naomi Osaka edged past former top-five player Sloane Stephens of the United States in a marquee opener at the BNP Paribas Open here on Friday (IST), as Amanda Anisimova (US), Marta Kostyuk (Ukraine) and Aliaksandra Sasnovich (Belarus) also advanced to the second round. In one of the most-anticipated opening clash of the tournament, Osaka secured a comeback 3-6, 6-1, 6-2 victory against the 28-year-old Stephens, the 2017 US Open champion. In her first match since the Australian Open in January, the Japanese 24-



year-old overcame the gritty opponent and blustery conditions, win-

ning the last six games to seal a 1 hour, 53-minute comeback. The win

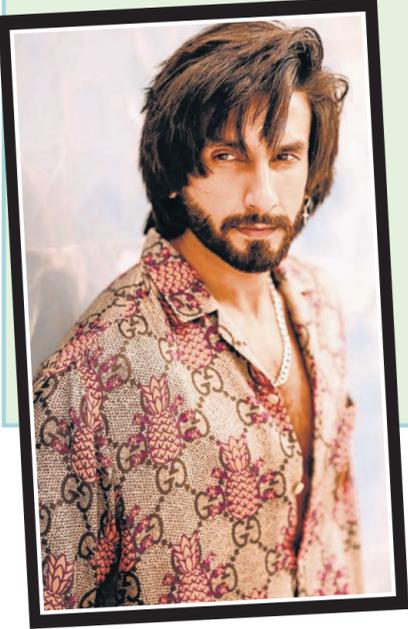
is her first against Stephens in three attempts, and marks a winning return for the 2018 champion in Indian Wells. Osaka didn't play last year when the tournament was rescheduled to after the US Open, and lost in the fourth round in 2019. The two hadn't played since the 2018 WTA Finals in Shenzhen, and Osaka lost the pair's first-ever meeting in Acapulco, Mexico in 2016. On Friday (IST), Osaka (current rank No.78) and Stephens (now No.38) battled through swirling winds inside the stadium, as sustained winds wrecked havoc. Osaka will meet No. 21 seed Veronika Kudermetova of Russia in Round 2 for the first time in her career.



## Ranveer Singh invited for Premier League matches, heads to the UK

Team Absolute | Mumbai

**R**anveer Singh has headed to the UK after being specially invited to watch Premier League football in the country. The 'Bajirao Mastani' actor will be watching three to four matches, including clashes like Manchester United vs Tottenham Hotspur, Arsenal vs Leicester City, Crystal Palace vs Manchester City, among others during his visit. Ranveer confirmed the development by saying, "It's going to be really exciting! I know it. I'm all pumped up! I'm heading there to watch some of the biggest matches - Manchester United vs Tottenham Hotspur, Arsenal vs Leicester City, Crystal Palace vs Manchester City. I cannot wait to be there." Earlier, the actor was also invited to play at the NBA Celebrity All Stars match where he had a gala time being in the company of some of the most revered stars of the game, and now he has been invited to the UK for premier league, which happens to be the biggest footballing event in the world.



## SAMANTHA: PEOPLE HAVE FORGOTTEN MY OTHER WORKS

Team Absolute | Hyderabad

**S**amantha Ruth Prabhu has spoken about her special song in 'Pushpa'. During a media interaction at the Critics Choice Awards, Samantha Ruth Prabhu stated that she has been overwhelmed with the kind of response she has been receiving for her special song 'Oo Antava' from 'Pushpa: The Rise'.

"I cannot explain the kind of love people are showering on me. I didn't expect 'Oo antava' to be such a hit pan-India," Samantha said.

The 'Rangasthalam' actress stated, "Not just Telugu audiences, people around the country, have forgotten the other movies I have done, but recognise me for 'Oo Antava' now." Samantha Ruth Prabhu's first special song 'Oo Antava Mama' has broken multiple records, creating many as well. Her appearance in Devi Sri Prasad's musical composition stood as one of the highlights for Allu Arjun & Rashmika Mandanna-starrer 'Pushpa: The Rise'.

Samantha had earlier stated that she was reluctant to sign the item song, but Allu Arjun and director Sukumar believed that the song will turn out to be a sensation. Now that the actress is quite happy at the kind of attention 'Oo antava' has earned for her, she credits Allu Arjun and Sukumar.



## Sonnalli Seygall is amazing: Sunny

Team Absolute | Mumbai

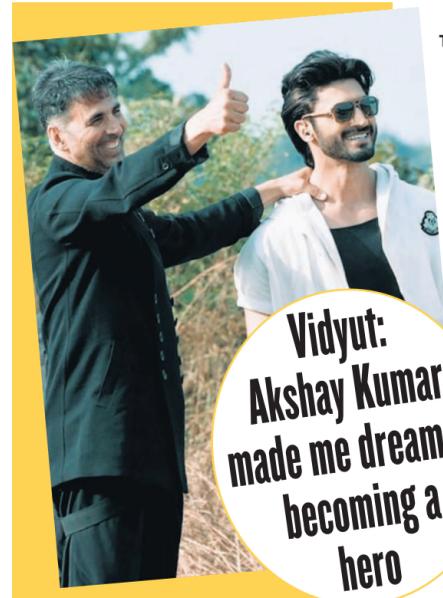
**A**ctress Sunny Leone has heaped praises on her 'Anamika' co-star Sonnalli Seygall and said that she has really done such an amazing job in it. Sunny said: "It was great. We were recently speaking and congratulating each other because people are talking about the series now with so much love and appreciation. I watched the series recently and realized that Sonnalli's so pretty. She has really done such an amazing job in it."

"Even on set, we had amazing conversations about life and what's interesting to us," Sunny shares about her equation with the 'Pyaar Ka PUNCHAMA' actress.

The actress goes on to inform that it was an amazing experience for both her and Sonnalli to shoot for the series as they both got to explore the adventurous action side of theirs.

"There are action scenes between me and Sonnalli, and not just one, but multiple ones. There's a cat and mouse chase happening between us and some amazing action taking place throughout the series," Sunny reveals.

The show 'Anamika', also featuring - Samir Soni, Rahul Dev, Shehzad Shaikh, Ayaz Khan - released on MX Player on March 10.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

**A**ctor and martial artist Vidhut Jammwal, who is hosting the non-fiction action reality show 'India's Ultimate Warrior', says the series would have been incomplete without the presence of Bollywood superstar Akshay Kumar.

Akshay has appeared in a special episode of the show and seeing the impressive performance of the participants he announced to give Rs 10 Lakhs to the winner of 'India's Ultimate Warrior'.

Talking about the experience of the special episode, Vidhut in a conversation with IANS said: "Like many youngsters, I was also a huge fan of Akshay Kumar who is known as one of the best action superstars of our country till date."

"I was training in martial art and as we all know he also started his career as a stunt man and a trained martial artist, he made me dream of becoming a hero in the film! I think he is one of those actors who has taken the action in our cinema to the next level." "Nowadays, in cinema martial artists have found a new place of respect because of Akshay sir. My show would have been incomplete without his presence," Vidhut further added.

'India's Ultimate Warrior' is a reality show, where Vidhut along with four mentors from different combat forms and experiences train participants and choose the best warrior of our country based on their physical and mental attributes like focus, control, determination, balance, discipline, amongst others.

"I think the most special element of our show is how we are choosing the warrior. As mentors for us, it was our responsibility to bring out the best of their potential."

Vidhut:  
Akshay Kumar  
made me dream of  
becoming a  
hero



## ARCHANA PURAN SINGH'S NOT LAUGHING AFTER NAVJOT SIDHU'S POLL DEFEAT!

Team Absolute | Mumbai

**A**rchana Pura Singh is trending on social media as netizens are making memes on her over reports that after Navjot Sidhu's election defeat in Punjab, he will take back the judge's seat on 'The Kapil Sharma Show'. Now, netizens are churning out some hilarious memes on Archana Pura Singh, pointing out that she should be worried about her position on the show as Sidhu can make a comeback. Everyone knows he was a popular face of 'The Kapil Sharma Show'. But later he was replaced by Archana Pura Singh as he pursued his political career.

He was the one who sat on the chair and laughed his lungs out on Kapil's jokes.

A user wrote: "Sidhu loses from Amritsar seat Meanwhile Archana Pura Singh. #Congress". Another mentioned: "Sidhu lost from his seat. Archana Pura Singh be like: 'Dar ka mahaul ha'. (There is an atmosphere of fear)".

## 'The Kashmir Files': Lending a voice to broken souls



FILM REVIEW

BY TROY RIBEIRO

(Running in Theatres)

**Director:** Vivek Agnihotri

**Cast:** Mithun Chakraborty, Amaan Iqbal, Anupam Kher, Bhasha Sumbli, Puneet Issar, Arpan Bhikhari, Pallavi Joshi, Ekta Singh, R.K. Gaurav, Chinmay Mandlekar and Darshan Kumar.

**Duration:** 170 minutes.

**Ratings:** \*\*\*1/2 (three and half stars)

**B**ased on actual incidents and narrated from the Kashmiri Pandit's point of view, director Vivek Agnihotri's 'The Kashmir Files' is a dramatised version of events that occurred in 1989.

The film, which showcases the plight of Kashmiri Pandits with all its grime and gore, begins on an innocuous note, with a euphoric cricket commentary on the radio in the backdrop of young Kashmiri children playing cricket in the snow-covered landscape. Synchronising their game to the radio commentary, young Shiva cheers for Sachin Tendulkar till his friend Abdul cautions him against doing so, and soon we realise why.

Told in a non-linear manner, initially, the plot meanders on a jerky note telling about the atrocities perpetrated on Pushkar Nath Pandit (Anupam Kher) and his family. But soon, the tale takes the form of a cathartic film, when Pushkar's four friends reunite after 30 years, at the behest of Krishna (Darshan Kumar), Pushkar's younger grandson, to scatter Pushkar's ashes at his ancestral home in Kashmir.

They meet in the house of Brahma Bhatt (Mithun Chakraborty), an IAS officer who was the adviser to the Governor of Kashmir.



The others in the room are Brahma's wife Laxmi (Mrinal Kulkarni), Dr Mahesh Kumar (Prakash Belawadi), DGP Hari Narayan (Puneet Issar) and journalist Vishnu Ram (Atul Srivastava). Together, they represent the pillars of the state, who tactfully decide not to address the elephant in the room, but then how long can one hold up pent-up feelings?

At the dining table, while discussing 'nadru' (lotus stems), Brahma recalls his time spent with Pushkar, and soon their resolution is broken.

Laying the cards on the table, mirroring what happened from the early 1990s till date, and packed with rhetorical questions, the film throws open a Pandora's box. It thus cleverly and astutely manoeuvres from being inspirational to motivational to a propaganda film where every character propels the narrative forward.

Pallavi Joshi plays Radhika Menon, a professor at a prestigious Delhi college where Krishna studies and vying to be a student leader. She is the perfect trouble-monger with misplaced confidence, who instigates

Krishna. "Make the government the villain," she says, "and you'll have a better negotiating power." She performs in a stereotypical and perfunctory manner. So is the case with Chinmay Mandlekar, who essays the role of Farooq Malik Bitta, the debatable "terrorist or freedom fighter".

On the other hand, Anupam Kher puts his soul into his performance and delivers an impressive Pushkar Nath Pandit. Equally remarkable is Mithun Chakraborty. But the actor who leaves an indelible mark on screen is Darshan Kumar, who, as Krishna, is striking, especially during his speech in the climax.

Mounted with ace production values, the visuals, except for a few frames, do not boast of any cinematic brilliance. Nevertheless, the film is relatable, and you get sucked into the narrative.

Overall, the film is engaging and like one of the dialogues, which tells us, "Broken souls don't speak -- they must be heard", 'The Kashmir Files' is the voice of tens of thousands of Kashmiri Pandits who were forced to leave their homes.

## INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Amyra Dastur