

Plot to harm Salman Khan: Navi Mumbai cops say they infiltrated Bishnoi gang's social media groups



■ STATE TIMES NEWS

MUMBAI:The Navi Mumbai police infiltrated the social media groups, including WhatsApp, of the Lawrence Bishnoi gang before arresting four of its members for allegedly plotting to attack actor Salman Khan, an official said on Saturday.

The action comes months after the police made arrests in connection with a firing outside the actor's Bandra home in Mumbai.

Vivek Pansare, Deputy Commissioner of Police Zone II (Panvel), told the media that Panvel police station senior inspector Nitin Thackeray got inputs in September-October last year about a conspiracy to harm the actor.

A few Navi Mumbai police officers and informers then infiltrated WhatsApp and

other social media groups of the Bishnoi gang and began tracking the chatter on those platforms, he said.

The police said they learnt that the four arrested gang members had reseed Salman's farmhouse in Panvel, the area around his home at Bandra in Mumbai and places he visited for film shooting. There were even attempts to get weapons from abroad, he said.

After gathering inputs, cops in April registered a case against 17 persons, including Lawrence Bishnoi and his younger brother Anmol Bishnoi, police said.

Accused Dhananjay Tapesingh, alias Ajay Kashyap (28) was arrested from Panvel on April 28. The same day, Gaurav Bhatia, alias Sandeep Bishnoi, was taken into custody from

Gujarat, the official said.

While the third person Vaspi Khan, alias Waseem Chikna, was picked from Chhatrapati Sambhajanagar, Rizwan Khan, alias Javed Khan, was arrested from Bangalore, he said.

They have been booked under Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections, including 120-B (Conspiracy) and 506 (criminal intimidation), the official said.

Lawrence Bishnoi is currently lodged in the Sabarmati central prison in Gujarat's Ahmedabad, while Anmol Bishnoi is believed to be in the US or Canada.

On April 14, two bike-borne men fired multiple rounds outside Khan's home - Galaxy Apartments - in Mumbai's Bandra. The shooters, Vicky Gupta and Sagar Pal, were arrested from Gujarat.

Sonu Bishnoi and Anuj Thapan, who allegedly delivered weapons to the shooters, were nabbed later from Punjab. Thapan allegedly hanged himself in a police lock-up here on May 1. Mumbai police subsequently made more arrests in the case.

Landslides, waterlogging in Kerala as Southwest monsoon intensifies; IMD sounds red alert



hours, while an orange alert means very heavy rain of 11 cm to 20 cm, and a yellow alert means heavy rainfall between 6 cm and 11 cm.

Landslides and trees getting uprooted were reported at Poochapra and Kolappa areas, located in the interior of the hill district Idukki on Friday night.

Some houses and vehicles were damaged in the landslip, but no casualties were reported, locals said.

Crops were destroyed and interior roads, used by local families, were damaged as huge granite boulders fell down from the hill and blocked the pathways.

"We faced such a horror... Following the continuous heavy rains, a landslide happened. Granite boulders, huge stones and sand gushed down...We felt as if the trees were coming down by flying," a villager recalled his horrendous experience.

A family, who had been living in the hilly area, had a narrow escape as rocks fell upon their house. They were later shifted to a safer place, local people added.

Traffic restrictions were put in place along Thodupuzha-Puliannala state highway due to the possible threat of mud-slides.

As five shutters of the Malankara Dam in Idukki

were raised, district authorities advised those living on the banks of Thodupuzha and Muvattupuzha rivers to exercise caution.

With various parts of the neighbouring Kottayam district receiving down-pour, people living close to Meenachal and Manimala rivers were also urged to remain vigilant.

Incessant rains that battered several parts of Kottayam for hours since Friday evening caused waterlogging and traffic snarls. While Vadavathoor region received 100 mm rainfall on Friday night, the urban areas of Kottayam got 99 mm, authorities said.

Though the port city of Kochi received moderate rains, Aluva region of Ernakulam experienced intense rains since May 31 night.

The central district of Thrissur has been experiencing intense downpours since this morning, leaving people stranded at bus stops and railway stations in large numbers. Waterlogging and traffic snarls were also reported

in various parts of the city.

As per the latest radar imagery, a thunderstorm accompanied by moderate to intense spell of rainfall with winds gusting upto 40 kmph is expected in Thrissur, the met department said.

Authorities have urged people to be alert as inundation on major roads and poor visibility of vehicles may lead to traffic congestion. They also warned about flooding in many parts of low-lying areas and river banks. Non-essential movements may be restricted and people should remain at safe places, they added.

Southwest monsoon made an early onset over Kerala and northeastern region on May 30, setting the stage for the four-month rainy season crucial for India's agriculture-based economy.

According to weather scientists, cyclone Remal, which ripped through West Bengal and Bangladesh on Sunday, had pulled the monsoonal flow to the Bay of Bengal, which could be one of the reasons for the early onset over the north-east and Kerala.

Braving icy heights: Election at world's highest polling station

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

TASHIGANG (HP): Prem Lal arrived early at the sub-divisional magistrate's office on Thursday, the icy cold and crisp morning air hinting at the challenges ahead.

As one of the 29 booth-level officers deployed from Kaza to polling stations in Lahaul-Spiti district of Himachal Pradesh, Lal knew that the next few days would be demanding.

Wearing sunglasses to shield his eyes from the glaring sun, the trained graduate teacher joined others in a semi-circle. The SDM, carrying a bunch of papers clipped together, called out the names of the poll-booth officers and their assignments.

It is Tashigang for Lal and his team of five others. Tashigang is a tiny village perched high in the icy Himalayas at a staggering altitude of 15,256 feet. The village holds the distinction of hosting the highest polling station in the world.

Located near the India-China border; the Spiti valley is part of the Mandi Lok Sabha seat, one of the four parliamentary constituencies in Himachal Pradesh and the second largest in India. Bollywood actor Kangana Ranaut of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is up against the Congress's Vikramaditya Singh on the seat.

The polling station at Tashigang, serving 62 voters from Tashigang and Gete, has been made a model polling booth.

The hour-and-a-half-long journey to Tashigang, located on the other side of a mountain facing the SDM's office in Kaza, is as formidable as the landscape itself -- rugged terrain, narrow winding dirt roads and unpredictable weather.

Yet, for Lal and his team, the assignment carries a sense of purpose. In a place where the harsh environment shapes every aspect of life, facilitating the democratic process is both a "duty and an honour".

"I have been part of a team that conducted elections at Hikim (also in the Spiti valley), the second-highest polling station in the country, in the past. So I have some experience," Lal said, laughing as he walked to board a white Bolero car with an elec-



tronic voting machine (EVM) in his hands.

After a brief pause, he added, "Thoda dikkat to hoga (there will be some difficulties)," acknowledging the challenges ahead, especially for those unaccustomed to such a difficult terrain with no mobile connectivity and limited power supply.

But the polling preparations are meticulous.

"The team will get a satellite phone and runners will be deployed to relay polling data to the headquarters," Additional District Commissioner Rahul Jain told PTI. "The terrain is tough, but our teams are committed and we have made all the preparations," he added.

As the journey commenced, the paved road quickly gave way to a narrow and uneven dirt path. The brown hills on either side were dotted with white pools of snow, slowly melting in the sun. At some places, water from the melting snow accumulated on the dirt road, making it dangerous to drive through.

The landscape was breathtaking but completely desolate -- a few houses were visible only because of their bright colours against the brown hills. There is nothing for miles in between, and with no or very limited mobile connectivity, tourists frequently lose their way.

The yellow-coloured polling station with the tricolour painted on its front is perched high on a hill, bleakly empty.

There is barely any vegetation, barring wild grasses.

"Highest polling station of India, Tashigang - 72. Altitude - 4,650 metres," read a message painted in blue and white on the front wall.

"Swagatam. We heartily welcome all the voters to the world's highest polling station," is written in Hindi on the welcome board, adorned with colourful frills.

Death toll in Mizoram landslides rises to 29: Official

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

AIZAWL: The death toll in landslides in Mizoram climbed to 29 after the body of a 34-year-old woman was found in Tlawng River in Kolasib district, officials said.

The woman, identified as Vanlalruali, and her husband had been missing after being hit by a landslide in Aibawk village in Aizawl district on Tuesday.

The woman's body was found in the river in

Hortoki village in Kolasib district, which borders Assam, on Friday, they said.

Her body was taken to Kawnpui after being fished out of the river and her family members confirmed her identity.

Search for five other missing persons - four of whom are from Melthum, including a six-month-old, besides Vanlalruali's husband - is underway.

The deaths were reported

On reaching the polling station, a Gujarat police personnel accompanying the polling party stepped outside and tried calling home, only to find that there was no network.

"Lag nahi raha hai (the call is not going through)," Takor Mahtoiji chuckled, tension replacing the smile on his face.

"This is the first time that I have scaled such heights. Temperatures here are bone-chilling for someone who is not used to such cold conditions. I did not carry warm clothes and bought new ones after reaching Kaza," Mahtoiji said.

Kumar Prince, the micro-observer for the election at the Tashigang polling station, is a bank clerk from Bihar's Muzaffarpur.

"Temperatures are reaching 50 degrees Celsius in other parts of the country. Here, it is a different world. I hope everyone has got enough warm clothes," he told PTI.

"It is a special and important task we have been assigned. If we do not make people in inaccessible terrains part of this process, how can we tell the world that we are the biggest democracy?" Prince said.

During the summer months, temperatures in Tashigang range from 5 to 20 degrees Celsius. But the mercury can drop due to sudden changes in weather.

On May 30, snowfall welcomed the polling party and security personnel, with temperatures dropping to minus 5 degrees Celsius at night.

Winters are harsh and inhospitable, with temperatures dropping as low as minus 35 degrees Celsius. The hills remain buried in snow and the sole dirt road connecting Tashigang to Kaza is closed, confining families to their mud-and-brick homes for six months, said Tanzin Takpa (54), a resident of Tashigang.

"A pregnant woman had to be carried on a yak to the hospital in Kaza at the time of delivery in February. She was

lucky," he said.

There is no hospital, clinic, school or market in Tashigang. The residents travel to Kaza, around 30 kilometres away, for medical and other needs, Takpa said.

The low oxygen concentration at high altitudes can lead to breathing issues. The icy-cold conditions pose a challenge to those arriving in higher hills. Adapting to the local environment could take days, if not weeks, said Kalzang Namgial (40).

This is the fourth time that voting will be conducted at Tashigang, which has been in the record books since 2019 as the highest polling station in the world.

In November 2022, all the eligible voters here exercised their franchise in the Assembly poll despite the immensely-cold conditions, Jain told PTI.

The one-storied polling station has two rooms on each side, recently painted bright yellow.

A vehicle carried blankets and mattresses for the polling team and security personnel. Women working with the state's public works department helped unload it.

On the ground floor, men and women PWD workers prepared tea and dinner for the polling team and security personnel.

A pink-and-white tent has been pitched on one side of the polling station as a sitting area for the voters.

A young woman decorated

the polling rooms with colourful balloons. She did not look like a local resident.

Gaira Raba, a tourist from Israel, travelled to Tashigang to volunteer.

"I have been in India for a month. I came to the Spiti valley a few days ago where I got to know it houses the world's highest polling station. People told me it is extremely difficult to reach this place and the climatic conditions are very harsh. I could not miss seeing something so amazing. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," Raba told PTI.

Lanzom (18), the youngest voter in the nearby Kee village, lent Raba a helping hand.

"Seeing the polling team facilitating the election process in such harsh climatic conditions strengthens one's trust in democracy. We do not have hospitals, schools, paved roads and permanent jobs, but we have a polling station that is the highest in the world. This is our opportunity to let the government know what we want," she said.

On voting day on Saturday, the entire polling team and the voters donned beautiful traditional Chuba attire.

A lunch was organized for the voters.

They took selfies at a selfie point set up against the backdrop of brown hills and a bright blue sky.

"My vote, my right," it says, capturing the spirit of democracy in this remote corner of India.

SC to hear on Jun 3 Delhi govt plea seeking direction to Haryana to release surplus water

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a Delhi government plea seeking a direction to Haryana to release surplus water provided by Himachal Pradesh to the national capital to mitigate its ongoing water crisis.

According to the cause list of the apex court, a vacation bench of justices P K Mishra and K V Viswanathan is likely to hear the matter.

The plea filed by Delhi's Water Minister Atishi has made the Centre, the BJP-governed Haryana and the Congress-ruled Himachal Pradesh parties to the petition, saying that access to water is essential for survival and is one of the basic human rights.

"Access to water is one of the basic human rights of an individual. Not only is water essential for sustenance, but access to water also forms an essential component of the guarantee of dignity and a quality of life guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution," the plea said.

"The current water crisis, which may only get worse given peak summers and



ongoing water shortage, violates the right to a dignified and quality life of the people of the NCT of Delhi, who are unable to access even adequate clean drinking water," it added.

The plea has sought a direction to the Haryana government for immediate and continuous release of water at the Wazirabad barrage, including but not limited to the full surplus water provided by the Respondent No. 2 (Himachal Pradesh) for the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi, in order to mitigate the water crisis in the NCT of Delhi.

The city government said it was constrained to file the plea on account of acute shortage of water being faced by the citizens due to the ongoing severe heat conditions in north India, particularly Delhi.

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: The government has reduced windfall tax on domestically-produced crude oil to Rs 5,200 per tonne from Rs 5,700 with effect from Saturday.

The tax is levied in the form of Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED).

SAED on the export of diesel, petrol and jet fuel or ATF, has been retained at

'nil'.

The new rates are effective from June 1, an official notification said.

India first imposed windfall profit taxes on July 1, 2022, joining a host of nations that tax supernormal profits of energy companies.

The tax rates are reviewed every fortnight based on average oil prices in the previous two weeks.

The city government said it has sought the direction as a one-time measure and not filed the plea for resolving any outstanding inter-state water dispute.

"The Petitioner is praying for the said relief of release of surplus water only as a stop-gap arrangement to remedy the current crisis till such time the monsoon season arrives and the temperature of the city goes down... thereby reverting the situation to normal," it said.

"Without prejudice to the inter-federal rights of Delhi, especially as a lower riparian state to shared water resources, the plea is filed only because of the unprecedented surge in temperature, which has triggered a surge in the demand for water," it said.

Such an excessive and unanticipated demand has precipitated an emergency in the form of a full-fledged water and sanitation crisis and has necessitated an emergent solution, the plea said.

In order to deal with the demand in summer

months, the Delhi government has devised a solution under which Himachal Pradesh has agreed to share its surplus water with Delhi, the petition said.

"Since Himachal Pradesh does not share boundary with Delhi, the surplus water released by it has to be transported through the existing water channels in Haryana and released to Delhi at the Wazirabad barrage," it said, adding that Haryana's facilitation and cooperation, which is not being provided as on date, is, therefore, imperative.

"It is also necessary to point out that presently, the water levels in the Sonia Vihar and Bhagirathi barrages, which constitute the other primary sources of water for the NCT of Delhi, are operating at their optimum level and meet the stipulated standards, therefore, any increase in water supply can only be considered at the Wazirabad barrage," it said.

The national capital has been facing a severe water shortage and Atishi has accused Haryana of not releasing Delhi's share of water.