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Huge security build-up continue on inter-state borders amid

FARMERS' PROTEST

After the Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur borders were completely sealed in view of the farmers' 'Delhi Chalo' march, the Delhi Traffic Police have issued an advisory for commuters for alternate routes and diversions. On Tuesday, police had completely sealed Tikri, Singhu and Ghazipur borders after farmers clashed with the police at the Haryana-Punjab Shambhu border and in Haryana's Jind district on Tuesday, leaving several people injured. According to traffic cops, owing to various farmer organisations 'agitation' that started on Tuesday, farmers from adjoining states may try to move towards Delhi by various means to participate in the above said protest. "NH-44 beyond Singhu Border has been closed for general traffic. Other connected roads going towards NH-44 - Sonapat/Panipat are also affected," said a senior traffic police official. However, two lanes of NH-9 and one lane of NH-24 at Gazipur Border are open for the general public.

Chandigarh | Agencies

Huge security build-up continued on inter-state borders between Punjab and Haryana on the second day on Wednesday, as assembled protesting farmers are adamant on heading to the national capital to lodge their protest over unfulfilled demands, including legal guarantee of minimum support prices (MSP) of crops.

Police used tear gas on demonstrators in a bid to stop farmers' protests from reaching the capital. Scores of policemen and farmers got injured in stone pelting that ensued between them. The farmers -- representing over 200 farmer unions -- also want waiver of farm loans and criminal cases against those protesting farm laws dropped.

Makeshift hospitals have been started at the site by the farmer unions and even the Punjab government has alerted nearby government hospitals and community health centres to tackle any emergency.

Supporting the cause of the farmers, Punjab Finance Minister Harpal Cheema wrote on X: "We strongly and vehemently condemn the attacks and atrocities on farm-



ers, who are well within their rights to protest democratically. These attacks show the draconian mindset of @BJP4India and @cmohry. Government must call farmers for a constructive dialogue and listen to their demands."

Drones were also used to drop tear gas shells on the thousands gathered, while several farmers were detained at the border.

The farmers on Tuesday damaged multi-layer barricades put up by the police to stop them at the border, by removing cement and barbed wire fencing with tractors.

The farmers were trying to break the barricades in a bid to cross the Singhu border to enter Haryana from Punjab and head to the national Capital. The farmers intend to march to Delhi from the Ambala-Shambhu, Khanauri-Jind, and Dabwali borders. Mobile internet services have been suspended in seven districts of Haryana and Section 144 was imposed in Panchkula and Chandigarh.

FARMERS TO BLOCK RAIL TRAFFIC IN PUNJAB TODAY

Chandigarh: In protest against firing of tear gas shells on agitating farmers on Punjab-Haryana border by the police, the Bharatiya Kisan Union (Ugrahan) will block rail traffic in Punjab on Thursday from 12 noon to 4 p.m. The 'rail roko' will take place at 10 locations initially, and more locations may be added, union leaders said. They said they would block road and rail traffic against the "dictatorial attitude" of the Haryana government. "This protest is against the repression by the Haryana government against the farmers of a few unions who had to go to Delhi as part of their Dilli Chalo protest call," BKU (Ugrahan) general secretary Sukhdev Singh Kokrikalan told the media.

PUNJAB TO BEAR TREATMENT COST OF FARMERS INJURED IN PROTEST

Chandigarh: The Punjab government will bear all cost of treatment for injured people during the ongoing farmers' protest, state Health and Family Welfare Minister Balbir Singh said here on Wednesday. After visiting government health facilities, he said keeping in view the safety of protesting farmers, all hospitals adjoining the Haryana border have been put on high alert and emergency services are being provided round the clock.

THIRD ROUND OF MEETING BETWEEN FARMERS, CENTRE IN CHANDIGARH TODAY

Chandigarh: Amid a huge security buildup continued on inter-state borders between Punjab and Haryana on the second day on Wednesday, a third round of meeting between farmer unions and Centre will be held here on Thursday, sources said.

Earlier, a meeting with top Punjab government functionaries was planned here in the evening with Union Ministers Arjun Munda and Piyush Goyal to virtually hold talks with farmer leaders. As assembled protesting farmers were adamant on heading to the national capital to lodge the protest over unfulfilled demands, including legal guarantee of minimum support prices (MSP) of crops, the Centre announced to hold another round of talks to "settle the issues amicably", a senior state government functionary said. In the past two days, police used tear gas on demonstrators in a bid to stop farmers' protests from reaching the national capital. Scores of policemen and farmers got injured in stone pelting that ensued between them.

RAHUL PLEDGES GUARANTEE ON MSP

New Delhi: Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday said that Congress, if voted to power, will give a legal guarantee on MSP to every farmer, based on the recommendations of Swaminathan report. "This MSP guarantee will be a game-changer for more than 15 crore farmers and will bring a lasting change to their lives. This is our first guarantee while treading on Nyay Yatra," Rahul announced on Tuesday. The contrasting stand of Congress party on support to Farmers Protest 2.0 and its outright dismissal of a 'progressive and fore-sighted' law in 2010 has given the BJP ammunition to tear into the grand old party and accuse it of playing to the gallery, ahead of the election season.

PM Modi inaugurates UAE's first Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi



Team Absolute | New Delhi

It was indeed a proud and historic moment for Hindus from across the world as Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) Mandir, the first Hindu temple in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), on Wednesday.

With Sanskrit shlokas and vedic hymns reverberating across the Abu Dhabi skyline, PM Modi arrived at the temple premises at 6 p.m. (IST) and was welcomed by BAPS' Ishwarachandras Swami and other delegates. Modi performed the 'global aarti'.

The inauguration of the iconic temple was celebrated through the 'Festival of Harmony' -- a series of uplifting programmes and community events focussed on strengthening faith, mobilising community service, and inspiring harmony among

people of all generations and backgrounds.

The celebrations began on February 10 and will continue until February 21.

Spread over a 27-acre piece of land, gifted by UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the iconic stone temple is located in Abu Mureikha, near Al Rahba off the Dubai-Abu Dhabi Sheikh Zayed Highway. Featuring the traditional Nagar style of architecture, the temple stands tall at 108 feet and is crowned with seven shikhars (spires) each representing one of the seven emirates of the UAE.

With two central domes, 'Dome of Harmony' and 'Dome of Peace', the temple's entrance is marked by eight idols, which symbolises the eight values foundational to Sanatana Dharma.

As per reports, the cost of the construction is estimated to be around 400 million UAE dirhams.

Sonia files nomination for RS polls from Rajasthan

Jaipur | Agencies

Congress President Sonia Gandhi filed her nomination for the Rajya Sabha polls from Rajasthan on Wednesday.

She arrived at the Rajasthan Assembly with senior Congress leaders, including former Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and Sachin Pilot.

Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra were

also present during her nomination filing.

The party had formally announced her name only after Sonia reached Jaipur this morning. Along with Sonia Gandhi, the names of three more leaders were also announced. These include the names of Abhishek Manu Singhvi from Himachal Pradesh, Akhilesh Prasad Singh from Bihar and Chandrakant Handore from Maharashtra.

Pak Rangers violate ceasefire along int'l border in J&K

Jammu | Agencies

Border Security Forces (BSF) on Wednesday said that they gave a befitting response to the unprovoked ceasefire violation by Pakistan Rangers, along the International Border in the RS Pura sector of Jammu.

"On February 14, 2024 at about 5:50 PM Pak Rangers resorted to unprovoked firing in RS Pura area which was befittingly responded by BSF troops," the BSF said.

BSF said that the firing stopped at about 6:15 p.m. "We are on high alert," the BSF said.

There has been a series of ceasefire violations at the International border in Jammu in the recent past. On October 17, 2023, Pakistan Rangers resorted to unprovoked firing



towards BSF troops in which two BSF personnel received bullet injuries. On October 26 last year, there was a ceasefire violation by Pakistan in the Armia sector of Jammu. On November 8, 2023, Pakistan Rangers resorted to unprovoked firing in Ramgarh area which was befittingly responded by BSF troops.

SC TO DELIVER ITS VERDICT ON VALIDITY OF ELECTORAL BONDS SCHEME TODAY

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court will deliver on Thursday its verdict on pleas challenging the validity of the electoral bonds scheme.

In November last year, a 5-judge Constitution Bench headed by CJI D.Y. Chandrachud and comprising Justices Sanjiv Khanna, BR Gavai, JB Pardiwala, and Manoj Misra had reserved its verdict in the matter after hearing the arguments for three days in a row.

The petitioners before the apex court had argued that the Electoral Bond scheme violates the citizen's fundamental right to information under Article 19 (1) and it enables backdoor lobbying and promotes corruption and eliminates level playing



field for political parties in Opposition. Responding to the challenge, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta -- the second highest law officer of

the Centre -- had contended that the scheme is intended to reduce cash in the electoral process. S-G Mehta asserted that the Union

government cannot know the details of donations made through Electoral Bonds. Placing a letter signed by the chairman of SBI on record, he had said that the details cannot be accessed without a court order. During the hearing, CJI Chandrachud had said that there are five important considerations: "1. The need to reduce the cash element in the electoral process; 2. The need to encourage the use of authorised banking channels; 3. Incentivising use of banking channels -- by confidentiality; 4. Transparency; 5. Legitimation of kickbacks." Further, the CJI had remarked that the scheme should not become a legitimisation of kickbacks and quid pro quo between the power centers and people who are benefactors of that power.

Rohit Sharma to lead India at 2024 T20 World Cup

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India will be playing the T20 World Cup 2024, to be organised in the Caribbean and the USA, under the captaincy of Rohit Sharma, said BCCI secretary Jay Shah at an event in Rajkot on Wednesday. India have had Hardik Pandya as their full-time skipper in the shortest format but the heart-breaking loss in the final of the 2023 World Cup to Australia have reignited the murmurs of senior batters Virat Kohli and Rohit returning for the T20 showpiece in June.



that in 2024 (T20 World Cup) in Barbados (venue for the final), under Rohit Sharma's captaincy, ham Bharat ka jhanda gaadenge (we will hoist the Indian flag)," Shah said at the end of his speech.

"In 2023 (final) at Ahmedabad, even though we did not win the World Cup after 10 straight wins, we won hearts. I want to promise you

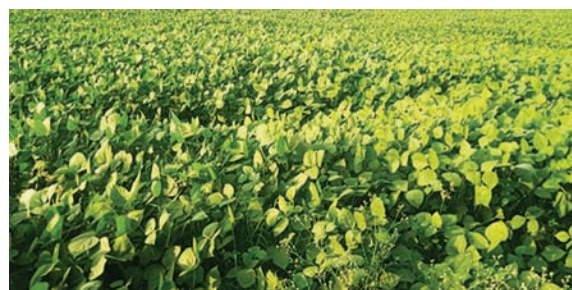
MSP for all crops: Impact will be multi-pronged, says CRISIL Market Intelligence and Analytics

Chennai | Agencies

It will be a multi-pronged impact if the government decides to procure the entire production of 23 crops for which minimum support price (MSP) has been announced, said an official of CRISIL Market Intelligence and Analytics.

For the exchequer, this will mean a higher outgo and for the farmers growing certain crops, it would mean cash support during times when prices plummet below MSP.

It will also give them the freedom to sow crops of their choice and be more amenable to their local conditions, said Pushan Sharma, Director-Research, CRISIL Market Intelligence & Analytics. "Considering the government will procure only crops trading in mandis below the MSP, our calculations show it will need a working capital of approximately Rs 6 lakh crore in Marketing Year (MY) 2023. We considered 16 of 23 crops, which account for over 90 per cent production of the field crops, for the analysis," Sharma said. The real cost to the government, though, will be the difference between MSP and mandi prices, which works out to around Rs 21,000 crore



for MY2023. The cost could be higher if the government offloads the commodities in mandis because then prices could fall further than what was seen in those markets in 2022-23, which was used to calculate the government's bill, Sharma said. Of the 16 crops tracked, eight traded higher than MSP and hence would not require procurement; the cost estimations reflect procurement for the remaining eight crops that traded below MSP. According to Sharma, while MSP is

announced for 23 crops, the government ends up meaningfully procuring only two crops -- paddy and wheat -- and hence over 60 per cent of field crop production in India comes from only these two crops (excluding sugarcane) as farmers tend to opt for these given the MSP support and lack of risk appetite for other crops. Sharma said a look at kharif 2022 and rabi 2023 shows that 41 per cent of the paddy and 24 per cent of the wheat produced during the year was procured. Next came mustard, where 9 per cent of production was procured. Eight crops did not need procurement at MSP as their mandi prices were higher. For the remaining 5 crops, procurement was less than 3 per cent of the production. In this milieu, guaranteeing MSP for all crops can lead to farmers moving to crops other than paddy and wheat, which see the maximum procurement. Another critical aspect to consider is that procurement is concentrated in only a few states, such as Punjab, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh, so farmers in other states do not get the benefit of MSP. Hence, guaranteeing MSP across crops will lead to percolation of the benefit across the country.



'ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION' OFFERS MULTIPLE BENEFITS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

With the Tamil Nadu Assembly having adopted the resolution against the Central government's proposed 'One Nation, One Election' policy, the spotlight is once again on the debate over the feasibility of this 'critical reform' that the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led regime is keen to go ahead with.

While the resolution moved by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin highlights various points of 'objections' to the move, it 'conveniently' chooses to ignore the benefits that the proposed electoral exercise offers.

'One Nation, One Election' refers to the idea of simultaneously holding the general and state elections. A high-level committee (HLC), headed by former President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, is already in the process of exploring the possibility of 'One Nation, One Election'.

The panel constituted by the Modi government has so far consulted a galaxy of constitutional and legal luminaries of the country as part of the exercise. The panel has held fresh consultations with the state election commissions this week in a bid to expedite the process.

The parties opposed to this reform agenda of the Modi government have not yet offered any substantial ground to punch holes in this plan. They appear to be deliberately trying to shift the public focus away from the positive sides of this endeavour that the government has so far showcased. One of the most important benefits that the Tamil Nadu Assembly seems to have overlooked while passing the resolution against 'One Nation, One



Election' is that synchronising the Lok Sabha and Assembly election cycles will help the government fast-track the development schemes and the programmes aimed at augmentation of financial system of the country and the states.

These are the two major areas which happen to suffer the most in the existing system of scattered polls, which is what the Modi government aims to do away with.

Secondly, holding general and state elections together will also result in toning up of the governance efficacy that gets affected badly due to poll processes taking place throughout the year, either in one state or another. Who is going to benefit the most if the efficiency level of the governments is ramped up? Who is going to be the main beneficiary if the cost on polls gets reduced? Obviously, it is the common people of the country.

There is no denying that holding an election is an expensive exercise, given the huge cost that every single

poll, be it that of Lok Sabha or Assembly, puts on the state exchequer. The huge amount of money spent on holding elections in a scattered manner can be used for greater development and better governance.

In addition to this, bureaucratic and other government apparatus is required to be engrossed more in election-related duties throughout the year in case of scattered polls. With this in view, simultaneous polls will be a better idea to have the entire government machinery focused more on the works that will benefit the people at the grassroots levels.

Needless to say, 'One Nation, One Election' could help save the country time, energy and money. The time and money so saved could be used in governing the public in a much better way.

Moreover, the governments elected under this practice could be stable for a full five-year term, which will enable them to focus on governance in a much better way. It goes without

saying that repeated elections divert the focus of the political parties from the public-centric works to just winning polls.

In fact, the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), which remains in force in one state or the other throughout the year due to fragmented polls, prevents the governments from implementing its schemes. As a result, it is the voters or common people whose work gets impacted.

While the Tamil Nadu government's resolution says that simultaneous polls will be against the idea of decentralisation, it does not throw any light on how 'One Nation, One Election' can do so.

On the contrary, the objective of 'One Nation, One Election' is to ensure that common people are the main beneficiaries. It is the idea of strengthening the system of empowering people. What has been observed is that the citizens of the country have been concerned about frequent elections in one part or another, which adversely impacts the economy and development.

Under the parliamentary system, the government needs a majority to continue in office. If it loses majority, legislatures are dissolved, and the country or state goes to premature elections, resulting in staggered polls.

To make sure that a state government does not fall without an alternative, the Law Commission recommended that "a no-confidence motion against a government should be followed by a confidence motion" to ensure that if the opposition does not have the numbers to form an alternative government, the regime in office cannot be removed.

U'khand govt sets UCC rollout in motion, forms new team for implementation

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Days after the Uttarakhand Assembly gave its nod to the Uniform Civil Code (UCC), the Pushkar Singh Dhami-led state government went a step further on Wednesday to realise the goal of equality and uniformity across different religions, with regard to marriage, inheritance, divorce and other aspects. The state government has formed a new committee for drafting the guidelines and modalities for UCC implementation in the state. The committee, comprising five members, has retained three past panelists-cum-experts from the erstwhile panel.

The new UCC committee has got the approval of the Governor for further laying down of rules. The members of the new panel are retired



IAS officer Shatrughan Singh, professor Surekha Dangwal, social activist Manu Gaur, ADG Amit Sinha, and Divisional Commissioner Ajay Mishra. special emphasis has also been made for facilitating digital propagation of the laid down guidelines. The committee has also been entrusted with the task of creating an online portal and mobile applications for easy and quick access to the UCC guidelines. This will empower the residents of the

state to lodge their complaints, grievances either from their residence or remote locations, if any. It will also ensure that people don't end up running from pillar to post and rather get a quick solution.

For the uninitiated, Uttarakhand has become the first state in the country to clear the rollout of UCC. After the Assembly's nod, it is just matter of days for the law to become operational.

Manipur: 1 killed in police firing as 'village volunteers' try to loot armoury at police training college

Imphal | Agencies

A 24-year-old youth was killed while two others were injured after security forces opened fire to disperse a mob of 'village volunteers', who reportedly tried to loot firearms from the Manipur Police Training College (MPTC) armoury in Imphal East district, officials said on Wednesday.

Sources said a large number of village volunteers attempted to barge into the armoury of MPTC at Pangei to loot firearms on Tuesday night.

The security forces opened fire to disperse the 'village volunteers' and in the process

three persons were injured. One of them -- Okram Sanaton -- succumbed to his injuries while being taken to a hospital in Imphal.

Security personnel initially fired a few rounds of tear gas shells, but had to open fire later to disperse the mob and bring the situation under control.

Additional security forces and a forensic team have reached the spot and further investigation is underway.

Since the ethnic violence broke out in Manipur on May 3, 2023, armed village volunteers of different communities have been guarding their villages along the peripheries of different districts to prevent attacks from the rival community.

Sanjay Singh files petition in SC against Delhi HC's decision denying him bail in money laundering case

Team Absolute | New Delhi

AP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh has filed a petition in the Supreme Court (SC) against the decision of the Delhi High Court rejecting his bail plea in money laundering case linked to the alleged excise scam.

The special leave petition challenges the February 7 order of the Delhi High Court dismissing Singh's bail application.

Last week, a bench of Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma of the Delhi High Court said that no ground is



made out for releasing the AAP leader on bail. However, it directed to expedite the

trial once it starts to protect Singh's rights as an accused.

Singh had moved the High Court seeking bail on January 4 after Special Judge MK Nagpal of Rouse Avenue Court on December 22 dismissed his plea.

The top court is already seized of another petition filed by Singh challenging his arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and subsequent remand.

Pursuant to the liberty granted by the Supreme Court in that matter, the AAP leader had moved a regular bail application before the jurisdictional trial court.

TWO ASSAM CONGRESS MLAS TO 'SUPPORT' BJP GOVT

Guwahati | Agencies

Two Congress MLAs Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha and Basanta Das on Wednesday announced their "support" for the BJP government.

Both the MLAs have met the Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma during the ongoing budget session of the assembly and tendered their support for the ruling party.

Purkayastha, a three-time MLA, has also resigned from his post of working president of the opposition just before he went to meet Chief Minister. Basanta Das was a minister in the Tarun Gogoi-led Congress government in Assam.

However, both the MLAs have said that they will not resign from



the Congress but will support the BJP government despite being a pri-

mary member of the opposition party.

Not resigning from Congress, the MLAs have made sure to avoid the bi-elections in their constituencies.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said that showing faith in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's development politics, the two Congress MLAs have chosen to support the government.

"They will support both the central and state governments with all public welfare initiatives and beneficial projects," the Chief Minister said.

He said that both MLAs will not join the BJP.

Earlier, two other Congress MLAs -- Sashi Kanta Das and Siddique Ahmed also had extended their "support" to the government but have not resigned from Congress.

KOLKATA RAILWAY STATION WILL TURN INTO AN ECONOMIC HUB SOON

Mumbai | Agencies

The country's only international railway terminus in the true sense, Kolkata Railway Station, is set to get a makeover soon that will turn it into a major economic hub.

The facility grew from a nondescript suburban station named Chitpur to an international terminus after introduction of the Kolkata-Dhaka Maitree Express. Today, another international train, the Kolkata-Khulna Bandhan Express, also operates from there.

The terminus is today a meeting point for the Bengali population from both sides of the border. Thousands of Bangladeshi citizens use the station for their travel to and from India.

Apart from facilities such as a Customs checkpost, Kolkata Railway Station offers several upscale passenger amenities to the international traveler like -- an executive waiting



hall, lounge spa that offers fish pedicure and massager, a food court, snacks counters and WiFi connectivity.

The station has five platforms and a large circulating area outside that offers parking for buses, cars and taxis. There are also App cab booths for those who wish to avail the facility. It has wide and well-maintained roads, connecting the railway station to the city's major thoroughfares. Now, the Kolkata Railway Station will go in for a major re-development.

"Kolkata Terminus (Kolkata Railway Station) is now under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme and will undergo major makeover and re-development. The plan involves the creation of an economic hub within the premises that will offer a variety of quality products. It will be an attraction for all and offer stiff competition to shopping hubs like Shyambazar and Hatibagan in the neighbourhood," said Kausik Mitra, CPRO, Eastern Railway.

NITISH'S DEPARTURE HAS NOT AFFECTED INDIA BLOC: CONGRESS

Patna: Bihar Congress Chief Akhilesh Prasad Singh on Wednesday said that Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's leaving the INDIA bloc has not affected the alliance in any manner.

"INDIA bloc remains unaffected after Nitish Kumar left. He becomes a liability for everyone whomsoever he joins. INDIA bloc is strong and will not be affected by Nitish Kumar," Akhilesh Singh said while filing his nomination papers for Rajya Sabha.

He said that there were rumours that Congress may split after Nitish Kumar left the INDIA bloc but those who were creating rift and breaking the political parties have now got the same treatment.

Besides Akhilesh Singh, JD-U leader Sanjay Jha, two leaders of BJP Bhim Singh and Dharmshila Gupta also filed the nominations for Rajya.

Lovers enter suicide pact on Valentine's Day in UP as family objects to relationship

Mahoba | Agencies

On Valentine's Day a 20-year-old youth and his 19-year-old girlfriend entered a suicide pact and ended their lives by consuming poison.

The young couple took the extreme step on Wednesday as they wanted to marry each other, but their families were not ready to accept the relationship.

According to reports, Surendra Singh, a resident of Kanera Village of Charkhari, was in a relationship with Seema, a girl who lived in the neighbourhood. When the family members discovered their affair, they scolded the youngsters and opposed their plans to marry. On Wednesday Surendra left home at six in the morn-



ing saying he was going to the fields and Seema also left home around the same time. Surendra first consumed sulfas and called Seema and informed her about it. After this, the girl also consumed sulfas. When the villagers saw Surendra in pain, they informed his family and the young man narrated the entire incident to them.

Both Seema and Surendra's relatives rushed them to the Mahoba District Hospital but they both died during treatment.

Inspector Ganesh Prasad of Charkhari police station said that information about the death of the couple had been received and the bodies had been sent for post mortem and a probe was on.

MODERATE TO HEAVY RAIN/SNOW LIKELY IN J&K FROM FEB 17-21

Srinagar | Agencies

Heavy to moderate rain/snow is likely to occur in J&K from February 17 to February 21.

Mukhtar Ahmad, director of the local MeT office told IANS, "A couple of moderate to intense Western Disturbances are most likely to affect J&K and adjoining areas from February 17 afternoon onwards.

"Under the influence of these, an extended wet spell from February 17 (night) onwards till February 21 (afternoon) is most likely to occur over J&K and adjoining areas.

"In Kashmir Division, weather on February 17 is likely to be partly to generally cloudy with possibility of light snow at isolated higher reaches towards late night.

"On February 18, generally cloudy weather with possibility of light to moderate rain/snow at many places.

"On February 19-20, there is possibility of light to moderate rain/snow at most places (plains & lower reaches) with possibility of heavy snowfall over middle & higher reaches of Kupwara,



Baramulla, Bandipora, Ganderbal, Badgam, Shopian and Kulgam districts during February 19 late afternoon/evening to February 20 late night.

"On February 21, there is possibility of light to moderate snow at many places till afternoon/late afternoon and gradual improvement thereafter.

"In Jammu Division on February 18, there is possibility of light rain/snow at many places and on February 19-20 there is possibility of intermittent light to moderate rain with thunder/lightning in plains of Jammu Division with light to

moderate snowfall over higher reaches with heavy snowfall over isolated higher reaches of Ramban, Poonch, Doda and Kishtwar.

"On February 21, light to moderate snow/rain/thunder/lightning over many places till late afternoon/evening and gradual improvement thereafter. "The system may lead to temporary closure of roads of higher reaches and important passes like Sinthan pass, Mughal Road, Sadhna & Razdan pass, Zojila etc." Travellers are advised to plan accordingly. Farmers are advised to withhold irrigation and fertilizer application & drain out excess water from Orchards and fields during the above period. "Significant drop in day temperature during the above period is expected." Srinagar recorded minus 3 degree Celsius, Gulmarg minus 4.2 and Pahalgam minus 5.2 as the minimum temperature on Wednesday.

Leh town in Ladakh region had minus 11.4 and Kargil minus 17.2 as the minimum temperature.

Jammu had 8.1, Katra 9, Batote 0.6, Bhandarwah 1.6 and Banihal 4.2 as the minimum temperature.



TRIBAL MAN STRIPPED, HUNG UPSIDE DOWN AND THRASHED IN MADHYA PRADESH

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A tribal man was stripped and brutally assaulted in Madhya Pradesh's Betul, the second such incident that has come to light in the district this week. The victim runs a tea shop and said that the attackers kept asking him for 'cut money' while he was being beaten.

A video of the assault which has gone viral on social media, shows the victim hanging upside down from the roof. He was mercilessly beaten with belts and sticks.

"They, stripped me, tied me up, and then beat me with sticks, belts and slippers. I don't know why I was being beaten, but they demanded money for the tea shop that I run with my father," the victim told NDTV.

The incident took place in November, but the victim did not file a complaint out of fear that the attackers would harm his family.

"They had a gun, and I heard they one of them has also committed a murder, which is why I didn't tell anyone. When the video went viral, I informed my elder brother that this



had happened to me a few months ago," he says.

Police have registered a case and hunt is on for the accused. This distressing event follows another incident that took place in Betul recently, where another tribal man was beaten brutally.

On Monday, a tribal man was assaulted and made to pose as a "murga" in Betul. The victim was subjected to physical violence and casteist slurs by a group led by Chanchal Rajput, an alleged member of Bajrang Dal.

Raju, who works as a DJ, narrated

the harrowing experience: "At around 11:30 pm, while I was on my way home, I was picked up near Subhash School by Chanchal Rajput and his Bajrang Dal friends. They assaulted me physically and verbally, and used casteist slurs against me."

Official statistics though suggest a decrease in serious crimes against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the state. According to data released by the Ajak branch of the police headquarters, there has been a 22% reduction in severe crimes against these communities from 2022 to 2023.

In 2022, there were 11,384 reported cases of crimes against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, while in 2023, the number decreased to 11,171. Murder saw a decline from 140 in 2022 to 121 in 2023. Similarly, reported cases of sexual assault dropped from 996 to 883 during the same period.

The police have also identified hotspots for crimes against marginalized communities throughout the state. In 2021, there were 906 such hotspots, and by 2023, the number decreased to 566.

History of Lodhi, Lodha and Lodh Kshatriya community is a chronicle of bravery and heroism : CM Dr. Yadav

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav said that the history of Lodhi, Lodha and Lodh Kshatriya community is a chronicle of bravery and heroism. The heroes and great men of the community sacrificed their all for the country for which we all are indebted to them. The future generations should take inspiration from their lives and values. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav was addressing the Provincial meeting of Lodhi, Lodha and Lodh Kshatriya Mahasabha at Tulsi Manas Bhawan.

Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has erased all material relating to slavery from the education curriculum by implementing the new education policy that honours heroes and great personalities. The new education policy includes biographies of great personalities, revolutionaries and martyrs along with essential knowl-



edge. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav paid tribute to braveheart Shah Lodhi and Rani Avanti Bai Lodhi and remembered their contribution and sacrifices for India's independence. Lodhi, Lodha and Lodh Kshatriya Mahasabha honoured Chief Minister Dr. Yadav by garlanding him with flowers and presenting him a shawl, shripal and memento.

Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Tourism, Culture and Religious Trusts and

Endowments, Dharmendra Lodhi thanked Chief Minister Dr. Yadav on behalf of the community for setting-up the Rani Avanti Bai Lodhi University in Sagar and naming an award after her.

On this occasion, Panchayat and Rural Development and Labour Minister Prahlad Patel, State President of Lodhi Lodha and Lodh Kshatriya Mahasabha, Jalam Singh Patel, representatives of the community and a large number of general public were present.

Free Scooties to be given to 7 thousand 800 highest scorers in 12th board exam

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A scheme for distribution of free scooties to students scoring highest marks in the 12th board examination of Madhya Pradesh Board of Secondary Education in government schools in the state has been started. The scheme has been introduced to encourage students to pursue higher education.

In the last academic session 2022-23, the benefit of this scheme was given to 7 thousand 800 students of the

state. These students were provided e-scooties by the School Education Department. The awarded students, are regular candidates, who have secured the highest marks in the entire stream in the class 12th examination in their school. A maximum amount of Rs 90 thousand has been provided for free e-scooty to the selected students benefiting from the scheme.

Vocational education provided to 2.50 lakh students The School Education Department has initiated a

scheme to provide vocational education to students of government schools to ensure employment-oriented education. In the last academic session, the state provided vocational education to about 2 lakh 56 thousand students in 12 trades in 1540 schools. Students were provided free vocational training in Agriculture, Apparel, Automotive, Beauty and Wellness, Banking and Finance Services, Electricals and Hardware, Media and Entertainment and IT education.

BJP ANNOUNCES 4 CANDIDATES FOR RS POLLS FROM MP; CONGRESS NOMINATES ASHOK SINGH

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The BJP on Wednesday announced four candidates for the Rajya Sabha elections from Madhya Pradesh.

The BJP has retained the Minister of State (MoS) for Information and Broadcasting, L Murugan for the second tenure for the Rajya Sabha.

The other three BJP candidates are Umesh Nath Maharaj, who is the head of Balmiki Dham Ashram in Ujjain, Maya Naroliya who is president of MP BJP Women's wing, and BJP's Kisan Morcha president Bansilal Gurjar.

Five Rajya Sabha seats are falling vacant in Madhya Pradesh as the term of the incumbent members is expiring. Of them four are with the ruling BJP and one is with the Congress.

Putting an end to suspense over the Rajya Sabha candidate from Madhya Pradesh, the Congress on Wednesday nominated Ashok Singh. Singh -- a senior Gwalior based Congress leader



-- has contested three Lok Sabha elections. He has a strong political base in Gwalior-Chambal region. Sources said that Congress leaders Digvijaya Singh and Kamal Nath both have agreed on Ashok Singh's name for the Upper House. Singh, a wealthy Congress leader, has always funded the party and other candidates during the elections.

Double bench overturned the decision of single bench, board and students got entangled in biology and maths

Team Absolute | Indore

The decision given by the single bench of the High Court in the interest of the student has been overturned by the double bench on the petition of the board. The case pertains to the resolution of the dispute as to which subject the student should appear in the 12th examination. The Single Bench of the High Court had given instructions to the Board of Secondary Education to conduct the examination in Biology subject to the student. Which the double bench canceled and said that the student will have to appear in the exam from Maths only.

Notably, on the petition of the student, the Single Bench had earlier given instructions to the Board to give its decision, on which the Board had filed a writ appeal against this decision, accepting which the Division Bench of Justice SA Dharmadhikari and Justice Devnarayan Mishra, while giving the decision to the Single Bench. Canceling the said order, it said in its order that the subject mentioned in the admit card will remain the same.

In short, the incident is such that Muskaan Ivanati, a student of Rau, had given the class 11th examination in Mathematics subject in Betul. Then



on coming to Indore, she took admission in Government Girls School Rau. While filling the form there, he chose Biology subject instead of Mathematics in class 12th. And he also gave the quarterly and half yearly examination of the school with the same subject, but when his admit card came for the annual examination of the board, his subject was men-

tioned as Mathematics instead of Biology. Due to which he requested the Board of Secondary Education to make his subject Biology. The board refused to change its subject citing the new guidelines for 2023-24. According to this new guideline, the subject which the student has taken in class 10th and 11th will have to be taken in the 12th board exam, it cannot be

changed. On this the student filed a petition in the High Court. The single bench accepted the petition and directed the board to make the said student appear for the examination along with Biology subject. The board had appealed to the double bench against this order. On which the double bench gave its decision in favor of the board.

Assembly proceedings adjourned indefinitely

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The proceedings of the Assembly have been adjourned indefinitely. Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav said that the opposition and the parties have presented their views in a healthy environment. The Speaker of the Assembly has given an opportunity to the party and the opposition to speak impartially. The Chief Minister thanked the opposition.

In the presence of CM Dr. Mohan Yadav, Revenue Minister Karan Singh Verma, after discussing the hailstorm in the House, said that Rs 148 crore has been distributed to the hailstorm victims in the year 2023-24. Wherever hailstorm occurred, a survey team is being formed and a survey is being conducted.

Discussion on damage to crops due to hail and frost. There was discussion on hail and frost in the assembly.



Congress MLA Omkar Singh Markam raised the issue of Dindori district. He has demanded that after surveying the loss, relief amount should be given to the poor. Markam said other farmers like Lahari Bai, who cultivates coarse grains, have suffered huge losses. Lentil cultivation in Narsinghpur has suffered huge losses. Congress MLA Ramniwas Rawat said that recovery of electricity bills of farmers whose crops have been damaged should be stopped. Recovery of their bank dues

should be stopped. They should be given relief amount. Loans for farming should also be provided from banks.

The papers were placed on the table in the House. During this, MLA Ramniwas Rawat talked about bringing an adjournment, which was rejected by the Speaker. Said, today the adjournment motion has not been received on time. The Assembly Speaker said that members should not talk among themselves while the House is functioning.

LOCAL URBAN BODIES WILL BE ABLE TO WITHDRAW RS 300 CRORE

Bhopal: On the recommendation of Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav, the Finance Department has given permission to the Urban Administration and Development Department to withdraw an amount of Rs 300 crore. It is noteworthy that the Urban Development Department has been given permission by the Finance Department to withdraw the amount of octroi compensation.

This order has been issued by the Finance Department, relaxing the restrictions imposed from March 31 in the year 2023. It is noteworthy that in its order, the Finance Department has directed the Urban Development Department to pay Rs 58 crore 40 lakh to the power companies out of the amount of Rs 300 crore.

Urban Development and Housing Department Commissioner Bharat Yadav said that as per the instructions of Departmental Minister Kailash Vijayvargiya, work related to salary, pension, establishment expenses and other daily work of employees in all 419 urban bodies will be done with this amount.

BUOYED BY ASSEMBLY POLL SUCCESS, BJP EYEING ALL 29 LS SEATS IN MP

Praveen Dwivedi | Bhopal

A little over two months after the BJP registered a landslide victory in the Assembly elections to retain power in Madhya Pradesh, the party has launched two separate campaigns -- 'Wall Writing' and 'Gaon Chalo Abhiyan' -- with an eye on bagging all the 29 Lok Sabha seats in the state in the upcoming general elections by tapping the 'key voters'.

In the last two general elections in 2014 and 2019, the BJP had almost made a clean sweep by winning 27 and 28 seats, respectively. In the November 17 Assembly elections, the results for which were announced on December 3, the party had bagged 163 out of the 230 seats on offer.

Looking confident to repeat its successful electoral performance, the BJP has begun preparations for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections with some concrete plans that it intends to execute on the ground.

Though its 'Wall Writing' initiative, BJP leaders will try their hands on creating party symbol (lotus) and catchy slogans for the upcoming general elections such as 'Ek Bar Fir Modi Sarkar', while the 'Gaon Chalo Abhiyan' is a relatively more grounded one.

As part of the Wall Writing campaign, leaders who are not used to holding a brush would write slogans on a design made by someone else. However, the Gaon Chalo Abhiyan is a multi-layered concept under which the BJP leaders would



have to spend hours in the villages among people. The idea behind Gaon Chalo Abhiyan is to aid

the new voters under BJP's 'key voters' programme. This campaign is being run in some specific rural

areas where the BJP's performance has been relatively weak in the recent polls, both in Assembly and general elections.

Senior BJP leader Narottam Mishra, who has been visiting villages in the Sagar region to execute the party's plans for the last few days, said the 'key voters' programme is also aimed at connecting the influential people with the party.

Mishra, a former Home Minister of Madhya Pradesh who has been appointed party in-charge for the Sagar Lok Sabha cluster, told correspondent, "Earlier, our last layer at the booth level used to be 'panna pramukh' and 'ardh-panna praukh'. But with the 'key voter' concept, we are trying to find out some selected people who were left untouched and bring them within the party fold."

He added that under this plan, the BJP leaders would organise different types of programmes involving the villagers. Further, the party would identify some influential people in the villages and bring them into the party fold by awarding them for their past achievements.

"These people can be from varied sections like retired government officials, women associated with social service, local artists, students, farmers and those who have a good reputation in their respective villages.

"The booth-level workers have been tasked with identifying such people and prepare a list. When a prominent leader visits these areas, the selected people will be invited and awarded," Mishra told correspondent.



EDITOR'S SPECS

Trouble brews in Samajwadi paradise in UP

There is trouble in Samajwadi paradise in Uttar Pradesh. A day after Swami Prasad Maurya quit his party post and accused the SP of being 'discriminatory', the Apna Dal (Kamerwadi) has now expressed its opposition to the SP's selection of candidates for the Rajya Sabha. Apna Dal leader and Sirathu MLA, Pallavi Patel, said she will oppose SP's Rajya Sabha nominees. Patel had won the Assembly election in 2022 on a Samajwadi Party ticket, defeating deputy Chief Minister Keshav Maurya. Pallavi questioned the absence of PDA (Pichhda, Dalit and alpsankhyak) among the Samajwadi Party's Rajya Sabha nominees. Pallavi categorically said that she, being an MLA, will oppose the SP's nominees and abstain from voting, if it takes place. However, when asked if this will be the end of Apna Dal(K) alliance with the SP, Pallavi said her decision is not about the alliance with SP. Asked whether her decision meant drifting towards the BJP-led NDA, of which her estranged sister Anupriya Patel is a part, Pallavi said she was against the policies of the BJP. Sources in Apna Dal said the party was upset because they had expected Akhilesh Yadav to nominate Krishna Patel as a candidate for the Rajya Sabha. Krishna Patel, sources said, had played a key role in stitching up an OBC alliance for SP in 2022 but could not win elections for herself. If voting is held for the Rajya Sabha biennial polls in Uttar Pradesh and Patel decides to abstain, SP would be left with 107 MLAs, two short of 109 votes required to see all three candidates through. However, the SP is confident that with the support of two Congress MLAs and four RLD MLAs -- who were SP members contesting on RLD tickets -- its three candidates will sail to victory.

Terai Arc Landscape, critical habitats for tigers, gets UN World Restoration Flagship

The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) on Tuesday named seven initiatives, including the Terai Arc Landscape, shared by India and Nepal and one of the world's most critical habitats for tigers, as UN World Restoration Flagships.

These initiatives -- from Africa, Latin America, the Mediterranean, and Southeast Asia -- include ecosystems at the tipping point of outright degradation resulting from wildfires, drought, deforestation, and pollution. They are now eligible for technical and financial UN support.

The World Restoration Flagship awards are part of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration -- led by UNEP and FAO -- which aims to prevent, halt, and reverse the degradation of ecosystems on every continent and in every ocean. The awards track notable initiatives that support global commitments to restore one billion hectares -- an area larger than China.

Over seven million people depend on the Terai Arc Landscape, stretching across 5.10 million hectares. It is also one of the world's most critical habitats for tigers whose numbers have sharply declined, along with those of other species such as rhinos and elephants, due to poaching, habitat loss, degradation, and human-wildlife conflict.

The Terai Arc Landscape Initiative has focused on restoring the forests of critical corridors of the Terai Arc Landscape and collaborates with local communities working as citizen scientists, community based anti-poaching units, forest guards and social mobilizers.

The restoration of 66,800 hectares of Nepal's forests, as well as other measures, has improved the livelihoods of about 500,000 households in Nepal. It also supported the tiger population in the landscape shared by India and Nepal, increased today to 1,174, more than doubling what had been its lowest number when the programme launched in 2001.

Development is expected to continue as almost 350,000 hectares will be restored by 2030.

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Nepal is the primary partner in this initiative, supporting the Nepalese government.

Each of the seven World Restoration Flagships is being announced in video messages shared on UN social media channels by a UN or UNEP Goodwill Ambassador or Advocate, including actors Dia Mirza, Jason Momoa, and Edward Norton, chef Leyla Fathallah, and super-model and best-selling author Gisele Bündchen.

The other World Restoration Flagships are the Mediterranean basin, world's second largest biodiversity hotspot; the 3,180 km long Indus river that has served as the vibrant core of the social, cultural, and economic life of what is today called Pakistan for well over 5,000 years; the Accion Andina social movement led by Peruvian conservation non-profit organisation, ECOAN (Asociacion Ecosistemas Andinos); the Sri Lanka Mangrove Regeneration Initiative; the Regreening Africa initiative; and the Forest Garden Program, launched in 2015, includes multiple Forest Garden projects in Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Gambia, Kenya, Mali, Senegal, Uganda, and Tanzania.

The winning initiatives are announced ahead of the sixth session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-6), the world's highest-level decision-making body for matters related to the environment, taking place from February 26-March 1 at UNEP headquar-



ters in Nairobi, Kenya.

Together, the seven new flagships are expected to restore nearly 40 million hectares -- an area almost 600 times the size of Nairobi -- and create around 500,000 jobs.

"For too long, economic development came at the expense of the environment. Yet today we see global efforts to usher in a comeback for nature," Inger Andersen, Executive Director of UNEP, said.

"These initiatives show how we can make peace with nature, put local communities at the heart of restoration efforts and still create new jobs. As we continue to face a triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste, now

is the time we must double down and accelerate restoration initiatives."

The World Restoration Flagships are chosen as the best examples of ongoing, large-scale and long-term ecosystem restoration by the Task Forces for Science and Best Practices of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and approved by its Executive Board.

Selection follows a thorough review process with over 60 indicators and criteria, embodying the 10 Restoration Principles of the UN Decade.

international

Indian-origin couple, 4-year-old twins found dead in California

New York | Agencies

In a series of unfortunate incidents involving Indian-Americans, a couple and their four-year-old twins were found dead inside their home in San Mateo, California.

Police are investigating the deaths of Anand Sujith Henry, 42, his wife Alice Priyanka, 40, and their sons Noah and Neithan as a murder-suicide.

Officers responded at about 9:15 am Monday to the home on the 4100 block of Alameda de las Pulgas to conduct a welfare check, NBC Bay Area reported.

After not receiving a response, they went inside the house through an unlocked window and found two children dead inside a bedroom and there was no sign of trauma on their bodies.

The man and woman were found inside a bathroom with gunshot wounds and a 9-millimeter pistol and a loaded magazine were also found there, police said.

While the cause of the death is still being investigated, police believe the boys were smothered, strangled, or given a lethal overdose, sources with direct knowledge of the investigation told NBC.

Police said they have been called to the home a few times in the past but refrained from disclosing the nature of those calls.

The San Mateo Police said in a statement that there was no note left at the



scene and that the deaths appeared to be an isolated incident with no danger to the public. While the motive remains unclear, police are waiting for autopsy results and forensic analysis.

"We are confident the person responsible was located within the home," they said. Neighbors said the 'friendly' couple had lived in the home for more than four years and seemed like a happy family.

The identities of the couple were

revealed by their friends and police are yet to officially release the names.

Anand's LinkedIn profile identified him as a former Software Engineering Manager at Meta and Google.

After leaving his position at Meta in June last year, he founded his own artificial intelligence company, Logits.

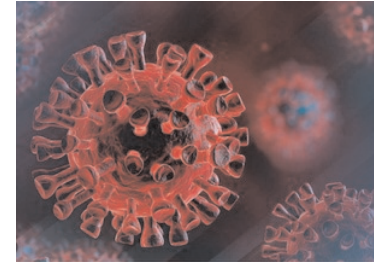
According to court records, Anand filed for divorce in December 2016 but did not go through with it.

1 in 9 adults in US experience Long Covid: CDC

Los Angeles | Agencies

About one in nine adults in the US who have ever had Covid-19 continue to experience Long Covid with a wide range of symptoms, according to new data of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

To bolster Long Covid research efforts, the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) announced on Tuesday that it is investing an additional \$515 million over the next four years into the Researching Covid to Enhance Recovery (RECOVER) Initiative, a



nationwide research program to fully understand, diagnose and treat Long Covid.

Covid.

Nearly 90,000 adults and children are participating in RECOVER observational studies through more than 300 clinical research sites across the country, Xinhua news agency reported, citing NIH.

RECOVER findings, including the identification of major symptom clusters, are helping clinical researchers broaden the identification of Long Covid in their patients and ultimately helping to inform diagnosis, treatment and care for all those suffering from Long Covid, said NIH.

Hezbollah leader vows to continue attacks on Israel until Gaza war ends

Beirut | Agencies

Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah has said that the Lebanese armed group will not stop its attacks in border regions with Israel until the latter's war on Gaza ends.

Nasrallah in a speech to commemorate Hezbollah fighters broadcasted by local TV channel al-Manar on Tuesday said that the group will "not stop the border offensive before the end of the Zionist war on Gaza", Xinhua news agency reported.

Nasrallah noted that the group's military front in southern Lebanon is aimed at weakening the Israeli enemy until it is convinced that it must stop



its aggression in Gaza.

"This front will only stop when the aggression against Gaza stops within an agree-

ment with the Palestinian resistance," he said.

Nasrallah added that Hezbollah also has a national

duty to protect Lebanon from "Israeli aggression," and would continue to fight back if Israel's attacks go on.

The Lebanon-Israel border has been witnessing increased tension since October 8, 2023, after Lebanese armed group Hezbollah fired dozens of rockets toward Israel in support of the Hamas attack on Israel the previous day, prompting Israel to respond by firing heavy artillery toward southeastern Lebanon.

The confrontations between Hezbollah and Israel have killed 271 people on the Lebanese side, including 190 Hezbollah members and 44 civilians, according to Lebanese security sources.

Will capture Hamas leader Sinwar dead or alive, says IDF

Tel Aviv | Agencies

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have said that their intelligence agencies were closing in on the Hamas terror leader, Yahya Sinwar and would catch him dead or alive.

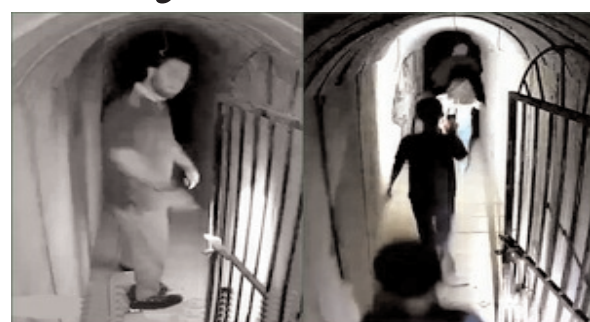
This was announced by the IDF spokesperson, Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari in a press statement on Tuesday night.

The IDF spokesperson said that the Military intelligence and other Israeli intelligence agencies were getting valuable inputs about the exact location of the Hamas leader, widely believed to be the mastermind of the October 7 attacks.

Meanwhile, the IDF has also said that it had obtained certain visuals of Sinwar along with one of his wives and children living in a network of tunnels. However, the said footage that it got was obtained during a recent raid conducted by the Israeli troops in a tunnel network under a cemetery in the Bani Suheila area, Khan Younis which is the birthplace of Sinwar.

The IDF spokesperson also said that the Israeli troops have captured close relatives of many senior Hamas leaders and that these people who are in Israel custody were revealing important information about the Hamas networks and whereabouts of its leaders in hiding. It is to be noted that the IDF had in a recent raid at Rafah in the Egyptian border rescued two of the hostages who were in the custody of Hamas.

Daniel Hagari said that among those who are in the custody of



the IDF include the father of Hamas Rafah area commander, Salemah as also the son of Husni Hamdan, another senior leader.

The IDF spokesperson also said that they have a few close relatives of Sinwar in their custody but didn't name them.

The IDF is in the meantime conducting raids and surveillance in several pockets of Rafah border where the intelligence has reported the presence of a large number of Hamas militants living among the civilian population, including women and children.

Israeli intelligence, including Mossad and Shin Bet, has also provided inputs on Hamas men mixing among the population to save themselves from being hit.

At least 9 workers trapped in Turkey gold mine landslide

Ankara | Agencies

At least nine workers were believed to be trapped in a landslide in a gold mine area on Tuesday in the Ilic district of eastern Turkey's Erzin Province, local media reported, citing authorities.

Erzin Governor Hamza Aydogdu told reporters that there may be nine to 12 workers trapped underground, but the exact number is not yet known.

Bekir Aksun, mayor of the province's namesake capital, told NTV that nine people were reported being trapped.

Several search and rescue teams were dispatched to the scene to assess the situation, said the report.

Imran ready for talks, except with PPP or PML-N

Islamabad | Agencies

Former Pakistan Prime Minister and PTI founder Imran Khan has said that he is willing to talk to all political parties other than PPP, PML-N and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM-P).

He also revealed that the PTI information secretary has been tasked to approach political parties, except for the ones mentioned above, to initiate a dialogue. Khan asserted that his party's priority is to challenge the results of the polls in the Supreme Court, adding



that he had never witnessed such a rigged election. Despite failing to secure a majority in the lower house of parliament, the rival parties have decided to enter an alliance, likely to be led by the PML-N, with the help of erstwhile Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) partners.



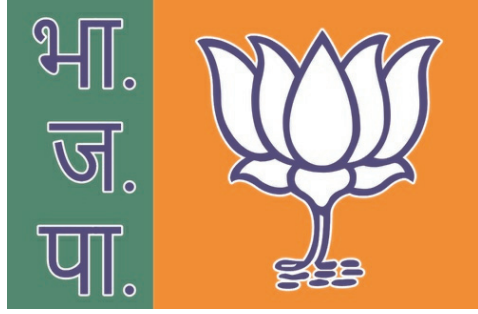
Maha RS elections to be unopposed, BJP won't field 4th candidate

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Wednesday decided against fielding a fourth candidate for the Rajya Sabha biennial elections, paving the way for uncontested walk through for all the six candidates.

"We are not going to give a fourth candidate. The elections shall definitely be unopposed," he asserted, scotching political speculation that the BJP could spring a 'surprise' by putting up a fourth candidate which could sully the prospects of the Congress in the RS polls.

The BJP on Wednesday announced three candidates - ex-chief minister Ashok Chavan, ex-MLA Medha Kulkarni and a RSS leader Dr. Ajit



Gopchhade - while the Congress has put up a Dalit face, its state Working President Chandrakant D. Handore.

Bawankule said that Chavan - who joined the BJP on Tuesday - deserves to be honoured with a RS nomination.

The ruling allies Shiv Sena and Nationalist

Congress Party are likely to announce their nominees shortly, with several names including Milind M. Deora and Parth Ajit Pawar or Sameer Bhujbal, respectively, doing the rounds.

Handore's name for RS came nearly 20 months after he suffered an embarrassing defeat in the June 2022 biennial elections as Member of Legislative Council due to cross-voting despite being the Congress' first-choice candidate, shocking the state and central party bigwigs.

Handore, 67, a prominent Dalit leader in the party, has been a former Municipal Corporator, later Mayor of Mumbai, a two-time MLA and state minister for several years, while his wife Sangita Handore is a former BMC Municipal Corporator.

Bawankule said that the stress was to send qualified and experienced candidates to the Upper House of Parliament as they work not only for the state but also for the entire country to fulfil peoples' aspirations effectively.

BJP Legislator who fired at Sena leader sent to 14-day Judicial custody

Team Absolute | Thane

A court in Maharashtra's Thane district on Wednesday remanded BJP MLA Ganpat Gaikwad, arrested for allegedly opening fire on a local Shiv Sena leader inside a police station, to judicial custody for 14 days. The MLA allegedly opened fire on Mahesh Gaikwad, the Kalyan unit chief of Chief Minister Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, inside the chamber of the senior inspector of Hill Line police station in Ulhasnagar area of the district on February 2.

Those accused in the case have been booked for attempt to murder and on various other charges.

After the incident, the Sena leader was taken to a private hospital in Thane and is now recovering.

The accused - MLA Ganpat Gaikwad, his associ-



ates Harshal Kene, Sandeep Sarvankar, Divyesh alias Vicky Ganatra and driver Ranjit Yadav - were produced in a court on Wednesday at the end of their police custody.

Heavy security was deployed around the court premises.

Advocates Nilesh Pandey and Umar Kazi, representing the accused, told reporters outside the court that the police requested for extension of remand of the accused for interrogation which the court did not allow and remanded them to judicial custody.

NCP-SP rubbishes speculation of merger with Congress

Team Absolute | Pune

The Nationalist Congress Party-SP on Wednesday scoffed at political speculation in Maharashtra suggesting that it was planning to 'merge' with the Congress party. Political circles were agog with rumours of such a possibility after AICC General Secretary Ramesh Chennithala held a two-hour-long meeting with NCP-SP President Sharad Pawar on Tuesday.

However, NCP-SP leaders, including Pune President Prashant Jagtap, ex-ministers Anil Deshmukh, Shashikant Shinde and others dismissed the speculation as "mere rumours" with no basis, after attend-



ing a meeting addressed by Sharad Pawar here on Wednesday.

As the kite-flying gained momentum, senior leaders including NCP-SP Working President Supriya Sule, Shirur MP Dr Amol Kolhe and others also rubbished it as "mischief mongers spreading unfounded rumours with malicious intentions."

The speculation was further fuelled by the recent decision of the Election Commission of India (ECI) to award the iconic 'Clock' symbol and name of the original NCP (founded by Sharad Pawar), to the breakaway faction led by Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar.

The NCP-SP has challenged this in the Supreme Court, and the party has submitted three alternatives for a symbol for the upcoming elections.

Man sets himself on fire outside Police outpost over parking dispute

Team Absolute | Pune

A 34-year-old man suffered serious injuries after he set himself on fire outside a police outpost in Pune city of Maharashtra seeking immediate action on a complaint he has lodged, an official said.

The incident took place on Tuesday at the police outpost in Wagholi area.

Police personnel put out the flames and rushed the man, identified as Rohidas Jadhav, to a hospital. He is in a critical condition, the police said.

Jadhav had lodged a complaint against

another person over a parking dispute in his housing society, and police had registered a non-cognisable (NC) offence. A counter-complaint was also lodged.

"Jadhav came to the police chowki in Wagholi area on Tuesday morning and sought immediate action on his complaint. The police personnel assured him of necessary action as there is no provision for arrest under NC complaint," the official said.

Jadhav, however, was not convinced. He went out and set himself on fire after dousing himself with some inflammable substance, he said.

Maratha leader Jarange-Patil's condition worsens on 5th day of hunger strike

Team Absolute | Jalna (Maharashtra)

On the fifth day of his fourth hunger strike in six months, the condition of Maratha Shivba Sanghatana leader Manoj Jarange-Patil worsened as he went off even water since two days, at his village Antaravali-Sarati, here on Wednesday.

This morning his supporters said that he had blood oozing out of his nostrils, he was dehydrated, feeling extremely weak, weary and can barely sit upright.

In his regular media briefing, Jarange-Patil lay sprawled on a matter on a stage erected in the village and he spoke to newsmen in a barely audible voice. He has also refused to take any medical help from a team of doctors which has reached there, as he used a handkerchief dabbed the blood running out of his nose, sparking con-



cerns among his hordes of supporters. Jalna Collector Dr. Shrikrishnanath Panchal and Superintendent of Police A. K. Bansal had requested Jarange-Patil to drink water on Monday night, but he steadfastly refused, and the medical team remained on standby.

He reiterated his demand to the state government to immediately issue a notification to formalise the draft notification of January 26, on 'Sage-Soyare'

(family bloodline), and expand the OBC quotas to include Kunbi-Marathas and Maratha-Kunbis.

"The draft is not enough. It must be enacted into a law. What is the government waiting for? They should immediately take steps to convert the notification into a law. If the government fails to take appropriate steps by February 15, I don't know what the Marathas will do. You have already witnessed what happened when they marched towards Mumbai last month," he declared two days ago. Agitated Marathas and local organizations have called for impromptu shutdowns (bandh) in several parts of the state including Pune, Ahmednagar, Solapur, Nashik, Beed and Jalna as the Shivba Sanghatana chief remained firm on his indefinite hunger fast, as the decision of the state cabinet on the issue is expected soon.

Congress fields Dalit leader Chandrakant Handore as Maha RS candidate

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Congress on Wednesday fielded prominent Dalit leader and the party's Maharashtra Working President Chandrakant D. Handore, as its candidate for the forthcoming Rajya Sabha elections. The development comes nearly 20 months after he suffered an embarrassing defeat in the June 2022 biennial elections as Member of the Legislative Council, due to cross-voting. Chandrakant D. Handore lost despite being the Congress' first-choice candidate, shocking the party bigwigs in Maharashtra and Delhi alike.

Chandrakant D. Handore is expected to file his nomination papers on



Thursday in a massive show of strength

planned by the Congress and its various organisations, plus Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi allies like the Shiv Sena-UBT and Nationalist Congress Party-SP. A prominent Dalit leader in the party, Chandrakant D. Handore, 67, has been a former Municipal Corporator, later Mayor of Mumbai, a two-time MLA and state minister for several years, while his wife Sangita Handore is a former BMC Municipal Corporator. He has served as a Vice-President of Maharashtra Congress, plus was in-charge of the crucial Mumbai Congress, and is founder of a social organisation, Bhim Shakti. He has been serving as the state party Working President since February 2021.

Adani Green Energy links 551 MW solar capacity plant to national grid

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Adani Green Energy Limited (AGEL) has successfully operationalised 551 MW solar capacity plant in Gujarat's Khavda renewable energy park which has now started supplying power to the national grid.

"AGEL achieved this milestone within 12 months of commencing work on the Khavda RE park, starting with the development of basic infrastructure, including roads and connectivity, and creating a self-sustaining social ecosystem. AGEL also transformed the challenging and barren terrain of the Rann of Kutch into a habitable environment for its 8,000-strong workforce," the company stated in a BSE filing.

The energy generated from the Khavda RE park is projected to power approximately 16.1 million homes annually.

The park is poised to become the largest renewable energy installation globally, with a planned capacity of 30 GW over the next five years.

"Adani Green Energy is creating one of the world's most extensive renewable



energy ecosystems for solar and wind," Adani Group chairman Gautam Adani said.

"Through bold and innovative projects like the Khavda RE plant, AGEL continues to set higher global benchmarks and rewrite the world's planning and execution standards for giga-scale renewable energy projects. This milestone is a validation of the Adani

Group's commitment and leading role in accelerating India's equitable clean energy transition journey towards its ambitious goals of 500 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030 and carbon neutrality," he added.

The AGEL share price increased by nearly 4% to Rs 1,882 in Wednesday's trade on BSE after the stock exchange filing.

Husband giving time, money to mother is not domestic violence: Court to woman

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A sessions court in Mumbai has dismissed a plea of a woman challenging a magistrate court order over her complaint against her husband and in-laws, observing that a man giving time and money to his mother cannot be considered as domestic violence.

Additional sessions judge (Dindoshi court) Ashish Ayachit, in the order passed on Tuesday, also said the allegations against the respondents are vague and ambiguous and there is nothing to prove that they subjected the applicant (woman) to domestic violence.

The woman, who works as an assistant in the 'Mantralaya' (state secretariat), had filed a complaint before a magistrate court under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act for an order seeking protection, monetary relief and compensation.

She alleged that her husband got married to her by suppressing the mental illness of his mother and deceived her.

The woman also claimed her mother-in-law opposed her job and used to harass her and that her husband and his mother quarrelled with her.

She said her husband stayed abroad for his job from September 1993 to December 2004. Whenever he came to India on leave, he used to visit his mother and send her Rs 10,000 every year. He also spent money for his mother's eye operation, the woman said.

She also claimed harassment by the other members of her in-laws' family.

Her in-laws, however, denied all the allegations.

The man claimed that she never accepted him as her husband and used to level false allegations against him.

According to him, he had filed a divorce petition before a family court due to her cruelties.

He also alleged that his wife had withdrawn Rs21.68 lakh from his NRE (non-resident external) account without any information and purchased a flat with the amount.

During the pendency of the woman's plea, the trial court (magistrate) granted her an interim maintenance of Rs 3,000 per month.

After recording of evidence of the woman and others, the magistrate court dismissed her plea and vacated the interim directions and reliefs granted to her during the pendency of the proceeding.

The woman subsequently filed a criminal appeal before the sessions court.



After perusal of the evidence, the sessions court held that the allegations against the respondents are "vague and ambiguous" and there is nothing to prove that they subjected the woman to domestic violence.

"It is a matter of record that the applicant is an 'assistant' working in Mantralaya and getting a salary. It is revealed from the entire evidence that her grievance is that, the respondent, her husband, is giving time and money to his mother, which cannot be considered as domestic violence," the court said.

"Careful reading of the entire evidence of the applicant and respondent number 1 (husband), I am of the opinion that the applicant has miserably failed to prove that she was subjected to domestic violence," the judge said.

The court also said held that this proceeding has been initiated only after the issuance of a notice by the woman's husband for seeking divorce.

The woman was not entitled for any relief under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, it said.

The court further said the argument that the woman's daughter is unmarried and therefore maintenance may be awarded to the latter cannot be accepted.

"I do not think that the applicant is entitled to recover maintenance for major daughter," who has an independent remedy available as per provisions of the law, the judge said. The impugned judgment of the trial court does not require interference by the hands of this court, the judge added.

Man enters river for fishing, Shark bites his leg

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A man was fishing in the waters of a bay in Maharashtra's Palghar but had a horrifying encounter when a shark circled him and bit him in the leg. The incident occurred in Maharashtra's Palghar and entered the Vaitarna River, which flows through the Nashik and Palghar districts and westward into the Arabian Sea. Vicky Gowari yesterday entered the bay with some people for fishing, but to their surprise, a shark was present in the bay and bit Vicky's leg and severely injured him. The man sur-



vived but almost half his leg below the

left knee was chopped off by the shark and he fell unconscious due to excessive loss of blood. Vicky was rushed to a hospital in Manor and a crowd had gathered near the shore. The incident has created a state of fear amongst the locals. A video shot by a local shows the shark coming out of the water and flapping its tail. The fish was caught by locals using a net and was brought to the shore. It's not clear whether more sharks are in the water. In another video, the shark, which was killed by locals, is held by a rope on the shore and blood stains can be seen on its belly.



JLO SAYS HER PREVIOUS RELATIONSHIP WITH BEN AFFLECK 'CRUMBLED UNDER PRESSURE'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer-actress Jennifer Lopez can't get enough of her husband, Ben Affleck. She spoke about her love journey with Ben, and dished about her new project, studio album, 'This Is Me... Now'. JLo's new project showcases her and Ben's love journey. The two were engaged in 2003 and called off their relationship in 2004, reports Mirror.co.uk.

Ben later married Jennifer Garner and Jennifer married Marc Anthony, who they both had children with and later divorced.

As per Mirror.co.uk, Ben and Jennifer rekindled their relationship in 2021 and married in 2022.

In her interview with Variety, Jennifer opened up about rediscovering her and Ben after trying to figure it out. She said, "You have trauma from your past. You have these patterns you haven't figured out yet. And you get into these relationships where you compromise yourself in ways that you never thought you would. Or you allow people to treat you in ways that you never thought you would....And that certainly has happened to me."

Jennifer said that her relationship with Ben was crumbling "under the weight of the pressure." They both lost themselves and needed to go their separate ways since they did not know how to get through. She said: "I had to figure myself out, and he had to figure himself out."



Sharon Stone reveals why it's 'very expensive to be famous'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Sharon Stone claims that being famous is a drag as she has to keep picking up \$3,000 dinner tabs. The actress told a Women's Cancer Fund event in March 2023, days after the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank, she had lost half her money in the recent financial crisis.

It seems she is now back on her feet as she has now told InStyle about how she regularly gets left with huge dinner checks when she is out: "You go out to dinner, and there's 15 people at the table, and who gets the cheque? You get the \$3,000 dinner check every single time."

She also said it's "very expensive to be famous." But she has said she is far from stingy, reports aceshowbiz.com.

In her 2021 memoir 'The Beauty of Living Twice', Sharon said she handed a huge chunk of her paycheck for 1995 Western 'The Quick and the Dead' to Leonardo DiCaprio, 49, so he could also feature in the movie.

She told InStyle about giving the actor the cash after seeing him in 'What's Eating Gilbert Grape', 'He was a superstar. I wanted to be in a great movie, not a stupid movie, so I got the best people to surround me that I possibly could.'

The actress has been hit by her share of hard times and said that she was snubbed by Hollywood after suffering a stroke.

The 'Basic Instinct' actress was rushed to the hospital in 2001 after suffering a brain hemorrhage that lasted nine days, forcing her to step away from her career for two years, which she said has led to her being out of the movies for 20 years.

Justin Bieber turned down Usher's offer to perform at Super Bowl

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer-songwriter Justin Bieber turned down Usher's offer to perform at the Super Bowl VIII Halftime show.

The 'R'n'B superstar pulled out all the stops for his performance halfway through the major sporting spectacle at Las Vegas' Allegiant Stadium on Sunday, reports Female First UK.

He was reportedly keen to get Justin, 29, on board but the 'Sorry' hitmaker "wasn't up for it," although an insider has insisted there is "no bad blood" between the pair.

A source told PageSix: "There's no bad blood between Usher and Justin. Justin just wasn't up for it — he just wasn't feeling it". Usher played a major role in the launch of Justin's career in the late 2000s after record executive Scooter Braun had spotted the teenager singing on YouTube and convinced the 'Yeah!' hitmaker to meet with the budding star.

As per Female First UK, the rapper met Justin in 2009 and after being impressed by his voice, signed him to his label RBMG where he quickly released the megahit singles 'One Time', 'One Less Lonely Girl', 'Baby' and the multi-million selling album

'My World 2.0'.

Justin is the only artist to ever have been signed to the label as of 2024 and RBMG also has a special profit-sharing business deal with Def Jam, which is owned by Def Jam Recordings, which is owned by Universal Music Group. On Sunday, the 45-year-old singer kicked things off with mega-hit 'Caught Up' into 'U Don't Have to Call'.

A snippet of 'Superstar' then aired before he went straight in with another fan-favourite in 'Love in this Club'. Then it was time for the first guest of the set, Alicia, who joined Usher for a rendition of their 2004 hit 'My Boo' after performing her own track 'If I Ain't Got You' first.

To mark the 20th anniversary of Usher's seminal album 'Confessions', rapper Jermaine introduced 'Confessions Part II'. Usher also performed 'Burn' from the album and was then joined by H.E.R. for 'Bad Girl'.

As promised, Usher brought a piece of his 'My Way' residency to the Super Bowl, as he hopped on rollerblades to perform 'Yeah!' alongside Lil Jon and Ludacris. Usher was also joined by Jon for his and DJ Snake's hit 'Turn Down for What' right before 'Yeah!'. Usher had already teased Jon and Ludacris would be joining him onstage.



When Tom Cruise spoke about missing son Connor on 'Last Samurai' set

Los Angeles | Agencies

Filmmaker Ed Zwick mentioned in his memoir about how he helped Hollywood star Tom Cruise nail an emotional scene in 'The Last Samurai' by speaking about family.

Cruise tapped into his emotions on "The Last Samurai" by thinking about his son Connor.

In Zwick's memoir 'Hits, Flops, and Other Illusions: My Fortysomething Years', the director recalled his observations about Cruise's soft spots while filming the 2003 period drama.

He said he noticed Cruise was "sweet and attentive" to a young actor in an earlier scene and that he was close to his then 8-year-old son Connor, whom he shares with ex-wife Nicole Kidman, people.com.

Aiming to evoke more natural emotion from Cruise for a scene, Zwick pulled the actor aside and asked him to talk about Connor. "Tell me about your son," I said. He looked at me, surprised. I knew Connor had just returned to L.A. and Tom wouldn't be seeing him for a while. For a moment Tom was quiet. And then he began to talk."

"It doesn't matter what he said in those few short moments in the fading light. I watched as he looked inward, and a window seemed to open and his eyes softened," wrote Zwick.

With the daylight fading, the upcoming take was on a time crunch and Cruise eventually "nailed the scene."

On their way off set, Zwick remembers making eye contact with the actor and Cruise mouthing to him a "thank you."



K-Pop band NCT member Ten launches solo career

Seoul | Agencies

Member of K-pop group NCT Ten is stepping into his solo career with the release of his first solo EP, eight years since his debut.

"I feel very nervous and burdened, because this is the moment I have waited for a long time," Ten said during a press conference held in Seoul, reports Yonhap.

"But I enjoyed the process of preparing for the album, whether recording it or filming the music videos, and it was also fun to discuss the album's concept with company staff."

Debuting as the sole Thai member of the 26-member boy group managed by SM Entertainment in 2016, Ten has also participated in various subunit activities within the group, including NCT U and WayV, as well as in SuperM, a project group comprised of seven members from four SM-managed boy bands.

He showcased his potential as a soloist by releasing several solo singles, including 'Dream in a Dream', 'Paint Me Naked' and 'Birthday'.

His first EP, christened 'Ten' features six tracks, all sung

in English, according to the website.

Having released several singles, all with flashy concepts, deciding on the concept for his first solo album was the most challenging, he said.

"I discussed the fashion concept extensively with company staff, suggesting it be flashy yet simple," he said.

"I wanted people to see me first and the costume later."

Leading the album is 'Nightwalker', a rhythmic and addictive pop-dance song with a mysterious atmosphere and lyrics about the feeling of being drawn to an irresistible presence. The album also carries five other tracks of different genres, 'Water', 'Dangerous', 'On Ten', 'Shadow' and 'Lie With You'.

"I've shown a lot of powerful and flashy sides of me so far. Tracks like 'Lie With You' represent a side that hasn't been shown before," he noted, describing it as a "simple easy-listening song."

Ten expressed his bend towards "alternative music." "I enjoy alternative music. I also like it when hip-hop and pop blend together," he said.

"Since I haven't explored many music genres alone yet, I believe I can show even more diverse sides of myself in the future."



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Neelam Gill



BATC: Indian women upset China; men beat Hong Kong to enter quarterfinals

Shah Alam (Malaysia) | Agencies

Indian women's badminton team upset the mighty Chinese while the men got the better of Hong Kong to march into the quarterfinals of the Badminton Asia Team Championships here on Wednesday.

The women, led by two-time Olympic medallists PV Sindhu, defeated China for the first time in a team event with teenage debutante Anmol Kharab coming up with an inspired performance to ensure a 3-2 score line in the Indian's favour in the Group W clash.

Later, the men's team defeated Hong Kong 4-1 to assure themselves of a top-two finish from Group A.

The BATC 2024 saw Sindhu making comeback to competitive badminton for the first time since the French Open last October long injury lay-off.

Sindhu showed that she was not just regain-

ing her form but also her confidence as she won the opening game against Han Yue comfortably and then turned around a 10-13 deficit by winning 11 of the next 13 points to give India the lead with 21-17, 21-15 win in the first rubber.

However, the Chinese team swiftly equalised the score to 1-1 as the doubles pair Ashwini Ponnappa and Tanisha Crasto lost in straight games with scores of 19-21, 16-21.

In the third rubber, Ashmita Chaliha suffered a straight games defeat to Zhi Yi Wang with scores of 13-21, 15-21. This put China in a favourable position to secure the win in the tie.

All England semifinalists Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand then fought back from a game down against world no. 22 combination Li Yi Jing and Luo Xu Min to win 10-21, 21-18, 21-17 in an hour and nine minutes to restore parity.

All eyes were then on national champion Anmol, who was playing in the competition



for the first time. In a closely contested opening game, the teenager kept her nerves under pressure from Wu Luo Yu to convert her second game point and draw first blood.

It looked like the pressure was getting to Anmol as she lost the second game and trailed 1-5 at the start of the third. However, she stuck to her game plan of keeping the shuttle in play and wrapped up the match with three straight points, 22-20, 14-21, 21-18.

With just two teams in Group W, India will qualify for the quarterfinals as the top team.

Reacting to the team's victory, Badminton Association of India General Secretary Sanjay Mishra said: "It is a special feeling to see the team beating China. More importantly, we showed faith in the youngsters while selecting the team and I am happy they delivered the goods."

In the men's team event, the Indian team put behind the reversal of HS Prannoy's loss in the opening men's singles match to beat Hong

Kong quite easily. They will face China to decide the group winners on Thursday.

In the opening rubber, Prannoy faced an 18-21, 14-21 loss at the hands of NG Ka Long Angus.

Then, the world no. 1 men's pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty started the turnaround with a 21-16, 21-11 win over Lui Chun Wai and Yeung Shing Choi before Lakshya Sen beat Chan Yin Chak 21-14, 21-9 and another men's duo MR Arjun and Dhruv Kapila beat Chow Hin Long and Hung Kuei Chun 21-12, 21-7 to seal the tie for India.

Kidambi Srikanth outplayed Jason Gunawan 21-14, 21-18 in the dead rubber to complete a 4-1 victory.

With the top two teams from each group making the quarters, the win guarantees the Indian men a place in the final eight as Hong Kong China have lost both their matches in the group stage. China beat them 5-0 on Tuesday.

Mohammad Nabi replaces Shakib Al Hasan as No.1 ODI all-rounder in ICC rankings



Dubai | Agencies

Afghanistan's Mohammad Nabi on Wednesday jumped a place to supersede Bangladesh Shakib Al Hasan as the No.1 ranked all-rounder in the latest ICC rankings.

Bangladesh's cricketing maestro Shakib Al Hasan held the position of No.1 all-rounder for five years. He hasn't played for Bangladesh since the 2023 World Cup due to an eye condition, also not able to participate in Bangladesh's white-ball series against Sri Lanka. It was a gripping showdown in Pallekele as Afghanistan faced Sri Lanka in the opening ODI. Despite early setbacks, Nabi's spectacular innings of 136 at No. 7, accompanied by Azmatullah Omarzai gritty unbeaten 149, provided a glimmer of hope in an uphill chase of 382 runs. Though falling

short by 42 runs, Nabi's heroics not only salvaged Afghanistan's innings but also propelled him to the summit of the all-rounder rankings. Sri Lanka's Charith Asalanka climbed five positions to occupy 15th following his unbeaten 97 in the second ODI. Pathum Nissanka jumped 10 spots to 18th after his unbeaten 210 in the opening ODI series against Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, New Zealand's Kyle Jamieson went up six places to eighth following his six-wicket haul against South Africa. Additionally, his contributions with the bat elevated his position up two places to 13th on the list for Test all-rounders, among Test all-rounders.

Keshav Maharaj, a left-arm spinner from South Africa, continues to lead the bowlers, with Dilshan Madushanka rising four spots to 33rd and Sri Lanka's Wanindu Hasaranga gaining 14 spots to equal 26th.

SPORTS MINISTER ANURAG THAKUR HANDS OVER CHESS OLYMPIAD TORCH TO BUDAPEST

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports Anurag Singh Thakur on Wednesday handed over the Chess Olympiad Torch to Budapest, Hungary, the official host of the 45th edition of the Chess Olympiad. The 1st Chess Olympiad Torch Relay was kicked off in a ceremony by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi here at Indira Gandhi Stadium on June 19, 2022. The hand-off ceremony took place at Major Dhyanchand National Stadium in the national capital, where the Sports Minister, along with Indian Grand Master Vishwanathan Anand played also a friendly game of Chess against FIDE President, Arkady Dvorkovich and Hungarian Grand Master Judit Polgar before handing over the Olympiad torch to the FIDE President and Budapest. During the event, the Sports Minister said: "I am delight-

ed that what we decided a few years back (to have Chess Olympiad Torch Relay) actually happened and that I am here at the handoff ceremony of the Torch for the Chess Olympiad." "Chess is an intellectual legacy that India probably offers to the world, and it is not merely a sport, but a reflection of strategic depth and philosophical wisdom. The elegant sport not only sharpens the mind but also teaches invaluable lessons of patience and resilience and takes one onto the path of intellectual pursuit of strategic mastery," he added. The 44th edition of the Chess Olympiad was held in Chennai in the year 2022. More than 2500 players and 7000 had taken part in the global event at that time. The next edition of the FIDE Chess Olympiad will now take place in Budapest, Hungary this year with the official announcement for the same being made earlier this year.

2024 IPL will start from March end in India, fixtures only after elections' dates announced: Chairman Arun Dhimal

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Indian Premier League chairman Arun Singh Dhimal on Wednesday made it clear that the 2024 edition of the league will kick-start from March end in India and fixtures will be announced after the general elections' dates are confirmed. "We will work with the Indian government, agencies to make sure that the league takes place in India. We are waiting for the schedule of the general election to be announced and then we will plan accordingly...like which state will host what game at the time of election will be planned that way," Arun Dhimal told. Asked if any tentative date for the IPL could be shared, he said, "It (IPL) will most likely start from March end... and general elections are in April, so we will work it out with the help of the government." As per the information received, with ten teams vying for the coveted trophy, expect a total of 74 matches to be played, potentially spread across two phases due to India's general elections scheduled during the same period. Earlier, some reports claimed that there are chances that IPL 2024 will take place outside India due to the Lok Sabha elections.

'We should just let it be, It's a broader loss for cricket': Ben Stokes on Virat Kohli's absence

Team Absolute | New Delhi

England captain Ben Stokes has chosen to tread carefully around Virat Kohli's absence from the Test series, emphasizing the importance of respecting Kohli's privacy during this challenging time.

Kohli had initially opted out of just the first two Tests citing personal reasons. However, the BCCI has respected his eventual decision to remain unavailable for the entire series.

In a video shared by the ECB on their website, Stokes addressed the question of Kohli's absence with tact and sensitivity. Refraining from labeling the situation as either advantageous or disadvantageous for England, Stokes highlighted the broader impact on cricket when a prominent figure like Kohli is unable to participate due to personal reasons.

"I don't mean to say anything disrespectful to the question. I think when it's situations like these, when



someone is missing a big series and a lot of cricket due to personal reasons, which we are not sure of, we shouldn't label that as positive or negative to our team," said Stokes to ECB.

"We should just let it be. It's a broader loss for cricket. I wish Virat whatever he is going through all the best. I wish he comes through it. Virat Kohli, on a cricket field, is something that everybody wants to see," he added.

Indeed, the void left by Kohli's absence has been palpable in the Indian batting lineup, evident in their struggle to assert dominance in the first two Tests.

With the additional blow of KL Rahul's absence in the upcoming Test, India finds itself grappling with an inexperienced batting order, where the burden of responsibility falls heavily on the shoulders of younger talents like Shubman Gill and Yashasvi Jaiswal.

IND v ENG: Wood replaces Bashir as England name playing XI for Rajkot Test

Team Absolute | Rajkot

England have named their playing XI to take on India in the third Test match, starting here on Thursday, with experienced pacer Mark Wood replacing the young spinner Shoab Bashir.

The third match of the five-game series will mark the 100th Test appearance for English captain Ben Stokes, who will become 16th man to reach a century of Tests for England. Woods replacing Bashir is the only change in the line-up from the second Test that England lost by 106 runs. It means that England will be playing two seamers for the first time in the series, after fielding a spin-heavy attack in the first two Tests.

With England winning the opening Test in Hyderabad by 28 runs and India bouncing back with a 106-run win at Visakhapatnam, the five-match series is currently levelled at 1-1.

England Playing XI: Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Ollie Pope, Joe Root, Jonny Bairstow, Ben Stokes (C), Ben Foakes, Rehan Ahmed, Tom Hartley, Mark Wood, James Anderson



Equestrian: Young champ Jai Sabharwal wins 2 golds at National Championship

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Mumbai based 14 years old Jai Singh Sabharwal from Amateur Riders' Club (ARC) clinched the two gold medals at the National Equestrian Championship (NEC) at the show jumping competition. Sabharwal clinched gold in the Grade III Jumping Individual Category and another Gold in the Six Bar Nationals (Seniors).

Jai Sabharwal secured Gold in the Grade III Individual Show Jumping with Zero penalties, Time in jump off of 30.48 seconds with the Height 120cm. He clinched the top spot in the Six Bar Nationals (Seniors) with height of 170 cm while riding on 'Carna De La Bryere'.

"I spent a lot of time training on learning the right way of riding with my coaches. Took part in many competitions with smaller height fences, made sure to get them right first and then took part in the shows with seniors.



"It has given me a lot of confidence to keep competing, and have the

opportunity to represent my country in the future. Encouraged me to

believe more in myself and know that I can achieve my goals if I continue working hard," said Sabharwal.

The National Equestrian Championship serves as India's premier equestrian competition, attracting riders nationwide who vie for the opportunity to represent the country on an international platform.

The event witnessed a total of 29 participants in the Individual category of Show Jumping at NEC, organised by the Embassy International Riding School (EIRS).

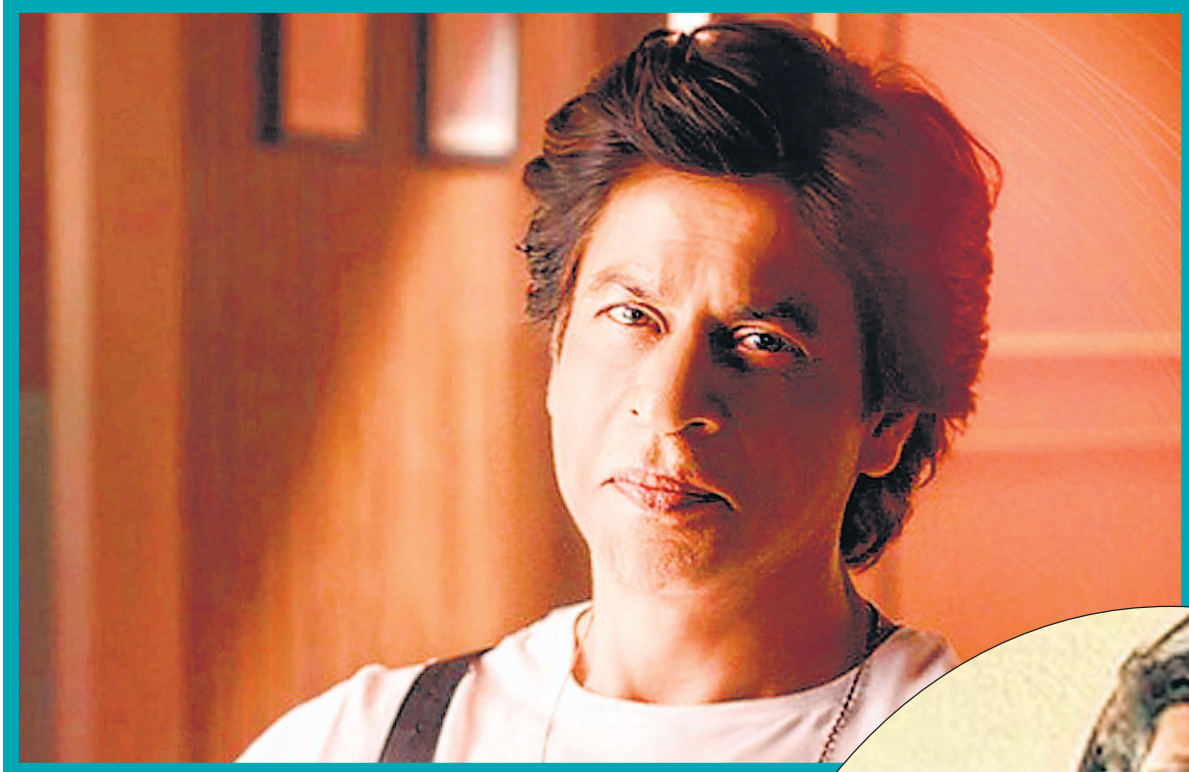
Amongst the participants, there were 3 riders from ARC, Niharika Singhania, Yashaan Khambata and Sambharwal.

Yashan secured a gold in Grade III in Team Show Jumping while riding on 'Empress' and a silver in NEC Sticks Bar Individual.

Niharika finished 5th and 6th Place in the NEC Grade III Show Jumping Normal Riding on 'Sir Lancelot' and 'Max Mara'.



Baking pizzas taught Shah Rukh perseverance when his films tanked at the box office



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Bollywood megastar Shah Rukh Khan, who set the box-office on fire in 2023 with his three releases -- 'Pathaan', 'Jawan' and 'Dunki', has reflected on a time when his films were not connecting with the larger audience.

The actor did 'Zero', in which he played a dwarf, in 2018. The film directed by Anand L. Rai tanked at the box-office after which Shah RUKh took a break for four years before he changed the trajectory of Bollywood with 'Pathaan'.

The actor recently attended the World Government Summit in Dubai, where he spoke about the time when his films weren't working. The actor shared that he shifted his focus from movies to culinary art for a brief period to make a strong return.

"I had massive flops, which they did very, very badly. I was licking my wounds. But you know what I did? I learnt to make the best pizza in the world. I stopped listening to stories, I

stopped wanting to tell stories.

"I made myself a little kitchen, and I started learning how to make pizzas. I learnt perseverance. Because to make the perfect round pizza, you have to first make a million square ones."

Asked if his family encouraged him to return to work, and if making a comeback was difficult, Shah Rukh said, "I was glad that my family didn't tell me, 'Listen, your pizzas are better than your films, stop making films'. I'm glad that they turned around and said, 'As good as your pizzas are, your films are better'. They were very encouraging, especially my children and my team."

"I'd become indulgent. I'd started becoming too innovative. I was looking for perfection, and I started failing. I needed to be excellent, I needed to be unique, but I needed to look at what the audience wanted."



Team Absolute | New Delhi

On Valentine's Day, Bollywood actor Shahid Kapoor has expressed his love for wife Mira Rajput with a delightful video, revealing his 'date' for tonight.

The video shows Shahid wearing a white tee shirt and black hoodie, with matching sunglasses, and a silver chain around his neck.

The 'Kabir Singh' fame actor who is sitting in a car, is seen saying in the video: "I love you Mira and because you are travelling and are not in town, this is my date for

tonight." Shahid was pointing to a date fruit in the snippet.

The video ends with the actor making a cute sad face, and consuming the dry fruit.

Shahid and Mira got married in July 2015. The couple have a daughter Misha, and son Zain.

Meanwhile, on the work front, Shahid was recently seen in the science fiction romantic comedy movie 'Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya'. It stars Kriti Sanon in the lead.

Shahid Kapoor reveals his 'date' for V-Day, says 'I love you Mira'



V-Day:

Arshad Warsi shares loved-up picture with wife Maria Goretti on 25th anniversary

Team Absolute | Mumbai

It's a double celebration for Bollywood actor Arshad Warsi. The actor, who recently registered his marriage with wife Maria Goretti, is celebrating 25th marriage anniversary with his wife on Wednesday on the occasion of Valentine's Day.

The actor took to his Instagram on Wednesday, and shared a picture of himself embracing his wife. In the picture, while Arshad can be seen wearing white shirt, his wife dons a cream-coloured shirt. The actor wrote in the caption: "Most important decision a man makes in his life is the woman he chooses to spend his life with - and I'm glad I made the right decision Happy Anniversary Goretti."

Earlier, the couple registered their marriage in court on January 23. Arshad and Maria got married on February 14, 1999. The two walked down the aisle in a church ceremony, followed by a traditional nikah.

The actor said that they registered their marriage for legal reasons, realising its importance when dealing with property matters and for the future. The two registered their marriage under the Special Marriage Act. Their kids couldn't come because only witness were allowed.

HRITHIK ROSHAN PULLS MUSCLE, SHARES PICTURE WITH CRUTCHES, WAIST BRACE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood superstar Hrithik Roshan, who was recently seen in the action film 'Fighter', shared a picture of himself on his social media in which he can be seen standing with the crutches and with a brace.

On Wednesday, the actor took to his Instagram and shared a mirror selfie and penned a long note along with the picture.

The actor recollected the incident when his grand-father was injured and he refused to sit on a wheelchair.

He wrote in the caption: "Good afternoon. How many of you out there ever needed to be on crutches or a wheelchair and how did that make you feel? I remember my grandfather refusing to sit on a wheelchair at the airport because it wouldn't align with his own mental image of himself as 'strong'. I remember saying 'But Deda, it's just an injury and nothing to do with how old you are!' It will help heal the injury and not damage it further. It made me so sad to see how strong he needed to be just to hide the fear and embarrassment on the inside."

The actor shared that he couldn't make sense of what his grand-father said back then, and that it made him feel helpless.

He continued: "I argued that the age factor is not applicable because he needs the wheelchair for an injury and not his old age. He refused and kept the strong image on display for strangers (who literally didn't care). It worsened his pain and delayed the healing. There definitely is merit in that kind of conditioning, it's a virtue. It's the mentality of a soldier. My dad comes from the same conditioning. MEN are strong." He further mentioned: "But if you say soldiers never need crutches and even when they medically do, they must refuse, just for the sake of keeping the illusion of strength intact. Then I just think that the virtue has been stretched so far that it borders on plain stupidity. I believe true strength is being relaxed, composed and fully aware that nothing position can lessen or alter the image of that GIANT that you are on the inside. Strength is not always being Rambo against all odds with a machine gun saying 'F*** em!' That's applicable for sure. Sometimes." And it's the kind we all aspire for. Even me. But the more coveted one is strength when there is no one to fight on the outside. It's that quiet fight on the inside between you and the 'image' of you. If you come out of that one feeling like wanting to do a slow dance by yourself, then you're my hero.



V-DAY: ZEENAT AMAN SHARES DATING ADVICE, REVEALS WHO SHE IS DATING

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Veteran Bollywood star Zeenat Aman, who is known as the 'Queen of Instagram', on Wednesday, shared some dating advice for the couples across the spectrum of race, religion and gender, on the occasion of Valentine's Day.

The actress also shared her relationship status and said that she is dating herself.

The 'Don' actress took to her Instagram and shared an array of pictures and penned a long note in the caption, sharing the pearls of wisdom for the younger generation.

Zeenat wrote: "What can a single bird such as myself possibly know about love? Truth be told, I can't decide whether it's brilliant or just plain cheeky of you to ask me to write this caption. For the sake of my own dignity, I'll choose to believe the former. And I'll rationalise it with a simple thought - failure is a far better teacher than success. So I'm probably well-placed to share a learning or two."

The actress shared that the first few months of a relationship are always heady and strip a person off their ability to reason.

Zeenat continued, "That's usually the ploy of infatuation and lust, don't mistake it for love. If your family opposes your relationship because of matters of caste, class, religion, gender or any other such divisive construct - challenge them. But if they dislike your partner for deeper reasons, hear them out. I'm not saying they're necessarily right. I'm saying that often our loved ones can grant us a missing perspective."



The actress then spoke about how a relationship goes beyond the dimensions of great sex and a stacked bank account, "There's certainly been an occasion or two where I wish I'd listened to my amma! In the long run - great sex, a stacked bank account and sweet talk are meaningless if you can't enjoy the mundane together. Which is not to say that sex and finances are unimportant. Compatibility on those fronts are essential too."

She further mentioned, "Preserve your sense of self against all odds. If your partner wants to entirely change you, they don't love you. They love control. On that note, make sure you're financially independent of them. A relationship should be a choice not a circumstance."

The actress then made a compelling point as she said that, "all relationships are work", as it requires constant labour to keep a relationship healthy and well-oiled.

Zeenat wrote: "It's easy to become the worst version of yourself once you grow too comfortable in your partnership. So be vigilant! Your partner does not owe you love. More importantly, you owe it to yourself and the relationship to evolve year on year. Bumble, these days I'm dating myself!"

"I do for me all the things that a loving, long-term partner would, but without the irritation of having to deal with another human's flatulence and snores. Which brings me to my final realisation - in love, there are no givens! And if you can't find a person to love you as you deserve, then it should be enough to love yourself (sic)," she added.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Ananya Pandey