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OMICRON+DELTA RECOMBINANT CASES DETECTED FROM 7 STATES IN INDIA: REPORT

THE HYBRID VARIANT

Regarding Omicron+Delta recombinant virus, reports said Karnataka remains a hotspot with 221, followed by 90 in Tamil Nadu, 66 in Maharashtra, 33 in Gujarat, 32 in West Bengal and 20 in New Delhi

SYMPTOMS OF HYBRID VARIANT

- High temperature: This means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature).
- New, continuous cough: This is defined as coughing a lot for more than an hour, or three or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual).
- Loss or change to your sense of smell or taste (anosmia): This means you have noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal.



WHAT IS THE OMICRON, DELTA RECOMBINANT VIRUS?

It is hybrid version of the coronavirus that combine genes from the Delta and Omicron variants, was found by experts. Philippe Colson of IHU Mediterranee Infection in Marseille, France, who is the lead author for the study, "During the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, two or more variants have co-circulated during same periods of time and in same geographical areas... This created opportunities for recombination between these two variants."

221, followed by 90 in Tamil Nadu, 66 in Maharashtra, 33 in Gujarat, 32 in West Bengal, 25 in Telangan and 20 in New Delhi. Regarding recombinants, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said, with both Omicron and Delta spreading at an intense, it was expected.

Deltacron's story begins in mid-February, when scientists at the Institut Pasteur in Paris uploaded a genetic sequence of the coronavirus that looked very different from previous sequences.

The virus sample had come from an elderly man in northern France and looked odd. Most of its genetic

INDIA ENDS COVID CURBS; FACE MASK, SOCIAL DISTANCING TO CONTINUE

New Delhi: In view of the continuous dip in coronavirus cases, the home ministry has decided to end its all Covid-19 containment measures from March 31, two years after their implementation following the outbreak of the pandemic. However, wearing of face mask and maintaining social distancing norms will continue as earlier. The central government had on March 24, 2020, issued for the first time orders and guidelines under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, for the containment of Covid-19 in the country and these have been modified on various occasions.

sequence was the same as delta's, which was dominant worldwide up until late last year, but the part of the sequence that encodes the virus's spike protein - a key part of its external structure, which it uses to get inside cells in the body - came from omicron. By March, three further hybrid genetic sequences had been reported, this time in the US. There are now over 60 logged, across France, the Netherlands, Denmark, the US and the UK.

Petrol, diesel prices raised again for 2nd consecutive day

As per pump prices, petrol now costs Rs 97.01 per litre and diesel Rs 88.27 per litre in Delhi. In the financial capital Mumbai, prices were hiked to Rs 111.67 per litre for petrol and diesel to Rs 95.85 per litre. In Bhopal, Petrol prices were hiked to Rs 108.96 and Diesel to Rs 92.50/ litre, respectively.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

State-owned oil marketing companies on Wednesday raised petrol and diesel prices for the second consecutive day.

These prices were revised for the very first time on Tuesday after a gap of more than 4-months.

Accordingly, the increase in selling price which includes state levies, central excise and cess amongst others came days after crude oil prices saw astronomical rise due to the Russian-Ukrainian crisis.

In New Delhi, the price of petrol and diesel were increased again by 80 paise per litre.

On Tuesday, petrol prices were increased to Rs 96.21 per litre and diesel to Rs 87.47 per litre.

Besides, the prices of both the transport fuels were raised in Kolkata. The petrol prices rose to Rs 106.34 and diesel to Rs 91.42 per litre.

In Chennai too, they were increased. Petrol there now costs Rs 102.91 and Rs 92.95 per litre.

Till Tuesday, fuel prices



were steady since early November when the Centre reduced excise duty on petrol and diesel by Rs 5 and Rs 10 per litre, respectively.

The OMCs revise the transportation fuel cost based on various factors such as rupee to US Dollar exchange rate, cost of crude oil and demand of fuel amongst others.

Resultantly, the final price includes excise duty, value added tax and dealer's commission.

It was widely expected that the OMCs will revise the current prices due to high

crude oil cost. Lately, crude oil prices have been volatile surging by nearly 35-40 per cent on fear of tight supplies.

Furthermore, it is feared that current sanctions against Russia will curtail more global supplies and stifle growth.

The crude oil price range is a cause of concern for India as it may ultimately add Rs 15-Rs 25 in petrol and diesel selling prices.

At present, India imports nearly 85 per cent of its crude oil requirements.

Trade Unions plan nationwide strike on March 28-29 to protest against government policies



Team Absolute | Bhopal

A joint forum of central trade unions has given a call for a nationwide strike on March 28 and 29, to protest against government policies affecting workers, farmers, and people.

The Joint Platform of central trade unions held a meeting in Delhi on March 22, to take stock of the preparations in various states and sectors for the proposed two-day all India strike on March 28-29 against "the anti-worker, anti-farmer, anti-people and anti-national policies" of the central government,

a statement said. The statement said that roadways, transport workers and electricity workers have decided to join the strike in spite of the impending threat of ESMA (Haryana and Chandigarh, respectively).

Financial sectors, including banking and insurance, are joining the strike, it stated.

The strike notices have been given by unions in the sectors such as coal, steel, oil, telecom, postal, income tax, copper, banks, insurance among others, it also stated.

The unions in railways and defence sector would be making mass mobilization in support of strike at several hundreds of spots, it stated.

STILL HOLDS THE TRUMP CARD: IMRAN KHAN

Islamabad: Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said on Wednesday that he still holds the trump card on the situation that emerged after the opposition submitted a no-confidence motion against him, and when he reveals the card the opposition leaders will be surprised, Samaa TV reported.

Speaking to a group of senior journalists after he held a key political meeting, the Prime Minister said that the "surprise" would be revealed a day before or on the day of the vote on the no-confidence motion.

The opposition leaders cannot imagine how few members will be left with them, he said. "It would be someone's delusion that I would resign and go home. Should I resign on the demand of thieves," Khan asked.

'NEVER FORGIVE THE CULPRITS'

Modi's blistering attack on perpetrators of Birbhum violence



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday urged the people of Bengal to never forgive the perpetrators of incidents like Birbhum violence and those who

ensure punishment for the perpetrators of such a heinous crime.

Assuring all the cooperation from the Centre, Prime Minister Modi said, "I would also urge the people of Bengal to never forgive the perpetrators

of such incidents and those who encourage such criminals." At least 10 persons were charred to death in the violence that allegedly broke out after the murder of a deputy Panchayat Pradhan at Baguti village in West Bengal's Birbhum district on Monday night.

FORMER CJ RC LAHOTI PASSES AWAY

New Delhi: Former Chief Justice of India (CJI) RC Lahoti passed away on Wednesday. He was 81.

He served as CJI from June 2004 to October 2005.

Justice Lahoti was born on November 1, 1940 and enrolled as a lawyer in 1962.

He was later appointed additional judge of the Madhya Pradesh High Court on May 3, 1988 and made permanent judge on August 4, 1989. He was transferred to the Delhi High Court in February 1994.

Justice Lahoti was elevated to the Supreme Court of India on December 9, 1998 and took over as CJI on June 1, 2004 before retiring on October 31, 2005.

WORLD TUBERCULOSIS DAY

SIGNIFICANT RISE IN YOUNG TB PATIENTS IN INDIA AFTER COVID

March 24 is globally observed as World Tuberculosis Day every year to raise awareness about the disease that is curable but affects approximately 4.1 million people across the world, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

India contributes to 27 per cent of the global TB burden. It is estimated that over 35-50 crore people in India have TB infection and over 26 lakh people develop TB annually.

While India is on a mission to become TB free by 2025, there is a significant rise in TB cases among youngsters.

"The pandemic has reversed years of progress made in tuberculosis control not just in India but across the globe. The absolute percentage of those succumbing to the disease has risen to 5-7 per cent now, up from 1-2 per cent during pre-Covid times."

Anand K, CEO, SRL Diagnostics

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Covid has significantly reversed the gains made in tuberculosis (TB) control and has led to an increase of about 25-30 per cent patients, partic-

ularly young adults, said experts on Wednesday ahead of World Tuberculosis Day. As Covid hogged the limelight, healthcare resources were diverted to combat the rising cases. TB services were thus disrupted in the last two years.

In March last year, an analysis by the Health Ministry notified that Covid brought down TB detection by 25 per cent in India in 2020. Tuberculosis notifications reduced to 18.02 lakh in 2020 from 24.04 lakh in 2019 due to lockdown and diversion of resources, the ministry said. India also accounted for 34 per cent of an estimated 1.48 million deaths due to TB globally in 2020. Deaths due to TB in the country also rose by 3 per cent compared to 2019, WHO's 2021 Global TB report said. As per experts, the deaths due to the infectious disease is still on the high. A recent report by Mumbai-based health-tech startup HaystackAnalytics has indicated that

India continues to bear the largest share of TB cases in the world, with 65 per cent of the cases being reported in the most economically productive population segment between the ages 15-45.

The reason is, "during the Covid 19 pandemic, many people had irregular sleep patterns like staying up till late night or early morning, skipping breakfast, and a lot many also followed a strict diet plan or did fasting without consulting the experts", Dr Vikas Maurya, HoD, Fortis Hospital said, adding "this lowers the immune system, which leads to diseases like TB". Other factors found to be increasingly associated with the increase of TB cases were presence of comorbidities, especially diabetes, heart disease, chronic lung and kidney disease, and cancer, the experts said.

Besides, a healthy nutritious diet, regular exercise, and proper sleep can strengthen the immune system, and help fight the infection, the experts said.

EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS FOR EVERYONE ON EARTH IN NEXT FIVE YEARS

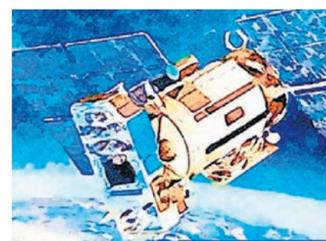
Team Absolute | New Delhi

Stating that one-third of the world's people are not covered by early warning systems and hence they are vulnerable to climate change, United Nations on Wednesday announced that it will spearhead new action to ensure every person on Earth is protected by early warning systems within five years. The announcement was made on the occasion of World Meteorological Day on Wednesday, which has 'Early Warning and Early Action' as the theme this year.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has tasked the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) to lead the effort and present an action plan to achieve this goal at the next UN climate conference in Egypt this November.

"Human-caused climate disruption is now damaging every region. The most recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change details the sufferings already happening.

"Each increment of global heating will further increase the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events," Guterres said, adding, "We must invest equally in adaptation and resilience. That includes the information that allows us to anticipate storms, heatwaves,



floods, and droughts." However, one-third of the world's people, mainly in least developed countries and small developing island states, are still not covered by early warning systems.

In Africa, it is even worse: 60 per cent of people lack coverage. Over the past 50 years (1970-2019), a weather, climate or water-related disaster has occurred on average almost every day -- taking the lives of 115 people and causing \$202 million in losses daily -- according to a 2021 WMO report on disaster statistics.

The number of recorded disasters increased by a factor of five over that 50-year period, driven by human-induced climate change, more extreme weather events and improved reporting.



IAS OFFICER STIRS ROW IN MP WITH STATEMENTS ON 'THE KASHMIR FILES'

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Amid the debate over the movie "The Kashmir Files, a parallel controversy has erupted over a senior IAS officer here for his continuous statements on the same subject through his social media account.

For his statements on director Vivek Agnihotri's Hindi movie 'The Kashmir File', IAS officer Niyad Khan who is currently serving as deputy secretary of the PWD in the Madhya Pradesh government, was reminded by a cabinet minister that he is crossing the line. The minister demanded action against Khan, who has written seven novels and is busy with his eighth one.

On Wednesday, Home Minister Narottam Mishra reminded the officer that he is violating the norms of public service and a show-cause notice will be issued to seek his reply. "I have seen Khan's tweets. This is a serious issue. He (Khan) is crossing and violating the lakshman rekha (limit) set for (government) officials. The state government will issue a show-cause notice to him and seek his reply," Mishra said on Wednesday.

In his defence, Khan has maintained that he has made statements on a movie using his constitutional right of expression and alleged that he was being attacked for his religious identity. "I have been a victim of my



name, especially my surname Khan. As soon as they hear my name, they label me as a Muslim - and it doesn't matter that I am as secular as anyone can be," Khan had stated on Tuesday.

Khan started making statements on his Twitter account soon after the movie was released. The controversy over Khan gained momentum after one of his statements on

his Twitter account, which reads, "I am thinking to write a book to show the massacre of Muslims on different occasions so that a movie like Kashmir Files could be produced by some producer, so that the pain and suffering of minorities could be brought before Indians."

Among several tweets, he pointed directly or indirectly at various people including The

Kashmir File's director Vivek Agnihotri, Bollywood actor Aamir Khan and MP and president of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM), Asaduddin Owaisi.

On March 20, Khan had pointed at Owaisi saying, "Owaisi ji is silent on the issue. Please speak on human issues, not only during elections. We have to make a strong country joining shoulders with Hindu brothers. Arab is not our model, India is our model and this land is our motherland."

In another statement he had appealed to 'The Kashmir Files' producer to transfer all earnings from the movie for the education of the children of Kashmiri Pandits and construction of homes for them in Kashmir.

However, controversy is not new to Niyaz Khan, who has written seven novels. He has been embroiled in controversies either due to his thoughts on various subjects or for his literary subjects. He has written seven novels titled -- Destiny of Drug, Love Demands Blood, Talaq, My Untold Story of Ashram, Once I Was Blackman and Be Ready to Die. Earlier he had claimed that his novel 'Love Demands Blood' is based on the love story of gangster Abu Salem and his girlfriend Bollywood actress Monica Bedi. Once he had demanded special leave and permission from the government to allow him to meet Abu Salem in Tihar Jail so that he could find out more for his novel.

YOGI IN DELHI TO DISCUSS GOVT FORMATION IN UP WITH BJP LEADERSHIP

New Delhi: A day before the Uttar Pradesh BJP legislative party meeting, caretaker Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath reached the national capital on Wednesday evening to discuss government formation in the state with the party's Central leadership.

Sources said that a meeting will take place at Union Home Minister Amit Shah's residence here to discuss the names to be appointed as ministers in the new Adityanath-led government in Uttar Pradesh.

"After attending the swearing-in ceremony of the Pushkar Singh Dhami government in Uttarakhand, Adityanath reached Delhi on Wednesday evening to discuss and finalise the names of ministers for his new cabinet," sources said. It is learnt that BJP chief J.P. Nadda and the party's national General Secretary (Organisation) B.L. Santhosh will be present during the meeting at Shah's residence.

"The names of ministers will be discussed after reviewing the performance of the existing ones. There are over a dozen vacancies as some sitting ministers lost the elections, while a few left the party before the polls. While finalising the names, social engineering and regional balance will be also considered," a party insider said.

The Uttar Pradesh legislative party meeting will be held in Lucknow on Thursday, before the swearing-in ceremony of the new Adityanath-led government takes place on March 25. Central observers Shah and former Jharkhand CM Raghubar Das will be reaching Lucknow on Thursday for the meeting.



Pushkar Singh Dhami sworn in as Uttarakhand CM for second term

DEHRADUN | Agencies

Pushkar Singh Dhami on Wednesday was sworn in as the Chief Minister of Uttarakhand for a second term. Governor Gurmit Singh administered the oath of office at a function at Parade Ground in Dehradun on Dhami.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP chief J.P. Nadda, union ministers Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh, Nitin Gadkari, chief minister Yogi Adityanath and others were present at the swearing in ceremony.

Governor Singh also administered oaths to eight ministers of the Dhami government. Satpal

Maharaj, Ganesh Joshi, Rekha Arya, Subodh Uniyal, Dhan Singh Rawat, Saurav Bahuguna, Premchand Agarwal, and Chandan Ram Das took oath as minister in the Dhami government. Dhami was elected as the 12th Chief Minister of Uttarakhand at the meeting of the BJP's legislature party in Dehradun on Monday. After that chief minister designate Dhami met the Governor and officially staked claim to form the government in the state. The BJP created history by becoming the only party to retain power for a second consecutive term in the state since its formation.

STUDENT BEATEN TO DEATH BY CLASSMATES, CCTV SHOWS

Dhanbad: A class 10 student of a private school in Jharkhand's Dhanbad district was allegedly beaten to death in the classroom by his classmates on Wednesday, police said. The father of the 15-year-old boy said he received a call from the principal of the school in the morning, stating that his son had fallen sick.

"When I reached the school I found him unconscious. I immediately took him to Shahid Nirmal Mahto Medical College and Hospital where doctors declared him dead," he said. CCTV footage showed that three students were beating up the boy around 10.23 am, police said. All three students involved in the incident have been identified, they said. The principal of the school, who initially told the press that the student fell in the classroom while changing his seat and got injured, refused to speak after police reviewed the CCTV footage. Police said a thorough investigation is underway in the case that triggered tension among the students, parents and teachers of the well-known English medium school in Sindri.

ALL THREE VIP MLAS IN BIHAR JOIN BJP, SAHANI HEADING FOR SACK?

PATNA | Agencies

All three MLAs of Mukesh Sahani's Vikasheel Insaan Party (VIP) on Wednesday met Bihar Assembly Speaker Vijay Sinha and informed him that they have officially joined the BJP.

The development took place after the proceedings of Vidhan Sabha ended for the day at around 6 p.m.

The three MLAs - Mishri Lal Yadav, Raju Singh and Swarn Singh - went to the chamber of the Speaker, along with the two Deputy Chief Ministers Tar Kishore Prasad and Renu Devi, but waited outside till state BJP chief Sanjay Jaiswal came.



Then, they went inside and shared their joining letters, while also announcing that they have no official relation with the VIP.

The three legislators said

that the VIP has only three MLAs in the house and all of them have joined the BJP, hence, the anti-defection act is not applicable on them. As per the act, if two-third legis-

lators of a party join another party, they cannot be penalised under it. Raju Singh accused Sahani of having "no political knowledge".

RAPE IS RAPE, BE IT BY MAN OR HUSBAND: KARNATAKA HC

BENGALURU | Agencies

In a significant judgment on the contentious issue of marital rape, the Karnataka High Court on Wednesday refused to quash rape charges filed against a man accused of sexually assaulting his wife. The high court said the "brutal act of sexual assault on the wife, against her consent, albeit by the husband, cannot but be termed to be a rape".

"Such sexual assault by a husband on his wife will have grave consequences on the mental sheet of the wife, it has both psychological and physiological impact on her. Such acts of husbands scar the soul of the wives," said the single-judge bench of Justice M Nagaprasanna.

The court made these observations while refusing to interfere with the proceedings initiated against the man, the petitioner, on charges of rape, cruelty as also offences under the POCSO Act for alleged sexual acts against his wife and daughter. The judge further contended that



any man raping a woman is "amenable to punishment under Section 376 of IPC". "The contention of the learned senior counsel that if the man is the husband, performing the very same acts as that of another man, he is exempted. In my considered view, such an argument cannot



be countenanced. A man is a man; an act is an act; rape is a rape, be it performed by a man the 'husband' on the woman 'wife'," he stated.

In a strong assertion, Nagaprasanna said marriage cannot be used to provide any special male privilege or a license for unleashing a

"brutal beast" on the wife, and stressed that for ages, a man in the role of a husband has used the wife as his chattel. The age-old thought and tradition that the husbands are the rulers of their wives, their body, mind and soul should be effaced, the court said.

Bar on Muslim traders near temples, Hindu fairs in K'taka: BJP says Cong framed rules

Bengaluru | Agencies

The ruling BJP in Karnataka quoted the rule book on Wednesday to blunt the opposition attack over the calls to ban Muslim traders from Hindu temple premises and religious fairs in the state's coastal region.

During a discussion on the issue in the legislative assembly on Wednesday, Karnataka Law Minister JC Madhuswamy referred to The Hindu Religious Institutions And Charitable Endowments Act and Rules (2002).

"As per the rule number 12 of Act, leasing out space near a Hindu religious institution to a person of another faith is prohibited. If the instances of Muslims being banned from doing business have taken place outside the temples' premises, we can examine. However, within the premises, the rules don't permit people from other communities to set up shop," Madhuswamy stated while pointing out that the Congress government of the time had framed these rules.

With instances coming to light of Muslim traders being barred from setting up shops and stalls in some temple premises and religious gatherings in Karnataka's coastal districts, the issue was hotly discussed in the leg-



islature on Wednesday.

During Zero Hour, Congress members UT Khadar and Rizwan Arshad focused attention on the banners being displayed at religious fairs and temples, prohibiting Muslim traders from setting up shops and stalls at local Hindu fairs. They alleged that such banners are being displayed in public areas too.

Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai said that the applicability of the rules has to be examined.

AAP WILL LEAVE POLITICS IF BJP WINS MCD POLLS: ARVIND KEJRIWAL

New Delhi: Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal attacked the BJP over the "postponement" of municipal elections, saying that AAP will quit politics if BJP gets these polls conducted timely and wins them.

His remarks came after the Union Cabinet on Tuesday approved a bill to unify the three civic bodies - North, East and South - in Delhi. "We (the AAP) will leave politics if BJP gets the MCD polls held (timely) and wins them," Mr Kejriwal told reporters outside the Delhi Assembly.

He added, "The BJP says it is the biggest political party in the world but it got scared by a small party and a small election. I dare the BJP for timely MCD polls." Later, Kejriwal took to Twitter and said that deferring the elections is an "insult to martyrs".

11 Bihar workers charred to death in Hyderabad fire accident

HYDERABAD | Agencies

Eleven migrant workers from Bihar were charred to death in a huge fire that broke out at a scrap godown in Secunderabad here early Wednesday, police said.

The incident occurred in the godown in IDH Colony of Bhoiguda area in Secunderabad around 4 a.m.

Police said one person managed to jump out of the fire and he was rushed to Gandhi Hospital. Others trapped in the fire due to heavy smoke were burnt alive.

All the victims were migrant workers from Chapra district Bihar and were asleep when the fire broke out. Barring one, the rest were between 23 and 35 years of age.

The fire was doused with the help of five fire tenders which rushed to the scene from different areas. Short circuit is suspected to have caused the fire. Hyderabad Police Commissioner C. V. Anand said the workers were asleep in rooms on the first while scrap material including



plastic, newspapers and other scrap items were stored on the ground floor. Someone alerted the police after a gas cylinder exploded due to the fire. The bodies were shifted to Gandhi Hospital. Hospital authorities

said bodies of 10 deceased were charred beyond recognition. Gandhi Hospital superintendent Dr Raja Rao said four teams were constituted for autopsy. "We have to do DNA tests to identify the bodies

and after completing the procedure we will hand over the remains to their families," he said.

Police said the negligence by the timber depot owner and violation of safety rules led to the incident.

AMENDMENTS TO IPC, CRPC IN CONSULTATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS: GOVT

New Delhi: The government on Wednesday informed the Rajya Sabha that it has initiated a process for bringing comprehensive amendments to criminal laws -- the Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860, the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973, and the Indian Evidence Act, 1872 -- in consultation with all the stakeholders.

It also said that the process has been initiated with an aim to provide affordable and speedy justice to all, and to create a people-centric legal structure.

Responding to a question in the Upper House, the Minister of State for Home Affairs, Ajay Kumar Mishra, said that a committee had been constituted under the chairmanship of the Vice Chancellor, National Law University, Delhi, to suggest reforms in criminal laws.

"The Ministry of Home Affairs has also sought suggestions from Governors, Chief Ministers, Lieutenant Governors (LGs) and Administrators of Union Territories, Chief Justice of India, Chief Justices of various high courts, Bar Council of India, Bar Council of various states, various universities/law institutes and all Members of Parliament regarding comprehensive amendments in criminal laws," Mishra said.



MORE IN STORE, WARNS BJP AFTER ED ACTION AGAINST CM'S KIN

A major war of words erupted once again between the Maha Vikas Aghadi allies Shiv Sena-Nationalist Congress Party-Congress and the Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party after the Enforcement Directorate (ED) attached 11 properties belonging to the brother-in-law of Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, here on Wednesday.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

A major war of words erupted once again between the Maha Vikas Aghadi allies Shiv Sena-Nationalist Congress Party-Congress and the Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party after the Enforcement Directorate (ED) attached 11 properties belonging to the brother-in-law of Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, here on Wednesday.

As a political storm raged in the state, top BJP leaders warned that "this is the just the beginning and more action would follow in the next few weeks", while the MVA leaders hit back at the BJP accusing it of "blatantly misusing central probe agencies to harass and topple the state

government".

Union MSME Minister Narayan Rane ominously said "Aage aage dekho, hota hai kya" (wait and watch what unfolds ahead), while his MLA son Nitesh Rane dropped hints seeking the CM's resignation after the ED attached properties of a company allegedly owned by Shridhar Madhav Patankar, Thackeray's brother-in-law.

Rejecting outright the MVA's charges, Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnis reiterated that the probe agencies are merely doing their job without any interference or influence to expose corruption at all levels. BJP activist and ex-MP Kirit Somaiya warned to expose at least half-a-dozen more 'corrupt ministers' of what he alleged was the 'maha

vasooli (extortionist) aghadi' 3-party alliance and other scams involving important leaders.

Another activist Mohit (Kamboj) Bharatiya vowed more fireworks to expose more misdeeds of the MVA bigwigs and certain bureaucrats of their purported financial misdoings and investments in properties in the US.

In a major development that shook the MVA, the ED on Tuesday said it has attached immovable properties worth around Rs 6.45 crore belonging to Pushpak Group's entity, Pushpak Bullion, in Thane.

These included 11 flats in the Neelambari realty project of Thane, which the ED said, belongs to Shree Saibaba Grihanirmiti Pvt Ltd owned

and controlled by Patankar - the brother-in-law of CM Thackeray and brother of his wife Rashmi Thackeray.

The stunning swoop action arose out of a money-laundering case registered against Pushpak Bullion and other group companies under the PMLA, in March 2017, when the BJP-Sena alliance was in power in the state.

NCP President Sharad Pawar, MVA ministers and leaders including Eknath Shinde, Aaditya Thackeray, MPs Supriya Sule, Sanjay Raut, Nana Patole, and many others slammed the ED for targeting opposition-ruled states like Maharashtra and West Bengal with sinister intentions to instil fear and bring down the duly elected governments.

Irregularities in paddy procurement in Maha referred to CBI: Govt

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Irregularities in paddy procurement in Maharashtra's Gondia and Bhandara districts of Maharashtra has prompted authorities to refer the matter to Central Bureau of Investigation for detailed investigation, the Parliament was informed on Wednesday.

BJP Lok Sabha member Sunil Baburao Mendhe had sought to know whether cases of alleged fraud and irregularities in paddy procurement centres in those two districts were reported and if the Centre proposed, or was likely to conduct, a CBI inquiry into these cases of irregularities.

In response, Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution Minister Piyush Goyal, in a statement tabled in the house, said: "Some complaints like delay in paddy procurement, procurement of paddy from middlemen, corruption in paddy procurement, etc. for the period of 2020-21 were received from public representatives of Maharashtra. Looking at the seriousness of the issue, the matter was referred to the Central



Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for detailed investigation."

However, he did not provide any further details about the case.

To Mendhe's query whether paddy was not being procured from the farmers on minimum support price (MSP) through paddy procurement centres for the last one year in the Bhandara-Gondia districts and was being procured from the traders in the name of farmers, the Minister said: "Maharashtra has adopted Decentralised Procurement (DCP) Scheme for procure-

ment of paddy under which, the state government itself undertakes direct purchase of paddy from farmers."

According to the statement, paddy procured in Bhandara district during last two and current Kharif Marketing Season (KMS) was 4,57,212.20 in KMS 2019-20, 5,59,101.20 MT in 2020-21, and 3,80,659.70 MT for 2021-22 (up to March 15).

In Gondia, in KMS 2019-20, procurement was 7,61,388.10 MT, in 2020-21, it was 7,20,739.20 MT, while in 2021-22 (as on March 15), it was 4,41,066.00 MT.

Maharashtra: 'Operation Change' Brews in this Illicit Liquor Town After Help from Police

Team Absolute | Solapur

The rural area of Maharashtra's Solapur district, till today, was infamous for producing illicit liquor. Women used to brew this illicit liquor in small breweries on a large scale. These women who considered this business 'dirty but profitable,' are now seeing a new dawn.

And the one who has made all these possible is none other than Solapur rural area Superintendent of Police Tejaswi Sawant. Her 'Operation Change' is solely responsible for bringing this new change. Under this drive, she has been able to successfully bring more than 600 families out of this illicit liquor production to

the mainstream of society. The Mulegaon Tanda village, infamous for producing illicit liquor, was first to see the light of the new dawn. Women from the village will now be making shirts that will be exported to Japan.

The SP says that after she was deputed in the Solapur Rural area, she found that illicit liquor is being brewed here. Then she thought about starting 'Operation Change' and she started working on this project. The aim was not to raid the illicit liquor brewing locations. But she adopted four-prong strategies of raid, awareness, counselling and rehabilitation to bring these women out of this business. Earlier, the police used to

raid these locations of illicit breweries once a month and was increased to every 15 days. However this did not impact the business. The police then began raiding these centres every third day. A list of the villages was prepared and police officers were asked to adopt each village. SP Tejaswi Sawant herself adopted the Mulegaon Tanda village.

Under this campaign, 45 women were given training in stitching for 45 days. A local company called Apex will supply the raw materials for stitching shirts and the readymade shirts will be collected the same day by the company. Women will be paid Rs 300 to Rs 350 per day for their work.

'The Kashmir Files' writer: We should remember our gory past to avoid a repeat

Saurabh M Pandey, the screenplay writer of 'The Kashmir Files' that has created awareness on the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits, says while the film brings hope to get justice for the community, remembering such a gory part of our history is important to prevent such a tragedy in future.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Saurabh M. Pandey, the screenplay writer of 'The Kashmir Files' that has created awareness on the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits, says

while the film brings hope to get justice for the community, remembering such a gory part of our history is important to prevent such a tragedy in future.

The film is a Vivek Ranjan Agnihotri directorial that is grabbing headlines in mainstream media and garnering a huge response from the audience on the brutality that took place in 1990, on the Kashmiri Pandit community who were forced to flee from their homeland. In conversation with IANS, Saurabh, the screenplay writer of the film shares his thought on why it is important to remember the history.

Saurabh said: "When it comes to our film, the history that we are talking about, has not been documented and talked about enough so that the



mass audience becomes aware of it. We all know the partition story that happened in 1947. There are several historical episodes of communal violence that we are aware of, but certainly not this one.

"How will the new generation get to know our history, unless we bring the conversation in popular culture, in mainstream media? Cinema is one such tool to bring back that conversation." Being the writer of the film, who also penned the story of the earlier "The Tashkent Files" and closely working with Agnihotri, Saurabh explained why moving on from the past is only possible if we remember the past. "You see, when I started

working on the mysterious death of late Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri ji, being a youngster, even I did not know so many things about the reality. It was the same with the genocide of Kashmiri Pandits. If we do not document, converse on our recent history, if we do not remember the gory side of our own story, what if tomorrow another ethnic cleansing happens? What if another mysterious death happens and no one questions that?" To stop the repeating of history, to move on to a better future, we have to remember the history. Our film 'The Kashmir Files' intended to do the same," Saurabh signed off.

"The Kashmir Files' starring - Anupam Kher, Pallavi Joshi, Mithun Chakraborty, Chinmay Mandlekar, Darshan Kumar, Prakash Belawadi, Puneet Issar, and Bhasha Sumbli - released in theatres.

No MSRTC merger with state government, Maharashtra Cabinet accepts three-member committee's report

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Cabinet chaired by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Wednesday accepted the report submitted by a three-member committee which ruled out the merger of Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) with the state government and treating its employees as government personnel was not feasible practically and administratively. As reported by the Free Press Journal, the committee's report, which was tabled in the state Assembly on March 4, recommended the rejection of the demand made by employees of the MSRTC for merger with the state government, while maintaining the independent status of the corporation.

The panel, in its report, has recommended that the government make a budgetary provision for the next four



years to ensure timely payment of wages to employees. The committee further said that after the specified period the financial status of the MSRTC must be reviewed and a decision about financial assistance

should be taken. The committee comprised additional chief secretary (transport) Ashish Kumar Singh, ACS (finance) Manoj Saunik and Debashish Chakravarty, the chief secretary who

retired recently. The Cabinet's move is important especially when the strike launched by MSRTC employees in October last year has not yet been called off despite the state government's repeated appeals and suspension and termination of striking employees. The government had earlier announced a hike in workers' pay and several other benefits. Transport Minister Anil Parab is expected to make the statement on behalf of the state government before the ongoing budget session is concluded on March 25. Further, the Cabinet's move came a day after the Bombay High Court on Tuesday said the striking MSRTC workers committing suicide was not a solution to their problems and advised agitating employees to resume work pending a decision by the state government on their demands.

BJP protests at Maharashtra Vidhan Bhavan demanding Nawab Malik's resignation

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Wednesday intensified its agitation demanding the resignation of Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) minister Nawab Malik, arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in an alleged money-laundering case, from the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in Maharashtra.

Former BJP minister Ashish Shelar sat on the steps of the Vidhan Bhavan along with party MLAs, holding placards and raising slogans against the MVA government. The BJP urged the government to seek Malik's resignation before the budget session that began on March 3 concluded on March 25 and warned that it would take the agitation to the streets across Maharashtra.

Opposition leader Devendra Fadnis said: "The charges against Malik are serious. He has underworld links. He has no moral right to continue as minister. Malik engaged in a 2.80-acre land deal at LBS Marg in Kurla in Mumbai with underworld fugitive Dawood



Ibrahim's associates. Malik made payment to Shawali Khan and Salim Patel. Khan was a 1993 serial bomb blast convict. Whereas, Patel is the frontman of Haseena Parkar, sister of Dawood Ibrahim. Following pressure from the opposition, the MVA government had last week divested Malik, who was the minister for skill development and minority affairs, of his portfolios. However, BJP decided to continue its protest until Malik resigns.

Shelar said: "How can MVA have a minister operating from judicial custody. When Malik is slapped with serious charges he should step down."

THREE WORKERS DIE OF SUFFOCATION WHILE CLEANING SEWAGE TANK IN MAHARASHTRA

Two more Western Coalfields Limited contract employees fell unconscious as well.

Team Absolute | Chandrapur

Three contractual workers of the Western Coalfields Limited died of suffocation while cleaning an underground sewage tank in Maharashtra's Chandrapur district, police said on Wednesday.

Two others fell unconscious in the incident that took place on Tuesday in Sasti-Dhopatala town in Ballarpur area, Rajura police station's inspector Chandrasekhar Bahadure said.

Around 9 am, four workers entered the 10-foot-deep tank to clean it. But, when they did not come out after a long time, some other workers alerted locals, he said.

A JCB machine was then used to remove a slab covering the tank. Later, a cleaner from Rampur gram panchayat also went down into the tank, but he too fell unconscious briefly. He and the four other workers were pulled out by locals and rushed to a hospital.

Two workers - Raju Janjarla and Subhash Khandalkar - were declared dead, the police official said. Another worker, Sushil Korde, whose condition was serious, was shifted to a hospital in Nagpur where he also died during treatment, the official said. Cleaner Shankar Andagula and another worker Pramod Vavhitkar were undergoing treatment in Chandrapur, he added.

Libel case gag plea: 'Dabangg' Salman finds match in NRI Ketan Kakkad!

In a key development in one of the most avidly watched pre-trials, a Mumbai court on Wednesday rejected a notice of motion filed by Bollywood megastar Salman Khan seeking a gag order on his NRI neighbour Ketan R. Kakkad from posting any content on social media.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a key development in one of the most avidly watched pre-trials, a Mumbai court on Wednesday rejected a notice of motion filed by Bollywood megastar Salman Khan seeking a gag order on his NRI neighbour Ketan R. Kakkad from posting any content on social media.

Salman, vide the notice of motion, sought an interim injunction barring Kakkad from posting or uploading any objectionable content about alleged violations of laws being committed at the actor's 100-acre farmhouse in Panvel, Raigad.

Mumbai Sessions Judge A.H. Laddhad heard lawyers from both sides at length during the online and in-person hearings for over six weeks before passing the much-awaited order. Kakkad's legal team comprising Abha Singh, and Aditya Pratap of Aditya Pratap Law Offices and Salman's bat-



tery of lawyers including P.D. Ghandy and D.S.K. Legal, argued over the matter for nearly six weeks.

Singh and Pratap said that Kakkad and his wife Anita had returned to India to lead a retired life at their Panvel plot adjacent to Khan's Arpita Farms - purchased in 1996.

Though the families enjoyed cordial relations for years, the situation suddenly changed after 2014 when the elderly couple returned from the US for good to build an eco-friendly Lord Ganesha temple, small cottage, and an ashram at their plot. Owing to certain "encumbrances" and obstacles like a massive gate created by Salman, the Kakkads were allegedly prevented from accessing their own plot for the past few years. They said prior to 2014, the two families regularly hosted each other, went for jogging and even fishing at a nearby rivulet, but now the Kakkads have not been able to visit their

land for several years, even to pray at their small temple and the electricity connection to their land was snapped by certain local officials. Stung by the unexpected change in the Khans' stance, the Kakkads approached all departments concerned like Revenue, Forests, the local police and even the local courts seeking justice, besides venting his ire in public. Singh and Pratap said that later, Kakkad took to social media platforms to highlight how alleged illegal constructions were carried out in the eco-sensitive area, violating provisions of the Matheran Eco-Sensitive Zone, causing great harm to the environment. Arguing in the courts, Kakkad's lawyers said that the videos or statements on social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook and Twitter were "not obscene", did not use "foul language" but were merely the plea of a hapless couple seeking access to his land, electricity and "darshan at his tiny temple". Salman's lawyers put up Kakkad's purported statements on "child trafficking, drug trafficking, graveyard, girlfriends", and sought to gag him to the point of not speaking about the actor's Panvel farmhouse.

However, Singh and Pratap denied the accusations and argued that these utterances were actually made by others, circulated widely in the print, electronic, and social media, wherein Kakkad was quoted out of context, causing damage to his own reputation and portraying him in a bad light.

"Salman Khan has blatantly restricted Kakkads from using his own land. He is more 'infamous' than famous, has not come with clean hands and suppressed material facts from the court, hence he (Khan) cannot demand equity.



EDITOR'S SPECS

BJPs 'The Kashmir Files'

As the craze for 'The Kashmir Files' grows by the day, the newly elected BJP MLAs in Uttar Pradesh have started organising free shows for the people in their respective constituencies. Unnao BJP MLA Pankaj Gupta, two days ago, booked the cinema halls and offered free viewing of the film for his voters. The MLA, said his aides, had booked one theatre till March 31 so that people can see the film which is now being promoted by the BJP. Gupta has appealed to the people to watch the film which is a piece of history that had been kept hidden all these years. Another BJP MLA from Sultanpur has also 'gifted' free shows of 'The Kashmir Files' to his voters. "It is a token of gratitude for those who have voted for us. The free shows are even for those who did not vote for us," said the MLA, requesting anonymity. "I do not want to be accused to trying to gain publicity on this issue," he explained. More and more MLAs from the ruling BJP are now planning to book theatres and allow free viewing for the people. "Since council elections are also being held, this is a better way of campaigning without much effort," the legislator from Purvanchal region said. The BJP, interestingly, has asked its newly elected legislator to work in their respective constituencies and ensure the victory of the party candidate on 36 seats of the Vidhan Parishad that are going to polls.

A CRITIQUE OF THE HIJAB JUDGMENT - PERSPECTIVES AND DIMENSIONS EXAMINED

Adeel Ahmed

We all know the story of Nobel Laureate, Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani hijab-clad girl who took a bullet in her head, just so that she could go to school. The plight of Indian Muslim women students in Udupi, Karnataka, is near about the same, who've been asked to choose between their religion or education, in light of the recent judgment passed by the High Court of Karnataka, stating that the "hijab is not an 'essential religious practice in Islam'", while also upholding the Government Order in question which prescribes a uniform to be worn, if prescribed by the schools concerned.

RELIGIOSITY OF A CONSTITUTIONAL MANDATE ?

The court has observed that regard being had to the kind of life conditions then obtaining in the region concerned, wearing hijab was recommended as a measure of social security for women and to facilitate their safe access to public domain. It has stated that at the most the practice of wearing this apparel may have something to do with culture but certainly not with religion.

It is hereby relevant to note that of, the various questions of Constitutional importance, in the Sabarimala case which is pending on the issue of entry of women in the Temple complex, the Supreme Court shall also decide whether at all Courts are to sit in decision over religious practices, belief or faith. But then time and again, as has been observed in various cases in the recent past, that judges have tried to emote clerics in their judgments and have tried to propound the essentiality of various religious practices on the basis of religious scriptures and texts. This is an

unnerving trend which has found its way into the sanctum sanctorum of Courts, as has been recently seen in the triple talaq case, or the Shayara Bano case, where question of maintenance and alimony of the Muslim woman was sought to be answered in light of the Qur'an and associated scriptures of hadis. By way of the latest pronouncement by the Karnataka High Court holding that the "hijab is not an essential religious practice", the Indian Court by entering into the domain of interpretation of religious practices and beliefs has again stepped onto thin ice.

WHICH ARE MORE FUNDAMENTAL: RIGHTS OR DUTIES ?

As per Article 14 of the Constitution of India, any law being discriminatory in nature has to have the existence of an 'intelligible differential', meaning that any such difference has to be reasonable like for instance no private person can arrest another person whereas a police officer has the power to do so. And, any such difference if at all, must bear a rational nexus with the object sought to be achieved. The object as has been claimed is to maintain public order in the institutions.

However, the authorities have failed to provide any nexus on how the public order will be disturbed if Muslim women enters the institution's premises while wearing hijab. This being the case, the classification based on the religious attire which is to comply with their religious practice does not have the nexus with the object sought by the Government Order, i.e. of the maintaining the public order. It is opposite that by seeking to draw an unreasonable distinction in the form of two categories of girl students viz., those who wear the uniform with hijab and those who do it without, and that would establish a sense of 'social-separateness', the court has trespassed the finer prin-

ciples of Article 14, and the larger fundamental freedoms guaranteed of the Constitution of India.

This apart, the court has stated that it is impossible to instill the scientific temperament which our Constitution prescribes as a fundamental duty vide Article 51A(h) into the young minds so long as any propositions such as wearing of hijab or bhagwa are regarded as religiously sacrosanct and therefore, not open to question. The Court has further observed that Article 51A(e) of our Constitution imposes a Fundamental Duty on every citizen 'to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women'. Is not the school premises the foreground for development of an individual and the impressionable & (in)formative years of a person to imbibe and inculcate secular values. Can a scientific outlook not be achieved because what is veiled is the face and not the fertile mind underneath it ?

Tinkering with the 1st Amendment of US Constitution :

This judgement puts to test the scope and extent of religious freedoms, and the expression thereof in public places. The High Court has heavily borrowed from Western concepts of freedom of expression and right to conscience and the challenges meted thereto by the idea of 'Secularism', as propounded by the Constitution of India. That it is this reasoning which has to be examined now before the Supreme Court of India, and that whether the court has been correct to place exclusive reliance on the Western and European notions of secularism and individual liberty, and whether the court has been right in its interpretation thereof. For instance, the court in the impugned judgment has sought to draw infer-

ence from the famous case of Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District, 393 US 503 (1969). The said case was in fact a landmark decision by the US Supreme Court that defined First Amendment rights of students in US public schools. The Tinker test, also known as the "substantial disruption" test, is still used by courts today to determine whether a school's interest to prevent disruption infringes upon students' First Amendment rights.

The Supreme Court's 7-2 decision held that the First Amendment applied to public schools, and that administrators would have to demonstrate constitutionally valid reasons for any specific regulation of speech in the classroom. The court observed: "It can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate."

Justice Abe Fortas wrote the majority opinion, holding that the speech regulation at issue in Tinker was "based upon an urgent wish to avoid the controversy which might result from the expression, even by the silent symbol of armbands, of opposition to this Nation's part in the conflagration in Vietnam".

The Supreme Court found that the actions of the Tinkers in wearing armbands did not cause disruption and held that their activity represented constitutionally protected symbolic speech. Thus, if any semblance were to be drawn to the facts of the instant case, it can be held that the students in question were only silent practitioners of 'hijab', and never in any way, by their conduct sought to disrupt the functioning of the school.

CULTURED CURRICULUM

The Karnataka High Court has held that schools have the

authority to prescribe a curriculum and as such, schools and educational institutions have the power to insist on a uniform sans any kind of religious attire, apparel or symbol, as directed by the assailed Government order. If that be the take, then is the recent decision of the Gujarat government to include the Bhagavad Gita in the school syllabus for Classes 6-12, justified in being advancement of a culture or religious ethos?

A circular issued by the Gujarat state government in this regard said the idea is to "cultivate a sense of pride and connection to traditions". Therefore, if an Order may resort to preserving non-Islamic traditions legitimate, then can the practice of a veil/scarf over the head, too difficult to palate to the Indian Constitutional aphorism. Like a learned submission before the high court, was that if Sikhs can don the turban in the army, then why can't the hijab be accommodated in a conducive and inclusive educational environment. After all a "Shaheed" is returned to his or her abode for last rites, as per the beliefs and religious practices of the martyr's family and that we as a nation take tremendous pride in the tribute to the departed soul's honorary last passage.

In conclusion, there is an old African adage that if you educate a man, you educate an individual; but if you educate a woman, you educate a nation. It remains to be seen what weighs more with the Court : freedom of education irrespective of conscience or belief and or for an exclusive world of education bereft of any real world diversity by means of complete uniformity.

(The author is an advocate-on-record at the Supreme Court of India)

international

LAVROV SAYS UKRAINE EVENTS AN ATTEMPT BY THE WEST TO ESTABLISH A NEW ORDER

Moscow | Agencies

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that what is happening in the world at the moment is "not only and not so much about Ukraine", this is an attempt to create a new world order.

He said this during a speech at MGIMO. "What is happening now in the world, of course, is not only, and not so much about Ukraine, it is about attempts to form a new order," Lavrov said, RT reported.

He added that the West "in a narrow circle" writes rules that "pass out as the ultimate truth and require everyone to comply with these rules."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that Ukraine was made a tool to contain Russia.



And in terms of the Russian direction of NATO policy, Ukraine was chosen as

an instrument for suppressing Russian independence... For this Ukraine to be an effective instrument of deterrence, it had to become anti-Russia, as our president recently formulated, and in this sense, neo-Nazism was planted and encouraged there," Lavrov said at a meeting with students and teachers of MGIMO.

According to Lavrov, the ultimate goal of the West is the revival of a unipolar world, Izvestia reported.

"There is no doubt that one of the rules that the West wants to implement is the containment of any competitor. Now here is Russia, China has been declared next, or all this will happen in parallel. And the goal of this rules-based world order is nothing less than the complete revival of the unipolar world," Lavrov summed up.

Ukraine seeks to open new humanitarian corridors in 4 regions

Kiev: Ukrainian representatives are seeking to establish new humanitarian corridors in four regions in negotiations with Russia, the presidential press service said on Wednesday.

Quoting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, the press service said that Ukraine seeks to establish new routes for evacuation of civilians in the Kiev region in central Ukraine, Kharkiv and Lugansk in eastern Ukraine, and Zaporizhzhia in the southern part of the country, Xinhua news agency reported.

A total of 7,026 people were rescued from the besieged city of Mariupol on Tuesday, where the active hostilities between Ukrainian and Russian forces were underway, it added.

Russian Deputy PM predicts collapse in oil, gas market without Russian hydrocarbons

Moscow | Agencies

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak on Wednesday said that without Russian hydrocarbons, the oil and gas market would collapse.

In his speech at the "government hour" in the State Duma, Novak stressed that as a result of a number of steps, the rise in energy prices could become unpredictable, RT reported.

"Russia is the largest supplier of energy resources to world markets, the share of Russian energy exports is about 20 per cent of the world level of trade. Obviously, without Russian hydrocarbons, the gas and oil markets will collapse. At the same time, the rise in prices for energy resources can be absolutely unpredictable," Novak said.

"Despite all the difficulties, in the EU, where there is also a rise in prices and a shortage of energy resources, under pressure from the United States, they refused to commission the already built Nord Stream 2 gas



pipeline to the detriment of European consumers," Novak said.

He noted that the price of gas at some points reached \$4,000 per thousand cubic meters. "And this is not really the limit," he said.

Putin wants rubles for Russian gas from 'unfriendly countries'

Moscow: Russia will now accept payment for gas exports to "unfriendly countries" in rubles only, President Vladimir Putin said at a meeting with the government on Wednesday.

The Russian President explained that Russia plans to abandon all "compromised" currencies in payment settlements, RT reported.

He added that illegitimate decisions by a number of Western countries to freeze Russia's assets destroyed all confidence in their currencies.

"I have decided to implement in the shortest possible time a set of measures to change the payments for - yes let's start with this - for our natural gas supplied to the so-called unfriendly countries in Russian rubles, that is to stop using all compromised currencies for transactions," the Russian President said. Putin gave the Central Bank and the government a week to determine the procedure for operations for buying rubles on the domestic market for importers of Russian gas.

The President added that Russia will continue to supply gas in accordance with the volumes and pricing principles of the contracts. Only the currency of payment will change, the report said.

First public school for Sikhs in Peshawar nears completion

Peshawar | Agencies

The first public school for Sikhs in Pakistan is nearing completion in Peshawar as '90 per cent construction work' has been concluded, media reports said.

The work on the project practically started two years ago after a piece of land was purchased in the Jogan Shah Mohalla situated in the old city, Express Tribune reported.

A woman living outside Pakistan had donated Rs 20 million from which the community purchased eight marlas of land. After the purchase of land, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government started construction work.

The project will be the first of its kind and provide an opportunity for the children of the Sikh community and other minorities to get an education in a better environment. A school in Peshawar had been a long-standing demand of the Sikhs from the province and the tribal areas, Express Tribune reported.

Previously, about 300 children from the Sikh community were studying at an NGO-run school in Dabgri. The school operating in a rented house had to be shut down after the landlords asked the administration to evacuate.

However, after demands by the Sikh community for a new school, Atif Khan, the former provincial Education Minister and current Food Minister, announced the project for the first government school for the Sikh communi-



ty. The government tasked the Sikh community with purchasing space to make the construction of the school practical. After the purchase of land, the K-P government started work on the site six months ago.

Rory Kumar, a member of the Standing Committee on Minority Affairs in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Assembly who belongs to the Hindu community, said that Pakistan's first Sikh government school was a long-standing demand of the community.

Baba Gurpal Singh, a committee member of the first Sikh school in Pakistan and a social worker, told The Express Tribune that IDPs from Orakzai, Khyber and Kurram districts

were forced to move to Peshawar.

Their children left their homes in the tribal areas and dropped out of school and education, he said, adding that children could not be sent to other areas due to security. He expressed gratitude to the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa government for providing Rs 23 million for the school. The school will have 15 classrooms where about 500 children will be able to study from nursery to middle school. Gurpal Singh further said that children of any minority community including Sikh, Hindu, and Christian communities will be able to get education at the public school, Express Tribune reported.

Pentagon says Kremlin's refusal to rule out nuclear option 'dangerous'

Washington: The Pentagon has condemned a Kremlin spokesman's refusal to rule out the use of nuclear weapons during the Ukraine conflict, BBC reported.

Dmitry Peskov told CNN International that such arms could be used if Russia faced an "existential threat". Russia has the world's largest stockpile of nuclear warheads.

Department of Defence spokesman John Kirby said Moscow's nuclear remarks were "dangerous". "It's not the way a responsible nuclear power should act," he told reporters. But Kirby added that Pentagon officials "haven't seen anything that would lead us to conclude that we need to change our strategic deterrent posture." "We monitor this as best we can every day," he added. Former US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta also criticised Peskov's comments. "I don't see how you can see it in any other way but as dangerous when Russia is looking for a possible excuse for the use of low-yield nuclear weapons," Panetta told CNN. "And basing it frankly on a very false premise that somehow Russia is being threatened. I think that presents a real concern that Russia at least is considering that possibility." I don't know that it's going to happen. I still think that Putin has to worry about how the US would respond and he has to worry about his own survival. Putin put his country's nuclear forces on special alert on February 27, but Western defence officials said afterwards they had not seen any significant sign of Russia's strategic bombers, missiles and submarines being mobilised.





STATE GOVERNMENT IS COMMITTED TO SOCIAL HARMONY: CM CHOUHAN

- ▶ Discussions Are Necessary About Education and Employment in New Circumstances, According to the New Requirements
- ▶ Chouhan Inaugurated the Two-Day Workshop of the State General Category Commission
- ▶ Recommendations of the Commission Will Be Implemented



understand the suffering and pain of the general class. Even if financially weak, it is difficult for this class to ask for anything from anyone. Indian culture has a tradition of accepting, respecting and giving place to every viewpoint. We are committed for the welfare of all sections.

Chouhan was addressing the inaugural session of a two-day workshop organised by the Madhya Pradesh

State General Category Commission at the Academy of Administration.

Chief Minister Chouhan said that the recommendations given by the Commission in the past have been implemented for the welfare of the general category. General Poor Class Scholarship Scheme, Swami Vivekananda Pre-Matric Scholarship Scheme, Veerangana Lakshmbai

Cycle Distribution Scheme, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam Meritorious Students Promotion Scheme are being conducted for poor children of general category. Along with this, the implementation of Vikramaditya Free Education Scheme, Sandipani Sanskrit Bhasha Prasar Yojana, Acharya Vidyasagar Gau-Samvardhan Yojana and Higher Education Loan Guarantee Scheme for professional courses are also being conducted.

Chouhan said that in new circumstances, according to the new requirements, deliberations are necessary for education, employment and other social arrangements. After deliberations, consideration and discussions in the workshop by the General Category Commission, the suggestions and recommendations presented will be implemented. Chief Minister said that we have to be alert from the forces that break the society. Various activities are going on to divide the castes. We have to take a pledge that we will not allow the society to be divided.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the State Government is committed to ensure social justice along with social harmony for all sections. The Chief Minister said that poverty does not come by looking at the caste, we

MP Govt starts vax drive for 30 lakh 12-14 age group

▶ ANTI-COVID VACCINATION DRIVE FOR CHILDREN BETWEEN 12 AND 14 AGE GROUPS BEGAN ON MADHYA PRADESH ON WEDNESDAY.

▶ IT IS OUR ENDEAVOUR TO ENSURE THAT CHILDREN SHOULD BE SAFE, THEIR SCHOOL, SPORTS AND NORMAL LIFE SHOULD CONTINUE WITHOUT FEAR OF CORONA

▶ CM LAUNCHES VACCINATION CAMPAIGN FOR CHILDREN OF 12 TO 14 YEARS

▶ BOOKLET ON GENERAL INFORMATION RELATED TO COVID VACCINATION OF CHILDREN RELEASED



It is the endeavor of the state government to ensure that children remain safe and can attend school, pursue sports activities and lead a normal life without fear.

Chouhan was addressing the Covid-19 vaccination campaign launch programme for children of 12 to 14 years in the state. In the programme organised at Government New Higher Secondary School, Aera Colony.

Chouhan said that 30 lakh children would be vaccinated in the campaign. This vaccination will be done in identified schools and government health institutions. Chief Minister thanked Prime Minister Modi for starting vaccination of children.

Chouhan also released a table book published by Clinton Health Foundation on the struggle and successes of Covid in the state, titled "Jan-Bhagidari se Jan-Kalyan: Madhya Pradesh Covid-19 Vaccination Campaign." The Chief Minister released a FAQs booklet focusing on commonly asked questions regarding Covid vaccination of children of 12 to 14 years.

It is estimated that there are around 30 lakh children belonging to this age bracket in the state. Children aged 12 and 13 years will be given Corbevax, and those aged 14 and above of it will get Covaxin, said an official associated with the state health department, who was present

at the vaccination programme launched by chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan in Bhopal on Wednesday. Vaccination for children aged between 12 and 14 has been started after necessary training to the frontline workers for all block and district level.

The government has targeted to vaccinate around 50,000 children in this age group in Indore district and nearly 43,000 in Bhopal on the first day. Children will get a job at their schools or nearest vaccination centre. For children, who do not have any documentation, district administrations have made special arrangements.

"At every vaccination centre, health workers have been asked to thoroughly check the birth date of children before administering the vaccine to ensure that the kid is not below 12 years. We have also decided to release a detailed FAQ as children and their parents may have questions related to their vaccination," official added.

Covid-19 preventive vaccination of children in the age-group of 15-18 years had started on January 3. For such beneficiaries, the vaccination option is only Covaxin. Meanwhile, precaution doses are available to all eligible persons above 60 years from Wednesday. They will not be required to submit any medical certificate for getting inoculated.

MP GOVT TO SET UP LUXURIOUS OLD-AGE HOME WITH NOMINAL RATES

The Madhya Pradesh government has decided to set up a luxurious old-age home for senior citizens in Bhopal by the end of this year. It would be a government-owned old-age home, which would be available at nominal rates.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

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The government claimed that it would be a first of its kind of old-age home, which will be equipped with luxurious facilities for the inmates. The building will be designed in such a manner that the senior citizens will feel relaxed.

It would function under the supervision of the social justice department of the state govern-



ment, though the management of the old-age home would be handed over to a private firm.

The department claimed that the building where the old-age

home would be set up is being constructed with an estimated cost of Rs 10 crore in Bhopal.

A senior official in the social and justice department said

that it would be a pilot project, which is likely to be made operational by December this year. If it gets good response from the people, the same facility would be provided in some other district in the future.

"There are so many well-equipped old-age homes in the country, which are either run by NGOs or private firms. But here it would be introduced by the state government for senior citizens who can pay the charges," said Prateek Hejla, principal secretary in social justice department. Charges will be fixed as per the facilities demanded by the inmates. As per the 2011 Census, Madhya Pradesh had more than 57 lakh senior citizens.

CM TO INAUGURATE 'BLF KNOWLEDGE KUMBH'

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A large cross section of subject experts and eminent national and international authors would be descending upon or connecting with Bhopal to participate in the fourth season of the much-awaited Bhopal Literature and Arts Festival.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan will inaugurate the three-day festival at Bharat Bhawan on 25th March, 2022. The festival would conclude on 27th evening. This was informed at a press conference organised here on Wednesday by Mr. Radhav Chandra, former IAS and chairman, society for Culture and Environment.

Chandra said "The Bhopal Lit Fest is different from other such festivals in that it is being developed and branded as a 'knowledge Kumbh' for the



young generation to develop a world-view which combines the vest of global and local. This is especially relevant for youngsters who are being overwhelmed by an aggressive invasion by commercially motivated western social media and OTT channels that are concerned with getting footfalls and earning revenues at the expense of traditional education and values."

BLF is aimed and poised to bring society together to appreciate works of art and literature, to encourage creativity, to revive an interest in

mankind's and in particular India's glorious history and heritage, to nurture tolerance in young mindsets, and above all to foster an attitude of patriotism and nation-building, said Festival Director Raghav Chandra, an author himself and a former bureaucrat. At the special request of the Union Defense Minister a few key sessions on military gallantry have been kept. The French government too has sent a top French philosopher and author of many books Pascal Bruckner.

CM Pays Homage to Amar Shaheed Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru on Martyrs Day

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan paid homage to the immortal revolutionaries Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev, who made supreme sacrifices for the country, on their martyrdom day. Chouhan offered floral garland on the portraits of martyrs in the auditorium at the residence office.

Amar Shaheed Sardar Bhagat Singh is considered one of the most prominent revolutionaries of the Indian national movement. Bhagat Singh was also a studious thinker, good orator and writer. At a young age, Bhagat Singh joined the non-cooperation movement. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre made a deep impact on him. He along with Chandrashekhar Azad formed a revolutionary organisation. Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were sentenced to death for the



execution of British Deputy Superintendent of Police JP Saunders to avenge the death of Lala Lajpat Rai in the Lahore Conspiracy Case. Sardar Bhagat Singh threw bombs and pamphlets to wake up the British government on 8 April 1929 in the auditorium of the then Central Assembly of British India in Delhi. Bhagat Singh was hanged along with Sukhdev and Rajguru at 7 pm on 23 March 1931.

Amar Shaheed Sukhdev was a major revolutionary of the freedom struggle. He started the Naujawan Bharat Sabha in Lahore. Sukhdev was also sentenced to death along with Rajguru and Bhagat Singh for killing JP

Saunders, the British Deputy Superintendent of Police under the Lahore Conspiracy. He too was hanged with Rajguru and Bhagat Singh at 7 pm on 23 March 1931 in the Lahore Central Jail.

Shivram Hari Rajguru was born on August 24, 1908 in Kheda village of Pune district. While receiving education in Varanasi, Rajguru came in contact with many revolutionaries. He was so impressed by Chandrashekhar Azad that he immediately joined the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army. Rajguru was also a good shooter. He fully supported Bhagat Singh and Sukhdev in executing Saunders. On March 23 1931, Shri Rajguru, along with Bhagat Singh and Shri Sukhdev, registered his name prominently in the list of immortal martyrs of India by hanging on the gallows in Lahore Central Jail.

Over one lakh PM Awas (urban) approved for the state

Bhopal: Under the BLC component of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban), for Madhya Pradesh, houses have been approved for one lakh 15 thousand 564 beneficiaries by the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. State's Urban Development and Housing Minister, Bhupendra Singh has expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Singh Puri for the approval of the houses. Singh has informed that Rs.2889 crore will be transferred to the accounts of the beneficiaries for construction of houses as Central and State's share for these houses. A grant of Rs 2.5 lakh is given to the beneficiaries for the construction of Pradhan Mantri Awas (BLC). Shri Singh has informed that these houses have been sanctioned for the beneficiaries of 197 urban bodies.

It may be noted that the Urban Development and Housing Minister, Shri Singh met Puri in New Delhi on March 17 and urged him to approve the pending proposals of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban).

Those Who Play With the Law Will Not Be Spared: CM

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that those who keep an evil eye on sisters and daughters, harass the poor and make illegal encroachments on land will not be spared. The state government has so far freed about 21 thousand hectares of land from illegal occupants. Houses for the poor will be built on this land. Dacoits, Naxalite, SIMI terrorists were active in different areas of the state in the past. The state government has eliminated all such criminal organisations by effectively controlling law and order. Presently no dacoit gang is active in the state. In future also those who play with the law will not be spared in the state. Chouhan was addressing the gathering near MLA Rest House on completion of two years of his fourth term as Chief Minister.



CM Planted Saplings with Public Representatives and Social Organisations on Completion of Two Years of Fourth Term

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted saplings of Cassia, Karanj, Gulmohar and Saptaparni in Smart City Park on Wednesday. Today, on the completion of two years of the fourth term of Chouhan, Khajuraho MP and State BJP President VD Sharma, Organisation General Secretary Hitanand Sharma, State General Secretary Kavita Patidar, Bhopal's Sumit Pachauri and other public representatives also planted saplings. Deepa Malviya, Vandana and Rekha Khare from three Samadhan Kendras of the Municipal Corporation also planted saplings. Chouhan said that the saplings planted today are dedicated to good governance, Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas (everyone's support, everyone's development), resolve of continuous public service and building a self-reliant Madhya Pradesh through public participation. There are three Samadhan Kendras of Municipal Corporation Bhopal. Which operate at Ten Number Market, Bittan Market and Boat Club. At these centres, cloth bags, bundles made of old sheets, eco-friendly material made of dona-pattal and cow dung are available. Utensil bank has also been started at Samadhan Kendra. Recently, a garbage cafe has also been opened at Samadhan Kendra located at Number Ten, in which Bhopal residents can give their garbage and in return take eco-friendly goods.

BJP Govt completes 2 yrs, Chouhan longest serving BJP CM

Shivraj Singh Chouhan-led BJP government, which came to power after the Congress dispensation collapsed following the resignation of 22 MLAs led by Jyotiraditya Scindia in March 2020, completed two years in office on Wednesday.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Shivraj Singh Chouhan-led BJP government, which came to power after the Congress dispensation collapsed following the resignation of 22 MLAs led by Jyotiraditya Scindia in March 2020, completed two years in office on Wednesday.

The collapse of the Congress government made Shivraj Singh Chouhan take oath as the chief minister of the state for the fourth term on March 23, 2020.

With this, Chouhan is also now the longest-serving BJP chief minister, who retained the post of CM for a period of more than 15 years, surpassing the record of former Chhattisgarh chief minister Raman Singh, who had held office for 15 years and four days.

While Raman Singh achieved the feat in three straight terms, Chouhan has been sworn into office on four occasions. Of the current chief ministers in the country, he has had the fourth-longest stint. Topping this list is Odisha's Naveen Patnaik followed by Bihar's Nitish Kumar and Neiphui Rio of Nagaland.



Out of 18 chief ministers of Madhya Pradesh (from 1952 to till today), including Kamal Nath (17 December 17, 2018 to March 23, 2020), Chouhan is only chief minister who was sworn-in for the post for four times surpassing the late Congress leader Shyama Charan Shukla's record of three terms as chief minister of the Madhya Pradesh -from March 26, 1969 to January 28, 1972, the second term from December 23 to April 30, 1977 and the third term from December 9, 1989 to March 1, 1990.

Chouhan is also the third chief minister of the BJP in Madhya Pradesh after the party

defeated the Congress and ending the 10 years (7 December 1993 to 7 December 2003) rule of the former chief minister Digvijaya Singh in December 2003.

The veteran BJP leader Chouhan was first sworn in as the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh on November 29, 2005 after taking over charge from the former chief minister (August 23, 2004 to November 9, 2005) of the state, Babulal Gaur, who had replaced the ever first woman chief minister of the state Uma Bharti (December 8, 2003 to August 23 2004).

After checkingmate the Congress, Chouhan

has also kept competition from within his own party at bay as the BJP's MP unit has no dearth of strong leaders. Right from the Jana Sangh days, the party has had deep roots in the state. Among Chouhan's main competitors are BJP national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya and state home minister Narottam Mishra.

While Vijayvargiya has made his career outside the state, serving as party in-charge for Haryana assembly elections and the general secretary in charge of West Bengal, Mishra has had several ministerial stints including state home minister during BJP rule in MP.

Political watchers say a fresh challenge to Chouhan in the days to come may emerge from BJP state president VD Sharma, who represents Khajuraho in the Lok Sabha. Union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia may also pose a threat to him in the future. However, amid the murmur from BJP's national headquarters in New Delhi to the state capital Bhopal of replacing Chouhan from the last few months, state BJP leaders said the upcoming Assembly election in 2023 will be contested on the leadership of the Chouhan.

"It is only speculation that Chouhan will be replaced by any other prominent BJP leader. It may happen after the 2023 Assembly elections but not before that. Top party leaders from New Delhi to Bhopal are very well aware of his political stature in the state and his replacement before Assembly polls will definitely give an extra edge to the Congress," a senior BJP spokesperson told IANS requesting anonymity.



BEYONCE, BILLIE EILISH, REBA MCENTIRE TO PERFORM AT OSCARS WHILE VAN MORRISON SKIPS

Los Angeles | Agencies

The forthcoming 94th Oscars have announced the musical performers for this year's nominees for best original song, which will include Beyoncé, Billie Eilish, Finneas, Reba McEntire and Sebastian Yatra. Four of the five songs will be performed, while nominee Van Morrison, who penned and sang 'Down to Joy' from 'Belfast', was invited but will not attend the ceremony due to his tour schedule. As a result, the song will not be performed on the broadcast, reports 'Variety'. Final voting for the 94th Oscars has concluded and the original song race is one of the most competitive of the night.

The nominated songs and credited songwriters this year are: 'Be Alive' from 'King Richard', 'Dos Origuitas' from 'Encanto', 'Down to Joy' from 'Belfast', 'No Time to Die' from 'No Time to Die' and 'Somehow You Do' from 'Four Good Days'.

'No Time to Die' has already won multiple accolades this awards season, including the Golden Globe and Critics Choice Awards and last year's Grammy Award for record of the year and song written for visual media.

If 20-year-old Eilish wins, she would be the youngest winner in the category's history, surpassing last year's winner H.E.R., who was 23 at the time. The category could also make Lin-Manuel Miranda the latest EGOT recipient, while Diane Warren looks to finally win a long-overdue statuette after 13 nominations.

'Variety' exclusively reported that Beyoncé's camp was in deep talks with producers to mount a satellite performance of her nominated song, 'Be Alive' -- one that could possibly open the show and broadcast live from the tennis courts in Compton, California. The location is where sports legends Venus and Serena Williams practiced relentless drills in their youth under the watchful eye of their father, Richard. However, the announcement from the Academy did not specify where the performances would be taking place.



Jared Leto:

Attracted to roles where there's an opportunity to transform

Los Angeles | Agencies

Oscar-winner Jared Leto transforms into the enigmatic anti-hero Michael Morbius in the film 'Morbius'. He says he is attracted to roles where there's an opportunity to transform - physical transformation, but also mental, emotional, any and all," says Leto, who is indeed renowned for his transformations. From his Academy Award-winning performance as Rayon in 'Dallas Buyers Club' to his portrayal of Paolo Gucci in 'House of Gucci', Leto disappears into his roles, bringing characters to life in ways that can be moving, or terrifying, or enigmatic, but always unforgettable. "There's a lot of range in there, so that was really fun to tackle. Not only does the movie have action, stunts, and fighting, but the role itself was taxing. Whenever he is fighting the affliction, he is caught in a crossroads between different parts of the character. "It's like a withdrawal process, a full body experience. I was excited about taking on the challenge of putting a character on screen that had never been on screen before. It gets harder and harder to find, and that was unique about this - a Marvel character that had never been portrayed outside of a couple of episodes of a Spider-Man cartoon." Leto was drawn to the character by the idea that the audience would discover the character as he transforms, and by the challenge of portraying those unusual transformations.



BTS IS THE WORLD'S TOP ARTIST

Los Angeles | Agencies

The global recorded music market grew by 18.5 per cent in 2021, driven by growth in paid subscription streaming, according to IFPI (International Federation of the Phonographic Industry), the organisation that represents the recorded music industry worldwide.

Figures released Tuesday in IFPI's Global Music Report show total revenues for 2021 were \$25.9 billion, reports 'Variety'.

While the free version of the report does not attach numbers to all of the rankings, they're pretty fascinating anyway:

The top 10 global artists, based on "consumption across all formats and all countries, weighted based on the value of each method of consumption."

According to 'Variety', the report notes that paid subscription streaming revenues increased by 21.9 per cent to \$12.3 billion, with 523 million users of paid subscription accounts at the end of 2021.

JESSIE J CRIED AFTER SUFFERING MORNING SICKNESS

Los Angeles | Agencies

Pop star Jessie J was told that she would not be able to have children after being diagnosed with endometriosis in 2014, and so Jessie was overcome with emotion when she suffered morning sickness for the first time.

She shared: "I got pregnant - I did it by myself. I didn't expect it to be that easy because I'd been told I wouldn't be able to have children with my endometriosis. I'm grateful that I got pregnant. That is the experience of a lifetime for me. "I was told that I would never... So for me to experience the morning sickness and all of that, it could make me cry with happiness just that I got to do that."

Jessie suffered a heartbreaking miscarriage in November. But the 'Price Tag' hitmaker still dreams of having children in the next two years, reports female-first.co.uk.

Asked whether she'd like to have a baby soon, the singer told the 'Rule Breakers' podcast: "Oh 100 percent. For sure in the next two years I want to have a baby. If I can. Whichever way it happens; naturally, surrogate, IVE, adopted... whatever I'm open. "I have such maternal energy and I've always been, 'Just give me your baby.' If you meet me, just hand me your baby. I just love babies and children, and everything about it." She has also opened up about the heartache of losing her baby, admitting it's an experience that's "hard to understand" from the outside.

Jessie shared: "When you haven't been through a miscarriage, physically, it's really hard to understand. It's the most painful, because it's so hormonal, your body and your hormones are just crazy. I remember crying and going, I don't even feel like I want to cry."



Life is 'better than imagined': Jenna Dewan

Los Angeles | Agencies

Jenna Dewan gushed that her life has become 'better than' she could have ever imagined when she first moved to Los Angeles to pursue stardom. The 41-year-old Flirty Dancing host, who split from Channing Tatum in 2018 after nearly nine years of marriage, opened up about finding love with her fiancé Steve

Kazee, managing anxiety and working with Janet Jackson. In her cover profile for NewBeauty Magazine, the Step Up actress said she wished she worried less as a teen and was more 'present' in the moment.

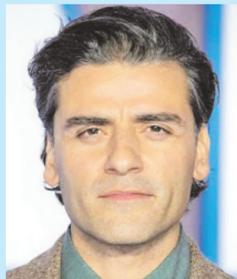
When asked what advice she would give her younger self, the mom-of-two replied: "To really just let go, have fun, and to not worry so much. It all works out, and it's even better than you could imagine." The brunette beauty also said, 'Speak your truth, say no when you must, and don't worry so much. There is a lot of worry at times, and I know that goes for everyone, but everything works out. It always does,' she continued. Dewan, who got her big break as a backup dancer for Jackson at 19, admitted she 'wasn't as present' as she should've been at times in her 'younger years.'

OSCAR ISAAC REVEALS THE KEY TO PLAYING MOON KNIGHT IN THE UPCOMING SERIES

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood actor Oscar Isaac, who is set to play the titular character in the upcoming superhero series, 'Moon Knight', shared that for him the key to portray a character with Dissociative Identity Disorder was to stay honest to what the ailment is about.

Talking about how his experience was to portray a superhero struggling with Dissociative Identity Disorder, Oscar said, "I think it was just about being honest to what Dissociative Identity Disorder is, and honest to what a lot of people have to deal with, which is really intense childhood trauma and how that manifests as an adult. I think for us it was about authenticity, more than even story communication." Meanwhile, Oscar's co-actor in the series, Ethan Hawke feels that having a protagonist under tremendous pain sans any tropes of a classic hero is interesting to have in a piece of audio-visual content. Elaborating on the same, the actor said, "It's especially interesting to take your hero and present him with a real source of pain in mental illness. It's not a joke. He's a guy who's really struggling, and it's very interesting to have a protagonist who's in a tremendous amount of pain and who is not a classic hero."



Nicole Scherzinger



WORLD NO.1 TENNIS PLAYER ASH BARTY SHOCKS THE WORLD; RETIRES AT 25

Barty won the French Open in 2019, the Wimbledon in 2021 and Australian Open earlier this year, and her current reign of 114 consecutive weeks at No.1 is the fourth-longest streak in the history of the WTA Tour, behind Germany's Steffi Graf (186 weeks), American stalwart Serena Williams (186) and Czechoslovakian-American great Martina Navratilova (156). Barty's 121 total weeks as the top ranked player are No.7 in the all-time list.

Barty's 21-month break from tennis included a stint playing cricket with the Brisbane Heat of the Women's Big Bash League (WBBL). She returned in May 2016, playing a USD50,000 ITF event in Eastbourne (England) -- winning three qualifying matches and three more in the main draw. One year later, she was ranked No. 88 and by the end of 2017 Barty was a top-20 player.



"It's the first time I've actually said it out loud and, yeah, it's hard to say. But I'm so happy, and I'm so ready. I don't have the physical drive, the emotional want and everything it takes to challenge yourself at the very top of the level any more. I am spent."

has the "physical drive" to continue playing the sport. The Australian leaves with a stellar set of credentials, including three major singles titles on three different surfaces. In all, she collected 15 titles in sin-

gles and 12 in doubles -- more than any other active player in that span, according to WTA.

Across all levels of play, Barty produced a 305-102 record in singles and a 200-64

record in doubles, earning a career prize money of USD23,829,071.

WTA chairman and CEO Steve Simon said, "We wish Ash only the very best and know that she will continue to be a tremendous ambassador for the sport of tennis as she embarks on this new chapter of her life. We will miss her." Barty has always been unconventional with regard to her career. She and Dellacqua enjoyed huge success playing doubles, reaching the finals of the Australian Open, Wimbledon and the US Open in 2013. But one year later, ranked outside top-200 in singles and No.40 in doubles, Barty -- then 18 -- decided to take a break.

A semifinal loss to Petra Kvitova of the Czech Republic in Doha in February was the last match she played in 2020. She stayed home in Australia due to the pandemic. After six months on the Tour in 2021 and after winning five titles -- including the Wimbledon -- Barty ended her season abruptly after a loss to American Shelby Rogers at the US Open.

Her No. 1 ranking qualified her for the WTA Finals, but Barty withdrew, citing Covid-19 travel and quarantine restrictions.

IPL 2022 SET TO WELCOME 25 PER CENT FANS BACK TO STADIUMS



Mumbai: The Indian Premier League (IPL) is set to welcome fans back to the stadiums with the governing body of the lucrative league announcing on Wednesday that the three venues -- Mumbai, Navi Mumbai and Pune -- will allow 25 per cent occupancy from March 26 onwards. The TATA Indian Premier League (IPL) 2022 resumes with the Chennai Super Kings taking on the Kolkata Knight Riders at the Wankhede Stadium on March 26. This match will be a momentous occasion as the 15th edition of the IPL will welcome the fans back to the stadiums after a brief hiatus owing to the pandemic. Ardent cricket fans are all set to witness nail-biting matches, cheering for their favourite players at the most anticipated cricket tournament of all time, IPL said in a statement.

"Fans can buy tickets starting March 23 for the league phase of the tournament," added the statement. Keeping in mind the Covid-19 protocols, only 25 per cent occupancy will be allowed, said the statement.

In all, 20 matches each will be played at the Wankhede Stadium and DY Patil Stadium, while 15 matches each at Brabourne and MCA International stadium, Pune will be played.

Blade runner Desai wins India's first gold at Dubai 2022 Para Athletics GP

Dubai: Sprinter Pranav Prashant Desai saved the blushes for India on the second day of competitions clinching the gold medal in men's 200m T64 final at the Dubai 2022 World Para Athletics Grand Prix - 13th Faza International Para Athletics Championships here.

It was the only medal for India on the day as throwers faltered at the Dubai Club for People of Determination grounds. Desai led from start-to-finish to finish the race in 24.42 secs, ahead of Thailand's Denpoom Kotcharang (25.78 sec) and Kenneth Jenssen Heggdal of Norway (27.08 sec).

"I came here with the gold in my mind and I am happy to lead the race from start to finish. It's nice to be back here. I have been working on my endurance speed for the past few months. Happy to execute my plans here.

"My target is to win 100m and 200m gold for India at the Asian Para Games which would pave my way to the Paris 2024 Paralympics," added the 22-year-old Desai, who trains in Sports Authority of India Centre, Gandhinagar. The day also witnessed one world record in men's javelin F40 finals when Iraq's Naas Ahmed hurled the javelin to a distance of



39.08 m to take the gold. It was also an Asian record. After two days, Colombia sits on top of the medals table with 13 medals that has six gold, ahead of Thailand (16) and Tunisia (7). India lies in the 15th place with four medals.

Among the top names, Switzerland legend Marcel Hug started his campaign at the Championships with a gold medal in the men's 1500m wheelchair T54 race.

Great Britain's women's wheelchair racing legend Hannah Cockroft ran in 17.36 sec to clinch her second gold of the competition, this time in 100 m wheelchair women final T34/53. Likewise, Thailand's wheelchair Paralympic star Pongsakorn Paeyo claimed his second gold in the Dubai 2022 event racing in 14.43 sec in men's 100 m wheelchair T53 final.

Jadeja tops Test all-rounders' chart; Azam makes huge gain with heroic 196

Dubai: Pakistan skipper Babar Azam, riding on one of the best innings of his cricketing career against Australia in the second Test at Karachi, has made massive gains in the latest ICC Men's Test Player Rankings for batters released on Wednesday, moving up three spots to No.5 on the chart.

Three Indian cricketers -- Rohit Sharma (7th), Virat Kohli (9th) and Rishabh Pant (10th) -- have maintained their positions in the rankings for batters, which is led by Australia's Marnus Labuschagne and followed by England skipper Joe Root.

The Pakistan skipper was at his glorious best against Australia during the second Test as he batted for almost two days to score a marathon knock of 196 in 425 deliveries as the hosts pulled off a sensational draw.

In the all-rounders' chart, India's Ravindra Jadeja is back at the No.1 spot, while West Indies' Jason Holder has dropped to No.2 after struggling during the second Test in Barbados. Holder picked up only one wicket and aggregated 12 runs in the match. R. Ashwin continues to hold on to the No. 3 spot among all-rounders behind Holder.

Other star performers with the bat from the same match -- Mohammad Rizwan and Australia's Usman Khawaja -- have also taken massive a massive leap. Rizwan has moved up six spots, to be joint No.11 alongside Australia's David Warner after his unbeaten knock of 104 in the second innings. Khawaja, who scored 160 and 44 not out in Karachi, moves up 11 spots to No.13.

West Indies skipper Kraigg Brathwaite is another big mover, gaining 16 spots up to No.27 after

scoring 160 and 56 not out in the second Test against England at the Kensington Oval in Barbados.

In the bowling charts, Shaheen Afridi has moved down one spot to No.6 after struggling in the Karachi Test, picking up only two wickets in the match. Australian pacer Mitchell Starc, who picked up three scalps in the first innings, moves up one place to No.15. India's Ravichandran Ashwin and pace bowler Jasprit

Bumrah continue to hold on to their second and fourth spots respectively on the bowlers' list, which is led by Australia's Pat Cummins.

Australian skipper Cummins has moved up one spot to No.8 after aggregating three wickets and scoring 34 not out in the first innings of the Karachi Test.



Indian GP athletics

Avinash Sable makes national record in 3000m steeplechase

Thiruvananthapuram: Agencies

Avinash Sable made men's 3000m steeplechase national record in the Indian Grand Prix 2 Athletics competition at the Chandrasekharan Nair Police Stadium here on Wednesday.

Quartermiler Priya H Mohan and Discus thrower Kamalpreet Kaur shared top honours in the women's events.

Competing for the first time since the Olympic Games in Tokyo last year, a languid Sable (Maharashtra) stayed on the heels of Balkishan (Haryana) who set a good pace from the start. The Olympian shifted gears with three laps to go and came home in 8:16.21, shaving off 1.91 seconds from his own



record set in Tokyo. Trailing Kerala team-mate Abdulla Aboobacker until the midway stage of the men's Triple Jump competition Eldhose Paul came up with a personal best effort of 16.95m to claim gold. In fact, each of his last three efforts - 16.74, 16.95 and 16.76 - was good enough to get him the title ahead of Abdulla Aboobacker's best of 16.70.

Kamalpreet Kaur had two throws past the 60m mark, with her sixth and final effort producing the best result for her. Having got to 60.15m on her third attempt, the winning distance of 61.39m will give the confidence, going into a busy year in which the World Championships, Commonwealth Games and Asian Games dot the calendar.

Sriperumbudur set to host FIA Asia-Pacific Rally Championship during the weekend

Chennai: Agencies

The 44th South India Rally, which doubles up as a round of the FIA Asia-Pacific Rally Championship 2022 (APRC 2022) and the final round of the FMSCI Indian National Rally Championship 2021, will be held in Sriperumbudur from March 25-27.

The events will be anchored to the MMRT circuit which will be the venue for start and finish of the event besides the Spectator Special Stage (tarmac) and the 12.9km-long Special Stage (dirt) bordering the race track. Another Special Stage (17.78km), is located



about 23km from the MMRT. Both stages will be run four times -- twice in forward direction (Saturday) and twice in reverse direction (Sunday) while the Spectator Special Stage once on each day. On Friday (March 25), the competitors will do a reconnaissance of the stages.

While four entries have been received for the APRC (Asia Cup) round, which

returns to India after a four-year gap, the INRC has attracted 44. Three-time APRC champion Gaurav Gill (co-driver Musa Sherif), Karna Kadam (Nikhil Pai) of Arka Motorsports, Amittiraj Ghosh (Ashwin Naik) and Younus Ilyas (Anirudha Ranganeekar) of Race Concepts will take part in the APRC and also headline the INRC entry list.

GOLFER GAURIKA FIRES FLAWLESS 65, TAKES 3-SHOT LEAD IN SIXTH LEG OF WPGT

Gurugram: Gaurika Bishnoi, searching for her first win this season on the 2022 Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour, played a flawless round of seven-under 65 to take a three-shot lead over Jahanvi Bakshi on the opening day of the sixth leg of the Tour here. Gaurika's last win came back in 2019, the year she won twice. Gaurika, who was in the two-ball that went out first from the tenth tee this morning, had four birdies on the back nine of the course, and then added one more on the fifth to go five-under. She went even better with an eagle on Par-5 fifth and then closed with four pars for a 65, a ladies course record at this venue.

It was one of Gaurika's best rounds in a long time, as she prepares to play a few events on the Ladies European Tour later this year. Jahanvi Bakshi, starting from the first, opened with a bogey on second, and then had six birdies, three each on either side of the course. She ended the day with a bogey on the challenging Par-4 17th for a day's effort of 68.

On a day when the Golden Greens Golf Course yielded a bouquet of sub-par scores, five players, Nayanika Sanga, Seher Atwal, Pranavi Urs, amateur Nishna Patel and Durga Nittur carded 69 each.

IPL 2022: ROHIT SHARMA TO OPEN INNINGS WITH ISHAN KISHAN FOR MUMBAI

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Five-time IPL champions Mumbai Indians' captain Rohit Sharma on Wednesday confirmed that he will be opening the batting with Ishan Kishan in the upcoming edition of the tournament.

He also confirmed that batter Suryakumar Yadav is still recovering at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) from the hairline fracture on thumb sustained in the T20I series against the West Indies in February. "I will open the batting. (I have) been doing that in the past, so I am looking forward to open (the batting) with Ishan (Kishan). Surya is at the NCA at the moment. He is recovering well. He will be here soon. I can't give you his availability right now; whether he will be there to play the first game or not. But we are trying to get him here as soon as possible once we have the clearance from NCA," said Sharma in the pre-season virtual press conference organised by the franchise. Sharma brushed aside suggestions that Mumbai will have an upper hand over other



teams in the tournament due to playing matches in their home city. Mumbai last played a match in their home city in May 2019, where they defeated Kolkata Knight Riders at Wankhede Stadium to march into the play-offs and eventually win the trophy.

"It's a relatively new team, lots of new guys have come into the team. I don't believe in added advantage because 70-80% of the squad hasn't played in Mumbai before. So, there is no such thing as added advantage. Only myself, Surya, Pollard, Ishan and Bumrah have played in Mumbai a lot and others have not played. We all are playing in Mumbai after two years and did not play a single game here. In fact, other franchises have played in Mumbai last year (2021, first half); we didn't get to play. So, there is no home advantage."

Sharma further felt that the style of Mumbai's preparation won't change with new teams Lucknow Super Giants and Gujarat Titans entering the IPL fold this season onwards and pointed towards the 2022 edition having the same format as the 2011 season.



SAISHA OFFENDED AS KAARANVIR REFERS TO HER AS 'HE'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Saisha Shinde is a well-known transwoman fashion designer and currently seen as an inmate in Kangana Ranaut's 'Lock Upp'. She is often seen getting the limelight being a transwoman and a similar situation arose recently when Kaaranvir Bohra referred to Saisha as 'he'.

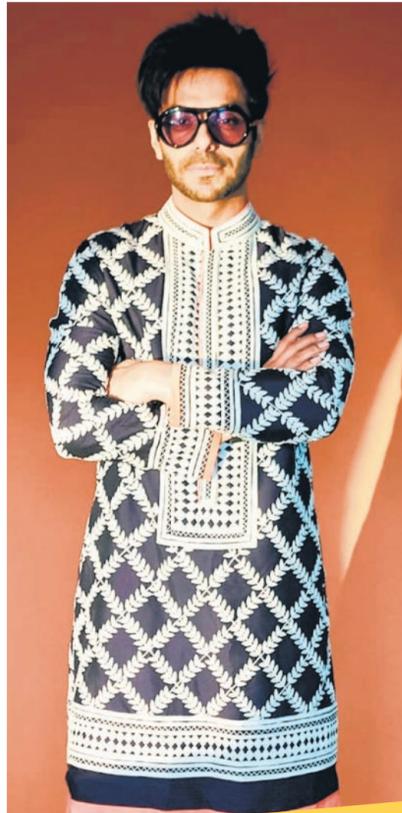
Saisha wanted to smoke in the morning, but she couldn't go to the smoking-room due to an activity in the yard, so she went in front of the camera and started ranting. She accused the show's creators, saying: "You can't do this to us!"

Kaaranvir arrives and instructs her not to act like this, but throughout the conversation, Kaaranvir refers to Saisha as 'he', which Saisha finds offensive because her pronouns are 'she/her'.

"First and foremost, it's not he, it's she!," Saisha says to Kaaranvir. Saisha's friend Nisha Rawal comes to her aid and tells everyone to refer to Saisha as 'she'.

Saisha had an emotional breakdown while speaking about the same. Munawar Faruqi was irritated by Nisha's attempt to embellish the entire conversation, so he responded to her by stating: "You could keep the explanation a little short."

Nisha became enraged and yelled to Munawar: "You can't tell me what to do! This is a really sensitive topic."



Avika Gor elated on response to her debut film in Kazakhstan

Absolute | Mumbai

Team

'Balika Vadhu' fame Avika Gor had a wonderful experience shooting her debut Kazakhstani film 'I Go To School', in Turkey. Happy with the response around the film, Avika reveals that she had to learn the language and understand the culture better to do justice to her character. And, she did not take this as a challenge but yet another opportunity to learn.

"Unknown language and unknown culture are the things I faced when I entered the Telugu film industry, but eventually the kind of love that I

received from the audience is what makes me more confident about the fact that I can do more. I am very proud that because of 'Balika Vadhu' and the TV work I have done, people are giving me so much love and respect.

"I feel blessed and am glad that this has happened to me. I am also happy to have started this movie journey and see a lot happening in the future. I am going to definitely collaborate with a lot of filmmakers in the coming times, I'm really excited for this new chapter in life," she says. The actress felt glad that she got a chance to go to Kazakhstan and see the response and the reaction at the premiere, and meet the fans. Avika shares that it helped her in understanding the audience better. She also feels

Success of music video is equal to feature film: Aparshakti

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor-singer Aparshakti Khurana, whose latest track 'Yaaron Sab Dua Karo' co-starring Jasmin Bhasin, has received a positive response from all quarters, feels that in the age of digital, the success of a music video is equal to the success of a feature film.

The song has already garnered more than 19 million views on social media. Aparshakti says, "In today's times, the entertainment industry has become extremely fluid in terms of the content being consumed by the masses."

The song has been re-composed by

Meet Bros and crooned by Stebin Ben, while the video has been directed by Vijay Ganguly.

The 'Stree' actor further mentions, "The success of a music video is almost equivalent to that of a feature film because of the same reason - the spectacle at which the music industry is currently operating, be it in terms of the production value, budgets or even marketing efforts, a property like a music video can easily be compared to a film."

"It's being consumed and liked by the masses which is evidently being shown in the numbers", he adds.

Aparshakti Khurana will next be seen in Aditya Motwane's yet-to-be-titled thriller web-series on Prime Video.



Badshah's new single brings augmented reality with new lens

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Rapper Badshah, who recently dropped his new single with Tamannaah Bhatia, now has an augmented reality-themed lens dedicated to his album 'Retropanda', for which he has partnered with a leading social media app.

Badshah shared that the single is high on nostalgia with retro sounds lining up the track.

Talking about his single, he said, "'Tabahi' is crazy, it's something you will connect with as you listen in and I know you will and if you don't, then listen to it again. The single is packed with nostalgia and you will experience and enjoy retro sounds with a twist."

"'Tabahi' featuring the super talented Tamannaah Bhatia, is definitely fiery. We shot for it over 2 days and in my hometown and I am sure the video is 'Tabahi' in itself", he added. Reacting to the Retropanda-themed AR lens in collaboration with Snapchat, Badshah said, "An AR lens is always excit-

ing and especially for my latest love, my album Retropanda, there is no better time than now to have it! And now that I say it out loud, Retropanda is definitely a universe that comes alive with the song." Listing the functionality of the lens, the rapper added, "Not only can listeners turn themselves into their version of Retropanda but also enjoy the song while vibing & capturing fun moments. I always look at doing something new with every release and partnering with Snapchat for an AR-inspired lens was an obvious next step." The lens overlays a complete 3D Retropanda on the user's face that mimics the head movement and grooves with you and the song 'Tabahi'.



'BHOLI PUNJABAN'S CHARACTER IS AS ICONIC AS IT GETS'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Richa Chadha is all set to reprise her role as Bholi Punjaban in the third instalment of 'Fukrey' and she says that the character is as iconic as it gets.

On her connection with the franchise, Richa says: "Bholi Punjaban's character is as iconic as it gets. She is a raw and gutsy gangster who knows how to get things done her way - and I thoroughly enjoy portraying her on the big screen."

"Over the years, the fanbase for this film has grown multifold, especially among kids. But if you ask me, it is more than just a film franchise, for on this journey I began two important relationships... Immensely excited for the next adventure and grateful for the love from the audience."

Backed by Excel Entertainment and directed by Mrigdeep Singh Lamba, the Delhi-set film series follows four friends who come together to make easy money.

The franchise became a cult classic after tickling the audiences' funny bone and taking them on fun-filled roller coaster rides twice. 'Fukrey 3' is currently on the floors in Delhi.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Fans across India have been eagerly waiting for SS Rajamouli's magnum opus RRR to release. After much delay due to Covid 19 pandemic, it is finally gearing up for a massive release on Friday (March 25).

Two days ahead of its release, the #BoycottRRRinKarnataka hashtag is trending on Twitter. Fans hailing from Karnataka are apparently disappointed. Taking to Twitter fans shared their disappointment on film not being released in Kannada.

Netizens from Karnataka are extremely unhappy with SS Rajamouli and the team of RRR for giving less

preference to the Kannada version of the film. Throughout Karnataka, less number of shows have been allotted to the Kannada version of RRR.

Sharing the screenshot from the movie booking app, which shows only Hindi and Tamil, a user wrote, "This is great insult for Kannadigas, this is the time to BAN RRR movies in Karnataka, we will welcome only if it is in Kannada."

Some of them mentioned that by not releasing the Jr NTR, Ram Charan starrer in Kannada language it is a great insult to the Kannadigas.

The film starring Ram Charan, Jr NTR, Alia Bhatt and Ajay Devgn will release in Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam and Hindi languages.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Elli AvrRam