Austria marks 80 years since annexation by Hitler

VIENNA, MARCH 12 /--/ Austria today marks the 80th anniversary of its annexation by Nazi Germany, with the country's President Alexander Van der Bellen urging young people not to be "taken in" by neo-fascist and far-right ideologies. On March 12, 1938, Adolf Hitler ordered 200,000 soldiers, SS officers and police to invade Austria, his native country, subsequently declaring its "Anschluss" or annexation by the Third Reich. A "Day of Commemoration" will be held on Monday to mark the events of 1938 that changed the course of Austrian history and served as a prelude to World War II. Asked in an interview with the Kurier daily what future generations could learn from the Anschluss, van der Bellen replied: "Not to be taken in." People should not take "peaceful cohabitation, co-determination and stable political conditions for granted," he warned. "These things can change." Van der Bellen -- a former leader of the environmentalist Greens who in late 2016 beat an anti-immigration candidate in a polarising and nail-biting presidential election -- said minorities enjoy better protection today. "They can't be outlawed at the stroke of a pen as they could then by a majority. If that weren't the case, the state could be immediately turned into a tyranny of the majority, as happened back then." Van der Bellen has repeatedly called for vigilance and for tolerance since a coalition government took power in December, headed by the 31-year-old conservative Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, with the leader of the far-right Freedom Party (FPOe), Heinz-Christian Strache, as his deputy. The FPOe, which counts former Nazis among its founders, is the oldest of the major right-wing nationalist and anti-immigration groupings currently on the rise in the European Union. FPOe politicians have repeatedly rejected neo-Nazism, racism and anti-Semitism since the party joined the ruling coalition. The party has also expressed its gratitude to "the Republic of Austria, democracy, parliamentarism and the rule of law". But the FPOe's position regarding the status of the Austrian state has long been ambiguous, with a strong current within the party -- particularly among student fraternities -- viewing Austria as part of a wider pan-German or "Greater German" identity.

Appearing on Austrian television alongside other leading politicians for the Anschluss commemorations, Strache said it was everyone's individual responsibility to remember "the National Socialist (Nazi) terror regime that murdered people on a large scale because of their religion, their origin and their political opinions." But since it joined the ruling coalition, the FPOe has found itself embroiled in a string of embarrassing controversies regarding its relationship to Austria's history. In January, for example, a leading FPOe candidate in regional elections quit the party because of a scandal over song lyrics praising the Holocaust. While Strache has been keen to clean up his party's image, other incidents have tarnished it, such as one FPOe member of parliament who declared in 2006 on television that "National Socialism also had its good sides".

Many events marking the Anchluss anniversary feature eyewitnesses of the time, while public debates will focus on the responsibility of Austria and everyday Austrians in Hitler's seizure of power. Talking about such issues in public was almost unheard of until the late 1980s, as Austria preferred to hide behind the status of Nazi victim that the Allies had officially conferred on it.

Such denial has prevented Austria from embarking on the very painful "Vergangenheitsbewaeltigung" or self-examination and coming to terms with the past that Germany has undertaken. Austrian conservatives began paving the way for Nazism as early as 1933 when they put an end to parliamentary democracy, then crushed the Social Democrats in 1934 and set up a one-party regime. In a country in the throes of an identity crisis following the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian empire, and in full economic slump, anti-Semitism flourished as early as the 1920s. "Everything had already long been ready by the time the Nazis arrived," Kitty Suschny -- who was just 13 in 1938 -- told a conference, recalling that a ban on "dogs and Jews" was imposed overnight in the grounds of Vienna's Schoenbrunn Palace. The persecution of Jews began in the early hours of the Anschluss. And on March 15, a euphoric crowd greeted Hitler in Vienna. An artistic installation will be unveiled Monday at the site where the dictator made his first speech after the annexation of the country. On Wednesday, Chancellor Kurz will ask his cabinet to approve a proposal for a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust to be erected in the centre of Vienna. (AFP)

CREATIVE WORLD

I won't work with Woody Allen again: Michael Caine

LONDON, MARCH 12 /--/ Veteran actor Michael Caine has joined the list of Woody Allen film alums who have vowed to never work with the director again in the wake of the allegations levelled against him by daughter Dylan Farrow. Caine, who won an Academy Award in 1987 for Allen's film "Hannah and Her Sisters" told The Guardian, "I am so stunned. I'm a patron of the NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) and have very strong views about paedophilia." The 84-year-old actor said that while he did not "regret working" with Allen when he did, he would not do so again. "I can't come to terms with it, because I loved Woody and had a wonderful time with him. I even introduced him to Mia (Farrow). I don't regret working with him, which I did in complete innocence; but I wouldn't work with him again, no," he said. Allen has long denied the allegations made by daughter Dylan, who is one of the star's three children with ex Mia Farrow. Dylan publicly claimed in 2014 that Allen molested her as a child. A number of celebrities have recently come out and expressed regret for working with the "Annie Hall" director, including Colin Firth, Timothee Chalamet, Mira Sorvino and Peter Sarsgaard. (PTI)

I can't wait to get married: Kaley Cuoco

LOS ANGELES, MARCH 12 /--/ "Big Bang Theory" star Kaley Cuoco says she cannot wait to get married to her "soulmate" Karl Brook. The duo got engaged in November on Cuoco's 32nd birthday and are currently busy planning their wedding. "We're totally going to get married. We are planning it. We are thinking about it. I can't wait. I don't want it to be much longer. That's the truth. I really can't wait. "We are so happy and in love. He is excited as I am, which is sweet. I finally found my soulmate, so we're ready to do it," she told E! online. Cuoco and Cook first sparked romance rumours in March 2016. A month later, Cuoco posted a cozy picture of her with her boyfriend on Instagram, saying, "That's what happy looks like." In September 2016, they made their relationship red carpet official. (PTI)

Hillary visits historical sites in MP's Mandu city

DHAR (MP), MARCH 12 /--/ Former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton today visited Jahaz Mahal and other monuments in the ancient Mandu city near here. Clinton, who is on a three-day visit to western Madhya Pradesh, took about two hours to go around some of the historical sites in Mandu, located 35 km away from the district headquarters. Sporting a hat and sunglasses, she came out of Jahaz Mahal, built during the rule of Mandu Sultan Ghiyas-ud-din Khilji, and told reporters that she enjoyed visiting the historical sites. "Well, today I'm just enjoying the magnificent archaeological site and learning a lot of the Indian history because of this beautiful palace ground. I am very excited about being here and everything that I have seen," she said. The magnificent Jahaz Mahal was built in second-half of the 15th century to accommodate women belonging to the royal harem.

It is located inside the walled Mandu fort. Clinton had lunch prepared by cooks who were brought from the Maheshwar town under a tent. She also visited other historical buildings in the vicinity, including the Hindola Mahal (swinging palace), Hoshang Shah's Maqbara (mausoleum) and Jama Masjid.She later left for Maheshwar town in Khargone district, where she will be staying tonight. Clinton, who was the Democratic Party's candidate for the 2016 US presidential polls, was scheduled to interact with children of a local school in the evening. She would also see the world renowned Maheshwari saree being weaved, an art started by Queen Ahilya Bai to help the downtrodden. Maheshwar was the capital of the erstwhile Malwa Holkar kingdom till January 6, 1818. After this, Indore was designated as the capital under the reign of Malhar Rao Holkar III. Clinton is visiting Maheshwar on an invitation of Richard Holkar, the scion of the erstwhile Holkar kingdom. She would also go for a boat ride in the Narmada river, Khargone Collector Ashok Kumar Verma said. Tomorrow morning, she would leave for Indore from where she would fly to Jodhpur. (PTI)

Producers Moira Walley-Beckett and Miranda de Pencier hold the award for best drama series for "Anne" during the Canadian Screen Awards in Toronto, Ontario, Canada—REUTERS

Zayn Malik shares new song post 'unprofessional' leak

LONDON, MARCH 12 /--/ Singer Zayn Malik has shared a new song with his fans after "unprofessionalism" led to it leaking online.

The 25-year-old singer-songwriter took to his Twitter account to post a link to "Don't Matter (Remix)", which features August Alsina, but has said that it was not the song he was planning to release. "This was not a song I intended to put out, but due to unprofessionalism has been leaked by someone and my fans mean more to me than a stupid leak, so here it is free for you to enjoy, before my music drops," he wrote along side a link to the song.

The former One Direction star's announcement sent fans into a frenzy and soon after he shared the song his website crashed. August responded to the leak by tweeting, "Zayn, I'm sending an abundance of love to you! You are my brother, I am yours. I don't know how this happened but way to make lemons into lemonade. (PTI)

Space bases could preserve civilization in World War III: Elon Musk

WASHINGTON, MARCH 12 /--/ Bases on the moon and Mars could help preserve human civilization and hasten its regeneration on earth in the event of a third world war, billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk, has said. Musk, the founder of rocket and spacecraft company SpaceX, said the company's interplanetary ship could begin test flights as soon as next year. There is "some probability" that there will be another Dark Ages, "particularly if there is a third world war," Musk said at the SXSW conference. "We want to make sure that there's enough of a seed of human civilization somewhere else to bring civilization back, and perhaps shorten the length of the Dark Ages," he said. "I think a moon base and a Mars base that could perhaps help regenerate life back here on earth would be really important." Musk said he thinks that SpaceX's interplanetary ship will "be able to do short flights, short sort of up and down flights, probably sometime in the first half of next year." SpaceX launched the world's most powerful rocket, the Falcon Heavy, last month, sending Musk's red Tesla Roadster car toward an orbit near Mars. (AFP)

Record 250 entries for Desert Storm rally

NEW DELHI, MARCH 12 /--/ India's longest cross-country rally, Maruti Suzuki Desert Storm, will see a record participation in the upcoming edition with 250 competitors vying for top honours across categories from March 17-23 in the sprawling and arid expanse of the Thar Desert around Bikaner and Jaisalmer. The biggest attraction of the 2018 edition is the participation of several international riders in the Moto-Quad category. Coming off a welcome break after the gruelling Dakar Rally in January, Desert Strom will mark the beginning of a new season for the international riders. The top draws include three-time winner of the Desert Storm, C S Santosh, who achieved his career-best finish in 34th place in this year's Dakar, piloting a Hero-Speedbrain 450 Rally in the 14-day race across South America. He will be ridding the updated Dakar-spec bike in the sands of Rajasthan.

But it won't be easy for India's top rally-raid pilot with TVS Racing entering strong team of five riders, spearheaded by the formidable Juan Pedrero Garcia. The highly-experienced Portuguese rider finished in commendable 11th place in this year's Dakar Rally. He will be supported by the defending champion, R. Nataraj and highly-talented Tanveer Abdul Wahid, who was the highest ranked rookie finisher in third place in the last year's India Baja Dakar Challenge. The event will also see the participation of Dubai-based Angata Racing. The four-man motocross and supercrosss specialist team will be led by Aaron Mare. The team includes Indian rider Sanjay Kumar, who was in the front-running pack in the previous edition of the rally before being hit by mechanical issues in the dunes of Sam, Jaisalmer. In the Xtreme cars category, the spotlight will be firmly fixed on defending champion and four-time winner of Desert Storm, Suresh Rana. The driver from the Manali, who races for Team Maruti Suzuki Motorsports, is the undisputed king of cross-country rallying in India.

With close to two-decades of cross-country rallying experience behind him, Rana knows all too well that nothing can be taken for granted in the this race of high attrition rate. The presence of local favourite, Raj Singh Rathore with his intimate knowledge of desert driving and winner of last year's India Baja in the four-wheeler category, Gaurav Chiripal, will surely heat up the action in the scorching sand. Another past winner, Abhishek Misra, is capable of posing a serious challenge to the defending champion. The presence of an eight-man Team Army led by Lt. Col. Shakti Bajaj will also add spice to the proceedings. This year, the Desert Storm will be a lot more compact rally with the competitive stages looping around Bikaner and Jaisalmer, where the rally will be parked for four days. The competitors will be covering an approximate total distance of 2,500 km after the ceremonial flag off from Noida. Out of this the competitive timed section will comprise 900 km over 10 stages, which is almost three times the racing distance of the entire National Rally Championship. The 200 km stage in leg three and the 160 km special that will be run in the night as part of leg four in the dunes of Sam will be high points of the 2018 edition. The rally will run four different categories concurrently. The Xtreme cars and Moto-Quad categories will be an outright speed test in the competitive sections, while the Ndure category for four-wheel drive vehicles and the Explore categories will be run on the Time-Speed-Distance format. (PTI)