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GEOMAGNETIC SOLAR STORM TO HIT EARTH? GPS, RADIO, POWER SUPPLY MAY GET

NATURAL CALAMITY

Earth is likely to be hit by a severe geomagnetic solar stormGPS, radio services, power supply may face disruptionsGeomagnetic storms also treat skywatchers on Earth to mesmerising aurora displays.

► **GEOMAGNETIC STORM MEANS DISCHARGE OF CORONAL MASS EJECTION IN SIGNIFICANT AMOUNTS WITH HIGH-INTENSITY ENERGY COMING TOWARDS THE EARTH.**

► **ACCORDING TO SPACE WEATHER, THE "CANYON OF FIRE" IS AT LEAST 20,000 KILOMETRES DEEP AND 10 TIMES AS LONG.**

► **WHEN A CME HITS EARTH, IT CAN WREAK HAVOC WITH THE PLANET'S MAGNETIC FIELD, CAUSING A GEOMAGNETIC STORM. POWERFUL GEOMAGNETIC STORMS CAN DISRUPT SATELLITE LINKS AND DAMAGE ELECTRONICS IN ORBIT, SPACE.COM REPORTED.**



across the globe.

Last week, filaments of plasma erupted from a fiery canyon on the Sun's surface, releasing powerful streams of magnetised solar wind to which observers reported that it might result in geomagnetic storms and auroras on Earth.

In a statement, the UK weather forecaster Met Office confirmed two "filament eruptions" - on April 3 and the second on April 4 - occurred in the south-central part of the Sun.

Satellites in the extreme ultraviolet part of the electromagnetic spectrum and ground telescopes equipped to observe in the warmth-carrying infrared wavelengths were both able to see the eruptions.

Both eruptions were accompanied by coronal mass ejections (CMEs), or expulsions of charged plasma from the Sun's upper atmosphere or the corona, the Met office said in a statement.

In some cases, these storms can even disturb power networks on the

“The incoming #solarstorm could bring #aurora to mid-latitudes April 14-15. Chances of reaching G2-level conditions are 80% at high latitudes & 20% at mid-latitudes. Radio #blackout risk remains low, but amateur #radio operators & #GPS users face disruptions on Earth's nightside.”

Dr Tamitha Skov, Space Weather Physicist

ground. On the other hand, geomagnetic storms also treat skywatchers on Earth to mesmerising aurora displays.

The year 2022 is expected to be relatively quiet for the Sun overall, as we are still towards the beginning of the 11-year solar cycle of activity that began in December 2019. Cycle beginnings usually have fewer sunspots and fewer eruptions. Activity should increase as we approach the peak, forecasted to be in mid-2025, the report said.

SW monsoon rainfall to be normal this year: IMD

“Normal to above normal seasonal rainfall most likely over many areas of northern peninsula and central India, along foothills of the Himalayas and some parts of northwest India, below normal rainfall is likely over many parts of north-east India, some parts of northwest India and southern parts of the south Peninsula.”

Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, Director General, IMD



Team Absolute | New Delhi

In what can bring cheer to large parts of agrarian India, the south-west monsoon rainfall this year, over the country as a whole, is most likely to be normal - quantitatively 99 per cent of the Long Period Average (LPA), the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Thursday.

The IMD also announced a slight reduction in the new normal for all India rainfall based on decadal data.

The LPA rainfall for the June to September period over the country as a whole for the period 1971-2020 is 87 cm. This 87 cm is the new normal all India rainfall from this year that the IMD has introduced replacing the earlier 88 cm based on 1961-2010 data.

That explains the quantitative forecast of 99 per cent plus/minus 5 per cent of model error.

The IMD would also provide forecasts for the monsoon convergence zone (MCZ), majorly central Indian portion, extending from Gujarat and Rajasthan to Odisha, which is largely rain-fed area (for agricul-

ture) and therefore from last year, making IMD's specific MCZ forecast more relevant for the farmers.

A cause of worry, if at all, is the likely presence of negative Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) - the difference in warming/cooling of the west Indian Ocean and the east Indian Ocean - around the time of beginning of the southwest monsoon season even when, at present, there is neutral IOD conditions over the Indian Ocean, Mohapatra said, adding: "However, we have to wait and watch how the situation pans out by then."

La Nina conditions prevail over the equatorial Pacific region and are likely to continue during the monsoon season. La Nina is associated with the cooling over the central and east Pacific Ocean. An El Nino (as against La Nina) is generally associated with deficient (surplus) monsoon rainfall over India. However, there is no one to one relationship between El Nino and the Indian monsoon.

After Thursday's first stage forecast for the south-west monsoon, the IMD will issue the second stage, updated, forecast in the last week of May with chances of announcing the date when monsoon would hit the Kerala coast prior to that.

WhatsApp to boost UPI adoption for next 500 mn Indian users



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Meta-owned WhatsApp Thursday said that its simple, reliable and secure experience will accelerate adoption of unified payments interface (UPI) for the next 500 million Indians.

Welcoming the approval by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) for an additional 60 million users for

UPI for WhatsApp -- taking its cap to 100 million for Payments - Manesh Mahatme, Director-Payments, WhatsApp India, told reporter that the UPI has been an unquestioned success.

"We believe there is an opportunity for UPI to have an even greater impact for the country -- especially in rural regions where digital and financial inclusion can significantly improve peoples' lives," Mahatme said.

"We believe that 'payments on WhatsApp' can be a key partner to NPCI and the RBI as we all aim to scale adoption of UPI and financial inclusion to those most in need," he added.

In November last year, the NPCI approved increasing the user cap for WhatsApp's payment service from the current 20 million to 40 million users.

The NPCI has been giving approval to WhatsApp in a phased manner so that the competition in the digital payment space in the country is not stifled.

As part of this roadmap, he said that the company has planned significant investments in 'payments on WhatsApp' across India "including 'India-first' features and focus on creating awareness and driving adoption among our users".

As the adoption of 'payments on WhatsApp' increases with users across the country, the company looks forward to working with the NPCI to further expand it to all users.

ELON MUSK WANTS TO BUY TWITTER FOR \$43 BILLION

San Francisco: Tesla CEO Elon Musk on Thursday made his "best and final" offer of \$54.20 per share in cash to buy 100 per cent of Twitter, in an updated filing with the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

The micro-blogging platform's shares soared nearly 18 per cent in pre-market trading after the news broke.

Musk is offering to "acquire all of the outstanding Common Stock of the Issuer not owned by the Reporting Person for all cash consideration valuing the Common Stock at \$54.20 per share," read the filing. Musk says Twitter needs to go private to go through the changes that need to be made. "I would need to reconsider my position as shareholder," he added. "I invested in Twitter as I believe in its potential to be the platform for free speech around the globe, and I believe free speech is a societal imperative for a functioning democracy," Musk said in the fresh filing. However, Twitter on Thursday said it will carefully review the "unsolicited, non-binding" proposal from Tesla CEO Elon Musk to acquire the micro-blogging platform for more than \$43 billion.

4 LET TERRORISTS KILLED IN J&K'S SHOPIAN, INVOLVED IN ATTACKS ON OUTSIDERS

Srinagar | Agencies

Four LeT terrorists were killed in an encounter with security forces in Jammu and Kashmir's Shopian district on Thursday and have been identified as locals, who were also involved in attacks on non-locals, police said.

Police said based on specific input generated by police regarding presence of terrorists in Badgam area of Zainapora in Shopian, a joint cordon and search operation was launched by police and army's 44 RR in the area.

"During the search operation, as the search party proceeded towards the spot, the hiding terrorists fired indiscriminately upon the search party which was retaliated effectively leading to an encounter. Later on, the CRPF also joined," police said.

In the ensuing encounter, four local terrorists linked with pro-



scribed terror outfit LeT were killed.

They have been identified as Aaqib Farooq Thoker, and Waseem Ahmed Thoker, both residents of Heffkhuri, Zainapora, and Farooq Ahmad Bhat and Shoqeen Ahmad Mir, both residents of Sujan.

"As per police records, all the killed terrorists were categorised terrorists and part of groups involved in several terror crime cases including attacks on police/security forces and civilian atrocities," police said.

Police said the four were involved in six terror crimes including attacks on outside labourers.

325 NEW COVID CASES IN DELHI, HIGHEST IN 40 DAYS

New Delhi: Delhi on Thursday reported 325 fresh COVID-19 cases, which is the highest in 40 days, and zero deaths, while the positivity rate was recorded at 2.39 per cent, according to data shared by the city health department. The Delhi Disaster Management Authority or DDMA will hold a meeting on April 20 to discuss measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus in the city, officials said. The Covid positivity rate in the national capital has jumped from 0.5 per cent to 2.39 per cent in a week, even as doctors on Tuesday said it was "not a panic situation" as the count of daily cases was still low, but cautioned against dropping the guard. Delhi on Wednesday reported 299 COVID-19 cases, while on Monday the city had recorded 137 cases, the data showed. There was no bulletin on Tuesday.

SIX KILLED IN FIRE AT CHEMICAL PLANT IN ANDHRA

Eluru: Six people were killed and 12 injured in a huge fire and reactor blast at a chemical factory in Andhra Pradesh's Eluru district. The disaster occurred at Porus Laboratories plant in Akkireddygudem village of Musunuru mandal late Wednesday, officials said. Five persons died on the spot while another succumbed at hospital. Four of the deceased hailed from Bihar. The injured were shifted to Government General Hospital in Vijayawada, where the condition of five of them is stated to be critical. Fire fighting personnel with the help of NDRF battled for nearly three hours to control the fire which broke out in unit-4 of the plant after a suspected gas leak. More than 100 people were working in the plant at the time of the mishap and they ran out in panic after hearing the loud explosion.

CONTRACTOR SUICIDE CASE: K'taka Minister Eshwarappa announces resignation



Shivamogga (Karnataka): Karnataka's Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister K.S. Eshwarappa, who is embroiled in the suicide case of contractor and BJP leader Santhosh K. Patil, on Thursday announced his resignation. "I have worked as the RDPR minister till date under the CM's (Basavraj) Bommai's leadership in the government. I have taken a decision to tender my resignation on Friday evening. I don't want to cause embarrassment to my party and party leadership," he said. Eshwarappa said that he had decided to tender his resignation earlier, but was stopped by his colleagues. "If I have committed any mis-

take, let the god punish me. I am confident of coming out clean from the allegations in the contractor suicide case," he said. Patil, who committed suicide by consuming poison, held Eshwarappa directly responsible for his death, alleging that the minister had asked for a 40 per cent commission in a Rs 4 crore project, through his aides. The Congress has called for an indefinite strike, demanding resignation and arrest of Eshwarappa.

IS TIKTOK AFFECTING CHILDREN'S FOCUS?

London | Agencies

Popular social media platform TikTok and other fast-paced video apps could be ruining the attention span of the youth and children with an "endless flow" of pleasure via short, 15 second, videos, warns an expert from Oxford University.

According to James Williams, an ethicist at Oxford, Chinese short-video making app TikTok is like a "candy store" full of "immediate pleasure", Wall Street Journal reported.

"It's like we've made kids live in a candy store and then we tell them to ignore all that candy and eat a plate of vegetables," Williams was quoted as saying. "We have an endless flow of immediate pleasures that's unprecedented in human history," he added.

Williams noted this could leave children struggling to focus on everyday tasks.

Frontal cortex is the area of the brain that helps humans con-



control focus. While adults are able to fully use it, children cannot as the brain is still not fully developed until the age of 25.

Scientists warn that if the brain becomes accustomed to 'constant changes' - like those in the digital world - it finds it difficult to stay focused, Daily Mail reported.

The short-video platform was also an instant success in India soon after it launched in September 2016. Though it was banned in the country in June 2020, over national security issues, several homegrown short-form video platforms hurriedly filled the vacuum. They now collectively attract over 240 million

active monthly users.

To take on TikTok, Meta, formerly Facebook, had also launched Reels on Instagram. With Reels, one can record and edit 15-30 second multi-clip videos with audio, effects and new creative tools.

TikTok and others draw users by monitoring which videos they spend the longest watching, and then showing them more videos similar to these.

Studies show that when users watch these it activates centres of the brain involved in addiction, further making it harder to put down the app.

TikTok is the second most popular social media platform among children in the US, after YouTube, with around 60 per cent of those aged 12 to 15 using it weekly.

A TikTok spokeswoman told WSJ that the app had recently made changes to curb extensive use of the app, including blocking users under-15 from receiving notifications beyond 9 p.m. and sending them regular reminders to take a break, the report said.



NARENDRA MODI INAUGURATES PRIME MINISTERS' MUSEUM, BUYS FIRST TICKET

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday dedicated to the nation "Pradhanmantri Sanghralaya" (Prime Ministers' museum) which will provide information regarding all the previous prime ministers of the country and their contribution in nation building.

Modi also bought the first ticket of the museum. Starting from the displays on freedom struggle and the framing of the Constitution, the museum tells the story of how our Prime Ministers navigated the nation through various challenges and ensured the all-round progress of the country, the PMO had said earlier.

Guided by the vision of Modi to honour the contribution of all the Prime Ministers of India towards nation building, the museum is a tribute to every Prime Minister of India since Independence, irrespective of their ideology or tenure in office. It is aimed at sensitising and inspiring the younger generation about the leadership, vision and achievements of all our Prime Ministers.

The design of the museum building is inspired by the story of rising India, shaped and moulded by the hands of its leaders. The design incorporates sustainable and energy conservation practices. No tree has been felled or transplanted during the course of work on the project.



The logo of the museum represents the hands of the people of India holding the 'Dharma

Chakra' symbolising the nation and democracy. Representing a seamless blend of the old and the new, the museum integrates the erstwhile Teen Murti Bhawan designated as Block I, with the newly constructed building designated as Block II. The total area of the two blocks is over 15,600 square metres. There are a total of 43 galleries in the museum.

Information for the museum was collected through resources / repositories with institutions such as Prasar Bharati, Doordarshan, Films Division, Sansad TV, Ministry of Defence, Media Houses (Indian and foreign), Foreign News Agencies, etc. Appropriate use of Archives (Collected Works and other literary works, important correspondences), some Personal items, Gifts & Memorabilia (Felicitations, Honours, Medals conferred, commemorative stamps, coins, etc.), speeches of Prime Ministers and anecdotal representation of ideologies and different aspects of the lives of Prime Ministers have been reflected in a thematic format.

The museum has employed cutting-edge technology-based interfaces to encompass heterogeneity in content and frequent rotation of display. Holograms, Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, Multi-touch, Multimedia, interactive kiosks, computerised kinetic sculptures, smartphone applications, interactive screens, experiential installations, etc., enable the exhibition content to become highly interactive and engaging.

We must remain ever vigilant against divisiveness, says CJI Ramana

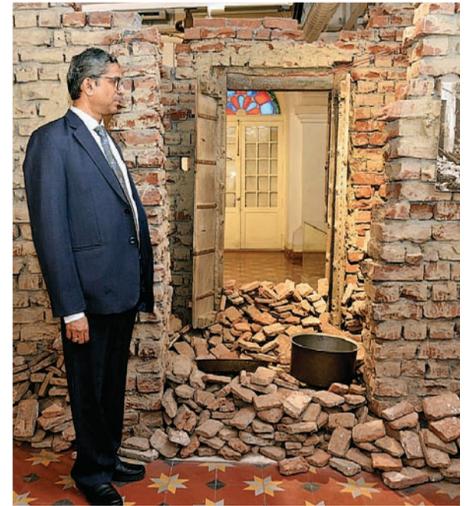
Team Absolute | New Delhi

Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana on Friday said one must remain vigilant against divisiveness and only through unity, can peace and progress be achieved.

He made the comments while visiting the Partition Museum in Amritsar.

"This museum reminds us of our tragic past and warns us against divisions of all kinds. It portrays vividly the losses suffered by mankind on an unprecedented scale due to the divide and rule policy of colonial powers. This dark chapter in our history should serve as a lesson to mankind. We must remain ever vigilant against divisiveness. Only through unity can we achieve peace and progress," Chief Justice Ramana observed in the visitors' book after walking through the museum.

Earlier, in the day, the Chief Justice also visited the Jallianwala Bagh and paid homage to the freedom fight-



ers. "Jallianwala Bagh manifests the strength and resilience of the people of this country. This serene garden is symbolic of the great sacrifice made in the face of tyranny. It serves as a

reminder of the heavy price paid for freedom, which we must always cherish and protect," he wrote in the visitors' book.

The Chief Justice also visited the Wagah Border and zero point.

Central govt departments asked for data on under-representations of SCs, STs

Team Absolute | New Delhi

With an aim to provide quota in promotions for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Central government, the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) has asked all departments to collect data of their under-representation before it finalises the policy for reservation in promotion.

The government move came after the Supreme Court order in January this year.

The DoPT has also asked the departments concerned to evaluate the suitability of the officials for the promotions under the impending policy.

Citing the apex court order which specified certain criteria to be satisfied by the government for the purpose of implementing the policy of reservation in promotion, the DoPT said: "All the ministries/departments are required to ensure that the above conditions are complied with before implementing the policy of reservation in promotions and carrying out any promotions based thereon."

The move will benefit the SCs and STs employees who were annoyed at for inordinate delay for their promotions.

The Central Secretariat Service (CSS) Forum had in January also urged the DoPT to immediately resume long-stalled promotions for its members.

NAGALAND GOVT BARS 'MASS CASUAL LEAVE' STIR OF DOCTORS

Kohima | Agencies

In view of the three-day 'mass casual leave' agitation by Nagaland government doctors from April 18 demanding increase in superannuation age, the state government has decided not to approve any casual leave to the doctors, officials said on Thursday.

Chief Secretary J. Alam, in an order, said that no one shall be granted casual leave from April 18 to 20, when the Nagaland In-Service Doctors Association (NIDA) has called upon its members to proceed on mass casual leave in pursuance of its demands for increase in superannua-



tion age from 60 to 62 years.

He held a meeting with the leaders of the NIDA on Wednesday and sought to persuade them to withdraw their decision but the meeting was inconclusive. An official statement said that Nagaland Government Servants Conduct Rules, 1968 prohibits government servants from par-

ticipating in any form of strike, including mass casual leave or in any way, abet any form of strike.

"There is no statutory provision empowering the employees to go on strike. The Supreme Court has also in several judgments agreed that going on strike is a grave misconduct under the Conduct Rules and should be dealt with, in accordance with the law," the statement said.

Noting that maintenance of public health and sanitation including hospitals and dispensaries are essential services under the Nagaland Essential Services (Maintenance) Act, 1978, the statement said that the proposed mass casual leave is likely to cause

severe disruption in medical care and public health services and is, therefore, liable to endanger the lives, health and security of the people of the state.

This will tantamount to violating the provisions of the Act and invite penal action, it said.

The Principal Director, Health and Family Welfare shall also issue directions to all Chief Medical Officers, Medical Superintendent of various hospitals, controlling officers in the district, sub-district, hospital level not to approve casual leave of any officers during the period of April 18 to 20 and if already granted, to recall or revoke the leave.

Bengal govt rations beer supply to retail liquor outlets

Kolkata | Agencies

There is bad news for beer lovers in West Bengal, and that too at a time when demand for the mild alcoholic beverage is on the rise because of the scorching summer heat.

The state excise department has decided to ration the supply of the beverage to retail liquor outlets of the state till further orders.

The excise department has issued clear instruction to the West Bengal State Beverage Corporation (WBSBC), the sole wholesale supplier of alcoholic beverages in the state, on this count and also provided a formula for rationing.

Explaining the rationing formula, a senior official of the WBSBC said on condition of anonymity that as per the excise department directive, one retail liquor outlet in a month will receive only that amount of beer bottles or cans that they raised from the corporation in the same month of the previous year, i.e., 2021.

The directive is effective from April 2022 and will continue till further orders, which means till the production and supply of beer gets stabilised.

Excise Commissioner S. Umashankar admitted that because of the pandemic situation, the pace of beer production had slowed, leading to the supply crisis.



However, he expressed hope that the situation will come under control soon, and supplies will be stabilised and rationing will be withdrawn.

This is not the first time that the excise department has decided to ration supply of beer in the state.

O.P. Gupta, who owns multiple retail liquor outlets, told reporter that the new rule will be a

matter of worry if the rationing continues for a long time, since the demand for beer will rise further in the next three months when the summer heat will be at its peak. IANS also contacted the office of the Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies in New Delhi to get its comment on this issue. But it declined to comment on the matter.

Raj CM criticises 'bulldozer justice', says no one has right to demolish houses

Jaipur | Agencies

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Thursday condemned the "bulldozer justice" saying neither the chief minister nor the prime minister has the power to get houses demolished by bulldozers.

"The right of demolishing houses via bulldozers does not lie even with the CM and PM," he said, adding "How can you raze a house without any investigation, without holding anyone accountable? What must be crossing an innocent's mind when on seeing his house being brought down like a pack of cards," he questioned. Commenting on the opposition without naming them, he said: "They say that innocent people have been arrested in Karauli violence. So can the



Rajasthan government bulldoze their houses since they have been arrested?" he questioned. He also expressed sadness at TV footage showing helpless people crying while their houses were being brought down. "They were crying, they were poor and no one had the right to bring down their houses without fair investigation. Let law take

its own course," he said and accused some state governments of flouting all laws and constitutional norms. "They have endangered the nation by raiding establishments by misusing judiciary powers, ED and Income Tax. Youngsters have to understand which way is the nation going or else they shall have to pay the cost," he warned.

President, VP, PM pay tributes to Dr Ambedkar on Jayanti



Team Absolute | New Delhi

President, Vice-President and Prime Minister on Thursday paid homage to Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar on his Jayanti.

Remembering Dr Ambedkar, President Ram Nath Kovind tweeted: "A strong advocate of social justice, as architect of the Indian Constitution Babasaheb laid the foundation of modern India. Let us do our part in building an

inclusive society following his ideal of 'Indian first, Indian later and Indian last'." In a tweet, Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu said: "My humble tributes to the architect of the Indian Constitution, Dr B.R. Ambedkar on his birth anniversary today. Babasaheb was a multi-faceted genius - a legal luminary, visionary statesman, outstanding constitutional expert, brilliant parliamentarian & social reformer." "He was the voice of the

socially oppressed and dedicated his life to the upliftment of the marginalized sections of society. His iconic life and noble thoughts continue to guide the nation," Naidu added. In his tribute to Dr Ambedkar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said: "Tributes to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar on his Jayanti. He has made indelible contributions to India's progress. This is a day to reiterate our commitment to fulfil his dreams for our nation."

13 INJURED IN CYLINDER BLAST IN DELHI



New Delhi: At least 13 persons suffered burns in a suspected cylinder blast that took place inside a restaurant, near the Jamia Millia Islamia, in Delhi's Okhla area on Thursday, officials said. According to the Fire Department, it is suspected to be an AC compressor or cylinder blast. All the injured were taken to the Holy Family hospital where they are undergoing treatment. Four fire vehicles were sent to the site. Police also said that they were looking into the matter. The cause of blast was yet to be ascertained.

Fresh tussle between Bengal Gov, Speaker over law & order

Kolkata | Agencies

Ambedkar birth anniversary celebrations within the West Bengal Assembly premises on Thursday turned into a verbal spat between Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar and Speaker Biman Banerjee.

The Governor, who came to the Assembly premises to pay floral tributes, chose the occasion to pour out his opinion about the law & order in the state.

"West Bengal has become a gas chamber for democracy. First the people are burnt alive and the victims of the family members are offered jobs. Why are there so many questions on the Central Bureau of Investigation probe? The state government does not forward any report to the governor. The crime against women is on the rise. No action was taken even after so many incidents of post-poll violence in the state. I wonder whether some consider themselves to be above the law," the Governor said with the Assembly Speaker standing next to him. Dhankhar also referred to incident of the Calcutta High Court on Wednesday, when two groups of advocates, one having affiliations with the ruling Trinamool Congress and the other to CPI-M, clashed within the court premises over the issue of boycott of the bench of Justice Abhijit Gangopadhyay,



who ordered CBI grilling for erstwhile state education minister, Partha Chatterjee (currently the state commerce & industries minister) in the probe on recruitment irregularities of West Bengal School Service A/Commission (WBSSC). "What happened at Calcutta High Court on Wednesday was most unfortunate. The temple of justice was shamed. The people of the state are living with constant fear," the government.

While he was speaking to the media-persons, the Speaker tried to interrupt and reminded him that the Assembly premises was not the place for media interaction. But the Governor totally ignored him and kept on speaking to the media. Immediately after the Governor left, Speaker Biman Banerjee told newsmen that no one should cross the limits. "The governor says a lot of

things, many of which are not true. We operate as per provisions of the India constitution," the Speaker said.

The state transport minister and the Kolkata mayor, Firhad Hakim also reminded the Governor of his limits. "The governor can seek report or give suggestions to the state government. But the state cabinet runs the administration as per constitutional provisions. If the governor desires extra constitutional power, that is never possible," Hakim said. BJP's state spokesperson, Shamik Bhattacharya came in defence of the Governor. "It has been a habit of the Trinamool Congress leaders, including the chief minister, to attack the governor on any issue. It is true that West Bengal is going through a constitutional crisis. That is why the ruling party is attacking the governor," he said.



PAWAR HOME ATTACK: SATARA POLICE TAKE CUSTODY OF ACCUSED LAWYER

A LAWYER FOR MAHARASHTRA STATE ROAD TRANSPORT CORPORATION (MSRTC) EMPLOYEES GUNRATAN SADAVARTE - ONE OF THE PRIME ACCUSED IN THE PAWAR HOME ATTACK CASE - WAS ARRESTED AND TAKEN AWAY BY THE SATARA POLICE, HERE ON THURSDAY.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A lawyer for Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) employees Gunratan Sadavarte - one of the prime accused in the Pawar home attack case - was arrested and taken away by the Satara Police, here on Thursday. Adv. Sadavarte has been charged for making inflammatory speeches two years ago against Chhatrapati Udayanraje Bhosale and Chhatrapati Sambhaji Raje - both direct descendants of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. After a complaint lodged by Rajendra Nikam, the Satara Police are probing the case, and Sadavarte had ignored police summons for

questioning in October 2020. Soon after the shocking April 8 attack on the Silver Oaks bungalow of Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) President Sharad Pawar, Sadavarte was nabbed, while his wife, Adv. Jayshri Patil-Sadavarte is also a wanted absconder. He was granted two police remands of two days each and on Wednesday (April 13) sent to judicial custody for 14 days after which the Girgaum Magistrate Court allowed him to be handed over to Satara Police till April 17. A total of 115 have been arrested including a journalist from Pune Chandrakant Suryawanshi - who has been sent to police custody for 3 days till April 16. On Wednesday, the Special Public Prosecutor Pradip D. Gharat

informed the court of a new financial angle that emerged in the investigations, with Sadavarte collecting over Rs 2-crore from the MSRTC staffers to fight their case. A witness has approached the police and testified that he himself had handed over an amount of Rs 80-lakhs to Sadavarte after which the additional Indian Penal Code Sec. 409 - that can attract a maximum life sentence in jail - was added, according to Gharat. It may be recalled that a mob of over 100 MSRTC employees, including many women at the lead, had attacked Pawar's home with stones and shoes. Later, the home department admitted to a lapse in heading intel-inputs, while the MSRTC employees who are accused of taking part in the attack will be dismissed from service.

Mumbai: NCB nabs South African man with 3.98-kg heroin

The Narcotics Control Bureau on Thursday said it has nabbed a South African national with 3.98 kg heroin when he landed at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport on Tuesday.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Narcotics Control Bureau on Thursday said it has nabbed a South African national with 3.98 kg heroin when he landed at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport on Tuesday. Following a specific tip-off, the NCB Mumbai Zonal team lay in wait for the passenger - whose identity has not been revealed - arriving by a flight from Johannesburg with a red trolley bag in which the contraband was concealed. A search of the luggage revealed a hidden cavity with four packs of heroin, totalling some 3.98 kgs - worth around Rs 25 crore in



the market - which has been seized by the NCB. A couple of years ago, the NCB had arrested a South African woman with a similar quantity of heroin at the CSMA. Officials said that with the air travel restrictions lifted after the relaxation of the pandemic norms, the NCB is keeping a hawk's eye for suspicious passengers who may be involved in international trafficking of narcotics.

One held for illegal fishing in Pench Tiger Reserve, boats seized

The Special Tiger Protection Force (STPF) at the Pench Tiger Reserve near here has arrested one person, and seized two boats from neighbouring Chhindwara district in Madhya Pradesh, for illegal fishing in Totladoh dam which comes under the tiger project area in Nagpur district.



Nagpur | Agencies

The Special Tiger Protection Force (STPF) at the Pench Tiger Reserve near here has arrested one person, and seized two boats from neighbouring Chhindwara district in Madhya Pradesh, for illegal fishing in Totladoh dam which comes under the tiger project area in Nagpur dis-

trict. The Deputy Director of Pench Tiger Reserve (PTR), Prabhunath Shukla, informed that the STPF busted an eight-member gang which had sneaked into the Totladoh reservoir inside the PTR. According to the forest officer, the STPF jawans noticed eight boats on the east side of Totladoh reservoir on Tuesday evening. The jawans chased the fishermen and nabbed one of them

apart from seizing two boats. The accused has been identified as Ramdas Sarate, a resident of Dudhgaon, Chhindwara. He was produced before the court at Ramtek on Wednesday, which remanded him to two-day police custody. "The boats were hidden under water, which is a common practice by fishermen to cover-up their crime," Shukla said.

Maharashtra received highest funds from SDRF during COVID-19

Maharashtra received the highest amount from SDRF and Madhya Pradesh has got the maximum NDRF fund. Maharashtra has received maximum fund from central ministry with Rs. 5,766 crore, UP received second most with 3,479 crore, MP received 3,276 crore. All funds released to state government subject to submission of utilisation certificate, annual reports etc..

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The cash-starved state government spent Rs. 1,500 crore on tackling Covid-19 from April 1, 2020 to August, 2021. This does not include the expenses incurred by the health department and BMC. The Centre contributes 75 percent of SDRF every year and use is audited by the CAG. SDRF is to be used to provide for temporary accommodation, food, clothing and medical care for people in quarantine camps or for cluster containment, the cost of consumables for sample collection, and support for checking and contact tracing. Prafull Sarda, a Pune based social activist has sort a RTI, through which details show that during Covid-19 pandemic

Maharashtra has got maximum funds under SDRF and Madhya Pradesh has got maximum NDRF fund. RTI reply from Ministry of Home Affairs to query said "keeping in the view the spread of Covid-19 virus in India by way of special one time dispensation- The central govt allowed states to use SDRF - State Disaster Risk Management Fund upto 50 percent for 20-21 and 21-22 of their total allocation." Maharashtra has received maximum fund from central ministry with Rs. 5,766 crore, UP received second most with 3,479 crore, MP received 3,276 crore, Odisha got 2,887 crore, Bihar got 2,548 crore, Gujarat got 2,383 crore, Andhra Pradesh received 2,014 crore, Tamil Nadu received 1,836 crore and West

Bengal got 1,819 crore respectively. Above all funds released to state government subject to submission of utilisation certificate, annual reports etc... said an official of SDRF. Prafull Sarda said, based on COVID-19 cases during first and second wave most of the states have shared details, utilisation certificate, audit reports to get qualify to get funds as per their requirement and based on their requirement central ministry has allotted fund and allowed states to use 50 percent to fight against COVID-19. Maharashtra had highest number of cases have managed to get maximum funds and utilised to keep covid cases under control. But, about NDRF most of the BJP led states have got upper hand and MP has got maximum fund and

states Bihar, Gujarat, Karnataka got preference while allotment of funds, said Sarda. The highest spends have been of Rs. 255 crore for the Pune region, Rs. 236 crore for Konkan, Rs. 194 crore for Aurangabad and Rs 145. crore for Nagpur during COVID-19 peak time. An officer of SDRF informed that, "the funds have largely been used for thermal scanners, ventilators, air purifiers, oxygen generation and storage plants, strengthening ambulance services, setting up of containment zones, COVID hospitals and quarantine centres and consumables in the government hospitals." "A high-level committee under the SDRF has prescribed rules for utilisation of funds and accordingly, we have spent funds for tackling the pandemic situation," said the official.

BENGAL MONITOR LIZARD RAPED IN MAHARASHTRA, 4 ARRESTED

The Maharashtra forest authorities have arrested four hunters for allegedly raping a bengal monitor lizard in the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve. The forest officials came to know about the incident when they checked the mobile phone of the accused.

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Four people have been arrested for allegedly raping a bengal monitor lizard in the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve near Gothane village in Maharashtra. The accused, identified as hunters, allegedly entered the core zone of Sahyadri Tiger Reserve in the Gabha area at Gothane and committed the abhorrent crime. They have been identified as Sandeep Tukram, Pawar Mangesh, Janardhan Kamtekar and Akshay Sunil. The Maharashtra Forest Department checked the mobile phone of the accused and came to know about the incident. The officials found the recording of the act which showed the accused allegedly gang-raping the monitor lizard. The forest officials posted at Sangli forest reserve traced the accused with the help of CCTV footage in which they can be seen roaming in the forest. Furnishing further details of the incident, the authorities informed that three accused had come



from Konkan to Kolhapur's Chandoli village for hunting. The forest officials, who are perplexed about the incident, will take up the matter with the Indian Penal Court to discuss the charges against the accused. According to the officials, the accused will

be produced in a court and appropriate legal action will be taken against them. For the unversed, the bengal monitor lizard is a reserved species under the Wildlife Protection Act 1972. If convicted, the accused could be charged with seven years of imprisonment.

Maharashtra needs law university: Justice Oka

Thane | Agencies

Maharashtra needs a separate law university on the lines of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, Justice Abhay S Oka of the Supreme Court said here on Thursday. Speaking at a conference organized here by the Bar Council of Maharashtra and Goa and Thane District Courts Bar Association, he also said that financial constraints should not come in the way of the improvement of judicial infrastructure in the country. Maharashtra needs a law university, he said, citing the examples of such spe-

cialized varsities in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The Lawyers Academy set up by the Bar Council was a good initiative, Justice Oka noted. Maharashtra should become the number one state in the country in terms of judicial infrastructure, he said. The finance departments of the states should change their attitude while sanctioning funds for improvement of judicial infrastructure, the judge said. Access to justice is a fundamental right of citizens, and financial constraints cannot be the reason for not ensuring this right, Justice Oka said.

Speaking in Marathi, he noted that the state government had issued a notification in 1998 that functioning of courts up to the district level should be carried out in Marathi, but it was not implemented. Why should Maharashtra, which has produced some of the best lawyers and judges, should lag behind in terms of infrastructure, Justice Oka wondered. Of 48 Chief Justices of the apex court, nine were from Maharashtra and of 15 Attorney Generals five were from the state, he pointed out. He also praised building management system at taluka courts in Karnataka.

After 2 years, Dabbawalas let their load down for 'festival break'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

For the first time after the two years of Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, Mumbai's famed Dabbawalas have gone on a five-day break to celebrate the annual village festivals with their near and dear ones, a spokesperson said here on Thursday. Since the start of the pandemic, this is the first opportunity for over 5,000 Dabbawalas to take time off to travel to their villages, mostly in Pune district and celebrate the festivities of Dev Khandoba, their deity. "Prior to the pandemic we used to announce our annual festival leave in advance to enable customers to make alternative arrangements. This year, there are four holidays of the five-day sojourn, so our patrons readily cooperated," said Ritesh S. Andre, spokesperson for Nutan Mumbai Tiffin Box Suppliers Charity Trust and Mumbai Tiffin Box Suppliers Association (NMTBSC and MTBSA). Since Tuesday, a majority of the Dabbawalas -- 95 per cent of the tribe -- have reached their villages like Khed, Junnar, Maval, Mulshi, and the rest scattered across Maharashtra, he added. During the pandemic lockdown, the Dabbawalas were among the worst-hit service sectors with business trickling down to virtu-

ally zero and many took up alternative jobs or even quit their world-renowned profession. The NMTBSC and MTBSA also explored options like large community kitchens for large-scale deliveries, tying up with other organisations in similar businesses, etc., to ensure livelihood for the then jobless Dabbawalas. "Presently, of the 5,000 barely 1,200 Dabbawalas are on duty and serving around 20,000 customers who have started attending their offices after the restrictions were lifted in March... We expect more to join gradually and substantially by June," Andre said with hopes of hard times finally passing them. Returning to their villages, many Dabbawalas were accorded a welcome with cheers and tears by their families from whom they had been separated and not congregated to celebrate the Dev Khandoba festival for two consecutive years. "This year, we have been selected for the prestigious 80th 'Master Deenanath Mangeshkar Award' which will be presented to us in Mumbai on April 24," said Andre proudly, of yet another recognition to his toiling ilk. Well before the award ceremony -- which is likely to be attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi -- the Dabbawalas shall return to their daily grind from Monday (April 18) to ferry the tiffin-boxes filled with good food for their familiar customers.

Why Raj Thackeray wants mosque loudspeakers removed

The MNS chief is seen as trying to gain ground among Hinduva supporters in a bid to stay relevant in Maharashtra politics

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) president Raj Thackeray, on April 12, issued an ultimatum that his party workers will take 'appropriate action' if the Uddhav Thackeray government did not get loudspeakers removed from mosques across the state by May 3. He said that while he was not adverse to use of loudspeakers on special occasions, he wouldn't tolerate them blaring throughout the year. Thackeray, addressing an MNS rally in Thane, on the outskirts of Mumbai, appealed to Hindus to play

Hanuman Chalisa on loudspeakers outside mosques if the loudspeakers at mosques continued to relay azaan. "This is not a religious matter. It is an issue of noise pollution," Thackeray said. "They should know how much we suffer because of the noise pollution." The MNS chief's stand is being seen as an attempt to get closer to the BJP, the party he had vociferously targeted till last year. Once seen as a rising political force, the MNS has been losing appeal among people has over the past decade. Between 2009 and now, the party's strength in the assembly has gone down from 13 to one. It also lost power in the Nashik Municipal Corporation in 2017. In the 2019 Maharashtra assembly election, the MNS won only one seat (Pramod Patil from Kalyan) in the 288-member Maharashtra legislative assembly. While Raj Thackeray's charisma is intact, his party is struggling to stay

relevant in Maharashtra politics. With elections to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) likely in October, Raj Thackeray appears to be eyeing the support of Hinduva supporters, who usually vote for the BJP. "Voters who support aggressive Hinduva but do not appreciate the BJP's Gujarati leadership will be our target [in the BMC elections]," claims an MNS leader, requesting anonymity. The BJP will need the MNS to be able to corner a share of the Marathi vote, which is the backbone of its former ally Shiv Sena. BJP sources say the party has identified at least 25 seats, of the total of 236, in the BMC where it could defeat the Sena by tacitly helping the MNS. The BJP aims to achieve its target of winning at least 120 seats in the BMC by engineering a division in the Marathi vote. BJP MLA Nitesh Rane, part of the party's strategy team for Mumbai,

says the party will not have an alliance with the MNS. Political observers, however, say a formal tie-up between the BJP and MNS has the potential to dethrone the Shiv Sena from the BMC-its bastion since 1997. The biggest hurdle to any such tie-up will be the MNS's image of an anti-migrants party. Raj Thackeray, in the past, has openly advocated targeting north Indian migrants in Mumbai, accusing them of taking away jobs from Marathis and spoiling the local culture. He has of late diluted his stand and claims he was not against north Indians but only the anti-social elements among them. The Thane rally was a rare occasion when Raj Thackeray did not utter a word against north Indian migrants. Rather, his remark about playing the Hanuman Chalisa was seen as an attempt to woo north Indians, among whom Lord Hanuman has a wide following.



EDITOR'S SPECS

'CHINTAN' FOR 'CHINTAN SHIVIR'

After poll debacle in five states and discontent simmering within the party, the Congress will hold a brainstorming session 'Chintan Shivir' likely next month. Ahead of the session, the party's CWC will meet to finalise the agenda. Senior Congress leaders have been meeting regularly to work on the agenda. Sonia Gandhi has assigned this task to senior leaders like Ambika Soni and Mukul Wasnik, who are holding talks with other leaders to finalise the agenda for the congress working committee (CWC) and the Chintan Shivir. The Chintan Shivir has been necessitated since the dissidents have been raising voices against the present functioning of the party. The G-23 is up against Rahul Gandhi and his team, even as the party's interim chief Sonia Gandhi has been holding meetings with the dissidents to cull internal rift. Sonia Gandhi on April 5 while addressing the parliamentary party had said that the revival of the party was essential for democracy and the results of elections were "shocking" and "painful". In her address, she had said, "Our dedication and determination, our spirit of resilience is under severe test. Unity at all levels of our vast organisation is of paramount importance and speaking for myself, I am determined to do whatever is needed to ensure it. Our revival is not just a matter of importance to us alone...it is, in fact, essential for our democracy itself and indeed for our society as well. "I am very well aware how disappointed you are at the recent election results. They have been both shocking and painful. The Congress working committee (CWC) has met once to review our performance. have met with other colleagues too. I have received many suggestions on how to strengthen our organisation. Many are pertinent and I am working on them."

THE 'HAQQANI GENERALS' AND THE THREAT OF FASCISM IN PAKISTAN

Pavan Kaushik

Imran Khan was finally booted out of power on the early morning hours of April 10. This is the first time in the political history of Pakistan that a sitting prime minister has been unseated through a vote of no confidence. This illustrates how deeply the Pakistani political and military establishment is divided. The fundamental cause for this division is two folds - one reason for the above mentioned division is the unstoppable downward spiral of Pakistan's economy and the other is the denial of rights of oppressed nations living under the iron clad of the federation of Pakistan. Can the new Pakistani Prime minister Shehbaz Sharif turn the crisis Pakistan is faced with today into an opportunity? In this article, I am going to look into issues Pakistan is facing and suggest some solutions. Over the years Pakistan has become a debt dependent economy. In order to run the day to day expenses of the country and to pay for the interest on the loans, Pakistan has to get more loans creating a vicious debt cycle. Secondly, Pakistan remains at the verge of social explosion. Perpetual decrease in the buying power of the population caused by inflation, continuous power failures due to energy crisis and breakdown of the health and social services sector due to lack of development funds are now translating into public anger in various forms and shapes. One form of public dissent is being expressed through Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), while other include the creation of Tehreek e Labbaik Pakistan and Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf. The top brass of the military establishment is keenly divided

between what I term the 'Haqqani Generals' led by the former DG ISI and the current Corps commander Peshawar, Lt General Faiz Hameed, and those who align themselves with the army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa. Finally, the national question that revolves around the issue of political representation based on economic sovereignty remains dangerously unresolved. From Balochistan to Sindh and from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to Pakistan-occupied Jammu Kashmir (PoJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan (PoGB), national liberation struggles are now a reality that might not resolve simply by issuing press statements and horse trading. In a nut-shell, the federation of Pakistan that entered troubled waters due to economic mismanagement and plunder is now collapsing under the threat of multiple armed separatist movements. In various parts of Pakistan, the ultimate authority of the federation seems to be broken-down beyond repair. The central authority of the state is being challenged with guns in Baluchistan and KPK. And the 1973 constitution of Pakistan appears to have decisively failed to keep the federation intact. The economy of the country under discussion has gone under. With lack of a community based cottage industry that could become the foundation for small industry, which in turn could become a base for heavy industry, Pakistan cannot make her economy turn around. China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project is going to add more debt to the economy and it has become both economically and politically a dead project. The Baluch and the people of PoGB are not accepting the plunder of their natural resources in the name of "progress". Hence, if Pakistan is to survive as a geographical entity, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Army Chief General Bajwa have to reconsider the relation between the



federation and the provinces and establish a confederation. Forming a confederation between the provinces and the centre simply means that the ultimate authority of control over natural resources, taxes and trade lies with the individual units or states and not with the federal state. The centre then becomes a weak body which is formed by member states only to deal with matters relating to foreign policy and defence. Therefore, Shehbaz Sharif will have to enter into negotiation with all the stakeholders and win a consensus. This would, firstly, remove the internal security threats to Pakistan and secondly, create a peaceful and stable environment for reshaping a self-reliant economic base. Stable economic environment is the first step toward containing social unrest and relocate the protesting population from the streets into the agricultural and industrial sector. And finally only by forming a confederation can Shehbaz Sharif guarantee an end to the political conflict that is current-

ly being negotiated though the barrel of gun. However, unless Shehbaz Sharif resolves the Kashmir issue by accepting PoJK and PoGB as illegally occupied territories and accelerates their peaceful return into the folds of the Republic of India, peace between India and Pakistan will remain a far-fetched dream. The ousting of Imran Khan did not deter the looming threat of religious fascism in the region. Imran Khan was and remains the representative of a conservative middle class that has been crushed due to economic instability, the urban jobless lumpen elements and the generals who have supported Islamic Jihad in Afghanistan and Kashmir. The rise of the Haqqanis to power in Kabul was orchestrated by the 'Haqqani generals' of Pakistan military led by Lt general Faiz Hamid. No wonder after being thrown out of power, Imran Khan's first public rally and a show of street power was held in Peshawar

where the former DG of ISI, Lt general Faiz Hameed serves as the Corps commander. The immediate threat of fascism staying in power might have been gotten rid of but the threat looms on the streets and among the top brass of military establishment of Pakistan. A military coup led by mass support of the religious right could prove to be a detrimental to the region. Prime Minister Sharif has a mountainous task ahead of him with limited political space to maneuver, therefore, he is left with no choice but to crush the fascist goons on the streets and eliminate the 'Haqqani generals' while negotiating the transformation of the federation of Pakistan into a voluntary confederation of sovereign states.

(Dr Amjad Ayub Mirza is an author and a human rights activist from Mirpur in PoJK. He currently lives in exile in the UK)

international

IMRAN KHAN MOVES PAK SC TO BAN DISSIDENT PTI LAWMAKERS FOR LIFE

Islamabad | Agencies

Former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has moved the Supreme Court on Thursday seeking disqualification of dissident Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf members of the National Assembly, media reports said. The petition lists the Election Commission of Pakistan, the Speaker of the National Assembly, the Law Secretary, and the Cabinet Secretary as parties, and has been filed under Article 184(3) of the Constitution which states that for the apex court to have jurisdiction on a matter, the matter needs to be of public importance and a violation of fundamental rights mentioned in the Constitution, Express Tribune reported. The petition requested that the dissident PTI members should be disqualified from parliamentary affairs for life and that if any member wants to leave the party they must resign as



members of the NA first "instead of committing defection as provided in Article 63-A of the Constitution by changing his loyalty in favour of another political party actuated by hidden motive". It stated that shifting loyalties meant that the individual was no longer "sadiq and amin (truthful and honest)".

The petition further claimed that the votes cast by dissident PTI members in the no-confidence motion against Imran Khan should not be counted. "Being an elected representative (it) is constitutionally prohibited and morally reprehensible to refrain from act of defection (against their parliamentary party), and the member cannot claim a vested right to have his vote counted... and such tainted votes are to be excluded from the vote count," the petition reads, Express Tribune reported. It stated that there was no reason for the dissident party members to not be banned for life. "This honourable court has observed in many cases that defection or floor crossing is nothing short of a disease of cancer to the entire body of politics and it destroys the spirit of democratic governance," the petition said, adding that this justified a lifetime ban, the report said.

Pak NSC meeting did not include 'conspiracy' in statement: DG ISPR

Rawalpindi | Agencies

Pakistan's Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Director General Major General Babar Iftikhar on Thursday said that the word "conspiracy" was not used in the statement issued after a meeting of the National Security Committee last month, media reports said. He was answering a question by a journalist at his press conference about the army leadership's stance on former Prime Minister Imran Khan's claim of a foreign conspiracy to oust him and whether the NSC had endorsed such a claim, the Dawn reported. "As far as military response about the NSC meeting is considered, that stance, in that meeting was fully given, and then a statement was issued... which clearly says what was concluded in that meeting. The words used are in front of you... as I said... the words used are clear. Is there any word such as conspiracy used in it? I think not," Maj Gen Iftikhar said. He said the minutes of the NSC meeting can be declassified if the government decides. In another answer, the ISPR DG revealed that the former Prime Minister had approached the army chief to help find a solution to the political crisis,

Dawn reported. "It is unfortunate that our political leadership was not ready to talk. So the army chief and DG ISI went to the PMO and three scenarios were discussed," he said, recalling that one was that the no-confidence motion should be held as it was. The other were that the Prime Minister resigns or the no-confidence motion was retracted and the assemblies were dissolved. "No option from the establishment was given," Gen Iftikhar clarified. He was briefing journalists on the recently held formation commanders conference at the General Headquarters on the recent disinformation campaign against the smear campaign against the military. The ISPR DG rubbished rumours doing the rounds on social media about the establishment meeting opposition parties. "There is no truth to this," he asserted, Dawn reported. "I heard these things... Investigative journalism has gone forward a lot. If someone has evidence, bring it forward. There were no such contacts, no deal... For God's sake, there is nothing like this," he said, further refuting BBC's story on the army chief meeting Imran Khan on the night of April 9. "I said it that day too that whatever political process has run, the army had no role or interference at any stage."

No progress in denuclearisation, inter-Korean ties Int'l community voices concerns over Japan's 'planned' release of radioactive wastewater

Seoul | Agencies

South Korea's Unification Minister-designate Kwon Young-se said Thursday it would be "difficult" to normalise inter-Korean ties as long as nuclear-armed North Korea continues to advance its nuclear development. Kwon, a four-term People Power Party lawmaker, made the remarks as he appeared at his office for the first time in central Seoul after being nominated to lead the ministry handling Seoul-Pyongyang affairs, Yonhap news agency reported. "Amid a situation that North Korea has nuclear weapons and is continuing to make advance-

ments in its nuclear development, I think the normalisation of inter-Korean relations is difficult," he told reporters. "One of the big obstacles (to inter-Korean relations) is the nuclear issue," he said. Kwon took issue with the latest statement by Kim Yo-jong, the sister of the North's leader, which carried a thinly-veiled threat to mobilise its "nuclear combat force" against the South. She was angrily responding to South Korean Defense Minister Suh Wook's remarks that the South's military has "preemptive strike" capabilities that can be used if needed to destroy the origin of an imminent North Korean missile attack. The nominee made clear

that the South can't incessantly dangle "carrots" for the North while it refuses dialogue. He added the incoming government will explore how to create momentum for dialogue although that is not an easy task under the current circumstances. "For sure, (we) will make a request for dialogue," he said in response to a question about whether the Yoon Suk-yeol administration to be launched in May has an intention of proposing talks with the North. The North has recently ratcheted up tensions in the region, resuming the test-firing of an intercontinental ballistic missile last month that ended its yearslong moratorium on such tests.

Tokyo | Agencies

Japan continued to push forward with its plan to discharge radioactive wastewater from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the sea despite a host of local and international opposition. "The contaminated water released into the ocean will spread across the entire Pacific Ocean in 10 years and affect almost all of our sea," said South Korean Representative Seo Sam-seok at a forum on Monday to seek ways of cooperating with neighbouring countries to tackle Japan's plan to dump the nuclear wastewater next spring, Xinhua news agency reported. "Marine pollution will be inevitable, so the government and political circles should proactively act for the safety of the people," he added. Civic activists in South Korea also voiced their concerns through protests. The Pohang Citizens Behavior, composed of six



civic groups and residents, held a protest rally against Japan's plan last week. The port city is forecast to be one of the hardest-hit fishing areas by the polluted water. The current Moon Jae-in government has banned imports of marine products caught in Japanese waters near Fukushima prefecture. The Japanese government's decision would cause danger to the safety of the maritime environment of the neighboring countries, said Anna Malindog-Uy, researcher of Philippine-BRICS Strategic Studies, noting the decision was made "unilaterally without sufficient consultation with neighboring

countries." "If something goes wrong with the sad plan, developing countries like the Philippines, like my country, we're surely be adversely affected and left on their own to suffer the negative consequences," she added. Cavince Adhere, a Kenya-based international relations scholar, pointed out that numerous scientific studies have linked radioactive elements contained in the water to public health risks. "Given the interconnectedness of the world waterways and food systems, the move by Japan could see millions of people in faraway spaces, including Kenya, affected," he said. "Japan is exposing the world to multiple and far-reaching consequences with the nuclear discharge," he added. It has been a year since Japan unilaterally announced its decision to dump radioactive wastewater accumulated at the crisis-hit Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the Pacific

Ocean. In December 2021, Tokyo Electric Power Company, the plant's operator, submitted an application to Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority with a detailed plan for discharging the contaminated water. The controversial plan is proposed to begin in the spring of 2023. The handling of the nuclear-contaminated water from Fukushima is not a private matter for Japan, said Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian. Instead, it bears on the marine environment and public health of the whole world. Zhao added that Japan should heed the appeals of neighboring countries and the international community and rescind its decision to dump the water into the sea. "It mustn't wantonly start the ocean discharge before reaching consensus with stakeholders and relevant international institutions through full consultations," Zhao said.



MUSLIM CLERICS MEET HM, DGP TO VOICE THEIR CONCERN OVER KHARGONE'S COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

A delegation of Muslim clerics led by Bhopal Qazi Syed Mushtaq Ali Nadwi met Director General of Police (DGP) Sudhir Saxena and the state Home Minister Narottam Mishra to express its concern over Khargone's communal violence incident.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The delegation also voiced its concern over Bajrang Dal and other Hindu religious groups' announcement of taking out a procession in Muslim dominated areas on Hanuman Jayanti (April 16). They urged the home minister and DGP to ensure tight security in Muslim dominated areas to avoid any untoward incident in the state capital. "Bajrang Dal has announced to take out a procession on Hanuman Jayanti in Muslim dominated areas, which are highly sensitive with narrow lanes. They are repeatedly warning on social media to carry out a procession in Itwara and

Budhwara localities. During this ongoing Ramzan festival, people of Muslim community in these areas are worried," the delegation stated in a letter handed over to the state home minister. The Muslim clerics also informed that CCTV cameras would be installed in all the mosques across the state. Bhopal Qazi - Syed Mushtaq Ali Nadwi said the state home minister and the DGP have assured heavy police force to be deployed to maintain a peaceful situation during Ramzan. Meanwhile, the delegation voiced its concern over state government's action against Muslim community in Khargone. It accused the police and the state government of biased action. "This is nothing less than



oppression of Muslims. Those who are guilty should be punished but without probing the veracity of accusations houses and business establishments of Muslims are being razed," said Syed Mushtaq Ali. Narottam Mishra has welcomed the initiative to install CCTV cameras in mosques. He said, "If CCTV cameras help in allaying any confusion it must be installed."

CURFEW RELAXED FOR 2 HRS IN RIOT-HIT KHARGONE IN MP

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Curfew was relaxed for two hours on Thursday in communal violence-hit Madhya Pradesh's Khargone district to buy essentials from the market. However, the police administration made it clear that only women will be allowed to run the errands for household items during relaxation. The development comes four days after communal violence broke out in Khargone prompting the district administration to impose a complete curfew in the area. The town is under curfew since April 10 post widespread communal violence on Ram Navami. "The situation is under control. Only women have been allowed to step out of their homes to buy essential



commodities during the two-hour relaxation from 10 am to 12 pm," Khargone Collector Anugrah P told reporters on Thursday. State Home Minister Narottam Mishra also informed that the situation in the riot-hit area was under

control, with several units of state and the central forces still deployed to ensure the peaceful situation. "The situation is under control and legal action is being taken against the suspects. Those who play with the peace and tranquility of the state on

social media will also not be spared," Mishra said while talking to the press in Bhopal on Thursday. Meanwhile, a source told IANS that communal tension was not confined to Khargone town only. A house belonging to a particular community was attacked on Wednesday night by a mob of local residents in Dhargaon village in Mandaleswar area, 51 km from violence hit Khargone town. A video of the fresh incident surfaced in social media. The police said the matter is being investigated. The source also told IANS that the state police are investigating the possible link of Popular Front of India (PFI) in violence. "PFI related outsiders had visited Khargone before the violence. The matter is still under investigation," the source said.

BULLDOZERS AND WAR OF WORDS RUN PARALLEL OVER KHARGONE VIOLENCE

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh administration's bulldozers on illegal buildings and war of words between politicians are running parallel in Madhya Pradesh for the past three days since communal violence broke out in Khargone district. The police said the situation is under control with heavy deployment of forces. However, curfew is still in place in the area. Former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh and Congress Rajya Sabha MP, Digvijaya Singh, who was in the news after his social media post on the Khargone violence for which he was cornered by the BJP leaders, accelerated his attack on Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, saying that 'communal violence occurs only when the Chief Minister wants'. Notably, while the entire state BJP unit appears to have united to accuse Digvijaya Singh of 'fueling' commu-



nal tension in the state, the latter continues his counter-attack on the Chouhan-led government. Singh claimed that the Khargone incident didn't happen all of a sudden, but it was a 'pre-panned' action. Talking to reporters, Singh directly

held Chouhan responsible for the incident. Referring to former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh (1963-1967), late Dwarka Prasad Mishra, Singh said, "He (Mishra) always used to say that communal violence occurs when Chief Minister wants and the

administration supports it." His remarks came in reply to state Home Minister Narottam Mishra's remark about Singh's possible arrest for sharing a photograph showing a group of youth hoisting a saffron flag at a mosque, which later turned out to be a fake. Mishra said, "MP police may arrest Digvijaya Singh for posting a fake and communally-sensitive tweet." The state government had on Tuesday constituted a two-member tribunal to recover damages from those involved in the communal violence. Curfew has been clamped in Khargone since Sunday after stone-pelting during a Ram Navami procession, which triggered arson and torching of vehicles. Nearly 100 persons have been arrested so far in connection with the violence, while more than 50 buildings have demolished by bulldozers so far.

BJP MP who once commented on PM Modi's beard, makes another controversial statement

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Senior BJP leader from Madhya Pradesh Janardan Mishra stirred a controversy when he said that slapping a district collector or commissioner establishes one as a political leader at least for a year or two. The Rewa MP was addressing a gathering of the party leaders and workers in his constituency and advising them on ways to come into prominence as a politician. "Slapping district collector or commissioner will establish one as a political leader at least for the next one or two years," he said. "During my era, people used to slap district collec-



tors or commissioners to get noticed as politicians. We were aware that slapping senior officials will establish us as political leaders at least for the next one or two years and would not miss any opportunity to do so," Mishra said. Notably, when Mishra made this controversial statement on Wednesday,

MP Assembly Speaker Girish Gautam, Rajya Sabha MP Ajay Pratap Singh, former state cabinet minister Rajendra Shukla and several other BJP MLAs were present in the meeting. However, it's not the first time that Mishra made a controversial statement. Earlier, he had made a strange statement about PM Modi's beard. Taking a jibe at Mishra for his remark, State Congress vice-president (women wing) Kavita Pandey said, "Two times MP and senior BJP leader is making such a condemnable statement. Unfortunately, leaders like him who are supposed to show the right path to the youth are advising them to slap officers."

CINE ACTOR AKSHAY KUMAR MET CM



Bhopal: Famous cine actor Akshay Kumar met Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan at his residence office. Chouhan apprised Akshay Kumar about the activities being carried out in the field of art and culture in the state and the initiatives being taken to encourage film-production activities in the state. Chouhan presented shawl-shripal, a famous gamcha (towel) of Chanderi silk and a replica of Sanchi Stupa to Akshay Kumar.

CM ATTENDED THE PROCESSION ON MAHAVIR JAYANTI

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan participated in the main procession of Lord Mahavir Swami's JanamKalyanak Mahotsav in Chowk Bazar area of Bhopal. Chouhan offered worship to the idol of Lord Mahavir installed in a chariot in Itwara area. Former Mayor Alok Sharma and representatives of Jain community were present.

CM PAYS TRIBUTE TO ISVESVARAYA

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan paid tributes to the great engineer, diplomat of India and Bharat Ratna Mokshagundam Visvesvaraya on his death anniversary. Chouhan paid floral tributes at his portrait in the auditorium at his residence office. Cine actor Akshay Kumar also paid tribute to Visvesvaraya. Visvesvaraya was honoured with India's highest honour Bharat Ratna in the year 1955. His birthday is celebrated as Engineer's Day in India. Dr. Visvesvaraya was also famous by the name of Sir MV. He considered illiteracy to be the main reason for the poverty and hardships of the people. He considered industries as the basis of the country's economy. He further developed the already established industries like silk, sandal, metal, steel etc. He was instrumental in the construction of Krishnaraj Sagar Dam and the establishment of Mysore University and Bank of Mysore. Sir Visvesvaraya passed away on April 14, 1962.

CM PAYS HOMAGE ON BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF AMBEDKAR

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan paid homage to the Pioneer of social justice and the architect of the Indian Constitution, Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar, on his 131th Birth anniversary. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a jurist, economist, politician and social reformer. He campaigned against social discrimination. He also supported the rights of workers, farmers and women.

Digvijay Singh's role in violent incidents should be probed: VD Sharma

Team Absolute | Bhopal

BJP's Madhya Pradesh unit president Vishnu Dutt Sharma has made a big attack on former Chief Minister Digvijay Singh, alleging that there is an international conspiracy of violent incidents, in which the role of Digvijay Singh should be investigated. In many parts of the state including Khargone, there was stone pelting on the processions on the occasion of Ram Navami. After that there were violent incidents and curfew had to be imposed in Khargone. Things are slowly returning to normal. After these incidents, the target of BJP is Congress and former Chief Minister Digvijay Singh. BJP state



president Vishnu Dutt Sharma on Thursday accused Digvijay Singh and said that there is international conspiracy in violent incidents; it is being funded by organizations like PFI. People like Digvijay Singh want to create unrest in the country. What is their role in the conspiracy of these violent incidents, there should be a strict investigation. Sharma further said that Digvijay Singh supports Naxalism, also supports terrorism, raises questions on India's army, such people have already been rejected by the people of Madhya Pradesh, but Sonia Gandhi has put him in charge of the movement that how they can go against the country, how they can spoil the environment of the country.

CM Planted Saplings with Cine Akshay Kumar

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted Gulmohar and Arjun saplings along with famous cine Akshay Kumar and former Mayor Alok Sharma at Smart City Garden. On the occasion of Mahavir Jayanti, along with Chief Minister Sunil Jain, Sandeep Jain and Devendra Jain of Jain Engineer Society also planted saplings. Chouhan apprised actor Akshay Kumar that tree plantation has been taken as a campaign in the state to protect the environment and save the Earth. With the aim of motivating the people in the campaign, he himself does plantation every day. Social organisations also enthusiastically participate in



this noble act of plantation. The Gulmohar planted today is considered one of the most beautiful trees in the world. It is also rich in medicinal properties. Arjun is a medicinal tree, the use of its bark and juice is beneficial in diseases like heart and tuberculosis. Arjun tree is found in large numbers in Madhya Pradesh.

State government following path and principles of Baba Saheb: CM

- ▶ MAJOR PLACES OF PANCHEERTH WILL BE CONNECTED WITH MUKHYA MANTRI TEERTH-DARSHAN YOJANA
- ▶ DHARAMSHALA WILL BE BUILT FOR DEVOTEES
- ▶ AMBEDKAR JAYANTI CELEBRATED WITH REVERENCE, FAITH AND ENTHUSIASM
- ▶ CHIEF MINISTER CHOUHAN PAYS FLORAL TRIBUTE AT THE HUGE BIRTH MEMORIAL

Team Absolute | Bhopal

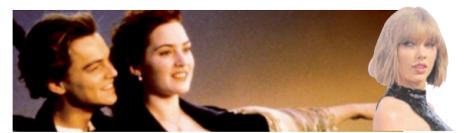
The birth anniversary of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar, the architect of the Constitution, was celebrated with full devotion and faith in his birth place, Ambedkar Nagar, (Mhow). Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan paid obeisance by garlanding the statue established in the grand memorial at his birth place. He also paid floral tributes at the memorial site after visiting the asthi-kalash of Baba Saheb. Chouhan said that the major places of Panchteerth related to the life of Babasaheb Ambedkar would be linked with the Teerth-Darshan scheme. Devotees will be able to travel free-of cost to these pilgrimages at the expense of the state government. All the expenses of food, excursion and lodging etc. will be borne by the state government for the passengers. Chief Minister said that a dharamshala would be constructed at a suitable place for the devotees visiting the birth memorial at Ambedkar Nagar, Mhow. For this, the district administration has been instructed to identify revenue land.



Chouhan said that the state government is following the path and principles laid down by Baba Saheb Ambedkar. No stone will be left unturned in uplifting the deprived section of the society. He said that it is our duty to give a proper governance system by following social justice and harmony. Social justice and social harmony is the basic mantra. Our endeavour is to ensure that all sections of the society get justice and there should be an atmosphere of harmony in the society. He said that those who are at backmost in the society are our first priority. The Chief Minister said that Baba Saheb had given the basic mantra of 'be educated, be organized and fight, By imbining this basic mantra, we can make our dreams come true. Social order can be improved by following the path shown by him. We can build a good society. We are moving towards the establishment of an egalitarian society. Tourism and Culture Minister Usha Thakur said that Ambedkar Nagar, (Mhow) is

a holy place from where Babasaheb Ambedkar, Tanya Mama and other personalities are associated. He said that we have to follow the ideals and principles of Baba Saheb, so that by becoming wise and knowledgeable, we can do maximum work in national interest. He said that while discharging your duties with hard work and honesty, we should strive to become a partner in the development of the nation. At the outset, Secretary, Memorial Committee, Rajesh Wankhede delivered the welcome address. Member of Parliament Chhatar Singh Darbar, Chairman of Indore Development Authority Jaipal Singh Chavda, MLAs, public representatives, officers and a large number of devotees were present. Chief Minister Chouhan also participated in the food arrangements made for the devotees at the birth place of Baba Saheb and had lunch with them. He said that today, he is privileged to have had food on the holy land of Ambedkar Nagar, the birth place of the

revered Baba Saheb. On this wonderful land, the food served became special, due to which the virtue of service has become stronger in the mind. Chouhan said that the district administration has made satisfactory arrangements for the devotees visiting the birth place of Baba Saheb in the programme held today after the Corona transition period. For this, the Chief Minister congratulated and appreciated the entire team of the district administration. The devotees who came here also expressed their gratitude for the hospitality towards the government and administration. Devotees from other districts of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, who came to attend the Ambedkar Jayanti celebrations, also praised the arrangements openly. Shri Balchandra Naik, who came from Nagpur, told that he along with his 12 companions had come to pay obeisance at the birth place of Baba Saheb for the first time. They had not imagined that such a grand monument would be built. From the arrangements made for the devotees, it seems that we have paid off the debt of Baba Saheb. Similarly Sunil Sirsat, Anita, Amrapali and Vijay Khade who came from Akola also appreciated the arrangements and said that they reached Ambedkar Nagar last night. On coming here, they were provided best arrangements of lodging, food and pure and cold drinking water. We did not even think that we would be treated like guests. We are overwhelmed by the arrangements. Similarly, Siddharth Patil, Pragati Chavre and Pradeep Uke who came from Amravati district also appeared satisfied. They also praised the arrangements. Students of Veterinary College, Indore, Dr. Sakshi Singh of Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, Dr. Anita Bhatnagar of Khargone and Dr. Lokesh Pagare of Chhindwara said that we have seen such a beautiful and grand monument for the first time. The arrangements are also satisfactory.



SALMA HAYEK REPLACES THANDIWE NEWTON IN 'MAGIC MIKE'S LAST DANCE'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Salma Hayek is joining the cast of Channing Tatum's new 'Magic Mike' sequel, replacing original female lead Thandiwe Newton.

"Thandiwe Newton has made the difficult decision to step away from the production of Warner Bros. Pictures' 'Magic Mike's Last Dance' to deal with family matters," a spokesperson for the studio told 'Variety'.

The film is being made exclusively for HBO Max. Reid Carolin, who wrote the first two movies, is returning as screenwriter. The film's original director Steven Soderbergh is back at the helm. The third installment is expected to wrap a bow on the trilogy.

Production just began in the UK

'Magic Mike XXL' director Gregory Jacobs is producing with Carolin, Nick Wechsler and Peter Kiernan.

In his February cover interview with 'Variety', Tatum and Carolin hinted that the lead female role would be crucial to the sequel's plot.

"It's really about a woman stuck at a horrible strip show like a Chippendales and then realising, 'What the hell am I doing here?'" Carolin said at the time.

"And then Magic Mike comes down from the ceiling. She gets to go down the rabbit hole and asks: What do I really want?"

Tatum added that the character is "really strong, almost stronger than Mike... we've never done a traditional love story, and this isn't a traditional love story." The first two 'Magic Mike' films grossed nearly \$300 million at the worldwide box office, and have spawned a live stage show franchise playing cities including London, Las Vegas, Berlin and Australia.

Los Angeles | Agencies

'Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings' star Simu Liu has penned a long note thanking his former boss for firing him from his job as an accountant at Deloitte. He shared that it "devastated" him at that time but it ended up being the best thing that ever happened to the actor. Liu took to Twitter, where he shared a long post about his firing and captioned it: "So this is a whole a** essay but the gist of it is that ten years ago today I was let go from my job as an accountant at Deloitte and although it devastated me at the time, it ended up being the best thing that ever happened to me."

In the note he wrote: "Ten years ago to the day, I was lead into my managing partner's office at Deloitte and told that they were terminating my employment effective immediately. A lady from HR and a security guard escorted me back onto the floor in front of the entire open concept office. It was so quiet you could hear a pin drop. Nobody moved, offered a whisper of encouragement or even looked in my direction." The actor said that he "fought back tears of humiliation", grabbed his things, and "never looked back". Liu added: "Ten years ago I thought my life was over. I had wasted countless time and money that my family had invested in me. Years of schooling, gifted programs, trying to live up to my parents' expectations. It all came crashing down in an instant."

Simu Liu thanks ex-boss for firing him 10 years ago



'Depp' 'penetrated Amber with bottle in hostage situation'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor Johnny Depp allegedly 'penetrated Amber Heard with an alcohol bottle' during a 'hostage situation' across three days in 2015, the actress's lawyer claimed. Depp's former wife Amber's lawyer Elaine Bredehoff made the claim in court during Depp's defamation trial on Tuesday, reports mirror.co.uk.

She told the jury: "He has her jammed up against the bar. He has hurled bottles and bottles at her. He has dragged her across the floor on the broken bottles.

"He has punched her. He has kicked her. He has told her he's going to fu**ing kill her, and he fu**ing hates her. He's pounding at her, pounding at her. And then, he penetrates her with a liquor bottle." As she



spoke, the 'Pirates of the Caribbean' actor reportedly shook his head as if he was disagreeing with the claims made. Depp's spokesperson has vehemently denied the claims.

In a statement, they said: "These fictitious claims were never made at the onset of Amber's allegations in 2016, and only advantageously surfaced years later once she was sued for defamation after noting in her op-ed that she was a victim of 'sexual violence.'" "Words are key in a defamation case and conveniently, this allegation only came after that. This follows a pattern of her elaborate, erroneous claims which have continued to change and evolve over time for the purpose of Hollywood shock value of which Amber has mastered and used to exploit a serious social movement." Jurors in the defamation trial have been told the actress was the abuser.

'OUTER RANGE': AN ENGAGING NEO-WESTERN WITH SCI-FI ELEMENTS



SERIES REVIEW

TROY RIBEIRO

(Streaming on Prime Video)

Duration: Average 49 minutes per episode (Total 8 episodes)

Directors: Alonso Ruizpalacios, Jennifer Getzinger, Amy Seitzmetz, Lawrence Trilling

Cast: Josh Brolin, Imogen Poots, Lili Taylor, Tamara Podemski, Lewis Pullman, Tom Pelphrey, Noah Reid, Shaun Sipos, Isabel Arraiza, Olive Abercrombie, Will Patton

Rating: ***1/2



ance of a young squatter named Autumn Rivers camping on the west side of their land close to where the mysterious giant hole 'connected to time' has appeared on their ranch adds to their woes.

The narrative gathers momentum after the accidental death of one of the residents of the county, and with the Deputy Sheriff following the many trails, the pace seldom slows down. Narrated in a non-linear manner with flashbacks and flashforwards, the plot does seem a bit scrambled by the eighth episode as fatigue sets in.

While the dependence on the superpower (God) is there right from the first frame of the series to its last, the meta-physical sci-fi element at the centre of the narrative meshes seamlessly into the tale, making the entire story relatable. 'Outer Range' is a shrewdly made, eight-episode series where its ace cast give it their all in a casual way that only professionals this seasoned and gifted can. All the characters are well-etched, and most of them display a tinge of

noir characteristics. Among the older lot Josh Brolin as the rancher Royal Abbott, Lili Taylor as his farm wife Cecilia, and Will Patton as their irrational and physically sick neighbour Wayne Tillerson, are very convincing.

So are Imogen Poots as the furtive hippy Autumn Rivers, Tom Pelphrey as the troubled Perry, Olive Abercrombie as his daughter Amy, Lewis Pullman as the depressed Rhett, Tamara Podemski as Deputy Sheriff Joy, and Noah Reid and Shaun Sipos as Wayne's sons Billy and Luke. They are memorable in their roles.

Visually the series is mesmerising. With atmospheric indoor shots and brilliantly captured outdoor scenes, the series is worth watching on a large screen. The image that stays in your mind's space is the herd of cattle galloping across the frame.

Accompanying the visuals is the exciting background score packed with a vague selection of music which includes some excellent country songs that make the series light and enjoyable.

PORTRAYING MICHELLE OBAMA IS 'TERRIFYING': VIOLA DAVIS

Los Angeles | Agencies

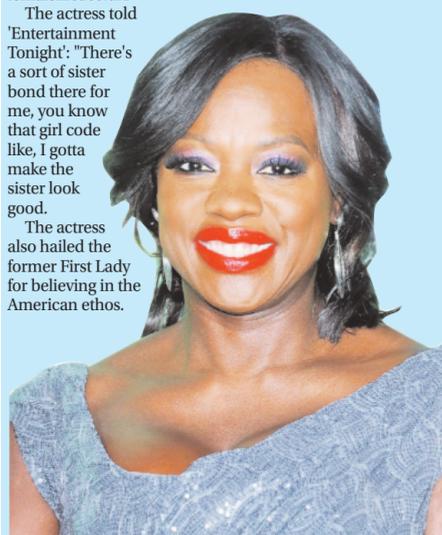
Actress Viola Davis portrays Michelle Obama, former First Lady of the United States, in a new TV drama 'The First Lady' and said that it was a nerve-wracking experience.

Davis shared: "You're terrified whenever you start a job because you are afraid you are going to be found out - that's big imposter syndrome. But with Michelle Obama, it's like everyone has ownership over Michelle Obama. I mean, her book came out and it was (on every) bestseller list, everyone knows what she looks like what she sounds like, what her hair [is like], you know?"

Davis was also concerned about what Obama would think of her performance in 'The First Lady', reports femalefirst.co.uk.

The actress told 'Entertainment Tonight': "There's a sort of sister bond there for me, you know that girl code like, I gotta make the sister look good.

The actress also hailed the former First Lady for believing in the American ethos.



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Olivia Culpo



IPL 2022: GUJARAT TITANS BEAT RAJASTHAN ROYALS BY 37 RUNS

Mumbai | Agencies

Captain Hardik Pandya's clinical all-round performance helped Gujarat Titans beat Rajasthan Royals by 37 runs in an IPL 2022 match at DY Patil Stadium, here on Thursday.

It was Rajasthan's fourth win of the IPL 2022 season and they climbed to the top of the points table with 8 points. A sensational unbeaten half-century by captain Hardik Pandya (87 not out off 52) powered Gujarat Titans to 192/4 in 20 overs. Apart from Hardik, Abhinav Manohar (43 off 28) and David Miller (31 not out off 14) also made valuable contributions with the bat for Gujarat, who were invited to bat first. Kuldeep Sen (1/51), Yuzvendra Chahal (1/32) and Riyan Parag (1/12) picked one wicket each for Rajasthan.

Chasing a big total, Jos



Brief scores:

Gujarat Titans 192/4 in 20 overs (Hardik Pandya 87 not out, Abhinav Manohar 43; Riyan Parag 1/12) beat Rajasthan Royals 155-9 in 20 overs (Jos Buttler 54, Shimron Hetmyer 29; Lockie Ferguson 3/23) by 37 runs

Buttler played an attacking knock (54 off 24) to give Rajasthan a flying start but he didn't get the support from the end. Once Buttler got out on an excellent deceptive leg-cutter in Lockie Ferguson over, it was

a mountain to climb for Rajasthan. Lower down the order, Shimron Hetmyer (29), Riyan Parag (18) and James Neesham (17) tried hard but it was not good enough as Rajasthan were restricted to 155-9 in 20

overs, losing by 37 runs. Lockie Ferguson (3/23) and Yash Dayal (3/40) picked up three wickets each for Gujarat while Mohammed Shami (1/39) and Hardik Pandya (1/18) also chipped in with one wicket each.

Champions League

Man City play Atletico at their own game to qualify for semis

Madrid | Agencies

Premier League winner Manchester City will play Spanish giants Real Madrid in the Champions League semi-finals after a 0-0 draw with Atletico Madrid in the Wanda Metropolitano Stadium made good of the 1-0 home win from their quarter-final first leg.

Pep Guardiola's side showed in the closing minutes that it is just as adept at the 'darker arts' of the game as Diego Simeone's side had shown in the first leg and were able to close the game down in the closing minutes.

Anyone expecting Atletico to change their usual defensive tactics to get back into the tie in the first half was in for a disappointment as Diego Simeone's side remained content to sit deep despite their 1-0 defeat from the first leg.

With City content to control the ball, very little happened before the break, with



Atletico managing one shot, while the visitors were unlucky not to double their advantage after Ilkay Gundogan thumped the ball against the post after a scramble.

Things changed after the break as Atletico finally began to look for the goal they needed to get back into the tie. Firstly, Koke set Antoine Griezmann free

down the right-hand channel, only for Aymeric Laporte to block his effort, before Griezmann then set up Joao Felix, who shot just wide, reports Xinhua.

All of a sudden, it was all Atletico as Joao Felix and Angel Correa combined for Rodrigo de Paul to fire wide with 20 minutes to go.

Correa went down in the City penalty area and looked

to have a good case for a penalty as Rodri pulled at his shirt, but the referee waved play-on and the game got bad-tempered as Felipe was sent off for a foul on Phil Foden.

Correa drew a good save from Ederson in the 98th minute and City were able to see out the remaining moments of an increasingly bad-tempered injury time.

Monte-Carlo Masters

ZVEREV, RUBLEV REACH THIRD ROUND IN MONACO

Paris | Agencies

Under the sunny but windy conditions at the Monte-Carlo country club in Monaco, second seed Alexander Zverev of Germany opened his 2022 clay season with a straight-set win on Wednesday, beating Federico Delbonis of Argentina 6-1, 7-5 to reach the third round.

After the shocking exit of top seed Novak Djokovic one day before, Zverev, seeking his sixth ATP Masters 1000 title, remained the highest-ranked player in the tournament. A victory at Monte-Carlo would see the 24-year-old move closer to the top spot of the ATP rankings.

"This is the only Masters on clay I haven't won yet, but I'm very motivated to do so," said Zverev, a 2018 semi-finalist at the event. "I'm very motivated to play great tennis and I hope I can show that on the court this week."



Zverev was dominant in the first set, winning six games in a row after losing the opening game to take the lead. But his Argentine opponent fought back strongly in the second set, even reaching a set point at 5-2. But Zverev was so calm on the brink, saving the set-point

and winning 11 straight points to move within a game of victory, reports Xinhua.

The tough Delbonis saved a match point at 4-5 and another at 5-6 but failed in the third. "I think just coming back, never letting him get too far ahead," Zverev said. "I broke him back twice, so that is helpful. If you're down 4-1, 5-2, something like that, it's not easy to come back."

The world No. 3 will next face Pablo Carreno Busta of Spain in the round of 16, as the latter advanced after his second-round rival Alexander Bublik retired in a three-set match.

Earlier, newly-crowned Miami Masters champion Carlos Alcaraz suffered a shock defeat to American youngster Sebastian Korda in a 7-6(2), 6-7(5), 6-3 three-setter. The 21-year-old Korda, competing in Monte-Carlo for the first time, hit a decisive break in the deciding set to move 5-3 ahead, then served out to triumph in the heavy wind.

Korea Masters badminton

China's Lu advances to quarters with easy win

Seoul | Agencies

China's fourth seed Lu Guangzu advanced to the men's singles quarter-finals by outclassing his Algerian opponent in the round of 16 at the 2022 Badminton Korea Masters on Thursday.

Lu, who won against Algerian Youcef Sabri Medel 21-10, 21-5, is the only Chinese player who squeezed into the men's singles quarter-finals.

Elsewhere in the men's singles, Li Shifeng lost to Kodai Naraoka of Japan 13-21, 21-12, 21-14. Lucas Claerbout of France advanced much more easily thanks to a walkover with Weng Hongyang.

In men's doubles, World Championships winner Tan Qiang and his partner Ren Xiangyu were edged out by Indonesia's Muhammad Shohibul Fikri and Bagas Maulana 17-21, 26-24, 22-20.

Tokyo Olympic silver medalist Liu Yuchen, paired with Ou Xuanyi, took an easy win over



Choi Hyun-beom and Park Byeong-hun of South Korea 21-13, 21-15. The He Jiting/Zhou Haodong pair was ousted by South Korean Kang Min-hyuk/Seo Seung-Jae 21-16, 21-19.

In women's singles, Olympic champion Chen Yufei smashed Japan's Saena Kawakami 21-14, 21-17, reports Xinhua.

Fourth seed He Bingjiao overwhelmed Kim Gaeun from South Korea 21-14, 21-14. Wang Zhiyi beat Malaysia's Goh Jin Wei 20-22, 21-7, 21-12.

Watson rates Kohli ahead of Smith, Williamson, Root and Babar among big five Test batters

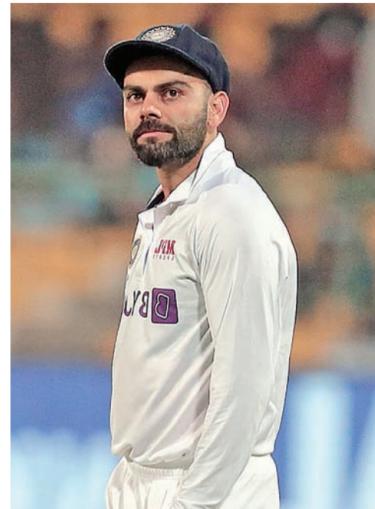
Dubai | Agencies

He may not have scored a hundred in Test matches since November 2019, former Australia all-rounder Shane Watson has picked Virat Kohli as the best among the current 'big five' batters in red-ball cricket.

Watson has rated Kohli ahead of Pakistan skipper Babar Azam, New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson, Australia's Steve Smith and England Test captain Joe Root in the latest episode of The ICC Review, the ICC's monthly podcast.

The world's current No.1 Test batter Marnus Labuschagne, who has played 26 Test matches and averages 54.31, would have increased the 'big five' to a 'big six', but was left out of the debate for this topic due to a 40-Test minimum being the criteria selected, the ICC said in a report on its official website.

Watson rates the 33-year-old Kohli at the top of the unofficial 'big five' with Babar Azam second, with Smith, Williamson and Root following in that order from third to fifth. Kohli has scored 8043 runs in 171 innings of 101 Tests at an average of 49.95. Babar has 2851 in 71 innings of 40 Tests at 45.98 is second while Smith with 8010 runs from



151 innings of 85 matches is third with an average of 59.77.

Williamson has scored 7272 runs in 150 innings of 86 Tests at 53.57 while Root has 9889 runs in 216 innings of 117 Test matches at 49.19.

While Kohli is only rated 10th on the ICC Men's Test batter rankings, the Indian great holds a remarkable Test batting record. Kohli has scored 27 Test centuries and 28 half-centuries and currently has a Test batting average of just under 50, it said.

Currently rated fourth on the ICC Men's Test batter rankings, Root showed his class during England's recent Test series against the West Indies by making consecutive centuries for his country. In total, he has 25 Test centuries to his name. The ICC said Watson's ranking of the 'big five' is sure to generate a debate and it sure will as Kohli has not been that successful in recent times.

In the last-10 matches, he trails the other four with 553 runs at 30.72 while Williamson leads the pack 950 from 17 innings. Root has 789 from 19 innings of 10 Tests, Smith 773 in 16 innings while Azam has amassed 769 runs in 16 innings of his last 10 Tests at an average of 48.06.

Indian Arrows take on Sirvodem SC in their Indian Women's League 2022 inaugural clash

Bhubaneswar | Agencies

The Indian Arrows, AIFF's developmental side containing the young and rising stars of women's football and the Goa based club Sirvodem SC are set to make their Hero Indian Women's League (HIWL) debut on the opening day of the 2021-22 season on Friday.

Ahead of the campaign opener, Indian Arrows head coach Suren Chettri said, "We are well-prepared for the first game of the season and ready to go all-out. As you know, football is always an ongoing learning process. We will keep working as the competition progresses."

Asked about the opponents, Chettri stated, "They are all new to us, we don't have enough idea about them, but the players are ready to take on the pitch and give



their best."

On the other hand, Sirvodem SC, who qualified for the league as champions of Goa are looking forward to a strong start to the season. Head coach Chitra was buoyant ahead of the match and discussed in detail about the side's preparations. "Our girls are confident and have good teamwork. Our strengths will be maintained and the areas to improve can be assessed after the first match," she stated.

Chitra went on to add about their HIWL debut and how the league will serve as a platform for their rising stars. "Sirvodem SC women's team was formed just two years back and we are happy that we could play in the HIWL. Most of our girls are making their debut in this season, which would give exposure and experience to them," she concluded.

England pacer Anya Shrubsole retires from international cricket

London | Agencies

England's Anya Shrubsole, a two-time Women's World Cup and inaugural T20 World Cup winner, on Thursday, announced her retirement from international cricket, ending a 14-year career at the highest level.

The 30-year-old finished with 173 international games for England, picking 227 wickets and was also a part of two Ashes-winning and two World Cup-winning campaigns.

Shrubsole bagged nine wickets at 29.66 at the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup 2022, during England's run to the final. Her best performance in the tournament came in the final against Australia, in which she registered figures of 3/46 in England's 71-run defeat. The pacer will continue to play



domestic cricket in the Rachael Heyhoe Flint Trophy, Charlotte Edwards Cup and The Hundred.

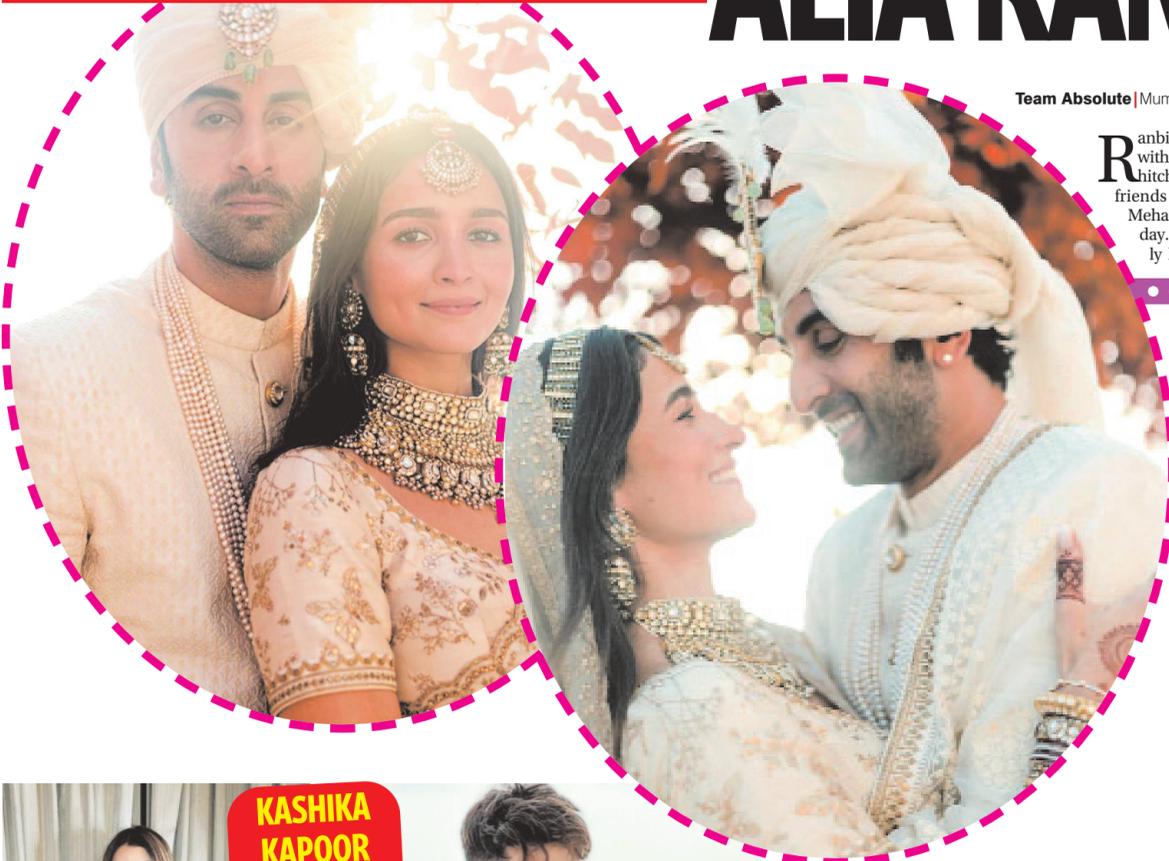
The Somerset-born was first picked for England during their limited-overs home series against South Africa back in 2008 when she bagged a match-winning

3/19 on her T20I debut. A year later, she was picked in England's T20 World Cup squad at home, as England surged to the title.

She leads the wicket-taking charts in T20 World Cups, with 41 wickets at 12.48 with an excellent economy of 5.32.

Congratulations

ALIA RANBIR KAPOOR



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Ranbir Kapoor has finally tied the knot with his ladylove Alia Bhatt. They got hitched amid the presence of close friends and family members. Their Mehandi ceremony took place yesterday. A haldi ceremony was reportedly held this morning ahead of the

wedding after which the further festivities took place. The Bhatt and Kapoor family had put their best fashion foot forward as they arrived for their wedding. As per reports now, Alia Bhatt and Ranbir Kapoor are now man and wife as the couple have exchanged wedding vows. For the unversed, in a kind gesture, the bride and groom had sent food packets to the media gathered outside the wedding venue. Reportedly, their fans will soon get to see a glimpse of the two as husband and wife anytime after 7 pm.

Samantha pens cute note after wrapping project

Team Absolute | Hyderabad

Actress Samantha Ruth Prabhu, who will next be seen in Vignesh Shivan's directorial 'Kaathu Vaakula Rendu Kadhal', wraps up dubbing for her role in the movie. After wrapping up the dubbing part for 'Kaathu Vaakula Rendu Kadhal', the 'Majili' actress took to Instagram to thank her team. The actress penned a sweet note alongside sharing a picture from the dubbing studio, which reads, "And.. Its a wrap for KRR. Dubbing done. So so excited for you guys to see this one." "And Thank you to the amazing people around me who have made working in this film an absolute breeze..love ya", Samantha wrote, as she tagged her teammates along with director Vignesh. Vignesh Shivan, who shared Samantha's post, responded, saying, "What a pleasure it has been to collaborate with you!! Thank you for your kind words"

Helmed by Vignesh Shivan, the movie 'Kaathu Vaakula Rendu Kadhal' stars Nayanthara, Vijay Sethupathi, and Samantha in the lead roles.



KASHIKA KAPOOR CLAIMS TO HAVE PROOF THAT PRATIK SEHAJPAL TRIED TO DELETE HER SCENES

Team Absolute | Mumbai

'Bigg Boss 15' fame Pratik Sehajpal and actress Kashika Kapoor are making headlines because of the recent statement by the actress during the promotion of their music video 'Tu Laut Aa'. Kashika alleged that Pratik tried to edit out her scenes from the video just to overshadow her. Later the actress tried to clarify her point by saying that it is just a publicity stunt after Pratik was

uncomfortable and asked her not to discuss it further. He also threatened to leave the promotional event as the producers tried to stop him.

Kashika, who is being targeted by Pratik's fans and friends, tried to prove her point and give clarification on her statement by saying: "Girls are a very easy target in our nation. And even now they will blame me for playing the woman card but I'm not."

"The complete case has been named upon me as 'Kashika Kapoor Controversy' and I'm completely

fine. I'm being targeted by Pratik and his fans and still that is not over. They are passing comments on me on social media, they abused me and asked me to commit suicide, abused my family members and not just that but I got to know that he's paid a good amount to ruin my name." "Apart from that, Big Boss contestants are also coming in support of him since they're all controversial. I agree if I said something wrong. It was all together new for me, it was the first press conference in my life and I'm just 20. And when you learn that your screen presence has been cut out by someone for their own gain anyone will be hurt and react. I have proof of the complete conversation with the producers who claimed Pratik asked them to delete my scenes," she added.

This controversy surrounding both grabbed eyeballs and many of Pratik's fans, co-stars, and friends came out in support of him.

Karan Kundrra took to twitter and wrote, "On what basis has @realsehajpal been called a 'criminal' openly on social media?? Dear whoever you are sir.. let me remind you that according to our country's law.. you cannot call anyone a criminal until proven by a court of law!! I am amazed how you can harass a legitimate (sic)."

He added: "Hardworking professional by threatening him and defaming him like this.. This is clear harassment and Pratik do not worry.. we are with you! (sic)" Celebrities such as VJ Andy, Umar Riaz, and Nikki Tamboli also tweeted their support.



KARAN KUNDRRA LEFT AWESTRUCK AT POONAM PANDEY, PAYAL ROHTAGI'S DANCE PERFORMANCE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

'Lock Upp' jailor Karan Kundrra was stunned looking at the performance by Payal Rohitagi and Poonam Pandey on the song 'Babuji zara dheere chalo'.

Poonam was wearing a cropped top and Payal had draped a red chunni over her dress.

Karan enters the house and bashes everyone as they had not shown any unity during a task. He also added on how unfair it is to him as a jailor, that he gave the inmates what

they wanted but still there was no improvement.

The inmates are then taken to the 'Lock Upp Rang Munch Task' where for the first time, the audience dons a 'white mask'. This indicates that they will not be judged this time.

Munawar gives a wonderful introduction to the act. While Mandana does a 2-minute monologue, and Kaaranvir does a 3-minute mime performance in which he recreates a few situations from the house.

Payal and Poonam danced to the song 'Babuji zara dheere chalo'.

MY GRANDSON IS MISCHIEVOUS LIKE HIS DAD SHAHID: PANKAJ KAPOOR

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Veteran actor Pankaj Kapoor talks about his grandson and how he is as mischievous as his father Shahid Kapoor on 'The Kapil Sharma Show'. He is coming as a special guest with his son Shahid Kapoor and co-star Mrunal Thakur to promote their movie 'Jersey'. During a conversation, host Kapil Sharma asked Pankaj Kapoor if Shahid was mischievous or he was more mischievous than his son. To this, he replied: "I will say the truth, or at least I will try, I was mischievous of course but he (Shahid Kapoor) has one mischievous quality that my grandson has too." "The quality is that after committing the mischief, they turn and look at you as if saying, 'ab batao?' (what do you have to say now?)". This quality is in both father and son. He (Shahid Kapoor) used to be like, 'did you recognise what I did?' and that same quality is in my grandson. He'll pick something up and throw it after which he'll look at us and be like 'ab batao?'." 'The Kapil Sharma Show' airs on Sony Entertainment Television.



Neeraj Pandey: Serious films demand clutter-breaking promotions

Team Absolute | Mumbai

National Award-winning filmmaker Neeraj Pandey who is coming up with his new film 'Operation Romeo' as a producer, says a film like that addresses the issue of moral policing needs to be promoted in a unique way. Post the release of its trailer, the cast and crew of 'Operation Romeo' did a unique social media and on-ground campaign involving common people, especially young couples on the street. Referring to such activity to promote his film, asked about how he involves himself in the process of making strategies, Neeraj pointed out why he along with his team are always looking for innovative ways to promote a film. Neeraj told IANS: "In our film 'Operation Romeo', we have some very good actors but the protagonist of the film - Sidhant Gupta and Vedika Pinto are debutants. Of course, Sharad (Kelkar) is a popular name. But our film is an important, relatable and hard-hitting story. At a time when star-driven films are ready in the pipeline every Friday for release, it is tough to make noise for a film like ours." He went on adding, "If the star is the face of a film, they just need to show up to the media and their fans, audience will go and watch the film quite willingly. For a film with newcomers, you need a clutter-breaking idea for promoting the film. I believe that a serious story demands such an innovative way of reaching out to the audience." The story of the film revolves around police harassment of a young couple followed by a revenge story. As the film is produced under his banner Friday Filmworks, Neeraj decodes his way of choosing a story for producing and directing. "Not all the film I produce, I direct also. I have my parameters for choosing those projects. It is quite simple. For example, we decided to produce 'Rustom' because we had the interest in the subject of the film.



INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Nora Fatehi