

absolute india

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IT raids at media group's premises across the country



Congress slams govt for IT raids

New Delhi: The Congress on Thursday slammed the government over IT raids on media houses and said that instead of protecting the nation, central agencies have now begun to act as poachers for intimidating the whistleblowers. Addressing a press conference, senior leader Abhishek Singhvi said, "The IT raid on Dainik Bhaskar highlights the dangerous, dismissive, and draconian nature of the BJP government."

► Criticising the government for "using ED and IT as weapons", former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister and Congress leader Digvijaya Singh took to Twitter and said "Hope promoters won't fear." Similarly, Bharat Samachar channel has gone on air to say the raid is an attack on free press.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Income Tax Department has conducted searches at offices of media entity Dainik Bhaskar and an Uttar Pradesh-based news channel Bharat Samachar in several locations across the country over alleged tax evasion.

According to people in the know, raids have been conducted at Bhopal, Indore, Jaipur and Ahmedabad premises of the Dainik Bhaskar group. Search operations also took place at the residences and offices of the promoters of the group and a few other employees.

According to sources, I-T department raids follow information of tax evasion and alleged cases of related party transac-

tions and instances of round tripping of funds. The department may have also laid its hand on a paper trail of bogus payments made to show expenditure in books of company.

Further, raids were also conducted in the office of Bharat Samachar, an Uttar Pradesh-based news channel. Search operations were conducted at its Lucknow office and the editor's residence.

Sources said the raids were based on

"evidence of tax fraud" by the channel.

The raids come at a time when both the media houses had recently put out reports critical of the government's handling of the coronavirus crisis, particularly the second wave of Covid that swept through India in April-May. The raids were raised in the Rajya Sabha by the opposition, which linked the crackdown to reports on Covid "mismanagement" by the government.

AGENCIES ARE FREE TO DO THEIR WORK: I&B MINISTER

Agencies do their own work, we don't interfere in their functioning. I would also like to say that facts need to be found before reporting about any incident. Sometimes lack of information is misleading."

Anurag Thakur, I&B Minister, India



CMs condemn action

Chief Ministers of Rajasthan and Delhi Ashok Gehlot, Arvind Kejriwal, former CM of Madhya Pradesh Kamal Nath and other political leaders also condemned the action of the taxmen in raiding the premises of a giant media house. Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee called it a brutal attempt to stifle democracy.

Pegasus project data

DALAI LAMA'S CLOSE AIDES HIT THE LIST

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The phone numbers of a top ring of advisers around the Dalai Lama are believed to have been selected as those of 'people of interest' by the government clients of Israeli surveillance company NSO Group. An analysis strongly indicates that the Indian government was selecting the potential targets, The Guardian said.

Other phone numbers apparently selected by Delhi were those of the former President of



the current Dalai Lama, 86, a globally acclaimed figure whose death is likely to trigger a succession crisis that is already drawing in world powers. Last year the US made it a policy to impose sanctions against any government that interfered with the selection process, The Guardian said.

The Dalai Lama, who has spent the past 18 months isolating in his compound in Dharamsala, is not known to carry a personal

PEGASUS IS A CONCOCTED HACK STORY: BJP

New Delhi: Hitting out at Amnesty International's role over the alleged snooping on prominent citizens using Israeli Pegasus spyware, the BJP on Thursday termed it a concocted hack story. The saffron party said that the global fishing expedition launched by a syndicate of media organisations put out a malicious report with no evidence.

Amnesty International Hits Out at 'False' Media Reports

New Delhi: Reports from some websites misquoting, mistranslating and misinterpreting a Hebrew statement issued by Amnesty International Israel on the Pegasus Project and its leaked database have been seized upon by the Modi government in an attempt to discredit the allegation that an official agency in India might have been snooping on journalists and opposition politicians. In a sharply worded official statement issued on Thursday afternoon it said: "Amnesty International categorically stands by the findings of the Pegasus Project, and that the data is irrefutably linked to potential targets of NSO Group's Pegasus spyware. The false rumours being pushed on social media are intended to distract from the widespread unlawful targeting of journalists, activists and others that the Pegasus Project has revealed." Amnesty International has said it will issue an English translation of the Amnesty International Israel statement shortly.



All allegations, all finger-pointing should be at the customer: Pegasus spyware seller

LONDON | Agencies

The maker of the powerful spy software allegedly used to hack the phones of various people around the globe says blaming the company is like "criticising a car manufacturer when a drunk driver crashes", the BBC reported.

A NSO spokesperson told BBC: "If I am the manufacturer of a car and now you take the car and you are driving drunk and you hit somebody, you do not go to the car manufacturer, you go to the driver. We are sending the system to governments, we get all the correct accreditation and do it all legally. You know, if a customer decides to misuse the system, he will not be a customer anymore. But all the allegations and all the finger-pointing should be at the customer." NSO Group is facing international criticism, after reporters obtained a list of alleged potential targets for spyware, including activists,



politicians and journalists. Investigations have begun as the list, of 50,000 phone numbers, contained a small number of hacked phones.

The Israeli company says its software is intended for use against criminals and terrorists and made available to only military, law enforcement and intelligence agencies from countries with good human rights records.

Company spokesman told BBC News: "we don't have any data of our customers in our possession and more than that, the customers are not related to each other, as each customer is separate. Since the beginning of the company, we didn't have 50,000 targets total."

Paper snatched from IT Minister in RS

New Delhi: Even as IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw was reading a statement on the Pegasus project amid an ongoing row over alleged large scale snooping involving politicians, Trinamool Congress MPs snatched the report from the Minister's hand and tore it into pieces on the floor of the Rajya Sabha on Thursday. Trinamool MP Shantanu Sen was seen on national television snatching the report right out of the Minister's hand, tearing it apart and then throwing the shredded pieces into the air.

the Tibetan government-in-exile, Lobsang Sangay, the staff in the office of another Buddhist spiritual leader, the Gyalwang Karmapa, and several other activists and clerics who are part of the exiled community in India, the report said.

The data may provide a glimpse at the delicate relationship between Tibetan exiles and the Indian government, which has provided refuge for the movement since its leaders fled a Chinese crackdown in 1959, while also viewing it as leverage -- and sometimes a liability -- in its own relationship with Beijing, The Guardian said. It also highlights the growing urgency of the question of who will follow

Farmers begin 'Kisan Sansad' at Jantar Mantar

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A group of 200 farmers reached the Jantar Mantar amid multi-layer security on Thursday to launch their agitation against the three Central farm laws in the heart of the national capital.

On the first day of the 'Kisan

Sansad', the protesting farmers held discussions on the Mandi Act, rollback of the three farm laws, besides demanding that MPs should discuss the farmers' issues during the ongoing Monsoon Session of the Parliament. Protesting farmer leaders said on Thursday that they intend to continue with the 'Kisan Sansad' at Jantar Mantar in the heart of the national capital till August 13, the day the ongoing Monsoon Session of the Parliament comes to an end. "We have selected a maximum of three persons from each farmer union. This time we are prepared to avoid any untoward incidents, like what happened on January 26. All the farmers will come to the protest site only in buses, and no personal vehicle is allowed. Moreover,

all those attending the Kisan Sansad will have identity cards issued by the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM)," said a protesting farmer.

Farmers are 'anndatas' of the land: Tikait



"Hooligans are the ones who have nothing. It is wrong to make such remarks for farmers. We are farmers, not hooligans."

FIR against Ex-Mumbai police commissioner

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Mumbai police have registered an FIR against senior IPS officer Param Bir Singh, five other police personnel and two more persons for allegedly demanding ₹15 crore from a builder to withdraw cases against him, an official said on Thursday.



Based on the builder's complaint, the case was registered at the Marine Drive police station in south Mumbai, he said, without specifying more details. Two of the builder's partners, Sunil Jain and Sanjay Punamia, have been arrested in the case, he said. According to the complaint, Jain and Punamia had conspired with police officials and demanded ₹15 crore from the builder to withdraw some cases against him, he said. The builder had named Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh along with others in his complaint, the official said.

4 killed as rains pound Maha, thousands marooned in coastal areas

Team Absolute | Mumbai

At least four persons were reported killed as torrential rains pounded Maharashtra on Thursday for the second time in five days, hitting the coastal Konkan and western parts severely, officials said.

Though Mumbai was largely spared, heavy rains lashed coastal districts of Thane, Palghar, Raigad, Ratnagiri, and Sindhudurg and the western districts of Satara, and Kolhapur. Pune, Nashik, Aurangabad, Parbhani, and Solapur also saw torrential rain, with the state deploying the NDRF, the SDRF, and Indian Coast Guard boats and helicopters, while Indian Navy teams were kept on standby. Several towns and cities like Bhiwandi, Badlapur, Ulhasnagar, Kalyan, Dombivli, Chiplun, Khed, Savantwadi, Mangaon, Mandangad, Kudal, Mahad, and others were inundated in three to six feet water, and higher in some low-lying



areas. Flood waters rushed into shops, offices, homes and ground floor flats, while around half a dozen homes were damaged or collapsed, many big and small vehicles were fully submerged or washed away, and people remained trapped in their homes for hours. While one person was reported to be killed in Raigad, three others lost their lives in Palghar in rain-related incidents, details of which were awaited. Several big and small rivers, dams, lakes ponds and other water bodies in these districts were above the danger levels or overflowing, and the situation worsened with dams discharging excess waters, inundating roads, railway lines bridges, agricultural farms, and fields.

108-year-old dies before SC agrees to hear case he filed over 50 years ago

► Sopan Narsinga Gaikwad, 108, died before the top court admitted his appeal in the matter, which he had been pursuing since 1968. The land dispute had remained pending at the Bombay High Court for 27 years, before it was dismissed. A bench of Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and Hrishikesh Roy, on July 12, issued notice in the matter.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

He pursued a land dispute for over five decades, more than half of his life, but died before he could see the legal battle, which he had fought vigorously, reach its finality in the Supreme Court.

Viraj Kadam, counsel appearing on behalf of Gaikwad, submitted there is a delay of 1,467 days and 267 days, respectively, in



moving the top court against the orders dated October 23, 2015 and February 13, 2019. Kadam contended that the delay may be understood in a proper perspective, as the petitioner was over 100 years and belongs to a rural area of Maharashtra and the delay has

also been added to by the intervening onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The top court noted that the petitioner is 108 years old and also, the high court did not examine the merit of the case, and dismissed it due to non-appearance of the advocates.

It said that the decree which was passed by the trial court was reversed by the first appellate court and the second appeal before the high court was pending since 1988.

The Case:

In 1968, Gaikwad had purchased a plot of land through a registered sale deed. He later learnt that the plot was already mortgaged to a bank, as the original owner had taken a loan on it. The bank had issued notice to Gaikwad in connection with attachment of the property, after the original owner defaulted on the loan. Gaikwad moved the trial court against the original owner and the bank, saying that he is a bona fide purchaser of the land, and that the bank should be asked to recover the loan by selling other properties of the original owner. The trial court passed a decree in his favour on September 10, 1982. The original owner moved the first appeal after which the decree was reversed in 1987.

After quitting as CM, will tour state to build BJP: Yediyurappa

BENGALURU | Agencies

Hours after hinting that he would resign, Karnataka Chief

Minister B.S. Yediyurappa on Thursday said that he would continue to tour the state and ensure the BJP retains Karnataka in the 2023 Assembly polls and also wins 25 seats in 2024 General Elections.

Yediyurappa told reporters that there is no message from party high command yet on anything. "I am still awaiting for their directions on July 25 (Sunday evening). Everything will be cleared on that day (Sunday)," he said, adding that he will abide by the party high command's decision.

He added that he was mentally prepared for both scenarios (continuing as well



as resigning from the CM's post) as everything depends on the party's decision on July 25.

He reiterated that he had offered to quit almost two months ago itself, which is known to everyone (his June 6 statement). "That day (June 6), I had offered to quit. I have neither placed any demand nor suggested any name for the CM's post. It is their choice," he said.



INDIA, CHINA TO SOON HOLD MILITARY TALKS TO RESOLVE BORDER ISSUES

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India and China will soon hold the 12th round of Corps Commander level talks at Chushul to iron out the agreement for the next phase of disengagement in Eastern Ladakh. Sources said that China had expressed their availability for military commander level talks on July 26, but India has asked for fresh dates as the Indian forces are occupied with Kargil Vijay Diwas events. Indian military delegates will meet to discuss disengagement at the friction areas such as Hot Springs, Gogra and the 900 sq km Depsang plains. The build-up in Depsang was not being considered part of the current standoff that started in May last year as escalations here took place in 2013. India has insisted during the recent military commander meetings to resolve all the issues along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).



"The initial attempt will be to resolve Gogra and Hot Springs. Finding a solution to Depsang might be tricky and take longer time," said an army officer familiar with the developments. It's been three months

since the 11th round of talks between the two countries. During the 11th round of Corps Commander level talks, the focus was on disengagement in the friction points like Gogra, Hot Springs and Depsang. On

February 20, Indian and Chinese military held the 10th round of dialogue to de-escalate tension along the LAC. China has been enhancing military infrastructure across the LAC. Looking at it, India has changed its posture towards China, and unlike its previous defensive approach that placed a premium on fending on Chinese aggression, India is now catering military options to strike back and has reoriented its military accordingly. India has reoriented around 50,000 troops whose main focus is on the disputed borders with China. This reorientation of the troops will lessen the number of soldiers dedicated solely to Pakistan, while at the same time, more acclimatised troops who can be shifted from the northern border to the western border with Pakistan will be available to Indian military planners. This gives the Indian defence establishment a higher level of maneuverability and flexibility vis-a-vis its neighbours.

CHIEF MINISTER CANNOT BREAK PROMISE MADE IN PRESS CONFERENCE, RULES DELHI HC



Team Absolute | New Delhi

In a significant judgment, the Delhi High Court on Thursday ruled that good governance requires that promises made to citizens by those who govern are not broken, as it held that the assurance/promise given by the Chief Minister is enforceable, both on the basis of the doctrines of promissory estoppel and legitimate expectation. A bench of Justice Pratibha M. Singh directed the Delhi government to decide, within six weeks, on an assurance given by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on March 29, 2020 to pay the rent of migrant workers in view of the Covid-19 pandemic. He had said if any tenant is unable to pay the rent due to poverty, the government would pay his/her rent on their behalf. The court made it clear that the assurance is not a political promise, as is sought to be canvassed before it, and it was also not made as a part of an election rally, and is rather a statement made by the Delhi Chief Minister. It added that there is a reasonable expectation on behalf of the citizens that the Chief Minister knows the background, and the number of people who would be affected by the same as also the financial implications of such a promise/assurance, in the context in which it was made.

Amarinder Singh agrees to attend Sidhu's 'coronation'

Chandigarh | Agencies

Just a day ahead of his 'coronation', Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Thursday extended an invite to all lawmakers for tea on Friday and then attend the ceremony of the new state Congress team taking charge led by Navjot Singh Sidhu. "Punjab CM Capt Amarinder Singh has invited all Punjab Congress MLAs, MPs and senior party functionaries at Punjab Bhawan for tea at 10 a.m. on Friday. They will all then go to Punjab Congress Bhawan together from there for the installation of the new PPCC team," Chief Minister's Media Advisor Raveen Thukral informed in a tweet.



Sidhu sent an invite, signed by some 62 legislators, through working presidents, Kuljit Singh Nagra and Sangat Singh Gilzian, to the 'sulking' Chief Minister to attend the swearing-in ceremony.

23 Bodo militants, including top leaders, surrender in Assam



Team Absolute | Guwahati

Twenty-three militants of National Liberation Front of Bodoland (NLFB) led by their chief and other top leaders surrendered in Assam on Thursday. The 23 NLFB militants headed by their self-styled chief M. Batha laid down their arms to Assam Minister for Information and Public Relations and Parliamentary Affairs, Pijush Hazarika, at a function at Lalpani in Udalguri district in western Assam. After welcoming the Bodo militants into the

mainstream, Hazarika said that in response to the appeal of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, the leaders and members of NLFB, including Batha, have finally returned home. Batha, who was an expert sharpshooter in the now disbanded National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), had formed the new extremist group -- NLFB -- to revive insurgency in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) in western Assam. The National Investigation Agency had announced a Rs 10 lakh bounty on Batha.

UP CONGRESS CHIEF HELD IN LUCKNOW AFTER CLASH WITH COPS



Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Congress chief Ajay Kumar Lallu and several leaders were arrested following a clash between party workers and the police in Lucknow on Thursday. Congress legislature party leader Aradhana Mishra was put under house arrest. The Congress leaders were on their way to Raj Bhawan to submit a memorandum on the Pegasus spyware row when a clash broke out with the police. Ajay Kumar Lallu was earlier in the day placed under house arrest by the police. Lallu, however, joined Congress workers on foot as they took out a march from Parivartan Chowk to demand a judicial probe into the Pegasus spyware issue. The police tried to stop Ajay Kumar Lallu but this led to a clash between party workers and the police. The arrested party workers have been taken to Eco Garden. Talking to reporters, the state Congress president hit out at the state government and also accused the centre of not respecting the privacy of people.

Former CBI Chief Alok Verma added to Pegasus list after being sacked

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Pegasus leaked list contains numbers of former CBI Director Alok Verma and his family, and of Rakesh Asthana, against whom the CBI had filed a case. The Wire reported. Eight of those phones were forensically confirmed by Amnesty International's tech lab to have been successfully compromised by the military grade spyware that its Israeli vendor, NSO Group, says it sells only to "vetted governments". Two other phones showed signs of targeting. Along with Verma, the personal telephone numbers of his wife, daughter and son-in-law would eventually get placed on the list too, making it a total of 8 numbers from this one family. The Wire report also added to the list of numbers at the same time as Verma were two other senior CBI officials, Asthana and A.K. Sharma. The report said like the erstwhile Director, both men were added on to the database about an hour after their former boss. Asthana was also removed from the CBI on the night of October 23, 2018, and is currently head of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). Sharma was divested that night of the crucial charge he held - head of the policy division - but remained in the CBI till January 2019,



when he was transferred out. He retired from government service earlier this year. The numbers of Asthana, Sharma, Verma and his family members figure in the leaked database for a short period. By the second week of February, 2019, by which time Verma had finally retired from government service, this entire cluster of persons ceased being of interest to the government agency which had added them to the list. The midnight coup in the CBI came barely two days after Verma ordered the filing of a criminal case against

Asthana, then special director in the Bureau, accusing him of corruption. The report said Verma's petition in the Supreme Court, filed a few days after his dismissal, sheds some light on the reason for his own sacking. "Certain investigations into high functionaries do not take the direction that may be desirable to the government," he said, adding: "Not all influence that is exercised by the political government would be found explicitly or in writing. More often than not, it is tacit, and requires considerable courage to withstand."

Frame charges against Kamat, Alemao in money laundering case: Goa court

Team Absolute | Panaji

A Goa trial court on Thursday directed the prosecution to frame charges against two former Chief Ministers, Digambar Kamat and Churchill Alemao in connection with a money laundering case involving a US-based firm Louis Berger filed by the Enforcement Directorate in 2015. Special judge Sherin Paul in her order has said that charges should be framed against the duo, while also directing Kamat and Alemao to appear before the Court on July 26. Kamat is currently the Leader of Opposition, while Alemao is the sole Nationalist Congress Party MLA. The development comes at a time when the state is headed for state

assembly polls, scheduled for early 2022. Kamat, who was chief minister of a Congress-led coalition government from 2007-2012 and Alemao, who served as a Public Works Department Minister in Kamat's cabinet are both accused of allegedly accepting a \$976,630 bribe in 2010 from officials of the New Jersey-based Louis Berger consultancy firm to secure implementation rights of a multi-billion dollar water and sewerage project in Goa worth Rs 1,031 crore funded by the Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA). In 2015, the Enforcement Directorate had attached assets belonging to Digambar Kamat and his wife Asha, which were valued at around Rs 1.20 crore and that of



Churchill Alemao amounting to Rs 75 lakh in connection with the case. However, in October last year, in a reprieve to Kamat and Alemao, the Bombay High Court bench in Goa had set aside a 2015 Enforcement Directorate's asset-seizing order. Top Goa government officials linked to the JICA

project, as well as senior employees of Louis Berger have also been booked in the money laundering case. Kamat and Alemao have been charged with criminal conspiracy (120-b) 201 (tampering with evidence) of the Indian Penal Code and other sections of the Prevention of Corruption Act.



Team Absolute | Hyderabad

Amid heavy rainfall in Telangana and massive inflows from upper riparian states into Godavari and Krishna rivers, Chief Minister K. Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday instructed ministers and MLAs to

KCR DIRECTS MINISTERS, OFFICIALS TO STAY ALERT AMID HEAVY RAINS

remain in their districts to monitor the flood situation from time to time. Due to heavy inflows from the catchment areas, projects' gates have been lifted in the upper riparian states, leading to waters reaching into Telangana. Rao issued his directions to legislators especially in the constituencies through which these rivers flow. Likewise, he also directed Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) leaders and cadres to be available at the Telangana Bhavan

to monitor the situation. "Along with officials in the catchment areas, TRS leadership from gram sarpanch to the ministers should ensure that people are not put to any hardship," said the Chief Minister. As heavy rain forecast is there for the next two days, Rao suggested people not to venture out and exercise caution. The CM urged public representatives to be on high alert and take necessary measures.



'CAN'T HAVE TWO LEGAL SYSTEMS': SC NIXES BAIL OF BSP MLA'S HUSBAND

The Supreme Court on Thursday said India cannot have two parallel legal systems - one for the rich and the other for small men -- as it cancelled the bail granted to Govind Singh, husband of BSP's Madhya Pradesh MLA Rambai, in a murder case.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A bench of Justices DY Chandrachud and Hrishikesh Roy said: "India cannot have two parallel legal systems, one for the rich and the resourceful and those who wield political power and influence, and the other for the small men without resources and capabilities to obtain justice or fight injustice. The existence of a dual legal system will only chip away the legitimacy of the law." The top court took a serious view of apprehensions expressed by the Additional Sessions Judge, in his order dated February 8, 2021 of "the

machinations of a highly influential accused evading the process of law", and said that the Madhya Pradesh High Court failed in its duty to ensure that the sanctity of the criminal justice process was preserved. He bench added that the high court should examine the apprehensions expressed by the ASJ on its administrative side, so that if they are found to be true, necessary action should be taken in order to secure the fair administration of justice, and also charges made against the judge. "There is no gainsaying that the judiciary should be immune from political pressures and considerations. A judiciary that is susceptible to such pressures allows politicians to operate with impunity and incentivises criminality to flourish in the political apparatus of the state," it said. It further added that the duty also falls on the state machinery to be committed to the rule of law and demonstrate its ability and willingness to follow the rules it itself makes, for its actions to not transgress into the domain of "governmental lawlessness". "An independent and impartial judiciary is the cor-

nerstone of democracy. Judicial independence of the district judiciary is cardinal to the integrity of the entire system. The courts comprised in the district judiciary are the first point of interface with citizens. If the faith of the citizen in the administration of justice has to be preserved, it is to the district judiciary that attention must be focused as well as the 'higher' judiciary," Justice Chandrachud wrote in 33-page judgement. The bench said the Constitution specifically envisages the independence of the district judiciary. This is implicit in Article 50 which provides that the state must take steps to separate the judiciary from the executive in the public services of the state, it added. The bench said: "This compartmentalisation of the judiciary and executive should not be breached by interfering with the personal decision-making of the judges and the conduct of court proceedings under them." The top court said judges, while being undeterred in their commitment to follow the law and do justice, should be wary of launching into a diatribe against the state authorities without due care and reflection.

Run awareness campaign for system of Namantaran and Haq Tyag: CM

Intensive campaign will start against spurious milk
CM Chouhan holds discussion with Kisan Manch representatives

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that a massive awareness campaign should be launched to provide information to the general public about the new system established for undisputed transfers. A special Record Purification Week will be observed in the month of August for correction of errors in land related documents. No fee will be charged from the farmers for correction of errors made during computerization of records. Chief Minister Chouhan was discussing about day-to-day works related to revenue, agriculture, electricity, cooperative, animal husbandry departments with Kisan Manch officials at Mantralaya. Chouhan said that the revenue and registration departments should



establish a clear system in relation to mortgage with mutual coordination and a wide publicity campaign should also be launched regarding the provisions and arrangements for Haq Tyag. Machines for demarcation will be increased. Chief Minister said that instead of burnt transformers, transformers of additional capacity should be installed. Grievance redressal camps should be organized at sub-station level for redressal of power related complaints. Intensive campaign will be launched against

spurious milk in the state. Chief Minister Chouhan said that the Agriculture Department should provide necessary support to revenue in harvesting. Chouhan said that standard testing machines would be installed in the mandis of the state. Women engaged in cleaning of garlic and onions will be provided with facilities which are available to hamals. Serious complaints of cooperative institutions will now be investigated by the administrative officers. Key points of discussion between

CM Chouhan and Kisan Manch representatives include name transfer documents should be made available as soon as the registration is completed. Fauti Namantaran should be done by the patwaris as proposed by the village Panchayat within the time limit. The responsibility of entering records in the computer should be fixed with the Patwari only. The undisputed division of property should be done by the tehsildar on getting notarized on the basis of mutual consent. The errors made by the department in Khasra B-1 should be rectified by the department. The traditional paths of the fields should be marked on the map. RI and the patwaris should not be posted in the home tehsil. Patwaris should be authorized only for the work of revenue. Separate officers should be appointed for other work and protocol. Permission for ballast (gitti) mining on the hills should be given at such a place where it can be used for water collection after mining. All work dealings of cooperatives should be computerized and transparency should be maintained.

'Maharani' of erstwhile Panna royal family arrested

A property dispute between Rajmata Dilhar Kumari and her daughter-in-law Jiteshwari Devi has been going on for years.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The family dispute of erstwhile royal family of Panna princely state again took an ugly turn after Maharani of the 'Panna state' allegedly threatened to Rajmata with dire consequence. Maharani Jiteshwari Devi, 50, was arrested by police on Thursday. The police said that a case of giving threat and also under Arms Act was registered against Jiteshwari Devi, following a complaint of her mother-in-law Dilhar Kumari. Notably, a property dispute between Rajmata Dilhar Kumari and his daughter-in-law Jiteshwari Devi has been going on for years. The royal family lives in a different



portion of a 10 acre palace known as Raj Mandir Palace. The family owns properties in Panna, Lucknow Delhi, Mumbai, Bhopal and few other places in the country. The property disputes of the family have hit the headlines on many occasions in the past.

According to superintendent of police (SP), Dharamraj Meena, a case was registered in June, 2021 following the complaint of Dilhari Kumari. "One of the accused had already been arrested and

sent to jail on judicial remand. Today, we have arrested another accused and she will be produced in the court soon," Meena said. While talking to journalists, Jiteshwari Devi said that a false case was registered against her. "My husband has been suffering from illness. Therefore, people are taking advantage. It is a completely false allegation levelled against me," he told journalists while she was being taken to the police station from her palace.

CM PLANTS PARAS PEEPAL SAPLING AT MANTRALAYA PREMISES



Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Thursday planted a sapling of Paras Peepal at Mantralaya premises. Chief Minister Chouhan plants one sapling every day in adherence to his resolve for tree plantation. Paras Peepal is a plant of medicinal importance. It has yellow flowers. Its leaves and flowers are used in various medicines. It is also used to get rid of addictions.

Share proofs on Pegasus: MP BJP chief VD Sharma hits back at Kamal Nath

Challenging the Congress leader, Sharma said if he (Nath) has the courage he should bring to light all the details in public.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Dismissing any link between the Narendra government and the Israeli spy ware, Madhya Pradesh BJP president Vishnu Dutt launched a fierce attack on leader Kamal Nath for demanding an inquiry by a Judge into the case and said that Congress leaders are against the country and working to defame the Modi government. Sharma also challenged Nath that if he has the courage he should bring to light all the details available with him. "These are the people who lived in the country, but were always against it. Kamal Nath claims he would expose the BJP. Then where is the list and the pen drive? How does Kamal Nath always get lists, pen drives (related to controversial issues) and on what basis?" retorted Sharma, on Wednesday. Earlier in the day, the MP Congress chief termed the alleged snooping of politicians and journalists by the Israeli spy ware Pegasus as



the "biggest attack on the privacy" of people and demanded a probe into it by a sitting judge of the Supreme Court. He alleged that the spyware was also used for toppling the previous JD(S)-Congress government in Karnataka. When asked whether the spy ware was used when his own government was brought down, he said, "It could be the case as MLAs kept in Bengaluru resort used to take staff's phone to speak to him claiming their cellphones were being taped. I had said it was a government of sauda' (horse-trading)," alleged Nath. Challenging the Congress leader, Sharma said if he (Nath) has the courage he should bring to light all the details in public.

CM meets NABARD President

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NABARD Chairman GR Chintala called on Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan at Mantralaya on Thursday. During the meeting, he discussed about the new possibilities of work in various fields with the Madhya Pradesh government. Chouhan also released the book "Magnificent Marvels" and "NABARD in Madhya Pradesh" published by NABARD.

Chief Minister Chouhan held discussion with Chintala on the possibilities of NABARD working with the Madhya Pradesh government in the areas of rural development, micro irrigation, dairy development, getting more water from Sardar Sarovar Dam, solar power projects, strengthening of district cooperative banks etc. Along with this, discussion was also



held on effectively implementing the 'Ek Zila Ek Utpad Yojana' of Madhya Pradesh and strengthening the Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs).

5 days a week working to continue in govt offices till Oct 31

MP extends ban on bus services with Maharashtra till July 28

As per an order issued by MP's additional transport commissioner Arvind Saxena, the ban on bus services was further extended in view of the COVID-19 situation.

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The Madhya Pradesh government extended the ban on the movement of passenger buses to

Maharashtra till July 28. As per an order issued by MP's additional transport commissioner Arvind Saxena on Wednesday (July 21), the ban was further extended in view of the COVID-19 situation. The earlier order issued was applicable till July 21. The MP government suspended the bus operations with Maharashtra in March this year during the surge in coronavirus cases in the western state. The ban on buses with Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh has already been lifted by Madhya Pradesh. On Wednesday, Madhya Pradesh

logged 15 fresh coronavirus cases, which pushed the infection tally to 7,91,704. With no new fatality, the death toll in the state stood at 10,512, state health department said. Maharashtra on Wednesday reported 8,159 new COVID-19 cases and 165 fresh fatalities. The caseload has reached 62,37,755 while the death toll mounted to 1,30,918 in the state, as per official data. Meanwhile, the Madhya Pradesh government on Thursday extended the five-day week system in all government offices till October 31. "In view of the COVID-19

pandemic's prevention and as a precautionary measure, all government offices in the state will have five-day week functioning (Monday-Friday) till October 31," the official was quoted as saying by the news agency. The state government order to open the government offices of the state for 5 days in a week from Monday to Friday in connection with the protection from and prevention of Covid-19 epidemic will now be effective till October 31, 2021. Earlier this order was implemented till July 31, 2021.

One gets spiritual bliss by serving the needy: Governor

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Governor Mangubhai Patel has said that government service is a good opportunity to bring a smile on the faces of the underprivileged and the poor and get the spiritual pleasure of working. He said that there can be many means to attain material pleasures, but the most effective way to attain true contentment and inner peace is by serving the needy. Patel was receiving information regarding the activities of the Department of Women and Child Development at Raj Bhavan today.

Governor Patel said that according to the intention of the government schemes, people should be benefited, for this the information about the ground realities of the schemes should be continuously obtained. He asked the officials to undertake extensive tour of the area. The true nature of the plans of the department will be revealed only by the visit, which will be useful in making the plans more effective. He said that he himself would visit the rural areas. He said that maximum number of people should get the



benefits of the schemes. It is necessary for all of us to work together so that the effective way of implementing them may be better. The officers should maintain a lively dialogue with the employees on the problems faced during the work at the local level and the efforts made to solve them. Patel said that the root cause of the problem of malnutrition is neglect in the family towards the health of adolescent girls and pregnant women. Referring to the discussion with the doctor who studied the situation of different countries in relation to malnutrition, he said that if the deficiency of blood is taken

care of by checking the health of the woman during pregnancy itself, then the main problem of malnutrition in children, anaemia can be cured. Similarly, proper care of the health of the girl child during adolescence can also prevent many congenital diseases. He said that the girl child makes two houses. This is a well-known fact. Therefore, special emphasis should be given on the works of girl child education. After reviewing the status of primary, secondary and higher education, the sequence of drop out and resuming studies should be tracked. Patel told the officers, it is neces-

sary that special attention should be paid to the efforts of the department to awaken the eligible beneficiaries to get the benefits of the schemes. Special emphasis should be laid on efforts to eliminate the orthodox beliefs of the society regarding the birth of Divyang, malnourished children. Work should be done to make the last line workers of the department aware of the intentions of the schemes and their benefits in local dialects. He said that efforts to get society's cooperation in government schemes should be publicized widely. Along with making the thinking of the society progressive, such programmes also increase awareness. Referring to the song prevalent among the carpet weavers in the tribal areas of Gujarat, he said that the song has been composed by the women of the community, which is the method of weaving carpets. The weavers weave the carpets while singing it. Songs are the way of storytelling, an effective way to inform, educate. Principal Secretary Women and Child Development Ashok Shah gave details of the activities of the department to the Governor.

"Sunnapuganugu is Online Exhibition at IGRMS

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Under its series of online exhibition Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya on Thursday presented the "Sunnapuganugu," a traditional mechanical device for preparing binding mixture for construction work situated in the open air exhibition, Traditional Technology Park of Manav Sangrahalaya has been presented online with its basic information and photographs and videos.

About this exhibition, Praveen Kumar Mishra, Director, IGRMS said that Sunnapuganugu is a traditional mechanical device for grinding limestone and preparing a lime binding mixture used for joining bricks and stone in construction works. It is a circular stone track pit built by khondalite stone pieces which is considered to be most suitable for this track pit having heavy weight resistance. This circular track is 1 feet deep and 1 feet wide and 11 feet in diameter. The main crushing roller sunnapuganugu is made of sand stone and weight around 350 to 400 kilograms. This roller has a square shaped hole at the centre for fixing of wooden axle Polukarra. The ingredients required to make this binding mixture are mainly lime powder, sand, sugarcane jaggery, baef fruit (Aegle marmelos), tree silt, Aloe Vera (Aloe barbadensis miller), Harra (Terminalia chebula) etc. The process of mixing the ingredi-



ents is completed in two stages. In the first stage, lime powder is prepared in Sunnapubatti furnace for heating limestone. In this furnace, limestone is heated with coal in the ratio of 1:3. Limestone is converted into powder by the energy of coal in the furnace. About the Sunnapuganugu Pritam Choudhary, Museum Associate told that - In the second stage, lime powder and sand are mixed in the ratio of 1:3 by Sunnapuganugu and mixed with other essential ingredients like jaggery water, aloe Vera, fermented Harra and silt obtained from trees. By pulling the wooden axle with the help of bull or male buffalo, Sunnapurai is driven. The material gets crushed due to the weight of the wheel. Jaggery water and fermented Harra are added in the mixture after completion of every 10 round. The structures made from this mixture remain cool during the summer. In the historical period this binding mixture has been used for constructing many forts, wells, step wells, bridges, memory pillars and religious places etc.



BOMBAY HC REFUSES TO QUASH CBI'S FIR AGAINST ANIL DESHMUKH

Rejecting a plea by Deshmukh and the Maharashtra government, a division bench of Justice SS Shinde and Justice NJ Jamdar said that "it deserved to be dismissed."

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a setback to former Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh, the Bombay High Court refused to quash the CBI's first information report against him for the probe into the charges of corruption, here on Thursday.

Rejecting a plea by Deshmukh and the Maharashtra government, a division bench of Justice SS Shinde and Justice NJ Jamdar said that "it deserved to be dismissed."

The CBI had lodged the FIR against Deshmukh and other unknown persons on April 24, following a high court order for a preliminary enquiry on April 5.

Deshmukh's lawyer, Amit Desai also sought time for a stay on the verdict and to appeal against it, which was refused by the court. In his March 20 'letter-bomb' to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, Singh had alleged that Deshmukh had set a target of collecting Rs 100 crore per month from bars and restaurants



in Mumbai and other misdeeds, but the ex-minister had rejected the allegations. The high court on April 5 disposed off a bunch of petitions in this regard, including by Singh and by lawyer Jayshri Patil, directing the preliminary enquiry against Deshmukh, which led to his resignation and a massive political furore.

12 BJP MLAS SUSPENDED FROM MAHA ASSEMBLY FOR ONE YEAR MOVE SC

New Delhi: A plea has been moved in the Supreme Court by 12 BJP MLAs from Maharashtra, challenging their suspension from the Assembly on July 5 for one year for "abusing" and "misbehaving" with presiding officer, Bhaskar Jadhav. The suspended MLAs are: Girish Mahajan, Jaykumar Rawal, Ashish Shelar, Atul Bhatkalkar, Yogesh Sagar, Parag Alvani, Ram Satpute, Sanjay Kute, Abhimanyu Pawar, Narayan Kuche, Shirish Pimple, and Kirtikumbar Bagadia.

Terminating the action of suspension "motivated and mala fide", the plea argued that all the 12 were at different places and some of them were not in the chamber, and also some of them were not in the well of the house, and "were merely spectators". The MLAs also argued that heated exchanges between the ruling party and Opposition forms the essence of democracy. The MLAs have contended the presiding officer ought to have granted an opportunity to them to offer their explanation and the suspension for one year was highly disproportionate. The chaos began when senior NCP minister Chhagan Bhujbal stood up to introduce a resolution in the Assembly seeking the release of empirical data on the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) by the Centre for providing political reservation to the community in the local bodies in the state. Among the legislators suspended for one year include at least three former ministers, and after the suspension, Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnavis led a noisy walkout. Fadnavis raised objections saying the government did not follow the Supreme Court directions for 15 months which led to the scrapping of the political reservations for the OBCs.

Fully vaccinated people should be allowed to go out: Pawar

The Maharashtra deputy chief minister's statement comes at a time when the number of fresh Covid-19 cases remains high in the state. On Wednesday, Maharashtra recorded 8,159 Covid-19 new cases and 165 deaths.

Team Absolute | Pune

Maharashtra's deputy chief minister has said that people who have received both the doses of coronavirus disease (Covid-19) vaccine should be allowed to go out. Pawar also said that he will discuss the matter with chief minister Uddhav Thackeray soon.

"In my opinion those who have received two shots of Covid-19 vaccines should be allowed to go out, in a phased manner. I will speak with the CM on this subject in the next two days," the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader said on Wednesday.

Pawar also said that people of Maharashtra are coming out to take the vaccine and there is no hesitancy.

The state government has already given certain relaxations in the Covid-19 curbs as the spread of the infection has slowed down. However, Pawar did not specify what



'going out' meant.

He refused to accept the fact that vaccination pace has slowed down in pockets of Maharashtra. Pawar said it depends on the availability of the vaccines and it is the Union government which supplies them. "The CM in every video conference with the prime minister raises the demand for supply of vaccine doses in proportion with the state's population," said Pawar. The Maharashtra deputy chief minister's statement comes at a time when

the number of fresh Covid-19 cases remains high in the state. On Wednesday, Maharashtra recorded 8,159 Covid-19 new cases and 165 deaths. The total number of Covid-19 patients in Maharashtra reached 6,237,755, of which Mumbai's share is 732,582.

The state government reconciled the Covid-19 death toll on Tuesday, which pushed the country's death toll to 3,998 in a single day. Out of this, 3,509 fatalities were from Maharashtra.

Fadnavis welcomes ACB inquiry in Jalyukta Shivar projects

The Maharashtra government had on Wednesday ordered an inquiry by the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) in 900 work orders under the Jalyukta Shivar, which was the flagship scheme of the Fadnavis-led BJP government in 2014-19

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnavis on Thursday welcomed the MVA government's decision to order a probe into Jalyukta Shivar, a water conservation scheme promoted by him during his tenure as the chief minister.

The Maharashtra government had on Wednesday ordered an inquiry by the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) in 900 work orders under the Jalyukta Shivar, which was the flagship scheme



of the Fadnavis-led BJP government in 2014-19.

Speaking to reporters, Fadnavis said, "I welcome the decision to probe the 950 works in Jalyukta Shivar scheme. During my tenure, I had already given similar probe orders into 600 works. These schemes were implemented under district collectors, with an average cost of Rs 1 lakh to 1.25 lakh. Some seven departments in a collectorate were involved in the scheme."

Earlier on Wednesday, state water conservation minister Shankarrao Gadakh said 900 projects that had violated guidelines and where the quality of work was inferior will face an open ACB inquiry.

Further, district collectors would conduct inquiry into some six lakh other works sanctioned under the scheme and check the quality of the work and if the procedures were followed or not, Gadakh had said. The Jalyukta Shivar scheme, pushed in a big way by the BJP-led government, focused on the construction of farm ponds, weirs on channels and streams as well as river-bed cleaning and widening. It also faced allegations of corruption and "non-scientific" approach to water conservation.

Develop Pune as electric vehicle hub, MCCIA tells Maharashtra govt

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Chamber of Commerce Industries and Agriculture (MCCIA) has asked the Maharashtra government to develop the Auto Cluster in Chinchwad as the hub for the electric vehicle industry. Prashant Girbane, director-general of the chamber, said Pune would be an ideal place to emerge as an electric vehicle hub given the already existing thriving automobile industry here.

Maharashtra became the latest state to announce hefty incentives for the electric vehicle industry as it announced a policy last week. The policy proposed to achieve 25 per cent electrification of public transport and last-mile delivery vehicles by 2025 in six targeted urban agglomerations - Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur, Aurangabad, Amravati and Nashik. Also, around 10 per cent of the existing fuel vehicles would be phased out by electric ones as per the target set by the government. The state government's policy has both consumer and producer level incentives for the industry. Given the dynamic nature of the industry, Girbane said a hub can act as the guiding light for the development of the sector. Pune, he pointed out, has both the Automotive Research Association of India



(ARAI) as well as the existing ecosystem of the automotive sector. "Also the electronic hub of the chamber would be functional by the end of the year," he said. Autocluster - a joint venture of the state government and the chamber can also play a very important role in this, he added. A developed hub can guide, train and also give direction to the emerging electric vehicle industry. Vendor training, an important part of the sector, can also be conducted here. "The gradual shifting towards electric vehicles would certainly pose a challenge for the existing value chain. Suppliers, vendors would have to tweak their operations and their technology to keep abreast of the changes. As a chamber we are continuing our endeavour by conducting sessions about this," he said. Bigger automotive companies who have started manufacturing electric vehicles have started such training. "After all, people would like to work with known people.

Raj Kundra case:

Sherlyn urges media to seek excerpts of her statement from Cyber Cell

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Sherlyn Chopra has opened up on her association with the Raj Kundra case. Sherlyn said that she was the first person to give statement to the investigating team of the Maharashtra Cyber Cell in this case.

Sherlyn shared a video on Twitter on Thursday, where she says in Hindi: "For the past few days several journalists and mediapersons have been calling me, emailing me and texting me to learn what is my take on this topic. I would like to inform you all that I was the first person to give my statement to the investigating team of the Maharashtra Cyber Cell. I was also the first person to share information with them about



Armsprime."

"When Maharashtra Cyber Cell had sent me a summons notice, unlike others who say 'My heart goes out to Shilpa and her kids', I did not go underground and did not go missing. I have not tried to flee from this city or this country. In March 2021, I went to the office of Cyber Cell and gave my neutral statement to them," the

actress informed.

Sharing a note for media persons, she urged: "Friends, there is a lot to say on this topic but since this matter is sub-judice, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the same. I would request all of you especially journalists to please get in touch with the Maharashtra Cyber Cell and place your questions before them. You can also

KOSHYARI RELEASES BOOK ON POST-ART 370 KASHMIR

Mumbai: Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari on Wednesday expressed confidence that Jammu and Kashmir will once again reclaim its lost glory and become a 'heaven on earth'. The Governor's comments came while releasing a book -- 'Kashmir Ki Kyari Mein Aag Ki Lapte



Aakhir Kab Tak? -- penned by Kashmiri writer and social worker Beena Budki, at the Raj Bhavan here. Budki's book makes references to the turbulence witnessed in Kashmir in the aftermath of the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019.

Koshyari said the contribution of Kashmir to Indian culture is vast and varied, adding that the works of Panini, Bharata Muni (Natya Sastra), Kalhana, Abhinavagupta and others are immortal, while Kashmiri Shaivism has enriched the cultural ethos of India. He also complimented the author for popularising Hindi in non-Hindi speaking regions of the country and for her social work, and felicitated 30 litterateurs and social workers on the occasion. A magazine, 'Kashmir Sandesh', brought out by Kashmiri Hindi Sangam and edited by Budki was also released on the occasion in the presence of prominent personalities like Pandit Mahesh Acharya and Dinesh Barot.

Maharashtra BJP president reaches out to Pankaja Munde



Insiders termed the meeting "a courtesy call aimed at reassuring her that BJP is in no way undermining her role in the organisation."

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In order to iron out creases, state BJP president Chandrakant Patil Wednesday met national secretary Pankaja Munde at the latter's Worli office in Mumbai. Munde has been upset after her younger sister Pritam Munde Khade was denied a ministerial berth in the Union cabinet. BJP leaders said the meeting was an exercise to reach out to a sulking Munde. Insiders termed the meeting "a courtesy call aimed at reassuring her that BJP is in no way undermining her role in the organisation." Patil said, "In any organisation you have leaders meeting each other. So why should my meeting

with Munde come as a surprise? It was a normal meeting where two leaders from BJP met. Nothing unusual."

Although Patil tried to dismiss it as routine process, party sources said, "At the state BJP OBC meeting, Munde was not present."

Earlier last week, Munde, while addressing her supporters, had said, "My leaders are PM Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah." The remark was perceived as an attack against state leader Devendra Fadnavis and Patil.

A close aide of Munde said, "Patil had said it was not easy to please every aspirant. Justice to one becomes injustice to another. This remark also upset Munde."

Maharashtra rains:

33 trains diverted, 51 short terminated, 48 cancelled, says Central Railways

Teams of the NDRF have reached Kolhapur as the area is battered by heavy rainfall. In Ratnagiri and Raigarh, rivers are flowing above the danger mark. Trains services disrupted.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Mumbai: Maharashtra train services have been disrupted due to heavy rainfall in the Konkan region of the state. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued a 'red' alert warning for Maharashtra capital Mumbai, predicting heavy to very heavy rainfall in the country's financial capital.

Authorities said major rivers in Ratnagiri and Raigarh districts in Konkan region of Maharashtra are flowing above the danger mark as a result of incessant rains, and government machinery is in the process of shifting affected people to safer places.

In Kolhapur, the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) has begun relief and rescue operations following the directions of Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray.

Meanwhile, 33 trains diverted, 51 short terminated, 48 cancelled and 14 short originating due to heavy rainfall in Mumbai, leading to massive damage, track washouts, mud on tracks, waterlogging etc. Train services were affected in the Igatpuri area of Nashik district due to the accumulation of mud on the tracks following heavy rainfall. Restoration work is underway. Many passengers are stranded at Igatpuri railway station. Indian Navy to join rescue operations in Ratnagiri, Chiplun, and other areas of Konkan where flood situation has arisen due to heavy rains. Teams to leave for the Konkan region shortly. Intense to very intense spells of rainfall continue over Konkan - Goa and Maharashtra's dis-



tricts of Raigarh, Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg, Pune ghat areas, Satara and Kolhapur leading to inundation and waterlogging in many parts said India Meteorological Department, Mumbai. Two teams of the NDRF reach Kolhapur for rescue and relief operations, in view of heavy rainfall in the area. One team has been deployed in Karveer tehsil while another team has been deployed at Shirol in Kolhapur. Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray held an emergency meeting to take stock of flood situation in Ratnagiri and Raigarh districts caused due to torrential rains in the last 24 hours. He has directed Disaster Management units and departments concerned to stay vigilant and start rescue ops: CM With record-breaking rains of 400mm plus in Mahabaleshwar in the last 24 hrs, the latest Mumbai radar observation indicates very intense clouds over the entire ghat areas Raigarh, Pune Satara including Ratnagiri district. As per rain reports, many rivers in RTN district flowing above danger marks: Head SID, Climate

Research and Services, Pune, IMD.

High tide hits Marine Drive amid rainfall. Mumbai and suburbs may witness moderate to heavy rainfall/thunder-showers with possibility of very heavy rainfall at isolated places, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

Due to the heavy rainfall, Konkan Railway suspended train services in Ratnagiri.

Train services affected in the Kasara Ghat section of Thane district and near Lonavala hill town in Pune district. Train services were disrupted, villages marooned in Thane and Palghar districts as heavy rainfall was recorded the night and on Thursday morning. A bridge at Sapgaon in Sahapur taluka of Thane suffered extensive damage.

Modak Sagar dam in Sahapur overflowed Thursday night. Two gates were opened to release the water. Due to heavy downpour, railway tracks were submerged in Badlapur Vangani section. Mumbai Solapur train stuck.

Mumbai received heavy rainfall on July 21. The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) informed that 68.72 mm of rainfall was recorded in the island city area of Mumbai, 58.75 mm in eastern suburbs and western suburbs received 58.24 mm of rain in 10 hours since 8 am of July 21. The weatherman has also projected heavy downpour in Bhandara, Chandrapur, Gadchiroli and Yavatmal districts which are located in Maharashtra's East Vidarbha region. Notably, an 'orange' alert has been issued by the IMD for the particular area. "A cyclonic circulation lies over Northwest Bay of Bengal and extends between 3.1 km and 7.6 km above mean sea level tilting southwestwards with height." Under its influence, a low-pressure area is very likely to form over northwest Bay of Bengal and neighbourhood during the next 48 hours. Hence, the monsoon is expected to remain active over Vidarbha from July 21-23," the IMD stated in its statement. The IMD has predicted very heavy to extremely heavy rainfall for Pune district.



EDITOR'S SPECS

New leaders in UP

With around six months left for the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections, it is a new generation of leaders that is preparing to lead the political campaign, paving the way for a new look politics in the state. Leading from the front is Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi who faces the uphill task of reviving a near defunct party. Under her leadership the Congress will try to catch the proverbial bull by its horns and her direct and aggressive style of campaigning is bound to unnerve her opponents to an extent. Another new generation politician who will be leading his party into the electoral arena is Jayant Chaudhary, president of the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD). For Jayant, this is his first independent election when he will not have the guidance of his father, Chaudhary Ajit Singh. The scales, however, are tipping in his favour because of his proactive role in the ongoing farmers' agitation and the overwhelming support that he has been receiving from his Jat community. Chandra Shekhar Azad, head of the Bhim Army that will be contesting the UP elections under the name of Azad Samaj Party, is another young politician to mark his debut in the state. The 34-year-old Dalit activist has already plunged headlong into the campaign and his cycle yatras are criss-crossing the state these days. Chandra Shekhar's aides say that he may not contest the elections this time but will ensure that his party gets ample Dalit support. While the BJP will also be fielding several new candidates, (including sons and daughters of senior leaders) after replacing sitting legislators, the party is apparently not worried about the onslaught of young leaders from other parties. SP spokesperson Juhie Singh, however, said the change was an ongoing process and with the entry of new faces, new leaders would bring a change in the political scenario.

WHY ARE SIKHS OF KASHMIR ANGRY?

Javed Beigh

After the exodus of the Kashmiri Hindu Pandits, the Sikhs of Kashmir are now the largest religious minority of Kashmir Valley, distributed equally among Baramulla in North, Srinagar in Central and Tral in south Kashmir Valley. The bond between Kashmiri Sikh and Kashmiri Muslim communities is as old as the history of Kashmir. The Kashmir valley is home to some of the most important and sacred gurdwaras located in Srinagar and Baramulla cities. So why is that the Sikh community of Kashmir is suddenly up in arms? The recent controversy over alleged cases of forced conversion and marriage of Sikh girls has not only been widely publicized and politicized, but it has also ruptured the cordial relation between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Sikh communities. Since there are various conflicting views and information circulating on the details and facts of these cases, I would not like to comment upon merits of these individual cases, but would rather focus on the wider picture of the status of Kashmir's non-Muslim minorities. The problem lies in the fact that Kashmir's majority Muslim population loves to remain in complete denial of how their image is perceived outside Kashmir valley but sooner or later they are confronted with the bitter reality, which is never debated or resolved and therefore the problem continues to persist. Regardless of what the majority Muslim population of Kashmir may think about themselves, the fact is that Kashmir valley is not only a conflict region but is also recognised as one of the most radical Muslim enclaves of the world, where religious minorities (Kashmiri Pandits and Sikhs) have been persecuted for their religious beliefs. No one outside Kashmir believes in the so called "Jagmohan" conspiracy theory for facilitating forced exodus of Kashmir's largest religious minority of Kashmiri Hindu Pandits. The dark episode of 1989 of the forced and violent exodus of Kashmiri Pandits has remained a biggest blot on the former secular credential of Kashmir's majority community, whether or not they want to believe. The subsequent rise of religious radicalism, orthodoxy, social conservatism and proliferation of puritan Islamic school of thoughts has further dented the image of Kashmir as an enclave of moderate, tolerant, secular Muslims, who followed their own unique syncretic Sufi Islam called "Rishiyat" that was an amalgamation of Central Asian Sufi traditions and Kashmir's own Hindu Shaivism. Those of us from majority community of Kashmir, who have had friendship and acquaintance with Sikh community of

Kashmir has historically been a multi religious society, where Kashmiri Muslims, Kashmiri Hindu Pandits and Kashmiri Sikhs have lived with each other for centuries maintaining cordial, harmonious and brotherly relationship. Sikhs of Kashmir, who actually are not historically from Punjab but are believed to be Brahmin and Rajput converts from neighbouring Jammu region and even Kashmir valley are very much an integral part of Kashmiri society.



Kashmir would tell the truth of the life that Kashmir's Sikh community has been living since last three decades in a highly brutalized, violent and religiously radical and intolerant Kashmir. Beyond the slogans of "Sikh 1/2 Muslim" bhai chara lies a suppressed story of religious harassment, religious taunts, stigmatization of Kashmiri Sikh community, which has only grown worst. I have been regularly hearing stories of Muslim community pressure on Sikhs to convert to Islam, which happens both expressly and indirectly. It is a fact that Kashmiri Sikh girls are special target of religious harassment. My Sikh friends would regularly tell me how their Muslim acquaintance would ridicule their Sikh faith and practices and would encourage them to visit mosques and learn about Islam. Kashmiri Sikh girls would be pressured to be "girl-friends" with Muslim boys. Few years back A Kashmiri Sikh girl in South Kashmir was stabbed over her refusal to wear Islamic hijab. The Sikh community of Kashmir, which already knows about the misery of Kashmiri Pandit community has been living in fear. They know that their presence is misused to exhibit an example of secular credential of Kashmiri Muslims but they can't say anything due to fear of being stuck in an overwhelm-

ingly Muslim majority region, where they have substantial financial and economic interests. It is a fact that non-Muslim girls are groomed not just in Kashmir but in almost all Muslim majority countries and regions for marriage with a Muslim man and conversion to Islam. We all know that seeking conversion (not forced one) is an important part of the religious culture of Muslim societies, which has unfortunately been twisted to force non-Muslim girls to marry a Muslim and then compulsorily convert to Islam. Kashmir is no different. Sikhs in Kashmir are angry because they have been facing and quietly suffering the religiously driven onslaught of converting to Islam for a long time, accelerated by the rise of the new generation of radicalized, orthodox puritan Muslims of Kashmir. These radical Muslims don't even spare Sufi Islam following Kashmiri Muslims and regularly taunt and harass them of following a "corrupt" faith and indulging in "shirk" and "biddah" and worshipping graves, one can only imagine the plight of Sikh minority, who can't even express their misery and suffering that they endure on daily basis out of fear of their security. The latest incident, even though politicised by a Sikh politician from

Delhi has finally broken the patience of Sikh community of Kashmir Valley and emboldened them to tell their tale of suffocation and suffering. As a majority community of Kashmir, it is our religious Islamic duty to protect our religious minorities, which we have unfortunately not done and it is a fact. We must acknowledge the toxic effect of religious radical elements, who have been harassing Sikhs of Kashmir are also parallelly harassing Kashmiri Sufi Muslims and Kashmiri Shia Muslims. It is not a question of Islam versus Sikhism, but of radicalism and intolerance versus Kashmir's glorious religious tradition of tolerance, Kashmiriyat and Sufi Rishiyat, which is at stake. We must understand and acknowledge grievances of our Sikh brothers and sister and strive to address them and make Kashmir once again a mecca of peace, tolerance and secularism. (Javed Beigh is a political leader and is State Secretary of People's Democratic Front. He can be reached @javedbeigh across social media platforms. Views expressed are personal)

international

Taliban has gained strategic momentum: Top US Gen

Washington | New Delhi | Agencies

The Taliban now controls a total of 212, or roughly half of Afghanistan's 419 district centres, a top US General said, adding that the insurgents appear to have gained "strategic momentum" since the withdrawal of American troops. "Strategic momentum appears to be sort of with the Taliban," General Mark Milley, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, said at a press conference at the Pentagon on Wednesday. "We're going to find out, the levels of violence, does it go up, does it stay the same, there's the possibility of a negotiated outcome still out there, there's the possibility of a Taliban takeover (and) any other number of scenarios," Milley said. He still expressed confidence in the ability of Afghan forces to fend off a Taliban takeover of the country. "The two most important combat multipliers, actually, is will and leadership. And this is going to be a test now of the will and leadership of the Afghan people, the Afghan Security Forces and the government of Afghanistan. I don't think the end game is yet written. A negative outcome, a Taliban automatic takeover, is not a foregone conclusion," he added. While the militants are yet to capture any of the country's 34 provincial capitals, they are pressuring about half of them, said Milley. Afghan security forces are consolidating their positions to protect those major urban centres including Kabul, he said. "What they're trying to do is isolate the major population centres. They're trying to do the same thing to Kabul." As of Wednesday, the Taliban now controls about 212 of Afghanistan's 419 district centres, Milley said, adding that it was a significant jump from the 81 district centres a month ago. The top US General attributed some of the Taliban's recent gains to Afghan forces consolidat-



ing in order to protect population centre, The Hill news website said in a report. "Part of this is they're giving up district centres in order to consolidate their forces because they're taking an approach to protect the population," Milley said. "And most of the population lives in the provincial capitals and the capital city of Kabul. So they are right now, as we speak, adjusting forces to consolidate into the provincial capitals and Kabul." He also predicted that, following a lull in violence for the Eid al-Adha holiday, the rest of the summer could be decisive for the tide of the war, the report added. Afghanistan has witnessed heavy battles between Taliban and security forces since the start of withdrawal of the US-led forces from the war-torn country on May 1. US President Joe Biden has set a formal end to the US military mission in Afghanistan for August 31, days ahead of his original September 11 deadline. US Central Command said last week over 95 per cent of the withdrawal had been completed. More than 2,400 US troops were killed in Afghanistan over the past two decades, with 20,000 wounded, according to the Pentagon. Estimates show that over 66,000 Afghan troops have been killed, and over 2.7 million people were displaced.

US govt could breach debt limit in Oct or Nov

Washington | Agencies

The US federal government is most likely to run out of borrowing room and breach the debt limit in October or November, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) said in a report. Currently, there is no statutory limit on the issuance of new federal debt because the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2019, enacted in August 2019, suspended the limit through July 31, 2021, the CBO report released on Wednesday said. On August 1, the debt limit will be reset to the previous ceiling of \$22 trillion, plus the cumulative borrowing that occurred during the period of suspension, the report said. Unless additional legislation either extends the suspension or increases the limit, existing statutes will allow the US Treasury to declare a "debt issuance suspension period" and to take "extraordinary measures" to borrow additional funds for a period of time without breaching the debt ceiling, according to the CBO. However, the ability to borrow using those measures would ultimately be exhausted, and the U.S. Treasury would probably run out of cash sometime in the first quarter of the next fiscal year that begins on October 1,



"most likely in October or November", the CBO estimated. "If that occurred, the government would be unable to pay its obligations fully, and it would delay making payments for its activities, default on its debt obligations, or both," the CBO said. It's unclear how or when Congress will act to raise or suspend the debt limit. Senate Republicans on Wednesday threatened to vote against an increase to the debt limit unless Congress first agrees to new spending cuts or other measures, according to The Washington Post. The new ultimatum marked a reversal for Republicans, who agreed to address the debt limit multiple times to advance policies under former President Donald Trump that helped add \$7 trillion to the federal debt during his term, the Post reported. As of today, the US national debt has exceeded \$28.54 trillion.

Passenger jets brush off at Dubai airport, no injuries reported

Dubai | Agencies

A "minor" collision was reported Thursday on the taxiway at the Dubai International Airport between two passenger jets. FlyDubai, the low-cost airline of Dubai, and the Bahrain-based Gulf Air were the airlines involved. The authorities said that nobody was injured in the incident. Reportedly, the wingtip of the FlyDubai plane and the tail of the Gulf Air jet brushed each other. An airport spokesperson said: "As a result of this, one runway was temporarily closed to allow for the incident to be swiftly managed. Operations at DXB were not impacted and the runway was reopened after two hours." FlyDubai said that a Boeing 737-800s, heading to Kyrgyzstan, was forced to return to the stand following the "minor incident". It added that the passengers took another flight,

which departed six hours later. Bahrain News Agency reported that Gulf Air confirmed "a ground incident at Dubai International Airport where one of its aircraft was impacted on the tail by an aircraft of another airline". The airline did not identify the aircraft involved, but said it was "working to reconnect all the passengers to their final destinations". Dubai International Airport is one of the world's busiest airports for international travel. Given the Eid-al-Adha holidays, this is expected to be a very busy week for the airport. On Wednesday, it tweeted: "This weekend DXB is predicted to be busy with arriving passengers returning to Dubai. With this in mind, we are advising anyone travelling to DXB over the next few days to allow for slight delays, organise onward travel in advance, and where possible, use public transport."

Death toll from heavy rains in China reaches 33

Rainwater has damaged more than 215,200 hectares of crops, causing a direct economic loss of about 1.22 billion yuan (\$188 million), reports Xinhua news agency.

Beijing | Agencies

The death toll from torrential rains in central China's Henan province increased to 33 on Thursday, while eight people still remain missing and more than 3 million others affected, local authorities confirmed. A total of 376,000 local residents have been relocated, said the provincial emergency management department. Rainwater has damaged more than 215,200 hectares of crops, causing a direct economic loss of about 1.22 billion yuan (\$188 million), reports Xinhua news agency. The Henan provincial meteorological observatory activated the highest level of rainstorm alert at 11 a.m. Thursday, as rainfall is expected to continue for the next three hours in a number of cities including Anyang, Hebi, Xinxiang and Jiaozuo. The local accumulated precipitation is likely to exceed 100 mm, according



to the forecasts. Downpours also lashed the city of Huixian between 8 a.m. Wednesday and 6 am Thursday with precipitation reaching 400 mm. Local authorities have mobilised 39,583 rescuers for disaster relief, and 37,953 people have so far been evacuated in Huixian. Despite the heavy rain in the region, traffic has gradually resumed in the province. Zhengzhou Xinzheng International Airport scheduled 397 flights on Thursday, 219

inbound and 178 outbound, an increase of 315 flights from the previous day. Meanwhile, 204 of Henan's 403 highway toll stations have opened, while 193 have partially opened with traffic control and six others remain closed due to water-logging and flood control. Railway authorities are making every effort to ensure supply for passengers on 35 trains stranded in Zhengzhou, while workers are clearing railway tracks to restore the traffic.

Why Delta Covid variant is spreading rapidly

Beijing | Agencies

People infected with the Delta variant of Covid-19 produce far more virus than those infected with the original version of coronavirus making it very easy to spread, according to a study. Researchers at the Guangdong Provincial Center for Disease Control and Prevention in China found that viral load -- a measure of the density of viral particles in the body -- is roughly 1,000 times higher in people infected with the Delta variant than those infected with the original coronavirus strain, Nature reported. According to current estimates, the Delta variant could be more than twice as transmissible as the original strain of SARS-CoV-2, the virus causing Covid-19. The variant, which was first identified in India in late 2020, has now become the predominant strain and has

spread to at least 111 countries. The team tracked 62 people who were quarantined after exposure to Covid-19 and tested their viral load every day throughout the course of infection to see how it changed over time. Researchers then compared participants' infection patterns with those of 63 people who contracted the original SARS-CoV-2 strain in 2020. The findings, posted preprint, showed that the virus was first detectable in people with the Delta variant four days after exposure. On the other hand, the original strain took an average six days to be present in people. This suggests that Delta replicates much faster, said epidemiologist Jing Lu at China's CDC. Individuals infected with Delta also had viral loads up to 1,260 times higher than those in people infected with the original strain.



Los Angeles | Agencies

Rapper Megan Thee Stallion has said that she takes inspiration

from the women in her life. "I grew up watching women who did it all. I saw people like my grandmother, my mother and my aunt pursue their education while still being fashionable, while still showing off their curves, and working nine-to-five jobs," the singer told Yahoo Life.

"I don't think it is hard for people to believe women can do it all, because we are in your face every day doing it," added Stallion, according to a report in femalefirst.co.uk.

The 26-year-old musician recently became the first rapper to appear on the cover of Sports Illustrated's Swimsuit Issue.

She said: "When I got the call that they wanted me on the cover, I was like, 'Wha--? Me?' And to be the first female rapper on the swim cover makes it extra special. It feels amazing!"

Stallion spent "months" training for her photoshoot and tagged the day as "one of the best experiences" of her life.

MEGAN THEE STALLION: GREW UP WATCHING WOMEN WHO DID IT ALL



Leslie Grace to play 'Batgirl'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Leslie Grace has been roped in to play the title role in "Batgirl" and will star as crime fighter Barbara Gordon in the upcoming film.

According to deadline.com, Warner Bros And DC Films was already looking at the Afro-Latina actress after her breakout role in "In The Heights", and the sources revealed that her audition sealed the deal as the choice.

The studio has shared no comments. The film will be on HBO Max, marking one of the first major DC properties to debut exclusively on the streaming platform.

It will be directed by Adil El Arbi and Bilal Fallah. The script is by Christina Hodson and Kristin Burr is producing it.

The details about the film are under wraps.

Halsey declares 'no more press'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer Halsey vowed "#NoMorePress goodbye," in a series of since-deleted tweets where they slammed their coverage in an Allure profile. She has announced a preference for both 'she' and 'they' pronouns and was incensed that the article only used feminine ones. Halsey also took objection to the way she felt the Allure cover story 'bastardized' what she said about growing up biracial. The singer's declaration came just two days after they announced the birth of their firstborn child whom they have named Ender Ridley. In the now-deleted tweets Halsey wrote: "hey @Allure_magazine. First your writer made a focal point in my cover story by pronouns and you guys deliberately disrespected them by not using them in the article." She continued: "Then your admin bastardized a quote where I discuss the privilege of being the white child of a black parent + intentionally used a portion that was the antithesis of the point I was trying to make." The singer added, "All of this ironically on the tails of an article where I give your article the intimate admission that I hate doing press because I get exploited and misquoted. Do f***ing better...?" Allure were slammed on Twitter for their pronoun usage and posted an apology saying they 'messed up' and assuring readers that they were 'adjusting our cover story with Halsey to use both "she" and "they" pronouns.'



The Rolling Stones announce a brand new 60th anniversary tour

Los Angeles | Agencies

Rolling Stones have announced a brand new tour following the postponement of their No Filter concerts last year. Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, both 77, and



Ronnie Woods, 64, and Charlie Watts, 80, will hit the road next year in America - taking in the 15 cities that had their dates pushed back because of the pandemic. They will also play three new dates in New Orleans, Los Angeles and Las Vegas. Taking to

social media this afternoon, the band posted: "THE NEWS YOU'VE ALL BEEN WAITING FOR!" "We are thrilled to be able to announce the rescheduled dates for the Rolling Stones 2020 US tour, which will now go ahead this Fall! Tickets are on sale now at rollingstones dot com." There is a pre-sale for the new dates available to members of the Stones mailing list on 28 July and tickets go on general sale on 30 July. Fans hope the group, who formed in 1962 and have sold more than 240 million records worldwide, will return to the UK and Europe in the months following this. Over the past few months the Stones have been putting the finishing touches to their next album, their first studio LP since their 2005 record A Bigger Bang.



LAURA HAMILTON WOWS FANS IN PLUNGING SWIMSUIT

Los Angeles | Agencies

APlace in the Sun's Laura Hamilton wowed fans as she enjoyed a glass of sangria in a plunging swimsuit.

The TV presenter showed off her enviable curves in the sunshine snap shared to her social media page.

Laura, 39, had a huge smile on her face as sat on a terrace wearing the black and white one-piece.

The daring costume was cut down the middle to tease her trim torso and slim figure.

She captioned the snap: "The golden hour with a glass of sangria! #spain #goldenhour #sunshine #propertysearch".

And her fans rushed to compliment the star on the glowing picture.

The mother-of-two recently revealed how she likes to keep fit when she's not helping couples find their dream homes abroad.

She told The Sun in between filming in Spain: "I've brought my skipping rope with me this week. I do like to try and go to hotel gyms. I'm on my feet all day, and I really enjoy the great Mediterranean food, loads of vegetables and olive oil."

Anna Faris and Michael Barrett secretly wed in courthouse ceremony

Los Angeles | Agencies

Annie Faris has confirmed she is married to Michael Barrett, not long after he was spotted wearing a simple wedding band during dinner with the star on Tuesday evening. The Mom actress, 44, revealed she and Barrett recently eloped with a courthouse marriage in Washington state while talking to Top Chef's Gail Simmons on her Anna Faris Is Unqualified podcast. The Scary Movie star first confirmed the engagement during an appearance on The Late Late Show with James Corden in February 2020. On Tuesday Anna and Michael were seen enjoying a cozy dinner with her son Jack, eight, at Tallula's Mexican restaurant in Santa Monica. Barrett sported a simple wedding band, while Anna was still proudly sporting her yellow cushion-cut diamond engagement ring. The stunning ring is estimated to be 'worth somewhere between \$25,000-\$50,000,' according to Brides.



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Dove Cameron

OLYMPICS: 28 INDIAN ATHLETES TO PARTICIPATE IN OPENING CEREMONY

Tokyo | Agencies

Only 28 members, comprising six officials and 22 athletes, of the Indian contingent will participate in the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Olympics on Friday after the organisers suggested restricting the number of athletes attending the curtain-raiser due to Covid-19 pandemic.

According to the numbers shared by the office of the Indian contingent at the Games Village, hockey will have only one representative in men's team captain Manpreet Singh, who will be a flag-bearer alongside boxer MC Mary Kom. Boxing will have the most number of members in the ceremony with eight participants followed by table tennis and sailing with four. Rowing has two participating members while gymnastics, swimming and fencing have one each.

Athletes from archery, judo, badminton, weightlifting, tennis, shooting and hockey will not be part of the ceremony due to their events happening on the same day or the next day.



The march-past will happen in the Japanese alphabetical order. India's number is 21st in the march-past list as conveyed by the organisers. The opening ceremony of the Tokyo Olympics will take place in the Olympic Stadium on Friday. The stadium, which will host major track and field events as well as the gold medal match in women's football, is also scheduled to host the closing ceremony on August 8. Other contingents are also sending restricted number of athletes to the opening ceremony with Australia restricting theirs to 50 and Britain to 30.



SUMIT NAGAL TO FACE ISTOMIN

Indian tennis player Sumit Nagal will face Uzbekistan's Denis Istomin in the opening round of the men's singles event at the Tokyo Olympic Games.

Nagal, who qualified for the Olympics last week after a large number of withdrawals, has been pitted against the Uzbek, ranked 197 in the world, in the draw released on Thursday. If the 23-year-old Nagal, ranked 160 in the world, wins, his second-round match could take place against second-seeded Daniil Medvedev of Russia. Medvedev, who is playing under the ROC flag, will face Alexander Bublik of Kazakhstan in his opening round match.



SANIA-ANKITA TO PLAY UKRAINE TWINS

In women's doubles, the Indian pair of Sania Mirza and Anika Raina will face the Kichenok twins -- Nadia and Lyudmyla -- of Ukraine in the opening round. Incidentally, Sania, the six-time Grand Slam champion, had paired up with Nadia to win the Hobart Open in 2020, her first tournament win after returning from maternity leave.

The Hundred: HARMANPREET SHINES BUT TEAM LOSES IN INAUGURAL MATCH

London | Agencies

Indian batswoman Harmanpreet Kaur made a quick-fire 16-ball 29 but could not save her team Manchester Originals (Women) from a five-wicket defeat to Oval Invincibles (Women) in the inaugural match of The Hundred competition here on Wednesday night.

South African Dane van Niekerk hit an unbeaten 42-ball 56 and shared a 73-run partnership with Proteas teammate and spouse Marizanne Kapp (38) for the fifth wicket to lead the Oval franchise to a win

with two balls to spare.

Harmanpreet hit six boundaries during her stay before she fell to left-arm seamer Natasha Farrant, who picked 3/25 in 20 balls. Marizanne picked 2/20 in 20 balls as Oval restricted Manchester to 135/6 in 100 balls. In response, England pace bowler Kate Cross (3/28 in 18 balls) ran through the Oval top-order, reducing them to 36/4. But Dane and Marizanne brought the home side back on track.



Brief scores

Manchester Originals (Women) 135/6 in 100 balls (Lizelle Lee 42, Harmanpreet Kaur 29, N Farrant 3/25, M Kapp 2/20) vs Oval Invincibles (Women) 139/5 in 98 balls (Dane van Niekerk 56 not out, Marizanne Kapp 38, Kate Cross 3/28).

My batting should give confidence to top-order batsmen: Chahar

Colombo | Agencies

Indian pace bowler Deepak Chahar, who hit an unbeaten 69 to help India win the second ODI against Sri Lanka on Tuesday, said on Thursday that he is not too concerned by the tag of all-rounder or selection to the T20 World Cup squad but remains focussed on improving his batting and taking chases down to the last over.

"Whether people consider me an all-rounder or not, it doesn't matter. But the batsman playing in front of me, he should have the confidence that I can support him. If I bat in a situation like this (in second ODI when India needed 83 with four wickets in hand) again, then it is very important [for top-order batsmen] to know that this batsman can help me and win the match," said Chahar to the media during a virtual interaction on the eve of the third ODI.

"I work hard on batting. My father is my coach. Whenever I talk to him, like if I am talking to him for 10 minutes, I talk to him for 6-7 minutes about batting," added Chahar.

The 28-year-old, who has represented India in five ODIs and 13 T20Is said that he likes to stick to the basics and play as straight as possible.

"I always believe that basics are most important. If your basics are correct



then you will do well," said Chahar. Chahar, who plays under MS Dhoni for Chennai Super Kings (CSK) in the Indian Premier League, called the former Indian captain a very big influence on him. "He has had a great impact not just in CSK. I have been seeing him from childhood and learning how to take matches close. Whenever I talk to him, he always tells us, that we have to take

the game till the end... We are here to entertain people. If the game goes into the last few overs, it becomes thrilling and people get entertained," the right-arm bowler said further. Chahar also made it clear that he is not too focussed on the T20 World Cup selection. Chahar added that he has benefitted a lot from Rahul Dravid, who is coach of the limited overs team in Sri Lanka.



Sri Lanka fined for slow over-rate in second ODI

Colombo | Agencies

Sri Lanka have been fined 20 percent of their match fees for maintaining a slow over-rate during their loss in the second ODI against India on Thursday.

Ranjan Madugalle of the ICC Elite Panel of Match Referees imposed the sanction after Dasun Shanaka's side was ruled one over short of the target after time allowances were taken into consideration.

On-field umpires Kumar Dharmasena and Lyndon Hannibal, third umpire Ruchira Palliyaguruge and fourth umpire Prageeth Rambukwella levelled the charge.

"In accordance with Article 2.22 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player

Support Personnel, which relates to minimum over-rate offences, players are fined 20 percent of their match fees for every over their side fails to bowl in the allotted time.

"In addition, as per Article 16.12.2 of the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Super League Playing Conditions, a side is penalised one point for each over short. Consequently, Sri Lanka will lose one point from their points tally during the Super League," said the International Cricket Council (ICC) in a release. ICC further said that Shanaka pleaded guilty to the offence and accepted the proposed sanction, so there was no need for a formal hearing. Sri Lanka will now face India in the third and final ODI on Friday, in the hope of avoiding a 3-0 series defeat.

Aussie women footballers make unique statement against racism

Tokyo | Agencies

The Australian women's football team posed with an Aboriginal flag and linked arms while standing on the halfway line to make their own special statement against racism ahead of their opening group match in the Tokyo Olympics against New Zealand.

The team, also known as Matildas, eventually won against their trans-Tasman opponents 2-1.

New Zealand had taken a knee to protest against racism while the Matildas stood opposite them with arms linked in their own special statement. They also posed with the



Aboriginal flag, consisting of red, black and yellow colours. Two of the players in the Australian

team, goalkeeper Lydia Williams and striker Kyah Simon are Indigenous Australians. The International

Olympic Committee (IOC) had relaxed rules around protests or political statements at the Games ahead of the Tokyo Olympics - allowing athletes latitude outside of competition or dais appearances. After the match, skipper Sam Kerr mentioned how the idea of hosting the Aboriginal flag came. "We are really proud of it. It's something we spoke about a lot as a team. We let the Indigenous girls drive it. We didn't want to do something that goes along with the grain, we wanted to do something that was relevant for our country." Australia are currently second in their group. They now face Sweden on Saturday followed by USA on Tuesday.

Artist Pattnaik unveils sand art for Indian athletes at Tokyo Olympics

Puri: Renowned sand artist and Padma Shri awardee Sudarsan Pattnaik has created a piece of sand art to wish the Indian contingent success in the Tokyo Olympics, which are set to begin on Friday. Pattnaik has joined the chorus of voices to cheer for India as part of the Indian Olympic Fan Army, an initiative by MPL Sports Foundation, to give the Indian Olympic team its very own fan group.

MPL Sports Foundation is the principal partner of the Indian Olympics team to Tokyo 2020. Pattnaik, the award-winning artist, known for his larger-than-life sculptures on a wide range of topics, unveiled a sand installa-

tion on Thursday that aims to inspire everyone to become fans of Indian athletes in their pursuit of Olympic glory.

The sand art by Pattnaik on Puri beach features engravings of the various Olympic disciplines as well as Hon'ble PM Narendra Modi's rallying cry of #Cheer4India.

More than 31 million fans from top sports teams and clubs in India like Kolkata Knight Riders, FC Goa, Gokulam Kerala FC, Ultimate Table Tennis, Real Kashmir FC, Shillong Lajong FC and Cricket Fauj have already joined the Indian Olympic Fan Army. The Tokyo Olympics run from July 23 to August 8.

Australia confirm T20I tour of Bangladesh

Dhaka | Agencies

Australia will tour Bangladesh for a five-match T20I series from August 3 to 9, it has been confirmed. All the matches will be played at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur. The tour will be Australia's first visit to Bangladesh since September 2017, when they visited the country for two Tests in Dhaka and Chattogram.

Earlier, Australia had cancelled their 2015 tour and pulled out of the 2016 under-19 World Cup over security reasons.

Both Australia and Bangladesh are expected to arrive in Dhaka after completing their tours of West Indies and Zimbabwe respectively on July 29.

Australia will come in a charter flight from Barbados to Dhaka. Upon arrival, both squads will go through a three-day room quarantine period at the hotel, which will be strictly off-limits for the

public. After the short quarantine period is over, both teams will commence practice on August 1 at the stadium ahead of the series.

Australia will have no changes from the squad of 20 currently in the Caribbean. It means that first-choice players David Warner, Glenn Maxwell, Pat Cummins, Steve Smith, Marcus Stoinis and Jhye Richardson will continue to miss out.

Bangladesh and Australia have met each other four times in T20Is. All four meetings have come in the T20 World Cups, with Australia emerging victorious on all occasions.

Australia squad: Aaron Finch (captain), Ashton Agar, Wes Agar, Jason Behrendorff, Alex Carey, Dan Christian, Josh Hazlewood, Moises Henriques, Mitchell Marsh, Ben McDermott, Riley Meredith, Josh Philippe, Mitchell Starc, Mitchell Swepson, Ashton Turner, Andrew Tye, Matthew Wade (vice-captain) and Adam Zampa. Travelling reserves: Nathan Ellis and Tanveer Sangha.



PANT JOINS INDIAN TEST SQUAD AFTER RECOVERING FROM COVID

Chester-le-Street (Durham):

Wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant has joined the Indian Test team here after recovering from Covid-19 and completing isolation, the Indian cricket board has confirmed. "Hello @RishabhPant17, great to have you back [emotion: grinning face] #TeamIndia," tweeted the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). The BCCI, on July 15, announced that both Pant and training assistant Dayanand Garani had tested positive for Covid-19. The Board said that the young wicketkeeper was already into his eighth day of isolation at the time of announcement. Pant, who has now returned negative test results, had been in isolation for two weeks since testing positive. India's other wicketkeeper on the tour, Wriddhiman Saha is still in isolation along with bowling coach Bharat Arun and standby batsman Abhimanyu Easwaran for being in contact with Garani. The trio is expected to come out of isolation on July 24. In the absence of both Pant and Saha, Indians have fielded KL Rahul as wicketkeeper in the ongoing warm-up match against County Select XI.



Tokyo Olympics: Brazil's Richarlison scores hat-trick against Germany

Yokohama: Brazilian forward Richarlison scored a hat-trick in the match against Germany at International Stadium, Yokohama on Thursday. This is the first hat-trick scored in the men's football event at the Tokyo Olympics. Richarlison scored his first goal of the day in the seventh minute. He saw his first shot saved by goalkeeper Florian Mueller. But the ball rebounded perfectly for the striker and he made no mistake the second time around, slotting past Mueller to give Brazil the lead. The Everton forward's second goal came in the 22nd minute with a header past Mueller from a delightful cross by Guilherme Arana. The hat-trick came in the 30th minute as Richarlison turned on his right and curled a strike past Mueller into the far corner. Richarlison's strikes helped Brazil, the 2016 Rio Olympics gold-medalists, lead 3-0 at half-time.



VIDYUT JAMMWAL'S SEQUEL OF 'KHUDA HAAFIZ' GOES ON FLOORS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Vidyut Jammwal has kick-started the shoot of his upcoming film "Khuda Haafiz Chapter II: Agni Pariksha" in Mumbai on Thursday. The shooting schedule began with a small mahurat pooja here.

Directed by Faruk Kabir, the film will roll into its first schedule in Mumbai followed by another schedule in Lucknow. The second chapter depicts an intense love story between the lead characters essayed by Vidyut Jammwal and Shivaleeka Oberoi in the antecedent and takes its drama and action to new heights.

Talking about the sequel, Vidyut says, "The sequel is always special as it is a happy validation of what you've done in the past. This story resonates with me because every movie has made me wonder what happens after a happy ending. 'Khuda Haafiz Chapter II Agni Pariksha' chronicles a couple's journey amid the challenges of societal pressure after they've traversed over a huge turmoil."

Director-writer, Faruk Kabir says, "When I conceived the story of 'Khuda Haafiz Chapter II Agni Pariksha', I knew I had to be brave in writing it, and hopefully you will feel the heartfelt essence the characters go through. I hope we give the audience a film with a large canvas and an even bigger heart.

My producers, Vidyut, Shivaleeka and all of us coming together for Chapter II even before a year of Chapter I releasing is truly a blessing and we will work harder than before to make it better."

The film is written and directed by Faruk Kabir, produced by Kumar Mangat Pathak and Abhishek Pathak, co-produced by Sanjeev Joshi, Aditya Chowksey and Hasnain Hussaini, with music by Pritam, lyrics by Irshad Kamil and starring Vidyut Jammwal and Shivaleeka Oberoi.

SONAM KAPOOR

PUTS A FULL STOP TO PREGNANCY RUMOURS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Sonam Kapoor Ahuja has put an end to rumours about her being pregnant, with a post on social media. Dressed in a black and white maxi dress, the actress implied that she was struggling on the first day of her period. In the clip, the actress is seen sipping on ginger tea and holding a hot water bottle.

Sonam wrote, "Hot water bottle and ginger tea for the first day of my period."

Sonam Kapoor was received by her father, actor Anil Kapoor, as she returned to Mumbai recently almost after a year.

On the work front, Sonam was last seen in 'The Zoya Factor' with Dulquer Salmaan (2019), and 'AK vs AK' (2020) with Anurag Kashyap and Anil Kapoor.

The actress recently wrapped the shoot of 'Blind', a thriller which is directed by Shome Makhija. This film narrates the story of a blind police officer who is in search of a serial killer. 'Blind' went on floors in December 2020 in Glasgow, Scotland. The film is produced by Sujoy Ghosh."

Adhyayan Summan releases teaser of new single 'Jab se dekha'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor-singer Adhyayan Summan released the teaser of his upcoming single "Jab se dekha" on Thursday. The song has been written by Ronit Vinta and composed by Giri G. The teaser gives a glimpse into the chemistry between Adhyayan and Mallaikaa Chheda, who also feature in the video.

Talking about his new single, Adhyayan said: "As a child, I always knew acting was my calling, but it's only when I grew up that I realised music too holds such a special place in my heart. Pursuing music has been life changing. I wanted to bring the best of music to my listeners. After the love I received for 'aaya na tu 2.0', 'Soniyo 2.0', 'Peggy Daariya', 'Rang jaaye', my next single is one step closer to that vision."

He adds: "Jab se dekha" is more than just a song for me, it's a passion project as every time I listen to it, I go down the memory lane and think about my love at first sight experience, I am very excited to present this song to my audience and for them to have their 'deja-vu moment'."

The track will release on July 28.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood superstar Salman Khan and Katrina Kaif have commenced shooting for the spy thriller "Tiger 3", which was put on hold due to the pandemic. "The new schedule of 'Tiger 3' has started today in Yash Raj Films Studios. It is a closely guarded set and one can expect no picture to leak from here. Salman and Katrina's fitness will be tested in this schedule as well as the extensive overseas schedule that is set to start from mid-August," a source said.

"Salman teased his physique in Tiger 3 on his social media and it is evident that he is building the best body that he has ever showcased on screen. Katrina, on the other hand, has been keeping an extremely low profile with hardly any revelation of how good she is looking currently. There's a reason to this also," said the trade source.

The trade source added: "She has worked like a beast to be her fittest best and people will have to wait to see her fittest best on screen when 'Tiger 3' is set to release!" "Tiger 3" is the third part of the spy thriller franchise starring Salman Khan with Katrina Kaif. The first installment "Ek Tha Tiger" directed by Kabir Khan released in 2012. The second "Tiger Zinda Hai" released in 2017 and was directed by Ali Abbas Zafar.

Salman Khan, Katrina Kaif resume shooting for 'Tiger 3'



Neha Kakkar: Never a bad time to be a singer

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Neha Kakkar is fast emerging a one-woman industry of sorts, belting out hits with astonishing regularity and currently ruling the roost. She says it is never a bad time to be a singer in the industry. Over the past years, she has delivered back-to-back hits that include film songs such as "Garmi", "Dilbar" and "O saki saki".

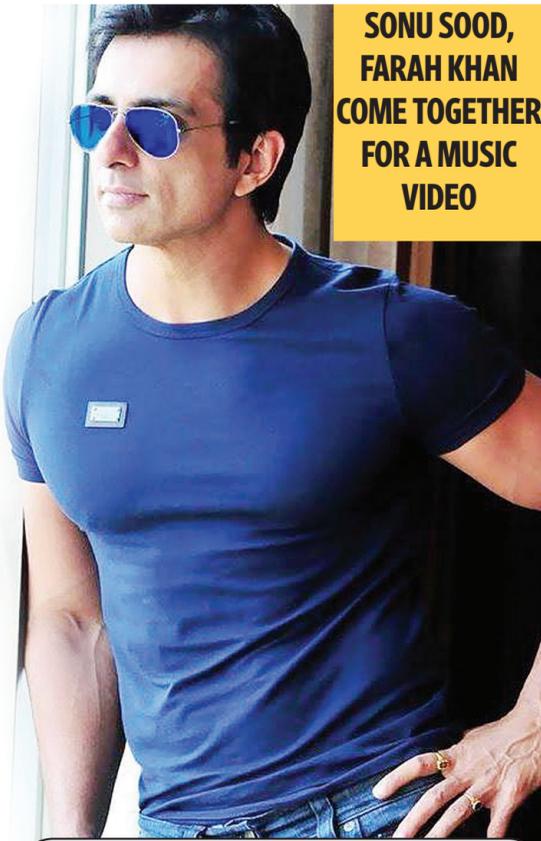
Asked if it is a good time to be a singer in the industry, Neha said, "It's never a bad time to be a singer in the industry, that's for sure. How unique you are matters but most of all, it's important to be a good human being. All our friends in the music industry are really nice and we wish them success."

In a very short time, Neha has become the undisputed queen of remixes. Before making her debut in Bollywood, Neha and her siblings Tony and Sonu Kakkar sang at jagratas.

She looks back at her journey from singing at jagratas to being one of Bollywood's top singers, and calls it a "humbling" one. "It's been hard work, and honest work. The journey has been humbling and it's so valuable for me to be able to measure how we have grown. My fans make my journey worth it, too!" she said.

With success comes criticism. Neha, who recently got married to singer Rohanpreet Singh, has often been trolled on social media and has also been a material to memes and jokes. She is not much bothered by negative comments coming her way.

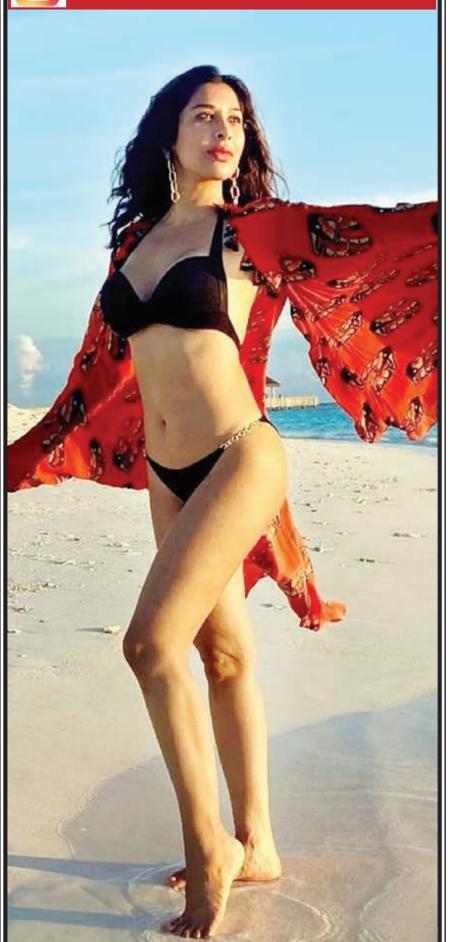
SONU SOOD, FARAH KHAN COME TOGETHER FOR A MUSIC VIDEO



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Sonu Sood and filmmaker Farah Khan have joined hands for a music video project. While details of the songs are under wraps, it is confirmed that Sonu features in the song and Farah directs it. The shooting for the track has already started in Punjab. Confirming the news to IANS, Sonu who was earlier directed by Farah in the film "Happy New Year", says: "This song will be something very different from anything that I've ever shot before. It's always wonderful to work with Farah." The story of the track will show Sonu's character as a farmer-turned-cop. The song will release at the end of the month.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Sophie Choudry