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Teacher, Muslim student beaten as hijab row protests turn violent in Karnataka

RELIGION V/S EDUCATION

Teargas fired in college campus, curfew in one more dist. Govt shuts schools and colleges for three days



Bengaluru | Agencies

Shocking details are emerging from the widespread incidents of violence from across Karnataka on Tuesday in the backdrop of hijab row. Amid the Karnataka High Court hearing the hijab matter, more incidents of violence were reported from an educational institute in the state on Tuesday.

The police fired teargas shells and carried out a baton charge to quell the violent mob in the Harihar First Grade College campus in Davanagere district.

Following the violence, the district administration has clamped prohibitory orders in Davanagere and Harihar twin cities.

The miscreants have attacked a teacher with iron rods causing severe head injuries to him in Bagalkot district. BJP MLA Haratala Halappa stood as a mute spectator even as a student was beaten up by a mob in Shivamogga district.

Manjunath Naik (30), a school teacher has been attacked with iron rods by miscreants in Banahatti town of Bagalkot district after the violence erupted following students protest. "I was crossing the road when a group of people attacked me with iron rods

on my head. I couldn't realize what was happening," a bleeding Manjunath Naik explained to media persons.

He was taken to hospital by the police later. The situation is still tense in Banahatti town and the police has made elaborate arrangements to avoid any incident of violence. In another incident, BJP MLA Haratala Halappa remained a mute spectator even as the violent mob attacked a student. The incident happened when Halappa visited Sagar District Hospital to inquire about injured students in the stone pelting and lathicharge incident. A large number of student groups have been stationed at the entrance of the hospital. The student groups tried to pour out complaints to Halappa. Hindu as well Muslim students raised slogans and condemned each other. Meanwhile, the incident took a violent turn when the saffron shawl cladding students suddenly attacked a student who was raising slogans in support of hijab. Even as violence was unfolding before him, MLA Halappa did not make any attempt to stop the crowd involved in violence. The video has gone viral and drawing sharp reactions from the public.

C.B. Ryshyanth, Superintendent of Police of Davanagere district where prohibitory orders are clamped till Wednesday evening stated that, the police department has taken suo motu complaint of the violence that has taken place in Davanagere and Harihar twin cities. Siddaramaiah, the Opposition leader has slammed the ruling BJP govern-

GOVT DECLARES 3-DAY SCHOOL HOLIDAY

Considering the volatile situation in the state against the backdrop of the hijab crisis, the BJP government has declared a three-day holiday for schools and colleges starting from Wednesday. Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai has requested the students to wait until the court order and not to get provoked. "I appeal to all students, teachers and management of schools and colleges as well as people of Karnataka to maintain peace and harmony. I have ordered the closure of all high schools and colleges for the next three days. All concerned are requested to cooperate," he said.

ment for the situation in the state. He said, the provocative statements by the Home and Education Ministers are responsible for the present situation in the state. The issue could have been solved at the local level in the initial stages. Now the ruling government is in a helpless state, he chided.

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IS OBSERVING US: K'TAKA HC

Bengaluru: Amid tension and violence at educational institutions in the state, the Karnataka High Court on Tuesday said the international community is observing us and it is not a good development and adjourned, to Wednesday, the hearing of petitions on questioning denial of permission to hear hijab to classrooms by Udupi Pre-University College students and others for Wednesday.

"FOR PIECE OF CLOTH, RUINING EDUCATION"

Muskan, the student in hijab seen standing up to a large group of saffron scarf-wearing men at a college in Karnataka on Tuesday day, said she "was not worried" about facing them alone and that she would keep fighting for her right to wear the hijab. In a confrontation caught on camera and viral on social media, Muskan is heckled by saffron-shouting young men wearing saffron scarves, but she fights back, at the Mandya pre-University college. As the hecklers shout "Jai Shri Ram" and advance towards her, Muskan shouts back: "Allah hu Akbar!" She keeps shouting the words as the group seems to follow her to the building. Finally, officials seem to escort her away from the men. "Our priority is our education. They are ruining our education," she told NDTV.

SKM appeal to 'punish & defeat BJP'



MEERUT | Agencies

In its first appeal ahead of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls, the Sanyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) has asked farmers of the state and the neighbouring Uttarakhand to "punish the BJP and ensure the ruling party's defeat" in the election.

Senior members of SKM also issued a letter for farmers and said that the Centre had promised to withdraw the cases registered against them, but that was yet to be fulfilled.

The SKM's letter stated: "My dear farmer, I have never met you. But this time my reputation is in your hands. You must have heard of the year-long protest of farmers in which over 700 brothers lost their lives, you must have heard about farmers being mowed by BJP minister Ajay Mishra's son in Kheri. Four of our brothers lost their lives in

that incident and the BJP government, rather than arresting the accused, tried to defend them."

It further said that the government "subjected farmers to tear gas and water cannons and used batons on them."

"The farmers were framed in fake cases, and called terrorists and anti-nationals. This party only listens to one language -- vote, seat and rule. Let's punish BJP and throw them out of power. BJP had manipulated farmers in 2017 and after coming to power, they turned away from all their promises."

Meanwhile, BKU leader Rakesh Tikait has warned those trying to "create a rift between Hindus and Muslims", and said: "Whoever tries to play the match of Jinnah or Hindu-Muslim in Muzaffarnagar or west Uttar Pradesh, I will set him right."

Seven soldiers trapped in Arunachal avalanche found dead: Army

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The bodies of the seven soldiers, who went missing after their patrol along the India-China border in Arunachal Pradesh's West Kameng district was hit by an avalanche, have been found, the Indian Army said on Tuesday.

The seven army personnel, part of a patrol, were struck by an avalanche in the high altitude area of Kameng Sector in Arunachal Pradesh on February 6.

The area, located at an altitude of 14,500 feet, had been witnessing inclement weather with heavy snowfall since the last few days.

The area has been wit-



nessing inclement weather with heavy snowfall since the last few days, the force said.

Congress thinking has been hijacked by urban Naxals: PM Modi

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi described the Congress Party as a "Tukde-Tukde gang" in the Lok Sabha, he on Tuesday said in the Rajya Sabha that the principal opposition party's thinking has been hijacked by the urban Naxals.

Replying to the debate on the Motion of Thanks on the President's speech in the Upper House, he said, "It is said that we are trying to change history. Congress thinking has been trapped by urban Naxals." Saying that their (Congress) thinking has become destructive, Modi added, "We just want to improve the memory of some people. We are not changing history. Some people's history starts from a particular time, we are only going back. Some people's history is limited to one family."



Taking a jibe over the statement made by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on the importance of federalism in the Lok Sabha last week where he said that India is a Union of States, Modi said that the Congress party has an objection to the word nation. Why do they not change the name of their party from Indian National Congress to Federation of Nations. "Correct the mistake made by your predecessors," he added.

Taking a dig at the Congress Party, he said that the grand old party did

not even spare its own leaders. They divided Andhra Pradesh in a wrong way that both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are fighting till now.

RaGa counters PM's RS attack, says abuse Cong but do your job

Congress MP Rahul Gandhi broke his silence on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's attacks on Congress in Rajya Sabha, news agency reported. "He (PM Modi) didn't answer my questions. We need to take the China & Pakistan issue seriously. My great grandfather served the country, I don't need anyone's certificate. BJP is scared of Congress as we say the truth. Do abuse Congress and Nehru but do your job," Gandhi added.

Rahul Gandhi's attacks came hours after Prime Minister Modi during his address in Rajya Sabha launched a blistering attack on the Congress and Gandhi family. Earlier, The Congress has accused the Prime Minister of making election speech and scuttling real issues. Addressing a press conference, leader of the opposition in the upper house, Mallikarjun Kharge said the Prime Minister did not respond to the issues raised by the opposition instead made an election speech. "The PM plumed new depths in the Rajya Sabha today, forcing an Opposition walk-out."



KFC, HYUNDAI FACE BACKLASH ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Indian users are fuming on social media over some controversial posts targeting Kashmir by reputed multinationals. Hyundai's Pakistan dealership came under heavy fire for sharing a post on its official social media handles, extending support to "Kashmir Solidarity Day". Soon after, #BoycottHyundai started trending on Twitter, with Indians condemning the car giant's controversial stand. Now, KFC has come under scrutiny over the same reasons, IB Times reported.

Indians are calling for a boycott of KFC, the popular fast-food chain with branches across the globe. The reason for the social media boycott, which is trending in India under the hashtag #BoycottKFC, is a post shared by the eatery's Pakistan handle last year.

"We stand together this Kashmir Solidarity Day, to realise their right to freedom," KFC PAK wrote. Making things worse, a picture of snowy mountains with overlaying text: Their cravings for freedom are heartfelt, was shared. The word Kashmir is marked with a barbed wire, signifying Kashmir is not free, the report said.



As the screenshot of last year's tweet by KFC Pakistan on Kashmir went viral, many Indians took to Twitter to express their dismay. Hundreds and thousands of users have called out the propaganda against India on the sensitive issue of Kashmir. Netizens are already pledging never to eat again at a KFC joint, IB Times reported.

The social media post, which triggered this controversy, remains active on all of KFC Pakistan's social media channels. KFC India, however, has issued an apology for the controversial post from its Pak handles, the report said. Korean car maker Hyundai Motor India found itself on a sticky road with its statement that many Indians consider as insufficient and skirting over the issue of whether Kashmir is an integral part of India. On Twitter the handles Boycott Hyundai and 'Boycott Kia' started trending.

28 acquitted, 49 convicted in 2008 Gujarat serial blasts case

Gandhinagar: The Ahmedabad special designated court on Tuesday pronounced its verdict in the 2008 serial blasts case which claimed 56 lives. The court acquitted 28 accused out of 77 and convicted 49. The court will pronounce the quantum of punishment on Wednesday.

Judge Ambalal R. Patel, who presided over the trial, resumed work after recovering from Covid-19. As many as 77 accused faced trial in the case. Out of the 28 acquittal, 16 were given a benefit of doubt, while 12 were pronounced innocent due to lack of evidence. At least 56 people were killed and over 200 were injured in 21 bomb blasts that rocked Ahmedabad city within a span of 70 minutes on July 26, 2008. The police had claimed people associated with the terror outfit Indian Mujahideen (IM), a faction of radicals of the banned Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), were involved in the blasts. It was alleged IM terrorists had planned and executed the attack as revenge for the 2002 post-Godhra riots. The trial in the case began in December 2009 against 78 persons connected to IM after the court merged all 35 FIRs.

Cancer scare pushes Johnson & Johnson toward global talcum powder ban

Johnson's Baby Powder was voluntarily removed from store shelves across North America in 2020 after regulators discovered traces of carcinogenic fibres, a form of asbestos, in a sample taken back in 2019. The resulting PR crisis precipitated a slump in sales so severe that J&J felt compelled to withdraw the product from sale the following year, although it remains available in the rest of the world - including the UK.

LONDON | Agencies

Healthcare multinational Johnson & Johnson (J&J) is edging toward a global withdrawal of its talcum-based baby powders from sale amid fears the product may present a cancer risk.

Now activist investment platform Tulipshare proposes to upend that status quo by forcing a shareholder vote on whether or not to mandate a global ban. Proposals for such a vote have already been submitted to the US Securities and Exchange Committee for consideration ahead of J&J's next annual meeting in April. The North



American scare has sparked an avalanche of lawsuits from women claiming to have developed ovarian cancer from using the powder, but J&J has dismissed the backlash as a product of widespread "misinformation."

A spokesperson for the healthcare giant said: "We stand behind the ingredients we use in our products, and Johnson & Johnson has a rigorous testing standard in place to ensure our cosmetic talc is safe. Not only is our talc routinely tested to ensure it does not contain asbestos, but our talc has also been tested and confirmed to be asbestos-free by a range of independent laboratories, universities and global health authorities."

J&J's lawyers argue that Tulipshare's motion is ineligible because it would impact thousands of pending lawsuits across the US, which contend that talc causes cancer.



BATTLE FOR UTTAR PRADESH: BJP MANIFESTO HAS SOPS FOR ALL

SP promises 33% reservation for women in govt jobs

LUCKNOW | Agencies

The BJP manifesto for the Uttar Pradesh assembly elections promises free electricity to farmers for irrigation and will launch a Mukhya Mantri Krishi Sichai Yojana at a cost of Rs 5,000 crore.

The manifesto, released by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, promises subsidy for small farmers for borewells, tubewells, ponds and tanks.

It has promised a Rs 5,000 crore renewal plan for sugar mills in the state. Also, it promises that wheat and paddy will be available at MSP in five years.

For those accused in love-jihad cases, the manifesto proposes a minimum sentence of ten years and a fine of Rs one lakh so that it works as a deterrent. The state government passed an 'anti-love jihad' ordinance in November last year.

Other promises made by the ruling party -- which is widely seen as facing a stern challenge from Akhilesh



Yadav's Samajwadi Party to retain control of UP -- include a commitment to double the state's per capita income and attract up to Rs 10 lakh crore in investment. The BJP will set up a Lata

Mangeshkar Academy of Performing Arts in the state in memory of the late singer. The BJP has also promised a 'Paryatan Kaushal Kosh' worth Rs 2000 crore that will generate employ-

ment for 10 lakh youth.

The manifesto also promises a scooty to meritorious college girls, free bus travel for women above 60 years and two free gas cylinders in a year. Two crore tablets and smartphones will also be distributed.

A pension of Rs 1,500 per month will be given to widows. A Ma Annapurna canteen will be set for free food to the poor.

The BJP will start a scheme in the name of former chief minister Kalyan Singh. Called the Babuji Kalyan Singh Gram Unnat Yojana, the scheme will ensure all round development of villages. Self help groups will be set up at a cost of Rs 5,000 crore for five lakh women.

A Garib Kalyan Mela will be organised in every gram panchayat.

A Ramayana University will be set up in Ayodhya for research into various books and scriptures related to the subject. To improve the medical infrastructure, the BJP has promised to recruit 6,000 doctors and 10,000 paramedics.

LUCKNOW | Agencies

In a major development, the Samajwadi Party on Tuesday announced 33 per cent reservation for women in government jobs when it comes to power in Uttar Pradesh.

Releasing the party's manifesto - 'Vachan Patra' - here, SP President Akhilesh Yadav said that the reservation would be for all categories including general.

He said that women presence in the police force would also be increased and 33 per cent reservation would be given to women.

The Samajwadi Party manifesto also announced 300 units of free power for domestic consumers and free power for small farmers. "Those having less than two bighas of land will be given free fertiliser, free power, and interest-free loan so that all farmers can be loan-free by 2025. We will also ensure MSP for all farmers and cane dues will be paid within 15 days. For this, we will make a farmers' corpus fund," Akhilesh Yadav said.

For BPL families, the SP has announced two free gas cylinders and one litre of petrol per month for owners of two-wheelers. Auto drivers will get three litres petrol/6 kg of CNG per month. In the IT sector, the SP will ensure 22 lakh jobs for the youth. Akhilesh Yadav further said that when he comes to power, free education will be given from KG to PG



and the 'Kanya Vidya Dhan scheme will give each girl Rs 36,000. The Samajwadi pension will also be increased to Rs 18,000 per year. Women helpline 1090 will be strengthened and the facility of lodging FIR on email and WhatsApp will be provided.

"We will follow the policy of zero tolerance towards hate crimes and all police stations will be made corruption free," he said.

Akhilesh Yadav further said that the old pension scheme will be revived for government employees and media facility centres will be set up for media persons.

A pension of Rs 18,000 per year will be given to artisans in the unorganised sectors and labour powerline 1890 will be set up to provide assistance to labour. Samajwadi canteens and kirana stores will be set up to provide subsidised food and groceries to the poor.

Mamata Banerjee launches blistering attack on BJP

LUCKNOW | Agencies

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, on Tuesday mounted a blistering attack on the BJP and asked it to first apologize for what happened in Hathras and Unnao and also for the Covid deaths.

"We worship Ganga River but when the bodies were flowing in the river, where was Yogi ji? You came to defeat me in West Bengal but did not take care of the people. Did you not have wood for cremation? First seek apology and then seek votes," she said while addressing a press conference here on Tuesday.

She reiterated that 'Khela hobe' in UP. "We ousted BJP from Bengal and we will oust it from UP too," she added and said, "The BJP has been claiming to give free vaccines but it is their money. Whose money, is it? It is the people's money."

She further said that money has been taken from people and public sector for PM Cares Fund but there is no account of it.



Lashing at the BJP, the West Bengal Chief Minister termed the BJP as a 'Khatra Party' and asked people to beware of it. "We will not allow BJP's lies to land in UP. Akhilesh will win hands down," she stated.

LALU SUPPORTS BJP MP'S DAWOOD JIBE ON NITISH KUMAR

Patna: Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) national president Lalu Prasad has supported the statement of BJP MP Chhedi Paswan who said that Nitish Kumar can shake hands even with Dawood Ibrahim for the post of the chief minister.

Lalu Prasad said that Chhedi Paswan has rightly pointed out the true character of Nitish Kumar.

"Chhedi Paswan rightly said that Nitish Kumar would shake hands with Dawood Ibrahim to achieve the post of chief minister. He can go anywhere for the post of chief minister," Lalu Prasad said.

On Monday, Chhedi Paswan said that the BJP top leadership has made a huge mistake by giving the post of chief minister to Nitish Kumar. The value of BJP MPs, MLAs, MLCs and workers are nothing in Bihar. It is totally zero.

"Nitish Kumar is a person who could shake hands with Dawood Ibrahim for the post of chief minister

No manufacturing in India, no tax relief, says Govt on Tesla

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The government on Tuesday questioned electric car company Tesla's business practices, of seeking tax breaks to use the Indian market to sell its products, but not wanting to set up manufacturing facilities in the country which can generate thousands of jobs.

"We can't grant subsidies or relaxation in taxes to the said company as they don't want to set-up their manufacturing and other operation bases here. Why should we favour a company which creates jobs in China and mints profit from our markets? Our Prime Minister has a vision for all such foreign companies, if you want to sell your product in our country, then manufacture them here only," Minister of State for Heavy Industries Krishna Pal Gujjar told the Lok Sabha in response to a question by Shiv Sena member Vinayak Bhaurao Raut. Raut had asked what kind of relaxation in taxes is the government is planning to grant the electric car giant, so that they can start their manufacturing in various states here as announced. The minister informed the house that Tesla hasn't shown any interest in any of the government's schemes for electric vehicles. "The said company has



not participated in any of our schemes, and that cleared their intentions that Tesla only wants to exploit our market to mint profit, but will refrain from setting up manufacturing units here. If they manufacture their electric cars in China, thousands of jobs will be created there, not for Indian youths here," he said. As per the Ministry of Heavy Industries, the government has formulated a scheme, Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid &) Electric Vehicles in India (FAME India) Scheme in 2015 to promote the adoption of electric/hybrid vehicles (EVs) in the country with an aim to reduce dependency on fossil fuels.

How many jobs were created out of 2 cr promised per year, asks Chidambaram

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Congress leader and former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram on Tuesday asked the government to reveal many jobs were created against its promise of two crore jobs in a year.

He also mocked the government over its stock 'no data available' response to the opposition's questions.

Initiating the debate on the Union Budget 2022-23 in the Rajya Sabha, Chidambaram said that there was no purpose in looking at this government's proposals and rather, he wanted to look at the outcome budget. "The government promised two crore jobs a year, they should report to us, how many jobs were created?" he



asked. Responding to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi's attack on the Congress in the Lok Sabha on Monday, he said: "I am a member of the 'tukde-tukde' gang, and I am not worried because a question was asked in Parliament who are the members of this gang and the minister said there was no data."

"The government has no data on tukde-tukde gang, deaths due to oxygen shortage, on the bodies flowing in rivers, on how many migrants walked to their home on foot and other wise," he said sarcastically.

Chidambaram also said that India's rank in Global Hunger Index has fallen to 101 and there is flight of talent from India too.

Congress to support BJP-backed Meghalaya government

SHILLONG | Agencies

In a significant political development, all five Congress MLAs in Meghalaya on Tuesday told Chief Minister Conrad Sangma that they wish to join the National People's Party (NPP)-led Meghalaya Democratic Alliance government, in which the BJP with two MLAs, is also a partner.

The five Congress legislators led by their legislature party leader Mazel Ampareen Lyngdoh met Chief Minister Conrad Sangma at the civil secretariat and handed over a letter, signed by five MLAs, expressing their willingness to formally join the MDA government.

The letter, available with

reporter, mentioned: "We wish to support you and the MDA to strengthen the government's arms and decision making, so as to ensure that our joint efforts will take the state forward, in the general interest of its citizens."

Besides Lyngdoh, the other Congress legislators are P.T. Sawkmie, Mayralbong Syiem, Kimfa S. Marbaniang and Mohendro Rapsang.

Later, Lyngdoh said that they have no relations with BJP and they are not concerned who the other parties supporting the MDA government.

"I am not aware whether they (BJP) are in the alliance or not. We did not ask the government who are their allies. Congress MLAs have

decided to support the MDA for the development of Meghalaya," she told the media.

She declined to reply directly whether they took approval from the party high command before announcing to support the MDA government.

She said: "We are the five (MLAs) and we are capable of deciding for the good. Politics is about the state's interest and players are also in the state. We will, however, remain in the Congress."

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Sangma said that in politics there are no permanent friends or foes, and since the Congress' interests align with the MDA they are welcome in the alliance.

PM insulted Telangana, say TRS, Congress

HYDERABAD | Agencies

Telangana's ruling party TRS and opposition Congress on Tuesday reacted sharply to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks on bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh in Parliament and alleged that he has insulted Telangana.

State Finance and Health Minister T. Harish Rao condemned the PM's remarks and alleged that he has been repeatedly displaying his malice towards Telangana.

"Telangana is progressing but Modi doesn't like this. He is afraid that Telangana is overtaking Gujarat in development," Harish Rao said while addressing a programme in Siddipet district.

Harish Rao alleged that it was BJP which betrayed Telangana by going back on its promise to create a separate state. He recalled that BJP had given slogans of 'one vote two states' and passed a resolution at Kakinada in 1999 promising that if voted to power, Telangana will be formed but after coming to power it went back on its word.

Referring to Modi's comment that Congress acted with arrogance in bifurcating Andhra Pradesh, the TRS leader wondered what had prevented BJP from creating Telangana state in a smooth manner when it was in power at



the Centre. "Is it not BJP which betrayed Telangana by not fulfilling its promise," asked Harish Rao. Ridiculing the Prime Minister's remark that the process of bifurcation was against federal spirit, he recalled that the Modi government overnight merged seven mandals of Telangana with Andhra Pradesh. "Did you consult Telangana? Where was your federal spirit then," he asked. State Congress chief A. Revanth Reddy demanded that the Prime Minister apologise to people of Telangana for what he called insulting the Telangana martyrs.

Special Cell busts fake visa racket in Delhi, 225 passports recovered

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Special Cell of Delhi Police has arrested six people who were involved in the procurement and arrangement of fake visa documents and preparation of fake visas of different countries, especially European countries, UK, France, Canada and Spain, an official said here on Tuesday.

The accused were identified as Sanjeev Kumar, a resident of Jalandhar, Punjab, Lakhvinder Singh, a resident of Rajpur, Punjab, Rajveer Singh, Anil Paul, Dushyant and Rajkumar, all residents of Delhi.

Special Cell DCP, Sanjeev Kumar Yadav said for the past few months a team from the Special Cell was working on the identification of sleeper cells and operatives, who indulge in anti-national activities, having connections with different banned Sikh terror outfits i.e. SFJ, KCF etc., and who may escape from India after committing any such terror activity.

In addition to working on different social media platforms, manual sources were also deployed in Delhi-



NCR and Punjab. "In this process, a few days back information was received that a racket is operating from Delhi which indulged in the preparation, procurement and arrangement of fake visas on passports and further facilitation of the same to their contacts as well as several visa aspirants of different countries, who have applied

for visa through their agents." On February 4, specific information was received that one Sanjeev Kumar of such a syndicate will meet his contacts in Janakpuri Institutional area near Gas Godam, New Delhi. Acting upon this information, a trap was laid and three accused persons Sanjeev Kumar, Lakhvinder Singh and Rajveer Singh

were apprehended. From the possession of Sanjeev Kumar and Lakhvinder Singh two passports with fake visas were recovered. From the possession of Rajveer Singh two passports, with one having a fake visa and one separate fake visa sticker were recovered, the official said.



NOW HIJAB ROW IN MP, MINISTER SAYS DRESS CODE ONLY IN SCHOOLS

After the controversy over wearing a headscarf or hijab in schools escalated in Karnataka, a statement in this regard by Madhya Pradesh School Education Minister has sparked controversy in Madhya Pradesh.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

After the controversy over wearing a headscarf or hijab in schools escalated in Karnataka, a statement in this regard by a Minister has sparked controversy in Madhya Pradesh.

Madhya Pradesh School Education Minister Inder Singh Parmar on Tuesday said that hijab will not be allowed in schools in the state. "Students will be allowed only to wear dress code and hijab is not a part of dress code," Parmar said on Tuesday in Bhopal.

Parmar, while talking to media persons also said that he has directed the school education department to ensure that only dress code is allowed in schools in Madhya Pradesh.

Sources told IANS that the Madhya Pradesh Government is planning to ban hijab in schools. Also, in a video which went viral on social media, Parmar is



being heard saying the department is working (school education department) on a dress code for Chief Minister Rise Schools in order to bring uniformity and equality among students.

The minister also claimed that "school uniform isn't connected to any community, it is for all and it was unfortunate that people are connecting it with a community." Speaking on this issue, Arif Masood, Congress MLA from Bhopal Madhya

assembly constituency said that it is an unfortunate statement from the School Education Minister. "It is unfortunate that MP school education minister is making such statement. Daughters look good when covered. Hijab has damaged nothing but has always protected girls," Masood added.

This came after a stand-off between hijab wearing girls and saffron shawl wearing students took place in various districts of Karnataka.

Mission of My Life Is To Work For the Empowerment of Mothers, Sisters, Daughters: Chief Minister

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that sisters can do wonders if they have the urge to work. Mothers, sisters, daughters are not born to live in deprivation and poverty and listen to taunts. The women are not yet given the respect they deserve. There is discrimination between sons and daughters. It is my life's mission to work for the empowerment of mother, sister, daughter, it is my top priority. After becoming the Chief Minister, the plans that I made were aimed at ensuring women empowerment up to the village level. Chouhan was addressing a programme to distribute bank loans to the members of self-help groups formed under the State Rural Livelihood Mission at Kushabhau Thakre auditorium. Chief Minister distributed bank loans of Rs. 300 crore to the members of self-help groups with asingle click. Chouhan also held a virtual dialogue with the members of the group at the Panchayat level.

In the programme, Chouhan also released Aajeevika Calendar full of comprehensive training material.

In the programme that started with the lighting of lamp and Madhya Pradesh song, a film focused on nutritional food plant made in Dewas district was screened. All the districts



and panchayats were virtually connected with the programme.

Chouhan thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for launching the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana and said that arrangements have been made through various schemes for the empowerment of women from their birth till their lifetime. Sambal Yojana is also being implemented in the state. Pregnant mothers under Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, Ladli Laxmi Yojana on the birth of a daughter, free books and school uniform if daughter goes to school, free cycle if daughter goes to another village, if daughter passes with good marks in class twelfth there is a provision for giving benefit of Gaon ki Beti Yojana, if the daughter goes to college then there is a provision for the benefit of Pratibha Kiran Yojana. Also, arrangements

have been made in the Mukhyamantri Kanya Vivah Yojana to ensure that the house of the daughter is settled properly. Chief Minister Shri Chouhan said that so far more than 40 lakh daughters have become Ladli Laxmi in the state. The state government is going to implement Ladli Laxmi-Two scheme soon.

Chouhan said that our government is committed for the educational, social, economic and political empowerment of women. For women, 50 percent reservation in local bodies was first given in Madhya Pradesh. For women, 50 percent reservation has been made in the posts of contract school teachers and 30 percent in police jobs. Women have also created a new history by working with self-confidence, this is a big social change. Indore has come first in cleanliness five times, the

mayor there is a woman. Women Sarpanchs are also doing exemplary work.

Chouhan said that economic empowerment is necessary for self-esteem and self-confidence. Women should be financially empowered, their income should increase, it is necessary for the complete empowerment of women. The state government is working continuously in this direction to ensure that every woman involved in the Aajeevika Mission should have a minimum income of ten thousand rupees per month.

Intensive meetings are being held with banks every month so that the women may get loans readily and easily from banks. Chief Minister Chouhan said that women of self-help groups should adopt the methods of digital transaction of money. Women should move forward with full confidence, following the 13 sutras of the concept of Aajeevika Mission, the state government is with women at every step.

Chouhan said that changes are coming in the field of economic as well as social empowerment due to the activism of women. Women self-help groups should also make continuous efforts for positive change in social behaviour in issues like prohibition, prevention of child marriage, cleanliness, nutrition, environmental protection.

Healthy competitive environment of good things must be in universities: Governor

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Governor Mangubhai Patel has asked the Vice Chancellors to create an environment of healthy competition for good work in the universities of the state. He told to take inspiration from whatever is good. Where there is a shortage, there work must be done with more energy. A new dimension of academic quality must be achieved. He has said that the Vice Chancellor should work with the feelings and emotions of the parents of the students. Arrangements in the university should be student oriented. Along with education, students should also be made to feel socially responsible. Ensure participation of students in the efforts of public awareness towards Sickle cell.

Patel was addressing a review meeting of Vice Chancellors of government universities at Raj Bhavan. Officials of National Health Mission gave information about Sickle Cell Anemia and its treatment besides management efforts of the state government through power point presentation. Governor Patel said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has



given an opportunity to the youth to make their dreams come true, giving new heights to the spirits of the youth in the new education policy. In order to ensure that the students of the state get the benefits of the new education policy, it is necessary that the syllabus and other related arrangements should be made soon. Ensure that the examinations and their results arrive on time. The infrastructure should be strong for quality study, teaching. Academic calendar should be followed. There should be

no delay in the filling of academic posts. Universities should organize convocation every year on a fixed date. Patel said that all the colleges affiliated to the university should get NAAC grading on completion of 5 years of establishment. Arrange libraries as per the norms of University Grants Commission. Get audit objections resolved year-wise. Work must be done seriously while treating the resolution work of court cases as a personal responsibility. Ensure that there is an effective and timely presentation of is done case before the court. He said that the arrangements for personal appearance in the court on the appointed date give positive results. He said that universities should adopt villages with tribal population. Sickle Cell Anemia disease awareness programmes, test and test camps must be organised in selected villages. Support must be extended in the treatment of patients. He said that those who serve with sincerity are partakers of God's grace. Principal Secretary to Governor DP Ahuja and Vice Chancellors of all government universities were present.

CM PLANTED SAPLINGS OF MOULSHREE AND CASSIA



Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted saplings of Moulshree and Cassia in Smart Garden on Tuesday along with Prayas team. On behalf of Prayas team, Kumud Wadhvani, Shikha Shah and Shivanthi Sharma planted saplings. Prayas Team is an NGO, which does park development work in BHEL area, Sonagiri, Piplani and Kalpana Nagar and tree plantation in schools and colleges for environmental protection.

Moulshree planted today is also called Kesav in Sanskrit, Molsari or Bakool in Hindi. It is a tree of medicinal importance, which has been used in Ayurveda for centuries. Cassia is also called wild cinnamon (dalchini) in India. The bark and leaves of Cassia Javanica are used in the preparation of Ayurvedic medicines.

17-year-old girl gang-raped, bitten on face in MP; 2 minors among 3 arrested

A 22-year-old man and two minor boys have been arrested for allegedly raping a 17-year-old girl in Madhya Pradesh. The accused also bit her face with their teeth.



Team Absolute | Bhopal

A 17-year-old tribal girl was abducted and gang-raped in Madhya Pradesh's Rewa district. The accused also bit her face with their teeth.

The incident took place on Sunday night. As per the police, the victim was returning home from a fair with her cousin when the three accused allegedly kidnapped her. They then took her to a deserted forest and raped her. The victim managed to escape and reached her relative's place around Sunday midnight. On

Monday, her family members lodged a complaint with the police.

A 22-year-old man, who is the main accused, and two minor boys, aged 16 and 17 years old, have been arrested by the police in connection with the case. The accused were booked under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code for gang-rape, abduction, hurting and threatening the victim, as well as provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO). The police official said that the girl's medical report confirmed the crime.

TIGER ENTERS BHOJ UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

The watchmen were doing the rounds of the premises when they flashed a torch at a spot and saw the tiger, said the Bhoj Open University Vice Chancellor.



ing the boundary wall. "In the early hours of Sunday, I saw the watchmen sprint towards the guard room. When I asked them what the matter was, they asked me to stay indoors as a wild animal was wandering nearby," Sonwalkar said.

"The watchmen were doing the rounds of the premises when they flashed a torch at a spot and saw the tiger, which let out a roar. Forest officials were informed and they arrived here. While at first it seemed it was a panther as per the pugmark, a

check of the CCTV confirmed it was a tiger," he added.

The VC's bungalow is situated in the 25-acre Bhoj University campus, which itself is close to Kaliyasot Dam built to supply water to Bhopal.

The Samarda-Kaliyasot area has 1,202 households, and a wildlife expert said Kaliyasot Dam close to Kerwa Dam situated in forested area in Bhopal is a tiger corridor between Ratanpuri Sanctuary in Raisen district and Kheoni Sanctuary in Dewas district of MP.

Multi Layer, Multi Crop Model: Innovative Experiment to Grow 70 Crops in One Hectare

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Avinash Dangi, a farmer of Bistan area of Khargone district, has prepared a self-reliant model of agriculture for the economic progress of the farmers. His model is "Multi layer, multi crop, fruit forest, family, farming model", and by adopting this he has earned good profit. Along with the farmer this model will directly benefit the agricultural land and the environment. Agriculture based on this model will help in nutrient and pest management, efficient use of irrigation water, more production with less cost and saving time. The production of essential crops of the family's requirement will be possible at one place.

Dangi has started farming according to this model in one hectare of his agricultural land from last June. He is doing innovative experiments by cultivating 70 types of crops. At present, 18 types of vegetables, 32 types of fruits and four spice crops are grown in his



field. These crops are planted in 360 feet long twenty one rows of a crop planted using advanced agricultural techniques is getting support for better production from the other crop. Dangi has taken green coriander, groundnut, urad, marigold flower and sweet corn crops during the period from June to December 2021, due to which he has earned a profit of about

one lakh rupees. In his model, fruits, vegetables, grains and pulses are being grown in several rows on agricultural land keeping in mind the needs of a family during each season. At present, crops suitable for the season have been planted. Drip and flood irrigation is also being used.

Vegetables used in fast food are also being produced in the self-sufficient

model of agriculture prepared by the farmer Avinash.

Along with the vegetables of the country, he has also grown vegetables grown in South China and East Asia in his farm. Among them green and black bokchoy, green and red lettuce, baccala, barbati, broccoli, French beans, cauliflower, red and white radish, red and green cabbage, purple and orange cauliflower, spinach and methi (fenugreek) are the main crops. Papaya, Surjana, banana, four species of custard apple, seven species of guava, coconut, mosambi, orange, mango, lemon, jackfruit, chikoo, fig, red and green amla, jamun, pomegranate, water-apple, litchi, cherry phalsa, cashew and Rampah plants have also been planted in the field. At present the crops of arhar, gram, turmeric and ginger are about to ripen. In their place, preparations are being made to plant cucumber, bitter gourd, coriander, tomato, moong and medicinal crops.

CM VISITS HOUSES OF VILLAGERS IN JAIT VILLAGE

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan visited Jait village in Sehore district and invited the villagers to attend the birthday of the village and Gram Sabha. The streets of Jait village were decorated with flowers and whitewashed.



Chouhan's wife, Sadhana Singh, was also present. Chief Minister sought information from the villagers about their well-being. He instructed the officials to construct roads and drains to stop water. The Chief Minister visited Purana Ghar, Bade Patel Tiraha, and visited Vikram Kakka, Munna Kewat, Gorlal, Santosh Kewat, Makhan Kewat, Tej Singh, Neeraj Jat and Prakash Jat's houses at Samla Mohalla and spoke to them and invited them to attend the Gram Sabha. Chief Minister Chouhan also reached Umesh Badde's field, Asharam Sahu's house, Anand Malvi's shop, the Sarpanch's house and Anganwadi center. Villagers welcomed the Chief Minister with shawl, tilak, garlands, towels etc. The Chief Minister blessed the girls to study diligently. He also blessed the newlyweds.

UNEMPLOYMENT HIGHEST UNDER BJP RULE: CONG LEADER DIGVIJAY SINGH

Senior Congress leader Digvijay Singh released the Congress' white paper on unemployment on Monday. The paper stated that the rate of unemployment was highest in India now.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Senior Congress leader Digvijay Singh released the Congress' white paper on unemployment on Monday. The paper stated that the rate of unemployment was highest in India now.

It claimed that unemployment rate was 7.9 percent on January 1, 2022.

Singh, who was the Congress general secretary in-charge for UP earlier, lauded

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's efforts and hard work over the past two years.

He said the Congress that had contested all seats in UP in 2012 (when he was in-charge of UP) has decided to do so again.

He said the gulf between poor and rich has widened between 2014 and 2022. In 2014 the BJP came to power at the Centre.

Singh said the



Congress has raised all the issues concerning people and claimed only the Congress has fought for the people's cause. The former Madhya Pradesh chief minister also said Priyanka and Rahul Gandhi have been fighting for people at the grassroots level. He said Priyanka Gandhi's initiatives have given new turn to the Congress. The last

Congress government in UP was in 1989. Singh said Priyanka Gandhi was raising issues concerning inflation, employment, declining quality of education and governance. He listed demonetisation and poor handling of Covid-19 situation among BJP government's failure. He said a large number of government posts were lying vacant and added that examination papers were leaked.

He also claimed there were irregularities even in online examinations.

On the claims of the BJP's "double engine government", Singh said there were reports that the two engines pulled in different directions. Double engine governments mean same party governments at the Centre and in the state. He singled He talked of Priyanka's move to provide at least 40 percent tickets to the women in the state. He said 155 out of 373 seats have been so far given to women in the state.



EDITOR'S SPECS

PUNJAB'S POLITICS AND SIDHU

Ever since he visited Pakistan and hugged its army chief, "nationalist" Indians have been deeply offended and spoken out against Navjot Singh Sidhu's allegedly pro-Pakistan views. The sentiment seems to have seeped into Punjab, says a survey conducted across the state covering all social and religious groups, apart from party supporters. The dislike for Sidhu amongst non-Sikhs and even non Jat-Sikhs is palpable. Respondents were asked the question: Has Sidhu proven to be an asset or a liability for the Congress? As many as 54.3 per cent of Dalit Sikhs consider him a liability. That's not surprising given the barbs Sidhu has been throwing at the Dalit Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi, going public suggesting that party bosses in Delhi want a weak leader and Chief Minister they can control. More than 42 per cent of Hindu voters also find him a liability, as do more than 46 per cent of BJP supporters. The funny thing is that 40.3 per cent of Congress supporters think Sidhu is a liability while 34 per cent consider him an asset. The respondents were further asked: To what extent do you blame Sidhu for the infighting in the Congress? The maximum blame came from Hindu voters amongst whom 67 per cent of the respondents either blamed Sidhu entirely or to a large extent. When asked who was a better leader between the two: Captain Amarinder Singh and Sidhu, the highest percentage among all social and religious groups, 48.5 per cent of Hindus, clearly preferred the Captain. That should worry the Congress because while AAP was already threatening to take away a chunk of Sikh votes, the newly-formed alliance between the Captain and the BJP threatens to take away a chunk of Hindu votes. Analysts feel Sidhu's words and actions have alienated the Hindu community.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ALL INDIA CIVIL SERVICES

DC Pathak

Perhaps the most crucial decision of the then national leadership of free India about the strategy of management of the new democratic Republic was to retain the 'steel frame' left behind by the British in the form of ICS and IP and establish IAS and IPS as the All India Civil Services to succeed them. These were envisioned as the specially empowered national instruments to broadly handle development administration and the law & order apolitically - across the national grid - taking into account the federal scheme of things in the Republic.

In no other major country in the world does an equivalent of IAS and IPS exist in the sense that on a merit-based selection at the national level, the entrant is installed in the decision-making 'leadership' position of an Under Secretary of Government of India just within three years after the training - Collector and SP in the states represent that status granted at the start of the service career itself.

That there was no conflict between the Centre and the states about these prime services was implied in the practice of the Centre handling the recruitment and training of IAS and IPS officials and then placing them in the hands of the states according to an assessed 'cadre strength' with the minimal subsequent role of broadly keeping track of their performance and giving them a sense of central protection against any unfair treatment meted out by the state government wherever necessary. The Centre has also been helping the reallocation of the cadre of the spouse wherever needed, if both husband and wife are members of All India Civil Services. The allocation of cadre state was made on two grounds - consideration of individual's preference allowed on the basis of place in the merit list and exercise of Centre's discretion.

The strong points of these services were the high-level of integrity at personal level, independent decision-making in public interest and fair play in the handling of the subordinate government servants down the line.

The comparative perks and facilities provided to even the young officers - considering the general economic situation of the country - are noticeable enough to promote self-confidence and a sense of pride in the All India Civil Services.

For long years after Independence, many of their members distinguished themselves in both Central and state governments. They served the cause of national integration and also added to the credit of the leadership in power in any part of India - regardless of its party label. But then there was an inevitable



slide reasons for which needed to be examined.

Members of the All India Civil Services retained an inbuilt willingness to serve the national government at appropriate stages of their career and looked forward to that experience to enhance their work profile.

They all carried the desire of holding senior most positions that existed only at the Centre. It was therefore the normal thing for the officers serving in their cadre states to aspire to get the opportunity of being picked up by Delhi under the Central quota, which every state knew it had to honour at any point of time. This gave them an added reason to perform well. There could be an occasion when the call from the Centre had to be declined by an officer for some valid personal or family reason, but it was otherwise a mutually agreeable arrangement that operated without impediment.

Slowly but steadily, politicisation of bureaucracy and police by the ruling parties of the states created the tendency among officers of holding on to their position in the state for vested interests. The state governments, for political reasons, also started giving weightage to state service officers directly recruited by them, inducing the IAS and IPS to become more and more 'compliant'. All of this resulted in the unhealthy trend of All India Civil Services officers looking weaker as they moved up the ladder - the Chief Secretary and DGP not minding even the transfers and postings of officers done by the political masters at their back. The Centre was justified in feeling concerned about the heads of administration and the police in the states not measuring up

to their apolitical Constitutional responsibilities. The Central oversight on the two premier All India Civil Services had to be maintained and legitimate procedural correctives made in the larger national interest to ensure competent administration of the democratic state.

An unreasoned refusal of the state to release an officer selected by the Centre for deputation with the Government of India - out of political recalcitrance - can adversely affect the great tradition of All India Civil Services contributing to democratic governance through their apolitical public-service oriented work. If the rule about the Centre's decision prevailing over the state's desire in the matter of central deputation of an officer acted somewhere as a deterrent against wilful neglect of Constitutional obligations at the top levels of state and police administration, this is welcome. A few long-range steps come to mind for improving matters relating to these Services. First, there should be greater transparency about the appointment of Chief Secretary and DGP of the state. There should be a healthy Central input in the process by way of UPSC in consultation with the state governments, drawing a panel of three most eligible officers of the cadre - on the basis of seniority and performance - to leave it to the state government to make the choice.

Sometime back, the Supreme Court commended this approach when striking down the practice of appointing an 'officiating' DGP. There is no reason why this could not be followed in the matter of selecting the Chief Secretary as well.

Secondly, for senior positions at the Centre requiring

specialised work background, officers available in various states could be given the opportunity of conveying their interest for being considered - this has perhaps been done to an extent already. Third, it would be useful for Cabinet Secretary and Home Secretary - Director of the Intelligence Bureau (DIB) to hold a biennial conference of Chief Secretaries and DGPs purely for discussing the All India Civil Services - related issues of performance, facilities and working conditions. For DGPs, this can be a segment of the annual conference convened by the DIB. Fourth, in keeping with the lofty objective of providing a uniform standard of efficient administration throughout the country after Independence - that had inspired the creation of the All India Civil Services - it is in the fitness of things that during the brief spell of joint training for the new probationers organised by the LBS National Academy of Administration in Mussoorie every year, education on strategic matters and national security had been introduced recently. This will help cooperation among the All India Civil Services officers in their later years on issues of national interests and foster in them the spirit of serving anywhere in the country. The idea should be replicated in the joint courses held for Civil Services in latter stages, as well. Last but not the least, there has to be a new emphasis on a further build-up of IAS and IPS as the principal instruments of governance through the intake of best available human material, special facilities of housing, transport and allowances provided in the early years of the career and introduction of the practise of a central deputation after certain periods of work in the cadre states, as far as possible.

The Centre heavily depends on these Civil Services and the states should be happy if their officers are selected for such deputation at the Centre. It seems there is a case for increasing the annual intake of officers for these services and meeting the demands of the states in this regard. The states should not hold on to officers needed by the Centre as a show of political assertion - they are always free to take up individual cases where they find it necessary to retain an officer for a longer time for some special requirement of the state. Nothing should be done to further politicise the handling of the All India Civil Services.

(The writer is a former Director of the Intelligence Bureau. The views expressed are personal)

international

GLOBAL SOCIAL PROTECTION SPENDING RISES BY 270% IN H1 2021 DUE TO COVID: UN



United Nations | Agencies

The UN has said that due to Covid-19, global spending on social protection rose by almost 270 per cent to \$2.9 trillion from December 2020 to May 2021. "The Covid-19 crisis has exacerbated inequalities, and multiple forms of deprivation," Liu Zhenmin, under-secretary-general for Economic and Social Affairs, told the 60th session of the Commission for Social Development, which kicked off on Monday in a virtual

format. Liu argued that the pandemic had highlighted the critical role of social policies, reports Xinhua news agency. "One key lesson is the importance of universal access to social protection, to enhance economic and food security, in times of crisis," he said. According to the latest UN data, the world is not on course to meet the fundamental Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of eradicating extreme poverty. Without decisive action, the number of people living in extreme poverty is expected

to reach 600 million, or 7 per cent of the world's population by 2030.

Abdulla Shahid, President of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly, said the meeting should address the end of the pandemic, framed by some key questions.

Noting that social protection measures had increased hugely, he reminded the meeting that implementation has been deeply uneven, particularly between developed and developing countries.

Shahid also asked member states to see the pandemic as both crisis and opportunity. "This requires us to be bold and ambitious in our intentions, and generous in our actions," he said.

Noting that history is replete with turning points, he asked for efforts to ensure that history remembers the pandemic, as another time for a big pivot.

NO ECONOMIC SHUTDOWN IN MALAYSIA



Kuala Lumpur: Malaysia will not shut down its economic and industrial activities even if there was a spike in new Covid-19 cases, Minister of International Trade and Industry Mohamed Azmin Ali said.

Previous lockdowns had caused 826,000 people to lose jobs in the first three months of the total lockdown in 2020, Xinhua news agency quoted Mohamed Azmin as saying. "We can't do it anymore (total lockdown), yes, we need to manage this pandemic effectively, we will do our best on the health matter, but 'economic health' is also important. And we will now do it in a balanced way if there is a sudden spike (Covid-19)," he added.

Mohamed Azmin said his ministry will focus on getting the employees of the economic sector vaccinated. Malaysia has seen a spike in fresh Covid-9 infections over the past week, with 13,944 new cases being reported on Tuesday alone, according to data from the Health Ministry, with the Omicron variant triggering the increase.

S Korean Air Force ordered to pay damages over airfield noise

Seoul | Agencies

A South Korean government panel has ordered the Air Force to compensate residents near an airfield for noise from aircraft operations, officials said on Tuesday.

The National Environmental Dispute Resolution Commission under the Ministry of Environment ruled the military should pay damages totalling 370.57 million won (\$309,000) to 518 people in the central city of Cheongju, 140 km south of Seoul, affected by military airplane noise, reports Yonhap News Agency.

It is the commission's first compensation ruling on aircraft noise pollution.

About 2,500 residents there filed complaints with the commission three times from



2019 to 2021 claiming damages for noise pollution that occurred for three years from January 2016.

The Air Force argued it made efforts to reduce noise by minimizing engine power during training and avoiding densely populated areas.

But the commission recognized residents in areas affected by noise level above 80 wecpnl (weighted equivalent

continuous perceived noise level) can suffer from emotional distress, according to previous court rulings.

The panel said it notified the applicants of the decision on January 17. Of the 2,500 applicants, those who were already compensated through court rulings or whose actual residence was not confirmed were excluded from the compensation.

AUSTRALIAN DEFENSE FORCE DEPLOYED TO EASE PRESSURE ON AGED CARE SYSTEM

Canberra: The Australian government has deployed military personnel to aged care homes to ease a staff shortage crisis as a result of surging Covid-19 infections.



Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced up to 1,700 Australian Defense Force (ADF) personnel will be sent in to support the aged care workforce, reports Xinhua news agency. The ADF personnel will assist across facilities including logistics and general duties tasks, such as screening of entrants to facilities, providing companionship to residents, supporting with meals and other non-direct care functions to take the pressure off qualified aged care workers and medical staff. The aged care industry has come under pressure in 2022 due to widespread outbreaks of the Omicron variant of Covid-19 in facilities. There have been reports of residents being isolated for months and going without proper care due to staff shortages. Till date there are 11,980 COVID-19 positive residents (5,439) and staff (6,541) in 1,176 active outbreaks in residential aged care facilities across Australia, according to the Department of Health.

On Tuesday morning, Australia reported more than 20,000 new confirmed cases of Covid-19 and 50 deaths - 20 in Victoria, 18 in New South Wales and 12 in Queensland. There were 3,916 cases being treated in hospitals on Monday, including 274 in intensive care.

Election campaign kicks off in Philippines amid pandemic

Manila | Agencies

Campaign for presidential election formally kicked off in the Philippines on Tuesday, three months ahead of the voting on May 9 to choose a new President that will lead this Southeast Asian country in the next six years.

At least 67.5 million Filipinos have registered to vote, including 1.8 million voters overseas, reports Xinhua news agency.

They will also elect the vice president, about 300 lawmakers, and over 18,000 positions as local officials. There are 10 presidential candidates and nine candidates for the Vice President. According to surveys, Ferdinand Marcos Jr, 64, the son of former President Ferdinand Marcos, is leading in the opinion polls. Trailing behind him are 56-year-old incumbent Vice President Maria Leonor Robredo, Manila City Mayor Francisco Domagoso, Senator Manny Pacquiao, Senator Panfilo



Lacson, and five others. In the Philippines, the President and Vice President are elected separately.

Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte-Carpio, 43, daughter of President Rodrigo Duterte, will run for vice president as the running mate of Marcos Jr. Duterte, whose six-year term ends in June, has yet to endorse any presidential candidate. Like in past elections, some candidates

already started campaigning on television, social media, and radio months before the campaign season started.

As early as October, presidential aspirants have begun crisscrossing the archipelago to dole out goodies and cash, launch TV promotions and roll out social media advertising programs. The candidates' names and pictures are displayed on giant billboards along major high-

ways. However, unlike in the past, the candidates are not expected to barnstorm cities and towns, croon love songs, hug babies, and dance on stage to win votes. The Commission on Elections has imposed restrictions in order to contain the spread of Covid-19, barring politicians from entering houses, crowding, handshakes, hugs, kissing, or any actions that involve physical contact.

Even taking selfies and photographs, activities that require proximity with people, as well as distribution of food and drinks are prohibited.

With the Covid-19 threat, the candidates are expected to be more prominent in digital platforms and hire social media savvy advisers to woo the youth, who comprise more than half of the total registered voters. Meanwhile, the crescendo of campaign rhetoric and mudslinging is also expected to intensify in the coming days as the three-month campaign unfolds.

Australian Defence Minister dismisses reports of plan to depose PM

Canberra | Agencies

Australia's Defence Minister Peter Dutton on Tuesday rejected reports suggesting he is preparing to depose Prime Minister Scott Morrison ahead of the general election this year. Dutton insisted he is behind Morrison in the lead-up to the election, which is expected to be held in the first half of this year, reports Xinhua news agency.

It came after Bob Carr, a former Premier of New South Wales (NSW) and Foreign Minister, claimed Dutton was the government minister involved in a leaked text exchange that savaged Morrison's character with then-NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian, according to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Carr recently wrote on social media that "if Morrison has one more week in free fall the prospect of a leadership change pre-election is real". Dutton said on Tuesday that the accusation

was untrue and baseless.

"I have been loyal to Scott Morrison from day one and I continue to be so, because I have seen what he has done in taking us through what has been a difficult situation," he told local media. Dutton was among a group of MPs who in 2018 manufactured the downfall of former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull. He contested the subsequent leadership ballot to become Australia's 30th Prime Minister but was defeated by Morrison. Former Opposition Labor Party leader Bill Shorten, who was defeated by Morrison at the 2019 election, called for the government to "settle their internal fighting".

"People have to be convinced about the merits of politics on a good day. But this government is hopelessly divided and we've got the aged care crisis," he told Nine Network television. "We've got people with disabilities risking Covid-19.



CONGRESS SEEKS APOLOGY FROM PM FOR 'INSULTING' MAHARASHTRA

Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole also said that the opposition party will stage protests outside BJP offices in the state on Wednesday demanding an apology from the prime minister.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Congress on Tuesday demanded an apology from Prime Minister Narendra Modi for "insulting" Maharashtra by suggesting that the state had encouraged the spread of COVID-19 in other states.

Speaking to reporters, Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole also said that the opposition party will stage protests outside BJP offices in the state on Wednesday



demanding an apology from the prime minister.

"Speaking in Lok Sabha on Monday, PM Modi insulted Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's Maharashtra by accusing the 12 crore people of the state of spreading COVID-19. PM Modi should apologize for his remarks," Patole told reporters. Modi had said in Lok Sabha on Monday, "What did Congress leaders do? They stood at railway stations in Mumbai and distributed free tickets to encourage them to leave Mumbai. They inspired people to leave so that the burden

over Maharashtra could be lessened. You go to Uttar Pradesh, you go to Bihar. Go, spread Corona there. You committed this and created an atmosphere of chaos." Patole further said that PM Modi had organised 'Namaste Trump' event in Gujarat and became the super-spreader of COVID-19. In February 2020, the then US President Donald Trump had visited India and also addressed a public gathering at a stadium in Ahmedabad as part of the 'Namaste Trump' event. "Had BJP leaders from Maharashtra been proud of the state they would have condemned the PM's remarks about the state. If they do not condemn these remarks these leaders will be known as 'Maharashtra Drohi' (traitors) in the history of the state," Patole added. Narendra Modi seems to have forgotten that he is the Prime Minister of the country. Patole said that he has become a 'BJP campaigner."

Indian Railways ran more trains for migrants from Gujarat than Maharashtra: Supriya Sule

"The Indian Railways' data reveals that 1,033 trains for migrant workers were run from Gujarat, while 817 Shramik trains were operated from Maharashtra," NCP MP Supriya Sule claimed

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) MP Supriya Sule on February 8 criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for accusing the Opposition of inciting migrants to flee from Mumbai during the COVID-19 lockdown, and claimed more trains were operated from Gujarat than Maharashtra for migrant workers during the pandemic-related curbs.

Modi said in Lok Sabha on Monday that the Congress "crossed all limits" during the COVID-19 pandemic, and accused the party of instigating and scaring innocent labourers into fleeing to their native states from Mumbai.

He was replying to the debate on Motion of Thanks to President Ram Nath Kovind's address to the joint

sitting of Parliament. The Congress currently shares power with the Shiv Sena and the NCP in Maharashtra. Talking to reporters in New Delhi on February 8, Sule said it is painful to see Prime Minister Narendra Modi targeting Maharashtra, that significantly contributed to his party winning 18 Lok Sabha seats in the 2019 general elections. "The Indian Railways' data reveals that 1,033 trains for migrant workers were run from Gujarat, while 817 Shramik trains were operated from Maharashtra," she claimed. Sule also referred to a 2020 social media post of the then railway minister Piyush Goyal, who had targeted Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray over the issue of trains for migrant workers. "Goyal in his Twitter post on May 24, 2020

said that 125 Shramik Special trains were ready to be allotted to Maharashtra for the migrant workers to return home. He had asked the State to give a detailed list of migrant workers within an hour to the Railways," the Lok Sabha member pointed out. Sule further said BJP MP Harish Dwivedi last week proudly stated in his speech in the Lok Sabha that the Union Government had operated trains for migrant workers to reach their homes safely. "Then why PM Modi is selectively talking about Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab in his speech?" she asked. "It was painful for me to see PM Modi insulting Maharashtra when we were expecting him to speak on issues like China, unemployment. He is the Prime Minister of India and not of a party," she said.

Bombay HC gives three weeks to Maharashtra ruling parties to reply on PIL against state bandh

Advocate RD Soni, appearing for the petitioners, told the court that no affidavit has so far been filed by any of the political parties, who are respondents in the petition.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bombay High Court on Tuesday gave three weeks to the Shiv Sena, Congress and NCP to file their affidavits in response to a PIL challenging the one-day bandh called by the three ruling parties in Maharashtra in October last year.

The court also said if the three parties do not file their response, then "consequences will follow".

The public interest litigation (PIL) was filed by four senior citizens, including former IPS officer Julio Ribeiro, challenging the one-day bandh called by the three constituents of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) on October 11, 2021 to protest the death of farmers in Uttar Pradesh's Lakhimpur Kheri.

A division bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice MS Karnik on Tuesday said that the political parties shall file their affidavits in three weeks if they wish to. "If not, then we (court) shall proceed to hear the plea without their replies. If they (political parties) do not file their affidavits, then consequences will follow," Chief Justice Datta said.

As per the plea, the bandh,



called to express solidarity with the farmers' protest over the now scrapped agri laws and against the violence in Uttar Pradesh's Lakhimpur Kheri district on October 3, had caused a loss of Rs 3,000 crore to the public exchequer.

The HC bench had in December 2021 directed the government and the political parties to file their affidavits. On Tuesday, additional government pleader Jyoti Chavan sought three more weeks to submit the affidavit. Advocate RD Soni, appear-

ing for the petitioners, told the court that no affidavit has so far been filed by any of the political parties, who are respondents in the petition. The petition sought the high court to declare the bandh as unconstitutional and illegal, and direct the three political parties to pay compensation to the affected citizens.

The court on Tuesday granted three more weeks to the respondents to file their affidavits and posted the matter for further hearing after five weeks.

PM Modi's fixation with 'Namaste Trump' event led to COVID-19 spread: Nawab Malik

In February 2020, the then U.S. President Donald Trump had visited India and also addressed a public gathering at a stadium in Ahmedabad as part of the 'Namaste Trump' event

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi accused the Opposition of scaring migrant workers into fleeing to their native States from Mumbai during the COVID-19 pandemic, Maharashtra Minister Nawab Malik on Tuesday hit back claiming the PM's fixation with the 'Namaste Trump' event was responsible for the coronavirus spread in the country.

In February 2020, the then U.S. President Donald Trump had visited India and also addressed a public gathering at a stadium in Ahmedabad as part of the 'Namaste Trump' event.

Modi said in the Lok Sabha on Monday that the Congress "crossed all limits" during the COVID-19 pandemic, and accused the party of instigating and scaring innocent labourers into fleeing to their native States from Mumbai. Malik, who is also the NCP's chief spokesperson, on Tuesday said, "When the Maharashtra government was asking for a ban on international flights, your (PM Modi's) own Health Minister (Dr. Harsh Vardhan at that time) was stressing that the coronavirus infection will not spread." "Modi, in his fixation with the 'Namaste Trump' event, invited people from across the globe to India and it spread the coronavirus infection in



all parts of the country," he claimed. "Prime Minister Modi is responsible for the spread of the coronavirus in the country," Malik alleged.

The Congress currently shares power with the Shiv Sena and the NCP in Maharashtra.

"You [Modi] said that we paid for the tickets of migrants. It is true, but you organised the special trains and we paid for the tickets. We bore the cost of train tickets because you wanted to collect money from the migrant labourers and workers," Malik

claimed. After the nationwide lockdown in 2020, the Indian Railways ran Shramik Special trains for the migrant workers. "When the migrant workers were walking to their native places, the Uttar Pradesh government had deployed buses for the first time to help the workers reach home. The Bihar government had also done the same. When the lockdown was imposed, you asked people to clang thalis," the NCP leader pointed out.

He further said that Modi had announced the lockdown without

any consideration or thinking about consequences of the decision. "Crores of people suffered because of such a decision," he said.

"The Maharashtra government provided food, water and even paid for their [migrant workers] tickets. You did not provide the train service free of cost," Malik said. "We even operated special bus services for the migrant workers so that they could reach their native places. We were the ones who stood by the migrant workers," the Minister said.

In 15 days, daily vaccination fell by nearly 45%; 81 lakh yet to get even first dose

In the state, over 90% of the eligible population has received the first dose while nearly 68% have been fully vaccinated.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Indicating vaccine saturation, daily vaccination numbers have plunged by nearly 43.24% in the last 15 days in Maharashtra. Meanwhile, over 81 lakh eligible people in the state are yet to get vaccinated. Data provided by the Public Health department show that between January 8 and 22, a total of 69,37,097 people were vaccinated in the state. In the next 15 days, between January 23 and February 6, it dropped to 39,37,196. With the start of the mass vaccination programme for children above 15 years and booster shots in the second week of January, on an average, 7.5 lakh people were inoculated daily in the state till the third week of January, which has now dropped to less than half, to 3.5 lakh.

In the state, over 90% of the eligible population has received the first dose while nearly 68% have been fully vaccinated. Public health officers attribute the drop in vaccination to saturation in the Covid-19 immunisation programme. "We are hardly getting new beneficiaries. Due to the time gap of 84 days, the public are waiting for their second doses. Other than that, booster shots and vaccination among the younger population are the biggest contributors to the latest vaccination tally," said



Dr Sachin Desai, state immunisation officer.

Meanwhile, as on February 6, 81,41,556 eligible residents of the state haven't taken a single dose of Covid-19 vaccine. Thane has the highest number of unvaccinated people, where 9.75 lakh eligible people haven't taken the first dose. This is followed by Nashik (7.49 lakh), Jalgaon (6.58 lakh), Nanded (6.01 lakh) and Ahmednagar (5.72 lakh), among others.

Also, the state has 1.09 crore beneficiaries, who have missed their scheduled shots. Of this, 92.19 lakh of the beneficiaries who took the first dose of Covishield haven't taken their due second jab. While another 17.51 lakh people, after taking their first jab of Covaxin, have missed their scheduled second shot in the state.

Speaking about this, Dr Desai said that during the third wave of infections, a large number of unvaccinated and partially vaccinated

people contracted Covid-19, and they have now postponed their inoculation. "We are expecting that in the next one month, the daily vaccination will increase once the infected individuals become eligible to get the jab," he said.

During the third wave, despite the high transmissibility of the Omicron variant, the case fatality rate was only 0.1%. Doctors believe that due to the vaccination, the severity of illness among patients, especially those with co-morbidities, was contained.

"The available vaccines don't provide 100% protection against Covid-19. But as seen in the last one month, the death rate among fully vaccinated people is lesser than unvaccinated patients. So, it is essential that all the eligible people get fully vaccinated as the pandemic isn't over yet," said Dr Shashank Joshi, member of the state Covid-19 task force.

Did Maharashtra govt ask migrants to leave during Covid lockdown?

In the Lok Sabha on Monday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi accused the Congress of instigating migrant labourers to breach the Covid-19 lockdown and leave Mumbai. What did he say? Did the Maharashtra government goad migrants to leave the state during lockdown?

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In the Lok Sabha Monday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi accused the Congress of instigating migrant labourers to breach the Covid-19 lockdown and leave Mumbai.

What did he say? Did the Maharashtra government goad migrants to leave the state during lockdown? When did the first migrant train leave from Maharashtra?

PM Modi accused the non-BJP state governments of instigating migrants to leave cities and escalating the spread of infection. He claimed Congress leaders in Mumbai had distributed free tickets to encourage migrants to leave the city. "The Congress Party has crossed all limits in this time of Covid-19... During the first wave, when the country was following lockdowns, when the World Health Organization was advising people across the world, all health experts were suggesting that people should stay where they are. This message was being given across the world because if a person infected with



coronavirus travels, he would carry the infection with him. At that time, Congress leaders stood at stations in Mumbai and distributed free train tickets and encouraged migrants to leave Mumbai so that the burden on Maharashtra can be reduced. You are from Uttar Pradesh, you are from Bihar, go and spread Corona there. You committed this big sin... You pushed our labourer brothers and sisters in great difficulties," he said.

There was no explicit directive asking migrants to leave the city. After train services were stopped on March 23, 2020, lakhs of migrants were left stranded in the state. The Maharashtra government had written several letters to the central government in April asking for train services to resume with advance planning from Mumbai and Pune for those stranded.

By April, the government had set up shelter homes across parts of Maharashtra, in which close to 7

lakh migrants were staying.

The state witnessed its first major migrant protest on April 14, 2020, when hundreds flooded the streets outside Bandra West Station, furious over the extension of the national lockdown, and demanding access to ration and the right to go home. The Mumbai Police had resorted to lathicharge to disperse the crowd.

Subsequent to the incident, the Maharashtra government had made several requests to migrants to stay put. On April 19, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray in his webcast to the state, had switched to Hindi from Marathi and addressed migrant workers, stating that they should tell their families they were safe where they are.

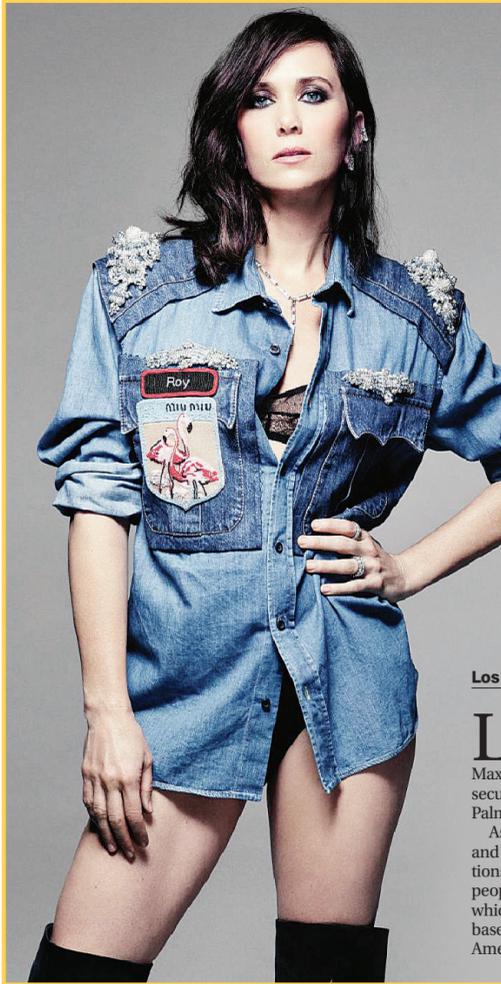
"I give you my word that the Maharashtra government will take you to your homes...when the crisis ends. I believe that when you go back to your homes, you should go back happily and not out of fear," he

said.

Again on April 26, Thackeray made a request to migrants not to crowd railway stations. "The talks are on and we will arrive at a solution soon. But train services will not start. There should be no crowding. If there are crowds, restrictions will have to be reimposed. Whenever possible, we will send everyone to your homes," he said.

The first migrant train to leave the state was on May 1, 2020 from Nashik, in which 332 stranded workers were sent to Madhya Pradesh. The passengers had to purchase a ticket priced at Rs 215 to board the train. A total of 817 such trains ran from Maharashtra over the subsequent months.

Many migrants who could raise funds for their travel were helped by various organisations. However, there was no large-scale funding of migrants' tickets by the Congress party in the state.



Kristen Wiig attached to 'Mrs. American Pie' comedy series

Kristen Wiig and Laura Dern will be starring in a new comedy series titled 'Mrs. American Pie'. Apple TV Plus has greenlit "Mrs. American Pie," a new comedy series starring Kristen Wiig.

Los Angeles | Agencies

Laura Dern, who executive produces the comedy series, is eyeing a key role. Set in the early 70s, 'Mrs. American Pie' follows Maxine Simmons (Wiig) as she attempts to secure her place within the high society of Palm Beach, reports variety.com.

As she navigates the line between the haves and the have-nots, the series focuses on questions of who gets a seat at the table and what people will sacrifice to get there. The series, which has received a 10-episode order, is based on Juliet McDaniel's novel 'Mr. & Mrs. American Pie'. Abe Sylvia will serve as

showrunner and executive producer. Tate Taylor serves as director and executive producer with John Norris under their Wyolah Entertainment banner.

Dern developed and executive produced with Jayme Lemons under their Jaywalker Pictures banner. Katie O'Connell Marsh executive produces for Boat Rocker.

Wiig is best known for being a 'Saturday Night Live' cast member from 2006 to 2012 and starring in the 2011 film 'Bridesmaids', which she co-wrote with Annie Mumolo.

More recently, she wrote and starred in 'Barb and Star Go to Vista Del Mar', also with Mumolo.

'The Smurfs' musical movie to debut in 2024

A Multiple feature films based on the Smurfs, as well as another season of the original television series, have been put into development, Paramount Animation and Nickelodeon Animation announced on Monday.

Los Angeles | Agencies

Renewed emphasis on the tiny blue creatures is the result of a new creative partnership with LAFIG Belgium and IMPS, the company that owns the Smurfs brand, reports variety.com.

The first project under the alliance will be an animated musical film, which is slated to begin production this year and set to release in theatres on December 20, 2024.

Pam Brady, a 'South Park' alum, has come on board to write the upcoming movie.

Created by the Belgian comics artist known as Peyo, the Smurfs have been the subject of several feature films over the years, most recently in Sony's 2011 movie 'The Smurfs'.

Despite negative reviews, the Neil Patrick



Harris-led film became a commercial smash and spawned a 2013 sequel.

On the television side, 'The Smurfs' show has been picked up for a second season, which will consist of 26 episodes.

The series launched in September 2021 in the US and later debuted on Nickelodeon channels internationally.

"Nickelodeon is the home to some of the world's most popular fami-

ly franchises, and we're honoured to add 'The Smurfs' to that roster," said Ramsey Naito, President of Animation for Paramount Animation and Nickelodeon Animation.

"We're excited to tell a story that stays true to its origins, but with a Smurf-tastic musical twist that excites new audiences and builds on the Smurfs franchise and universe of wonderful characters and stories."

Catherine Zeta-Jones to star in 'National Treasure' series

Hollywood star Catherine Zeta-Jones has been cast in the upcoming 'National Treasure' series at Disney Plus.

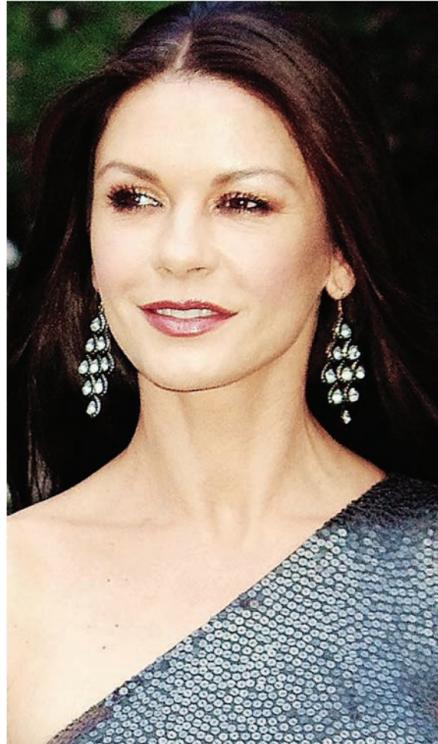
Production is set to begin this month in Baton Rouge, LA.

The series focuses on a young heroine, Jess (Alexis), a brilliant and resourceful DREAMer who embarks on the adventure of a lifetime to uncover the truth about her family's mysterious past and save a lost Pan-American treasure.

Zeta-Jones will portray Billie, described as a badass billionaire, black-market antiques expert, and treasure hunter who lives by her own code.

She transformed herself from a penniless orphan to a shrewd, stylish business-woman and adventurer. Billie's used to getting what she wants -- and she wants the Pan-American treasure. But not just for the money. This treasure has deeper stakes for her.

Zeta-Jones' recent TV credits include 'Prodigal Son' at Fox and 'Queen America' for Facebook Watch.



Los Angeles | Agencies

Zeta-Jones joins previously announced cast members Lisette Alexis, Zuri Reed, Jordan Rodrigues, Antonio Cipriano, and Jake Austin Walker, and Lyndon Smith in the series continuation of the film franchise of the same name, reports variety.com.

Rita Ora joins cast of 'Beauty and the Beast' prequel series

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer-songwriter Rita Ora has joined the cast of Disney Plus' upcoming 'Beauty and the Beast' prequel.

The news was announced Monday during Disney Branded Television's session at the Television Critics Association's winter press tour, reports variety.com.

In the 'Beauty and the Beast' (working title) prequel, Ora will star as "a fugitive with surprising abilities who carries with her a secret that could potentially affect an entire kingdom." She joins a cast that includes Josh Gad, Luke Evans, Briana Middleton, Fra Fee and Jelani Alladin.

Gad also serves as an executive producer and co-showrunner, along with Edward Kitsis and Adam Horowitz. The show takes place years before the events of 'Beauty and the Beast' and follows Gaston and LeFou

as they set off with LeFou's stepsister, Tilly, after a surprising revelation from her past comes to light. Ora's film credits include the 'Fifty Shades of Grey' franchise, 'Fast & Furious', 'Southpaw', 'Pokemon: Detective Pikachu' and 'Twist'.

As a performer, Ora has landed four No. 1 singles in the UK, and holds the record for the most Top 10 singles for a British female artist in the UK in history with a total of 13. Most recently, Ora co-wrote and produced the global collaboration 'Bang' with Kazakh DJ and record producer Imanbek. The four-track EP featuring David Guetta, Gunna and Argentinian rapper KHEA. It's the follow up to her album 'Phoenix', which has amassed over 4 billion streams worldwide and spawned the platinum singles.

'Lonely Together', her collaboration with Avicii, won the 'Best Dance' VMA at the MTV Video Music Awards.



Will Smith to travel from South Pole to North Pole in series from National Geographic

Hollywood star Will Smith will be covering both ends of the Earth in a series for National Geographic.

Los Angeles | Agencies

The programmer announced on Monday that it has ordered the non-fiction series 'Pole to Pole', which follows Smith on a journey from the South Pole to the North Pole, reports variety.com.

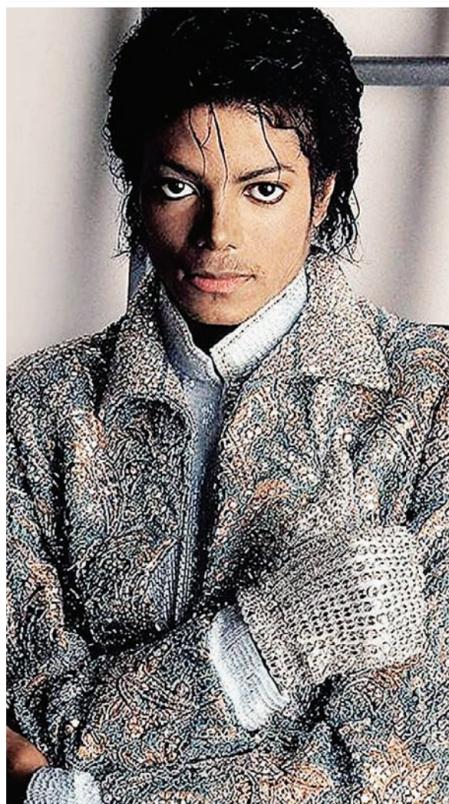
'Pole to Pole' is part of an extensive slate of new content that Nat Geo is bringing to Disney Plus, which it revealed during its portion of the Television Critics Association winter press tour. 'Pole to Pole' will mark Smith's third project with National Geographic after 'Welcome to Earth' and 'One Strange Rock', reports variety.com.

The series covers an expansive journey spanning different biomes, communities and landscapes across the Earth. 'Pole to Pole' is executive produced by

Smith under his Westbrook banner, alongside Miguel Melendez and Terence Carter. For Nutopia, Jane Root and Terence Lovering are executive producers. For Protozoa, Darren Aronofsky and Ari Handel are executive producers.

"At National Geographic, our strategy is to tell bold, best-in-class stories that ignite curiosity and inspire people to explore and care about our world," said Courtney Monroe, president of National Geographic Content, in a statement. "With premium, creatively ambitious shows from the very best storytellers in the world, we are bringing awe and wonder to the lives of global Disney+ subscribers with wildly entertaining National Geographic documentary series, feature documentary films, epic natural history and fact-based scripted drama."

GRAHAM KING TO PRODUCE MICHAEL JACKSON BIOPIC



Los Angeles | Agencies

Graham King, the producer of 'Bohemian Rhapsody', is all set to bankroll another biopic, this time around late pop legend Michael Jackson.

Lionsgate will look after the distribution of the film, reports Variety.

As per Variety, the screenplay is by three-time Oscar nominee John Logan. King and Logan previously collaborated on Martin Scorsese's 'The Aviator'. Lionsgate will distribute the film worldwide.

Tentatively titled 'Michael', the film is being made with the cooperation of the Michael Jackson estate. The involvement of the estate may have an effect on how the film deals with the multiple allegations of child sexual abuse that were brought against the 'King of Pop'.

Lionsgate Motion Picture Group Chair Joe Drake said in a statement, "I am very excited that Lionsgate will be part of this epic film, and thrilled to be working with Graham, who has proven success in telling iconic life stories, from 'Bohemian Rhapsody' to 'Ali'; when combined with John, we couldn't be in more extraordinary hands."

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Charlotte Dawson



2ND ODI: CONFIDENT INDIA AIM TO SEAL SERIES AGAINST WEST INDIES

Ahmedabad | Agencies

After winning the first ODI convincingly, Rohit Sharma-led Team India will look to continue their domination and win the second ODI and seal the three-match series at the Narendra Modi Stadium, here on Wednesday.

Since India didn't have much trouble in defeating West Indies in the first match, hosts are unlikely to make any changes in their playing XI. However, the focus will be on vice-captain KL Rahul who has joined the team after a family engagement and was seen sweating it out in the nets ahead of the game.

Ishan Kishan, who opened with Rohit in the first ODI did a decent job with a 36-ball 28 and both Deepak Hooda and Suryakumar Yadav also did well to finish the game for India. If Rahul plays, then either of the three among Kishan, Deepak Hooda, and Suryakumar would have to sit out to accommodate him as Virat Kohli,



Rishabh Pant and Rohit Sharma are certain to play.

But the management might also choose to play the same XI and win the series and give Rahul, Mayank Agarwal, and Shikhar Dhawan a go in the last game of the series.

Speaking on the eve of the match, middle-order batter Suryakumar also didn't reveal much about the inclusion of Rahul and Mayank Agarwal in

the playing XI.

"They [Rahul and Mayank] are coming back into the squad after quarantine and it makes our unit really stronger. At the end of the day, it's all team management's call on who's gonna play. But yeah, really happy to have them back," Surya said in a virtual press conference.

Eyes will be there also on Virat Kohli, who will like to get among the

runs and reach his 71st century, which has been in waiting for over two years.

In the bowling department, India had a clinical outing in the previous game, so the team management is unlikely to make any changes. The likes of Washington Sundar, Mohammed Siraj, Yuzvendra Chahal, Prasidh Krishna, Shardul Thakur had restricted visitors to a below-par target in the first ODI.

On the other hand, West Indies, who failed to play even 50 overs in the first ODI, will look to improve their form and get going in the series.

The Kieron Pollard-led side need to put a bigger prize on their wicket and have a better shot selection. Along with Jason Holder and Fabian Allen, who batted well, in the first game, the rest of the batters would also have to come good. The Windies bowlers also need to be on the mark with line and length as well as the pace. They were taken to task by the Indian batters, especially Rohit.

BENGALURU OPEN

Prajnesh beats Bourgue, remains lone Indian in the fray

Bengaluru | Agencies

Prajnesh Gunneswaran started his campaign in the Bengaluru Open ATP Challenger event in style by overcoming the challenge of Frenchman Mathias Bourgue 7-6(4), 6-2 in a singles first round encounter here on Tuesday. Other Indians in the main draw, Ramkumar Ramanathan, Prajwal Dev, Rishi Reddy and Arjun Khade lost their respective first round matches. Prajnesh, who took the first step towards regaining his 2018 title, beat Mathias Bourgue to advance to the pre-quarterfinals of the event at the KSLTA Stadium here on Tuesday. However, it was Mathias' compatriot Alexandre Muller who created the biggest flutter when he ousted the second seed Stefano Travaglia of Italy 6-1,



7-6(2) to enter the round of 16 even as the top seed Jiri Vesely of the Czech Republic survived a scare before struggling past Swiss qualifier Antoine Bellier 6-3, 6-7(2), 6-2. Meanwhile, the highest-ranked Indian in the fray, Ramkumar, also India No.1, showed much promise but succumbed to Australian Max Purcell, the doubles finalist at the Australian Open last month going down 6-3, 0-6, 5-7, which left only Prajnesh, the lone Indian in fray for the singles crown. Prajnesh had an early break in the third

game which was nullified by Mathias in the next. The 32-year-old Indian played some nice down-the-line shots which at times stunned the Frenchman. After both had traded breaks in the 7th and 8th games, the set headed for a tie-break which Prajnesh won at 4. The second set saw Mathias let his emotions get the better of him as he broke his racket in a fit of rage. An early breakgame put Prajnesh on the road to victory as the southpaw broke his rival's serve once again in the eighth game to seal his victory.

Mandhana makes big gains in latest ICC ODI rankings for batters

Dubai | Agencies

India's top-order batter Smriti Mandhana has risen two places, to fifth, while captain Mithali Raj continues to hold on to her second position in the latest Women's ODI Player Rankings for Batters released on Tuesday. Mandhana, on 710 points, has displaced South Africa's Lizelle Lee (702) and England's Tammy Beaumont (696) in the ranking, which is led by Australia's Alyssa Healy (742 points). Meanwhile, dominant performances in the first two ODIs of the Women's Ashes have seen several Australian players climb the charts in ODI Player Rankings. Having dropped to the second spot after the series against India in September 2021, Australia all-rounder Ellyse Perry is back at the top of the



Women's ODI Player Rankings for All-rounders with 407 points. India's Deepti Sharma is fourth with 299 points. Perry was the 'Player of the Match' in the second ODI, first returning figures of 3/12 to reduce England to 129 all out, before scoring a 40 off 64 balls to take Australia close to victory. Perry also made huge gains in the bowlers' rankings, rising seven spots to break into the top-10 and occupying the No.9 spot. There hasn't been much for England to cheer about in the ODI leg of the

Ashes but Katherine Brunt's all-round brilliance in the first ODI, where she finished with 3/12 and scored 32 not out, sees her gain three spots to No.5 in the all-rounders' rankings. Brunt also jumped a spot to No.6 in the bowlers' rankings. Despite England ending up on the losing side in the first two ODIs, Sophie Ecclestone bowled economically and jumped to third with a career-best 717 rating points in the ODI Player Rankings for Bowlers, which has India's Jhulan Goswami in second spot.

WOMEN'S ASHES

Sutherland takes four as Australia complete England humiliation

Melbourne | Agencies

Australia's 20-year-old pace bowler Annabel Sutherland finished with career-best ODI figures of 4/31 to reduce England to 163 before skipper Meg Lanning's half-century took the hosts through to an eight-wicket victory in the final One-day International of the multi-format Ashes on Tuesday.

Young all-rounder Sutherland led the way with 4/31 at Junction Oval as England were bowled out for a paltry 163, before contributions from all the top-four batters ensured Australia cruised home with more than 13 overs to spare. The win means Australia finished the multi-format series without a loss and with a 12-4 scoreline. After opting to bat, England lost debutant Emma Lamb (0) and skipper Heather Knight (9) inside the first hour to slump to 19/2 in nine overs. The experienced duo of Tammy Beaumont (50) and Nat



Sciver (46) combined to put on an 88-run stand but were extremely cautious in their approach. They couldn't find a single boundary between overs

18-30, and the pressure of scoring big eventually got to both the batters as they fell in a span of five overs. Thereafter, it all went downhill for the visitors. Attacking batter Danni Wyatt (9) was Sutherland's first victim and the wickets continued to fall in quick succession as England lost their last seven wickets for just 39 runs to be dismissed midway through their final over for 163. While the England batters looked to avoid damage, Australia threw caution to the wind from the start, with openers Alyssa Healy and Rachael Haynes adding 47 runs in the powerplay.

Brief scores

England Women 163 in 49.3 overs (Tammy Beaumont 50, Nat Sciver 46; Megan Schutt 2/25, Annabel Sutherland 4/31) lost to Australia Women 164/2 in 36.2 overs (Alyssa Healy 42, Rachael Haynes 31, Meg Lanning 57 not out, Ellyse Perry 31 not out) by eight wickets.

NATIONAL EQUESTRIAN: ZAHAN SETALVAD CLAIMS NEC GRAND PRIX TITLE FOR 3RD TIME



Mumbai: Zahan Setalvad has secured top spot in the NEC Grade I category and became winner of the National Equestrian Championship Grand Prix for the third time at the Amateur Riders' Club, Mahalakshmi here. According to information received, in the Grade I category, the athletes need to clear 1.40m and in the Grand Prix, they need to clear 1.50m hurdle jumps. In the Grand Prix category, Zahan completed his rounds while riding on his horse Quintus in 77.73 seconds with 8 penalties. Zahan competed with Pranay Khare and Keavaan Setalvad. He finished his rounds in 81.54 seconds while riding on his horse Caprice with 19 penalties. "I am very grateful that I was able to win the grade 1 and Grand Prix this NEC. This is the third time I have become the national champion in the last 5 years." "It was one of my most difficult competitions due to many obstacles put in the way by representatives of the federation. However, I am glad I came out victorious," said Zahan Setalvad.

ICC announces Player of the Month nominations for January, 'Baby AB' Brevis included

Dubai | Agencies

The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Tuesday announced the nominees for Players of the Month for men's and women's international cricket featuring Dewald Brevis from South Africa, Ebadot Hossain from Bangladesh, Keegan Petersen from South Africa, Sri Lanka's Chamari Athapaththu, West Indies all-rounder Deandra Dottin and England captain Heather Knight. The ICC Player of the Month nominees have strong men and women candidates, who are staking their claim with some brilliant performances. An independent ICC Voting Academy and fans around the world will now vote to decide the winners, which will be announced next week. The South African youngster Dewald Brevis impressed everyone with his all-round brilliance in the ICC U-19 World Cup 2022 in the Caribbean. The batter finished as the highest run-scorer of the tournament with 506 runs at an outstanding average of 84.33. He scored two hundreds and three fifties in his six appearances, and also picked up seven wickets at 28.57. His all-round exploits helped him in claiming the Player of the Tournament Trophy as well, along with the charming moniker 'Baby AB'.



India's Arjun Maini joins team HRT for Asian Le Mans Series

Dubai | Agencies

This season, Haupt Racing Team (HRT) will compete in the Asian Le Mans Series for the first time. The team from Meuspath is set to line up with one Mercedes-AMG GT3 in all four of the series' races. Alternating at the wheel of the car, with its striking blue and yellow livery, will be Hubert Haupt (Germany), Arjun Maini (India) and Rory Penttinen (Finland). The first race of the season gets underway on Saturday at Dubai Autodrome.

The calendar for the Asian Le Mans Series comprises four races. The opening weekend in Dubai (February 12-13) sees the teams contest two four-hour races. One week later (February 19-20), the series moves to Yas Marina Circuit in Abu Dhabi for another two four-hour races. This year's field features 37 cars, 23 of which - more than ever before - will line up



in the GT class. The teams will not only be battling it out for the title in the Asian Le Mans Series, but each class winner will also be rewarded with a starting place at the legendary 24 Hours of Le Mans. In Rory Penttinen, HRT has acquired a wealth of experience in the Asian Le Mans Series: The Finn started every one of the races in 2021, winning the Team and Driver titles in the LMP3 class. He will share the cockpit with team owner Hubert Haupt, with Arjun Maini being the third driver: Like Penttinen, the 24-year-old Indian, who drove in the DTM last year, will be making his race debut for Haupt Racing Team in Dubai.

FLEXIBLE TO BAT AT ANY POSITION: SURYAKUMAR YADAV

Ahmedabad | Agencies

India batter Suryakumar Yadav on Tuesday said that batting at number five is not different for him and he is flexible to bat at any position, adding that he is also ready to bowl whenever the team requires him to contribute on that front.

The 35-year-old has batted at number 3, 4, 5 and 6 for India across the T20 and ODI format. He came at five in the first ODI against West Indies.

"It is not too different (batting at number five), I have been batting at all the positions and I am really flexible, so where ever the team management decides and wants me to bat, I am really flexible to bat at any position and really happy with the way things are going right now," said Suryakumar during a virtual press



conference, on the eve of the second ODI against the West Indies here.

In the last few years, India have missed a top-six batter who can also bowl. And, Surya, who is now regularly turning his arm over in the nets, wants to contribute to his team with his bowling as well. "I'm bowling in the nets. Whenever the opportunity comes, I'll be ready. Whenever they feel they can use me, I'm always available," he said. The Mumbaier also mentioned that he also does a lot of net sessions at home to keep himself match-ready and the motivation to play for the county comes from inside. "Back home, I do a lot of net sessions. The motivation to play for the county comes automatically," he said.

Suryakumar is also known for his wide range of strokes, and the cricketer feels it's all about practice.

Bakshi sisters lead the charge at the first leg of WPGT 2022

Hyderabad | Agencies

India's young talent, including the Bakshi sisters, Jahanvi and Hitaashee, will be back in action on Wednesday as the first tournament in the 2022 season of the Women's Pro Golf Tour gets underway at the Boulder Hills Golf and Country Club here.

As many as 32 players, including six amateurs, will tee off in the Rs.10 lakh event. The Bakshi sisters, who have already tasted success on the pro circuit, will be joined by some of the established names like Gaurika Bishnoi, Ridhima



Dilawari, Seher Atwal, Neha Tripathi, Saaniya Sharma, Lakhmehar Pardesi and Pranavi Urs. Almost all of them are past winners on the WPGT. The field also includes promising amateurs like Sneha Singh, Vidhatri Urs and Nishna Patel. Another established player, who can always be among the contenders, is the seasoned Smriti Mehra.

There will be three events in the month of February, followed by three more in March. The season which was due to have started in January had to be pushed to February because of the pandemic.



DEEPIKA PADUKONE'S KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIP: COMMUNICATION!

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Bollywood superstar Deepika Padukone, who has redefined romance with her actor-husband Ranveer Singh time and again, has shared the key to a good and healthy relationship.

The actress, who in 2018 was named as one of the 100 most influential people in the world by TIME, has also talked about what it feels like to be in love. She says for her love is trust, friendship, companionship and where one can just be themselves.

Talking to correspondent in a candid chat about what it takes to make a relationship healthy and successful, Deepika said: "Communication."

She added: "I think honest communication in a relationship is extremely important and it's not necessary that two people in a relationship are always on the same page. They may not necessarily have to agree with each other on all points but I think to communicate the way you feel about certain things and to be honest about that."

Deepika says "communication is extremely key and important." "Even if there are arguments and disagreements. The fact that you feel a certain way and to communicate is that I think is important. So, I think a key to a good or a healthy relationship is communication," added the doe-eyed actress.

Deepika and Ranveer have set the benchmark of what love is with their constant romance-filled exchanges on social media.

Asked what it feels like to be in love, Deepika

shared: "Well, I think love in itself is a very loaded and complicated word to use like that I think. Also, because love just means so many different things to different people." She added: "But as far as I am concerned, for me love is trust, friendship, companionship, love is where you can just be yourself, love is adjustment. I think when you are 19 or 21, the definition of love is very different and when you get older the definition changes."

Deepika currently awaits the release of her upcoming romantic drama 'Gehraiyaan', which talks about love and complex human relationships. The film is all set for a digital release on Prime Video on February 11.

Talking about her character Alisha in the film, Deepika said it was her story that was emotionally draining. "I don't think I can say there's one thing that drained me. I think just the backstory of the character is the baggage that she's carrying from the past. The emotional and mental turmoil she is going through when you see her in the film and the circumstances around her throughout the film," she said.

"So, it's like the character has been layered from the start so the minute you introduced to the character you realise that she is already at quite a juncture in her life in a sense so I think the hardest part was obviously was the conviction with the choices that are being made by this character and the repercussions of the choices," Deepika added.

"So, emotionally that sort of turmoil of choices and consequences was the most difficult part for me."



Lata Mangeshkar to be included in AU curriculum

Students in the department of music and performing arts in Allahabad University (AU) will now study the life, struggles and achievements of iconic singer Bharat Ratna Lata Mangeshkar, who passed away in Mumbai on February 6 at the age of 92.



Prayagraj | Agencies

Prof Vidyadhar Prasad Mishra, head of the department, said: "A proposal to include the life of Lata Mangeshkar in the curriculum has been prepared. It would be part of a soon-to-be-launched five-year integrated course under the New National Education Policy (NEP)-2020."

The legendary singer's name has been included along with other icons of the world of music like Bhimsen Joshi, Alla

Rakha Khan, Bismillah Khan and Pt Jasraj, among others.

"The unit based on veteran singers of the country would be implemented after getting a formal approval of AU's Academic Council (AC), Executive Council (EC) and is expected to be rolled out from 2022-23 session," Mishra said.

Presently, the curriculum being taught to students of UG and PG courses teaches about several renowned Indian and western musicians.

Arjan Bajwa: Mithun da's enthusiasm even now gives me goosebumps

Actor Arjan Bajwa who reunites with veteran star Mithun Chakraborty in web series 'Bestseller' says that the energy and the enthusiasm of the senior actor is truly inspiring.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

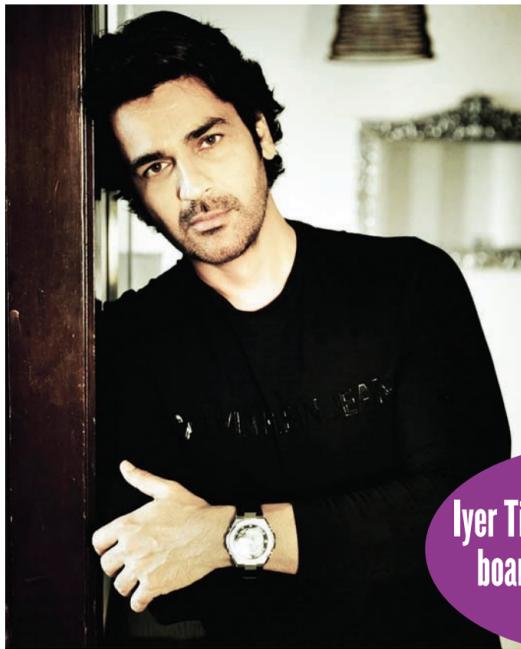
Arjan told reporter: "One quality that I have noticed of his is humility. He is a superstar, a National Award-winning actor and we all know the great dancer that he was in his younger age. He has achieved everything that an actor wishes for...but on set, he is always on time and his enthusiasm is almost like a newcomer; as if it is his debut film. It just gives me goosebumps. I think there is a reason why these actors become icons and that is not just about their talent and luck. It has a lot to do with their humility and remain the constant learner of their craft."

He went on adding, "One we become

successful we tend to think we know it all and nothing can go wrong in whatever we do. But when we look at an actor like Mithun da who is always ready to improvise in a scene and change things without hesitation and mingling with us, his co-star as if we are classmates, without keeping any distance of seniority it says a lot about him."

The show 'Bestseller' is an adaptation of a book written by Ravi Subramanian, named 'The Bestseller She Wrote'. The show is directed by Mukul Abhyankar.

Arjan earlier worked with Mithun in Mani Ratnam directorial 'Guru' but he did not have much screen time with the veteran. However, the actor mentioned that this time he has a substantial amount of that.



Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari joins advisory board of women-only platform

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Filmmaker Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari, who is known for films like 'Nil Battey Sannata' and 'Bareilly Ki Barfi', has joined the advisory board of a women-only platform called Eve World.

Founded by Tarun Katial, the platform aims to create a positive digital experience for women worldwide.

Sharing her excitement, Ashwiny said, "With every big idea comes responsibility and purpose. I am glad to be a part of the advisory board of Eve World which encompasses stalwarts and visionaries who have never stopped making their own paths that

paves the way for many women who can dream of finding their unique voice." She added, "If I can be an anchor of many unknown talented women and their expression, we can build a battalion of strong compassionate humans who create an equal space for women with their own identity." In addition, Anupriya Acharya, Apurva Purohit, Bhavani Iyer, Dr Anjali Chhabria, Priya Kumar, Radhika Gupta, Sonali Bendre, and Supriya Yarlagadda will also represent the Editorial Advisory Board.

Meanwhile, on the work front, Ashwiny is currently shooting for her digital debut 'Faadu' and is also co-producing a few projects.



Papon brings two love ballads for the month of love

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Musician Papon has released two love songs one in Hindi and in Assamese on the occasion of Valentine's Day. Hindi song is titled 'Choti Choti Galtiyaan' and the Assamese track called 'Rode Rodaale Saa'.

Sung by Papon, 'Choti Choti Galtiyaan' features Gautam Gulati and Shivaleeka Oberoi and its lyrics have been penned by Kumaar. Weaved in an addictive melody by Meet Bros, the song follows a love story about forgiving mistakes that don't matter for the bigger cause of love. 'Rode Rodaale Saa' has been sung, composed and programmed by Papon and its lyrics are written by Jananjoy Saikia. Set in Spring, the Assamese song is a melodic experience of dreaming about love and waking up with its beauty. Papon says: "There's so much variety that comes from every culture in India. It fuels my experiments with music. Choti Choti Galtiyaan is a beautiful composition that has been independently created." He adds, "What a fabulous composition! While 'Rode Rodaale Saa' is an Assamese song and it is yet another take on love. I'm blessed to be able to offer different interpretations of love through music. I'm excited about the response to it." Papon has lent his voice in numerous songs of different languages including Hindi, Assamese, Bengali, Tamil and Marathi.



INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Shama Sikandar