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RBI HIKES REPO RATE BY 25 BPS, INFLATION OUTLOOK MIXED

The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) on Wednesday hiked the repo rate by 25 basis points to 6.50 per cent. Wednesday's MPC meeting is the last one for this fiscal. The repo rate is the rate at which the RBI lends to the banks.

Chennai | Agencies

Announcing the hike, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said the MPC decided to hike the policy rate by 25 bps to 6.5 per cent. The MPC also decided to remain focused on withdrawal of accommodation to ensure that inflation remains within the target going forward, while supporting growth.

As expected, there was a split in the rate hike decision with four members voting for and two against.

Dr. Shashanka Bhide, Dr. Rajiv Ranjan, Dr. Michael Debabrata Patra and Das voted in favour of rate hike while Dr. Ashima Goyal and Prof. Jayanth R. Varma voted against. Similarly, Bhide, Ranjan, Patra and Das voted to remain focused on withdrawal of accommodation to ensure that inflation remains within the target going forward, while Goyal and Varma voted against this part of the resolution. Das said the 25 bps hike was considered correct at this juncture. It also provides an elbow room to look at the incoming data.

According to Das, after the repo rate hike the standing deposit facility (SDF) rate stands adjusted to 6.25 per cent, and the marginal standing facility (MSF) rate and the Bank Rate



to 6.75 per cent. He said the MPC also decided to keep a vigil on the inflation rate and it remains within the band.

According to him, the outlook for inflation is mixed. "While prospects for the rabi crop have improved, especially for wheat and

oilseeds, risks from adverse weather events remain. The global commodity price outlook, including crude oil, is subject to uncertainties on demand prospects as well as from risks of supply disruptions due to geopolitical tensions. Commodity prices are expected to face

upward pressures with the easing of Covid-related mobility restrictions in some parts of the world," Das said.

The ongoing pass-through of input costs to output prices, especially in services, could continue to exert pressures on core inflation, he added. With RBI's survey point to some softening of input cost and output price pressures in manufacturing and considering an average crude oil price (Indian basket) of US\$ 95 per barrel, Das said the inflation for the current fiscal 2022-23 will be at 6.5 per cent and for Q4 at 5.7 per cent.

Das said the easing of inflation in the last two months was driven by strong deflation in vegetables, which may dissipate with the summer season uptick.

"Headline inflation excluding vegetables has been rising well above the upper tolerance band and may remain elevated, especially with high core inflation pressures. Inflation, therefore, remains a major risk to the outlook," he added.

On the growth front, Das said the gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to grow at 6.4 per cent during 2023-24 with Q1 growth rate at 7.8 per cent, Q2-6.2 per cent, Q3 6 per cent and Q4 5.8 per cent and the risks are evenly balanced.

One client will not affect Indian banking system: RBI Governor on Adani row

Chennai | Agencies

An individual client Adani Group will not bring down the Indian banking system as the country's banking sector is resilient and strong, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das said.



Queried about the Indian bank's exposure to the Adani Group and the comments of credit rating agencies, Das said the Indian banking system is strong and an individual client will not affect it.

Das said the banks lend money based on fundamentals of the project and not based on the market capitalisation of the company. He also said the credit appraisal methods of Indian banks have improved.

According to him, two years back, the RBI rationalised the large exposure norms for banks and the norms are being complied.

Adding further, RBI Deputy Governor Mahesh Kumar Jain said the exposure of banks is based on underlying assets and the exposure of the banking sector against shares is insignificant.

Global credit rating agencies Fitch Ratings and

Moody's Investors Service on Tuesday said that Indian banks' exposure to the Adani Group does not present any major risk to the banks' standalone credit profiles.

"Banks' exposures to Adani are not large enough to affect their credit quality materially. We estimate that their exposures to Adani are not more than 1 per cent of their total loans. While we estimate that the exposures are larger for public sector banks than for private sector banks, they are smaller than 1 per cent of total loans for most banks," Moody's said. Fitch Ratings said the economic and sovereign implications of the Adani controversy remain limited. However, there is a tail risk that fallout from the controversy could broaden and influence India's sovereign rating, with knock-on effects for bank Issuer Default Rating.

GARUDA AEROSPACE DRONES TO BE DEPLOYED IN QUAKE-HIT TURKEY

Chennai | Agencies

Drones from India's Garuda Aerospace will be deployed in a rescue mission in the quake-hit Turkey by the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), said a top company official.



"Garuda Aerospace has always stepped up during crises and has created massive impact by deploying drones for various emergency situations. Given the current situation in Turkey, Garuda Aerospace is deploying drones to support the ongoing rescue and relief operations."

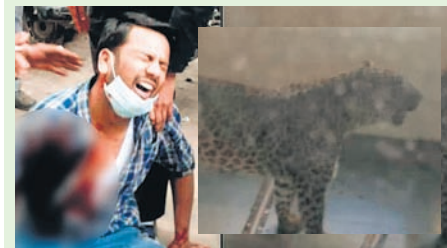
Agnishwar Jayaprakash, Founder and CEO, said. The NDRF had requested Garuda Aerospace to provide their Directorate General Civil Aviation (DGCA)-approved drones for disaster management operations.

The city based drone-as-a-service start-up Garuda Aerospace will

deploy their Droni Drone for surveillance in the most affected areas to identify where victims could be trapped under rubble piles and a modified Kisan Drone which will carry payloads that will help transport emergency medicines, supplies and food for victims.

Earlier, Garuda Aerospace deployed drones for rescue and relief operations to the Chamoli glacier burst at Uttarakhand and supported the locust control operation in Rajasthan.

LEOPARD ATTACKS 3 IN GHAZIABAD COURT



Ghaziabad: A leopard entered the premises of a Ghaziabad court on Wednesday, and attacked three persons including a lawyer, cobbler and police constable near the old building complex, an official said. The cobbler has been admitted to a hospital after he sustained critical injuries. Several people were also injured in the commotion. All the rooms of the old building were evacuated as soon as news of the leopard entering the premises spread. A video of the incident has surfaced, where three lawyers are seen patrolling the building with sticks to catch the leopard. One of them was filming the video when suddenly the big cat attacked them, injuring one lawyer. A 12-member team of the Forest Department carrying nets and cages rushed to the spot for rescue operations, a source said. Currently, the main building has been cordoned off and the forest department officials have been carrying out attempts to rescue the animal. According to eyewitnesses, the leopard was first seen under the stairs in the CJM court building.

Delhi HC asks social media platforms to take down sexually explicit videos of judicial officer

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi High Court on Wednesday asked the social media platforms, including WhatsApp and Google, to take down URLs or posts relating to a sexually explicit video of a judicial officer, which had gone viral on Internet on November 29, 2022, if not already removed as per the interim restraining order passed a day later.

A single-judge bench of Justice Yashwant Varma was dealing with a suit by someone whose identity has not been revealed as the court allowed a request to hide it, seeking a permanent injunction to stop the further circulation of the video.

The court allowed the social media platforms to examine independently in case the plaintiff, in the future, brings to the notice of intermediaries any persisting URLs of the video.

With directing the removal of existing URLs, the court also ordered that the plaintiff will be entitled for refund of court fees. After the plaintiff's counsel said that the defendants were taking remedial steps post the interim order and the plaintiff claimed no further relief of damages and prayed disposal of the suit, Justice Varma dis-



posed of the matter.

However, the defendants' counsel objected to it as it was based on the interim order saying that it would place them under a "continuing obligation" to attend to the issues that take place in future.

In wake of the High Court ordering the taking down of sexually explicit video of a judicial officer, social media platforms on December 9 had told the court that they have removed the video and blocked several URLs.

However, WhatsApp had told the court that it is not possible to erase the video

from the platform unless it is provided with users' phone numbers and the court's order. Appearing for WhatsApp, senior advocate Kapil Sibal had said that if they are provided with phone numbers, they will pull down the video if ordered by the court. At this, Justice Varma had told the plaintiff's counsel to provide the phone numbers so that WhatsApp can take requisite steps.

The HC on November 30, directed the Centre and social media platforms to ensure that the offending video be not shared, distributed, forwarded or posted further.

Justice Varma had also asked for the video to be taken down and blocked from all ISPs, messaging platforms, and social media platforms.

"Bearing in mind the sexually explicit nature of the contents of that video and taking into consideration the imminent, grave and irreparable harm that is likely to be caused to the privacy rights of the plaintiff, an ad interim ex parte injunction is clearly warranted," the court had said.

The plea had sought a permanent direction to restrain the social media platforms from publishing or telecasting the video in question.

US says Chinese balloon also spied on India, others

Washington | Agencies

The US believes that the suspected Chinese surveillance balloon that it shot down on February 4 over the Atlantic Ocean, was part of a wider effort by Beijing to spy on military assets in other countries, including India.



Meanwhile, an Indian official had attended a briefing conducted by Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman on Monday for representatives from 40 embassies.

These developments were first reported by The Washington Post citing unidentified US officials who further said that such a balloon had been sighted over five continents.

The Post reported that US officials believe the surveillance balloon effort, which has operated for several years partly out of Hainan province off China's south coast, "has collected information on military assets in countries and areas of emerging strategic interest to China including Japan, India, Vietnam, Taiwan and the Philippines".

No other details were available of the spying on Indian military assets, not about the extent or time period.

"What the Chinese have done is taken an unbelievably old technology, and basically married it with modern communications and observation capabilities," an official told the Post.

The suspected Chinese spy balloon which was shot down by an American F-22 fighter jet over the Atlantic Ocean on February 4.

US defence officials had first announced they were tracking the

"strange object" on February 2, and waited until it was safely over water before shooting it down.

The officials described it as a violation of American sovereignty and internal laws.

Debris of the balloon and its payload were salvaged off the coast of Myrtle Beach in South Carolina a day after it was shot down.

The development came at a time when the two countries were moving to put the relationship on an even keel, building on the first in-person summit between Presidents Joe Biden of the US and Xi Jinping of China on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Bali.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken also called off a scheduled visit to Beijing for wide-ranging talks, including a meeting with President Xi, even after China had expressed regret in a rare display of contrition -- it said the "airship" was meant to study weather and had strayed into American airspace.

China also expressed regret over the incident.

Viral photos of teen help, tortured, lead to Gurugram couple's arrest

Gurugram | Agencies

A 13-year-old domestic help was rescued from her employer's house in Gurugram late last evening - where she suffered horrific abuse over the last few months, the police said.

The girl, who is from Jharkhand, was found with wounds all over her body, officials said, adding she has been admitted to a hospital for treatment.

Doctors are also conducting her medical examination to ascertain if she was sexually assaulted, it's learnt. The girl was allegedly beaten with hot tongs and sticks by the couple, sources said. Initial investigation suggests the couple would starve and thrash the girl accusing her of "not working properly" and stealing food.

"She was not given food for days. The teen used to eat leftover food from the dustbin," an official said. The girl was rescued by the police following a complaint filed by a Gurugram-based NGO. The NGO contacted police after a Twitter



thread on the girl's condition by an activist went viral yesterday.

The photographs shared by activist Deepika Narayan Bhardwaj show the girl with bruises and burn injuries on her forehead, lips, cheeks and arms. She was hired by the couple last year through a placement agency to take care of their three-month-old daughter.

The couple has been arrested and a case registered under Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences or POCSO Act among other charges.

The girl's photographs, which are in wide circulation on social media now, have evoked strong reactions. Sources say the arrested woman has been sacked by the organisation she worked for.



TRANS COUPLE BLESSED WITH BABY IN KERALA

Kozhikode: A Keralite transgender couple, who recently announced pregnancy, was blessed with a baby at a state-run hospital in Kozhikode on Wednesday, considered to be the first such case in the country.

"The baby was born by around 9.30 am through a Caesarean Section at the Government Medical College Hospital," Ziya Paval, one of the trans partners. Both the baby and Zahhad, her partner who delivered the child, are doing well, Paval added. However, the trans person declined to reveal the gender identity of the newborn and said they did not want to make it public right now. Ziya Paval recently took to Instagram and announced that Zahhad was eight months pregnant "We are about to realise my dream of becoming a mother and his dream of becoming a father. An eight-month-old foetus is now in (Zahhad's) belly... From what we came to know, this is the first trans man's pregnancy in India..." Paval had said in the Instagram post.

Paval and Zahhad have been together for the past three years.



'UNTIL FURTHER ORDERS': SC HALTS CONSTRUCTION WITHIN CORE AREAS OF TIGER RESERVES, NATIONAL PARKS

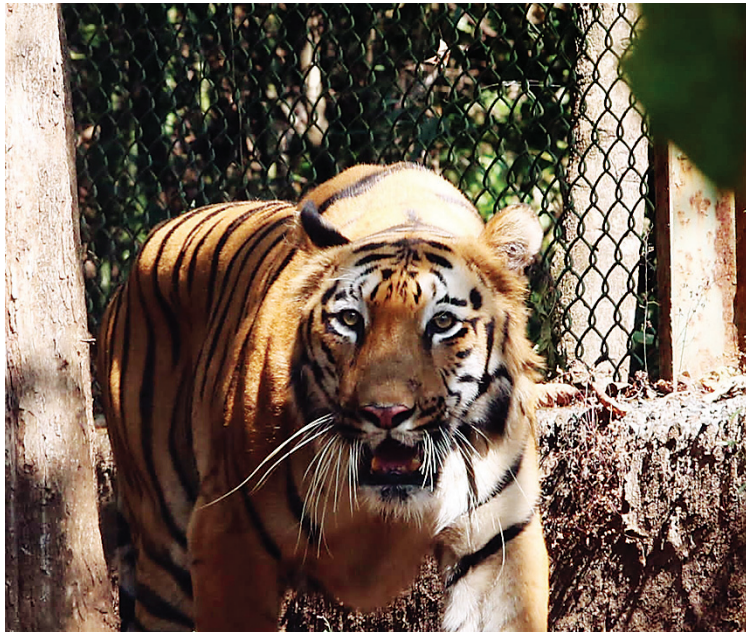
Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday expressed its discontent with setting up of zoos and safaris inside tiger reserves and national parks.

It said prima facie it does not appreciate the necessity of zoos inside tiger reserves and national parks and restrained authorities from doing any construction within the core areas notified in tiger reserves, national parks, and wildlife sanctuaries.

A bench of Justices B.R. Gavai and Vikram Nath sought reply from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) detailing the necessity of having safaris in national parks. It said that until further orders "we restrain the authorities from doing any construction within the core areas notified in tiger reserves, national parks and wildlife sanctuaries".

A report by the Central Empowered Committee (CEC), a panel constituted by the apex court,



was also brought to the notice of the bench. The CEC asked the Union

Environment Ministry to amend or withdraw guidelines related to setting up zoos and safaris within tiger

reserves and wildlife sanctuaries. It further sought discontinuation of the use of wildlife habitats for tourism activities which are non-site specific. Also, approvals given for setting up zoos and safaris within tiger reserves and protected areas should be withdrawn forthwith, it added.

The panel, in its report, said the location of such safaris and zoos shall not endanger the life of the natural population and eco-tourism and wildlife education should not be at the cost of survival of the endangered species.

The apex court was hearing a matter connected with alleged illegal constructions in tiger reserves and the establishment of a tiger safari in the buffer area of Corbett Tiger Reserve in Uttarakhand.

In an application, advocate Gaurav Kumar Bansal raised the issue of alleged illegal construction of buildings and water bodies by way of cutting trees illegally in Sanher Forest Rest House towards Pakhrao Forest Rest House etc.

K'taka Cong chief gets ED summons, daughter receives CBI notice

Shivamogga (Karnataka) | Agencies

Karnataka Congress President D.K. Shivakumar said on Wednesday that he has been asked by the ED to appear before it on February 24 while his daughter, Ishwarya, has been served a notice by the Central Bureau of Investigation.

He chided that the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the CBI were only meant for the opposition parties.

The CBI has issued a notice regarding disproportionate assets to Ishwarya and directed her to submit various documents. Sources said that the agencies have completed the investigation and the CBI was making preparations to file the charge sheet.

Reacting to the development, Shivakumar said to the media, "I can't do anything about it. All developments are happening in this juncture. The CBI has sent a notice to my daughter. They are asking for documents regarding matters such as college fees."

"The ED has called me for inquiry on February 24. Should I participate in Prajadhvani Yatra in Karnataka or go to ED? ED is existent only for us (opposition). For the ruling party there is no ED and CBI. Let it be, I will certainly know what will happen," he said.



Sources said that Shivakumar's problems may amount as the CBI is likely to file a charge sheet in the disproportionate assets case and the timing may coincide with the polls. The CBI has been conducting investigation in this regard for the past two years. Multiple raids have been conducted on residences of Shivakumar and his relatives.

CBI lodges FIR against 4 persons for misappropriating Rs 10.13cr

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has lodged an FIR against four businessmen who run a liquor shop in Dehradun for allegedly misappropriating Rs 10.13 crore that was transferred to their account mistakenly from the account of Uttarakhand Power Corporation Limited (UPCL), an official said on Wednesday. The CBI got a complaint on November 9, 2022, in this respect from the Punjab National Bank (PNB) against four individuals.

The PNB alleged that on March 12, 2021, a sum of Rs 10.13 crore was wrongly debited from the account of Uttarakhand Power Corporation Limited (UPCL), and the entire money was mistakenly credited to the



account of a liquor shop -- run in partnership between Ram Sagar Jaiswal, Anita Jaiswal, Raj Kumar Jaiswal and Kuldeep.

The bank said Rs 10.13 crore was transferred by PNB employees -- Mohit Kumar and Manish Sharma.

"The wrongful beneficiary 'The Liquor Shop' illegally

transferred the entire Rs 10.13 crore, which did not belong to them, to various other accounts between March 12, 2021 to March 29, 2021. When the PNB made efforts to recover the amount, only an amount of Rs 3.65 crore could be recovered from 'The Liquor Shop' till November 9, 2022. The amount yet to be recovered is Rs 6,69,66,448 plus applicable interest," read the complaint. The bank alleged "The Liquor Shop", and thereby, facilitated the accused to misappropriate the amount of Rs 10.13 crore.

Based on their complaint, the CBI has now lodged an FIR under Sections 120-B, 403, 420 IPC and 13(2) read with 13(1)(a) of the Prevention of Corruption Act.

No arrests have been made as of now.

Coal scam: ED recovers Rs 1 crore from businessman's office in Kolkata

Kolkata | Agencies

Enforcement Directorate (ED) sleuths, probing the multi-crore coal-smuggling case in West Bengal, reportedly recovered an amount worth Rs 1 crore from the office of a Kolkata-based businessman after a marathon raid and search operation at his residence and office on Wednesday.

Although the ED sleuths have refused to disclose the name of the businessman concerned, they said they have got specific clues that the money recovered from his office was part of the coal scam proceeds which the said business was supposed to divert to different channels.

As per the latest report, the ED sleuths have detained the businessman for questioning. Sources said that the said businessman was involved in multiple business activities - the prime of which were real



estate and food chain. He is also an owner of a popular dhaba in Kolkata. It is learnt that the team conduct-

ing raid and search operations on Wednesday at the residence and office of the said businessman was

led by three special officers of the ED who arrived from New Delhi especially for this purpose.

Sources said that the name of the businessman in question came from the examination of different documents and statements given by different witnesses in connection with the coal smuggling scam. Sources said that the names of some other businessmen on this count have also surfaced and similar raid and search operations will be conducted at their premises as well in the days to come.

Recently Ratnesha Burma, a close associate of the prime accused in the coal scam Binay Mishra, surrendered at a special CBI court at Asansol in West Bardwan district. Burma was reported involved in managing the accounts of the coal smuggling scam proceeds. During the course of interrogation, he gave crucial clues to the investigating officials.

UGANDAN NATIONALS HELD IN GOA FOR POSSESSING DRUGS

Panaji: Goa Police on Wednesday arrested two Ugandan nationals for allegedly possessing drugs, including ecstasy, cocaine and MDMA.

North Goa SP Nidhin Valsan informed that inputs were received from reliable sources that two women, both foreign nationals, were supplying drugs in the coastal region of Anjuna for past few days. "On Wednesday, two ladies who had come to supply drugs to prospective customers were detained and their personal search was conducted," he said. "During the search, seven gm Ecstasy valued at Rs 45,000, 10.3 gm of cocaine valued at Rs 82,400, and 3.4 gm MDMA valued at Rs 34,000 were recovered from their possession," the police said. "The accused women have been identified as Ssanyu Florence (28) and Nabankema Arisat (26), both Ugandan nationals," Valsan said.

UP GOVT SEEKS SOURCE OF FUNDING OF UNRECOGNISED MADRASAS NEAR INDO-NEPAL BORDER

Gorakhpur | Agencies

The Uttar Pradesh government has started an exercise to track sources of the money reaching around 1,500 unrecognised madrasas running along the Indo-Nepal border and collect information regarding the number of students studying there.

In a letter to district minority welfare officers of various districts, the registrar, Uttar Pradesh Madrasa Education Board, Jagmohan Singh has sought details about the strength of students along with income and expenses records of madrasas functioning at the borders.

Madrasas have to be categorised in three categories.



In the first category, the madrasas with strength of 100 to 200 students, while in the second category madrasas having

enrolment of over 200 to 500 students and in the last category, madrasa with over 500 students will be listed. Gorakhpur minori-

ty welfare officer Ashutosh Pandey said a letter to this effect had been received and the objective of the exercise was to update the record of Madrasa Board website.

These madrasas are located in Balrampur, Shravasti, Maharajanji, Siddharth Nagar, Bahraich and Lakhimpur Kheri districts. During the state government's 46-day madrasa survey conducted in September-October last year seeking information on 12 aspects, including their source of funding, most of these madrasas had claimed that they got 'zakat' from cities like Kolkata, Chennai, Mumbai, Delhi and Hyderabad but there was no record of the money that reached them.

GUJARAT MAN TRIES TO FLEE AFTER STABBING WIFE DIES IN ACCIDENT

Bhavnagar | Agencies

A man, who was trying to flee the spot allegedly after stabbing his wife over a domestic quarrel, was killed in a road accident in Ranghola village in Gujarat's Bhavnagar district.

On Tuesday night, Anil Jain stabbed Monika Jain, who succumbed to her injuries at a district hospital.

Complainant Hitesh Dave who is neighbour of the couple said Monika, a teacher in Omkar English Medium School, was stabbed by her husband over a heated argument.

After stabbing Monika with a

sharp-edged weapon on head, hands and in the chest, Anil tried to flee, but was killed in an accident, just a km away from the crime scene. Monika was first rushed to Sihor government hospital, where after primary treatment she was referred to Bhavnagar district hospital, where she succumbed to her injuries during treatment. Around 1.30 a.m. on Wednesday, police received a call about the body lying on the road near the telephone exchange of Ranghola village.

During investigation, it was found that the man, who died in a road accident, was none other than Anil Jain.

Over 4,000 youths cheated on pretext of 'gigolo', escort jobs, two arrested

Team Absolute | New Delhi

With the arrest of two men, the Delhi Police on Wednesday said they had busted a racket that duped over 4,000 youths of lakhs of rupees on the pretext of providing 'Gigolo' and 'Escort' jobs.

The accused have been identified as Kuldeep Singh Charan, 29, and Shyam Lal, 33, both residents of village Dantra near Jaipur.

Police said that Shyam Lal is fluent in both Hindi and English languages and also mimicking the voice of women after posing as NRI woman client to lure the victims.

The officials said that both the accused have been working on online cyber crime fraud of playboy services, escort services, gigolo and dating services since last four years.

"The web developer who developed the website used in the commission of tje crime has been served notice under Section 41.1 (A) Cr.P.C. and his role in the case is being examined," said the officials.

According to Deputy Commissioner of Police, Outer North, Devesh Kumar Mahla, a grievance was reported on Cyber Crime Reporting Portal from a resi-



dent of Gautam Colony, Narela.

In the complaint, the man stated that he was searching for an online job on Google when he came across a website "SP Playboy services.com" and contacted the given number mentioned in the website.

"In the name of providing a job, the accused demanded the initial

registration fee amounting to Rs 2,499 and subsequently issued an identity card to the complainant on Whatsapp. Thereafter the alleged started demanding amounts in the name of advance commission of 40 per cent, massage kit, pass code charges and hotel booking. In this process the alleged defrauded

complainant to the tune of Rs 39,190. After a preliminary enquiry, a case was registered and investigation taken up," said the DCP.

During investigation, police after getting server space details, call detail and money trail, nabbed Charan from Jaipur.

"Police recovered the mobile phone and number used in commission of the crime from the possession of the accused. The same mobile number was also mentioned on the website," said the DCP.

Further during the scanning of the money trail, the police team found that the cheated amount was settled in the co-accused bank account registered in the name of Shyam Lal.

"The mobile number given to the complainant in the name of NRI client was stated to be in the possession of Shyam Lal and he was also arrested," said the DCP.

As per police investigation so far, both the accused were online defrauding the people in the name of playboy services, gigolo services and escort services since 2017 and defrauded more than 4,000 people.

"They have used more than a dozen bank accounts for receiving the fraud amount," said the official, adding that further probe is on.

'Over 5K vehicles scrapped at Registered Vehicle Scrapping Facilities'

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A total of 5,359 private and 67 commercial vehicles have been scrapped at Registered Vehicle Scrapping Facilities (RVSFs) set up in accordance with the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) notification under Vehicle Scrapping Policy, between January 1, 2022 and January 31, 2023.

According to a written reply by the Ministry in Rajya Sabha on Wednesday, all RVSFs set up in accordance with MoRTH notification GSR 653 (E) dated September 23, 2021 are private entities.

There was no intervention by the government in the determination of fair price of vehicles to be scrapped.

The price of these vehicles is decided by the market forces as per the condition of the vehicle to be scrapped.

The Ministry of Steel has specified the mechanism to determine the reserve price of government-owned vehicles older than 15 years which are required to be scrapped in accordance with MoRTH notification GSR 29 (E) dated January 16, 2023.

In order to incentivise the scrapping of old unfit and



polluting (End of Life vehicles) vehicles, MoRTH has issued GSR 720 (E) dated October 5, 2021 to provide concession in the Motor Vehicle Tax of up to 25 per cent in case of non-transport vehicles and up to 15 per cent in case of transport vehicles which are purchased against the 'Certificate of Deposit'.

Moreover, MoRTH has also issued a notification through October 4, 2021, to waive off the registration fee of new vehicles, which are purchased against the Certificate of Registration of government vehicles shall expire after the lapse of 15 years from the date of initial registration. Disposal of such vehi-

नाम परिवर्तन
मैं अजय सिंह राजपूत (Ajay Singh Rajput) सर्वसाधारण को सूचित करता हूँ कि मेरी 10वीं एवं 12वीं की मार्कशीट में अजय सिंह (Ajay Singh) अंकित है। जबकि मेरा सही एवं सत्य नाम अजय सिंह राजपूत (Ajay Singh Rajput) है। अतः मुझे मेरे सही नाम अजय सिंह राजपूत (Ajay Singh Rajput) आत्मज श्री बलराम सिंह निवासी- म.नं. 115, पुरुषोत्तम नगर, सेमरा कला भोपाल के नाम से जाना एवं पहचाना जाए।



GRAND TEMPLE OF SANT RAVIDAS WILL BE BUILT IN SAGAR: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan announced that a huge and grand temple of Sant Ravidas will be built at Badtuma near Sagar at a cost of Rs. 100 crore. Creplets and teachings of Sant Ravidas will be engraved on the walls of the temple. The personality and work of Sant Ravidas will also be displayed in the temple premises. The CM said that the vision of Sant Shiromani Ravidas Maharaj's ideal state has been realised in Madhya Pradesh. Sant Ravidas had said that "Aisa chahu raj main, jahan mile saban ko ann, chhote-bado sab sam base, Ravidas rahe prasann" (I want such a rule, where everyone gets food, small and big all live together, everyone remains happy.) We are walking on the same path shown by him. CM Chouhan said that Madhya Pradesh will touch the heights of develop-



ment with the co-operation of the people and with the blessings of the saints. CM Chouhan attended Sant Ravidas Mahakumbh at Sagar on February 8. CM Chouhan said that the sisters and daughters are highly respected in the state. No distinction is made between men and women. After Ladli Laxmi Yojana for daughters, now Ladli Bahna Yojana has been launched for sisters, in which one thousand rupees will be

given to poor and middle class sisters. Food, education, medicine, house, employment are being ensured for everyone in the state. There is no caste distinction in the state, no one is big or small, everyone is equal, everyone has equal opportunity and everyone is respected equally. Chief Minister Chouhan performed Bhumi Pujan of Shahgarh-Banda group water supply scheme costing Rs. 251 crore 25 lakh. He

launched the Kalash Yatra by presenting Kalash to the sarpanchs. Chief Minister Chouhan also inaugurated and had a look at the exhibition focused on Sant Ravidas and "One District-One Product" at the venue. Urban Development and Housing Minister Bhupendra Singh, Finance, Commercial Taxes, Planning, Economic and Statistics Minister Jagdish Deora, Revenue and Transport Minister Govind Singh Rajput, Public Health and Family Welfare Minister Dr. Prabhu Ram Chaudhary, Water Resources, Fishermen Welfare and Fisheries Development Minister Tulsiram Silawat, Public Works and Cottage and Village Industries Minister Gopal Bhargava, Cooperatives, Public Service Management Minister Arvind Bhadauria, MP Raj Bahadur besides more than 200 seers and general public in a large number were present.

4 KILLED IN CAR-TRUCK COLLISION

Seoni: Four people were killed and two injured when a truck collided with their car on a highway in Madhya Pradesh's Seoni district, police said on Wednesday.

The accident took place on Tuesday evening at Lakhnadon bypass on National Highway-44, located 65km from the district headquarters, an official said. Six people were travelling in the car from Nagpur to Sohagpur in MP when a truck coming from the opposite side collided with their vehicle, sub-divisional officer of police Deepak Sharma said.

Four of them, including a couple, died on the spot, while two people were injured and are undergoing treatment at a hospital in Lakhnadon, he said. The deceased were in the age group of 19 to 42, he said. The truck driver fled from the spot and efforts were on to trace him, the official said.

No end to Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan-Kamal Nath war of words

Team Absolute | Bhopal

War of words between CM Chouhan and senior Congress leader Kamal Nath continued on Tuesday. Chouhan shot his 11th question to Nath and claimed that he has not replied to even a single of the last 10 questions raised by him. Chouhan said, "One leader after another is coming forward. Why are they coming forward and who is behind them? Why is this someone behind them? Now Kamal Nath should consider why he is the self-proclaimed future CM. Sutt naa Kapas, julahon mein latham latham (Nothing is certain, everything is up in the air and yet all of them are fighting)," the CM said.

Chouhan said, Today's question, "You promised to start a new social security pension scheme for farmers under which Rs 1000 will be paid monthly. Tell us, who have you paid this so far?" In response, Nath turned the tables claiming that it is



Chouhan who is running away from the questions raised by Congress leader.

"Shivraj Singh Chouhan, by running away from the questions, you are becoming a fugitive chief minister in the eyes of the people of Madhya Pradesh. You are creating a situation for the BJP in which you are drowning and taking the party down with you too," Kamal Nath tweeted.

In a second tweet, the veteran Congress leader and former Union minister Kamal Nath said, "If there are any tears left in your eyes, then

answer the question of the people. You had promised that marginal and small farmers of every caste will be included in Surajdhara and Annapurna schemes and through that high-quality seeds will be made available to them at subsidized rates. You did not connect anyone to those schemes, but you also deprived the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe farmers who were earlier getting the benefits of the scheme. Do you have an answer?"

NURSE RECRUITMENT EXAM STOPPED AFTER PAPER LEAK

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The second of a two-part exam to recruit contract nurses under the National Health Mission in Madhya Pradesh was cancelled hours before it started on Tuesday, after the question paper was found to have been leaked. Eight persons caught carrying copies of the question paper have been arrested, the police said.

This is suspected to be part of a big racket. The mastermind had got the question paper leaked through the company tasked with holding the exam across the state, the police said.

Three of the arrested men are from Gwalior, two each from Prayagraj and Haryana, and one from Bihar. The mastermind, a resident of Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh, is on the run.

The first round of the examination took place this morning. The one due to begin at 3.30 pm was cancelled. The test was being held to fill up 2,284 vacant posts of contract staff



nurses under the National Health Mission. About 45,000 candidates were appearing for the test.

Following a tip-off on Monday night, the police raided a hotel in Tekanpur area on the outskirts of

Gwalior district, sources said. Copies of the exam paper were found from eight persons who were inside. Original documents of 80 candidates were also found with them, quoting Superintendent of Police

Amit Sanghi. As many as 39 mobile phones were also seized. The gang charged about Rs 2 to 3 lakh for question papers, he said.

A police case has been filed against the men, accusing them of cheating. They have also been charged under the Madhya Pradesh Recognised Examination Act and Information Technology Act.

Madhya Pradesh is still feeling the aftershocks of the Vyapam scam -- the multi-crore medical entrance and recruitment scam involving politicians, senior officials and businessmen. The rigging of exams, which started in 1995 and was exposed in 2013, is being investigated by the Central Bureau of Investigation, which took over the case in 2015 after a Supreme Court order.

The agency has so far chargesheeted more than 650 people, including the chairmen of three medical colleges.

CM CHOUHAN TAKES SWIPE AT RAHUL OVER HIS PARLIAMENT SPEECH

Bhopal: MP Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Wednesday criticised Congress MP Rahul Gandhi's stance against Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the Parliament, Adani row and the Centre's foreign policy among other issues. Chouhan questioned Rahul Gandhi's mental age and the benefit nation received out of the Congress-led Bharat Jodo Yatra. "I sometimes have doubts about mental age of Rahul Gandhi. Speaking on President's address in Parliament, key topics were supposed to be discussed. But you can't expect a party covered in corruption from head to toe, to discuss relevant topics," CM Chouhan said as quoted by news agency. He further asked about Rahul Gandhi not discussing on the development work along the way of the Yatra. He added that Gandhi is surrounded by people who speak against the nation.

"During his yatra, why did Rahul Gandhi not spot any development works? The intention of his yatra was 'Bharat todo'. His left & right consist of people who speak against nation. Also, what did his yatra give the nation?" he asked.

MINOR GIRL RAPED, KILLED BY RELATIVE; BODY FOUND IN FIELD: COPS

Gwalior: A relative of a seven-year-old girl has been arrested on the charge of raping and killing her in the Gwalior district of Madhya Pradesh, an official said on Wednesday.

On Monday, the child went out to watch a wedding procession but did not return home, prompting her family to approach the police, said the official.

The police were tipped that she had seen with a relative who lives next door. Initially, the relative tried to mislead the police but later admitted to raping and killing her, said the official. The girl's body was then recovered from an agricultural field. The accused has been booked under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), said Additional Superintendent of Police-rural Jairaj Kuber, adding that the body has been sent for an autopsy.

Man gets married in hospital to fulfil dad's last wish

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A man got married in a hospital in Madhya Pradesh's Betul district to fulfil his dying father's last wish.

The event took place in Krish Memorial Hospital of Multai, located about 50 km from the district headquarters on Monday night.

80-year-old Moit Ullah Khan, a resident of Prabhat Pattan village, is undergoing treatment for blood cancer and is currently on oxygen support in the hospital.

He expressed his wish to his son, Ayub Khan to get married so that he could leave the world peacefully.

The nikah took place in the presence of a maulvi, in which the family members of the patient, along with the hospital staff participated.

The patient was content to see his desire being fulfilled. Hospital staff said that the patient's condition is critical. They added that Ayub



completed all the rituals in the hospital and the newly married couple was blessed by the relatives and hospital staff.

Dr Ankush Bhargava of the hospital said that the patient was earlier admitted in a Nagpur hospital, but was brought by his family to Krish hospital due to the high cost of treatment at the previous hospital. Bhargava added that the marriage was allowed to take place in view of the patient's critical health.

Indore station redevelopment will be done keeping in mind the need of next 50 years: MP Shankar Lalwani

Team Absolute | Indore

Preparations for the transformation of Indore railway station have been completed. The Railway Department will issue a tender in this regard on February 15. The design of Indore station will be inspired by Rajwada, sky walk and metro station will be connected here. Along with this, Park Road station will also be developed.

A master plan has been prepared to develop the Indore railway station and works will be carried out



under this. This state-of-the-art station will have a grand entrance, roof plaza, executive lounge, additional entrance, platform cover shed, drainage system of station area, Wi-Fi etc. facilities

will be available here. MP Shankar Lalwani informed that around Rs 1,000 crore will be spent on the development of Indore station, out of which Rs 340 crore has been allocated in next financial year's budget. The railway station will be developed keeping in mind the needs of the coming 50 years.

Lalwani said that Indore is the fastest growing city in the country where people from all over the country reach, so the railway station will be provided facilities according to the increasing number of passengers.

CM CHOUHAN PLANTS SAPLINGS ALONG WITH MEMBERS OF PRESS COUNCIL AND SOCIAL WORKERS



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted saplings of Mango, Peepal, Guava and Saptaparni along with the members of the Press Council at Water Vision Park (Smart Park) Bhopal today. Prof. JS Rajput (Representative to UNESCO and former Director

of NCERT) along with Council members Prakash Dubey, Dr. Suman Gupta, Shyam Singh Pawar and Vice Chancellor of Makhnallal Chaturvedi National University of Journalism KG Suresh joined in. Along with Chief Minister Chouhan, Mukesh Goyal, Jeet Yogesh, Neetu, Rakesh and Reva Goyal also planted saplings.

One stabbed to death over dispute on social media comment

Team Absolute | Ratlam

One 19-year-old boy was stabbed to death in Ratlam district, following a dispute over a controversial comment on social media accounts. An incident was reported at Shivgarh village under the Shivgarh police station limit, and the deceased was identified as Abhishek Patni, son of Ishwar Patni, a resident of Pipalchowk, Shivgarh. He was killed after a scuffle between two groups at the Shivgarh Higher Secondary School Ground on Tuesday night that led to the death of Abhishek. Five others were also injured in the clash.



During the preliminary investigation, it was revealed that the entire dispute started following the controversial comment on social media. After this, two groups of young boys fought with sharp knives.

Gaurav Soni, Rishabh, and Abhishek Patni of the first group, along with

Mahesh Hada and Mukesh Hatila of the second group, were severely injured in the fight. Abhishek Patni suffered multiple injuries and died while undergoing treatment at the district hospital. Shivgarh police station has registered a case in this matter and begun its investigation. Necessary actions would be taken against the guilty. When the ambulance reached the village carrying the body at around 11.15 am on Wednesday morning, a huge crowd gathered at the bus stand and demanded that the ambulance and run over a bulldozer on the houses of the accused involved in the crime.

Jabalpur women stage Dharna in favor of liquor ban, say 'alcohol destroying our families'

Team Absolute | Jabalpur

Women of Bijouri village in Jabalpur district sat on dharna in protest of liquor ban on Wednesday and demanded the immediate closure of liquor shops in village. Hundreds of women from Bijouri village, surrounded the liquor shops and came on streets to protest against liquor ban and said liquor shops in rural areas are



badly affecting people and their families. Liquor is the main reason behind disputes in their family, when

women do not provide money to their husbands for liquor, they start selling household items. Not only

this, but for liquor men beat their wives. Liquor is destroying families," said a protester.

The women of Bijouri village said their protest will continue until the liquor shops are removed from the village. Although the police reached the spot after getting informed and had a discussion with the women sat on dharna, which led to the calling off of protest.

Advertisement for MPTenders.gov.in featuring a notice in Hindi and a table of tender details. The notice is from the Office of the Municipal Commissioner, Gunna, District Gunna (M.P.), regarding the selection of a contractor for legacy waste dumpsite remediation. The table lists the tender number (2023_UAD_246036_1), the work description, and the estimated cost of 528.00 lakh. The deadline for submission is 15/03/2023.



EDITOR'S SPECS

BJP seeks report on exodus of elected representatives in Bengal

The continuing trend of elected public representatives of the BJP in West Bengal shifting to the ruling Trinamool Congress has left the party's central leadership worried. A day after BJP legislator from Alipurduar Suman Kanjilal joined the state's ruling party, the BJP's central leadership is understood to have sought a detailed report from the state leadership on this count. Party insiders said that at a time when the central leadership of the party is trying all possible ways to reorganise the organisational structure of the party in the state, Kanjilal's shift to the Trinamool has come as a major jolt. Sources said that the central leadership has asked the state leadership on why they are unable to keep the existing strength in the Assembly intact despite the fact that the state's ruling party is facing multi-angle odds in the present moment. The central leadership has also asked the state leadership on what would be their specific strategy to arrest similar exodus in the coming days. Kanjilal did not have any prior record of association with Trinamool and he directly joined BJP by quitting his profession as a journalist. Leader of opp. in the Assembly Suwendu Adhikari launched a scathing attack against Kanjilal and described the latter as betrayer to the voters of Alipurduar assembly constituency who elected him as an MLA. "I would be soon going to Alipurduar and meet the voters, who had been duped by Suman Kanjilal and that too at a time when the state leadership of BJP are trying hard to organise a movement against the misuse of Trinamool Congress in the state," Adhikari said. Ridiculing him, Trinamool General Secretary and spokesman Kunal Ghosh said that before making such comments Adhikari should remind this theory of anti-defection to his father and brothers. Incidentally, Suwendu Adhikari's father Sishir Kumar Adhikari and younger brother Dibyendu Adhikari are both Trinamool MPs.

BUDGET GIVES LARGER WINGS TO REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY SCHEME UDAN

KUMAR VIKRAM

While the last couple of months have witnessed consistent growth in the aviation traffic in the country, the budget announcement to revive 50 aircraft landing sites comprising airports, heliports and water aerodromes is likely to give more wings to the government's ambitious aviation scheme, Regional Connectivity Scheme Udan. "Fifty additional airports, heliports, water aerodromes and advanced landing grounds will be revived for improving regional air connectivity," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in her Budget speech. The importance of the regional connectivity scheme (RCS) can be gauged from the fact that the RCS has seen a doubling of allocation in this year's Budget since the last allocation and has increased from Rs 600 crore to Rs 1,244 crore. The government had launched RCS-UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik) in October, 2016 to enhance regional air connectivity from unserved and underserved airports in the country and making air travel affordable for the masses. Under the scheme, 459 UDAN routes involving 72 airports including nine heliports and two water aerodromes have been operationalised across the length and breadth of the country. Over 1.13 crore passengers have travelled in more than 2.16 lakh UDAN flights, so far. Nine heliports have been developed and operationalised under the UDAN scheme in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Mandi and Rampur are in Himachal Pradesh while Almora, Chinyalisaur, Gaucher, Haldwani, New Tehri, Sahastradhara and Srinagar are in Uttarakhand.



The UDAN scheme is applicable for a period of 10 years from the date of notification of the scheme. The government has set a target to operationalise 1000 UDAN routes during the currency of the scheme and to revive and develop 100 unserved and underserved airports, heliports, water aerodromes by 2024. Thereafter, the Krishi Udan Scheme was launched in August 2020 to assist farmers in transporting agricultural products so that it improves their value realization.

Krishi Udan 2.0 mainly focuses on transporting perishable food products from the hilly areas, north-eastern states and tribal areas. Experts have also lauded the Budget announcement on development of airports and heliports. Shamsheer Dewan, Senior Vice President & Group Head - Corporate Ratings, ICRA Limited, said, "The Union Budget 2023-24 has reiterated its focus on improving regional air connectivity through the setting up of 50 additional airports, heliports, water

aerodromes, and advanced landing grounds revival, which will boost domestic air travel. Further, the budget provides a lot of thrust on the promotion of tourism through the development of 50 tourist destinations covering various aspects and further through the development of theme-based local tourist spots." Sharing his views, Vinay Dube, founder and CEO, Akasa Air, said that

the announcement of 50 additional airports and ramping up of the air transport infrastructure is a welcome move and will support the nation's growing demand for air travel. "The focus on promoting domestic tourism will provide impetus to further revival of the sector and aligns with our vision to strengthen India's transportation system," he added.

international

TURKEY-SYRIA TOLL REACHES 9,638, RESCUE EFFORTS BECOMING 'HARDER'

Ankara/Damascus | Agencies

The death toll from the devastating 7.8-magnitude earthquake that hit Turkey and Syria earlier this week has reached 9,638 on Wednesday, with rescue efforts becoming "harder" due to freezing weather in the two countries, authorities said.

In its latest update, Turkey's Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) said the overall death toll currently stood at 7,108, while the number of injured persons increased to 40,910, reports Anadolu News Agency.

More than 96,670 search and rescue teams are currently conducting operations in the field, the AFAD said. "As a result of the negotiations with the Turkish Foreign Ministry, 5,309 personnel coming from other countries for help were dispatched to the disaster area," it added.

Besides rescue teams, blankets, tents, food, and psychological support teams were also sent to the affected areas. A total of 70,818 family tents were set up to shelter survivors, AFAD said, adding that 5,434 vehicles, including excavators, tractors and dozers, were sent to the disaster area.



President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is scheduled to visit Kahramanmaraş and Hatay, two of the worst-hit regions, later on Wednesday, the BBC quoted his office as saying. He will also go to Pazarcik, epicentre of Monday's quake. In Syria, at least 2,530 people have died in both government-controlled areas and rebel-held regions, while nearly 4,000 others were injured. Aid agencies and rescue workers say the death toll is likely to increase further with many people still

trapped under the rubble. Meanwhile, rescue workers have not been able to access all the disaster areas as a cold and wet weather system is moving through the quake-hit region in the two countries, plunging temperatures below freezing. Temperatures are already bitterly low, but are forecast to fall several degrees below zero on Wednesday. Scattered showers and snow in the region are expected to continue, putting the lives of those trapped underneath the rubble, who have already

gone days without food and water, at risk of hypothermia, reports CNN. The World Health Organization has also warned that the death toll in the two countries could end up surpassing 20,000. The earthquake-stricken region in Turkey is also home to hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees who have fled the civil war in their homeland. The devastating 7.8 tremor struck Turkey's southern province of Kahramanmaraş at 4.17 a.m. on Monday morning, which was followed by a 6.4-magnitude tremor a few minutes later in Gaziantep province. The epicentre of the 7.8-magnitude quake was 23 km east of Nurdagi in Gaziantep, at a depth of 24.1 km. At around 1.30 p.m., a third 7.5-magnitude tremor hit Kahramanmaraş, which officials said was "not an aftershock". Turkey's southern province of Hatay and Syria's northern Aleppo city suffered the biggest casualties, while Lebanon, Israel and Cyprus also felt the tremor. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared a three-month state of emergency on Tuesday in the 10 provinces. Turkey is also observing a seven-day period of national mourning.

Bangladesh trade deficit dips to \$12.30bn in H1 of fiscal 2022-23

Dhaka | Agencies

Bangladesh's trade deficit in the first half of the current 2022-23 fiscal year (July 2022-June 2023) dipped by 21.71 per cent to \$12.30 billion year-on-year, according to data from the central bank.

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) data revealed that the country's import payment was \$38.13 billion, down 2.15 per cent, in the July-December period of the current fiscal year while earnings from exports stood at \$25.83 billion, up 11.04 per cent, during the same period, reports Xinhua news agency.

The BB data showed the gap between Bangladesh's export earnings and import payments in the July-December period of the previous 2021-22 fiscal year (July 2021-June 2022) was \$15.71 billion.

A central bank official who did not give his name said that growth in remittances as always helped Bangladesh cushion the



impact of the trade deficit. Bangladesh's overall remittance inflow rose by 2.44 per cent year on year to \$10.49 billion in the first half of the 2022-23 fiscal year. Bangladesh's trade deficit ballooned to a record level of over \$33 billion in fiscal 2021-22 ending on June 30, 2022 on the back of increased imports. In its bid to boost the country's shrinking forex reserves which fell below

\$33 billion at the end of the last month, the central bank has taken various measures in recent months to discourage imports. The bank had recently raised the interest rate on loans in foreign currency from the Export Development Fund by 50 basis points to 4.5 per cent with a view to reducing forex reserve expenditure, according to central bank sources.

12 TERRORISTS KILLED IN PAKISTAN MILITARY OPERATION

Islamabad: Twelve terrorists were killed in an armed offensive of the Pakistani army in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the military said in a statement on Wednesday. In the overnight operation, the security forces targeted a vehicle of the terrorists associated with the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terror group by acting on an intelligence tip-off, the military's media wing Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in the statement. "Terrorists' movements and activities were being watched by intelligence tentacles for the last week. Terrorists were lured in by providing a vehicle for escape that was intercepted and neutralized," Xinhua news agency quoted the ISPR as saying. Weapons, ammunition, and foreign currency were also recovered from the terrorists during the operation, the statement added. Security Forces are carrying out clearance operations in the area, the ISPR said.



Not expecting recession in 2023, says Australian Treasurer

Canberra | Agencies

Australia's Treasurer Jim Chalmers said on Wednesday that the country is not on track for a recession in 2023 despite the central bank again raising interest rates.

The Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) on Tuesday raised interest rates for the ninth meeting in a row to 3.35 per cent, reports Xinhua news agency.

Making the announcement, RBA Governor Philip Lowe said he expects further increases will be needed to ensure inflation returns to target.

Responding to the move, Chalmers said there were signs inflation has begun to



moderate. "The expectation of the Treasury forecasters is higher interest rates combined with difficult global conditions will slow our economy considerably, but they don't expect at this point a recession here in Australia," he told Australian Broadcasting Corporation radio. "There is of course, as the RBA Governor acknowledged in the statement yesterday, the fact that when interest rates go up, people

with a mortgage feel it immediately but the impact on the economy takes a little while to flow through." Australia's inflation hit 7.8 per cent in the 12 months to December 2022, the highest it has been since 1990, with housing costs rising 10.7 per cent. Stephen Jones, the Assistant Treasurer, said that Tuesday's rate rise should mark the peak of the monetary tightening cycle, warning that households are "doing it tough". "We think that inflation has peaked and it is starting to turn around," he told Sky News on Wednesday. "So we're hoping that this is, if not the last, then nearly the last of the interest rate increases."

Pakistan bars 190 Hindus from travelling to India

Islamabad | Agencies

Pakistan immigration authorities at the Wagah Border stopped 190 Hindus from travelling to India after they failed to provide satisfying responses to officials about the purpose of their visit to the neighbouring country, sources said.

Various Hindu families, including children and women, from interior Sindh province, reached the border to go to India on the visas for religious pilgrimage. The Express Tribune reported citing the sources as saying. However, the immigration authorities did not clear them because they could not satisfy them as to why they wanted to go to India. According to the sources, the trav-



elling Hindu families lived in huts. They added that such families take visas for a religious pilgrimage and then stay for a long time there. "After going to India, these people live in huts and do hard work but defame Pakistan, saying that they are not safe here," a source said, adding that currently a large number of Pakistani Hindus were living as nomads in Rajasthan and Delhi.



SHINDE-FADNAVIS GOVT TO PRESENT MAIDEN STATE BUDGET ON MARCH 9

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra legislature's four-week-long Budget Session will be held from February 27 to March 25 and the government of Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis - which took office in June 2022 - will table its maiden Budget for FY 2023-2024 on March 9, officials said here on Wednesday.

The Budget Session will begin with the customary address by the Governor on the first day and the playing of the newly-ordained state song, "Jai Jai Maharashtra Majha" after the "Vande Mataram" in both Houses of the legislature.

The decision was taken by the Business Advisory



Committee at a meeting on Wednesday that was attended by Shinde, Fadnavis, leader of opposition (Assembly) Ajit Pawar, Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar, Deputy Speaker Narhari Zirwal, leader of opposition (Council) Ambadas Danve, legislative council Deputy Chairperson Neelam Gorhe, representatives of various political parties, ministers,

and senior officials. The government proposes to table resolutions on the occasion of the platinum jubilee of Marathwada Mukti Sangram Day, a special discussion in both houses to mark the International Women's Day (March 8), while the Budget will be discussed for three days followed by six days of debate on the Budget proposals. At the BAC meeting and

later outside, Pawar criticised the four-week duration of the session and said it should be of at least five weeks since this will be the first full-fledged Budget Session after two years of truncated sessions during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Referring to a provision of Rs 500 crore for 75th anniversary of the Marathwada Mukti Sangram Day made by the previous Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), Pawar urged the government to ensure that all political parties and their leaders are taken together for the celebrations to make the new generations aware of the movement.

Around a dozen proposed bills are likely to come up for discussion and tabling before the House during the Budget Session, said an official.

9 UNDER TRIAL PRISONERS HOSPITALIZED, FOOD POISONING SUSPECTED

Palghar: Nine under trials lodged in a police lock-up in Maharashtra's Palghar district were rushed to hospital due to suspected food poisoning, an official said on Wednesday.

The incident took place on Tuesday after the under-trials were given lunch at the lockup in Nallasopara police station at around 2 pm, he said.

After consuming food, two of them complained of nausea, uneasiness and vomiting. Later, the other under trials also complained of similar issues, Nallasopara police station's senior inspector Vilas Supe said. The under trials were rushed to the civic hospital at Sopara, he said.

Supreme Court must decide on "Rebel MLAs" first: Uddhav Thackeray

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Uddhav Thackeray, who heads a faction of the Shiv Sena, on Wednesday said that the decision by the Supreme Court on the disqualification of the party's rebel MLAs should come first and then by the Election Commission on who the original party belongs to.

Addressing a press conference, Uddhav Thackeray also asked why the EC froze the Shiv Sena name and its 'bow and arrow' symbol when it has not been used by the rival Eknath Shinde faction yet. "The decision on disqualification should come first and then by the Election Commission (which faction Shiv Sena belongs to)," Uddhav said, adding that the



apex court will start hearing the matter related to the disqualification of rebel MLAs on a daily basis from February 14. The Sena was split last June after a rebel-

lion led by Shinde, prompting his faction and the one headed by Uddhav Thackeray to try to stake claim over the party's name and its symbol.

Furious Shiv Sena (UBT) flays attack on Aditya Thackeray's motorcade

Team Absolute | Aurangabad/Mumbai

The Shiv Sena (UBT) on Wednesday reacted angrily to an "attack" targeting former Minister and MLA Aditya Thackeray during his visit to Aurangabad.

Top Sena (UBT) leaders like MP Sanjay Raut, Leader of Opposition (Council) Ambadas Danve, spokesperson Kishore Tiwari, Aurangabad leader Chandrakant Khaire, and others have strongly condemned the incident.

Party leaders said that Aditya Thackeray's convoy was pelted with stones as it was passing through Mahalgaon village late Tuesday night during his ongoing 'Shivsamvad Yatra' in several districts, and a huge crowd of aggressive miscreants attempted to lay siege to his car.

While Aditya and Danve have pointed fingers at the 'traitors' -- referring to the ruling Balasahabnchi Shiv Sena (BSS) activists for the incident, Khaire alleged that a local prominent leader of the ruling alliance had hired goons to perpetrate the attack in front of the local police team which did not rush to control the threatening mob.

Raut said it was fortunate that there were no casualties in the attack but called upon the state government to ensure that such incidents do not occur in future against any political leaders. Slamming the government, Tiwari



said Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and his supporters are rattled by Aditya's challenge for a face-to-face electoral contest against him in Thane or Worli Assembly seats and the attack was intended to "silence and suppress" the Sena (UBT) youth leader.

Meanwhile, the Sena (UBT) has also sent a letter to the state DGP and others highlighting the incident and demanding adequate security for Thackeray Jr., while former Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray is likely to speak on the issue later this afternoon.

Hours later, the Maharashtra Police is understood to have provided an additional cover to the Sena (UBT) leader, though the state government has not yet commented on the developments.

Social luminary Appasaheb Dharmadhikari named 'Maharashtra Bhushan' 2023

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Renowned social worker and reformer Dattatreya Narayan Dharmadhikari, alias Appasaheb Dharmadhikari, has been named for the 'Maharashtra Bhushan' 2023 award, Chief Minister Eknath Shinde announced here on Wednesday.

The award comprising a medal, citation and Rs 25,00,000/ shall be conferred on Appasaheb Dharmadhikari, 77 - who was given the Padma Shri in 2017 - at a function later.

Shinde, along with Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, called on Appasaheb Dharmadhikari at his home in Revdanda, Raigad and warmly felicitated him for the honour this afternoon.

Incidentally, his father and the renowned preacher-reformer, the late Dr. Narayan Vishnu Dharmadhikari, revered as Nanasahab Dharmadhikari was also conferred the 'Maharashtra Bhushan' 2008 award.

Shinde described Appasaheb



Dharmadhikari as instrumental in social and society building activities like afforestation, blood donation and medical camps, shunning dowry system, empowering women and tribals, organising training for children and adult literacy centres, holding job fairs, cleanliness, eradicating superstitions, conducting de-addiction, national integration and preaching to

the masses on traditional and religious values.

The famed regular gatherings, known as 'Shri Baithaks' were launched by late Nanasahab Dharmadhikari in October 1943, and since the past over three decades, his son Appasaheb Dharmadhikari has taken it forward.

In December, 2013, the Dr

Nanasahab Dharmadhikari Pratisthan conducted the world's largest medical camp with over 152,000 participants and 1,571 doctors, which created a Guinness World Record. Besides India, the Pratisthan has also organised different types of camps in the US, Australia, Singapore, Qatar, and other countries where their followers are living.

AAP ALLEGES RS 1,000 CR SCAM IN MMRDA'S METRO-6 PAP ALLOTMENTS

Demands court-monitored probe

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Wednesday alleged a Rs 1,000 crore scam in Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority's (MMRDA) Project Affected People (PAP) Unit allotments for the Mumbai Metro 6 project. Alleging that the massive embezzlement was not possible without the blessings of the incumbent Chief Minister Eknath Shinde since he was the Urban Development Minister of the state since 2014, AAP said that the RTI applications filed by the Party and pursued with meticulous research, an unmistakable pattern has emerged in PAP allotments.

The party alleged that "the mastermind behind the PAP scam", Rachana Indurkar, Deputy Collector and Chief of the Social Development Cell - MMRDA, is backed by Chief Minister Shinde and has been occu-



pying the position for the last 10 years without promotion when the term for Dy Collector is three to five years.

According to the party, the procedure for the allotment of Project Affected People (PAP) units includes eligibility criteria, based on which a survey was undertaken of existing standing structures on Metro 6 proj-

ect land. For Metro 6, a survey was undertaken by Rachana Indurkar and the survey was executed by EQMS Pvt Ltd.

The party's Mumbai's President Preeti Sharma Menon said that in just one Metro-6 project, a total of 114 fake 'ghost structures' were added to the list of eligible structures. She said Indurkar has been conspic-

uously occupying the same position for the last 10 years.

"This is a mafia syndicate whose patronage goes all the way to our present CM Eknath Shinde. Shinde has been Maharashtra's Urban Development Minister since 2014 and MMRDA directly reports to him. Even in his home constituency in Thane's Vartak Nagar Metro Line, approximately 85 bogus allotments have been made using the same modus operandi," Menon said.

Demanding that a court-monitored probe be launched to unearth the large-scale corruption, Menon said that till date, approximately 65,000 PAP Units have been allotted by the MMRDA for various infrastructure projects. Approximately, more than 2,000 of these PAP Units are bogus, she claimed, "this is a Rs 1,000 crore scam, which has been undertaken with the blessings of CM Eknath Shinde himself."

Civic Body Engineer Arrested For Taking Rs 8.5 Lakh Bribe

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Anti-Corruption Bureau arrested a sub-engineer of the civic building and factories department, while allegedly accepting an Rs 8.5 lakh bribe for not taking action against illegal construction in a Bandra chawl.

According to the officials, the arrest was made on February 7 and the BMC engineer is identified as Mohan Rathod. His aide, Mohammed Raza Khan has also been arrested, officials added.

According to the ACB, the complainant has a ground-plus-two house at Chapel Road in Bandra West.



On January 16, the complainant got a BMC notice about the alleged illegal construction. He said he visited the ward office on February 9, where Rathod demanded Rs 9 lakh not to take action. He approached the ACB, who laid a trap and nabbed the duo. Khan was caught red-

handed while accepting Rs 8.50 lakh from the complainant, on the alleged instructions of Rathod, officials informed. The two have been booked under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code and further investigation is underway, officials added.

Police files murder charge in journalist's death case

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Police on Wednesday slapped the murder charge against a man arrested for allegedly mowing down a journalist with his car in Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra, an official said. Several media organisations had demanded a probe into the death of journalist Shashikant Warishe, claiming he had written against local land dealer Pandharinath Amberkar, who is said to be a supporter of the proposed Ratnagiri refinery project.

The organisations claimed Amberkar crushed the scribe's bike under his car at a petrol pump in Ratnagiri district on Monday.

Warishe succumbed to the injuries at a Kolhapur hospital on Tuesday. The accused (42) was arrested under section 304 (Culpable Homicide not amounting to murder) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Police have

added section 302 (Punishment for murder) in the FIR against Amberkar, the official said.

He was remanded in police custody in Rajapur till February 13.

Police are investigating the exact motive behind the murder. Earlier, Akhil Bharatiya Marathi Patrakar Parishad members had met Maharashtra Home Minister Devendra Fadnavis and sought a probe into Warishe's death.

The Ratnagiri Refinery and Petrochemical project, earlier proposed to be built at Nanar village in Ratnagiri district in coastal Konkan, was scrapped before the 2019 polls at the insistence of Shiv Sena, the then alliance partner of BJP.

A Union minister had last year said establishing a 60-million metric tonne per annum oil refinery will be the biggest plant in the world and hinted at its revival

Researchers at giant telescope concerned over rail project linking Pune

Team Absolute | Pune

With the Pune-Nashik High-Speed Rail project getting in-principle approval of the Centre, researchers at the Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope (GMRT) in Pune have expressed concern over likely disruption of the scientific facility operations due to continuous movement of trains on the route located near the observatory antennas. When contacted, a senior official of the Maharashtra Rail Infrastructure Development Corporation (Maharail) said that necessary precautions will be taken and all the issues will be resolved.

The GMRT, which operates at 150-1420 MHz, is located at Khodad, 80 km away from Pune city. It consists of 30 antennas each of 45 m diameter, and is operated by the National Centre for Radio



Astrophysics (NCRA) of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research.

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday said the Ministry of Railways has accorded "in-principle approval" for the Pune-Nashik high-speed rail project, which will boost development and provide seamless connectivity to the industrial zones of both the cities. A source at the GMRT said that the route chosen for the high-speed rail project passes through Narayangaon, which

is within the 15 km circle of the antennas at the facility and very close to some of the antennas.

The closest distance (of the rail project route) is less than one kilometre from one of the antennas. "This whole route is going to be very dangerous (for GMRT operations) for the reason that when a high-speed electric train moves, its pantograph touches the high power line and that is like make-and-break contact and sparks are generated which produce unwanted radiation," the

source said.

Apart from these disturbances, all modern trains have communication systems which are normally of frequencies at which the GMRT operates, and this may cause a lot of problems, the source added.

NCRA Director Yashwant Gupta said they have "initiated a dialogue" with the rail authorities concerned to address the issue.

"Though we have received some response, we have not got a final conclusion for the issue and under those circumstances, giving the approval to go ahead is worrisome for us," said Gupta. When contacted, Maharail Managing Director Rajesh Kumar Jaiswal said they have held meetings with GMRT officials and they have been told that when the actual work of the rail line starts, necessary precautions will be taken and all the issues will be resolved.

SC refuses to grant relief to Rapido against ban in Maharashtra

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Tuesday refused to entertain an appeal filed by Rapido challenging the Maharashtra government's denial to grant two-wheeler bike taxi aggregator licence to the company.

A bench headed by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud said the amendments made to the Motor Vehicles Act in 2019 clearly state that without a valid licence, as aggregator cannot operate. The bench, also comprising justices P.S. Narasimha and J.B. Pardiwala, noted that the Pune RTO had rejected the company's plea for licence in December 2022.

Rapido moved the apex court against the Bombay High Court's order, which declined to entertain its plea against the state government's refusal to grant a

two-wheeler bike taxi aggregator licence to the company.

The top court granted liberty to the company to move the high court to challenge the January 19 notification issued by Maharashtra, and also asked the high court to examine it is uninfluenced by the earlier order.

The state government had said there was no policy on licensing of bike taxis and there was no fare structure policy.

It contended before the high court that a committee has been constituted to consider developing guidelines for bike taxis in the state.

The high court had directed the company to suspend the services immediately, noting that it was operating without procuring a licence from the Maharashtra government.



PRIYANKA CHOPRA SHARED THE TRAILER RELEASE DATE OF HER UPCOMING FILM

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas has shared the trailer release date of her upcoming film, 'Love Again'. The actress took to her Instagram on Wednesday and shared a video about her Valentine's Day plan which "involves Celine Dion", the Canadian singer known for her superhit track 'My Heart Will Go On' from the James Cameron directorial 'Titanic'. She captioned the video: "YOU, Celine, Sam & I... let's make a plan for Valentine's Day. We're bringing you 'Love Again' movie - trailer in ONE WEEK!" With all the visually pleasing looks & moments, 'Love Again' is the one film everyone globally is looking forward to. The film, which also stars Russell Tovey, Steve Oram, Omid Djalili, Sofia Barclay, Lydia West, Arinze Kene and Celia Imrie, is produced by Screen Gems and distributed by Sony Pictures. Recently, Priyanka's husband Nick Jonas spoke about their daughter attending a public event for the first time. Speaking on the 'Today Show', Nick said: "It was really her first time out in public and we were nervous about it. The whole day I think was such a great setting for the family to be together and for all of us to celebrate. Having my little girl out there was really special."

Leonardo DiCaprio is 'not dating' Israeli model Edén Polani: Reports

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Leonardo DiCaprio, according to a new report, is "not dating" 19-year-old Israeli model Edén Polani, despite being recently spotted together at a party. Sources close to the Oscar-winning actor confirmed to Daily Mail that the pair is not in a relationship. "They were seated next to each other at a music-listening party. There were a number of people at that event," the insiders said. However, they did not comment on whether there had ever been any romantic connection between the two, reports showbiz.com.

showbiz.com.

Dating rumours emerged after Leo was photographed getting close to Edén at Ebony Riley's release party for her new EP on January 31 in Los Angeles. In some pictures, the 'Don't Look Up' actor could be seen showing off a soft smile next to the model as he appeared to enjoy himself at the packed party.

After photos of Leo and Edén made their way online, some Twitter critics called him out. "Leonardo DiCaprio's girlfriend is so young her high school experience was interrupted by COVID-19," one person wrote.

Someone else commented: "Stop making jokes about Leonardo DiCaprio being almost 50 dating literal teenagers and start calling him what he is - a predator."

The sighting arrived after Leo sparked romance rumours with Victoria Lamas. It is unclear if he is still with the beauty as he was apparently last seen in public with her back in December, when they celebrated New Year's Eve together.

Leo was rumoured to be dating Victoria, the daughter of Lorenzo Lamas, after they were caught leaving a Los Angeles social club in December 2022. However, Lorenzo himself clarified that the two are "not in a serious relationship" though Victoria "likes him very much" and is "very smitten."

Pam Anderson is set to host a plant-based cooking show

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Pamela Anderson is set to front a plant-based cooking show on Food Network Canada.

The star has landed a new series 'Pamela's Cooking With Love,' a working title, which has been commissioned by Corus Studios and will see her team up with top level chefs at her home in Canada, as they work on a variety of plant-based meals and menus, reports showbiz.com.

"Creating elegant and inviting spaces that inspire a compassionate, calm and healthy environment has always been important to me and comes naturally. Corus Studios and I have set mutual goals with good intentions. It's been a learning curve - and I am confident they will be a positive partner in helping bring my true vision to life," she said in a statement.

Lisa Godfrey, Senior Vice President of Original Content and Corus Studios added: "Corus Studios is proud to collaborate with Pamela Anderson on these two series as we work together to share her passion for food and entertaining with both a Canadian and international audience." "Pamela's Cooking With Love is the perfect companion series to Pamela's Garden of Eden, and services our commitment to authentic story-telling and building a premium library of content for the global market."

According to a press release, the new cooking show is focused on the 'Baywatch' legend being "fuelled by a craving to learn more about cooking and how she can use food to take entertaining to the next level."

The preview teases: "She works with a variety of influential chefs to develop delicious plant-based menus, gather the diverse ingredients, and prepare incredible meals and moments for her friends and family."

"Whether it is a casual afternoon cocktail party in the garden, an intimate dinner with family, or breakfast following a night around the campfire - Pamela shines as a host and sous-chef."

'I'M DAD MORE THAN I'M ANT-MAN'

Paul Rudd said my kids don't care that I'm famous!

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor Paul Rudd's children don't care that he is a Hollywood star because he is "just dad" to them. The actor is known for starring in the title role of the Marvel Cinematic Universe movies 'Ant-Man' but noted that his kids are not interested because he is "just dad," reports femalefirst.co.uk. He said: "I think I'm dad more than I'm Ant-Man or in the MCU (Marvel Cinematic Universe). Yeah. They don't care, nor should they!" Meanwhile, the 'Wanderlust' star, which was named Sexiest Man Alive by PEOPLE magazine in 2021 before the outlet passed the baton onto Chris Evans the following year, went on to add that his career has been a "wild ride" and said that being part of the MCU has afforded him so many opportunities that are not normally possible. He told People: "It's like this kind of thing doesn't just happen, so it's coming up now on nearly 10 years, which is a long time, and it's been a wild ride. I've got to go to many different countries. I've met lots of people I never would've met, and to be a part of something that has such global interest has been an amazing experience." Rudd previously admitted that he worked out "like an athlete" to prepare for the 'Ant-Man' movies.



'AGEISM AND MISOGYNY'

Madonna says 'ageism, misogyny' are behind criticism of her Grammys look

Los Angeles | Agencies

Madonna has written a lengthy social media post saying that "ageism and misogyny" are behind the commentary about her look at the Grammys. Unbowed and far from bloody after being the talk of Twitter for two days, Madonna ended her missive with a command: "Bow down, b****es!"

She also borrowed the words of the ceremony's leading winner, Beyoncé, writing: "You won't break my soul," reports Variety.

"A world that refuses to celebrate women past the age of 45 and feels the need to punish her if she continues to be strong willed, hard-working and adventurous," she wrote.

She wrote on Instagram: "It was an honour for me to introduce Kim Petras and Sam Smith at the Grammys. I wanted to give the last award which was Album of the Year, but I thought it was more important that I present the first trans-woman performing at the Grammys - a history-making moment!! And on top of that she won a Grammy!!"

"Instead of focusing on what I said in my speech, which was about giving thanks for the fearlessness of artists like Sam and Kim, many people chose to only talk about close-up photos of me taken with a long lens camera by a press photographer that would distort anyone's face!!"

"Once again I am caught in the glare of ageism and misogyny that permeates the world we live in."

"I have never apologised for any of the creative choices I have made nor the way that I look or dress and I'm not going to start. I have been degraded by the media since the beginning of my career, but I understand that this is all a test, and I am happy to do the trailblazing so that all the women behind me can have an easier time in the years to come."

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Abbie Quinnen



IND V AUS

We have to play on whatever wickets provided to us: Rohit Sharma

Nagpur | Agencies

Well before the start of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy series, the visiting Australians and their peers have been constantly talking about spin-friendly pitches that the Indians are expected to prepare for the four Tests, calling them doctored wickets.

India skipper Rohit Sharma dismissed all talk about pitches tailor-made for the Indian spinners and said they have to play on whatever wickets are provided to them, just like the Indians do when they are on tour, clearly indicating that the Indians are entitled to use home advantage.

"Doctored wicket? I just feel that we have got to focus on the cricket that is going to be played over the next five days. Do not worry too much about the pitch. In the last series, we played here. A lot was spoken about the pitches; all 22 cricketers who are going to play are all quality cricketers. So not to worry about pitch is going to be like, how much it is turning, seaming or things like that. You are gonna just come out and play good cricket," he said. The Indian skipper was also asked about how they will bat when



the ball is turning a lot as many of his teammates are suspect against quality spin bowling. "When the ball spins a lot, your methods, your preparation, ways to score runs becomes very important. When you play on pitches like those, it is important to have a counter attacking method as well. That is how you will score runs. The

SHASTRI BACKS SKY TO BAT AT NUMBER FIVE

New Delhi: Former India head coach Ravi Shastri has backed Suryakumar Yadav to bat at number five in the first Border-Gavaskar Trophy Test against Australia, to be held at VCA Stadium, Jamtha, Nagpur. Suryakumar hasn't played Test cricket yet, and his selection in the Test squad for the first two matches against Australia came largely on the back of his highly impactful performances in T20Is.

"At number five, Suryakumar (Yadav) will get the position, because there's no Shreyas (Iyer). There'll be talk about, 'can (Shubman) Gill bat at five?' I think you need the right guy for the right number."

"At five, when you go there, especially if the ball is turning, then you



need someone who is good at playing the right shots against spin. Surya demands that position. I think it's straightforward," said Shastri. With Shastri ruling out Gill to bat at number five, he believes that the decision on the young right-handed batters inclusion should come down to who between him or vice-captain KL Rahul looks in better touch to open the batting alongside captain Rohit Sharma.

spinners are quite smart; the opposition captains are quite smart. They straightway set the field, so it is not possible to get boundaries that easily. You have to rotate the strike and see what methods you can score runs off. The Indian skipper was also asked how they will choose from the four

spinners at his disposal. "All four are quality spinners. Jadeja and Ashwin have obviously played a lot together and they have performed consistently. Axar and Kuldeep whenever they have gotten an opportunity have done well; they have put the batters under pressure.

WOMEN'S T20 WORLD CUP

Ireland stun Australia, England beat New Zealand in warm-up games

Stellenbosch (South Africa) | Agencies

Ireland produced a jaw-dropping result in warm-up matches of the ICC Women's T20 World Cup to register a stunning three-wicket victory over defending champions Australia.

Australia had set Ireland 169 to win at the University Ground, with a trio of players in the runs as they ended up at 168/3 in 20 overs. Alyssa Healy (62 off 40 balls) got some runs under her belt, though she lost opening partner Beth Mooney first ball, which was cleaned up by Orla Prendergast.

All-rounder Tahlija McGrath (56 off 47 balls) walked out to meet Healy in the middle at number three, and the pair put the defending champions back into the ascendancy before the team retired both players. Ellyse Perry (40 not out from 20 balls) was also in good touch. Orla (2/19 off four overs) and Arlene Kelly (1/17) led Ireland's bowling effort.

In reply, a combined effort from the Irish batting unit saw them pull off an unexpected run chase with two balls to spare. Seven bat-



ters reached double figures, with Amy Hunter (26 from 14), Gaby Lewis (11 from 11) and Orla Prendergast (26 from 15) setting the chase up brilliantly.

Laura Delany top-scored with a crucial 32 through the middle overs, and it all came down to the final over, with Ireland requiring nine to win. Arlene's superb six off the second ball of Tahlija's over put Ireland within reach, and they sealed victory with three wickets in hand.

On the other hand, at the Western Province Cricket Ground, a strong bowling and fielding effort from England restricted New Zealand to 114/9, before Sophia Dunkley and Alice Caspey impressed again as England chased it down with ease and five wickets in hand.

SHUBMAN, HARDIK GAIN BIG IN ICC MEN'S T20I PLAYER RANKINGS AFTER VICTORY OVER NZ

New Delhi | Agencies

Opener Shubman Gill and fast-bowling all-rounder Hardik Pandya have gained big in the latest ICC Men's T20I player rankings after India registered 2-1 series win over New Zealand at home last week.

Gill's 126 not out off 63 balls in the series decider at Ahmedabad that contributed to India's huge 168-run victory and helped seal the series 2-1, lifted him by an incredible 168 places in the rankings to be at 30th position. Gill, who has now slammed centuries in all three formats of the game, is ranked sixth in ODIs and 62nd in Tests.

Pandya, who grabbed 4/16 and smashed a 17-ball 30 in the Ahmedabad T20I, has progressed in all three lists.



He has moved up from 53rd to 50th among batters, 66th to 46th among bowlers and is in second place among all-rounders, only a couple of rating points behind Bangladesh's Shakib Al Hassan. Left-arm fast bowler

Arshdeep Singh, Gill's teammate in the ICC U19 Men's Cricket World Cup-winning squad of 2018, is another Indian player to move up the rankings, gaining eight slots to reach a career-best 13th position after finishing with 2/16 in Ahmedabad.

German Cup: Frankfurt overpower Darmstadt in six-goal thriller to reach quarterfinals

Berlin | Agencies

A brace from Randal Kolo Muani helped Eintracht Frankfurt see off resilient rivals Darmstadt 4-2 to reach the German Cup quarterfinals.

The "Eagles" staged a lively start in front of the home crowd and needed only six minutes to break the deadlock as Kolo Muani made no mistake to head home Aurelio Buta's pinpoint cross into the box, reports Xinhua news agency.

Frankfurt had the chance to make it 2-0 five minutes later but for all that Rafael Santos Borré squandered Buta's good build-up work and pulled wide with all time and space from close range.

The hosts remained in control but continued wasteful in the final third as Mario Gotze unleashed a shot from a promising position into the arms of Darmstadt goalkeeper Marcel Schuhen with 23 minutes gone.

Darmstadt eventually punished Frankfurt's laxness in front of the goal after Marvin Mehlem forced a turnover before squaring into the path of Mathias Honsak, who kept his cool and beat Frankfurt custodian Kevin Trapp, making it 1-1 on the scoreboards at the half-hour mark.

Frankfurt was stunned and one goal down moments later as Honsak's brace turned the tides fol-



lowing a successful counterattack.

After the restart, Darmstadt still looked dangerous on fast breaks, but Frankfurt regained the lead in the 61st minute when Kolo Muani's lay-up header allowed Daichi Kamada to slot home with the outside of the boot from the edge of the box.

The visitors nearly reduced the arrears, but Philipp Tietz rattled only the woodwork from close range in the 65th minute.

Elsewhere, Freiburg advanced into the next round after two late goals against second-division outfit Sandhausen.

India U-20 Women's Team to begin camp on Feb 10 in Chennai

New Delhi | The India U-20 Women's National Team will resume its training camp in Chennai from Friday.

The Young Tigresses, after returning from their SAFF U-20 Women's Championship campaign, will be back in the camp in Chennai, as they prepare for the upcoming AFC U-20 Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers next month.

India has been placed in Group F of the qualifiers, which will be played in Vietnam. Apart from the hosts, India is also set to face Singapore and Indonesia.

The 28-member squad is as follows: Goalkeepers: Monalisha Devi, Anshika, Anjali Munda. Hempriya Seram.

Defenders: Purnima Kumari, Kajal, Shilky Devi, Astam Oraon, Shubhangi Singh, Varshika, Gladys Zonunsangi, Th Saneha. Midfielders: Babina Lisham, Martina Thokchom, Kajol Dsouza, Shailja, Nitu Linda, Tania Kant, Shelia Loktongbam.

Forwards: Lynda Kom Serto, Sumati Kumari, Anita Kumari, Neha, Sunita Munda, Sonali Soren, Apurna Narzary, Rimpia Haldar, Amisha Baxla.

Second ICC World Test Championship final to be played from June 7-11

Dubai | Agencies

The International Cricket Council (ICC) confirmed on Wednesday that the second edition of the ICC World Test Championship Final will be played between June 7-11, 2023, at The Oval in London, England.

The Oval has hosted over 100 Test matches in its rich history, and in June will welcome the top two Test sides in the ICC World Test Championship standings, which will compete for the ICC World Test Championship Mace following two years of hard-fought competition.

"Leading Team India out onto the field of play at the World Test Championship Final would be spe-



cial. We have grown and developed as a team during this competition and to be in with a chance of lifting the Mace at the Oval in June, we know we still need to overcome a tough Australia

side." "There have been so many dramatic moments in Test cricket lately, and there are undoubtedly more to come. I am excited by the prospect of booking our place at the Final and

hopefully creating history later in the year," said India captain Rohit Sharma. Australia currently top the standings, with India in hot pursuit in second place, and both teams go head-to-head across a four-Test series for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy from February 9 with a place for the final at The Oval, and the coveted ICC World Test Championship Mace, firmly in their sights. While six teams in total stand a chance of qualification, among the frontrunners to challenge Australia and India are Sri Lanka, who sit third in the standings and South Africa in fourth, who take on reigning WTC champions New Zealand and the West Indies respectively over two two-Test series during February and March.

Serbian duo lift Juve to comfortable win over Salernitana

Rome | Agencies

Juventus eventually righted the ship with a 3-0 win away to Salernitana, as Dusan Vlahovic ended his goal drought by bagging a brace while his compatriot Filip Kostic added another.

Juve are in deep trouble as they have been docked 15 points for inflating transfer fees to boost gains and only collected one point in the last three Serie A games. Vlahovic started upfront to form an attacking trident with Kostic and Angel Di Maria, while Fabio Mirretti

got the nod in the middle of the park, reports Xinhua news agency.

The away side broke the deadlock in the 26th minute when Mirretti was tripped down in the box, and Vlahovic stepped up to convert it.

Juve doubled the lead before half-time as Salernitana's poor clearance went for Vlahovic, whose wayward attempt turned into an assist for Kostic to tap it in from a close range. Vlahovic sealed the win



straight after the break as substitute Nicolo Fagioli threaded through for the Serbian to complete the scoresheet.

Despite the win, Juve are still struggling in the 10th place with 26 points, 13 points off fourth-placed Lazio.

EX-BRAZIL MIDFIELDER LIMA REJOINS SANTOS

Rio De Janeiro: Former Brazil international midfielder Lucas Lima has returned to his former club Santos on a short-term contract.

The player will initially be tied to the club for three months under a performance-based deal that includes the option of a 12-month extension if both parties agree, reports Xinhua news agency.

"I wanted to apologize for all the times I hurt (you)," Lima told fans in a video, in reference to his acrimonious departure from the club in 2017.

"I know I didn't react in the best way and I regret it. I have a chance to write a new story in the place where I was most happy in life," he added.

Lima, who has been capped 14 times for Brazil, made 163 league appearances for Santos before joining Palmeiras in 2018. He spent the last 18 months on loan at Fortaleza.



ROYALS EDGE INTO SEMI-FINALS DESPITE CAPITALS DEFEAT

New Delhi | Agencies

The Paarl Royals may have lost by 59 runs to the Pretoria Capitals in the last round-robin match of the SA20, but they did just enough to sneak into the semi-finals.

The Royals were playing a game within a game after the Capitals posted a mammoth 226/5 in their allotted 20 overs.

Sri Lankan international Kusal Mendis was the mainstay of the Capitals innings with 80 off 41 balls. Colin Ingram (41) and Phil Salt (39) also made worthwhile contributions.

The Paarl-based side's secondary target was 163 in order to edge out Durban's Super Giants for the last remaining semi-final spot.

The Super Giants' hopes were rising when the Royals were reduced to 38/3 in the Powerplay and then a further 101/5 in the 14th over when



captain David Miller walked back to the pavilion with seemingly his team's hopes of progressing with him.

However, the Royals still had Jos Buttler at the crease and England's limited-overs captain delivered a superb 70 off 45 balls (4x4, 5x6) to take his team to the brink of qualification.

Ten runs were still required off eight balls when Buttler departed though and it was left to Bjorn Fortuin to get the Royals into the semi-finals with a vitally important eight runs off eight deliveries.

The table-topping Capitals, meanwhile, will be glad that they returned to winning ways after their hiccup against the Super Giants with a rematch awaiting them against the Royals in the first semi-final at the Wanderers.

The second SA20 semi-final will see Joburg Super Kings face off against third-placed Sunrisers Eastern Cape at Centurion today.



SALMAN KHAN WRAPPED UP THE SHOOTING OF HIS UPCOMING MOVIE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood superstar Salman Khan, who kept his fans waiting for a new film for over a year, has wrapped up the shooting of 'Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan'. A little more wait and the film will land in theatres; until then, one can cherish his cameo in 'Pathaan'.

Sharing a brand new look of him from the film, Salman Khan announced on his

social media handles about winding up the shoot.

As soon as the announcement was made, social media was flooded with audience and fan messages about their eagerness for the film's release and their desire to see their favourite megastar on the big screen. Speaking of the new look, Khan looks dashing and uber cool in the picture. The man has once been voted one of the sexiest men alive, after all.

'Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan' stars Salman Khan, Venkatesh Daggubati, Pooja Hegde, Jagapathi Babu,

Bhumika Chawla, Vijender Singh, Abhimanyu Singh, Raghav Juyal, Siddharth Nigam, Jassie Gill, Shehnaaz Gill, Palak Tiwari and Vinali Bhatnagar.

Salman Khan Films Production produced by Salma Khan, the film, directed by Farhad Samji and has all the elements of a Salman Khan film - action, comedy, drama, and romance.

'Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan' is slated for Eid 2023 and will be a Zee Studios worldwide release.



It is hugely gratifying that people are rooting for the anti-hero: John



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor John Abraham, who is currently riding high on the success of 'Pathaan', hopes that a prequel to his character Jim from the film that reveals his backstory is made.

John said: "It is incredible the amount of love that I have been receiving for playing Jim in Pathaan! As an actor, I only work for the love of audiences and fans. Records and milestones are a huge bonus and I'm grateful that Pathaan is such a historic blockbuster." "I didn't expect that people would love my character so much that they want more of Jim."

He added: "I'm astounded by the number of messages I'm getting daily on my social media about how there should be a prequel to Jim. When people almost always root for the hero, and that hero is Shah Rukh Khan in Pathaan, it is hugely gratifying that people are rooting for the anti-hero too!"

"I'm fortunate that my work in Pathaan has spoken loudly and hopefully, I have managed to give people an anti-hero that they will always remember. That was my intent when I heard Pathaan."

Speaking of what he loves about Jim, the leader of notorious Outfit X, a band of deadly gun-toting mercenaries on hire, John said: "Jim is a refreshingly suave villain, with very well etched out characterisation that dives into why he became what he became! Imagine the pain he endured, imagine the hurt that broke him and turned him into the man is."

"To me, Jim was a very powerful character and yes, it would be great if Aditya Chopra wants to bring him back and tell the world how good a super-spy he was and how he became a ruthless mercenary later!" He added: "As Luthra says in Pathaan, Jim and Kabir are the best in business. So, there could be lots to explore if a film is made on Jim. I don't know what Aditya Chopra has in mind. As of now, I'm relishing the love that's coming my way and I'm thankful that I have entertained people thoroughly."

2012 WAS NOT A GREAT YEAR FOR ME PERSONALLY: SHRUTI HAASAN

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress-singer Shruti Haasan, who is known for being vocal about her thoughts and feelings, recently spoke to her younger self through the medium of social media and shared with her followers the uncertainties that followed her after 2012. The actress posted an image of hers from 2012 on her Instagram and shared that the year wasn't that great for her personally and little did she know that things were going to change for her, professionally as well.

Sharing the picture, Shruti wrote in the caption, "This picture is from 2012 it was not a great year for me personally and little did I know things were going to change for me professionally... I look back at that version of me and I so wish I could go back in time and give her a giant hug and show her where she would eventually end up." She continued in the caption, "I want to tell her that people will always talk s**t and that there is a strong breeze of fakery constantly in the air and that the instinct was right and strength is vulnerability." She feels grateful for the constant learning that life has thrown at her in the form of oddballs.

"But what gives me from my yesterdays for my tomorrows is that there is pain in the fire that (is) always burning in me - always looking for something ahead of me - something to learn from something, to see something to dream for. It's silent, it's violent and it's true also gothpapa vibes in secret have now come out," she concluded.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Abhishek Bachchan, who turned 47 on February 5, rang in his birthday with his wife Aishwarya Rai Bachchan and daughter Aaradhya in Maldives.

Abhishek took to Instagram, where he shared a string of photos from his 47th birthday trip including his "beautiful view" of Aishwarya.

He wrote: "Some more beautiful views... Especially the last one. Thank you stregis

maldives for

making my birthday so special.

On the work front, Abhishek, who was last seen in the comedy 'Dasvi', will make a cameo in Ajay Devgn's upcoming film 'Bholaa' this March. He will also be seen in R. Balki's 'Ghoomer' with Saiyami Kher.

Abhishek posts pic of wife Aishwarya, calls it 'beautiful view'



YAMI MET REAL LIFE CRIME JOURNALIST DURING HER FILM'S SHOOT

Mumbai Yami Gautam Dhar, who is awaiting the release of her upcoming streaming film 'Lost', met real life crime journalists during the course of the film's shooting in which she essays the role of a crime reporter in hot pursuit of a story. The actress said, "I didn't meet any crime journalists prior to the shooting but yes, I did meet them while we were shooting, and they were very senior. They were very kind." "It was a pleasure meeting them because if they hadn't told me who they were, I would never know their significant body of work. I wouldn't have known their background. They were extremely warm. They watched us shoot and perform. That's all about it; there was no particular journalist that I had in mind while preparing for the role."

The actress also shared why she feels that cinema is one of the most respected professions in the world. She said, "Cinema has a large influence on people, which is why it is considered one of the most loved and respected professions in the world. It manages to evoke a beautiful bag of emotions within you. It has the capacity to entertain and engage you as an audience and that's what I call success. I am hoping 'Lost' can give the audience that kind of experience."



Shruti Yogi