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Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav

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HOW INT'L FINANCIAL INDUSTRY ENABLES THEFT, CORRUPTION

SUISSE SECRETS

Switzerland is a well-known destination for money from all over the world, in part because of its banking secrecy laws. There is nothing inherently wrong with having a Swiss bank account. But banks are supposed to avoid clients who earned money illegally or were involved in crimes - and reporters identified dozens of corrupt government officials, criminals, and alleged human rights abusers among Credit Suisse account holders, the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) said in a report.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The 'Suisse Secrets' project investigates bank account information leaked from Credit Suisse, Switzerlands second-largest lender. The leak included more than 18,000 accounts that held in excess of $100 billion at their peaks. It is the only known leak of a major Swiss banks client data to journalists. The documents have been compiled after more than 163 journalists from 48 media outlets in 39 countries across the world spent months analysing bank account information leaked from Credit Suisse. OCCRP stated that the leak included more than 18,000 accounts that held in excess of $100 billion at their peak. It is the only known leak of a major Swiss bank's client data to journalists.

Despite their notoriety - which, in some cases, would have been obvious from a quick Google search - Credit Suisse maintained relationships with some of these clients for years, though it is possible that some accounts were ordered frozen by law enforcement. The Suisse Secrets project investigates these account holders, whose exploitation of Swiss banking secrecy is a prime example of how the international financial industry enables theft and corruption.

The Suisse Secrets data was provided to the German newspaper Suddeutsche Zeitung by an anonymous source more than a year ago. Nothing is known about the source's identity. The source, however, did provide a statement explaining his or her motivations.

Those cases that merited publication involved clients known to have been high-risk: politically connected people or those accused or convicted of serious crimes. OCCRP said dozens of Credit Suisse accounts belonged to prominent figures, alongside the scandals, criminal investigations, or high-profile political events they were involved in.

The larger story that unites these cases is that of a major financial institution that allowed clients to stash away laundered or stolen assets. Nearly all of the stories rely on publicly available information, meaning that Credit Suisse's due diligence department would have had access to it as well, the OCCRP said.

CREDIT SUISSE DENIES

Credit Suisse, which is a global investment bank and financial services firm based in Switzerland, on Sunday (February 20) said that it "strongly rejects" allegations of wrongdoing. Credit Suisse is apparently Switzerland's second-largest lender. Multiple media outlets have published results of investigations into a leak of data on thousands of accounts held there in previous decades. The documents termed "Suisse Secrets" have been published by Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP). It is an international investigation into one of the world's wealthiest and most important banks.

PAK LINKED TO 600 ACCOUNTS

New Delhi: Around 1,400 individuals domiciled in Pakistan are linked with around 600 accounts opened in Credit Suisse, The News reported. The data also contained information of the accounts which have been closed now but remained operational in the past. A leak from a Swiss bank has unmasked the hidden fortune of its wealthy clients in 128 countries and they range from the business individuals to politically exposed persons and those investigated, at times convicted, in connection with different criminal activities.

NSE fraud: CBI grills former NSE chief's advisor Subramanian

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The CBI, which is probing the "yogi" fraud at the NSE, has questioned the bourse's former Chief Strategic Advisor, Anand Subramanian, who has appointed to his position despite lack of experience and paid a hefty salary, but found him to be "evasive", sources said on Monday.

A source told reporter that his statements was recorded for three consecutive days at Chennai.

"His statement is over. We have asked him not to leave the country. He will be summoned again whenever we will have a need. He was evasive throughout the questioning," the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) source said. Subramanian, who was brought to the NSE by its then CEO and MD Chitra Ramkrishna, reportedly had access to the email ID on which the emails were sent to the "Himalayan yogi" with whom the classified informations was shared.

The source added that another team of the CBI searched the SEBI office in Mumbai, and recovered some incriminating documents, evidences and digital documents."These are crucial documents and evidences nailing the lies of the accused involved in the case. We are in process of making a foolproof case against all the accused. These will help the prosecution in proving our case when it will go to court," said the source.

The CBI had on February 19 grilled erstwhile NSE director Ravi Narain, who held the post before Ramkrishna.

Earlier, it was said that Narain had fled to London and is living there. But the CBI source told IANS that Narain was in Delhi where his statement was recorded.

K'TAKA HINDU ACTIVIST'S MURDER: 3 HELD; PROTESTERS TORCH POLICE BUS

Bengaluru | Agencies

Karnataka Home Minister Araga Jnanendra said on Monday that the police have arrested three persons in connection with the killing of Harsha (26), a Bajrang Dal activist who was stabbed to death in Shivamogga on Sunday night.

Meanwhile, the situation in Shivamogga continues to be volatile with protesters torching a police bus on Monday.

The procession march organised for Harsha turned violent as incidents of stone pelting, and torching of vehicles were reported from Shivamogga, forcing the police to use tear gas and lathi charge against the protesters. Meanwhile, the Bajrang Dal has called for a state-wide bandh on February 23 condemning the killing of one of its activists. The police have arrested a person named Kasif in connection with the murder. Based on the information provided by him, two other accused have been arrested from Bengaluru.

SKYMET FORECASTS NORMAL MONSOON FOR INDIA IN 2022

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Skymet, India's leading weather forecasting and agriculture risk solutions company, has come out with the 'Preliminary Monsoon Forecast Guidance for 2022'. Skymet expects the upcoming Monsoon to be 'normal'. Skymet has been predicting Monsoon since 2012, except in 2020 when it abstained for strategic reasons. Skymet intends to release a detailed report on the prospects of Monsoon 2022 in April. Skymet is in the process of gathering data sets pertinent for a comprehensive monsoon forecast. Ascertaining authenticity is absolutely essential and that is a long-drawn procedure. Therefore, it is a bit premature to share the collated figures but suffice to present preliminary guidance. Monsoon has large inter-annual fluctuations in its arrival, intensity, duration, and withdrawal. It is rather early to decode all these aspects at this stage. However, there are precursors to get an early glimpse and gauge its health during the four-month-long season. The last two Monsoon seasons have been driven by back-to-back La Nina events, which has started shrinking now. It also means that Monsoon 2022 is going to be a devolving La Nina to start with and turn neutral later.Negative sea surface temperature anomalies in the equatorial Pacific Ocean are weakening. This warming inclination of the Pacific Ocean, albeit within neutral limits, may not lead to an above-normal or excess rainfall but chances of a 'corrupt' monsoon are also ruled out. This could be one of the 'normal' monsoon years making a robust start and finishing around the midway mark of the normal range, the range of normal rainfall is 96-104% of LPA (880.6mm).

LALU SENTENCED 5-YR JAIL, RS 60L FINE IN 5TH FODDER SCAM CASE

Crores of rupees were illegally withdrawn in the name of transporting animals and arranging fodder for them in Bihar's animal husbandry department. The animals included bull, buffalo, cow, goat and sheep. The documents submitted by the department regarding the transportation were found to be fake. The vehicle numbers shown in the documents were of scooters, mopeds and motorcycles.

Team Absolute | Ranchi

A special CBI court in Ranchi on Monday sentenced Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) chief Lalu Prasad to five years imprisonment and imposed a fine of Rs 60 lakh on him in the Rs 139.35 crore Doranda treasury scam, the fifth fodder scam case.

The former Bihar chief minister along with other accused was pronounced guilty by the court on February 15. Lalu, 75, appeared in the court virtually. He is in judicial custody and is admitted to the Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS) due to his poor health conditions. Beside Lalu Prasad, the court had convicted 74 others, including former MP Jagadish Sharma, Public Accounts Committee president Dhruv Bhagat in the case while 24 were acquitted for want of evidence. Earlier, the former Bihar chief minister was found guilty in four cases related to the Rs 950 crore fodder scam, and is serving a sentence of 27.5 years of imprisonment. In the fifth case related to the scam, an FIR was lodged in the Doranda police station in 1996 and later the CBI took over the case for investigation. Initially, in case number RC 47 A/96, a total of 170 were accused of corruption, of which 55 have died, seven became witnesses, two confessed to the crime while six are still absconding. During the hearing of the case in the CBI special court, 575 people testified on behalf of prosecution, while 35 from the defendants. The probe agency produced 15 documents in the case.

SC-APPOINTED PANEL SUBMITS INTERIM REPORT IN PEGASUS SNOOPING CASE

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Pegasus panel, appointed by the Supreme Court, is learnt to have submitted an interim report appraising the apex court about the progress on the probe. According to sources familiar with the development, the panel has submitted an interim report in the apex court. A bench headed by Chief Justice N.V. Ramana and comprising Justices Surya Kant and Hima Kohli will take up the petitions in the matter on February 23. The panel had earlier said that only two people submitted their mobiles phones with it for forensic examination. On October 27 last year, the top court said it was compelled to take up the cause to determine the truth, as it appointed an independent expert technical committee supervised by a retired top court judge, Justice R.V. Raveendran, to probe the Pegasus snooping allegations.

The top court had authorised the technical committee to devise its own procedure to effectively implement and answer the terms of reference. The committee can hold an investigation it deems fit and take statements of any person in connection with the inquiry and call for records of any authority or individual.

Smartphones may reveal your identity, breaching privacy

- **THEY FED 4,680 DAYS OF APP USAGE DATA INTO STATISTICAL MODELS. EACH OF THESE DAYS WAS PAIRED WITH ONE OF THE 780 USERS, SUCH THAT THE MODELS LEARNT PEOPLE'S DAILY APP USE PATTERNS.**
- **AROUND 75 PER CENT OF THE TIME, THE CORRECT USER WOULD BE AMONG THE TOP 10 MOST LIKELY CANDIDATES.**
- **AN IDENTIFICATION IS POSSIBLE WITH NO MONITORING OF CONVERSATIONS OR BEHAVIOURS WITHIN APPS THEMSELVES.**

London | Agencies

The time a person spends on different smartphone apps is enough to identify them from a larger group in more than one in three cases, say researchers, who warn of the implications for security and privacy.

Researchers from Universities of Lancaster and Bath analysed smartphone data from 780 people. The researchers then tested whether models could identify an individual when provided with only a single day of smartphone activity that was anonymous and not yet paired with a user.

"Our models, which were trained on only six days of app usage data per person, could identify the correct person from a day of anonymous data one third of the time," said David Ellis from the University of Bath.

While that might not sound like much, when the models made a prediction regarding who data belonged to, it could also provide a list of the most to the least likely candidates. The findings published in the journal Psychological Science showed that it was possible to view the top 10 most likely individuals that a specific day of data belonged to.

As a result, the researchers warn that software granted access to a smartphone's standard activity logging could render a reasonable prediction about a user's identity even when they were logged-out of their account.

Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that app usage data alone, which is often collected by a smartphone automatically, can potentially reveal a person's identity.

While providing new opportunities for law enforcement, it also poses risks to privacy if this type of data is misused, the researchers said.

COVID PANDEMIC MAY END IN 2022: WHO

Moscow: If there are no more major Covid outbreaks after Omicron, the pandemic may see an end in 2022, the World Health Organisation (WHO) Representative in Russia has said. However, it does not mean that the virus will vanish completely, Melita Vujnovic was quoted as saying in an interview with TASS news agency. "It's hard to make predictions at the moment but we hope that if nothing else happens, the pandemic may end in 2022. "What does an end to the pandemic mean? It means that there will be no major outbreaks, but it doesn't mean that the virus will vanish. "A great number of cases means that the virus is capable of mutating so we don't know how the situation will unfold. However, there is cautious optimism that major outbreaks will end once Omicron spreads across the globe," she said. According to Vujnovic, the WHO is trying to predict when it will happen, but it's difficult because countries "are now changing their testing strategies".

WEARING HIJAB NOT ESSENTIAL RELIGIOUS PRACTICE, K'TAKA AG TO HIGH COURT

BENGALURU | Agencies

Wearing hijab is not an essential religious practice in Islam and it can't come under the Constitution's Article 25 (Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion), Advocate General Prabhuling Navadagi argued in the Karnataka High Court on Monday.

He said that petitioner students have approached the court not just seeking the permission to wear headscarves, but want to wear hijabs to attend classes as part of their religious right.

Contending that the petitioners can't press for right to wear a hijab under Article 25, he said that the provision doesn't state it as a fundamental right.

"It is impossible to define religion. Article 25 does not protects the practice of the religion but, which is essential religious practice, so they narrowed it to essential religious practices. In Sabarimala case also, they used the word 'essential'," he said.

The core religious practices, those things without which any religion is no religion, shall be considered as religious practices which could be considered under the right to religion, he said.The practice which is prevented and feared to cause fundamental change in the character of religion is essential practice, he said, adding that essential practice is what causes a religion to vanish if the practice is not allowed. Food and dress shouldn't be considered as essential part, Navadagi said, and went on to quote Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's statement of not allowing religion into the institutions and how it should be consciously kept out, which could be in the present context of religious symbols.

He also cited imposition of religion on others and noted when the Parliament discussed adoption of secularism, it was argued if is it necessary to have religious rights? The Parliament, at the time of throwing open of temples to all Hindus, stated that social reform must be brought to all religions.

The Advocate General maintained that the question of whether wearing of hijab is an essential religious practice must be settled and then other issues could be addressed. He reiterated that the petitioners simply would not come to the court with a request to permit them to wear headscarves, but seeking they be permitted to wear it as a religious practice.

At this, the bench questioned Navadagi as to what is the stand of the government on wearing of hijab, and if the government order is not specifying anything on hijab, what is the stand - can hijab can be permitted or not? "If institutions are permitting students with hijab, will the government has any problem?" it asked. The bench also asked the that the petitioners are seeking to wear same colour headscarf as the uniform, can be treated as part of the uniform? If they are wearing dupattas, can they wear it around their neck? As he said that complete freedom is being given to the College Development Committees, and as a matter of principle, students are proposed to have secular outlook and can't display religious symbols, the bench asked whether wearing of cloth around neck is religious?

BJP, RSS want one ideology, culture to prevail in India, Cong to promote diversity: Rahul

IMPHAL | Agencies

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday said that the vision and ideology of the BJP and the RSS is to promote one idea, one culture and one language maintaining these are superior to all other ideas, all other languages and all other cultures.

Gandhi referring to his recent Lok Sabha speech on "Union of states" said the Congress always wanted to protect and develop the diverse culture of people of all the states and Union Territories of India.

He said that the BJP and the RSS did not like the reference of "Union of states" because they have a different vision of the country.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP and RSS leaders are coming to Manipur not with respect to the people of the state, not with understanding, they come with a sense of superiority. PM comes to Manipur with the idea that he has a superior vision, superior language and he has the right to define about India.

"I come Manipur with humility; because I understand that you (people) have a lot to give. I come here to learn a lot from you because there is a diverse culture, languages and traditions here. PM will come to Manipur on Tuesday with an air of superiority to tell you what he thinks and not to learn from you," the Congress leader said. While addressing his first election rally in poll bound Manipur at Hapta Kangjeibung in Imphal, Rahul Gandhi said the Congress believed in an India where every state had equal rights and the right to have its own language, culture and history. Modi earlier promised to give two crore jobs in a year, deposit Rs 15 lakhs in the bank account of every Indian and he would change the destiny of the farmers, Gandhi said."But now he is not talking about those commitments ...he is not talking about three black farm laws. He is not talking now about the severely bad effect of 'Notebandi' (demonetisation). He is not talking about the flawed GST."The faulty GST was created to help two to three millionaires and to destroy the small and medium industries and enterprises. India is now witnessing the highest number of unemployed in 40 years." Gandhi referring to the Rs 11,000 crore National Palm oil cultivation mission of the government, said that this cultivation would not help the farmers of Manipur, it would destroy the economy of Manipur. "Companies like Patanjali and large business organisations would be benefited and make profit from this cultivation. We are not interested to help Baba Ramdev and punish Manipuri people. We are always keen to protect the interest of Manipur and to make the state self-sufficient in rice production," he observed.

Wet spells over NE, NW India from Today

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The IMD on Monday predicted a wet spell over northeast India on Tuesday and over Western Himalayan Region till February 24 and over adjoining plains of northwest India on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Delhi may get light rains on Tuesday. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) also predicted another wet spell over east India on February 24 and 25.

Under the influence of an approaching Western Disturbance and its likely induced cyclonic circulation, scattered to fairly widespread light/moderate rainfall/snowfall is very likely over Jammu-Kashmir-Gilgit-Baltistan-Muzaffarabad and Himachal Pradesh from Tuesday till February 24 with maximum activity on February 22 and 23 and isolated/ scattered rainfall/snowfall over Uttarakhand during the same period.

The IMD also said there is isolated heavy rainfall/snowfall very likely over Jammu-Kashmir-Ladakh-Gilgit-Baltistan-Muzaffarabad on Tuesday. Isolated hailstorms are also very likely over Uttarakhand on February 23.

Isolated light rainfall is likely over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, and west Uttar Pradesh on Tuesday and Wednesday and over Rajasthan on Tuesday.

Strong surface winds (25-35 kmph) are very likely to prevail over Haryana-Chandigarh-Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and east Rajasthan on Tuesday while dust raising winds (25-35 kmph) are also very likely to prevail over west Rajasthan on Tuesday.

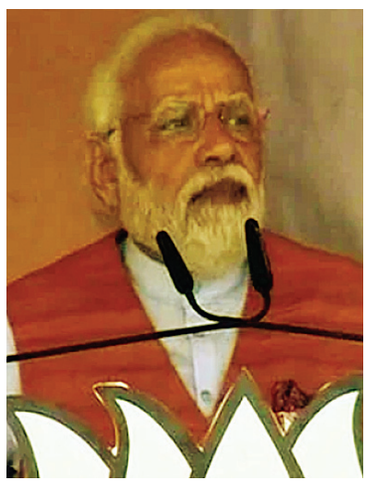
Meanwhile, there is a cyclonic circulation over Bangladesh in lower tropospheric levels and a trough in lower and middle westerlies runs roughly across, and under their influence, scattered to fairly widespread light/moderate rainfall is likely over Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, and Tripura during next 24 hours and will reduce thereafter.

Isolated to scattered light/moderate rainfall is very likely over Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal-Sikkim on February 24 and 25, the IMD said.

A gradual rise in minimum temperature by 2-3 degrees Celsius is very likely over the central India and no significant change thereafter while there is no significant change in minimum temperatures very likely over rest parts of the country during next five days.

"Bombs Were Kept On Cycles": PM's Swipe At Samajwadi Party's Symbol

HARDOI (UP) | Agencies



Days after a court convicted 49 people for the Ahmedabad serial blasts, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said he had vowed to punish the perpetrators even if they took refuge in "paatal", and accused the Samajwadi Party of being sympathetic to such terrorists.

Addressing a BJP campaign rally in Hardoi in Uttar Pradesh, PM Modi slammed the Samajwadi Party for being sympathetic towards terrorists and claimed that the previous government headed by it had sought to withdraw cases against several terror accused.

PM Modi said, "When I was the chief minister of Gujarat, the Ahmedabad serial bomb blasts took place. I can never forget that day when the earth was reddened by the blood of the victims of the serial blasts. There were uncontrolled tears. I picked up the blood-soaked soil and took a 'sankalp' (vow) that my government will track these terrorists, even from 'paataal' (netherworld), and punish them."

Mocking the Samajwadi Party and its election symbol 'bicycle', PM Modi said, "...in the initial blasts, the bombs were kept on cycles...I wonder why they (terrorists) opted for cycles."

INSULT TO BICYCLE IS INSULT TO NATION, SAYS AKHILESH

Lucknow: Samajwadi Party (SP) President Akhilesh Yadav has said that an insult to the bicycle was an insult to the nation.

Reacting to Prime Minister Narendra Modi statement that the Ahmedabad serial blast perpetrators had planted bombs on bicycles and that the SP's election symbol too happens to be a bicycle, Akhilesh Yadav said that the bicycle was integral to the lives of poor who use it as a means of transportation.

"Bicycles help farmers pedal their way to prosperity. Our bicycle ferry our girl child to school. Our bicycle is the only mode of commutation on which price rise cannot take its toll.

"Our bicycle is an aeroplane for the common man and a matter of pride for rural India. Insulting a bicycle is like insulting entire nation," Akhilesh tweeted in Hindi.

DELHI MAN SODOMISES WOMAN AFTER KILLING HER, HELD

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A 26-year-old man was arrested for allegedly killing a woman in Delhi and sodomising her dead body, Delhi Police said on Monday.

The accused, identified as Aman Bisht, was apprehended from Jaipur and charged under the Indian Penal Code's Sections 302 (punishment for murder) and 377 (unnatural offences - carnal intercourse against the order of nature).

On February 19, a call was received at the Burari police station, stating that a girl has been murdered at Kaushik Enclave in Burari area.

"As a police team reached the spot, the caller submitted that when she arrived at her home in the evening, she found a dead body of a girl lying on the floor of her bedroom," Deputy Commissioner of Police Sagar Singh Kalsi said.

A crime team was called to examine the spot and take all evidence. The needle of suspicion was pointing towards her husband, Bisht as he was absconding.During investigation, the accused's location was traced to Jaipur after which a police team was deployed and he was apprehended there."From Jaipur, the accused Bisht was planning to flee to a safer location, possibly Nepal or somewhere in north India," the DCP said.

It was learnt that the accused, under turmoil of a "unsatisfied sexual life with his wife", found refuge in drugs and virility drugs. He was also irked as his friends taunted him over his "cold" married life and sought to use his closeness with the victim to satisfy his urges.The interrogation revealed that on the day of the crime, Bisht brought the victim to his residence on the pretext of getting a saree for his wife. "After getting brushed off by her, the accused tried to overpower her and then in a fit of rage, used brute force on her neck, killing her in an instant," the DCP told IANS, adding that he then allegedly sodomised her dead body.There are traces of sexual act done by the accused for which the police are awaiting forensic test results. "Further investigation is on," the DCP added.

Minor girl gang-raped, strangled to death in Delhi; one held

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A 32-year-old man was arrested in connection with the gang-rape and murder of a 14-year-old girl in the national capital, an official said Monday.

The other accused, however, is still at large, he added.

Sharing details of the case, DCP (Outer north) Brijendra Kumar Yadav said a kidnapping case was registered on February 15 against unidentified persons after a girl went missing in the Narela Industrial Area Police Station.

On February 19, an information was received from one Rahul Rai of village Sannoth, who had returned from Jhansi, regarding a foul smell emanating from his shop and a labourer working there missing. Acting on the information, a police team searched the shop and found partially decomposed body of the missing girl hidden under gunny bags containing cow dung cakes. "The spot from where the body was recovered, was also examined by a Crime Team and the body was shifted to the mortuary of BJRM Hospital Jahangirpuri," the DCP said.

The police then immediately swung into action and deployed several teams to nab the accused. "Finally, a tip-off was received and one of the accused was arrested from the outskirts of the Sannoth Village on the intervening night of February 20-21," Yadav said, adding the accused was trying to flee to Mumbai.

During interrogation, the accused, a native of Hardoi district of Uttar Pradesh, revealed that he, along with another person, lured the victim to the work place after consuming liquor. The duo then sexually assaulted her.

READY TO QUIT CONG AND REVIVE PATIDAR AGITATION: HARDIK PATEL

Hardik Patel, the Gujarat Pradesh Congress Committee working president, on Monday threatened to revive the Patidar agitation if the pending demands are not met by March 23, and said he was ready to quit the party for this.

GANDHINAGAR | Agencies

He said that demands related to the 2015 agitation put forth by the Patidar Anamat Andolan Samiti (PAAS) have still not been fulfilled. And this has forced him and other Patidar leaders to revive the agitation.

"During the month preceding the ultimatum date of March 23, which is Bhagat Singh's death anniversary, we have planned to hold four programmes. The Patidar leaders and all those who want to join the agitation will approach the elected representatives and submit their memorandum. Similarly, the government offices at Tehsil and districts will also be approached," said Jayesh Patel, Hardik's aide and convenor, Patidar Anamat Andolan Samiti (PAAS).

"The BJP government has not heeded to our demands so far and their assurance of fulfilling all the pending demands have proven to be just a lollipop. I am once again raising this issue. If the demands are not met, then we will once again revive the Patel agitation, and it will be of the same intensity as was in 2015," said Hardik.

He said the PAAS's demands regarding the reservation for the Patidar community was justified since the state government and the Centre had made provisions to give reservation to the poor and backward classes and 10 per cent quota for the economically backward upper castes.

"The government can take our ultimatum of March 23 as a request as well as a threat. We have been requesting the government to fulfill their assurances," Hardik Patel said.

"Anandiben as the chief minister withdrew many cases but the Vijay Rupani-led government has not withdrawn any. So we are repeating our demands to the new leadership. If the government wishes to have vengeance against me let it be, but at least withdraw the sedition cases against 202 others," said Hardik.

Hardik said that as many as three to four thousand youths were still affected due to those cases. "They are having trouble in securing government jobs, studies or for going abroad," said Hardik.

'SANJAY RAUT PLANNING TO OUST UDDHAV THACKEREY WITH PAWAR' CLAIMS BJP MAHARASHTRA CHIEF

MAHARASHTRA BJP PRESIDENT CHANDRAKANT PATIL CLAIMED THAT SHIV SENA MP SANJAY RAUT WAS WORKING ON NCP CHIEF SHARAD PAWAR'S AGENDA, WHICH WAS TO REMOVE UDDHAV THACKERAY FROM THE CHIEF MINISTER.

Pune | Agencies

Maharashtra BJP president Chandrakant Patil on Monday claimed that Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut was working on NCP chief Sharad Pawar's agenda, which was to remove Uddhav Thackeray from the chief minister's position and make Raut the CM.Speaking to reporters here, Patil also said there was an attempt to uproot the foundation of 'Matoshree', the Mumbai-based private residence of Shiv Sena president Thackeray.

"Whether he considers it or not, Uddhavji is our friend. He is the son of Shiv Sena supremo late Balasaheb Thackeray. We have worked together for several years," he said.

Who is Sanjay Raut? He came to the Shiv Sena lately and who is he teaching? the BJP leader further said.

"We would like to tell Uddhavji that as per what we understand, Raut is working on an agenda given by Pawar Saheb. The agenda is to remove you from the chief minister's position as you have completed two-and-a-half years as CM," Patil claimed.

"...And since Supriya Sule cannot be made CM, for him (Pawar) making Raut the chief minister will be as good as making Sule the CM," Patil added.

Sule, the Lok Sabha member from Baramati in Pune, is Pawar's daughter.

Notably, after the 2019 Maharashtra Assembly polls, the Shiv Sena had snapped ties with its long-term ally BJP over the issue of sharing the chief ministerial post.

The Thackeray-led party had then forged an alliance with the NCP and Congress to form government in the state. To a query, Patil deplored the language used by Rajya Sabha member Raut in some of his statements against BJP leaders and said "using such kind of language is not our culture".

COVID-19:

HC asks Maharashtra govt if it will withdraw ban on unvaccinated people from travelling in local trains

A bench of Chief Justice Datta and Justice MS Karnik was hearing two public interest litigations seeking that all people in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) be allowed to travel in local trains, irrespective of their vaccination status.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bombay High Court on Monday asked the Maharashtra government if it was willing to withdraw its notification issued last year prohibiting people not vaccinated against COVID-19 from travelling in local trains in the city. "Let bygones be bygones. Let there be a new beginning," Chief Justice Dipankar Datta said, adding that Chief Secretary Debashish Chakraborty must inform the court on Tuesday if the state government will withdraw its decision to permit only fully vaccinated people to travel in local trains, irrespective of their vaccination status.

The PILs challenged three notifications issued by the Maharashtra government in July and August last year that prohibited unvaccinated people from travelling in local trains, which are considered as the lifeline of Mumbai.

Niles Ojha, the counsel for one of the petitioners, had earlier argued in the HC that the prohibition on use of local trains by unvaccinated people was illegal, arbitrary, and in breach of the citizens' fundamental right to move freely across the country, as guaranteed by Article 19 (1) (d) of the Constitution.

He had argued that the government's move discriminated between the vaccinated and unvaccinated people, though neither the Centre nor the Maharashtra government had made vaccination mandatory.

On the previous hearings, the HC asked for the state files on the three notifications under challenge and realised that the decision to prohibit unvaccinated people from travelling in local trains had been taken unilaterally by the then chief secretary Sitaram Kunte.

The high court on Monday said, "Chief Secretary has to withdraw order (the notification on such prohibition). Whatever has been done by his predecessor (Kunte) is not in accordance with law."

"Withdraw this and allow people. Now, the COVID-19 situation has improved. Maharashtra handled it beautifully. Why are you inviting a bad name?" the court said.

The state must be sensible and not treat the issue as an adversarial litigation, the court said and sought the chief secretary''s response by Tuesday afternoon.

MORTAL REMAINS OF SOLDIER CREMATED WITH FULL STATE HONOURS IN MAHA

The mortal remains of martyred Indian Army soldier Romit Tanaji Chavan was cremated with full state honours at his native Shigaon village in Islampur taluka here on Monday morning.

Sangli | Agencies

The mortal remains of martyred Indian Army soldier Romit Tanaji Chavan was cremated with full state honours at his native Shigaon village in Islampur taluka here on Monday morning.

Chavan, 24, along with another soldier fell to terrorists' bullets on Friday during a fierce encounter in Shopian's Chermarg Zainapora village in Jumma & Kashmir, and succumbed to his injuries on Saturday.

On Sunday, his mortal remains were flown to Pune and then taken to his native place in Sangli district for the last rites today on the banks of the River Warana.

Nationalist Congress Party state President and Sangli Guardian Minister Jayant Patil said that it was Chavan's childhood dream to join the Indian Army and defend his motherland.

"He not only fulfilled his dreams, but also earned the honour of being a brave and conscientious soldier of the army. The country has lost a courageous soldier at a very young age... The people of Sangli will never forget his sacrifices," said Patil.

Chavan had joined the Army in March 2017 and was serving with the Mahar Regiment 4 under the Rashtriya Rifles Battalion when the tragedy struck.

He is survived by his aged parents and a younger sister, who were present at the funeral, besides hundreds of villagers from Shigaon and surroundings, top district and military officials and political leaders across party lines.

Maharashtra women's panel asks police to submit report on Narayan Rane's remark on Disha Salian

The Maharashtra State Commission for Woman has sought a report on Union minister Narayan Rane's allegations about Disha Salian's death.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra State Commission for Women has asked the Mumbai Police's Malvani police station to submit a report on Union minister Narayan Rane's allegations about Disha Salian within 48 hours.

In a press conference on Saturday, Narayan Rane had repeated his allegations that Sushant Singh Rajput's manager Disha Salian was gang-raped and murdered.

Shiv Sena leader and Mumbai Mayor Kishori Pednekar lodged a complaint against the minister over his statement. "It is unfortunate that Disha is being defamed even after her death. Even the CBI has investigated the matter and this despite the post-mortem report stating that Disha was neither raped nor was she pregnant," Pednekar said in her complaint.

The mayor claimed that even Disha's parents had said the same thing accepting the post-mortem report.

Taking cognisance of the complaint, Maharashtra State Women's Commission chairperson Rupali Chakankar tweeted the directions. "The Maharashtra State Women's Commission has directed the Senior Inspector of Police, Malvani Police Station to submit a report in this regard within 48 hours," she said in a tweet.

Narayan Rane made the allegations a day after he got a notice from the Shiv Sena-ruled Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) for inspecting his bungalow in Juhu for alleged violations.

On Monday, BMC officials inspected Rane's bungalow for alleged violations. The Union Environment Ministry too issued a notice to Rane's seaside bungalow in Malvan for alleged violations of the Coastal Regulatory Zone (CRZ).

Rane had alleged the action by the state government as vendetta politics.

BJP DEMANDS BUDGETARY PROVISION FOR DHANGAR COMMUNITY

Mumbai: BJP leader Gopichand Padalkar has written a letter to Maharashtra Finance Minister Ajit Pawar reminding him to make provisions in the budget for the Dhangar community.

Ahead of presenting the state budget, BJP leader Gopichand Padalkar has written a letter to Maharashtra Finance Minister Ajit Pawar reminding him to make provisions for the Dhangar community.

The BJP MLC pointed out the failure of the Maha Vikas Aghadi government that could not spend Rs 1,000 crore meant for the community in the past two years.

In the letter, Padalkar said, "Dhangar community has contributed a lot in development of Maharashtra. They were at the forefront in fighting with the British. Maharaja Yashwantrao Holkar who belonged to Dhangar clan fought for the rights of the backward and oppressed. However, now the community is struggling for its rights for the past 30 years. And your government has failed to keep any promise with the community."

Recalling the promise given by the community by earlier BJP government, Padalkar said that the then state Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis was the only one 'who understood their problems'.

"In a major political change, Devendra Fadnavis government came to power in 2014. For the first time, he recognised the seriousness of the issue and assured them that the community would be entitled to 22 welfare schemes meant for tribals till they get the Scheduled Tribe certificate. He had immediately announced Rs 1000 crore and sanctioned Rs 500 crore."

"The schemes included educational scholarships, hostels, measures to elevate social and economic status, housing benefits, etc... However, the government changed and not a single rupee has been spent on the Dhanagar community. Covid-19 pandemic, diseases of sheep and goats, lack of basic facilities at dwelling places of Dhanagar community have marred their economy," he said.

Requesting the government to boost the morale of the community, the BJP leader said they need justice.

"Fadnvis government announced the schemes for them, now those schemes have only remained on paper during your tenure. There is anger in the community and that perhaps explode one day. I expect you to at least make some provisions for the community in the coming budget session and bring some relief in their present situation," Padalkar added in the letter.

ED raids India Bulls Housing in Delhi, Mumbai

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday conducted raids at the offices of India Bulls Finance Centre in Mumbai and Delhi in connection with a Prevention of Money Laundering case lodged against the company and its promoter Sameer Gehlaut in April 2021.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The ED had earlier recorded the statement of a Pune based businessman who deals in real estate, in this connection.

The ED officials held a meeting on Sunday to plan Monday's raid. Separate teams were formed to recover a few incriminating documents.

Earlier, a case was lodged against the company and its promoter at Palghar, Maharashtra. It had been alleged in the FIR that the real estate company first took loan from India Bulls and invested in India Bulls housing shares. The company had increased the share value and the money were later siphoned off to other entities.

ED files charge sheet against four in Red Sanders smuggling case

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday said that they have filed a prosecution complaint or charge sheet, against Badshah Majid Malik and three others before a Special Court in Mumbai under Prevention of Money Laundering Act in a case pertaining to the smuggling of Red Sanders.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

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The ED officials said that the court after accepting the charge sheet took cognisance of it. "On February 15, we filed the charge sheet while the cognisance of the charge sheet was taken on February 18".

The ED initiated money laundering investigation against Badshah Majid Malik and others on the basis of prosecution complaint filed by the DRI in a case relating to seizure of Red Sanders worth Rs 3.16 crores in 2015.

Investigations by DRI had established that Badshah Majid Malik was the kingpin of the syndicate involved in the smuggling of Red Sanders.

The ED had on December 20, 2021 conducted searches at eight locations in Mumbai and Thane resulting in the seizure of incriminating documents. On December 21, 2021, a day after the raid, ED had arrested Badshah.

The ED, during the investigation, learnt that Badshah Majid Malik and others had laundered the proceeds of crime generated by Malik's illegal activities in the guise of share subscription premium in one company that had been incorporated by him and his associates.

The money was subsequently transferred to the accounts of the promoters of the Company including Badshah Majid Malik and was used for purchasing properties, luxury cars and paying off loans.

Declare Marathi 'Classical Language' by Feb 27, Maha urges Centre

A day after dispatching 4,000 postcards to President Ram Nath Kovind, Maharashtra on Monday made a strong pitch to the Centre to accord the status of "Classical Language" for Marathi by February 27 - celebrated as Marathi Language Day.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A day after dispatching 4,000 postcards to President Ram Nath Kovind, Maharashtra on Monday made a strong pitch to the Centre to accord the status of "Classical Language" for Marathi by February 27 - celebrated as Marathi Language Day.

Marathi Language Minister Subhash Desai went to New Delhi and called on Union Culture Minister G. Kishan Reddy and discussed the long-pending issue with him."We have submitted a letter and a booklet to him detailing how the state government has completed all the formalities and why Marathi deserves to be given the status of a classical language at the earliest," he said.

Desai said that Reddy was extremely open to the suggestion and even conveyed that there is no doubt that Marathi deserves the honour."We have invited Minister Reddy to come to Maharashtra on Feburary 27 and make the momentous declaration granting the classical language status which would be welcomed by the 13 crore people of the state," he added.

Earlier, Desai and his team comprising officials like Bhushan Gagrai, film personality Shrirang Godbole and others gave a detailed presentation showing that Marathi language satisfies all the parameters for been made a classical language.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah have displayed a positive approach to the state's demand and Reddy assured that the Centre would take a decision soon in the matter.

On Sunday, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray dispatched a box containing around 4,000 postcards to the President to demanding classical language status to Marathi.The postcards - sent in a gift-wrapped box with the slogan "Abhijat Marathi Jan Abhiyaan (Mass Campaign for Classical Marathi)" printed on it - are part of an ongoing state-wide campaign which the state government hopes will fructify by February 27.This was the second lot of postcards - earlier another lot of 6,000 was sent - to the President with the same plea.

In the past couple of months, people all over the state - ranging from celebs to commoners - have dropped over 125,000 postcards to Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Last December, Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar fired the first postcard to the President, neatly typed in Marathi and signed by him, kick-starting the trend.

Presently, only six Indian languages - Sanskrit, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, and Odia - have been bestowed the status of classical language, based on various parameters.

Maharashtra's ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi pointed out that although the Centre took the decision in 2004 to confer the classical language status to various languages, Marathi was ignored despite repeated requests.Even a high-level committee of language experts appointed by the Centre had unanimously approved a proposal to this effect seven years ago, but there has been no further progress in the matter.

Pawar had said in his postcard to the President that it was necessary to grant the status of a classical language to Marathi as recommended even by the Sahitya Akademi, at the earliest."Marathi is not only an ancient language but also the state language, used by litterateurs, intellectuals, by people of religion besides the common masses, and ranks among the major languages in the world," he said.The Maharashtra Legislature passed a unanimous resolution recommending to the Centre to accord classical language status to Marathi in 2020.In anticipation of the exalted status, Thackeray in October 2021 cleared the proposal to construct a 'Marathi Bhasha Bhavan' on a 2,500 square metre plot in south Mumbai - a project which had been on the backburner for nearly eight years.Coming up within the Jawahar Bal Bhavan complex at Marine Drive, the work on the project is starting shortly with a completion target of 18 months, comprising a library, an expo centre, conference halls, etc, to promote the Marathi language.

During the tenure of Congress Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan, a committee chaired by litterateur Rangnath Pathare had prepared a voluminous report running into 500 pages on the same issue.

The report was forwarded to the government in July 2013, but the matter remained unresolved after the change of guard both at the Centre and the state.

The Akhil Bharatiya Marathi Sahitya Sammelan, which started in 1878, has demanded the classical language status for Marathi several times in the past.

The status paves the way for two prestigious international-level awards for scholars of eminence in the Indian classical language, setting up centres of excellence for studies, the University Grants Commission creating or starting certain number of Professional Chairs in these languages besides dedicating various institutions for the same to promote the study and research in such classical languages.

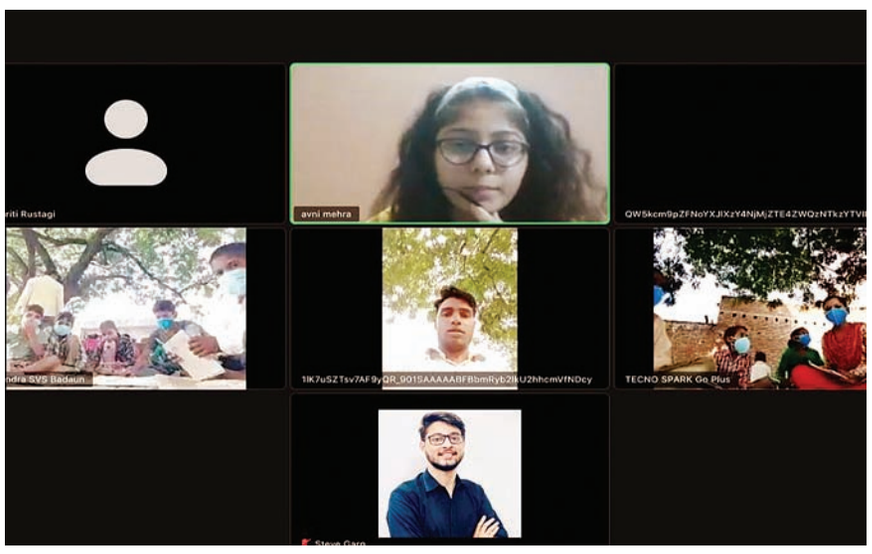
EDITOR'S SPECS

CRUCIAL PHASE FOR BJP, CONGRESS

The stage is now set for the fourth phase of polling in Uttar Pradesh in which 59 Assembly constituencies, spread across nine districts, will go to polls on February 23. This phase includes 16 reserved constituencies. A total of 624 candidates are in the fray for 59 Assembly seats. In the fourth phase, polling will be held in Rohilkhand, Terai region, Awadh and Bundelkhand regions. In this phase, voting is also taking place in state capital Lucknow which has nine Assembly seats. Of these, eight are with the BJP. Polling is also scheduled to be held in this phase in Lakhimpur Kheri which has become a focal point of the farmer movement, especially after the October 3 incident in which four farmers were mowed down by an SUV owned by union minister Ajay Mishra Teni's son Ashish Mishra. Ashish Mishra was recently released on bail from jail last week. The opposition has been constantly targeting the BJP on this incident and Mishra's release has further stoked the fire. This phase is crucial for the BJP which faces the challenge of retaining its 51 seats. The party is facing resistance in the Terai region where BJP MP Varun Gandhi has been speaking up on issues against his own party. Varun is MP from Pilibhit, a farmer dominated constituency. Then the party faces hostile voters in Lakhimpur where the opposition is refusing to let the October incident fade from public memory. In Sitapur, the BJP faces rebel candidates. For the Congress, the biggest challenge of these elections comes from Rae Bareli that also goes to polls this week. Both the Congress MLA, Aditi Singh and Rakesh Singh, have turned rebels and joined the BJP. Rae Bareli is the parliamentary constituency of Congress president Sonia Gandhi and the party will face major embarrassment if it fails to win seats here.

Bridging the education gap for underprivileged children amidst pandemic

More than 3000 volunteers across nation and from others parts of the world successfully ran online classes constantly for 2 years. Amidst distress and losses volunteers as young as 14-years-old contributed in running online classes



When schools were shut and attending online classes was a distant dream for many children from underprivileged communities amidst pandemic, around 3000 volunteers as young as 14 years and as old as 50 years dedicated their days and nights to ensure learning for more than 4500 children. Out of these 3000 volunteers 600 were from Delhi alone.

The activity based learning model developed by Child Rights and You (CRY) and its volunteers helped children from underprivileged communities of 13 states who either had poor or no access to resources to join online classes. CRY volunteers in collaboration with partner organisations not only made devices like mobile phones, laptops, tablets available to conduct online classes but also ensured that as many children must attend classes'every day.

Despite residing in a conflict zone in Israel amidst unrelenting airstrikes and bombings, a CRY volunteer Jiya Udenia, 21, who was part of ideation team for online classes ensured that classes don't stop even for a day. Jiya who works with South Delhi Action Group of volunteers since, March 2021 used to conduct classes from bomb shelters.

"Initially, I felt it is going to be really hard for me to take classes from the underground bunkers and in between deafening noises of bombardments and air strikes; but I chose not to give up. I had this realisation that my sessions were extremely important for these children who were away from schools for months due to pandemic, and were waiting eagerly to connect with me online, for their lessons. And their lives were even harder than mine but still they always smiled and never lost hope. I asked my children not to pay attention to the noise of missiles and bombardments going on in my background and just to focus on what I am teaching", she said. On the other hand a group of Phd scholars from Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Roorkee arranged laptops through crowd funding for the children of a settlement in Majra village of Roorkee so that they can get access to online classes. They also introduced One Child One Mentor programme during pandemic so that quality learning of every child joining online classes can be ensured.

BineetMaurya, a PHD scholar from IIT Roorkee and mentorship head for the year 2020-21 said "one of the biggest challenges in online mode was the need of devices and ensuring that they are operated properly. Initially we arranged a mobile phone, later we bought 2 laptop through crowd funding in our institute itself and shifted to laptop. There were other challenges like convincing children to come to classes' everyday amidst so much of distress due to COVID-19 but we were able to successfully conduct the online classes for over 18 months. To ensure learning of every child in online mode as well we introduced 1 Child 1 Mentor programme to track proper progress of each and every child".

Online learning was ensured by a group of volunteers in remote areas of Badaun district of Uttar Pradesh as well. Around 62 children of two remote areas- GaiharBasti in Meer Saray and RasoolpurNagla village of Badaun are being provided with access to online classes run by volunteers since October 2020. Despite poor connectivity issues and many other challenges, volunteers came forward with solutions for every obstacle in providing education to children from underprivileged communities of Badaun.

"These 2 areas where we are conducting classes are remote villages where there is always connectivity issues. To resolve that we even approached various telecom companies so that we can provide a stable medium to these children to connect with us online every day. Despite difficulties and lack of resource we were determined to conduct classes, thus, children also started showing a lot of interest in our activity based learning. We have seen a lot of change in reading and writing skills of these children. It gives us an extremely fulfilling experience", said Naman Rai, a computer science engineer from Haridwar and a CRY volunteer.

These volunteers have been tirelessly working day and night since pandemic hit the nation not only to provide online classes but also to ensure relief material, vaccination awareness and sensitizing children and their families from underprivileged communities.

Explaining the essence of volunteerism Regional director, CRY - North, Soha Moitra said "CRY has always believed that volunteering is not just helping and supporting underserved communities. Rather it's a mutual process. Volunteering gives you the opportunity to understand the society at large, especially the issues and challenges that underserved communities go through. It gives you the power to work on the problems in the society that has been displeasing you. It teaches you how even a small contribution to the society can lead to massive changes".

international

Russian battleplans call for 'overwhelming intensity of fire' on Ukraine

- Russian battleplans have called for an "overwhelming intensity of fire" on Ukraine that could kill "tens of thousands" within the opening days of a conflict, as President Vladimir Putin moved his troops within three miles of the two countries' border, the US

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Russian battleplans have called for an "overwhelming intensity of fire" on Ukraine that could kill "tens of thousands" within the opening days of a conflict, as President Vladimir Putin moved his troops within three miles of the two countries' border, the US has warned.

Tanks, trucks and artillery have been spotted just two and a half miles from Ukrainian territory in Russia's Belgorod region as new satellite images reveal convoys and troops hiding in civilian areas and the treelines of forests in Soloti and Valuyki - a short distance from Ukraine's Kharkiv region where major military bases are located, the Daily Mail reported. Diplomacy is continuing despite the threat, though the Kremlin on Monday downplayed the possibility of a meeting between US President Joe Biden and Putin after the White House said that the American leader had agreed "in principle" to talks brokered by France, provided war did not break out in the meantime."It's premature to talk about any specific plans for organising any kind of summits," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, adding that no "concrete plans" had been put in place for a meeting, the Daily Mail reported.

The next high-level negotiations between the two sides are due for Wednesday this week, when US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will meet with the issue of Biden-Putin talks expected to be on the agenda.

Meanwhile Russian military exercises in Belarus which were due to end on Sunday were extended to an unspecified date, meaning 30,000 men plus ballistic missile launchers, artillery and tanks will remain in place on Ukraine's northern border and within easy striking distance of Kiev.Biden warned at the weekend that Putin has already given the order to attack, leaving the world guessing as to where and how hard the hammer will fall.American officials who claimed to have seen some of the Kremlin's battle plans warned that a full scale bombardment of the country is being prepared.

"We were told to expect tens of thousands of casualties in the opening days," one of the officials told The New York Times.

Pak concerned over presence of foreign terror groups in Afghanistan

- The Pakistani ambassador to Kabul has expressed the countrys serious concerns over the active presence of foreign terrorist groups in Afghanistan, who use Afghan soil to carry out terror related attacks and activities in Pakistan.

Kanul | Agencies

The Pakistani ambassador to Kabul has expressed the countrys serious concerns over the active presence of foreign terrorist groups in Afghanistan, who use Afghan soil to carry out terror related attacks and activities in Pakistan.

Ambassador Mansoor Ahmed Khan said that terror groups like Daesh and Al-Qaeda pose a serious threat to Pakistan as they facilitate, support and operate in tandem with terror groups in Pakistan.

"Terrorist organisations present in Afghanistan have been posing threats to the security of Afghanistan as well as to other countries, including Pakistan. Daesh is there, and remnants of Al-Qaeda may be there too. Then there are elements like Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Baloch insurgents and many other groups," said Ahmed Khan during an interview with Afghanistan's Tolo News.Khan also expressed security concerns along the Durand Line, hoping to resolve the matter with the Taliban leadership in Afghanistan."The fence was erected or installed in the previous years when cross-border terrorism was at its highest. One of the ways the Pakistan government could deal with this issue was to erect a fence," he said.Khan's reservations raise questions over the Taliban leadership of the Islamic Emirate, as it does not agree to the presence of foreign terrorist groups on its soil. Afghan Taliban have also assured that Afghan soil would not be used against anyone.It is pertinent to mention that the Taliban regime does not recognise the Durand Line, an issue that has escalated tensions between the two countries in the recent past, when Taliban fighters removed the fence, claiming that the Pakistani authorities had installed the fence on Afghanistan territory."Considering the current difficult condition, Afghanistan should have good political, economic and social relations with its neighbors, particularly Pakistan," said Sayed Haroon Hashmi, a political analyst.

DEATH TOLL FROM BRAZIL LANDSLIDES REACH 152

Brasilia: The death toll from the major landslides in the Brazilian municipality of Petropolis has risen to 152, with 165 people still missing, local civil defense agency reported.

According to the agency, more than 500 firefighters were working in the area where the landslides occurred, aided by about 40 sniffer dogs, as they searched for the missing, reports Xinhua news agency.

Local residents also offered a helping hand for the search, especially in the area of Morro da Oficina, where at least 80 homes were destroyed.The mayor's office in Petropolis, a city located 68 km away from state capital Rio de Janeiro, began on Sunday a mega clean-up operation in the area, where roads and buildings were damaged by flooding and landslides."I never imagined something like this and, look, I have served four terms and seen a lot of rain. This is the biggest tragedy in Petropolis. I am going to dedicate all my energy to fighting right now," Mayor Rubens Bomtempo told reporters.

The rains on February 15 that triggered the landslides were the worst the city has seen since 1932, according to Rio de Janeiro State Governor Claudio Castro.

China to provide J-10C fighter jets to Pakistan

China will deliver 25 J-10C fighter jets to Pakistan within weeks in a major boost to the countrys military capabilities to defend its airspace, The News reported.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

China will deliver 25 J-10C fighter jets to Pakistan within weeks in a major boost to the countrys military capabilities to defend its airspace, The News reported.

UK's Financial Times reported that the first batch of combat aircraft is being tested in Chengdu, the base of its manufacturer Chengdu Aerospace Corporation.

"They will be transferred to Pakistan once Pakistan Air Force pilots and technicians complete an introduction to the aircraft," a journalist, working with a Chinese military publication, told FT.

Senior officials in Islamabad said the jets would be delivered before the end of the month, the report added.

The images of the J-10C fighter jet with the marking of Pakistan Air Force (PAF) recently surfaced on social media and were widely circulated by media outlets.

First published on social media last week, the images show two J-10Cs, equipped with China's domestically developed WS-10B Taihang turbofan engines, undertaking test flights at an undisclosed location.

"If confirmed, this could be the first time China has exported the J-10 series fighter and also the first time it has exported the WS-10 series engine," observers said.

Commenting on the matter, Chinese analysts have lauded the latest defence cooperation between the two countries, saying that the move yields great significance to them, in terms of boosting combat capabilities of the Pakistan military, promoting China's aviation equipment, and responding to their security interests in the region, The News reported.

JAPANESE PM TO JOIN ONLINE G7 SUMMIT OVER UKRAINE TENSIONS

Tokyo: Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida will take part in an online meeting of the G7 countries this week and the talks will be aimed at measures to de-escalate tensions between Russia and Ukraine, the government said on Monday.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida will take part in an online meeting of the G7 countries this week and the talks will be aimed at measures to de-escalate tensions between Russia and Ukraine, the government said on Monday.Kishida said he would make his utmost efforts in lockstep with the G7 and other members of the international community to deescalate and ultimately resolve the crisis on the Russia-Ukraine border, Xinhua news agency reported.Addressing Parliament, he said that "while the situation remains critical, Japan will continue to make diplomatic efforts with other countries to ease tensions".

Kishida urged Russian President Vladimir Putin last week to find an "acceptable" diplomatic solution to the current impasse and held a teleconference with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky during which a number of pertinent issues were traversed, government sources said.

Kishida's participation in the Thursday summit, meanwhile, to be hosted by Germany, was announced by Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno.

KUNDALPUR AND BANDAKPUR WILL BE MADE HOLY AREAS: CM CHOUHAN

Items like meat and liquor will remain banned. CM seeks blessings from Acharya Shri Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that Kundalpur and Bandakpur will be made holy areas. Things like meat and liquor will be banned here. Chief Minister along with wife. Sadhna Singh reached Kundalpur Panchkalyanak Maha-Mahotsav today for the darshan of Bade Baba. Here he sought the blessings of Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj after darshan and offering prayers to Bade Baba. Chief Minister Chouhan and his wife attended the Panchkalyanak festival as Indra and Indrani. Public Works Minister Shri Gopal Bhargava, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Minister Omprakash Sakhlecha, Former Minister Jayant Malaiya also sought blessings of Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj.

Chouhan said that Acharya Shri has done the work of showing the way to the wandering humanity. He has done inspiring work in the field of education, health and Gau Seva. The coming generations will not be able to believe that great saints like Sant Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj have also lived on this earth. He said that whenever he comes across any problem, he gets a solution by remembering Acharya Shri. He has not come here as Chief Minister but as a disciple. This place seems like heaven. The darshan of Acharya Shri gives such satisfaction and joy that cannot be described.

The Chief Minister said that the Bade Baba temple built in Kundalpur is wonderful. This temple is dazzling. People from all over the world will come to this holy place and seek Bade Baba's darshan. He said that by planting saplings on the hills, for greenery. He also directed the departmental officers to prepare their plan.

Chief Minister Chouhan said that as told by Vidyasagar Maharaj ji, the state government will impart education through Hindi medium in a medical and engineering college from this year itself. Emphasis will be given on self-employment along with education. Vocational education will also be imparted from Class VI onwards. The Chief Minister said that the society should also come forward for gau seva. He requested the people to treat both sons and daughters as equal, and not to discriminate in any way. He said that the situation has changed in Madhya Pradesh with Ladli Laxmi Yojana. Earlier in the year 2012, 912 daughters were born for one thousand sons, now 956 daughters are being born for one thousand sons. Plantation plan will be made to make the hills of Kundalpur green. Chief Minister Shri Chouhan also requested people to plant saplings for environmental change.

Chief Minister released the German translation of the famous book 'Mookmati' written by Acharya Shri. On reaching Kundalpur, the members of the Maha Mahotsav Committee honored the Chief Minister and other ministers and presented mementos.

Senior administrative officers of the division and district and a large number of devotees from all corners of the country were present in the programme.

CM Chouhan Will Distribute PMAY Benefits to Over One Lakh Beneficiaries

GRIH PRAVESH OF 50 THOUSAND NEW HOUSES AND BHOOMI-POOJAN OF 30 THOUSAND HOUSES WILL HOLD VIRTUAL DIALOGUE WITH THE BENEFICIARIES

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan will distribute benefits to more than one lakh beneficiaries under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban). The programme will be held at Kushabhau Thakre International Convention Centre (Minto Hall) Bhopal on February 23 at 3 pm. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan will transfer an installment of Rs 250 crore to 26 thousand 500 housing beneficiaries through a single click. Along with this Grih Pravesh of 50 thousand new houses of the beneficiaries, virtual bhoomi poojan of 30 thousand newly approved houses will also be performed. Chouhan will also hold virtual dialogue with the beneficiaries.

Urban Development and Housing Minister Bhupendra Singh and Minister of State for Urban Development and Housing Shri OPS Bhadauria will also be present in the programme.

Urban Development and Housing Minister Singh has informed that a total of 8 lakh 68 thousand houses are approved under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Urban in the state. Till now the work of 4 lakh 72 thousand houses has been completed and the rest is in progress. Beneficiaries of one lakh 6 thousand 500 houses will be benefitted in this programme, total cost of their houses is Rs 4100 crore. The estimated cost of the house is Rs. 3 lakh 85 thousand per house. In this, financial assistance of one and a half lakh rupees is given by the central government and one lakh rupees by the state government. This programme will be broadcast live in all the urban bodies of the state. In this, dignitaries will also be present along with regional public representatives and beneficiaries.

Ulema Board in MP against Love Jihad, wrote a letter to Qazis

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Ulema of Madhya Pradesh is against love jihad, that is why the State President of All India Ulema Board, Qazi Syed Anas Ali Nadvi, has written a letter to all the Qazis saying that the marriage should not be performed without the consent of the parents. Action will be taken against those who do so. Many cases of love jihad have been reported in Madhya Pradesh along with other parts of the country, due to which the situation of dispute and tension has also been created. In view of this, the Ulema Board has taken a big decision. State President of Ulema Board, Nadvi says that there should be no love jihad cases.

Sources say that there have been complaints in which many young men and women change their names to get married to the Qazi, after that the Ulema Board has taken this big decision.

According to Nadvi, the state president of the Ulema Board, he is receiving complaints that people of two different religions are secretly married, on which there is a ruckus later.

It is not proper to get the marriage done without the consent of the parents and without their presence. Therefore, it is necessary that the necessary documents should be checked at the time of registering the marriage. Get married only when you are completely satisfied.

Qazi Anas Nadvi has instructed the Qazis who do Nikah that they should not violate the rules and regulations, for doing so, action will be taken against them.

Chief Minister Chouhan Planted Moulshree and Gulmohar Saplings

TV NEWS CHANNEL REPRESENTATIVES ALSO PARTICIPATED IN PLANTATION

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted saplings of Moulshree and Gulmohar in Smart garden. Chief Minister is planting saplings as per his resolve. In order to make tree plantation a public campaign, Chouhan plants trees with social organisations, voluntary organisations and organisations and individuals who encourage people to plant trees. Chief Minister Chouhan planted saplings along with Vatsal Shrivastava, Sudhir Dandotia, Naveen Singh, Vivek Pataiyya and Shikhil Beohar of TV news channel IBC-24.

After the plantation, Chief Minister Chouhan said in a discussion with the news channel that plantation is necessary to reduce the ill effects of climate change and global warming. The state government is making continuous efforts in this direction. Along with this, activities are also being conducted for the expansion of energy literacy. Chief Minister Chouhan said that we have to tell the masses that saving electricity is equal to making electricity. Thermal power plants spoil the environment. If we save electricity then the need to generate electricity will be less. In this way we can also contribute towards environmental protection by trying to save electricity. Chief Minister Chouhan said that he himself is constantly active and alert to save electricity at the Chief Minister's residence. Producing electricity from solar energy does not cause pollution. Chief Minister Chouhan said that the State Government is committed to promote energy literacy and renewable energy.

Chief Minister Chouhan said that the foundation stone has been laid for solar power plants at Agar-Malwa, Neemuch and Shajapur. The construction of floating power plant at Omkareshwar is in progress. The state government is encouraging power generation from solar energy, wind energy and biomass. It is our endeavour to reduce the percentage of electricity generation from thermal power plants. Trees and plants have been given great importance in Indian culture. According to the spirit of Indian culture, we believe in the principle of utilisation, not exploitation of nature.

BEGGAR BECAME PART OF CASHLESS CAMPAIGN IN CHHINDWARA

Team Absolute | Chhindwara

A beggar from Chhindwara district of Madhya Pradesh is in the news these days because he has become a part of the cashless campaign in begging. Not only this, he has also digitized himself by innovating to get rid of chillar for begging people and has also taken QR code on which he can beg digitally. Hemant Suryavanshi used to be an employee of the municipality here. When he lost his job, he decided to earn his living by begging. During this, his biggest problem came with chiller and free money. To whomever he extended his hand for alms, he would have avoided him saying that he was not a chiller. On this, he decided to digitize himself and also took the QR code.

Hemant is found roaming in the streets of the city, the QR code is clearly visible around his neck. The video of him begging by putting this QR code around his neck is also becoming very viral on social media these days. They suggest digital payment by showing the QR code when someone is told that there is no open money.Hemant has also got a big advantage of taking the help of technology, because where he used to get one or two rupees earlier, now he gets more than five rupees. They say that their begging money has also increased due to the use of digital technology.

Hemant has become a big part of this campaign, because he is taking this campaign forward through begging.Hemant tells that the QR code he has is that of a shopkeeper, in whose account the begging amount reaches and he goes to the shopkeeper in the evening and takes his share. This idea came in his mind, when he used to go somewhere to beg in the shop offices, he used to see QR code placed on the table or counter of the shop. Only after that he also took the QR code.Hemant tells that there has been a big advantage of digitizing himself for begging and the daily begging has increased as compared to earlier. Due to this the family is surviving.

4 accused arrested for plotting conversion in Betul

Team Absolute | Betul

Police have registered a case against four people and arrested them for hatching a conspiracy to convert to Bhainsdehi in Betul district of Madhya Pradesh. According to the information received from the police, on Saturday in Udama village of Bhainsdehi police station area, some people of Betul and Maharashtra gathered the villagers and complained against Hindu religion for abusing religion, hurting religious sentiments and motivating conversions to Bhainsdehi police.

According to the police, on the report of Raju Bhalavi, resident of Udama, Bhainsdehi police had interrogated Saibu Ivne (50), Vijay Jadhav (46), Denny Paul (21) and one other in custody. After the accused accepted the crime, the police registered an offense against them under Section 295A, 34 and Enhancement Section 3(1), ST SC Act and arrested them and produced them in the District Court on Sunday, from where the warrant was issued.

Gajendra Chauhan, sub-inspector of Bhainsdehi police station said that the court has issued a jail warrant against the four accused, who will be sent to jail.

It has been told that the police took seriously the complaint of conspiracy to convert. As a result, under the direction of Superintendent of Police Simala Prasad and under the guidance of SDOP SC Bohit, Bhainsdehi police registered

Rs 343 crore approved for upgradation of 87 km National Highway

Movement to become easy between MP and UP

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Ministry of Road and Transport, Government of India, has approved Rs.343 crore for the upgradation of 87 km area of National Highway No. 346 passing through Madhya Pradesh. Upgradation work of National Highway up to Jakhar Kheda, Berasia, Dhol Khedi will be done. In addition, three bypass roads are proposed to be constructed in an area of 13 km around Ahmedpur, Barkheda Hassan and Berasia city.

Principal Secretary Public Works Neeraj Mandloi informed that in the meeting held today with the Ministry of Road and Transport, Government of India, approval has been given for upgradation of 87 km area in National Highway 346. With its upgradation, the movement between the states of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh will become easier. This highway will be helpful in connecting East West Corridor NH-27 to Dinara and Bhopal-Nagpur corridor NH-86 to Jhakhar kheda. As a result of this, the movement between the cities of Bhopal, Gwalior and Jhansi will be easy.

Ambassadors of 8 countries witnessed the inauguration of Khajuraho Dance Festival

Team Absolute | Chhatarpur

The '48th Khajuraho Dance Festival' began on Sunday night in Khajuraho, the world famous tourist city of Madhya Pradesh. Ambassadors and High Commissioners of eight countries were present for the opening ceremony of the event, which lasted till 26 February. Inaugurating the function, Governor Mangubhai Patel said that the dance festival would give recognition to the exquisite stone art of Khajuraho at the world level. It will leave an indelible mark not only on the state and the country but also on the cultural landscape of the world.

Governor Patel along with Tourism, Culture and Spirituality Minister Usha Thakur, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Minister Om Prakash Sakhlecha and MP Vishnu Dutt Sharma inaugurated the function by lighting the lamp. He also offered flowers to the picture of Mother India. Ambassadors and High Commissioners from eight countries, Korea, Argentina, Vietnam, Brunei, Finland, Malaysia, Thailand and Lao, attended the opening ceremony performances of the Khajuraho Dance Festival. . National Kalidas Samman, State Roopankar Kala Award, Devkrishna Jatashankar Joshi Award, Dattatreya Damodar Devlalikar Award, Jagdish Swaminathan Award, Vishnu Chinchalkar Award, Raghunath Krishnarao Phadke Award, Ram Manohar Sinha Award Sagar were presented.

Australian comedy web series 'Deadloch' begins production

Los Angeles | Agencies

The noir comedy series 'Deadloch' has gone into production in Australia. The series is set in the once sleepy seaside hamlet of Deadloch, the story begins after a man's dead body is found on the beach.

After the incident, two female detectives are assigned to the case. With an over-eager junior by their side, they have to pool forces to solve the case while the town is putting on its annual crafts, culture and cooking festival.

As per 'Variety', the eight-part show, conceived by comedy duo Kate McCartney and Kate McLennan, will be directed between February and May by Australian directors Ben Chessell, Gracie Otto and Beck Cole with Andy Walker taking the onus of production by Prime Video, Guesswork Television and OK Great Productions.

The show has been written by McCartney and McLennan along with Kim Wilson, Christian White, Anchuli Felicia King, Kristy Fisher and Sami. McCartney and McLennan will also serve as showrunner-producers. Fiona McConaghy is co-producer. McCartney and McLennan will also executive produce the show along with Kevin Whyte and Tanya Phegan. The series will star Kate Box, Madeleine Sami, Alicia Gardiner, Nina Oyama, Tom Ballard, Susie Youssef, Pamela Rabe, Kris McQuade, Duncan Fellows, Harvey Zielinski, Shaun Martindale, Katie Robertson, Nick Simpson-Deeks, Mia Morrissey, Leonie Whyman and Mick Davies with Holly Austin, Kartanya Maynard and Naarah.

The show marks Amazon's fourteenth Australian commission since 2019 and its third locally-made scripted drama.

'Katie will not do!'

Kate Beckinsale reveals her late father Richard sent a telegram to the hospital after her birth demanding that she was called GYPSY

Los Angeles | Agencies

Kate Beckinsale has revealed how she almost had a very different first name after her father decided against calling her 'Katie' at the last minute.

The actress, 48, told how her father Richard sent a telegram to the hospital after her birth to demand that she was called Gypsy after having a change of heart.

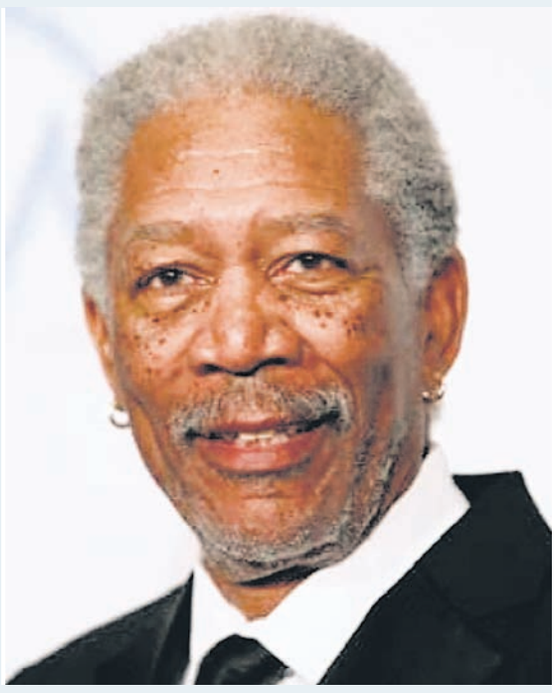
Kate shared pictures of the old telegram on her Instagram page on Monday morning, while revealing she also had doubts about the name of her daughter, Lily Mo.

The babygram, which was sent to West Middlesex University Hospital to her mother Judy Loe, read: 'Katie will not, do decided on Gypsy. Much love, Richard.

'The front of the telegram featured a picture of a painted stork shielding a baby, surrounded by two cherubs and flowers.

Reflecting on her own change of heart when it came to the name of her daughter Lily, now 23, Kate explained how she originally wanted to name her Ruby Tirian, reports dailymail.co.uk.

Morgan Freeman admits to being a 'recluse'



Los Angeles | Agencies

Oscar winning-actor Morgan Freeman has lost interest in awards ceremonies over recent years and says he's now just happy to spend time at home, away from the spotlight.The Hollywood icon, who has won numerous awards during his career, including an Oscar and a Golden Globe, explained: "I don't watch them anymore, and I don't know who's there.

"I haven't seen all of the movies (nominated). I'm kind of a recluse now, so ... (there's) not quite the same fascination that I remember having about the awards. All of them."

Freeman starred in 1994's 'The Shawshank Redemption', as a prison contraband smuggler.

Although he's wondered what it would be like to reprise the role, he also thinks "what happened next" should remain a mystery.He told Sky News: "I think it's best to do it in the mind. I really don't think I'd be that interested in going back and trying to recapture that. Although Tim (Robbins) and I do remain very close friends still."

Earlier this month, Morgan admitted he's now "too old" to travel the world.The acclaimed actor has no desire to jet around the globe in his advanced years, because he's already visited the places he's wanted to see.

TOM HOLLAND IS EMBARRASSED BY HIS CHEST HAIR

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Tom Holland didn't want people to see his chest hair in 'Uncharted'. The 25-year-old actor joked he hoped he was well groomed for filming because he was embarrassed about audiences seeing him without his shirt on in the new action movie, reports female-first.co.uk. After being asked by host Kent 'Smallzy' Small if he was nervous about having his body blown up on an IMAX screen, Tom said on 'Smallzy's Celebrity Small Talk' podcast: "I hoped I shaved my nipples on those days because I have the most embarrassing chest hair."

Tom shared that joining the film's cast - which also includes Mark Wahlberg, Antonio Banderas and Sophia Taylor Ali - was "an easy decision" for him as had gotten to know the character while playing the video game.

He said: "It was an easy decision. The initial script that I read was fantastic. The character was someone that I really enjoyed playing in the video games, so someone I was excited to bring to life on the big screen."

Along with this, the 'Spiderman: No Way Home' star also relished the opportunity for a "new challenge" after the Marvel franchise dropped its most recent installment in December.

Holland, who is in a relationship with 'Euphoria' star Zendaya, said: "Also I was excited for a new challenge. You know, this film has been incredibly difficult to make for all sorts of reasons, but equally has been as rewarding, so it was an easy decision." The British actor thinks it is "funny" that he's asked if he's ever been tested for Covid every time he gets swabbed because routine screening has become such a big part of making a movie. He said: "It's so funny, every time, I get tested now, the person's like, 'Have you been tested before?' Where do yo think I've been, what do you think I do?"

Holland assured that some tests "tickle more than others do" and that there was a testing clinician they nicknamed "deep throat Debbie" on set.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY

Jourdan Dunn

JUSTIN BIEBER TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID, POSTPONES LAS VEGAS CONCERT

Los Angeles | Agencies

Canadian singer Justin Bieber has tested positive for Coronavirus. The singer was all set to take the stage in Las Vegas on Sunday evening (U.S. Pacific Standard Time) as a part of his Justice World Tour but had to delay the concert following the outbreak of Covid-19 in his team.

As per 'Variety', the Vegas concert has been pushed back a few months, with a new date of June 28. Tickets for the original concert date will be honoured and refunds are now available for those that elect to seek one out.

The tour shared news of the abrupt delay as they put out a statement accessed by 'Variety', "Due to positive Covid results within the Justice Tour family, we will unfortunately have to postpone Sunday's show in Las Vegas."

"Justin is of course hugely disappointed, but the health and safety of his crew and fans is always his number one priority. The tour launch in San Diego was a massive success and Justin is excited to bring this spectacular show to his Las Vegas fans as soon as possible," the statement further reads.

The Justice World Tour has just begun with its inaugural performance in San Diego on Friday. Las Vegas was intended to be the second in line performance for the tour, which is set to run across 20 countries through March 2023.

Adele looks glum on date night

Los Angeles | Agencies

Adele looked morose as she attended the 2022 NBA All-Star Game at Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse with boyfriend Rich Paul in Cleveland, Ohio on Sunday night.

The singer, 33, looked stylish as she wrapped up warm in a $12,900 Alaia leopard print coat while sitting alongside her sports agent boyfriend, 40.

During her trip to London this month, which saw her attend the BRIT Awards and enjoy a wild night out at a gay club, the star was flashing a huge diamond ring on her engagement finger, but on Sunday she had swapped the sparkler for an understated band, reports dailymail.co.uk.

Adele and her beau may have had the best seats in the house, but the VIP treatment didn't perk up the singer's mood as she remained stony-faced during the game. The star was looking glamorous on the outing as she wore a pair of pointed heels and wore lashings of make-up to highlight her pretty facial features.

INDIAN TEEN PRAGGNANANDHAA BEATS NO.1 CARLSEN IN ONLINE CHESS TOURNAMENT

Chennai | Agencies

India's 16-year-old Grandmaster Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa shocked world champion Magnus Carlsen of Norway in the eighth round of the Airthings Masters online rapid chess tournament on Monday.

Praggnanandhaa halted Carlsen's three-game winning streak on the second day of the 16-player all-play-all online tournament which is part of the Champions Chess Tour.

Both Pragg, the youngest player in the field, and Carlsen had a rough first day of the event which has four games played on each of three days (Feb 19-21) of the preliminary stage while three rounds will be played on Tuesday (Feb 22).

Carlsen had racked up three wins in a row as he charged up the points table of the event hosted by his company Play Magnus Group.

But then he ran into Praggnanandhaa in the eighth round and stumbled again as the Indian player capitalised on a blunder by the reigning world No. 1 to record his first win against Carlsen in any format of chess.

After losing three successive games on Sunday night, the Indian Grandmaster from Chennai ran into Carlsen and scored a memorable win.

Opting for Tarrasch variation in French Defence, Praggnanandhaa got an advantage as Carlsen blundered and the Indian won in 39 moves. This was his second win in eight games in this event.

Earlier, he defeated Armenian-American Levon Aronian and drew with Dutch GM Anish Giri and Le Quang Liem of Vietnam but lost to China's Ding Liren, Eric Hansen of Canada, Jan-Krzysztof Duda of Poland and Shakhriyar Mamedyarov of Azerbaijan.

Praggnanandhaa was thus placed 12th among 16 players with eight points in an event with football-style scoring in which a player gets three points for a win and one for a draw.

Russia's Ian Nepomniachtchi scored three wins on the second day of the tournament that ended early on Monday and was leading with 19 points from a possible 24 points. Ding Liren and Hansen were sharing the second spot with 15 points each.

Carlsen (13 points) was sharing the fifth spot with Vincent Keymer of Germany while Aronian followed in the next position in the event in which the top eight placed players qualify for the knockout stage on February 23 which will also be played on chdess24.com's online platform.

India climb to top of T20I rankings

Dubai | Agencies

India's 3-0 whitewash of West Indies in the T20I series has helped them overtake England at the top of the ICC Men's T20I Team Rankings released on Monday.

India won the third and final T20I by 17 runs against the Kieron Pollard-led side in Kolkata with young wicket-keeper-batter Ishan Kishan (34), Shreyan Iyer (25), Suryakumar Yadav (65) and Venkatesh Iyer (35 not out) coming up with useful contributions as the tourists could manage only 167/9 in reply to India's 184/5.

The triumph helped India leapfrog England at the top of the T20 team rankings, with Rohit Sharma's side now matching the top rating of 269.

While England and India both have the same rating (269), India have a total of 10,484 points, 10 more than England's 10,474.

Pakistan (rating of 266), New Zealand (255) and South Africa (253) round out the top five countries, while Australia (249) remain in sixth after their 4-1 series victory over Sri Lanka.

India are fourth in the ODI rankings with a rating of 110, with New Zealand (121), England (119) and Australia (116) occupying the top-three spots.

Spanish teenager Alcaraz makes history; becomes youngest ATP 500 titlist

Rio de Janeiro | Agencies

Spanish teenager Carlos Alcaraz made history, becoming the youngest ATP 500 titlist since the category was created in 2009, defeating third-seeded Diego Schwartzman of Argentina 6-4, 6-2 on Monday (IST).

Interestingly, Alcaraz had won his first ATP Tour match as a 16-year-old at the Rio Open two years back. It is the second tour-level title in the teenager's career following his breakthrough in Umag last year.

When the Spaniard had stunned countryman Albert Ramos-Vinolas in Rio two years ago, he was No. 406 in the ATP Rankings but with the title triumph, the teen is expected to move into the ATP top-20 for the first time.

Alcaraz overwhelmed the world No. 14 Schwartzman with his power and gritty play, winning 12 of the final 16 games. He also converted five of his six break points in the match.

Alcaraz employed a lot of power and used tactical drop shots at the net to finish the job. It was an impressive week from Alcaraz, who lost his first set of the tournament on February 15 against Jaume Munar of Spain by a 6-2 margin. But after that, the teenager played sensational tennis to excel on the South American clay.

La Liga Review

Good weekend for Real as Sevilla only top-6 side not to win

Madrid | Agencies

Real Madrid reopened a six-point lead at the top of La Liga after they won 3-0 at home to Alaves, while second-place Sevilla were held to a 1-1 draw away to Espanyol on Sunday evening.

Marco Asensio, Vinicius Jr and Karim Benzema were all on target as Real Madrid scored three goals in the last 27 minutes to claim a 3-0 win at home to struggling Alaves.

Sevilla looked to be on track for a win away to Espanyol when Rafa Mir finished at the far post to put them 1-1 up in the 36th minute, but Sergi Darder's second goal in two games, early in the second half saw the points shared.

Betis remain just a place behind their neighbors after a tight 2-1 win at home to Mallorca which came thanks to an 83rd minute Willian Jose penalty for handball.

FC Barcelona remain fourth with a convincing 4-1 win away to Valencia in the Mestalla Stadium.

Barca were hugely effective in attack, getting all six of their shots in the game on target, with four of them hitting the new. Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang scored twice, while Frenkie de Jong also netted to finish off an excellent move as Barca went in-3-0 at the break.

Athletic Club Bilbao kept in touch with the battle for Europe on Sunday evening with a 4-0 thrashing of local rivals, Real Sociedad in the Basque derby.Arnaut Danjuma's scored a hat-trick as Villarreal continued good form with a 4-1 win away to Granada, which leaves the home side in trouble.

Danjuma put Villarreal 2-0 up by halftime and although Luis Milla's penalty gave Granada hope of a comeback, Danjuma also scored a penalty, before Moi Gomez added a fourth in injury time.

Qatar Open

Azarenka overcomes Putintseva in Doha comeback

Doha | Agencies

Former World No.1 Victoria Azarenka of Belarus had to stage an incredible fightback in her opening match at the Qatar Open, outlasting Yulia Putintseva of Kazakhstan 5-7, 6-2, 7-5.

Two-time Australian Open champion Azarenka will have her first meeting with Madison Brengle of the United States in the second round. Brengle defeated Turkish wildcard Ipek Oz on Sunday, 7-5, 6-3. No.12 seed Azarenka, winner of back-to-back Doha titles in 2012 and 2013, was down 0-4 in the third set and saved a match point at 5-4 in the decider before prevailing after 2 hours and 48 minutes of intense tennis.

Azarenka has now improved her stellar career win-loss record in Doha to 18-2, as she aims to become the first three-time Doha champion.

Putintseva is still seeking her first main-draw win of the season after a first-round defeat at the Australian Open and a loss to Marketa Vondrousova in Dubai qualifying.

India cricketer V.R. Vanitha hangs her boots

Bengaluru | Agencies

India cricketer V.R. Vanitha on Monday announced her retirement from all forms of cricket at the age of 31. Vanitha informed about the decision to retire from cricket in a post through her Twitter and Instagram accounts.

"19 years ago, when I started playing cricket, I was just a little girl who loved sport. Even to this day, my love for cricket remains the same. My body says stop. It's been a journey of struggles, joy, heartbreak, learning and personal milestones," wrote Vanitha.

Vanitha made her international debut in an ODI against Sri Lanka in January 2014. She went on to represent India in six ODIs and 16 T20Is, scoring 85 and 216 runs, averaging 17 and 14.40 respectively. Vanitha was a part of India's squad during the 2016 Women's T20 World Cup at home, where the hosts' failed to reach the semi-finals.In domestic cricket, Vanitha represented her home state Karnataka before making a switch to Bengal ahead of the current domestic season. Vanitha was last seen captaining Aryan Club in the inaugural edition of Bengal Women's T20 Blast, a league organised by the Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB). She had played a crucial role in Bengal reaching the semi-finals of the Senior Women's One-day Trophy, scoring 225 runs in six innings at an average of 37.50.

SAVITA TO LEAD WOMEN'S HOCKEY TEAM IN PRO LEAGUE GAMES

New Delhi: Indian women's hockey team goalkeeping stalwart Savita will continue to lead the team while Deep Grace Ekka will be her deputy during the FIH Pro League games against Spain in Bhubaneswar, Odisha on February 26 and 27.

Hockey India on Monday named a 22-member squad for the weekend matches, with promising young forward Sangita Kumari from Jharkhand -- who has made an impression during her stint with the junior India side -- included.

Chief coach Janneke Schopman said she was happy with the improvement shown by the new players.

Strandja Memorial Boxing

SUMIT UPSTAGES WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS MEDALLIST

Team Absolute | New Delhi

On a mixed day for India, pugilist Sumit put up a power-packed performance to make a sensational start to his campaign at the 73rd Strandja Memorial Boxing Tournament, outclassing 2021 World Championships silver medallist Dzhambulat Bizhamov on the opening day in Sofia, Bulgaria. Playing his only second senior international tournament, the reigning national champion Sumit produced a flawless show to register a dominating 5-0 victory against his Russian opponent in the 75kg opening round match. The Indian will now face Ukraine's Oleksandr Khyzhniak in the second round.While Sumit made it to the next round, Narender Berwal (+92kg), Varinder Singh (60kg) and Lakshya Chahar (86kg) made exits with defeats in their respective opening round matches, Boxing Federation of India (BFI0 informed in a release on Monday.Narender went down fighting 2-3 against the Spanish boxer Ayoub Ghadfa Drissi while Varinder and Chahar lost to their Russian opponents Artur Subkhankulov and Sharabutdin Ataev by 0-5 and 1-4 margin respectively.

The second day of Europe's oldest international boxing tournament on Monday will see four Indian boxers starting their campaigns.Shiksha will face a tough challenge against the reigning Asian champion Dina Zholaman from Kazakhstan in the 54kg opening round match. Nitu (48kg) and Anamika (50kg) are the other two Indian women to take the ring on Day 2. Among men, Akash Sangwan, who received a bye in the opening round, will play against the German pugilist Daniel Krotter in the 67kg second round match late on Monday night.

The prestigious tournament, which will be played till February 27, has been witnessing the participation of over 450 boxers from 36 countries around the world, including strong boxing nations such as Kazakhstan, Italy, Russia and France.

A 17-member Indian contingent, including seven men and 10 women, is participating in the tournament which is the first from the Golden Belt Series and also a testing event for International Boxing Association's World Boxing Tour format. It is also the first exposure trip for Indian boxers this year.

Winless India hopes to achieve first victory on tour of New Zealand

Queenstown | Agencies

With the ODI series already conceded to New Zealand, a winless India will be hoping to achieve their first win on the tour in the fourth ODI at the John Davies Oval on Tuesday. The Mithali Raj-led side will be hoping that Tuesday will be the point from where the performances across all departments click in unison.

If it was the batting that didn't step up to the occasion in the one-off T20I and first ODI, then it was the turn of bowling to be one of the chief reasons for India losing second and third ODIs. With no Smriti Mandhana and Harmanpreet Kaur still searching for a big knock, India did well to register scores of 270 and 279 in the second and third ODIs.

In defence of the totals, India were pushed on the backfoot as Amelia Kerr and then Lauren Down bailed New Zealand out of difficult situations in the second and third matches. But with Smriti, Meghna Singh and Renuka Singh's availability, India should now focus on putting an eleven which will be consistent in the upcoming w'men's Cricket World Cup.

The good news for India has been that earmarked reserve player Sabbhineni Meghana sparkled with 49 and 61 in Smriti's absence. Shafali Verma, who looked a little at sea in the initial matches, got a half-century in the third match. Deepti Sharma has looked in her elements while bowling her off-spins and would like for more support from senior spinners Rajeshwari Gayakwad and Poonam Yadav. New Zealand, on the other hand, has very few things to worry about. Their experiments have proved to be masterstrokes and look the side to beat ahead of the World Cup. Amelia has been strong with bat and ball while Lauren showed that she can be a dependent person in taking New Zealand out of tough scenarios in the future.

Conversation with Wriddhiman Saha came from respect for him: Dravid

India head coach Rahul Dravid explained that his conversation with Wriddhiman Saha came out of respect for the contributions and achievements of the wicketkeeper-batter to Indian cricket.

Kolkata | Agencies

He also added that Saha deserved 'honesty and clarity' and was not hurt by the contents of the conversation coming into public domain.

On Saturday, Saha along with Ajinkya Rahane, Cheteshwar Pujara and Ishant Sharma were excluded from the squad for the Test series against Sri Lanka in March. In the virtual press conference, Sharma had said that the team was looking at the younger options for the Test side.

In some interviews after being left out, Saha had said that Dravid had indicated to him to think about any other decision, with the team management inclined towards a younger back-up keeper to first-choice Rishabh Pant.

Dravid began on a light note in the virtual press conference after India won 3-0 against the West Indies in T20Is.

THE STORY IS RAW AND DRAWS A LOT FROM REALITY: HEMAL DEV

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Hemal Dev's film will premiere at the MAMI Mumbai Film Festival. She is excited and looking forward to the response from the audience and critics. "The story of 'Unaad' is raw and draws a lot from reality. Kudos to my director Aditya Sarpodar who has made sure to get the best out of all of us. When you watch the film you will feel you are a part of that universe. We shot the film in Konkan. The name of my character is Swara. I can't reveal much about the role, you have to watch the film to know more about Swara and the narrative," she says.

The film features Ashitosh Gaikwad in the leading role. Hemal says that he has done a phenomenal job.

"He is the most passionate actor I have ever worked with. He has inspired me to do better. Abhishek Barate, who played Dev Patel's elder brother in 'Lion', is also a part of the film. He is somebody who has already touched Hollywood and I am fortunate to work with him. We were a bunch of fresh talent along with some veterans like Devika Daftar, Devendra Pem.

"I was lucky to work with actors who know the craft well. I learnt a lot in the process. We were not trying to mimic anything or anyone, we were just beings in the universe that was created by Aditya sir," Hemal shares about her co-stars in the film.

This is Hemal's second release. She has shot for a couple of Marathi films, her first was 'Ashi Hi Aashiqui' that was an out-an-out commercial venture directed by Sachin Pilgaonkar, released in 2019.

Esha Deol: I've been a huge fan of Idris Elba

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Esha Deol, who will be seen in the Hindi adaptation of the popular British series 'Luther' titled 'Rudra - The Edge of Darkness', says she is a big fan of star Idris Elba, who featured in the international series.

The crime thriller is headlined actor Ajay in an intense avatar of a cop for the first time in a series. Spanning across six episodes is produced by Applause Entertainment in association with BBC Studios India. It also features a stellar cast including Raashi Khanna, Atul Kulkarni, Ashwini Kalsekar, Tarun Gahlot, Ashish Vidyarthi, and Satyadeep Misra in pivotal roles.

Esha, who is all set to mark her digital debut with this exciting crime thriller is really excited for the release of the series.

Talking about how she is keenly looking forward to her digital debut, she shares, "I am really eagerly waiting for Rudra to release because it's something that has been shot on a large scale and our audience are gonna enjoy watching the show and the entire journey of all of us in the show, all our characters are beautifully woven. It's a very edgy thriller, Ajay Devgn, AJ in my words it's his digital debut so this is something that I am extremely excited about to be debuting alongside Ajay in a web series."

She reveals why she chose 'Rudra: The Edge of Darkness'.

Guru Randhawa teases and announces his new 7-track album

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Punjabi pop artiste Guru Randhawa, who is gearing up for a full-length 7-song album, gave a sneak peek into the new album and also announced the name of the album as 'Unstoppable' on Monday.

He took to his social media to share a few details about one of the songs from the album titled, 'Signs'. Guru wrote in the caption, "'SIGNS' from the upcoming album 'UNSTOPPABLE'. I can't wait to show you guys the magic we did on 7 songs. I think with this I am announcing my album (sic)."

In the video, Guru can be seen approaching his cruiser bike before he zooms off in the arid land captured beautifully through a bird eye shot. The glimpse of the song gives an idea about it being a blend of Punjabi folk blended with electronic music tied neatly by a soothing melody and prominent snare beats at the end of each bar.

Recently, Guru's dance number 'Dance Meri Rani' featuring Nora Fatehi, received a lot of positive response from music lovers.

ASHISH TRIVEDI: VIEWERS NO MORE JUDGE ACTORS OVER ONSCREEN ROLES

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Ashish Trivedi, who is currently seen playing the role of the fiance of Tejasswi Prakash's character in 'Naagin 6', doesn't fear getting typecast.

He says: "I'm playing a grey shaded role for the first time onscreen. And as an actor I'm enjoying the freshness of my character Mayank. He is very much possessive about his relationship. I'm getting a really very good response for my role. However I'm not scared to be typecast for playing negative roles. As I feel nowadays viewers easily connect to actors individual identities on social media. They don't judge them anymore over their onscreen performance. And makers are always interested in experimenting with their actors who succeeded to make their roles alive onscreen." The actor who made his acting debut after featuring in the show 'Udaan' revealed he was passionately waiting for a good role.

"I made my acting debut and was seen on TV screen last in 2019 in Udaan. After which I was passionately waiting for a challenging and promising role. I never wanted to repeat myself. Lockdown was also another reason. But yes, meanwhile I was also shooting for digital projects." Earlier Ashish has been part of shows like 'Skulls and Roses', 'Crime and Confession' among others.

ANIL KAPOOR, SON HARSH VARRDHAN TO APPEAR IN UPCOMING REVENGE THRILLER

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actors Anil Kapoor, Harsh Varrdhan Kapoor, Fatima Sana Shaikh and Satish Kaushik will be seen starring in the upcoming revenge thriller titled 'Thar' on Netflix. Inspired by Western Noir genres, 'Thar' is set in the eighties and essays the story of Siddharth - played by Harsh Varrdhan. Shifting to Pushkar for a job, Siddharth embarks on a journey to avenge his past. The directorial debut of Raj Singh Chaudhary who has also written the film.

Talking about his upcoming film, the producer and actor, Anil Kapoor said: "I am extremely proud of what we have achieved with Thar and am super excited about the film for several reasons. The genre itself - a noir thriller set in Rajasthan that pays tribute to the genre of the classic Western is a first for Indian cinema and audiences."

"'Thar' is a playground where the dynamism of new blood meets the experience of industry stalwarts, both on and off screen. On screen we see the fresh pairing of Harsh Varrdhan Kapoor and Fatima Sana Sheikh and off-screen we see director Raj Singh Chaudhary creating magic with a team of ambitious, risk-taking debutantes - Director of Photography Shreya Dev Dube and Music Composer Ajay Jayanthi. As an actor and a producer, I have always strived to push the envelope and disrupt the status quo with innovative content." Thar is a classic thriller paired with suspense, mystery and drama making it the perfect entertainer. Shot at some of the most aesthetic locations in the country, the film will also be a treat to the eyes.

Hrithik's rumoured girlfriend Saba Azad joins the actor for family lunch

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood star Hrithik Roshan was joined by his rumoured girlfriend actress Saba Azad for a family lunch. Hrithik's uncle and music composer Rajesh Roshan took to his Instagram to share a picture of the family.

Sharing two pictures, the family frame and a delicious south Indian meal, the composer captioned his post, "Happiness is always around.. especially on a Sunday, specifically at lunch time."

The photo shows Hrithik sporting a beard in comfy clothes with his mom Pinkie Roshan, his sons Hrehaan and Hridaan, cousin Pashmina, niece Suranika, Rajesh Roshan and other members of the family.

The 'War' actor commented under the picture, "Hahaha true that chacha!! And you are the most fun." Suranika wrote, "Best Sunday, best family, best lunch!" Saba too took to the comments section and wrote, "Bestest Sunday."

The buzz about the two actors dating began last month when they were seen walking out of a Mumbai restaurant holding hands. However, neither of the two has confirmed that they are seeing each other.

Hrithik, who was last seen in the 2019 blockbuster 'War', was earlier married to Sussanne Khan, with whom he has two sons. The two parted ways in 2014.

While Hrithik is working on the Hindi remake of 'Vikram Vedha', Saba was most recently seen in the biographical series 'Rocket Boys' based on the lives of space and nuclear pioneers of India, Homi J. Bhabha and Vikram Sarabhai.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY

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