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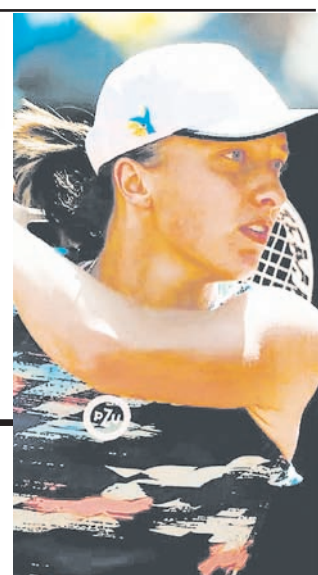
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APRIL RETAIL INFLATION AT 7.79%, HIGHEST IN 8 YEARS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India's retail inflation surged to 7.79 per cent in April, largely driven by rising fuel and food prices, government data showed on Thursday. The consumer price-based inflation figure stayed well above Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) upper tolerance limit for the fourth consecutive month. In April, the CPI inflation expanded at its highest pace in eight years. The previous high was recorded at 8.33 per cent in May 2014. April's print was higher than

6.95 per cent in March and 4.23 per cent a year ago. Inflation in the food basket rose to 8.38 per cent in April from 7.68 per cent in the previous month. Food inflation, which accounts for nearly half the consumer price index (CPI) basket, reached a multi-month high in April and can remain elevated due to higher vegetable and cooking oil prices globally. The rate of price rise in 'fuel and light' category in the retail inflation basket quickened to 10.80 per cent in April this year from 7.52 per cent in the preceding month.

In the 'oils and fats' category, inflation remained at an elevated level of 17.28 per cent in April as Ukraine is one of the major sunflower oil producers in the world and India imports a major portion of the commodity from the war-ravaged country. Besides this, Ukraine is also a key supplier of fertiliser to India. Vegetables witnessed an inflation print of 15.41 per cent during the month as against 11.64 per cent in March. The Reserve Bank has been mandated by the Centre to keep the retail inflation between 2 per cent to 6 per cent. The elevated price outlook

pushed RBI to hike its repo rate for the first time in four years, lifting it by 40 basis points (bps) to 4.40 per cent in an off-cycle meeting earlier this month. Repo rate is the rate at which RBI lends money to commercial banks. On the global front, U.S. Federal Reserve also increased its interest rate by 50 bps, the highest in 22 years. Central banks have also indicated future rate hikes to bring down surging inflation. Another set of government data conveyed that the factory output rose 1.9 per cent in March this year.



SW MONSOON TO REACH SOUTH ANDAMAN SEA ON MAY 15, MAY TOUCH KERALA FOUR DAYS AHEAD TOO

Nation Wants to Get Wet

▶ KERALA, TOO, MAY WITNESS MONSOON ARRIVAL FOUR DAYS EARLY ON MAY 26, AS INDICATED BY THE IMD'S EXTENDED RANGE FORECAST. HOWEVER, THE OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT REGARDING THE EXACT DATE WOULD BE MADE AROUND MAY 15 WHEN THE IMD ISSUES ITS SECOND STAGE SOUTH-WEST MONSOON FORECAST.

▶ SOUTHWEST MONSOON - CONSIDERED THE REAL FINANCE MINISTER OF INDIA - HAS A WIDE RANGING IMPACT ON INDIA'S ECONOMY WITH AGRICULTURE, ECONOMY, TRADE, TRAVEL, ALMOST EVERYTHING DECIDED BY THE RAINFALL QUANTUM AND TIMING.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Southwest Monsoon is likely to advance into South Andaman Sea and adjoining Southeast Bay of Bengal around May 15, almost four days earlier than its normal expected date, the India Meteorology Department (IMD) announced on Thursday. "Fairly widespread to widespread light/moderate rainfall is very likely over Andaman and Nicobar Islands during the next five days. Isolated heavy rainfall is very likely over the region between May 14-16 even as squally weather with wind speed reaching 40-50 kmph, gusting to 60

kmph, is also likely over south Andaman Sea on May 15 & 16," the IMD statement said. Former Secretary, Earth Sciences, M Rajeevan Nair, said: "Generally SouthWest Monsoon reaches Andaman & Nicobar Islands by May 19-20. This time it is at least a week in advance." He said, there is no direct correlation between the arrival of SW monsoon at Andaman and Nicobar Islands and that at Kerala. "However, the extended range forecast of IMD shows that conditions will turn favourable, and Kerala will most likely receive southwest monsoon rainfall by May 26." The heavy rainfall that Kerala has

been witnessing for at least the last two days is a side impact of the Cyclone Asani and its remnant system on the east coast, but things would change in the next two days. At present, the IMD uses a criterion adopted in 2016 for declaring the onset of monsoon over Kerala, which was based on the daily rainfall of 14 stations over Kerala and neighbouring area along with wind field and outgoing longwave radiation (OLR) over southeast Arabian Sea. It emphasises on the sharp increase in rainfall over Kerala along with setting up of large-scale monsoon flow and extension of westerlies up to certain criterion.

DELHI HIGH COURT'S VERDICT

Sex worker entitled to decline consent, but not married woman

▶ THE OPPOSING ARGUMENT WAS THAT THE POSITION OF A SEX WORKER CANNOT BE COMPARED WITH PERSONS BOUND BY MARRIAGE. THE PERPETRATOR OR THE ABUSER CANNOT CLAIM RESTITUTION OF CONJUGAL RIGHTS AGAINST A SEX WORKER AND CORRESPONDINGLY, A SEX WORKER CANNOT CLAIM MAINTENANCE AGAINST THE PERPETRATOR OR ABUSER.

▶ THERE IS NO EMOTIONAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SEX WORKER AND THE PERPETRATOR WHEREAS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE HUSBAND AND WIFE IS A PACKAGE COMPRISING MUTUAL RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS WHICH ARE SOCIAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, RELIGIOUS AND ECONOMIC. IT CANNOT BE LIMITED TO JUST ONE EVENT OF CONSENT IN THE CONTEXT OF SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS, AS PER THE COUNTERING ARGUMENT.

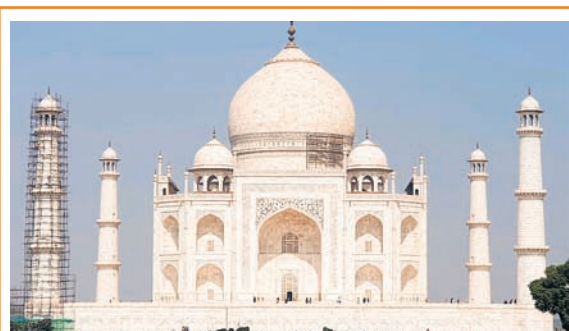


"The argument that in a marriage, there is a presumption in favour of consensual sex which is not present in forced sexual intercourse outside marriage is flawed. The argument is founded on the theory that husbands have a greater degree of laxity available to them with regard to consent when engaging in sex with their wives. That this argument is untenable in law can be tested against the plight of a sex worker. The Supreme Court has decreed such an attempt by holding that even a sex worker has a right to refuse forced sexual intercourse."

Read the order

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court, in its split verdict on criminalisation of marital rape, has observed that rape is rape and a rapist remains a rapist, and while every other woman, including a sex worker, is entitled to decline consent and prosecute for rape, but the right which is not available to a married woman. In the split verdict passed on Wednesday, Justice Rajiv Shukla supported striking down the contentious exception in the Indian Penal Code's Section 375 which exempts forceful sexual intercourse by a man with his own wife from the offence of rape.



ALLAHABAD HC DISMISSES PETITION ON TAJ MAHAL, SHARPLY PULLS UP PETITIONER

Lucknow | Agencies

The Allahabad High Court's Lucknow bench on Thursday dismissed the petition seeking opening of 22 rooms in the Taj Mahal premises. The two-judge bench ripped into the petitioner who sought opening of the 22 locked rooms, stating that the truth about the iconic monument needs to come out, and that he has filed multiple PILs for the same. "Tomorrow you will ask for permission to see our chambers. Please, don't make mockery of the PIL system," the bench said during the hearing. The writ petition, seeking to "find the truth" behind the 22 locked rooms in the Taj Mahal, was filed last week before the Lucknow bench by Rajneesh Singh,

who is the media in-charge of the BJP's Ayodhya unit. The petition cited the claims of some historians and Hindu groups about the mausoleum actually being an old Shiva temple. The petition has sought the Archaeological Survey of India form a special committee to examine the locked rooms and release the report to the public. The bench responded sharply, saying: "Who are you asking the information from? If you are not satisfied that the rooms have been closed for security reasons, use your remedies in law to challenge that. Do some research first -- do MA, Ph.D, enroll yourself somewhere. Don't make a mockery of this." Several right-wing organisations claim Taj Mahal to be Tejo Mahalaya, a Hindu temple.

Wickremesinghe, in sixth PM stint, assures end to Sri Lanka's economic crisis

Susitha Fernando | Colombo

Setting several world records, Sri Lanka's veteran politician Ranil Wickremesinghe was sworn in as the 26th Prime Minister of Indian Ocean island nation, which has been crippled with its worst-ever economic crisis. Holding the office for a record-breaking 6th occasion, Wickremesinghe was sworn in as PM by his rival party leader and President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. He also becomes the world's first premier to run a government with just one seat in the Parliament. Amidst the ongoing crisis, President Rajapaksa invited the opposition parties to join to form an all-party government. The main opposition United People's Power, led by Sajith Premadasa and the Marxist party, National People's Power, led by Anura Kumara Disanayake, refused to form a government until President Rajapaksa resigned.



NOW BENLING INDIA'S ELECTRIC 2-WHEELER EXPLODES

Team Absolute | Hyderabad/New Delhi

There is no stopping EV fires in India and now, an electric two-wheeler belonging to Gurugram-based Benling India has exploded while being charged in Telangana. According to the local police, no one was injured during the incident and they were yet to receive a complaint. The incident occurred in a village in Karimnagar district of Telangana and some portions of the e-scooter were burnt after the explosion. According to local media reports, Egurla Odelu purchased a Falcon e-scooter from the company just two months ago. He put the battery on charge before going to bed on May 8 night. The battery exploded "within

minutes after it was put on charge". Benling India, on its website, says it offers "beautifully crafted electric scooters in high and low speed ranges in 53 countries including India". Late last month, an 80-year-old man was killed and two others injured when the battery of a Pure EV electric two-wheeler exploded in their house in Telangana's Nizamabad district. In yet another tragic incident just three days later, a 40-year-old man died after a blast occurred in an e-scooter belonging to Boom Motors while being charged at home. The incident in Andhra Pradesh's Vijayawada also left the deceased Kotakonda Siva Kumar's wife and two daughters with severe burn injuries. To date, at least 12 electric two-

wheelers have exploded and several EV makers have recalled the faulty batches amid the growing heat from the government. The preliminary findings from the government-constituted probe committee on electric vehicle (EV) fires have spotted issues with battery cells/design in nearly all of the electric two-wheeler (2W) fire incidents in the country. The committee was constituted in the wake of EV fires and battery blasts in e-scooters belonging to Okinawa Autotech, Boom Motor, Pure EV, Jitendra EV, and Ola Electric. The experts found defects in battery cells as well as battery design in nearly all EV fires. The government is now working on new quality-centric guidelines for electric vehicles.

Tablighi Jamaat case: SC says blacklisting shouldn't influence future visa applications

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday said that future visa applications of persons, blacklisted during the 2020 Tablighi Jamaat congregation, held at the capital's Nizamuddin Markaz, should be considered uninfluenced by the blacklisting order. A bench, headed by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar disposed of the petitions filed by foreigners belonging to 35 countries, who were blacklisted by the Ministry of Home Affairs, on the allegations of having indulged in Tablighi activities in



2020. The bench, also comprising Justices Abhay S. Oka and J.B. Pardiwala, said without going into the questions of law raised by both sides, there is no blacklisting order served on any of the foreigner peti-

tioner nor any such blacklisting order was placed on record by the Centre. The top court directed the authorities concerned to examine the future applications for grant of visa -- made by the petitioners or similarly placed persons -- on a case-to-case basis. Nearly 3,500 persons were blacklisted in connection with the Tablighi Jamaat congregation. The bench added that future visa applications of the foreign nationals should be considered as per law and uninfluenced by the stand of the Centre, which blacklisted the foreigners for 10 years.

PORTAL TO COME UP FOR THOSE VISITING INDIA FOR TREATMENT

New Delhi: A 'One Step' portal is being made for the convenience and ease of credible information for those who want to take treatment in India from abroad, Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said on Thursday. Highlighting the need to take steps to further strengthen the Medical Value Tourism, Mandaviya suggested establishing facilitation centres at the Indian embassies across the world for the people wanting to travel India for treatment. In addition, a system to get feedback, testimonials from people who are getting treated in India can be instituted. This will help us in making medical tourism, 'Brand India',

Mandaviya said while addressing the round-table conference with senior IFS officers on building Brand India, at Vigyan Bhawan, here on Thursday. "Today, people from different countries of the world are coming to India for treatment in large numbers. With an aim to further boost Medical Tourism, the government has launched 'Heal in India' programme under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Similarly, we have started the 'Heal by India' programme. This will provide an opportunity for our medical workforce to travel all over the world and contribute towards a healthy global society," added Mandaviya.



DEMOLITION DRIVE: ACTION CONTINUES IN DELHI, ENCROACHERS OUTRAGED

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi's headline approach vis-a-vis demolishing illegal encroachments in the national capital left the 'encroachers' outraged on Wednesday in the southeast part of the city.

The civic authorities had planned to demolish illegally constructed structures in various parts of the city, but when they reached the Madanpur Khadar area, people started protesting against the demolition drive.

Amid agitation and sloganeering, the civic agency continued its action against illegal encroachments. Two five-storey under construction buildings were demolished in the process.

Aam Aadmi Party MLA Amanatullah Khan soon reached the spot where people were protesting against the corporation officials.

While speaking to the media, Khan accused the civic body of demolishing the houses of poor people.

"You said that you will remove encroachments. I am with you on this. But you are demolishing poor people's houses. There is not a single encroachment in this area," the AAP MLA claimed.



An hour after he reached the spot, the protest suddenly turned violent as people in large numbers resorted to stone pelting. The police had to use force to disperse the crowd. Amid the pandemonium, several people were detained.

The situation in the area remained tense for a few hours and then gradually turned normal. The demolition

drive was carried out by the South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) in Madanpur Khadar and Dhirsan Marg. The North Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) carried out similar drives in Rohini and Karol Bagh in the northern part of the city.

Meanwhile, the hapless destitutes residing alongside the K.N. Katju road

were left agonised as their illegally constructed huts were demolished by the civic agency. The shanties that were razed to the ground were constructed on the pavement of the main road, i.e., on government land.

As the officials of the civic body arrived there, the people, rather than resisting the drive, were seen removing the temporarily structures themselves. "We have been residing here for the past 25 years and there was no problem. We are not Bangladeshis or Rohingyas. We came from Rajasthan decades ago," Ram Lal Solanki, whose dwelling was demolished, told reporter.

When asked where they will go now, Solanki said they have no place to go and will reside on the same pavement, sans a roof over their head. A woman named Binla expressed similar sentiments while speaking to reporter.

"I have four sons and as many daughter-in-laws. My grandchildren are studying in school. We won't go anywhere and stay here only," she said. After removing over 300 shanties, the demolition process culminated for Thursday and the bulldozers were last seen removing the debris on the footpath.

Sachin Pilot's posters removed ahead of Cong's 'Chintan Shivir'

Posters and hoardings of Congress leader and former Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot put up in Udaipur have been removed ahead of the party's "Chintan Shivir" in the city, his supporters claimed.

JAIPUR | Agencies

Hoardings and posters were put up by Pilot's supporters around the hotels, airport and in other areas of Udaipur to welcome him.

However, late on Wednesday night, and on Thursday morning, the hoardings and posters were removed from different areas of the city, said Pilot's supporters.

While Pilot's supporters said that these posters have been removed by the administration, Udaipur district collector Tarachand Meena said "the administration has no role in putting up or removing the posters".

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot is in Udaipur to review the preparations for the "Chintan Shivir".

When Congress' Rajasthan unit president Govind Singh Dotasra was asked to respond on the issue, he said: "All the work related to



the 'Chintan Shivir' is being looked after by the AICC. In this regard, there is nothing like this happening to the best of my knowledge... and I have not given any kind of instructions in this regard."

Six detained for pelting stones on Dalit wedding procession in Gujarat

AHMEDABAD | Agencies

Stones were pelted on a wedding procession of the Dalit community by anti-social elements at Bhasan village in Gujarat's Patan district on Thursday morning. The police have detained six persons, besides deploying additional force in the village. Ramji Parmar's son Vijay's marriage was planned on Thursday, and the 'barat' was to reach a nearby village.

The villagers said that the family members had apprehensions that the marriage procession will be attacked and so they had requested for police protection advance, which was provided.

When the procession reached Thakor, some unknown persons pelted stones on the marriage party, causing minor injuries to four



persons, Patan SP Vijay Kumar Patel told reporter.

Patel added that some nine to ten years ago, the Bhasan Gram Sabha had passed a resolution banning marriage processions and show-off in weddings for all communities. Since then, marriages were held in a simple manner. Ramji Parmar and his

family live in Ahmedabad, and had come to the village specially for the marriage. They disagreed to abide by the Gram Sabha's resolution and decided to go ahead with the procession, added the DSP. The moment the stone pelting incident was reported, additional force was rushed to the village.

COUPLE IN TN INSTALLS OVER 5 FEET STONE IDOL OF DECEASED SON

Chennai: K. Hariharan, 48, a businessman in Tamil Nadu's Kancheepuram district was on the way to the doctor with his wife for consultation on May 10 last year, when he suddenly developed chest pain, fainted, and died. However, he maintains a presence in his parents' home.

After his death, his parents, retired teacher Karunakaran, 80, and Sivakami, 72, were inconsolable and after a few days, they decided to build a statue of their son and install it at their home. The family contacted a sculptor who charged Rs 2.5 lakh to make the 5.2 feet statue.

Talking to reporter, Hariharan's friend Surailkumaran, a businessman at Kancheepuram, said: "His mother and father were insistent that an idol of him be made and already installed it at their home and converted that room into a temple."

IMA urges Health Minister to reschedule NEET-PG exam 2022

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Amid ongoing junior doctors' demand to postpone the NEET-PG 2022 exam, the Indian Medical Association (IMA) has also joined in and requested Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya to reschedule the May 21 exam.

IMA has written a letter to the Health Minister seeking to reschedule the exam.

"The NEET-PG 2021 was held five months after the scheduled date in the month of September 2021. Then the counselling scheduled to begin from October 25, 2021, was also initiated (in January 2022) after a delay due to a pending decision on seat reservations and was further delayed owing to the Supreme Court ruling of March 31, 2022, which ordered cancellation and conduct of special round of coun-



selling for the mop-up round", the IMA said in the letter.

The letter reads further that as a result of the delayed counselling schedule, NEET-PG 2022 was deferred from April 2022 to May 2022, so that the candidates could appear for the final stay vacancy round of NEET-PG 2021 and can still have plenty of time for preparation

and reappearance next time, if they failed to secure a seat this year.

Highlighting the delay in All India Quota counselling for the exam, the IMA underlined that the difference between the NEET-PG 2022 exam date and the completion of 2021 counselling is too short for an aspirant to prepare and appear for such an extremely difficult exam like it.

Army chief reviews force deployment along China border in Ladakh region

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Chief of Army Staff, General Manoj Pande, is on a three-day visit to Ladakh to review force deployment along the borders with China.

He arrived at Leh on Thursday on his maiden visit to Ladakh region after assuming charge as Army chief.

General Pande was briefed on the security situation along the borders with special focus on Eastern Ladakh. The high-level of operational readiness being maintained by the forces while maintaining a high tempo of capability development was highlighted.

Later, General Pande, accompanied by Lieutenant General Upendra Dwivedi, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Northern Command, and Lieutenant General A. Sengupta, General Officer Commanding, Fire and Fury Corps, called on R.K. Mathur, the Lieutenant Governor of the Union Territory of Ladakh.

This was followed by a detailed discussion on issues related to civil-military cooperation and the role of Indian Army in developmental activities in the UT of Ladakh.



During his visit to Ladakh, General Pande will also visit the forward areas in Eastern Ladakh and interact with the troops deployed along the Line of Actual

WEARING EARPHONES TURNS FATAL FOR TEENAGER IN BIHAR'S SARAN

Patna : Walking on the railway tracks, while wearing earphones to hear music, turned fatal for a teenager in Bihar's Saran district, as he was run over by a train, his family said on Thursday.

The fatal incident occurred near Tero railway station under Madaura block of Saran on Wednesday evening.

The victim, identified as Rahul Kumar, 15, was returning to his native village, Sonali under Mashrahk block, from his maternal grandmother's house in Tero village. "Rahul went to Tero to attend a marriage function on Monday. He was returning home by train. While walking on the railway track near Tero railway station, he came under the Gorakhpur-Patliputra express train and died on the spot," his uncle, Santosh Parihar, said.

"Rahul was wearing earphones and listening to music while walking on the track. The train driver sounded the horn to warn him but he did not hear it," he added.

"We have recovered the dead body from the track. Pieces of earphones were also recovered from the spot," said a GRP official of Chapra railway station.

DRI seizes 61.5 kg gold tap worth Rs 32 cr sent from China

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In a major operation code-named 'Golden Tap', the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) intercepted an air cargo consignment at the Delhi Air Cargo Complex, and recovered 61.5 kg gold in the shape of a tap having a market value of Rs 32.5 crore.

The consignment was sent from China through Japan Airlines.

"The consignment was declared to contain triangle valves manufactured in Guangzhou, China, and it arrived at the IGI Airport in a Japan Airlines flight. After a thorough and prolonged examination, a large number of imported valves were found to have 24 karat gold concealed in them," said the DRI official. After examination, the officers of DRI were able to recover 61.5 kg gold having a market value of Rs 32.5 crore from the consignment.

"The recovered gold, found to be of 99 per cent purity, has been seized," said the official. The detection came on the heels of other recent seizures of gold from air cargo and courier consignments made by the agency. These include the seizures of 11 kg gold worth more than Rs 5.88 crore in Lucknow



and Mumbai in May, seizure of 80.13 kg gold valued at Rs 39.31 crore in November 2021, and seizure of 16.79 kg gold valued at Rs 8 crore from a courier consignment in July 2021, both in New Delhi. "DRI's ability to detect such sophisticated modes of concealment is reinforced by these seizures, which act as a deterrent to those attempting to compromise India's economic frontiers. DRI remains committed to continuing its relentless crackdown against the perpetrators of such crimes," the official said.

FIVE KILLED, 2 INJURED IN ACCIDENT ON YAMUNA EXPRESSWAY

Agra: Five people were killed and two seriously injured when an SUV collided head on with a dumper on Uttar Pradesh's Yamuna Expressway on Thursday. The SUV was en route to Noida when the accident took place. The injured have been admitted to a hospital in Noida for treatment while the bodies sent for post-mortem. All of them are natives of Maharashtra. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has expressed grief over the incident and has directed officials to ensure proper treatment of the injured.

World No Tobacco Day CIGARETTE, BIDI BUTT COLLECTION CAMPAIGN FLAGGED OFF IN B'LURU

BENGALURU | Agencies

Hundreds of citizens, civil society organisations and NSS volunteers have started the exercise of collecting cigarette and bidi butts in Bengaluru to expose rampant smoking in public places and to urge the Central government to amend the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA) in the run-up to the World No Tobacco Day which is observed on May 31.

The three-week long campaign is led by Consortium for Tobacco Free Karnataka in association with 32 coalition members. The campaign was flagged off on Thursday by former MP and retired IPS officer H.T. Angliana, ex-BBMP Mayor Gangambike Mallikarjun and K.

Ravi, Dean and Director of Bangalore Medical College and Research Institute (BMCRI).

The campaign across Bengaluru will conclude on World No Tobacco Day on May 31 at the Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences (RGUHS), where all the collected cigarette and bidi butts will be displayed. At the culmination of the event, Members of Parliament will be invited and a memorandum will be submitted requesting them to raise the issue of rampant smoking in public places in the Parliament and get the COTPA amendment bill passed. COTPA came into effect in 2003 and prohibits smoking in public places. However, this provision is being violated blatantly, forcing non-smokers into passive smoking. The



finest prescribed for violations as per the existing COTPA are minuscule. A fine of Rs 200 is not deterrent enough against smoking in public,

stated the official release. A study recently published in the Journal of Nicotine and Tobacco Research has estimated that the annual direct economic costs attributed to second-hand smoking in India amounted to INR 567 billion. To gather evidence and to expose rampant smoking in public places like tea shops, bakeries, hotels, restaurants, near educational institutions, hospitals, offices, theaters, parks, bus stations, railway stations, cigarette and bidi butts will be collected safely in garbage bags across Bengaluru. Noted oncologist Ramesh Bilimappa, President of the Consortium for Tobacco Free Karnataka, said that World No Tobacco Day 2022 is being observed with the theme 'Tobacco: Threat to our Environment'.

TWO KILLED IN CHOPPER CRASH AT RAIPUR AIRPORT

Raipur: Both the pilots were killed when a Chhattisgarh government helicopter crashed at the Raipur airport on Thursday evening, officials said.

According to information received, the helicopter was landing when the crash occurred, but it was not clear what led to the accident.

Chhattisgarh Chief Bhubesh Baghel has expressed his deep sorrow at the death of the pilots -- identified as Captain Gopal Krishna Panda and Captain A.P. Srivastava -- and extended his condolences to their families.



PM NARENDRA MODI TO VIRTUALLY LAUNCH MP STARTUP POLICY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will virtually launch the 'Madhya Pradesh Startup Policy' on Friday, May 13.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will virtually launch the 'Madhya Pradesh Startup Policy' on Friday, May 13.

He will address the startup community during the Madhya Pradesh Startup Conclave being held in Indore on Friday.

The Prime Minister will also launch the Madhya Pradesh Startup portal, which will facilitate and help promote the startup ecosystem. In a statement, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said that the conclave will witness participation of various pillars of the startup ecosystem including policy makers from government and private sector, innovators, entrepreneurs, academicians, investors, mentors and

other stakeholders.

The conclave will witness a variety of sessions, including speed mentoring session, where startups will have dialogue with leaders of educational institutions and startup space; how to start startup session, where startups will be guided by policymakers; funding session, where entrepreneurs will learn about various funding methods; pitching session, where startups will get opportunity to collaborate with investors and put forth their ideas for funding; and ecosystem support session, where participants will learn about brand value and about promoting startup ecosystem in the state.

A Startup Expo displaying new trends and innovations will also be displayed at the venue.

Youth Congress Stages Massive Protest Against Inflation, Unemployment

YOUTH CONGRESS LEADERS ON THURSDAY STAGED A MASSIVE PROTEST IN BHOPAL AGAINST THE BJP GOVERNMENT IN MADHYA PRADESH. POLICE USED WATER CANNONS.



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh Youth Congress leaders and workers on May 12 staged a massive protest in Bhopal over rising inflation, fuel price, unemployment, corruption, irregularities in exams, atrocities on tribal people, and the law and order situation in the state.

Congress workers planned to stage the protest at the Vyapam intersection on link road-1. However, police officials moved Congress leaders and workers in large numbers from the Vyapam intersection on Link Road-1 towards Chief

Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's residence. Meanwhile, the Police is using water cannons and have installed barricades to stop the Youth Congress workers in front of the Red Cross Hospital. Heavy police is deployed to maintain law and order in the area.

State Youth Congress president Vikrant Bhuria stated that the 'Bhopal Chalo Yuva Shankhnaad' protest would be a peaceful protest. However, Congress leaders sat on a dharna and police chased them away with sticks leading

to a massive dispute in the area.

Youth Congress workers and NSUI officials across the state were seen participating in the 'Yuva Shankhnaad Hall Bol' protest in Bhopal. The national president of the Youth Congress VB Srinivas along with the State Youth Congress president Vikrant Bhuria addressed the youth and said that we need to bring changes in all sectors of the society.

Madhya Pradesh Congress president Kamla Nath, Leader of Opposition Govind Singh, and Former Union Minister

Suresh Pachauri also participated in the protest. Speaking during the protest in Bhopal, Leader of Opposition Govind Singh said, "Madhya Pradesh government have been collecting money from the unemployed. They have been collecting crores of money to find their foreign trips."

Madhya Pradesh Congress president Kamal Nath addressed the Youth Congress Workers. He said, "I have got strength after coming here." Youth Congress national president VB Srinivas said, "Why government is not running bulldozers on the houses of Kingpin of unemployment and inflation. Officials of the Madhya Pradesh government are acting as security guards of other states and have forgotten Madhya Pradesh's atrocities." He further said, "Madhya Pradesh government has forgotten everything. The government is facing various issues including coal shortages." The police detained Youth Congress national president VB Srinivas and other senior activists.

CHIEF MINISTER PLANTED NEEM AND BANYAN SAPLINGS



Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted Neem and Banyan saplings in the Smart City Park. Rahul Kumar, Khushboo Rai, Rupak Choubey and Rahul Shukla of The RK Hunger and Needy Person Welfare Foundation also participated in the plantation.

The foundation is always ready to help the needy people. In the Kasturi Royal Park Colony in Katara Hills area, work is also being done in the field of plantation and sanitation for environmental protection. Members of the Foundation believe that motivating residents to segregate wet and dry waste helps in maintaining cleanliness. Special campaigns are also conducted in this direction.

The banyan tree is also called Vat Vriksh, Bad or Bargad. It has religious and Ayurvedic significance. Rich in antibiotic elements, neem is known as the supreme medicine.

Section 144 back in riot-hit Khargone

SECTION 144 HAS BEEN RE-IMPOSED IN THE RIOT-HIT KHARGONE DISTRICT OF MADHYA PRADESH AS A PREVENTIVE MEASURE.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Section 144 has been re-imposed in the riot-hit Khargone district of Madhya Pradesh as a preventive measure.

A notification issued jointly by the district administration and the police on Wednesday stated that no rallies, processions, Jagarans and shobha yatra or political rallies will be allowed in the district till July 10.

It came a week after the administration had lifted curfew from the riot-hit area claiming that the situation had returned to normal in the district. Last time section 144 was imposed was on April 11, a day after



communal violence broke out in the district during the Navratri festival.

Restrictions were re-imposed a day after a group Muslim women took out a rally in accusing the police of harassing women and arresting the people without proper verification. A

delegation of Muslim women on Tuesday staged a protest at SP office alleging that police have arrested children and senior citizens.

"Police are barging into houses of Muslims and arresting men and children. They are harassing women as

well. We are living in a fearful situation," a Muslim woman told reporters.

While Muslim women alleged harassment by police in the name of arrests-searching, ASP-Khargone, Neeraj Chaurasia assured of befitting action. Chauaria further informed that the administration is currently engaged in efforts for peace in Khargone, which recently witnessed communal riots.

Notably, as many as 182 people have so far been arrested in 72 cases registered in connection with the violence. Among the injured was SP Siddharth Choudhary, who was hit by a bullet in his leg. Police arrested a man, identified as Mohsin aka Waseem, for the firing incident.

Communal clashes broke out in Khargone on the occasion of Ram Navami on April 10, leading to violence, with incidents of Arson and stone-pelting. A curfew was imposed immediately.

Clashes in Rajgarh over land dispute, cop among 3 injured

Three people, including a police officer, were injured when two groups clashed over a land in Madhya Pradesh's Rajgarh district, police said on Thursday.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Three people, including a police officer, were injured when two groups clashed over a land in Madhya Pradesh's Rajgarh district, police said on Thursday.

An angry mob went on a vandalism spree, torching shops and houses. The violence occurred on Wednesday evening, it said.



District Superintendent of Police Pradeep Sharma said an angry mob damaged public and private properties. A van and two motorbikes were also set ablaze. When police reached the spot, miscreants pelted stones and shattered the glass of a police vehicle and the Khilchipur SDM's car. Police had to fire tear gas shells to disperse the mob and called for back-up. In the wake of the violence, heavy

police deployment was seen in Karedi on Thursday. The situation is tense but under control, District Collector Harsh Vikas told media.

DSP Pradeep Sharma said the entire incident was triggered when a man attacked another from a different community with an iron rod after the two had a verbal spat over a land dispute. The injured were rushed to Rajgarh District Hospital, where they are currently undergoing treatment.

"Fire tenders put out the blaze and police brought the situation under control. There was no loss of life. At least three people -- two brothers and one policeman -- were injured in the stone pelting," police said.

After aspirant's death, physical test for MP Police recruitment postponed till June 2

The ongoing physical test for police recruitment has been postponed till June 2 in view of scorching heat in Madhya Pradesh. An announcement was made by the state Home Minister Narottam Mishra on Thursday.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The ongoing physical test for police recruitment has been postponed till June 2 in view of scorching heat in Madhya Pradesh. An announcement was made by the state Home Minister Narottam Mishra on Thursday.

This decision came a day after an aspirant appearing in the physical efficiency test for

the post of constables (GD and radio) died in Jabalpur. An official spokesperson in Madhya Pradesh Police Headquarters told IANS that the physical efficiency test for affected aspirants will be rescheduled from June 6.

"Physical efficiency test scheduled between June 3 and June 5 will continue, whereas the candidates, whose physical test will be affected due to postponement, will be rescheduled from June 6. Candidates will be informed about their turn for the physical test in advance," said Ashish Sharma, a spokesperson in the MP Police. On Wednesday, a candidate -- Narendra Kumar Goutam, resident of Seoni district, died after finishing the 800-metre race during a physical test in Jabalpur. According to the officials, Goutama fell down soon after finishing the race. The onlookers noticed that he was facing difficulty in breath-

ing. He was taken to the Ranjhi hospital and later was shifted to Victoria hospital and then to Jabalpur hospital. Later in the evening, he died in the hospital. Indar Kumar, another aspirant faced a similar situation on Tuesday. After completing the 800-metre race, he sat on a chair and fell unconscious. As per the official information, Kumar started bleeding from nose and mouth. "He was rushed to the hospital and sensing the urgency a green corridor was created and he was transported to Jabalpur hospital. He is still recovering in the hospital," official said. Online examination was conducted by Madhya Pradesh Professional Examination Board Bhopal from January 8 to February 17 for the recruitment of 6,000 posts of constable (GD) and constable (radio). The results were declared on the website www.peb.mp.gov.in on March 24.

COP STRANGLES 6-YR-OLD BOY TO DEATH IN DATIA DISTRICT

In a shocking incident, a six-year-old boy was strangled to death by a cop in Madhya Pradesh's Datia district.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In a shocking incident, a six-year-old boy was strangled to death by a cop in Madhya Pradesh's Datia district.

The hungry boy was reportedly seeking money from a constable which enraged the cop who strangled him to death, the police said on Wednesday.

As per the police, the incident was reported from Datia district, and the accused cop, Ravi Sharma, was arrested soon after the incident.

Datia district Superintendent of Police has written to the police headquarters in Bhopal to dismiss Sharma from service.

The state police top brass is likely to dismiss Sharma from service soon, sources told IANS on Wednesday.

According to the police, the six-year-old boy went missing on May 4. The son of the owner of a small saloon, the boy went missing on the day when the town was dotted with VIP visits for the Maa Pitambara Rathayatra.



A case of abduction was lodged at the Datia Kotwali on the complaint of the missing boy's family on May 5. The same day a boy's body was found in the Jhansi Road area in

adjoining Gwalior district. When the local police matched the body with the missing boy's photograph, it was established that the body was of the same minor," said a police officer.

The subsequent probe revealed that the boy's body was dumped in Gwalior's Vivekanand Chouraha area from a black Verna car owned by Sharma, a head constable posted with the Police Training School in Gwalior district.

The accused told the police that he had been suffering from depression for sometime and got irritated when the boy kept demanding money from him.

While he was on a filed duty in Datia's Panchsheel Nagar, the boy repeatedly kept asking for money.

The accused got irritated, took the boy near his car and then strangled him to death, the Datia SP told the press on Wednesday.

The accused later put the body in the boot of his car, drove to Gwalior and threw the body at an isolated place, the SP said.

"Sharma has been arrested and booked for murder," the officer said.

After SC's order, BJP, Cong find ways to woo OBC voters

After the Supreme Court pronounced that 'no reservation for the OBCs can be provisioned until the triple test exercise is done' and mandated the Madhya Pradesh State Election Commission (MP-SEC) to start election process without OBC reservation in the state, both the BJP and Congress have worked out their own strategy to woo the OBC voters.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

After the Supreme Court pronounced that 'no reservation for the OBCs can be provisioned until the triple test exercise is done' and mandated the Madhya Pradesh State Election Commission (MP-SEC) to start election process without OBC reservation in the state, both the BJP and Congress have worked out their own strategy to woo the OBC voters. Like the Congress, the state ruling BJP too on

Thursday announced that the party will give tickets to 27 per cent OBC candidates in the local body polls. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, after chairing a meeting of party leaders in Bhopal, announced that the more than 27 per cent candidates will be given tickets in local body polls. An indication in this regard had already come from the state BJP president B.D. Sharma on Wednesday.

A day after Chouhan, along with the State Home Minister Narottam Mishra, met Solicitor General Tushar Mehta and a team of senior advocates in Delhi to seek legal opinion to file a review petition against SC's order, he said on Thursday that the party was ready for local body elections. Addressing the BJP leaders at party's headquarters in Bhopal, Chouhan said the government tried its best to provide justice to the OBC people by increasing their reservation quota from existing 14 per cent to 27 per cent and the local body polls were announced accordingly, but the Congress leaders took the matter into the court. "We were ready for elections and all preparation was done, but fearing defeat, the Congress reached the court and the election process was stopped. BJP has given



three OBC Chief Ministers in the state. Being the CM, I am making this announcement that the party will give over 27 per cent tickets to OBC candidates in local body polls," Chouhan said.

Meanwhile, he also appealed to BJP leaders and workers to start the process for 'Mahavijay Sankalp' to expose the Congress on OBC reservation issue. He also said that the state government will continue to fight for providing reservation for OBC people in the state.

As both the ruling (BJP) and the opposition (Congress) wanted to increase OBC's reservation quota from 14 per cent to 27 per cent in the state, both the parties had earlier in December last year had passed a unanimous resolution from the Assembly.

The MP Congress president and former Chief Minister Kamal Nath had already on Wednesday announced that the party will give 27 per cent tickets to OBC candidates in local body elec-

tions. Nath on Wednesday had alleged that the BJP did nothing for the last two years to provide reservation for OBC people. "The state government could have amended the rule to provide 27 per cent reservation to OBC, but they did nothing. Nor had they represented the case in the court and as a result, the SC pronounced its judgment." "We have no hope from the BJP now. They (BJP) did nothing for the last two years. The state government could have amended the rule to provide 27 per cent reservation to OBC, but they did nothing. Nor had they represented the case in the court and as a result, the SC pronounced its judgment on Tuesday," he said.

Politics, which has been raging on the issue for almost six months now, further intensified in the state after the SC's judgment and both parties have started blaming each other for creating hurdles on OBC reservation.

Elections to 23,263 three-tier panchayat bodies, including 22,709 panchayats, 313 janpad panchayats and five district panchayats and 321 urban local bodies, including 16 municipal corporations, 79 municipalities and 223 municipal councils have been pending for around two years.



EDITOR'S SPECS

Birds in Festival

Jammu and Kashmir will soon have its first-ever Bird Festival to promote sustainable ecotourism and give impetus to nature based alternative sources of livelihood to the local people, it was announced on Wednesday. This was disclosed in a meeting of officers chaired by Secretary, Tourism and Culture, Sarmad Hafeez. The festival is tentatively being planned to be held in Pahalgam and Dachigam areas and besides the bird watching sessions, awareness camps and conservation drives during it, it would have pre-festival bird watching trails for more than a month all across J&K. The festival would be jointly organised by the Tourism and Forests and Wildlife Departments with the support of Sanctuary Nature Foundation, a Mumbai-based organisation working for the preservation of birds and other wildlife. Hafeez termed forests and wildlife important constituents of J&K's tourism and asked all the Departments concerned to work for a synergised approach to preserve these while putting the same to the display of visitors. He called for constitution of Eco Clubs at schools and colleges at various tourist destinations to work in a coordinated manner for preserving the flora and fauna besides pristine beauty in these ecologically fragile zones.

OF SMOKES AND MIRROR: PAKISTAN'S FLAWED AFGHAN AMBITIONS

Chayanika Saxena



The fall of Afghanistan to a puritanical group, the Afghan Taliban, has brought with it a host of challenges not only for the war-ravaged country itself but for the larger geopolitical dynamics in the South Asian region. On the one hand, the supposed victory of the insurgent Taliban is said to have bolstered extremist sentiments throughout the region.

On the other, the Taliban's almost uncontested return to power has upset the delicate balance between the nation-states in this part of the world. Today, each of the eight South Asian countries is grappling with challenges that the ascent of the Taliban has thrown its way. From concerns regarding the legitimacy claimed by the until now outlawed insurgent group to the humanitarian crisis currently unfolding in Afghanistan, the South Asian region is finding itself at the precipice of yet another geopolitical tumult.

However, even as each of the eight South Asian nations has its own set of apprehensions about what the ongoing geo-economic and geopolitical crisis in Afghanistan will mean for it, Pakistan may have bitten more than it can chew.

Dealing with a constitutional crisis of its own, the Pakistani (deep) state finds itself at the crossroads of a geopolitical crisis, which is partly of its own making. Suffice it to say here that the rise of its extremist protege, the Taliban, to power in Afghanistan has created rippling effects for which Pakistan might be ill-prepared. In a way, then an observation made by Hillary Clinton years ago, on the potentially harmful consequences of "breeding snakes in one's backyard" is likely to prove true, especially as the Pakistani benefactors and the beneficiary Taliban will only grow further apart in the days to come.

After all, with the nation-state of Afghanistan, its governance structures and administrative institutions firmly under its control, the Taliban will start feeling the pinch of having to deliver on its (controversial) promises, some of which might even be at odds with the interests of its military-ruled neighbour.

Pakistan's Strategic Gambit and Afghanistan Notwithstanding the larger troubling consequences, the interim Afghan government led by the Taliban offers a sense of immediate comfort and satisfaction to Pakistan. It must be

mentioned here that the current government led by the Taliban is populated with individuals (and entities) that are known to have explicit backing of the Pakistani deep state.

The Haqqani Network (HQN), for instance, is understood to be a critical middleman within the larger movement of the Taliban, which works to keep the balance in favour of Pakistani interests. It comes as no surprise then that the leader of the HQN, Sirajuddin Haqqani, has made his way into the Taliban's government as the Interior Minister.

Similarly, the rise of a so-called friendly regime in Afghanistan is being viewed as a strategic accomplishment by the Pakistani deep state, which for long had seen the democratic governments of Afghanistan as an implicit threat to its national security. Backed by Western countries on the one hand and being in a friendly alliance with India on the other, the previous regimes leading the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan were seen as being inimical to Pakistan's perpetual (and flawed) quest for "strategic depth".

It is important to note here that Pakistan's enduring rivalry with India coloured its approach towards Afghanistan so much so that it viewed the latter's humanitarian and developmental aid with unredeemable suspicion. In fact, the former Pakistani Foreign Minister, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, had gone onto claim that the Indian embassies and consulates in Afghanistan had become a "hub for terror sponsorship against Pakistan".

And while the animosity between India and Pakistan makes trading of allegations an everyday reality, a claim such as the one made by Qureshi is not only phony but also counterfactual given that there has been an increase in the intensity of attacks within Pakistan since the Taliban takeover in August 2021.

India, like other members of the democratic bloc, had shut down all its consulates and

embassies in the wake of Taliban's walkover, punching holes in Pakistan's ill-founded thesis.

It is true that the Taliban does not necessarily see eye to eye with India because of reasons that owe themselves partially to the former's close association with the Pakistani deep state. Having said that, the newly assumed mantle of being the political authority of a nation-state is pushing Taliban to question its traditional geopolitical stance. In fact, in a recent statement issued by the Taliban's UN Ambassador designate, Suhail Shaheen, the interim government in Afghanistan is willing to provide "secure environment to reopen their embassies and start functioning as normal".

While it will not be geopolitically judicious to take the Taliban on its face value, India could very well use this opportunity to de-hyphenate the Pakistan-Taliban equation. The Pakistani deep state, however, is unlikely to take such statements of invitation kindly.

All is Not Well in the Paradise

According to a report published by the International Crisis Group, "the Taliban, in fact, at least initially appeared in some ways to be dictating Pakistan's policy choices -- forcing Islamabad to concede to at least some demands on cross-border movement and pressuring it to reach a negotiated settlement with the Pakistani Taliban". That the Taliban has managed to turn the tables, even a little bit, indicates that all may not be well in the client-patron paradise.

For that matter, the consolidation of political power in the hands of the Afghan Taliban has given the group some leverage to negotiate with its Pakistani benefactor on a plane shared (only) by state actors.

While the Taliban is still far from attaining national and international credence as the legitimate authority presiding over Afghanistan, it is nevertheless the de-facto gov-

ernment that the world, including Pakistan, will have to deal with on newer terms. Hence, it will not be wrong to suggest that the Taliban's transformation from an insurgent group to an interim government has in itself become an irritant for the Pakistan.

With the Taliban taking a life of its own, more so politically as the authority in Afghanistan, Pakistan is finding itself in a bind of having to deal with a former non-state group becoming its de-facto counterpart.

Facing a Catch-22, or a situation from which there is no escape because of mutually conflicting circumstances, the Pakistan of today has willingly made way for the rise of a regime next door that is unlikely to receive national and international support at least in the near future.

It will be tough for Pakistan to not be seen as a protector of a pariah regime. However, the Taliban 2.0, if we may call it that, has not proven to be drastically different from its previous avatar, especially in terms of the policies and practices it follows.

Domestically, the Taliban's inability as well as its lack of capacity to administer the rule of law, provide services and create a sense of public order in a chaotic Afghanistan will only expose the weaknesses of this group further.

Reportedly, the rifts within the Taliban are only growing, which are bound to make the matters worse by pushing competing factions to stake claim at power in their own -- often violent -- ways. On balance then, the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban may not be as beneficial as the Pakistani deep state might want it to be. Far from it, the Taliban's ascent has thrown up challenges for Pakistan, including the potential of further damaging the latter's relationship with the West. Moreover, the Taliban's return to power as an Islamist force is expected to have dangerous spill-over effects that Pakistan can ill-afford.

Hence, while the so-called victory of the Taliban may have delivered a sense of gratification to the powerful army-intelligence nexus of Pakistan in the short-term, it is entirely possible that the Frankenstein will turn on its creator sooner than later. In some ways, it already has.

(Chayanika Saxena is a President Graduate Fellow and final year PhD candidate at the Department of Geography, National University of Singapore)

international

RANIL WICKREMESINGHE TO BE SWORN-IN AS SL'S NEW PM

Colombo | Agencies

To end the current political deadlock, former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe will take oath as the new Prime Minister of Sri Lanka on Thursday.

The oath will be taken before President Gotabaya Rajapaksa at 6 p.m. local time.

Vacated after the controversial resignation of former Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, the elder brother of President Gotabaya, Wickremesinghe is to take up the premiership for the record sixth time in the island nation.

Mahinda resigned from his post following violent clashes that erupted when his supporters attacked a month-long protest carried out by non-political people. The protesters have been demanding the resignation of the



Rajapaksa government and the President amidst a severe financial crisis involving shortages of essentials, including food, fuel, medicine, cooking gas and hours of power outages. On Wednesday night, while addressing the nation President Gotabaya announced

that a new PM and a government would be replaced for the positions vacated by his brother Mahinda and his government. Gotabaya also said that he would work on reintroducing the 19th Amendment stripping powers of the Executive President which he himself enjoys and giving much powers to Parliament. He also agreed to abolish the Presidential system. Rajapaksa said the new government would be run by a Prime Minister who can command the majority in Parliament.

However, it is not yet clear as to how Wickremesinghe, the leader of United National Party (UNP) country's oldest political party, now limited to just one seat out of 225 MPs could command the majority. The news on the appointment of Wickremesinghe comes a day after his discussion with President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

N Korea fires unspecified ballistic missile toward East Sea: S Korean military

Seoul | Agencies

Seoul: North Korea fired an unspecified ballistic missile toward the East Sea on Thursday, the South Korean military said, in its latest saber-rattling just two days after the inauguration of South Korean President, Yoon Suk-yeol.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff announced the launch, the North's 16th show of force this year. Other details were not immediately available, Yonhap news agency reported.

The latest launch came after North Korea fired an apparent submarine-launched ballistic missile on Saturday and what was thought to be an inter-continental ballistic missile on May 4.

SL court bans ex-PM Rajapaksa, son & 14 others from leaving country

Colombo | Agencies

A Sri Lankan court on Thursday banned former Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and 15 others, including his son, MPs and senior police officers from leaving the country, for instigating Monday's violence that killed nine people and injured over 300.

Colombo's Magistrate court issued the travel ban on Mahinda Rajapaksa, his son MP Namal, and 14 others who participated in Monday's meeting with his supporters who later carried out violent attacks on peaceful protesters in front of his house and his President's office. The Attorney General Sanjaya Rajaratnam, who has directed the Inspector General of Police (IGP) to investigate the violent attacks on peaceful protesters, had informed the courts to impose a ban on the former PM and others. Mahinda Rajapaksa, his son and others, who were present at the meeting, need to be present in Sri Lanka for the ongoing investigations on the attacks as they were suspected to have con-



spired and planned the attacks. The pro-Rajapaksa supporters, who protested against Rajapaksa leaving his post were later armed with clubs, poles and iron bars, had attacked the protesters.

The protesters had been camping for more than a month demanding the Rajapaksas to leave amid a severe economic crisis.

Among others against whom the travel ban has been imposed were former ministers Pavithra Wanniarachchi, Kanchana Jayaratne, Rohitha Abeygunawardena, Sanath Nishantha, other MPs and senior DIG Deshabandu Thennakoon.

Finnish Prez, PM back NATO application

Helsinki | Agencies

Finnish President Sauli Niinisto and Prime Minister Sanna Marin on Thursday publicly supported the idea of Finland applying to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

"Finland must apply for NATO membership without delay. We hope that the national steps still needed to make this decision will be taken rapidly within the next few days," the two leaders said in a joint statement, arguing that NATO membership would strengthen Finland's security.

Foreign and security policies in Finland are jointly managed by the President and the Cabinet, according to the Finnish constitution. A formal decision would have to be made by the President and the Cabinet ministerial committee for foreign and security policy in a joint meeting. Xinhua news agency reported.



Speaker of the House, Matti Vanhanen said on national radio Yle on Thursday that the President and the Cabinet are expected to "make their decisions" this coming Sunday.

Finland is expected to submit an application soon, possibly in collaboration with neighbouring Sweden, according to local media reports. Finnish public support for NATO membership began to rise in February. Various polls show that it has risen from around 20 per cent to more than 70 per cent. According to local analysts, 10-15 MPs are expected to oppose the application and membership.

US won't let Imran-led propaganda damage ties with Pak

Islamabad | Agencies

US State Department spokesperson Ned Price has said the Joe Biden administration will not let former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's propaganda of a US-led 'foreign conspiracy' ousting his government from power cause any damage to the relationship between the US and Pakistan.

Terming Khan's claims of a foreign conspiracy as "propaganda and lies", Price said that the US respects its ties with Pakistan.

"Secretary of State Antony Blinken had a detailed discussion with Pakistan Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. They talked about strengthening the ties between two countries," Price said.

Zardari said the former Pakistani Prime Minister's narrative of a foreign conspiracy is based on a "false, self-made concocted theory".



"Imran Khan's stance on a foreign conspiracy is false as he was removed by a democratic conspiracy. He was removed by constitutional means. He was removed by the conspiracy of the Bilawal House, not the United States," he added.

"Imran Khan is now attacking the state institutions and harming democracy. Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) spent three years to

bring the opposition on one page and remove Imran Khan. We brought the opposition on one page, brought a no-confidence motion and succeeded. I advise Imran Khan to come back to the Parliament and play his role as the Opposition leader," Bilawal said.

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Pak court sentences 22 culprits to 5-year jail in Hindu temple attack case

Lahore | Agencies

Pakistani Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) has sentenced at least 22 accused to five years of imprisonment each for allegedly attacking a Hindu temple in Punjab province in 2021.

In July 2021, miscreants allegedly attacked the Ganesh temple at Bhong city of Rahim Yar Khan district in Punjab province with sticks, bamboos and weapons.

The angry mob allegedly assaulted the security guard, damaged idols, walls, doors and electric fittings and set part of the temple ablaze, desecrating the holy Hindu temple.

The mob attack was triggered in response to desecration of a Muslim seminary by an eight-year-old Hindu boy.

At least 84 suspected persons, who attacked the Hindu temple were taken into custody during September 2021, and a case was registered in the ATC in Bahawalpur of Punjab

province. As per details, Bahawalpur ATC judge, Nazir Hussain, announced the judgment in the case.

"The judge handed down imprisonment of five years each to at least 22 suspects while acquitting the remaining 62 people on benefit of doubt," confirmed a court official. The court handed out the punishment to 22 accused persons after the prosecution presented the relevant evidence in the form of footages and witnesses who testified against them," the official added.

The matter was also taken up by the Pakistan government, which had already announced a compensation of Rs one million from the alleged suspects. This was done as per orders of the same court.

The government had also announced immediate restoration of the Ganesh temple, which was complied to, and the temple was restored at the expense of the government.



SHIV SENA MUMBAI MLA RAMESH LATKE DIES IN DUBAI

SHIV SENA MLA FROM MUMBAI RAMESH LATKE DIED OF A MASSIVE HEART ATTACK IN DUBAI



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Shiv Sena MLA from Mumbai Ramesh Latke died of a massive heart attack in Dubai, late on Wednesday.

Sena MP and Chief Spokesperson Sanjay Raut said he was 52 and the end came around midnight. "I spoke with him just last evening... He was absolutely fine... And then around midnight the sad news came..." a visibly emotional Raut said.

Latke had gone to Dubai with his family and he passed away when they (family) had gone out for shopping. "We are now making efforts to bring his mortal remains to Mumbai for the last rites

maybe tomorrow or so," said Raut.

Starting life as an ordinary Shiv Sainik over three decades ago, he was always at the forefront of all agitations, campaigns and programmes.

He soon became a Shiv Sena Shakha Pramukh, then elected BMC's Municipal Corporator.

He grew further and subsequently was elected MLA from Andheri East in 2014, emerging a giant-killer when he defeated a strongman and Congress Minister Suresh Shetty, and in 2019 re-elected. Many top Sena leaders and others expressed their condolences at the passing of Latke.

World's first subcutaneous therapy for breast cancer launched in India

WORLD'S FIRST SUBCUTANEOUS THERAPY FOR BREAST CANCER THAT IS EFFECTIVE AND REDUCES TREATMENT TIME BY A MASSIVE 90 PER CENT HAS BEEN LAUNCHED IN INDIA, ROCHE PHARMA SAID ON THURSDAY.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

World's first subcutaneous therapy for breast cancer that is effective and reduces treatment time by a massive 90 per cent has been launched in India, Roche Pharma said on Thursday.

The treatment by Roche called PHESGO is the first ever fixed dose formulation in oncology that combines two monoclonal antibodies: Perjeta (pertuzumab) and Herceptin (trastuzumab) with hyaluronidase. It is administered via an under the skin injection in combination

with intravenous (IV) chemotherapy for the treatment of early and metastatic HER2-positive breast cancer. Roche, in a statement, said that it has combined two monoclonal antibodies that can be administered by a single SC injection. The single dose jab takes a few minutes compared to hours with IV formulations for each round of treatment, thus reducing chair time for patients by 90 per cent.

It also provides a faster, more convenient, and less invasive means to receive breast cancer therapy.

PHESGO was first approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in June 2020, and the European Medicines Agency (EMA) in December 2020, and also has been recognised in the NCCN treatment guidelines.

In India, PHESGO was approved by the DCGI in October 2021 and the import licence was granted in January 2022. Globally, over 17,000 breast cancer patients have benefited from PHESGO as of December 2021, Roche said. As per the phase II study, 85 per cent of people receiving treatment for HER2-positive breast cancer preferred treatment with PHESGO compared to IV administration due to less time in the clinic and more comfortable treatment administration.

"PHESGO is a pathbreaking drug that will provide convenience and improve quality of life of patients suffering from breast cancer by significantly reducing the in-clinic time for them," Roche Pharma India CEO and Managing Director V. Simpson Emmanuel said in a statement.

PEOPLE LIVING IN MUMBAI DON'T NEED UP 'EMBASSY': MAHARASHTRA MINISTER JAYANT PATIL SLAMS UP CM

DAYS AGO, UTTAR PRADESH CHIEF MINISTER YOGI ADITYANATH DIRECTED STATE OFFICIALS TO SET UP A UP OFFICE IN MUMBAI TO HELP UPITES IN THE CITY CONNECT AND EXPLORE INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN THEIR HOME STATE.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Shortly after Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath announced the decision to set up an office in Mumbai to be able to establish contact with Uttar Pradesh natives in the city, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader and Maharashtra Minister Jayant Patil said that people living in Maharashtra do not need such an 'embassy' office.

"Like China has an embassy in America and England, similar thinking is visible of Yogi saheb. But people who live in Mumbai, Maharashtra do not need such an embassy or office," Patil told reporters on the sidelines of a meeting on Thursday.

He further added that the move has come ahead of BMC elections, but the people of UP and Bihar consider themselves safe here. "BJP is holding a meeting with Maharashtra Navnirman Sena

(MNS) these days but they are seeing some deception in BMC elections, so they are opening such offices," he alleged.

Earlier this week, Adityanath directed UP officials to open a UP office in Mumbai. A statement from the Uttar Pradesh government said that the purpose of such an office would be to facilitate the connection between UP domiciles staying in Maharashtra and their home state. The office would also keep them informed about the job and investment opportunities in Uttar Pradesh. According to official sources, there are about 50 to 60 lakh people of north Indian origin staying in Mumbai, a city of about 2 crore population. A statement released by the state government noted that the UP residents in Mumbai have contributed to a number of fields including the service sector, retail trade, transport, and food business among others.

Dacoity Attempt Foiled Thane; 4 Arrested

A preliminary probe revealed that the accused were planning dacoities at farmhouses in Thane city and Karjat, the official said.

Team Absolute | Thane

The police foiled a dacoity attempt and arrested four persons in Maharashtra's Thane city, an official said on Thursday.

Acting on a tip-off, officials of the crime branch unit V laid a trap and arrested the accused near a liquor bar on Wednesday and seized three country-made revolvers,

eight bullets and a motorycle from them, the official said.

A preliminary probe revealed that the accused were planning dacoities at farmhouses in Thane city and Karjat, he said.

Offences under relevant sections of the IPC and Arms Act have been registered against Premkumar alias Pappu Ramlakhan Singh

(51), Datta Vishnu Patil (30), Surajkumar Sadanand Yadav (19) and Kundankumar Ramesh Singh (42), the official said.

Singh was a convict in a murder case in 2004 and had been lodged at Kolhapur Central Jail and was out on parole, while Patil had offences to his name at Kalwa police station, he added.

Aadhaar numbers of student to be linked to govt schemes by Dec 30

According to finance department officials, the government had said during the Budget Session of the state legislature that Aadhaar numbers of beneficiaries have to be linked to mid-day meal schemes.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

To ensure that no student is deprived of the benefits, concessions and scholarships offered under government

schemes, the Maharashtra Cabinet on Wednesday decided to link Aadhaar numbers of beneficiaries with such schemes. The process has to be completed by December 30.

According to finance department officials, the government had said during the Budget Session of the state legislature that Aadhaar numbers of beneficiaries have to be linked to mid-day meal schemes.

"The process of linking the names of beneficiaries of departments of women and child development, school education, social

justice, tribal and other backward Bahujan welfare have to be completed by linking their Aadhaar numbers," said an official.

"The secretaries of all concerned departments, while compiling the database of teachers, students and beneficiaries, have to ensure that by linking Aadhaar numbers, no beneficiary is deprived of benefits."

The official added, "Besides, the GPS tracking system of vehicles will be implemented till December 30 for departments that supply nutritious food and grain. From June 1, the secretaries also

want to keep the master database of their respective departments updated."

The official further said that scholarships should be credited to the account of eligible students through DBT from January 2, 2023, after linking their Aadhaar numbers with schemes under the departments of higher and technical education, medical education, school education, social justice, tribal development, other backward Bahujan welfare and minority development. "It is to ensure that no eligible student is deprived of benefits."

Mother fights off leopard to save girl; shoot order issued

The girl was rescued by her mother who charged at the beast with a stick. The startled feline fled the spot but not before injuring the girl whom it tried to drag away.

Team Absolute | Chandrapur

Order has been issued to shoot a female leopard after it barged into yet another house and attacked a three-year-old girl in Durgapur village on Tuesday night. The girl was rescued by her mother who charged at the beast with a stick. The startled feline fled the spot but not before injuring the girl whom it tried to drag away.

Enraged villagers gheraoed the forest team lead by RFO, Chandrapur range, Rahul Karekar which rushed to the spot on getting information. The villagers did not allow the foresters to leave until CCF Prakash Lonkar visited the place and issued shoot order on Tuesday night.

Aaraksha Poppulwar (3) was having meal at her home at around 9 pm when the leopard jumped inside and attacked her. The girl's mother, who was in the kitchen, rushed to her rescue and

attacked the beast with a stick after which the leopard fled the spot.

An injured Aaraksha was rushed to Chandrapur GMCH and later shifted to a private hospital. She is now learnt to be out of danger.

The feline has terrorized Durgapur village since February this year. It has killed three people and mauled one person in a span of just three months. In the last three incidents, the leopard had intruded houses in the village.

CCF Lonkar told media persons that even as police were present at the spot, villagers were not ready



to allow the foresters to leave until orders were issued to shoot the problem leopard.

"They relented only after I rushed to the spot. The order to shoot the problem leopard was issued after consulting higher officials," said the CCF.

Earlier, the CCF's office had sent a formal proposal to PCCF (wildlife) seeking orders to either capture or kill the problem leopard following recommendations of an advisory committee in the backdrop of the leopard attack in which a woman was killed in her house in Durgapur village on May 1. The proposal was still under consideration when the latest attack took place.

"Two teams with tranquilizing experts and a shooter have been deployed in the area. They have been instructed to first try to tranquilize and capture the problem animal. If the efforts fail, shoot the beast as the last resort," Lonkar said.

The CCF further said that forest department has installed cages with baits to lure the leopard while camera traps will track its movement.

According to state wildlife board member Bandu Dhotre, the conflict situation in Durgapur has reached a critical juncture.

"The leopardess intruded houses to attack humans in three consecutive incidents. The beast has become a threat for human lives and there is discontent among people following the repeated attacks. In his order, the CCF has agreed that the leopardess's behaviour has turned abnormal and aggressive, and it poses threat to human lives," said Dhotre.

THREE BROTHERS, THEIR NEPHEW KILLED, ONE INJURED AS CAR FALLS INTO GORGE

Beed: Three brothers and their nephew were killed and one of their relatives was injured after their car fell into a 60-foot deep gorge near a village in Ashti Tehsil of Beed district, police said on Thursday.

The accident took place on Wednesday around 8.30 pm near Mhasoba Wadi Phata, they said.

The deceased were identified as Satish Panjmal Tekwani (58) and his two brothers - Shankar (46) and Sunil (48) - and their nephew Lakhman Mahesh Tekwani (20), an official of Ashti police station said, adding that one of their relatives suffered injuries in the incident.

"All of them were residents of Beed city. They were going to Ahmednagar district from Beed city in a car, when it plunged into a 60-foot deep gorge," he said. The injured has been admitted to a hospital in Ahmednagar, the official added.

SIX BOOKED FOR DUPING MAN OF RS 1.28 CRORE

Thane: The victim kept paying money to the accused since 2013 without any returns, said the police.

Police have registered a case against six persons, including two brothers, for allegedly cheating a 71-year-old man in Maharashtra's Thane city to the tune of Rs 1.28 crore on the pretext of involving him into their business, an official said on Thursday.

In his complaint, the septuagenarian man alleged that he was wooed into joining their work of changing the tyres of cars owned of a prominent company and was promised lucrative returns, following which he paid money in several tranches over the past few years, he said.

"As per the complaint, the victim kept paying money to the accused since 2013 and when he neither got any returns nor the invested money, he finally approached the police, following which the FIR was registered," the official of Vartaknagar police station said.

The accused were identified as Satish Hariya, Viral Hariya, Manohar, Chandan Mourya, one accountant and another official of the company, police said, adding that they were booked under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), including 420 (cheating), 465, 468, 471 (all pertaining to forgery) and 506 (criminal intimidation).

Maharashtra Congress devises 'strategy' to beat BJP in BMC polls, hints at co-operation with Shiv Sena

A Congress leader said that the party will support the Sena candidate in places where its candidate is weak and seek the Sena's support in places where it has an upperhand.

Team Absolute | Pune

In a significant development, the Maharashtra Congress revealed Wednesday that it has devised a strategy to ensure the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) defeat in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections. Though the Congress ruled out a formal alliance, it indicated that it would seek mutual cooperation from the Shiv Sena to beat the BJP.

"We are confident that the BJP would lose the BMC elections... The BJP will not get more than 30 corporators in the BMC elections," Maharashtra Congress chief spokesperson Atul Londhe told The Indian Express in Pimpri after a press conference Wednesday.

Asked specifically as to whether Congress was determined on ensuring the Sena's loss in the BMC polls by contesting on its own, Londhe said, "That's not true. The Congress has its own pockets in Mumbai but we want the BJP's defeat. We have devised a strategy to ensure this but would not like to reveal what the plan is."

The remarks assume significance as the Congress has been repeatedly claiming that it would contest the elections on its own and not in alliance with either Shiv Sena or the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP).

A Congress leader said that the party will support the Sena candidate in places where its candidate is weak and seek the Sena's support in places where it has an upperhand. In the 2017 elections, the BJP came close to toppling the Sena from the helm at the BMC by winning 82 seats against its 84. Though the Congress is the third player, it is way behind the BJP and the Sena in terms of the number of corporators.

When asked whether the Congress will tie up with the Sena in the BMC polls, Londhe said: "The party's view is that we should contest local self-government bodies' polls separately and not in an alliance. It gives our grassroots leaders an opportunity to contest elections and strengthen their base. Therefore, there is little chance of an alliance. But our party leaders in Mumbai will decide what is best suited for the party and our alliance partner in the state, the Shiv Sena."

Meanwhile, Londhe also said Congress will go



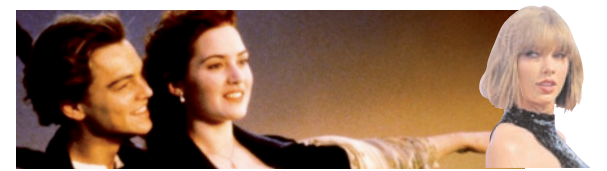
all alone in the Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation elections. "As per our earlier policy, we will fight the elections on our own... We have enough candidates to contest the elections. The party has been on an expanding spree in these two cities which it ruled for years," he said.

When asked why the Congress was in the background when the Shiv Sena was taking on the BJP head on in Maharashtra, Londhe said: "It is not true that the Congress was in the background. All the three MVA alliance (ruling coalition in Maharashtra) partners are united and together and we are taking on the BJP and its tactics to put pressure on the government through the central agencies. The Congress has backed the leaders of Shiv Sena and the NCP who have been targeted by the BJP through agencies like the Enforcement Directorate." Discrediting the BJP rule in Pimpri-Chinchwad, Londhe said at the press conference: "In the last five years, Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation (PCMC) has only seen corruption and loot of public money. BJP corporators and MLAs have looted public money in the

name of carrying out development. The BJP's corruption is best highlighted by the fact that its own standing committee chairman was arrested for taking bribes... There is corruption even in the smart city works. The BJP says Rs 1,400-crore development plans have been implemented by the Pimpri-Chinchwad Smart City Ltd. There is not even an iota of change in the industrial city. Forget about becoming a smart city, the situation has only worsened in the industrial city," he said.

Londhe said a Congress delegation will meet Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and seek an investigation into the corruption during the BJP rule at the PCMC. Londhe also slammed the promise of drinking water made to Pimpri-Chinchwad residents by the BJP. "The Pavana dam was full. The PCMC was supposed to get over 300 MLD (million litres per day) of additional water from two dams. On both counts, it failed to get additional water during its tenure. As a result, residents in Pimpri-Chinchwad continued to get water only on alternate days. Hundreds of residents struggled to get their daily quota of water," he said.

Pimpri-Chinchwad Congress president Kailas Kadam, Youth Congress chief Narendra Bansode and All India Congress Committee secretary Prithviraj Sathe were also present.



EMILY BLUNT TO STAR IN CRIMINAL-CONSPIRACY FILM 'PAIN HUSTLERS'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Emily Blunt will star in 'Pain Hustlers', a criminal-conspiracy film directed by 'Fantastic Beasts' director David Yates that will be introduced to buyers at Cannes. According to 'Variety', from a script by 'The True American' writer Wells Tower, the film is produced by Lawrence Grey through his Grey Matter Productions banner and Wychwood Pictures. The movie's official logline reads: "Dreaming of a better life for her and her young daughter, Liza Drake (Blunt), a high-school dropout, lands a job with a failing pharmaceutical start-up in a yellowing strip mall in Central Florida."

"Liza's charm, guts and drive catapult the company and her into the high life, where she soon finds herself at the centre of a criminal conspiracy with deadly consequences. In the vein of 'The Big Short', 'American Hustle' and 'The Wolf of Wall Street', 'Pain Hustlers' is a hilarious, dramatic and wild journey to the corrupt heart of the American dream." BAFTA-winning filmmaker Yates is fresh off the release of his third 'Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore'. Golden Globe winner Blunt most recently starred in 'Jungle Cruise', and will next appear in Christopher Nolan's World War II epic 'Oppenheimer'.

'She wanted to know how I got my face so tight!'

Jessica Alves reveals Madonna, 63, 'asked her for cosmetic procedures advice' at a 2019 house party after the singer shared a meme of the surgically enhanced star

Los Angeles | Agencies

Jessica Alves has claimed Madonna asked her for advice on cosmetic procedures when they crossed paths at a house party in 2019, held by their mutual friend. The TV personality, 38, who has spent £800,000 on 78 surgeries to enhance herself, alleged to MailOnline that the pop superstar, 63, wanted to know how she 'got the skin on her face so tight' at an intimate gathering in London's swanky Knightsbridge.

Her revelation comes after the fresh-faced singer shared a now-deleted meme of the former Celebrity Big Brother housemate alongside the caption, 'Martini Monday,' to Instagram on Tuesday, reports dailymail.co.uk.

At the lavish soiree, Madonna is said to have acknowledged that Jessica 'likes getting work done', before seeking her



TOM DALEY IS FEARLESS WHEN IT COMES TO EXPERIMENTING WITH HIS STYLE

you're doing the best you possibly can, and I think it can be weird sometimes for people to see two dads and a baby. Speaking to BBC Radio at the time of their son's birth Tom said: 'In the US, where we've been working with our surrogate, the reception was incredibly warm, with almost no exception,' reports dailymail.co.uk.

David Duchovny to write, direct and star in adaptation of his novel

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star David Duchovny will write, direct and star in 'Bucky F*cking Dent', which is based on his book of the same name, a novel that topped the best-seller list and was embraced by critics.

According to 'Variety', 'Bucky F*cking Dent' is set in New York during 1978, and follows an aimless thirty-something named Ted, who moves back in with his father Marty (Duchovny) after learning of his terminal illness.

Marty is looking to make up for lost time, but his health seems to deteriorate whenever his beloved Red Sox lose a game (a condition familiar to Boston sports fans of the era).

With help from a crew of



neighbourhood old-timers and Mariana - Marty's Nuyorican grief counselor - Ted orchestrates an intricate plan to

provide the illusion of a Sox winning streak to keep Marty's spirit up (and heart beating). The film is described as "an ode to the bond between father and son" and a true underdog story.

'Bucky F*cking Dent' will shoot later this year and will be produced by Jordan Yale Levine and Jordan Beckerman of Yale Productions.

Yale's recently-launched sales banner Great Escape, led by Nick Donnermeyer, will introduce the project to buyers in Cannes this month, reports 'Variety'.

In Cannes, Great Escape is also handling sales on 'The Kill Room' starring Uma Thurman, Samuel L. Jackson and Joe Manganiello, along with Brittany Snow's directorial debut 'September 17th'. Both films are produced by Yale.

"We're thrilled to be working with David to bring this amazing story to life," said Yale Levine and Beckerman.

"His passion and vision for this film are so clear, and the themes of this story - father and son, life and death - are deeply meaningful and universal." Duchovny is known for his work as FBI Agent Fox Mulder in 'The X-Files', as well as for his turn as the self-destructive Hank Moody in Showtime's 'Californication'.



guidance, which was to try 'injections of collagen booster'.

The Hung Up songstress has never fessed up to going under the knife, however speculation began swirling among fans after the worldwide icon debuted an age-defying visage around this time.

Now, Jessica has spilled the beans on their surprising friendship and how the pair have bonded over their love of Brazil and the Portuguese language. The transgender star began: 'I have met Madonna twice at a house party of a common friend of ours. The first time was in 2017 and last time was in 2019 when I was starting my transition process.'

'In 2017, I didn't get to speak to her at the house party. It was a small gathering of about max 20 at my friend's house in Knightsbridge.'

Halfway through the party, and after I'd had a few Martinis, we both greeted each other and she said that I looked cool. I then said, "Thanks. You look great," and walked away.

'But when I met her again at the same house party in 2019, she was more chatty and I was less nervous. Although I am a fan of Madonna, I didn't want to make her feel uncomfortable since we were at an informal event just at a friend house. 'She then said, "Hi again, how have you been?" I then said I was ok and she said, "Well you look good." I then said, "Thanks."

'She said, "I know that you like getting work done. How did you get your face skin so tight?" so I told her that I did few treatments including injections of collagen booster.'

'She knew that I was born in Brazil and she said how much she loved Brazil and that she speaks some Portuguese words also because she also lives in Portugal.'

'Madonna is an icon and I love her as an artist but I never expressed it to her, everyone in that small house party wanted to make her feel at home and a normal person and not the Madonna.'

'There are a lot comparison about us saying that we look alike and that is flattering to me. If I reach Madonna's age looking as good as she does nowadays, I'll be happy.' Madonna's representatives has been contacted for comment by MailOnline. In 2019, Madge was accused of getting butt implants. Her response was: 'Desperately Seeking No Ones Approval.....' That was a play on her 1985 movie Desperately Seeking Susan.

RITA ORA TURNS UP THE HEAT

Los Angeles | Agencies

She never shies away from sharing sexy snaps on social media. And Rita Ora turned up the heat once more as she went braless in her latest sizzling selfie to Instagram on Thursday.

The hitmaker, 31, slipped into a plunging semi-sheer top that laced up down her chest with a pair of low slung smart trousers.

Drawing further focus to the daring neckline, she added an array of gold necklaces alongside a silver piece that read Daddy.

She wore her golden locks in a messy up do with her natural curls tumbling down in front of her face.

To complete her look, she added flirty false eyelashes, a shimmery pink shadow and a slick of berry lipstick.

Alongside the slew of photos, she penned: 'Find your light after a long day is what I say.'

Rita's latest racy snaps come as she posed up a storm in an iridescent purple mini dress on Wednesday, reports dailymail.co.uk.



Irina Shayk



IPL 2022

SUPERB BOWLING HELPS MUMBAI INDIANS BUNDLE OUT CSK FOR 97, WIN BY 5 WICKETS

Team Absolute | Mumbai
Daniel Sams claimed 3/16 while Riley Meredith and Kumar Kartikeya scalped 2/27 and 2/22 respectively as Mumbai Indians bowled out Chennai Super Kings for 97 before surviving some anxious moments to rattle the runs and claim a five-wicket win in Match 59 of the IPL 2022 at the Wankhede Stadium here on Thursday.

Chasing 98 for victory, Mumbai Indians were in trouble at 33/4, losing their top batters Ishan Kishan (6) and skipper Rohit Sharma (18) cheaply.

However, sensible batting by young middle-order batter Thilak Varma (34 not out, 32 balls, 4x4), Hrithik Shokeen (18, 23 balls, 2 x 4), and Tim David (16 not out, 7 balls, 6 x 2), helped Mumbai Indians reach 103/5 and register their third victory in 12 matches.

Choosing to bowl first, the Mumbai Indians pacers bowled good lines and hard length and used the juice in the wicket well. The ball was swinging even in the 8th over but there were no demons in the pitch. CSK were hard-done on some occasions but their batters too did not show necessary application to



counter the condition and good bowling. In reply, Mumbai looked in trouble as they ended the powerplay at 36/4, only a slightly better position compared to CSK who were 32/5. Mukesh Choudhary bowled brilliantly, claiming 3/23 in four unchanged overs, troubling the Mumbai Indian batters with his superb line and length, using the juice in the pitch. But in the end, the score of 97 did not give CSK enough leeway. Mukesh Choudhary raised Chennai Super Kings' hopes of an unlikely win as he claimed 3/23 in his four overs, bowled unchanged, as Dhoni went on the attack. Choudhary, the joint-most successful bowler for CSK with

Dwayne Bravo at 16 wickets, made the most of the conditions and bowled a superb line and hard length to rattle the Mumbai Indians batting order.

He made the breakthrough for CSK in the first over itself, sending back Ishan Kishan (6) as the batter chased an outswinger bowled wide and edged behind to Dhoni. Mumbai skipper Rohit Sharma started with a four off Simarjeet Singh in the second over and then sent Choudhary to the fence twice in the third over, backing away to one pitched on the middle and hitting it flat over mid-off and punching a fullish but slightly wide delivery to the boundary. But he was out for 18 off 14

deliveries, nibbling at a wide one and offering an edge to Dhoni off Simarjeet Singh. But with just 17 runs needed to win the match, Tim David hammered Moeen Ali for two sixes in the 15th over to seal a five-wicket win for Mumbai Indians with 31 balls to spare.

This was Mumbai's third win in 12 matches and took them to six points while CSK slumped to their eighth defeat and remained on eight points from 12 games, thus ending their slim hopes of making it to the last four. Robin Uthappa (1) did not last long, trying to flick across the line to a length ball by Jasprit Bumrah and rapped on the front pad while Ruturaj Gaikwad (7), who had watched the carnage from the other end, edged one down the leg-side and was caught by the keeper.

Brief scores:

Chennai Super Kings 97 all out in 16 overs (MS Dhoni 36 not out; Daniel Sams 3/16, Riley Meredith 2/27, Kumar Kartikeya 2/22) lost to Mumbai Indians 103/5 in 14.5 overs (Rohit Sharma 18, Thilak Varma 34 not out, Hrithik Shokeen 18, Tim David 16 not out; Mukesh Choudhary 3/23) by 5 wickets.

Inter Milan lift eighth Coppa Italia title after defeating Juventus 4-2



Rome | Agencies

Inter Milan won its eighth Coppa Italia title and the first since 2011, after beating Juventus 4-2 in the final in extra time at the Stadio Olimpico here on Wednesday.

Inter has a superior head-to-head performance over Juve this season, as it managed two wins and one draw in the Serie A and Supercoppa against its archrival. The Bianconeri needed a win to avoid finishing the season without a trophy, while the Nerazzurri is still fighting for a domestic treble.

Inter took the lead just seven minutes into the game when Nicolò Barella cut inside from the left to unleash a missile with both power and precision.

Juve turned the game around just two minutes after the break with Alex Sandro's equalizer and Dusan Vlahovic's follow-up, reports Xinhua.

Lautaro Martinez won a penalty for Inter in the 79th minute as Hakan Calhanoglu stepped up to convert it, dragging the game into extra time. Inter ran riot after that as it restored the lead with Ivan Perisic's spot-kick before the

Croatian smashed in a blockbuster to seal the win. Conflicts were sparked later on the sideline between Juve's coach Massimiliano Allegri and Inter's coaching staff, which ended up with Allegri's red card.

"I have the honor of sharing this journey with the team, the staff and everyone who works behind the scenes on a daily basis," said Zhang Kangyang, president of Inter Milan. "This trophy is another piece of Inter's history, but our season doesn't finish here. We must keep fighting to the very last minute," he added.

Suhl Junior World Cup: Esha Singh, Saurabh Chaudhary win Mixed Team Pistol gold

Madrid | Agencies

New Delhi: India's 10M Air Pistol Mixed Team combinations extended their dominance in the Pistol disciplines, as Esha Singh and Saurabh Chaudhary claimed gold and Palak and Sarabjot Singh silver at the ISSF Junior World Cup in Suhl, Germany, on Thursday.

According to information received here, Esha and Saurabh prevailed 16-12 in the gold medal match.

Ramita and Paarth Makhija also won silver in the 10M Air Rifle Mixed Team competition, going down 13-17 to the Polish pair of Julia Piotrowska and Wiktor Sajdak, making it three on the day and a total of 10 medals so far, including four gold. The Indian Pistol pairs came through topping a 38-field qualification round of 60



shots with scores of 578 and 575 respectively. It was Palak and Sarabjot who had the better of Esha and Saurabh in this round, however the more experienced pair of Esha and Saurabh saw it through when it mattered most.

In the Junior Men's Trap, three shooters Arya Vansh

Pathak, Vivaan Kapoor and Shardul Vihaan shot respectable scores of 118 (the first two names) and 117 each to finish ninth, 10th and 12th respectively. Shapath Bharadwaj finished 17th with a round of 115 while Bakhtyaruddin Malek shot 110 for a 32nd place finish.

Atletico assure top-four finish, Sevilla still have work to do in LaLiga

Madrid | Agencies

Atletico Madrid moved into third place in La Liga, leapfrogging Sevilla, after a 2-0 win away to Elche on Wednesday.

The result, which came thanks to goals from Matheus Cunha's 28th-minute goal and a second-half effort from Rodrigo de Paul, assures Atletico's place in next season's Champions League.

Sevilla dropped to fourth after drawing 0-0 at home to Mallorca, with a result that leaves Sevilla (who visit Atletico on Sunday) with work to do to assure a top-four finish, while leaving Mallorca in the bottom three and still in deep relegation trouble. Sevilla had most of the chances and were close to taking all three



points in injury time when Mallorca keeper Manolo Reina produced a spectacular save to tip Youssef En-Nesyri's header over the bar. Alaves climbed off the

bottom of the table and kept their slim hopes of avoiding relegation alive until the weekend with a 2-1 win at home to Espanyol, reports Xinhua. The team from

Vitoria reacted well to their defeat in Vigo at the weekend and opened the scoring in the 7th minute thanks to Miguel de la Fuente.

Raul de Tomas leveled from the penalty spot soon afterwards, but Espanyol's options weren't helped by Yangel Herrera's red card at the start of the second half and Gonzalo Escalante sealed the win just before the hour.

Getafe edged another point closer to safety with a 1-1 draw away to Osasuna after a solid defensive display in the second half.

Oier Sanjurjo Mate, who announced his retirement earlier in the week, opened the scoring in an emotional moment in the 9th minute, but Lucas Torro's own goal in the 20th minute saw the points shared.

BRENDON MCCULLUM APPOINTED ENGLAND MEN'S TEST HEAD COACH



London: Former New Zealand captain Brendon McCullum has been appointed as England's men's team head coach, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) announced on Thursday.

The 40-year-old, McCullum will start his role with the Test side in the home series against New Zealand, starting on June 2 at Lord's, subject to obtaining a necessary work visa.

"We are delighted to confirm Brendon as England Men's Test Head Coach. It has been a real privilege to get to know him and understand his views and vision for the game. I believe his appointment will be good for England's Test team," Managing Director of England's men's cricket Rob Key said.

McCullum's appointment comes after Chris Silverwood departed from the role, following the 4-0 drubbing in the Ashes away. It means the England men's coaching duties have now been split, with separate coaches for red and white-ball cricket.

The former Kiwi skipper has coaching experience in franchise cricket, currently serving as the head coach of the Kolkata Knight Riders in the IPL. McCullum was also the head coach of the CPL franchise Trinbago Knight Riders.

As the head coach of the England Test side, McCullum's first order of business will be improving England's position in the ICC World Test Championship 2021-23 table. England are currently languishing at the bottom after a string of poor results.

Italian Open

SWIATEK BEATS AZARENKA TO SET UP QUARTERS CLASH WITH ANDREESCU



Rome | Agencies

World No 1 Iga Swiatek survived a bruising test to overcome former No 1 Victoria Azarenka 6-4, 6-1 and advance to the quarterfinals of the Italian Open, here on Thursday.

The victory extended Swiatek's remarkable winning streak to 25 matches, the longest since Serena Williams ran off 27 wins in 2015. The victory sets up a marquee match-up against 2019 US Open champion Bianca Andreescu on Friday.

While the scoreline appears perfunctory, Swiatek found herself under constant pressure from Azarenka's suffocating return game. The 20-year-old needed 79 minutes to complete a comeback from a double-break down at 0-3 in the opening set. Azarenka held at least one break point

in each of Swiatek's service games in the opener, generating a total of 11 break points. But in the key game of the first set, Swiatek came through a seven-deuce game, wiping out three break chances, to hold for a 4-3 lead. That hold was a part of a five-game run for Swiatek, but Azarenka's trademark fight never wavered. With Swiatek serving for the set at 5-3, the former No 1 wiped out four set points and broke to get back on serve.

Meanwhile, Canadian tennis player Andreescu reached her first WTA 1000 quarterfinal in 14 months, defeating qualifier Petra Martic 6-4, 6-4 in 1 hour and 43 minutes in the Round of 16.

The 21-year-old returned to action in Stuttgart last month following a six-month mental health hiatus, and is making her debut in Rome. In a first-time encounter

with last year's semi finalist Martic, she dealt with the tough challenge of an experienced clay-court expert with impressive sharpness.

No 90-ranked Andreescu's last appearance in a WTA quarterfinal was also her only previous run to the last eight on clay, at the WTA 250 in Strasbourg last year. This result marks her first WTA 1000 quarterfinal since reaching the 2021 Miami final.

In a clash between two strong servers, the stat sheet illustrates Andreescu's superiority in this key area and in crucial moments. The former US Open champion landed 72 per cent of her first serves compared to Martic's 50 per cent and saved six of the seven break points she faced while converting three out of four on Martic's serve.

Man City remain clear in Premier League

London | Agencies

Kevin de Bruyne produced a masterclass performance and scored four goals as Manchester City won 5-1 away to Wolverhampton on Wednesday to take a three-point lead over Liverpool at the top of the Premier League.

City were under pressure at kick-off after Liverpool's 2-1 win away to Aston Villa that drew them level on points 24 hours earlier, but De Bruyne quickly got the game under control with a hat-trick within 24 minutes.

The first goal came after he ran onto Bernardo Silva's pass on seven minutes and although Leander Dendoncker drew Wolves level soon afterward, de Bruyne slotted home a loose ball in the 16th minute to put his side back ahead.

De Bruyne then scored a stunning left-foot shot in the 24th minute to add a third before smashing home from 10 meters to assure the points in the 60th minute.



Raheem Sterling added a fifth in the closing minutes to also improve City's goal difference in relation to Liverpool. Chelsea took a big step towards assuring a top-four finish while deepening Leeds United's relegation worries with a 3-0 win at Elland Road. Mason Mount fired Chelsea in front in the 4th minute and Daniel James then made life easy for Chelsea when he was sent off for a bad challenge on Mateo Kovacic 20 minutes later. Playing against 10 men, Christian Pulisic and Romelu Lukaku rounded off the win for Chelsea in the second half. After the game, Chelsea boss Thomas Tuchel said Kovacic would probably miss this weekend's FA Cup final due to his injury.

India's Anamika begins her campaign on winning note

Istanbul (Turkey) | Agencies

Indian boxer Anamika showed her prowess and technical superiority in the 50kg weight class to advance to the pre-quarterfinals at the 12th IBA Women's World Boxing Championships, defeating Romania's Eugenia Anghel by a unanimous decision, here on Thursday.

The bout started on an aggressive note as both the boxers relentlessly attacked from the word go but Anamika used her sharp footwork and movement to land clear punches and evade her opponent's attempts.

The boxer from Rohtak continued her relentless attack in the second round



and didn't let her opponent settle down. She dictated terms throughout the bout and comfortably won by a 5-0 margin to move to the next round. Anamika will next face

World Championships bronze medalist, Kristy Lee Harris of Australia, in the Round-of-16 bout on Sunday.

Later tonight, two other

Indian pugilists- Shiksha (54kg) and Jaismine (60kg) are set to begin their challenge at the prestigious tournament, which has been witnessing high voltage competition in presence of record 310 boxers from 73 countries across the world.

This year's event, which marks the 20th anniversary of the IBA Women's World Championships, will be played till May 20.

Shiksha will be up against Argentina's Herrera Milagros Rosario in the 54kg opening round match whereas Jaismine (60kg) will square off against two-time Youth Asian Champion Pornthip Buapa of Thailand respectively.

Two-time Asian Champion

Pooja Rani (81kg) and Tokyo Olympic bronze medalist Lovlina Borgohain (70kg) will play their respective round-of-16 bouts on Friday. Pooja, who will begin her World Championships campaign, will take on Hungary's Timea Nagy while Lovlina will fight against Cindy Ngamba of the Fair Chance Team. Lovlina had defeated former world champion Chen Nien-Chin in the first round on Monday.

Late on Wednesday, India's Saweety (75kg) went down fighting against England's Kerry Davis and lost the bout by 2-3.

In the last edition of the tournament, held in Russia in 2019, Indian boxers secured one silver and three bronze medals.



SHILPA SHETTY TAKES A BREAK FROM SOCIAL MEDIA

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Shilpa Shetty Kundra is an avid social media user. The diva enjoys a massive fan following of 25.4 million followers. But in a shocking piece of news today, the diva informed her fans about taking a sabbatical from social media.

The actress shared a black picture with the caption, "Sooooo bored of the monotony, everything looking the same... going off social media till I find a new avatar."

The recent announcement has left Shilpa Shetty's fans in shock. Her stunning fashion pictures, Sunday binges, and wellness inspira-

tion posts have a massive fan base on the internet.

Well, we hope to see Shilpa Shetty back on the Gram soon! Meanwhile, on the work front, the busy actress has multiple projects in her kitty. She is gearing up for the release of Nikamma and Sukhee. The powerhouse performer is also shooting Rohit Shetty's Indian Police force, marking her OTT debut and the filmmaker's first female cop.



Sharad Malhotra on Vivek Agnihotri's latest release: It is a legendary film

Shachi Chaturvedi | Mumbai

Sharad Malhotra is an Indian actor who works largely in Hindi television and films. In 2004, he made his acting debut. The actor rose to prominence after playing Maharana Pratap Singh in Bharat Ka Veer Putra - Maharana Pratap. He is also known for playing Rishi Singh Bedi in Kasam Tere Pyaar Ki.

In an interview with Absolute India News, Sharad Malhotra discusses his new short film The Hindu Boy. "The script was narrated by the Director. I was so taken aback that I couldn't think twice before saying yes," Sharad stated.

Further talking about the Kashmir Files, a film depicting the genocide of Kashmiri pandits. The actor brought up "It is a legendary film. I cried while watching the movie. It was about events from the past, but this short film takes a different approach."

Sharad also shared some exciting news for his fans, revealing that he is working on two music videos as well as planning to work in short films and web series.



SANJAY GAGNANI EXPLAINS HOW TO KEEP FIT EVEN WITH A BUSY SCHEDULE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

TV actor Sanjay Gagnani, known for his role of Prithvi Malhotra in 'Kundali Bhagya' gives insights about his fitness regime amidst busy shooting schedule.

Sanjay says: "I love dancing and so I make sure to inculcate a dance workout in my daily routine. Since time is of the essence in careers like ours, dancing does two things at once, helps in fitness as well as relaxation."

"Sometimes adding to the mix things like running, jogging, and cardio as well. Managing a busy schedule along with workouts requires inner strength and willpower to be fresh, clean, and healthy. It also depends on how you want to look and if you wish to look a certain way you will automatically work on it," he adds. In response to how he maintains his fitness regime in the heat of the Mumbai summers,

Sanjay shares: "In this extremely hot climate, I increase my water intake, I have lots of fresh fruit juices and fruits and anything that helps me stay hydrated. The best mantra for staying in shape is to eat healthy, stay away from toxic people and foods." Known for his work in many shows like 'Bairi Piya', 'Hamari Devrani', 'Encounter', 'Veera', 'Savdhaan India' and 'Halla Bol', Sanjay has also acted in two films 'Rakhtbeej' and 'Heroine'.



SANJAY DUTT'S MANTRA: NOBODY CARES ABOUT YOUR STORY TILL YOU WIN, SO WIN!

Team Absolute | Bengaluru

Sanjay Dutt, who is known for his personal charisma and physique, has yet again impressed with his performance in 'KGF: Chapter 2'.

The actor's 'never give up' attitude was seen when he was shooting for the blockbuster Yash-starrer after he had just pushed back cancer. And he nailed the villainous character of Adheera with his stellar performance.

The actor has now taken to his social media handle and shared an intense workout picture, which shows his dedication as he lifts heavy chains in the gym. His message for his followers: "Nobody cares about your story till you win, so WIN!" He should know this better than most, for he has set many examples with his triumphs over difficult life situations in the past.



Adnan Khan recounts his experience of shooting for Indonesian TV show

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Adnan Khan, who was last seen playing the protagonist Mawlawi Kabir Ahmed in the TV drama 'Ishq Subhan Allah', shares his experience of shooting for an Indonesian show.

He says: "It was an amazing experience to shoot in Indonesia. I'm delighted to be part of a popular television show named 'Pesbukers' which airs on an Indonesian channel called Antv. As an actor I always look forward to such opportunities. I literally enjoyed my time while shooting there."

Adnan, who has earlier also acted in shows like 'Khade Hai Teri Raahon Mein', 'Twist wala Love', 'Love by Chance' among others, enjoyed visiting the country.

He adds: "I enjoy visiting Indonesia, it has a very beautiful natural wealth. Because of its natural beauty the place is very close to my heart. People there are so welcoming. I literally enjoyed the love and appreciation I received from my well wishers over there. Watching their craze for Indian television shows was mesmerising."

Sudha Chandran gets a chance to play a double role after 35 years

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Sudha Chandran was always fascinated by double roles and feels lucky to have finally got the chance to play it in her show 'Naagin 6'. The actress, who plays the role of Seema and her mother Tara in the show, says that she loves the variations between the two characters.

"This is the first time that I have played a double role. It's very exciting and I always wanted to do a double role. Each time I saw actors doing double roles, I always longed to do one but I never got the chance. After 35-36 years, Balaji Telefilms gave me the opportunity and I simply loved it," she says.

On elaborating about the variations she has made in two characters, she explains: "I always felt that the variation is very important, if you see me in 'Naagin 6', the character of Tara that I am playing is of adivasi and I have made it very rustic and kept very black makeup."

"It looks very rustic and low but when it came to Seema's character, which I am playing as well, I have plaits and a long bindi. It is a cute looking image. As an actor when I saw myself, I was very convinced that these two looks are so different and unique," she says.

While talking about the challenges, she adds: "The challenging part in playing a double role is that you have to look different. The mannerisms have to be different, especially when you are in the same frame. The fun part is seeing yourself play the two characters."

The actress says that people are also loving this sequence.

MS Dhoni to produce Tamil movie with Nayanthara in the lead

Team Absolute | Chennai

Ex-India captain M.S. Dhoni is now venturing into film production, sources in the Tamil film industry said. According to information available, Dhoni who has set his eyes on the film industry is picking his first movie in Tamil with Nayanthara in the lead.

Dhoni, according to sources, has already roped in Sanjay, one of the closest aides of megastar Rajinikanth. Sources said that Sanjay has given the tip-off to Dhoni that roping in Nayanthara for his debut movie will augur well for him in the Tamil film industry.

Nayanthara's would-be husband and director Vignesh Sivan is an ardent fan of Dhoni and the possibility of the former Indian captain playing a cameo role in the movie is not ruled out. The movie 'M.S. Dhoni: The Untold Story' was a super hit and did extremely well in Tamil Nadu as Dhoni is a hit among the Tamil fans ever since he has been leading the Chennai Super Kings in the IPL and sources said that his confidence of producing a Tamil movie has come from this fan following he has in Tamil Nadu.



INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Tamannah Bhatia