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PM Modi, US President Biden to have 'straightforward' talks on Ukraine on sidelines of Quad summit

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Joe Biden will hold bilateral talks on the sidelines of the Quad summit in Tokyo on May 24. During their meeting, the two leaders are expected to hold a "constructive and straightforward dialogue", which will also touch upon the ongoing situation in Ukraine.



Notably, the meeting comes on the day when the February 24 Russian invasion of Ukraine will enter its fourth month.

Ahead of his two-day visit to Japan, PM Modi said that he will hold a bilateral meeting with President Biden, where they will discuss further consolidation of the multi-faceted bilateral relations between the two nations. "We will also continue our dialogue on regional developments and contemporary global issues," the Prime Minister added.

While speaking about the US President's bilateral meeting with PM Modi in Japan, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said, "It will be a continuation of the conversation they have already had on how we see the picture in Ukraine. They will talk all of that through and this will be similarly constructive and straightforward."

PM Modi has been a strong proponent of dialogue between Russia and Ukraine for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. However, India has so far

avoided taking a hard stand on the issue and has abstained from voting on several resolutions on the conflict at the United Nations.

President Biden had earlier called out India for its "somewhat shaky" stand on Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Both Australia and Japan, who make up the Quad with India and US, have criticised Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

However, despite India sticking to its position in the face of growing pressure from US, the bilateral ties between the two two democracies

have remained largely unaffected.

PM Modi will visit Tokyo for two days at the invitation of his Japanese counterpart Fumio Kishida. In March 2022, PM Modi hosted Kishida for the 14th India-Japan Annual Summit.

Various Quad initiatives, developments in the Indo-Pacific region and global issues of mutual interest will be discussed during the upcoming Quad summit in Tokyo, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said before his visit. In Japan, PM Modi will also participate in the second in-person Quad Leaders' Summit, which will provide an opportunity for the lead-

ers of the four Quad countries to review the progress of initiatives taken by the grouping. Last year, the leaders of the Quad countries had taken part in the first in-person summit of the four-nation group in US.

Quad is a strategic alliance of the four countries which aims to keep an eye on China's expansionist behaviour in the Indo-Pacific.

China has quite often criticised the security alliance as it sees it as a mechanism to contain its global rise. The country has accused the group, particularly US, of being dedicated to undermining its interests.

Taj and Qutab next right-wing targets after Ayodhya, Kashi, Mathura

Team Absolute | Lucknow

It began with Ayodhya, went on to Kashi and now Mathura. Hindu activists are clamouring for the liberation of Kashi and Mathura and the battle is now being played out in courts.

The Gyanvapi mosque dispute has already reached the Supreme Court and after a court in Mathura allowed a petition seeking the removal of Shahi Idgah from the Krishna Janmabhoomi, the issue is all set to blow up into another major controversy.

The list, however, does not stop here. Over the years, several BJP leaders have repeated and amplified unhistorical claims that the Taj Mahal is in fact a Hindu temple that was built much before the reign of Shah Jahan. In 2017, Vinay Katiyar, who was then a BJP Rajya Sabha member, claimed that the monument was in fact a Shiva temple named 'Tejo Mahalaya', which was 'originally' built by a Hindu ruler.

The 'Tejo Mahalaya' claim was first made by a historian named PN Oak in a book written in 1989. He made dogged efforts to establish his idea, and even petitioned the Supreme Court, which is said to have commented in 2000 that he had a "bee in his bonnet." Oak argued that Shah Jahan's Taj was in fact a



Hindu temple of Lord Shiva that was "perhaps built in the 4th century to serve as a palace" by Raja Paramardi Dev. Oak, who's also the founder of the Institute for Rewriting Indian History, believed that monuments attributed to Muslim rulers were actually Hindu in origin. In 1976, he wrote a book called Lucknow's Imambaras are Hindu Palaces', and another titled Delhi's Red Fort is Hindu Lakhot'. In 1996, he published Islamic Havoc in Indian History'.

Oak claimed that 'Tejo Mahalaya' was destroyed and raided during Muhammad Ghor's invasion of India in the late 12th century, and that after the defeat of Humayun (mid-16th century), it passed into the hands of the Jaipur royal family and was managed by Jai Singh I, who was a senior Mughal mansabdar and the Raja of Amber. According to Oak, the temple was then taken over

by Shah Jahan, who turned it into a tomb and renamed it Taj Mahal. Earlier this month, another petition filed in the Allahabad High Court demanding that the 22 locked room in the basement of the monument be unlocked to verify Hindu symbols, was tersely dismissed by the court which questioned the credentials of the petitioner -- a BJP leader from Ayodhya.

Another monument in the list is the Qutub Minar in Delhi that has already been named 'as Vishnu Stambh'.

A group of saffron activists recently chanted Hanuman Chalisa in front of the Qutub Minar to emphasise their claim to the pillar.

Since Oak's books have turned into a Bible of sorts for Hindu activists, the Imambaras in Lucknow, the Red Fort in Delhi and other remnants of the Mughal rule will soon be on the list for liberation.'

India would emerge as world leader by 2047: Scindia

Team Absolute | Bengaluru

Union Minister of Civil Aviation Jyotiraditya Scindia on Saturday said that India has upheld the democratic principles in worst global scenarios.

He further stated that India would emerge as a world leader by 2047.

He was addressing a special keynote Session at the "India@2047" conclave in Bengaluru.

Scindia further stated that India has always upheld economic and democratic order.

India is determined to work towards attaining a steady growth path from "Aatmanirbhar Bharat to Bharat Par Vishv Nirbhar" and thus emerge as a world leader by 2047, he said.

"She (India) always protected her territorial integrity, but never in the form of an aggressor. That speaks of Indian history not only from 1947 but from 5,000 years India has never been aggressor but has always been an assimilator," he said.

India has redefined the old belief that democracies are always accompanied by low levels of development and high level of inequality. In fact, if democracies are prospering around the world, some credit also comes to India, he said.



"Now, the common terminology of Asia-Pacific has changed into Indo-Pacific, it is a testament to her (India) rise.

"The way that we have guided the world during pandemic, the measures that put in place is note worthy. The country which used to import vaccines today has become exporter of vaccines," he added.

He further stated India will become the flag-bearer of democracy, growth and peace to the world.

He maintained that by 2027, India will be the become largest economy of the world.

"That's what the change leadership brings about. In the old era, the Indian government only to provide and control but now the government aides people to prosper."

As Gyanvapi row boils over, SP, BSP, Cong maintain diplomatic silence

Team Absolute | Lucknow

Having realised the 'power of Hindu vote' in elections in India after 2014, the Gyanvapi mosque controversy has put the opposition parties in a Catch 22 situation.

The opposition parties, particularly those in Uttar Pradesh, are unable to take a stand on the issue. If they back the Hindu petitioners, they will lose out on Muslim support, and if they side with the Muslims, they will be dubbed as 'anti-Hindu.'

The Samajwadi Party, which is the main opposition party in Uttar Pradesh, has avoided taking a clear stand on the controversy though Akhilesh Yadav has been accusing the BJP of stoking communal issues for electoral gains.

Akhilesh Yadav recently made a remark about the tendency among Hindus to place a stone and start worshipping it, and the entire BJP workforce came down on him accusing him of insulting the Hindu religion.

The inherent power of such allegations has forced Akhilesh Yadav to beat a hasty retreat. The Samajwadi Party chief realises that for his political survival, he needs the support of Muslims as well as Hindus, and taking a side on the Gyanvapi row will hit him against one community.

None of the top SP leaders, barring



Muslim MPs like Shafiqur Rehman Barq and ST Hasan, have voiced their opinion on the issue.

The Congress, too, has maintained a studied silence on the issue and its leaders, who often go overboard in announcing their opinion on such issues, have also remained quiet this time. Acharya Pramod Krishnam, known to be playing a proactive role in the party these days, however, went a step ahead and advised Muslims to hand over the Taj Mahal and Qutub Minar to Hindus.

His statement earned him considerable flak within the party's WhatsApp

groups and stunned him into silence.

The Bahujan Samaj Party has also not gone beyond issuing a customary statement criticising the BJP for disturbing communal harmony in the country.

What is politically significant in the situation is the silence of BJP's allies who have, so far, refused to be drawn into the controversy.

The Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party and the Apna Dal have not issued any statement on the Gyanvapi issue, which indicates that they are playing it safe on the issue and also do not wish to upset their caste equations with the minorities.

KCR, KEJRIWAL DISCUSS NATIONAL POLITICS AT LUNCHEON MEETING

New Delhi/Hyderabad: Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao on Sunday had a luncheon meeting with his Delhi counterpart Arvind Kejriwal at the latter's residence in New Delhi.

The meeting between the two chief ministers lasted around an hour. According to the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) in Hyderabad, they discussed issues related to the country's federal structure, states' contribution in national growth and other national political issues. The Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), who is eyeing a key role in national politics, is believed to have discussed his plans to evolve an alternative national agenda with Kejriwal, who is national convener of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). KCR, as Rao is popularly known, is on a week-long visit to various parts of the country to meet leaders of various political parties and attend different programmes. Samajwadi Party leader and former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav had called on KCR at the latter's residence in the national capital on Saturday.

After Sunday's meeting with Kejriwal, both the chief ministers left for Chandigarh where they along with Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann will meet the families of farmers, who lost their lives during the year long agitation by the farmers against controversial farm laws made by the Centre. KCR will distribute the cheques of Rs 3 lakh for each bereaved family. He will also hand over a cheque of Rs 10 lakh each to the families of four Army personnel from Punjab who were martyred during clashes with the Chinese troops in Galwan Valley.

LET'S WAIT FOR COURT'S VERDICT, RESPECT IT: CENTRAL MINISTER

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Union Minister and former confidant of late Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Kalyan Singh, BL Verma has called for waiting for the court verdict and respecting it in the Gyanvapi and Krishna Janmabhoomi cases.

While the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya is going on in a full swing, a dispute is building up on the issues of Gyanvapi and Krishna Janmabhoomi.

In an exclusive interview with IANS, Verma gave an insight into what will be the BJP's role on both the issues, whether the BJP-led Central government or the state government can take an initiative on its own and what is the BJP government's view on the Places of Worship Act 1991.

Excerpts:

Q. After Gyanvapi's survey report, Hindus and Muslims are pitted against each other and a lot of statements are being made. What is your take on it.

A. See, the Gyanvapi issue is in court and we should all respect the court's order. The way the Shilving and other signs of Hindu culture have

been found there, everything becomes clear by itself.

Q. Citing the Places of Worship Act 1991, Muslims and people like AIMIM leader Asaduddin Owaisi are saying no changes can be made at Gyanvapi mosque. What's your view.

A. Owaisi can say anything, but the country runs by the law and the Constitution. The country will not run on the basis of Owaisi's statements. He gives provocative speeches but Hindus and Muslims of Uttar Pradesh are sensible enough not to get carried away by his speeches. But if such acts will continue, the law will take its own course.

Q. But Owaisi is saying that as per the Places of Worship Act, no changes can be made in Gyanvapi.

A. Who is making the changes... Nobody... Whatever is being done, it is on the basis of the court's directions. We have less knowledge of law as compared to people sitting in courts. So, whatever verdicts the court had given or is giving is on the basis of rules and regulations.



Q. Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav is holding the BJP responsible for the dispute
A. Akhilesh Yadav does the politics of Muslim

appeasement. Earlier, his father Mulayam Singh Yadav used to do that and nowadays Akhilesh is doing that. The statement Akhilesh has given is petty in itself. It means that he does not have any faith in Hindu dharma and culture. He does the politics of appeasement to keep the Muslims happy and hurt the feelings of Hindus. Earlier also, he had to bear the brunt and will continue to do so.

Q. But opposition parties are accusing you of raking up these issues to divert people's attention from the real problems.

A. He should know that following the mantra of 'sabka saath sabka vikas', the BJP governments without being biased are working for all. Under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the country is progressing rapidly. But as he is in the opposition, he wants to say one or the other thing. However, the public knows it all.

Q. You said that the matter is under consideration in the court. How will the court solve the dispute. What is your opinion on this

A. See, we have been slaves for quite a long time. A few people revere those who ruled us

and act on the basis of their ideology. It is the country's misfortune. As far as a solution is concerned, we are waiting for the court's verdict.

Q. Your party (BJP) had in the 1989 Palampur convention passed a proposal and came out in support of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement. What will the BJP do in Mathura and Kashi

A. See... for the BJP, Ayodhya, Mathura and Kashi are symbols of faith. Other political parties do vote bank politics but the BJP doesn't.

Q. Your government repealed Article 370, 1500 obsolete laws. Considering them, a demand is being made for an amendment in the Places of Worship Act or its revocation.

A. Whatever is in the interest of the country, a government should do that and our government is doing that.

Q. Will you amend the Places of Worship Act or repeal it?

A. I will not comment on the issue right now. I will only say that the BJP government acts in a constitutional way.



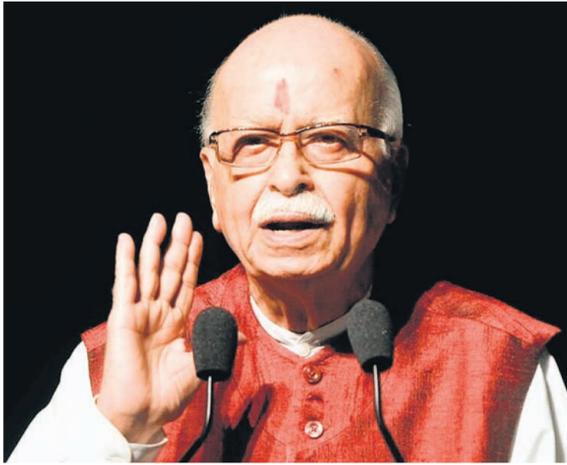
OPPN YET TO COME UP WITH CREDIBLE NARRATIVE TO COUNTER MANDIR-MASJID BLITZ

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The seeds of the present BJP-led full majority government, now in its second term, were sown by party veteran Lal Krishna Advani's 'Sommnath to Ayodhya Yatra' in 1990 which pumped up the sentiments of the people and catapulted the BJP from two seats in 1984 to about 120 Lok Sabha seats in the 1991 elections. This was followed by the 13-day government in 1996 and two successive governments led by AB Vajpayee in 1998 for 13 months and then a full term government in 1999.

The Ram Rath Yatra was a religious yatra but had political aims. It was organised by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its sympathisers and led by the then president of the BJP, LK Advani. The yatra was to support the agitation led by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Sangh Parivar to construct a temple to Hindu deity lord Ram at the site of the Babri Masjid. Following the yatra in 1992 the disputed structure was demolished and now the construction of a temple is going on at the Ayodhya site, after the apex court judgement.

The ongoing Gyanvapi mosque row will also have wide ramifications



for national politics. The principal opposition party, the Congress, has alleged that it is a diversionary tactic but political analyst Vinod Shukla differs and says that the "BJP does not need any issue for 2024 as Hindu have already awakened and the 2019 election is testimony to it, the BJP is very strong and does not need any such emotive issue."

"The issue of other places is raked up because the sentiments within the community is that why should all the wrongs done in the past should be rectified," he added.

While other experts said that the real issues have been put on the backburner thanks to the media which is raking up the issue continuously, political analyst Shakil Akhtar

said that, "the BJP now has to answer for anything related to the inflation, unemployment and China issues, but certainly any emotive issue has a political impact on politics and the BJP with a brute majority and all resources in hand will cash in on the situation."

Though the 2024 elections are two years away but keeping the pot boiling will suit the ruling dispensation which has taken all the credit for the Ram Mandir. The opposition lacks a counter narrative and the leadership to take on the BJP on issues like this. Sources said that in the recently concluded Congress Chintan Shivir, the party had discussed about Hindutva but did not discuss the issue of the Gyanvapi mosque.

Ayodhya helped BJP in forming five governments -- the first 13 days government, then the 13 months coalition government and the five year coalition government and now in 2014 and 2019. In the last two elections the BJP reduced the opposition Congress to double digits, its worst ever performance. However, the Congress thinks that the economic and social issues will help it to counter the BJP but playing second fiddle to the BJP on the Hindutva issue will not help, as it will be champions vs greenhorns.

3 steps forward & 2 steps backward: Cong on excise duty cut on fuel

A day after the reduction in excise duty on petrol and diesel, the Congress on Sunday said that the step was a political gimmick and not relief to people, as it was like 'three steps forward and two steps back'.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A day after the reduction in excise duty on petrol and diesel, the Congress on Sunday said that the step was a political gimmick and not relief to people, as it was like 'three steps forward and two steps back'.

Addressing a press conference here, Congress spokesperson Gaurav Vallabh said that the BJP government was clueless about the economy and financial management.

"Instead of accepting it and seeking guidance from experts, the BJP only resorts to trickery to create an optical delusion. In yet another instance, the honourable Finance Minister put out a series of tweets announcing a series of actions that were purely meant to create a delusion," he said.

The Finance Minister on Saturday announced a reduction of Rs 8 per litre on petrol and Rs 6 per litre on diesel in Central Excise.

Vallabh said, "While it may seem a significant reduction in absolute terms, but the



point of contention doesn't change," adding, "Three steps forward and two steps back doesn't mean it leads to any improvement in the lives of the common people."

"The prices are back to the March 2022 numbers. Were the common people pleased at the fuel prices in March 2022? The answer is No. Is the government still charging a hefty excise on fuel? The answer is Yes. True relief will only come when the excise will be reduced to 2014 levels," Vallabh said.

Only CBI can answer: Nitish Kumar on Lalu raids

Team Absolute | Patna

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Sunday avoided questions on CBI raids over his archival and former Bihar CM Lalu Prasad. Nitish Kumar said that such a matter pertains to law and investigative agencies, so they are in a better position to comment. "Those who have conducted the raids, they are answerable," Nitish Kumar said, putting the ball in the court of the CBI.

Nitish Kumar's statement came just after he met his party workers in Patna on Sunday.

Such a statement is significant as it reflects that JD-U would not want to create more problems for the RJD and Lalu Prasad.

The RJD has accused the CBI of acting upon instructions from the BJP government.

Nitish Kumar was earlier quite vocal against Lalu Prasad and his family, especially



during the 2020 assembly elections, when he took a dig at them (Lalu Prasad-Rabri Devi) saying people have not forgotten the "Jungle Raj". But now the mood of Nitish Kumar seems to have changed towards the Yadav family. When asked about Rajya Sabha candidates of the party, he said: "When time comes, the name of the candidates will be announced. Don't worry about it," he said, speaking to the media.

The suspense over the Rajya Sabha fate of RCP Singh is still hanging in balance. If he is not sent to the Rajya Sabha, he will have to quit as Union Cabinet Minister. RCP Singh is currently Union Steel Minister.

JD-U, on the other hand, has already announced the name of Anil Hegde for the Rajya Sabha. As per the strength of the JD-U, it is not in a position to send another candidate to the upper house.

Places of Worship Act to be put to test in Mathura mosque case too

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Amid the row over discovery of a "Shivling" inside the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi, a district court in Mathura, earlier this week, allowed a plea by the Shri Krishna Janmabhoomi Trust and other private parties, seeking ownership of the land on which the Shahi Idgah mosque is built. Both the Gyanvapi mosque and the Shahi Idgah Mosque, fall under the purview of The Places of Worship Act, 1991, but now they are under litigation. The Idgah is next to the Sri Krishna Janmabhoomi Shal, where Lord Krishna is believed to have been born, and the Gyanvapi mosque is adjacent to Kashi Vishwanath Temple.

The Mathura dispute involves ownership of 13.37 acres of land, which the petitioners claim belongs to Lord Shri Krishna Virajman and also challenged the validity of a 1968 compromise agreement between Shri Krishna Janmasthan Seva Sansthan and the Trust Masjid Idgah.

The petitioners claim the compromise agreement was fraudulent, where the temple authority

conceded the contentious portion of land to the Idgah. The temple trust and the private parties claim since the land was under control of the trust, the temple management authority was not in a position to enter into a compromise.

Counsel representing Idgah contended that the society is an agent of the trust, which appoints the head of the society, and the compromise agreement was also registered. The court has agreed to examine this compromise.

Since, both - Gyanvapi and Shahi Idgah - fall under the purview of the 1991 Act, it will be interesting to see what methodology the court adopts to resolve the issue. The Places of Worship Act, 1991 terms itself "An Act to prohibit conversion of any place of worship and to provide for the maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on the 15th day of August, 1947, and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto." Section 4 of the Act says: "It is hereby declared that the religious character of a place of worship existing on the 15th day of August, 1947 shall continue to be the same as it existed on that

day." Petitions have also been filed in the Supreme Court challenging the validity of the 1991 Act.

The Gyanvapi mosque case bears a striking resemblance to the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri dispute -- the matter is before the apex court, arising out of a civil suit. However, Shahi Idgah Mosque matter is still at the trial court stage.

Both cases involve interpretation of a complex mesh of laws against the backdrop of constitutional rights of two different communities to practice their religious faith respectively. Both cases are likely to see arguments for exemption of places of worship which are over a century old. And, the efficacy of the 1991 law, will also be under scrutiny in both cases. Especially, when the Supreme Court, in the 2019 Ayodhya judgment, had said that the Act is intrinsically related to the obligations of a secular state and it reflects the commitment of India to equality of all religions. It will be interesting to see, how the Hindu parties skirt around the 1991 law or find gaps in the law to establish their claims - and also, the Muslim parties prepare their defence in view of the 1991 law.

BJP LOK SABHA MEMBER ARJUN SINGH REJOINS TRINAMOOL CONGRESS

Bringing an end to all speculations and in another jolt to the BJP, BJP's Barrackpore MP Arjun Singh rejoined West Bengal's Trinamool Congress on Sunday evening.

Kolkata | Agencies

Bringing an end to all speculations and in another jolt to the BJP, BJP's Barrackpore MP Arjun Singh rejoined West Bengal's Trinamool Congress on Sunday evening. He was greeted back into the party by Trinamool General Secretary Abhishek Banerjee at the party office at Camac Street in central Kolkata. Other top Trinamool leaders, MLAs, and ministers from the North 24 Parganas district were present on the occasion. The development comes as another setback for the BJP against the backdrop of the West Bengal Panchayat polls in 2023 and the Lok Sabha polls in 2024, as Singh was an important pillar in expanding its organisational base in North 24 Parganas district, especially in the Barrackpore, area since 2019.

Speculations were rife for quite some time that Singh might come back to Trinamool as he continued with his salvos against the Union government on the issue of fixing the price of jute. Recently Singh also became vocal against the state leadership of BJP claiming that the latter has become social media-oriented instead of focusing on grassroots level organisation. Union Textiles Minister Piyush Goyal and BJP's national President J.P. Nadda even had separate meetings with Singh in New Delhi to address his grievances. However, as the latest developments show, those did not prove to be fruitful.

After rejoining, Singh said that he had switched over the BJP in 2019 after misunderstandings with Trinamool leadership.

"But after joining BJP, I faced hurdles in acting independently as an elected Lok Sabha member



from the state. I tried hard to settle the jute price issue and there too I faced hurdles. So, I decided to join back..." he said.

Asked whether he would resign as a Lok Sabha member on moral grounds, Singh said that currently there are two Lok Sabha members from Bengal, who are officially Trinamool MPs, but are actually with the BJP. "The day these two MPs resign on moral

grounds, I will also resign within an hour and face fresh elections," he said. His clear hints were towards the Leader of Opposition in Assembly, Suvendu Adhikari's father, Sisir Adhikari, the Trinamool MP from Kanthi and brother, Dibyendu Adhikari, the Trinamool MP from Tamluk. Both these constituencies are in East Midnapore district.

Reacting to Arjun Singh's exit,

BJP's national Vice President, Dilip Ghosh said that Singh was unable to bear the administrative and police pressure on him since the time he was elected on behalf of the BJP from Barrackpore. "Previously some of our elected MLAs joined Trinamool Congress because of the same pressure," he claimed. Arjun Singh was a four-time Trinamool MLA from Bhatpara Assembly constituency in North 24 Parganas district from 2011 to 2019. However, as he was denied the Lok Sabha nomination from Barrackpore Lok Sabha constituency by the Trinamool leadership in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, he joined the saffron camp. The BJP fielded him as its candidate from Barrackpore Lok Sabha in 2019 and Singh got elected defeating Trinamool sitting member, Dinesh Trivedi by a margin of little less than 15,000 votes.

Bangladeshi 'infiltration' bid foiled

A group of people from Bangladesh allegedly tried to enter India by crossing the Kushiya river on a boat in South Assam's Karimganj district. However, the "alert" local residents claimed that they foiled the infiltration attempt.

Guwahati | Agencies

A group of people from Bangladesh allegedly tried to enter India by crossing the Kushiya river on a boat in South Assam's Karimganj district. However, the "alert" local residents claimed that they foiled the infiltration attempt. India and Bangladesh share the trans-boundary water of Kushiya, with the Indian riverside without any fencing in many places alongside the land border.

The SP of Karimganj district said, "We have taken the matter with the BSE. I also visited the spot and spoke with the residents there. A few locals had claimed that they have seen a boat carrying a group of twenty people trying to enter from the Bangladesh side. The locals raised an alarm and lit torches following which the boat turned back. We are still investigating the matter."



The IG of Mizoram and Cachar Frontier of BSF Mridul Sonowal informed that they took note of the incident. He said, "We have camps in that area. Though the guards patrol there regularly, we have stepped up the vigil further following that incident. There are different opinions behind the alleged incident which took place on Friday night. Some locals are saying that the Bangladeshis planned to cross the riverine border side with the motive of committing theft and dacoity. The police and BSF authorities refused to comment on this claim.

With 2024 not far, BJP gets stronger, weakens its opponents at the same time

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Eyeing upcoming Assembly elections and 2024 Lok Sabha polls, the BJP is working on a two-pronged strategy - strengthening the organisation and at the same time weakening its opponents.

The saffron party is busy in expanding its base by using every occasion and platform to inform people about the achievements of the Modi government.

On the completion of eight years of the Modi government, the party has planned several outreach programmes from May 30 to June 14 and will run a special campaign 'Sewa, Sushasan and Garib Kalyan' (Service, Good governance and Welfare of the Poor).

The Modi government has asked its ministers to go to the villages and directly interact with the people.

On the occasion of the International

Yoga Day on June 21, BJP workers have decided to organise Yoga camps at 75,000 places across the country.

To pay tributes to Dr Syama Prasad Mukherjee on his Balidaan Diwas, the BJP workers will plant trees across the country from June 23 to July 6.

On the directions of Prime Minister Narendra Modi under the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' campaign, BJP MPs are already busy in making 75 ponds in their areas and are doing other social works. The saffron party's strategy is to reach out to all sections of the society and establish direct contact with them.

The BJP is in fact working at both level to strengthen the party.

The BJP has decided to hold the meetings of all the state executives by June 10, all district executives by June 20 and all mandal executives by June 30. Apart from this, a target has also been set to complete the three-day



training of BJP workers in all the states by July.

In view of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP is also working on a special strategy how to strengthen its

"weak" booths. A total of 73,000 such booths have been identified. To increase party's influence on these booths, a panel of four senior leaders was formed in April.

Most of the weak booths are in southern and eastern states. The list includes minority community dominated booths where the BJP is weaker than other parties.

At the same time, the BJP is also focusing on weakening its opponents. Under this strategy, the BJP will target those opposition leaders who are popular and influential in their areas but upset with their parent parties.

Congress leader Manik Saha, who had joined the BJP, was made the Tripura chief minister.

The party has indicated that it believes in giving respect to a leader who is capable and popular and rewards them accordingly.

The BJP recently inducted Sunil Jakhar into the party fold as he was upset with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. In Gujarat, speculations are rife that Patidar leader Hardik Patel,

who quit the Congress recently, will join the BJP. According to sources, in Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh too, the BJP is eyeing several disgruntled leaders who are upset with the Congress. However, a senior leader of the BJP told IANS that internal democracy no longer exists in many regional and family-based parties including the Congress, and that's why good leaders, unhappy with the arrangements there, are looking for alternatives.

The party said it is not necessary that all the opposition leaders would join BJP or BJP should include all of them into its fold.

The main opposition party in Uttar Pradesh, the Samajwadi Party is likely to weaken further after rift surfaced between Akhilesh Yadav and senior party leader Azam Khan with Shivpal Yadav wooing Azam Khan.

This is a win win situation for the BJP.



CM CALLS RAHUL GANDHI 'FRUSTRATED' POLITICIAN; 'NO ONE LISTENS TO HIM'

► CM SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN ON SUNDAY SLAMMED CONGRESS LEADER RAHUL GANDHI FOR CRITICISING INDIA ON AN INTERNATIONAL PLATFORM & RAISED QUESTIONS ABOUT HIS PATRIOTISM



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Sunday slammed Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for criticising India on an international platform and raised questions about the Wayanad MP's patriotic sense. He further added that it's not right to make such hate comments against one's own country when in a foreign land. Chouhan further stated that Rahul Gandhi makes such state-

ments abroad because no one listens to him in India.

Taking a jibe at Congress, CM Chouhan said that Rahul Gandhi is so immature still there are some leaders of his own party who aspire to make him Congress president.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is India's most unsuccessful, frustrated & despondent politician in the country. Nobody listens to him in India so

he is making such statements by going abroad. Due to the statements of Rahul Gandhi, now doubts and questions arise about his patriotism. No politicians make comments against the country as Rahul Gandhi does on foreign land. He is immature, but some leaders of his own party want to make him congress president," Chouhan said. He further added, "When

Manmohan Singh was the Prime Minister of India, I was on a visit to the United States, their journalists asked me if India's PM was an under-achiever, I said he's the PM of India not just of the Congress & that India's PM can't be an under-achiever. We never criticised the country while being abroad."

Notably, while addressing an 'Ideas for India' conference at Cambridge in London, Rahul Gandhi stated that India is not in a 'good place' as he attacked the BJP-led government at the Centre and stressed that the opposition needs to bring "people, communities, states, and religions" together.

"India is not in a good place. BJP has spread kerosene all over the country. You need one spark & we'll be in big trouble. I think that's also the responsibility of the opposition, the Congress, to bring people, communities, states, & religions together. We need to cool this temperature down because if this temperature doesn't cool down, things can go wrong", he stated.

Our resolve no poor should be deprived of treatment due to lack of money: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that it is our resolve that no poor will remain without treatment due to lack of money. The government is providing free treatment up to Rs. 5 lakh to poor patients in private hospitals under the Ayushman Bharat scheme launched by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Chief Minister said that soon many hospitals in the state are going to be dedicated and foundation stone will be laid by the President. Chouhan was addressing the bhoomi-pujan ceremony of Devraj Institute of Medical Science and Hospital in Gwalior on Sunday.

Chouhan said that this medical college and hospital will give a new direction to Gwalior-Chambal division. It will also provide state-of-the-art medical facilities to the economically weaker patients of Gwalior-Chambal division and other nearby areas. The Chief Minister said that I wish the best to those students who have studied here to become good doctors.

Chouhan said that on the holy land of Gwalior, we take a pledge that no stone will be left unturned in the development of Gwalior-Chambal division. The development of Gwalior is going on in the auspicious time of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav. Very soon a 1000 bed hospital will start here. Elevated roads, state-of-



the-art airports, central level agricultural institutions and other development works are also taking shape. He said that it is the resolve of the state government to make arrangements for food, clothing, education and employment for all.

Chouhan said that the Devraj Institute of Medical Science is going to become a perfect example of women empowerment.

Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Narendra Singh Tomar said that there is a large population in our country and the state, to whom providing education and health facilities is a big challenge. The central and state governments have done the work of mobilizing medical facilities on a large scale. Private sector and voluntary organizations are also contributing in providing medical services.

Union Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia

said that on the initiative of Chief Minister Chouhan, the entire state including Gwalior is being connected with better air services. New flights are going to start from June 3 for Delhi, Bhopal, Gwalior and Jabalpur. Along with this, flights will also be available for three days for Bilaspur city of Chhattisgarh. The benefit of better air service will also be available in the health sector. If needed, specialist doctors can be called from other cities of the country.

Devraj Institute of Medical Science will have 780 beds, with ICU facility. The hospital will start with 300 beds in the first phase. In the second phase also, classes will begin on 150 MBBS seats in the medical college with 350 beds. All facilities required for this state-of-the-art hospital including state-of-the-art trauma center, general and private ward, cancer, neuro and other serious diseases treatment unit, nursing college, hostel will be available.

Bulldoze home of person who killed mentally unwell man: Locals

Team Absolute | Neemuch

A 65-year-old mentally unwell man was allegedly thrashed to death in the Manasa area of Neemuch district. A video of the same went viral on social media on Friday.

Now, the locals from his village are demanding that the house of the perpetrator be bulldozed.

In a video that went viral on social media, a man can be seen thrashing the victim, Bhanwarlal Jain, on suspicion of belonging to a particular religion. In the video, the accused was also seen demanding Aadhaar card from the victim.

A man in a red shirt can be seen slapping the old man continuously and asking, "Is your name Mohammad?"



AFTER A MENTALLY ILL MAN WAS ALLEGEDLY THRASHED TO DEATH IN NEEMUCH, THE LOCALS FROM HIS VILLAGE HAVE DEMANDED THAT THE HOME OF THE PERPETRATOR BE BULLDOZED.

Show me your Aadhaar card." Bhanwarlal Jain went with his mother Pistabai, the sarpanch of the village, and other family members to Chittorgarh in Rajasthan for prayers on May 15.

Bhanwarlal Jain, who was differently-abled and had

trouble with memory, went missing from Rajasthan. His family lodged a missing complaint at the police station there. Later, they received information that a body had been found in Manasa in Neemuch district. They reached there and identified

the body. On Friday, they performed the last rites.

Later, the family saw the aforementioned viral video and lodged a police case.

On seeing the video, the locals from Bhanwarlal Jain's village were very angry. They have demanded that strict

action be taken against the perpetrator.

Dinesh Nayma, the doctor in Sarsi village, said the people of the village want the chief minister to ensure action is taken. "Bulldozers should be run at the house of the BJP leader who killed the elder from Sarsi in Ratlam district. If the state government is strict against criminals, the same strictness should apply here," the villagers said.

The accused has been identified as Dinesh Kushwaha and, according to sources in the police department, his wife has served as a corporator of the city.

According to SHO KL Dangi, "A case under section 302 and 304/2 has been registered against the accused and he has been arrested."

Madhya Pradesh Plans Monthly Ranking of Govt Schools to Improve Education

■ MP government will publish ranking of government schools from Class 1 to Class 8 every month.



Team Absolute | Bhopal

In a bid to improve quality of education in Madhya Pradesh's schools, the state education department recently announced on its official Twitter handle that it will provide the ranking of government schools from Class 1 to Class 8 every month. According to the announcement, the government will begin providing ranks to schools in all 52 districts based on the quality of education. Schools will be ranked based on the number of points they receive for meeting duties and producing high-quality work.

Another tweet made by the education department revealed that the decision to

rank schools was made after Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's directive. The official notice claims that the Chief Minister has asked officials to publish the schools monthly ranking on the CM dashboard.

Notably, earlier this month, Shivraj Singh Chouhan also announced new scholarships to encourage Sanskrit among students. He promised scholarships to students learning Sanskrit. Reportedly, the scholarship is scheduled to begin in July. As per the media reports, this decision was taken prior to the cabinet meeting at Vallabh Bhawan when addressing his cabinet ministers. Students will be able to

apply for the scholarship through an online portal, claimed the reports.

The scholarship is intended to assist students and priests studying the Sanskrit language. This will also result in the filling of empty Sanskrit instructor positions. As per the Times Of India report, 1900 posts have been filled so far, and recruitments were being made on the remaining posts. Furthermore, until teachers are hired, arrangements will be made for guest faculty. CM Chouhan made a number of announcements at the beginning of May, including the state government's plan to add a lesson on Bhagwan Parshuram to the school curriculum.

'Minor rape victim murdered by relative in Bhopal': Police

■ The minor girl (17), who was raped by a villager earlier this month, was forced to consume poison by her uncle and cousin. During interrogation, the victim's cousin told the police that they killed her because she defamed his family in the village.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In a shocking incident, a minor (17) rape survivor was murdered by her maternal uncle and his son in Rajgarh district.

The minor girl, who was raped by a villager earlier this month, was forced to consume poison by her uncle and cousin, a senior police officer said.

Based on a complaint from the girl's father, the accused, aged 48 and 22, were arrested on May 21 after a case under Section 302 (murder) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) was registered against them, said Mukesh Gaud, in-charge, Khilchipur police station. "On May 18, the police were informed that the rape

survivor died in suspicious circumstances," said Gaud. "Her maternal uncle informed the police that she consumed poison and died by suicide. On May 20, his son was interrogated and confessed to the crime."

During interrogation, the girl's cousin told the police that they killed her because she defamed his family in the village, the senior officer said. "They forced her to consume poison and later changed her clothes to present it as a suicide case," Gaud added. The role of other family members is being investigated, he said.

Earlier, the minor was abducted and raped by a 22-year-old man, police said. "The girl shifted to her

maternal uncle's house a year ago after the death of her mother due to Covid-19. The 22-year-old man from the same village as her maternal uncle abducted the minor on April 30 and took her to Rajgarh," said Gaud. "Her maternal uncle informed her father about it, who filed a missing person's complaint at Khilchipur police station."

Later, the girl was rescued from the Rajgarh bus stand and the accused was arrested, Gaud said. The accused was booked for abduction and rape under relevant sections of the IPC and prevention of children from sexual offences (POCSO) Act. He is currently lodged in jail, he added.



CM PLANTED SAPLINGS WITH GROUP OF PROFESSORS FROM BHOPAL

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted Peepal and Neem saplings in the Smart City Garden on Sunday. BMS Bhadauria, Bhavna, Vinita Choudhary, Renu Verma of "Jeeteenge Hum" group, Rakesh Thakur of Sewa Bharati and active photographer of the capital Javed Khan also planted saplings. Javed Khan's wife Rubina Khan and daughters Alina and Ayra were also present.

There is a "Jeeteenge Hum" group of the professors posted in various colleges of Bhopal. More than 30 professors are connected with it. Health awareness, environmental protection, plantation and other works are being done by the group. The group has planted more than 150 shady, fruit and medicinal plants in village Golkhedhi. During the Corona period, a large number of food packets including masks, medicines and other materials were made available to the needy people. Oxygen was also arranged for the patients by the group. Among the saplings planted today, Peepal is a shady tree. It purifies the environment. It has religious and Ayurvedic significance. Rich in antibiotic elements, neem is known as the supreme medicine.

Fireworks over OBC reservation turn up political heat in MP

■ Following the Supreme Courts permission to conduct the local body polls with Other Backward Classes (OBC) reservation in Madhya Pradesh, the political slugfest attempting to show their respective strength alongside with accusations continued between the BJP and the Congress in the state.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Following the Supreme Courts permission to conduct the local body polls with Other Backward Classes (OBC) reservation in Madhya Pradesh, the political slugfest attempting to show their respective strength alongside with accusations continued between the BJP and the Congress in the state.

While the opposition Congress stood with the agitating section of the community and extended its support to the state bandh' call of Anya Pichhadvarg Mahasabha, the union representing the OBC community on Saturday, on the other side the ruling BJP, which

received the SC order as a political victory, celebrated the occasion by organising a thanksgiving programme for Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan in Bhopal. The state BJP leaders are gleefully narrating the story of their so-called political victory while highlighting the steps taken by the Shivraj Singh Chouhan government to smoothen the way for OBC reservation in Madhya Pradesh.

Ramkhelawan Patel, who is a prominent OBC face in the BJP and also a minister in Chouhan's government, said, "The Congress was talking of OBC reservation outside, but inside it always created a hurdle. It could happen



because CM Chouhan took the decision to set up an OBC Commission on September 2 last year. He fought for the OBCs despite relentless attacks from the Congress to derail the process to provide reservation to the community. Therefore, we thank Shivraj Singh Chouhan for his efforts to bring justice to OBC people."

The Congress reiterated its claims that the party had initiated the process to increase the OBC reservation quota

from the existing 14 per cent to 27 per cent during Kamal Nath's 18-month government in Madhya Pradesh. The Congress also accused the BJP of misleading the people with false claims. It said the OBC community would get just 14 per cent reservation in the local body elections, which was already a fixed quota for the community.

Former state Congress president Arun Yadav, talking to IANS said, "Initially, former chief minister (late)

Arjun Singh took the first step to provide reservation for OBCs in Madhya Pradesh and then the Digvijaya Singh-led Congress government took the process further. An OBC Commission was established in 2008, subsequently a resolution to increase the OBC reservation quota from 14 per cent to 27 per cent was passed by the state assembly."

Yadav alleged that during the 15 years of his tenure, Shivraj Singh Chouhan kept the OBC reservation issue in cold storage. He claimed that when the Kamal Nath-led Congress government was formed in 2018, a resolution was passed again to increase the reservation quota for the OBC.

"The BJP, which kept the OBC reservation issue in cold storage for years, has no right to claim the SC judgment as a victory. Even if they are doing it, they are doing propaganda because they have nothing to tell the OBC people what they have done for them in the

last 15 years. The Congress has raised its voice for increasing the reservation quota for the OBC from 14 per cent to 27 per cent and will continue to fight until it is provided to them," Yadav said.

Veteran journalist Law Kumar Mishra, who has covered the politics of Madhya Pradesh for nearly four decades, told IANS, "If the Congress leaders claim that they took the initiative to provide reservation to the OBC, they are right. The resolution to increase the reservation quota for the OBC from 14 per cent to 27 per cent was passed by Digvijaya Singh's government in 2008, but the matter remained in the court. And the BJP's politics was limited to upper castes and knowing the fact that MP's politics was upper caste dominated, they too kept the issue in cold storage. But, the scenario changed after the Narendra Modi-led Central government started giving special attention to OBC in other states."



EDITOR'S SPECS

Five women: Shaken up the nation

The five women who caused an upheaval in the country by filing a petition seeking permission to offer prayers at the Shringar Gauri shrine in the Gyanvapi mosque complex here are neither friends, nor part of one group. Of the five petitioners, one is based in Delhi while four belong to Varanasi. The closest they came to know of each other is a chance meeting at a 'satsang'. While Laxmi Devi, Sita Sahu, Manju Vyas and Rekha Pathak live in Varanasi and have been present at every hearing of the case which began in August 2021, the fifth and the main petitioner, Rakhi Singh, lives in Delhi and has not been to court. Rakhi Singh's interest in religion seems to originate from her links to the 'Vishwa Vedic Sanathan Sangh'. Rakhi, 35, is a founder member of the outfit, which claims to have done 'coordination' for the petition. Her uncle, Jitendra Singh Bishe, is the President of the Sangh. The outfit coordinated with four of the women and brought them together to file the Gyanvapi petition in August 2021. The second petitioner is Laxmi Devi, 65, whose husband, Sohan Lal Arya, is a senior VHP office-bearer in Varanasi. Laxmi Devi is essentially a homemaker and lives in Varanasi's Mahmoorganj area. Sita Sahu, another petitioner, however, has another story as to how they came together for the case. Sita Sahu runs a small general store from her house in Chetganj area of Varanasi, just 2 km from the Gyanvapi complex. Manju Vyas, 49, runs a beauty parlour from her house located 1.5 km from the Gyanvapi complex and is not a member or office-bearer of any outfit or organisation. Apart from her small business, she looks after her family. Her interest is to pray at the Shringar Gauri Sthal.

CONTESTED PLACE OF WORSHIP:

HISTORY AND CONTEXT OF THE GYANVAPI MOSQUE IMBROGLIO

In an India that boasts of secular ethos, there stands a mosque bearing a Sanskritised name. Gyanvapi (meaning 'well of knowledge') is a mosque in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, yanked into limelight for a dispute over its prevailing religious status, notwithstanding its established history. The resurrection of a medieval episode of Mughal ruler Aurangzeb's desecration of one particular temple in the ancient city of Kashi (Varanasi) makes it necessary to revise the sequence of developments that precede the edifice that stands as Gyanvapi mosque, adjacent to the famous Kashi Vishwanath temple situated on the western banks of river Ganga.

The history of Gyanvapi site

What existed there prior to this temple is debated by scholars, but before this mosque came to be, on its ground stood a Vishweshwara temple, dedicated to Shiva. This temple, as per records, was built in the 16th century under Akbar's reign by two people: Todar Mal, Akbar's finance minister and a premier noble in the Mughal Empire; and Narayana Bhatta, the head of Kashi's predominant Brahmin family. Going further back, popular sources inform of the claims that the original temple that stood at the site of the present-day mosque was destroyed by Qutb al-Din Aibak in 1193-94 CE after defeating Jayachanda, the ruler of Kannauj (a region in Uttar Pradesh). Few years later, the Razia mosque was erected in place of the original temple. However, during the reign of Iltutmish (1211-1266 CE), a Gujarati merchant rebuilt the temple but it was demolished by Hussain Shah Sharqi (1447-1458) or Sikandar Lodhi (1489-1517). According to yet another claim, the temple was reconstructed by Raja Man Singh during Akbar's reign, only to fall prey to Aurangzeb's cultural pillages this time. It is said that Aurangzeb had the

temple destroyed around 1669 and constructed a mosque in its place. The plinth of the temple was largely left untouched and remained in use as the courtyard of the mosque. The structure went on to have several other features of the Mughal architectural style that remain to this day. However, oral accounts suggest that despite destroying the temple, Brahmin priests were permitted to reside within the mosque complex and exercise privileges regarding matters of Hindu pilgrimage as the Gyanvapi site, especially for its surviving plinth, remained popular among Hindu pilgrims. Records indicate that after Aurangzeb razed the original Vishwanath temple and built Gyanvapi mosque over it; the current structure of Vishwanath temple was built adjacent to the mosque by the Maratha ruler, Ahilya Bai Holkar of Indore, in 1780. Several claims and counter-claims prevail regarding the historicity and sequence of events pertaining to the original temple site, but without attestation of historical scholarship. It is a popular fact that foreign invaders looted temples but a lesser-known fact is that it was not just the Muslim invaders that pillaged temples but Hindu rulers too looted the treasury from temples in other territories. However, "there is a difference in the way the Hindus and the Muslims looted temples", points out professor Vipul Singh, historian and faculty at University of Delhi, while talking to correspondent. "Temples were identified with rulers of the region. There was nothing called India at that time. Much wealth was hidden in those temples," the historian said, explaining the loot of temples by invading Hindu rulers. "But it was not looted the way Muslim invaders looted temples -- they demolished the temples and used the materials to construct their own mosques over it."

The Gyanvapi Mosque dispute in recent times

A petition was filed in 1991 at a Varanasi court whereby the petitioners, who were local priests, sought permission to worship in the Gyanvapi mosque complex. The petitioners maintained that the mosque was built upon the orders of Aurangzeb by demolishing a part of the Kashi Vishwanath temple during his reign. The case was revived in December 2019 following the Supreme Court verdict on the Ayodhya dispute when a Varanasi-based lawyer, Vijay Shankar Rastogi, filed a petition in the lower court claiming illegality in the construction of Gyanvapi mosque and sought an archaeological survey of the site. The Varanasi court thus directed the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to carry out a survey and produce a report. However, the body that runs Gyanvapi mosque, Anjuman Intezamia Masjid Committee, along with the Sunni Central Waqf Board opposed the petition and the court's order to survey the mosque. When the matter reached the Allahabad High Court, it ordered an interim stay on the direction of ASI for conducting the survey. The high court highlighted that as per the Places of Worship Act, 1991, any change in the religious character of a place of worship from as it existed on August 15, 1947, is prohibited. However, in March 2021, a Supreme Court bench headed by then Chief Justice of India, S.A. Bobde, agreed to examine the validity of The Places of Worship Act. Further, on August 18, 2021, five Hindu women filed a petition in the Varanasi court seeking permission to worship the deities (Shringar Gauri, Ganesha, Hanuman, and Nandi) regularly, in addition to restricting opponents from harming the statues inside Gyanvapi structure.

Further, on August 18, 2021, five Hindu women filed a petition in the Varanasi court seeking permission to worship the deities (Shringar Gauri, Ganesha, Hanuman, and Nandi) regularly, in addition to restricting opponents from harming the statues inside Gyanvapi structure.

Context of the dispute

The Kashi Vishwanath Temple-Gyanvapi Mosque dispute was raised by the Bharatiya Janata Party, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh during the campaign for construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya along with the Krishnanjama Bhoomi-Shahi Idgah Masjid in Mathura. They claimed that all the three mosques were built after demolishing Hindu temples. Popular sources indicate that the original Shivaling at the temple was supposedly hidden by priests inside the Gyanvapi well at the time of Aurangzeb's raids. Such a proposition validates the recent finding of a Shivaling-like structure from the mosque's premise, which the claimants on the Muslim side say is a defunct fountain head. "As researchers, we have certain protocols to follow, we need evidence," says professor Singh, commenting on the recent discovery in the mosque premises and the possibility of the Shivaling actually stowed away there, "the only way to prove it by a legal permit to carry out excavations at the site and then arrive at a conclusion," he said. Adding that "It's a political issue, no one wants to listen to the historians; and there is nothing concrete about what we are hearing," Singh asserted that "you can't deny that many temples were indeed destroyed." Meanwhile, the Varanasi civil court on Tuesday removed Advocate-Commissioner Ajay Kumar Mishra from the panel formed to survey the mosque. After he was ousted, Mishra said, "I've not done anything that reveals the secrecy of the matter." Correspondent reached out to a serving and a retired ASI official with an inquiry pertaining to releasing any information in the course of the survey and before its completion, or having any directive in this regard as a matter of protocol. They refrained from commenting saying that a legal expert may explain this better. Correspondent then reached out to Delhi-based advocate Vinay Pandey to shed light on the matter. He explained that with respect to the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958, "There is no provision which categorically mandates the confi-

dentality of the interim findings of a survey until its conclusion. However, in the Gyanvapi mosque case, survey was conducted in compliance with the Varanasi district court order by a court-appointed advocate commissioner (which later was changed) and the same stood concluded on May 17, 2022. In any case, when the court is seized of the matter and orders any probe by way of survey or inspection, then it shall be the bounden duty of the person upon whom the responsibility is laid to execute the same in an utmost fair, impartial, secure, and neutral manner." Further, The Places of Worship Act, 1991 mandates to maintain the religious character of a place as on August 15, 1947 and disallows conversion of a place of worship. It is widely critiqued that this dispute over Gyanvapi mosque is a defiance of the law. Advocate Pandey elucidates: "The main object and purpose for The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 came into force to prohibit conversion of any place of worship and to provide for the maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on the 15th day of August, 1947. "There are conflicting arguments from both the sides in this long-drawn litigation as one side is seen stating that the said Act is not applicable to the said mosque and it is covered under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958, as mentioned under sub-section 3 of section 4 of the 1991 Act." Expatiating further, he added that "the other side is claiming that the mosque directly falls within the ambit of sections 3, 4(1) and 4(2) of the 1991 Act". He concluded by saying that "the justifiability of the debate surrounding the status of the mosque will ultimately depend upon the adjudication of the aforesaid primary issues".

international

S KOREAN ACTIVISTS HOLD ANTI-BIDEN RALLIES

South Korean civic and student activists held rallies against US President Joe Biden throughout his three-day trip in the Asian nation to clamour for peace on the Korean Peninsula. A group of students from the Korean University Progressive Union on Sunday held an anti-Biden rally near the US military base in Yongsan, where the President reportedly planned to meet staff members from the American Embassy in Seoul, reports Xinhua news agency. "Leave this land, Biden, who escalates a war crisis on the Korean Peninsula," the student activists chanted, raising on their hands the signs opposing joint military exercises and South Korea-US-Japan military alliance. "From the day Biden arrived here, university students continued to shout anti-American voices. It reflects the desire of people. Nobody wants war in this land. Everybody wants peace," a student said during the rally. The student activists went after Biden during his tour, an air base where he



arrived and departed for Japan, a hotel where he stayed, and the presidential office where he held talks with South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol. The student activists were surrounded by the police, which heightened the security of Biden's visiting locations to the highest level. One student was taken to a hospital during a tussle on Friday night with policemen who hindered the rally near the hotel Biden allegedly stayed, according to local broadcaster YTN. Right before Biden's visit to Seoul, representatives from a total of 155 civic

5.8-MAGNITUDE QUAKE JOLTS JAPAN, NO TSUNAMI WARNING

Tokyo: An earthquake with a magnitude of 5.8 on Sunday struck off Japan's Ibaraki prefecture, but no tsunami warning was issued. According to the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA), the tremor occurred at 12.24 p.m. at a latitude of 36.8 north and a longitude of 141.5 east and at depth of 30 km, reports Xinhua news agency. The quake logged five upper in some parts of Ibaraki and Fukushima prefectures on the Japanese seismic intensity scale which peaks at seven, Xinhua news agency quoted the JMA as saying. There were no immediate reports of damages or injuries.

Imran again praises India for buying discounted oil from Russia

Islamabad: Former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan once again praised India for buying discounted oil from Russia despite being a key member of a US-led Quad alliance. "Despite being part of the Quad, India sustained pressure from the US and bought discounted Russian oil to provide relief to the masses," Dawn news quoted Khan as saying in a tweet. "This is what our government was working to achieve with the help of an independent foreign policy," he added. In a second tweet, Khan



claimed that for his government, "Pakistan's interest was supreme but unfortunately the local Mir Jafars & Mir Sadiqs bowed to external pressure, forcing a regime change and are now running around like a headless chicken with the economy in a tailspin".

MAGNITUDE 6.1 EARTHQUAKE JOLTS PHILIPPINES



Manila: An earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 6.1 jolted Batangas province on the main Philippine island of Luzon on Sunday, the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology said. The institute said the quake, which occurred at 5:50 a.m., hit at a depth of 132 km, about 21-km northwest of Calatagan town. The tremor was also felt in Metro Manila and the provinces of Bulacan and Oriental Mindoro, Xinhua news agency reported. There were no immediate reports of damage or casualties. The institute added that the tectonic quake will trigger aftershocks and can cause damage. The Philippines has frequent seismic activity due to its location along the Pacific "Ring of Fire".

SWEDEN, FINLAND URGED TO ADDRESS TURKEY'S SECURITY CONCERNS

Ankara: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan spoke with leaders of Sweden and Finland, urging the two NATO applicant states to address Ankara's security concerns. In a phone call, Erdogan told Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson that the Nordic country should end political, financial and weaponry support to "terror organisations", Xinhua news agency quoted the Turkish presidential office as saying in a statement. Turkey expects Sweden to take concrete steps to address its concerns about the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party and its extensions in Syria and Iraq, Erdogan noted. He also urged Sweden to lift the arms exports embargo imposed on Turkey after the latter launched a cross-border military operation in Syria in 2019. In a separate call with Finnish President Sauli Niinisto, Erdogan said ignoring the terror threats a NATO ally faces is incompatible with the spirit of friendship and alliance. Turkey expects "respect and support for its legitimate and determined struggle against a



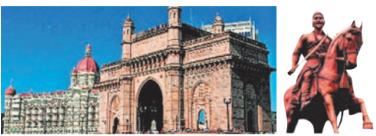
clear threat to its national security and people", Erdogan was quoted as saying. He also told NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg via phone that Turkey would not approach Sweden and Finland membership bids positively unless they stand for Turkey's fundamental issues, especially in the fight against terrorism. Stoltenberg, for his part, stated that Turkey's security concerns should be addressed. Sweden and Finland on May 18 formally submitted their NATO membership applications to Stoltenberg.

'WITHOUT CORRECT GOVT SUPPORT, PROTESTS SEEN IN SL COULD BE REPEATED IN OTHER NATIONS'

Washington: Kristalina Georgieva, head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), said that governments need to subsidise the cost of food and energy for the poorest members of society and without the correct support, the protests seen in Sri Lanka could be repeated in other countries. Speaking to the BBC, Georgieva said that such similar unrest before the Covid-19 pandemic, from France to Chile, was caused by "a sense of inequality growing" and decisions being made without the support of the people. "If we are to learn any lessons from 2019 if is to be much more humble about policy decisions, and engage in multiple ways with people, because policies must be for people, not the paper we write them

IRANIAN PRESIDENT TO VISIT OMAN ON MONDAY

Tehran: At the invitation of Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi will visit Muscat on Monday to discuss bilateral economic, political and cultural relations. Raisi is scheduled to meet the sultan of Oman, sign cooperation documents, and meet Iranians residing in the Arab state as well as Omani traders and businessmen during the one-day visit, Xinhua news agency quoted an official statement as saying. The visit will be Raisi's first trip to Oman after taking office in August 2021 as Iran's President. Before the visit, a delegation comprising 50 Iranian traders and businessmen visited Oman to lay the groundwork for the strengthening of bilateral economic and trade relations. Since taking office, Raisi has constantly highlighted the need for enhancing trade and economic cooperation with Arab neighbours.



MAHARASHTRA CUTS VAT ON PETROL & DIESEL PRICES AFTER CENTRE SLASHES EXCISE DUTY

The Maharashtra government's move comes a day after the Centre reduced the excise duties on petrol and diesel by Rs 8 and Rs 6 per litre respectively. The reduction in excise duty meant the prices of petrol and diesel dipped by Rs 9.5 per litre and Rs 7 per litre respectively.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra government on Sunday reduced Value Added Tax (VAT) on petrol and diesel by Rs 2.08 per litre and Rs 1.44 per litre respectively. The reduction will be implemented with immediate effect, the Maharashtra government statement added. The Maharashtra government's move comes a day after the Centre reduced the excise duties on petrol and diesel by Rs 8 and Rs 6 per litre respectively. The reduction in excise duty meant the prices of petrol and diesel dipped by Rs 9.5 per litre and Rs 7 per litre respectively.

While announcing the reduction in excise duties, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman had said that the



move will have a revenue implication of around Rs1 lakh crore per year for the government.

Soon after the finance minister's announcement, Prime Minister Narendra Modi took to Twitter, saying

the decisions showed that for his government, it is always people first.

"Today's decisions, especially the one relating to a significant drop in petrol and diesel prices will positively impact various sectors, provide

relief to our citizens and further 'Ease of Living'," the prime minister had tweeted.

Earlier in the day, The Rajasthan government reduced VAT on petrol by Rs 2.48 per litre and Rs 1.16 per litre on diesel, chief minister Ashok Gehlot had tweeted.

On the other hand, Kerala finance minister KN Balagopal said that the government had no plans to cut sales tax levied on fuel. This comes a day after the minister had issued a statement that the government would reduce tax on petrol by Rs 2.41 per litre and diesel by Rs 1.36 per litre. But the opposition accused the minister of misleading the people. "In the last six years we never increased tax on fuel. The state can't afford to reduce tax at this juncture," he said.

'STOP THESE PRETENSIONS,' Uddhav Thackeray on fuel price cut



Reacting sharply to the reduction in fuel prices, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said on Saturday that the Centre should stop these pretensions and slash excise duties on petrol-diesel.

The CM was slamming the Centre's decision on Saturday evening, giving some relief in excise duties that would help reduce the prices, which evoked mixed reactions.

Congress chief spokesperson Atul Londhe said in the past eight years, the government has looted the people of Rs 27 lakh crore and now it is giving some small relief.

"The BJP government should reduce all taxes to the 2014 level, and slash cooking gas cylinder rates to Rs 400 if they really want to unburden the people," Londhe said.

The excise duty reduction came amid widespread protests since the past few weeks against the massive rates of petrol, diesel and cooking gas which have made life miserable for the common masses without any corresponding increase in their incomes.

The Shiv Sena, Nationalist Congress Party and Congress, besides many smaller parties, social groups, NGOs and others have been carrying out series of agitations across the state to draw the BJP's attention to the miseries facing the common man.

Earlier in the week, the Pune NCP staged a protest and attempted to present a box of bangles to Union Minister Smriti Irani, asking her to hand it over to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to draw his attention to the scalding fuel prices.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Reacting sharply to the reduction in fuel prices, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said on Saturday that the Centre should stop these pretensions and slash excise duties on petrol-diesel.

The Chief Minister said that two months ago, the Central government had increased the excise duty on petrol by Rs 18.42 per liter and on Saturday it has announced to slash it by Rs 8. Similarly, excise duty on diesel had also been increased by Rs 18.24 and now it has been reduced by Rs 6.

"First increase the prices at large-scale and then slash them at nominal scale, and then do the pretentiousness of slashing prices. This is not right," Thackeray said.

He also called upon the citizens of India not to get trapped in government data.

"The people of the country would get relief in the true sense only if excise duty is slashed as much as it was six-seven years ago," Thackeray demanded.

MAN GETS LIFE IMPRISONMENT FOR RUNNING OVER ACQUAINTANCE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A sessions court in Maharashtra's Palghar district on Friday convicted a 25-year-old man and sentenced him to life imprisonment for killing a 26-year-old man by running a car over him after a brawl during a mutual friend's birthday party on January 15, 2018. Additional sessions judge DH Keluskar also fined the convicted Nimesh Tanna of Rs 10,000. The incident took place at Achchhad village in Talasari taluka. According to the complainant Hemant Bora, Tanna rammed his car into that of the victim Pratik Patel near Sahyadri hotel after they left a resort after the party in a bitter note. Bora was travelling along with Patel in his car at the time.

Patel got down from the car to see the damage when Tanna suddenly took a reverse turn and knocked him down, the complainant told the police. Patel fell to the ground after which Tanna for a third time tried to ram into his car and ran over him. In the process, Tanna rammed his car into a bike and a cycle as well and fled from the spot. Patel was rushed to a nearby hospital but was declared dead before admission. A murder case was registered and Tanna was arrested subsequently. According to the complaint, the group of friends had gathered at the resort to celebrate the birthday of a mutual friend, Pooja Yadav. After having drinks, one of Yadav's friends Paramjit abused Tanna for not having alcohol.

Tanna got angry and got into a physical fight with Paramjit but was stopped by others. One of them passed comments on Tanna's friend Aradhna which had angered him further, according to sources. While leaving the resort, Tanna also pulled out a cricket bat from his car to assault one of them but was stopped by others, Bora told the police.

Raj's surgery next week; 'anti-loudspeaker' drive to continue

The Maharashtra Navnirman Sena President Raj Thackeray has said he would undergo a surgery for knee and back problems on June 1, but the party's 'anti-loudspeakers' agitation will continue, here on Sunday.

Team Absolute | Pune

The Maharashtra Navnirman Sena President Raj Thackeray has said he would undergo a surgery for knee and back problems on June 1, but the party's 'anti-loudspeakers' agitation will continue, here on Sunday.

"I shall be undergoing hip bone surgery on June 1... I have been in pain since some time in the legs and now also in the back," Raj -- the estranged cousin of Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray -- said at a rally here.

Post-surgery, he would be recuperating for a couple of months but promised to write a letter to 'all Hindu sisters and brothers' on the MNS' ongoing agitation against loudspeakers on mosques in the state.

"For the first time in Maharashtra's history, the early morning 'azans' have



stopped being played on loudspeakers... It was due to the MNS... If they increase their volume, then our campaign will be started again. Our Hindutva gives results," claimed Raj.

He also took a swipe at the Rana couple -- independent MP Navneet Kaur-Rana and her MLA husband Ravi Rana -- for their 'Hanuman Chalisa' agitation plans outside the CM's private residence 'Matoshree'.

"What I had said was Hanuman Chalisa would be played outside mosques blaring out 'azan' on loudspeakers. What was the need for the Rana couple to go to 'Matoshree' - is it some kind of mosque? Then all the con-

troversy, their arrests, jail, release, and statements started," he said.

Raj also took the opportunity to justify his 2008 agitation against the north Indian communities, reiterating that they were depriving Marathi local youths of jobs in railways, and blamed the north Indians for triggering the violent reaction by MNS activists then.

It may be recalled that the MNS chief was planning to go on trip to Ayodhya on June 5, but last week he abruptly cancelled it, and was interpreted as a huge setback to the party.

There was much speculation whether the trip was deferred owing to certain health issues and he himself set right the records Sunday.

Earlier, he faced jibes from many politicians, including from the ruling Shiv Sena- Nationalist Congress Party-Congress, and other parties over the Ayodhya tour cancellation, especially since it came at the peak of the 'anti-loudspeakers' row in the state. The trip postponement was sought to be linked with threats by an Uttar Pradesh Bharatiya Janata Party MP Brijbhushan Sharan Singh who has openly "vowed" to block Raj's entry there till he apologises for the humiliating treatment meted out to North Indians during the MNS's 2008 agitation.



LOCALS LOOT EDIBLE OIL AFTER TANKER OVERTURNS ON MUMBAI-AHMEDABAD HIGHWAY

The driver of the tanker, carrying 12,000 litres of edible oil for processing from Surat in Gujarat to neighbouring Mumbai, lost control over the wheels near Tawa village.

Team Absolute | Palghar

A tanker carrying edible oil overturned on the busy Mumbai-Ahmedabad highway here in Maharashtra, disrupting traffic movement on the road for about three hours, police said on Sunday. After the accident took place on Saturday, a number of locals rushed to the spot and looted the oil

overflowing from the tanker, they said.

The driver of the tanker, carrying 12,000 litres of edible oil for processing from Surat in Gujarat to neighbouring Mumbai, lost control over the wheels near Tawa village. As a result, the vehicle overturned and the oil leaked from it. Many villagers rushed to the spot and took away the leaked oil in their

cans and other vessels, the official said. The police had a tough time controlling the crowd as well as traffic movement, which was affected for nearly three hours. The tanker driver suffered minor injuries in the accident, the official said. A local rescue team later removed the tanker from the road and normal traffic movement was restored, the official said.

Away from rows, a piece of Aurangzeb history brought to light in Maharashtra

Bibi ka Maqbara had been constructed by the sixth Mughal Emperor in 1660, in the memory of his first wife and chief consort Dilras Banu Begum, as a replica of the Taj Mahal, which had been built by his father Shahjehan, for his wife.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

From the renewed row over the Gyanvapi Mosque in Varanasi built by him, to the disturbed quiet around his spare tomb near Aurangabad, Aurangzeb finds himself back at the heart of controversies. However, one piece of history involving the Mughal Emperor is slowly coming to life in Maharashtra.

For the past six months now, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has been excavating a 400-year-old hammam located opposite the 'Bibi Ka Maqbara' built by Aurangzeb in Aurangabad.

Bibi ka Maqbara had been constructed by the sixth Mughal Emperor in 1660, in the memory of his first wife and chief consort Dilras Banu Begum, as a replica of the Taj Mahal, which had been built by his father Shahjehan, for his wife.

The excavation began after the ASI came to know of the existence of such a hammam (public bath), forgotten and buried under a plot of land located opposite the Bibi Ka Maqbara for over half a century.

So far, the ASI has discovered a 36x36 metre structure, and cleared out a part of the area. ASI



officials said the hammam is located exactly opposite the Bibi Ka Maqbara, and might have been meant for use just before entering the monument.

Officials said that in the Mughal period, such hammams would exist in front of monuments such as tombs or mosques or other places of worship.

ASI officials believe that the hammam got covered up in soil sometime after the 1660s, when a road was laid between it and the protected monument. Over the years, it was forgotten.

An official, who did not want to be named, said: "It came to the notice of the ASI only recently when a person whose father worked with the ASI and was an attendant at the monument met some officials."

He informed them that when he was a child he would come to the site to deliver tiffin with his

father, and would always see the hammam, and that it was now covered by debris. He also showed the exact location to the ASI staff.

"He told us that if you excavate the site and remove the soil, you will find a door and an entry point. Accordingly we got approvals and started excavating. We indeed found a door and, on further excavation, the remaining structure."

The official said that the process began over a year ago, and they were hoping to complete it as soon as possible.

The ASI's Aurangabad Circle Superintendent, Milan Kumar Chauley, said: "We are doing scientific clearance (of the soil) currently. Once it is completed, we will restore the structure and conserve it, and open it to the public."

'IS MATOSHREE A MOSQUE':

Raj Thackeray's all-out attack at Maharashtra govt over Rana couple-Hanuman Chalisa row

Raj Thackeray also requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi to bring Uniform Civil Code at the earliest, and also bring a law on population control. He also urged him to change the name of Aurangabad to Sambhajinagar.

Team Absolute | Pune

Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) chief Raj Thackeray on Sunday hit out at the Shiv Sena-led Maharashtra government over the arrest of lawmaker couple Navneet Rana and Ravi Rana for their announcement of reciting Hanuman Chalisa outside Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's residence and asked if 'Matoshree' was a mosque.

Navneet Rana, the MP from Amravati in Maharashtra, and her MLA-husband Ravi Rana were arrested by Mumbai police last month following their public declaration of reciting Hanuman Chalisa outside Thackeray's private residence in Mumbai 'Matoshree'.

Hitting out at the Chief Minister over the couple's arrest, the MNS chief while addressing an indoor rally at a hall in Pune city of Maharashtra, said, "After I asked my workers

to play Hanuman Chalisa on loudspeakers, the Rana couple said they will recite Hanuman Chalisa at Matoshree. Is Matoshree a mosque? Everyone knows what happened between Shiv Sainiks and the Rana couple later."

Last month, Thackeray had made a strong pitch for the removal of loudspeakers from mosques across the state, and threatened that MNS workers will play Hanuman Chalisa if his demand is not fulfilled.

During his rally, he reiterated that the MNS workers will resume agitation if loudspeakers atop mosques do not follow the noise rules.

Earlier, the Chief Minister had said that reciting the Hanuman Chalisa at his home is not a problem but 'dadgiri' won't be tolerated.

Commenting on his much-awaited visit to Ayodhya, which has been postponed now, the MNS chief said that political developments around his trip to the Uttar Pradesh

city were a ploy to "trap" his party workers into legal tangles and hence, he decided to defer it.

Thackeray on Friday announced that his visit to Ayodhya scheduled on June 5 has been put on hold for now.

"Two days ago, I tweeted about postponing my Ayodhya visit. I intentionally gave the statement to allow everyone to give their reactions. I was watching things which were being discussed after I had announced the Ayodhya visit. Those who were against my Ayodhya visit were trying to trap me, but I decided not to fall into this controversy," he said at his rally.

He said those who didn't like his plan to go to Ayodhya started "creating issues" around his visit.

Taking to Twitter, the MNS president said, "Ayodhya visit on hold for the time being. Details about it will be given at the rally in Pune on May 22."

The MNS chief had announced about his visit to Ayodhya during his rallies held last month.

Thackeray also requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi to bring the Uniform Civil Code at the earliest, and also bring a law on population control. He also urged him to change the name of Aurangabad to Sambhajinagar.

The MNS leader also slammed AIMIM leader Akbaruddin Owaisi over his recent visit to Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's tomb in Aurangabad and called it "shocking".

"Does Sharad Pawar think Aurangzeb was a saint? He says Aurangzeb came to expand his empire. Didn't he come to kill Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj? This is now being forgotten," Thackeray said.

The MNS chief said that he has to undergo a hip bone surgery on June 1 and after recovering from it, he would again address a public meeting.

MENTALLY CHALLENGED MAN KILLS FATHER

Palghar: A 40-year-old mentally challenged man allegedly killed his father here in Maharashtra, police said on Sunday.

The incident took place on Saturday at a field in Mokhada taluka of Palghar where the 70-year-old victim, Pandu Savji Molve, worked, the official from the police control room said. The exact reason behind the killing was not known. When the victim's wife reached the field with food, the accused, Kashinath, snatched an axe from his father's hand and allegedly attacked the latter with it. The victim died on the spot, the official said.



Los Angeles | Agencies

In a new interview, the 'Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings' actor said that he was crushed about not getting a part in the 2018 film, reports aceshowbiz.com. The 33-year-old Chinese actor auditioned four times for Jon M. Chu's rom-com, which starred the likes of Constance Wu and Henry Golding, and said he was told he didn't have the 'It factor', which knocked his confidence. Speaking on the 'How To Fail With Elizabeth Day' podcast, he said: "I just remember being devastated at the time."

"It was at a time that was very difficult for me," Simu recalled.

He further shared, "I was trying to figure out whether I could be the lead character or whether I could only be a supporting character for my entire career."

Simu added: "We got, 'Well Simu doesn't have the X factor' or the 'It factor'. And that was just such a crushing blow for me because I, again, I felt like I already worked so hard."

He continued: "And I came so far and I trained as an actor and taken countless hours of class was like, 'What is the 'It factor'?' like it just felt like someone was telling me that I just wasn't good enough."

Simu is set to play a version of Ken in the upcoming live-action



Simu Liu left 'devastated' after not being cast in 'Crazy Rich Asians'

'Barbie' movie alongside the likes of Margot Robbie (Barbie) and Ryan Gosling (Ken), and the cast have had so much filming the flick that they can't believe they are getting paid to do it.

Simu spilled: "It's very pink. There's a lot of fun to come to work every day, right?"

Simu also said that "there's been multiple times on this production that we've kind of looked at each other, whether it's like cast or crew or even Greta (Gerwig, director) and been like, 'How are we getting paid to do this? This is insane' which I think is always a good sign every day feels like we're just going to play." He continued raving, "And I can't wait for people to see it."

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Olivia Munn admitted that she's worried about the baby formula shortage in the country. When speaking about the matter, the Betsy Braddock depicter in 'X-Men: Apocalypse' said she wishes she could breastfeed her son, reports aceshowbiz.com.

"It's so crazy when people say 'if you breastfeed you won't have to worry about the formula shortage!' I have low milk supply, so to keep my baby fed I depend on formula," the 41-year-old wrote on Twitter. "I wish I could breastfeed so I wouldn't be panicking about the shortage right now. But I don't have a choice." Munn and boyfriend John Mulaney reportedly welcomed baby Malcolm on November 24 last year, one day before Thanksgiving Day in Los Angeles. It was not until one month later that the two lovebirds introduced their baby to the world. Since then, aThe Newsroom alum has been opening up about her motherhood journey.

"Breastfeeding is sooooo hard, especially if you have low supply," she shared on her Instagram Story on January 19. "Eight weeks in and I've taken a million vitamins, countless teas, lozenges, tinctures and worked with two lactation consultants. Breastfeeding. Is. Hard." Munn was not the only celebrity to weigh in on the formula shortage.

More than a week prior, Bette Midler suggested mothers to breastfeed instead of complaining about the issue. "TRY BREASTFEEDING! It's free and available on-demand," she penned on Twitter. The post, however, didn't sit well with many people. "This is truly something a stupid/uneducated person would say," one person said. While another shared: "A women who has not breastfed cannot just start breastfeeding on command. Your tweet is insulting to women. What should adoptive mothers do to feed infants? Adoptive/single fathers?" "This is profoundly insensitive," a different user said. "First, there are a million reasons why some women can't nurse at all, or can't nurse full time & supplement with formula. Second, women don't even need a 'reason'. She can decide not to just because she doesn't want to. Period."

Olivia Munn laments breastfeeding struggles amid formula shortage



Los Angeles | Agencies

Pop icon Madonna was shocked to receive a notification saying she had "violated community guidelines" when attempting to go live on Instagram. Speaking in a video depicting the incident posted to her main Instagram page, Madonna said: "Guys we're gonna go live. What the f***? We're blocked from Live? Ew, what's happening?"

The 'Material Girl' hitmaker went on to reference her frequent nude photos shared on the app and joked that at that moment she was fully clothed and was left "speechless" when issued with an on-screen warning from the Meta-owned app regarding nudity, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

She added: "I've never worn so many clothes in my life. I'm speechless!"

Instagram issued a warning to the pop megastar which explained that she must "respect" others on the platform and warned her to always "follow the law".

It read: "We want Instagram to continue to be an authentic and safe place for inspiration and expression. Help us foster this community. Post only your own photos and videos and always follow the law. Respect everyone on Instagram, don't spam people or post nudity."

Back in November 2021, the 'Papa Don't Preach' crooner defiantly reposted images of herself posing suggestively on a bed after Instagram had taken them down "without warning" and was "astounded" that they had been removed because her nipple was on show.

Madonna banned from Instagram Live after sharing nude photos



IDINA MENZEL WANTS TO STAR IN THE 'WICKED' MOVIE

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Idina Menzel wants to star in a version of 'Wicked', joking that she could reprise her Tony Award-winning role of Elphaba almost 20 years later.

The 50-year-old star won a Tony Award for originating the lead role of green girl 'Elphaba' in the smash hit musical when it opened on Broadway back in 2003 and joked that she would be happy to take on the part once again for the upcoming screen adaptation, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

She said: "If they asked me to do it at the age of 51, I would say, sure a" just put a little Vaseline on the lens, throw some green makeup on me, use a little CGI and I'll look gorgeous!"

However, the film - which will be released in two parts between 2024 and 2025 - has already cast Cynthia Erivo as Elphaba and will also star pop singer Ariana Grande as her co-lead Glinda, with the 'Frozen' actress going on to claim that it is "all good" and admits that too much time has passed since her star turn in the show.

She told PEOPLE: "But no, it's all good. That ship has sailed!"

Her comments come just months after former co-star Kristin Chenoweth, who starred opposite her as Glinda the Good Witch in the musical that tells the backstory to 'The Wizard of Oz', said it would be "really cool" for her to reunite with her fellow Broadway veteran in a cameo appearance in the movie and replicate the show's famous poster design.

She said: "Well, I haven't thought about it...but here's what I think should happen. I just thought it'd be really cool if the camera panned by and Idina and I were just there and you just saw me (whisper into Idina's ear)."



Woody, Ruben Ostlund reteam for his next film

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Woody Harrelson will reteam with 'Triangle of Sadness' director Ruben A-stlund for his next film 'The Entertainment System is Down'.

The Oscar-nominee broke the news during the press conference for 'Triangle of Sadness' at Cannes on Monday, the morning after the movie world premiered in competition.

"Ruben is a maestro so my interest was to work with Ruben (a). I'm going to be in his next film whether he wants it or not," said Harrelson.

He added that the script was "phenomenal."

Ostlund has been developing the project for the last couple years, collecting anecdotes from people around the world, but the actual script is still in early stage, he told Variety last week.

In 'Triangle of Sadness', Harrelson plays a rabid Marxist who is the captain of a cruise for the super-rich. The yacht

sinks, leaving survivors, including a fashion model celebrity couple, marooned on an island.

As Ostlund described it during the presser, the off-field comedy is ultimately about "the end of civilisation." Ostlund said Harrelson will have a similar role in his next movie.

"(Woody) is going to play a captain on an airplane," revealed the director.

Harrelson said working with Ostlund had been a "revitalising experience, one of the greatest experiences of my life."

Harrelson said he also loved his character who carries the "message of the film" but he's not in alter ego. "My character is a Marxist. But I'm not a Marxist, I'm an Anarchist. So in that sense we're different."

"The Entertainment System is Down" will once again be a comedy with a sociological edge. The feature project is set on board a long-haul flight and inspired by Aldous Huxley's dystopian novel 'Brave

New World'.



Charlie Chaplin's granddaughter Kiera during Cannes Film Festival

Los Angeles: Kiera Chaplin attended the Chopard Loves Cinema dinner at the Hotel Martinez on Saturday night during the 75th annual Cannes Film Festival in France.

The granddaughter of Charlie Chaplin exposed her cleavage in a black glittery gown featuring a cutout slit, while elevating her height with sparkly gold heels.

Having painted her pout an eye-popping shade of red, the model swept her sandy tresses behind her ears and beamed from ear-to-ear.

After Cannes was entirely cancelled in 2020 and held under strict health protocols in 2021, the red carpet returned in all its glamour on Tuesday night for the Opening Ceremony.

The film chosen to open the festival was Final Cut, a comedy love letter to filmmaking and Z-list zombie movies from the team behind the award-winning The Artist.co.uk.

There is set to be an array of TikTok stars taking to the red carpet this year after organisers sought to refresh their image by partnering with the video streaming platform, which is sponsoring an award for short films.



Alessandra Ambrosio



IPL PERFORMERS REWARDED IN INDIA'S SQUAD FOR SOUTH AFRICA T20IS, PUJARA BACK FOR RESCHEDULED ENGLAND TEST

Pace sensation Umran Malik (SRH), left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh (PBKS), and veteran wicket-keeper batter Dinesh Karthik (RCB) were on Sunday named in India's 18-member squad for the five home T20I series against South Africa, starting on June 9, after their impressive performance in the ongoing IPL 2022.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Pace sensation Umran Malik (SRH), left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh (PBKS), and veteran wicket-keeper batter Dinesh Karthik (RCB) were on Sunday named in India's 18-member squad for the five home T20I series against South Africa, starting on June 9, after their impressive performance in the ongoing IPL 2022.

Malik has had a breakout season, picking 21 wickets in 13 fixtures so far and often clocking speeds in excess of 150 kmph while Arshdeep has emerged as a brilliant death overs specialist for Punjab Kings, enjoying one of the better economy rates in the tournament and has picked 10 wickets this season.

On the other hand, Karthik has been in blistering form at the back end of the innings for the Royal Challengers Bangalore. With a batting strike rate of 191.33, the veteran cricketer has won numerous games for the RCB as a designated finisher this season. The 18-member squad will be led by K.L. Rahul, with a host of first-team players being rested in order to prepare for the tour of England. The likes of captain Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, and Jasprit Bumrah have all been given a break. All-rounder Hardik Pandya, who last played for India in the T20 World Cup has made a comeback. There were doubts about the option for the national side but he has proved himself during the ongoing IPL, where he's bowled for the Gujarat Titans and even done so in



the powerplay.

Deepak Hooda and Venkatesh Iyer also retain their places in the squad. Spinners Kuldeep Yadav and Yuzvendra Chahal are also included in the squad, on the back of their impressive performances for Delhi Capitals and Rajasthan Royals respectively.

Meanwhile, India also named the 17-member squad for the rescheduled Test against England at Edgbaston, Birmingham starting from July 1 with senior pro-Cheteshwar Pujara, who was dropped for India's last Test series against Sri Lanka, making a comeback.

Impressive performances in the County Championship have helped Cheteshwar Pujara make a comeback into the Test squad. However, Ajinkya Rahane is still not part of the squad while Ravindra Jadeja

who was ruled out of the IPL 2022 due to injury has found a place in the Test squad.

Shubman Gill has been picked in place of Mayank Agarwal while Shreyas Iyer -- who made his impressive Test debut earlier this year -- continues to take a middle-order slot. K.S. Bharat is the second keeper in the squad but there is no room for Ishant Sharma. Prasad Krishna, who has impressed in the white-ball format for India, finds a place in the Test squad.

India's Test specialists are likely to leave for England on June 15. The Birmingham Test was pushed back following a Covid-19 outbreak in the Indian camp last year. India, who currently lead the series 2-1, will look to seal their first Test series win in the country since 2007.

Head coach Rahul Dravid is set to join the tour party after the conclu-

sion of India's five-match T20I series against South Africa on June 19 in Bengaluru.

India's Test squad: Rohit Sharma (captain), KL Rahul (vice-captain) Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, Hanuma Vihari, Cheteshwar Pujara, Rishabh Pant (wk), KS Bharat (wk), Ravindra Jadeja, Ravichandran Ashwin, Shardul Thakur, Mohd Shami, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohd Siraj, Umesh Yadav, Prasad Krishna

India's T20I squad: KL Rahul (captain), Rituraj Gaikwad, Ishan Kishan, Deepak Hooda, Shreyas Iyer, Rishabh Pant (vice-captain)(wk), Dinesh Karthik (wk), Hardik Pandya, Venkatesh Iyer, Yuzvendra Chahal, Kuldeep Yadav, Axar Patel, Ravi Bishnoi, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Harshal Patel, Avesh Khan, Arshdeep Singh, Umran Malik

IPL 2022

PUNJAB REGISTER 5-WICKET WIN OVER HYDERABAD, FINISH TOURNAMENT ON A HIGH

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Punjab Kings signed off from IPL 2022 on a high by registering a five-wicket win over Sunrisers Hyderabad at the Wankhede Stadium on Sunday. After left-arm spinner Harpreet Brar and pacer Nathan Ellis took three wickets each to restrict Hyderabad to 157/8, Punjab chased down the total with 29 balls to spare, thanks to a rollicking unbeaten 49 off just 22 balls from Liam Livingstone.

In the pursuit of 158, Jonny Bairstow began with five boundaries off Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Washington Sundar in the first two overs. Despite getting a reprieve from Umran Malik in the second over, Bairstow couldn't make much of the chance as left-arm pacer Fazalhaq Farooqui flattened his off-stump.

Shahrukh Khan got going by pulling Kumar for a six over deep mid-wicket. In the next over, he clipped Farooqui through the same region for four. Shikhar Dhawan was lucky to survive an inner edge off Farooqui and went on to thump Jagadeesha Suchith by dancing down the pitch and smacking back-to-back sixes over deep mid-wicket.

Shahrukh welcomed Umran Malik with a beautiful straight drive. But the pacer, who got a call-up to India's T20I squad before the match began, had the last laugh as Shahrukh miscued to mid-on. With Mayank Agarwal falling cheaply to Sundar after suffering a blow to his rib-cage off Malik, Punjab needed quick runs to win the match. That was provided by Livingstone, who was off the mark with a gigantic pulled six over deep mid-wicket off Sundar. He then thumped Malik for consecutive sixes wide long-off and deep mid-wicket. Though Dhawan chopped on to his stumps, Jitesh Sharma struck three fours and a six in his first five balls before holing out to long-on off Suchith.

By then, Livingstone had been dropped again at 26 after being given a reprieve earlier at six. From there on, the hard-hitting batter clubbed Romario Shepherd for two fours and as many sixes, including bringing the 1000th six of the tournament, to take 23 runs off the 15th over. Debutant Prerak Mankad lofted Malik over cover for the winning boundary to



sign off from the tournament on a high.

Rahul Tripathi joined forces with Abhishek Sharma to stitch a 47-run stand off 35 balls, including the former being dropped by pacer Nathan Ellis off his own bowling. But Brar, in his first over, ended the partnership by having Tripathi sweep a down leg delivery straight into the hands of short fine leg.

Punjab continued to dent Hyderabad's innings as Nicholas Pooran nicked straight off an across-going delivery to Sharma off Ellis. Brar picked up his third wicket of the night by using turn and bounce to get Aiden Markram forward and Sharma from behind whipped the balls when the right-hander's backfoot strayed out of the crease.

From 96/5 in 14.4 overs, Hyderabad were able to cross the 150-mark, thanks to the 58-run stand, off 29 balls between Sundar and Shepherd. After starting cautiously against Arshdeep, the duo took 43 runs off overs 17, 18, and 19, hitting eight boundaries between themselves, including a scoop from Sundar off Rabada, to give Hyderabad a respectable score despite the batter and J Suchith falling in the final over, proving inadequate to avoid a loss.

Brief scores:

Sunrisers Hyderabad 157/8 in 20 overs (Abhishek Sharma 43, Romario Shepherd 26 not out; Nathan Ellis 3/41, Harpreet Brar 3/26) lost to Punjab Kings 160/5 in 15.1 overs (Liam Livingstone 49 not out, Shikhar Dhawan 39; Fazalhaq Farooqui 2/32, Washington Sundar 1/19) by five wickets

India take on arch-rivals Pakistan in Asia Cup hockey opener

Defending champions India will open their campaign in Asia Cup hockey in a high-octane clash against arch-rivals Pakistan on Monday at the GBK Arena, the same venue as the Asian Games Jakarta in 2018.



In the previous edition of the continental tournament, which is also the World Cup qualifier, India had defeated Malaysia 2-1 in the final held in Dhaka. India and Pakistan have won the tournament three times each, while South Korea is the most successful team, having clinched the title four times in 10 previous editions.

India have named a young team with experienced Birendra Lakra as their skipper, and SV Sunil as vice-captain, while star performer at the Tokyo Olympic Games, Simranjeet Singh, makes a comeback after a long injury lay-off. The team will be guided by two-time Olympian and former captain Sardar Singh as their coach.

Speaking on the eve of their clash against Pakistan, Lakra and Sunil stressed on the need to guide the young-

sters in the high-pressure game. "Pressure is always there (against Pakistan). Any match against Pakistan is always high-voltage. As seniors we can't be too excited as then the junior players will come under pressure. So, we need to take it as a normal match," said Sunil.

Lakra added, "Both the teams are young. For us, it is important to go match by match. If the performance is good, result will definitely come. If we perform well, the confidence level will be high."

Emphasising on how all teams are on par with each other, and on a good day, anyone can upset any team, Sunil said, "No team can be taken lightly. Everyone is here to earn a place in the World Cup next year and as defending champions our focus will be on putting up our best show."

TABLE TENNIS MUMBAI TEENAGER DIYA CHITALE WINS U-19 TITLE IN PERU

India's teenage rising table tennis star Diya Chitale won the gold medal in the U-19 Girls' singles event of the WTT Youth Contender Lima 2022, beating Colombia's Juhana Lozada 3-0 in the final.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

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The Mumbai-based Diya scored an authoritative win against Juliana Lozada 11-6, 11-2, 11-5 in 31 minutes at the Villa Deportiva Nacional, Lima, Peru, on Saturday.

The 19-year-old Diya, was dominant from the opening round and progressed to the winner's podium without dropping a game.

The high point of her success was her fluent victory against Laura Watanabe of Brazil, the current South American Youth Champion

National circuit. In the recently concluded National season, Diya ended as India Rank 3 in the women's category, thereby being eligible for selection to the Commonwealth Games team.

Her performances in the national circuit include winning the gold medal in the National Ranking Tournament in Indore in January 2022, and her first-ever women's title at age 18. In the National Championships in Shillong in April 2022, Diya won the bronze medal in the women's doubles event and the silver medal in the women's team event. In recognition of her consistent performance, she was declared the Best Junior Player participating in the senior nationals.

Diya has been selected as one of the eight probables for the Commonwealth Games team. If this young talented Mumbai player gets selected for the Commonwealth Games team, it will provide her the perfect exposure to get groomed for the future.

Diya has also been taking giant strides in the Women's category on the Indian

FRENCH OPEN: DOMINIC THIEM KNOCKED OUT IN FIRST ROUND



Paris: Two-time French Open finalist Dominic Thiem crashed out of the tournament in the first round at Roland Garros after losing to Bolivian world number 87 Hugo Dellien here on Sunday. Dellien broke Thiem four

times to register an impressive 6-3, 6-2, 6-4 victory in a two-hour and one-minute clash at Court Simonne Mathieu, capitalising on a below-par performance from the former World No 3 to advance to the second round at the clay-court Grand Slam for the second time. Although Thiem's rustiness was evident in just his sixth match of 2022 since returning from a right wrist injury suffered last June, Dellien was inspired in the pair's first four-level meeting. The Bolivian's effortless movement around the court and high-class ball striking made life difficult for Thiem from the opening game as Dellien surged to a fifth tour-level victory of the year. Thiem showed signs of his best with some trademark cleanly struck backhand winners, but the Austrian struggled for consistency throughout. Dellien let slip a breakpoint in Thiem's opening service game of the match as the Austrian held for 1-1, but the Bolivian remained aggressive, keeping the Thiem serve under constant pressure and cleverly using his drop shot to pull the 2020 US Open champion around the court. The win continues a solid 2022 for Dellien on the clay. The Bolivian won an ATP Challenger Tour event in Santiago on the surface in March and he also reached the second round after qualifying at the ATP Tour events in Barcelona and Estoril in April. His second-round opponent in Paris will be Portuguese qualifier Nuno Borges or 21st seed Karen Khachanov. The 28-year-old Thiem, who played in two straight finals, four straight semi-finals and five straight quarter-finals at Roland Garros from 2016 through 2020, is still seeking a maiden win in 2022 since returning from a right wrist injury suffered last June.

FRENCH OPEN: MAGDA LINETTE OUSTS JABEUR IN FIRST-ROUND UPSET

Paris: Poland's Magda Linette knocked out No 6 seed Ons Jabeur of Tunisia 3-6, 7-6(4), 7-5 in the opening match of the French Open, here on Sunday. World No 56 Linette was only 2-16 against Top 10 opponents coming into the match, and she had lost to Jabeur in the Roland Garros third round last year. But this time, Linette pulled off a comeback against Jabeur, who won the WTA 1000 Madrid title earlier this month. Both of Linette's previous Top 10 wins also came at Grand Slam events (including over the then-World No 1 Ashleigh Barty at last year's Roland Garros via retirement), and she grabbed another upset at a major after 2 hours and 28 minutes of play. Jabeur had won 17 matches on clay this season, far ahead of everyone else on tour (Amanda Anisimova and Ekaterina Alexandrova are tied for second place with 10 clay-court match-wins apiece in 2022). Along with her Madrid title, Jabeur reached finals in Charleston and Rome. Linette, though, came through in a tricky final set, garnering her second win over Jabeur in their five career meetings. Jabeur had 35 winners to Linette's 32, but the unseeded Pole kept her unforced errors lower, with 35 to Jabeur's 47. Jabeur broke Linette three times in the first set but missed opportunities to take a lead in the second set, where the Tunisian went 0-for-4 on break points. Linette used her court craft to draw errors from Jabeur late in the second-set tiebreak and squeak out the set. Rain began to fall as the pair exchanged breaks during the third set, and a love hold for 6-5 put Linette in charge down the stretch. Jabeur saw a 40-0 lead slip away in the following game, and Linette eventually broke for the upset after a forehand miscue by the World No.6.

Bahrain 2022 para-badminton: Bhagat, Dhillon win two gold each; Indian contingent finishes with 23 medals

Top para shuttlers Pramod Bhagat and Tarun Dhillon clinched two gold medals each as the Indian team ended with a rich haul of 23 medals including seven gold medals at the 1st Bahrain Para-Badminton International Championships 2022.



twin gold medal show, while Nithya Sre Sumathy Sivan (WS SH6) and Dhinakaran Pandurangan and Sivarajan Solaimalai (Doubles SH6) claimed the other top honours for India. Pairing up with a new partner, Bhagat turned the colour of his mixed doubles SL3-SU5 silver medal from Brazil into gold this time. He and promising Manisha Ramdass got the better of Thailand's Siripong Teamarom and Nipada Saensupa 21-14, 21-11 to take the gold.

The Tokyo 2020 Paralympic champion Bhagat then went on to take the men's singles SL3 gold after England's Daniel Bethell gave a

walkover.

In the men's SL4 events, Dhillon, who missed out on a medal at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics, first paired with Nitesh Kumar to pull off a convincing 21-13, 21-7 win over Thailand's Mongkhon Bunsun and Siripong Teamarom in men's doubles SL3-SL4 summit clash. High in confidence, Dhillon took just 20 minutes to thump South Korea's Shin Kyung Hwan 21-9, 21-9 for the men's singles SL4 gold. Manisha, Nithya shine in women's events in women's events, Asian Youth Para Games champion Nithya Sre Sumathy Sivan continued her good run of form to defeat England's Rachel Choong 21-15, 21-15.

Meanwhile, Mandeep Kaur, who pulled off an upset win in her semi-finals, had to settle for the second place after going down to Turkey's Halime Yildiz 21-5, 21-17 in the women's SL3 finals, the Paralympic Committee of India (PCI) informed in a release on Sunday.

She later came out with a strong show combining with Manisha Ramdass for the gold in

the women's doubles SL3-SU5 finals. They took just 23 minutes to defeat the Paralympian pair of Palak Kohli and Parul Dalsukhbhai Parmar 21-11, 21-11.

In doubles SH6, Dhinakaran Pandurangan and Sivarajan Solaimalai took the gold after Hong Kong's Chu Man Kai and Wong Chun Yim retired with one game all 21-12, 10-21.

Chief national coach Gaurav Khanna was a proud coach at the end of the day with consistent results from his wards. "Our para shuttlers have yet again come out with great results. I am very happy with the way the players are delivering excellent results in back-to-back events. Though there's still some work needed to be done and one of the main focuses will be on their fitness."

"There are quite a few names who are doing really well in the recent tournaments. We have high hopes from promising names like Manisha Ramdass etc."

The Indian team will be next in action at the 4th Fazza Dubai 2022 Para-Badminton International that gets underway on Tuesday.

Manama | Agencies

Top para shuttlers Pramod Bhagat and Tarun Dhillon clinched two gold medals each as the Indian team ended with a rich haul of 23 medals including seven gold medals at the 1st Bahrain Para-Badminton International Championships 2022. Promising doubles shuttler Manisha Ramdass also shot into the limelight with her



POOJA IS HOPING TO INSPIRE YOUNG INDIAN GIRLS TO DREAM BIG

Team Absolute | Mumbai

South star Pooja Hegde, who has made her debut at the 75th annual Cannes Film Festival, is hoping to inspire young Indian girls to dream big. She was invited to represent her homeland at the Cannes Film Festival where India is the country of honour this year, reports 'Deadline'.

The rising star, who works across Tamil, Telugu and Hindi movies has a number of hit credits to her name and is currently shooting 'Kabhi Eid Kabhi Diwali' opposite Salman Khan, while her turn in Rohit Shetty's comedy 'Cirkus' is due in December.

Hegde also has a lot more stories to tell, saying "I want to do more films for women because I genuinely think that we are not represented enough. When I see a powerful woman on film, you want to emulate them, you want to be them, and I hope I can be a small part of that in terms of inspiring girls in India to just dream a little bigger and tap their inner potential."

Indian films have increasingly seen great box office success on a global stage, including the recent hits 'KGF: Chapter 2' and 'RRR'. That's encouraging to Hegde, both within and outside India.

Citing Oscar winner Bong Joon-ho, Hegde said: "I think that it's time we stop looking at languages as a barrier; it's like the director of 'Parasite' said at the Oscars that if we get over that one-inch barrier of a subtitle we would be privy to such amazing content across the world, and across India."

India, she noted, is "so culturally diverse and so culturally rich as a country, and I think film is a way to make us understand other people in a much more insightful way and personal way. We have it in us we just need to continue to tell our stories the way we want them to be told."

JACQUELINE STEPS IN TO HELP BOLLYWOOD PHOTOG IN DISTRESS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Apart from acting in movies, Jacqueline Fernandez is also known to help out people in need. Last year, she had also launched her foundation 'You Only Live Once' or YOLO to spread kindness through various mediums. Recently, Jacqueline stepped in to help Bollywood photographer Manoj Mehara who was in dire need for funds for his brother's medical treatment.

When he reached out to Jacqueline for help, the actress, along with her Foundation, came to his aid. Expressing his gratitude Manoj took to his Instagram and shared, "@jacquelinef143 aur @j.yolofoundation ka dil se shukriya. Aapne mere bhai ke ilaj ke liye madad kar mere liye kaafi bada kaam kiya hai aur main aapki iss help ke liye aapko kitna bhi thank you bolu kam hai. Maine ek din aapko meri takleef aur pareshaani batayi aur aapne bina waqt gavaye turant hi apne foundation ke dwara meri aur mere bhai ki help ki. Mere bhai aur meri family ke taraf aapko dher saara respect, pyaar aur THANK YOU. You are a person with a golden heart!" Jacqueline has recently clocked one year of YOLO Foundation, had tied up with an NGO called the Roti Bank, to provide one lakh meals that month for the needy. YOLO had also partnered with the Feline Foundation, an initiative to help stray animals, distributed masks, sanitizers, and raincoats to front-line workers - the Mumbai and Pune Police Force, who continued to work relentlessly amid the pandemic.

The acts of spreading kindness continued when Jacqueline along with the foundation partnered with Beachplease for the beach clean-up drive, During Diwali they connected with Mann NGO for the Diwali artifacts purchasing and joined the kids there in making those products.

Satyajit Ray's work inspires projects from Big Bazaar, Roadshow at Cannes

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Restored version of Indian maestro Satyajit Ray's 'The Adversary' is playing at Cannes Classics this year and films inspired by his works are being planned.

Kolkata-based Indian producer-director Anrita Sen's Roadshow Films and Los Angeles-based British writer-director Alex Harvey's Big Bazaar Films are producing two films this year, which take their inspiration from Ray's life and work, reports 'Variety'. First up is feature documentary 'Forest of Humans', which looks at Ray's creative relationship with Kolkata, the city where he lived and worked all his life.

Directed by Harvey and produced by Sen, the documentary explores the many ways in which Ray used Kolkata's diverse humanity to create an entire cinematic world. Filming almost entirely on location in Kolkata, 'Forest of Humans' aims to show how Ray's poetic world is still mysterious and alive in the city

today. "Kolkata endlessly fed Ray's imagination," says Sen.

"In return Ray gave the city its sense of self." "His films never try to idealise Kolkata but constantly transform how it is perceived," says Harvey. "Look at 'The Adversary's' disaffected anti-hero who is seen apart from his city, unable to find solace in its casual pleasures."

'The Adversary' also partly provides the inspiration for 'Prantik', a contemporary drama set in Kolkata and London.

"In addition to 'Prantik' and 'Forest of Humans' we're also planning a period film called 'Niru', set in the Calcutta (as the city was called then) of the 1880s, at the height of the Raj, and based on Ibsen's play, 'A Doll's House'. 'Ray's extraordinary film, 'Charulata', is proving to be a great creative inspiration for that project," Harvey and Sen said.



Both filmmakers said they are committed to exploring the rich legacy offered by Ray.

"Ray was the reason I wanted to work in film, the reason I feel in love with cinema," says Sen.

"Ray is the most complete auteur in the history of cinema. He wrote, designed, directed, edited and even composed the musical score for his films. You can learn everything from Ray." Sen previously produced series 'Feluda' based on stories by Ray. Harvey's last film was mixed martial arts documentary 'Enter the Jungle'

Divyendu Sharma is dying to do slapstick comedy

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Making his Bollywood debut with 'Pyaar Ka PUNCHAMA' where his comic timing was one of the much-appreciated parts of his performance as 'Liquid', Divyendu Sharma has only seen audiences remember and praise him as Munna in 'Mirzapur'.

But he misses playing comic characters on-screen and here's why he loves to perform in what he considers to be the most challenging genre of all. Divyendu told IANS: "I am dying to do a comedy honestly speaking because in the last couple of projects of mine, especially with the success of Mirzapur, I am offered different shades of character but in a serious space. 'Also, generally in our cinema, AweAseldom get a well-written comedy script. In my understanding, comedy depends on two factors, a well-written script and the correct timing of the performer. It shouldn't be the performer who laughs first at his own joke but the audience does."

And he added: "When it comes to genres like drama, thriller, horror, there are multiple cinematic tools like lighting, sound, camera angle etc. But for comedy, it is like all focus is on that moment, on the actor! Tough space to be in!" Post the release of 'Mirzapur Season 2' the actor was seen in the short film '1800 Life' that was released on Amazon miniTV. He has been gearing up for the new season of 'Mirzapur', but he also has other projects on his docket. "Currently I am working on multiple projects that will be releasing on OTT platforms and in theatres," Divyendu said.

"I am playing a pivotal part in one of Yash Raj Production's 'The Railway Men' and another film. I have also finished shooting a web series for Applause Entertainment and a very special one with one of my favorite directors... but let the official announcement happen," he added and signed off.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Shahrukh's darling daughter Suhana Khan is all set to mark her Bollywood debut with The Archies. The soon-to-be actress, turns a year older today.

As the diva celebrates her 22nd birthday today, May 22, her mommy Gauri Khan wished her in a special way.

Gauri Khan shared a gorgeous picture of her daughter and captioned, "Birthday Girl??". She

also posted this on her Instagram stories.

Not only her mother, even her friends like Ananya Panday and Shanaya Kapoor also wishes her.

While Ananya Panday shared a childhood picture with her, Shanaya Kapoor shared a picture from their vacation.

Shanaya captioned her post, "Sisters by heart" along with a heart emoji.

While Ananya captioned it, "Happy birthday to my bestest girl with the best heart. I love you so so much Sue pixie."

GAURI KHAN HAS THE SWEETEST B'DAY WISH FOR SUHANA



DISHA PATANI SHARES A GLIMPSE OF HER WORKOUT ROUTINE



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood actress and fitness enthusiast Disha Patani has shared a glimpse of her regular day at the gym and it leaves everyone stumped. Disha shared a short video on her social media, where she is seen enacting a scene at the gym. In the clip, she is seen walking and is being eve-teased by two men. What happens next leaves everyone in shock. The actress is seen flaunting her flawless martial art skills and in a dramatised version, she is seen beating the men to pulp.

"Just a regular day at the gym," wrote Disha, who is rumoured to be dating action star Tiger Shroff.

Her video currently has 2.2 million views on the photo-sharing website. Tiger's sister Krishna Shroff was amazed to see Disha's skill and commented: "Too f*** good."

On the work front, Disha will be seen in action drama 'Yodha' starring Sidharth Malhotra. She also has 'Ek Villain 2' with John Abraham, Arjun Kapoor and Tara Sutaria.

The actress has also been roped in for Prabhas-starrer 'Project-K', which also features Deepika Padukone and Amitabh Bachchan.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Shraddha Kapoor