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CHINA DOESN'T WANT UNIPOLAR ASIA, RESPECTS INDIA'S ROLE IN REGION: WANG YI

Melting Ice!

Team Absolute | New Delhi

China does not want unipolar Asia and respects India's traditional role in the region, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told National Security Advisor Ajit Doval during their meeting in Delhi, according to the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

Wang conveyed to Doval that China is open to 'plus one' projects in South Asia, and both countries should cooperate multilaterally, the Chinese Foreign Ministry stated.

Wang is in Delhi for two days. He landed in the national capital on Thursday evening.

China and India have a thousand-year history of cultural exchanges, and friendly cooperation has always been the mainstream, Wang said.

The realisation of national rejuvenation between China and India will have a significant and far-reaching impact on Asia and the world at large, the Minister said.

"Both sides should adhere to the strategic judgment of the leaders of the two countries that 'China and India do not pose a threat to each other, but provide opportunities for each other's development', place differences on the border issue in the proper position of bilateral relations, and adhere to the correct development direction of bilateral relations," Wang said during the meeting with Doval, and extended invitation to him to visit China.

Replying to the invitation, Doval said he could visit after immediate issues are resolved successfully, sources said.

India and China have been engaged in border disputes for the last two years in Eastern Ladakh.

Doval discussed the need to take forward early and complete disengagement in remaining areas and remove impediments to allow the bilateral relationship to take its natural course.

He also conveyed to Wang that restoration of peace and tranquility will help build mutual trust and create enabling environment for progress in relations

The Chinese foreign minister met the National Security Advisor at his office here in the South Block.

It is the first high-level Chinese visit to India in over two years of border dispute between the two countries in Eastern Ladakh. So far, 15 rounds of military talks have taken place between both countries to resolve the issue.

COULD VISIT CHINA AFTER BORDER DISPUTE RESOLVED: NSA DOVAL

New Delhi: In response to Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's invite to visit Beijing, National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval said on Friday that he could embark on a trip to the neighbouring nation after the border issues were resolved, according to sources. Earlier on Friday, Wang met Doval in the latter's office in South Block.

BORDER DISENGAGEMENT HAPPENING AT SLOWER PACE: JAISHANKAR TELLS WANG

New Delhi: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on Friday that during his meeting with visiting Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, he told the latter that the disengagement of troops at the LAC in Eastern Ladakh is a "work in progress", but is happening at a "slower pace" than desired.

Addressing the media after the meeting, Jaishankar said: "My talks with Foreign Minister Wang Yi have just concluded. We met for about three hours and addressed a broad and substantive agenda in an open and candid manner. We discussed our bilateral relations that have been disturbed as a result of Chinese actions in April 2020.

"So long as there are very large deployments, the border situation is not normal. We still have ongoing friction areas and have made progress in resolving some friction areas, including Pangong Tso. Our discussion today was how to take this forward. There have been 15 rounds of talks.

"If you ask me if our relationship today is normal, then my answer is no, it is not normal. Our effort today is to sort out the issue in its entirety."

Calcutta HC orders CBI probe into Birbhum violence

The court said: "The CBI will not only be handed over the case papers but also the accused and suspects who were arrested in the matter and in custody. Hence, we direct the CBI to forthwith take over the investigation in the case and submit the progress report before us on the next date of hearing." According to the judges, the incident has "shaken the conscience of the society" and has "a nationwide ramification".

Team Absolute | Kolkata

The division bench of Calcutta High Court on Friday ordered a CBI probe into the Rampurhat carnage in West Bengal's Birbhum district where ten people including six women and two children were burnt to death following the murder of a Trinamool gram panchayat leader.

The court in its order said that the probe was ordered in the "interest of justice", "fair investigation" and to "instill confidence in the society". The state government will not be carrying out any further investigation on the matter, and the CBI will have to submit a progress report before the court on April 7.

The Division Bench comprising Chief Justice Prakash Shrivastava and Justice Rajarshi Bharadwaj observed: "...We are of the opinion that facts and circumstances of the case demand that in the interest of justice and to instill confidence in the society and to have fair investigation to dig out the truth it is necessary to hand over the investigation to the CBI. Accordingly, we direct the state government to forthwith hand over the investigation of the case to CBI."Ten people, including two children, were charred to death as nearly a dozen houses were set ablaze in Bogtui in Birbhum's Rampurhat block early Tuesday in a suspected fallout over the murder of a Trinamool Congress (TMC) deputy panchayat pradhan Bhadu Sheikh. The SIT has so far arrested 22 people, including the TMC's Rampurhat I block president Anarul Hossain.

Petrol, diesel prices raised again

Team Absolute | New Delhi

State-owned oil marketing companies (OMC) on Friday raised petrol and diesel prices for the third time this week.

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

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

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

As per pump prices, petrol now costs Rs 97.01 per litre and diesel Rs 88.27 per litre in the national capital.

On Wednesday, petrol prices were increased to Rs 97.81 per litre and diesel Rs 89.07 per litre in Delhi.

In the financial capital Mumbai, prices were hiked to Rs 112.51 per litre for petrol and diesel to Rs 96.70 per litre.

Besides, the prices of both the transport fuels were raised in Kolkata. The petrol prices rose to Rs 107.18 and diesel to Rs 92.22 per litre.

In Chennai too, they were increased. Petrol there now costs Rs 103.67, while diesel is Rs 93.71 per litre.

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

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

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

It was widely expected that the OMCs will revise the current prices due to high crude oil cost.The crude oil price range is a cause of concern for India as it may ultimately add Rs 15-Rs 25 in petrol and diesel selling prices.

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

405 POSTS OF HIGH COURT JUDGES VACANT ACROSS THE COUNTRY

New Delhi: Out of the sanctioned strength of 1,104 judges in high courts across the country, there are 699 judges, while 405 posts are vacant, the Parliament was told on Friday.

"Against 405 vacancies, at present, 175 proposals are at various stages of processing between the government and the Supreme Court Collegium. Further recommendations from High Court Collegiums are yet to be received in respect of 230 vacancies in high courts," Law Minister Kiren Rijuju told the Lok Sabha in a reply to a question.

He said that filling up vacancies in the high courts is a continuous, integrated and collaborative process between the executive and the judiciary.

HEALTH RESEARCH BUDGET INSUFFICIENT TO MEET EXISTING, FUTURE CHALLENGES: PARLIAMENTARY PANEL

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare in its report has said that the increase in the health research budget year on year is very meagre and is not commensurate with the tasks DHR-ICMR are entrusted to deal with. The allocated budget is grossly insufficient to meet the existing and future healthcare challenges, said the Committee.

"The Committee feels that higher budgetary allocation for health research will result in more research based findings which in turn would help in devising more informed affordable and practical plans, methodologies for diagnosis and treatment of both communicable and non-communicable diseases. Higher allocation for health research would also make the country better prepared for tackling any future outbreaks and health exigencies" said the committee in its report which was tabled in Parliament on Thursday.

The Committee has also recommended considering global standards with respect to investment in health research adding that the Government must invest at least 0.1 per cent of the GDP in the next five years.

Teen's body with slit throat found; minor held

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi Police has apprehended a 17-year-old teenager, in connection with the case of murder of a minor boy whose body was recovered from the national capital's Mangolpuri area on Friday morning, an official said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Sameer Sharma said a 17-year-old boy's body, stuffed inside a travel bag, was found earlier in the day in Mangolpuri.

According to the official, a PCR call was received around 7 a.m. at Mangolpuri police station after which the a police team immediately rushed to the spot near Peer Baba Mazar main road.

According to sources, a civil defence volunteer was the first to spot the bag. A foot of the deceased was visible as well.

"As the police reached the spot, they found a traveller bag in which an unknown body of male, with throat slit injuries, was stuffed," the police officer said, adding the teen was wearing a white kurta pyjama.

The police then registered a case under section 302 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and initiated an investigation.

"Several teams were formed for the identification of the deceased, for checking the CCTV footage of the adjoining areas and for developing intelligence with regard to this incident," the DCP said, after which the deceased was identified.

The 17-year-old went missing on Thursday night following which a complaint was lodged at the south Rohini police station.

"An FIR was found already registered under section 363 (punishment for kidnapping) of the IPC," said the official.

Several police teams were formed to investigate the case.

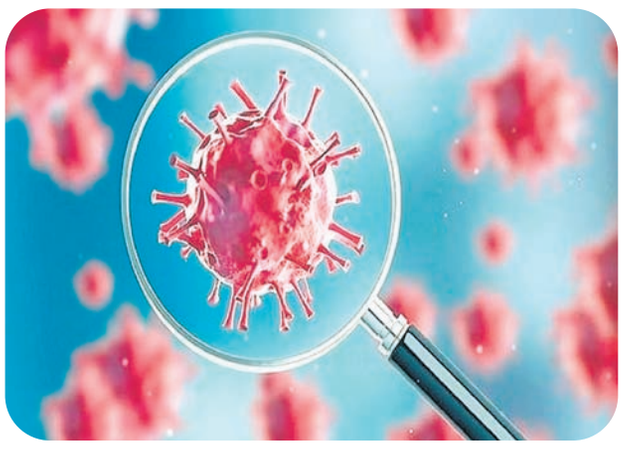
"The call detail records of the concerned persons were obtained and analysed. After getting some leads about a person, an extensive search was carried out and the accused juvenile (a resident of Sector 2, Rohini) was apprehended," Sharma said.

The police are yet to speak on details about the motive of the murder.

Further probe is underway.

BA.2 dominant around globe, behind Covid surges in Asia, Europe: WHO

- **THE WHO REPORTED THAT THE BA.2 IS DRIVING A FRESH SURGE OF CORONAVIRUS CASES IN MANY COUNTRIES INCLUDING THE UK, THE US, CHINA, HONG KONG, SOUTH KOREA, AMONG OTHERS.**
- **DURING THE SAME PERIOD, BA.I.I REPRESENTED ABOUT 9 PER CENT, BA.I ABOUT 5 PER CENT AND BA.3 LESS THAN I PER CENT.**
- **BA.2 IS ALREADY DOMINANT IN THE WHO'S AMERICAS REGION AND ITS SHARE OF CASES HAS BEEN STEADILY INCREASING IN SEVERAL COUNTRIES OF AFRICA, ASIA, EUROPE, AND THE MIDDLE EAST SINCE THE END OF 2021, THE AGENCY SAID.**
- **SCIENTISTS SUSPECT THAT BA.2'S RAPID GROWTH IS THANKS TO ITS UNIQUE MUTATIONS. IN THE GENE FOR THE SPIKE PROTEIN ON THE SURFACE OF THE VIRUS, BA.2 HAS EIGHT MUTATIONS NOT FOUND IN BA.I, THE NEW YORK TIMES REPORTED.**
- **ALTHOUGH BA.2 HAS BECOME THE LATEST SUBVARIANT ON MANY PEOPLE'S MINDS, THERE ARE ALSO THREE SO-CALLED RECOMBINANT VARIANTS THAT THE WHO HAS DEEMED NOTEWORTHY. ONE OF THESE VARIANTS, NICKNAMED "DELTACRON," WAS DISCOVERED IN FEBRUARY BUT HAD NOT BEEN OFFICIALLY NAMED.**



GENEVA | Agencies

Even as countries are increasingly lowering their guard on Covid norms, the BA.2 sub-variant also referred to as "stealth" Omicron, has emerged as the dominant strain around the world, the World Health Organisation has said.

Globally, BA.2 made up about 86 per cent of cases reported as updated on the open access database GISAID between February 16 and March 17, the agency said in a report this week.

In the US, about a third of new coronavirus cases are BA.2, Dr Rochelle Walensky, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said at a White House briefing on Wednesday.

US health officials, including the top infectious disease expert Dr. Anthony Fauci, expect the US to soon see an uptick in cases due to the BA.2 subvariant of Omicron.

Even though Omicron has shown immunity escaping properties, the existing Covid vaccines have proved effective.

The agency now said that it had named the three variants - two versions of Deltacron and one that combined BA.1 and BA.2 - XD, XE and XF. There was no evidence that these recombinant variants are more transmissible or cause "more severe outcomes," the report said.

YOGI SWORN IN FOR 2ND TERM; UP GOVT GETS A NEW COMPLEXION

LUCKNOW | Agencies

Yogi Adityanath was sworn in as the 33rd chief minister of Uttar Pradesh on Friday in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union ministers and a galaxy of chief ministers.

Adityanath was administered the oath of office by Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel at the Ekana stadium here, with over 75,000 people from different walks of life, cheering him on.

Two deputy chief ministers were also sworn in along with the chief minister. They include Keshav Maurya -- who recently lost the election, and Brajesh Pathak.

Deputy chief minister Dinesh Sharma in the previous government, has been dropped this time. Sources said that he would now be given an organisational post.

The new ministry sworn in on Friday includes 52 ministers, including 18 in cabinet rank, and the government now has a new complexion.

Five women ministers have been included. They are -- Baby Rani Maurya, Gulab Devi, Pratibha Shukla, Rajni Tiwari and Vijay Laxmi Gautam.

Uttar Pradesh Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president Swatantra Dev Singh has been inducted into the ministry while some senior leaders including Shrikant Sharma, Siddhartha Nath Singh, Ashutosh Tandon, Mahendra Singh, Jai Pratap Singh, Satish Mahana and Mohsin Raza have been dropped.

A much-awaited inclusion was that of former IAS officer Arvind Sharma who had quit his job in the PMO last year and was made MLC in Uttar Pradesh.

Asheesh Patel of Apna Dal and Sanjay Nishad of Nishad Party have also found a berth in the council of ministers as cabinet ministers.

Daya Shankar Singh, husband of former minister Swati Singh, has also been made minister of state.

Former IPS officer Aseem Arun, who quit his job in January to join politics, has also been made minister.However, former ED official Rajeshwar Singh, who won the election after quitting his job, has not been made minister.

Among the surprise omissions in the government formation are rebel Congress MLA Aditi Singh who had contested the elections on a BJP ticket from Rae Bareli.

Aparna Yadav, younger daughter-in-law of Mulayam Singh Yadav, who was also tipped to become a minister, was not on the list.

SC reserves verdict on plea for enhancing Sidhu's sentence in 1988 road rage case

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday reserved its verdict on a review petition seeking a direction to enhance the sentence of Congress' former Punjab unit chief Navjot Singh Sidhu in the 1988 road rage case, where he was let off with a mere Rs 1,000 fine.

Senior advocate A.M. Singhvi, representing Sidhu, submitted before a bench headed by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar that sentence was a discretion of court and no interference, could be done, except in cases of death penalty, given in rarest of the rare cases, and in the present case, there is no need to have a relook at the 2018 judgment.

"Appeal on adequacy of sentence should not be entertained. The state is not in appeal against the sentence and the victim cannot challenge the adequacy," he submitted.

He further added that there has been no allegation of lack of cooperation on the part of his client.

The bench, also comprising Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul, noted that the issue before it is only whether despite the court having issued limited notice on point of sentence, the provision under which sentence has been imposed needs to be looked at. "Whether the sentence which was restricted to fine needs to be enhanced with the actual sentence also?" it said.

Pointing to the 34-year-old incident, Singhvi said it is an extraordinary case which does not merit consideration.

The bench reserved the judgment after hearing detailed arguments in the matter. The plea was filed by the kin of the deceased, Gurnam Singh seeking a relook on the 2018 judgment.

Senior advocate Sidharth Luthra, representing the victim's family, submitted the death due to cardiac arrest is not correct, and a blow was delivered on the victim. Singhvi vehemently argued that it is extremely doubtful that an injury, caused by a fist blow, could have led to the death. Luthra argued that the 2018 judgment failed to consider the previous decision in the case of Richhpal Singh Meena vs Ghasi (2014). He added that, in this case, the top court was of the view that when there is death of a human being, it may either be culpable homicide (amounting or not amounting to murder) or not culpable homicide.

Punjab CM receives complaint on corruption helpline

CHANDIGARH | Agencies

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Friday said he has received a complaint on the newly-launched anti-corruption helpline.

In a tweet, he said: "I received a complaint on our anti-corruption action helpline. Directed the authorities for immediate investigation, those caught asking for bribes will face severe consequences. Corruption won't be tolerated in Punjab now."

The anti-bribery helpline 9501 200 200 has received around 20,000 complaints so far. However, a majority of these do not have an audio or video proof to support their claim.

Asking strong cognizance of the complaints received on the helpline number, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government has issued orders to register a case against a clerk of tehsil office in Jalandhar.

AAP spokesperson Malwinder Singh Kang and state Joint Secretary Sunny Ahluwalia told the media the government is continuously taking public-friendly decisions and the Chief Minister on Friday making a big change in the formula of pension to the MLAs, announced 'one MLA, one pension' to cut down multiple pensions of MLAs.

Bihar Panchayat official faces probe over 'liquor party' in office

PATNA | Agencies

The Patna district administration has launched an enquiry against the Secretary of a Panchayat for allegedly organising a liquor party in a government office, an official said on Friday.

Block Development Officer, Bihta, Vishal Anand, has written a letter to the Panchayati Raj Ministry for action against accused Panchayat Secretary Bhim Kumar.

"A video of a Panchayat secretary surfaced before district administration on Friday where he was consuming liquor and a semi-nude girl was also present there. Based on this video, we have written a complaint to the Panchayati Raj Ministry to investigate this matter and take action against the accused.

"The district administration has also initiated a separate inquiry into the matter. We will take legal action based on the investigation report," Anand said.

As per the video uploaded on social media, and not authenticated by IANS, Bhim Kumar is seen consuming liquor along with other people including a girl in a semi-nude position at his office-cum-residence, allocated to him by the state government.Meanwhile, Bhim Kumar claimed that the video was doctored and someone is trying to malign his image. He said that he was never involved in organising a liquor party in his office or any other place.

In another incident, Excise Department officials arrested a CEO of a software company for procuring liquor."We have conducted a raid at flat number 505 of Mundeshwari apartment located at Rajiv Nagar locality and arrested a person named Abhishek Kumar in a drunken stage on Thursday night. We have also recovered a liquor bottle from the flat," Assistant Commissioner Kishore Kumar Shah said.

INX media case: Delhi HC notice to Chidambaram, son on ED plea against trial court order

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Friday issued notice to former Union Minister P Chidambaram, his son Karti Chidambaram and others on a petition filed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) against an earlier trial court order which permitted them to access copies of unrelied documents related to the INX money laundering case.

Issuing notice in the matter, a bench of Justice Yogesh Khanna slated the matter for further hearing on April 20.

Earlier on January 25, 2020, a Special Judge of Rouse Avenue Courts passed an order allowing Chidambarams to check the copies of all the unrelied documents from 'Malkhana' -- the room to store case-related materials in court.

The Delhi High Court had, on November 10,2021, rejected a similar petition filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) challenging the trial court order.The CBI has approached the High court opposing the inspection of documents by the accused persons on the grounds that allowing them inside the 'Malkhana' may lead to the tampering of evidence in the ongoing high-profile money laundering case.

As per the probe agency, while the accused had a right to a fair trial, the collective interest of society cannot impinge. On March 14, the Delhi High Court's Justice Chandra Dhari Singh had recused himself from hearing the ED's plea challenging an order that allowed accused persons in INX Media Pvt Ltd, including Chidambarams, to inspect the documents seized during the investigation. In another case related to Chidambarams, on March 23, a Delhi Court had granted them regular bail in a case alleging irregularities in the grant of Foreign Investment Promotion Board approval in the Aircel-Maxis deal, filed against them by the CBI and the ED.

WOMAN GANG-RAPED IN DELHI'S GHAZIPUR

New Delhi: A 36-year-old woman was allegedly raped by two men in east Delhi and is currently undergoing treatment in a hospital, police said on Friday.

According to a police official, the incident took place on Wednesday in the Ghazipur area and came to light the next day when a PCR call about presence of some "unclaimed person" was received.

Based on the victim's statement, a case under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code was registered by the police.

"The victim has now been shifted to Safdarjung Hospital for better medical treatment," said the official, adding her condition is now said to be stable.Police has formed five teams to nab the accused at the earliest.

Female CISF constable suspended for strip-searching elderly woman

GUWAHATI | Agencies

A Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) female constable was suspended after a complaint that a wheel-chair bound elderly woman passenger, who had undergone a hip implant, was reportedly strip-searched at the Guwahati international airport during a security check, officials said on Friday.

According to CISF sources, the woman constable has been suspended and an inquiry into the incident is underway.

On Thursday, taking to Twitter, the daughter of the 80-year-old Delhi-bound woman, Dolly Kikon, complained that her disabled mother was made to strip at the CISF security check at the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International (LGBI) Airport here. The security personnel wanted "proof" of her titanium hip implant and forced her to undress, said Dolly.

The CISF also tweeted: "Security and dignity of needy pax (passenger) go hand in hand. CISF has already started enquiry in connection with the unfortunate incident at Guwahati airport. The concerned personnel has been suspended. Deputy Inspector General (DIG) CISF has spoken with the passenger."In another tweet, Dolly said: "Met with Guwahati airport authorities and CISF officials to follow up. The DIG CISF also reached out over the phone. They have assured me that the matter will be taken up. Thank you for promising to look into the case."

As per CISF sources, the woman constable had asked the female passenger to remove the clothing from her lower body as the metal detector beeped indicating metal on her body.

"As the metal detector beeped, the CISF constable requested the woman passenger to undergo thorough checking and show her the hip implant area to confirm the passenger's claim of having undergone a hip implant," a CISF officer said. In October last year, the Adani Guwahati International Airport Limited (AGIAL) had taken over the management, development and operation of the LGBI airport in Guwahati, the second international airport in the northeast after Imphal.

Cargo ship sinks in Bihar's Katihar

A cargo ship carrying 18 trucks sank in the river Ganga in Bihar's Katihar district.

PATNA | Agencies

The incident happened on Thursday night. The ship was on its way from Jharkhand's Sahibganj to Manihari in Katihar district.

Ansar Ali, one of the employees of the cargo ship, managed to swim out from the river after the accident. He said that there were 18 trucks containing stone chips (used as construction material).

"As the trucks were carrying a huge weight, the balance of one of the trucks was lost and it rolled into the Ganga river. Due to that truck, the ship lost its balance and other trucks also rolled into the river. Soon the entire ship overturned and submerged into the river," Ali said.

"I was sitting in one corner of the ramp. When the ship lost its unbalance, I jumped into the water and swam to the bank. A number of passengers including drivers, helpers and employees of the ship were on board. I don't know whether they have survived or not," he added.

Manihari circle officer Rajesh Kumar confirmed the mishap, adding that a rescue operation was currently underway.

However, there was no information on the total number of people who were onboard. Further details were awaited.

500 kg heroin smuggling by Pak through Gujarat, NIA files supplementary chargesheet

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Thursday said it has filed a supplementary chargesheet against an accused in connection with a 500-kg heroin smuggling case by people based in Dubai. The drug was smuggled through Pakistan-India sea route.

Earlier, 10 accused persons have been chargesheeted in the case. The chargesheet was filed before a Special Court in Ahmedabad.

The case was initially registered by the Gujarat Anti-Terrorism Squad in 2018.

The case pertains to a criminal conspiracy hatched by the accused based in Dubai and Pakistan for smuggling and distribution of 500 kg of illegal narcotic heroin from Pakistan to Gujarat through the sea route.

This heroin was brought by Pakistani nationals in a Pakistani fishing vessel and was delivered in the Indian territorial waters near Jakhau Port in Kutch.

The NIA had re-registered the case on July 2, 2020.

The accused Shahid Kasam Surma was a close associate of earlier accused persons -- Arshad Razak Sota and Rafik Adam Sumra -- who have been absconding since committing the crime.

Surma had stored, transported and delivered 495 kg of the 500 kg of drugs received from Pakistan to Amritsar, Punjab, through his associates.

A red corner notice was issued against him by the Interpol. He was later deported from Dubai and arrested in this case.

Gold, asset devaluation pulls India's forex reserve down by $2.597 bn

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Devaluation of gold and other asset classes pulled India's foreign exchange reserves lower by $2.597 billion during the week that ended on March 18.

Reserve Bank of India data showed that India's forex reserves fell to $619.678 billion from $622.275 billion reported for the previous week.The country's forex reserves consist of foreign currency assets (FCAs), gold reserves, SDRs, and the country's reserve position with the IMF. On a weekly basis, FCAs, the largest component of the forex reserves, edged lower by $703 million to $553.656 billion. Similarly, the value of the country's gold reserves decreased by $1.831 billion to $42.011 billion, while the SDR value fell by $62 million to $18.865 billion. On the other hand, the country's reserve position with the IMF remained flat at $5.146 billion.

"India's FX reserves decreased by $2.60 billion to $619.68 billion in the week ending 18th March largely due to valuation effects in gold by $1.8 billion and $0.7 billion in foreign currency," said Sajal Gupta, Head Fx & Rates, Edelweiss.

"The week prior to that, the FX reserves had decreased by $9.65 billion to $622.27 billion."

VIVEK AGNIHOTRI IN BHOPAL, EVADES QUESTION ON 'HOMOSEXUAL' REMARK

'The Kashmir Files' director Vivek Agnihotri arrived in Bhopal on Friday, a day after a viral clip of his triggered a row in which he could be heard saying "Bhopalis are assumed to be homosexuals".

Team Absolute | Bhopal

'The Kashmir Files' director Vivek Agnihotri arrived in Bhopal on Friday, a day after a viral clip of his triggered a row in which he could be heard saying "Bhopalis are assumed to be homosexuals."

In the video clip of an interview to an online channel, the director could be heard saying in Hindi: "I have grown up in Bhopal, but I am not a Bhopali. Because Bhopali has a different connotation. You can ask any Bhopali. I will explain it to you in private. If someone says he is Bhopali, it generally means he is homosexual, a person with 'Nawabi' desires."

Agnihotri arrived in Bhopal on Friday where he planted a sapling with Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan. He also placed a demand before the Chief Minister to set up a 'genocide' museum to showcase the atrocities faced by the Kashmiri pandits.

Chouhan along with Agnihotri later addressed the media, but the director evaded questions on his "homosexual" remark.

Taking a dig at Chouhan and the 'The Kashmir Files' director, Congress spokesperson KK Mishra said, "You (Chouhan) are our pride being the CM, and you also call yourself Bhopali. The comment of Vivek Agnihotri, who is planting saplings with you, has put us to shame, but you are smiling."

Agnihotri is in Bhopal to attend the inaugural ceremony of the three-day Chitra Bharti Film Festival scheduled to be held on Friday evening.

Meanwhile, reacting to Agnihotri's reamrk, Congress Rajya Sabha member and former Madhya Pradesh CM, Digvijaya Singh, tweeted: "Vivek Agnihotri ji, this could be your experience, but not that of the Bhopal citizens. I am also in contact with Bhopal and Bhopalis since 1977, but I never had this experience. Wherever you stay, there's always an influence of the company you keep."

SOME MORE SUSPECTS OF JMB MEMBERS UNDER MP POLICE RADAR

Days after Madhya Pradesh police arrested four 'tech-savvy jihadists' associated with Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), some more suspects are under police radar and are likely to be arrested soon, sources in MP police said.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Days after Madhya Pradesh police arrested four 'tech-savvy jihadists' associated with Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), some more suspects are under police radar and are likely to be arrested soon, sources in MP police said.

On the basis information received following the interrogation of arrested JMB members, several teams of Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) have been in search of some more suspects in different states, including Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

As per the information, six persons have so far been arrested in the case, which is being monitored by National Investigation Agency. According to sources, those who interrogated the six have unearthed crucial information regarding JMB's terror plans.

The first four suspects were arrested on March 13 after a day long search operation by MP police and the Centre agencies was carried out in several locations in Bhopal. Of them, three were arrested from one residential building, while the fourth one was arrested later from a different location.

Those arrested are - Fazhar Ali, Mohammad Aqeel, Zahooruddin, and Fazhar Zainul Abdeen. Three of them are Bangladeshi nationals and one is from Bihar. On March 14, Bhopal district court had remanded them in police custody for 14 days. They have been booked under UAPA and Foreigners Act.

The 14-day police remand of main three suspects will be end on March 27 and by then the some more suspects are likely to arrested, sources in MP police told IANS.

A large amount of jihadi literature, laptops and mobile phones were confiscated from them. Initial investigations suggest that the terror accused were in touch with their handlers, mostly Bangladesh-based, via social media and an app. Their mobile phone call lists have foreign numbers, an officer who is part of the probe team said, a senior police official had told the press on March 13.

Sonia to meet dissident Ajay Singh Rahul

- Congress interim president Sonia Gandhi is likely to meet another set of dissident leaders, including Ajay Singh Rahul the former leader of the Opposition in Madhya Pradesh Assembly.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Congress interim president Sonia Gandhi is likely to meet another set of dissident leaders, including Ajay Singh Rahul the former leader of the Opposition in Madhya Pradesh Assembly.

In 2018, Rahul had lost from his Churhat seat, which he had represented six times.

Apparently, the meeting is the follow-up of her earlier meetings with Ghulam Nabi Azad, Anand Sharma and Manish Tewari.

On March 22, Sonia Gandhi had met senior party leaders Anand Sharma and Manish Tewari to discuss the proposals mooted by the disgruntled G-23 group.

In her efforts to put up a united front, she is reaching out to the party dissidents who have been demanding sweeping reforms.

Azad, who met the party chief on March 18, had said that there was no vacancy currently for the post of President and that nobody has asked her to quit.

Distancing himself from the views of senior party leader and fellow G-23 leader Kapil Sibal on leadership change, Azad had noted that Sonia Gandhi's offer has been rejected by all groups, including the one he belonged to, and "we want her to continue."

MEETING OF GROUP OF MINISTERS HELD

Bhopal: To provide a new structure to the Mukhyamantri Kanya Vivah Yojana, a meeting of the Group of Ministers was held in Mantralaya on Friday. Water Resources Minister Tulsiram Silawat, Agriculture Minister Kamal Patel and Social Justice, Disabled Public Welfare and Animal Husbandry Minister Prem Singh Patel discussed and gave their suggestions in the meeting. Principal Secretary Social Justice Prateek Hajela was present. Silawat informed that various issues were discussed regarding Kanya Daan Yojana, necessary suggestions would also be prepared and presented so that the benefits of the scheme reach every section of the society. According to the goals and intentions of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, the people in the last row of the society should get the benefits of the schemes, for this, suggestions will be presented after discussing all the points.

CM Planted Saplings in the Memory of Kashmiri Pandits The Kashmir Files

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan today planted saplings in the memory of Kashmiri Pandits at Smart Garden. Chouhan planted saplings of Bel, Rudraksha and Shami along with the Director of The Kashmir Files Vivek Agnihotri and the displaced Kashmiris who are residents of Bhopal. The Bel planted today was named as Sharda, Rudraksha as Shiva and Shami as Shyama in the memory of Late Shri Shyama Prasad Mukherjee.

After the plantation, Chief Minister Chouhan while discussing with the media representatives present at Smart Park said that our Kashmiri brothers and sisters were compelled and forced to leave their motherland. Despite this, they have done the work of illuminating the world with their knowledge, they did not lose their courage. I admire their courage. The world has known the pain of Pandit families displaced from Kashmir. In this regard, Vivek Agnihotri has suggested the establishment of a museum and art centre in Madhya Pradesh. The state government will provide space and necessary assistance for this. Agnihotri also interacted with the media representatives. The Shami planted today is considered very beneficial from the point of view of Ayurveda. Also, the use of samidhas of Shami tree in yagyas is considered auspicious. Bel leaf is also called Bilva. Bel leaves are offered to Lord Shiva with reverence. Rudraksha plant is considered a symbol of faith. Garlands of its fruit are also worn. Wearing Rudraksha gives positive energy. Its seeds are mainly used as ornaments and garlands in India and Nepal.

WORKERS OF URBAN AREAS WILL GET OLD AGE PENSION

Bhopal: Urban Development and Housing Minister Bhupendra Singh has informed that the unorganised workers of urban areas will be given the benefit of Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan Yojana. The registration work has been started in the scheme. Shri Singh has said that registration of all eligible workers in the "Azadi Ke Amrit Mahotsav" should be done by conducting a campaign. Under this scheme, the workers of the unorganised sector will get the benefit of pension and social security in old age. Benefits of Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan Yojana can be provided to street vendors, mid-day-meal workers, those who carry loads, brick kiln workers, cobblers, rag pickers, domestic workers, washer men, rickshaw pullers, landless labourers, agricultural workers, construction workers, bidi workers, handloom workers, leather workers, hearing and sight impaired workers, daily wage earners, cleanliness workers, workers employed by outsourced organisations/sanitation workers or workers engaged in similar occupations.

SWEEP 2022 women entrepreneurs learned the tricks of success

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Friday was the second day of International Women Entrepreneur Conference SWEEP - 2022 organized by MAWE. The number of women entrepreneurs who attended the conference and their enthusiasm indicated that this international event is well on its way to success.

Conferences and workshops were also organized on March 25 to learn from experts and network with women entrepreneurs. During this, women entrepreneurs also learned the tricks of success. SWEEP - 2022 organized by MAWE is being organized in collaboration with Ministry of MSME (Government of India), Ministry of MSME (Government of Madhya Pradesh), Madhya Pradesh State Industrial Development Corporation Limited (MPIDC), Madhya Pradesh Tourism and others. The conference is being held at Kushabhau Thackeray Hall (Minto Hall).

On this occasion MAWE President, Archana Bhatnagar said that "Many women entrepreneurs are unable to go to any industrial area, they work from their homes and during this time they also have to face many problems. Keeping this in mind, Over the years, the government was suggested by the entire team for a multi-storey complex under which a commercial complex should be built where about 1000 to 2000 square feet of sales space on each floor can be given to women entrepreneurs.

Through the space, those women entrepreneurs can do manufacturing or start their service offices. That is, many women entrepreneurs can operate their different business in the same complex. Keeping this demand in mind, Sweep- Hon'ble Chief Minister has announced to build the first such complex in Jabalpur in 2022, it is a very commendable step. We are all grateful to the Chief Minister."

CM PAID HOMAGE TO GANESH SHANKAR VIDYARTHI

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan remembered freedom fighter and eminent journalist Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi on his martyrdom day. Chouhan garlanded his portrait in the auditorium at his residence office.

Ganesh Shankar 'Vidyarthi' was born on 26 October 1890 in Allahabad. Vidyarthi was a fearless and impartial journalist, social worker and freedom fighter. His name is eternal in the history of India's freedom movement. Vidyarthi was such a journalist who with the power of his writings made the British rulers lose their sleep in India. He supported and assisted non-violent ideas and revolutionaries alike with his pen and speech. In his short life span, he raised his voice against the cruel system. He was associated with revolutionary papers like 'Karmayogi' and 'Swarajya' and also wrote his articles in them. He was also the editor of "Pratap" newspaper. He had to suffer a lot because of his revolutionary journalism. The British government filed many cases against him, imposed heavy fines and he was arrested several times and also sent to jail. He died on March 25, 1931 in Kanpur.

Vivek Agnihotri proposes:

CM Chouhan to set up Kashmiri Pandit 'genocide' museum

A museum will be set up in Madhya Pradesh to commemorate genocide against the Kashmiri Pandit community, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said on Friday.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A museum will be set up in Madhya Pradesh to commemorate genocide against the Kashmiri Pandit community, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said on Friday.

The proposal to set up the museum came from the director of 'The Kashmir Files', Vivek Agnihotri, who was here on Friday.

Talking to the reporters, Agnihotri said he wants to set up a genocide museum in Bhopal, wherein people will know how Kashmiri Pandits faced the terror onslaught, and despite all the hardships they never took up arms in retribution.

"Kashmiri Pandits never asked their children to hold weapons or hate in their hearts despite facing so many atrocities. They prefer education and that is why all Kashmiri Pandits living in India or anywhere in the world are successful in life," Agnihotri said.

He further added that he has urged Chief Minister Chouhan to set up the museum in Bhopal so that the world knows the reality and takes lessons from it. "MP is a peaceful state and I am proud to belong to Bhopal. My wife is also from Indore," he added.

Responding to him, Chouhan said the Madhya Pradesh government will provide land and other facilities to set up the museum in Bhopal. "I had once visited Kashmir to attend a programme organised by Kashmiri Pandits in 2008. I have felt their pain. I assure you that the MP government will provide full support to set up a genocide museum in Bhopal," Chouhan said.

Vivek Agnihotri arrived in Bhopal on Friday to participate in the inaugural ceremony of the three-day Chitra Bharati Film Festival, which will begin this evening. It is estimated that as many as 120 short films will be screened during this festival. The organisation has received a total 712 short films in 15 languages from 22 states.

Talented students will not be deprived of education due to lack of fund: CM

- CM Chouhan transfers scholarship of Rs 331 crore in the accounts of 2 lakh 40 thousand students with a single click
- CM Conducts virtual dialogue with students
- Students said state government's assistance helped us realize our dreams

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that students who have talent, who are good in studies, will not be deprived of studies due to lack of funds. The state government has initiated various schemes to help such children at every level of education. Sambal Yojana has also been made for this purpose, so that the talented children of our poor families can also fulfil their dream by getting higher education.

Chouhan was interacting virtually with students after transferring Backward Class Post Matric Scholarship of Rs 331 crore in the accounts of two lakh 40 thousand students with a single click. Minister of State for Backward Classes and Minorities Welfare Ram Khelawan Patel, Chief Secretary Iqbal Singh Bains, Principal Secretary Ashok Varnwal and other officers were present. Chief Minister Chouhan interacted virtually with the students of Mandla, Sehore, Ujjain, Dewas and Sidhi. While wishing the students a very happy Holi and Rangpanchami, Chief Minister Chouhan said that success is achieved only by being positive about the future and making efforts with enthusiasm towards their goals. It is true that the income of farmers is not high enough to spend more on education. Children coming from working families are also facing this problem. You work hard, be dedicated towards the goal, the state government will support you. Chief Minister Chouhan said that this year Rs 703 crore will be given as scholarship. The system was affected during the Corona period, but now the students will get the scholarship amount on time.

During a virtual dialogue with Chief Minister Chouhan Sushri Sonika Yadav, a student of economics of Sidhi district who is aspiring to pursue PhD and become a lecturer said that we have been able to study up to this point only because of the state government's schemes. Shubham Vishwakarma, son of Sujan Vishwakarma, a wooden toy maker at Budhni in Sehore district, is pursuing his MBA from the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Kolkata. Their fees of Rs 11 lakh 54 thousand 500 is being paid by the state government. In a conversation with Chief Minister Shubham's father Sujan Vishwakarma said that without the help of the state government, this dream of Shubham would not have come true.

Abhishek Vishwakarma of Dewas, who is pursuing diploma in mechanical engineering informed Chouhan, that his father is a laborer. On the basis of the scholarship received from the state government, he plans to do his BE Pallavi Bairagi of Ujjain is a student of B.Sc. Statistics. She wants to become IAS officer by appearing in UPSC exam. Chouhan told Pallavi that those who work hard with dedication by setting goals, eventually get success. Anjali Yadav hailing from a farmer family of Mandla district is pursuing a nursing course. Chief Minister Chouhan encouraged Anjali to go for this service. He said that the service of the suffering humanity is a big resolve. He told her to serve well and be successful. The Backward Classes and Minorities Welfare Department distributes Post Matric Scholarship to more than six lakh students every year. This scholarship is given to students pursuing undergraduate, postgraduate and technical and vocational courses. The scholarship is released into the individual bank accounts of the students. Students whose parents and guardians' annual income from all sources is less than Rs. 3 lakh are eligible for the scholarship. Also, pre-matric scholarships are distributed to more than 32 lakh children through the School Education Department.

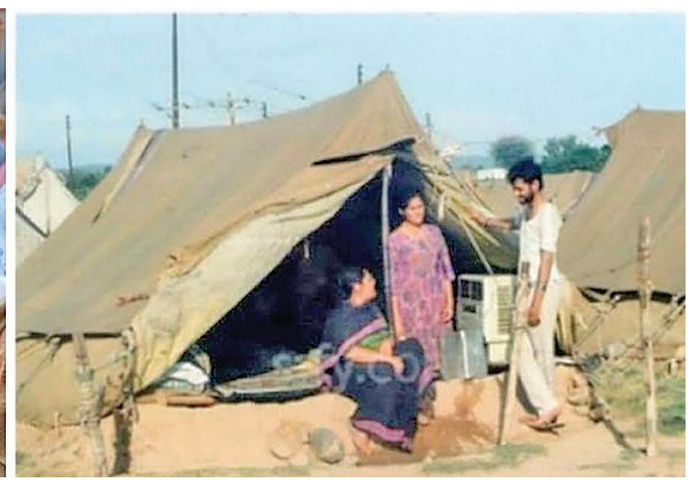
EDITOR'S SPECS

YOGI 2.0 TO FOCUS RELIGIOUS

In its second term, the Yogi Adityanath government will be taking forward its vision to establish Uttar Pradesh as the 'religious tourism hub' of the country. The Yogi Adityanath government has several reforms in store which will provide immense employment opportunities to the people in the state. According to a spokesperson for the state government, concerned authorities have been working for the past five years for developing religious sites and increasing facilities for the devotees. The Yogi government, in its first term itself, gave priority to the development of the religious sector, accelerating the development of places including Ayodhya, Kashi and Mathura. The construction work of Ram temple in Ayodhya is going on in full swing. At the same time, the infrastructure development in Ayodhya is also going on a rapid pace. More than 17 projects worth Rs 138 crore have been completed in Ayodhya. Work is going on a war-footing on 54 projects at a cost of Rs 3,126 crore. The pilgrimage centres falling on the 84 Kosi Parikrama Marg are being developed. The government also plans to develop Ayodhya as a Vedic City under which roads are being constructed for Panchkosi, 14 Kosi and 84 Kosi Parikrama. In these religious places, airports are being constructed, roads are being widened and markets are being organised so that tourism can be facilitated. Varanasi, despite being a big centre of religious faith, could not achieve the position that it should have in terms of tourism due to meagre facilities. Shri Kashi Vishwanath Dham was constructed at a cost of more than Rs 600 crore within five years of the BJP government. Continuing with its policy of promoting religious tourism in the state, the state gave priority to maintaining the purity of the Braj region.

NO HEROES IN KASHMIR,ONLY VILLAINS

Deepika Bhan



The downfall of the administrative and political set up in Kashmir in the late 1980s and early 1990s had a direct bearing on the rise of militancy, which was fully aided and abetted by Pakistan and took a totally communal colour.

Veteran journalist Brij Bhardwaj, who covered Kashmir for over 50 years and is a witness to one of the tumultuous chapters of the state's and nation's history, says: "The continued political bungling by the Centre and state governments gave the space to those elements who always wanted to whip an anti-India wave in Kashmir. In the 1950s and 1960s and a big part of the 1970s, there was a leadership which could take decisions and largely kept the separatist and pro-Pakistan elements in check."

Official patronage of militancy

In the late 1980s when Farooq Abdullah was the Chief Minister in Jammu and Kashmir, and Mufti Mohd Sayeed the Union Home Minister, thousands of people were going to Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) for training.

"Buses were running to LoC, hundreds were crossing over and coming back after getting training. Didn't the Chief Minister know this or what was the Army or BSF doing at the LoC? They are all guilty. That is why I say there was official patronage. Being in Kashmir, and talking to all, whether the locals or leaders or the security officers, I could assess that the system was rotting ... and they were all in it. All those big central officers posted in Kashmir that time made huge fortunes. "So when there is official backing, nothing can prevent the situation from going downhill. And that is what happened in Kashmir. First it was the JKLF, then many other groups cropped up. There was no stopping them and they went full throttle. They resorted to targeted killings of Kashmiri Pandits and attacked those Muslims who were perceived to be pro-India.

"The Kashmiri Pandit community was seen as pro-India. So to make them fall in line, targeted killings were done and an atmosphere of fear was created for them to either join the militant movement or leave or get killed. JKLF had the total support in our Kashmir as well as in PoK But other groups didn't have," Bhardwaj told correspondent.

The veteran journalist says the kidnapping of Rubaiya Sayeed on December 9, 1989, was a real one. "Mufti was the Home Minister and there were inputs that his son would be kidnapped, but no one could have thought the daughter, a girl, would be kidnapped. Farooq Abdullah was against releasing the terrorists, but then they were set free."

No Control

Anti-India elements have always been in Kashmir, but it was the leadership that knew how to control them. In 1947 and 1965, infiltration happened, Pakistani militants entered homes in the valley but the locals did not support them. The locals gave them away, thus blowing up the Pakistan agenda.

In 1965, it was the Gujjars who first gave the information about the infiltrators. "A Gujjar who gave the information to an Army officer was slapped by him, saying 'what you think we are fooling around?' and, then when firing happened in Batmaloo (Srinagar), all hell broke loose. In 1971, the India-Pakistan war happened, but there was no trouble within Kashmir. "In the 1980's this was not so. All had changed because there was no leadership to control the situation. The Rajiv-Farooq accord was there, but there was no trust. There was no political strength, no state administration and the Centre was weak. So things went out of hand," says Bhardwaj.

"Without people like Late P.N. Haksar (former Principal Secretary to then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi) in Delhi, Late D.P. Dhar (former Advisor to Indira Gandhi) and old Kashmir hands like Late Vishnu Sahay (Secretary for Kashmir Affairs in the Ministry of External Affairs and later Union cabinet Secretary in 1958-1960 and 1961-1962), and late Bhagwan Sahai (Jammu and Kashmir Governor May 15, 1966- July 3, 1967), the Centre was clueless about handling the Kashmir issue.

"Then B.K. Nehru in April, 1984 was suddenly recalled after differences arose with Indira Gandhi over the dismissal of the Farooq Abdullah government, and the appointment of G.M. Shah, who led a faction of the NC, as the Chief Minister with support from the Congress without the floor test. Nehru was ousted and Jagmohan was brought in. Farooq Abdullah was miffed. Though he was friends with Rajiv Gandhi, who became the Prime Minister after Indira Gandhi was assassinated, the relations were not smooth. Farooq was dismissed as CM and later brought again and removed again. This political mistrust cost the state and the country a lot. The state had gone weak."

The Exodus

"By 1989, everything was like haywire in the valley. There was no administration. People were getting killed, kidnappings were happening, many Pandit women were abducts, brutally gang-raped and killed, firings ad cross-firings were happening almost every day... The militants had automatic guns, latest pistols. They were fully armed. Thousands of people would gather on the roads chanting 'azadi' and other slogans. Over 70 hardcore terrorists were released. Finally Farooq, before he could be sacked, resigned on January 18, 1990 and later left the country. Jagmohan had taken the charge a second time a day later in Jammu (January 19, 1990- May 26, 1990).

"What happened on January 19, 1990, was unprecedented. The Kashmiri Pandits were targeted and many of the community leaders, professionals and young men and women were brutally killed. This was not an all of a sudden event. There had been a systematic brainwashing of the locals towards the minorities. The Kashmiri Pandits were the most educated community in the state. They had the maximum number of central and state government jobs. So there was a kind of animosity against them. This suited those who were championing the separatist agenda," says Bhardwaj. He, however, said that Jagmohan could have prevented the fleeing of the minorities, if he had taken the decision of getting the police into strong action and the army on the roads immediately. "If the political leadership was strong, this could have been prevented. But the right people were not there at the helm. A whole lot of non Kashmiri Maulvis had been touring the valley and inciting the youth to join the 'jihad'. All these were from different parts of the country. There were intelligence reports. Why were these people allowed to move freely and incite communal passions?

"I was in Kashmir in the mid 1990s on a tour. I was staying in a houseboat in Nagin Lake. The owner told me that a non-Kashmiri Maulvi had asked a group of young boys, including his son, to go to Pakistan. The house boat owner, instead of reprimanding his son which could have proven counter-productive, asked his son to ask the Maulvi to accompany them. But when the boy asked the same to the Maulvi, he detracted and left after a few days. 'I could convince my son and he saw the reason', the house boat owner told me. So, not all Kashmiri Muslims were supporting the so-called 'jihad'. What was needed was strong leadership to control the grave situation and stop the youth from falling down the precipice."For politics, power and greed, Kashmir has been destroyed. Its people have been wrecked. Each Kashmiri has lost someone and the Pandits cannot go back. They have lost their homes and they are suffering because of a weak governance.

"Kashmir is a tragedy where there are no heroes, but everyone has been a villain," signs off the doyen, who saw Kashmir as a child in 1953, as a college student in 1956, as a journalist in 1971 and then as an expert.

international

'At least 300 people killed in Drama Theatre bombing in Mariupol'

London | Agencies

Local officials in the besieged Ukrainian city of Mariupol have said that at least 300 people are known to have been killed in the bombing on March 16 at the Drama Theatre, The Guardian reported.

About 1,300 were believed to have been sheltering in the building, with just 150 survivors having staggered out of the rubble immediately after the attack.

Sources said the bulk of those in the theatre had been hiding from the shelling under the stage and that rubble was blocking their exit.

There are no emergency services operating in Mariupol and the intense fighting and shelling near the theatre has prevented rescue attempts. The theatre was bombed by plane despite the word 'children' having been painted on the ground in white, The Guardian reported.

In a statement on Friday morning, a spokesman for the city council said they were able to share a new death toll from the tragedy.

The statement said: "Unfortunately, we start this day with bad news. From eyewitnesses, information appears that about 300 people died in the Drama Theatre of Mariupol as a result of the bombardment by a Russian aircraft. Until the last, I do not want to believe in this horror. Until the last, I want to believe that everyone managed to escape. But the words of those who were inside the building at the time of this terrorist act say otherwise.

"The Drama Theatre in the heart of Mariupol has always been the hallmark of the city. A place of meetings, dates, a point of reference. 'Where are you? I'm on Drama'. How many times have we heard or said this phrase: 'On the Drama'.

"Now there is no more Drama. In its place, a new point of pain for Mariupol residents appeared, ruins that became the last refuge for hundreds of innocent people."

RUSSIAN GENERAL BRANDED AS 'BUTCHER OF MARIUPOL' HAD ALSO DEVISED SIEGE OF ALEPPO

London | Agencies

The Russian general dubbed as the 'Butcher of Mariupol' has been heard berating a junior officer for not cutting off the ears of a private who had been caught not wearing his uniform properly, according to a chilling intercepted phone call, Daily Mail reported.

Colonel-General Mikhail Mizintsev, who is overseeing the siege of the Ukrainian city of Mariupol, appeared to call for the private to have his "face messed up" and called for others to beat him with a bottle after he wore the wrong uniform.

Olexander Scherba, Ukraine's ex-Austrian Ambassador, this week branded Mizintsev as the 'Butcher of Mariupol', while Oleksandra Matviichuk, head of Ukraine's Centre for Civil Liberties, called on him to face war crime charges.

And it would not be the first time he has given such grim commands. In his role as defence chief, Mizintsev was also likely to have helped devise Russia's military strategy in Syria including the bloody siege of Aleppo, which has chilling parallels with the horror being inflicted in Mariupol, Daily Mail reported.

In the audio clip, Mizintsev berated the junior officer for not disciplining the soldier and asked why the private was not "limping by now", the report said.

"Look at that scum standing there, frowning with his bovine eyes, showing me his unhappy face, his stinking mug," Mizintsev can he heard saying in the audio shared by Scherba, Daily Mail reported.

"Why is he still serving? And why should I have to waste my time with your scum? If you're the head of a unit, then step up to the plate. "Why is his face not mutilated yet? Why hasn't anyone cut off his ears? Why isn't this moron limping yet," Mizintsev can be heard saying. The release of the audio clip comes as Mizintsev was identified as the commander overseeing the operation in Mariupol, which has deprived the city of food, water and power for a month during merciless bombardments that killed thousands of civilians, the report said.

Yoon urges Xi to cooperate closely for N.Korean denuclearization

Seoul | Agencies

South Korean President-elect Yoon Suk-yeol on Friday called on Chinese President Xi Jinping to cooperate closely for North Korea's denuclearization and the stable management of the political situation on the Korean Peninsula.

Yoon made the call during a 25-minute phone conversation with Xi a day after North Korea test-launched an intercontinental ballistic missile for the first time since 2017, reports Yonhap News Agency.

"Regarding North Korea's ICBM-class missile launch yesterday, President-elect Yoon Suk-yeol stressed that the people are greatly concerned over the rapid escalation of tensions on the Korean Peninsula and in the region caused by North Korea's serious provocation," Yoon's spokesperson Kim Eun-hye said. "(Yoon) called for the two countries to cooperate closely to realise the complete denuclearization of North Korea and for the stable management of the political situation on the Korean Peninsula." Yoon and Xi agreed to communicate closely to set up a meeting between them at an early date after the President-elect's inauguration in May, she added.

North Korea earlier confirmed it successfully test-fired a new ICBM, called the Hwasong-17, on Thursday at the direct order of its leader Kim Jong-un, scrapping a self-imposed moratorium on long-range missile testing that had been in place since late 2017. China is North Korea's main ally and economic benefactor, and its cooperation is key to getting Pyongyang to dismantle its missile and nuclear weapons programs.

RUSSIA IS PREPARING TO ATTACK POLAND: ENVOY

Aggression by Russia against Poland or another European Union (EU) country is possible in the near future, said Andrii Deshchytsia, the Ambassador of Kiev in Warsaw.

Warsaw | Agencies

Russia is preparing to attack Poland. Diplomatic missions, including the Russian Embassy in Warsaw, probably have this information. And they are covering their tracks," European Pravda quoted the envoy as saying.

The Ambassador referred to the smoke over the Russian embassy in Warsaw. A similar smoke over the Kiev embassy in Russia was noticed on the eve of the invasion.

"It is clear why they are doing this. If there had been information and documentation that would not have caused Poland any harm, they would not even burn it, even if they had to leave the embassy. But if the documents or archives at the Embassy contain evidence of any subversive activities of Russian diplomats in Poland, this is a serious accusation and a serious argument that can be used later in an international criminal court against Russia," said Deshchytsia. He believes that Russia is now trying to create a pretext for the use of weapons. "Russia needed at least some excuse to invade Ukraine. But in order to enter Poland, which is a member of the EU and NATO, it is necessary to prepare much more seriously. Russia needs to have serious arguments as to why it intends to interfere in Poland's internal life and attack Poland," he said.

The destruction of the Russian Embassy building could be such a reason, European Pravda reported.

"Then, under this pretext, Russia would send spetznaz (special forces) to protect it. During such an operation, there is provocation, a Russian soldier is killed, and then Russia has a reason to send in its troops," Deshchytsia added.

Seoul approves upgrade of missile defence after N Korea's ICBM launch

Seoul | Agencies

South Korea on Friday approved a project to upgrade its key surface-to-air missile interceptors after North Korea test-fired an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) for the first time since 2017, the state arms procurement agency said.

The Defense Project Promotion Committee endorsed the project worth 720 billion won ($591 million) to upgrade the Cheolmae II interceptors from next year through 2029, Yonhap News Agency reported. The project seeks to upgrade the missiles to enable them to intercept both aircraft and ballistic missiles at altitudes below 20 km. The existing interceptors to be upgraded can only shoot down aircraft.

The committee also approved a 690 billion won project to develop and manufacture ship-to-air guided missiles from next year through 2036 and a 230 billion scheme to develop long-range air-to-ground weapons for precision strikes by 2028.

In addition, the committee endorsed a 710 billion won project to purchase foreign-made transport planes by 2026. For this project, the European aircraft maker Airbus' A400M, the Brazilian company Embraer's C390 and the US defence firm Lockheed Martin's C130J are expected to compete.

Thursday's launch was Pyongyang's 12th show of force this year, ending its self-imposed moratorium on nuclear and long-range missile testing. In April 2018, Pyongyang declared a moratorium on nuclear and ICBM tests amid Seoul-brokered diplomacy that led to the first-ever summit between the US and the North in Singapore in June of the same year.

NSEL FRAUD: ED ATTACHES SHIV SENA MLA'S ASSETS WORTH RS 11.35 CR

CONTINUING ITS PROBE INTO THE NATIONAL SPOT EXCHANGE LIMITED SCAM, THE ENFORCEMENT DIRECTORATE (ED) PROVISIONALLY ATTACHED PROPERTIES BELONGING TO SHIV SENA MLA PRATAP SARNAIK WORTH RS 11.35 CRORE IN AN ALLEGED MONEY-LAUNDERING CASE RELATED TO THE NSEL INVESTORS FRAUDS, HERE ON FRIDAY.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Continuing its probe into the National Spot Exchange Limited scam, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) provisionally attached properties belonging to Shiv Sena MLA Pratap Sarnaik worth Rs 11.35 crore in an alleged money-laundering case related to the NSEL investors frauds, here on Friday. Commenting on the developments, Sarnaik said he would soon move the court to clarify his position in the matter and would fully cooperate with the ED as he had done in the past. "This has been going on ever since I moved against (actress) Kangana Ranaut and journalist Arnab Goswami last year. I have full faith in the judiciary," Sarnaik told mediapersons.

The ED has slapped attachment on two flats in Hiranandani Complex and a plot of land in Thane, with a combined value of Rs 11.35 crore, under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act in the NSEL fraud related case.

The NSEL has been under the scanner after the Mumbai Police's Economic Offences Wing registered a complaint in September 2013, on the basis of which the ED launched its probe.The case involves NSEL, its directors and top officials, 25 defaulters and others who are accused of hatching a criminal conspiracy to defraud some 15,000 investors. They are charged with luring them to trade on the NSEL platform, creating forged documents, bogus warehouse receipts, fake accounts, and thereby committing a criminal breach of trust cheating the investors of Rs 5,600 crore.

The ED probe unearthed that the investors' monies were diverted by borrowers/trading members of NSEL for other activities like investment into real estate, repayment of outstanding debts and other activities. It also revealed that the Aastha Group, linked with Sarnaik, and consisting one of the defaulting members of NSEL, has a liability of Rs 242.66 crore towards NSEL.

The Aastha Group diverted Rs 21.74 crore of Vihang Aastha Housing Projects LLP during the period 2012-13, out of which Rs. 11.35 crore was transferred to Vihang Enterprises and Vihang Infrastructure Private Limited, both firms controlled by Sarnaik and his family, according to the ED.

On the basis of the money trail, scrutiny and identification, the ED has provisionally attached Sarnaik's assets. The remaining amount of Rs 10.50 crore originating from Aastha Group was paid to one Yogesh Deshmukh, attached under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA) and confirmed by the PMLA Adjudicating Authority.

Raut alleges Central agencies-BJP nexus, says after Maharashtra and Bengal, it's Tamil Nadu's turn

FORMER MAHARASHTRA CM AND LEADER OF OPPOSITION DEVENDRA FADNAVIS EARLIER THIS MONTH HAD HANDED OVER A PEN DRIVE TO MAHARASHTRA SPEAKER AND SAID THAT IF HE DOES NOT TAKE ACTION, THE OPPOSITION WILL GO TO COURT AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT. HE HAD STATED THAT A 125-HOUR VIDEO IN THE PEN DRIVE SHOWED A SPECIAL PUBLIC PROSECUTOR CONSPIRING TO TRAP THE OPPOSITION LEADERS IN MCOCA AND OTHER SUCH CASES.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut on Friday alleged that there is a nexus between the Central agencies and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and claimed after Maharashtra and West Bengal, they will target the Tamil Nadu government.

Accusing the Central agencies of targetting the governments in the non-BJP ruled states, the Shiv Sena leader said, "What's this pendrive (on BJP's Fadnavis giving pendrive to Maharashtra Speaker), new pendrive is surfacing every day...Is there a factory of it?""There's a nexus of Central agencies and BJP...Same is happening in West Bengal, soon it'll happen in Tamil Nadu as well," he added.

Earlier on March 8, former Maharashtra CM and Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnavis alleged that the special public prosecutor of the state government has been planning a conspiracy against BJP leaders in Maharashtra.

He had also handed over a pen drive with 125 hours of video recording to the Assembly Speaker and demanded a CBI probe into the matter.

"What is going on in the state if SPP (special public prosecutor) of state government plans a conspiracy against us? All these things have happened, I have videos. Who will investigate this? I request you (Speaker) that this must be investigated by CBI," Fadnavis had said in the Maharashtra Assembly.

Raut had on Thursday alleged that the governors and Enforcement Directorate (ED) are harassing only the state governments of Maharashtra and West Bengal."Governors are targeting state governments in Maharashtra and West Bengal only. Other states also have governors and ED offices, but they are not targeting BJP-ruled states," he had said.

MLC resolution condemns Karnataka CM

Maharashtra Legislative Council passes resolution condemning Karnataka CM for his statements on Maharashtra-Karnataka border

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra Legislative Council on Friday unanimously passed a resolution condemning Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai for his statements on the issue.Bommai reportedly stated that the border dispute between the two states no longer exists.

The issue was raised by Shiv Sena, who also told the House that Bommai had reportedly said regions like Akkalkot and Solapur were given to Maharashtra, and, thus, Belgaum, Karwar and neighbouring regions were given to Karnataka.

Council Chairman Ramraje Naik-Nimbalkar said, "I move a proposal to condemn the comments of the Karnataka government and its chief minister Basavraj Bommai.

There is a case going on in the Supreme Court over the border dispute between Maharashtra and Karnataka and he should not have made remarks that would influence the case."

BIG CATCH: NOIDA BUILDER HELD IN NASHIK FOR RS 1,000 CR FRAUD

Delhi Police have arrested a notorious land mafia and interstate cheater from Maharashtra's Nashik, for duping people of Rs 1,000 crore on the pretext of allotting flats in Uttar Pradesh's Noida, a senior police official said on Friday.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi Police have arrested a notorious land mafia and interstate cheater from Maharashtra's Nashik, for duping people of Rs 1,000 crore on the pretext of allotting flats in Uttar Pradesh's Noida, a senior police official said on Friday.

The accused, identified as Piyush Tiwari (42) alias Puneet Bhardwaj was also declared a proclaimed offender in 2018 in the cheating cases and a reward of Rs 50,000 was also declared against him.

Furnishing details, Deputy Commissioner of Police Sagar Singh Kalsi said on March 20, an information was received through sources that one proclaimed offender, namely Piyush Tiwari, who was carrying a reward of Rs 50,000 was residing somewhere in Nashik, Maharashtra.

Acting on the information, a police team was constituted which further developed the information and found that the accused was residing in Nashik and was in the foodchain business. The team conducted a raid and apprehended the accused.

During interrogation, he disclosed that he had started his business as a builder in 2011 and created eight companies along with 15-20 shell companies till 2018. In 2016, an income tax raid was conducted at his house and about Rs 120 crore was seized, the official said."After this, accused Piyush's business as a builder collapsed and in order to stand in the market, he started cheating people on the pretext of selling one flat to multiple buyers," the DCP said.

As several cases were registered against the accused in this regard, he fled from Delhi and shifted his base to South India on a fake name and entered into various businesses.

The accused has been arrested under sections 406 (Punishment for criminal breach of trust), 409 (Criminal breach of trust by public servant, or by banker, merchant or agent), 420 (Cheating and dishonestly inducing delivery of property), 120B (Punishment of criminal conspiracy) and further probe is on, the official added.

MUMBAI'S BDD CHAWLS NAMED AFTER RAJIV GANDHI, BALASAHEB AND PAWAR

The Maharashtra government on Thursday said it has renamed the century-old clusters of eyesore matchbox tenements, commonly known as 'British Development Department' (BDD) chawls, after three prominent leaders.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra government on Thursday said it has renamed the century-old clusters of eyesore matchbox tenements, commonly known as 'British Development Department' (BDD) chawls, after three prominent leaders.

While the BDD Chawl in Worli has been named after the Shiv Sena founder as 'Balasaheb Thackeray Nagar', the cluster on N.M. Joshi Marg shall be henceforth known as 'Rajiv Gandhi Nagar', and the third one in Naigaon has been rechristened as 'Sharad Pawar Nagar' after the Nationalist Congress President supremo, said Housing Minister Jitendra Awhad.

The three major erstwhile BDD chawls complexes - where once Mahatma Gandhi spent a night among the Mehtar Samaj (sweepers) in 1937 - are currently undergoing what is billed as Asia's biggest redevelopment project worth Rs 20,000 crore, started in August 2021.

Built between 1921-1924, there are a total of 207 ground-plus-three-storey buildings, each with identical 160-sq.feet 'face-to-face' chawls', a 20-feet wide centre passage, common water supply, bathing and toilet areas, housing around 17,000 families and spread across 93 acres of the most prime chunks of land in south Mumbai.

Awhad said that the work on the complexes is progressing well and all the residents shall get their new homes over the next five years in the upcoming 32 swank towers with 500-sq.feet 2-BHK ultra-modern flats and other top amenities, bringing a sea-change to their lives.

Being built by Tatas, L&T and Shapoorji Pallonji for different projects, the well-planned new complexes will have 40-storied and 22-floor tall towers with floors for parking, wide roads, at least 4 four schools, welfare centres, mini-hospitals, gardens, playgrounds, markets and shopping plazas.

Besides Mahatma Gandhi, a regular visitor there was the Chief Architect of Indian Constitution, Bharat Ratna Dr. B.R. Ambedkar who had planted a 'Peepal' sapling which has now bloomed into a gigantic shady tree.

Months before his assassination (May 1991), the former Prime Minister and Bharat Ratna Rajiv Gandhi - then the Leader of Opposition - was delayed for an evening rally in the Gandhi Maidan here, but finally turned up early the next morning around 3.30 a.m., but the venue was full of enthusiastic, though groggy-eyed people still waiting to hear him out!

The other prominent 'products' of BDD Chawls include the founder of Republican Party of India and ex-Governor of Andhra Pradesh and Bihar (1973-1977) Dr. R. D. Bhandare, legendary test cricketer Ramnath Parker, Ranji Trophy player Sanjay Patil, prominent Dalit activists, former Mumbai Mayor Nandu Satam (1988-199), litterateurs like Bhausaheb Adsul, Vishwasrao Bhosale, 'Samrat' Editor Babban Kamble, et al.

Maharashtra College Principal Alleges "Harassment" Over Hijab, Resigns

In her resignation letter, Battull Hammid, who served as the principal of Viva College of Law in Virar, claimed she was quitting the post as she was feeling uncomfortable and suffocated.

Team Absolute | Palghar

The principal of a law college in Maharashtra's Palghar district has resigned alleging she had been "harassed" by the management for wearing a hijab after a controversy over the head scarf erupted in Karnataka, a charge denied by the institution's administration.

In her resignation letter, Battull Hammid, who served as the principal of Viva College of Law in Virar, claimed she was quitting the post as she was feeling uncomfortable and suffocated. Battull Hammid claimed wearing the hijab had never been an issue before, but it became a matter only after the row in Karnataka.

Battull Hammid has alleged that college management had instructed the other staff members not to cooperate with her and even her personal assistant was not helping her with routine work.

The college management, however, has dismissed the allegations, citing that several students from the Dawoodi Bohra community wore hijab and they had never objected to the same.

It may be recalled that a few months ago two teachers of a school in Bhiwandi in neighbouring Thane district were prevented from coming to work in hijab.

However, the issue was resolved following the intervention of local leaders and elected representatives who spoke to the state education minister and senior police officials.

BJP MLA OPPOSES RENAMING NAIGAON AFTER PAWAR

Mumbai: Earlier, Housing Minister Jitendra Awhad in the legislative assembly had announced that Naigaon will be named on NCP Chief Sharad Pawar's name

A Bhartiya Janata Party(BJP) MLA, Kalidas Kolambkar opposed the proposal of renaming 'Naigaon' to Sharad Pawar's name on Friday.

Earlier, Housing Minister Jitendra Awhad in the legislative assembly had announced that Naigaon will be named on NCP Chief Sharad Pawar's name.

"I respect Sharad Pawar but what I feel is renaming any place in the name of the people who are alive is not right. I oppose the process of renaming Naigaon to Sharad Pawar Nagar" Kolambkar told ANI.He also clarified that he only came to know about the matter after it was announced in the assembly."I know Awhad respects Sharad Pawar because Pawar saheb has made him Minister so he wants to show his affection. However, I will oppose the proposal in the house today as I have the right to do so" concluded Kolambkar

The Maharashtra Assembly Budget session was underway in Mumbai on Thursday where MLA Jitendra Awhad while speaking on Mumbai's issues announced that a 'chawl' in Worli will be renamed 'Balasaheb Thackeray Nagar' after the Shiv Sena founder and the cluster on N.M. Joshi Marg shall be known as Rajiv Gandhi Nagar and Naigaon would be renamed as Sharad Pawar Nagar.

Disha Salian parents' plea to Prez, PM, CM:

NARAYAN RANE & SON ARE 'LIARS', DRIVING US TO SUICIDE

In a shocking development, the aged parents of former Bollywood-linked entrepreneur Disha Salian, have knocked the doors of Rashtrapati Bhavan complaining how Union MSME Minister Narayan Rane and his MLA son Nitesh Rane are "liars" and virtually driving them to suicide.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a shocking development, the aged parents of former Bollywood-linked entrepreneur Disha Salian, have knocked the doors of Rashtrapati Bhavan complaining how Union MSME Minister Narayan Rane and his MLA son Nitesh Rane are "liars" and virtually driving them to suicide.

In a stinging 5-pager, Satish Salian and his wife Vasanti Salian have targeted the Rane father-son duo and some private television channels for running a 'false narrative' on television and social media on their deceased daughter Disha -- who had fallen from a building or committed suicide on June 8, 2020.

Drawing parallels with the Nirbhaya rape-cum-murder case of Delhi a decade ago, the Salians pointed out that till now, that victim's identity has not been revealed, but here "Rane is blatantly taking my daughter's name" repeatedly and saying that she was raped.

Asking "whether the law of the land is not applicable to the Union Minister", the Salians said even after registering a (police) against them, the "liars" Rane duo have not stopped maligning the family's name.

When contacted, the Salian couple said that it has been two days since they wrote to President Ram Nath Kovind, but there has been no response so far. "We have also made the same appeal to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, Bharatiya Janata Party Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnavis and Chief Justice of Bombay High Court, to stop a few politicians from maligning our daughter's name," Salian told IANS.

They pointed out how whenever the Union Minister took their daughter's name, it became national news and wondered how should the police deal with the case against "rich and powerful politicians like Rane", and what could the common citizens do to stop these people.

Urging for sensitising the judiciary on such issues instead of taking side of powerful politicians who are accused in such cases, they referred to the Sessions Court Judge's observation in the Ranes' bail order that the "investigation machinery is not expected to act as a tool in the hands of the government" but how it is acting in an unprecedented manner in dealing with the alleged crime. They recalled how after four hours of questioning by the investigators, Rane came out and claimed that he called up the Union Home Minister after which he was allowed to step out from the Malwani Police Station."If this is true, then on whom can we trust to get justice... when our dignity is assaulted by such unscrupulous elements...," the Salians said.

On top of that, after securing anticipatory bail, Nitesh Rane termed it as a 'historic' win' and promised to get justice for Disha Salian.

"Who are they to get justice for our daughter? Such statements and allegations are making us disgusted and frustrated," said the Salians, reiterating that "the Mumbai Police found no foul play with respect to (Disha), her fiance and friends" that fateful night.Challenging the Ranes' claims that they had no faith in (Mumbai) Police and they would submit the proof to the CBI, the Salians said after listening carefully to the court proceedings, they are convinced the Rane father-son are "liars"."They have no proof whatsoever... The facts are in our personal knowledge... and we are well aware that both of them cannot give any proof since they are liars... They are giving false excuses of giving the proof to the CBI and not the police," they said sharply.

PRIYANKA CHOPRA, KAITLYN DEVER, CHLOE FINEMAN SIZZLE AT OSCARS BASH

Los Angeles | Agencies

With the Oscars week underway, the celebrations for the prestigious awards ceremony are in full-swing with Oscar parties raising the excitement further. Recently, stars from Hollywood and international cinema, attended several events and the pictures, accessed by 'Variety', are stunning to say the least.

Reinaldo Marcus Green, Jamie Dornan, and Donall O Healai were all suited up for the Oscar Wilde Awards at The Ebell of Los Angeles.

Another set of pictures, accessed by 'Variety', show Saniyya Sidney and Aunjanue Ellis put their best fashion foot forward at the Essence 15th Annual Black Women in Hollywood Awards at the Beverly Wilshire hotel. Storm Reid was also seen sporting a light yellow coloured gown for the same with British actor Damson Idris donning a cloud grey coloured suit for the said event.

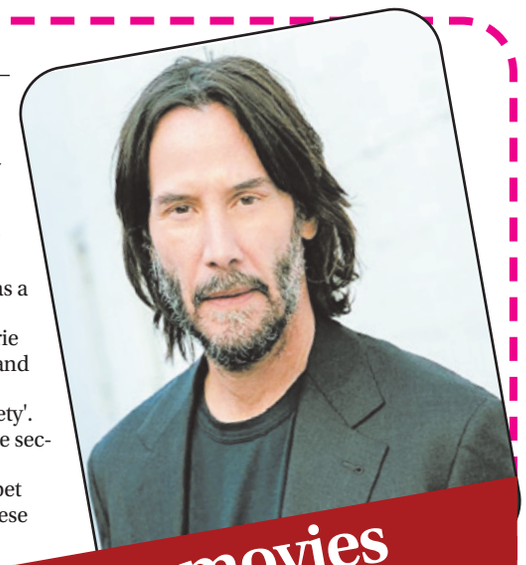
Priyanka Chopra Jonas and Aziz Ansari were seen sharing a laugh at the Celebrate South Asian Excellence event at UTA where Kal Penn and Joseph Patel too registered their presence.

Justice Smith, Nat Wolff, Chloe Fineman, Tinx, Olly Sholotanat, Kaitlyn Dever, Joey King, Chase Stokes and Kathryn Newton graced the Vanity Fair and BACARDÍ Rum Celebrate Vanities: A Night for Young Hollywood at Musso & Frank Grill.

Yvette Nicole Brown and Maitreyi Ramakrishnan were seen acing their fashion game at the Emily's List Oscars Week Discussion at the Four Seasons in Beverly Hills along with Chiney Ogwumike, Amber Tamblyn and Gloria Calderon Kellett.

Keanu Reeves movies reportedly pulled off from streaming platforms in China

Los Angeles | Agencies



Movies starring Keanu Reeves have reportedly been scrubbed from China streaming platforms such as Tencent Video, Youku and Migu Video following the actor's public support for Tibet earlier this year.

Reeves was announced in January as a performer for the 35th annual Tibet House Benefit Concert alongside Laurie Anderson, Patti Smith, Cyndi Lauper and Iggy Pop. Philip Glass serves as the Benefit's artistic director, reports 'Variety'.

The event took place virtually for the second year in a row earlier this month.

After Reeves participation in the Tibet Benefit concert was announced, Chinese nationalists took to social media in protest of the actor.

China rejects claims of Tibetan independence and has long blackballed artists who have expressed support for Tibet and/or the Dalai Lama. Reeves support for the Tibet benefit went public just as 'The Matrix Resurrections' was opening in China, but the action sequel was boycotted by nationalists and underwhelmed at the box office. Following the Tibet House benefit this month, dozens of Reeves movie have now been scrubbed off streaming platforms in China. As reported by the Los Angeles Times, at least 19 movies were pulled from Tencent Video.

Every Reeves movie save for his voice role in 'Toy Story 3' was pulled off top streamers Youku and Migu Video. Other platforms such as Bilibili and Xigua Video also reportedly saw Reeves movies scrubbed. Although 'Toy Story 3' remains on streaming, its credits feature the local dubbing cast when mentioning voice talent, and thus Reeves is not credited.

A search for Reeves on the platform iQiyi reportedly gives users the following message: "Sorry, no results related to 'Keanu Reeves' were found. Due to relevant laws, regulations and policies, some results are not shown."

'THE BATMAN' DIRECTOR RELEASES DELETED JOKER SCENE

Los Angeles | Agencies

'The Batman' director Matt Reeves released a deleted scene from his superhero film featuring Robert Pattinson's Caped Crusader facing off against his classic nemesis, the Joker, played by Barry Keoghan.

The scene is available after visiting a website that mimics the word puzzles posed by the Riddler (Paul Dano) in the movie, reports 'Variety'.

As Reeves explained to 'Variety' in an interview in February, the scene follows Batman's discovery that the Riddler has killed the Gotham City police commissioner, leaving behind another of his cryptic notes addressed to Batman.

Unnerved by the Riddler's interest in him, Batman decides to seek out insight into what makes the Riddler tick. "I thought he would be really insecure about this and he'd probably want to find some way to get into the (Riddler's) mindset, like in 'Manhunter' or 'Mindhunter' -- this idea of profiling somebody, so you can predict his next move," Reeves said. The filmmaker liked the idea of suggesting to the audience that Gotham is rife with villains just on the edge of the story, and that Keoghan's Joker is one of the first enemies Batman captures. "Almost our anniversary, isn't it?" Joker tells Batman in the scene.

Reeves shared: "You realise that they have a relationship, and that this guy obviously did something, and Batman somehow got him into Arkham."

Batman pushes Joker for reasons why Riddler is doing what he's doing, and why he's leaving notes for Batman at all of his crimes.

Britney Spears considers getting breast enhancement surgery after weight loss

Los Angeles | Agencies

Pop star Britney Spears on social media got real about her considering a breast enhancement surgery.

"It's crazy living in Los Angeles.... I was thinking about getting a b**b job ... my b**bs are fairly small," 40-year-old pop star wrote.

"I mean, with the right bra it's fine but I was curious what a doctor would say !!! I lost 7 pounds in the last 6 months and that's a lot for me !!!"

She went on to joke that she's "officially part of the 'itty bitty t****y committee' " following her slimdown.

"They shrunk !!! I don't know where my b**bs went," she continued, reports aceshowbiz.com.

The 'Oops! I Did It Again...' hitmaker went on to recall her unsuccessful trip to a specialist.

"I show up at the office and I'm going the back way walking up 8 flights of stairs !!! I'm like W** is this ???" she shared. "They want you to die before you make it there !!! F**K THIS !!! Nobody was there to let us in ... uhhh how long do we wait here ??? 10 minutes go by ... 15 minutes ... f**k that 1!! I've never been back."

After she returned home, she went "online to see the biggest starts getting facials with their facialists saying, 'people don't believe but no filter !!! This is real !!!' "

Further complaining about an unnamed celebrity, the pop star continued, "This celebrity has done movies and all and is shot so beautifully ... what the hell is she trying to prove ??? I know she's beautiful !!! I've seen her in person so it was weird seeing someone like her trying to convince people she's natural beautiful."

ALESSANDRA AMBROSIO SHOWS A LOT OF LEG NEXT TO FELLOW CATWALK QUEENS HEIDI KLUM AND KAROLINA KURKOVA AS THEY ATTEND THE GREEN CARPET FASHION AWARDS, REPORTS DAILYMAIL.CO.UK.

Model mayhem!

Los Angeles | Agencies

Some of fashion's biggest names headed out to celebrate environmental fashion at the Green Carpet Fashion Awards on Thursday, including Alessandra Ambrosio, Heidi Klum and Karolina Kurkova.

The 40-year-old Ambrosio, 48-year-old Klum and 38-year-old Kurkova were among the fashion luminaries at the event, held at the San Vicente Bungalows.

Ambrosio stepped out in a shimmering black gown with bib straps, plus an elegant diamond necklace around her neck.

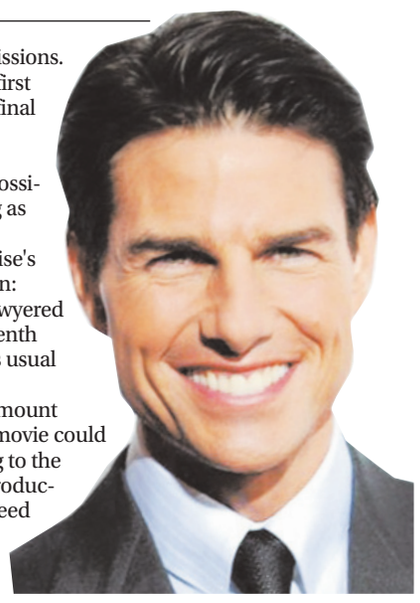
She had her hair parted down the center with strands falling over her cheeks, with the gown featuring a large slit up the leg. She completed her look with a silver bracelet on her left wrist, a black handbag that matches her dress and black heels.

Klum opted for a more colorful look, with a multi-colored floral print dress with a plunging neckline. She accessorized with emerald green and gold earrings along with a number of rings while holding a green clutch.

The supermodel and mother of four completed her look with black heels.

Tom Cruise eyes 'Mission: Impossible 8' as final film Of the franchise

Los Angeles | Agencies



Hollywood star Tom Cruise is seeing the end of his missions. The actor, who has portrayed Ethan Hunt since the first film, reportedly plots 'Mission: Impossible 8' as the final installment of the franchise.

According to The Hollywood Reporter, Cruise, who also serves as producer, has begun working on the eighth and possibly last "M:I" movie, with Christopher McQuarrie returning as writer and director, reports aceshowbiz.com.

This detail comes as part of the outlet's report about Cruise's dispute with Paramount over the release strategy of 'Mission: Impossible VII'. According to the website, the Cruise has lawyered up as he cannot agree with the studio's plan to give the seventh installment a 45-day theatrical window, far shorter than his usual three-month run, before streaming on Paramount+.

"For (Cruise), 45 days is like going day-and-date," a Paramount source told THR. "He also felt that setting a date when the movie could be seen on the service would discourage people from going to the theatre." The issue has arisen since the movie was still in production, but it remains unsolved as both parties reportedly agreed to postpone it until the film is finished. Cruise, however, keeps holding out the completion of the film until he hammers out a great deal for 'M:I 8'.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY

Julia Fox

BCCI to launch six-team women's IPL next year

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Responding to the growing demand for a franchise-based T20 league for women players in the country, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has decided to launch a six-team women's Indian Premier League (IPL) next year.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the IPL Governing Council in Mumbai on Friday.

The meeting decided that all efforts will be made to start a six-team annual Twenty20 tournament for the women's cricketers, with the first preference being given to the existing IPL franchises, according to a report by cricbuzz. According to sources, three existing IPL franchises have shown interest in setting up women's teams. BCCI president Sourav Ganguly said the IPL Governing Council's decision has to be approved by the BCCI AGM and added that hopefully, it will happen soon and the league will start next year.For this season, there will be the normal Women's Twenty20 Challenge, IPL Chairman Brijesh Patel said, adding that there will be four matches involving three teams around the time of the playoffs.

With leagues for women like Women's Big Bash League (WBBL) and the Women's Hundred gaining ground, there has been a demand for a women's T20 league in India on the lines of the IPL with many Indian women's players leading the demand. The women's cricket has also gained lot of ground since the Indian National Team did well in the last World Cup.

Italy knocked out of World Cup play-offs after 0-1 defeat to North Macedonia

Palermo | Agencies

European champions Italy will not play in the 2022 World Cup after being stunned by North Macedonia in their play-off in Palermo on Thursday.

Italy have failed to qualify for a second consecutive World Cup, ensuring the Azzurri will endure at least 12 years between appearances at football's showpiece event.

Italy were "destroyed and crushed" after again missing out on the World Cup finals n following a 1-0 defeat at home by North Macedonia in Thursday's playoff semi-final, defender Giorgio Chiellini said after the match.Aleksandar Trajkovski of North Macedonia picked up the loose ball in the 92nd minute, drove forward and fired a sensational winner from outside the area. The goal sparked wild celebrations on the North Macedonia bench, while Italy's players and coaching staff dropped to their knees in front of their home fans.It is just eight months since Roberto Mancini's side celebrated one of their greatest triumphs - beating England at Wembley to win Euro 2020 having been considered outsiders going into the

tournament.But they have now paid the price for a disjointed - if previously unbeaten - World Cup qualification campaign during which they finished runners-up to Switzerland in their group, winning four and drawing four of their eight matches.Midfielder Marco Verratti said North Macedonia's goal in added time was a "real nightmare".

Four-time World Cup winners Italy, who are ranked sixth in the world, will watch events in Qatar in November and December from afar.

IPL 2022: KKR, CSK RE-IGNITE RIVALRY UNDER NEW LEADERSHIP

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a repeat of last year's final, the Chennai Super Kings (CSK) and Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) with their new captains -- Ravindra Jadeja and Shreyas Iyer, will lock horns in the opening match of the IPL 2022 and look to start their campaign on a winning note at the Wankhede Stadium, here on Saturday.

Ahead of the start of the IPL 2022, the 40-year-old M.S Dhoni on Thursday decided to hand over the captaincy of CSK to Jadeja. The star all-rounder, who has been an integral part of Chennai Super Kings (CSK) since 2012, will only be the third player to lead the Chennai-based franchise after Dhoni and Suresh Raina.

Notably, it will be the first time that Dhoni will play as a pure wicket-keeper batter and won't lead the side in an IPL match. The only time that the legendary cricketer has represented Super Kings strictly as a player was in 2012, in a dead-rubber Champions League T20 game against Yorkshire.

A decade later, CSK will be starting a new chapter under the leadership of Jadeja, who has been an integral part of the franchise since 2012, becoming only the third player to lead the Chennai-based franchise after Dhoni and Suresh Raina.

As a new skipper, star all-rounder's first challenge is to fill the big voids created by the absence of first-choice players Deepak Chahar (injured) and Moeen Ali (unavailable due to visa issues). Moeen reached India late due to visa issues and he will only be available for CSK's second game, against Lucknow Super Giants on March 31, after undergoing quarantine for three days.

In the absence of England all-rounder, New Zealand batter Devon Conway is set to make his IPL debut. But it will be interesting to see, whether CSK plays him as an opener or use him as a floater in the middle-order to counter Knight Riders' mystery spinners Conway is technically very sound against spin bowling. In all T20 cricket, Conway averages 61.63 and strikes at 134.65 against spin. Against pace, the average drops to 37.40 and strike rate to 126.15.Rajvardhan Hangargekar is likely to play in the place of Deepak Chahar and the rest of the CSK side is mostly settled. On the other hand, new KKR skipper Shreyas Iyer will also have to find the opening partner of Venkatesh Iyer. KKR bought Alex Hales during the IPL auction but the England cricketer pulled out of the IPL 2020 and his replacement Aaron Finch, who is not available for the early part of the tournament.On the other hand, Kiwi pacer Tim Southee, who got married earlier this week and joined the IPL bubble late, will miss Saturday's game. In his absence, Knight Riders could bring in Sri Lanka's Chamika Karunaratne or pick an extra Indian seamer.Though KKR reached the final last season, they had a horror start to that season. And, Iyer will love to continue that attack-first approach of KKR.

Women's World Cup

Australia beat Bangladesh by five-wicket

Wellington | Agencies

Six-time champions Australia maintained their unbeaten streak in the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup with a five-wicket win over Bangladesh in a rain-affected 43-over affair at the Basin Reserve.

The win was achieved mainly on the back of Beth Mooney making a fighting, unbeaten 66 and sharing an unbroken stand of 65 with Annabel Sutherland (26 not out) to chase down 136 in 32.1 overs.

The efforts of Mooney and Sutherland came after spinner Salma Khatun, with her three for 23, gave a huge scare to Australia by taking out Alyssa Healy, Rachael Haynes and captain Meg Lanning in quick succession.

Things went worse when Tahlia McGrath and Ashleigh Gardner fell too. But it wasn't enough as Mooney fought through wind, freezing cold and Bangladesh, with some support from Sutherland, to help Australia maintain their clean slate in the

league stage of the mega event.

Earlier, after a delayed start due to rain, Lata Mondal top-scored for Bangladesh with an excellent 33 as Gardner and left-arm spinner Jess Jonassen took four wickets between themselves to restrict them to 135/6.

Murshida Khatun (12) and Sharmin Akhter (24) were able to safely negotiate an Australia seam attack missing star all-rounder Ellyse Perry because of injury. The pair took the score along to 33 without too much trouble. But the introduction of Gardner (2/23) changed things for Australia as Khatun fell.

Fargana Hoque (8) was dismissed by Annabel Sutherland (1/22), before Akhter and skipper Nigar Sultana (7) fell to Jess Jonassen (2/13) in quick succession to leave Bangladesh in tatters at 62/4. Rumana Ahmed (15) combined with Mondal for a 33-run stand.

But their total was never going to be enough as Mooney scripted yet another rescue act to ensure Australia entered the knockout stages of the tournament with seven wins in as many matches.

Brief scores :
Australia 136/5 in 32.1 overs (Beth Mooney 66 not out, Annabel Sutherland 26 not out; Salma Khatun 3/23, Nahida Akter 1/33) beat Bangladesh 135/6 in 43 overs (Lata Mondal 33, Sharmin Akhter 24; Jess Jonassen 2/13, Ashleigh Gardner 2/20) by five wickets

Miami Open: Sabalenka, Kontaveit bow out as seeds struggle

Miami | Agencies

No.70 Irina-Camelia Begu of Romania earned her first top 10 win since 2018, defeating top seed Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka 6-4, 6-4 in the second round of the Miami Open on Thursday.

Begu's victory closed out a tough Day 3 for the seeds in Miami, coming just minutes after No.65 Ann Li of America defeated No.3 seed Estonian Anett Kontaveit in three sets 6-0, 3-6, 6-4. Li will face fellow American Alison Riske for a spot in the Round of 16.

After Thursday's action, only three seeds remain in the top half of the draw: No.8 Ons Jabeur, No.9 Danielle Collins, and No.22 Belinda Bencic.

No.22 seed Belinda Bencic opened her campaign with a strong performance, defeating Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk 6-3, 6-1. The victory snapped a three-match slide for the

reigning Olympic champion, with her last win coming in St. Petersburg.

Bencic will face Great Britain's Heather Watson in the third round. Watson pulled off a dramatic comeback to notch her first Top 20 win in two years, saving match point to defeat No.20 Elina Svitolina 4-6, 6-3, 7-6(4).

Australia clinch Test series 1-0 against Pakistan

Lahore | Agencies

Australia have clinched the three-Test series against Pakistan 1-0 after a dramatic day five victory in Lahore on Friday.

For Australia, fast bowler Pat Cummins picked three crucial wickets while off-spinner Nathon Lyon picked up five wickets to wrap up Pakistan's innings at 235/10 in 92.1 overs.

Pakistan captain Babar Azam, who saved Pakistan from the jaws of defeat in the second Test in Karachi with a 196 in the second innings, also succumbed to pressure and got out.After Azam's wicket, none of the Pakistan's batters were able to carry their innings.

Cummins dismissed Fawad Alam and wicketkeeper Mohammad Rizwan, who also struck an unbeaten 104 in the second innings of the drawn Karachi Test, in successive overs with both batters falling leg before wicket.

The first two Tests in the series - the first between the sides in Pakistan since 1998 - were drawn.

Brief scores :
Australia 391 and 227/3 dec; Pakistan 268 & 235 (Imam-ul-Haq 70, Babar Azam 55, Pat Cummins 3/23, Nathan Lyon 5/ 83) lost by 115 runs.

IWL 2021-22 TO START ON APRIL 15 IN BHUBANESWAR

New Delhi: The Hero Indian Women's League is all set for a return in the 2021-22 season, as it will be held in Bhubaneswar from April 15.

This season's Hero IWL will feature 12 teams that will fight it out for the top prize in Indian Women's Football, and will fight it out in a league format from April 15 to May 26, with the champions of the tournament getting the chance to play in the next edition of the AFC Women's Club Championship. The matches will be played at the Kalinga Stadium, the Seventh Battalion Ground and the Capital Ground.

Defending Champions Gokulam Kerala FC, who also join the league as the champions of Kerala, will also be joined by the champion teams from 10 other states - Odisha Police (Odisha), Hans Women FC (Delhi), Kickstart FC Karnataka (Karnataka), Gokulam Kerala FC (Kerala), Sethu Madurai (Tamil Nadu), PIFA Sports Colaba FC (Maharashtra), Mata Rukmani FC (Chhattisgarh), Sirvodem Sports Club (Goa), Indian Arrows (AIFF's Developmental Team), SSB Women FC (West Bengal), Sports Odisha (Odisha), and one club from the Hero IWL Qualifiers. The qualifiers of the Hero IWL will take place in New Delhi from April 1 to 5, where four clubs - Guwahati City FC, Golazo FC, ARA FC, and YWC will fight it out at the Ambedkar Stadium in New Delhi, in a round robin format with the top team proceeding to the tournament proper.

World Para-athletics GP

Desai, Padhiyar win gold as India sign off with 14 medals

Dubai | Agencies

Sprinter Pranav Prashant Desai and high jumper Ramsingbhai Govin Padhiyar clinched gold medals on the final day as the Indian contingent signed off from the Dubai 2022 World Para Athletics Grand Prix and 13th Fazza International Para Athletics Championships here with a total of 14 medals.

Overall India won five gold medals, six silver and three bronze to claim eighth place in the medals table.

Colombia finished on top with 25 medals including 12 gold, followed by Algeria (16) and Thailand (30) with 11 and 8 gold medals respectively.After his 200m T64 gold on the second day, Desai claimed the top place in 100 m men T63/64 final, racing in 11.74 seconds to finish ahead of Thailand duo Denpoom Kotcharang (12.12 sec) and Kantinan Khumphong (13.57 sec) in perfect conditions at the Dubai Club for People of Determination grounds.

Later, Padhiyar and Shailesh Kumar produced a leap of 1.84m each but the former was awarded the gold in the men's high jump T42 final. Thailand's Angkarn Chanaboon took the bronze in the T47 category with a jump of 1.90m.

In women's events, Jayanti Behera ran the 100m women's final T46/47 in 13.16 seconds to take the bronze, behind USA's Brittni Mason (12.43s) and Tereza Jakschova of the Czech Republic (13.04s).

Earlier, Desai, Someswara Rao and Mohit have clinched gold medals for India.

VINICIUS ON TARGET AS BRAZIL ROUT CHILE

Rio: Vinicius Junior scored his first international goal as Brazil cruised to a 4-0 win over Chile in their FIFA World Cup qualifier here on Thursday.

Paris Saint-Germain star Neymar put the hosts ahead at the Maracana stadium with a penalty after being tripped by Mauricio Isla in the 43rd minute. Vinicius doubled the lead two minutes later by combining with Antony and sliding a low shot past Claudio Bravo.Brazil continued to attack with flair after the interval and were unlucky not to extend their lead when goal-bound Lucas Paqueta was dispossessed by a perfectly timed Claudio Baeza tackle,reports Xinhua. But the third goal came shortly afterward when Philippe Coutinho converted from the spot after Bravo clattered into Antony.Second-half substitute Richarlison completed the rout with a cool finish in stoppage time following slick build-up play from Bruno Guimaraes.The result leaves Brazil unbeaten at the top of the 10-team South American group with 42 points from 16 matches. Chile are seventh with 19 points from 17 games and need to win their final qualifier against Uruguay in Santiago on Tuesday to have any chance of securing a playoff spot.

WORKING WITH JOHN WAS EXTREMELY COMFORTABLE AND FUN: JACQUELINE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

After 'Housefull 2', 'Race 2' and 'Dishoom', John Abraham and Jacqueline Fernandez will be seen sharing screen space in the upcoming film 'Attack'. The actress says the movie has an extremely strong narrative and that working again with action star was extremely comfortable and fun.The film is about India's first super soldier played by John Abraham. The film is helmed by Lakshya Raj Anand.

It also features Rakul Preet Singh. 'Attack' (part 1) is not an ordinary action movie, it showcases sci-fi angle, a complex drama and a narrative with a question mark on how in future India handles terrorism. Talking about the chemistry and working with John once again, Jacqueline said: "It's always a pleasure to work with John, I am really looking forward to the audience's reaction to the film. It's an interesting storyline and extremely strong narrative and working again with John was extremely comfortable and fun."'Attack (Part 1) also stars Prakash Raj, Ratna Pathak Shah as they combine their forces to bring the audiences a special adrenaline pumping action entertainer to be watched exclusively in cinemas. Dr. Jayantilal Gada (Pen Studios), John Abraham (JA Entertainment), and Ajay Kapoor Productions present John Abraham's action entertainer 'Attack ', which will be released worldwide by Pen Marudhar. The movie is slated to hit the cinemas on April 1.

SHWETA TRIPATHI HEADS TO KASHMIR FOR SHOOT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILLER 'SAAF'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Shweta Tripathi, who was recently seen in the web series, 'Yeh Kaali kaali Ankhein', has started work on her next project 'Saaf' - a series for which she has jetted off to Kashmir to kickstart the shoot. She was intrigued about the project right the moment she got to know about its premise.

'Saaf' based on American series, 'The Cleaning Lady', is a psychological thriller, which will follow the aftermath of planned murders with a lady at the helm.

Talking about the project, Shweta said, "As soon as I heard the premise of 'Saaf', I knew I had to be a part of it. It is about young women trying to push boundaries and conquer both the world - personal and professional. It talks about how no one multi-tasks better than women as if they are trained to compartmentalise and compromise with a super exciting plotline."

Further giving an insight into the project's tone and narrative, she said: "'Saaf' challenges society's set stereotypes, allowing the entire cast and me to explore more as artists. I am sure it will instantly connect with the audience and resonate with them."

Backed by One Life Studios, 'Saaf' will see Shweta playing the lead. In addition, Shweta also has 'Mirzapur S3', 'Yeh Kaali Kaali Ankhein S2', 'Gone Game 2', 'Escaype Live', 'Makkhichoose', and 'M for Mafia' up her alley.

NTR thanks fans and audience for their unwavering love

Team Absolute | Hyderabad

Jr. NTR, who essays the role of Akhtar alias Bheem in SS Rajamouli's latest sensational movie 'RRR', has thanked his fans for their unwavering love all through. As the fictional drama 'RRR' hit the screens on Friday, the 'Aadhi' actor, who took to his social media website, expressed his gratefulness. Being on the receiving end of unprecedented fandom, NTR seems to be overwhelmed. He tweeted, "Thank You, each and every one, for your unwavering love. Your love, admiration and support is what keeps me going...Enjoy the visual spectacle that is #RRRMovie." 'RRR' is touted to be NTR Jr's first pan-India movie, which is now being called a historic blockbuster. His fans, who had to wait for more than 3 years to watch him on the screen, were seen raining white streamers at NTR Jr's first appearance in the film. NTR's introduction scene that shows him locking horns with a tiger inspired an uproarious hysteria among fans.

Mrunal Thakur's look from next bears uncanny resemblance with Madhubala

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Mrunal Thakur, who was last seen in an extended cameo in Kartik Aaryan's crime thriller 'Dhamaka', will be next seen debuting in a Telugu film opposite south sensation Dulquer Salmaan.

What's interesting is that the actor's look from the film bears a striking resemblance with the yesteryear superstar, Madhubala.

Often called the most beautiful Indian actress of all time, Madhubala is an icon, so any comparison to her is a huge compliment.

Mrunal says: "It's an honour to be told I resemble one of the most beautiful actresses, Madhubala ji."

The actor adds, "This film just got a whole lot special for me after being associated to such a legendary actor. Really look forward to this one and I hope that my fans love the film as much as we loved making it!"

Produced by Swapna Cinema, the film is being directed by Hanu Raghavapudi. It will be presented by Vyjayanthi Films.

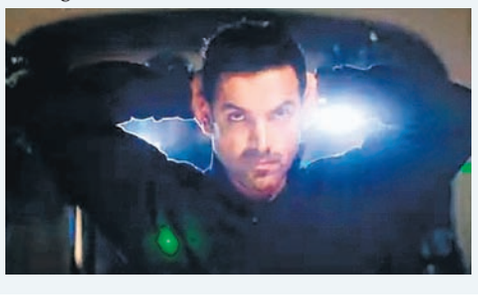
Mrunal Thakur will also be seen in Shahid Kapoor's upcoming sports drama, 'Jersey', directed by Gowtam Tinnanuri, releasing worldwide on April 14.

JOHN ABRAHAM EXPLAINS WHAT A 'SUPER SOLDIER' IS!

New Delhi: In his action film 'Attack' which is scheduled to hit the screens on April 1, actor John Abraham will be seen essaying role of a "super soldier". John has explained what a super soldier exactly is during a candid chat with reporter.

He says: "In the art of modern warfare today, the rules of engagement have changed. We want to make sure there is as much less collateral damage in the world as possible which is why we wanted to do an action film with a difference because we have done many action films ... Action can be different, we can be different... When I say we, I mean the Entertainment production house."

The storyline of the film revolves around John's character, an army veteran, who while battling his inner demons, volunteers to become part of a governmental experiment to become a cybertronic humanoid super-soldier developed to combat terrorism. He added: "We wanted to make something very unique. The action has to have a unique selling proposition and we thought of a concept of a super soldier... I was inspired and we have given credit to that person in the film -- a civilian called Nathan in the US who is paraplegic and got a chip in his brain." John shared: "It is all a reality and is just around corner. When I started making this film, it sounded very far fetched... We wanted to make a film that is different and that is why a concept of a super soldier where there is no collateral damage to an Indian soldier."



RRR: A VISUALLY SCINTILLATING TALE MAGNIFICENTLY CARRIED BY RAM CHARAN AND JR NTR

FILM REVIEW

BY AAKRUTI BAGLA

(Running in Theatres)

Direction: S.S.Rajamouli

Cast: Ram Charan, Jr NTR, Alia Bhatt, Ajay Devgn, Olivia Morris, Ray Stevenson, Alison Doddy and ensemble.

Duration: 3 hrs 6 mins

Ratings: 4.5/5 (four and half stars)

Maverick filmmaker S.S.Rajamouli who is well known for giving us a masterpiece like Bahubali, is back with yet another visually appealing film RRR.

Set during the time of British era, RRR is a tale of two Indian revolutionaries Alluri Sitarama

Raju (Ram Charan) and Komaram Bheem (Jr NTR). One thing is common between the two, both are rebellious towards the ruthless British Empire. Malli a girl from the Gond tribe community was forcibly taken away by a British officer as they were mesmerised by her soulful voice. In pursuit to save Malli from the clutches of Britishers, Bheem disguises himself to fight against the evils. To trace him, one police officer, a part of the British police force, is appointed. He is none other than Rama (Ram Charan). Rama is desperate to attain the position of a special police officer as it is the only way of revenge of his father's death. He is given the responsibility to arrest Bheem. Ram and Bheem share a close friendship, more or less a bond of brotherhood.

Performances: Ram Charan and Jr.NTR are outstanding and words fall short to praise the brilliant performance of the two, Rama(Ram Charan) as a fierce police office and Bheem(Jr NTR) as the guardian of his community do justice to their roles and their camaraderie just appears effortless.

Alia Bhatt and Ajay Devgn have brief roles. Alia Bhatt(Sita) is the fiance of Ram Charan(Rama) who is his pillar of strength in his mission.

Ajay Devgn who is essaying the role of Rama's father who prepares villagers to fight against the Britishers and undoubtedly he delivers a top-notch performance. Their characters are established during the second half of the film.

Olivia Morris(Jennifer), Ray Stevenson(Scott Buxton) and Alison Doody(Lady Scott) manages to create an impact with their supporting role.

Technical Department: Be it direction, VFX or cinematography, everything is on point. Even though, there are moments of flashback, but it doesn't appear cliche and pushes forward the narrative flawlessly. High octane action sequences are captured so beautifully, that it keeps you at the edge of your seats. The film involves dubbing at many places due to which editing plays a major role, which is done smoothly.

Music: The thumping background score composed by MM Keeravani is like the icing on the cake. Song Naatu Naatu which is ruling the charts, is so invigorating on the big screen that you won't feel like blinking your eyes even once. Song Sholay is a soothing watch, even though it appears at the end. Final Verdict: Boasting of an interesting storyline and stellar performances, RRR is a visual treat that simply cannot be missed.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY

Aishwarya Sushmita

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