

# absolute india

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PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM BHOPAL, MUMBAI AND NEW DELHI

**NATION** > 02  
FIR against Union Minister Arjun Munda and 40 others over ...



**HOLLYWOOD** > 06  
When Margot Robbie read 'Barbie' script, she thought it won't make it ...



**SPORTS** > 07  
ICC T20I rankings: SKY maintains top spot, Babar moves up ...



## 4 JAWANS KILLED IN BATHINDA MILITARY STATION FIRING

Stating that no individual has been detained yet, the Indian Army said on Wednesday evening that a search team has located the INSAS rifle along with the magazine used in the killing of four army men inside the Bathinda military station in Punjab. "Joint teams of the Army and police will now undertake forensic analysis of the weapon for ascertaining further details," the Army said in an evening bulletin.

Considering sensitivities involved, the Indian Army on Wednesday asked the media to avoid rumours and refrain from speculation over a firing incident inside the Military Station in Punjab's Bathinda, which led to the deaths of four soldiers, and "the area continues to be sealed off to establish the facts of the case".



Team Absolute | Chandigarh

Two unidentified persons in civil dress opened fire at army personnel sleeping in the barracks of the military station early on Wednesday morning, killing four army men, said Superintendent of Police (Investigation), Ajay Gandhi, adding that 19 empty shells of an INSAS rifle were recovered from the spot. The firing took place at about 4.35 a.m. on Wednesday at the military base -- the largest in Asia -- located some 100 km from the Pakistan border. Gandhi, who is heading the police team probing the incident, refused to comment on the use of weapon/weapons in the crime. "The matter is still under investigation," he

told the media.

The officer said that 19 empty shells of an INSAS rifle were recovered from the spot, adding that the deceased -- Sagar, Kamlesh, Santosh and Yogesh -- were asleep when the assailants opened fire inside the military barracks. The South Western Command headquarters said the balance number of rounds in the INSAS rifle would only be available after forensic analysis. "The joint investigation with Punjab Police is in progress. All possible assistance is being provided. No individual has been detained or apprehended yet," it added. Earlier in the day, the command headquarters had said in a statement that it has been "ascertained that in the unfortunate incident, four army jawans of an artillery unit succumbed to gunshot

injuries sustained during the incident". "No other injuries to personnel or loss/damage to property have been reported. The area continues to be sealed and a joint investigation with Punjab Police is being coordinated to establish the facts of the case," the statement said. It added that all aspects, including the possible use of an INSAS rifle and 28 rounds of ammunition that went missing two days back, are being probed. Senior Superintendent of Police (Bathinda), Gulneet Singh Khurana, told the media that "it was not a terror attack and seemed to be some internal development in the military station". The Bathinda cantonment, which houses one of the biggest ammunition depots in the country, is located along National Highway-7 on

### Not a terror attack: Punjab Police

Chandigarh: Four Army personnel were killed in a firing incident inside the Military Station in Punjab's Bathinda, one of the country's largest defence establishments, the Indian Army said on Wednesday. However, the local police clarified that it was not a terror attack. Bathinda Senior Superintendent of Police Gulneet Singh Khurana told the media "it was not a terror attack and seemed to be some internal development in the military station".

He said the police teams have been on spot for an in-depth investigation and assisting the local military authorities.

Preliminary reports said the incident seems to be an incident of fratricide. Sources said an INSAS rifle from the unit and some rounds of ammunition had gone missing from the unit premises a few days ago.

The military installation in Bathinda is crucial as it is the headquarters of 10 Corps, which falls under the jurisdiction of the South Western Command based in Jaipur in Rajasthan.

the Chandigarh-Fazilka stretch that further leads to Rajasthan.

## 'Social stigma may continue..': SC on pleas for extending reservation benefits to Dalit converts



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday orally observed that social stigma and religious stigma are two different things, and social stigma may continue after conversion while hearing a batch of petitions seeking extending of benefits of reservation to Dalits who converted to Christianity and Islam. Additional Solicitor General K.M. Nataraj, representing the Centre, submitted before a bench that Justice Ranganath Misra Commission report of 2007, which recommended for recognising Dalits in Christianity and Islam, had not gone into all aspects: it did not conduct field study, did not do comparative analysis etc., while defending Centre's decision to not accept the report. The Centre had maintained that it had appointed

former Chief Justice of India K.G. Balakrishnan to head a commission to examine the claims and the court should wait for its report. During the hearing, the bench orally observed how many commissions of inquiry may sit on the matter, and if tomorrow there is a different political dispensation, they will say that "we do not accept that inquiry commissions" report, "therefore there is some kind of a colour to this dispute". On the Centre's criticism of Justice Ranganath Misra Commission report, the bench queried Nataraj: "Are you sure, you should probably recheck the report, it is not that perfunctory and it is a too generalised statement... It is a generalised comment on the report." The bench said it is flagging the issue, whether it will be in the domain of the court to look into the material of the report, and also

whether there can be a writ issued to include in the Presidential order any community for reservation. As advocate Prashant Bhushan, representing one of the petitioners, said the communities in the presidential order is discriminatory and unconstitutional, Justice Kaul observed that the petitioners are saying that person carries a tag, even if they move to Islam or Christianity. Justice Amanullah orally observed that they wanted to lose their caste identity is not correct, the court has not gone into the heart of why they have converted. He added that why there is need for protection under reservation, there is an untouchability act, and one can protect himself. After hearing arguments, the bench said it will begin hearing submissions in the matter in July.

## Process of Oppn unity begins as Kharge meets Nitish, Tejashwi

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Amid talks of opposition unity ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the Congress, JD(U) and RJD leaders met here on Wednesday. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar along with his deputy and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav met Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge in the presence of Rahul Gandhi. The meeting took place at Kharge's residence. After the meeting, the four addressed the media jointly. Kharge said that they will reach out to like-minded parties. "We have decided to unite all opposition parties and fight the election unitedly." Chief Minister Nitish Kumar said, "We will reach out to as many political parties and move forward



together." Former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi said, "This is a battle of ideologies and it is a historic step towards the 2024 fight." The meeting comes after Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge took the first step to unite the opposition parties ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha election. Kharge has made phone calls to leaders of various like-minded opposition parties, including M.K. Stalin, Nitish Kumar

and Uddhav Thackeray. Kharge has invited these leaders for an opposition meet in Delhi next month to formalise a common agenda. Sources said that the leaders interacted on the opposition unity and future strategy to challenge the BJP in the country. Bihar CM Nitish Kumar, on several occasions has been saying that he is waiting for the Congress to take the initiative of getting the opposition together.

## Ashok Gehlot Calls New Vande Bharat Train "A Big Gift for Rajasthan"

Jaipur | Agencies

Describing the launch of the Vande Bharat Express between Ajmer and Delhi Cantonment as a "big gift" for Rajasthan, Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Wednesday said the state will become an economic leader in the country if rail facilities are increased. Speaking at the Jaipur railway station after the state's first Vande Bharat train was flagged off by Prime Minister Narendra Modi virtually, Gehlot said there is a great need for development of railways in Rajasthan due to its geographically distinct identity. He said rapid industrial development has



taken place in Rajasthan. "For this reason, if rail facilities are increased here, the state will become a leader in the country from the point of view of the economy," he said. "Railways has an important contribution in the social, cultural and economic development of the country. The changes brought about in the railways after independence are the

result of the thinking of our great leaders and the hard work of the dedicated railway employees and officers. Along with passenger and goods transport, railways have also rendered its important services in times of natural calamity and war in the country," Gehlot said. The Chief Minister said the Vande Bharat train "is a big gift for Rajasthan". It is Rajasthan's first

semi-high-speed train, which will reduce the travel time between Jaipur and Delhi. The regular service of the new Vande Bharat train will start from April 13 and will operate between Ajmer and Delhi Cantonment with stops in Jaipur, Alwar and Gurgugram. Gehlot also urged Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw to connect the headquarters of Banswara, Tonk, Karauli with the railways. The Chief Minister said a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the Rajasthan government and the Railway Board for the rail service between Dungarpur-Banswara-Ratlam sections.

## K'taka BJP faces rebellion after announcement of 1st list, Cong ready to poach

Bengaluru: Even as the BJP is facing rebellion from some senior leaders, who have not been given the tickets to contest the Assembly poll, the Congress is ready to poach disgruntled leaders, sources have said. BJP MLC and former Deputy Chief Minister Laxman Savadi has announced that he will resign, and former CM Jagdish Shettar has also stated that he will contest elections no matter what. The rebellious move of both the leaders is expected to cause serious damage to the party in north Karnataka and Kittur Karnataka region. Both leaders hail from the Lingayat community and have been with the BJP party for decades. On the other hand, the Congress party is all set to poach BJP sitting MLAs, who are not given tickets. The party had already approached Savadi and was also in touch with other senior leaders, sources said. Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai commenting on the developments, stated on Wednesday that he is hopeful of retaining both the leaders in the party. Reacting to Savadi's threat to resign, Bommai said that he has spoken to him. Shettar is visiting New Delhi after he was denied a ticket from Hubballi-Dharwad constituency.

## Retail inflation falls to 5.66% in March as food prices slide

New Delhi: India's retail inflation, which is measured by consumer price index (CPI), fell to 5.66 per cent in March from 6.44 per cent in February, according to official data released on Wednesday. The retail inflation fell mainly due to sharp slide in food inflation, which stood at 4.79 per cent in March against 5.95 per cent in February. Retail inflation was 6.95 per cent in March 2022. With CPI-based inflation falling below 6 per cent, it is now within the RBI's tolerance level, which is between 2 per cent to 6 per cent. The RBI has the mandate of keeping inflation at 4 per cent, with a margin of 2 per cent on either side.

## KOLKATA METRO CREATES HISTORY WITH SUCCESSFUL UNDERWATER TEST RUN

Kolkata | Agencies

Kolkata witnessed history on Wednesday as a rake of Kolkata Metro conducted a successful trial run through an underwater tunnel under Hooghly River in the route connecting Esplanade in central Kolkata with the iconic Howrah station. Only senior officials and select engineers of Kolkata Metro were on board during the trial run, the first in the history of the nation. Describing the event as a historic moment for the city, Kolkata Metro General Manager P. Uday Kumar Reddy said that this is just the beginning and regular underwater trial runs in this route will commence soon. Reddy, who described the trip as "revolutionary", was



part of the first trial run as he travelled from the Mahakaran station to the Howrah Maidan station. According to Reddy, regular trial runs on this route will be conducted for the next seven months. "Soon after that, regular services for the general public will commence," he said. The route stretching from Howrah to Esplanade is approximately 4.8 km long, of which 520 metres will be through the tunnel under Hooghly River. The tunnel is 32 metres under the water surface level.

## Serum Institute Restarts Manufacturing Of COVID-19 Vaccine Covishield

Intro: According to Union Health Ministry data updated on Wednesday, India registered a single-day rise of 7,830 new coronavirus infections, the highest in 223 days, and the count of active cases in the country reached 40,215.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Serum Institute of India CEO Adar Poonawalla on Wednesday said the company has restarted manufacturing of COVID-19 vaccine Covishield amid rising numbers of cases of the virus infection. He said the company already has six million booster doses of Covovax vaccine available and adults must take the booster shot. "Just as a precaution, at risk we have done it so that people have Covishield as a choice if

they want it," Poonawalla told Press Trust of India on restarting manufacturing of the vaccine. He further said Serum Institute of India (SII) will make 6-7 million doses of Covishield available in 90 days and it could take up to nine months to further build up the stock based on demand. The company had stopped manufacturing of Covishield in December 2021. The restarting of manufacturing of Covishield by SII comes at a time when the number of COVID-19 cases in the country is rising again.



## Maha registered 9 Covid deaths in 24 hours

Mumbai: Maharashtra reported nine Covid-related deaths in the last 24 hours, the highest in the latest surge in infections in the state. The state also reported 1,115 fresh Covid cases, according to the government's latest bulletin. These include 320 new cases and two deaths in state capital Mumbai, which recorded a positivity rate of 14.57%. Currently, there are 5,421 active cases in the state. Of those, 1,577 are in Mumbai. With the latest additions, the cumulative figures have risen to 81,52,291 cases and 1,48,470 deaths in the state. Mumbai accounts for 19,752 of the total deaths. Tuesday, the state recorded 919 fresh cases and one death. Coronavirus cases are rising across the country, driven by the XBB.1.16 subvariant of Omicron. But there is no need to worry as hospitalisations will remain low, health ministry sources asserted on Wednesday.



# 20 VILLAGE YOUTH CREATE 132 FEET BANNER ON AMBEDKAR'S LIFE

**Team Absolute** | Ahmednagar  
A group of 20 village youth has created a 132 feet long and 8 feet tall banner on the life of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar ahead of the 132nd birth anniversary of the chief architect of Indian Constitution on April 14. The youngsters are from Dharangaon village under Kopergaon Taluka in Ahmednagar district, and they self-financed the cost of Rs 10,000 for their creation.



"The multi-coloured banner has been erected on the main thoroughfare leading to the village, and it is prominently visible to all those coming or going from there. It was inaugurated on Tuesday night with fireworks and celebrations," said Jitendra Chandrakant Ranshur, a Kopergaon Republican Party of India leader. Created under the name 'Samrat Group', the banner depicts some of the greatest sayings and slogans of Ambedkar, has glimpses of his life from childhood, his educa-

tion in India and abroad, his family, the old dark car which he used to travel in, images of the Parliament symbolising India's democracy, plus several pictures of other major historical personalities and those with whom he interacted during his lifetime. "The youth have tried to convey to the present generation

how Ambedkar not only worked for the downtrodden Dalits, but also for the society as a whole along with his contributions to laying the foundation for Indian democracy," said Ranshur. The giant cloth banner, measuring a whopping 1,056 sq ft and weighing around 40 kg, was stitched together in Kopergaon,

and then transported free of cost by a government bus driver to the Dharangaon village where it will be on display till April 20. Additionally, the Samrat Group has collected Rs 100,000 which will be used for various social-cultural-educational programmes on April 14, including a community meal in the village.

## Excise policy scam

# Delhi court adjourns hearing in Sisodia's bail plea

**Team Absolute** | Delhi  
Delhi court on Wednesday adjourned the hearing in AAP leader Manish Sisodia's bail plea in connection with the Delhi excise policy case being investigated by the Enforcement Directorate (ED).



The ED submitted before the bench of special judge M.K. Nagpal of the Rouse Avenue Court that Sisodia had planted fabricated e-mails to show that there was public approval for the policy.

"We have evidence that Sisodia had e-mails planted. These were received not only in the official e-mail account of the excise department, but even in his personal e-mail account. The content of the e-mails was given by Sisodia which suited his agenda," the ED counsel told the court while opposing Sisodia's bail plea.

The directions to send these pre-drafted e-mails were given to Zakir Khan, Chairman of Delhi Minorities' Commission, who then asked his interns to send the e-

mails, the ED told the court. "Fabricated e-mails were sent to show that there was public approval for the excise policy. It was a sham approval. An illegal ecosystem was created to give benefits to the liquor cartels in lieu of kickbacks," the ED counsel said.

The ED's special public prosecutor Zoheb Hossain then told the judge that the agency wants to show him the case diary. To this, Sisodia's counsel said that it should not be done so in secrecy.

"Sealed cover business should go. If something is used against me to deny me my liberty, if they are relying on something behind my back, it should be shown to me as well," the counsel said on behalf of Sisodia.

However, the probe agency said that the 60 days given to complete the investigation against Sisodia are not over yet.

The ED counsel said: "We will show it to you after 60 days."

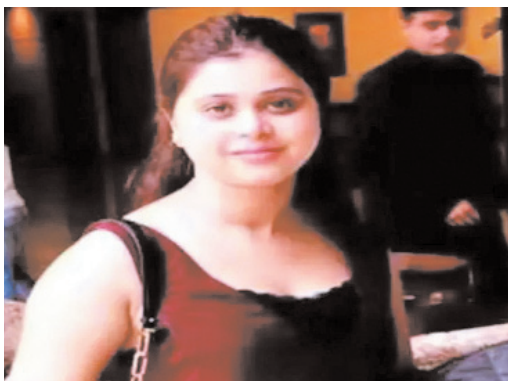
The court then adjourned the matter for next hearing on April 18. On April 5, the ED had informed special judge Nagpal that it has found fresh evidence indicating Sisodia's involvement in the alleged excise policy scam, and the investigation is at a crucial stage.

The court had extended the AAP leader's custody till April 17 in this case.

Advocate Vivek Jain, representing Sisodia, had told the court that the ED lacked evidence to support the accusation that his client was involved in money laundering.

# ED questions Lalu Prasad's daughter Ragini in 'land for jobs' case

**Team Absolute** | Delhi  
The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday questioned Ragini Yadav, one of the daughters of former Railway Minister Lalu Prasad, in connection with the alleged land for jobs case, an official said. She was recently summoned by the ED to join the investigation into the matter.



Yadav.

"Investigation revealed that in a similar fashion, land was taken from several poor parents and candidates in lieu of Group D jobs in the Railways. It has been revealed during the investigation that in many Railways Zones, more than 50 per cent of recruited candidates were from Lalu Prasad's families' constituencies," the ED said.

Lalu Prasad's daughter Misa Yadav and son Tejashwi Yadav were also questioned by the ED in connection with the matter.

"Ragini on Wednesday reached the ED's headquarters and joined the probe," a source said. On Tuesday, Tejashwi was grilled for about eight hours.

During the investigation, the ED found that 4 parcels of land acquired by the family members of Lalu Prasad for just Rs 7.5 lakh from poor Group-D applicants were sold to Syed Abu Dojana, a former RJD legislator by Rabri Devi, with huge gains at Rs 3.5 crore, in a collusive deal.

The ED said that their investigation has further revealed that a major portion of the amount thus received, was transferred to the account of Tejashwi

# FIR against Union Minister Arjun Munda and 40 others over protest in Ranchi

**Team Absolute** | Ranchi  
The district administration has lodged an FIR against 41 people, including Union Minister Arjun Munda, five BJP MPs and three MLAs, in connection with laying siege to the Secretariat in Ranchi.



than 60 people getting injured.

The saffron party has announced that a Black Day would be observed on

Wednesday to protest against the police. In the FIR registered on the statement of Upendra Kumar,

executive magistrate of Ranchi district in the matter, all the accused have been charged with rioting, inciting riots, violating government instructions, obstructing government work, inciting crime and causing harm to other persons.

The FIR stated that the BJP's Secretariat siege was announced on April 11. For this, the Deputy Commissioner and SSP had jointly issued orders related to the deployment of magistrates, officers and security forces. Prohibitory orders under Section 144 were imposed from 8 a.m. to 11.30 p.m. in the area.

Police personnel and some journalists reporting the incident were injured in the melee. Water canon and tear gas were used to control the crowd.

# DELHI: 8 HELD FOR SELLING FAKE IPL MATCH TICKETS

**New Delhi:** The Delhi Police on Wednesday claimed to have apprehended eight persons including two juveniles, and busted a racket involved in printing and selling fake IPL tickets. Police said that a total of 80 fake IPL tickets for the Delhi Capitals vs Mumbai Indians match were recovered from their possession. According to the police, on Tuesday during an IPL match between "Mumbai Indians and Delhi Capitals", a police team took their position around Arun Jaitley Cricket Stadium in plain clothes, posing as spectators, and also put colours and stickers on their faces. "After a close vigil, the team noticed a few persons engaged in selling tickets in black. During this exercise, a total of three persons were apprehended along with 24 tickets. They were selling IPL tickets of Rs 1,250 at the cost of Rs 4,000 each," Deputy Commissioner of Police Sanjay Kumar Sain said. The accused individuals were identified as Piyush, a resident of Gurugram in Haryana, Tarun Kumar, a resident of Daryaganj, and Mohammad Nasim, a resident of Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh, police said. "During further exercise, one more person was also apprehended. He was identified as Rohit Chauthan, a resident of Mumbai, the DCP said. On questioning, Rohit disclosed that he, along with his friends, used to visit those cities where IPL matches are being played. On reaching such a destination, they used to prepare fake IPL tickets having features similar to the original tickets using software, colour printer and other materials. After printing such tickets, the accused took position at the venues of IPL matches and, taking advantage of the high demand for tickets for IPL matches, they used to sell such tickets to needy persons at a very high rate.

# Four held in Punjab with 36.9 kg heroin



**Team Absolute** | Chandigarh  
Punjab Police have arrested four alleged smugglers after recovering 35 packets of heroin, weighing 36.9 kg, from their possession in Fazilka district, Director General of Police (DGP) Gaurav Yadav said on Wednesday.

The arrested persons have been identified as Manpreet Singh, Jaspal Singh, Sukhdev Singh and Dyalvinder Singh, all residents of Tarn Taran district. The police have also recovered two Sedan cars, which were used to smuggle in drug consignments from Rajasthan.

The DGP said that following inputs about the influx of large quantities of heroin from Rajasthan to Punjab, the police carried out an operation in the Lalo Wali village area, where four persons were waiting for someone. On seeing the police party, the

accused tried to flee but the police managed to apprehend them.

"During checking, the police recovered 23 packets of heroin, weighing 24.295 kg, concealed in the enclosure of their car windows," the DGP said, adding that another chunk of 12 packets of heroin, weighing 12.620 kg, were recovered from the location disclosed by the accused.

Deputy Inspector General of Police (Ferozepur Range), Ranjit Singh Dhillon, said as per preliminary investigation, the accused were coming from Rajasthan after collecting the heroin consignment which was dropped from across the border using a drone. Senior Superintendent of Police, Avneet Kaur Sidhu, said that further probe is on to find out more people involved in this module and also the Punjab-based receiver of the consignment.

# Nigerian national held with Rs 1.5 cr worth heroin in Delhi

**Team Absolute** | Delhi  
A 48-year-old Nigerian national was apprehended in Delhi's Dwarka and 300 grams of heroin worth Rs 1.5 crore was recovered from his possession, a Delhi Police official said on Wednesday.



Deputy Commissioner of Police (Dwarka).

The accused has been identified as Nnamdi Peter Oguegbulem, a resident of Imo State, Nigeria.

According to police, the staff of Anti-Narcotics Cell, Dwarka was tasked to develop intelligence and information regarding the drug traffickers, who are indulging in drug-trafficking in Dwarka.

"On April 8, the police team was in Uttam Nagar area for verification of illegally staying foreigners. Meanwhile, one foreigner came to Peer Baba road and was stopped by the team," said M. Harsha Vardhan, the

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Dwarka).

"Nnamdi was asked to produce a visa and passport, but he was not able to produce any valid documents. During his search, polythene containing white colour substance was recovered from his possession, which upon checking with the field testing kit, was found to be heroin, weighing 300 grams," said the DCP. "A case under section 8/21 NDPS Act was registered at the Uttam Nagar police station and Nnamdi was placed under arrest," said the official.

# Delhi school evacuated after bomb threat email



**Team Absolute** | Delhi  
A private school in the national capital was on Wednesday evacuated after an email containing a bomb threat was received by the administration of The Indian School, a police officer said.

"A minute and thorough checking of the school premises (Indian School) was undertaken by the bomb disposal squad, bomb disposal team and the SWAT teams after evacuating the premises. The email threat appears to be a hoax," Deputy Commissioner of Police (South) Chandan Chowdhary said.

Authorities at The Indian School in Defence Colony told police that the email was received at around 10.49 a.m.

The Special Cell and the Special Branch were also informed about the email.

"The SWAT team is also conducting searches inside the premises. The police have so far conducted two rounds of search and that the third round is underway.

"Police teams are looking for the source of the e-mail. In November last year, the school received a similar email which was sent via a German server," the police officer said.

# AIIMS BHUBANESWAR SIGNS MOU WITH IIT BHUBANESWAR ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

**Team Absolute** | Bhubaneswar  
To integrate medical science with technology for providing a better and more equipped healthcare service, Bhubaneswar based AIIMS and IIT have signed an MoU to promote academic and research collaboration in various areas of health and technology.

Both the institutes have agreed to extend collaboration in advancing research for public health applications like early diagnosis of disease and outbreaks, artificial intelligence and data analytics, biomedical engineering and technology, disease prediction modelling, digital health, development of tools, equipment and strategies for diagnostic and therapeutic use.

AIIMS Bhubaneswar executive director Ashutosh Biswas and IIT Bhubaneswar director Shreepad Karmalkar have signed the agreement on Tuesday evening here at AIIMS.

This endeavour will aid in finding solutions to the current challenges in the public health and patient treatment in the region.

Application of cutting-edge technology into healthcare will have immense translational value in diagnosis and treatment of diseases, said Biswas.

The collaboration will focus on application of artificial intelligence with relation to various health disorders, material development, app development, wearable sensor development, image-based diagnostics, AI & amp; data sciences enabled smart health monitoring system, and early warning systems among others, Biswas said.



AIIMS executive director Biswas has extended gratitude to Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandviya and Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan for the support to make this MoU a successful one.

IIT Bhubaneswar director Shreepad Karmalkar said that several faculties of both the institutions have been looking at possible mutual partnerships for some time.

The societal effect of these two institutions in

Odisha and throughout the nation will increase as a result of this MoU, which will combine all of these efforts and give them a powerful boost.

"We thank Education Minister Pradhan ji for encouraging the creation of this MoU. We shall now endeavour to ensure that this MoU produces concrete results," stated the IIT Bhubaneswar director.

The institutes will also focus on dedicated laboratory development. An advanced research centre called Center for Biomedical Engineering and Technology which will largely include biomedical signal processing, advanced characterisation, detector fabrication for imaging, additive manufacturing for designed materials, bio tracker and biosensor development for mental health care, is also planned under this collaboration.

In addition, both the institutes have agreed to facilitate faculty and student exchange programmes and reorientation/training courses that will bring academic excellence in their respective fields.

The institutes also agreed to develop and offer joint academic programmes involving technology and healthcare as well as academic credit sharing mechanism, sources said.

Both the institutes will focus on dedicated facility development and explore the use of advanced medical equipment for artificial intelligence enabled patient care services. This will provide joint academic programmes that include short summer courses for MBBS and B. Tech students, and research dissertation and thesis work for doctoral (PHD/M. Tech) students.



# '7 BJP LEADERS GEARING UP FOR THE CM CHAIR IN MP, THEY EVEN GOT THEIR SUITS READY,' HITS DIGVIJAYA SINGH

Team Absolute | Sagar

To review party's placement in upcoming assembly elections, Congress senior leader Digvijaya Singh is on a tour of Bundelkhand. Taking a jibe at BJP's 'ambitious' leaders to become CM of Madhya Pradesh, he said "As many as seven people in the BJP are eyeing the CM seat. While Shivraj is not ready to vacate the chair, his party leaders are dreaming of becoming CM. From state BJP president VD Sharma, state home minister Narottam Mishra to other senior leaders like Bhupendra Singh, Gopal Bhargava, Narendra Singh Tomar, Kailash Vijayvargiya, all are preparing to become CM. They have even begun to get their special suits ready for when they take oath as



CM. "However, their dreams will be left unfulfilled as Congress' Kamal Nath will take oath as CM in 2023 assembly elections," he added. Digvijaya Singh is speaking at the Surkhi assembly of Sagar district on

Wednesday. He accused state transport minister Govind Singh Rajput-- who is also the MLA from Sagar's Surkhi assembly constituency, of not doing any public welfare work. "Even the Sarpanchs are not happy, they don't get any work," he added.

Regarding the farmers, Digvijaya Singh said that now is the wheat season. Farmers have been standing at the procurement centres here for four days.

But there's no purchasing of wheat. No businessman is ready to stay here as he has to pay government tax as well as MLA's tax.

The government is event charging Rs 15 per sack from farmers. Where is this money going? Shivraj says that he is the son of a farmer then why is he looting farmers?" Digvijaya asked.



## 25-YEAR-OLD WOMAN GANG-RAPED IN SHIVPURI

Team Absolute | Shivpuri

Two youths allegedly raped a 25-year-old woman in absence of her husband in Pohri police station area, on Wednesday said the officials. According to TI Balwinder Singh Dhillon, two youths barged into the house of a 25-year-old woman when she was alone, gagged her mouth, tied her hands and allegedly raped her.

After this, the victim reached police station with her husband and lodged a complaint against the two accused. A case of rape was registered against the youths under various sections. At present the accused are absconding, whom the police are looking for. The accused will be arrested soon, said TI Balwinder.

# Kamal Nath will be Congress' CM face in MP: Digvijaya Singh

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Veteran Congress leader and Rajya Sabha MP Digvijaya Singh has said that Madhya Pradesh party president Kamal Nath will be the chief ministerial candidate unopposed, if the party wins the assembly polls due at the end of this year. While addressing a press conference in Surkhi assembly constituency of Sagar district on Wednesday, Singh said the entire Congress unit of Madhya Pradesh is united under the leadership of Kamal Nath.

"We have only one face for CM and that is Kamal Nath. We are fighting the assembly polls under his leadership and he will be the chief minister's face, if the party comes back to power. We need 116 seats to form the government, and we believe that the Congress will be back in power with a full majority," Singh said while responding to whether the chief ministerial face would be a youth if the Congress wins?

He took a dig at the BJP saying at least seven leaders are in the race for the chief minister's post, but current CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan would not let their dream come true.



Singh said urban development minister Bhupendra Singh, PWD minister Gopal Bhargava, home minister Narottam Mishra, Union Minister Narendra Singh Tomar, BJP's general secretary Kailash Vijayvargee and MP BJP president V. D. Sharma are in the race to become CM.

"CM Chouhan is not ready to leave the post, on the other side, there is a long list of candidates to replace him. But, the next CM of Madhya Pradesh will be Kamal Nath," Singh added. What was surprising was that Singh did not mention the name of Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia among the CM aspirants.

## Unhappy, BJP MLA Narayan Tripathi announces his own party, promises for Vindhya region

Team Absolute | Satna

In a new twist, BJP MLA from Maihar, Narayan Tripathi has announced the formation of a new political party on Tuesday. The new political outfit, Vindhya Janta Party is seeks a statehood title for the Vindhya region of the Madhya Pradesh.

Tripathi is a four-time MLA from Maihar in Satna district. Lately, there were reports of him joining Congress as he was unhappy with the BJP.

He said that the new outfit will soon be registered as a regional party. Tripathi is also aiming to put up candidates on all 30 assembly seats in the Vindhya region in the upcoming state polls in December 2023. Apparently, there have been reports that a lot of BJP leaders are upset and angry with

the party management. In fact, last week, BJP had appointed 14 senior leaders to pacify the old hands of the party. 'You give me 30, I will give you Vindhya'



Speaking at the closing ceremony of Vindhya Premier League season-2 in Maihar, he sought public cooperation in the struggle for the revival of the Vindhya region. Along the lines of Netaji Subhash Chand Bose's popular slogan 'You give me blood, I will give you freedom', Tripathi said, 'You give me 30, I will give you Vindhya'.

Everyone has a right to form a party: VD Sharma

On the other hand, the state BJP declined to immediately react to the development. "In democracy, everybody has a right to form a party," state president VD Sharma said.

## Madhya Pradesh achieved milestones in education sector without publicity: PM Modi

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In a veiled attack on the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while lauding the efforts made in the education sector in Madhya Pradesh, on Wednesday said the state's ranking as per National Achievement Survey-2021 has gone up to fifth position from 17th earlier, and this accomplishment has come "without any noise, publicity and boasting".

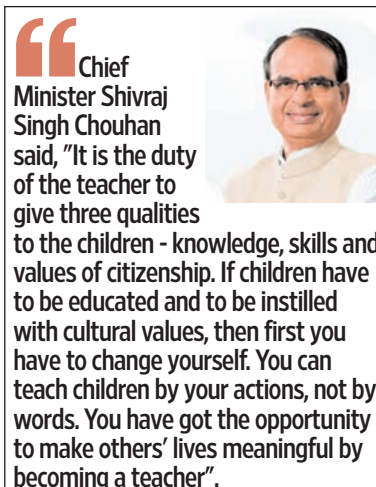
Addressing a program organised by the Madhya Pradesh Government for training of newly appointed teachers, the Prime Minister in a virtual address said, "Rural children will be benefited the most by the appointment of such a large number of teachers. The MP Government has set a target of more than one lakh government recruitments this year." The PM



further said, "In the field of education, Madhya Pradesh has taken a big leap from 17th to 5th position in the National Achievement Survey and this the state has achieved without creating any unnecessary noise and expenditure

on publicity." Asking teachers to ensure that they make a place in the hearts of students, the PM said, "The education given by you will bring change not only in students, but also in society. You are a good teacher, but always keep your inner student alive."

Noting that the campaign to provide government jobs to the youth in Madhya Pradesh is going on at a fast pace, Modi said, "Thousands of youths were recruited through employment fairs, in which



Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said, "It is the duty of the teacher to give three qualities to the children - knowledge, skills and values of citizenship. If children have to be educated and to be instilled with cultural values, then first you have to change yourself. You can teach children by your actions, not by words. You have got the opportunity to make others' lives meaningful by becoming a teacher".

more than 22 thousand were recruited for the post of teachers. Congratulations to all the teachers for taking up the teaching work."

# Tiger kills baby elephant in Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A one-and-a-half-year-old elephant was reportedly killed by a tiger in Madhya Pradesh's Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (BTR) located in Umaria district. The incident occurred on Monday when the baby elephant got separated from the herd owing to bad weather conditions and was attacked by a male tiger, a forest official said.

The forest officials found the body of the elephant calf while patrolling an area in the Panpatha Corps range of BTR on Monday. They also saw a tiger near the body along with pug marks in the surrounding area. The elephant's body had marks of tiger attack on the neck, the



official said. "This is the first time that a tiger has hunted a wild elephant, not just in Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, but in whole of Madhya Pradesh," the official said. "After the incident, ques-

tions are being raised whether a tiger can kill a wild elephant. Yes, if the elephant is below five years of age, it can be killed by a mature tiger. In this case, the baby elephant was just one-and-a-half-year-old. The tiger must

have killed the elephant because it was alone after getting separated from the herd," Pushendra Dwivedi, the wildlife warden at Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, said.

Dwivedi said the baby elephant got separated from the herd due to bad weather conditions. One more baby elephant had got separated from the herd, but it was rescued unhurt and was reunited with the rest of the elephants later, he said. Notably, out of the six tiger reserves in Madhya Pradesh, wild elephants are found in only two only two reserves -- Bandhavgarh and Sanjay-Dubri Tiger Reserve. According to forest officials, Bandhavgarh is home to more than 48 wild elephants.

## Sehore's Sharbati wheat gets GI tag

Team Absolute | Sehore

Madhya Pradesh's popular Sharbati wheat, also called The Golden Grain, has bagged the Geographical Indication (GI) tag. Efforts were on to get it the GI tag for a very long time. While Sehore district is the largest producer of Sharbati wheat in the country, Madhya Pradesh is its largest producer and exporter. Flour made from Sharbati wheat is considered to be of the highest quality in the country. Farmers also get the highest level of prices for the most productive sharbati wheat in the district.

As the name suggests, Sharbati variety wheat is slightly sweeter in taste probably due to the presence of slightly more amount of

simple sugars like glucose and sucrose as compared to other wheat varieties. Recently, several handicraft products of Madhya Pradesh received the GI tags, including wrought iron crafts of Dindori, batik print of Ujjain, hand-made carpet of Gwalior, stone craft of Bhedaghat in Jabalpur and handloom sarees and fabrics of Waraseoni.



## Governor Patel congratulates Jiwaji University

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Governor Mangubhai Patel has expressed happiness over Jiwaji Vishwavidyalaya Gwalior getting NAAC grade A++. Hearty congratulations to the management faculty and students of the university. He said that the university getting A++ grade in NAAC grading is a success of the efforts being made in the field of quality higher education in the state. Governor Mangubhai Patel has said that achieving the high grading of NAAC A++ is a testimony to the excellence of the university in its academic quality, research, efficient management and innovations. The high grading of NAAC will strengthen the national identity of the university. New opportunities for higher studies will be created in the university. The students will have better placement prospects. Financial support for research projects and coordination with prestigious educational institutions of the world will improve. Opportunities for mutual understanding, cooperation and harmony will expand in academic activities.

## CM Chouhan plants saplings



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan today planted saplings of Neem, Amla and Karanj at Smart Garden Shyamla Hills. Along with Chief Minister Chouhan, Raghav Jan-Kalyan Samiti, Bhopal's Priyanka Singh, Malti Singh, Parikshit Singh, social workers from Sehore Sushil Tamarkar, Rakhi Tamarkar and Pari Tamarkar also planted saplings on her birthday. Mukund Tiwari of Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Good Governance, Bhopal participated in plantation along with journalists Dharmendra Paigwar, Sanjeev Srivastava and Ashish Srivastava. Bhupesh Bhargava, office bearer of Sant Gadge Baba Parit Samaj Sewa Samiti, Dinesh Bhonsle and their colleagues also planted saplings.

## NEW BHOPAL-JAIPUR DIRECT FLIGHT TAKES OFF TODAY

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In a boost to air connectivity, a new direct flight between Bhopal and Jaipur will start from Thursday onwards. The flight operated by Indigo will fly three days a week, i.e. on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, as per reports of Nai Duniya.

Currently, the flight will depart from Jaipur at 5.10 pm to reach Bhopal at 7.00 pm. From Bhopal it will depart at 7.20 pm and will land in Jaipur at 9.00 pm.

Passengers have expressed their happiness with the commencement of this flight, also they have suggested that a morning flight should also commence in this route.

The need for direct flights from Bhopal to Lucknow and Kolkata has been felt for a



long time. Indigo has assured passengers that it will include Kolkata and Goa flights in the summer schedule. The Goa flight is scheduled to start in May, however the schedule of the Kolkata flight is yet to be released.

The Airport Authority is making efforts to increase the number of flights, and they are ready to give slots on the Lucknow and Kolkata routes. The commencement of the Jaipur flight has fulfilled an old demand of the passengers of Bhopal, and it is hoped that more direct flights will be started in the future to make traveling more convenient for passengers.

# Overwhelmed by the support from Ladli Bahnas in the development of state: CM Chouhan

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that, in the ongoing social revolution for women empowerment in the history of the state, I am overwhelmed by the immense widespread support of the Ladli Bahnas to the government. With everyone's cooperation, we will create a new Atmanirbhar Madhya Pradesh, which will be in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a glorious, strong and Atmanirbhar Bharat. After Ladli Lakshmi, Mukhya Mantri Kanya Vivah, Sambal Yojana, the Ladli Bahna Yojana will prove to be a milestone in this direction.

CM Chouhan was addressing a huge gathering at Ladli Bahna Mahasammelan at Shujapur in Shajapur district. The Chief Minister dedicated development works worth Rs 118 crore 68 lakh and performed bhoomi puja and distributed benefits to the beneficiaries of various schemes. In the



beginning, the Chief Minister performed Kanya Pujan and Kalash Pujan. Shajapur district administration's 'Shajapur Jandarshan' booklet was also released. Ladli Bahnas tied rakhi to their dear brother and applied tilak on his forehead. Ladli Bahna song was also sung in the programme. Chief Minister Chouhan said that he has

been observing discrimination between sons and daughters since childhood, the son whom the parents consider as a support of their old age, is unpredictable, but I guarantee that the daughters will not forget their parents till their last breath. When I came into politics, I took a vow that I will make every daughter a boon and till today I am

continuously in this direction.

Chief Minister Chouhan said that every sister should support their brother in this campaign of women empowerment. I am the real brother of all the sisters of the state. I want to fill your life with happiness. It is my endeavour that tears should not come in the eyes of any of my sisters and daughters. CM Shri Chouhan said that Ladli Bahna Sena should be formed in every village, which should not only see the implementation of Ladli Bahna Yojana, but also do social reform works. Chief Minister Chouhan said that no child is an orphan on the land of the country. All such children who do not have parents are the children of the state. The government is making complete arrangements for their living, food, education etc. Minister of State for School Education (Independent Charge) Inder Singh Parmar said that under the leadership of Chief Minister Chouhan, the state is continuously moving ahead in the field of education.



EDITOR'S SPECS

WHO's new Covid update on vax threaten demand, revenues

The recent update on Covid-19 vaccine and booster dose by the World Health Organization (WHO) can lead to reduction in global demand and revenue for vaccines against the deadly infectious disease, according to a report on Monday. The WHO recently revised its vaccine guidance following a meeting of the agency's Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunisation (SAGE). SAGE no longer recommends annual Covid vaccine boosters for healthy adults under 60 years of age after they have received both a primary vaccine series and booster. Further, they no longer recommend vaccinating healthy children aged six months to 17 years against Covid at all. With the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other national health agencies following suit with similar updates, the future of Covid-19 vaccine rollouts is becoming highly uncertain, revealed the report by GlobalData, a data and analytics company. SAGE has also updated its guidance on bivalent Covid vaccines, now accepting the use of bivalent BA.5-specific vaccine doses for the primary series, due to the benefits observed in symptomatic disease. However, the agency highlighted that there is no evidence indicating the bivalent vaccine is more effective in preventing severe disease, further threatening the Covid booster landscape. Since the threat of severe disease has diminished, health agencies and governments are now focused on shifting resources to vaccinate against other diseases such as RSV and influenza. Most European countries, including the UK, have already restricted boosters to the highest-risk groups. Despite signs of decreasing funding and legislation to support booster rollouts, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved a second booster dose in adults aged 65 years or older and is planning a meeting of its vaccine advisory committee in June to determine an action plan for the use of bivalent boosters during the upcoming fall season.

'WHY DO WEAK PEOPLE ALWAYS HAVE TO PAY THE PRICE OF DEVELOPMENT?'

Pooja Yadav

Its mighty roar down to a warble, the Narmada flows tepidly through the quaint village of Odhari in Mohgaon block of Mandla district. On its banks, protests simmer over the looming threats - to land, livelihood and biodiversity.

The Gonds and Baigas mostly occupy Odhari, the proposed site of Basania dam under the Narmada Valley Project (NVP). Once completed, the dam will flood 31 villages -- 18 in Mandla and the rest in Dindori -- and dislocate 2,735 families.

Naval Singh Maravi is already troubled visualising that fateful day when he would have to leave. Hailing from Rampuri in Mohgaon, Maravi got five-and-a-half-acre ancestral property when his father partitioned 22 acres among his four sons. Income from his urad dal (black gram) crop is minimal, so the family depends on the village forest for a living. Armed with community and individual rights under the FRA, they collect tendu leaves, harra (Terminalia chebula), behda (Terminalia bellirica), chironji (Buchanania lanzan) and amla, besides firewood.

"I am more worried about losing the forest income than the land. We do not have to seek permission or pay up for accessing this resource. How will I feed my family if we are moved out?" says Maravi, who belongs to the Backward Class.

Titra Singh of Odhari is annoyed the moment you ask why villagers are protesting when they are eligible for compensation. "I have three acres of land abutting the forest. How much compensation will I get? Maybe, Rs 2 to 4 lakh per acre? If we calculate based on the maximum price of Rs 4 lakh, I will get Rs 12 lakh. Is this money enough to buy land elsewhere, run the household and conduct the marriages of my two children?" he rues.

Titra says he will lose Rs 50,000 to



one lakh annually as there will be no forest, wherever he goes and settles. His calculations are based on the amount provided during previous instances of land acquisition. So far, the government has neither announced the project launch nor the compensation.

In response to a question from Ashok Marskole, the MLA of Niwas Assembly constituency in Mandla district, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan had said in a written reply on March 3, 2016, that the Basania dam project will be nixed. "It was announced in the Assembly that Basania dam and six similar projects were cancelled after considering the vast submergence area, the forestland involved and other reasons," Marskole told 101Reporters. When the MLA inquired about it in December 2022, he learnt that permission had been granted.

Last November, when the government entered into an agreement with Afcons Infrastructure Limited for dam construction, huge protests erupted in both Mandla and Dindori districts. In January, villagers submitted a memorandum addressed to Governor Mangubhai Patel and CM Chouhan to Mandla Collector Harshika Singh, with an appeal to convert the hydropower project that would possibly submerge 2,437 hectares of land, including 2,107 hectares of forest, into a micro-irrigation scheme.

On January 29, the local struggle committees in all 31 villages jointly organised a massive public meeting at Dhangaon in Mandla. They claimed the area of submergence will increase once the authorities get down to field surveys and reiterated their demand.

PESA over troubled waters

The NVP involves construction of 29 dams for the purpose of irrigation and hydropower generation. So far, work on 10 reservoirs are over, while six are under construction. Of the rest 13, nine have received administrative approval. As per the Narmada Valley Development Authority's Annual Administrative Report 2009-2010, Basania dam will irrigate 8,780 hectares of land in 42 villages and generate 100 MW hydropower. The estimated cost of construction was Rs 2,884.88 crore at that time. However, preliminary information suggests that 6,343 hectares, including 2,443 hectares of private lands, 2,107 hectares of forestland and 1,793 hectares of government land, will be submerged.

Mandla is a designated Scheduled Area under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution. The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, which gives village councils absolute powers on many fronts, including land acquisition and development plans, is applicable in the district starting November 15, 2022, the day Madhya Pradesh implemented the PESA Act.

Permission should be taken at the gram sabha meetings of the affected villages with regard to the dam project, but Titra claims the NVP officials have not even visited his village, which falls under Badjhar gram panchayat. It is rumoured that some NVD officials visited the villages surrounding

Odhari on December 30, 2022, but the villagers besieged them and made them write a letter saying no official would enter their premises to conduct any survey without prior permission.

"People have not been informed about the dam work. This is in complete violation of the constitutional rights bestowed on the tribals under the PESA Act. I learnt about the plan from a local daily's report on the pact that the NVP signed with a Mumbai-based company. Our gram sabha will never approve this construction," Titra says defiantly.

According to Rajkumar Sinha, the convener of Bargi Dam Displaced and Affected Association, the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has postponed the conditional permission for an environmental impact assessment of Basania dam project and has suggested submitting an Alternative Site Analysis. At the same time, it has not rejected the project as demanded by lakhs of affected families. "It is clear that the dam will be proposed again after the upcoming elections (likely in November)," he adds.

But he is also optimistic about the awareness among the people and the strength of their collective resistance, despite the sordid history of governments faking gram sabha resolutions to push projects through. "PESA will play a key role in Basania Project," he said.

"In the rules formulated and implemented last year, it is clearly stated that the gram sabha is empowered to oppose the handover of lands for the project and they will also have to be consulted regarding its social impact. The FRA too gives gram sabhas the right to protect their water sources and their resolutions are binding."

In a joint letter dated January 25, social activist and Narmada Bachao Andolan founder member Medha

Patkar and other social activists/organisations including Sinha wrote to Dr K Gopakumar, Chairman, Expert Appraisal Committee for River Valley Projects, MoEFCC, saying a combined environmental assessment of all the projects was required if many dams were planned in a river valley like Narmada. However, the water planning of the Narmada is hardly visible and the information about its detailed plan is not publicly available. It claimed that imposing a project on the villagers and withholding information from them will go against the very spirit of the PESA Act and will prove that the Madhya Pradesh government's claim of implementing the PESA law is false.

The loss of forest cover and fertile land, decreased water in the Narmada due to serial dam construction and the dwindling fish stock apart, the villagers are worried about the project's social impact. To date, tribals have collectively worshipped bada dev, celebrated nava khai, hal sudum and janatiya gau-rav divas, and participated in shaila dance.

"All of us will not be settling in one place after displacement. Our social and cultural identities will be broken. Moreover, we will have to remain silent spectators as the forests that house our deity, saaj (Indian Laurel) trees, drown. No amount of money can compensate for our losses," laments Titra.

As we take leave, Maravi signs off with a pertinent question: "Why do weak people always have to pay the price of development?"

(Pooja Yadav is a Bhopal-based journalist and a member of 101Reporters, a pan-India network of grassroots reporters, where this article was originally published.)

international

IMF SLASHES PAKISTAN'S ECONOMIC GROWTH FORECAST AMID INCREASING INFLATION

Hamza Ameer | Islamabad

Pakistan worsening economic crisis, coupled with a steeply rising inflation, has increased the risk of a financial meltdown for the country, according to estimates and forecasts of global lenders including the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In a latest forecast, the IMF has reduced the economic growth estimates of Pakistan to 0.5 per cent, while the inflation spike projection estimates are far above 20 per cent for at least two years.

The staggering estimates showcase Pakistan's deep rooted financial crisis, which are showing their damaging effects on the people, who are facing severe hardships, which for the moment, are



not going to end soon.

As per the IMF estimates, the interest rates in Pakistan are also expected to remain at their highest levels.

The IMF's World Economic Outlook report has also slashed the projection of Pakistan's current account deficit (CAD) for the current fiscal year, estimating it at about 2.3 of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP),

which many experts believe is an unrealistic forecast.

As per the forecast, Pakistan's GDP growth has been revised with a downward trend, while the inflation forecast has been revised with an upward trend, which are in line with the current existing harsh, tough and struggling conditions of the country's economy.

The revision of IMF's infla-

tion estimates for Pakistan also highlight a big jump in comparison to the eighth review of the lender's Extended Funding Facility (EFF, which was forecasted at about 19.9 per cent.

However, the revision of the inflation rate for the current fiscal year has shown the barometer crossing 27 per cent. The current annual inflation rate in Pakistan has been recorded to be at 50-year high of at least 35 per cent.

And as per the IMF's forecast, the next fiscal year 2023-24 average inflation forecast has been increased to at least 21.9 per cent, a massive rise in comparison to eight months back, when the IMF had projected a 10 per cent inflation rate for the year 2023-24.

Experts say that the high inflation rate projections indicate that the current ruling government will not have the leverage of reducing interest rates if it intends to get into the new IMF programme.

"The country's central bank has already increased the interest rate by 21 per cent. The figure is still in the negative if adjusted with the inflation rate," said Khurram Shahzad, an economic expert.

Pakistan claims that it has secured at least \$2 billion financing assurance from Saudi Arabia and is waiting for another \$1 billion loan confirmation by the United Arab Emirates.

However, even after the assurances, a gap of at least \$3 billion still persists.

N.Korea unresponsive to regular contact via liaison line for 6th day

Seoul | Agencies

North Korea remained unresponsive to daily routine calls with South Korea through an inter-Korean liaison communication channel for a sixth straight day on Wednesday, Seoul's Unification Ministry said.

The North was unresponsive to the 9 a.m. routine opening calls, and has not answered the calls from the South since April 7, according to the Ministry.

Seoul's opening call via the militaries' East and West seas communication lines also went unanswered, reports Yonhap News Agency.

The two Koreas typically hold two phone calls daily, at 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., as part of communication between liaisons.

In July 2021, the North



restored the inter-Korean hotline, about a year after it severed the contact channel in protest of Seoul activists' leaflet campaigns critical of Pyongyang.

The liaison line was again cut off in August that year for about two months in apparent protest against Seoul-Washington's military exercises. The latest suspension of the hotlines comes amid

heightened tensions on the Korean Peninsula following the North's recent weapons tests in protest of joint military drills between South Korea and the US.

On Tuesday, South Korean Unification Minister Kwon Young-se issued a rare statement expressing "strong regret" over the North's "unilateral and irresponsible" move.

30 die in road accidents in Zimbabwe during Easter weekend

Harare: At least 30 people died in 288 road accidents in Zimbabwe during the Easter weekend, police said.

Among the accidents, 16 were fatal and two involved passenger vehicles in which a total 16 congregants died on their way to prayer meetings, Xinhua news agency reported, citing a statement issued by police spokesperson Paul Nyathi on late Tuesday.

Nyathi attributed most of the accidents to human errors, including speeding, inattention, misjudgement and failure to observe road rules and regulations.

He urged the travelling public to be more careful on the roads during the forthcoming Independence holiday on April 18. The number of deaths from road accidents declined from the same period in 2022 when 73 people died in 264 road accidents.

Spain sees 2nd hottest March in 21st century

Madrid | Agencies

The latest data from the Spanish State Meteorological Agency (AEMET) revealed that last month was the second hottest March of the 21st century recorded in the country, with the least rainfall in about 30 years.

Despite a spell of freezing weather at the start of March, the average temperature for the month was 11.6 degrees Celsius for mainland Spain, which is 1.8 degrees above the average for the period of 1991-2020, Xinhua news agency quoted the AEMET as saying.

A record high of 33 degrees Celsius was recorded in the city of Murcia in southeast Spain, while the average temperature in the Canary Islands off the northwest coast of Africa was three degrees higher than normal. The high average tempera-



ture was accompanied by unusual dry weather, with the average rainfall over mainland Spain merely reaching 21.2 mm, only 36 per cent of the normal amount the country usually experiences during March.

The Ministry for Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge said that due to the alarming weather, Spain remains in a state of persistent drought that began at the end of December 2022.

The hot and dry weather also resulted in an early start of the wild-fire season in Spain.

Three Sherpa climbers go missing in Mt. Everest

Kathmandu | Agencies

Three Sherpa climbers have gone missing in a crevasse on Mount Everest on Wednesday, according to Nepal's Tourism Department.

The three identified as Chiri Sherpa, Lakpa Tendi Sherpa and Lakpa Rita Sherpa, were heading to Camp II from Camp I carrying rope-fixing equipment, the Department's Director Yubraj Khatiwada.

Search and rescue efforts are underway. As the new expedition season is coming closer, it is expected that around 500 climbers will make an attempt to climb the world's tallest mountain this year.

In 2021, the Department had issued a record 409 Everest permits.

The number dropped to 325 in 2022 as the Russia-Ukraine war prevented potential climbers from the two warring nations, Poland and some other European countries from com-



ing to Nepal.

Hordes of adventurers are again piling to the Khumbu region with fresh hopes, dreams and enthusiasm.

An Everest climbing permit costs \$11,000 for foreigners and \$75,000 NPR for Nepalis.

An experienced climbing guide makes as much as \$12,000 during the 45-day season, where the good weather window is normally available

for two weeks in a year.

A normal or beginner guide earns \$7,000 per season, while high-altitude porters earn up to \$4,000 per season.

Even the income of a porter is five times greater than the average income of Nepalis.

The climbing time from the Everest Base Camp (altitude 5,364 metres) to Camp 1 (5,943 metres) is six hours.

The Khumbu Icefall, the most

treacherous part of the route, lies between these two camps. Most climbers try to cross the Khumbu Icefall before sunrise when it is less susceptible to movement.

As sunlight warms up the ice, the chances of crevasses opening up or blocks falling become much greater.

It takes four hours to reach Camp 2 (6,400 metres) from Camp 1, the most exciting and easiest part of the route.

From Camp 2 to Camp 3 (7,162 metres), the average walking time is seven hours, while from Camp 3 to 4 (8,000 metres) or South Col, the average walking time is seven hours.

At Camp 4, the ultimate thrill begins as it is the last point from where the Everest push-starts.

It takes 10 hours to reach the summit (8,848 metres) from Camp 4.

Normally, the summit push begins at 11 p.m. or midnight so that climbers can reach the summit and begin their descent during the day.



# NCP'S AJIT PAWAR MEETS CM SHINDE, DCM FADNAVIS AMID RUMOURS BETWEEN MVA PARTIES

Team Absolute | Mumbai

NCP leader and LoP in Maharashtra Assembly Ajit Pawar on Wednesday had a meeting with Chief Minister Eknath Shinde at the Sahyadri Guest House to discuss issues related to damage of crops due to unseasonal rains. This meeting took place a day after Shinde's visit to farmers in Ahmadnagar and Dhara...



changes will be implemented swiftly as per the government's statement. The meeting took place at the Sahyadri Guest House in the afternoon and lasted around 50 minutes. During this time, Pawar presented several requests to the Chief Minister, which were duly noted. The meeting, however, has once again given room for speculations regarding unity of the MVA alliance.

# A DAY AFTER PAWAR-THACKERAY 'SUMMIT', MVA RUBBISHES RUMOURS OF 'RIFT'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A day after the late-night rendezvous between Nationalist Congress Party supremo Sharad Pawar and Shiv Sena (UBT) President Uddhav Thackeray, the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) leaders sought to allay fears of any 'rift' in the three-party Opposition alliance, here on Wednesday. Thackeray, along with party MP Sanjay Raut, had rushed to meet Pawar after his remarks to a private TV channel that sparked off huge speculation of fissures in the MVA and its possible repercussions.



THACKERAY-PAWAR MEETING POSITIVE; THEY DISCUSSED POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS: SANJAY RAUT



Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Wednesday said Uddhav Thackeray and Nationalist Congress Party president Sharad Pawar discussed political developments in Maharashtra and the country during their meeting a day before, which he termed as "positive".

Thackeray had visited Pawar's residence in south Mumbai on Tuesday late evening. Talking to reporters, Raut said Congress general secretary K C Venugopal has sought Thackeray's time for a meeting. He said Venugopal will meet Thackeray as a representative of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and the priority is to maintain the Opposition unity. The possible meeting between Thackeray and Venugopal will be held amid strained ties between Congress and Shiv Sena (UBT) after Rahul Gandhi's remarks on late Hindutva ideologue V D Savarkar, which were objected to by Thackeray. "A long and important meeting took place. Discussions took place on political developments in Maharashtra and the nation, and changing the direction of the future. It was a positive meeting," Raut said when asked about the meeting between Pawar and Thackeray.

late-night meeting. The MVA was perturbed by Pawar's comments last week questioning the need for a Joint Parliamentary Probe into the Adani Group scam, but on Tuesday, he apparently softened his stance and said he would not oppose the JPC if other Opposition parties wanted it. Later, Pawar and his nephew Leader of Opposition Ajit Pawar remarks on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's academic qualifications, the reliability of EVMs, among others, also became the topic of discussion among the three allies.

# Chandrakant Patil should not have made Babri-Shiv Sena workers remark: Mumbai BJP chief

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Mumbai BJP chief Ashish Shelar on Wednesday said it would have been better had his party colleague and Maharashtra minister Chandrakant Patil not made his remark about the role of Shiv Sena workers in the Babri Masjid demolition. Patil's statement that not a single Sena worker was present when the Babri mosque in Ayodhya was demolished in 1992 has put the Bharatiya Janata Party in a spot, as it is a partner of the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena in the Maharashtra government. Shelar's reaction came after he met Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi. "Patil made those comments in personal capacity. Perhaps it would have been better had he not made those comments," he told reporters. All were working to bring together various communities and groups. Balasaheb's (late Sena founder Bal Thackeray) role in it (Ram Janmabhoomi movement) was helpful and supportive. We have welcomed it, respected it and honoured his (Bal Thackeray's) views in this movement, he said. "I want to ask Uddhav (Uddhav Thackeray) what was his role in the whole (Babri Masjid demolition) operation," Shelar, a former Maharashtra minister, further said. The BJP believes that the Babri structure demolition was a spontaneous reaction of Hindus, he said. "The party neither took any credit for it, nor does it seek it now," he said, adding that religious leaders had started the Ayodhya movement. Following Patil's remarks, Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray had demanded that Chief Minister Shinde, himself a Shiv Sena worker, either step down himself or ask Patil to resign. Bal Thackeray had often been quoted as saying that he was proud if any of his party workers were involved in the demolition of the mosque.



Chandrakant Patil's remark about Shiv Sena workers in the Babri Masjid demolition has put the BJP in a spot.

# Case against man for abetting married woman's suicide

Pune | Agencies

The Navi Mumbai Police have registered a case against a man from Pune for allegedly abetting the suicide of the married woman in Maharashtra, an official said on Wednesday. The accused and the woman were neighbours in Hingewadi area of Pune. The woman got married to another person in May 2019. She and her husband, who lived in Navi Mumbai, used to have quarrels over domestic issues, an official from Rabale police station said. On February 22 this year, the woman allegedly committed suicide by hanging herself from the ceiling of her house in Navi Mumbai, he said. On April 9, the woman's father



got to know from the Rabale police that her mobile phone found near the body contained some messages and calls made by the accused in January and February. In the messages, the accused man abused her. Due to the continuous harassment by him, she committed suicide, as per a complaint lodged by the woman's father. The deceased's father also informed the police that when the victim lived in Pune, the accused used to harass her and her family had also reprimanded him for it, the official said. A case has been registered against the accused under Indian Penal Code Section 306 (abetment of suicide), he said, adding that no arrest has been made so far.

# CASE AGAINST AUTOMOBILE DEALER FOR CHEATING CAR OPERATOR OF RS 8 LAKH

Thane: The Navi Mumbai police have registered a case against an automobile dealer from Maharashtra's Thane city for allegedly cheating a travel car operator of more than Rs 8 lakh, an official said on Wednesday. The accused and the victim got acquainted at a food outlet. The victim expressed the desire to purchase a car following which the accused offered him a vehicle at Rs 8.99 lakh, inclusive of the registration, delivery and other charges, an official from Nhava Sheva police station said. The victim paid more than Rs 8 lakh in February this year, but the car was not delivered to him. When the victim reminded the accused about it, the latter gave evasive replies, he said. The victim then filed a complaint, based on which the police registered a case on Sunday against the automobile dealer under Indian Penal Code Sections 420 (cheating) and 406 (criminal breach of trust), the official said. No arrest has been made so far, he said, adding that a probe was on into the case.

# PMC conducts mock drills at 32 hospitals for Covid

Navi Mumbai | Agencies

Amid the rising cases of Covid in the state, as per the instructions of the Central Government, a mock drill was conducted at 32 private hospitals under the Panvel Municipal Corporation's (PMC) jurisdiction. The preparedness to deal with Covid patients was checked. During the mock drill, the availability of health facilities, the capacity of isolation beds, beds with ICU and oxygen facilities, ventilator beds, oxygen cylinders, emergency medicines, injections, PPE kits, general beds, manpower and equipment were inspected. In addition, RT PCR tests and antigen tests have been made available for citizens in six civil primary health centers by the PMC for patients with mild symptoms of Covid. The Municipal Corporation has appealed



to the citizens to consult a doctor and get tested for Covid-19 if they have symptoms like cold, cough, fever, body ache, sore throat, or difficulty in breathing. "If the citizens have mild symptoms, they should stay in self-isolation at home until they are fully recovered and avoid going to offices, schools, colleges, crowded places, public places and take medication and Covid test only on the advice of the doctor," said Dr Anand Gosavi, medical health officer.

# THREE HELD FOR KILLING SHOP OWNER

Thane | Agencies

Police have arrested three persons for allegedly strangling to death a solar products shop owner and dumping the body in a forest in Maharashtra's Thane district, an official said on Wednesday. The victim, Sachin Mhamane (46), and his wife had reprimanded a man employed at their shop in Titwala area for being irregular in his work, Kalyan taluka police station's senior inspector Jitendra Thakur said. On April 6, the angry employee called Mhamane to Dahagaon area for a business deal. The employee and two of his friends, all in the age group of 22 to 25 years, allegedly strangled the shop owner to death and dumped the body in a forest there, he said. After the victim did not return home, his family lodged a missing person's complaint with local police. During the search, the police found the victim's car abandoned on road in Dahagaon on April 8. They also found his decomposed body in the forest the



next day, the official said. The post-mortem confirmed the death due to strangulation following which the police registered a case of murder and destruction of evidence, he said. The police team worked on various leads and nabbed the three accused on Tuesday, the official said. The accused were booked under Indian Penal Code Sections 302 (murder) and 201 (causing disappearance of evidence of offence), he added.

# CIDCO to fill vacancies to give impetus to city projects

Navi Mumbai | Agencies

The City and Industrial Development Corporation (CIDCO) has sought applications to fill vacancies for the posts of Executive Engineer, Assistant Executive Engineer, Assistant Engineer, Assistant Transportation Engineer, Senior Planner, Economist, and Assistant Law Officer, among others. "The ambitious projects of CIDCO like Navi Mumbai International Airport, Mass Housing, Navi Mumbai Metro, NAINA, and Corporate Park are in progress. The government has emphasized the transformation of Navi Mumbai into an international city and raising the standard of living of the residents of Navi Mumbai through these ambitious projects. The recruitment process will give an impetus to the works related to these projects and will also help to make the services given by CIDCO to the citizens of Navi Mumbai speedy and efficiently," said Eknath Shinde, Chief Minister, State of Maharashtra. Dr Sanjay Mukherjee, VC & MD, CIDCO said, "CIDCO has a challenge before it to complete the various projects undertaken in time and since there is a need for skilled



human resources. Therefore, under the guidance of the Government of Maharashtra, the recruitment of Class-I cadre in various departments of CIDCO is initiated. Accordingly, CIDCO appeals to eligible candidates to participate in the recruitment process and to witness the progress of the state." The advertisements regarding the recruitment have been published in newspapers and the detailed advertisement, eligibility criteria, terms and conditions etc. are available on the website www.cidco.maharashtra.gov.in under the "career" section and CIDCO has appealed to the candidates to visit this website.

# WOMAN'S CORPSE FOUND IN VASAI FLAT

Vasai: The decomposed body of a woman in her 20s was found in an apartment at Vasai on Sunday night after neighbours complained to the police about a foul smell in the area. Residents of Shree Ashirwad Apartment at Navghar sensed the foul odour and traced it to an apartment on the first floor that had been locked for the past few days. The Manikpur police who broke open the door and entered the flat found the body of Mumtaz Kazi in the bedroom. "We found the body on the bed with a saree around her neck. There was also a part of the saree attached to the ceiling fan," an officer from Manikpur police station said, adding that they also found the rent agreement during the search, registered in the names of Momin Ghazi and Kazi. The agreement indicates that the two had occupied the flat just a month ago, but the nature of their relationship is yet to be established. According to another officer, there is a possibility that Ghazi had seen Kazi hanging and tried to save her by cutting the saree, but fled after he realised she was dead. "Or perhaps, he or someone else killed Kazi and left her body hanging and someone pulled it down," he added. The Manikpur police have registered an accidental death report in the case. Meanwhile, a search has been launched for Ghazi who is currently absconding.

# Maharashtra records 9 Covid fatalities, 1,115 fresh cases in 24 hours

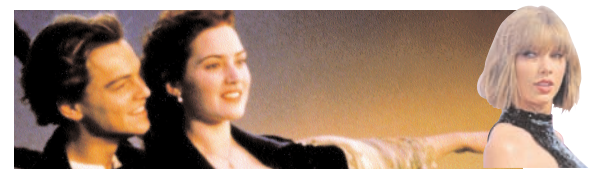


Mumbai | Agencies

According to the latest bulletin released by the government, Maharashtra recorded 1,115 new Covid cases along with the highest number of nine Covid-related fatalities in the recent surge of infections within the state over the last 24 hours. The state presently has a

total of 5,421 active cases, out of which 1,577 are in Mumbai. Cumulative Covid numbers in state at 81.5 lakh After the recent additions, the cumulative numbers for the state have increased to 81,52,291 cases and 1,48,470 deaths. Out of these, the state capital Mumbai has contributed 19,752 fatalities to the

overall death toll. Today, health ministry sources claimed that while Coronavirus cases are on the rise throughout the country, it is mainly due to the XBB.1.16 sub-variant of Omicron. However, they also reassured the public that hospitalizations are expected to remain at low levels, hence there is no need to worry. In the past 24 hours, India reported 7,830 new Covid cases, which is the highest number in over seven months. Sources have stated that Covid cases will continue to increase for the next 10-12 days, followed by a decline. They also mentioned that the country is currently in the endemic stage of the virus. During an endemic stage, an infection is contained within a specific region, whereas during a pandemic, the infection spreads across a larger geographical area, sometimes even worldwide.



# WHEN MARGOT ROBBIE

READ 'BARBIE' SCRIPT, SHE THOUGHT IT WON'T MAKE IT

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Margot Robbie has talked about her first reaction to reading Greta Gerwig and Noah Baumbach's 'Barbie' screenplay was disbelief over the movie being made. "The first time I read the 'Barbie' script, my reaction was, 'Ah! This is so good. What a shame it will never see the light of day because they are never going to let us make this movie,'" Robbie said, reports 'Variety'. "But they did." When asked for more details on the mysterious script, Robbie said:

"Can't tell ya!"

'Barbie' stars Robbie as the eponymous doll and Ryan Gosling as Ken. The two characters find themselves travelling from Barbie's dream land to the real world, although why and what happens there remains under wraps. Various Barbie and Ken actors appear in the film (including Emma Mackey, Kate McKinnon, Ncuti Gatwa, Issa Rae, Simu Liu, Kingsley Ben-Adir and more), while Will Ferrell stars as the CEO of Mattel. Expect things to get meta. Liu told GQ U.K. last year that he knew almost nothing about the 'Barbie' movie when he agreed to audition for a role. The actor decided to throw his name in the ring for a role after a junior agent

at his agency told him that Gerwig and Baumbach's script for the film was one of the best he'd ever read. "He literally said this verbatim," Liu said. "He was like, 'If I could stake my career on any one script, it's the 'Barbie' script. I really think you should do it.'" Liu described 'Barbie' as 'wild' and 'incredibly unique', adding, "I wish I could just show you what we do day-to-day because it's crazy." Robbie, on the other hand, went from doubting 'Barbie' could even get made to being overwhelmed by the constant buzz and social media attention the film garnered as it filmed scenes in Los Angeles last year.



# 'I'm all in'

Nick Cannon said he wants to have a 'baby with Taylor Swift'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Television personality Nick Cannon would be "all in" to have a baby with singer Taylor Swift because he thinks they would "relate well" to each other. The comedian already has twins Monroe and Moroccan with ex-wife Mariah Carey, Powerful Queen, two, six-month-old Rise with Brittany Bell, 20-month-old twins Zion and Zillion and five-month-old Beautiful Zeppelin with Abby De La Rosa, Legendary Love, seven months, with Bre Tiesi, and Onyx Ice, six months, with LaNisha Cole and most recently welcomed Halo Marie with Alyssa Scott in December, one year on from losing their son Zen to brain cancer, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

Now, "The Masked Singer" host has shared that he would like to welcome a child with country superstar Taylor because he thinks they would "relate" to each other.

Asked by host Howard Stern on "The Howard Stern Show" if he would like to have a child with Taylor, he said: "I'm all in! First of all, she's an amazing songwriter. What I do love about Taylor Swift is that she has been so vulnerable and open with all of her music. I think she would relate to me very well. We probably will understand each other."

Just days ago, Cannon shared that he regretted not fathering a child with 'AM to PM' hitmaker Christina Milian when they were together for a couple of years in the early 2000s.

Speaking to the Shade Room in an interview shared on YouTube, he wrote: "Everybody talks about having kids (in relationships). If I say this, I know it's gonna go viral."

"But when Christina Milian and I were doing 'Love Don't Cost a Thing', I remember when I found out she was pregnant (years later) I was like, 'Dang, man.' But I was so happy for her. I remember we (were) kids in love early on, and so we talked about that. But to each his own. Life plans it out. The universe gives it how it's supposed to be given."



# 'IT'S TIME TO RETURN TO KING'S LANDING'

'House Of The Dragon' Season 2 filming with surprising character returning



Los Angeles | Agencies

The network HBO has announced that production of 'House of the Dragon' season 2 has officially begun. "It's time to return to King's Landing. Season 2 of #HouseoftheDragon is now in production," the official Twitter and Instagram account for Game of Thrones' spin-off confirmed. The post featured a picture of the coveted Iron Throne.

Ryan Condal, co-creator, showrunner and executive producer of 'House of the Dragon', expressed his excitement for the medieval drama's return.

"House of the Dragon has returned," he said in a statement, reports aceshowbiz.com. "We are thrilled to be shooting again with members of our original family as well as new talents on both sides of the camera. All your favourite characters will soon be conspiring at the council tables, marching with their armies, and riding their dragons into battle. We can't wait to share what we have in store." Returning for the sophomore season are Matt Smith, Olivia Cooke, Emma D'Arcy, Eve Best, Steve Toussaint, Fabien Frankel, Ewan

Mitchell, Tom Glynn-Carney and Rhys Ifans. Season 2 will not feature Milly Alcock and Emily Carey, who portrayed the younger versions of Rhaenyra and Alicent respectively in the first half of the first season. Meanwhile, one character's return to the second season may come as a big surprise for fans. The upcoming season will see Sonoya Mizuno reprising her role of mysterious Mysaria. At the end of season 1, it was suggested that Mysaria died after her house was set on fire. Now that she's returning to the new season, it's safe to say that it's not the case.

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Sarah Paulson helped out her longtime friend Pedro Pascal at the start of his acting career by giving him her daily pay from jobs she landed so he could 'feed himself'. The 'American Horror Story' star met Pascal in 1993 after he moved to New York to study at the Tisch School of the Arts and after she started landing acting jobs, she handed him her daily pay so he could make ends meet while he was struggling to break into the industry, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

She told Esquire magazine: "He's talked about this publicly, but there were times when I would give him my per diem from a job I was working on so that he could have money to feed himself." Paulson added that she's thrilled her friend of 30 years has found success in shows like 'The Mandalorian' and 'The Last of Us', saying: "He's a part of some spectacularly successful things. But sometimes in those situations, the show is the superstar. It's really exciting to see that he is the thing that is becoming the superstar out of this." The actress went on to share that Pascal could go on to become one of the biggest stars in Hollywood, adding: "Everybody wants a piece of him ... You just want him to succeed. And that to me, I feel like, is the sign of a major movie star." "I'm ready for him to take the reins from the guys from romantic comedies past, like Bruce Willis and Mel Gibson and all these guys. He can be all that. Let's remake 'Die Hard' with Pedro. Remake all the 'Lethal Weapon' movies with Pedro."

Sarah Paulson helped Pedro Pascal with money so he could 'feed himself'



# ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Kerry Condon



## IPL 2023

# RR beat CSK in a last-ball thriller

Chennai | Agencies

Valiant blazing 32 not out off 17 balls by skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni went in vain as Chennai Super Kings lost to Rajasthan Royals by three runs in a last-ball edge-of-the-seat thriller in the India Premier League (IPL) 2023 at the MA Chidambaram Stadium here on Wednesday.

Chasing a target of 176 on a slow turner and with dew coming down in copious amounts was expected to be easy for Chennai Super Kings in what was the 200th match for Dhoni as captain. The CSK skipper made a brave effort by hitting two sixes in the final over but in the end, fell short narrowly.

But after recovering from the setback of losing Rituraj Gaikwad, their top scorer so far, for eight runs, but recovering to 78/1 thanks to Devon Conway and Ajinkya Rahane, CSK reached a stage with 40 needed off the last 12 deliveries. Dhoni and Ravindra Jadeja pulled them to 21 off six and then seven off three deliveries. It boiled down to five runs off the final delivery faced by Dhoni when Sandeep Sharma, who had started the final over with two wides, bowled a good yorker to deny Dhoni the glory on his milestone day.

After deciding to bowl first and restricting Rajasthan Royals to what initially looked like a below-par 175/8 in 20 overs, Chennai could manage 172/6 in 20 overs and lost by a narrow



### Brief scores

Rajasthan Royals 175/8 in 20 overs (Jos Buttler 52, Devdutt Padikkal 38, R Ashwin 30, Shimron Hetmyer 30 not out; Ravindra Jadeja 2-21, Tushar Deshpande 2-37, Akash Singh 2-40) beat Chennai Super Kings 172/6 in 20 overs (Devon Conway 50, Ajinkya Rahane 31, M.S Dhoni 32 not out, Ravindra Jadeja 25 not out; r Ashwin 2-25, Yuzvendra Chahal 2-27) by 3 runs.

margin. Earlier, brilliant bowling by Rajasthan Royals spinner Ravichandran Ashwin (2-25) and Yuzvendra Chahal (2-27) off their respective four overs had hampered Chennai Super Kings' chase as they had recovered from losing an early wicket to reach 78/1 in the 10th over.

Opener Devon Conway, who had struck Adam Zampa to two boundaries in the fifth over, and seasoned Ajinkya Rahane (31) had repaired the innings but things went downhill for CSK on their home ground after Ashwin had trapped Rahane in front to give Rajasthan Royals the much-

needed breakthrough. Ashwin also got Shivam Dube (8 off 9) while Adam Zampa accounted for the dangerous Moeen Ali (7 off 10) and Chahal sent back Ambati Rayudu (1) as Chennai Super Kings slumped to 103/5. Chahal then claimed the prized wicket of Devon Conway (50), and Chennai Super Kings looked down and out.

However, skipper MS Dhoni and Ravindra Jadeja struck some big blows as they pulled CSK to 40 runs needed off the last two overs. Dhoni and Jadeja hammered Jason Holder for two sixes and a four as they raised

19 runs from the 19th over.

With CSK needing 21 runs off the last over, Sandeep Sharma started with a couple of wides and then Dhoni smacked sixes off the next two deliveries off two low full-tosses and Chennai needed seven from three deliveries. He managed one run off the fourth delivery of the over and Jadeja could take a single off the fifth delivery, leaving it for Dhoni to get five runs off the last delivery to seal the victory. Sandeep Sharma bowled a superb yorker and Dhoni could manage only one run as Rajasthan Royals claimed a thrilling win.

## ICC T20I RANKINGS

# SKY maintains top spot, Babar moves up to third

Dubai | Agencies

The battle for the top spot of the ICC Men's T20I Batter Rankings continues to heat up as Suryakumar Yadav maintained his no. 1 position and Pakistan duo Mohammad Rizwan and Babar Azam get the chance to close in on the Indian batter at the head of proceedings.

While Suryakumar currently holds a commanding lead at the top of the T20I rankings for batters with 906 rating points, Rizwan placed second with 811 rating points. Babar moved one spot up to third with 755 points, followed by South African Aiden Markram and New Zealand's Devon Conway in the fourth and fifth positions respectively on the rankings that were updated by the ICC on Wednesday.

Both Babar and Rizwan sat out Pakistan's most recent T20I series against Bangladesh. It was Devon Conway's absence from New Zealand's series against Sri Lanka that led to Pakistan skipper improving one place to third on the latest set of rankings.

The duo will get a further opportunity to make inroads on Suryakumar when



Pakistan commence their five-game T20I series against New Zealand on Saturday.

A host of New Zealand and Sri Lanka players that featured in the recently completed T20I series were rewarded for their performances.

Sri Lankan Kusal Mendis (up 11 spots to equal 25th) and New Zealand right-hander Tim Seifert (from outside the top 100 to 36th) were the other big winners on the latest set of T20I rankings for batter.

Young spinner Maheesh Theekshana, who was the match winner for Sri Lanka in the first match of the

series, is the biggest eye-catcher as the 22-year-old rose to a career-high rating and equal fifth-place on the rankings for bowlers.

His teammate Wanindu Hasaranga was expensive during the series and duly dropped two places to fourth on the T20I bowler rankings, with Afghanistan pacer Fazalhaq Farooqi (second) and Australia seamer Josh Hazlewood (third) both rising a place as a result.

Afghanistan holds the top two spots on the T20I bowler rankings, with spinner Rashid Khan leading Farooqi in what is a tight ongoing race for the top spot.

## UEFA Champions League: Haaland creates history as Man City dominate Bayern

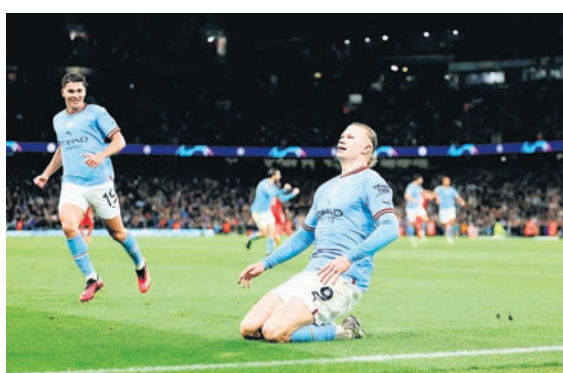
Manchester | Agencies

Manchester City took a big step towards the semifinals of the UEFA Champions League after their outstanding 3-0 win against Bayern Munich in the first leg of the Champions League quarter-final tie.

It was another record-breaking day for Erling Haaland scored his 45th goal of the season in all competitions, the most in history by a player at a Premier League club.

The Norwegian went past Mohamed Salah and Ruud van Nistelrooy, who have 44 goals. Both players achieved the feat in 52 appearances while Haaland has managed to create his milestone in just 39.

It took a stunning 25-yard left-footed shot from Rodrigo



that flew into the top-left corner to break the deadlock on 27 minutes. Bernardo doubled the advantage with a thumping header on 69 minutes, powerfully meeting Erling Haaland's cross from the left.

Haaland made it three with a right-foot effort on 76 minutes, his 45th of the season ensuring he's now scored the most goals in all competi-

tions by a player at a Premier League club.

The win ensured that City are now unbeaten in the last 25 Champions League home games, the longest run by an English team in the competition's history.

The 2020/21 finalists were full value for their victory and will travel to the Allianz Arena next Wednesday looking to complete the job.

# Shakib, Henriette Ishimwe clinch ICC Player of the Month awards

Dubai | Agencies

Bangladesh's Shakib Al Hasan scooped the ICC Men's Player of the Month while Rwanda's Henriette Ishimwe bagged the ICC Women's Player of the Month as the International Cricket Council (ICC) on Thursday announced the winners of the awards for March 2023.

Both all-rounders edged out their fellow contenders following a vote conducted among a specialist panel - comprising ICC Hall of Famers, former international players, and media representatives -- and global cricket fans registered at icc-cricket.com, who had been voting since the nominees were announced last week.

In claiming the ICC Men's Player of the Month for March, Shakib wins his second Player of the Month crown after first winning in July 2021. He triumphs following a string of fine dis-



plays with bat and ball, cementing his position at the summit of the ICC Men's T20I Player Rankings for all-rounders. As well as an impressive series win over Ireland, Shakib was instrumental in securing a historic 3-0 T20I series victory over touring world champions England.

All-rounder Ishimwe started the year at the heart of the Rwandan team that lit up the inaugural ICC U19 Women's T20 World Cup in South Africa. Her breakout tournament included a memorable four wickets in four balls in the win over Zimbabwe, and she carried that form into the Nigeria Cricket Federation (NCF) Women's T20I Tournament last month. 92 runs and 9 wickets in March, which included another hat trick sees her become only the second female from an Associate Member to win the ICC Player of the Month award.

## PGTI Players Championship: Chopra, Ghai, Chandra, Sanju share the lead after Day 1

Team Absolute | Chandigarh

American Varun Chopra, Gurugram-based Tapy Ghai, Mysuru's Yashas Chandra and Mohammad Sanju of Kolkata shot scores of four-under 68 to make up the leading quartet on Day One of the Rs. 1 crore PGTI Players Championship 2023 at the Chandigarh Golf Club on Wednesday. On a windy day, the leaderboard looked packed with seven golfers bunched in tied fifth place just one shot behind the lead at 69. This chasing pack included Delhi's Sachin Baisoya who made a hole-in-one on the eighth as well as Chandigarh pros Harendra Gupta, defending champ Yuvraj Singh



Sandhu and Akshay Sharma. The three other players in tied fifth were Mari Muthu, Harsh Gangwar and Divyanshu Bajaj. Inspired by Spaniard Jon Rahm's winning performance at the Masters last week, rookie Varun Chopra put behind the disappointment of a double-bogey on his opening hole of the tournament with a superb display thereafter as he went on to pick up six birdies. Chicago-based Chopra, a

joint runner-up at PGTI's event in Kolkata in February this year, made three birdie conversions from a range of 15 to 30 feet and also capitalised on two of the par-5s by sinking two putts for birdies there. The 23-year-old Chopra fired his approach within three feet of the pin for his sixth birdie of the day on the 17th. Chopra, who is staying with family in Chandigarh this week, said, "After making a double bogey on the first hole, I thought about and was inspired by what Jon Rahm did at the Masters last week. Rahm too began the tournament with a double-bogey but then came back fighting with birdies on the next two holes and a score of 65 in the first round which laid the foundation for his victory.

## MONTE CARLO MASTERS Djokovic makes winning return to action, advances to round three

Monte Carlo | Agencies

Novak Djokovic made a winning return to action as he fought his way into the third round of the Monte Carlo Masters with a 7-6(5), 6-2 win over Russian qualifier Ivan Gakhov.

It was Djokovic's first tournament in over a month as he was forced to miss the Sunshine swing -- Indian Wells and Miami Open -- both ATP 1000 masters' events, after he was denied entry to the United States over his vaccination status.

After receiving a bye in the opening round, the World No. 1 faced a spirited challenge from World No. 198 Gakhov and was in danger of losing the opening set. But Djokovic navigated the big moments well to seal the win. "It was probably, if you can call it this way, an ugly tennis win



for me today," Djokovic said in his on-court interview. "I haven't played my best, particularly in the first set. And I kind of expected that that was going to happen in a way with swirly conditions, a lot of wind today, changing directions. "It's different practising and then playing an official match on clay, (where) I guess no two

bounces are the same. It's always quite unpredictable what's going to happen. But all in all, I'm just pleased with the way I held my nerves in the important moments and I managed to clinch the two-set win." Gakhov was the fourth alternate into the qualifying field and took full advantage of the opportunity to reach the main draw and earn his first ATP Tour win to advance to the second round. But Djokovic was playing his 1,254th tour-level match compared to Gakhov's third, and that experience paid dividends in the critical moments. "I never saw Ivan play before today to be honest. I've seen a little bit of his video from yesterday's match and that's all. That was not the best preparation, but he's a young player coming up from the Challenger Tour and he just was on a roll," Djokovic said.

# FIFA: Women's World Cup: Spain defeat China by 3-0 in warm-up

Ibiza, Spain | Agencies

The Spain women's football team defeated China 3-0 in Ibiza, Spain in a friendly match to help prepare for the forthcoming World Cup in Australia and New Zealand.

Goals from Tere Abelleira, Athenea del Castillo, and Alba Redondo gave the Spanish a win against a well-organised rival that had chances to score, but seemed tired in the closing minutes, reports Xinhua. Spain went into the game after an impressive 4-2 win against Norway five days earlier, while Shui Qingxia's side is also putting the finishing touches on their preparations for this summer's World Cup. The Chinese coach opted for a 4-4-2 system, and China looked well-organised and hard-working on the pitch. Spain struggled to find space



in midfield or attack as the Chinese players constantly closed them down.

The game began to open up around the half-hour mark, with Chinese keeper Xu Huan at full

stretch to save from Olga Carmona.

China reacted well as Zhang Linyan worked a chance in the Spain area but her effort was blocked by Spain keeper Misa Rodriguez.

Spain took the lead on the stroke of halftime with Abelleira hitting a low shot into the bottom corner of the net after excellent work from Jenni Hermoso, who beat two defenders and then found the midfielder in space to score her first international goal.

However, Spain doubled their lead in the 61st minute when Del Castillo beat two defenders in the area before scoring with a left-foot shot that left Xu Huan rooted to the spot. Redondo added Spain's third goal following a corner in the 81st minute, with the Chinese defense looking tired and allowing her a free header that gave an extra sheen to the result.

## STOKES WANTS 'FAST, FLAT WICKETS' FOR ASHES TO UNLEASH ENG'S ATTACK ON AUSSIES

Team Absolute | New Delhi

England Test skipper Ben Stokes wants to add a fresh threat to the aggressive game-plan when Australia tour for the Ashes this summer as he has demanded "fast, flat wickets".

Speaking to Sky Sports, Stokes said that he has asked the five Test venues to produce fast, flat wickets that will suit England's batters to score as quickly as possible and to put the opposition under pressure.

"We've been very clear, especially with the ground staff around England, about what type of wickets we want. And they've been very responsive to us which has been good," Stokes said. "We want fast, flat wickets. We want to go out there and score quickly. It brings their (Australia's) guys in: if they've got fast wickets to bowl on then they'll be



happy with that as well," he added.

The English skipper also stated that England will maintain their aggressive style of play during the upcoming Ashes series against Australia and will not make any changes to their approach.



# SALMAN UPLOADS GYM PIC, CAPTIONS 'YOU NEED WILL POWER TO GO DO WORKOUTS'



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood superstar Salman Khan will be back on the silver screen after 4 years with his theatrical film 'Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan'. As the film draws closer to its release, the actor on Wednesday took to his Instagram and shared a picture with his signature one-line wisdom.

Sharing a picture of himself from his gym, the actor wrote in the caption: "Gym n dining table, the fairest places ever. Uss ke liye power nahi will power chaheyeh (you don't need power for that, all you need is will power)." The last part of the caption is inspired by one of the dialogues from the film, a hint of which the viewers can see in the trailer as well.

Director-writer Farhad Samji, who has directed Bollywood superstar Salman Khan in the upcoming action family entertainer 'Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan', is over the moon having worked with Salman.

Samji feels that all that he has done during his journey in films was paving the way for him to work with Salman one day, a dream that came true with 'Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan'.

Expressing his excitement and gratitude, the director said: "I have waited 20 years to direct a Salman Khan film. It has been a journey of blood, sweat and tears to be entrusted with the responsibility of delivering 'Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan'. For someone like me, every project I have worked on since the start of my career has contributed to making this happen. I remember when I was told I will direct the film, I was over the moon."

The director said that he is a "Bollywood keeda" and that he is grateful to Salman Khan for trusting him with the directorial duties of the film which has an ensemble cast. Farhad further mentioned: "When people say that he is known for nurturing new talent, they are right. The faith he shows is insurmountable. It is a challenge and responsibility he put on me when he decided to back my vision for the project and I have given it my all to make it the entertainer we hoped for it to be."

# Alia Bhatt will be making her Met Gala debut this year

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood actress Alia Bhatt, who is currently cherishing motherhood, and will be making her international debut with 'Heart of Stone', is all set to make her debut at one of the biggest fashion events of the year, Met Gala. The Met Gala was established in 1948 by fashion publicist Eleanor Lambert as a fundraiser for the newly founded Costume Institute to mark the opening of its annual exhibit. This year's theme for the event is titled 'Karl Lagerfeld: A Line of Beauty', which will honour the artistic brilliance of the late designer and trace his evolution. The actress will be wearing a Prabal Gurung outfit for the red carpet. Meanwhile on the work front, Alia has an exciting year ahead with the release of Netflix's 'Heart of Stone' with Gal Gadot and 'Rocky Aur Rani Ki Prem Kahaani'. The year 2022 was a highly rewarding year for her both on personal and professional fronts as she married the line of hey life

Ranbir Kapoor and also welcomed their daughter Raha in November 2022. Her projects like 'Gangubai Kathiawadi', 'RRR', 'Brahmastra' and 'Darlings', were all major successes.



## WHEN SAMANTHA STRUGGLED TO GET CLOTHES FROM DESIGNERS; WAS ASKED 'WHO ARE YOU?'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Samantha Ruth Prabhu recalled how she and her colleagues down south were disrespected in the past over clothes. In an interview, the actress spoke about how far regional films have come in recent years, with movies in Tamil, Telugu and Kannada out running Hindi cinema at the box-office.

Samantha said: "It's absolutely wonderful. There were times when we south actors couldn't source garments from designers because they were like, 'Who are you? South actor? What south?'"

Samantha, whose upcoming film 'Shaakuntalam' has over 3,000 costumes for the actors, supporting cast and junior artistes, made by designer Neeta Lulla: "We've come a long way from there, haven't we? This inclusivity is quite amazing, and we're now finally where we should be."

Over the last two years, films such as 'RRR', 'KGF' franchise, 'Pushpa: The Rise' and 'Kantara', among many others gave a Hindi cinema a run for their money at the box-office.

## ADITYA NARAYAN DELETES ALL INSTAGRAM POSTS, SAYS HE'S ON A BREAK



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Television host and singer Aditya Narayan has deleted all his pictures from his Instagram handle and said that he is on a "digital break."

Aditya took to Instagram, where he penned a long note sharing that he wants to spend more time in the real world.

Taking to his Instagram handle, Aditya wrote: "Before anyone jumps the gun, let me inform all my well wishers that I'm absolutely fine. I am on a digital break, happily spending time with my daughter, wife, and parents & loved ones along with putting finishing touches to my debut album 'Saansein'." He added: "Why have I deleted all posts from Instagram? Because it's like my digital canvas, and I wish to erase my previous imprints

and begin afresh, as if starting a new painting. I am also a firm believer that one must, every once in a while, disconnect from our current social confines, spend time with yourself and look within, for, that is where I have gained life's deepest insights."

"Good health is only so if it's multi dimensional. Physical, mental & spiritual. I aspire to lead a wholesome life, and I feel like it's time for me, in a way, to go back to school."

The "Tattad Tattad" hitmaker shared that he wishes to acquire new skills and hone his old ones along with indulging in a few trivial activities. "In short, spend more time in the real world, and not this digital bubble that a lot of us have made their reality. It's as simple as that."

He shared an Arnold Schwarzenegger meme which had 'I'll Be Back' written on it.

## APARSHAKTI HAS A 'WEIRD REAL-LIFE' CONNECTION WITH HIS SERIES' CHARACTER

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Aparshakti Khurana says that there is a weird real-life connection between him and his character Binod from the recently released series 'Jubilee'.

In the series, Aparshakti showcases Binod's journey - starting off as a worker in the studio to climbing the ladder to stardom as Madan Kumar.

Aparshakti said, "There is a weird real-life connection between me and my character, Binod. I started my career as a costume designer at the age of 21-22 but I always wanted to switch careers and work on TV as a host."

"So, I joined a television channel as a costume stylist and worked my way through and landed an audition as a TV host for a show. Luckily, I was selected for the same and my journey started from there. And in Jubilee, too, I start my career as an employee at Srikant Roy's (Prosenjit Chatterjee) studio where I work as an assistant but secretly aspire to be an actor. So that little connection was a motivation to work on this role better. That's what worked for me."

Directed by Vikramaditya Motwane and created by Soumik Sen and Vikramaditya Motwane, Jubilee has been produced by Andolan Films in association with Reliance Entertainment and Phantom Studios.



## SANJAY DUTT SUFFERED INJURIES WHILE SHOOTING FOR A KANNADA MOVIE

Team Absolute | Bengaluru

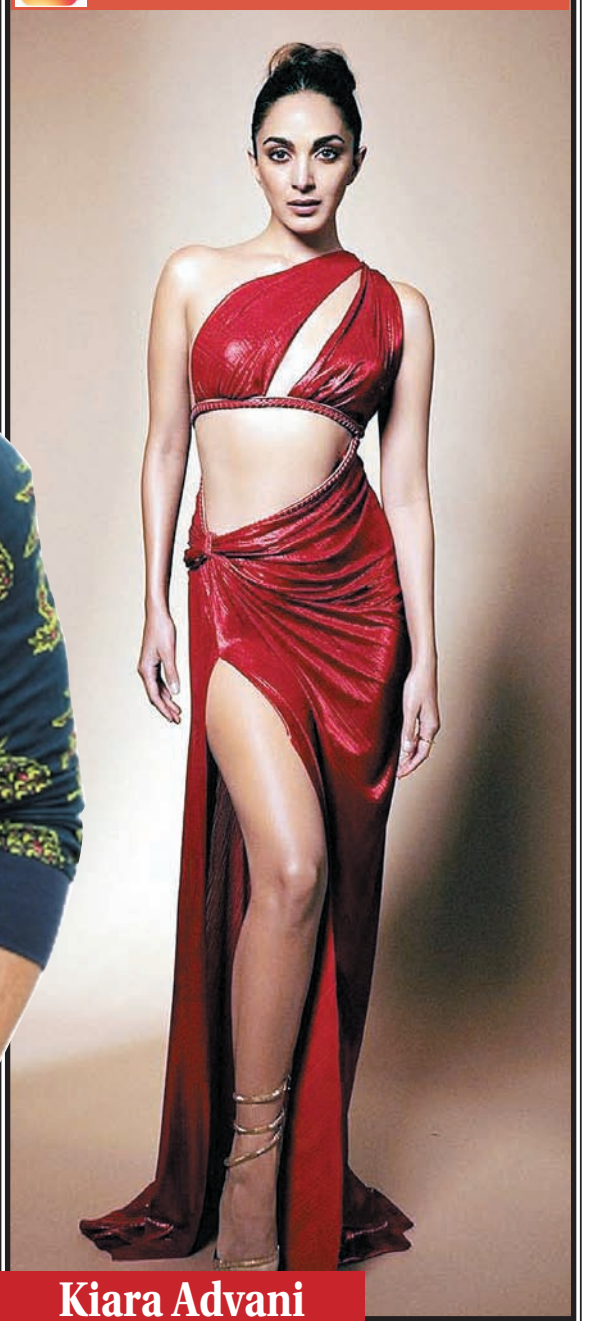
Bollywood superstar Sanjay Dutt, who is currently shooting for 'KD', a Kannada pan-India movie in surrounding areas of Bengaluru, has been injured while shooting a bomb explosion sequence, sources stated on Wednesday. The sources explained that while shooting the bomb explosion scene, Sanjay Dutt suffered injuries on his elbow, hand and face. The shooting of the film has been halted following the incident.

Fight master Dr Ravi Varma was composing a fight for the movie. The incident had come to light lately and exact details of the incident are yet to be known. The incident had taken place at Magadi Road in Bengaluru and Sanju Baba is recovering from the injuries, sources in the film industry explained.

After KGF Chapter 1 and 2, Sanjay Dutt is enacting a villain role in the Kannada movie 'KD' against action hero Dhruva Sarja, whose teaser of 'Martin' movie has become popular. 'KD' is directed by Prem and is produced under the KVN banner. Bollywood actress Shilpa Shetty is also playing a major role in the movie.



## INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Kiara Advani