

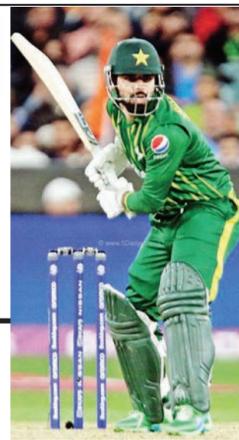
NATION > 02
National Education Policy reflects academic thoughts of Tagore...



HOLLYWOOD > 06
Liv Tyler set to return to MCU after 16 years ...



SPORTS > 07
Shadab Khan's all-round show help Pakistan to avoid clean...



HOW DIGITAL 'SURGICAL STRIKE' HITS MGNREGA WORKERS

FROM PEOPLE'S SCHEME TO TECH QUAGMIRE

Team Absolute | Rayagada (Odisha)

In a post-budget statement by the Peoples' Action for Employment Guarantee (PAEG) and NREGA Sangharsh Morcha (NSM), activists and academics hit out against the low allocation for Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) this year.

"Instead of adequately funding the programme, the Union government has repeatedly resorted to needless technical tinkering. The National Mobile Monitoring System (NMMS) application for capturing workers' attendance, mandated in the current FY, is one such anti-worker intervention," they said.

The latest digitisation efforts, ostensibly to weed out corruption and ensure fiscal transparency, have deviated from the primary objective of the scheme - to provide guaranteed 100 days of employment to adult members of rural households in every financial year.

The procedure to get work under the MGNREGA itself is a bit complex. Those who want work should raise their demand with the gram panchayat, after which an acknowledgement form (C2) with details of the number of workers for a given work (from a pre-approved list of works) and the muster roll is generated.

Work-snatcher NMMS app

The MGNREGA mate has to take this muster roll to the worksite and record attendance on the NMMS application. Once the work is done, a Bare Foot Technician (BFT) or junior engineer will measure the progress of the work. Subsequently, the bill for the muster roll is



approved and sent for payment.

After a brief pilot phase, and even before any independent evaluation of its efficacy had been carried out, the Ministry of Rural Development made the use of NMMS compulsory for capturing workers' attendance under the MGNREGA from January 1.

During its pilot phase since May last year, individual works (in private lands of registered beneficiaries) like land development were excluded from digital attendance. Manual attendance was also allowed when the number of labourers was less than 20.

All that has changed with the NMMS, in which two time-stamped and geotagged photographs of the workers should be uploaded on a given day. The first shows the worker during the 6 to 11 a.m. schedule and the second during the 2 to 6 p.m.

schedule.

"Due to technical issues, the attendance taken in the morning does not get registered in the app. We are eligible for payment only if the attendance is captured in the app twice daily," Majhi Sabar, a job-seeker from Akhusingi gram panchayat in Padmapur block in Odisha's Rayagada district, said.

ABPS and non-linking

The ministry has also made Aadhaar-based Payment System (ABPS) mandatory. In simple terms, it means linking both bank accounts and job cards with Aadhaar numbers, which is done at the block level. However, the problem arises when the MGNREGA website uses an automated process to identify and reject job seekers based on the Aadhaar linkage. Sometimes,

it rejects those whose bank accounts are already seeded with Aadhaar!

Delayed payments

Instead of learning from and building on the potential that MGNREGA demonstrated during the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, the government is determined to slowly kill the programme, says Rajendran Narayanan, Assistant Professor at the Azim Premji University. "NMMS is an unnecessary and irrelevant intervention that is being used to discourage worker participation. It doesn't address the root causes of corruption in the scheme like the use of machines to co-opt work, lack of adequate junior engineers to verify work done in the field and the defunding of social audit infrastructure at the local level," he observes.

A situation that is bound to become worse with the reduced funding for the scheme. The budgeted allocation for MGNREGA has been reduced from Rs 73,000 crore in 2022-23 to Rs 60,000 crore in 2023-24 fiscal. In 2021-22 fiscal, the allocation was Rs 98,000 crore.

"Life is difficult. I do not even have the money to pay off my debts to the shopkeeper," said Gudaria, who along with a few other labourers have decided to migrate to other states in search of work.

All this ultimately is leading to lower demand and work days under MGNREGA. The MIS data for Padmapur block show the total expenditure during 2021-22 fiscal was Rs 9.56 crore, while the number of man-days was 4.44 lakh. In comparison, the expenditure for the current fiscal up to February 2023 was only Rs 4.67 crore against 2.10 lakh man-days, which is only around half of the previous year.

'Frontal attack on judiciary': Lawyers' body move SC seeking action against VP, Law Minister



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Bombay Lawyers Association on Tuesday moved the Supreme Court challenging a high court decision refusing to entertain its PIL against Union Law Minister Kiren Rijiju and Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar for their remarks on judiciary and the collegium system for appointment of judges.

The lawyers' body argued that both, the VP and law minister, are continuing their rampage of attack upon the Constitution with complete impunity.

"It is further submitted that Respondent no. 1 and 2 have violated the oath that they took at the time of assuming their respective offices, and, therefore, they have forfeited their right to continue in that office, by disrespecting this Hon'ble Court and Constitution of India," said the plea.

The lawyers' body has chal-

lenged the February 9 order passed by the Bombay High Court dismissing its plea on the ground that it was not a fit case to invoke the writ jurisdiction under Article 226 of the Constitution. The association claimed that Rijiju and Dhankhar showed lack of faith in the Constitution with their remarks and conduct.

"Respondent Nos 1 and 2 are launching frontal attack on the institution of judiciary, particularly the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in most derogatory language without any recourse which is available under the constitutional scheme to change the status quo as per the law laid down by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India," said the plea.

"Respondent Nos.1 and 2 are attacking the collegium system as well as basic structure in public platforms. This kind of unbecoming behaviour by Respondent Nos.1 and 2 who are holding constitutional posts is lowering the majesty of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in the eye of public at large."

The plea added that the respondent No.1 is the Vice President of India as provided under Article 63 of the Constitution and affirmed his oath bearing allegiance to the Constitution vide Article 69. "The Respondent No 1's attack upon the judiciary is also an attack on the Constitution upon which he had sworn an oath to bear true faith and allegiance," it added.

Rijiju had said the collegium system of appointing judges was "opaque and not transparent" and Dhankhar had questioned the landmark 1973 Kesavananda Bharati judgment that gave the basic structure doctrine.

Atiq Ahmed gets life term, brother acquitted

Team Absolute | Prayagraj (Uttar Pradesh)

An MP/MLA court in Prayagraj on Tuesday awarded life sentence to gangster-turned-politician Atiq Ahmed, and two others Dinesh Pasi and Shaukat Haneef in the 2006 kidnapping of Umesh Pal, the prime witness in the BSP MLA Raju Pal murder case.

Earlier in the day, the three were held guilty by the court in the case. The court, however, acquitted Atiq Ahmed's brother Ashraf along with six others.

It may be recalled that after the killing of BSP MLA Raju Pal on January 25, 2005, Umesh Pal, then a zila panchayat member, had told the police that he was a witness to the murder.

Umesh Pal alleged that when he refused to retract and buckle under pressure from Atiq Ahmed, he was kidnapped at gunpoint on February 28, 2006.

The FIR was registered on July 5, 2007,

against Ahmed, his brother, and four unidentified people.

Umesh Pal was gunned down outside his Prayagraj residence on February 24, 2023. Atiq Ahmed and his brother Ashraf were accused of being involved in a conspiracy, while they were both in prison, to kill Umesh Pal. Atiq Ahmed, his brother Ashraf and another accused were present in court when the verdict was announced.

Large crowds were seen outside the local court in Prayagraj where hearing of the Umesh Pal kidnapping case was scheduled.

Atiq Ahmad was brought to the court amid heavy security.

Visuals from outside the court show a long police cavalcade bringing the gangster-turned-politician in large vans as crowds gather on both sides of the road.

A section of lawyers chanted "Phansi do phansi do (give death sentence)" as the convoy bringing the accused entered the court premises.

Deadline for linking PAN with Aadhar extended till June 30

New Delhi:

In order to provide some more time to taxpayers, the date for linking PAN with Aadhaar has been extended to June 30. The earlier deadline was March 31.

According to a notification issued by the Income Tax Department on Tuesday, till June 30, people can intimate their Aadhaar to the prescribed authority for PAN-Aadhaar linking without facing repercussions.

However from July 1, the unlinked PAN will become inoperative with consequences. The PAN though, can be made operative again in 30 days, upon intimation of Aadhaar to the prescribed authority after payment of a Rs 1,000 fee.

No refund will be made against inoperative PANs, also interest shall not be payable on such refund for the period during which PAN remains inoperative, and TDS and TCS shall be deducted at higher rate.

Conman Kiran Patel's wife held for illegally occupying senior citizen's bungalow

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Crime Branch of Ahmedabad Police on Tuesday said it has arrested conman Kiran Patel's wife Malini Patel for allegedly trying to illegally take over the bungalow of a senior citizen Jagdish Chavda (63).

In the FIR both Kiran Patel and Malini have been named as accused. Kiran Patel is accused of impersonating as a PMO official in Jammu and Kashmir. He was arrested and is in judicial custody.

A case of cheating was filed against Malini based on the allegations of the victim. In this case both Kiran Patel and his wife Malini have been named as accused.

The bungalow which they tried to occupy is located in a posh area of Ahmedabad. Kiran Patel had threatened the bungalow owner that he had links with the PMO.

Chavda lodged a complaint with the local police and finally a FIR was



registered. He said in his complaint that Kiran Patel contacted him in the first week of February and told him that he was a property dealer.

Kiran Patel tried to convince the victim that if the bungalow is renovated they might get a good price. Chavda fell into their trap and agreed to their suggestion. Later, Malini and some interior designers met him. The

accused took Rs 35 lakh initially from Chavda. Due to the renovation work, Chavda had to shift.

Later Chavda came to know that Kiran Patel and Malini had changed the name plate and had been living in the house claiming to be the owners. They didn't even renovate the house.

Now the police has made the first arrest in the matter.

Manipur to set up shelter home at Moreh for Myanmar refugees

Team Absolute | Imphal

The Manipur government is considering setting up a temporary shelter home in the border town of Moreh to accommodate around 5,000 immigrants who fled from conflict-torn Myanmar, officials said on Tuesday.

A ministerial team comprising three state ministers -- Letpao Haokip, Awangbow Newmai and Thasanta Singh -- had on Monday visited Moreh along the Myanmar border to study the area where the shelter home is expected to be set up. They also interacted with the Myanmar immigrants.

An official said that the Myanmar nationals would be given temporary shelter in the shelter home and would be deported to their country soon after the situation in Myanmar



normalises. The border town of Moreh is 110 km from state capital Imphal.

Among the refugees, Myanmar MP Thangsel Haokip, who is also taking shelter in Manipur, reportedly informed the ministerial team that they would like to take shelter in the Indian territory as the violent clashes

between the Myanmar military and the People's Defence Force (PDF) rebels continue in the Saingang region of Myanmar that borders with the Indian states of Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram.

Amid the clashes between the Myanmar army and the resistance

group PDF, the Manipur government has deployed additional security forces and asked the Assam Rifles to maintain strict vigil along the international border.

Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh had earlier said that the security along the India-Myanmar border with Manipur has been tightened to avoid untoward incidents.

According to security officials and the district administration, round-the-clock foot patrolling has been intensified along the international border. Besides, additional forces comprising Manipur State Rifles, police and other security personnel have also been deployed.

Manipur shares around 400 km unfenced border with Myanmar, which is the main source of smuggling of drugs, golds, exotic animals, poppy seeds and other contrabands.

Mumbai Shocker: Cop forces rape victim to walk 2 km for medical test

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a shocking incident, a Dalit woman lawyer - who had complained of rape, black magic practices and domestic violence by her in-laws and others - was allegedly made to walk around 2 km by a lady constable for her medical examination at a government hospital, her lawyer said here on Tuesday. The victim had lodged complaint of rape against her NRI husband, a tantrik, her brothers-in-law and other relatives for allegedly subjecting her to repeated rape, torture and other forms of abuse since her marriage, said Advocate Nitin Satpute.

Even her complaint was registered by the Bhoiwada Police a few days ago, but only after making a lot of efforts, and she was sched-



uled for a medical examination at the KEM Hospital in Parel on Tuesday, he said.

"A lady constable asked her for the taxi fare, which the victim woman, a lawyer practising at the Bombay High Court, did not have. So the lady constable made her walk for 2 km from there to the BMC's KEM Hospital for her medical," Satpute said.

He wanted to know "where

are the Nirbhaya vehicles for such rape victims", and how could the accused be made to walk for the medical test while the accused are being taken around in police vehicles.

Satpute has brought the matter to the notice of the Deputy Commissioner of Police (Zone IV), Pravin Mundhe, and is awaiting the police response.



NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY REFLECTS ACADEMIC THOUGHTS OF TAGORE: PRESIDENT

Kolkata | Agencies

President Droupadi Murmu said on Tuesday that the National Education Policy (NEP) of the Union government reflects the academic thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore.

"Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's academic thoughts showed the way of introducing modern thoughts in the higher education system of the country. The reflections of the academic thoughts of that great son of the soil are there in the National Education Policy 2022," Murmu said while addressing the annual convocation ceremony of Visva Bharati University, which was founded by Tagore, at Santiniketan in Birbhum district.



The President also expressed her satisfaction over the balanced proportion of male and female students at Visva Bharati University.

"I am really happy over this balanced ratio of male and female students. Almost 50 per cent of the population in India are women. There is an urgent requirement for women's empowerment through improvement in education standards for women in

order to achieve the goal of self-reliant India. Hence, additional emphasis should be given to women's education throughout the country," the President said.

To mark the occasion, the university authority handed over to a portrait

of Tagore to Murmu.

After reaching Santiniketan on Tuesday afternoon, the President first paid a visit to the museum at Rabindra Bhavan located within the university campus, where she paid floral tributes to the statue of Tagore.

Thereafter, she paid a visit to the Kala Bhavan within the campus and appreciated the sculptures displayed there. West Bengal Governor C.V. Ananda Bose, who is the rector of the university by virtue of his chair, was also present on the occasion.

ED freezes Rs 3.05 cr of fintech firm involved in app betting

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday said that it has recently carried out searches at a Fintech company involving 150 bank accounts during investigations being conducted related to an illegal betting case against Rakesh R Rajdev and others.

These accounts were involved in the layering of funds received from individual persons who are placing bets through a website www.wolf777.com.

"Subsequent to searches, an amount of Rs 3.05 crore lying in these bank accounts has been frozen under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)," the official said.

The ED initiated the investigation after recording the ECIR based on the FIR registered by the DCB police station, Ahmedabad, where it was alleged that the accused Rakesh Rajdev and others have opened one bank account in the name of Akash Ojha, using his PAN and Aadhar card, without his knowledge. They used that account for transacting Rs 170.70 crore of betting money generated through the betting website www.wolf777.com.

"During PMLA investigations, it has been found that the accused are operating through a private communication platform and providing the login ID and password to the persons who want to place bets online. This web-



site is providing a platform for placing bets on various types of speculation games such as Teen Patti, Rummy, Andar Bahar, 'Poker' and also on various live games including cricket matches. They were asked to deposit money in their accounts for buying credits/coins through online mode and once money is deposited the person can place bets in the website using the login ID and password," the official said. The proceeds of crime generated through these betting apps were being traced and it has been found that bank accounts in the name of various fictitious entities have been opened for routing and layering of money and after routing through multiple layers, the money is being sent abroad through bogus entities in the guise of imports.

Electricity Amendment Bill not to impact agriculture sector, says Power Minister

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2022 covers amendments related to power sector and there is no amendment proposal related to agriculture sector, the Parliament was told on Tuesday. Power Minister R.K. Singh gave the assurance in response to a question in Lok Sabha during Question Hour.

"Further, the provision of subsidy as in the present Act i.e. Electricity Act, 2003 is not proposed to be changed and the states can continue to give subsidy to farmers and other consumers as they are doing at present," he said.

As per Electricity Act, 2003, the subsidy to specific categories of consumers including domestic and farmers is decided by state governments.



The proposed legislation is currently under consideration of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Energy, which is headed by BJP MP Jagdambika Pal. Last year during the Monsoon session, the Electricity (Amendment) Bill was referred to the

Parliamentary Committee by the power minister, immediately after being introduced in Lok Sabha, amid protests by opposition that it encroached upon powers of states and allows privatisation of electricity on the lines of communication sector.

No prescribed format for issuing provisional attachment orders: CAG report

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A CAG audit on 'Attachment of property of an assessee by ITD under Section 281B' observed that there is no prescribed format for issuing provisional attachment orders resulting in missing essential information such as estimated tax liability, validity period and not providing assesses with the option of furnishing bank guarantee in lieu of the attached property etc. from the provisional attachment orders which are not in conformity with the provisions or rules.

The audit report observed that the assessing officer (AOs) is not adequately establishing and documenting the basis/grounds for invoking these provisions and in the absence of documentation, audit could not draw assurance whether the applicability of the provisions is justified in those cases.

A notification of provisional attachment orders to registering authorities was found to be inadequate, which eventually defeated the purpose of such notification in a few cases.

The report also noted that as per available records, the AOs did not comply with the Board's instructions of ascertaining details of all assets in the possession of assesses that could be considered for provisional attachment. In the majority of



the cases for which records were made available, the list of assets prepared by the investigation wing as reflected in the appraisal report was not shared with audit. Therefore, audit could not verify the role of the investigation wing in supplementing the efforts of the AO in selection of appropriate property for provisional attachment.

CAG's subject specific compliance audit on 'Attachment of property of an assessee by ITD under Section 281B' on direct taxes was presented in the Parliament on Tuesday.

As per the report, the audit also noticed deficiencies in respect of list of assets provided in the appraisal report which resulted in incorrect attachment of a property. The process of identification of

assets was found to be deficient, thereby reducing the effectiveness of the provisional attachment.

The audit observed that the time gap from the date of search to the date of initial order under Section 281B ranged between 208 days and 1,220 days. Absence of a prescribed time limit for issuing order of provisional attachment has an inherent risk of the assessee alienating property(ies), which are being considered for attachment, in the intervening period in case of abnormal delay in issuance of orders under Section 281B, it said.

The audit also noticed certain cases wherein the assessee was able to dispose of the attached property inspite of notification of the order under Section 281B to the concerned registering authority.

The CAG audit recommended that the CBDT may prescribe a format for the order under Section 281B to include all the elements of essential information required for provisional attachment to ensure consistency and legal sustainability.

The CBDT may frame specific criteria for opinion formation, perhaps with illustrative examples, and clarify 'exceptional circumstances' to facilitate the AOs in initiating provisional attachment proceedings in an effective, transparent and legally sustainable manner, it recommended.

No change in number of constituencies in Assam after delimitation: CEC

Guwahati | Agencies

The 126 assembly and 14 parliamentary seats in Assam will remain the same following the process of redrawing the boundaries of the constituencies, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar said on Tuesday.

The CEC added, "In connection with the ongoing delimitation exercise, we held discussions with political parties and other organisations in the last two days. We also met around 60 civil groups and organisations. In the delimitation exercise, we will do our best to take into account all of the political parties' and organisations' suggestions."

Rajiv Kumar said that they had decided to hold a discussion with the stakeholders before the publication of the draft of the delimitation exercise.

He informed that those who participated in the exercise included the TMC, BJP, CPI, CPI(M), NCP, Asom Gana Parishad, AIDUF, Bodoland People's Front, United People's Party Liberal, and three more registered parties, Assam Jatiya Parishad, Lok Raksha



Party and Rajiv Dal.

"126 assembly seats and 14 parliamentary seats will remain the same. We have given time by extending the date to April 15 and during that time anybody can give their suggestion to us. We will publish a draft and will give one-month time for taking suggestions on it," the Chief Election Commissioner said. Rajiv Kumar also said that the Election Commission received recommendations and suggestions from

the stakeholders and took note of them. He mentioned, "One idea they provided was instead of the 2001 Census, we could consider the 2011 census. Another suggestion they gave was to increase the parliamentary constituencies, instead of keeping them constant. A recommendation was that there should be a provision of 30 per cent variation in the areas of upper Assam, where the population increase is minimal." The CEC further said, "The question has been asked when delimitation was stopped in 2008, why it has suddenly started, and when delimitation is due in 2026, why it is being carried out now." According to Rajiv Kumar, these suggestions were competing and conflicting, having people on both sides of the claim.

Meanwhile, reacting to Assam Congress president Bhupen Borah's allegations that the delimitation exercise is a 'match-fixing' exercise, Rajiv Kumar said, "We are habituated to hearing this. There is no need to fix anything because the initial disclosure was made, and we have been accepting suggestions before the completion of delimitation."

Licences of 18 pharma companies suspended over drug quality

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In a major development, the Central government has suspended the licence of 18 pharma companies in the country over the poor quality of drugs.

A top official source on Tuesday said that the Drug Controller General of India had inspected 76 companies and the licence of 18 have been suspended, while 26 have been served show cause notice over poor quality of drugs.

The Centre has also cancelled the product permission of three pharma companies.

In a joint operation by Centre and the states, the action was taken against pharma companies across 20 states. The special drive had been initiated to stop the production of 'Not of Standard Quality' medicine and to ensure Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) of medicine across the country, said the source. The source said that the DCGI's action was taken from last 15 days in Andhra



Pradesh, Bihar, Delhi, Goa, Gujarat, Hariyana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Puducherry, Punjab, Rajasthan, Telangana, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and West Bengal.

The source said that the special drive will continue to stop the production of substandard medicines in the country.

MURDER ACCUSED SHOT DEAD IN COURT IN BIHAR'S SAHARSA

Patna: An under-trial prisoner was shot dead in the district court Bihar's Saharsa by a band of unidentified assailants, an official said.

Prabhakar Kumar, a murder accused, was brought to district court for the hearing when four bike-borne assailants opened fire on him, killing him on the spot.

Following the incident, the assailants managed to flee from the court campus while waving their firearms in the air. Soon a large number of court employees and visitors assembled at the place.

District SP Lipi Singh also visited the spot.

SDPO Sadar, who is heading the investigation, told IANS that four assailants came to the court campus and opened fire on an under trial prisoner. "We are scanning the CCTV footage of the court campus to identify them," the official added.

SLUMS NEAR VIZAG AIRPORT 'COVERED' FOR G20 MEET

Visakhapatnam | Agencies

The Greater Visakha Municipal Corporation (GVMC) has triggered a row by covering slums along the road from the airport to the city with green shade nets in view of one of the G20 summit meetings being held in the port city.

By hiding the slums behind green tarpaulin sheets, GVMC hopes to hide them from the eyes of the foreign delegates, said former bureaucrat and activist E.A.S. Sarma.

The two-day G20 summit meeting began in the city on Tuesday, in which about 200 delegates from various countries are taking part.

The retired IAS officer said that the slums are a standing testimony to GVMC and the government's failure to implement slum welfare programmes year after year. Even in the latest budget approved by the GVMC, instead of providing 40 per cent of the budgeted amount for slum development, the Corporation has allocated funds for contractor-



driven works, betraying the magnitude of corruption that exists in it, Sarma said.

Sarma, who released a few pictures of slums being covered, said in a statement that they depict the pitiable condition of a slum cluster, including a slum in which a

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), about 60 Chenchus live in sub-human conditions. This slum is in ASR Nagar at Thatchetlapalem on the airport road. "This is nothing but a mockery of the state and GVMC's contemptuous attitude towards the

most disadvantaged groups. Strictly, this attracts the penal provisions of the law to prevent atrocities on Scheduled Tribes," he said.

A few days ago, GVMC had displaced hundreds of street-side hawkers and vendors, damaging their shops, in violation of the Central law that has conferred special rights on them. Many of the vendors belong to the most disadvantaged sections of the society. This is nothing but an outright onslaught on their human rights, Sarma said.

GVMC violated the environmental laws, especially the CRZ norms on the Vizag beach, damaging valuable marine resources, he alleged.

Sarma said the GVMC apparently spent Rs 150 crore of tax-payer's money on beautification works in Visakhapatnam, and it is a matter of shame that people's representatives in the Corporation should meekly allow this to happen without remaining accountable to the people. Beautification is a euphemism for enriching contractors, he alleged.

Supporting GST was our greatest mistake: Mamata Banerjee

Kolkata | Agencies

The Trinamool Congress's greatest mistake was to extend support to the Union government for rolling out goods & services tax (GST), its national President and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said on Tuesday.

"After GST being rolled out, the Union government is taking away all the money from the state without releasing the state's share on this count. Our greatest mistake was to extend support to the Union government in rolling out GST. We thought that the state would benefit from it. But now the Union government has stopped releasing all funds under the different centrally-sponsored schemes. Starting from MGNREGS to PMAY, the funds under schemes have stopped reaching the state," she said while inaugurating a rural-road network at Singur in Hooghly district, which is erstwhile sire for Nano, Tata Motors' small car project.



Banerjee said that from Wednesday, she will be going for a sit-in demonstration at the base of B.R. Ambedkar statue at Red Road in Kolkata which will continue till 7 p.m. on Thursday.

"I had been in a fasting agitation for 14 days demanding return of land for unwilling farmers in Singur. Later after coming to power, we returned that land to the farmers of Singur. The farmers of Singur gave total support to our movement on this issue," she claimed. Banerjee also said that under the state's own rural road development schemes, a fresh 9,000 km of rural road network will be set up besides renovation of 12,000 km of existing rural roads.



KHARIF LOAN REPAYMENT DEADLINE EXTENDED TILL APRIL 30: CHIEF MINISTER CHOUHAN

Ministers should regularly monitor the implementation of Ladli Bahna Yojna. 6 lakh 96 thousand 522 applications have been received so far in Ladli Bahna Yojna. Chief Minister addressed before the meeting of the Council of Ministers.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the time limit for repaying the loan of Kharif crop by the farmers is being extended from March 28 to April 30. This decision has been taken on the request of the farmers. The increase in time limit will lead to an additional interest burden of Rs 60 crore, which will be paid by the state government. Chief Minister also instructed the ministers to monitor the wheat procurement system in their respective districts. Chouhan was addressing the ministers before the cabinet meeting. The meeting of the Council of Ministers, chaired by Chief Minister Chouhan, began with the singing of Vande Mataram at Mantralaya. Chief Minister said that the state government is with the farmer brothers in the calamity arising out of hail-



storm. Farmers will be provided relief amount at the rate of Rs 32 thousand per hectare. Relief amount will be made available to the farmers even in case of 25 to 35 percent loss and considering more than 50 percent loss as 100 percent relief will be given.

Ministers should coordinate and monitor the survey work of hail affected fields in their respective areas. It is necessary to ensure that cases of crop insurance scheme are made for the affected farmers and the farmers get the benefit of the scheme

in time. The Chief Minister said that a decision has also been taken to postpone recovery from hailstorm affected farmers, whose interest will also be paid by the state government. With this, farmers will be able to get loans for the next crop at zero percent interest.

Chouhan said that 6 lakh 96 thousand 522 applications have been filled so far under Mukhyamantri Ladli Bahna Yojana. Efforts will be made to remove the problems that came out from the experiences of three days. Funds are being made available for e-KYC by the state government. Complaints have been received from some places demanding money for e-KYC. Taking quick action on this, the culprits have been punished. Chief Minister Chouhan instructed the ministers to regularly monitor the implementation of the scheme in their areas of charge.

Ailment of Namibian cheetah Sasha who died in MP first detected in January

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Five-year-old female Namibian cheetah 'Sasha', who reportedly died due to serious renal (kidney related) on Monday, her ailment was first detected in the last week of January, three months after she along with seven other big cats were released at Madhya Pradesh's Kuno National Park (KNP).

According to sources in the state Forest Department, Sasha was spotted lying lazily in her big enclosure on January 23, after which the three doctors team had shifted her for treatment at a quarantine 'Boma' (small enclosure).

Later, Sasha's blood sample was sent to Van Vihar National Park in Bhopal and a team of veterinary doctors established that she was suffering with kidney infection. Subsequent ultrasound examination of Sasha at KNP confirmed the blood test report findings.

Since then, veterinary doctors in coordination with their counterparts in Namibia and South Africa, were administering treatment to the female cheetah and were monitoring her daily activities closely. "Around one-and-a-half month back when her health condition had improved marginally, the officials in Madhya Pradesh Forest Department, who were monitoring Sasha's movement regularly, had high hope that she will survive now," a source privy with the development told reporter on condition of anonymity. Further, the KNP, in consultation with experts from Wildlife Institute of India (WII) Dehradun, made all efforts to secure the medical treatment history of Sasha from the cheetah conservation foundation in Namibia. "In her treatment history, it was found that before being flown to India, the female



Cheetah's last blood test on August 15, 2022, had revealed that the creatinine level was above 400, which was suggestive that the female cheetah was suffering from renal infection before being trans-located to India," sources claimed.

Since January 22, Sasha had been under prolonged treatment of veterinary doctors posted at the KNP, a Namibian veterinary specialist, and senior veterinary expert Adrian Tordiffe of University Of Pretoria, South Africa. On February 18, a team of veterinary experts from South Africa, who arrived at the KNP along with the 12 South African cheetahs, too had examined Sasha and reportedly expressed satisfaction with the medical measures being undertaken at the KNP to keep her relatively healthy despite being afflicted with severe chronic renal ailment. The KNP now has 19 African cheetahs. Of them, 12, brought from South Africa on February 18, are in the quarantine Bomas. Out of remaining seven, which were flown from Namibia on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's birthday (September 17, 2022), four are now in the open jungles of the KNP and three are in big enclosures, awaiting for their turn to be released into the open jungles.

Approval of "Kaushal Vikas Yojana" in agriculture mechanization sector

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In the cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan at Mantralaya, it was decided to create 3 new tehsils in 3 districts and sanctioned posts for their efficient operation. Sanction was given for creation of new tehsil Chaigaon Makhan in Khandwa district, new tehsil Bargawan in Singrauli district and new tehsil Soytkala in Agar-Malwa district.

The cabinet approved the capital plan of Madhya Pradesh Power Generating Company Limited for setting up a new super critical ther-

mal power unit of 1x660 MW capacity expansion unit at Amarkantak Thermal Power Station, Chachai at a cost of Rs 4665 crore 87 lakh. Implementation of the unit M.P. Power Generating Company Limited and Coal India Limited's Subsidiary Company S.E.C.L. Will be done by a joint venture formed between for the financial support of the project, 70 percent loan will be provided by financial institutions and 15 percent equity will be provided by SECL and the remaining 15 percent share capital by the state government from the budget of MP. Power will be made

available to the generating company between the year 2022-23 to the year 2028-29. This unit is being constructed keeping in view the future energy needs of the state. There is a plan to start commercial production from the unit in the year 2027-28.

The cabinet approved the establishment of a new agricultural college in district Panna under Jawaharlal Nehru Agricultural University, Jabalpur. For its establishment, non-recurring expenditure of Rs 51 crore 90 lakh 35 thousand and recurring expenditure of Rs 31 crore 20 lakh 80 thousand was approved for 3 years.

Vyapam 'whistleblower' Dr Anand Rai dismissed from govt service

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Vyapam 'whistleblower' Dr Anand Rai, who was posted as a medical officer at Hukumchand hospital in Indore, was dismissed from service on Monday, the Madhya Pradesh government announced on Monday.

A notice issued by the state Health Department stated that Dr Rai was dismissed for not complying with official orders, being regularly absent from duty, and also portraying a "bad image" of the state government's welfare schemes.

The notification said that he has been dismissed under provisions of the MP Civil Services Act.

It said that he to inspect four health care facilities - civil dispensary (Residency, Indore),



Hukumchand Hospital (Indore), P.C. Sethi Hospital (Indore) and civil dispensary (Vrindavan Colony, Indore) - on March 29 and March 30, but did not go for inspection thought his attendance was marked in attendance register. "It was found that he

reported for duty for only 18 days from February 15 to March 15, 2022. Casual leave forms were also not submitted for remaining 6 days," the notification said. It said that Rai had submitted casual leave application on March 29, 2022. The civil surgeon

at Hukumchand Hospital asked him to appear before a special medical board on the same day between 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., but he did not turn up.

He was also accused making comments on social media, which dented the image of government welfare schemes, as per the notification.

Rai had been courting controversy with his statements against the state government. A recent episode occurred last week when he has posted a message on his social media account mentioning that ex-BJP MLA Ranjna Baghel will support JAYS in the next Assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh.

However, after Baghel objected his claim and warned of lodging an FIR against him, he had apologised for his comment.

Workshop on immunofluorescence in skin and renal pathology conducted at AIIMS Bhopal

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Department of Pathology and Lab Medicine, AIIMS Bhopal conducted a "Workshop on Immunofluorescence in Skin and Renal Pathology" on 27th of March 2023. Residents and faculty from various Medical Colleges in Madhya Pradesh participated in the workshop. Facility for Direct Immunofluorescence in Government sector is presently only available in AIIMS Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh thus dissemination of knowledge in this domain is of extreme importance for the benefit of patients of central India.

The workshop was inaugurated by Professor (Dr.) Bertha Rathinam, Head, Department of Anatomy. At the inauguration, welcome note and brief introduction about the workshop was given by Professor (Dr.) Neelkamal Kapoor, Chairperson of the workshop. An educational video



on Immunofluorescence Technique was released on this occasion via QR code.

Dr. Tanya Sharma (Associate Professor Pathology and Lab Medicine), Organizing Secretary, Dr. Sramana Mukhopadhyay Co-Organising Secretary (Associate Professor Pathology and Lab Medicine), Dr E. Jayashankar,

Member Scientific Committee (Additional Professor Pathology and Lab Medicine) and Dr Hemlata Panwar, Member Scientific Committee (Associate Professor Pathology and Lab Medicine) carried out the workshop which encompassed demonstration of Direct Immunofluorescence Technique, slide interpretation, slide viewing ses-

sion and lectures.

Dr. Girish Chandra Bhatt, Additional Professor, Department of Paediatrics discussed the clinical perspectives of renal biopsies and immunofluorescence. Clinical aspects on role of immunofluorescence in cutaneous lesions were discussed by Dr. Adhyatm Bhandari, Assistant Professor, Dermatology.

Chief Minister Chouhan planted Amla, Kachanar and Jamun plants

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted saplings of Amla, Kachanar and Jamun in the garden located at Shyamala Hills. MLA Shishupal Yadav, President of State Press Club Indore Praveen Khariwal along with Manohar Limbodia, Sanjeev Srivastava, Akash Choukse, Vivaan Singh and Ashish Raghuvanshi were with him. Boy Devansh Khatri along with Chief Minister Chouhan planted a sapling on his birthday. Along with Chief Minister Chouhan, girls Ridima, Anaya and their parents Himanshu Gupta and Lucky Gupta also planted saplings. Ashish Singh and Shivam Sahu of Satna Chittrakoot also participated in plantation. The members



of State Press Club Indore also presented tree plantation plaques to the Chief Minister Chouhan.

NEW POSTING OF INDIAN ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICE OFFICERS

Bhopal : The state government has posted Indian Administrative Service officer Sibi Chakraborty M as Additional Secretary Industrial Policy and Investment Promotion on his return from deputation to the Central Government. Along with this, additional charge of Additional Secretary Transport has been assigned.

In another order also, Faiz Ahmed Kidwai has been posted as Principal Secretary, Social Justice and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities. Only Principal Secretary Prateek Hajela will be free from the charge of social justice and empowerment of disabled people from his current responsibilities.

SC NOTICE TO CENTRE ON PLEA BY CONGRESS LEADER CHALLENGING PMLA'S SECTION 50

Team Absolute | New Delhi/Bhopal

The Supreme Court on Tuesday issued notice on a plea by Congress leader seeking to declare Section 50 and Section 63 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 as ultra vires the Constitution.

Section 50 gives Enforcement Directorate (ED) power to summon an accused and record a statement, which is admissible evidence in court of law.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, representing petitioner Govind Singh, a Congress MLA in Madhya Pradesh, submitted that plea challenges Sections 50 and 63 of the PMLA, and the matter is regarding an ECIR in which the person would not even know in what capacity he is being called. The plea also challenged the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) summons issued to Singh.

A bench of Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul, Ahsanuddin Amanullah, and Aravind Kumar issued notice to the Union of India and the ED on the plea and scheduled it for further hearing after six weeks.

The plea, filed through advocate Sumeer Sodhi, said: "Primarily the challenge is based upon the premise that the provisions of the PMLA allowing an officer of the Directorate of Enforcement to summon any person to record his statement under Section 50 of the act and requiring that person to speak truth in such statements is violative of Article 20(3) and 21 of the Constitution."

The plea contended that the petitioner is conscious of the recent judgment of the apex court whereby a challenge to vires of Section 50 of the PMLA has been turned down in the case of Vijay Madanlal Choudhary & Ors. v. Union of India & Ors.



"However, the petitioner being an informed citizen of this country has certain grounds to urge as to why the said judgment in Vijay Madanlal (supra) deserves to be held as per incuriam and the issues raised in the present petition deserve to be settled by a larger constitutional bench in terms of Article 145(3) of the Constitution," the plea added.

The plea argued that Section 50 is in direct contravention to the fundamental right against self-incrimination enshrined under Article 20(3)

of the Constitution. The plea said: "Petitioner has not been supplied with a copy of the ECIR, nor have any details of the same been provided to the petitioner, therefore, the petitioner herein is completely unaware of the scope of investigation, or the allegations being investigated in relation to which the Petitioner is being called upon by the Respondent No.2 (ED)."

The plea said the non-disclosure of the ECIR or the remit of the ED's investigation would enable a roving and fishing inquiry, which is impermissible in law.

"Not informing the person being summoned as to in which capacity he is being summoned is violative of the fundamental rights and scheme of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973. Every criminal statute must satisfy the test of fair play. There is no procedure in criminal jurisprudence that allows for summoning a person without informing him as to the capacity in which he/she is being summoned," added the plea.

The petitioner also sought quashing of summons issued against him under Section of PMLA.

On August 25 last year, the Supreme Court had agreed to review its July 27, 2022, PMLA judgment, which upheld the Enforcement Directorate's powers in connection with attachment of property involved in money laundering, arrest, search and seizure under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act.

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



EDITOR'S SPECS

Bad to be Samaritan!

After serving a legal notice to Mohd Arif for 'violating the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 (amended)' by keeping a sarus with him for a year, senior forest officials in Uttar Pradesh seem to be having second thoughts on the issue. Authorities have summoned Arif, who looked after the bird for a year, to explain his side at the office of the assistant conservator of forest in Gauriganj (Amethi) on April 2. A senior forest official said, "Arif saved the life of the sarus. This gesture matters a lot even when he has been served notice that seeks explanation from him." According to the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 (amended), one cannot keep any wild animals with them. "Arif rescued the sarus and treated it too. His only mistake is that he did not inform the forest staff. Whether one finds an injured human or a wild animal, you must report to the authorities," said the official. Meanwhile, D.N. Singh, divisional forest officer Amethi, said, "We have not broken the friendship between Arif and the bird. Sarus live in pairs but this one was alone and therefore, it is our responsibility to place the bird in its natural habitat so that it could lead a normal life." Arif told reporters that he never confined the bird. "I found the bird injured and hence, gave it treatment and food. After the treatment, it kept coming back to me but I never kept it as a pet. It roamed freely for the entire day in the fields. Is it my mistake if the bird came to me for its food?" said Arif. Arif found the injured bird in February 2022. He helped the sarus recover and soon, they developed a rare camaraderie. Last month, the videos of the bird and Arif went viral on social media platforms.

REFORMED MULTILATERALISM

D.C. Pathak

It is an established principle that if you get the 'macro-picture' right you will be less troubled by 'details' - even when some of them look unsettling at first sight. It is a sign of civilisational confidence of India that it has for its G20 Presidency adopted the motto - 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', which means 'the whole world is one family'. Nothing can be more comprehensive and higher as the global mission for a world conference, than this thought embracing the entire humanity. A basic advantage here - from India's point of view - is that any 'small thinking' will show itself to all, producing if anything, a certain degree of embarrassment for the dissenter. It is in line with this approach that India favours reformed Multilateralism as a desirable idea to define international relations. In one word this is multilateralism that produces a positive environment and no negative fall out at all. It goes to the credit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi that his foreign policy is marked by a consistent adherence to three seminal ideas that added up to this kind of multilateralism. First is India's belief in a multi-polar world. This helps to diffuse the danger of the reappearance of the Cold War that was basically the product of a bipolar world order. Multiplicity of major powers makes it more likely that they would make a competitive contribution for improving the world economy and global peace - in their keenness to project a good image for themselves, internationally. It is India's independent foreign policy that made Prime Minister Modi the first world leader to reach out to both Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and advise them upfront to stop the armed conflict in favour of negotiated peace. Through the year long Ukraine-Russia confrontation, India has retained its image as a world counsel for peace because it maintained that 'this is not an era of war', abstained from anti-Russia resolutions in the UN and also did not endorse the supply of war equipment and arms to Ukraine by the US-led West in the proxy mode that had only prolonged the war-like situation. India maintains that concerns of both Russia and Ukraine have to be addressed for working out a peace pact between the two neighbours. Significantly, India has in this period maintained the best of relations with the US, the UK and Europe and with a strategic finesse checked the drift of the world towards another Cold War between US on one hand and the Russia-China combine, on the other.

The second point about India's foreign policy that paved the way for a reformed multilateralism is that the latter is a natural by-product of India's favoured option of going in for bilateral relations which were mutually beneficial to both sides in terms of economic and security interests. This policy effortlessly pursued by the Modi regime had ensured that bilateral relations were not at the cost of any other country. The Sino-Pak axis on the other hand follows an opposite philosophy as it is geared to executing plans 'against' India. The unholy alliance between a Marxist dictatorship and a fundamentalist regime is driven by hostility towards this country and is a perpetual threat not only to the security of South Asia but to that of the entire democratic order. For upholding the case of Pakistan in Afghanistan, China has in fact entered into a give-and-take arrangement with Pakistan on Taliban Emirate and even gone along with the Pak-sponsored faith-based terrorism that threatened global security. Western democracies led by the US must realise that the motivation of faith that Islamic extremists and radicals brought to bear on the new global terror, has created a perpetual danger for the entire world. This threat had to be countered jointly by all peace-loving countries through exchange of intelligence and coordinated action. Extremism in the name of Islam can enforce an 'asymmetric' war because the motivation here was strong enough to produce 'suicide bombers' to take down the opponent. India with its transparent advocacy of 'all religions being given equal respect' provides a standing counter to the 'supremacist' outlook of a particular faith - in the process it is best placed to act as the anchor of world security against the new threat of radicalisation. Even as the agenda of G20 is exclusively about economic growth and elimination of the crippling gulf between the North and South, security concerns plaguing the world have also to be addressed during India's Presidency of the event. It is a matter of great satisfaction that G20 outreach is designed to fulfil the task of shaping both the global economy as well as world security. To go about it in a mission mode carries the stamp of the Modi government - the latter in fact was living up to the 'sabjan sukhaye sabjan hitaye' philosophy. Finally, 'multilateralism' is not 'alignment' - it is in fact a negation of the latter. An alignment is always 'against' somebody or some country. Reformed multilateralism does not create conflict and India goes for it with that mindset. India is an active participant in Quad

because this forum stands for 'maintenance of rules based order in the Indo-Pacific' - it is not against any particular country but against unwarranted aggressiveness wherever it came from. It needs to be mentioned that India's bilateral relations with the US, Japan and Australia are on an upswing independently of the geopolitical objective of Quad. If India also sees in it a preemptive arrangement to counter any hostile encroachment in the Indian Ocean, there is nothing wrong with it. Since China seeks to 'win a war without fighting a battle' through the strategy of salami slicing, India has every right to expose and put down that hidden agenda of the adversary and do whatever it takes to counter it. India is working for the return of sanity in international relations and is set to improve upon the traditional thinking of somehow preserving national interests even when that meant not caring for the global commons. India has an opportunity of playing this profound role at the world stage and it is a matter of pride that Prime Minister Modi had the political will to rally the international opinion in favour of maintaining global peace so that the cause of economic advancement of the world as a whole, could be served. In a way the slogan of 'Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas' at home is in complete sync with the G20 call of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. If it can establish the feasibility of reconciliation between national growth and human advancement across the globe, G20 would be achieving an unprecedented mission where the world would truly be one - eliminating the menace of conflict and divisions forced in the name of religion, region and race. This would be happening for the first time in the post-Cold War era. Think20 is providing the much needed ideation to the G20 events to enable the latter to fulfil this mission. Bilateralism enlarging into multilateralism without causing harm to any national entity is perhaps a political philosophy whose time had come - it shows the determination at the national level, to do what was right. While every nation has to have military strength to safeguard its sovereignty, seeking prosperity and gains through arms export and economic destruction of a rival has its limitations - those having such a mindset should realise that. Some countries will always be richer than others but they all must work for a sustainable human existence in order to minimise conflict and violence that detracted from the idea of making the world a better place for everybody. The good news is that the approach of India steers clear of ideological contradictions that had marred international

and national politics so far and shows a new light to the world on the strength of its civilisational moorings. Democracy ultimately is rule for the people and whether it is the regional setting that produced the Ukraine-Russia armed conflict or an alliance like Sino-Pak axis that was driven by malice against India, the vision set by the thought of universal good and human dignity would win the battle for the people. India has set this higher mission and there is every hope that at the end of India's G20 Presidency it will make a difference to the world. The world can do with injecting some 'philosophy' of life in 'realpolitik'. To sum up, India has come of age as a major power influencing geopolitical trends. It is an advocate of world peace but also a believer in a firm rebuttal of the attempts of a few to disturb it for their own vested interests or hegemonist traits. It looks upon multilateralism as a constructive pathway to economic well-being that would keep the international community from armed combat and destruction. Competitive success in the economy may bring in advantages but these should not lead to a temptation for usurping other 'territories' or 'subjugating' people. Prime Minister Modi's pithy reminder that this is not an era of war, has made an impact on the world and certainly checked the trend of third parties covertly adding fuel to the fire in an ongoing conflict. Peace brings in long-term gains while wars produce losses for all parties. A complication in the times we live in, has risen because of the advent of proxy wars that technology - particularly social media and cyber space - had aided. It enabled covert offensives to succeed in creating a sense of victory in combat because violence and destruction went undetected or remained unattributable in specific terms. Multilateralism has therefore, not only to facilitate mutual economic advancement but also highlight the importance of exchange of intelligence for countering terrorism and other forms of proxy war. It stands to reason that liaison at the level of National Security Advisors so successfully achieved by India, is becoming the bedrock of India's international relations and foreign policy strategies. This confirms the reality that global security presaged the world's economic development and that the two had to be pursued with equal vigour.

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

international

NETANYAHU SUSPENDS JUDICIAL OVERHAUL PLAN AMID PROTESTS

Jerusalem | Agencies

Amid nationwide protests, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has announced that he would suspend the legislation of his contentious plan to overhaul the country's judiciary by about a month to allow "dialogue" between coalition and opposition lawmakers. He made the remarks in a televised speech late Monday, which came after tens of thousands of Israelis rallied outside Parliament earlier in the day and a general strike to protest the overhaul, reports Xinhua news agency. Netanyahu said he has decided to suspend the legislation in order to "allow time to try and reach a broad agreement" on the reforms. "In any case," the legislation blitz will resume after the Knesset, or Parliament, reconvenes after the Passover holiday break on April 30, he said. Opponents of the judicial overhaul rejected Netanyahu's statement, saying that the suspension is not real because there is no discussion or voting while the Knesset is in

recess, which began on Monday. "The struggle continues," Orly Bar-Lev, one of the main leaders of the protests against the overhaul plan, wrote on Twitter. "As long as the Prime Minister and his far-right allies intend to resume the legislation, we will be on the street," she added. Following Netanyahu's remarks, Israel's largest trade union Histadrut, which represents 800,000 workers from infrastructure, banking, transportation, health and other sectors, announced the general strike that paralysed the economy on Monday will end on Tuesday. The Israel Airports Authority said in a statement that outbound flights, which had been halted in the morning as part of the strike, have resumed. Benny Gantz, leader of the opposition party of the National Unity, said in a televised news conference that he and lawmakers from his party would take part in talks with the representatives of the coalition in President Isaac Herzog's residence in Jerusalem. Opposition leader Yair Lapid didn't immediately endorse Netanyahu's statement, but said that he always welcomes dialogue.

At a televised news conference, Lapid said that despite Netanyahu has called for dialogue several times, he continued to push ahead with the reforms without pausing for talks. "We are facing the largest crisis in the history of Israel," he said, adding that the protest should continue with the goal of drafting a constitution for Israel. The overhaul, proposed by the ruling coalition and aimed at curbing judicial power, has divided the country for weeks, with tens of thousands taking to the streets in demonstrations and blocking major highways across Israel and rallying outside the Knesset in Jerusalem. On Monday, factories, banks, shopping malls and local authorities participated in the general strike and shut down services. Meanwhile, the Israeli Medical Association announced a day-long strike at all public hospitals and community clinics. The Azrieli Group and BIG Group, two of Israel's largest mall chains, joined the strike and shut down dozens of their shopping centres across the country.

UKRAINE GETS FIRST BATCH OF LEOPARD 2 TANKS FROM GERMANY

Kiev: Ukraine received the first batch of Leopard 2 tanks from Germany, media outlets reported. The German-made tanks were handed over to Ukraine two months after Berlin's decision to supply them, the Interfax-Ukraine news agency reported on Monday, citing German news outlet Der Spiegel. It did not specify the number of tanks that were transferred to Ukraine. In January, Germany decided to supply its Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine and green-lighted requests by other countries to do so, Xinhua news agency reported. Media outlets reported that Germany intended to send 18 Leopard 2A6 tanks to Ukraine.

Landslide leaves 16 dead in Ecuador

Quito | Agencies

At least 16 people were killed and another 16 were injured after a massive landslide buried numerous homes in central Ecuador's Alausi canton, in Chimborazo province, the Secretariat of Risk Management has said. According to the agency's preliminary report, seven people are still missing and as many as 500 people have been impacted by the disaster that hit the town on Sunday night, with countless homes destroyed, 65 per cent of a major roadway made impassable and 25 per cent of streetlights not working, Xinhua news agency reported. "One hundred per cent of the transportation service for communities and cities is affected," the secretariat said. The country's ECU 911 integrated



emergency hotline and service issued an alarm Sunday night that immediately dispatched search and rescue teams to the rural area. "Temporary accommodation and the mobilisation of sleeping kits have been activated for those who have lost their homes," the presidency's communications secretariat said in a statement. By presidential order, the Risk Management Secretariat was coordinating relief efforts with the Armed Forces and the Public Health Ministry, as well as local police and fire departments, the statement said.

US watching Rahul's case in Indian courts: State Dept



Washington | Agencies

AUS Department of State spokesperson has said that Washington is watching Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's case in Indian courts in the wake of the latter's disqualification as an MP following a defamation case. During a press briefing on Monday when asked if Rahul Gandhi's disqualification

was consistent with democratic values, the Department's Principal Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel said: "Respect for the rule of law and judicial independence is a cornerstone of any democracy, and we're watching Mr. Gandhi's case in Indian courts, and we engage with the government of India on our shared commitment to democratic values -- including, of course, freedom of expression. "In our engagements with our Indian partners, we continue to highlight the importance of democratic principles and the protection of human rights, including freedom of expression, as a key to strengthening both our democracies." In response to another query if the US was still engaging with Rahul as the opposition leader, Patel said that although he did not have "any specific engagements to read out... it is normal and standard for us to engage with members of opposition parties in any country where we have bilateral relationships". On March 24, Rahul Gandhi was disqualified as member of the Lok Sabha, a day after his conviction in the 2019 'Modi surname' defamation case.

Russia irked with Pakistan's slow progress in importing crude oil

Hamza Ameer | Islamabad

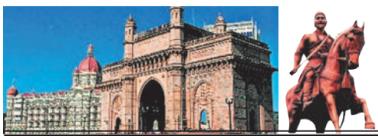
Pakistan's plans to import crude oil from Russia has hit a critical roadblock due to slow processing by Islamabad, which has irked and disappointed Moscow. As per sources, Moscow has expressed serious concerns over Pakistan's initiative to import crude oil from Russia and has communicated to Islamabad to import at least one crude oil cargo and establish its seriousness and intent. Russia has also expressed its disappointment over Pakistan after it was revealed that Islamabad did not even initiate the process to start the first shipment of crude oil. As per sources, Pakistan had committed that it would set up a new Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) company responsible for import of Russian crude oil to the refineries in Pakistan. It was also committed by Islamabad that the SPV would be responsible for handling all matters related to the import and its relevant payments for oil. However, Islamabad has not yet



started work on its committed plan, as it is yet to register the SPV. Further details revealed that because of the delay in the establishment of the SPV, the first cargo of crude oil from Russia, which was expected to be imported next month, is not expected to arrive in May this year. One of the major reasons why Pakistan has delayed the whole process of importing crude oil from Russia is the G7 oil pricing cap mechanism. The United States had recently

reminded Pakistan on the same, asking it to follow the mechanism and negotiate the best possible price. This complication has put many issues on finalisation of crude oil pricing with Russia. The other point of concern is the incentives offered by Russia on crude oil trade as the Russian oil produces more furnace oil and less diesel, in comparison to the Arabian crude oil, which produces more diesel and less furnace oil. Pakistan requires crude oil

that produces higher diesel oil, in reference to which, importing crude oil from Russia will increase costs and erode incentives. "Arabian oil produces 45 per cent high-speed diesel (HSD) and 25 per cent furnace oil. Russian crude oil will produce 32 per cent HSD and 50 per cent furnace oil. If we take such a ratio, Pakistan will require higher discounts from Russia," said a source with knowledge about the development. It is also important to note that Pakistani companies are already facing major challenges in consuming furnace oil, especially after the country's power plants shifted towards LNG fuel. One other issue that hinders the process is the fact that the government has not taken the oil industry on board to discuss the matter. "And if Pakistan goes ahead with the Russian crude oil import, it could be a challenge for the country to pay given the current dollar crunch," the source said. If both Pakistan and Russia sign the deal, Moscow will become Islamabad's second-largest crude oil supplier after Saudi Arabia, exporting around 100,000 barrels of crude oil per day.



DELHI HC ISSUES SUMMONS TO UDDHAV THACKERAY, OTHERS IN DEFAMATION CASE BY EKNATH SHINDE'S AIDE

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday issued summons to Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray, MP Sanjay Raut and MLA Aditya Thackeray in a defamation case filed by Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's aide Rahul Ramesh Shewale.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Shewale had filed the defamation suit against the three for certain statements alleging that the Shinde-led Shiv Sena faction bought the party symbol for Rs 2,000 crore. While appearing for Shewale, senior advocate Rajiv Nayar prayed the court to pass an injunction order to restrain them from making any further defamatory claims, Justice Prateek Jalan said that an order will be passed only after having the response of parties.



the court said. It has also sought response of the defendants, including Google and Twitter. Justice Jalan listed the case for next hearing on April 17.

During the hearing on Tuesday, the court orally remarked: "These are political fights going on... As far as the institutions are concerned, they have

to stand for themselves. The Election Commission's shoulders are broad enough to deal with all this. Like the courts, people say all kinds of things about the courts."

On Nayar asking the judge if the defendants' conduct shocks his conscience, Justice Jalan said: "The question is, is a person entitled to shock my conscience? The question is not whether it shocks my conscience or not. The question is that in the free marketplace of ideas, are people entitled to say things which might shock my conscience? Ultimately he will have to stand on his own legs."

The court added that it wants to give an opportunity to the defendants and go through their responses before giving a prima facie finding at this stage of issuance of summons.

Bombay HC bats for feeding stray dogs, cautions against cruelty to animals

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Adopting a humane touch, the Bombay High Court on Tuesday frowned at hatred and cruelty to stray dogs terming it as unacceptable from persons of civil society and cautioned that "such cruelty would be against the Constitutional ethos and statutory provisions".

A division bench of Justices Girish Kulkarni and R.N. Laddha was hearing a petition filed by a dog-lover of a Mumbai cooperative housing society alleging cruelty to 18 stray dogs as its managing committee was not ready to provide a designated feeding spot to feed them and threatened to hire bouncers to restrain her.

The bench cited the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and the Animal Birth Control Rules, and said it would be an obligation of all the society members to follow them and to avoid causing any harassment or cruelty to the animals or those wanting to care for them. It also directed the society management to inform them of the designated (feeding) spot as well as other welfare measures for the dogs, by April 6, when the matter would be heard again.



The directions came in a petition, filed through advocate Nishad Nevgi, by animal lover, Paromita Purthan, living in RNA Royale Park CHS, Kandivali west, where she was feeding 18 stray canines.

Purthan informed the court of a Managing Committee resolution of November 13, 2022 allowing feeding the dogs at a specified place but the society had not allotted the feeding spot in the huge society complex.

Sounding a caution to the society and all its members, the bench said: "To hate stray dogs and/or treat them with cruelty can never be an acceptable approach, from persons of civil society, as an act of cruelty to such animals would be against the Constitutional ethos and the statutory provisions."

Antilia bomb scare case

Bombay HC junks plea for probe into Parambir Singh's role

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bombay High Court recently dismissed a writ petition demanding a probe into the role of former Mumbai Police Commissioner Parambir Singh in the Antilia bomb scare and the related Mansukh Hiran murder case.

A division bench comprising Justice Sunil Shukre and Justice Kamal Khata has held that the petition is based on 'hearsay' and does not 'disclose commission of any cognizable offence' or reasonable probability of commission of such an offence by Singh.

The petitioner, Parshuram Sharma had sought the court's directions to the state to probe Singh's role and claimed to have gathered information indicating the possible involvement of the former police commissioner in the cases.

Sharma had relied on certain previous observations of another bench to support his contentions, but the National Investigation Agency had questioned his locus standi claiming his plea was based on 'hearsay' evidence from the media reports.



The judges observed that the petitioner would need to show more circumstances that would convert his suspicion into a reasonable probability of Singh's involvement in the crime.

Until and unless such material is available on record and within the knowledge of the person seeking action in the matter, it cannot warrant further probe by the police, and dismissed Sharma's plea.

4 DEAD, 3 INJURED AFTER TRUCK HITS 2 BIKES IN PUNE

Pune: Four people including two children were killed, while the other three were injured after a pickup truck collided with two motorcycles in Pune's Junnar, police said.

According to police, the incident occurred on Monday late at night at around 11 pm. "Those dead and injured were going towards Ahmednagar's side on two motorcycles when they were hit by a pickup truck," police said.

"In the accident, four people, including a man, a woman, and two children aged 6 and 2 were killed," police added. Three who sustained injuries in the accident are currently undergoing treatment at a hospital, police said.

Further investigation is underway.

IIT-B student's death case

KIN CLAIM NO KNOWLEDGE OF 'SUICIDE NOTE'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Hours after the Mumbai Police Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing IIT-B student Darshan Solanki's death case recovered a purported 'suicide note', his kin have claimed they have no knowledge of the same, here on Tuesday.

A family member said that they had no information about it and Darshan's father has gone to meet the SIT for details, and declined to speak more.

Among other things, the suicide note has reportedly named a room-mate of Darshan for alleged harassment, threats and casteist discrimination that compelled him to take the extreme step on February 12. The SIT led by Joint Commissioner of Police (Crime) Lakshmi Gautam has found the 'suicide note' from Darshan's room over a month after his death which sparked off a huge furore in higher education campuses all over India. As per reports, the brief 'suicide note' names the co-student, whose identity has been established by the SIT



and who had allegedly threatened and harassed Darshan.

The note, in a small chit, was recovered by the SIT nearly three weeks ago, when they investigated the room and

carried out a panchnama, which was not found during the previous probe by the Powai Police Station.

Now, the SIT has lodged a case invoking relevant sections of Indian Penal Code and Atrocities Act pertaining to abetment to suicide and caste-based discrimination, against the co-student.

Earlier, an IIT-B internal inquiry panel had ruled out any "caste-based discrimination" leading to Darshan's death, but his father Ramesh Solanki last week outright rejected the contentions.

Darshan, 18, a First Year Chemical Engineering student died on February 12, a day after writing his semester exams, and following a massive controversy, the state government appointed a Mumbai Police SIT.

At least three students associations - the Ambedkar Phule Periyar Study Circle-IITB, the Ambedkarite Students Collective-IITB and Concerned Alumni-IITB - had earlier written to Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, urging him to request the Mumbai Police to register Ramesh Solanki's complaint.

"Fight Against PM Modi, Not Savarkar": Uddhav Thackeray, Rahul Gandhi make up

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Congress appeared to have mended its fences with Maharashtra ally Uddhav Thackeray, who was hugely upset over Rahul Gandhi's comments about VD Savarkar. Senior leader of Uddhav Thackeray's Sena faction, Sanjay Raut said Gandhi has dialled Thackeray and the differences are all in the past. "We have talked to Rahul Gandhi. Our fight is not with Savarkar but with Modi ji," Raut told reporters.

"The things that have been said in the meeting -- the things that have been said, are good things. Let our unity remain intact. I think it is going well," he added, alluding to last evening's dinner meet at Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge's home. Thackeray had pulled out of the meet, saying Gandhi's comments against Savarkar could drive a wedge in their alliance in Maharashtra.



Thereafter, the 17 parties attending the meet had decided that no opposition leader would make comments on sensitive issues like Savarkar, sources had said. The Congress, they added,



had indicated that it would take into account feelings of like-minded parties. Mr Gandhi, who was present at the meet with his mother and former party chief Sonia Gandhi, had also

addressed the assembled leaders, sources said. Today the senior leader is writing to all political leaders who, in a rare gesture, stood by him and condemned his disqualification from Lok Sabha after the two-year jail term was handed to him by a court in Gujarat last week, sources added.

The Congress has announced a month-long protest over Gandhi's disqualification as an MP.

Gandhi was found guilty and sentenced to two years in prison last week in a defamation case from 2019, over his remarks about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's surname. In the campaign ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, Gandhi had apparently said, "How come all thieves have the common surname Modi?"

The Gujarat court, which sentenced him to two years in jail, also granted him bail and suspended the sentence. On Friday, he was formally disqualified by Lok Sabha.

Irked by blackout, Nagpur man threatens to blow up Fadnavis' home!

Nagpur | Agencies

Enraged by a power failure in his home, a Nagpur man allegedly threatened to blow up the Nagpur home of Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, sending the police into a tizzy, officials said here on Tuesday.

Nagpur Police Commissioner Amitesh Kumar told mediapersons this morning that the culprit who made the fake bomb threat has been traced and detained for investigations. According to officials, around 2 a.m. on Tuesday, the Nagpur Police Control Room received a call warning that a bomb had reportedly been planted outside Fadnavis' home before the caller abruptly disconnected.

Not taking chances, a police team and a bomb disposal squad were rushed to the site and a thorough check was carried out inside and outside the VIP home, but nothing was found. Fadnavis and his family are currently



in Mumbai. The police also traced the caller to his home in the Kanhan area of the city where he was staying in darkness due to a power failure, and in a fit of anger had allegedly made the bomb threat call to mislead the police.

The caller has been picked up and detained for questioning in the fake call matter, said Kumar.

"PROVE SAVARKAR APOLOGISED TO BRITISH," HINDUTVA ICON'S GRANDSON TELLS RAHUL GANDHI

Mumbai:

The grandson of late Hindutva ideologue VD Savarkar has sought action against Rahul Gandhi for his comments and also challenged the Congress



leader to show documents that prove he had apologised to the British.

Rahul Gandhi's "My name is not Savarkar, my name is Gandhi and Gandhi does not offer an apology to anyone" remark has drawn fire from BJP.

The former Congress chief made this remark while addressing a press conference after being disqualified from Lok Sabha.

Calling such comments childish, Savarkar's grandson Ranjit Savarkar on Monday said, "Rahul Gandhi is saying he won't apologise as he isn't Savarkar. I challenge him to show documents that prove Savarkar apologised." "Using the names of patriots to promote politics is wrong and deplorable. Action must be taken," Savarkar said.

Sharad Pawar's advice as Rahul Gandhi's Savarkar comment threatens alliance

At an opposition meeting that Uddhav Thackeray skipped on Monday over Rahul Gandhi's Savarkar comments, Sharad Pawar advised the Gandhis that the Congress must avoid speaking on what is an emotional subject for Shiv Sena leaders.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Pawar, who crafted the Maha Vikas Aghadi coalition in 2019 by bringing together the ideologically disparate Congress, NCP and Shiv Sena, intervened after Thackeray warned against "fissures" in the Maharashtra coalition caused by Gandhi's comments.

The veteran leader reportedly spoke to both Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi at the meeting in which Thackeray's Sena faction was a notable absentee. Pawar emphasised that targeting VD Savarkar, a revered figure in Maharashtra, would not help the opposition alliance in the state. Pawar also told Gandhi that Savarkar was never a member of the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh), and underscored that the opposition's real fight was with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP.

"We should focus on issues of democracy.

Controversies divert focus from the issue. Today it is about Rahul Gandhi's suspension, earlier Sanjay Raut was jailed. So we should avoid talking on emotional and emotive issues and stick to real issues," Pawar reportedly said.

The Congress agreed to tone down its criticism of Savarkar.

Eighteen opposition parties attended the meeting, which was meant to be a show of solidarity with the Congress over the disqualification of Gandhi from parliament after a Gujarat court sentenced him to two-year jail.

Sanjay Raut, a leader of Thackeray's Sena, said today: "If they have decided to avoid such things it is good. I spoke to Rahul ji. I feel it is going well."

Congress leader Jai Ram Ramesh indicated that the parties have patched up. "19 parties are together, and that includes Shiv Sena. Last night there were 18 parties, today I said 19.

Understand. It will turn into 19 from 18 only if Shiv Sena is part of the group," he said.

Gandhi's frequent criticism of Hindu ideologue Vinayak "Veer" Savarkar has been a cause of strain between the Congress and the Shiv Sena.

On Saturday, when Gandhi was asked about his refusal to apologise for his comments on democracy in the UK or for the "Modi surname" remark that led to his jail sentence, he said: "My name is not Savarkar. My name is Gandhi and Gandhi doesn't apologise."

His comments on Savarkar during the Bharat Jodo Yatra last year had also infuriated Thackeray's party. Later, the allies agreed to step back from a clash, with Thackeray's top aide Raut joining Gandhi's march.

After Gandhi's latest comment, Thackeray said: "I want to tell Rahul Gandhi that we have come together, that's right, we have come



together to save democracy and constitution in this country. But do not make any statements that will create fissures. They (BJP) are trying to provoke you, if we miss this timing, then our country will surely go towards autocracy."



'GOT' STAR LENA HEADEY TO FEATURE IN OTT SERIES 'THE ABANDONS'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood actress Lena Headey of 'Game of Thrones' fame is set to star in Kurt Sutter's upcoming Netflix series 'The Abandons'.

The Western series was ordered at Netflix in October 2022. The official series description states: "As a group of diverse, outlier families pursue

their Manifest Destiny in 1850s Oregon, a corrupt force of wealth and power, coveting their land, tries to force them out."

"These abandoned souls, the kind of lost souls living on the fringe of society, unite their tribes to form a family and fight back. In this bloody process, 'justice' is stretched beyond the boundaries of the law," reports 'Variety'.

Headey will play Fiona, described as "a strong, devout matriarch who, unable to have her own children, took in four orphans

to create her own family. Driven by a higher purpose - and a strong-willed Irish temper - her faith and love for her family trump all."

Headey is best known for playing Cersei Lannister on the global hit HBO series 'Game of Thrones', for which she earned five Emmy nominations.

Headey's other notable past roles include starring in films like '300', 'Dredd' and 'Pride and Prejudice and Zombies' as well as shows like 'Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles'. She is also set to

appear in upcoming projects like 'White House Plumbers' at HBO.

'Variety' further states that Netflix has given 'The Abandons' a 10-episode order. Kurt Sutter created the show and will serve as showrunner and executive producer under his SutterInk production banner.

Emmy Grinwis will also executive produce. Stephen Surjik will serve as director and executive producer, while Otto Bathurst will direct the first episode and executive produce.



Liv Tyler set to return to MCU after 16 years

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood actress Liv Tyler is returning to the Marvel Cinematic Universe, 16 years after her last appearance.

She will appear in 2024's 'Captain America: New World Order' reprising her role from 2008's 'The Incredible Hulk' as scientist Betty Ross, the daughter of General Thaddeus 'Thunderbolt' Ross, reports 'Variety'.

That role was originated by the late William Hurt, who reappeared several times for Marvel Studios, starting with 2016's 'Captain America: Civil War', in which Ross had become Secretary of State. Harrison Ford is stepping into the role of Thaddeus Ross for 'New World Order', in which the character has become President of the United States.

'Variety' further states that in 'The Incredible Hulk', Tyler's Betty Ross was the love interest for Edward Norton's Bruce Banner; after Norton was replaced by Mark Ruffalo, Tyler's character was mentioned in passing, but the actor had not returned in the role. 'New World Order' stars Anthony Mackie as Sam Wilson, who took on the mantle of Captain America in Marvel's 2021 Disney+ series 'The Falcon and the Winter Soldier' with the blessing - and the supposed off-screen death - of Chris Evans' Steve Rogers. Carl Lumbly, Danny Ramirez, Shira Haas and Tim Blake Nelson fill out the rest of the cast.

Julius Onah is directing from a script by Malcolm Spellman and Dalan Musson. Kevin Feige and Nate Moore are producing. Tyler most recently appeared on the first season of the Fox series '9-1-1: Lone Star' and opposite Brad Pitt in the 2019 sci-fi drama 'Ad Astra'.



Christopher Nolan's 'Oppenheimer' is 'three hours' long: Matt Damon

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Matt Damon said that filmmaker Christopher Nolan's "Oppenheimer" runs a hefty three hours long. On the red carpet for 'Air', in which he co-stars, Damon also talked about Nolan's upcoming historic drama in which he appears alongside Cillian Murphy, reports 'Variety'.

"It's three hours. It's fantastic," Damon said, revealing that he's seen 'Oppenheimer'.

"Cillian is phenomenal. He's everything you would want him to be," Damon told Malkin. "I think it's almost three hours. It goes so fast, it's great." Directed by Ben Affleck, 'Air' stars Damon as Sonny Velasco, who led Nike to pursue the endorsement of Michael Jordan and the creation of the Air Jordan basketball sneakers.

'Air' opens April 5 and co-stars Affleck, Viola Davis, Jason Bateman and

Chris Messina. 'Oppenheimer' stars longtime Nolan collaborator Murphy as theoretical physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer, the director of the Manhattan Project and the "father of the atomic bomb." The cast also includes Emily Blunt, Robert Downey Jr., Florence Pugh, Rami Malek, Benny Safdie, Josh Hartnett, Dane DeHaan, Jack Quaid, Matthew Modine, Alden Ehrenreich, David Krumholtz, Michael Angarano and Kenneth Branagh.

'Oppenheimer' would likely run longer than 'Interstellar', at 169 minutes, and 'The Dark Knight Rises', at 165 minutes.

'Oppenheimer', which opens in theatres July 21, is Nolan's first movie at Universal Pictures after his long run at Warner Bros. It's based on Kai Bird's novel, 'American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer', and focuses on Oppenheimer's research effort as the Los Alamos Laboratory director.

DICAPRIO STARER 'KILLERS OF THE FLOWER MOON' TO RELEASE IN OCTOBER

Los Angeles | Agencies

Filmmaker Martin Scorsese's 'Killers of the Flower Moon', a historical drama about the serial targeting and murder of members of the oil-rich Osage tribe, will open in limited theatres starting October 6. The film will then have a wide release on October 20.

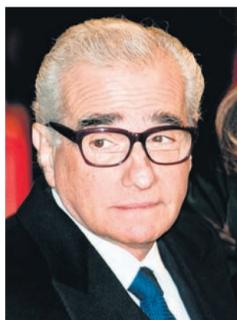
'Killers of the Flower Moon', which is being produced by Apple Original Films, will then begin streaming on Apple TV+ at an unspecified date. Paramount Pictures will partner with Apple on the theatrical release of the movie, which has an impressive ensemble that includes Oscar winners Leonardo DiCaprio, Robert De Niro and Brendan Fraser, as well as Jesse Plemons and Lily Gladstone, reports 'Variety'.

Given the top talent involved, 'Killers of the Flower Moon' is expected to be a major awards season player.

Scorsese, an Oscar winner for 'The Departed' and routinely ranked among the greatest filmmakers in history, directs the film from a script that he wrote with Eric Roth. The movie is based on David Grann's best-selling book of the same name. It unfolds in 1920s Oklahoma and depicts the serial murder of members of Native Americans and the investigation into the string of brutal crimes by the FBI.

Select festival-goers may get a peek at the film before the fall, as multiple sources say that the movie is expected to debut at this year's Cannes Film Festival, where it will be one of the splashiest premieres.

'Killers of the Flower Moon' was produced alongside Imperative Entertainment, Sikelia Productions and Appian Way. Producers are Scorsese, Dan Friedkin, Bradley Thomas and Daniel Lupi, with DiCaprio, Rick Yorn, Adam Sommer, Marianne Bower, Lisa Frechette, John Atwood, Shea Kammer and Niels Juul serving as executive producers.



BLACKPINK could perform at Biden's state dinner for South Korean President



Seoul | Agencies

South Korean girl group BLACKPINK has been asked to perform at a state dinner that US President Joe Biden plans to host for President of South Korea Yoon Suk Yeol when he visits Washington next month, sources said on Tuesday.

YG Entertainment, the group's agency, confirmed the offer, saying it is "positively considering" the request,

reports Yonhap, a news agency.

The group is currently scheduled to perform in Mexico on the day of the state dinner as part of its world tour.

American singer-songwriter Lady Gaga has reportedly been asked to also perform at the function together with BLACKPINK. The two previously collaborated on 'Sour Candy', included on Lady Gaga's sixth studio album, 'Chromatica'.

Yoon is set for a state visit to the

United States on April 26, where he will hold a summit with US President Joe Biden and attend a state dinner.

Presidential officials declined to discuss the issue, according to Yonhap.

"Nothing's been decided yet on that particular cultural event," a presidential official said.

Another official said all details of the state dinner, including its participants, will be determined mainly by the United States as the host country.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Madison Beer



IPL 2023

KEEPING PLAYERS FIT AND INJURY FREE WILL BE A MAJOR CHALLENGE FOR TEAMS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Indian Premier League (IPL) 2023 has ended for Kyle Jamieson, Will Jacks and Rishabh Pant even before the action has started.

Shreyas Iyer and Lockie Ferguson are struggling with injuries and look doubtful starters and may even miss the tournament altogether. India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah is still recovering from an injury and things are not yet clear whether he will represent Mumbai Indians in the IPL or not.

Injuries are part and parcel of a sports person's life and every player dreads falling prey to them -- not only at the start of prestigious tournaments but also during the event and ending up missing matches.

Iyer is expected to miss at least half of the IPL 2023 season while things are not clear how much time Ferguson, who was traded from Gujarat Titans to Kolkata Knight Riders a few months ago, will need to recover from the hamstring injury he suffered just before the start of New Zealand's ODI series against Sri Lanka while Pant had suffered grave injuries



during a car crash in December and has just about started walking with assistance.

While the Chennai Super Kings have brought in Sisanda Magala as a replacement for Kyle Jamieson (back injury); Michael Bracewell has joined Royal Challengers Bangalore as a substitute for Will Jacks (muscle injury). Besides, Mumbai Indians have lost Australian pacer Jhye Richardson, who has undergone surgery for a hamstring problem, and Rajasthan Royals are sweating over the back injury Prasad Krishna is recuperating from.

Tackling injuries to players before the start of the IPL 2023 is not a major issue for the franchises as they can

seek and get like-for-like replacements, a matter of major concern for them is the injuries the players suffer during the tournament.

Injuries putting players out of circulation is a matter of concern for all franchises during the IPL, especially in a lengthy tournament like IPL 2023. With 10 teams in the fray, each franchise will be playing 14 matches -- facing the four other teams in their group twice (home and away), four teams in the other group once and the remaining team two times. The knockout stage will involve four matches. With the tournament spread over nearly two months (from March 31 to May 28) and involving a lot of travel because of the home and away

format, a player's body will suffer a lot of wear and tear and quite a lot of players will end up playing with niggles. But it is the major injuries that could give not only the players and their IPL franchises but also their national federation sleepless nights as players getting hurt would mean them missing playing for their nation. It will not only end up upsetting the combinations in their T20 franchise but also the national team.

With the 50-overs World Cup scheduled to be held in India in October-November this year, teams can't afford to lose key players to injuries as that would upset their preparations for the World Cup and also disturb the team balance.

Stokes to play as specialist batter in early stages of IPL 2023

England Test captain Ben Stokes will play as a specialist batter during the initial phase of the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2023 in order to manage his knee injury.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Stokes, who was signed for INR 16.25 crore by Chennai Super Kings (CSK), arrived in India last week and has been training with his new teammates. CSK will take on defending champions Gujarat Titans in the IPL 2023 opener on Friday.

Before leaving for the IPL, Stokes had a cortisone injection in his problematic left knee in order to manage the injury, according to BBC.

"He's ready to go as a batsman from the start, the bowling might be waiting and see. I know he had his first very light bowl this week since he had his injections in his knee," CSK batting coach Mike Hussey was quoted as saying by BBC.

"My understanding is he won't be bowling much at all in the first few games of the tournament, or it might be a few weeks. Hopefully, we'll get him bowling at some



stage in the tournament," he added.

During the second Test against New Zealand in February, Stokes faced difficulties due to his longstanding issue and did not even bowl. He also encountered difficulties with his knee while batting on the final day.

due to his longstanding issue and did not even bowl. He also encountered difficulties with his knee while batting on the final day.

Miami Open

Sabalenka cruises into fifth quarterfinals of the season

Miami | Agencies

World No.2 Aryna Sabalenka advanced to her fifth quarterfinal of the season after defeating No.16 seed Barbora Krejickova 6-3, 6-2 in the fourth round of the Miami Open.

With a straight-set win on Monday, Sabalenka improved her tour-leading record to 20-2 on the season. This was the third meeting of the season between Sabalenka and Krejickova, with all three coming at the first three WTA 1000 events of the season.

Krejickova snapped Sabalenka's 13-match win streak in February en route to the title at the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships. Sabalenka got her revenge two weeks ago at the BNP Paribas Open.

Sabalenka will next face Romania's Sorana Cirstea, who has reached back-to-back quarterfinals in Indian Wells and Miami. The 32-year-old has beaten Czech Marketa Vondrousova 7-6(3), 6-4. On the other hand, Jessica Pegula is on a roll as she prevailed



over Poland's Magda Linette, 6-1, 7-5. This is the fifth time the American reached the quarterfinals this season, and her fifth win over a top 20 player this season.

Pegula's quarterfinal opponent will be Anastasia Potapova.

It's a rematch of their third-round match at the Indian Wells, won by Pegula only 16 days ago in three sets.

LATE SILVA OWN GOAL HANDS CHILE VICTORY OVER PARAGUAY

Santiago: Goalkeeper Antony Silva scored a late own goal as Chile clinched a dramatic 3-2 home win over Paraguay in their friendly here.

Paulo Diaz put the hosts ahead in the 25th minute by heading in at the far post after Marcelino Nunez's floating free-kick, reports Xinhua. Paraguay equalised through Matias Rojas, who slotted home from close range on his second attempt after his initial effort was blocked by Claudio Bravo.

Rojas then turned provider with a dashing run into the box and precise cross for Gabriel Avalos, whose first-time effort slipped through Bravo's gloves. Chile were back on level terms in the 76th minute when Diego Valdes' header found Alexis Sanchez, who finished calmly from eight yards. Both teams were reduced to 10 men in the 81st minute as Diaz and Ramon Sosa were handed red cards for their part in a melee. Chile regained the lead in the second minute of stoppage time when Sanchez's low corner to the near post was misjudged by Silva before the ball ricocheted in off his chest.



Afghanistan vs Pakistan

Shadab Khan's all-round show help Pakistan to avoid clean sweep

Sharjah | Agencies

Stand-in captain Shadab Khan's all-round show powered Pakistan to a 66-run win over Afghanistan in the third T20I of the three-match series at the Sharjah Cricket Stadium on Monday, here.

This was Pakistan's consolation win in the T20I series as Afghanistan had already clinched the series by winning the first two matches by six and seven wickets, respectively.

Shadab Khan was awarded the player of the Match for his impressive all-round performance in the third game, scoring a crucial 28 off 17 and picking up three wickets in his four-over quota after conceding 13 runs.

After being asked to bat, Pakistan put up a commanding



total of 182/7 courtesy 49 off 40 balls from young opening batter Saim Ayub and cameos from Shadab (28) and Iftikhar Ahmed (31).

For Afghanistan, Mujeeb (2/28) was the pick of the bowlers, whereas Rashid Khan (1/31), Fazal Haq Farooqi (1/25), Fareed Ahmad (1/28), Mohammad Nabi (1/32), and Karim Janat (1/32) got one wicket apiece.

In response, Afghanistan didn't manage to replicate the success of the first two games and fell short off 66 runs as they were bundled out at 116 runs in the 19th over.

Chasing 183 to win, Afghanistan batters for the first time in the series were never allowed to settle in by Pakistan's bowlers as the hosts lost wickets at regular intervals.

Women's National Football C'chip: Bhumika Mane strikes two in Maharashtra's big win

Haldwani | Agencies

Riding on a brace of goals by attacking midfielder Bhumika Mane, Maharashtra (WIFA) romped to a convincing 5-1 win against Mizoram in the opening Group-II league match of the Hero 27th Senior Women's National Football Championship 2022-23, here on Tuesday.

In the other matches of the same group, fancied Kerala blanked Pondicherry 6-0, while Uttarakhand and Chandigarh played out a goalless draw.

In other matches on Tuesday, Telangana handed a 6-0 defeat to Haryana while Sikkim held Punjab 1-1.

Earlier, besides the efforts of junior international Bhumika, the entire Maharashtra team produced a solid collective performance to make a bright win-



ning start in the match played at the IGIS Complex.

The Sanaya Anklesaria-coached Maharashtra team opened the scoring in the 14th minute through Sapna

Rajpure's strike to gain ascendancy. Maharashtra doubled the lead when Arya More found the back of the Mizoram net in the 36th minute.

Maharashtra continued to press forward and Bhumika did well to score the third goal in the second minute of the additional period and give her team a commanding 3-0 cushion at the break. On resumption, Mizoram showed signs of fighting back and cut the deficit with Deborah Lalenui scoring their lone goal in the 52nd minute. Maharashtra continued to search for goals and Sanika Patil struck the fourth goal in the 55th minute before the energetic Bhumika was once again on target with the fifth goal to complete the winning tally. The Maharashtra women will meet Pondicherry in the second group match on Friday (Mar 31).

France edge Ireland, the Netherlands win ten-men Gibraltar in Euro Qualifiers

Berlin | Agencies

Benjamin Pavard's goal saw France edge Ireland to lead Group B in a tough Euro 2024 qualifying fixture in Dublin, while the Netherlands and Hungary claimed victories in less stressful encounters.

Pavard's strike from distance in the 50th minute ensured Les Bleus two straight wins in their qualifying campaign. The 2022 FIFA World Cup runners-up were restricted to few chances in the opening half, but Pavard cut out a Josh Cullen pass just outside the Ireland area before arrowing a strike, reports Xinhua.

The Netherlands bounced back after being thrashed by France on Friday as they won 3-0 over Gibraltar. Memphis Depay's header in the 23rd minute gave the hosts a deserved lead midway



through the first half, before Nathan Ake nodded in a second four minutes after the restart.

Gibraltar suffered the majority of their second half with only 10 players on the pitch after Liam

Walker was sent off for a high challenge on Netherlands debutant Mats Wieffer. Ronald Koeman's team capitalized on their numerical advantage later on as Ake got his second of the game

in the 83rd minute. Estonia took a first-half lead in Linz against Austria in Group F, but Florian Kainz responded with his first international goal and Michael Gregoritsch scored the winner for Austria in the second half. Sweden celebrated a 5-0 home success against Azerbaijan.

Moldova played out a goalless draw with the Czech Republic in Group E, while Poland earned a 1-0 home victory against Albania.

Hosts Hungary cruised to an eye-catching 3-0 win against Bulgaria to begin their Group G campaign. Hungary have won seven of its last eight Euro qualifier matches. In a contest between neighbors in Podgorica in Group G, Serbia overcame the hosts Montenegro, as Juventus forward Dusan Vlahovic struck twice in the closing stages.

WORLD CUP SHOTGUN C'SHIP: INDIAN SKEET SHOOTERS BOW OUT IN QUALIFICATION STAGE

New Delhi: Indian skeet shooters bowed out at the qualification stage of both the women's and men's individual competition, at the ongoing International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) World Cup Shotgun Championship at Larnaca, Cyprus.

Raiza Dhillon was the best Indian finisher overall, shooting a score of 114 for a 16th-place finish in the women's skeet. London Olympics bronze medalist and six-time European champion Danka Bartekova of Slovakia won gold in the event. Among the other Indian women in the fray, Parinaz Dhalwal shot 108 for a 33rd place finish while Areeba Khan was further back in 40th with a score of 105, the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) informed in a release on Tuesday.

In the men's skeet, Angad Vir Singh Bajwa shot 116 to finish 33rd while Abhay Singh Sekhon was 74th with a tally of 108 hits. Man Singh shot 105 for an 86th-place finish.

Four of them, the pair of Raiza and Man and Areeba and Angad, will come back on Wednesday for the mixed team skeet competition.

GOLF: DIVYANSHU BAJAJ LEADS INDIAN CHALLENGE, LIES SECOND AT KGA CHALLENGE

Bengaluru | Agencies

India's Divyanshu Bajaj had a hole-in-one on the way to a blazing start of 7-under 65 that put him in second place on Tuesday after the first round of the 300,000-dollar KGA Challenge, the second of two European Challenge Tour events in the country.

The Indians enjoying home advantage had a good day as young Kartik Sharma and R Mari Muthu carded 6-under 66 each to be tied fifth while Aman Raj, eighth last week, and local lad Khalin Joshi shot 4-under 68.

Last week at the Black Bull Challenge, the first Challenge Tour event being played in India after 10 years, India's Om Prakash Chouhan emerged as the winner after a superb final two rounds.

Bajaj aced the Par-3 13th hole after starting from the tenth and was one shot behind the leader, German Michael Hirmer (64). Bajaj had an ace, six birdies and a bogey in his round of 65 and was tied second with Alex Fitzpatrick and Phillip Katoch.

The two Challenge Tour events have meant new opportunities for Indian golfers. Chouhan,



the winner last week, now has a card on the Challenge Tour. Also, with 300,000 dollars at

stake, there is a lot to play in terms of the Order of Merit on the PGTI Tour, from which the win-

ner gets a card to the Tour.

C. Muniyappa, Samarth Dwivedi and Varun Parikh of Gujarat carded 3-under 71 each to be tied 28th. M. Dharmaraj played 2-under 70.

"It's been a long time since I shot such a low score. I was playing well and performing consistently on the PGTI till 2019 just prior to the onset of Covid. But thereafter I had some health issues due to which I struggled on the golf course. I've addressed the health problems with some changes in my lifestyle such as restrictions in my diet. These changes along with my self-belief have helped me get my game back on track," said Divyanshu, who is yet to win on the pro Tour. "I was very stable from there on and kept the errors out of my game even though I missed a couple of birdie opportunities from 10 feet on the front nine," he added.

Leader Hirmer said, "I got off to a great start, my putter was really hot and I was in a nice flow this morning. I hit some good irons today and stayed patient. Last week I played well but didn't make my putts. It was nice to see some putts drop today."



'I had beef with people': **Priyanka Chopra**

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas has revealed the reason she left Bollywood and moved to working in the US. She said that she had "beef with people" and was pushed into a corner. She also revealed that she was not the happiest with the work she was getting from the Hindi film industry. Priyanka was speaking to Dax Shepherd on his podcast Armchair Expert and said that for the first time as she was feeling "safe" during their conversation.

Talking about her music career, Priyanka said Anjula Acharia of Desi Hits spotted her in a music video and called her up when she was shooting for 'Saat Khoon Maaf'. She asked if she would be interested in a music career in US.

"I was being pushed into a corner in the industry (Bollywood). I had people not casting me, I had beef with people, I am not good at playing that game so I kind of was tired of the politics and I said I needed a break," she said.

"This music thing gave me an opportunity to go into another part of the world, not crave for the movies I didn't want to get but I would require to schmooze certain clubs and cliques of people. It would require grovelling and I had worked a long time by then that I didn't feel like I wanted to do it," she added. "So when this music thing came I was like 'fu** it I am going to America'," she said.

She talked about all the stars she worked with from Pitbull, Will.I.Am to Pharell Williams and even met JayZ. However, when the music career did not work out, she quickly realised she was 'much better at my day job'. She then shared that someone suggested that she try out for acting roles in the US as well.

Which she did and eventually landed herself the lead role in 'Quantico' in 2015. After that, Priyanka was seen in big budget Hollywood releases such as 'Baywatch', 'Matrix: Revolutions', 'The White Tiger' and will be seen in 'Citadel' and 'Love Again'.

The actress reveals she left Bollywood because she was 'being pushed into a corner'



RELIGIOUS OUTFIT FILES COMPLAINT AGAINST TAAPSEE PANNU FOR HURTING SENTIMENTS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A complaint against Bollywood actress Taapsee Pannu, who is known for films like 'Pink', 'Blurr', 'Haseen Dillruba' and several others, has been filed for hurting religious sentiments after she donned a necklace with Goddess Lakshmi's sculpture paired with a revealing set of clothing as per the complainant.

The 'Manmarziyaan' actress had uploaded a picture and a video on March 14 from the ramp walk at Lakme Fashion Week held on March 12 in Mumbai. The religious outfit Hind Rakshak Sangathan has filed a charge against Pannu for violating religious emotions and spreading obscenity.

The allegation was made by Eklavya Singh Gaur, the convener of the Hind Rakshak Sangathan Indore, who is also the son of BJP MLA Malini Gaur. Police said that they received a complaint from Eklavya Gaur against actress Taapsee Pannu for hurting religious sentiments and the image of the religion.

Taapsee is yet to react or issue a statement on the legal action.



Urvashi Rautela steps out with Jason Derulo for a meal

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Urvashi Rautela was recently spotted with international star Jason Derulo. The 'Jalebi Baby' hitmaker is in India currently for his work commitments.

Urvashi and Jason will be soon seen together in an international music video 'Soniye' that is going to be released soon.

Urvashi donned a metallic silver sleeveless plunging neckline crop top, with strings attached at the back, along with black dazled pants and pointed flared toe pumps heels. The actress rounded up her look with diamond earrings. Urvashi poned off her look with a perfect high, sleek ponytail, blushed cheeks, and glossy lips.

Jason chose a cool sweatshirt along with black ripped jeans and sports shoes. He sported blue coloured hair. The duo posed together for the paparazzi with all smiles and posed for them happily.

I would love to work with Deepika Padukone: Nani

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Telugu superstar Nani, who is travelling to different cities to promote his film, 'Dasara', said that he would love to share screen space with Bollywood actress Deepika Padukone and will also explore an opportunity to work with Aamir Khan.

He told IANS: "I would love to work with Deepika Padukone as she is a marvellous actress and definitely if I get an opportunity and a right story, I would just love to be cast opposite her."

Nani is known for his work in Telugu films like 'Ashta Chamma', 'Ride', 'Bheemili Kabaddi Jattu', 'Ala Modalaindi', 'Pilla Zamindar', 'Eega', 'Yeto Vellipoyindhi Manasu', 'Yevade

Subramanya', and many more. e also hosted the second season of 'Bigg Boss Telugu', and got a lot of appreciation in the movie 'Jersey'.

As the actor talked about his special love for Bollywood, he shared that he wants to be part of a Rajkumar Hirani project.

He added: "The one Bollywood director I really want to work with will be Rajkumar Hirani. I am just fond of the kind of movies he makes."

Asked about his favourite Bollywood star with whom he would like to work, he said: "I just wish to work with Aamir (Khan)sir. I enjoy watching his movies," adding that he will also watch Ajay Devgn's 'Bhola'.



RAPPER BADSHAH: I ALWAYS LOVE SHOCKING PEOPLE

Durga Chakravarty | Mumbai

It wouldn't be wrong to call him number one as all his songs from 'Genda Phool', 'Paani Paani', 'Jugnu' to his latest 'Sanak' among many others have been chartbuster hits. Rapper Badshah says he loves to shock people and wants to bring madness into their life with his hip-swaying numbers. You've already made it big by being the number one musical artist, moving ahead where does Badshah see himself?

Talking to IANS, Badshah, who has even collaborated with "Prince of Reggaeton" J. Balvin with the song 'Voodoo', said: "Adding Madness to people's life. I always

love shocking people."

"Right when you think, this is it and you just raise the bar. That's what I love and that's what I'm always looking towards."

Too much swag is synonymous to Badshah, whose real name is Aditya Prateek Singh Sisodia.

Does it ever get tiring to put up an act?

"I have to be really convinced before putting a song out. That is why, even if it is tiring, I put all my energy and creativity into it. And before every show, I always Hug my team before going on stage," added the rapper, who is con-



sidered one of the highest-paid artists in the country.

Badshah, who is a big fan of Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan and coined his stage name from the actor's 1999 film 'Badshah', started his career in 2006. Since then he has belted out hits such as 'DJ Waley Babu', 'Kar Gayi Chull', 'Genda Phool' and 'Players' to name a few.

Asked if the creative satisfaction ever gets lost in the numbers game, Badshah said: "Sometimes, yes. It's actually a benchmark of where you are right now. But they should not define your music making process."

"They should not affect your

thinking process as an artist. But of course, it helps you to know where you stand, not the numbers, but there are other stats as well," added the rapper, who was seen performing in Bhubaneswar for Seagram's Royal Stag presents Royal Stag Boombox, a first-of-its-kind musical experience.

"Like I love Bhubaneswar because I get a lot of love from this place. This is a fact that I came to know because of these stats. You use them to your advantage probably," said Badshah, who has appeared in Forbes India's Celebrity 100 in 2017, 2018 and 2019 as one of the highest-paid celebrities in India and as the only rapper in the list.



Eshanya S Maheshwari