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CEC SENDS LETTER TO J'KHAND GUV RECOMMENDING SOREN'S DISQUALIFICATION AS MLA

Team Absolute | Ranchi

The Chief Election Commission has sent a letter to Jharkhand Governor Ramesh Bais recommending cancellation of the Assembly membership of Chief Minister Hemant Soren.

He will then have to resign from the post of chief minister.Former Jharkhand Chief Minister Raghubar Das and the BJP have been demanding disqualification of Soren as MLA in an office of profit matter.

They accused Soren of extending a mining lease to himself.

Terming it as violation of the office of profit and Representation of the People's Act, the BJP and Raghubar Das have written a letter to the governor.

With the issuance of the Governor's order on the instructions of the Election Commission, Soren's membership will end. In such a situation, Soren may have to resign as the chief minister. However, the JMM-Congress alliance which is led by Soren has a majority in the Assembly. So, after the resignation he can again stake claim to form the government in the state.

Governor Bais, who is currently in Delhi, will reach Ranchi later in the day. An announcement in regard to the EC's recommendation is expected after that.

It is not clear whether Soren has also been disqualified from contesting elections.

The lease of a stone quarry in Angada block in Ranchi was issued in the name of Soren which he had surrendered later. However on the BJP's complaint, the EC conducted many rounds of hearings. After hearing the matter, the EC had reserved the decision on August 18.

His brother Basant Soren is also accused of taking mines lease while being an MLA and a hearing in this matter is also going on in the EC. The poll panel has fixed the matter for hearing on August 28.

As Basant's case is similar to Hemant Soren's, the former is also likely to lose his membership.

DEBT ON EVERY INDIAN INCREASED DURING MODI GOVT, SAYS CONGRESS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Congress on Thursday alleged that due to economic policies of the Narendra Modi government, the debt on the country has increased manifold and each Indian is under debt of more than Rs 1 lakh.

Addressing a press conference, party spokesperson Gourav Vallabh said: "One of the most worrying aspects is the spiraling debt pattern. The outstanding internal and external debt and other liabilities of the Central government at the end of 2022-2023 are estimated to Rs 152.17 lakh crore, as against Rs 55.9 lakh crore at the end of 2013-14. So, per capita debt on us increased from Rs 43,124 (March 31, 2014) to Rs 1,09,000- (an increase of 152 per cent in the last 9 years)."

He also alleged that the debt, "being offered on a platter to some friends of the government, has created an anxious position for the nation, on top of the national debt obligations". Raising the issue of NDTV, he also alleged that one person is being given loans by banks due to pressure from the government.

"Who from the government is putting pressure banks such as the SBI to grant loans of such proportions putting the national economy and banks at colossal risk? Why are the Finance Ministry and SEBI sitting idle on the entire hostile acquisition episode of a leading TV news channel? What is the Modi government's plan to save the economy and specific sectors from collateral and cascading damage in case of default or loan repayment delay...?" he asked.

BILKIS BANO CASE:

SC notice to Gujarat on plea against release of 11 convicts

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday sought a response from the Gujarat government on a plea challenging the release of 11 men convicted for the gang-rape of Bilkis Bano and multiple murders during the 2002 Gujarat riots, while clarifying that it did not grant permission for remission to the convicts but instead asked the government to consider.

A bench, headed by Chief Justice NV Ramana and comprising Justices Ajay Rastogi and Vikram Nath, said the question is whether the convicts could have been granted remission and if it was within the parameters of the law.The Gujarat government released the convicts on Independence Day, which has created a huge political controversy.

Justice Rastogi asked senior advocate Kapil Sibal, representing the petitioners: "Day in and day out, remission is granted to convicts of life sentence, what is the exception (in this matter)."

After hearing arguments, the top court issued notice to the Gujarat government and posted the next hearing after two weeks.It clarified that its May 2022 order merely held that the remission or premature release should be considered in terms of the policy which is applicable in the state where the crime was committed. "I read somewhere the court has granted permission for remission. No, the court said only to consider," noted the bench.

The bench asked the petitioners' counsel to make the convicts in the case party in the plea along with the Gujarat government.

The top court observed orally: "Whatever act was committed; the accused have been punished and convicted."The bench was hearing a petition filed by CPI-M's former MP Subhasini Ali, journalist Revati Laul, and Prof Roop Rekha Verma.

Eleven convicts, sentenced to life imprisonment, were released from Godhra sub-jail on August 15 after the Gujarat government allowed their release under its remission policy. The convicts had completed more than 15 years in jail.

In January 2008, a special CBI court in Mumbai had sentenced the convicts to life imprisonment for gang-rape and murder of seven members of Bilkis Bano's family. The Bombay High Court upheld their conviction.

SC flags no ECIR to accused, negation of presumption of innocence; agrees to review PMLA verdict

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday agreed to review its July 27 PMLA judgment, which upheld the Enforcement Directorate's powers in connection with attachment of property involved in money laundering, arrest, search, and seizure under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act.

A bench, headed by Chief Justice NV Ramana, said there are two main concerns non-providing of ECIR to accused at the time of arrest and negation of presumption of innocence. The top court issued notice to the Central government on the review petition filed by Congress MP Karti Chidambaram.

Senior advocates Kapil Sibal and AM Singhvi submitted that the entire judgment needs to be considered. However, the top court clarified the two issues, which will be considered under the review. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta submitted that review is unlike a writ petition, and all the issues can't be reviewed.

The top court noted that there was no need for elaborate hearing and the court feels there are two aspects required in the judgment for a re-look. "We are in full support of the prevention of black money. The country cannot afford such offences as the object is noble," said the top court.

The bench, also comprising Justices Dinesh Maheshwari and CT Ravikumar, added that judges feel there are two aspects, which required a re-look, in the judgment. Opposing the review, Mehta said there has to be error apparent on record for review, and this is not a standalone act, instead it is as per India's international commitments.

Sibal, representing Karti Chidambaram, submitted that the judgment holds that money laundering is a continuing offence, so the proceeds from 1999 can be an offence, even if it was not a scheduled offence in 1999. He added that the issue is that a person can be proceeded now on grounds of concealing proceeds of crime.

The bench reiterated that it has prima facie identified two issues - relating to ECIR and negation of presumption of innocence. Sibal urged the bench to reconsider the entire judgment, but it was unmoved by Sibal's submissions and said it is limiting the review on two grounds.

After hearing submissions, the bench issued notice on the review petitions and extended its order granting interim protection to the petitioner by 4 weeks.

Only 27, the top court affirmed the stringent provisions of Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) in connection with definition of proceeds of crime, power of arrest, search & seizure, attachment of properties and also the twin bail conditions.

Five out of 29 mobiles examined infected with malware, no conclusive proof of Pegasus: SC panel

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Pegasus panel, in its report submitted in the Supreme Court, said the presence of controversial Israeli spyware Pegasus was not conclusively established in 29 mobile phones examined, and also the Central government did not cooperate in the probe.

The top court-appointed panel said five out of 29 mobile phones were possibly infected with some malware, but that does not mean it was Pegasus spyware.

The panel, headed by retired Supreme Court judge RV Raveendran, had submitted its report in the apex court last month. The panel said the government did not fully cooperate while examining the phone for the malware.

A bench, headed by Chief Justice NV Ramana and comprising Justices Surya Kant and Hima Kohli, said one thing the committee has said that the government did not cooperate.

The bench said: "The same stand you took here, you took there." At this, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the Centre, replied that he is not aware of that.

The report consisted of three parts: report of the technical committee, digital images of phones examined for infection due to spyware, and the report of overseeing judge Justice Raveendran. The bench indicated that it may upload the report of Justice Raveendran, but the other parts of the report may not be made public.

The report suggested that a country's cyber security needs to be enhanced, and while protecting privacy of the citizens, it is necessary to ensure that no unauthorised surveillance is allowed.

It pointed out that there are certain malwares which could be misused, they cause concerns to the security, and also violate the privacy of citizens. The panel suggested that some mechanism should be put in place to check illegal surveillance, and the private firms involved in surveillance should be prosecuted.

On October 27, last year, the top court said it was compelled to take up the cause to determine the truth, as it appointed an independent expert technical committee supervised by Justice Raveendran, to probe the Pegasus snooping allegations.

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

Flexible workplaces are the need for future: PM Modi

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said the future needs flexible workplaces, a work-from-home ecosystem and flexible work hours, adding that these should be used as opportunities for women's labour force participation.

Addressing the National Conference of Labour Ministers of all states through video conferencing in Tirupati, Prime Minister Modi reiterated the various efforts by the government like Pradhan Mantri Shram-Yogi Maandhan Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, that have given security cover to the workers.

"These schemes have assured the labourers of the recognition of their hard work and contribution. The Emergency Credit Guarantee Scheme, according to a study, saved 1.5 crore jobs during the pandemic," he said during his speech.

Modi further pointed out the e-Shram portal is one of the key initiatives to bring the labour force under the ambit of social security.

"In just one year, about 28 crore workers from 400 areas have been registered on the portal. This has especially benefited construction workers, migrant labourers, and domestic workers," he said.

The Prime Minister requested all the ministers to integrate state portals with the e-Shram portal.

Raja Singh sent to jail as police invoke Preventive Detention Act

Hyderabad | Agencies

Suspended BJP MLA T Raja Singh Lodh was sent to jail on Thursday after Hyderabad Police arrested him and invoked Preventive Detention (PD) Act.Police took the MLA into custody from his residence in Mangalhat amid tight security and continuing protests for his re-arrest for allegedly making derogatory comments about Prophet Muhammad.Raja Singh, who has been arrested for second time in three days, was later shifted to Cherlapally Jail on the city outskirts.The police announced that it has invoked PD Act against Raja Singh, a rowdy sheeter of Mangalhat Police Station, on the orders of Hyderabad Police Commissioner CV Anand.

According to the police, Raja Singh has been habitually delivering provocative and inflammatory speeches and driving a wedge between communities leading to public disorder.A total of 101 criminal cases registered against him since 2004. He was involved in 18 communal offences in the limits of different police stations in Hyderabad.

Raja Singh on August 22 posted online an offensive video against Prophet Mohammad with an intention to provoke all sections of people and thereby cause breach of peace and public tranquility, said the police statement.

"Any venomous hate speech has the potential of provoking individuals to commit acts of riot, indiscriminate violence, terrorism etc. Offensive speech has real and devastating effects on people's lives and risks their health and safety and severely affects fraternity, dignity of individuals, unity and national integration and also offends the fundamental rights guaranteed under Articles 19 and 21 of the Constitution of India," said police.

Sensing danger to the life and properties in the hands of the protesters, people got panicky and closed their shops and establishments. The entire population of the city and the state went into grip of fear and shock by his activity, police said.

According to police, by his blasphemous utterances, Raja Singh has been continuously creating hatred and ill-will between major communities resulting in widespread unrest among the people in Hyderabad and the state, thereby adversely affecting the maintenance of public order.Raja Singh was arrested hours after issuing him noticed in two old cases.Both the notices were issued in connection with the old cases.A case was registered against him on the direction of the Election Commission of India.

BJP'S 'OPERATION LOTUS' FAILS IN DELHI: AAP

New Delhi: The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Thursday said that the BJP's 'Operation Lotus' has failed in Delhi. Addressing reporters after a meeting at Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence earlier in the day, AAP spokesman Saurabh Bharadwaj said that "all AAP MLAs are in our contact and the Delhi government is completely stable without any hindrance."

"Today, we officially announce that the BJP'S 'Operation Lotus' has failed in Delhi," Bhardwaj added. The spokesman further claimed 12 MLAs said at the meeting that BJP leaders had contacted them to quit the AAP.

Bhardwaj said that the BJP offered Rs 20 crore to them to bring in 40 MLAs amounting to Rs 800 crore. "Where is this Rs 800 crore worth of of black money kept? Why don't the ED and CBI conduct raids to find out?" he queried. "To protest against this black money, we have decided to go to the Mahatma Gandhi Samadhi Sthal. Bapu once saved us from the British. Now he will save us from this."

Out of the total 62 MLAs, 53 attended Thursday's meeting and the remaining were present on the phone, the spokesman informed.

"Manish Sisodia is in Himachal Pradesh, Speaker Ram Niwas Goyal is out of the country. Remaining other MLAs Vinay Kumar, Shivacharan Goyal, Gulab Singh, Dinesh Mohania and Mukesh Ahlawat were present on the phone in the meeting," he claimed.

SC allows Gujarat govt time to file response on Teesta Setalvad's bail plea

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday allowed the Gujarat government further time to file its response on a bail of activist Teesta Setalvad arrested for allegedly fabricating documents to frame high-ranking officials, including then Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi in the 2002 riots cases in the state.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the Gujarat government, submitted that the government's response was ready but it needs some modification.

A bench headed by Justice U.U. Lalit observed that somebody is behind the bars and the court would have to examine whether further incarceration is needed in the matter. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, representing the petitioner, submitted that any extra day's incarceration is wrong.After hearing arguments, the top court scheduled the matter for further hearing on Tuesday.

Setalvad, along with former senior police officers R.B. Sreekumar and Sanjiv Bhat, were arrested after a criminal case was lodged by the Gujarat ATS at Ahmedabad.

Earlier this month, the Gujarat High Court had issued notice to the SIT seeking a reply to bail applications filed by Setalvad and former state Director General of Police Sreekumar. The high court is scheduled to hear the matter in September.

In her appeal before the apex court, Setalvad has taken objection to a long gap of one and a half month in the hearing of her bail application, and cited the ruling of top court in Satendar Kumar Antil v. CBI, contending that bail matters must be heard expeditiously.

In July, a session court in Ahmedabad declined to grant bail to her and Sreekumar. Rejecting the bail application, the court noted: "If the applicants - accused are enlarged on bail then it would impliedly encourage to the wrong doers that in spite of such type of accusations against the then Chief Minister and others, the court has enlarged the accused on bail. Therefore, looking at the above facts and circumstances, even though the applicant is a lady and another is a retired IPS officer and aged person, they are not required to be enlarged on bail."

On June 24, the Supreme Court dismissed the appeal filed by Zakia Jafri, wife of Congress leader Ehsan Jafri who was killed during the violence at Ahmedabad's Gulberg Society in 2002, challenging the SIT's clean chit to the then Chief Minister Modi and others during the riots in the state.

STAY IN LINE OR PAY THE PRICE, TEJASHWI TELLS UNION MINISTER FROM BIHAR

Patna | Agencies

Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav on Thursday warned a Union Minister from the state not to cross the line or he will have to pay the price.

"That minister comes from Bihar and he was trying to repeat the incident of Maharashtra. That minister was dreaming of holding the post of Chief Minister of Bihar. I want to ask him to stay in line or he would get appropriate treatment. This is Bihar and people of Delhi will not save him here," he said.

"Now, we have a government of Mahagathbandhan in Bihar and the BJP is alone here. We are going to win 40 out of 40 seats in the upcoming 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Hence, BJP is doing the drama," the RJD leader added.

Tejashwi Yadav also slammed some media organisations for "doing one-sided reporting" when CBI was carrying out the raids on his party leaders and trying to malign his image. "When the CBI raided the house of RJD MLC Sunil Kumar Singh, some media organisations reported that crores of rupees were recovered from his house. The CBI team brought a currency counting machine to count the notes which was absolutely false. If the CBI recovered crores from his house, then put it into public domain. Release the details of the currency notes. Some media organisations report the incidents on the basis of sources and without caring what exactly was recovered from there. There was no truth in their reporting. It was an objectionable act with an idea to defame me. I want to ask them to rectify themselves and not do one-sided reporting," he said.

"The CBI sleuths came here to seize my currency but I have detected the currency of BJP. The CBI conducted the raid on an Urban Cube mall of Gurugram located at Sector 71... that mall belongs to White Line Corporation Ltd and Navdeep and Atma Prakash have shares in it. If I was the director or shareholder of that mall, my name should have been mentioned in the list. Where is my name? CBI should clarify it as my name was used in the raid.

"Now, I have cleared that my name was not mentioned as a director or shareholder of that mall, will the CBI register an FIR against the BJP as I have already cleared that a BJP MP has invested in that mall," Tejashwi Yadav said. "CBI raided the house of RJD leaders in Bihar under land for job scam, I want to say that CBI is registering FIR against those persons who got jobs in 2005 and sold the land in 2015. The CBI officials are using abusive language during the raids and threatening them to penalised them if they continue their links with Lalu Prasad Yadav," he alleged.

MVA rumblings as Congress targets Shiv Sena

Mumbai | Agencies

Indicating differences in the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi alliance, the Congress has indirectly targeted ally Shiv Sena by demanding a CBI probe into Mumbai road contracts between 2017-2022, ahead of the civic elections.

The plea by ex-union minister and senior leader Milind M. Deora came a day after Mumbai Bharatiya Janata Party President Ashish Shelar also made a similar demand to probe the Shiv Sena's affairs in the BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).

The Sena, led by ex-chief minister Uddhav Thackeray, has been ruling the BMC for over a quarter century, independently or in partnership with its former ally BJP.

Setting political circles aflutter, Deora sought an investigation into a reported staggering amount of Rs 12,000 crore spent by the BMC in road repairs in the past five years.

This amount, he contended, is 10 per cent of the annual budget of the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) and yet Mumbaikars have to endure poor roads or hop over potholes every year during monsoons.

"Mumbai braves bad roads and has the right to know who is looting India's richest civic body... I demand a CBI probe. Roads are just the tip of the iceberg," added Deora, a former Mumbai Congress chief.Incidentally, on August 24, the state government also ordered the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) to conduct a special audit into the allegations of massive irregularities into the BMC's working.

Former Congress Leader of Opposition in the BMC and senior leader D. Raja concurred with the demand and said there are a lot of suspicions which can be cleared by a proper probe.

"After spending so much, we are witnessing the results everyday... The cold-mix method used by the BMC has always given a bad result but still the administration insists on it," said Raja.

State Congress President Nana Patole stated that since the BMC went to the Sena-BJP, "they have sunk Mumbai". "When the BMC was ruled by Congress with our Mayors, the city never got flooded even during very heavy rains, but now the situation is different along with the miserable roads," Patole said.

While announcing the CAG special audit, Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis referred to specific complaints of money being siphoned off and assured that the probe will be done seriously in a time-bound manner.

Multiple blunt force injuries on Sonali Phogat's body; murder case lodged

Panaji | Agencies

Goa Police on Thursday said Haryana BJP leader and TikTok star Sonali Phogat's body had 'multiple blunt force injuries', as per the postmortem report, and a murder case has been registered.

Deputy Superintendent of Police Jivba Dalvi told IANS that there are multiple blunt force injuries on the body. "We have registered the case against her personal assistant Sudhir Sangwan and his friend Sukhwinder Wasi," Dalvi said.

The autopsy was conducted on Thursday.

The case has been registered on Thursday following a complaint by Rinku Dhaka -- the brother of Sonali Phogat.

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on Thursday said that DGP has been given full freedom to take decisions in this case. "There is full freedom to the police department to take correct decisions," he said after the case was registered.

Sawant on Wednesday had said the Goa police is thoroughly investigating the death of Haryana BJP leader and actor Sonali Phogat,

however, according to preliminary investigation, it looks like cause of death is cardiac arrest. According to Goa police, Sonali Phogat felt uneasy on Monday night and later in the morning (on Tuesday), she was taken to St. Anthony hospital in Anjuna at around 8 a.m., where she was declared brought dead.

She had come to Goa on August 22 and was staying at a hotel in Anjuna.

BKS THREATENS STATEWIDE BLOCKADE IN GUJARAT

Gandhinagar: Members of the Bhartiya Kisan Sangh (BKS) staged a protest here on Thursday over the pending issues of farmers in Gujarat. Their main demand is that the state government should provide power at the same rate to all farmers. Those with horsepower connections should not be charged more.

BKS state president Jagmalbhai Arya said since the last six months, farmers have been agitating over the power tariff issue, but the state government is not addressing the issue. Their demand is, "A farmer with one horsepower connection is paying Rs 665 per annum and Rs 66,500 for 100 horsepower consumption annually. Against that farmers having an agriculture electricity connection and meters, pay 80 paise per unit plus Rs 20 for the first five years. With such charges, a farmer is paying Rs 1,20,000 annually for the same 100 horsepower. It is almost double the price of a consumer without a meter. All agricultural consumers should be supplied power at the same rate." Arya has threatened that if the government does not decide in a day, from August 27 the Sangh will launch an agitation, block roads, give village bandh calls, and stop MLAs and MPs from entering villages.

B'luru Idgah Maidan row: BJP treads cautiously on celebrating Ganesh festival

Bengaluru | Agencies

The ruling BJP in Karnataka is in a dilemma over the Hindutva activists' demand for celebrating the Ganesh festival at the controversial Idgah Maidan in Chamarajpet locality of Bengaluru and is treading cautiously on the issue.

Minister for Revenue R Ashok stated on Thursday that a decision would be taken regarding celebration of the Ganesh festival at the Idgah Maidan.

"We will discuss with the officers. Maintaining law and order is very important. The police department and Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) officers are conducting a meeting in this regard."

The minister reiterated that maintaining law and order is important and the district commissioner will take a decision on the submissions made to him regarding the celebration.

He maintained that he had passed an order to celebrate the Kannada Rajyotsava at the site. "I am seriously considering celebrating the Ganesh festival, but a decision has not been made," he said. "We managed the situation without any confusion on August 15. We know how to deal with the situation," he said. He maintained that he was not aware of the letter written by BJP National General Secretary C T Ravi for the celebration of the Ganesh festival.

Meanwhile, the Wakf board has approached the High Court challenging the decision of the BBMP to handover the property rights to the revenue department.

After raids on 5 RJD leaders, Bihar Mahagathbandhan anticipates more action

Patna | Agencies

A day after the CBI raids on five leaders of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in Bihar, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar just gave a smile in answer to questions of waiting mediapersons. "You would see what will happen in future," Kumar said while hinting that the BJP top leadership 'acted in anger'.

The leaders of Mahagathbandhan are expecting more raids in the future, said sources.

Nitish Kumar along with Governor Phagu Chauhan and deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav went to the statue of socialist leader B.P. Mandal to pay gratitude on his birth anniversary. On Wednesday, the CBI conducted multiple raids in Patna, Katihar, Madhubani and Gurugram on the houses and properties of five

RJD leaders.

CBI teams under the protection of CRPF personnel conducted raids at the houses and offices of RJD MLC and Biscoman chief Sunil Kumar Singh, RJD Rajya Sabha MPs Asfaq Karim (Katihar) and Fayyaz Ahmed (Madhubani), former MLC Subodh Rai and ex-MLA Abu Dujana. A team of CBI also conducted raids at Urban Cubes mall located at sector 71 of Gurugram (Haryana).

CBI believes that Tejashwi Yadav has a stake in the mall even though he has clarified that he has nothing to do with the mall. It is owned by a person named Krishna Kumar and a BJP MP has investments in it. Moreover, the mall was inaugurated by Haryana CM Manohar Lal Khattar. Tejashwi further said that the CBI should ask Manohar Lal Khattar to ascertain the name of the owner.

Law being misused against me, says K'taka Cong president

Bengaluru | Agencies

The law of the land is being misused to foist cases on me. I have faith in the law. They are torturing everyone around me. I am ready for any consequence, Karnataka State Congress president DK Shivakumar stated on Thursday venting his ire on the BJP government.

Reacting to a recent notice to Vijay Mulugund by the CBI, Shivakumar stated that Vijay is a general secretary of the Congress party and he is in my close circle. Notices have been issued to about 30 to 40 persons who have business connections and have done letter transactions with him, he added.

"I have decided not to talk about it and answer legally. I have information on the details of how much property was possessed by ruling BJP netas when they were MLAs and how much they own now as ministers. I gather information too. I am of the opinion that my honesty will be valued and my party will get its due respect," Shivakumar maintained.

"Let them do anything, I am prepared," Shivakumar underlined. "A former BJP minister owes Rs 600 cr to Rs 700 crore loan amount to the Apex bank, former minister KS Eshwarappa was given a clean chit before the investigations, there is no action even as a letter is written to PM Modi against the ruling BJP. We have to talk about it," Shivakumar stated.

Shivakumar said that the authorities have seized the property owned by his mother. "Can a mother be benami to her son's property? Do you want more harassment than this? Let them misuse the ED, Income Tax and other departments, I am ready," he said.

Shivakumar was arrested in a money laundering case by the ED and later released. The Congress backed him and elevated him to the post of state president. He was given a hero's welcome in Karnataka after being released from prison.

Cong presidential poll likely to be deferred by few weeks

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The election for Congress president is likely to be postponed for a few weeks, sources said on Thursday, and the final schedule will be decided in the Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting scheduled on August 28.

Sources said that it was likely that instead of the election process to get completed by September 21, the whole process may now be completed in October or November. The decision on the new schedule will be taken by the Congress Working Committee (CWC) on Sunday.

Sources also said that the new decision to defer has been taken since the party leaders will be busy in 'Bharat Jodo Yatra', which will commence on September 7 and the Gandhis, including Sonia Gandhi are abroad.

The Congress has called a meeting of its Working Committee on August 28 to decide the poll schedule for the party president's post.

"A virtual meeting of the CWC will be held on the 28th August, 2022 at 3:30 PM, to approve the exact schedule of dates for the election of the Congress President. Congress President Smt. Sonia Gandhi will preside over the CWC meeting," tweeted KC Venugopal, party General Secretary Organisation.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot has emerged as the top choice for the Congress

president's post. Sources have said that Sonia Gandhi had requested him to contest during a meeting which she held before heading abroad for medical checkup and treatment.

The Gehlot camp has not confirmed the development, but sources have confirmed that the Congress is looking beyond the Gandhis for the top post. Gehlot himself has said that these things were coming up in the media and he had no knowledge of it.

The Central Election Authority of the Congress was awaiting a nod from the party's working committee to announce the schedule for electing the next Congress President as the grand old party is still in search of a consensus candidate for the top post after refusal by Rahul Gandhi.

Punjab SIT summons Sukhbir Badal in 2015 Kotkapura firing incident

Chandigarh | Agencies

In a major political development, a Special Investigation Team (SIT) investigating the 2015 Kotkapura firing case following sacrilege of Guru Granth Sahib has summoned then former Deputy Chief Minister and current Shiromani Akali Dal president Sukhbir Singh Badal in Chandigarh on August 30.

The SIT led by Additional Director General of Police (ADGP) LK Yadav, earlier questioned former DGP Sumedh Singh Saini.

However, SAD leaders denied that Badal, who was the home minister of Punjab in 2015, has been summoned for questioning.

Badal has been asked to appear at the Punjab Police Officers Institute in Sector 32 in Chandigarh at 10.30 am.

Saini was removed from the top police post by Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal in 2015 following incidents of sacrilege of Guru Granth Sahib and subsequent violence in the state in which the police force was accused of excesses that left two people dead.

Justice Ranjit Singh (retd), who headed the commission appointed by the previous Congress government into the alleged incidents of sacrilege of Sri Guru Granth Sahib and the subsequent police firing on protesters, has placed the then Chief Minister, the SAD patriarch, and then DGP Saini in

dock.

Also, he castigated the Sirsa-based Dera Sacha Sauda, whose chief and self-styled godman Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh is currently serving a 20-year jail sentence for raping two of his disciples and a life term for a journalist's killing, for the incident of sacrilege. Justice Singh made these comments in January on the release of his 423-page book 'The Sacrilege' based on his inquiry when he was heading the government set up commission.

"Inference on the basis of material and evidence is against both then Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal and then Director General of Police (DGP) Saini for not playing active role (with the subsequent police firing on protesters after the sacrilege incident)," Justice Singh had told IANS at the book launch here.

The incident of sacrilege took place in Behbal Kalan village of Faridkot district and the subsequent police firing on protesters that claimed two lives was raked up by the Congress against the SAD-BJP combine government in the 2017 assembly polls.

Even in 2022 polls, the incidents continued to rock the state's political sphere as the successive governments are under fire for failing to deliver justice in the cases.

The Punjab and Haryana High Court on April 9, 2021, quashed the previous police SIT report that gave a clean chit to the Badals and directed the state government to set up a new team.

The high court had not only quashed the probe but also raised doubts over the methods and ordered reconstitution of the SIT probing the case without IPS officer Kunwar Vijay Pratap Singh, who is now an AAP legislator.

Following the court directive, the then Congress government led by Captain Amarinder Singh constituted another SIT on May 7 to probe the incident.

EMPLOYMENT AND SELF-EMPLOYMENT IS PRIORITY OF STATE GOVERNMENT: CM

- SPEED UP THE CLUSTER CREATION PROCESS
- STARTUPS RELATED TO FOOD PROCESSING AND AGRICULTURE HAVE AMPLE POTENTIAL
- PRIORITY SHOULD BE GIVEN TO MATERIALS MANUFACTURED IN THE STATE IN THE PURCHASE OF GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS
- CM CHOUHAN REVIEWED THE DEPARTMENT OF MICRO, SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the process of development of 17 clusters to be launched under the schemes of the Central and State Governments in the state should be started in a month. Employment and self-employment is the priority of the state government. Large-scale employment opportunities are created in pharma, furniture, ready-made garments, food-processing and toy manufacturing. Complete the work of these clusters on top priority. The process of construction of industrial parks should also be accelerated. Along with this, a system should be ensured to provide a convenient environment and necessary incentives to the youths to connect them with micro, small and medium enterprises for self-employment, not only employment. Complete the portal upgradation work to transfer the grant amount directly to the beneficiary's account online under self-employment schemes. All district collectors should connect more and more youths with the Employment Day to be held every month.

Chouhan was addressing the review meeting of the Department of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises in Mantralaya.

Chouhan said that in the purchase of government departments, priority should be given to the materials manufactured in the state without compromising on the quality. This will encourage the industries of the state. There is a better ecosystem for startups in the state, there is ample potential for startups related to food processing and agriculture. In this area, work should be speeded up with mutual coordination among various departments.

Chief Minister said that it should be ensured that youth do not face any problem in taking benefits of schemes like Mukhyamantri Udyami Kranti Yojana, MSME Protsahan Yojana and assistance on investment in Madhya Pradesh Startup Policy.

It was informed that an MoU has been signed with Walmart to link the manufactured material with the e-commerce companies under the "One District - One Product" plan. Talks are also on with Hemledge, First Cry etc.

CM Shivraj joins rescue operations, Cong seeks immediate relief for victims

With at least three districts of eastern Madhya Pradesh affected by floods after 30 hours of heavy rainfall, Chief Minister Shivraj Chouhan, apart from carrying out the aerial survey, also led the rescue operations on the ground.

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Meanwhile, the Congress has sought immediate relief for the affected people.

The Chief Minister along with disaster relief teams on Wednesday participated in rescue operations after carrying out the aerial survey of the affected areas. He also reached to the people trapped in flood and made announcment through loud speaker in residential colonies in Vidisha.

Chouhan assured the people trapped in flood that things will be alright and the government will compensate for damaged crops and all other losses. "Once the flood is over, a survey would be conducted to assess the loss of properties and crops, and I assure that the government will provide all possible help. Houses that were collapsed or damaged due to rain, will be rebuild by the government," he announced.

The rainfall relatively relented on Wednesday providing relief to the people, especially in the flood affected areas.

Compensating against the heavy loss after the assessment of damaged crops and properties would definitely put a huge burden on state exchequer, especially at a time when the state is grappling with the financial debt of over three lakh crore. While Chouhan has been leading

the rescue operations from the front and visiting the flood areas, damage to newly build reservoirs, dam and roads have elevated challenges for him as the Congress accused the BJP government of corruption, especially on Karam dam built on the Narmada river in Dhar district.

The Karam dam, which was constructed recently, could not survive for one season rainfall and seepage on its wall had put the lives of over one lakh people in three adjoining districts in danger, however, joint quick action by army personnel and disaster relief teams averted the catastrophe last week.

The Rs 304-crore Karam irrigation project is already under probe and the state government has acknowledged this in the assembly. However, the probe hasn't progressed much ever since Shivraj Singh Chouhan managed to topple the Congress government in March 2020. The police have booked officials of some companies which were awarded the tenders. Two IT companies carrying out the work have also been blamed.

Contract for the dam was first awarded to a Gujarat-based company, but was cancelled after a scam came to light. A Delhi firm then got the tender. Work began in August 2018. It was to be completed in three years by August 2021 but got delayed.

The Delhi firm hired another firm from Gwalior for a part of the work, and the Gwalior-based firm took this up for Rs 99.86 crore -- which was 14 per cent lower than what the Delhi-based firm had quoted to the state government, meaning that the government had overpaid for the work.

With the state assembly elections just 15 months away, Congress is trying to corner the Shivraj Singh Chouhan-led BJP government with a bundle of corruption allegations.

Madhya Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) chief and former Chief Minister Kamal Nath said on Wednesday that lakhs of people have been affected by the heavy rains in many districts. Farmers' crops have been ruined, people are homeless and living in relief camps, a large number of houses have been damaged and household and food items have been washed away.

"The government should immediately provide relief to the people affected with flood. The government should immediately start relief work, all possible help should be given to the affected people," Nath urged.

Cong needs to be more aggressive to take on BJP: Kamal Nath

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Madhya Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) president and former chief minister Kamal Nath on Thursday said the party needs to work more aggressively and in a well-organised manner to take on the BJP in the upcoming assembly elections scheduled to be held next year.

Madhya Pradesh Congress leaders had assembled for meeting at the party headquarters on Thursday.

The brainstorming session, which concluded after three hours, was attended by former cabinet ministers and senior leaders including Rajya Sabha MP Digvijaya Singh, Ajay Singh (Rahul), Kamaleshwar Patel, Sajjan Singh Verma and others.

Apart from senior leaders of the party, presidents and in-charges of all 52 districts in the state, also attended the meeting, chaired by Kamal Nath.

Congress leaders said the meeting was to kick off preparations for the assembly elections in 2023. Notably, it was the first such meeting in which district level party cadre to senior most leaders assembled for a brainstorming session. In the elections, the Congress has received massive response from the people, and it has won five mayoral seats, including Gwalior, Morena and Rewa.

While addressing the gathering, Kamal

Nath asked party cadres to start reaching to the people in their respective areas with single vision to defeat the BJP in 2023 assembly elections. "We can defeat the BJP only if we all move together. Time has come when you all need to come into action leaving everything else behind," Nath said. Nath said that all district head and in-charges will be called for assessment of their work performance after one-and-a-half months.

"We need to work more aggressively than earlier. And that should be in a well organised manner," Nath said.

Meanwhile, Kamal Nath also clearly warned that those willing to discontinue from the post of in-charge should take a decision as soon as possible, and "not create any disturbance later."

MP CONG SET FOR RESHUFFLE, MANY TO BE SHOWN EXIT DOOR

Bhopal: The Madhya Pradesh Congress on Thursday indicated that the party is gearing up to show the door to those who abused the party's trust and supported the BJP candidates in the recently concluded urban and three-tier panchayat elections. The grand old party has also decided to reorganise its cadres in the districts and blocks.

The state Congress leadership indicated that the party has started the process of strengthening its cadre in view of the next assembly elections in the state which are due after 15 months. Sources told IANS that former chief minister Kamal Nath's team has prepared a list of those party leaders and workers who went beyond the party line and supported the BJP for their personal interest.On Thursday, addressing a gathering of senior Congress leaders, district heads, newly elected mayors and others, Madhya Pradesh Congress chief Kamal Nath said that those came to Bhopal with a caravan of hundreds of vehicles should work on the ground. "Victory will come from working on the ground and not coming with a caravan of 100 vehicles, so start working on the ground. And, if you don't want to spare time to work on the ground for the party, then tell me. Deserving persons would be given a chance to work," Nath said. Sources said that Kamal Nath has decided to reshuffle the district and block level party cadres and only those giving full time to the party, will be promoted. "He (Nath) is working to strengthen the party cadre from top to bottom. He wants to give more preference to district heads and in-charges to strengthen the party, instead of giving importance to individuals.

Grappling with floods, MP likely to witness another spell of rain

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Already grappling with floods after heavy rain in the eastern parts of Madhya Pradesh, the state is likely to witness another spell of moderate to heavy rainfall in the next 48 hours, the weather department warned on Thursday.

The weather scientists in the regional office in Bhopal said that a cyclonic circulation was lying over the northern part of the Bay of Bengal, which suggested that eastern Madhya Pradesh may receive another spell of rain, said a weather official.

He said, "the rain spell is likely to last till August 31. It is going to cover central and eastern parts of Madhya Pradesh. It might be less effective in Indore, Ujjain, Gwalior and Chambal divisions," he added.

The cyclone circulation is going to intensify into a low pressure area in the next 24 to 48 hours and it will move towards Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh triggering rainfall in Madhya Pradesh, as per the IMD's report.

Already grappling with floods after heavy rain in the eastern parts of Madhya Pradesh, the state is likely to witness another spell of moderate to heavy rainfall in the next 48 hours, the weather department warned on Thursday.

Heavy downpours over the last few days had caused flooding in parts of Vidisha, Sagar, Bhind, Morena and Sheopur districts. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan had conducted an aerial survey and also visited some of the flood-affected areas by boat.

According to the IMD's report, in the 24-hour period ending at 8.30 a.m. on Thursday, Sidhi city and Churhat area of the district received 108.5 and 105 mm rainfall, respectively.

Mada in Singrauli district recorded 82.6 mm rain and Chandiya in Umaria district received 61.2 mm downpour, as per the IMD data.

Due to heavy rainfall, roads and bridges in many areas were submerged, posing a challenge to the people living in the lower areas. Due to water flowing over the bridge, a pregnant woman was taken to a hospital in a bulldozer.

RMNH organised Folk Song Competition" on "Ecofriendly Life of Tribes"

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Regional Museum of Natural History, Bhopal (A Regional Centre of National Museum of Natural History, New Delhi) organized a "Folk Song Competition" on the theme "Ecofriendly Life of Tribes" on 25th August, 2022. 38 Students of class 6th to 12th from 08 schools participated in the competition.

During the welcome address, Scientist-in-charge of the museum, Manoj Kumar Sharma welcomed the jury members, participants, teachers etc. and also detailed the role of tribal society towards the environment conservation.

Participants sung various songs like Baster mocho, Paryavaran bachaye ho, Aadivashi aadivashi hamu aadivashi re, Aadivashi jungle rakhvala re, Than liyo man paryavaran bacha, Are bole ji o ho dharti yaha bi are bolo ji o, Jungle ki seva mor dharam hai; to elaborate the ecofriendly life of tribes.

Jury members of the competition Vijay Sapre, Music Instructor, Jawahar Bal Bhawan, Bhopal; Iqrar Hussain, Music Teacher, Scholar's Home Public School, Bhopal and Beenish Rafat, Scientist-C, Regional Museum of Natural History, Bhopal evaluated the participants during competition.

Samiridhi Tekam from Kendriya Vidyalaya, Sehore won the first prize, Mehvish Rizvi from Bal Bharti Public School, Bhopal bagged second prize and Prakhar Pandit from St. Joseph Co-ed Senior Secondary School, Kolar, Bhopal bagged third prize. While Pihu Soni from Bal Bharti Public School, Bhopal; Arharv Parmalkar from IES Public School, Bhopal; Purvi Pathak from Kendriya Vidyalaya No. 3, Bhopal won the encouragement prizes of the competition.

Shri Manik Lal Gupta, Scientist-C coordinated this Competition.

No let up in the development of higher education even during the difficult times of Corona: Yadav

- THE GLORIOUS TRADITION OF INDIAN EDUCATION WILL CONTINUE UNINTERRUPTED
- NEW COMMERCE FACULTY BUILDING DEDICATED

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Higher Education Minister Mohan Yadav has said that no stone will be left unturned to build a bright future for the children of the state. New dimensions are being established continuously for the development of higher education in the state. Be it the construction of colleges or the systematic operation of new courses, the development of higher education was not allowed to decline even in the difficult times of Corona. Yadav was addressing the inauguration programme of Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Postgraduate College at Itarsi in Narmadapuram district today at a cost of Rs 5 crore 24 lakh.

Yadav said that the history of Indian education has been glorious. The education policy of Lord Macaulay, which came in the year 1845, has somehow obstructed our tradition of self-knowledge, self-realisation and self-research. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has re-established the culture of diversity in India's diverse regional languages, dialects, culture and unity. From the National Education Policy, now the glorious tradition of Indian education will flow uninterruptedly. The college will be established as a temple of education. Yadav said that in the last two years, the infrastructure of the colleges has been strengthened continuously in all the districts at a cost of about Rs. 2000 crore. He said that this fully equipped building constructed at a cost of about Rs. 5 crore 24 lakh would prove useful for the students.

MLA Sitasaran Sharma said that it is our good fortune that Yadav, who is well versed in all streams of education, is our Higher Education Minister. With the efforts of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Yadav, higher education is being developed continuously in Narmadapuram, so that the children of this place will be able to illuminate the name of the nation, state and Narmadapuram in the world. He also thanked the Higher Education Minister for the newly constructed building. Sharma placed some demands related to the development of higher education in the area and conducting new courses in front of the Higher Education Minister. MLA Sohagpur Vijaypal Singh said that new dimensions are being written for the development of higher education in the state under the leadership of the Higher Education Minister. Mementoes were presented by the college management to the Higher Education Minister and other public representatives and officials.

CHIEF MINISTER PLANTS SAPLINGS

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted saplings along with the representatives of Sanskrit Sanskriti Vikas Sansthan in the Smart City Garden at Shyamla Hills. Chouhan along with Nilamp Tripathi, Rama Arya, Sunil Sharma, Nidhi Tripathi and Ashutosh Pandey of the Sansthan planted saplings of Peepal, Neem and Moulshree. The Sansthan is working for the protection of Sanatan culture and the participation of masses in environmental protection through tree plantation.

The Sansthan has also established Gurukul for the education of needy children and the protection of Sanatan culture. Senior journalist of the capital Dharmendra Paigwar along with his sons Sarthak and Samarth participated in plantation. Sarthak planted saplings along with Chief Minister Chouhan on the occasion of his birthday Vishwa Vijay and Shri Sankalp Tiwari also participated in plantation. Peepal planted today is a shady tree. It purifies the environment. It has religious and Ayurvedic significance. Moulshree is a medicinal tree, which has been used in Ayurveda for centuries. Rich in antibiotic elements, Neem is known as the ultimate medicine.

GREEN GANESH CAMPAIGN IN EPCO FROM AUGUST 26 TO 29

Bhopal: Like previous years, EPCO is running a 4-day Green Ganesh campaign from August 26 to 29 this year. In this, training will be given to the general public to make Ganesh idols from clay. Participants will be able to take the self-made idols to their home. In the training programme, soil will be made available to the citizens on site and training in making Ganesh idols will be given by sculptors. These soluble clay idols painted with natural colours can be immersed at home after worship. It is noteworthy that idols made of Plaster of Paris are harmful to the environment. These idols do not dissolve in water for months and the toxic substances present in them are harmful to aquatic animals, plants and humans.

EDITOR'S SPECS

Teen marriage and consent with a cost

The Delhi High Court order allowing a girl of just over 15 years to live with her husband, citing the Sharia, is surprising as it is in contravention of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and the legal marriageable age of a girl in India. While the court may have taken the humane view because the girl is pregnant, the hostile circumstances of her home, her religious mores, and that she had married the lover of her own will, the order opens up a debate on the legally permissible age for marriage for different communities.

The court is explicit that the girl, who had "attained the age of puberty could marry without the consent of her parents and had the right to reside with her husband even when she is less than 18 years..." It implies that her consent matters, which is important. But such a ruling could prompt more such marriages of minor girls in the Muslim community, where the girl's 'consent' could be overridden in a patriarchal setup. There is already a sharp spike in the number of child marriages due to the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Such a trend could impact the education and health of girls in the community. Teenage marriages disrupt a girl's education, leave her unemployable and financially dependent, and affect the social and economic development of the community at large. More importantly, the girl's health suffers: it is proven that an adolescent girl's body is not mature enough for pregnancy, nor is her mind ready for motherhood. Teenage pregnancies entail risks of premature labour, low birth weight and undernourished babies, miscarriages and also impact the infant's nutrition.

Muslim leaders should focus on social issues

It seems as if every ruling party rakes up the issues related to the Indian Muslims deliberately over the years, before any elections particularly. Further, what confounds one is why do the Muslim religious leaders try to resolve the issues facing the community near these dates only, why don't they stick to their original plans? One fails to understand the reason that why did the AIMPLB held a meeting to discuss the issue just two months before the assembly elections in some states.

Following the Supreme Court's order in 2017, Muslim religious leaders had shown willingness to outlaw the Triple Talaq, a completely unIslamic practice, but alas even after five years they have not taken any concrete step in this regard.

It seems as if every ruling party rakes up the issues related to the Indian Muslims deliberately over the years, before any elections particularly. Further, what confounds one is why do the Muslim religious leaders try to resolve the issues facing the community near these dates only, why don't they stick to their original plans? One fails to understand the reason that why did the AIMPLB held a meeting to discuss the issue just two months before the assembly elections in some states.

The most recent example in this case is that of formulating the Model Nikahnama for the Indian Muslims, by the Muslim religious leaders, whohadpromised almost five years ago in 2017 that they'll draft the Model Nikahnama under the aegis of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), when they were rapped hard on the knuckles by the government on the issue of Talaq-e Biddat or the Triple Talaq.

In reality, the religious leaders had drafted a model Nikahnama for the first time way back in 2003. But the ideological differences amongst different sects are such that they can't agree to have a consensus on any religious issue.

Though the Supreme Court had banned the practice of Triple Talaq in 2017 and in spite of several initiatives since 2003 to find a judicious process based on Islamic Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence), the leaders have been unable to do so and in fact none of them uttered any word either against the SC or the government when the SC gave its verdict in 2017, as they knew within their hearts that they had wrongfully given consent to or not spoken against the Triple Talaq.

Though after 2017, very few cases of Triple Talaq have been reported, yet the practice reportedly continues unabated, as it has not been condemned or banned by the Muslim leaders. Meanwhile, instead of focussing onhow to find a way out of the impasse, the religious leaders continue with their slumber and feeding the community with rhetoric-laced pills.

They claim that the drafting of a new Nikahnama is being worked upon but shy away frommentioning any firm date by which it'll be finalised. This shows their commitment to the community, their followers and particularly Islam. They are unable to sit together and thrash out a strategy against an unIslamic practice in one sitting of the learned ones. Yet they continue with the charade of safeguarding the Muslims of India. The AIMPLB at one of its meetings earlier this month, continued with their obduracy on not to insert a clause against instant Triple Talaq, as desired and dictated by the SC and which the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, has made a criminal act. Reportedly, they approached the issue in a roundabout manner and suggested amongst themselves to insert a clause on Talaq-e-Tafweezor delegated divorce. Thus, effectively trying to paint a picture that they haven't bowed to the government, but in fact turning a blind eye to an unIslamic practice, and suggesting yet another one on the applicability of which they'll have no say. The new suggestion makes the issue not only complex but also shows their desire to hoodwink the law. The leaders have proposed to insert a new clause called Talaq-e Tafweez, based on Sharia. Talaq-e Tafweez is one of the most important forms of divorce under Muslim Law or Sharia, as it gives to Muslim women a right to divorce their husband without going to court of law. In this form of divorce a Muslim male can delegate his power of repudiation of marriage to a third person or to his wife also, at the time of marriage.

It further makes one wonder that if the religious leaders and jurists are unable to categorically ban the instant Talaq then what is the assurance that this new proposal will make the instant Talaq, go away from our society. In fact, it makes them the butt of joke and shows their obduracy and unwillingness to hear any sane word of advice.

Some members of the AIMPLB reportedly, even opined that Khula, the women's inalienable right to instant divorce, was a more viable alternative, so there was no need for the clause on Talaq-e Tafweez. Thus, in toto making a mockery of the whole issue. In reality, a Nikahnama, which is essentially a contract between a groom and a bride, is based on the logic to specifyto the women with all necessary terms and conditions of the marriage being solemnised. Its sanctity and the rights given to Muslim women is evident by the fact that the Wakeels (advocates) and two eye witnesses get the bride's consent to the marriage in absence of her parents to ensure avoiding any sort of pressure from her parents or relatives for the marriage. This is the practical and humane form of the Islamic Sharia, which tries to give every right to its women followers too, at par with her male counterparts.

But this and her other rights given to her by the Sharia, such as her Right to Inheritance in the assets and property of her father are often not followed and given to her by her male relatives. The religious leaders have also been unable to ensure that very bridegroom pays the Mehr (dower, which the husband has to pay to his wife) promised by him to his bride as soon as possible after the solemnisation of the marriage and preferably before the nuptial night. The ponderable issue here is that when and how the old Nikahnama was given-up by the Indian Qazis. Historically, these earlier Nikahnamas used to contain every minor detail about the nuptial contract between husband and wife and very specifically listed out various rights of the wife.

Now a day, the Nikahnama, used in various Indian states varies from state to state and also from sect to sect, and is mostly a piece of paper stating the basic information about the two parties and contains no mention of the various rights and duties of both the husband and wife. AIMPLB, which claims to be the highest decision making body of all sects of Indian Muslims should strive to get a modern Nikahnama drafted at the earliest.

This should include the rights and duties of both the husband and wife and also guidance on how to ensure a long lasting marriage and if need be, then how to proceed with Talaq or divorce -- a step which is despised most by Allah as mentioned in the Holy Quran.

This document should not only have the social, economic guidance but also be guided by the Quranic teachings, otherwise it would be an effort in vain and will lead to further politicisation of the issue to be used by different political parties when it suits them.

(Asad Mirza is a political commentator based in New Delhi. He writes on Indian Muslims, educational, international affairs, interfaith and current affairs)

international

DEATH TOLL IN TRAIN STATION ATTACK IN UKRAINE RISES TO 25

Kiev | Agencies

Twenty-five people have been confirmed dead in the Russian shelling of the Chaplyne train station in Ukraine's central Dnipropetrovsk region, a top official said here on Thursday.Two children were among those killed in the shelling that took place on Wednesday as the country marked its 31st Independence Day news agency quoted deputy head of the presidential office Kyrylo Tymoshenko as saying on his blog on Telegram.

He said another 31 people were also injured. President Volodymyr Zelenksy said in a video address late on Wednesday that five dead bodies had been recovered from a car by the railway tracks. Train stations and rail infrastructure have been repeatedly hit during the war which completed six months on Wednesday.

In April, at least 57 people died in an attack on the Kramatorsk station in the eastern Donbas region. On Tuesday, Zelensky had warned citizens against massive shelling and possible provocations by Russia on Independence Day. Besides the station attack, authorities reported several others across the country on Wednesday, including the Khmelnytskyi region in the west and Zhytomyr in the north.

FOREST FIRES IN RUSSIA BURN OVER 100,000 HECTARES

Moscow: Forest fires in Russia continued to spread and have consumed nearly 110,000 hectares of land in just three days up to Thursday.

A report by the state-run news agency said that a total of 126 forest fires were recorded, and the area affected by wildfires increased by 8,000 hectares during the past three days. The Far East region's Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) is the worst hit area, where about 75,000 hectares of forest were engulfed by fire, news agency quoted the report as saying.

The Republics of Komi and Ryazan and the Nizhny Novgorod Oblast in western Russia have also suffered wildfires. Smoke from forest fires has recently reached the capital Moscow, limiting visibility in the city.

US forces carry out second airstrike on Syria in 24 hrs

Damascus | Agencies

The US Air Force has bombed new positions manned by militias loyal to Iran in Syria for the second time in 24 hours, the American militarys Central Command and a monitoring group said on Thursday. The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the new airstrikes targeting posts in the countryside of Deir al-Zour resulted in the killing of three Iran-backed militia fighters, reports news agency. In its report, the US Central Command said there were two or three dead and the bombings were a response to coordinated militia rocket attacks on two American Army facilities in the region shortly before. On Wednesday, the US Air Force attacked positions also in Deir al-Zour which are manned by a group made up of Shia fighters from Afghanistan. The Observatory said six people were killed in Wednesday's strikes.

"The strike was necessary to protect and defend US personnel in Syria, which had been the targets of several recent attacks by Iran-backed militia groups," top Pentagon official Colin Kahl said Wednesday in Washington. The US soldiers were fired on several times by the militias, he added. "This operation is a demonstration (that) the US will not hesitate to defend itself against Iranian and Iran-backed aggression when it occurs," Kahl said. US forces deployed in Syria in 2015 to help their allies, especially the Syrian Kurds, in their fight against the Islamic State terror group. The was no official comment from Syrian government on the strikes.

ISRAELI PM BLASTS 'BAD' PROPOSAL TO RESTORE IRAN NUKE DEAL

Jerusalem: Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid issued an urgent warning against a proposal under consideration by the US and Iran to restore the 2015 nuclear deal."On the table right now is a bad deal," Lapid told here on Wednesday, arguing it will result in Tehran having $100 billion more a year at its disposal due to lifting of sanctions. "This money will not build schools or hospitals. This is a $100 billion a year that will be used to undermine stability in the Middle East and spread terror around the globe."Iran will pour even more money into funding Israel's enemies, namely the Lebanese Hezbollah militia and the Palestinian militant organizations Hamas and Islamic Jihad, news agency quoted the Prime Minister as saying."This money will go to the people who are trying to kill authors and thinkers in New York," he said, referencing the attack on "The Satanic Verses" author Salman US law enforcement is still investigating the stabbing, which left Rushdie severely injured."Of course, it will be used to strengthen Iran's nuclear programme," Lapid said. In 2018 the US, under then-president Donald Trump, decided to unilaterally leave the agreement and impose new, tough sanctions.

India breaks streak of UN abstentions on Ukraine, votes in opposition to Russia

United Nations | Agencies

Breaking its streak of abstentions on votes related to Ukraine, India has voted for a procedural matter that Russia opposed at the UN Security Council . Going against Moscow's stance, India on Wednesday joined 12 other members of the Council to vote for inviting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to speak via a remote video link.

China abstained on the vote and Russia naturally voted against the invitation, but because it was a procedural matter it did not count as a veto .When the meeting began, Russia's Permanent Representative Vassily Nbenzia, objecting to Zelensky's video link arrangement, demanded he should come in person to the Council chamber and asked for the vote, which ended up showing Moscow's isolation . Although this was the first time India had not abstained on a matter linked to Ukraine and voted with the west, a diplomatic source played down its significance. The source said Wednesday's vote was different from the issues India had abstained on and those were more substantial."It was (only) for or against Zelensky's participation" in the meeting through a video link, the source pointed out.

While speaking at the meeting, India's Permanent Representative Ruchira Kamboj stuck to New Delhi's distinctive version of neutrality in the Ukraine conflict. The meeting took place on a day of twin import for Ukraine -- its independence day as well as six months since Russia launched its ongoing invasion of Kiev on February 24. Allowed to speak by video link after the vote, Zelensky warned that the world's security depended on how Russia's invasion is handled."It is on the territory of Ukraine that the world's future will be decided," Zelensky said, "our independence is your security

HEAVY FLASH FLOODING IN AFGHANISTAN KILLS 178 PEOPLE

Kabul: In the past one month, at least 178 people have lost their lives as a result of devastating flash floods in Afghanistan, an official said.

Another 250 were wounded in the heavy rainfalls and flash floods that severely affected 13 of the country's 34 provinces, a spokesman of the Taliban's National Disaster Management Authority Nasim Haqqani, told news agency on Wednesday. In addition, more than 3,000 residential houses were partially or completely damaged, thousands of acres of land destroyed and hundreds of livestock perished, the official added."People need more aid because they have experienced huge financial and human losses. They have lost everything," Haqqani said

The floods hit Afghanistan only a few months after the country experienced one of its deadliest earthquakes in the past decades. Seasonal flooding occurs every year in Afghanistan, but has been unusually heavy in recent weeks .Flash floods usually catch people by surprise as there is no alarm system in the mountainous country. Decades of conflict, coupled with environmental degradation and insufficient investment in disaster risk reduction have contributed to the increasing vulnerability of Afghans to natural disasters, according to the UN. On average, natural dis-

SHINDE DEFENDS REBELLION, SAYS HE HAS TAKEN 'CONTRACT' FOR MAHARASHTRA DEVELOPMENT

Speaking in the Assembly, Shinde defended his revolt against the Shiv Sena leadership in June, which brought down the two-and-a-half-year-old Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government, and asserted his act was neither unconstitutional nor illegal.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Thursday said he has taken a "contract" for development of the state and to ensure prosperity and welfare of its people, hitting back at his opponents over their constant jibe at him since assuming the top office.

Speaking in the Assembly, Shinde defended his revolt against the Shiv Sena leadership in June, which brought down the two-and-a-half-year-old Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government, and asserted his act was neither unconstitutional nor illegal.

Replying to an Opposition sponsored debate on various issues facing the state on the last day of the monsoon session, the chief minister said he has been often described as a "contract CM" by his opponents.

Shinde maintained people's welfare was his only agenda.

"When Union minister Narayan Rane made some comments (last year) against the then-chief minister (Uddhav Thackeray), he was arrested. But I would say I have taken a contract for development of the state, prosperity and welfare of its people," he said.

In an apparent reference to being constantly targeted as a "betrayer" by the Uddhav Thackeray-led faction of the Shiv Sena since his rebellion, Shinde described criticism against him as a sign of "ideological bankruptcy".

"Who has betrayed the ideology of (Shiv Sena founder) Balasaheb Thackeray and mandate of the people by forging an unnatural alliance for the sake of power?" he asked, referring to the saffron party's tie-up with the Congress and the NCP in 2019 which led to the formation of the MVA government.

MAHARASHTRA FOREST DEPT ISSUES ORDER, ASKS STAFFERS TO ANSWER PHONE WITH 'VANDE MATARAM'

Pune: The Maharashtra government's forest department on Thursday issued an order urging its employees to say 'Vande Mataram' while answering phone calls related to official work.

The order, or government resolution (GR), was issued days after newly-appointed Cultural Affairs and Forest Minister Sudhir Mungantiwar directed all government officials to say "Vande Mataram" instead of "hello" while receiving phone calls in offices.

'All the officials and personnel with the forest department have been urged to say Vande Mataram instead of hello while attending the phones of common citizens and people's representatives related to official work," said the GR.

"We are entering the 76th year of Independence. We are celebrating Amrit Mahotsav (of Independence). Hence, I want officials to say 'Vande Mataram' over the phone instead of hello," Mungantiwar had earlier said.

CM Shinde Writes To PM Modi Over Classical Language Status For Marathi

In a letter to the Prime Minister, Eknath Shinde informed that the state government had sent a detailed proposal on the issue to the Centre on November 16, 2013.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Thursday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to give approval for bestowing classical language status on Marathi.

The matter has been pending with the Union Culture Ministry.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, Eknath Shinde informed that the state government had sent a detailed proposal on the issue to the Centre on November 16, 2013.

"The state has been regularly following up with the Centre about the status of the proposal. The people of the state conducted a signature campaign and collected 1.20 lakh signatures in support of the demand, which were sent to the President of India," the Chief

Minister wrote in his letter.

Union Culture Minister G Kishan Reddy had told the Rajya Sabha on February 3 this year that the proposal was under consideration.

"The proposal has been under consideration for a long time and I request that the approval should be given at the earliest," Shinde said in the letter to the Prime Minister.

Shinde convenes meeting with Maratha organisations on reservation

THE GOVERNMENT IS UNDER PRESSURE TO IMPLEMENT WELFARE SCHEMES TO FACILITATE BETTER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES TO POOR MARATHAS IN THE STATE.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Chief Minister Eknath Shinde has convened a meeting with Maratha organisations on Thursday to discuss the controversial Maratha reservation issue.

"Shinde will discuss the Maratha reservation issue with various organisations and see what welfare measures the government should initiate in the interim period," a highly placed source revealed.

The government is under pressure from organisations to implement welfare schemes to facilitate better education and employment opportunities to poor Marathas in the state.

All political parties in Maharashtra, cutting across ideological differences, have always unanimously supported Maratha reservation. In 2018, the then chief minister Devendra Fadnavis had after adequate consultations with all party leaders taken the initiative to create a law to accommodate Marathas under the socially and economically backward class.

As against the proposed 16 per cent quota recommended by the state government, the Bombay High Court had upheld 13 and 12 per cent Maratha reservation in jobs and education, respectively. But the matter was challenged through public interest litigations (PILs) in the Supreme Court, which then scrapped the reservation.

The state was confronted with two challenges. One, to substantiate how Marathas were socially backward, which is mandatory as per constitutional provisions for reservation. Second, reservation to Marathas would amount to violation of the 50 per cent quota limit.

'KHOKE' RUCKUS CONTINUES TO ROCK MAHA POLITICS FOR FIFTH DAY

The 'khoke' (crore) row continued to rock Maharashtra politics for the fifth straight day with Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's group and Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) targeting each other, here on Thursday.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The 'khoke' (crore) row continued to rock Maharashtra politics for the fifth straight day with Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's group and Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) targeting each other, here on Thursday.

The Shinde Group legislators lampooned Shiv Sena leader and ex-minister Aditya Thackeray, displaying posters on which he is shown astride a horse facing the opposite direction, outside the Vidhan Bhavan building.

The banners carried slogans like Yuvrajanchi Disha Chukli' (the prince missed the route), and Maharashtra's pappu' or param pujya' and calling him the Prince pappu of Maharashtra, as the Shinde Group MLAs raised slogans to counter MVA legislators.The posters also ridiculed Aditya

Thackeray for doing 'nothing' when he was the tourism minister, but instead touring the state now, adding that his 'adamance' cost the Shiv Sena its government.

On his part, Aditya Thackeray -- the son of ex-CM Uddhav Thackeray -- hit back by raising the familiar '50 Khoke' (Rs 50 crore in street slang) slogan implying how the Shinde Group MLAs allegedly got the huge amount to switch sides and topple the MVA government of Shiv Sena-Nationalist Congress Party-Congress in June.

Aditya Thackeray even joined the MVA chorus of '50 Khoke, Chidley Boke' (Rs 50 crore, irate cats), gaddars' (traitors) plus all the other slogans that have rattled the Shinde Group in the past five days of the legislature's monsoon session, leading to a bout of jostling and fisticuffs on Wednesday.He dared the Shinde Group's 40 MLAs to resign from their constituencies and contest the elections afresh, saying, "Let the electorate and masses decide who is right or wrong once and for all."

The Shinde Group hit back by demanding that first he should quit from his Worli seat where he was perched on the support of other legislators and an ex-Mayor, to which Aditya Thackeray said he would resign after the 40 MLAs from the rival camp quit. "What they are indulging in is Ravan Raj', not 'Ram Rajya'... I pity them as the 40 MLAs have been denied what they were promised. They should take up the issues of the people, farmers and youth," said Aditya Thackeray.

The Congress-NCP MLAs also raised slogans demanding a wet drought' to be declared in the state, compensation to farmers and other related issues.

Need to regulate tourists at Ajanta caves to preserve its paintings says ASI

THE POPULAR UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE, COMPRISING 30 ROCK-CUT BUDDHIST CAVE MONUMENTS, IS LOCATED ABOUT 100 KM FROM AURANGABAD; THE CAVES HAVE PAINTINGS DEPICTING THE LIFE OF GAUTAM BUDDHA.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A senior official of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has expressed the need to control tourist footfall at the world famous Ajanta caves in Maharashtra to preserve its paintings for a longer time.

The popular UNESCO world heritage site, comprising 30 rock-cut Buddhist cave monuments, is located about 100 km from the Aurangabad district headquarters.

The caves have paintings depicting the life of Gautam Buddha.

Every week, thousands of tourists visit the monument.

"The presence of a large number of tourists increases humidity inside the caves, causing a negative impact on the paintings there," ASI's Aurangabad circle superintendent Dr Milan Kumar Chauley said at an event on Wednesday.

Some of the paintings have got damaged over a period of time due to this and other reasons, he said.

"Hence, to save the paintings for a longer period of time, the way out is to restrict the footfall and allow fewer people inside the caves," Chauley said.

He also said they can send only 40 tourists inside the caves at a time for a period of 10 minutes. In such a short span, the visitors cannot even see the paintings properly as they need time to get acclimatised to the darkness inside the caves, he added.

There is an interpretation centre constructed by the state government outside the cave complex.

"Earlier, we (ASI) had demanded to hand it over to us so that we can display the replicas of these paintings there and the footfall can be controlled. But the state government has not taken any action so far," the official said.

Speaking about proper management and people's responsibility at tourist sites, Chauley said India's north east region should serve as a model for the country.

"If a tourist litters in north eastern states, the licence of their vehicle driver is temporarily suspended. Even small tourist destinations there are well maintained and taken care of," he said.

In Maharashtra, professional people with tourism background should be deployed in offices handling tourism activities, the official opined.

People from other fields cannot easily understand the needs of visitors and the tourism industry, he said.

WOMAN CHASED, STABBED SEVERAL TIMES

Nashik: A man is seen chasing a woman employee of a petrol pump and stabbing her multiple times with a sharp weapon in full public view, in a horrifying video from Maharashtra. The woman is seen running around the fuel station to save her life, with the attacker behind her.

The staff of the petrol pump in Nashik and some passersby are seen rushing to save the victim but seemed afraid to approach him because of the weapon in his hand.

Minutes later, she falls to the ground and the man hits her a couple more times. A passerby throws a chair at the attacker to stop him. He flees the spot when more people come to the woman's rescue. Two men were seen chasing him with fire extinguishers in their hands.

The incident took place at the Jadhav Petrol Pump in Nashik this afternoon. Zubeda Sheikh, the victim, has been admitted to a hospital.

A probe is on and a search is underway to catch the accused

Maharashtra PSUs report an accumulated loss of Rs 42,839.19 crore in 2020-21

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) in its report for the year ended March 31, 2021, has pointed out that the accumulated loss incurred by 109 state public sector undertakings (PSUs) in 2020-21 was reported at Rs 42,839.19 crore.

The state government's investment in sector-wise PSUs (power, agriculture and allied), infrastructure, service, finance, manufacturing and miscellaneous) total investment (equity and long-term loans) was Rs 4,23,109.39 crore as on March 31, 2021, against Rs 3,37,775.59 crore, a rise of 25.26%. The investment consisted of 77.01% towards equity and 22.99% as long term loans. The long-term loans advanced by the state government constituted 1.35% 9Rs 1,308.30 crores) of the total loan term loans of the PSUs whereas 98.65% (Rs 95,950.99 crore) of the total long-term loans were availed from the Centre and other financial institutions.

According to CAG, the annual budgetary assistance to these PSUs ranged between Rs 9,759.55 crore and Rs 15,028.73 crore during 2018-19 to 2020-21. The budgetary assistance of Rs 12,316.35 crore during 2020-21 included Rs 0.30 crore and Rs 12,316.05 crore in the form of equity and grants/subsidy respectively. "The state government did. not provide any loans to these PSUs during 2020-21," it said.

The state government provided significant assistance to Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Limited (Rs 10,715.76 crore) and Tapi Irrigation Development Corporation (Rs 787.30 crore) in the form of grants and subsidies for different projects and to Police Housing and Welfare Corporation Limited (Rs 437.88 crore) for the purpose of construction of police quarters and administrative buildings.

Out of the budgetary assistance of Rs 12,316.35 crore given to the state PSUs during 2020-21, Rs 357.86 crore was given to the Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC), a loss making statutory corporation. MSRTC receives budgetary support in lieu of transport-related subsidies announced by the state government to benefit various sections of the society such as students, ex-servicemen and senior citizens. CAG said the state government gives guarantee to PSUs to obtain financial assistance from banks and financial institutions. The government charges the guarantee fee from the same and it varies from 0.50% to 2% depending upon the loanees.

The guarantee commitment of the state government decreased to Rs 48.49 crore during 2020-21 from Rs 56.95 crore in 2019-20. Further, two PSUs did not pay guarantee fees/commission which was payable during the year.

MAHARASHTRA RECORDS 1,887 COVID CASES, SIX DEATHS; ACTIVE TALLY AT 12,269

Mubai: Maharashtra on Thursday recorded 1,887 new coronavirus cases and six pandemic-related deaths, the health department said in a bulletin.

The state's COVID-19 case tally rose to 80,91,276, and death toll reached 1,48,214. On Wednesday, the state had recorded 1,913 cases and five fatalities.

State capital Mumbai recorded 838 new coronavirus cases and two fatalities on Thursday. Pune city, Solapur city and Raigad and Solapur districts recorded one fatality each. The case fatality rate in the state stands at 1.83 per cent.

There are 12,269 active cases in the state now. As many as 2,190 patients recovered from coronavirus infection since Wednesday evening, taking the total of recovered patients to 79,30,793.

The recovery rate in the state stands at 98.02 per cent. As many as 35,969 tests were conducted since previous evening, which took the tally of tests conducted in the state to 8,39,58,734.

Coronavirus figures of Maharashtra: New cases: 1,887; Deaths: six; Active cases: 12,269; Tests: 35,969.

MVA'S UNITY PITCH FORCES BJP TO REDRAW ITS ELECTION STRATEGY FOR 2024 POLLS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) alliance's unanimous resolve to put up a united fight in the 2024 Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in Maharashtra is set to pose a major challenge to the ruling coalition of the BJP and Eknath Shinde-led rebel Shiv Sena faction.

In its first meeting after the BJP toppled the Uddhav Thackeray-led MVA government in collaboration with the Shinde Sena, the MVA on Tuesday decided that the Uddhav-led Sena, NCP and Congress will contest both the coming Assembly and Lok Sabha polls in the state together.

Evidently, the MVA constituents have decided to stick to each other with an overriding agenda to oust the BJP from power. The leaders of the three allies were candid in admitting that a divided MVA would give the BJP a cake-walk at the hustings. Despite setting ambitious electoral targets for itself, the BJP reckons that if the Uddhav Sena, NCP and Congress fight the coming elections together the move would consolidate their support bases, making the saffron party's battle tougher.

BJP insiders said that the party has already swung into action to redraw its election strategy accordingly. The saffron party believes that along with a strong agenda to appeal to the people, it will also have to get its electoral maths right.

The BJP central leadership has set for its Maharashtra unit a target of 42-plus seats out of the total 48 Lok Sabha seats and 200-plus of the 288 Assembly seats in the state. A senior BJP leader, requesting anonymity, said, "One of the reasons why BJP was desperate to break the MVA government was to unsettle

them."

However, for the BJP, one key question that will haunt it in the run-up to the 2024 polls is, how much of its ground the Uddhav Sena will be able to regain in electoral alliance with the Congress and the NCP. After the MVA's meeting, ex-CM Uddhav said, "We three parties fought a pandemic like Covid-19, which brought the world to its knees, successfully. This obstacle (Shinde-Fadnavis government) is a very minor one compared to that. We shall overcome and we standing together will send a message to the country." Similar sentiments were echoed by the Congress and the NCP. While its alliance with the Shinde Sena may have returned the party to power, its 2024 goals would remain an uphill task for the BJP in the state. Given the simmering discontent within sections of the two camps, the BJP will have to do a tightrope walk in the run-up to the polls. When the two allies enter seat-sharing negotiations, CM Shinde is set to drive a hard bargain to get his faction's pound of flesh, creating intra-party challenges for the BJP - the senior partner with 106 MLAs.

In the 2019 elections to the 288-member state Assembly, the BJP garnered 105 seats with 36.47 per cent vote share, Shiv Sena 56 seats and 19.44 per cent vote, Congress 44 seats and 15.28 per cent vote, and NCP 54 seats and 18.75 per cent vote. Before the Sena split, the MVA accounted for 154 seats and 53.47 per cent vote.

At their meeting the MVA allies could however not reach a consensus on fighting the local body polls together. Clearly, each of them will try to consolidate and expand their vote banks then in order to strengthen their hands during their seat-sharing talks for the Lok Sabha and the Assembly polls. A senior NCP leader said, "In principle we have agreed to remain together. But seat-sharing is going to be a roller-coaster ride for us."

KIM KARDASHIAN IS 'OPEN TO DATING AGAIN'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Reality TV star Kim Kardashian is said to be open to dating again, following her split from comedian Pete Davidson.

The 41-year-old star recently split from comedian Pete Davidson after nine months together, and Kim is already keen to get back on the dating scene, reports website.

A source said: "Kim is definitely open to dating again and her friends and family would love to set her up and think it's so fun."

Kim has been leaning on her family since her split from Davidson.

The insider told to a website: "Kim is doing surprisingly well since her break-up with Pete.

"She has been relying on her family when needed and leaning on them for support. She's fully submerging herself into work to keep herself busy and keep her mind off of the break-up."

Davidson is heartbroken about their split but he's also eager to maintain a good relationship with Kim and her kids.

The source said: "Pete is bummed, but he is trying to stay focused and positive. He has the utmost respect for Kim, her kids and the family; he wants to maintain a healthy relationship with all of them."

On the other hand, Kanye is said to be "over the moon" about their break-up.

The insider said: "Since day one, he was hoping that they would not work out."

Kim and Pete dated for nine months and their recent split is said to have been a "mutual decision".

An insider also insisted that reconciliation is an unlikely prospect.

The source said: "It was an amicable split. They had discussed ending their relationship for a bit. It wasn't sudden. "And it was a mutual decision. Getting back together is not in the cards right now."

John Boyega is not returning to 'Star Wars' franchise

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor John Boyega, who had a breakout moment with his role of Finn in the 'Star Wars' sequel trilogy, is not keen on returning to the galactic franchise. John is currently awaiting the release of his films 'Breaking' and 'The Woman King'.

"At this point I'm cool off it. I'm good off it," Boyega said on SiriusXM's 'Tell Me Everything With John Fugelsang'. "I think Finn is at a good confirmation point where you can just enjoy him in other things, the games, and the animation. But I feel like '(Episode) VII' to '(Episode) IX' was good for me."

Boyega added: "To be fair, (with) the allies that I've found within Joel Taylor and Jamie Foxx, Teyonah Parris, Viola Davis, all these people I've been working with... versatility is my path."

According to website, Boyega also discussed his experience facing racism in the 'Star Wars' fandom, an issue that 'Obi-Wan Kenobi' star Moses Ingram dealt with earlier this year. Disney and Obi-Wan himself, Ewan McGregor, came to Ingram's defence and publicly decried the racist backlash she was receiving.

"Moses Ingram being protected makes me feel protected. Do you understand what I'm saying? It makes me feel like, 'Okay, cool. I am not the elephant in the room.' Because when I started, it wasn't really a conversation you could bring up," Boyega further said.

"You know how they went through it. It was kind of like, let's just be silent. It wasn't a conversation you could bring up. But now to see how blatant it is, to see Ewan McGregor come and support... for me, (it) fulfils my time where I didn't get the support."

Idris Elba 'sick and tired' of James Bond questions

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood actor Idris Elba is annoyed by people frequently quizzing him about portraying James Bond.

Tipped to replace Daniel Craig as 007, the 49-year-old actor confessed that he is frustrated with the constant questions about the rumours, reports website.

"I have no more answers for it," Idris said as he spoke on the "Jemele Hill Is Unbothered" podcast.

"I just tell people 'aw, don't ask me that.' "

Elba believes he has answered all the questions about playing the legendary spy and finds it "lazy" that he is constantly asked about it by the media.

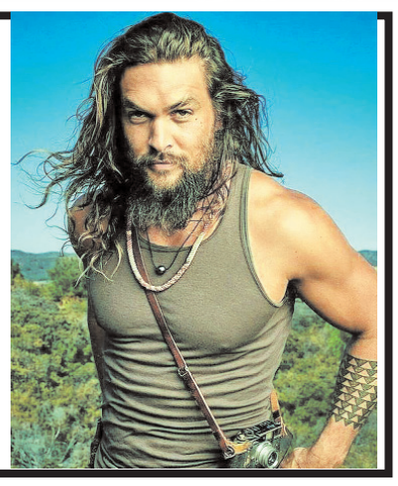
The actor said, "A lot of times it's really lazy journalism. And people try to use it as clickbait like 'what's he gonna say this time?' I try to say the same things. Every now and then I just tease them, but every now and then I'll give them some philosophy on why I don't want to do it or why it's a rumour. But most times now I tend not to talk about it."

It was recently reported that Idris had walked away from talks with Bond officials to pursue "his own film franchise" but the star has apparently suggested other potential 007s to producer Barbara Broccoli. An insider told a daily newspaper, "Fans and Barbara wanted Idris but he wants to create something for himself. However, he's put forward names to play 007. He's 'informally' in the decision-making process as he's been in talks with producers for so long."

A film insider recently claimed that the new Bond must be aged under 40 and taller than 5ft 10 inches.

The source said that movie chiefs are hoping to bring in an actor in their "late 30s" to allow him to stay in the role for at least a decade or potentially three films.

JASON MOMOA TO PLAY VILLAIN IN 'FAST X'



Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Jason Momoa is excited to play a "quirky" villain in 'Fast X'.

Cast as an antagonist in the latest movie of the 'Fast and Furious' franchise, the actor can't wait for the next phase of his career.

"I've never played a character that's, what's the word - he's evil and quirky and androgynous. He's very sadistic and fun. It's very bizarre," Moma told to a website.

The 'Game of Thrones' star enjoyed starring in the flick - which is due to be released in 2023 - and embraced playing a bad guy in the "Fast" family. He said: "I haven't played a villain in a very long time."

Jason will reprise his role as Aquaman in the DC Extended Universe (DCEU) sequel 'Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom' and he said that the film will be a "brothers' journey" between his alter ego Arthur Curry and the hero's half-brother Orm Marius, played by Patrick Wilson.

The project will see Momoa reunite with Ben Affleck, who is reprising his role as Bruce Wayne/Batman in the film, and he can't wait to work with his 'Justice League' co-star again. "It's just hugs and kisses. I love that guy. We get along too well. It's very good to see him again.

'Batgirl' to get 'funeral screenings' after its cancellation

Los Angeles | Agencies

The hard work of 'Batgirl' cast and crew may not completely go to waste as the movie will get its own screenings, though only a select group of insiders will get a chance to see it.

Sources told a daily newspaper that 'Batgirl' will be screened on the Warner Bros. lot this week.

It is believed that only the cast and crew who worked on the film along with representatives and studio executives were given invites to the screenings that began and will go throughout the week.

One source described the private screenings as "funeral screenings," as it's likely the only time a handful of people get to see the film before it is locked away in a vault, either physical or digital, reports website.

Warner Bros. shocked everyone on August 2 when it announced its decision to shelve 'Batgirl', starring Leslie Grace in the titular role. The project, which was directed by Billal Fallah and Adil Al Arbi, had finished shooting, but was still far from complete, with temp visual effects and score.

Reacting to the news, Grace wrote on Instagram, "On the heels of the recent news about our movie 'Batgirl,' I am proud of the love, hard work and intention all of our incredible cast and tireless crew put into this film over seven months in Scotland."

"I feel blessed to have worked among absolute greats and forged relationships for a lifetime in the process!"

The directors recently denied reports that said the film was canned because of poor test screenings.

El Arbi said, "The guys from Warners told us it was not a talent problem from our part or the actress, or even the quality of the movie. They told us it was strategic change. There was new management, and they wanted to save some money."

They additionally claimed that they didn't have access to the footage of the cancelled film because the studio shut them out of the production servers.

Barbie Ferreira says she's leaving 'Euphoria'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Barbie Ferreira says that she will not be returning to 'Euphoria' for its third season. The actor announced her apparent departure via Instagram, writing in a story post: "After four years of getting to embody the most special and enigmatic character Kat, I'm having to say a very teary-eyed goodbye."

"I hope many of you could see yourself in her like I did and that she brought you joy to see her journey into the character she is today. I put all my care and love into her and I hope you guys could feel it. Love you Katherine Hernandez."

The best friend of Maddie (Alexa Demie) and Cassie (Sydney Sweeney), Kat was a beacon of body positivity for the show as she revamped her style and grew more confident in her sexuality, reports a website.

However, viewers were left confused when her storyline faded to the background in Season 2. Though there were rumours of on-set tension between Ferreira and show creator Sam Levinson, including that Ferreira had stormed off set, which HBO refuted, the actor shut them down in a March interview with Insider

"I really think that the fans are really passionate and I do appreciate that because 'Euphoria' has really impacted so many people," she said.

"Sometimes, things take on a life of their own, and they're not rooted in the truth, but it's okay because I know it's just out of passion and out of curiosity and all that good stuff. And I signed up for it. So, I'll take it. I'll take the good and the bad." In addition to 'Euphoria', Ferreira recently starred in the 2020 film 'Unpregnant' and made an appearance in Jordan Peele's horror film 'Nope'.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY

Madelaine Petsch

BJP'S KALYAN CHAUBEY AND CONGRESS' NA HARIS JOIN HANDS TO RUN AIFF

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Kalyan Chaubey, the BJP leader from West Bengal, is the unanimous choice of the 36 state football federations for the post of president of All India Football Federations (AIFF) while Congress leader N.A. Haris of Karnataka State Football Association and Kipa Ajay of Arunachal Football Association to get vice-president and treasurer posts respectively, sources in the know of things said It seems that BJP and Congress have joined hands to run the AIFF as Kalyan Chaubey from BJP and NA Haris from Congress have reached an agreement for the post of president and vice-president posts. Sources said that once the executive committee is elected, the Delhi Football's president Saji Prabhakaran is expected to take over as the General Secretary of AIFF."The decision has been taken in a Delhi hotel, on yesterday evening that the State Associations will nominate the candidates unanimously and elect them without contest," he said.

On Wednesday, the state associations had called a press conference but postponed it due to unavoidable reasons. The sources told that the reason behind the postponement of press meet was disagreement on the few names. But now it has been decided that both Chaubey and Haris will be elected unanimously.

According to the sources, the 14 executive committee members will be: Avijit Paul -Orissa, Syed Imtiaz Husainv-Bihar, Menla Ethenpa - Sikkim, Mohan Lal - Chattisgarh, Lalnghinglova Hmar - Mizoram, K Neibou Sekhose - Nagaland, Deepak Sharma -Himachal Pradesh, Arif Ali - Uttarakhand , Vijay Bali - Punjab, Anilkumar P -Kerala, G.P.Palguna - Telengana, Dilip Singh Shekhawat - Rajasthan, Maloji Raje Chhatrapati - The Western India Football Association (Maharashtra), Valanka Natasha Alemao- Goa. The filing of nomination will start from today at 11-00 am. The team is a combination of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Congress. After the SC order, the returning officer Umesh Sharma stated that the election will be held on September 2 at the AIFF headquarter in Delhi and the results could be announced either on September 2 or 3.

U.S OPEN QUALIFIERS: YUKI BHAMBRI MOVES INTO SECOND ROUND; RAMKUMAR, SUMIT CRASH OUT

New York | Agencies

Indian tennis player Yuki Bhambri advanced to the second round of the U.S Open 2022 men's singles qualifiers after a hard-fought win over Moldovas Radu Albot, here.

Bhambri, 552 in the ATP rankings, beat world No. 107 Radu Albot 7-6(4), 6-4 in one hour and 34 minutes on the hard courts of USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center on Wednesday night.In the first set, Yuki got off to a slow start and was broken in his first service by Radu Albot. The Indian tennis player immediately returned the favour and then built on the momentum to go 5-2 up in the seventh game. However, the former junior Australian Open champion, with a higher number of unforced errors and doubles faults, allowed his opponent a way back into the set which stretched into the tiebreaker.

The Indian won the first five points in the tiebreaker and then thwarted a late comeback to take the first set. The unforced errors kept flowing from Bhambri's racket in the second set but with decent net play and better break-point conversions, he won the second set to qualify for the next round, an olympics.com report said. The 30-year-old Bhambri will take on world No. 155 Zizou Bergs of Belgium in the second qualifying round of the Grand Slam event on Thursday. There are a total of three qualifying rounds in the men's singles before the main draw action gets underway at the U'S Open 2022.

Jack Draper ends Thiem's run at Winston-Salem Open

North Carolina | Agencies

Dominic Thiem's run at the Winston-Salem Open came to a halt as Jack Draper claimed a comfortable straight sets victory here on Wednesday.In the first meeting between Draper and Thiem, it was the 20-year-old Brit who sealed his place in the last eight with a routine 6-1, 6-4 victory.

Draper charged ahead in the first set, creating five chances to break and taking two of them, while his sole successfully converted break point in the second set paved the way for the Winston-Salem debutant to serve out the match.

Draper did not offer up a single break opportunity, and said, "I was really good behind serve, really solid. In the second set it was tough because he was coming up with some amazing shots. It was a real honour to be on court with Dominic. He's an amazing player."I started confidently, I started well. I was hitting through the ball, felt good in the conditions. It was a difficult start because I felt like everyone was supporting Dominic and I knew that I needed to come out confidently and sharp, and that's what I did."Draper will meet Marc-Andrea Huesler in the quarter-finals, after the world number 102 overcame Ilya Ivashka, reports . Botic van de Zandschulp is the favourite after Grigor Dimitrov's retirement due to illness with the Dutchman progressing to the last eight by defeating Spain's Jaume Munar in straight sets. He will face Benjamin Bonzi after the Frenchman's 7-5, 6-2 defeat of Thiago Monteiro.

Maxime Cressy will face Adrian Mannarino after coming from a set down to beat Lorenzo Sonego 6-7 (4-7), 6-2, 7-6 (7-3), while Richard Gasquet and Laslo Djere make up the other quarter-final tie after respective victories over Steve Johnson and Jason Kubler.

BWF World Championships: Prannoy pips Lakshya; Arjun-Kapila, Satwik-Chirag into quarters, Saina bows out

Tokyo | Agencies

Ace Indian shuttler H.S Prannoy advanced to the men's singles quarter-finals in the BWF World Championships 2022 after beating compatriot Lakshya Sen in a round of 16 clash, here on Thursday.

Prannoy came from a game down to beat the ninth-seeded Lakshya 17-21, 21-16, 21-17 in the round of 16. With this win, the veteran continued his fine run of form in the tournament having beaten former world champion Kento Momota in the previous round. The 30-year-old will next face China's Zhao Jun Peng in the last eight and will be assured of a first BWF World Championships medal if he wins.

After an even start, Lakshya clawed his way ahead, picking the shuttles early and hurrying his senior compatriot to take the opening game. However, Prannoy was smart to change the strategy and engaged the recently-crowned Commonwealth champion Sen in long rallies to take the second. In the decider, Prannoy took the attack to his opponent, dictating the pace of the rallies and displaying impressive defence against Lakshya's attacks. He led for most of the game and despite a slight wobble towards the end, Prannoy took victory when Lakshya sent a return long.

"It's always tough [playing against Sen], he's one player that's improved tremendously over the past couple of years. It's always tough to beat players who have a lot of confidence," Prannoy said after the game."His defense is super solid and there are no easy points with him. It took its toll on my body and I'm wondering how I will play tomorrow. I'll have to get a good sleep tonight as the last one I lost against him," he added.

Earlier, the pair of M.R Arjun and Dhruv Kapila had made history by becoming the first Indian men's doubles pair to make the quarterfinals at the world championships after beating Singapore's Hee Kong Yai Terry and Loh Kean Hean 18-21, 21-15, 21-16.They were soon joined by seventh-seeded pair Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy who beat Denmark's Jeppe Bay and Lasse Molhede 21-12, 21-10. Chirag-Satwik will next face reigning world champions Takuro Hoki and Yugo Kobayashi while Arjun-Kapila is up against the 'Daddies' Mohammad Ahsan and Hendra Setiawan of Indonesia.

However, Olympic medallist and former world No. 1 Saina Nehwal's campaign came to an end after she lost 17-21, 21-16, 13-21 to Thai shuttler Busanan Ongbamrungphan. The 32-year-old produced some of her classic moments -- the deceptive drops and long returns to push her opponent back. But the two-time world championships medallist committed too many unforced errors and was unable to sustain the high level throughout the match.

Ultimate Kho Kho: Odisha Juggernauts halt Chennai Quick Guns' winning run

Pune | Agencies

Odisha juggernauts ended Chennai Quick Guns' impressive winning run with a 10-point victory in the inaugural edition of Ultimate Kho Kho at the Shree Shiv Chhatrapati Sports Complex, Mahalunge, here on Wednesday.

It was a third successive win for Odisha Juggernauts. With this win Odisha Juggernauts not only entered the Top-2 on the points table with 12 points but also completed a league double over Chennai Quick Guns. Earlier, they had won by eight points. Nilesh Jadhav scored 15 points for Odisha Juggernauts which included five brilliant dives, skipper Milind Chavarekar and Suraj Lande supported him well with nine and eight points respectively .For Chennai Quick Guns, P Narasayya and Manoj Patil struck eight points each.

With Gowtham MK and Jagannatha Murmu securing dream runs by defending for 2.33 minutes and 2.59 minutes respectively, Odisha Juggernauts didn't allow Chennai Quick Guns to score easy points and restrict them at 19-4 lead in the first seven minutes. Chennai Quick Guns came into the match after three back-to-back wins. Despite in-form Ramji Kashyap presenting some challenge in the defence with his stay of 2.23 minutes, Odisha Juggernauts responded well to level the scores within the first five minutes of second turn before they ended the first innings with 28-19 lead.All-rounder Subhasis Santra claimed four bonus points for Odisha Juggernauts with his stay of 3.04 minutes as Chennai Quick Guns could manage to get only a narrow five-point lead with 37-32 at the end of third turn.

Odisha Juggernauts added 19 more points to their tally in the final turn to end the game comfortably with 51-41 scoreLater tonight, Mumbai Khiladis will take on Rajasthan Warriors in the second match of the day. On Thursday, Odisha Juggernauts will clash with Rajasthan Warriors while Gujarat Giants will take on Telugu Yoddhas. Season 1 of India's first-ever franchise-based league has been featuring six franchises-Chennai Quick Guns, Gujarat Giants, Mumbai Khiladis, Odisha Juggernauts, Rajasthan Warriors and Telugu Yoddhas.

PGA Tour stars agree to play more lucrative events

Berlin | Agencies

Top players have made an "unprecedented commitment" to the PGA Tour by agreeing to further enhancements to the schedule .PGA TOUR commissioner Jay Monahan on Wednesday detailed four key items that will be introduced to bring the game's leading players together more often.The latest enhancements were announced a week after Tiger Woods met fellow PGA Tour players amid the ongoing threat posed by Golf, reports.

There will be additional elevated events for 2023, a commitment from top players to compete in at least 20 PGA Tour events per year, an expansion to the player impact program and guaranteed league-minimum earnings for full Tour members.

Monahan said at the TOUR Championship, "Our top players are firmly behind the Tour, helping us deliver an unmatched product to our fans, who will be all but guaranteed to see the best players competing against each other in 20 events or more throughout the season.""Today is a culmination of a strengthened partnership between the Tourand the players, and amongst the players themselves. "It's unprecedented for our Tour and a testament to who these guys are and what they believe in," he added.

Formula 2 Championships: Indian racer Jehan Daruvala hoping for Spa reset

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Indian racer Jehan Daruvala heads to the iconic Spa-Francorchamps track this weekend hoping his Prema Racing team has turned the page on its recent struggles as the Formula 2 championship returns from the summer break for its Belgian round. The 23-year-old, who opened the season with a streak of five podiums from six rounds, and his teammate Dennis Hauger endured a lean run of results over the races leading up to the summer break as Prema suffered from a puzzling lack of pace.

But having recharged his batteries over the break and analyzed with Prema the team's struggles, Daruvala, a triple F2 winner, is ready to hit the reset button and hopeful of being back in the fight at the front. Daruvala said, "I can't wait to get back in the car and go racing again. I've had a good break at home with my family and friends and I feel rested, rejuvenated and ready to go. The races leading up to the summer break didn't go as planned. But we've worked hard to understand why and I'm excited to see what we can do this weekend."

The 7-km long Spa-Francorchamps track, one of the most historic and daunting circuits on the calendar, is Daruvala's favourite venue. The Red Bull-backed racer won there in 2018 while racing in European Formula 3 and followed that up with a podium in the FIA F3 championship the following year. This weekend will be only the second outing for Daruvala around the track in Formula 2 machinery. The series will race as a support event to the Formula One Belgian Grand Prix.

NADAL, SWIATEK, GAUFF LEAD UKRAINE SUPPORT AT U.S. OPEN

New York | Agencies

The world's best tennis players will face one another over the next fortnight with the US Open trophy at stake. On Wednesday evening, however, they banded together for a 'Tennis Plays For Peace' exhibition in support of Ukrainian humanitarian relief. Rafael Nadal, Iga Swiatek, Coco Gauff, John McEnroe and many more stars thrilled a packed Louis Armstrong Stadium for two hours of tennis to raise money for those suffering in Ukraine, with recently retired Ukrainian players Sergiy Stakhovsky and Olga Savchuk in attendance.

"It has been a very tough couple of years in terms of [the] pandemic, now with the war," Nadal said."Excited to be back of course, always a pleasure to play in New York and in front of probably the best crowd of the world ."After an opening ceremony featuring Stakhovsky Savchuk and host Patrick McEnroe, the Ukrainian national anthem was performed and Nadal took the court for a mixed doubles match alongside Swiatek against Gauff and McEnroe."Being on the court with John, Rafa and Iga, World No. 1, it's really crazy here in New York," Gauff said.

"I'm happy that I'm able to do it for this cause and you guys all know me, I like to speak out when it's right. I'm glad that I was able to be a part of this."Swiatek snuck in a joke about 'Coach Rafa', "On the last point (he) told me that John is going to serve wide and he was wrong. He's wrong sometimes, wow!" she said as Nadal laughed. Swiatek has previously held her own charity event in support of Ukrainian children. The World No. 1 was happy to spend her time for the cause again."I'm pretty happy that we are united and that we as public persons and athletes are doing so much. For sure the event that I did in Poland was a great experience for me. That was the first event that gained so much attention in tennis in Poland," Swiatek said.

Big B to make debut as music composer

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The upcoming film 'Chup' will mark the debut of veteran superstar Amitabh Bachchan as a music composer, director R Balki divulged the details as the film is set to release on September 23.

The film is a romantic psychopath thriller, a thought Balki had after 'Cheeni Kum' and decided to write it much later. Talking about the same, Balki said "'Chup' is special for more than one reason. For me the biggest reason is it marks the official debut of Amitabh Bachchan as a music composer."

Big B and Balki have a long standing association and the superstar has worked with him in almost all of his films. The director then revealed how the music composing debut for Big B unfolded, "Amitji saw 'Chup' and played an instinctive original melody on his piano as he relived the film. It was his way of expressing his feelings for the film, paying a tribute. This composition, his gift to the film, will be the end title track of 'Chup'. I don't think there can be an artist whose sensitivity can beat Bachchan's and 'Chup' has his touch!"

The film stars Sunny Deol, Dulquer Salmaan, Shreya Dhanwanthary and Pooja Bhatt. The original story is by R Balki, with the screenplay and dialogues co-written by R Balki, critic-turned-writer Raja Sen and Rishi Virmani.

I always had a soft corner for black cats, big or small: Sadaa

Team Absolute | Chennai

Actress Sadaa, who has been part of several blockbuster films in Tamil and Telugu, has now also turned into an avid wildlife photographer. The actress, who has played the female lead in several blockbusters including Vikram-starrer 'Anniyan', 'Unnale Unnale' and 'Jayam', recently put out on Instagram, pictures of a black panther she had shot in Pench, Madhya Pradesh. Posting her pictures of the panther called Shyama, the actress said, "She is young, she is bold, she is curious and playful, none other than the young beauty of Pench, Shyama, who's taken the wildlife enthusiasts' world by storm.

"She was seen an evening before I reached Pench last time on August 12. Just a couple of days after I finished my trip of four dry safaris and headed back home, she was sighted again. "I fell in love almost instantly seeing her images. I have always had a softer corner for black cats, big or small, but there was no way I was going to travel back.

"By then she was being seen in almost every safari. I was resisting the temptation so hard until Dr Priyansha called me late night saying, "Come if you can". In spite of having a work schedule a day later in Hyderabad, I still decided to take the first flight to see this beauty. Never have I done anything as insane as this. But it was so well worth it! "I have goofed up the images this time, so this is all I have to share of her."

Shankar to direct Ram Charan's 'RC15', Kamal's 'Indian 2' simultaneously

Team Absolute | Chennai

Ever since the massive success of RRR, Ram Charan fans are eagerly waiting to see him on the big screens yet again. He is presently working on S Shankar's drama, tentatively titled RC15.

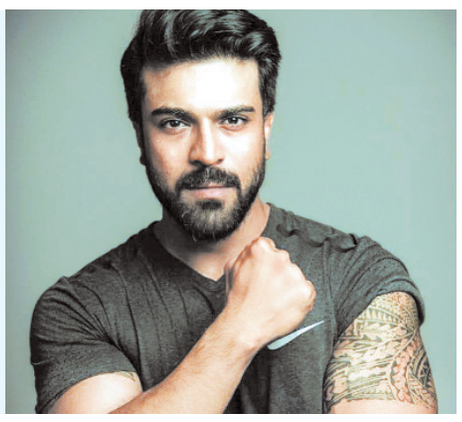
The Telugu cinema, which was at a standstill, will begin shooting on September 1st. This means that shoots for some much-awaited films will resume.

Giving an update on Kamal Hasaan's Indian 2 and Ram Charan's tentatively titled film RC 15, director A Shankar shared a tweet. He confirmed that shoot of both the films will resume simultaneously.

For the unversed, the decision of halting shooting was taken as production costs of the film have mounted multifold in recent times, whereas the theatrical revenues have dropped to a new low.

Talking about the films, apart from Kamal Hasaan, the cast of Indian 2 includes, Kajal Aggarwal, Bobby Simha, and Siddharth. Additionally, it also stars Rakul Preet Singh, Priya Bhavani Shankar, Guru Somasundaram, and Samuthirakani in key roles.

Whereas, Ram Charan will be sharing screen space with Kiara Advani in the film. If the reports are to be believed, the RRR actor will essay a double role in the movie. While the team has already filmed a major portion of the flick in Amritsar and Vizag, the latest schedule will commence from the first week of September in Hyderabad and Vizag.



SAYANTANI IS ON HARNESS ALL DAY, SPENDS TWO HOURS ON MAKEUP EVERY DAY

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Many are familiar with the famous line 'Khul ja sim sim', a character which follows commands in the story of 'Alibaba and Forty Thieves'; and now, Sayantani Ghosh is all set to play the role of Sim Sim in 'Alibaba - Dastaan-e-Kabul'.

She shares: "I am exploring Sim Sim's identity and journey in new ways with each shoot. Apart from being on a harness all day long and devoting 2 hours for the makeup and costume every day, there are times when I'm shooting without the company of any co-stars for hours, which is a really draining process. However, all these emotional and physical challenges are worth it based on the incredible work of our entire crew.

The 'Naagin' fame further elaborates about her character and adds: "Sim Sim is driven by love and becomes the ringmaster to orchestrate the narrative in 'Alibaba - Dastaan-e-Kabul'. She doesn't shy away from being vulnerable, and the journey in creating something so refreshing."

While talking about the show, the actress emphasises that the audience is not going to watch the similar story like they saw or read many times and most important sim sim won't be a character following commands but will be shown as a villain.

"I'm sure you're all familiar with the story of Alibaba, his love for the orphan kids, and the forty thieves. However, this is not the regular Alibaba and chaalis chor (Alibaba and forty thieves) story of a cave replete with treasure. In fact, our story is packed with intense twists and dramatic events.

"Apart from looking at the countless journeys of Alibaba and the hurdles he overcomes, you'll also for the first time witness the character of Sim Sim as not just a command, but an a character in this show; a villain whose emotions and past is given immense importance in the show," she concludes.

Rashmika puts pics that she thinks describe her

Team Absolute | Chennai

Actress Rashmika Mandanna has now put out four pictures of herself on social media, saying these were the actual pictures that described her as she really was. Taking to Instagram, Rashmika said: "I don't really remember when this was shot.. but other than being an actor, I think these are the four pictures that just describe me as ME!"

"They say na - that pictures can speak a thousand words. It such does. I don't remember when these were taken but I think I remember the feeling I had when these were taken. So well, this is me in my own little world." "It makes me feel calm... looking at these pictures. It's so strange but I love it!," she wrote. The actress has been having a dream run in both Tamil and Telugu industries with all her recent films from 'Pushpa' to the recently released 'Sita Ramam' going on to become superhits. She is now working on Vamshi Paidipally's bilingual film, 'Varisu', featuring actor Vijay in the lead.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY

Shiny Doshi

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