



PRESIDENT LAUDS GOVT'S WELFARE SCHEMES, VACCINATION DRIVE

Team Absolute | New Delhi

President Ram Nath Kovind on Monday lauded the government's performance in the last three years, specially during the corona pandemic.

Addressing the joint sitting of both Houses of Parliament at the start of the Budget session, the President said: "We are in the third year of the pandemic caused by coronavirus. In these years, the people have displayed profound faith in the democratic values, discipline and sense of responsibility."

Hailing the government's efforts during the pandemic, he said that the example of India's capability in the fight against Covid-19 is evident in the ongoing Covid vaccination programme. India has surpassed the record of administering more than 150 crore vaccine doses in less than a year.

While more than 90 per cent adult citizens of the country have received the first dose of the vaccine, more than 70 per cent have been administered both the doses, President Kovind said. The government is also reaching out to the rest of the population through the "Har Ghar Dastak" campaign. Adolescents in the age group of 15 to 18 years have also been included in the vaccination programme from this month.

To empower the farmers and the rural economy of the country, despite the pandemic, the government made record procurement to match the record production. The farmers produced more than 30 crore tonnes of foodgrains and 33 crore tonnes of horticulture produce in 2020-21.



It procured 433 lakh metric tonnes of wheat during the Rabi season benefitting about 50 lakh farmers. A record quantity of about 900 lakh metric tonnes of paddy was procured during the Kharif season, benefiting 1 crore 30 lakh farmers.

The first batch of women cadets will enter the NDA in June 2022. With the policy deci-

sions and encouragement of my government, the number of women personnel in various police forces has more than doubled as compared to 2014.

On implementation of a new National Education Policy across the country, Kovind said it was part of the government's endeavour to give shape to the resolve and potential

of "Atmanirbhar Bharat." Local languages are also being promoted through the National Education Policy. Noting that India has again emerged as one of the fastest growing economies in the world, he said that the GST collection has consistently remained above Rupees one lakh crore during the last several months. Inflow of 48 billion dollars in the first seven months of the current financial year is a testimony to the belief the global investor community has in India's growth story. India's foreign exchange reserves today exceed 630 billion dollars. During April to December 2021, goods exports stood at 300 billion dollars or more than Rupees 22 lakh crore, which is one-and-a-half times more than the corresponding period of 2020.

President's address bereft of anything new, silent on key issues: Opposition

New Delhi: The opposition leaders on Monday criticised the President's address to the joint session of Parliament saying that not only did it lack anything new but was silent on several key issues.

Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge told reporter that the address was nothing but a compilation of the government's claim of its last seven years' work. "Whatever Modi ji used to say outside the House, which is rarely seen inside the House, the same has been repeated in the President's speech. We expected something substantial on the growing unemployment."

India Assembly polls: WhatsApp says taking action on bulk messaging

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Meta-owned WhatsApp on Monday said it is taking action on accounts engaging in automated and bulk messaging at a time when political parties and individual candidates are misusing the platform for reaching out to voters ahead of the Assembly elections in five states. Reacting to an IANS story on how the bulk WhatsApp API (application programming interface) tools are helping parties and candidates send political messages to the voters' WhatsApp for just 8 to 10 paise per bulk message in a fraction of seconds, the popular mobile messaging platform said that it deeply cares about the online security of its users as well as about preserving election integrity.

"WhatsApp has advanced spam detection technology that works round the clock to spot and take action on accounts engaging in automated and bulk messaging, which includes banning such accounts for violating WhatsApp's Terms of Service," said the company spokesperson. In December 2019, the company had said that it will be taking legal action against those who are engaged in or assisting others in abusing the platform by sending bulk or automated messages. However, such automated bulk messages are



back in action, and the WhatsApp policy against individuals and companies who misuse the app by sending such bulk messages in violation of its terms and conditions is being "violated at a large scale in the electoral campaign in the five states," according to experts. WhatsApp said that the company has "also devoted efforts from a product and an education standpoint, to empower users with resources that help them verify information."

"For example, our limits imposed on 'forwards' have reduced the spread of 'highly forwarded messages' on WhatsApp by over 70 per cent, therefore, actively constraining virality on the platform. We encourage users to block and report accounts they find suspicious or if they receive problematic messages from them," the WhatsApp spokesperson told reporter. The company said it is working with 10 fact-checking organisations that are enabled on the WhatsApp Business platform and are accredited by the International Fact-Checking Network. WhatsApp has over 400 million users in the country.

6 dead after electric bus runs over bystanders in Kanpur

KANPUR | Agencies

At least six people were killed and several others injured after an electric bus lost control and mowed down several bystanders near the Tat Mill crossroad in Kanpur in the intervening night of Sunday/Monday, police said.

The police said that a group of 15 people were at the site where the accident took place. According to reports, three of the victims have been identified and efforts were underway to establish the identities of the rest.

Pramod Kumar, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Kanpur East, said that the brakes of the bus stopped working on the Tat Mill incline and it went on hitting cars, motorcycles and pedestrians. He added that nine people are in critical condition and being treated in a hospital. "A probe in the matter



has been initiated," the DCP added.

Meanwhile, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra took to Twitter to express condolences to the families of the deceased in the road accident.

"Received unfortunate news of a road accident in Kanpur. My deepest condolences to the families of the deceased. I pray to God for the speedy recovery of the injured in the accident," she said in a tweet posted in Hindi.

MAMATA BLOCKS GUV JAGDEEP DHANKHAR'S TWITTER ACCOUNT

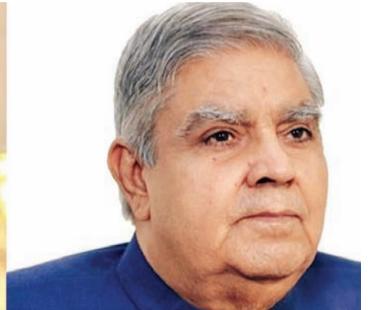
KOLKATA | Agencies

Monday when Trinamool Congress leader in the Parliament formally told President Ram Nath Kovind to remove West Bengal Governor, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee told in a press conference that she has blocked Dhankhar's twitter account making it clear that the ruling party will not leave any stones unturned in their battle against the Governor.

"I apologise for it in advance. He [Jagdeep Dhankhar] tweets something every day abusing me or my officers. Unconstitutional, unethical things, he says. He instructs and advises. Elected government has become bonded labour. That's why I have blocked him from my Twitter account. I was getting irritated every day," Mamata Banerjee said at a press conference on Monday. Alleging that the governor has been sitting on files and continuously threatening his officers, the Chief Minister said, "I have written several letters to the PM about him. That he [Governor] is not listening and he is threatening everyone. I have even been to him and spoke with



him. We have been patiently suffering for the past years. He has not cleared several files. He is keeping every file pending. How can he speak about policy decisions?" Minutes after the Chief Minister announced to block the Governor's Twitter account, Dhankhar from his Twitter handle wrote: "Mandated under Article 159 of the Constitution to ensure none



in the state 'blocks' Constitutional Norms and Rules of Law and those in authority bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of India."

The governor also said that the chief minister is "constitutionally ordained to discharge duty under Article 167 of the constitution to impart information on Pandemic Purchase Scam and other issues".

Woman cannot be treated as commodity, argues advocate in marital rape case

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A woman cannot be treated as a commodity, having no rights to say no, an advocate for a petitioner in the matter related to the criminalisation of marital rape told the Delhi High Court on Monday.

A bench of Justices Rajiv Shakdher and C. Hari Shankar were hearing a batch of pleas, challenging the exception to Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and seeking a direction that marital rape is declared as an offence and a crime.

"We will address the issue of punishment, as it does not serve either the victim or the perpetrator. The exception is entirely independent of that concern," advocate Karuna



Nundy, representing petitioner NGOs RIT Foundation and All India Democratic Women's Association, said in her rebuttal submissions for

the petitioners. "It is quite clear that a rapist does not remain a rapist and marriage does convert him to a non-rapist,"

she added. Nundy said that her arguments were divided into three sections.

"First, our constitution is transformative and requires us to travel to the destination of constitutional morality. The second is what is the test that is to be applied to the SC judgement in independent thought. Third thing is that we will address the marital rape argument and the fact that is pre-independence, has no application of mind." "Our Constitution is in our hands, women have gained universal suffrage, right to work, right to worship and right against divorce by utterance of three words," she said.

The arguments, which were inconclusive on Monday, will continue on Tuesday.

BJP fields MoS Baghel to challenge Akhilesh from Karhal

LUCKNOW | Agencies

Union Minister of State for Law and Justice, S.P. Singh Baghel, will be BJP's candidate against Samajwadi Party President Akhilesh Yadav from Karhal.

Baghel filed his nomination an hour after Akhilesh Yadav filed his papers in Mainpuri on Monday.

Interestingly, Baghel had served as a security officer to former Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav, before his political ambitions started taking shape. A sub-inspector in UP police, a professor of military science and a five-time MP, Baghel has donned many hats in his career. Hailing from Auraiya district, Baghel is known for his oratory skills as much as he is known for his party hopping. He was a member of the Lok Sabha in 1998, 1999 and 2004 as a Samajwadi Party MP, representing the Jalesar seat.



Assailants open fire, loot Rs.43 lakh in Telangana's Siddipet

Two unidentified miscreants looted Rs 43 lakh after opening fire on a person in Telangana's Siddipet town on Monday, police said.

HYDERABAD | Agencies

Two men wearing masks and riding a motorcycle snatched the money from a car driver at the sub-registrar office in the town. The car driver, who was carrying the money on his behalf of his employer after a property transaction, was injured in the incident.

Parshuram, who sustained bullet injury on his leg, was admitted to the government hospital in Siddipet.

The assailants opened two rounds from the revolver and threw the weapon before fleeing along with the money.

Police rushed to the scene and gathered clues. The



investigators were scanning the CCTV footage and collecting other evidence to identify the culprits.

Two FIRs lodged for giving communal colour to Delhi sexual assault case

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi Police has registered two FIRs in the Shahdara sexual assault case against two people for giving a communal colour to it, an official said here on Monday.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Shahdara) R Sathiyasundaram told reporter that the FIRs were registered on the tweet of two accounts bearing the names Sukhpreet Slatch and StarRegards.

The incident happened on January 26, when the 20-year-old victim was allegedly attacked by a group of people, including women, who chopped off her hair, tore her clothes, blackened her face, and then paraded her on the streets of Shahdara area. The woman was



also gang raped in a house in the same area.

In a controversial tweet, the accused had blamed the Delhi Police for not taking the victim of the assault to a hospital. ".....found in a critical state but Delhi Police didn't take her to hospital," read the tweet.

The DCP said that the FIRs were registered on Monday under sections 153, 153 A, 505 (b)(c) of the Indian Penal Code at Vivek Vihar Police Station.

Earlier in the day, the Delhi Police debunked rumours about victim committing suicide. "Social media post regarding suicide of victim girl is false and a rumour," Sathiyasundaram informed reporter. He said that police officers had met the girl on Monday morning and she was doing fine.



SCHOOLS TO RE-OPEN WITH 50% CAPACITY FROM TODAY

▶ THE MADHYA PRADESH GOVERNMENT ON MONDAY DECIDED TO RE-OPEN SCHOOLS FOR ALL CLASSES FROM FEBRUARY 1 (TUESDAY). THE CLASSES, HOWEVER, WILL RESUME AT 50 PER CENT CAPACITY.

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The Madhya Pradesh government on Monday decided to re-open schools for all classes from February 1 (Tuesday). The classes, however, will resume at 50 per cent capacity. A decision in this regard was taken by the Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan after reviewing the Covid-19 situation in the state on Monday. The state government had on 14 January ordered the closure of



schools and hostels for all classes till 31 January in the wake of a surge in Covid-19 cases. The Chief Minister said that offline classes for all government and private schools from classes 1 to 12 will be resumed Tuesday onwards. However, the schools would be allowed to function offline classes with 50 per cent seating capacity. Meanwhile, restrictions imposed in view of the Covid-19

pandemic in the state will remain unchanged. The state has already imposed night curfew. Social, religious, economic, entertainment, political gatherings etc. are allowed to function with a limit of 250 people. Sports activities in stadiums will remain functional with 50 per cent capacity. The daily Covid cases in the state have crossed the 4,000 mark in just four days. The state government had on January 14 ordered the closure of schools and hostels for all classes till January 31 in the wake of a surge in Covid-19 cases. Meanwhile, Madhya Pradesh School Education Minister Inder Singh Parmar said board exams will be conducted offline and the department has started its preparation. The board exams for classes 10 and 12 are scheduled to start from February 17. The state on Sunday has reported 9,305 fresh Covid-19 cases with daily positivity rate of 11.49 per cent against 11.74 per cent in the previous day.

State progressing rapidly in Covid-19 vaccination

■ 98 percent citizens got the first dose of the vaccine
■ Record of first dose made under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi: CM Chouhan



record of maximum number of vaccinations in a day. Chouhan said that I feel proud of the people of my state, who worked shoulder to shoulder with the administration considering vaccination as a service to humanity. The passion for public participation in Madhya Pradesh has emerged as a model for other states. Chouhan has appealed to the people of the state that just as everyone has cooperated in achieving the achievement of up to 98 per cent in vaccination, with the same enthusiasm and dedication, ensure that the remaining 2 per cent people also get the vaccine. He said that it is the effect of vaccination that the people who are getting infected in the third wave of corona are not getting the lethal effect of corona. Most of the patients are recovering at home with proper treatment. They do not have to be admitted to the hospital. Chouhan has appealed to all the citizens to take all precautions as per the Corona Protocol.

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Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the world's largest vaccination campaign was conducted in India under the able leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and in a short span of time the record of first dose to the eligible population was set in the country. Chouhan said that in Madhya Pradesh too, more than 98 per cent of the eligible population has been vaccinated with the first vaccine. Chouhan said that so far 10 crore 95 lakh, 29 thousand 343 vaccine doses have been administered in Madhya Pradesh. In this 5 crore 73

lakh, 91 thousand 84 first dose and 5 crore 14 lakh 64 thousand 940 citizens have been given both doses of the vaccine. Apart from this, 6 lakh 73 thousand 319 pre-conception doses have also been taken. Vaccination work is going on continuously in the state. Chouhan said that vaccination has been important in the efforts made to save the people of the state from corona infection. PM Modi provided free vaccine, which has been used the most in the public interest by Madhya Pradesh. While ensuring public participation in the special vaccination campaigns run in the state, Madhya Pradesh has made a

Bhopal MP Pragya Thakur tests Covid positive

Lok Sabha MP from Bhopal Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur has tested positive for Covid-19.

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Lok Sabha MP Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur has tested positive for Covid-19. The BJP MP from Bhopal made the announcement via Twitter on Monday, urging those who came in contact with her to get themselves tested. In a tweet, just a few hours commencement of Parliament's Budget session, Thakur said: "Today my corona report is positive. I am under the supervision of doctors. All those who came in contact with me in two days are urged to be alert and also get the corona test done if required. We are concerned about you." The Budget session will commence under the shadow of coronavirus, with nearly 875



employees of Parliament have tested positive for the virus.

STOP SELLING CHINESE STRINGS, MISHRA TO FLIPKART AND AMAZON

Bhopal: Home Minister Narottam Mishra has asked online trading companies Flipkart and Amazon to stop selling Chinese strings for kites in Madhya Pradesh with immediate effect. Mishra made the statement while talking to journalists here in Bhopal on Monday. He said that Chinese strings were banned in Madhya Pradesh. "I am asking both the companies- Flipkart and Amazon- to remove this item from their lists with immediate effect as it is banned in MP. Otherwise, they will complain that the government didn't inform them," Mishra said. He added that he had got information that both the companies were selling Chinese strings for kites in Madhya Pradesh.

Two get 7 years rigorous imprisonment in Vyapam case

▶ A SPECIAL CBI COURT ON MONDAY AWARDED SEVEN YEARS RIGOROUS IMPRISONMENT TO TWO ACCUSED, INCLUDING A CANDIDATE, IN CONNECTION WITH THE 2013 CASE PERTAINING TO POLICE CONSTABLE RECRUITMENT TEST CONDUCTED BY MADHYA PRADESH PROFESSIONAL EXAMINATION BOARD, ALSO KNOWN AS VYAPAM.

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A Special CBI court on Monday awarded seven years rigorous imprisonment to two

accused, including a candidate, in connection with the 2013 case pertaining to Police Constable Recruitment test conducted by Madhya Pradesh Professional Examination board, also known as Vyapam. Satya Narayan Yadav (the candidate) and Laxmi Narayan Yadav (Impersonator for the candidate) were sentenced to seven years' jail besides a fine of Rs 8,000 each. On September 2, 2015, the CBI had registered a case in compliance with the Supreme Court's order. As per the direction of the apex court, the CBI took over the investigation. Earlier, Bhopal Police was looking into the matter. The case was lodged at Police Station Jahangirabad, Bhopal (MP) on a complaint against two of the accused on allegations that the said accused entered into a conspiracy for cheating, forgery and impersonation in Police Constable

Recruitment Test conducted by Vyapam. It was alleged that the Satya Narayan Yadav had managed his selection in the written test in 2013. A charge sheet was filed by the State Police in the court of CJM, Bhopal against him. Further investigation in the case was kept open. During the investigation carried out by the CBI, Laxmi Narayan Yadav was identified as impersonator on behalf of candidate Satya Narayan Yadav in the said examination. Expert report also opined that specimen thumb impression of the Laxmi Narayan Yadav matched with the thumb impression available on OMR answer sheet of the candidate Yadav. After investigation, the CBI filed a supplementary chargesheet against Satya Narayan Yadav and Laxmi Narayan Yadav in 2016 before the court of Special Judge, CBI Cases, Bhopal.

MAFIA SHOULD BE DEALT WITH STRICTLY: SILAVAT

■ Strict action will be taken against those who do irregularities in food distribution: Agriculture Minister Patel
■ Water Resources Minister Silavat and Patel gave instructions to the officials

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Water Resources Minister and Minister in-charge of Harda district Tulsiram Silavat and Agriculture Minister Kamal Patel instructed in a meeting of officers in Harda district on Monday that strict action should be taken against sand, mining and land mafia and adulterants. Silavat directed that on the occasion of Narmada Jayanti, a special campaign for plantation should be conducted in Harda district. Plantation



should be done in Narmada banks, government school and hospital premises and other government offices. He said that after selecting one barren hill, efforts should be made to make it green by planting a large number of saplings on it. Silavat reviews progress in vaccination. He said that a wide publicity campaign should be launched for Covid friendly behaviour. People should be encouraged to wear masks and practice social distancing. Silavat inquired about the availability of oxygen gas and oxygen concen-

trator in the district hospital and other government hospitals. He instructed the Covid Command Control Center to keep it operational for 24 hours and also made necessary inquiries from the duty doctor by calling the Covid Command Control Center. Agriculture Minister Patel has directed to take strict action against those who do irregularities in the distribution of food grains. Silavat and Patel took 750 m of Bhunnas sub-branch of Handia branch canal of Tawa project. But inspected the fall. Irrigation is done in 214 hectares by this canal. He directed the officials of the Water Resources Department to remove the encroachments around the canals and ponds and beautify them by planting saplings around the ponds. Silavat and Patel prayed for the happiness, prosperity and prosperity of the citizens of the state by worshipping and performing aarti of Mother Narmada on the occasion of Somvati Amavasya at village Nandara Goyat in the district.

"Dhank or Tasi" is Fifth Exhibit of the Week at IGRMS

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Under the Latest and popular online series of Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (IGRMS) entitled 'Exhibit of the Week' the "Dhank or Tasi" (Musical Drum) collected from 2010 is on display. The Community of Rajbanshi, South Dinajpur, West Bengal. It's Measurement Length- 66cm and Dia of body- 51cm, displayed in the audience as the fifth Exhibit of the month of January, 2022 through official website, Facebook, Instagram and twitter page of the IGRMS. In this regard Praveen Kumar Mishra, Director, IGRMS said that Many tribal and folk societies use a type of musical drum for performing dance and songs. In the Bengali folk culture such kind of musical instrument is known as Dhak or Dhaki and mostly played during festivals and pujas. It is a hollowed-out barrel-shaped drum prepared from a single piece of wood. This instrument is larger than a traditional Dhol. Such instruments have regional and ethnic variations in terms of their size and scale. The goat's skin is



wrapped around both sides and secured to the hollowed hardwood shell with a thick leather strap. The bracing is formed of strong cotton thread with circular brass rings at the ends. It can be played either by hand or with the use of sticks. The player sometimes uses mainly one side by positioning the drum nearly vertical to attain the desired rhythm, while the other side is thrashed with sticks or fists. The beating of dhak is an integral part of the Durga puja celebration. Visitors can see this object from home through the Official site (https://igrms.com/wordpress/?page_id=8300) and Facebook site (<https://www.facebook.com/NationalMuseumMankind/>), Instagram and twitter page of the IGRMS.

CM PLANTED MANGO SAPLING



Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted a mango sapling in the premises of his residence today. Along with this, he also offered Shramdaan. Chouhan had taken a pledge to plant saplings every day on the last Narmada Jayanti, since then he is planting saplings every day. Plantation is done by the Chief Minister even during his stay outside Bhopal. Mango is called the king of fruits because of its taste, aroma and appearance. There are many varieties of mango. Mango is a fruit easily found everywhere in almost every state of the country. Dussehri, Langda, Chausa, Fajri, Alphonjo, Totapri, Bombay Green etc. are the major varieties of mango. Noorjahan mango grown in Katthiwada of Alirajpur district in Madhya Pradesh and Sundarja mango of Rewa have their own unique identity. The bark of the mango tree is full of special medicines. On auspicious occasions, it is considered favourable to put and decorate mango leaves on the doors of the houses.

Cows found dead in cowshed, sparks BJP-Cong spat

BJP LEADER BOOKED AFTER SCORES OF COW CARCASSES FOUND

▶ ON SUNDAY, SOME VILLAGERS SHOT VIDEO OF CARCASSES OF COWS THAT WERE LEFT ABANDONED IN A DRY WELL NEAR THE SHELTER AND POSTED ON SOCIAL MEDIA. LATER, A TEAM LED BY DISTRICT COLLECTOR AVINASH LAVANIYA VISITED THE SHELTER.

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BJP leader Nirmala Devi Shandilya has been booked after district administration recovered carcasses of around 60 cows from her shelter in the Berasiya area of Bhopal on Sunday, the district collector said. Shandilya had been running a cow shelter in Bairasiya for the past 30 years. On Sunday, some villagers shot video of carcasses of cows that were left abandoned in a dry well near the shelter and posted on social media. Later, a team led by district collector Avinash

Lavaniya visited the shelter. "During the visit, we found about 60 carcasses of cows, but most of them were found decomposed fully. About half a dozen cows were killed in the past one week and their carcasses were sent for post mortem to know the reason behind the deaths. The FIR was registered for not disposing of the carcasses after death. A health camp was also organised to check the health condition of remaining about 200 cows," said Avinash Lavaniya, the collector. Berasiya police registered a case under section 269 (negligent act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life) and 270 (malignant act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life) of Indian Penal Code against Shandilya. After the case, the district office took over the administration of the shelter and now Vikas Mishra CEO, district panchayat office,



will take care of cows. Clarifying the incident, the BJP leader said, "I am the leader of BJP. I am popularly known as Gaushal Wali Madam. A few cows died due to cold and old age. How much attention do we give? Many times, they consume polythene that also causes the death of cows. I am an elderly lady. This is a conspiracy hatched by opposition leaders to defame me." Notably, a large number of cows were found dead in a cowshed in Berasia town leading to a political slugfest in the state. On Sunday, some villagers shot video of carcasses of cows that were left abandoned in a dry well near the shelter and posted on social media. The video showing a large number of carcasses at the cowshed triggered a political slugfest between the Congress and the state ruling BJP.

In the meantime, leaders from both the BJP and the Congress - launched a war of words on social media, levelling allegations on each other. Senior Congress leader and two-time Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh Divijaya Singh, who often seen vocal on such issues, accused the BJP of being involved in a trade in cow bones and leather. Singh alleged a trade in cow bones and leather was going on in this cowshed, which he claimed was run by a woman BJP leader. Singh claimed, "Trade of cow bone and leather in Berasia has been going on for many years in the Gaushal (cowshed) run by BJP leader Shandilya. Today more than 500 cows were found dead. A case of cow slaughter should be registered on the board of directors of this cowshed." He demanded that the grants received by the cowshed in previous years should also be investigated. Similarly, senior Congress spokesperson, KK Mishra, accused the BJP-led state government of suppressing the issue to hide the truth in the matter. "Those who use cow-mother for their political business, now have started suppressing the issue."



EDITOR'S SPECS

Friends in Bihar, foes in UP

They are friends in Bihar and now foes in Uttar Pradesh. The presence of two political parties from Bihar in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections are taking a toll on their friendship with the BJP in Bihar. The parties, Janata Dal (United) and Vikassheel Insaan Party (VIP), are part of the ruling NDA government in Bihar. Both are contesting the UP elections alone after the BJP refused an alliance with them. Though JD(U) national spokesperson K.C. Tyagi insisted that this will not affect the alliance in Bihar, he said that his party was disappointed and was contesting the UP elections alone. The JD(U) has declared a list of 20 candidates. It will contest a total of 50 seats with focus on central and eastern Uttar Pradesh, said state party president Anup Singh Patel. Union minister and senior JD(U) leader R.C.P. Singh was in talks with the top leaders of BJP to stitch up an alliance for the UP Assembly elections but it did not materialise. Singh's name is now missing from the list of JD (U)'s star campaigners in UP. VIP, a Nishad-centric party, had also made an attempt to form an alliance with the BJP, riding on the hope that being a part of NDA in Bihar will make it easy for it. However, that did not work out either. In fact, BJP, in Uttar Pradesh, is in alliance with the Nishad Party, which represents the community. VIP attacked national president of Nishad Party Sanjay Nishad on several occasions for "using sentiments of the community he represents for his and his family's growth". The VIP is going full steam to contest the polls and is using Phoolan Devi's legacy to claim Nishad votes. The party is also targeting the BJP indirectly and the Nishad Party directly for the plight of the Nishad community in the state.

INDIA'S CENTRAL ASIAN OUTREACH

Asad Mirza

India's ties with Central Asia can be traced back to the ancient Silk Road, along which goods, people, and ideas flowed. Geographically Central Asia has been at the intersection of crucial political and economic transformations for centuries. While the dissolution of the Silk Road limited exchanges, there is a renewed effort to reconnect India with the region by the leadership.

The importance which India attaches to the 5 Central Asian Republics (CARs) was shown by its commitment to hold a virtual summit with the Presidents of 5 CARs, when they were unable to travel to India to participate at the Republic Day parade as Chief Guests due to Covid travel restrictions.

He highlighted the fact that India's state governments are active partners in growing cooperation with Uzbekistan, while there is an active partnership with Kyrgyzstan in education and high-altitude research. Modi described Turkmenistan as an important part of India's vision for regional connectivity, and said this was evident from "our participation in the Ashgabat Agreement".

With Tajikistan, he said: "We have a longstanding cooperation in the field of security. And we are continuously strengthening it."

IMPORTANCE OF CARs

In the last decade, Central Asian nations have also been looking for viable partners particularly in economic and security sectors. Both share common concerns in tackling radicalisation and terrorism.

INDIA'S OUTREACH

As expected the issue of Afghanistan constituted one of the focus areas of the agenda for the summit. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the five Presidents decided to set up a joint working group on Afghanistan, with a broad consensus emerging on issues such as combating terrorism and drug trafficking.

Modi outlined the three focus areas for India in its relationship with CARs; Central Asia is central to India's vision of an integrated and stable extended neighbourhood and cooperation between India and Central Asia is essential for regional security and prosperity, secondly to establish a framework of regular interactions at different levels and among various stakeholders, and lastly to create an ambitious roadmap for future cooperation.

Modi also referred to India's close ties with all the Central Asian states at a bilateral level, and also underlined the importance of each of these countries. He described Kazakhstan as an important partner for India's energy security.



Ashgabat Agreement in 2018, including Iran, Oman, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

More importantly, 12 years after becoming an observer, India joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) as a full member in 2017. SCO is not only beneficial for India to remain connected with Central Asia, but also has the potential for India to work collectively with other leading powers in the region to address economic and security issues that may have potentially detrimental concerns for the world.

While these steps have given a new lease of life to India's vision for Eurasian connectivity, New Delhi must combine skilful diplomacy with action on the ground to ensure the continued viability of these projects in the face of US-Iran tensions.

CHINA AND CARs

Though India has adopted a more proactive approach and explored new avenues for economic cooperation with CARs. China has

aggressively wooed the CARs through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), besides leveraging its geography, finances and population to ensure that its projects can contribute to making its dream of a new and improved Silk Road a reality.

Operating at several levels the Chinese economic strategy in Central Asia also focuses on development of western China, through opening up of Xinjiang and ensuring its economic development in order to cool tensions there. In addition China needs CARs as a market for its goods besides getting its energy requirements through CARs.

Chinese anxiety to consolidate its links with CARs and disallow India from taking any initiative in the region is shown by its haste to hold a summit with the leaders of Central Asian countries on January 25, at a very short notice, after India had announced its summit. Chinese President Xi Jinping had offered \$500 million in assistance to the region and has vowed to strength-

en trade with the countries.

On the other hand trade between India and Central Asia lies at a insignificant \$2 billion compared to Chinese trade with the CARs, which roughly amounts to \$100 billion. India could increase this bilateral trade by trying to meet its high import dependency for energy, through CARs, which are rich in resources such as oil, natural gas, uranium, etc. On the other hand it could explore areas where the Indian industry could export to CARs at a considerably lower cost.

As stability in Central Asia remains critical to the interests of big players like Russia and China, the CARs will remain in focus at multilateral forums concerning Afghanistan; this also underlines the importance of improving relations with CARs for India to expand regional cooperation.

(Asad Mirza is a political commentator based in New Delhi)

international

PAKISTAN-AFGHANISTAN TO HAVE BORDER COMMITTEE ON DURAND LINE

■ Pakistan and Afghanistan have agreed to form a high-level committee to address the recently flared up dispute over the Durand line, which brought the Taliban and Pakistani border security forces at loggerheads.



Islamabad | Agencies

Pakistan and Afghanistan have agreed to form a high-level committee to address the recently flared up dispute over the Durand line, which brought the Taliban and Pakistani border security forces at loggerheads.

The decision to form the committee was taken during Pakistan's National Security Advisor (NSA) Moeed Yusuf's recent two-day visit to Kabul.

During high-level meetings with the Taliban leadership, the issue of Durand Line remained as one of the primary points of discussion.

Pakistan's NSA, who also heads the Afghanistan Inter-Ministerial Coordination Cell (AICC), held important meetings with Afghanistan's acting Deputy Prime Minister Mullah Abdul Salam Hanafi and acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi. Both sides discussed the current situation in Afghanistan and strengthening of bilateral relations between the two countries.

"Both sides agreed to establish a national-level coordination mechanism for enhancing facilitation at border crossing points and to expedite the ongoing negotiations to conclude a new trade agreement," stated Pakistan's Ambassador in Kabul, Mansoor Khan. The focus of the visit of Yusuf to Kabul on January 29-30 was on increasing facilitation in trade, transit, business and humanitarian

engagements. Both sides also agreed to renew deliberations on the 2010 Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA), which expired last year.

Pakistan maintained that the objective of the visit was to discuss with the Afghan leadership the humanitarian requirements of the country and "Pakistan's proposals for deepening economic engagement to overcome the current challenges Afghanistan is facing".

"The visit yielded substantive outcomes in terms of forward movement on trade facilitation and social sector support. Both sides also agreed to initiate barter trade, modalities for which will be worked out immediately," a statement issued by Pakistan's foreign office maintained.

Pakistan has offered capacity-building and training support in multiple sectors, including health, education, banking, customs, railways and aviation. "Afghanistan and Pakistan emphasised their commitment to ensuring peace and stability in both countries," the statement read.

Support for Australian govt collapses to 3-year low: Poll

Popular support for the Australian government has slumped to its lowest level in more than three years, according to a latest poll.

Canberra | Agencies



Popular support for the Australian government has slumped to its lowest level in more than three years, according to a latest poll.

According to the first NewsPoll of 2022, which was published by News Corp Australia on Sunday night, the opposition Labor Party leads the governing Coalition 56-44 on a two-party preferred basis, reports Xinhua news agency.

It represents a six-point shift from Labor's 53-47 lead in the last poll of 2021 and represents the opposition's biggest lead over the government since September 2018.

The poll found that primary support for Labor has

increased to 41 per cent while the Coalition's vote fell to 34 per cent -- the lowest figure since August 2018 when Prime Minister Scott Morrison deposed his predecessor Malcolm Turnbull as the Coalition leader.

The poll revealed widespread frustration with the federal government's handling of the Omicron variant led Covid-19 wave.

Morrison's net approval rating, which is calculated by subtracting the disapproval rating from the approval rating, collapsed 11 points to -19, the lowest since early 2020. His lead over Labor leader Anthony Albanese as voters' preferred PM fell from 9 points in December to just 2.

Despite the poor result for the Coalition, Treasurer Josh Frydenberg declared Morrison was the right person to lead the government to the election.

"Scott Morrison has done a really really good job, in very, very difficult times and he will be the first Prime Minister to go to an election after serving a full term since John Howard," he told the media on Monday.

Demonstrations rage in Sudan demanding civilian rule

Khartoum | Agencies



Thousands of protesters took to the streets in the Sudanese capital of Khartoum and other cities to demand civilian rule and urge the authorities to punish alleged killers of protesters during demonstrations in recent weeks.

Protesters on Sunday gathered in Khartoum's busiest bus station Sharwani, and marched toward the Republican Palace, but the security forces used tear gas to expel them, Xinhua news agency. Sudanese security forces closed major roads in central Khartoum and deployed military reinforcements around the army headquarters, as well as the routes leading to the presidential palace in Khartoum. The protests took place despite a ban announced by the State's security committee on Saturday on gatherings in central Khartoum during the weekend. On the same day, the

UN Integrated Transitional Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) urged the Sudanese authorities not to restrict peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. For nearly two months, the Sudanese capital Khartoum and other cities have been rocked by regular mass protests demanding civilian rule, and dozens of protesters were killed in clashes with security forces. Sudan has been suffering a political crisis after the general commander of the Sudanese Armed Forces Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan declared a state of emergency on October 25, 2021 and dissolved the Sovereign Council and the government.

Debate between South Korean presidential candidates scrapped

■ A one-on-one debate between South Korean ruling party's presidential candidate Lee Jae-myung and main opposition candidate Yoon Suk-yeol was scrapped on Monday as the two sides failed to narrow their differences over the rules.



Seoul | Agencies

A one-on-one debate between South Korean ruling party's presidential candidate Lee Jae-myung and main opposition candidate Yoon Suk-yeol was scrapped on Monday as the

two sides failed to narrow their differences over the rules.

The conservative People Power Party (PPP) said it failed to reach an agreement with the ruling Democratic Party (DP) even after rounds of negotiations over details of their first two-way debate, scheduled for Monday night, before having an expanded debate with two minor contenders on Thursday, reports

Yonhap News Agency. "It seems impossible to hold the debate now," said Rep. Sung Il-jong, the PPP's chief negotiator, saying his DP counterpart did not respond to his call to talk earlier in the day.

Whether candidates are required to participate in the debate without reference materials has emerged as a thorny issue during negotiations, although the two sides

agreed to hold a free debate with no restrictions on topics.

While the DP suggested neither candidate use materials during the debate, the PPP insisted on using reference materials related to Lee's alleged connection to a massive development corruption scandal. Meanwhile, minor candidates Ahn Cheol-soo of the People's Party and Sim Sang-yeung of the Justice Party launched separate sittings at the National Assembly to protest the planned one-on-one debate. The two had sought injunctions to stop the three major TV stations from hosting a Lee-Yoon debate, and the injunctions were granted by two courts last week. Following the courts' decisions, the PPP proposed a two-way debate without the involvement of the broadcasters.

Foreign journalists being harassed severely by China: Report

Media freedom in China is declining at "breakneck speed", according to a report by a group representing foreign journalists in the country.

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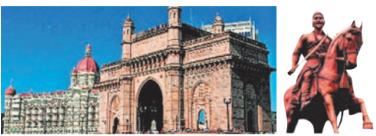
The report by the Foreign Correspondents Club (FCC) of China said journalists there face physical assaults, hacking, online trolling and visa denials, the BBC reported.

Local journalists in mainland China and Hong Kong are also being targeted.

China has labelled the FCC an "illegal organisation". It comes as the world's media turn their attention to the Beijing Winter Olympics, which is already under scrutiny due to alleged human rights abuses in

Xinjiang and a crackdown in Hong Kong, the report said.

The report found that foreign journalists are being harassed so severely by the state that a handful of correspondents have left mainland China. Others have been forced to come up with emergency exit plans as a precaution. Chinese colleagues of foreign reporters have also faced intimidation with authorities harassing their families, the BBC report said.



MAHARASHTRA BOARD STUDENTS PROTEST DEMANDING ONLINE EXAMS, LATHI CHARGED

▶ MAHARASHTRA BOARD HSC, SSC STUDENTS DEMAND ONLINE EXAMS. MSBSHSE HAS RELEASED THE EXAM SCHEDULE AND WILL HOLD THE BOARDS FROM MARCH 4 ONWARDS.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Hundreds of students demanded online exams for board took to streets. A large group of students marched toward Maharashtra School Education Minister Varsha Gaikwad's house to mark their protest. Students were demanding to hold SSC and HSC exams in online mode. Considering the large crowd outside Gaikwad's house despite the covid-19 pandemic, police had to disperse the students.

Police claim they resorted to a "mild baton charge" to stop them from moving towards the minister's residence in the vicinity. The protest took place in Ashok Naka in Dharavi and police had to resort to a mild baton charge, an official said.

The students, who had assembled from areas like Thane and Nashik besides the metropolises on the basis of information shared on social media, did not have per-



mission for the protest, the police official added. "No student was injured in the lathi-charge. Some of them were brought to the local police station and released soon after," a police official said.

Maharashtra Board Students Protest Demanding Online exams or cancellation of Maharashtra Board 10th and 12th board exams for months on social media platforms. Students have now taken their protest offline mode. The Maharashtra State

Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education (MSBSHSE) has announced to begin class 10 exams from March 15 while for HSC students the theory board exams are slated to begin from March 4. Students demand that there should be online exams for online classes. Lakhs of students who are eligible to appear for the Maharashtra board claim that holding exams amid rising cases of Omicron can be a health threat. Further, students also claim that due to

online classes they have not received an equal and quality education. Maharashtra government had allowed district authorities to open schools from January 24, however, only Mumbai-based schools had started in-person classes. Pune will resume classes in physical mode from February 1. Students in classes 10 and 12 fall under the category of the vaccination-eligible population. The government had rolled out vaccination for 15 to 18-year-olds earlier, starting January 31 second dose for the teens are also available.

Last year, Gaikwad had said that the government should adopt a no-exam route for students. Maharashtra Board had declared results based on the past three-year performance of students, however, this year, students have been asked to take exams in offline mode. Considering, about 15 lakh students appear for Maharashtra Board exams, the authorities had assured that exams will be held amid strict covid-19 precautions. The class 10 and 12 board exam 2022 will be held in two shifts - the first half will begin from 10:30 am up to 2 pm and the second half will be held from 3 pm to 6:30 pm, as per the schedule. The MSBSHSE Maharashtra board SSC, HSC exams 2022 will be held in offline mode and results will be announced in June. The board has also reduced the syllabus by 25 per cent for both classes 10 and 12, Gaikwad had announced earlier.

Ex-Maha home minister's lawyer gets bail in 'document leak' case

A Delhi court on Monday granted bail to former Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh's lawyer Anand Daga and his social media manager Vaibhav Gajendra Tumane in connection with a case related to leaking of confidential documents to divert the probe against Deshmukh in a corruption case.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A Delhi court on Monday granted bail to former Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh's lawyer Anand Daga and his social media manager Vaibhav Gajendra Tumane in connection with a case related to leaking of confidential documents to divert the probe against Deshmukh in a corruption case. Special Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) Judge Sanjeev Aggarwal has granted bail to them. Opposing the

bail plea, the CBI argued that Tumane was the one who collected the sensitive report from lawyer Daga, prepared its copies, and sent them through courier to various addresses in Delhi. As per the FIR, Investigating Officer Abhishek Tiwari, who was assisting the Enquiry Officer in the preparation of the probe report, was in possession of sensitive documents. He allegedly shared copies of different documents like memorandum of proceedings, sealing-unsealing memorandum, statements, seizure memos etc., related to the investigation of the case with Daga through WhatsApp on many occasions.

The CBI said that the investigation has revealed that Abhishek Tiwari and Anand Dilip Daga met in Delhi, Mumbai, and Pune in person, and had been in regular touch through WhatsApp calls and messages and SMS after April 14 last year. The probe has revealed that Deshmukh's lawyer Anand Daga had bought an iPhone worth Rs 95,000 for CBI official Abhishek Tiwari and gave it to him as illegal gratification in lieu of sharing case sensitive and confidential documents.

SHARAD PAWAR RECOVERS FROM COVID

Exactly 8 days after he tested positive for Covid-19, Nationalist Congress Party Sharad Pawar on Monday said he has recovered from the infection.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Exactly 8 days after he tested positive for Covid-19, Nationalist Congress Party Sharad Pawar on Monday said he has recovered from the



infection. "My Covid-19 RT-PCR is negative today. I am grateful to my doctors, friends, colleagues and well-wishers for all prayers and wishes for my

speedy recovery," the 81-year-old leader said in a tweet this evening. A party leader said Pawar is now feeling "fit and fine" after the week-long treatment. Pawar had tested positive on January 24 and had gone into home isolation plus treatment, even as all his engagements were cancelled, sparking concerns in various circles. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had called him up last week to enquire after his health and other top leaders of Shiv Sena, Congress and other parties had also wished him speedy recovery.

Maharashtra SSC, HSC Exams 2022:

Board to collect vaccination data of Class 10, 12 students

▶ MAHARASHTRA EDUCATION BOARD WILL BE COLLECTING DATA ON VACCINATED AND UNVACCINATED STUDENTS FROM CLASS 10 AND 12. THE BOARD WANTS TO ENSURE THAT MAJORITY OF THE STUDENTS ARE VACCINATED BEFORE THE MAHARASHTRA SSC, HSC EXAMS 2022 COMMENCE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Education Board will be collecting data on vaccinated and unvaccinated students from Class 10 and 12. The vaccination of the students is expected to rise as the exams come closer and with the state board seeking details regarding the numbers. Maharashtra Education Board has asked schools and junior colleges to speed up the process of vaccination of students, with the nearing the Maharashtra SSC and HSC Exams 2022. The vaccination

drive which began on January 3, for children in the age groups of 15 to 18, is yet to gain pace in the state. No official statement has been made if whether unvaccinated students will be stopped from appearing for the exam, but the Maharashtra State Education Board would prefer if maximum students participating in the Maharashtra SSC and HSC Exams 2022 are vaccinated, with at least one dose if not both. There is pressure on the junior colleges to pick up the pace when it comes to the vaccination of stu-

dents. "HSC students must try and get fully vaccinated by February end," stated an education official. Maharashtra HSC students will begin their board practicals and orals from February 14, 2022. All colleges have been informed to adhere strictly to all the COVID guidelines and SoP's when students are on campus. BMC's health department has already begun the process of data collection and has begun to approach schools and colleges regarding the vaccination of students and the drives they are conducting for the same.

CIVIL WORK ON MAHARASHTRA'S LONGEST TUNNEL COMPLETE

▶ THE TUNNEL IS LOCATED BETWEEN IGATPURI AND KASARA GHAT

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Civil work on Maharashtra's longest tunnel one of the six tunnels to come up on the 701-km eight-laned Mumbai-Nagpur Samruddhi Mahamarg or Super communication Expressway Corridor is now complete with 100 per cent road concretisation done, officials said. The tunnel is located between Igatpuri and Kasara Ghat. "The construction of the concrete road under the twin tunnel has been now completed, which is the most crucial task after the tunnelling work. Now, the electric work like installation of lights, fans and other work are pending. They will also be completed soon," said an official from the Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC).



Out of the six tunnels to be constructed en route the Greenfield Expressway, the 7.7-km twin tunnels between Kasara Ghat and Igatpuri will be the longest and widest highway tunnel in Maharashtra, officials said. The 7.7-kilometers twin tunnels with a width of 17.5 meters have three lanes on each side of the road

and will enable the motorists to cross the Kasara ghat in just 6-7 minutes as against the present 15 minutes. According to the officials, the tunnels have been designed to last for 100 years and for a vehicular speed limit of over 120 kmph. An official said the tunnel has been built using

a modern technology called 'New Australian Tunnelling Method', also known as 'design as you go' method. The Samruddhi Mahamarg is being built in a total of 16 packages covering 10 districts between Mumbai and Nagpur and is going to be the fastest expressway in the country, officials said. The tunnel falls under the package 14 of the project and will mitigate the 160-metre elevation difference of Kasara hills, they added. The Nagpur-Mumbai Expressway, named as 'Hindu Hrudaysamrat Balasaheb Thackeray Maharashtra Samruddhi Mahamarg', will be the fastest expressway in the country with permitted top speed of 150 km/hr, officials said. This will reduce the travel time between the two cities to eight hours from the current 16 hours, they added. The entire project cost was earlier finalised at Rs 46,000 crore. However, with further developments in construction, planning and land pooling, the total project cost increased to Rs 55,335 crore, making it one of the major megaprojects in the state.

Hazare Opposes Maharashtra Govt Decision over Wine Sale

Social activist Anna Hazare said it is the government's duty to discourage people from drugs, alcohol and addiction.

Team Absolute | Pune

Social activist Anna Hazare on Monday said it was unfortunate that the Maharashtra government was giving priority to liquor sale for financial gains, days after the state government allowed sale of wine in supermarkets and walk-in shops. Maharashtra Skill Development Minister Nawab Malik had last Thursday said the state cabinet took the decision to give a boost to fruit-based wineries which provide additional income to farmers. Anna Hazare in a state-

ment on Monday said it is the government's duty to discourage people from drugs, alcohol and addiction. It is sad to see that decisions are being made to promote alcohol and addiction only for revenue generation, he said. "The Maharashtra government recently decided to allow the sale of wine in supermarkets and grocery stores. This decision is very unfortunate for the people of Maharashtra. The state government said the decision was taken in the interest of farmers. The state government also said wine is not alcohol. The real question is where will such a decision take the state?" the activist asked. While people of the state are protesting against the government's decision, those in the government are supporting it, he said.

"It is unfortunate for the people of this state that the government has given priority to the sale of liquor in this way only to generate revenue," Hazare said. Talking about the interest of farmers, he said the state and central governments should provide a fair price for what ordinary cultivators grow in their fields. "But, what exactly the government wants to achieve by setting a target of selling 1,000 crore litres of wine a year? This means the government is okay with people getting addicted, but it (government) will insist that its revenue should increase," he said. Hazare also said that in November last year, the Maharashtra government reduced the Excise duty on imported Scotch whiskey by 50 per cent.

Pending ex-gratia claims of Covid victims:

HC tells Maharashtra Government to not keep it pending

Bombay HC tells the Maharashtra gov't to not keep pending ex-gratia claims by kin of Covid victims, merely because those were not filed online.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bombay High Court on Monday directed the Maharashtra government through an interim order to not keep pending the applications made for ex-gratia claims by kin of COVID-19 victims, merely because those were not filed online. A bench led by Chief Justice Dipankar Datta also directed the Maharashtra government, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation and the Union government to file their replies to a PIL seeking directions to the state government

to pay such ex-gratia amounts even to those who filed their applications physically or by post, and not through the state government's online portal. The Maharashtra government's counsel, Poornima Kantharia, told the HC that the state had received a total of 114 applications for ex-gratia payments physically or by post in Mumbai suburban and city areas, and 54 of these applicants had been contacted by officials for assistance with the online procedure. Their applications were now pending with the BMC, she said. The state was unable to trace the whereabouts of 14 of the applicants and, hence, was unable to assist them with the online method of applying. Kantharia said. The court asked Kantharia if the state government was willing to make a statement that it will not reject an application merely because someone had

applied physically. Kantharia, however, said the online portal had been formulated by the Maharashtra government in accordance with an order of the Supreme Court and was meant for the benefit of the applicants. She further said the state government was willing to provide requisite assistance to those who were not comfortable with the online system of applications. The petitioner's counsel, Sumedha Rao, told the HC many of those laying claims to such ex-gratia payment were slum dwellers or poor people, who were not adept at filing claims and annexing documents online. "The SC also said ex-gratia must be paid within 30 days of one applying for the same. Almost 50 people applied for the payment physically between October and November last year from across Maharashtra before the formation of the portal," Rao said.

Swaminarayan sect's army of idols 'captures' a Guinness World Record

A stunning group of enchanting idols of Lord Swaminarayan -- displayed at the Shree Swaminarayan Mandir, Kundalgham in Gujarat -- has entered the Guinness World Records (GWR), in what is billed as a 'first-of-its-kind global achievement by a temple', officials said here on Monday.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A stunning group of enchanting idols of Lord Swaminarayan -- displayed at the Shree Swaminarayan Mandir, Kundalgham in Gujarat -- has entered the Guinness World Records (GWR), in what is billed as a 'first-of-its-kind global achievement by a temple', officials said here on Monday. The GWR's citation says: "The largest collection of religious statues is 7,090 and was achieved by PP - Gyanjivandasji Swami (India) in Kundalgham (Gujarat), India, on 18 December 2021. More than 5000 people attended the event 'Swaminarayan's Akshardham in Kundalgham' where the religious statues were available for the public to see." The GWR was awarded at a special function held over the weekend at its sprawling branch at Bhayander, Thane district, to the head of the Shree Swaminarayan Mandir PP Gyanjivandasji Swami, at a virtual event, by Indian flautist Pt Ronu Majumdar, Mumbai MP Gopal Shetty and other dignitaries.



The legion of 7,090 idols, ranging from 6 inches to 6 feet, including an imposing horse-mounted one, in different forms and costumes, are displayed at Kundalgham in an enclosure as big as a cricket ground, said a senior temple aide, Alaulik Dasji Swami. "We were inspired by PP Gyanjivandasji Swami and the entire project was started in 2000 to achieve the Guinness World Record after 22 years," Alaulik Dasji Swami told IANS. All the fibre idols are meticulously detailed and made by the Temple Bhakts with help from expert local artisans, carefully hand-painted. The

smaller idols take around 5 days to complete and the bigger ones can go up to 10 days, informed Chitsagar Dasji Swami. The two Swamis said that the actual idols produced in the past two decades may have crossed 100,000, but many were donated to devotees through the Kundalgham temple from all over the world. "The entire collection is dedicated to Shree Swaminarayan Bhagwan, who was born as the infant 'Ghanshyam' to Dharmadev Pande and Bhaktimata Pande at a small village, Chhapaiya in Uttar Pradesh, in Vikram Samvat-1837 (April 2, 1871 AD)," said Alaulik Dasji Swami. Renouncing the world at the tender age of 11, he travelled all over the country and his real identity - Swaminarayan - was finally revealed to the world when he was 21 (VS-1858), anointed as the Head of the Uddhav Sect (founded by Ramanand Swami), which henceforth came to be known as the 'Swaminarayan Sect'. In his lifetime, Shree Swaminarayan Bhagwan built temples at Ahmedabad, Bhuj, Dholera, Gadhpur, Junagadh and Vadatal, before he became immortal in VS-1886, aged 49.



Bella Hadid shares what keeps her going back to 'abusive' relationships

Los Angeles | Agencies

Supermodel Bella Hadid is getting candid about being in "abusive" relationships. The supermodel shared on Victoria's Secret's 'VS Voices' podcast that she kept going back to people who were abusive to her because of her lack of boundaries, reports aceshowbiz.com.

"I constantly went back to men - and also, women - that had abused me and that's where the people pleasing came in," the 25-year-old beauty said.

"I started not having boundaries, not only sexually, physically, emotionally, but then it went into my work space. I began to be a people-pleaser with my job."

The daughter of 'The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills' alum Yolanda Hadid went on to elaborate: "I always felt like my voice was never heard growing up. I grew up around men - whether that was in relationships or family or whatever that was - where I was constantly told that my voice was less important than their voice."

"Then moving into relationships growing up, and not having the boundaries of being able to stick up for myself and have my voice being heard, affected me in my adult relationships very intensely. My nervous system would crash. It was fight or flight."

Hadid, who famously dated The Weeknd before, later credited taking break from social media for helping her heal.

Jared Leto: It's OK not to like my 'House of Gucci' performance

Los Angeles | Agencies

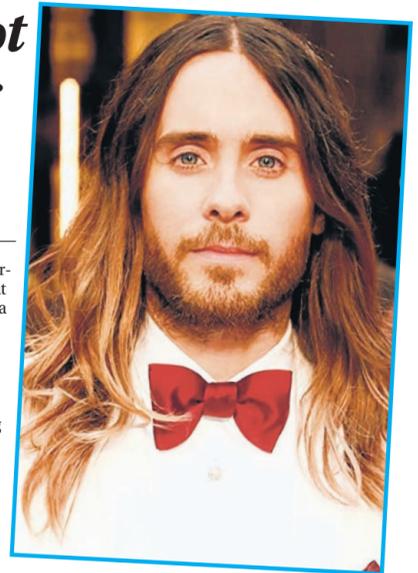
Hollywood star Jared Leto has received a mixed reaction to his portrayal of Paolo Gucci in the film 'House of Gucci', but shared that he never reads reviews so the only thing that matters is he "had a blast" making the movie and is happy just to have sparked a reaction.

He told ScreenDaily: "I can imagine (the reaction) because it's a big swing. I don't look at reviews, I don't look at critics or read comments, but I tried my very best. Paolo is the best I can do. If you don't like the work, that's OK."

"I had a blast playing it, I dug in as deep as I could. It's also that thing of if you're not p***** people off then you're doing something wrong."

"As an actor, if you want to put a dent in things you got to break things a bit, and not everyone's going to understand that. So if that's happening, then great."

While Leto likes to immerse himself into his roles, he thinks people misunderstand his process and it is just "practical" to be as prepared for his work as possible, reports femalefirst.co.uk.



Pamela Anderson and Tommy Lee intimate scenes are essential:

Lily James

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Lily James, who stars as Pamela Anderson alongside Sebastian Stan as Motley Crue drummer Tommy Lee in the series 'Pam & Tommy', has defended the X-rated moments in the drama.

James is quoted by The Sun as saying: "We really felt that the sex scenes had to be a part of the story and had to be essential to the script and progressing their relationship and looking at what happened."

"It was a really great constant conversation and nothing was set in stone." The 'Rebecca' star admitted it was "the biggest acting challenge" she's ever had to portray as 54-year-old 'Baywatch' bombshell, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

She continued: "She was one of the biggest stars on the planet and an icon. I got a lot out of this. It was definitely the biggest acting challenge of my life. It felt alive and I really loved that."

"The Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again" star also revealed she wanted to swipe Pamela's iconic red bathing suit from 'Baywatch'.

She said: "I asked to keep it, and they said, no. I should have just stuck it in my handbag."

Meanwhile, Tommy is said to be "stoked" about the new drama on his infamous sex tape with Pamela, his friend Guerin Swing revealed.

The incident is to be revisited in the hotly-anticipated new series, and Guerin recently hinted that Tommy will be tuning in when it airs on Disney+ this coming week as he is proud of the notoriety from the scandal. The artist featured in the tape, which was stolen from the couple's home in 1995 after being filmed on the couple's honeymoon, and explained that it isn't particularly X-rated.

Pamela and Tommy -- who are parents to Brandon Lee, 25, and Dylan Jagger, 24 -- tied the knot in 1995 after just four days of knowing each other, and divorced in 1998.



CARA DELEVINGNE: GROWING UP QUEER WAS ISOLATING

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress-model Cara Delevingne has opened up about the challenging time she had navigating her sexuality.

Speaking to The Sunday Times newspaper, Delevingne said, "Growing up as a queer child was isolating and hard to navigate at times. My sisters did their best to be there for me but it was something I had to go through myself to truly know who I was. I'm still on that journey and will continue to be for the rest of my life."

She signed with Storm Management straight out of school and admits she

was naive when she first started out in the modelling industry, but she has since come to "cherish" the fashion world, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

She added, "When I had my first modelling job at 10, I wasn't aware of what I was doing or the fashion and artistry that I now understand and cherish. With any job or path there's always a way to make some sort of change."

The 'Carnival Row' star also shared she's always had a rebellious side and wants to "question" everything.

She said, "First and foremost I have

always seen myself as a rebel, not as someone who wants to break rules but as someone who wants to question them. I love the word 'naughty', but only as an adult. To me naughty means someone who questions what they're told."

"I think at this point I might be the naughtiest of the three of us."

She previously shared that she felt "suicidal" while struggling with her sexuality when she was a teenager.

The actress spent her youth battling with internalised homophobia as she grew up thinking same-sex relationships were "disgusting".

Michelle Williams quits movie inspired by Heath Ledger's death

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Michelle Williams decided just before filming that she couldn't star in a movie inspired by the loss of her late fiancé and actor Heath Ledger.

The actress ultimately decided against taking the role in 'Blood' as it was "all a little too close for her still", following the



passing of 'The Dark Knight' star and the father of her 16-year-old daughter Matilda, who died from an accidental overdose aged 28 in 2008, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

Bradley Rust Gray, the film's director and a friend of Ledger, told Entertainment Weekly: "When we were getting ready to shoot the film, she realised it was all a little too close for her still, and she politely bowed out."

Williams was to play Chloe, who travels to Japan after her husband passes away and reconnects with an old friend and the idea of falling in love again, and 'Blade Runner 2049' star Carla Juri took her place.

Rust Gray added that he and Michelle both "shared the weight" of Ledger's death.

GEORGE EZRA IS 'OVERWHELMED' BY TOURING DURING PANDEMIC HIATUS

Los Angeles | Agencies

"Shotgun" hitmaker George Ezra has announced that his third album "Gold Rush Kid" will be released in June and says that the record is inspired by the positives of his life as a pop star as the pandemic has changed his perspective on stardom.

"In the last two years I've allowed myself to be overwhelmed by the idea of touring and doing stuff publicly,

"It's not going to last forever, so I just need to enjoy it while it's here. I've met people, seen things and been to places that I never should have, and I've loved that," he told Hits Radio, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

Ezra, who recently released his new single "Anyone For You", joked that there has been a silver lining during lockdown as he has been able to change his hairstyle.

The 'Budapest' hitmaker said: "Lockdown sorted the hair out because I had no choice but to grow it. I was like, 'Dude, you should have been doing this ages ago.'"

Ezra previously suggested that the pandemic has enabled him to cut loose as his mindset has changed.



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Kaz Crossley



SREEJESH BAGS THE WORLD GAMES ATHLETE OF THE YEAR 2021 TITLE

In a global fan vote conducted on TheWorldGames.org, Sreejesh finished well clear at the top of the 24-strong nomination list, with his tally of 1,27,647 votes being almost twice as many as the second-placed athlete, Spain's Sport Climbing ace Albert Ginés Lopez, who garnered 67,428 votes.

Sreejesh becomes the second hockey player to win the award, following in the footsteps of compatriot and India w'men's captain Rani, who took the 2019 prize, the FIH said in a release on Monday.



"I'm very honoured to win this award. First of all, a big thank you to FIH for nominating me for this award, and secondly thanks to all the Indian hockey lovers around the world, who voted for me."

PR Sreejesh

Lausanne (Switzerland) | Agencies

Seasoned goalkeeper PR Sreejesh, who played a crucial role as India men's team claimed a first Olympic medal in over four decades when it won bronze at last year's Olympic Games in Tokyo, has been named as The World Games Athlete of the Year for 2021. The World Games is a multi-sport event staged every four years by the International

World Games Association with the support of the International Olympic Committee. The World Games are staged over a period of 11 days, with more than 30 sports in the programme. Indoor Hockey was featured as an invitational sport at The World Games in 2005, which took place in Duisburg, Germany. Hockey will have a presence with

sports demonstrations during The World Games 2022, which takes place in Birmingham, the USA between July 7-17, 2022.

FIH Hockey Pro League

India women thrash China by 7-1

Muscat (Oman) | Agencies

The Indian women's team made a great impact on its FIH Pro League debut on Monday, beating China 7-1 in a match played at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex here. The Indian team, which has been invited to participate in this year's FIH Pro League edition following the withdrawal of Australia and New Zealand, came up with a brilliant performance to get the better of the Chinese in the match played after the Women's Asia Cup in which Savita's team had bagged a bronze medal, beating the same opponents 2-0. Relentless, talented and speedy; India's entry into the FIH Hockey Pro League was marked by a win that showed that Janneke Schopman and her team are more than ready for the challenges ahead in FIH Hockey Pro League. It was a day of firsts in Muscat, Oman as the city hosted its first FIH Hockey Pro League match. The hockey-mad city had just played host to the 2022 Women's Asia Cup and now two of the teams that had competed in that competition -- India (FIH World Ranking:9) and China (WR:13) -



came head-to-head in the opening FIH Hockey Pro League match of 2022.

In another first for India as three goals were scored from penalty strokes, the most penalty strokes to be awarded and converted in a Hockey Pro League match. India certainly hit the ground running. Two goals in the opening quarter were ample proof that the team were up for this challenge. In the fifth minute, Navneet Kaur smashed a shot past Wu Surong to give her side the lead. Just seven minutes later, a great save by skipper and goalkeeper Savita from a China penalty corner was turned to India's advantage and the counterattack allowed Neha to double the lead.

In the second half, China finally rewarded. The ball was moved swiftly up the pitch and Deng Xue was able to steer the ball goalwards and past Etimarpu Rajani, who had replaced Savita in the India goal. India won a penalty stroke in the 47th minute. Sushila Chanu made no mistake and put the ball into the corner of the China goal. India's next goal came from the stick of forward Sharmila Devi. A second penalty stroke was won by the India and Gurjit Kaur stepped up to calmly and precisely send the ball home. With eight minutes left Sushila scored her second penalty stroke of the game making the final score 7-1. Sharmila Devi was adjudged as Player of the Match.

Holder's magical spell helps West Indies clinch T20I series vs England

Bridgetown (Barbados) | Agencies

All-rounder Jason Holder's four wickets in four balls and a superb bowling display by left-arm spinner Akeal Hosein (4/30) helped the West Indies defeat England by 17 runs in the fifth and final T20 International at the Kensington Oval here to clinch the series 3-2 on Monday (IST). Holder joined Afghanistan's Rashid Khan, Ireland's Curtis Campher and Sri Lanka's Lasith Malinga as the only male bowlers to achieve the feat of four-in-four at T20I level, preventing a late England resurgence. Batting first, West Indies notched up a fighting 179/4, thanks mainly to gutsy unbeaten knocks of 41 and 35 from captain Kieron Pollard and Rovman Powell, respectively. Holder (5/27) and Hosein then accounted for nine wickets among themselves as



they bundled out the tourists for 162 with a ball remaining. England's chase started poorly with Jason Roy (9) falling in the first over of

their reply. While the visitors kept abreast with the required run-rate, they kept losing wickets at regular intervals with Tom Banton (16),

Moeen Ali (14) and Liam Livingstone (6) all falling cheaply. James Vince made a gallant 55 off 35 balls before being dismissed by Hosein, who finished with brilliant figures of 4-0-30-4. The England chase seemed to have lost steam after Vince's wicket. Sam Billings gave them some hope with a quick-fire 41 off 28 balls. But it was the 'Holder show' to end the innings as the Windies all-rounder picked four wickets in four balls in the final over to complete a five-wicket haul. He becomes the first West Indian male player to take a T20I hat-trick.

Brief scores :

West Indies 179/4 in 20 overs (Brandon King 34, Kieron Pollard 41 not out, Rovman Powell 35 not out) beat England 162 in 19.5 overs (James Vince 55, Sam Billings 41, Akeal Hosein 4/30, Jason Holder 5/27) by 17 runs.

ATP Rankings: Djokovic remains world No.1, Federer hits 21-year low

Melbourne | Agencies

The 20-time Grand Slam champion Roger Federer has hit a 21-year low in the latest ATP rankings released on Monday while Serbia's Novak Djokovic remains world No. 1 despite not playing in the Australian Open. After missing the first Grand Slam of the year, the 40-year-old Federer slipped 13 places and now sits at 30th position with 1,665 points in the latest rankings. Spain's Rafael Nadal remains in fifth despite winning his 21st Grand Slam on Sunday. Italy's Matteo Berrettini is the only men's player to move inside the top 10, leapfrogging Russia's Andrey Rublev into sixth after the former made the semifinals at the Australian Open for the first time in his career. American Taylor Fritz has moved from No. 22 to No. 20 to get into the top 20 for the first time, despite a third-round defeat in the Australian Open by Spain's Roberto Bautista Agut. In the women's section, Australia's Ashleigh Barty remains world No. 1 after winning the Australian Open for the first time in



her career on Saturday. Barty's straight-set win over American Danielle Collins means she has extended her ranking points lead over No. 2 Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka. French Open champion Barbora Krejickova of the Czech Republic, who reached the quarterfinals of the singles, has risen one spot into third. Poland's Iga Swiatek, who reached her first semifinal at Melbourne, has moved up from ninth into fourth while Collins has surged up 20 places from No. 30 to No. 10. Former world No.1 Garbine Muguruza of Spain, who was knocked out in the second round in the Australian Open, has dropped four places to seventh.

We have to see more women's Test matches: Alex Hartley

Canberra | Agencies

England left-arm spinner Alex Hartley has joined the clamour of seeing more women's Test matches in the cricketing calendar. She added that the multi-format series, which has the provision to include a Test match, should be adopted all over the world in women's cricket. Since the one-off Test in the women's Ashes at the Manku Oval ended in a thrilling draw on Sunday, where England almost chased a record 248 set by Australia, the chatter around having more women's Test matches has increased, especially extending to five days



to be on par with men's Tests. "We have to see more women's Test matches. The more you play Test cricket, the more you learn how to deal with those emotions. There were so many highs and lows throughout that match, which were extreme because they do't experience

playing Tests very often," wrote Alex in her column for The Telegraph. "Across the world, we've had three Tests in the last 12-month period, which is far more than in recent years but is still fewer than what England's men alone play per series. That last Test match has proven that there should be more," added Alex. Alex, 28, pointed out if women's Test cricket is made a regular feature, then they can expect consistent performances from the players. "Sure, you're not going to make money out of women's Tests right now but how can you expect to get a return on women's cricket if you don't invest in it in the first place."

ENGLAND ALL-ROUNDER BRESNAN ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT FROM CRICKET

Birmingham:

England all-rounder Tim Bresnan has announced his retirement from all forms of cricket, said his county side Warwickshire on Monday. The 36-year-old now ends his 20-year cricketing career which saw him represent England on 142 occasions across all formats, including 23 Test caps. Bresnan was a member in England winning the 2010/11 Ashes in Australia and the T20 World Cup 2010 trophy in the West Indies. In the domestic arena, Bresnan played for his home county of Yorkshire from 2001 to 2019 before spending two seasons at Warwickshire which culminated in helping them claim an eighth County Championship title last year. Overall, in first-class cricket, Bresnan amassed 7,138 runs, including seven centuries and scalped 575 wickets comprising nine five-wicket hauls.



You do not need to be a captain to be the leader: Virat Kohli

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Stylish Indian batter Virat Kohli, who quit Test captaincy earlier this month, said "moving on" is also a part of leadership, to understand that "maybe the environment needs a different direction". Speaking at a business forum, Kohli highlighted that captaincy also has a fixed 'tenure and time period'. Kohli led India in South Africa Test series but a day after the visitors were beaten 2-1, Kohli took to social media to announce his decision to give up Test captaincy. Kohli took over from MS Dhoni as India's Test captain as early as 2014. He led India to 40 victories in 68 Tests, becoming India's most successful captain in the longest format. "You do not need to be a captain to be the leader. When MS Dhoni was in the team, it was not like he was not the leader, he was still the guy from whom we wanted to have input. To win or not win is not in your hands, the striving for excellence and to be bet-



ter every day, it is not something you can do short term. When it comes to a culture, it will last beyond your playing years and your responsibility. However, he was later removed as the captain in the 50-over format of the game following India's early exit in the T20 World Cup. He then played under KL Rahul's captaincy in the ODI series in South Africa. He will play under Rohit Sharma in the upcoming ODI and T20I series against the West Indies in February.

37 more positive cases reported ahead of Winter Olympics



Beijing | Agencies

The Beijing Winter Olympic Games organisers have confirmed 37 more COVID-19 cases in the latest round of testing conducted at the Beijing Capital International Airport and within the Winter Olympic Games closed loop on Sunday. A report on inside-thegames.biz on Monday said that 28 COVID-positive cases had been recorded in PCR tests conducted on 1,252 Olympic-related arrivals at the airport. Eight of those testing positive at

the airport are athletes and team officials, while the remaining 20 are Games stakeholders. The organisers also revealed that a further 62,928 tests were conducted within the closed loop on Sunday, "including 2,502 taken by athletes and team officials". Four athletes and team officials returned positive, with five other stakeholders too testing for the virus. The 37 positives is a "marginal increase", following 34 on January 29 and 35 on January 28. The Winter Olympics are scheduled to take place from February 4 to 20.

ISL 2021-22

FC GOA, ODISHA FC LOOK TO GET THEIR CAMPAIGN BACK ON TRACK

Bambolim (Goa) | Agencies

FC Goa and Odisha FC are determined to get their respective campaigns back on track when they meet in the Indian Super League clash at the Athletic Stadium in Bambolim on Tuesday. FC Goa are on a four-game winless run, sitting in the ninth position with 14 points from the same number of games. Derrick Pereira's side lost to Jamshedpur FC in their last encounter despite playing some eye-catching football and Pereira would know his charges have to convert their chances in order to get back to winning ways. Goa have to start winning games now if they are to push for a playoffs spot but in Odisha, who are one rung above them, they will face an opponent who will harbour similar thoughts. Odisha have had a mixed results this season, starting on a good note to then taper off in the middle. With 17 points from 13 matches, they still have time to fight for a playoff spot and a win on Wednesday would



put them back in the fray. For Goa, lack of finishing has been a

problem as they have created more chances and attempted more shots than any other

team this season. In their last game against Jamshedpur, Goa hit the woodwork thrice, the highest in a single game this season. FC Goa also hold the record for most crosses in a single game this season. They attempted 31 crosses against SC East Bengal, the joint highest attempted by a team in a single game this season alongside ATK Mohun Bagan. Brandon Fernandes played for Goa in the last game, and coach Pereira said he is one of the key players in the side and the team is happy to have him back. Odisha have been among goals despite enduring a loss in the last game and their ability to score late goals should make coach Kino Garcia happy. Jonathas also got back among goals in the last game and it was Odisha's ninth goal in the last 15 minutes of a game this season. With four goals, only Aridai Cabrera (5) has scored more goals for Odisha this season besides Jonathas. Indian wide players Jerry Mawimhanga and Nandhakumar Sekar have been putting in some impressive performances in their last few games.



'BIGG BOSS 15'

Netizens unhappy with Tejaswi's win, extend support to Pratik

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Tejaswi Prakash may have won 'Bigg Boss 15' but the pulse of the nation shows that the audience was rooting for Pratik Sehajpal, who finished as the runner up. The early hours of Monday morning saw #PratikSehajpal trending on Twitter with almost 40,000 tweets in his support.

Several Twitter users took to the social media platform and expressed their displeasure at Tejaswi being titled the winner.

One user wrote: "No one cheered for the winner for the first time since I've been watching BB. This is your winner @ColorsTV slow claps for you."

#PratikSehajpal deserved it more than your fixed winner.#PratikSehajpal." Another said: "I will not watch bigboss going forward now. Real Winner is PRATIK SEHAJPAL." "I'm never gonna watch Bigg Boss 15. They fckn played with his emotions the whole season. This boy here literally gave his everything to the show. So biased and heartless even after seeing all his efforts. #PratikSehajpal," one other user wrote. In addition, celebrities too shared their opinion on Pratik losing to Tejaswi.

Actress Debina Bonnerjee tweeted: "The winner is in the silence of the audience LOUD and clear



#PratikSehajpal you have won hearts. And that is true winning. #PratikFam."

Former winner of 'Bigg Boss' Gauahar Khan too shared her opinion on Twitter saying: "Lo!!! The silence in the studio at the announcement said it

all. #bb15 there is only one deserving winner, n the world saw him shine. #PratikSehajpal you won hearts . Every single guest who went in, you were their fave, the public loves you. Keep your head held high (sic)."

COVID-POSITIVE KAJOL MISSES DAUGHTER NYSA

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Kajol has tested positive for Covid-19 and been forced to isolate herself. From isolation, the "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai" actress took to her Instagram to share a picture of her daughter Nysa Devgn.

Captioning the throwback picture where



Nysa can be seen in ethnic attire, Kajol wrote, "Tested positive and I really don't want anyone to see my Rudolph nose so let's just stick to the sweetest smile in the world!"

Teasing her daughter, she added in the caption, "Miss u @nysadevgn and yes I can see the eye roll!"

Priyanka Chopra Jonas commented under the picture, "She's stunning." Kajol's sister Tanishaa Mukerji wrote in the comments section: "Sending u some virtual hugs baby @kajol."

On the work front, Kajol had signed "The Last Hurrah", which will be directed by Tamil and Malayalam actress Revathi.



Salman won't host BB 16 if fee isn't upped

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Will Salman Khan host "Bigg Boss 16"? When Deepika Padukone, who joined the "Bigg Boss 15" grand finale with the other lead players of the upcoming film "Gehraiyaan" asked this question to the superstar host on Sunday night, Salman said he would not repeat his association with the show if his fee is not increased.

"Price increase nahi hoga toh nahi karunga," he said emphatically. Only time will tell whether this declaration needs to be taken with a bucketful of salt.

Deepika also played a round of truth and dare with Salman. When asked the name of the celebrity whom she stalks, Deepika said it was none other than Salman Khan. She said she even knew who the actor was with at Anavel (his family's farmhouse outside Mumbai).

All eyes, in fact, are on Deepika, for she will announce which one among the four finalists left in the fray -- Pratik Sehajpal, Shamita Shetty, Karan Kundrra and Tejaswi Prakash -- will be eliminated from the final race.



AAKANKSHA SINGH TO PLAY DON-TURNED POLITICIAN'S WIFE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Aakanksha Singh will be seen portraying the character of Hena Shahab, the wife of convicted gangster-turned-politician Mohammad Shahabuddin in the upcoming web series.

According to a source close to the development, the actress is currently shooting in Lucknow for the same and the role is something very different from anything that Aakanksha has ever had before. "The story and her character is inspired by Hena Shahab, the wife of gangster-turned-politician Mohammad Shahabuddin, and the actress is leaving no stone unturned to nail her part," the source informs. "She is doing extensive research at her end by reading everything there is about Hena and is also watching her interviews and seeing videos available on her. Aakanksha still has a few days of shoot left in Lucknow but she is really thrilled about this revolutionary part," the source further added. Aakanksha will next be seen in Ajay Devgn-starrer 'Runway 34', which also features Amitabh Bachchan and Rakul Preet Singh.



Aishwarya Dutta's prayer on Insta wins the appreciation of fans

Team Absolute | Chennai

A prayer posted by actress Aishwarya Dutta on Instagram is winning her appreciation from fans and followers.

The actress, who has been a part of critically acclaimed films like 'Tamizhukku En Ondrai Azhuthavum',

said: "A journey of so many days. A journey of so many years. A journey of my hard work. A journey of my success."

A journey of my memories. A journey of mine from a different city. A journey of my transformation. A journey of transforming from every bad to good.

"Thank you God for everything. Thank you for holding my hands and

never letting me go off. Thank you God for giving me all the strength to rise, to wake up every day with a new hope. Thank you God for being my parent."

The actress, who shot to fame after her participation in the television reality show Tamil Bigg Boss, ended as the runner up in the second season of the show.



HRITHIK ROSHAN IS DATING SABA AZAD

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Hrithik Roshan and Sussanne Khan parted ways a couple of years ago. The ex-couple continues to co-parent their kids, Hrehaan and Hridhaan. Quite obviously, there's an interest in their dating life. Recently, photos of Hrithik with actress Saba Azad surfaced on social media.

People started speculating if the actor had moved on in his life. It was being reported that Hrithik is dating actress Saba Azad. However, the story behind their alleged dinner date is different. Spilling the beans about Hrithik's equation with Saba, a source exclusively informed IndiaToday.in, "Hrithik Roshan and Saba first met each other through a common friend, who is into Indie music. After their first meet-

ing, Hrithik and Saba stayed in touch and met recently for dinner. The duo discussed their work over dinner." For the uninitiated, Saba has acted in a couple of movies and she is a musician as well. The actress was last seen in the Netflix series Feels Like Ishq. She made her acting debut in 2008 with Dil Kabaddi. Saba will be seen next in Rocket Boys.

Hrithik Roshan has exciting projects lined up. He will be

sharing screen space with Deepika Padukone in Fighter. They have collaborated for the first time and fans are excited to see the duo perform together in Siddharth Anand's movie. The actor also has the Hindi remake of Vikram Vedha with Saif Ali Khan in the pipeline. Hrithik has already started shooting for the film, which featured R Madhavan and Vijay Sethupathi in the original version.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY


Urveshi Rautela