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Moody's slashes India's economy growth projection to 8.8% for 2022

INFLATION HIKE ON THE CARDS !

Global financial services provider firm Moody's Investors Service has slashed India's GDP projection to 8.8 per cent for 2022, from 9.1 per cent estimated previously. The rationale behind the cut was the prevailing high inflation. Further, aggressive monetary tightening, amid worries of long-term inflation expectations getting unanchored, could also become a catalyst for a recession.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The next few months will be critical if the global economy can remain resilient over this period, the growth path could become more sustainable through next year, Moody's said.

Economies are returning to a post-pandemic normal, which involves reversals of some economic patterns to pre-Covid trends and permanent changes to others.

As pandemic disruption wanes, households are once again spending more of their incomes on high-contact service activities and buying fewer goods, it said.

As central banks shift to tighten monetary policy in response to higher inflation, there has been a rise in financial market volatility and asset repricing. Bond yields the world over have risen in anticipation of further interest rate hikes, equity prices have fallen from their peaks and the US dollar has strengthened, it added.

India's retail inflation accelerated to 7.79 per cent in April, remaining above the tolerance limit of central bank RBI for a fourth month in a

"Except for Russia, we do not currently expect a recession in any G-20 country in 2022 or 2023. Still, there are multiple risks that could further undermine the economic outlook, including additional upward pressure on commodity prices, longer-lasting supply-chain disruptions, or a larger than expected slowdown in China."

Madhavi Bokil, Senior VP/CSR, Moody's

Russia-Ukraine war could cause global recession: World Bank chief

Washington: David Malpass, chief of the World Bank. has warned that Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine could cause a global recession as the price of food, energy and fertiliser jump. He made the remarks while addressing a US business event on Wednesday, the BBC reported. "As we look at the global GDP, it's hard right now to see how we avoid a recession... The idea of energy prices doubling is enough to trigger a recession by itself," he said in the latest warning over the rising risk that the world economy may be set to contract.

Last month, the World Bank cut its global economic growth forecast for this year by almost a full percentage point, to 3.2 per cent. Malpass also said that many European countries were still too dependent on Russia for oil and gas. That's even as Western nations push ahead with plans to reduce their dependence on Russian energy.

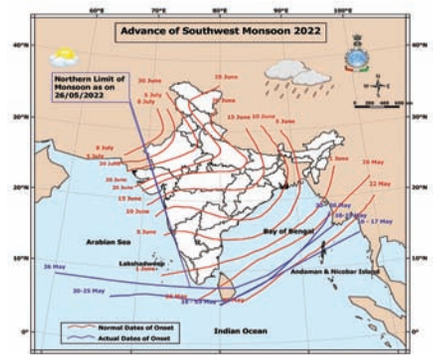
Monsoon onset over Kerala can happen anytime till June 1: IMD

Contrary to its earlier prediction of the onset of the Southwest Monsoon over Kerala on May 27, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Thursday said it can happen anytime this forecasting week (meaning till June 1) and the conditions are being monitored real time.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The wait for the most awaited news at this time of the year just got extended. The news of onset of Southwest Monsoon over Kerala is the most awaited news for the agrarian practices across India that have a major impact on the domestic economy, including on the share markets.

This 'week' is the forecasting week, from May 26 till June 1, and that in turn means, the monsoon is expected any time till June 1.Asked for the specific reason for the delay, a senior IMD scientist said: "Our earlier forecast for May 27 did mention an estimation of plus/minus four days. Kerala's all 14 identified stations have not received rainfall even today."Monsoon is a complex phenomenon and a number of criteria are to be satisfied before IMD declares onset over Kerala and is dependent on factors such as rainfall, wind field and Outgoing Longwave Radiation (OLR).



"Conditions are favorable for further advance of Southwest Monsoon over some more parts of South Arabian Sea, entire Maldives & adjoining areas of Lakshadweep and some more parts of Comorin area during next 48 hours. Conditions are likely to become favourable for onset of monsoon over Kerala during the week."

Chinese visa scam: Karti Chidambaram gets interim protection from arrest till May 30

New Delhi: Rouse Avenue Court here on Thursday granted interim protection from arrest to Lok Sabha MP Karti Chidambaram till May 30 in a money laundering case registered by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) linked to an alleged Chinese visa scam.

The ED had filed the money laundering case against the Congress MP, his close aide S Bhaskararaman, and others in connection with the alleged scam, which facilitated project visas for Chinese nationals for a power project of the Vedanta group in Punjab in return for bribes, when his father P Chidambaram was the Union Home Minister during the Congress regime.Earlier in the day, Karti appeared before the CBI at its headquarters here to record his statement in connection with the case.On Wednesday, Bhaskararaman, Chartered Accountant of Karti, was arrested by the CBI from Chennai for allegedly helping Chinese nationals get visas by flouting the rules.

Infiltration attempt foiled along LoC, 3 terrorists killed

SRINAGAR | Agencies

The elimination of three Pakistani terrorists and recovery of war like stores including stores for (IEDs) Improvised Explosive Devices is a clear indication of an intent to disrupt peace, prosperity of locals and the impending Amarnath Yatra, the Army said on Thursday.

An infiltration attempt was foiled in forward areas of Keran sector on Thursday culminating in killing of three terrorists and recovery of large quantity of war like stores."The operation was launched based on Joint Intelligence from several agencies including SSP Kupwara. Several search parties were formed, who conducted vigorous searches and established multiple ambushes. The contact with terrorists was established at 4.45 a.m. on 26 May in the forward areas close to the LoC, leading to heavy exchange of fire. One civil porter also lost his life in the firefight. The thorough search was conducted in the morning and concluded at about 2 p.m.," the Army said.

It said the search of the area yielded dead bodies of three terrorists, three AK rifles, one pistol, six grenades and large quantity of ammunition and stores related to (IEDs) Improvised Explosive Devices. "Exporting terrorism in J&K has been a state policy of Pakistan in the last three decades. Increased desperation of terrorist handlers in POJK is evident as a result of effect-based operations conducted by the Indian Army and prevailing peace and tranquility evident from large number of tourists coming to the valley," army said.

'New flashpoint'

Mamta govt for CM, not Governor, as varsities Chancellor

KOLKATA | Agencies

A fresh confrontation between West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar and the Mamta Banerejee government loomed after the state cabinet on Thursday decided to have Chief Minister as the Chancellor of all state universities instead of the Governor.

This is for the first time that the state government has taken such an initiative to break the protocol, persisting since Independence, of having the Governor as Chancellor of the state universities.

Following the state cabinet meeting at the state Secretariat, Nabanna, Education Minister Bratya Basu said that the state government will bring a bill in the Assembly proposing that the Chief Minister, not the Governor, will be the Chancellor of the state universities."Once the bill is passed in the Assembly, it will be sent to the Governor for his assent. In case the Governor refuses to clear the bill, the state government will bring an ordinance to implement this change of practice," he said.

The development comes at a time when the state government and the ruling Trinamool Congress is already in a fix over the ongoing Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe on the West Bengal School Service Commission (WBSSC) recruitment irregularities where two ministers of the state government have already been grilled by the central agency sleuths.

Till this report was filed there was no reaction from the Governor on this matter. However, the opposition parties have criticized the initiative.

Educationists seemed to be divided over this development.Educationist, political analyst and former Principal of the then Presidency College, Dr Amal Kumar Mukhopadhyay said that the Chief Minister is the administrative head of the state and a political personality.Renowned historian and Sanskrit scholar, Nrisingha Prasad Bhaduri, however, welcomed the decision.

FIR AGAINST UNKNOWN PERSON FOR THREATENING MP NAVNEET RANA

New Delhi: Delhi Police has registered an FIR against an unknown person for allegedly issuing death threats to Member of Parliament Navneet Rana, an official said on Thursday.

"An FIR has been registered at the North Avenue police station under sections 506 (punishment for criminal intimidation) and 509 (word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman) of the Indian Penal Code," Deputy Commissioner of Police (New Delhi district) Amrutha Guguloth said.Rana's Personal Assistant, Vikas Goswami, in the complaint, alleged that the parliamentarian received 11 calls on Tuesday in which the caller threatened her of dire consequences if she ever recites Hanuman Chalisa or comes to Maharashtra."The caller spoke to her very rudely and in a very inappropriate manner. He abused her, threatened to kill her and said he won't allow her to enter Maharashtra," the complaint lodged in Hindi read.He further wrote that MP Rana was extremely disturbed and scared after several threatening calls.

Prisoners to operate petrol pumps in Haryana

CHANDIGARH | Agencies

Haryana Jails Minister Ranjit Singh on Thursday said the government is making efforts to bring about change in the mindsets of the prisoners with a proposal to open petrol pumps on the land of the jails at 11 places.

The first will be opened in Kurukshetra on May 31. The minister told the media the jailer would initially ensure that training is being imparted to the prisoners and thereafter duty would be kept on rotation subject to their behaviour at workplace. He said after observing the functioning and response to the jail filling station in Kurukshetra, the stations would be opened at 10 other places -- two in Ambala and one each in Yamunanagar, Karnal, Jhajjar, Faridabad, Gurugram, Bhiwani, Jind and Hisar.Singh said the objective of the scheme is to make prisoners a part of society. He said when people come to the filling stations, they will see that the prisoners can also work like the common man.Responding to a question about the availability of power, Singh, who also holds power portfolio, said despite the extreme weather conditions, there was no power cut in urban areas post-May 1.

69% VICTIMS BETWEEN 18-45 YRS AS ACCIDENTS REDUCE BY 12.84% IN 2020

As per report "Road Accidents in India -- 2020" prepared by Transport Research Wing of the Road Transport and Highways Ministry, the number of road accidents has been on decline since 2016 except for a marginal increase of 0.46 per cent in 2018. For the second consecutive year, the total number of road accident fatalities has declined in 2020.

- *The major states that achieved significant reduction in road accidents in 2020 are Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka.*
- *The major states that achieved significant reduction in road accident fatalities in 2020 are Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh.*

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Union government on Thursday said road accident parameters registered a significant decline in 2020 as compared to 2019 and total accidents decreased on an average by 18.46 per cent, the number of persons killed decreased by 12.84 per cent and the number of injuries decreased by 22.84 per cent.

Similarly, the number of persons injured has been on the decline since 2015. A total of 3,66,138 road accidents have been reported by states and Union Territories during 2020, which claimed 1,31,714 lives and caused 3,48,279 injuries. In 2020, fatal road accident victims were largely youth between the age group of 18-45 years and accounted for 69 per cent of victims during 2020.

People in the working age group of 18-60 years share 87.4 per cent of total road accident fatalities. The present volume of "Road accidents in India -- 2020" provides information on various parameters of road accidents in the country during 2020. It has 10 sections and covers information relating to road accidents in the context of road length and vehicular population.The data or information provided in this report is sourced from police departments of states or UTs collected on calendar year basis in standardised formats as provided by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific under the Asia Pacific Road Accident Data base project.As per report, there has also been a decline in the number of fatal accidents involving at least one death. A total of 1,20,806 fatal accidents were reported in 2020, which is 12.23 per cent lower than the 2019 figure of 1,37,689. During 2020, national highways, state highways and other roads reported less number of accidents, fatalities and injuries as compared to 2019.

GERMANY APPROVES BHARAT BIOTECH'S COVAXIN

New Delhi: Germany on Thursday approved the 'Made in India' Bharat Biotech's Covid vaccine Covaxin.

"Covaxin has been approved by Germany. The entrants will no longer need proof of vaccination as the Federal Cabinet relaxes restrictions," said Bharat Biotech in a tweet on Thursday."The Federal Cabinet of Germany has approved Covaxin and relaxed restrictions on the entry for those vaccinated with WHO approved vaccines. The promulgation takes effect from June 2022," said the vaccine manufacturer in a statement.The World Health Organization in November last year issued an emergency use listing (EUL) for Covaxin.

REFORM, PERFORM, TRANSFORM DEFINE TODAY'S GOVERNANCE: PM NARENDRA MODI

HYDERABAD | Agencies

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said reform, perform and transform mantra define today's governance in the country.

He said during the last eight years, the government with the political willpower brought reforms and they yielded results on the ground due to people's participation.

He said this while addressing 20th anniversary celebrations and graduation ceremony of the Post Graduate Programme of Class of 2022 at the Indian School of Business (ISB) here.

Addressing students of both Hyderabad and Mohali campuses of the ISB, he said that while the need for reform was always felt in the country, there was always a lack of political willpower.

"Due to the continuous political instability in the last three decades, the country has seen a lack of political willpower for a long time. Because of this the country stayed away from reforms and from taking big decisions. Since 2014, our country is seeing political will and also, reforms are being done continuously. We have shown public support and popular support is assured when reforms are undertaken with determination and political will," he said.

He cited the example of adoption of digital payments among people. He said in a country where banking was considered a privilege, fintech has changed the life of the common man. He pointed out that today 40 per cent of the world's digital transactions are happening in India.

The Prime Minister noted that today, India is the fastest growing economy in the group of G20 countries. In the case of smartphone data consumers, India is at number one. India is second in the world in terms of the number of Internet users. India is also second in the world in the Global Retail Index. The world's third largest start-up ecosystem is in India. The world's third largest consumer market is in India.He claimed that even amid Covid pandemic, India proved its resilience. The century's biggest health crisis disrupted the global supply chain and the war added to the problem.

"Despite all this India is emerging as a major centre of growth today. Last year, the highest ever recorded FDI came into India. Today the world is realising that India means business." Modi said it was not the success of the government alone but business schools like ISB, professionals who passed out from such institutes and youth played a big role. "Be it start-ups or traditional business, manufacturing or service sector, India youth proving they can lead the world. Today, the world is looking at India's youth with confidence and respect," he said.

The Prime Minister pointed out that Indian solutions are being implemented globally. "Today on this important day, I would like to ask you to link your personal goals with the goals of the country," he told the business graduates.

Modi said that resilience and strength of the health sector was proved during the pandemic. He recalled that there were no PPE manufacturers but the country produced 1,100 manufacturers and the Covid infrastructure in no time. There were only a couple of labs for testing but the number went up to 2,500. "Regarding the Covid vaccines, concerns were being raised here whether foreign vaccines would be available or not. But India developed its own vaccines. In India more than 190 crore doses have been administered. India has also sent vaccines to more than 100 countries of the world," he said. Referring to the expansion of medical education in the last eight years, he said the number of medical colleges increased from 380 to over 600 while the number of graduate and post-graduate medical seats went up from 90,000 to over 1.50 lakh.

The Prime Minister stated that bureaucracy has also made firm contributions in the reform process.

Police complaints filed against Telangana BJP chief for hate speech

HYDERABAD | Agencies

Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) leaders on Thursday lodged police complaints against state BJP chief Bandi Sanjay for delivering a hate speech in Karimnagar town.

The All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) has demanded the state government take action against Sanjay while Muslim leaders of the Congress too have decided to file police complaints against the BJP leader, who had made the speech on Wednesday.

Local TRS leaders filed two separate complaints with Sanjay at Two Town Police Station in Karimnagar. They demanded strong action against him for making provocative comments against Muslims, mosques, and madarsas.

They requested the police to register cases against Sanjay, who is also a Member of Parliament from Karimnagar, under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code. The AIMIM has urged Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao and Director General of Police M. Mahender Reddy to take "exemplary" action to prevent untoward incidents and protect communal harmony of Telangana.

The party tweeted that the BJP government at the Centre has done nothing for people of Telangana in the last eight years and that is why Sanjay was spreading hatred.

Meanwhile, Telangana Congress' Minorities Department Chairman Abdullah Sohail Shaik has announced that the party leaders in all 33 districts will lodge police complaints against Sanjay. He claimed that the police should have taken suo moto note of the hate speech and register a case but no action was taken as the ruling TRS "has a secret understanding with the BJP".

There will be major changes at national level, says KCR

BENGALURU | Agencies

Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao who called on former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda on Thursday asserted that no one is currently happy in the country during the BJP's rule, and there is going to be major changes at the national level.

"No one can prevent major changes. You (media) will get sensational news in 2 to 3 months," he said, adding: "We want 'Ujwal Hindustan'. The attempts will be made to ensure changes in India. We are working in that direction."Speaking to reporters after meeting JD-S leader Deve Gowda, he said that adivasis, farmers and poor people are not living peaceful lives. Industries are shutting down, the value of the Indian currency is falling. Attacking Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech on "Pariwarvaad", KCR, as the Telangana Chief Minister is popularly known, said: "We don't want speeches, we want change. GDP is taking a nosedive, inflation is increasing." "I have discussed issues of national politics with our senior brother Deve Gowda Ji and Kumaraswamy Ji (Deve Gowda's son). I want to convey this here. My words turned out to be true when I announced that I will come to attend the swearing in ceremony of Kumaraswamy. He went on to become the CM. This time I will assure that there will be major changes at the national level and it is impossible to prevent it from happening," he said.

He further claimed that the economy of the country has collapsed. "There is young talent, resources, but, even today there is no discussion on relevant issues of concern in the country."Rao and former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda met on Thursday and discussed topics of national importance.

Naga national flag symbolises Naga political identity, it is not negotiable: NSCN-IM

KOHIMA| Agencies

The Isak-Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM) categorically said that "the Naga national flag symbolises Naga political identity. It is not negotiable", in the editorial of its latest news bulletin "Nagalim Voice". It is unthinkable for NSCN-IM to accept the Naga national flag as a cultural flag as hinted by the Government of India.

Since 1997, the Central Government has held more than 85 rounds of negotiations with the NSCN-IM and other Naga groups. However, the NSCN-IM's insistence on a separate Naga flag and Constitution have become a big hurdle in the way of resolving the Naga issue.

The former interlocutor and then Governor of Nagaland, R.N. Ravi had rejected these demands repeatedly.

The editorial of the May issue of Nagalim Voice, referring to the Framework Agreement signed on August 3, 2015, expressed: "Today, NSCN is watching how Prime Minister Narendra Modi is going to handle Framework Agreement with NSCN and Naga people that he himself took so much pride in and credit for. When the high profile Framework Agreement was signed, Modi went histrionic as he called up all political leaders who matter to announce that he has solved the longest running insurgency movement in Southeast Asia. The world at large was, however, not impressed and waited to see how he would match his words with action acceptable to the Naga people."

The editorial further read: "What is of concern to NSCN in particular, and to the Nagas in general is the habitual betraying of the Government of India after signing agreement after agreement."

"Such was the depravity on the part of Government of India that every good thing gained during the 25 years of Indo-Naga political talks is facing the risk of going down the drain. The unfortunate development is tantamount to political blackmail," the editorial said. The Nagalim Voice said that NSCN cannot allow defilement to take place for the fourth time and this is the crux of the issue. "Everything is clear before the world," the Naga outfit said.

Woman gets husband killed by contract killer over illicit affair

Team Absolute|New Delhi

A 40-year-old woman got her husband killed by a contract killer over an illicit affair with another man, an official said on Thursday.

The accused were identified as Zeeba Qureshi (40), Shoaib (29) and the contract killer Vinit Goswami.

Furnishing details, DCP Shweta Chauhan said on May 17 at about 10 p.m., a sensational firing incident took place in front of gate No 3 Khalsa School at Kalidas Road which is a densely populated area of Daryaganj, Delhi. The complainant Rukmuddin Qureshi stated that his elder brother Moinuddin Qureshi was present at workshop, at about 10 p.m. when he came out to urinate near gate No 3 Khalsa School. Suddenly the complainant heard firing sound and saw that blood was oozing out from the body of his brother Moinuddin.

His brother told him that someone had fired upon him. The complainant took Moinuddin to LNJP Hospital where he succumbed to gunshot injury.

Accordingly, the police registered a case under section 302 of the Indian Penal Code at Daryaganj police station.

4 injured after Dalit wedding procession attacked in Gujarat

AHMEDABAD | Agencies

Several members from the upper caste (Thakor) community on Thursday allegedly attacked the wedding procession of a Dalit woman in Gujarat's Ahmedabad, leaving four persons injured.

The injured persons were rushed to the hospital for treatment.

The police reached the Dangarva village and brought the situation under control.

The bride's family intends to file an FIR once her wedding ends.

Bride Tara Jagdish Parmar's marriage with Rahul Haresh Parmar was scheduled on Thursday afternoon.

When the 'barat' (wedding procession) reached the outskirts of the village, the bride along with other family members started a procession with DJ to welcome the groom and his family.As the procession reached near Thakorvas area, nearly 40 persons armed with sticks and other weapons attacked the procession by pelting stones, alleged Jagdish Parmar, the bride's father.

Jagdish said the village has passed a resolution banning wedding procession on horses, so his daughter and family members walked on foot accompanied with DJ music, yet members from Thakor community attacked the wedding procession.

As the police came to know about the incident, police personnel from the Detroj and nearby police stations reached the spot and brought the situation under control.

DRI SEIZES 52 KG COCAINE VALUED AT RS 500CR

Team Absolute|New Delhi

The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) on Thursday said it has recovered a consignment of 52 kg of cocaine valued at Rs 500 crore under "Operation Namkeen" at Mundra port that was imported from Iran.

"On the basis of extensive data analysis and field surveillance, intelligence was developed by the DRI that certain consignments being imported from Iran were likely to contain narcotic drugs.

"... 'Op Namkeen' was launched and a consignment, declared to contain 1,000 bags of common salt having gross weight of 25 MT, which had been imported at Mundra port from Iran, was identified for detailed examination," said a DRI official.

The said consignment was examined for three continuous days from May 24-26.

During the examination, some bags were found to be suspicious, as a substance in powder form having distinct smell was found in these bags. Samples were drawn from those suspected bags and testing was conducted by officials of Directorate of Forensic Sciences, Gujarat, who reported the presence of cocaine in these samples.

"Examination and seizure proceedings under the provisions of NDPS Act, are in progress. Roles of various persons involved in the consignment are also being investigated by DRI," the official said.

ALLAHABAD HC DENIES BAIL TO 34 COPS ACCUSED OF KILLING 10 SIKHS IN 1991

PRAYAGRAJ | Agencies

In a significant order, the Allahabad High Court has denied bail to 34 constables of the Pradeshik Armed Constabulary (PAC) who have been accused of killing 10 Sikh men in an alleged fake encounter in 1991, treating them as terrorists.

The bench of Justices Ramesh Sinha and Brij Raj Singh observed that the accused cops had indulged in a barbaric and inhuman killing of innocent persons by calling them terrorists.

"Besides, if some of the deceased were involved in anti-social activities and criminal cases were registered against them, then too, procedure established by law should have been adhered to, to bring them to task and not indulging in such a barbaric and inhuman killing of the innocent persons."

The court listed the criminal appeal of accused filed challenging their conviction, for a final hearing on July 25.

As per the prosecution case, on July 12, 1991, a bus containing passengers/pilgrims was stopped near Pilibhit by a team of Uttar Pradesh Police of district Pilibhit (appellants). They brought down 10-11 Sikh youths from the bus, boarded them in their blue police bus and some police personnel sat in the bus along with the remaining passengers/pilgrims.

Thereafter, the remaining passengers/pilgrims kept roaming the pilgrims' bus the whole day here and there with the police personnel and after that, the policemen left the bus in a Gurudwara in Pilibhit at night, whereas 10 Sikh youths, who were alighted from the pilgrims' bus, were killed by the police.

The 11th one was a child whose whereabouts could not be traced out and his parents were given compensation by the state.

Initially, the investigation of the incident was conducted by the local police of district Pilibhit, and a closure report was filed by the local police. However, the Supreme Court entrusted the investigation of the incidents relating to the encounter to the CBI.

The trial took place in the court of the Special Judge, CBI/Additional District Judge, Lucknow, and vide its judgment and order dated April 4, 2016, in total, 47 persons were convicted under Sections 120-B, 302, 364, 365, 218, 117 IPC.

J&K: 7 FEARED DEAD IN ZOJILA PASS ROAD ACCIDENT

Srinagar: Seven to eight people are feared dead in a road accident on Thursday in Zojila Pass that connects Ladakh with Jammu & Kashmir (J&K).

An official of the disaster management department said a taxi carrying 7 to 8 persons skidded off the road in the Zojila pass area of Ladakh-J&K road and plunged into 440 feet deep gorge."Rescue operation has started in the area", an official said.

MVA JOLTED AS ED RAIDS SENA MINISTER ANIL PARAB, ASSOCIATE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In another rude jolt to the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), the Enforcement Directorate (ED) swooped on the homes and offices of Shiv Sena leader and Transport Minister Anil D. Parab, and his associates, here early on Thursday.

Around 7 a.m., ED teams simultaneously fanned out to around half a dozen locations in Mumbai, including Parab's official bungalow and private residence, besides his native Ratnagiri, and in Pune where two premises of a business associate Vibhas Sathe were searched.

A team of senior ED officials zeroed in on Parab at his official home where he was undergoing the 'preliminary' round of investigations.

The action follows a complaint lodged by the central probe agency in an alleged money-laundering case against Parab, certain shady land deals, besides other reported financial irregularities, arising out of the probe into allegations hurled by sacked Mumbai police officer Sachin Vaze.The developments rattled the MVA as Parab became the second sitting Minister who has been targeted by the central probe agencies in the past four months.

Earlier in February, MVA constituent Nationalist Congress Party's Minister Nawab Malik had also been raided and is currently in jail.

In an early operation, ED teams with CRPF posses swooped at the locations to conduct searches and reportedly gathered incriminating electronic devices and other documents. An MLC with a law background, Parab was one of the key players that led to the formation of the MVA government in November 2019.

Sena Chief Spokesperson Sanjay Raut and Congress state Chief Spokesperson Atul Londhe slammed the raids "with vendetta and ulterior political motives" to harass the MVA government. "BJP leaders face more serious charges and cases, but nobody touches them... The Central agencies are being deliberately misused to demoralise the MVA allies, but we shall not be cowed down. We are with Parab," said a grim Raut.

Londhe said that the BJP has not yet digested its 2019 defeat in Maharashtra and is now hounding the MVA allies in its efforts to topple the state government.

Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party former MP Kirit Somaiya, who had predicted the ED actions, said this is only the beginning and many more persons shall be in the dragnet.

"Parab will go to jail today for his corrupt activities. Then, the Chief Minister's in-laws will have to be ready... This entire government is corrupt and one by one, all will be brought to book," Somaiya said in a dark warning.

Shiv Sena's Sanjay Raut, Sanjay Pawar file nominations for RS polls

IN A MAJOR SHOW OF STRENGTH BY MAHA VIKAS AGHADI (MVA), RAUT AND PAWAR WERE JOINED BY CHIEF MINISTER UDDHAV THACKERAY, DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER AJIT PAWAR, CONGRESS LEGISLATURE PARTY CHIEF AND MINISTER BALASAHEB THORAT, NATIONALIST CONGRESS PARTY PRESIDENT SHARAD PAWAR, MANY MINISTERS, MPS AND MLAS FROM THE THREE ALLIES. SIMULTANEOUSLY, THE NCP HAS DECIDED TO RENOMINATE SENIOR LEADER PRAFUL PATEL FOR ONE SEAT, WHILE THE CONGRESS IS YET TO ANNOUNCE ITS CANDIDATE.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Two Shiv Sena leaders -- party Chief Spokesperson Sanjay Raut and Kolhapur District Chief Sanjay Pawar -- filed their nomination papers for the upcoming biennial elections to Rajya Sabha, here on Thursday.

With Sena filing nominations for two seats, the fate of Yuvraj Chhatrapati Sambhajiraje is not clear, as he had planned to contest the RS polls independently with support of all other parties. There are indications that Sambhajiraje may withdraw from the contest and he is likely to announce his decision here on Friday. Speaking to mediapersons after submitting their nomination papers, Raut said that both the RS seats "belong to the Sena" and the party would bag them comfortably.

To a question, Raut said even if the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) fields a third candidate, the Sena nominee would win as it has "more than the required number of votes".The RS elections will fill up the vacancies by six retiring members -- one each from ruling (MVA) allies, Shiv Sena (Sanjay Raut), NCP (Praful Patel) and Congress (P. Chidambaram), and three from the BJP Dr. Vinay Sahasrabuddhe, Piyush Goyal and Dr. Vikas Mahatme.

This time, given the realignment of the legislature after the 2019 Assembly elections, the BJP can win only two of the three seats it holds, the MVA can win their three seats, and Sena is now contesting the third seat held by the BJP. The electoral college comprises the 288 MLAs and a candidate must get 42 votes to win a seat in the Upper House of Parliament. The MVA has 170 MLAs -- Shiv Sena 55 (one MLA Ramesh Latke, died in Dubai last week), NCP 53, Congress 44, smaller parties/groups 10 and eight Independents.

On the Opposition side, BJP has 106 with other smaller parties/groups two and five Independents.

Axis MF Manager on I-T radar for Lamborghini buy, luxury flats

Team Absolute | Mumbai/New Delhi

Former Chief Trader and Fund Manager of Axis Mutual Fund Viresh Joshi is on the radar of the Income Tax Department amid allegations of irregularities.

Joshi has been accused of taking bribes from the brokers in lieu of sharing mutual fund's tips.

It has been alleged that he made huge financial gains from the brokers and bought a Lamborghini and several luxury apartments in Mumbai.

It was also alleged that brokers used to pay him on a monthly basis. Joshi allegedly invested in mutual funds by buying many Midcap and smallcap stocks to benefit the brokers and himself.

The I-T department has reportedly formed a team of its elite officials to look into the alleged front-running scam and the Axis Mutual Fund. Around 12 fund managers, including Joshi, are on the radar of the I-T department.The Axis Bank had said that it had on May 4 suspended Joshi and other fund managers on the charge of alleged front-running. The Income Tax Department was surprised as the accused didn't furnish information about their real estate in the tax filing, which was later detected.The I-T department in its preliminary inquiry found that the fund managers have a number of commercial and non commercial assets, which they allegedly hid in their tax filing. They had even shown that they were not earning from their real estate businesses.The I-T department has learnt that the fund managers were earning rent from their properties on which the tax was not paid.The department is also looking into their sources of income, as to how the fund managers were able to buy luxury apartments and other properties.

The fund managers will now face the tax evasion case and there are also possibilities that they might face a parallel probe on their sources of income.

In coming days, the I-T department could summon all of the fund managers to appear before it and furnish the documents regarding their sources of income.

CONTROVERSY OVER MAHA HOME MINISTER'S SEXIST COMMENT

Mumbai: A video has emerged of a top Maharashtra Nationalist Congress Party leader making a sexist comment amid a similar controversy involving a rival BJP leader.Maharashtra Home Minister Dilip Walse Patil, whose NCP is a member of the ruling alliance in the state, is seen addressing supporters at a public event when he made the sexist comment.

"For better marriages and to avoid domestic violence, men should stay outside, and women should do housework," Patil is heard saying in Marathi in the video, which has been shared widely on social media.

Patil now finds himself firmly in the middle of the sexist comment controversy along with his rival and Maharashtra BJP chief Chandrakant Patil.Targeting NCP leader Supriya Sule, the state BJP chief during a protest had told her, "If you don't understand politics, go home and cook."Chandrakant Patil made the sexist comment as the two parties sparred over reservations for Other Backward Classes, or OBC, in Maharashtra.

Tweeting the video involving Dilip Walse Patil of the NCP, Andhra Pradesh BJP leader Vishnu Vardhan Reddy tagged and took a swipe at Priyanka Chaturvedi, a colleague of the Maharashtra Home Minister: "...Now waiting for you to take credit of his statement." Dilip Walse Patil hasn't yet responded to the criticism over the video.

MEDIA PROFESSIONAL CHEATED OF RS50,000 IN CYBER FRAUD IN CAPITAL

Mumbai: A 24-year-old female media professional has been duped of nearly Rs 50,000 by a cyber fraudster who sent her emails from a fake ID using her senior's name and asked her to transfer the amount in her bank account, a police official said on Wednesday.

According to a Vakola police station official, the victim works in a private media house.

Last week, the media professional received messages from her senior's email ID asking her to deposit Rs 50,000 in her bank account on an urgent basis, the official said.

Without cross-checking, the woman first transferred Rs 25,000 and then another Rs 24,700 (total Rs 49,700) online in the bank account mentioned in the emails, he said.

After transferring the amount, the victim enquired with her senior and was shocked to know that the latter had not asked for any financial help as mentioned in the emails, the official said.

Based on a complaint, the police in suburban Vakola registered an FIR on Tuesday against an unidentified person under the IPC section 420 (cheating) and relevant provisions of the Information Technology Act, he said, adding further investigation was underway.

Satish Kaushik accuses airline of using 'dubious ways to earn money from passengers'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood actor Satish Kaushik shared a post on social media accusing private airline Go First of using dubious means to earn money from passengers.

He talked about a recent bad experience where he paid extra money for a particular seat but the airline allegedly still sold that seat to someone else.

Satish posted on Twitter on Wednesday morning about paying Rs 25,000 for a middle seat on a Go First flight from Mumbai to Dehradun. He later found out that the same seat had been sold to some other passenger.

The actor wrote, "It is very very sad that @GoFirstairways has to use dubious ways to earn money from passengers. My office booked two seats (Satish Kaushik/Ajay Rai) in the first row with middle seat also and paid 25K in G8 2315 from Mum-Dehradun on 23rd June. But alas they sold the middle seat to another passenger inspite of my office paying for it."

He added that members of the flight crew tried to help him and were apologetic too.

"Mr Zubin from Go First tried to help by telling the other passenger that he will adjust him next flight since the flight was full and there was no seat but that passenger was adamant. After the fellow passenger did not get seat and flight was in hold I decided to offer the seat to him. "Zubin and air hostesses who were aghast at the mistake of their own organisation thanked me. Air hostess told me that I will mail her airline office about this unfortunate glitch from their side and give you an apology. Zubin told me that I will inform the office get refund the money for that seat.

"I told Zubin that it will never happen and as I thought that actually happened. Zubin my office is contacting the customer care and they are saying what I expected, NO REFUND."

The actor asked the airline and accused them of harassing passengers, questioning their practices.

17th Mumbai International Film Festival to go hybrid

The Mumbai International Film Festival (MIFF) will be back with its 17th edition in a hybrid format.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The fest, which showcases documentaries, short fiction and animation films, will start from May 29 with the inaugural ceremony at Nehru Centre Auditorium, Worli, Mumbai and will conclude with the award distribution ceremony on June 4.

DG, Films Division and Director, MIFF, Ravinder Bhakar informed that the hybrid component is being facilitated by National Film Development Corporation (NFDC). Bangladesh has been chosen as the 'Country of Focus' this year in commemoration of 50 years of its Independence. A special package of 11 films from Bangladesh including critically acclaimed film 'Hasina: A Daughter's Tale' will be presented at MIFF 2022.

Dheep Joy Mampilly, Director Administration(Films Division) and Deputy Director, PIB, Mumbai quoted, "The 17th and the first post-pandemic edition of Mumbai International Film Festival is being held by Films Division, Government of India, with the aim to celebrate films and filmmakers and honour the timeless values which films hold and nurture.""On behalf of Festival Director and DG, Films Division, Ravinder Bhakar and the Government of India, it is our privilege to invite and welcome all citizens to join the celebration. While the festival is being hosted at Films Division Complex, Pedder Road, Mumbai during.Current + aspiring film lovers can join the celebration online as well,since the festival is being held in a hybrid format this year", he further said in the statement.

"Close to 400 documentary, short fiction and animation films from India and across the world will be showcased at this festival", he concluded.

Internationally acclaimed film 'Reena Ki Kahani' will be screened at the fest along with the World Premiere of the Netflix original series 'Mighty Little Bheem: I love Taj Mahal' episode and the first animation film co-produced by India and Japan 'Ramayana: The Legend of Prince Rama', which will complete its 30th anniversary this year.

Animation lovers will be delighted to savour retrospective packages from three countries - Portugal, Russia and Canada. Films of Portuguese animator Regina Pessoa; Russian animation director, Aleksandr Petrov; Canadian animator and illustrator Janet Perlman will be a treat to animation lovers.Filmmakers from documentary and animation genre, who left us in the recent times, will be remembered with special screenings under 'Homage' section: legendary Pin screen Animator from Canada, Jacques Drouin; first female documentary filmmaker of Italy, Cecilia Mangini; Indian veteran Buddhadeb Dasgupta; multi-faceted Sumitra Bhave; famous national award-winning cinematographer from Manipur, Irom Maipak are some among others.

Contribution of Films Division in documentary culture in India will be showcased through a specially curated package, 'Image-Nation'.

Special packages like Oscar Film package, curated by Shorts TV, Special film packages from Italy and Japan, Indian Panorama - from the recent editions of IFFI will be a point of attraction for film buffs.

Murder case cracked within 14 hours by Railway Police

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Government Railway Police (GRP) in Mumbai cracked a murder case in less than 14 hours, with the arrest of a 21-year-old man who allegedly killed a woman, stuffed her body in large plastic bags before dumping it on the railway tracks here, police said.

The GRP at Mumbai Central arrested Vikas Jagan Khairnar for allegedly brutally killing Sarika Damodar Chalke (30), a resident of Goregaon, over a monetary dispute, an official said.

The victim's body was found stuffed in three large plastic bags on the railway tracks between Mahim and Matunga stations on Tuesday morning. The victim had multiple stab wounds on her stomach and neck, he said.

During the probe, the GRP found that the bags used to stuff the body had 'Hari Om Drug Goregaon' written on them, and they traced the victim's family to the area, the official said, adding that the woman's husband had lodged a missing person's complaint at Dindoshi police station on Monday.

Based on the CCTV footage from the victim's work place, the police took the accused into custody and during interrogation, he confessed to the murder, the official said.

The accused was part of the housekeeping staff at Satellite Tower, where the victim worked, and she had borrowed money from him and had not repaid the same, he said.

The accused killed the woman, stuffed her body in large plastic bags and boarded a Churchgate-bound local train from Goregaon. He threw the bag out between Mahim and Matunga stations, the official said.

EDITOR'S SPECS

Rajasthan will be ruled by Gehlot or Pilot?

The Congress will take a final call on the leadership issues in Rajasthan, where tussle between Sachin Pilot and Ashok Gehlot continues, after June 10 Rajya Sabha polls in order to avoid the Punjab-like situation to hit the party. Sources said that there will be a major overhaul in the state organisation and the government, and party interim president Sonia Gandhi has held discussions with leaders, including General Secretary in-charge Ajay Maken. Sachin Pilot has been vying for the Chief Minister's post, but Ashok Gehlot has the confidence of Sonia Gandhi. Time and again, Pilot's MLAs have been targeting their own government. The top leadership of the party in Delhi has been upset with this. Sources say all this will be decided after Rajya Sabha polls and preparations for 2023 Assembly polls will also begin. Advisor to Gehlot and Independent MLA from Sirohi, Sanyam Lodha also opened a front against the government. He gave a breach of privilege notice against the Home Department and the Revenue Department for inaction in two cases despite an announcement being made in the Assembly. Lodha submitted breach of privilege notices against both the departments to the Assembly Secretary. Now, the Assembly Secretariat will start the further process. The infighting is happening when the opposition BJP is aiming to win two Rajya Sabha seats by fielding two candidates. Four seats of the Rajya Sabha are going to polls from the state, the Congress wants to win three but its short of 15 MLAs there are 13 independent MLAs. While one of the Rashtriya Lok Dal MLA is in alliance with the Congress, the CPI-M and the Bharatiya Tribal Party of India have two votes each. The BTP recently announced its divorce from the state Congress.

CYBER SECURITY CONUNDRUM

D.C. PATHAK

Sometimes the roots of a problem are obscured by discussions on the 'enormity' of its possible repercussions -- some of this is happening in the way experts were making their expansive analysis of the threats to cyber security.

The success of Information Technology Revolution -- 1991 is accepted as the cut off year for this transition since in that year, investment in IT sector exceeded that in the industrial sector for the first time in US -- marked the advent of the Age of Information as the Internet provided for instant communication, created borderless markets and made way for globalisation, producing the new phenomenon called Knowledge Economy.

Internet-based products and services -- from mobile to Twitter and home delivery -- held the sway. The fact that information would be communicated and stored on Internet produced the problem of securing it against the adversary's attempt at prying into the same or against the theft of data committed for other undesirable purposes.

The first point of clarity about the use of Internet, however, is that it is a public platform and the user therefore should be aware that he or she should not say on it what would not be permitted to be spoken from such a platform.

Section 66 of IT Act punishes calls for violence, specific threats to persons or a brazen attack on the nation's sovereignty. The 'public' character of Internet makes it illogical for you to expect that your information fed there by you would be kept confidential -- until special steps are taken by you as a user or by the organisation which obtains information from you online, to safeguard it against exposure. A large part of noise raised about 'privacy' of information loaded on the Internet, therefore, made no sense.

The second fundamental thing about the use of Internet is that security in any sphere -- cyber, industrial or State-related -- revolves around the threats to the three assets of a target organisation, material, human resource and protected information.

Correspondingly, there are concepts of physical security, personnel security and information security for protection against what is described in professional terms as Sabotage, Subversion and Espionage, respectively.Taking the issue of 'information security' first -- in the context of Internet -- it has to be mentioned that by definition, Espionage is manoeuvring 'unauthorised access to protected information'. If the organisation has not protected its information it cannot complain of breach of its security -- this protection starts with the 'security classification' of the particular information in terms of its being labelled as 'restricted', 'secret' or 'top secret' and determination of who amongst the employees would have access to it.

Security of information in the 'virtual' layer begins with the techniques of 'access control' to limit entry to authorised users -- these include Firewalls, Passwords and Biometric Devices. The security policy has to be formulated with clarity to achieve effective designing and implementation of Firewalls.

Cryptography transforms a clear text into a non-decipherable cyber text. The key size of the encryption process reflects the strength of the algorithm. Encryption is the best device for ensuring message 'confidentiality' or privacy and also for checking unauthorised access to data. It is to be noted that multiple encryptions may make the security stronger but it may have a negative influence on efficiency. It is logical that Passwords should be stored on record in encrypted form. And finally, Biometrics has to be extensively used for establishing the identity of the legitimate user.

There is a strong Physical Security side of cyber operations. At the physical layer, which is the data communication interface with the hardware, specific access controls are required. This is the layer that performs the physical transfer of data to the transmission medium.Floppy disks, magnetic tapes, pen-drives, optical disks and any other hard drive back up material should always be kept in safe custody. Printed, unclaimed and sensitive documents must be destroyed by 'shredding'.

The IT Act of India provides detailed guidelines even on a secure site design for a Data Centre or Master Computer. All openings of this Centre should be monitored round the clock by surveillance video-cameras.

Physical Security begins with the installation of a secure perimeter -- which is not always a brick-and-mortar structure -- and prompt detection of any attempt to make an intrusion into the same. One of its objectives is to prevent Sabotage which by definition is 'the threat of causing unacceptable physical damage to the target organisation'.

Data destruction will also fall into this description. All strategic sectors of economy are run on cyber systems whose security is a must for averting a disruptive attack that would impact national stability. Code breaking may be done by the enemy by using brute force in which an attempt is made to decipher the code by using every possible key combination.

Launching a direct clandestine attack from outside may result in 'denial of service' in which the ports of the target are clogged and the network resource is degraded. Data destruction may be caused by injecting a virus through false messaging. A malicious website may be used to download a virus.

Unfortunately, any 'hacking' or unauthorised penetration of the system is detected only after it had succeeded and that is why emergency response to any such event was important for mitigating the damage.

The Personnel Security component of cyber domain is often underestimated for lack of understanding of the ways in which the threat against it came into play without getting detected. In all systems having a direct bearing on national security, the angle of threat of Subversion, which by definition is rooted in the enemy's capacity to alter the loyalty of an employee of the target organisation, is accorded high priority.

The standards of Personnel Security -- which aim at preventing this subversion -- are more stringent in the sensitive sectors of national security. The enemy can either recruit an employee already on the roll by managing to reach out to the individual and then exploiting some vulnerability of the latter to affect a switch in the loyalty -- from the organisation to the entity outside -- or alternately, 'plant' its agent under 'cover' in the target organisation using some vulnerability in the prescribed process of entry.

Importance of background checks and enquiry into the character and antecedents before the employment is confirmed, suggests itself. In sensitive organisations, there is periodical reverification, as well. It is obvious that a subverted employee would be used by the adversary for various objectives like securing access to protected information and carrying out acts of sabotage.

The third basic feature of cyber security relates to a universal finding that nearly half of the breaches there were attributable to an insider. One of the tasks of the security set up of a sensitive enterprise is to take note of any 'suspicious' conduct of an employee and check out on that to determine if the individual was not already working for some outsider.

At a deeper level, the security set up looks for any 'vulnerability' shown by an employee like greed, addiction or disgruntlement and examines it for administering a warning to the individual for that 'weakness' -- after all this would be noticed by the adversary as well.

Further, the practice of 'need to know' principle is meant to enforce 'restrictive security' by which the employee is given access to only that part of organisational knowledge which was essential for the individual's own performance- this reduces the subversive potential of a compromised member.

It is for this reason that internal Firewalls are also used to protect one area of a company from another in pursuance of 'restrictive security'. In an Intelligence organisation, where the 'need to know' principle is followed in totality, members understand what part of operational knowledge is not to be shared with the colleagues. They also know that restrictive security did not operate vertically.

A fourth essential point about cyber security is that its framework rests on certain requisites -- legal, operational and managerial -- and like in any other security domain, conforms to the principle that security is an 'integral' concept not given to divisibility of any kind.

Security is a mainstream function as it requires full knowledge of the enterprise and derives its authority from the top man. Training is necessary for all aspects of security and a security savvy culture has to be established to avert avoidable failures.

A cyber security regime banks for its success on its capacity to attend to the details. A System Administrator has to be appointed, this is a legal requirement, whose responsibilities are exclusive for creating, classifying, retrieving, deleting and archiving information, putting in place arrangements for Password management, authorising access to users on a 'need to know' and 'need to do' basis with a complete documentation of this authorisation, ensuring that all security violations are recorded, investigated and put up for review by the top management and finally, ensuring that security policies are understood by all members of the organisation. For this, an audit trail of security sensitive access and actions taken shall be logged.

Finally, the cyber domain is an instrument of development and facilitates the welfare function of the democratic State, but it is also a licence for anti-national forces to indulge in mischief against the latter. Weapons of higher defence, including nuclear missiles, operate on complex cyber security systems that are fail-safe.

In what is a new phenomenon, social media -- a product of Internet -- is already becoming an instrument of combat and 'proxy war'. We live in times where a minimal understanding of cyber security issues is an essential component of the requirement of 'being well-informed' -- this is the mandate of the age, for being successful in any sphere of work.

(The writer is a former Director of Intelligence Bureau. Views are personal)

international

AZADI MARCH ENDS AS IMRAN GIVES 6-DAY ULTIMATUM TO ANNOUNCE POLLS

Islamabad | Agencies

PTI Chairman and former Prime Minister Imran Khan on Thursday gave a six-day ultimatum to the incumbent government to announce an election and dissolve Assemblies, indicating an end to his partys 'Azadi March'.

The PTI chairman was off to his Bani Gala residence after addressing the participants of the Azadi March' at Jinnah Avenue, leaving behind his supporters who marched for hours in anticipation of a major public gathering and sit-in, Geo News reported.

The PTI marchers, who were in D-Chowk most of Wednesday night, had by this time entered Islamabad's prohibited Red Zone, which is home to several sensitive buildings, including Supreme Court, PM House, US Embassy.They managed to enter despite heavy security.

In his speech at Jinnah Avenue, Khan said he had reached Islamabad after 30 hours of travelLing from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

"The government tried every method to crush our Azadi March. They used teargas on peaceful protests, our homes were raided and our privacy was violated. However, I have seen the nation free itself of (the) fear of slavery," Geo News quoted the former premier as saying.He also claimed that three PTI workers lost their lives in Karachi, while two others were thrown off Ravi Bridge and thousands of others were arrested.

Giving a deadline to the government to announce the date for fresh polls in the country, Khan said he is giving the government this time to announce a general election in June.

"My message for the imported government is to dissolve assemblies and announce elections, otherwise I will come back again to Islamabad after six days."

As Khan's convoy entered Islamabad and started marching towards D-chowk with the large caravan, the federal government called in the army to protect Red Zone.

According to the notification issued by Interior Ministry, the "Army has been called in to control the situation under article 245 of the Constitution".

Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah took to Twitter and confirmed the development.

PTI workers threw stones using catapults at the Jang/Geo building located near D-Chowk and shattered the glasses of the newsroom.

Due to stone-pelting, several staffers got injured. Also, vans parked near D-chowk were damaged, Geo News reported.

RUSSIA CANCELS UPPER AGE LIMIT FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL

Moscow: The Russian Parliament has passed a bill to scrap the upper age limit for those who want to serve in the army under a contract.Previously, Russian citizens aged 18-40 and foreigners aged 18-30 were entitled to conclude the first contract for military service, reports Xinhua news agency.

Now those who are older will be able to serve under a contract until the end of the working age, the State Duma or the lower house of Parliament, said on Wednesday.

The adoption of this bill will make it possible to attract more specialists to the military service, said Andrei Kartapolov, co-author of the initiative and chairman of the Defence Committee of the State Duma.

An explanatory note said highly professional specialists are needed for the use of high-precision weapons, and the operation of weapons and military equipment, while experience shows that professionals in that area are usually in the age range of 40-45.

25 killed in Rio de Janeiro police operation

Rio de Janeiro | Agencies

Twenty-five people were killed in a police operation conducted in a favela, or marginal neighbourhood, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazilian authorities said.

The operation by the Federal Police, the Federal Highway Police and the Military Police took place in Vila Cruzeiro in an attempt to capture leaders of the city's largest criminal faction, reports Xinhua news agency.

In a statement on Wednesday, the Military Police said that officers responded to an attack by alleged criminals in the favela, leaving 15 suspects dead, while a 41-year-old woman was killed by a stray bullet and nine other bodies have not been identified yet.

The confrontation also left several wounded, including a teenager and two people who died on Wednesday.Rifles, pistols and a grenade were seized during the operation, along with a large quantity of drugs, and motorcycles and vehicles used by the alleged criminals.This is the second deadliest police operation carried out by security forces in Rio de Janeiro, after the one carried out a year ago in the Jacarezinho favela with 28 people dead.

BLASTS IN AFGHAN CITIES KILL 14 PEOPLE

Kabul: At least 14 people were killed and 32 others injured in four separate explosions that rocked Afghanistan's capital Kabul and the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, authorities said.

Five people were killed and 17 others injured after a blast ripped through a mosque during prayers on Wednesday evening in Kabul's Kolola Pushta locality, reports Xinhua news agency.

The blast occurred when people were offering prayers in Hazrat-e-Zekria Mosque, police spokesman Khalid Zadran said in a tweet.The blast came about an hour after three consecutive explosions struck three van-buses in PD 10 and PD 5 in Mazar-i-Sharif, killing nine people and wounding 15 others, Mohammad Asif Waziri, spokesman for the provincial police department, told Xinhua.

The targeted buses were carrying commuters along busy roads during the evening rush hour in the northern city, capital of Balkh province.

No group or individual has claimed responsibility for the attacks so far. In recent weeks, the war-torn country has witnessed a series of bombings reportedly launched by the Islamic State terror group which opposes the Taliban-led caretaker government.

Canada confirms 16 monkeypox cases

Ottawa | Agencies

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) has confirmed 16 cases of monkeypox in the country.

All the cases have been reported in the province of Quebec, PHAC said in a statement, adding that samples are being received for confirmatory testing from multiple jurisdictions, reports Xinhua news agency.

According to the statement, cases of monkeypox are being identified and treated by local health clinics.

There is ongoing planning with provinces and territories to provide access to approved vaccines in Canada that, if required, can be used in managing monkeypox in their jurisdiction.

As a preparedness step, PHAC provided Quebec with a small shipment of Imvamune vaccine from Canada's National Emergency Strategic Stockpile to support their targeted response.

Similarly, as warehousing and cold chain operations are confirmed, other jurisdictions will begin receiving limited pre-positioning supply shipments, PHAC said.

Monkeypox is a sylvatic zoonosis that may cause infections in humans and the disease usually occurs in forested parts of Central and West Africa.

It is caused by the monkeypox virus which belongs to the orthopoxvirus family, according to the World Health Organization.

GLOBAL COVID CASELOAD TOPS 527.2 MN

Washington | Agencies

The global coronavirus caseload has topped 527.2 million, while the deaths have surged to more than 6.28 million and vaccinations to over 11.48 billion, according to the Johns Hopkins University.

In its latest update on Thursday morning, the University's Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) revealed that the current global caseload and the death toll stood at 527,265,341 and 6,282,780, respectively, while the total number of vaccine doses administered increased to 11,485,421,664.

The US continues to be the worst-hit country with the world's highest number of cases and deaths at 83,706,662 and 1,003,743, respectively, according to the CSSE.India accounts for the second highest caseload at 43,142,192.

The other countries with over 10 million cases are Brazil (30,851,191), France (29,605,758), Germany (26,159,106), the UK (22,462,129), Russia (18,038,920), South Korea (18,036,720), Italy (17,312,432), Turkey (15,066,784), Spain (12,238,073) and Vietnam (10,712,733).The nations with a death toll of over 100,000 are Brazil (666,261), India (524,507), Russia (370,972), Mexico (324,768), Peru (213,122), the UK (178,973), Italy (166,264), Indonesia (156,553), France (149,095), Iran (141,293), Colombia (139,833), Germany (138,643), Argentina (128,825), Poland (116,290), Spain (105,947) and South Africa (101,043).

Urban Body Elections

MAYOR TO BE ELECTED DIRECTLY, COUNCILORS WILL ELECT MUNICIPAL PRESIDENT

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In Madhya Pradesh, the government has taken a big step in the matter of urban body elections to be held in the coming times, now the mayor of the municipal corporation will be directly elected by the public and the councilors will elect the presidents of the municipality and nagar panchayat. Governor Mangubhai Patel has approved this ordinance of the state government.

State Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan had met Governor Patel at Raj Bhavan on Thursday morning. This meeting was being linked to this ordinance. By noon, the reason for the meeting was also revealed.

State's Urban Administration Minister Bhupendra Singh while discussing with the reporters said that, the election of the mayor of the municipal corporations in the state will be held directly by the public, that is, through the direct system, while the election of the president and vice-chairman of the municipality and the president and vice-chairman of the city panchayat will be done by the councilor.

He further said that the state government had sent an ordinance to the governor in this regard, on which the governor's permission has been received. After notification of the ordinance, the proposal will be sent to the State Election Commission.It is to be known that for the past several days, the discussion was in full swing that the government has sent an ordinance to the governor regarding the urban elections, but the government had denied this in the past. The Chief Minister's meeting and Urban Administration Minister Bhupendra Singh's statement have cleared the picture.

Now buses will run from village to village, passengers will sit comfortably

THE GOVERNMENT WILL GIVE FUNDS TO THE TRANSPORTERS TO MEET THE LOSSES. CHIEF MINISTER CHOUHAN HAS INAUGURATED RURAL TRANSPORT SERVICE DEVELOPMENT WORKS FROM KAGPUR VILLAGE IN VIDISHA DISTRICT.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that a network of roads has been laid in every village of the state, but at present good transport services are not available to the commuters to travel to and from rural areas. 'Rural Transport Service' is being launched by the government from village Kagpur. Gradually this service will be expanded to the whole of Madhya Pradesh. Now buses will run from village to village and passengers will travel comfortably in buses.

Chief Minister Chouhan said that the transporters suffer losses in running buses on short routes, due to which they do not run buses there. The government has decided that the government will help and facilitate them to run buses on these routes, so that they will be able to earn profit. This is an unprecedented rural transport scheme. It will be extended to remote villages. Chief Minister Chouhan duly launched the Rural Transport Scheme at village Kagpur in Vidisha district today. He also presented Rural Transport Service Operation Certificates to the drivers. Chouhan inaugurated/bhoomi-pujan of development works worth crores. He distributed moong to the students of primary and secondary classes. Chouhan also honored shooting ball players of Madhya Pradesh selected for international competition. Chief Minister said that the government has decided that piped water from Sanjay Sagar Dam will be brought to 165 villages of this region. 208 crore 94 lakh will be spent on this scheme. Water will also be supplied to the downstream villages through stop-dams etc. Efforts will be made to reach water to every village. Along with this, water will be supplied from tap to every house under the Nal-Jal Yojana.Chief Minister Chouhan said that everyone will get a pucca house. In Vidisha district, 83 thousand 719 persons will be sanctioned housing plus Prime Minister's houses. Chouhan said that the government is ensuring bread, cloth, house, education and medicine to the people in the state. He also talked about doubling the income of farmers and increasing the income of women of self-help groups.

Chief Minister Chouhan said that elections to Panchayat and local bodies would be held soon in the state. In places where the election will be held unopposed, special facilities will be given by the government. Such Panchayat and local body will get the benefit of all the schemes. Chief Minister Chouhan said that everyone should cooperate in the operation of Anganwadi. Farmers should give free grain. He himself went out with a handcart for the Anganwadis and a large amount of material was collected.

Revenue and Transport Minister Govind Singh Rajput gave detailed information about the Rural Transport Scheme. He informed that this scheme has been started today as a pilot project from village Kagpur. After six months, this scheme will start simultaneously in the whole of Madhya Pradesh. An incentive amount of Rs 5 thousand will be given to the transporter for operating 3,000 km in a month. There will be 50 percent discount on the fare for the handicapped. Women will be given training to drive. 'Driver Testing Tracks' will be prepared to produce efficient drivers. Electric buses will also be run.

CM to release approvals and first installment of PMAP to 5 lakh beneficiaries on May 28

STATE LEVEL PROGRAMME WILL BE HELD IN BHOPAL. PROGRAMMES WILL ALSO BE HELD AT DISTRICT, DISTRICT AND GRAM PANCHAYAT LEVEL

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan will issue letters of approval and first installment amount of Awas Plus under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Rural) to 5 lakh beneficiaries on May 28. Chouhan will also hold talks with the beneficiaries of different districts of the state through video conferencing.

The state level programme will be held in Bhopal from 1 pm, from where Chief Minister will virtually connect with all the district, Janpad and Gram panchayats of the state. The programme will start there at 12 noon. Training will be imparted on the main provisions of the scheme in the programme. People's representatives who will be present from 12.30 pm to 1 pm and from 1 pm will address the programme and be connected to the main program of Bhopal.

After completion of the main programme of Bhopal, all the rural and public representatives will go to the approved housing sites of the beneficiaries of Awas Plus in the respective areas and perform bhoomi-pujan and kalash sthapna.

PRESIDENT WILL INAUGURATE "AROGYA MANTHAN"

President Ram Nath Kovind will inaugurate the Arogya Manthan programme on May 28 at Kushabhau International Samagra Centre Bhopal on the topic "One Nation-One Health is the need of the present time". Governor Mangubhai Patel, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and AYUSH Minister Ramkishore Kavre will be present.

CM CHOUHAN PLANTS BANYAN AND NEEM SAPLINGS

Bhopal : Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted Neem and Banyan saplings in Smart City Garden today. Anchor and correspondent of Doordarshan Delhi Aditya Shrivastava, Shubham Shinde of Matri-Bhoomi Public Welfare Society, Shrinkhla Dore, Mahima Verma and Vijay Singh also planted saplings.

The banyan tree planted is also called Vat tree or Bad. Banyan has religious significance, according to Ayurveda, it is possible to cure many diseases with the banyan tree. Replete with antibiotic elements, neem is known as the ultimate medicine.

Nehru's statue damaged, Congress demands probe

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A group of anti-social elements damaged the statue of the country's first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in Madhya Pradesh's Satna district. The miscreants, mostly appearing to be of a young age, tried to demolish the statue by damaging its lower portion and hitting it with sticks and iron rods.

A video which surfaced on social media showed nearly a dozen miscreants, with some of them damaging the upper portion and others raining blows on the lower portion of the statue. It also showed that one of them was striking Nehru's statue with a hammer in an attempt to break it.

One of them was holding a big saffron flag. The video showed them shouting slogans against the Shivraj government -- 'Shivraj Singh Chouhan murdabad, Shivraj government murdabad'.

Reporter was informed that the miscreants tried to damage Nehru's statue located in Satna city's Dhavari squire on Wednesday afternoon.

After verifying the viral video, the police have registered an FIR against unidentified persons. "A case has been registered against unidentified persons. They have been booked for damaging Nehru's statue and creating social disturbances in the society. Strict action will be taken against them," said a senior police official in Satna district.

Former MP chief minister and state Congress president Kamal Nath has demanded an investigation in the matter.

A FUNERAL FOR MONKEY IN REWA DISTRICT

Bhopal: Residents of a town in Rewa district held a traditional funeral of a monkey that died due to electrocution.

A video of the funeral procession held in Teother town shows a group of people taking out the procession along with a music band. A man was seen holding the carcass wrapped in a cloth with the name of Lord Ram inscribed on it.

The monkey was found dead near an electric pole on Monday.

"When contacted, local civic officials said it is the work of the forest department to cremate the animals. On the other hand, the forest department said it is the civic body's responsibility," Mahendra Kesharwani, a local trader, said.

The forest officials later suggested that the citizens could perform the last rites of the ape, he said."We traders then decided to perform the monkey's last rites in a traditional way," he said. Later, some village residents buried the carcass with full respect as per the traditions, he added.

Several injured in communal clash in Rewa over land dispute

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Several persons were reportedly injured in Madhya Pradesh's Rewa district after a communal clash broke out over a land dispute, police said on Thursday.

People from two communities (Hindu-Muslim), claiming ownership of a government plot where a temple and mosque are located side by side, indulged in a heated argument which later turned into a communal clash.

As per the police, a former BJP Councillor of the area, Lavkush Gupta was about to start construction on the land when a group of Muslims objected to it, claiming the land belonged to the mosque.

During the argument several people from both the communities assembled there and fought with each other.

The incident occurred on Wednesday in Mangawan area, nearly 30 km from the district headquarters, Rewa.

Police reached the spot and brought the situation under control. Heavy security has been deployed to ensure peace in the area, a local police official told reporter.Police said both communities attacked each other with 'lathi' (stick) and pelted stones.

Those injured during the communal clash have been admitted to Sanjay Gandhi Memorial hospital for treatment. "People from both communities have lodged complaints against each other. Heavy police personnel were deployed to avoid any untoward incident," said a police official posted in Mangawan police station.

Inspector In-charge of Mangawan police station, D.K. Dahiya said the land belongs to the state government where a temple and a mosque have existed for the last several years.

Later, Rewa Superintendent of Police, S. Navneet Bhasin reached the site and interacted with the people from both communities."FIR has been registered against 11 people. We have requested revenue officials to verify the land. Action would be taken after investigation in the matter. As of now, the situation is under control," Bhasin said.

"Adopt Anganwadi Campaign" will start to connect society in Anganwadis functioning: CM Chouhan

LET US PLEDGE, EVERY CHILD WILL BE COMPLETELY HEALTHY. IN THE MAHAYAJNA TO MAKE CHILDREN HEALTHY, EDUCATED AND CULTURED PEOPLE OF THE STATE SHOULD ALSO MAKE OFFERINGS. CM CHOUHAN ISSUES MESSAGE TO PEOPLE OF THE STATE

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that children are the future of our country and healthy, educated and cultured children build a capable nation. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, a "Mahayajna" is going on to build a glorious, prosperous, and powerful India. To ensure success to this endeavour it is necessary that our children remain perfectly healthy. Anganwadi is a platform to keep children healthy and well educated, giving them better values and to ensure their better growth. Anganwadi is not the responsibility of the government only. The government is mobilising resources. It is ensuring nutritious food. It is making arrangements. Society also has a responsibility in this endeavour. Me, you have a responsibility towards your children and therefore we have thought that the Anganwadi should not run by the government alone, but society should also be associated with the government. For this purpose we have started "Adopt Anganwadi Campaign".

Chief Minister said this in a message issued to the people of the state through media. Chief Minister Chouhan said that many people have adopted Anganwadis. But, why only a few people should adopt Anganwadis? Everyone should be associated with the Anganwadis. There is a need that proper nutritious food should be made available in Anganwadis, proper arrangements for education should be made and arrangements for sports should also be there. Today it is the need of the hour and keeping this in mind, I went out with a handcart in Bhopal to make proper arrangement of total resources for the Anganwadi and to connect our society to the Anganwadi. To collect toys and other materials for the children, people extended cooperation with open hands. I had gone out with a handcart, but trucks were filled with toys in reciprocation. A variety of material arrived, cheques and commitments worth lakhs of rupees arrived. I am excited, my enthusiasm has increased further. Therefore, the campaign to connect the society with Anganwadi is now becoming a social movement.Chouhan said that I make a humble appeal to you that you should also join this campaign, join the movement, you can extend cooperation in fulfilling the needs of Anganwadis. If you are a farmer, give food grains, if you are a trader give material, if you are industrialists, employees, officers are any other person engaged in social or any other work, donate something to the Anganwadis, according to your capacities. You celebrate your birthday with the children of Anganwadi. If you cannot go there then send milk, fruits, something nutritious to Anganwadi. You can arrange food for children in Anganwadi in memory of your parents. On the birthdays of your children, you can gift something to the Anganwadi. That is why I am making an emotional appeal to you today. Join Anganwadi means connect yourself with your children and join the future of your country.

Couple, 2 minor daughters among 5 run over by speeding SUV

Team Absolute | Gwalior

In a hit-and-run case, a couple and their two minor daughters were among five persons who died after being run over by an SUV in Gwalior district on Thursday afternoon, police said.

The incident took place when the victims were waiting for a bus on a road near Baragaon Khurai area, around 22 kms from the district headquarters, after attending a marriage function, Additional Superintendent of Police Rajesh Dandoutia told news agency.

"A SUV being driven at a high speed crushed to death five persons. After the incident, the driver sped away the vehicle and escaped from the spot," he said, adding that efforts were on to identify and detain him.

The victims were identified as Pappu Jatav (50), his wife Raja Beti (35) and their daughters - Reshma (10) and Poonam (5). The fifth victim, who is a close relative of the Jatavs, is being identified, the ASP said.

Their bodies were sent for post-mortem, he said.

"The family hailed from Dongar Kirar village in Morena district of the state and had come to Gwalior to attend a wedding. They were waiting to catch a bus to return home when the accident occurred," Dandoutia said.A case was later registered against the unidentified driver, he added.

JOE ALWYN GRACED THE RED CARPET WITH CO-STAR MARGARET QUALLEY

Los Angeles | Agencies

The Stars at Noon, starring Joe Alwyn and Margaret Qualley and directed by Claire Denis, is presently screening at Cannes 2022. Alwyn and Qualley looked lovely as they posed together on the red carpet for the premiere event, wearing dazzling ensembles.

Joe Alwyn, who recently appeared in the series Conversations With Friends, strolled the Cannes red carpet in a smart ensemble consisting of an off white jacket, a black shirt, and black slacks. Margaret Qualley, his co-star, was also dressed in black, donning a floor-length gown. The next film by the team is based on Denis Johnson's novel.

Taron Egerton was set to star in The Stars at Noon, however he was later replaced by Alwyn. Joe looked good in his Cannes 2022 appearance, while fans were sad that his fiancée Taylor Swift was not in there to cheer him on. The actor recently spoke about his connection with the singer and explained why they wish to keep it quiet. He also responded to rumours of the couple's engagement with an ambiguous response that said,"If the answer was yes, I wouldn't say. If the answer is no, I wouldn't say", reports.

In Alwyn's new project, the actor will play an English businessman, while Qualley, who received critical acclaim for her portrayal in OTT's limited series Maid, will play an American journalist.

Khloe Kardashian: I've only had one nose job

Los Angeles | Agencies

The 37-year-old star has confessed to being "offended" by recent rumours that she's undergone 12 face transplants, reports femalefirst.co.uk. Khloe explained: "It did use to bother me when people were [saying] I've had 12 face transplants. I'm like, 'Oh, my God, I have?' I was like, 'That's crazy.'"

The 'Kardashians' star has been baffled by the recent rumours, and insisted she's only gone under the knife one time. Khloe, who has True, four, with her ex-boyfriend Tristan Thompson, told the 'Not Skinny But Not Fat' podcast: "It didn't bother me. It offended me. I just couldn't figure out why people thought that. I've had one nose job that I love. Like, I want everyone to know I don't care to lie about it. But the transplant thing, I just want to understand why." Khloe subsequently joked about going under the knife later in life. She quipped: "That sounds amazing later in life, but now, I'm good." Khloe previously opened up about her dramatic weight loss. The reality star recalled being "chubby" during her younger years, and explained how her split from Lamar Odom inspired her to get into shape. Khloe shared: "Growing up, I was always chubby, I used to just accept the way people defined me. When people called me the fat sister, I'd say, 'Yeah I'm big-boned.' Whatever we do to laugh at things instead of letting them hurt you. And then, I slowly but surely took something really bad in my life or a stressful time, which was my divorce, and I turned it into a positive."

DOJA CAT REVEALS HER ACTING AMBITION

Los Angeles | Agencies

Rap star Doja Cat has already achieved huge success in the music business, and she would like to try her hand at acting one day. The 'Juicy' hitmaker said: "I'd love to act. I'd love to be in movies. That's a massive want for me." Cat launched her debut album, 'Amala', in 2018 and she's already one of the best-selling rappers in the industry, reports female-first.co.uk.

She said: "It's just not realistic and it's not fun, to be honest, when you have to rush through things. So that is something I definitely want to do, but I want to do it only. So I would take a break from music."

Ewan McGregor on how he prepped for 'Obi-Wan Kenobi'

Los Angeles | Agencies

'Obi-Wan Kenobi' actor Ewan McGregor, who is all set to headline the series, says he has watched all the nine Star Wars movies and has special fondness for the original trilogy of the '70s and '80s since those were the films he grew up with.

"It's been nice for me to realize that the work we did in the past is really loved and appreciated. During my preparation for this film, I watched all nine of the Star Wars movies just to get into the Star Wars world again, and it was nice to watch our three again. I enjoyed them a lot," said McGregor.

Reprising his role as the iconic Jedi Master, Ewan McGregor is set to headline the series along with Hayden Christensen, Moses Ingram, Joel Edgerton, Bonnie Piesse, Kumail Nanjiani, Indira Varma, Rupert Friend, O'Shea Jackson Jr, Sung Kang, Simone Kessell and Benny Safdie.

'Obi-Wan Kenobi' will premiere on May 27 on Disney+ Hotstar.

KATE MOSS DENIES RUMOUR JOHNNY DEPP ONCE PUSHED HER DOWN THE STAIRS

Los Angeles | Agencies

Supermodel Kate Moss appeared at Johnny Depp and Amber Heard's $100 million defamation lawsuit via video link to deny rumours that her ex-boyfriend had pushed her down the stairs. Heard, previously referenced the model during the ongoing court case, when she discussed an alleged altercation between Depp and her sister, Whitney Henriquez, saying: "(Whitney's) back was to the staircase, and Johnny swings at her. I don't hesitate, I don't wait - I just, in my head, instantly think of Kate Moss and stairs."

When asked in court by Benjamin Chew, a member of Depp's legal team, if actor had ever pushed her down the stairs while they were dating, Moss replied: "No, he never pushed me, kicked me or pushed me down any stairs." She told the court how during a holiday in Jamaica with Depp he had picked her up and "got (her) medical attention" after she had fallen down some stairs. She explained: "We were leaving the room and Johnny left the room before I did. There had been a rainstorm and as I left the room I slid down the stairs. I hurt my back. And I screamed because I didn't know what had happened to me and I was in pain. He came running back to help me, carried me to my room and got me medical attention."

Anthony and Joe Russo are 'big Dhanush fans'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Joe Russo says he and his co-directing partner-brother Anthony Russo are big fans of Indian actor Dhanush, who plays "one of the top assassins of the world" in their upcoming film 'The Gray Man'.

The filmmaker says the role is specifically written for the Indian star. The director also shared that there is a possibility that the actor will feature in the films of the potential franchise. Joe said on Twitter space session hours before the launch of the trailer: "Anthony and I are big Dhanush fans. We wrote this role specifically for him. He's a sort of classic bada** character, who shows up to combat the hero and complicate the film. He's a fun character. He's unique."

"Dhanush has a great presence on camera and the character is almost mystical in a way. The intention is if audiences like this film, we expand out the storytelling from here, and this is a fascinating character to move forward in that world."

The only detail shared by Joe was that Dhanush plays "one of the top assassins of the world".

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY

Claire Holt

WOMEN'S T20 CHALLENGE

VELOCITY QUALIFY FOR FINAL DESPITE 16-RUN LOSS AGAINST TRAILBLAZERS

Pune | Agencies

Velocity qualified for the final of the Women's T20 Challenge despite losing by 16 runs against defending champions Trailblazers in their second match of the tournament due to a better run rate, here on Thursday.

Chasing a target of 191 runs for victory, but Velocity were restricted to 174 for nine in 20 overs. Velocity will now face Supernovas in the final on Saturday.

Trailblazers (-0.825), Supernovas (+0.912) and Velocity (-0.022) ended with two points each but the top two teams made it to the final as they had better net run-rate than the defending champions.

Put into bat first, Sabbhineni Meghana and Jemimah Rodrigues slammed scintillating fifties to propel Trailblazers to 190-5 in 20 overs. Sabbhineni top-scored with 73 off 47 balls, while Jemimah made a 44-ball 66. On the other hand, Simran Bahadur (2/32) was the most successful bowler for Velocity. The Trailblazers needed to restrict Velocity to 159 to become the second team to qualify for the final and they eventually did it. However, it was not easy for them as Kiran Prabhu Navgire played a sensational knock.

Brief scores :
Trailblazers 190/5 (S Meghana 73, Jemimah Rodrigues 66; Simran Bahadur 2-31) beat Velocity 174/9 (Kiran Navgire 69, Shafali Verma 29; Poonam Yadav 2-33) by 16 runs

Batting at No 3, Navgire top-scored for Velocity with a 34-ball 69 but it was not enough to win the game for her side. Poonam Yadav (2/33) and Rajeshwari Gayakwad (2/44) picked up two wickets apiece for Trailblazers.

ASIA CUP HOCKEY

India thrash hosts Indonesia 16-0, qualify for Super 4s

Jakarta | Agencies

Indian men's hockey team picked up a stunning 16-0 win over the hosts Indonesia in their final match of the Asia Cup 2022 Pool A at the GBK Sports Complex Hockey Stadium here on Thursday and qualified for the second round of the continental meet.

India needed to win by a margin of 15 goals in the final group match to qualify for the Super 4s.

Dipsan Tirkey (42', 47', 59', 59') starred for India, scoring four goals in the match, while Sudev Belimagga (45', 46', 55') also scored a hat-trick in the match. Pawan Rajbhar (10', 11),SV Sunil (19', 24'), and Karthi Selvam (40', 56') also scored a brace, while Uttam Singh (14'), Nilam Sanjeep Xess (20') and Birendra Lakra (41') scored a goal each to help their team pick up the win. India started the match against Indonesia at a relentless pace against the hosts, showcasing their intention to get a big win from the first minute itself.

Indonesia goalkeeper Alam Fajar defended well in the third quarter as India continued to search for more goals. Karthi Selvam finally broke the resistance in the 40th minute, getting the 7th goal for India. Skipper Birendra Lakra made an impact, getting the 8th goal for India in the 41st minute, after which Dipsan Tirkey and Sudev Belimagga scored a goal each to take India to 10-0 before the start of the final quarter. In the final 15 minutes, Dipsan Tirkey scored thrice, Sudev Belimagga scored a brace, while Selvam Karthi added another goal as India picked up a consolidating 16-0 win. India will play their first game of the Super 4s against Japan on Saturday.

LONG JUMPER MURALI SREESHANKAR WINS GOLD IN GREECE

New Delhi: India's ace long jumper Murali Sreeshankar won the gold medal at the 12th International Jumping Meeting in Greece with an effort of 8.31m. Sreeshankar was followed by Thobias Montler of Sweden & Jules Pommery of France, who claimed silver 8.27m & bronze 8.17m respectively. His series of six jumps was 7.88m, 7.71m, 8.31m, 7.79m, x, x. This championships is a Bronze level event & part of World Athletics Continental Tour.

Murli who is consistently crossing the 8m mark is also the current national record holder and had a jump of 8.36m in his kitty. He broke his own national record last month at the Federation Cup in Kozhikode after a close battle with Tamil Nadu's Jeswin Aldrin. Murli Sreeshankar will compete again on 29th May 2022 in VENIZELIA-CHANIA 2022 international track and field meeting (World Athletics Continental Tour Bronze level).

INDIA WOMEN'S CRICKET TEAM TO TOUR SRI LANKA IN JUNE FOR WHITE-BALL SERIES

Colombo: The Executive Committee of Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) on Thursday confirmed that the India women's team will tour the country in June for three ODIs and as many T20Is. It also said that the ODIs will come under the newly-launched ICC Women's Championship, which serves as a qualification pathway for the 2025 Women's Cricket World Cup. Approving the India women's tour of Sri Lanka is one of the seven decisions given the green signal by the SLC Executive Committee. While the Indian cricketers are participating in the ongoing Women's T20 Challenge in Pune, Sri Lanka are currently touring Pakistan for three T20Is and as many ODIs, all to be played in Karachi. The last time India toured the island nation was in 2018, where India won the ODI series 2-1 and T20I series 4-0, after the second match finished with no result. If the trip happens despite Sri Lanka under immense economic crisis, then it will be India's first bilateral series after failing to reach the semifinals of ICC Women's Cricket World Cup 2022 in New Zealand. After the Sri Lanka series, India is scheduled to feature in the Commonwealth Games at Birmingham in July-August, grouped alongside Australia, Barbados and Pakistan. This will be followed by playing England in three ODIs and as many T20Is from September 10 to 24.

LOVLINA ELECTED CHAIR OF IBA ATHLETES COMMITTEE, SHIVA MEMBER

New Delhi: India's Tokyo Olympic s bronze medallist Lovlina Borgohain has been elected as chairman and voting member on the Board of Directors for the IBA's Athletes Committee, the International Boxing Association (IBA) has announced. Indian male boxer Shiva Thapa has also been elected as a member of the IBA Athletes Committee, during the corresponding elections held during the 2021 IBA Men's World Championships, the IBA announced on Wednesday.

Lovlina had received the highest number of votes during the election held at the 2022 Women's World Championship and thus has been elected as chair of the board.

ROMA BEAT FEYENOORD TO WIN FIRST EUROPA CONFERENCE LEAGUE TITLE

Tirana (Albania) | Agencies

AS Roma defeated Feyenoord 1-0 in the UEFA Europa Conference League final here at Tirana Air Albania stadium. Feyenoord started the match on Wednesday night with a strong attack as they pushed as high up the pitch as they could.

Roma's Portuguese midfielder Sergio Oliveira had an early appearance as he was substituted in for Henrikh Mkhitaryan in the 16th minute. Roma took the lead in the 32nd minute after Gianluca Mancini found midfielder Nicolo Zaniolo, and the latter brought the ball down and deftly flicked it beyond Feyenoord goalkeeper Justin Bijlow, reports Xinhua. Zaniolo, 22, is the youngest Italian player to score in a final of a major European competition since Alessandro Del Piero in a UEFA Champions League match in May 1997.

Feyenoord strengthened their attack after half-time, but a 50th-minute attempt was saved well by Roma goalkeeper Rui Patricio.

Feyenoord kept on pressing, and in the 62nd minute Tyrell Malacia picked a pass for Reiss Nelson, but the Englishman did not catch his effort smoothly and Roger Ibanez snuffed out the danger.

The Italian team kept the lead to the end to win the first-ever edition of the UEFA Europa Conference League.

In doing so, Roma coach Jose Mourinho became the first manager to win all three major European titles (UEFA Europa Conference League, UEFA Champions League, and UEFA Cup/Europa League).

FRENCH OPEN

Medvedev advances to third round after beating Djere

Paris | Agencies

World No 2 Daniil Medvedev advanced to the third round of the French Open after beating Serbia's Laslo Djere 6-3, 6-4, 6-3, here on Thursday.

The 26-year-old, who eliminated Facundo Bagnis in the first round, was resilient against Djere throughout their two-hour, 36-minute clash on Court Philippe Chatrier. Medvedev soaked up the World No 56's powerful forehand as he scampered around the baseline, while he turned the tables in points by standing deep in the court and taking large cuts at the ball. Following his win, Medvedev has leveled his ATP Head to Head series with Djere at 1-1 and will next face Miomir Kecmanovic after the 28th seed defeated Alexander Bublik 4-6, 7-5, 6-2, 6-1.

Medvedev, who is still searching for his first title of the season, will return to No 1 in the ATP Rankings if he reaches the final in Paris. However, not until June 13, a week after the tournament ends, when ranking points from last year's edition of Roland Garros drop.

The World No 2 recovered from losing his serve in the first game of the match by rolling off five straight games from 0-2 to take control. Medvedev was content to soak up pressure with his flat groundstrokes and found first serves when it mattered, saving break points in the seventh and ninth games to move ahead.

2ND TEST, DAY 4

Mathews, Chandimal tons put Sri Lanka on top against Bangladesh

Dhaka | Agencies

Excellent centuries by Angelo Mathews (145 not out) and Dinesh Chandimal (124) put Sri Lanka in a commanding position against Bangladesh on the fourth day of the second Test, here on Thursday.

The twin tons from the two experienced batters gave Sri Lanka a massive lead of 141. The bowlers then did significant damage in the final hour of play as Bangladesh limped in at 34/4 at stumps, trailing by 107 runs.

Resuming the Day 4 at 282/5, still 83 behind Bangladesh, Mathews and Chandimal started positively, smashing two boundaries and a six in the opening five overs.Their approach became a lot more cautious thereafter, but despite that, they ensured the runs didn't dry up, constantly rotating the strike and putting away the occasional boundary.

Chandimal brought up his fifty at the stroke of lunch, and the two batters went unscathed into the break having added 87 runs to the overnight score, giving Sri Lanka a slender lead of four runs.

In reply, Bangladesh had a tricky hour to see off before stumps, and endured a horror start to their second innings when Tamim Iqbal fell for a duck, collecting a pair in the match.Two overs later, a direct hit from Jayawickrama sent Najmul Hossain Shanto back to the hut. Mominul Haque followed him back in the very next over for a duck, with DRS coming to Sri Lanka's aid.

Brief scores :
Bangladesh 365 and 34/4 trail Sri Lanka 506 all-out (Mathews 145 not out, Chandimal 124; Shakib 5-96, Ebadot 4-148) by 107 runs

IPL 2022, QUALIFIER 2

Rajasthan face stern test against formidable RCB

Team Absolute | Ahmedabad

After losing to Gujarat Titans in Qualifier 1, the Sanju Samson-led Rajasthan Royals will face a stern challenge against Faf du Plessis' formidable Royal Challengers Bangalore in the Qualifier 2 of the IPL 2022 at Narendra Modi Stadium, here on Friday. Rajasthan have been a solid team in the ongoing IPL edition, which was very much evident during the league stage of the tournament as they finished at the second spot in the points table. However, Royals didn't have a great outing against Gujarat in Qualifier 1, especially because their bowlers failed to deliver under the pressure situation. They now face RCB, who are peaking at the right time in the tournament. The winner of Qualifier 2 will lock horns with Gujarat Titans in the final of the IPL 2022 in front of a huge crowd at Motera Stadium.

Banglore needed some luck to qualify for the play-offs. However, once they went through, RCB showed their all-round strength against Lucknow in the Eliminator and have given their fans hope of winning the coveted IPL trophy.

RCB batting stars Virat Kohli, Faf du Plessis and Glenn Maxwell couldn't contribute much in the previous game and will be keen to play impactful knocks against RR.

On the other hand, Rajat Patidar who played a sensational match-winning knock against LSG, will be high on confidence and would be pumped up to repeat his batting heroics. Lower down the order, Dinesh Karthik has played his role of a pace hitter to near perfection and the team management would be also hoping for the same consistency in the upcoming game.

In the bowling department, the likes of Harshal Patel and Josh Hazlewood have done the job for RCB on most of the occasions and Mohammad Siraj's good bowling in the LSG game make it an even more effective bowling line-up. On the other hand, Wanindu Hasaranga has shown courage despite being taken to the cleaners by batters.

On the other hand, Rajasthan batting line up is too much dependent on Jos Buttler and skipper Sanju Samson, who also scored against Gujarat in their previous game.

Batting at No 3 and No 4, Samson has got the starts but he will be keen to convert his 30s and 40s into a match-winning knock against RCB. On the other hand, Buttler will look to bring his experience and T20 expertise in use in the must-win game. RR team management would also want batting contributions from the likes Devdutt Padikkal, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shimron Hetmyer and Riyan Parag, who haven't been consistent with their runs.

Rajasthan bowling line-up consists of Ravichandran Ashwin, Trent Boult, Yuzvendra Chahal, Obed McCoy, Prasidh Krishna had a forgettable day against Gujarat and it will be interesting to see how they made a comeback against RCB.

KUCH BHI HO SAKTA HAI

(ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE)

Rhydhima Raj | Los Angeles

Some people come with such a positive aura and leave behind lessons to learn. One such optimist Mr. AnupamKher blessed UCLA premises on May 23 2022.

His aura and his speech brought tears to several eyes. He was there to have a conversation / discussion about The Power Of Truth which was organized by Indian Policy Forum at UCLA (a club on UCLA campus that is for Indian Policy). During the interview with AmbikaPandey (3 year undergrad student), Mr. Kher revealed about his personal sufferings and the most applauded film 'Kashmir Files'. Amidst a hall full of aspiring students Mr. Kher shared how to be truthful to oneself and others.

"Don't be afraid of making a fool of thy self" says Mr. Kher adding that's the best thing one could to oneself and is therapeutic. Being oneself is the biggest power we have, there would be people manipulating but don't let distraction get you.

During the course of the event, he also highlighted, "stand for yourself and be truthful, even if you are fighting the battle alone, because you are doing it for yourself which makes you popular in your own eye rather than others".

Mr. Kher spoke about his facial paralysis during the shoot of one of his prominent films and with his optimistic vision he overcame it. He being duly inspiring, still wants to take in challenging roles, make his work rather more difficult in order to learn something new and different. Apart from brining light to various questions that the students had, he also taught things through, very subtly, jokingly and created an ambience full of joyfulness.

Mr. Kher is expected to visit Los Angeles at least once a year during which he makes motivational, funny and inspirational videos for his Twitter and Instagram family.

He is definitely representing India on a Global platform through his outstanding performances and humble approach to make people believe in the power of 'anything is possible'.

To the man who took several students seated in the audience back home, opening the jar full of memories from India. Jai Hind

Will never limit ourselves as artistes

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The singing duo Sukriti and Prakriti who are now hosting the new season of the youth show titled 'Dil Beats : Sache Pyar Ki Unfiltered Kahaniyan' - said that as artistes they do not want to limit themselves only to singing but expand in dancing, acting and more. The twin sisters are known for delivering some of the superhit independent songs like 'Sudhar Ja', 'Mafiyaan', 'Kehndi Haa Kehndi Naa', 'Hum Tum', 'Sona Lagda', and 'Majnu'.

Now that they are hosting the youth show 'Dil Beats : Sache Pyar Ki Unfiltered Kahaniyan', they are very excited to explore their ability as TV host. Sukriti said, "We are very excited about this new show. I believe we are an artist altogether so we shouldn't be limited to singing, we can dance, act and host. I am very happy that I am getting this opportunity to do something like this and I know we will kill it". Prakriti added, " I completely agree with her, we are artists and we shouldn't be put in a box. I mean the sky's the limit and should always do whatever you love doing. We are very excited about our new show and we hope that the audience will pour out their love and support."The show airs on MTV Beats.

Pankaj Tripathi had a tough time shooting in Ladakh

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Pankaj Tripathi, who is gearing up for his upcoming web show 'Gulkanda Tales' created by director duo Raj and DK, shared his experience of the show's grilling Ladakh shoot schedule. The actor shot for intense and action packed sequences in Leh and Ladakh, which is over 12,000 feet above sea level. Sharing his experience, actor said, "The scenes which they meant to shoot needed a certain level of fitness, and we had hired these coaches to help us get trained and be in a fit shape to allow us to walk or run (if required) on inclined slopes and tough terrains." "The entire experience was like working on an adventure trip, and as much physically draining as it was, I enjoyed each and every day of the entire schedule. Look forward to the release of this much-awaited and thrilling web show," he added. The series which also stars Kunal Kemmu, has been directed by Rahi Anil Barve who earlier directed the mythological horror film 'Tumbbad'.

WAMIQA GABBI REVEALS HER FIRST KISS EXPERIENCE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Wamiqa Gabbi, whose recent romantic web anthology 'Modern Love Mumbai' is getting a lot of positive response, has shared how she perceived the idea of love as a teenager and also spoke about her experience of her first kiss.

In the anthology, Wamiqa is a part of the episode directed by Vishal Bhardwaj, titled 'Mumbai Dragon', which tells the story of love beyond the boundaries of culture and traditions.

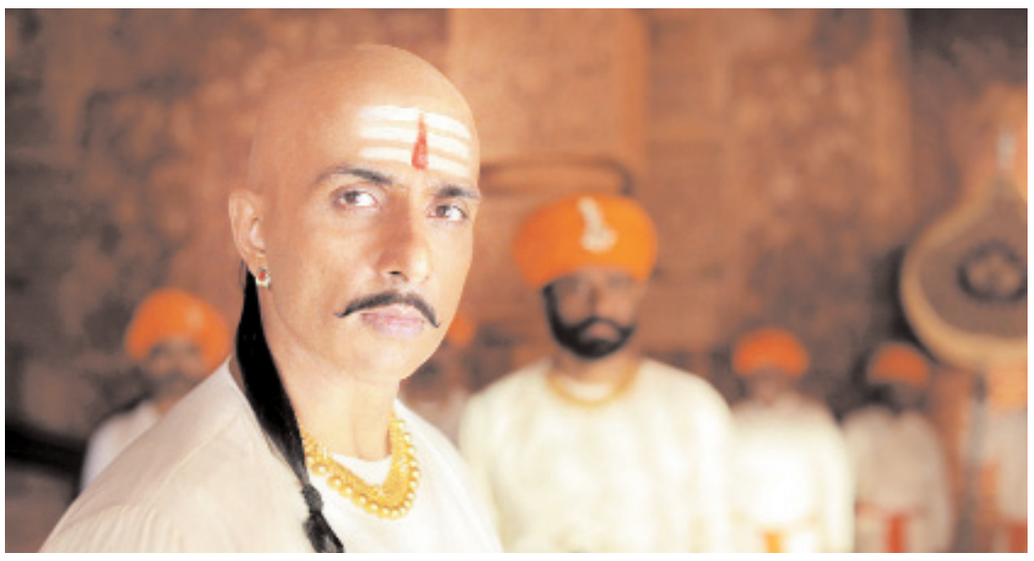
The actress shared, "I have always been a romantic soul - a firm believer in love stories, or even so, filmy love stories."

Talking about her first kiss, she said, "I still remember being kissed for the first time when I was a teenager and not washing my face for two days. I was nervous yet excited and totally in love with the idea of being in love at the time."

She further mentioned, "Fuelled by preadolescent hormones, this beautiful 'puppy love' phase in my life lasted for quite some time before I grew older and started to look at love stories through a more mature lens and all of this came rushing back to me recently, during the shoot of 'Modern Love'. But it made me realize that you can fall in love more than once. You can fall in love over and over again. We have the capacity and we have the heart to do that."

Bollywood is a cutthroat industry, people only salute success: Sonu Sood

Sonu Sood has been one of the most talked about actors in Bollywood. He has carved a niche for himself with his acting skills and even went on to win millions of hearts with his social work during the COVID 19 lockdown. The actor is also making headlines these days for his upcoming film Prithviraj with Akshay Kumar, Manushi Chhillar and Sanjay Dutt.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a freewheeling chat, the actor talks about controversies surrounding the film, his take on the North-South 'divide' between film industries, being choosy about scripts, and much more. Read on:

- **How does he look at this phase of his life?**
On doing a humongous period drama after doing social work, an elated Sonu Sood said, "I would say this is the best phase of my life. It is something feel blessed about. Doing blockbuster films is all together a different ballgame, but connecting with the common men is very satisfying. This is something I have not done before. So I am thoroughly enjoying it."
- **On film miring in double controversy**
Recently on one hand Karni Sena demanded a change in title of the film, while a Mahasabha had issue with the depiction of the 12th-century warrior king. Commenting on film landing in controversies Sonu Sood averred, "A certain section of people oppose when they feel a connection with it, while some do it for the sake of gaining limelight. This is the reason filmmakers don't attempt to make such films. I also think, filmmakers don't try to appease people. Infact, they don't take chances and are aware of taking cinematic liberty to a certain extent. They try their best to keep it close to reality and everything on record. Director's and actors deliberately don't showcase anything that is not relevant."
- **How his choice of projects has evolved over the years?**
Over the years, Bollywood actor Sonu Sood has entertained us on the big screen with varied characters. The actor, however, has more often than not been seen in villain or antagonist roles. However, his prolific work during the nation-wide lockdown has put him in the spotlight yet again. Since then, there has been a massive change in his approach towards choosing work. Commenting on the same, Sonu Sood said, "Initially, I wanted to play positive roles, but since I didn't have a film background I was offered negative roles. Surprisingly, people loved me as an antagonist, but still, I used to get upset sometimes. But then I realised that as an actor your primary goal is to entertain the masses. There will be some side of yours which will still be unexplored. But these days I have been offered positive roles as filmmakers are apprehensive to cast me in a negative role. After all, this is a cutthroat industry, people salute only success.
- **Dealing with criticism**
The actor also shared how he dealt with negative opinions that came along with stardom. He shared, "It's all about survival. If you are not immune to criticism, you can't survive. The harsh reality of most of the industries is, whether people know you or not, they don't want to see you succeed. If one can handle this, they can succeed. After all, Success is all about how long you can hold your breath under water".
- **On taking forward humanitarianism to next level**
Sonu Sood is a real-life hero in a true sense and the actor has proved the same last year. He was the only actor who came forward and helped hundreds of migrant workers and made them reach their homes safely during the lockdown. Talking about taking social working along with films to another level, the actor quipped, "There was a phase when I was eager to work with certain filmmakers and waited for their call. Then came a phase I was getting calls from them but didn't have the time to answer them. But then I realised these calls don't excite me anymore. I enjoy helping the needy."
- **The ongoing Bollywood/South cinema debate**
Sonu Sood, who has worked in both Hindi films and movies down south shared his view on the ongoing language debate. He said, "There was a time when I was doing South films more than Hindi films. But for me, experience matters and not the language. Since I am selective about taking up projects, South industry helped me staying away from films I never wanted to do. In my opinion, the film should be entertaining, should manage bring a smile on people's face, and audience must have the zeal to spend money and go to theatres to watch it."

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY

Janhvi Kapoor

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