

absolute india

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PREGNANT WOMEN TO BE VACCINATED

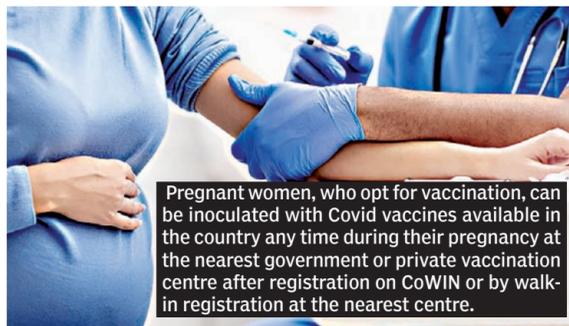
Team Absolute | New Delhi

Pregnant women in India are now eligible to get vaccinated against Covid with the union health ministry Friday giving the approval based on recommendations of the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunization (NTAGI).

The decision has been communicated to all the states and union territories to implement it under the ongoing National Covid Vaccination Program, it said in a statement.

Based on scientific and epidemiological evidence, the programme gives priority to strengthening the country's healthcare system by protecting the professionals, health and frontline workers, manning it, as well as protecting the most vulnerable population groups, the ministry said.

Till now, all groups except pregnant women were eligible for Covid vaccination. Now, it is expanded to even pregnant women in the world's



Pregnant women, who opt for vaccination, can be inoculated with Covid vaccines available in the country any time during their pregnancy at the nearest government or private vaccination centre after registration on CoWIN or by walk-in registration at the nearest centre.

largest immunization drive, the statement said. The NTAGI has recommended vaccination for pregnant women. The National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for COVID-19 (NEGVAC) too has unanimously recommended it. Further, a national level consultation on Covid vaccination for pregnant women was

also convened by the health ministry to build consensus on Covid vaccination of pregnant women. The consultation unanimously welcomed the recommendation of NTAGI to vaccinate pregnant women.

The ministry has accepted these recommendations and prepared an operational guideline for vaccination of pregnant women, counseling kit for medical officers and frontline

Covishield should be accepted in travel schemes: Johnson

London: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Friday said he saw no reason why people who received Indian-made AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines should be left out of vaccine passport schemes after the European Union did not initially recognise it. About 5 million people in Britain are thought to have had the vaccine made by Serum Institute in India, known as Covishield.



workers, and information education communication material for general public to equip the states and union territories to carry out the vaccination of pregnant women.

EARLIER STUDY REPORTED

- Studies have shown that Covid infection during pregnancy may result in rapid deterioration of health of pregnant women and they are at an increased risk of severe diseases and it might affect fetus too, it said.
- The matter has been examined by domain knowledge experts based on the evidence that indicate that pregnant women are at an increased risk for severe illness from Covid compared to non-pregnant women in case they get infected.
- Further, pregnant women with COVID-19 infection are at an increased risk for preterm birth and other adverse pregnancy outcomes including higher chances of neonatal morbidity.

INDIA'S COVID TOLL GOES PAST 4L

New Delhi: India on Friday became the third country, after the US and Brazil, to cross four lakh deaths due to Covid-19 pandemic. There were 853 deaths reported in past 24 hours. According to data released by the Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry on Friday, there were 46,617 fresh cases during the same period. With six lakh deaths US is at the top of the list followed by Brazil with 5.2 lakh due to the coronavirus. The first death due to Covid-19 in the country was reported last year in March. On May 23, 2021, the country witnessed highest fatalities with 4,454 deaths in 24 hours.

Uttarakhand CM set to quit, BJP MLAs meet on Saturday

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat is likely to resign as he is unable to get himself elected to the state Assembly within the stipulated six month period, sources said on Friday.

Sources said that Rawat, who was in Delhi where he had met BJP chief J.P. Nadda twice in three days, on Friday left for Dehra Dun and will submit his resignation to the Governor, names of Dhan Singh Rawat, Satpal Maharaj and some others started doing rounds as his possible successors.

Sources in the party said that a legislative party meeting will be called on Saturday to elect a new Chief Minister.

"We have learned that Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar will be coming as central observer of the legislative party meeting to elect a new Chief Minister. We have heard that a MLA will be elected for the post of Chief Minister to avoid any crisis like the current one," a Uttarakhand BJP leader said.

Rawat, who is to step down following his likely inability to become a member of the state Assembly by the deadline of September 10, as required, on Friday evening returned to Dehradun from New Delhi



and is likely to submit his resignation to Governor Baby Rani Maurya.

Dhan Singh Rawat, a minister in Tirath Singh Rawat government, has emerged as front runner for the post. Close to RSS, he has worked as state Secretary of its student wing ABVP and also served as an RSS office-bearer. He unsuccessfully contested for the first time in 2012, but won in 2017 and currently is Education Minister.

After Dhan Singh, another prominent name doing the rounds is veteran Satpal Maharaj, also a minister in the current government. A former Congressman and Union Minister who joined the BJP in 2014, Satpal Maharaj has clearly shown

his ambitions to become Chief Minister.

A BJP insider said that due to the constitutional crisis, the party has decided to replace Rawat with a sitting.

Rawat, who had met Nadda and Union Home Minister Amit Shah late on Wednesday night, as per the rules, needs to be sworn in as an elected MLA within six months of taking over as the Chief Minister.

Earlier in the day, Rawat met the BJP chief again to discuss the political situation. Before leaving for Uttarakhand capital, Rawat said that holding of bypolls will be decided by the Election Commission and he will follow whatever the Central leadership of the party decides.

Loud sound heard in B'luru; IAF, HAL deny sonic boom

Team Absolute | Bengaluru

The Indian Air Force (IAF), Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and the Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre (KSN-MDC) have ruled out the possibility of a supersonic boom or earthquake behind the mysterious loud sound similar to an explosion that was heard across many southern parts of Bengaluru on Friday noon.

The Indian Air Force (IAF) denied that any flying activity or any known action it's their side had caused the loud sound. The KSNMDC said in a statement that a loud sound was reported by the locals from Kengeri, Rajarajeswari Nagar and Vijayanagar areas between 12 noon and 12:45 pm. Bengaluru South division DCP, Harish Pande, said, "We don't have any clear



information yet. But from past experience, I can say that it seems like a sonic boom." HAL spokesperson Gopal Sutar said that regular sorties of fighters and trainers take place at the HAL airport. "Today (Friday) too was no different. HAL can't comment on the loud noise reportedly heard on Friday in Bengaluru," he said.

In May last year, a mysterious loud noise was heard across Bengaluru, which had rattled many citizens as theories and rumours about the major boom spread like wildfire. The Indian Air Force had revealed that it was an IAF test flight involving a supersonic profile had resulted in the sonic boom.

NO PROPOSAL TO REDUCE EXCISE DUTY ON PETROLEUM PRODUCTS: FM

Bengaluru: Union Finance Minister

Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday ruled out any cut in excise duty levied on petroleum products for now.

"When the international price of crude oil is higher, we have to increase the prices and when the international price is lower, we have to decrease the prices here too. This is a market mechanism which is followed by oil marketing companies. We have given them the freedom," she said in response to a question.

Sitharaman added that the Centre is spending on providing free food grains to the poor besides spending money on vaccines and healthcare infrastructure. "So, state governments can give relief by reducing taxes or levies on petrol," she said.



"Welcome Sharad Pawar's Statement On Farm Laws": Agriculture Minister

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Centre today welcomed NCP chief Sharad Pawar's reported views on making amendments to farm laws, with Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar placing on record his agreement with the veteran leader. However, the former minister's party stressed that he was referring to the Maharashtra government's proposed changes to state laws and not the three controversial central laws at the core of farmers protests for over six months.

"One of the country's top leaders Sharad Pawar has said in a statement that all laws need not be changed. The clauses that seem problematic must be considered and changed. I welcome this statement of the former agriculture minister. I'd like to tell him that the Central government agrees with him. We have discussed this with the farmer union eleven times...The government of India is willing to reconsider with an open mind the issues that



seem problematic," Tomar said.

Pawar, a former Union Agriculture Minister himself, had yesterday said that he had held discussions with Balasaheb Thorat, the Maharashtra Revenue Minister, over matters related to the state's farm laws.

"As the Centre has cleared the law, now the state, before passing these laws, should discuss the contentious points and take a decision. I don't think it will come up in a two-day session of the Assembly. If it does, then it should be discussed," Pawar reportedly said.

Power crisis force Punjab to curtail office timings

CHANDIGARH | Agencies

Facing severe electricity crisis, the Punjab government has curtailed timings of government offices from Friday, and cutting down of power supply to high energy consuming industries with immediate effect to save crops and ease the domestic power situation.

Chief Minister Amarinder Singh has appealed to all government offices to make judicious use of electricity in government offices, adding that the situation was dire as the peak demand in the state had touched a whopping 14,500 MW. A government spokesperson told reporter



that no decision on ban on use of ACs in government offices, which will function from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. till further orders, has been taken.

The Chief Minister urged the agitating Power Department employees to call off their stir, which has aggravated the crisis, with complaints of breakdowns resulting from overloading of feeders and sub-stations not being addressed promptly.

Drone spotted over Indian high commission in Islamabad

Air Chief Marshal RKS Bhadouria on Friday said the drone strikes in the Jammu airbase were an "act of terror" that was aimed at targeting key military assets.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A drone was spotted over the Indian High Commission complex in Islamabad last week and Pakistan has been asked to investigate the incident and prevent recurrence of such "breach of security," the external affairs ministry said on Friday.

The Indian mission has also lodged a strong protest with Pakistan over the incident through a note verbale which is a diplomatic communicate, people familiar with



the development said.

The incident came to light amid growing concerns in India after explosives-laden drones were used to carry out an attack on the Jammu Air Force station on June 27.

"A drone was spotted over the premises of the Indian High Commission in Islamabad on June 26. This has been taken up officially with the government of Pakistan. We expect Pakistan to investigate the incident and prevent recurrence of such breach of security," external affairs ministry spokesperson

QUADCOPTER FROM PAK REPULSED BY BSF AT

Jammu: The Border Security Force (BSF) have fired at a quadcopter from Pakistan to repulse it from crossing the International Border (IB) in the Arnia sector of Jammu, officials said. "Alert BSF troops fired at a small quadcopter belonging to Pakistan today morning at about 4.25 a.m. as it was trying to cross IB in Arnia sector," BSF said. "Due to this firing it returned back immediately. It was meant for carrying out surveillance of the area." Jammu is witnessing heightened drone activity.

Arindam Bagchi said at a media briefing.

It is learnt that the drone was sighted within the complex when an event was being held at the mission.

In Islamabad, Pakistan Foreign Office spokesperson Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri rejected there was any 'drone incident', saying no proof has been shared with it to substantiate the charge and alleged that it was an "Indian propaganda".

PAK INVOLVEMENT IN JAMMU DRONE ATTACK CAN'T BE RULED OUT

"We have strong suspicion about the involvement of Lashkar-e-Taiba in this attack. And since LeT is run by Pakistan, the involvement of Pakistan cannot be ruled out. To what extent Pakistani agencies are involved in this attack would be known as the investigation gets along in this case."

Dilbag Singh, DGP, J&K police

Pogonotrophy: New word revealed by Sashi Tharoor, refers to PM

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor, known for his penchant for rarely used English words, sent the Twitterati running for their dictionaries on Friday with another head scratcher - pogonotrophy. Tharoor said he learnt of the new word pogonotrophy, which means the growing or cultivation of a beard, from a friend. He also used the word to take an apparent dig at Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

A Twitter user reached out to Tharoor, saying she was waiting to learn a new word and the former Union minister was quick to oblige. "My friend Rathin Roy, the economist,

taught me a new word today: pogonotrophy, which means 'the cultivation of a beard'. As in, the PM's pogonotrophy has been a pandemic preoccupation," he said in a tweet.





AFTER POONIA'S LETTER, NOW RAJE'S PURPORTED AUDIO CLIP GOES VIRAL

Archana Sharma | Jaipur

After a 22-year-old resignation letter penned by Rajasthan BJP President Satish Poonia went viral recently, a purported audio clip of Vasundhara Raje has gone viral on Friday, where the former Chief Minister can be heard recognising the members of 'Vasundhara Raje Samarthak Manch' as her own people.

In the clip, Raje can also be heard directing the forum's district president Tarachand Sharma to continue running the platform.

It needs to be mentioned here that the 'Vasundhara Raje Samarthak Manch' is a platform being run on social media since the past few months. The forum has been demanding Raje to be announced as the CM face for the next Assembly elections scheduled in 2023. However, till date, only the followers of Raje were seen voicing their opinions on social media. But the latest audio clip has raised questions whether Raje herself is backing this platform.

Many eyebrows were raised at the start of the year when the list of presidents of this forum was announced for each district of the state, giving rise to speculation that Raje is floating her own



political party. But Raje's silence over the next few months has out an end to the discussions, while her followers still continue to declare her as the CM face for the 2023 elections.

Raje continued doing philanthropic work during the Covid-19 pandemic through this forum, running a parallel entity to the state BJP unit.

Now with the release of this audio clip, silent whispers in the political corridors are once again hinting at Raje planning to go solo in the upcoming Assembly elections.

However, there has been no response from the Raje camp till the filing of this report, while district president Tarachand Sharma has said that Raje was speaking about continuing the philanthropic work, and there is nothing more to it.

The audio clip has gone viral a few days after a three-page resignation letter written by Poonia 22 years back went viral on social media. Factionism is running deep within the saffron party in Rajasthan ever since the appointment of Poonia as the state BJP President. Since then, Raje has been maintaining a distance with the party office, even staying away from the campaign for the recent bypolls.

Recently, her posters were removed from state BJP headquarters.

Poonia is presently in Delhi holding discussions with senior party leaders on a range of issues concerning the party in Rajasthan.

Organised racket may have stolen 1K Italian visa stickers in Islamabad



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Pakistan has reported the theft of around 1,000 visa stickers from the Italian Embassy in Islamabad, SchengenVisaInfo reported.

Pakistan daily Dawn has reported that the Italian Embassy has informed the Foreign Ministry about the theft of visa stickers, which are valid for travelling to any of the 26 Schengen states in Europe. The region mostly functions as a single jurisdiction for international travel purposes with a common visa policy. The Foreign Ministry requested the Interior Ministry and the FIA "to keep track of these visa stickers at all entry and exit points and report any seizure to this [foreign] ministry".

The Interior Ministry has referred the matter to the FIA headquarters, the report said.

Dawn said the sources did not rule out the involvement of an organised network of human traffickers in the theft since they sell the visa stickers.

An official working with

a private overseas employment company has said that it is a multi-billion rupee scam because the price of a Schengen visa starts from Rs 2 million and some people may even be willing to pay up to Rs 4 million for it.

As per the report, an FIA official has said that there are organised rackets and small groups of people who smuggle thousands of desperate men, women and children abroad every year. The FIA Red Book lists around 112 "most wanted traffickers".

The Red Book contains the names of the most wanted terrorists and criminals involved in drug trade, fraud, money laundering, human trafficking and other such illegal activities.

Most of these wanted traffickers belong to Central Punjab, while a sizeable number of these criminals hail from Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and POK, the report added.

The sources expressed apprehensions that the traffickers may already have sent a number of

aspirants to the Schengen states through stolen visa stickers.

According to Schengen Visa Statistics, Pakistan has been listed as the 11th country in the world with the highest rejected Schengen visa rates, following several African countries. In 2021, the data revealed that 43.5 per cent of the visa applications from Pakistan had been rejected, the report said.

It added that the European Asylum Support Office's (EASO) May report had also revealed that Pakistan was among the top countries to have applied for asylum in the European member countries during March 2021.

EASO has reported a 17 per cent increase in first-time applications and a 31 per cent decline in repeated applications. The organisation said that 42,000 asylum applications were lodged in the EU countries in March 2021.

Last year, European Parliament member Dominique Bilde had said that Pakistan leads the fake passport and documents market.

5 TERRORISTS, INCLUDING LET COMMANDER, KILLED IN PULWAMA ENCOUNTER



Srinagar: In a major anti-terror operation, five terrorists, including a self-styled district commander of proscribed outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), were killed in an encounter between militants and security forces in the Hanjin Rajpora area in South Kashmir's Pulwama district, officials said on Friday. The police said that during the intervening night of July 1/2, acting on a specific input regarding the presence of terrorists in the Hanjin Rajpora area, a joint cordon and search operation was launched by the police, the army and the CRPF. "During the search operation, the civilians were evacuated to safer places. As the presence of terrorists got ascertained, they were given an opportunity to surrender. However, they fired indiscriminately upon the joint search party, which was retaliated leading to an encounter," the police said. Due to darkness, the operation was suspended though the cordon remained intact throughout the night.

"On Friday morning, repeated announcements were made urging the hiding terrorists to surrender, but the terrorists again fired on the joint search party which was retaliated. In the initial exchange of fire, two army jawans received gunshot injuries and were rushed to the hospital. Unfortunately, one of them later attained martyrdom," the police said. During the ensuing encounter, five terrorists were killed and their bodies were retrieved from the site of the gunfight. The slain terrorists have been identified as Nishaz Hussain Lone alias Khitab (district commander LeT), a resident of Nageempora Tral, Danish Manzoor Shiekh, a resident of Sathergund Kakapora, Amir Wagay, a resident of Hanjan Payeen, Mehran Manzoor, a resident of Jamalato Srinagar, and a foreign terrorist identified as Abu Rehan alias Tawheed, a resident of Pakistan. "All the killed terrorists were linked to the proscribed terror outfit LeT," the police said.

As per records, all the killed terrorists were part of groups which were involved in many terror crime cases and civilian atrocities, the police said. Arms, ammunition and other incriminating materials were recovered from the site of the encounter. "One SLR rifle belonging to the J&K Police, which was snatched by terrorists in 2016, was also recovered from the encounter site," the police said.

Meanwhile, IGP Kashmir Vijay Kumar has congratulated the police and the security forces for successfully conducting the operation in a professional manner.

LIGHT RAIN IN DELHI PROVIDES RESPITE FROM SCORCHING HEAT



New Delhi: The national capital witnessed light rain with thunderstorm and heavy winds on Friday evening, providing some much-needed respite from the scorching summer heat. As per the Met department, for the last four days, Delhi was reeling under severe heatwave with the mercury soaring well above the 40-degree Celsius mark.

Earlier in the day, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) had said that "isolated and scattered thunderstorm activity accompanied by lightning and rainfall is likely" in Delhi and its nearby states, but no favourable conditions are likely to develop for further advancement of southwest monsoon as the heatwave

HC directs Bengal govt to provide relief to post-poll violence victims

Kolkata | Agencies

The Calcutta High Court on Friday issued a show cause notice for contempt of court proceedings against Deputy Commissioner of Police of South Kolkata Rashid Munir Khan for failing to prevent obstruction to the team of National Human Rights Commission which was visiting Jadavpur to examine allegations of post-poll violence. It also directed the state government to provide relief to the victims.

The court was referring to the incident when the fact-finding team of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) constituted by the Calcutta High Court to probe into the allegations of post-



poll violence was allegedly attacked by some people in the Jadavpur area. The committee submitted its interim report to the court on June 30. Taking a strong stance against the state on post-poll violence, the five-member

bench of the Calcutta High Court directed the state government to treat all complaints regarding the post-poll violence as FIR and arrange for ration and medical treatment to all those persons who were injured.

ED attaches properties of Dino Morea, Ahmed Patel's son-in-law in bank fraud case

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In a big setback to late Congress leader Ahmed Patel's son-in-law Irfan Ahmed Siddiqui and Bollywood actor Dino Morea, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) said on Friday that it has attached their properties in connection with the Sandesara Group bank fraud case.

An ED official said that the financial probe agency on Friday attached eight immovable properties, three vehicles and several bank accounts/shares/mutual funds having a total value of Rs 8.79 crore belonging to four persons under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) in the Sandesara Group case.

The official said that the agency attached properties to the tune of Rs 1.4 crore belonging to Morea, besides



attaching properties worth Rs 2.41 crore in the name of Siddiqui.

Besides these two, the agency also attached properties worth Rs 3 crore belonging to one Sanjay Khan, and properties worth Rs 1.98 crore in the name of one Aqeel Abdulkhalil Bachooali. The ED had registered a case of money laundering on the basis of an FIR registered by the CBI against several entities for cheating various public sector banks. The official said that during the probe, it was revealed that the Sandesaras had diverted the proceeds of crime of Rs 3 crore, Rs 1.4 crore, Rs 12.54 crore and Rs 3.51 crore to Sanjay Khan, Dino Morea, Aqeel Bachooali and Irfan Ahmed Siddiqui, respectively.

Earlier, the ED had attached properties to the tune of Rs 14,513 crore in connection with the case.

Cong questions govt's silence in row over Covaxin deal with Brazil

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A day after Brazil decided to suspend the \$320 million contract to procure 20 million doses of Bharat Biotech's Covaxin to probe allegations of irregularities in the deal, including the price of \$15 per dose, the Congress on Friday demanded that the Centre, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan should break their silence on the issue.

Addressing a press conference at the party headquarters, Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinete said: "Indians have the first right on vaccines being made and manufactured here and the government, which is buying vaccines at pre-determined prices from Serum Institute of India (SII) or Bharat Biotech, needs to answer the question of how some export deals still continue."

Noting Indian vaccines are



"at the centre of huge controversy", she cited the case of Covaxin in Brazil.

"We are perhaps staring at a cancellation of the contract, the Senate is probing into this, two criminal investigation agencies are now probing into this and the taint

comes all the way to the ICMR also because it is a co-developer of the vaccine... it is not just Bharat Biotech, which is a private entity," Shrinete said.

She said that it is important to raise these questions, because Bharat Biotech may

be a private entity, but "public fund was diverted for the development of this vaccine, tax payers money was put into this and which is why we have a right to question".

"What has happened with that money and why is the government conspicuously silent on it," she asked.

Shrinete noted that Bharat Biotech got into an agreement with Precisa Medicamentos of Brazil and they had signed a contract to supply 20 million doses, but then allegations of huge price rise arose. She said that media reports alleged that Bharat Biotech quoted a price of \$1.34 per dose, which was jacked up to \$15 per dose, and that is what the Brazilian opposition and the Senate are probing.

The Congress leader said that they are also probing an offshore possible fund diversion by an entity called Madison Biotech related to Bharat Biotech.

5 killed, 5 injured in Jammu-Srinagar highway accident



Jammu | Agencies

Five people were killed and five others injured on Friday in a road accident on Jammu-Srinagar highway in Ramban district, police said. Police said around 4.30 p.m., a vehicle coming from Ramban town towards Ramsoo on Jammu-

Srinagar highway went out of the driver's control at Digdole and plunged into a gorge.

"Five persons travelling in the vehicle were killed on the spot while five injured persons were rescued by police and army teams which reached the spot immediately and shifted the injured to hospital," police said.

UP scribe set on fire by lover's kin in Bihar

Team Absolute | Patna

A journalist working with a private media organisation in Uttar

Pradesh was set on fire in Bihar's Siwan district on Friday as the victim was in love with a girl whose parents disapproved of their relationship. The victim has been identified as Ramu, a native of Orai in Uttar Pradesh's Jalaun district. He had gone to the Kanhauli village in Siwan district, which comes under the MH Nagar Hasanpura police station, to meet his girlfriend Poonam Kumari on Friday morning. Jitendra Pandey, the Siwan block SDPO, said the victim was involved in a verbal duel with the family members of Poonam. "The situation turned so ugly that Poonam's family members allegedly poured oil over him and set him on fire. When Poonam tried to save him, she also received burn injuries," Pandey said on the basis of Poonam's statement to Bihar police. Both

Ramu and Poonam have sustained severe burn injuries and are admitted to a primary health centre in Hasanpur.

CHANGE OF NAME
My old name was SHABBIR HUSAIN now I have change my name my new name known as SHABBIR HUSAIN KAPADIYA s/o Mulla ebrahim bhai R/O house No 42/1 mohalla nayapura RAMPURA Distt-Neemuch

CHANGE OF NAME
MY old name was JAMILA SAIIFY now I have change my name my new name known as JAMILA W/O MUFADDAL R/O H no 20 ward no 15 nehru marg kasrawad. Distt khargone.



AFTER MAHA GOVERNOR'S LETTER, THACKERAY PENS A POLITE REBUFF

Responding to the Governor's one-page letter of June 24 which was released on June 30 Chief Minister Thackeray has sent a 3 pager, explaining in detail the points raised by the Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnavis which were put forth by Koshiyari for the government's consideration.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Days after Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari's letter routing for certain issues raised by the Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

addressed to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, the latter has penned a polite rebuff, here on Friday. Responding to the Governor's one-page letter of June 24 which was released on June 30 Chief

Minister Thackeray has sent a 3pager, explaining in detail the points raised by the Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnavis which were put forth by Koshiyari for the government's consideration.

The CM has said that the decision to hold a brief two-day Monsoon Session was taken by the Business Advisory Committee of the Legislature taking into consideration the prevailing Covid-19 situation in the state and experts' advice on the same.

Similarly, he added that the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government was very keen to hold the election for the post of Speaker that is lying vacant since February 2021 but it could not be done on account of the pandemic situation, and the (Speaker's) duties are being handled by Deputy Speaker Narhari Zirwal.

Thackeray also sought the Governor's help on resolving the pending sensitive issue of the OBC quotas with the Centre, to enable the Maharashtra government initiate appropriate steps in the matter.

Leading a BJP delegation to Raj Bhawan on June 23, Fadnavis had sought: Extending the Legislature's Monsoon Session duration, steps to fill up Assembly Speaker's post, and postponing the local bodies' elections due to the pending OBC reservations matter.

We are not here to advise Guv: SC on plea seeking norms for Maha Legislative Council

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday declined to entertain a PIL for issuing specific directions to prepare norms for nominations of Maharashtra Legislative Council by the Governor. A bench headed by Chief Justice N.V. Ramana told the petitioner's counsel, "The Governor is bound by the advice of Council of Ministers. We are not here to advise the Governor".

The bench also comprising Justices A.S. Bopanna and Hrishikesh Roy rejected contention of a Latur-based headmaster, Dr Jagannath Shamrao Patil that due to lack of specific norms or criteria, several eligible and deserving personalities were deprived from consideration of names for the purpose of their nominations as members of Maharashtra Legislative Council.

The petitioner contended that the Governor must have discretion to choose people from specified fields to avoid the party in power making recommendations for it. The bench said, "There is a separate provision for what you want, you want us to amend the Constitution?" After a brief hearing in the matter, the bench declined to entertain the plea.

The plea argued that the top court should direct Maharashtra's Maha Vikas Aghadi government led by Uddhav Thackeray not to intervene in the process of nomination. The plea added that this will avoid the practice of nomination under political considera-



tions. The plea also brought the court's attention to clause 5 of Article 171. Clause 5 of the Article 171 of the Constitution has given mandate to the Governor that the nomination shall consist of "persons having special knowledge or practical experience in respect of such matters as literature, science, art, co-operative movement and social service."

The petitioner submitted that no norms have been framed or finalised so far, for the purpose of making the nominations from the five prescribed categories. "Thus, the political parties who are in governance are taking the undue advantage of this loophole and are making the recommendations of the names of the persons who are not from the prescribed category but who are either powerful in politics or to whom the political parties want to make powerful by way of such nomination," said the plea filed on behalf of advocate R.R. Deshpande and Associates.

65 Crore In Assets Linked To Ajit Pawar Attached In Maharashtra Bank Scam Case

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Enforcement Directorate has attached assets worth 65 crore in connection with the alleged 25,000 crore Maharashtra State Cooperative Bank (MSCB) scam - in which NCP leader and Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar has been named - sources in the central agency said on Friday.

The action was taken under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, and the attached properties include a company linked to Pawar, sources added.

These assets include land, building, machinery and other facilities held by a Guru Commodity Services Private Limited, that had leased it to a sugar mill - Jarandeshwar Sakhari Sugar Karkhana (SSK) - in Maharashtra's Satara district.

The majority shareholder in the mill - Sparking Soil Pvt Ltd - is linked to Pawar, the agency said.

"Sparkling Soil Pvt Ltd is holding majority shares of Jarandeshwar Sugar Mills. Investigations revealed it is related to Ajit Pawar... and Sunetra Pawar (his wife)," the agency said.

Total value of assets is 65.75 crore - the purchase price in 2010 - the agency added.

The agency's action come during an uncertain time in the relationship between the Shiv Sena and other two members of Maharashtra's ruling MVA government - the NCP and the Congress.

An uncertainty that was highlighted by comments from Nana Patole, the Congress' state unit chief about contesting future elections on their own.

Recent meetings between Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have sparked speculation of a reconciliation between their two parties, which have much more in common with each other than the Shiv Sena does with

The agency's action come during an uncertain time in the relationship between the Shiv Sena and other two members of Maharashtra's ruling MVA government - the NCP and the Congress

either of its current allies.

Earlier this week Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut said Thackeray and PM Modi still shared a strong bond, despite their two parties falling out.

At least one Sena leader - MLA Pratap Sarnaik - has called on the two former allies to reunite. Sarnaik, interestingly, cited "harassment" by central agencies like the Enforcement Directorate, which last year raided properties belonging to Mr Sarnaik over a money laundering case.

"Harassment" central agencies has been a long-standing complaint; the opposition has accused the BJP of using the CBI and other agencies to pressure MPs and MLAs to switch sides, and bring down elected governments, with Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee among the most vocal.

In 2019 the Enforcement Directorate filed a case naming the Pawars based on a case filed after a Bombay High Court ordered the police to charge Ajit Pawar and 75 others in the alleged scam.

The MSCB is controlled largely by NCP leaders and people close to them.

The complaint alleges banking laws and RBI guidelines were violated when loans were distributed to sugar factories and spinning mills in Maharashtra that had weak financial profiles. Many of those who had sanctioned the loans were allegedly linked to the owners of the sugar mills.

Last year Mumbai Police filed a closure report in the case, but the central agency opposed this.

How a Maha radio station helped educate poor students without smartphones

Team Absolute | Nashik

A community radio station that is helping educate poor students - who can ill-afford expensive smartphones - is earning laurels for helping bridge the digital divide during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown.

"Radio Vishwas 90.8", run by the Vishwas DhyanaPrabodhini & Research Institute (VDPRI), also bagged two awards at the recent 8th National Community Radio Awards, instituted by the Information & Broadcasting Ministry.

It won the first prize in the 'Sustainability Model Awards' and the second prize in the 'Thematic Awards' category for its radio programme, "Education For All" during the pandemic.

Launched in June 2020, the programme aimed at providing free education, especially for the poor students from Class 3 to Class 10, studying in Zilla Parishad and Nashik Municipal Schools, benefitting around 60,000.

Daily for 14 hours, it broadcast lectures in Hindi, Marathi, English and Sanskrit - recorded by 150 teachers in a studio - which all could access and gain education, said Radio Vishwas 90.8 Station Director Dr. H.V. Kulkarni.

According to Kulkarni, a group of teachers from Igatpuri taluka in Nashik distributed 451 FM devices comprising a USB, Bluetooth and high-end speakers to students to ensure they didn't miss out any lectures on the current syllabus.

Now, the plan is to upload these lectures on YouTube which can be used to teach the students when normal schooling resumes post-lockdown.

"The programme received a very positive



response... There are students trapped in poverty and cannot afford smartphones for digital education," Kulkarni said. The lectures were aired according to slots allocated for each subject, akin to school periods for the benefit of the students.

Buoyed with the success, the lectures were shared with 6 other CRSs in Maharashtra and the content was broadcast through their radio channels to benefit their student-listeners.

The CRS' innovative sustainability model enabled the radio station to sustain itself in

four key areas - financial, human, technical and content.

Over the past 10 years, the radio station has developed a listener base of around 300,000, spread across a radius of 10-15 km, said Kulkarni.

The CRS focuses on topics of local and community interests ranging from kitchen gardens to favourite reading to issues that confront senior citizens, and is run by the locals who host talk-shows, sing or play local songs and music for the keen audiences.

Sighted over PM Modi's residence, Mumbai centre to track UFOs

To begin with, the ICEU will create an authentic, searchable database, cataloguing all UFO sightings reported in the Indian media, and others that were ignored.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Opening up an exciting field of scientific study, a Mumbai-based scientist has formed a centre to study the mysteries and suspense shrouding Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs) -- once sighted above Prime Minister Narendra Modi's residence in New Delhi -- to coincide with the World UFO Day-2021 (July 2), here on Friday.

It also marks the release of a major report in June 2021 by the US Department of Defense and the Director of National Intelligence, acknowledging the existence of UFOs, and how the Pentagon Report failed to explain 143 of the 144 UFO sightings investigated in the past decade.

"Against this backdrop, the Indian Astrobiology Research Foundation has launched the 'IARF-Centre of Excellence for UFOs (ICEU)', IARF Head and scientist Pushkar G. Vaidya, told IANS.

To begin with, the ICEU will create an authentic, searchable database, cataloguing all UFO sightings reported in the Indian media, and others that were ignored. It will provide a credible platform to submit their own UFO sightings which would be independently verified by the ICEU and its expert teams.

"The ICEU will conduct primary research and surveys on UFOs across the country and involve the people



and international scientists on UFO discussions within the scientific parameters," explained Vaidya, 40, who is a scientist with over 25 years in astro-biology and related aspects.

Explaining the philosophy behind the ICEU, he said that UFOs have been spotted in Indian skies since long and recorded since the 1950s, though there have been no reports of genuine UFO landings or crashings, or alien creatures seen scurrying about anywhere.

"The World UFO Day is celebrated this day (July 02) to commemorate the controversially famed UFO crash on July 2, 1947 at Roswell, New Mexico in the USA. Since then, UFOs have grabbed public imagination and led to lot of interest even among the global scientific communities," Vaidya said.

Although UFO sightings are being reported from various parts of India since 1954, the most famous one was in November 1996 when a group of aeronautical engineers witnessing UFOs for several days above the

Kandivali suburb of north-west Mumbai.

"Interestingly, in June 2018, a UFO paid a visit to the PM's official residence in the capital, which was widely reported by the media and sent the Indian intelligence agencies into a tizzy," smiled Vaidya who authored a book "In Search Of Aliens" (1997) when he was 16 years old.

Prior to that, worried Indo-Tibetan Border Police Force brass wrote to the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2012, detailing over 100 UFO sightings near the famous Pangong Tso Lake in Ladakh.

"We plan to investigate in detail all such past and present events to get to the truth of the UFOs, their possible origins from alien civilisations, the implications for the country and humanity as a whole," Vaidya added.

Besides, there have been stray UFO sightings reported from Thane (adjoining Mumbai), Bengaluru, Kerala, Assam by individuals and now there are several amateur groups of 'UFO Hunters' in India who track and scout for such objects in space.

On the relevance of ICEU in the Indian context, Vaidya said: "The subject of UFO falls squarely within the stated definition of astro-biology which concerns the study of the origins, evolution and distribution of life in the universe, including the search for hitherto unknown or undetected intelligent extraterrestrial life."

NO RIFT IN MVA: AJIT PAWAR

Team Absolute | Nashik

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on Thursday said there is no substance in reports claiming a rift among ruling coalition partners in the state.

The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader also hit at state BJP president Chandrakant Patil for demanding a CBI probe into the allegations levelled against him and another state minister by dismissed Mumbai cop Sachin Waze.

"Based on the allegations made by a culprit who is in jail and who has tarnished the image of the police department, Chandrakant Patil has made a demand. When Chandrakant Dada was the Revenue, Public Works and Co-operation minister in the (BJP) government, Shiv Sena MLA from Kolhapur Rajesh Kshirsagar had levelled allegations of corruption against Patil," he said.

"What action was taken? If no action was taken on allegations made by a people's representative, what action will be taken on allegations made by a culprit?" Ajit Pawar asked.

He was replying to a query about Mr Patil's demand for a CBI inquiry against him and Transport Minister Anil Parab.

In a letter to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Mr Patil has referred to a hand written note submitted by Sachin Waze to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) court in April in which the former assistant sub-inspector had claimed Mr Pawar and Parab allegedly asked him to collect money from illegal gutkha sellers, manufacturers and civic contractors.

Sachin Waze is in jail in the Antilia security scare-Mansukh Hiran murder



case. Ajit Pawar said NCP president Sharad Pawar has already said the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government will complete its five-year term. The ruling alliance consists of the Shiv Sena, the NCP and the Congress.

"We have selected our Chief Minister and that, too, for five years. The decision was taken by the top leaders of the three parties - Sonia Gandhi (Congress), Sharad Pawar (NCP) and Uddhav Thackeray (Shiv Sena)," Ajit Pawar said.

"Our leader Sharad Pawar has said the government will complete five years in office. Congress leaders Nana Patole and Balasaheb Thorat have also said that Sonaji wishes this government remains in office for five years. Reports (about differences among allies) are baseless, there is no substance in them," he said in reply to a question.

Ajit Pawar said the Centre is neglecting the agitation launched by farmers against the three new agri-marketing

laws enacted last year. "The neglect of farmers' agitation by the Union government is an insult to Indians. The Shiv Sena, the Congress and NCP have cleared their stand on the issue. We will not support laws which are against farmers. However, we will surely consider provisions which are in favour of farmers," he said.

About the coronavirus situation, Ajit Pawar said the state government has decided to vaccinate 70 per cent of its adult population in the next two months but unavailability of adequate vaccine stock is an obstacle to achieve the target. Ajit Pawar was on a day-long tour of Nashik district, where he inaugurated several development projects.

Meanwhile, Sambhaji Brigade activists had decided to gear up Ajit Pawar and Nashik district guardian minister Chhagan Bhujbal and give them memorandum listing their demands. However, the police intervened and detained the activists who had gathered in the Ashok Stambh area of the city to stage a protest.



MP TO BE SELF-DEPENDENT IN PRODUCTION OF MEDICAL OXYGEN: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that Madhya Pradesh should achieve self-reliance in the production of medical oxygen at the earliest, so that at the time of crisis, the state need not depend on oxygen supply from other states.

Chouhan said that the ongoing construction work of oxygen units in the state should be completed soon. Care should be taken to ensure quality in the work.

The Group of Ministers made a presentation on self-reliance in 'Medical Oxygen Production' in Mantralaya on Friday before the Chief Minister.

It was informed in the presentation of the Department of Industrial Policy and Investment Promotion, that large oxygen cylinder manufacturing units are being set up in Ujjain and Gwalior. Work is being done to set up PSA plant, LMO production and storage and flowmeter manufacturing units. Plans are afoot for setting up ASU in districts where there is no ASU. It was informed in the



presentation of the Department of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, that 200 tonnes each of oxygen storage tanks are to be installed in Bhopal, Sagar and Indore. Arrangements are being made to audit and monitor the capacity and quality of ASUs.

It was informed in the presentation of Public Health and Family Welfare Department, that Liquid Medical Oxygen Plants of 6 K.L. capacity are being installed in

34 district hospitals of the state. Also, there will be PSAs in every district hospital. At present there are 11184 oxygen supported beds in government hospitals and 4193 oxygen beds in medical colleges. In government hospitals, 2887 oxygen beds and 866 oxygen beds in medical colleges are being increased.

Chouhan said that oxygen pipeline would be mandatory in 30 percent of beds in private hospitals of the state. Oxygen concentrators

will be available in far-flung areas. Constant maintenance of oxygen concentrators is must. It was told that there are 6019 big oxygen concentrators in the government hospitals of the state. Apart from this, 5970 concentrators of 5 and 10 liters have been sent by the Government of India. The concentrators will be sent to primary health centers and health and wellness centres. It was informed in the presentation of the Medical Education Department, that the capacity of LMOs is being increased in Jabalpur, Gwalior, Shahdol and Ratlam Medical Colleges. It was informed in the presentation of the Transport Department that there is a plan to hire about 20 cryogenic tankers in the state. Chouhan instructed to begin work on this. It was informed in the presentation of the Department of Technical Education, Skill Development and Employment, that arrangement has been made by the department for training for operation, repair and maintenance of oxygen plants. While in the first batch 57 persons have been trained, 502 persons will be trained in the next batch.

Preparations on to face third wave of Corona: CM



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that the state government is making all possible preparations to face the possible third wave of Corona. Developing Dr. Kailash Nath Katju Civil Hospital in the form of a dedicated Covid hospital is a step in this direction. Chouhan was addressing the gathering during the dedication of Katju Civil Hospital after upgrading it as a 200 bedded dedicated Covid hospital. Chouhan has said that we should not forget the sufferings of the second wave of Corona infection. Corona has not gone yet although it is true that cases are decreasing in the state. Three days ago there were 38 cases in the state, yesterday there were 40 and today it has become 43. It is also a bitter truth that the Delta Plus variant of Corona is wreaking havoc in many countries. The number of Corona affected is increasing in Kerala and Maharashtra. Lockdown is not a permanent solution. Due to this, many families have to suffer unemployment and loss in business. There is safety only in caution. It is necessary to follow Covid appropriate behavior and take all related precautions to avoid the third wave. Chouhan said that public participation made it possible to face Corona crisis in the state. The state government, public representatives and voluntary organizations have united against the third wave. Care India Institute has extended support in the upgradation of Katju Dedicated Hospital. The hospital will be run by the institution with a sense of responsibility and service towards the society. No payment will be made to the institute by the state government. Voluntary and private organizations are extending support in other places as well.

Chouhan said that intensive testing is going on to prevent the third wave of Corona. More than 75 thousand tests are being conducted daily in the state. If a single person is found positive, contact tracing of 25 people is being done. This is being done so that any condition of spread of infection can be controlled promptly. Chouhan said that vaccination is a powerful way for Corona prevention. Those who have administered the first dose should get their second dose after a certain interval. Chief Minister Chouhan also kept in touch with the drivers of oxygen tankers.

Medical Education Minister Vishwas Sarang said that Chief Minister Chouhan has started a public movement to follow the necessary precautions to avoid Corona crisis. Corona control in the state was possible only as a result of the monitoring of the arrangements by Chief Minister during the second wave. Out of the total 200 beds in the dedicated hospital, 50 bedded Intensive Care Unit (ICU) will be operated with 24x7 availability of ventilator, suction, oxygen, medicine, all necessary equipments, testing facilities and treatment by specialist doctors.

WOMAN DRAGGED BY HAIR, THRASHED FOR LEAVING IN-LAWS' HOUSE

Bhopal: A 19-year-old woman is dragged by her hair, tied to a tree and beaten with sticks in full public view by her father and cousins, in a set of disturbing videos that have emerged from Madhya Pradesh. The family members were apparently angry at the woman, who got married three months ago, for leaving the house of her in-laws and coming home for a visit. In one of the videos, recorded on cell phones by the assaulters, a man is heard saying, "Stop Crying. Will you ever come back now?" Another man is then seen thrashing the woman mercilessly. He stops only when the stick he was beating her with breaks. In another video, the men are seen tying the woman to a tree and laughing at her plight. Several onlookers, including a little girl, can be seen in the frame. No one comes forward to help her. The girl, who belongs to a tribal community, had gone to her maternal uncle's house in. She was dragged out of there and tortured on June 28. After several videos of the incident surfaced online, the police recorded the statement of the girl and arrested her father and cousins.

Wheelchair-bound terror accused MP Pragya Thakur seen playing basketball, leaves Congress surprised

■ She had gone to attend a sapling plantation event at Saket Nagar in Bhopal on Thursday, where she spotted some players practising on a basketball ground.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A purported video of terror accused Bhopal's BJP MP Pragya Singh Thakur, who usually moves in a wheelchair citing health issues, walking and dribbling a ball before netting it a basketball hoop on a ground, has gone viral on social media. Her act has left many surprised, with the Madhya Pradesh Congress saying that it was delighted to see Thakur trying her hands at the basketball game, given that it was so far under the impression that she cannot even stand or walk.

Thakur had gone to attend a sapling plantation event at Saket Nagar in Bhopal on Thursday, where she spotted some players practising on a basketball ground, sources said. The saffron-robed BJP leader then went to



the basketball court and showcased her skills. She dribbled the ball with right hand and netted it with perfection amid cheers and clapping as seen in the video. Congress spokesman Narendra Saluja said, "I have seen MP Sadhvi Thakur wheelchair-bound so far. But today I am delighted to see her hands at basketball at the stadium. "So far, it was known that she couldn't even stand or walk due to an injury...May God keep her healthy always," he said in a release. The Congress has also shared the video of her playing basketball on the social media. However, efforts to establish contact

with Thakur failed.

When contacted, Thakur's elder sister Upama Singh described the incident as a "small thing". "Many of you might not know that she has done a certificate course in physical education (CPED) and bachelor of physical education (BPEd). "She was fit and fine before her going to jail, where she was tortured and tormented," her sister said. Pragya Singh Thakur is an accused in the 2008 Malegaon blast case.

In January this year, the special National Investigation Agency (NIA) court in Mumbai had granted exemption from physical appearance to her till further orders.

She had appeared before the special court on January 4 and filed an application seeking permanent exemption on medical and other grounds. Six people were killed and 100 injured when an explosive device strapped to a motorcycle went off near a mosque in Malegaon in north Maharashtra on September 29, 2008. Thakur had contested and won the 2019 Lok Sabha election as a BJP candidate from Bhopal.

State govt denies vaccine shortage after stampede-like situation seen at job centers

The Madhya Pradesh government on Friday claimed there was no shortage of vaccines in the state. This comes a day after a near stampede-like situation was seen at vaccination centers in Vidisha and Chhindwara districts.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Day after a near stampede-like situation was seen at vaccination centers in Vidisha and Chhindwara districts, the Madhya Pradesh government on Friday claimed there was no shortage of vaccines in the state.

"These incidents happened because a large number of people turned up. But we still vaccinated 9,82,000 people across the state on Thursday. On Saturday, our focus will be on the second dose so it might appear that the numbers are falling but as is visible, we are constantly striving to vaccinate the maximum number of people in the minimum possible time. There is no shortage of vaccines as such," state Medical Education Minister Vishwas Sarang said.

On Thursday, over 20,000 people turned up at 10 vaccination centers across Vidisha where only 6,000 vaccines were available. This resulted in long queues outside the vaccination

centers with many people not wearing a mask and not following social distancing norms.

At the city hospital in Vidisha, the police had to be called in to maintain order as people standing in long queues through the day got restless. People waited in queues till 6 pm and most had to return disappointed without a jab.

In Chhindwara's Lodhikhera village, a stampede-like situation was witnessed outside an inoculation center where over 2,000 people turned up for a jab. The center was allotted only 200 doses.

"A large number of people, including women, turned up at the center as soon as it opened in the morning. Some people suffered minor injuries in the melee. Some people even tried to break barricades, though the situation was brought under control after additional force reached the spot," the police said.

The government-run vaccination programme is held on four days—Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday—every week across the state.

CM HOLDS MEETING WITH UNION MINISTER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT

Sports complex for Divyangjans and National Institute of Mental Health unique gifts for state: CM

- Madhya Pradesh first in giving identity cards to differently-abled
- District Divyang Rehabilitation Centres will be built in all 52 districts of the state

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the National Institute of Mental Health and Research being built at Sehore and the sports complex being constructed for the differently-abled at Gwalior by the Government of India are unique gifts for the state. The State Government is continuously active for the welfare of Divyangjans. Identity cards have been made available to about 6 lakh Divyangjans in the state. The Central Government is also extending full cooperation in this direction. Chouhan was addressing a meeting at Mantralaya along with Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Thawarchand Gehlot.



It was informed that the Institute of Mental Health and Research is being constructed in Sehore by the Government of India at a cost of Rs. 179 crores 40 lakhs. For this, 25 acres of land has been provided free of cost by the state government. Certificate courses and training activities on mental health will be conducted in this national level institute to be completed by June 2022. In Gwalior, 34 acres of land has been provided free of cost by the state government for the sports complex being built for the differently-abled at a cost of 170 crores.

Gehlot congratulated Chouhan for being the first in the country to issue identity cards to Divyangjans. It was informed in the meeting that against the target of 6 lakh 7 thousand 313 set by the

Government of India, 5 lakh 97 thousand 170 persons with disabilities have been issued identity cards.

Gehlot said that Madhya Pradesh has been the first in the country to give identity cards to transgenders. It is commendable. On the basis of the identity card, financial assistance was also provided to the transgenders twice during the Corona Curfew period. It was informed that on January 8, 2021, the identity cards were first issued to transgender persons by Bhopal Collector.

Chouhan said that 33 lakh 43 thousand beneficiaries are being benefitted in the state under Indira Gandhi National Old Age and Widow and Disabled Pension Schemes run under social assistance programme. Out of these, 11 lakh 38 thousand beneficiaries

are being paid pension by the state government. Chouhan also requested for payment of pension amount by the Central Government for these 11 lakh 38 thousand beneficiaries.

Chouhan requested the Central Government to release the approval of Rs. 81 crore seven lakh at the earliest for the construction of ramps and lifts etc. in the government buildings of the state for the convenience of the divyangjans.

Chouhan said that the budget allocation proposals for District Divyang Rehabilitation Centres approved for 24 districts of the state have been sent to the Central Government. Divyang Rehabilitation Centres are useful and beneficial for the differently-abled. Chief Minister requested to sanction budget for the rehabilitation centres for Divyangs in all 52 districts of the state. Giving consent to this, Gehlot instructed to send the proposal to the Government of India in a week.

Chouhan said that only dedicated and service-oriented self-help organisations should be entrusted with the responsibilities related to the welfare and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities. The review of the status of the beneficiaries of the centres run by the voluntary organisations should also be ensured regularly.

In rural MP, people shed hesitancy towards vaccination

Team Absolute | Bhopal

With the focus on spreading awareness to make people shed misconceptions about the vaccination drive, especially in the rural areas of Madhya Pradesh, the people have started realising that vaccination is the only potent weapon to stop the spread of the Covid-19 infection.

The evidence of this shift in attitude among the rural population towards vaccination in the state has emerged with the 100 per cent vaccination already carried out across several Gram Panchayats in the state.

Vaccination drive is taking place in full swing in Madhya Pradesh with more than two crore people having been vaccinated till now. At the starting of the vaccination drive in rural areas, several hurdles were faced by the administration and the people conducting the vaccination drive. In many places, incidents

of misbehaving with the vaccination teams also came to light.

It was a challenge before the government to eliminate the confusion among the people residing in villages as they felt that vaccination could lead to death or cause impotency. To deal with these situations, different strategies were prepared and implemented at the district level.

In Betul district, the priests of the tribal population came forward to tell the people that vaccination is the only way to prevent coronavirus infection and the misconceptions spread about it were false. This effort had a ripple effect and the tribals received the vaccine jabs.

As the pace of the vaccination campaign increased, the efforts made to spread awareness among the people living in the rural areas started showing positive outcome. In Jabalpur district, the vaccination data that has emerged from the rural areas has given a boost to



the administration and the state government. Hundred per cent vaccination has been undertaken across the 33 Gram Panchayats in Jabalpur. In rural areas of

this district, a greater number of vaccinations have been done than the target set by the state government.

Calling positive thinking behind the

awareness spread among the people in the villages, Jabalpur District Magistrate Karmaveer Sharma said this was possible only due to the joint efforts of the Health, Revenue and Rural Development Department, including Anganwadi workers, public representatives and members of Village Disaster Management Committee, as well as villagers coming forward for vaccination.

Similarly, Jamui Gram Panchayat of Shahdol district has also been 100 per cent vaccinated.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said vaccination is a potent way to prevent Covid-19 infection. Every Gram Panchayat in the state needs to undergo vaccination as a protective shield just like the Jamui villagers of Shahdol district.

CM Chouhan said, "Coronavirus has not been eliminated yet but we all have to learn to live in this pandemic.

According to experts, there is a possibility of a third wave of Covid-19 hitting the state. The state government is fully prepared for handling the third wave effectively and all necessary arrangements are being made in advance for this purpose.

At the same time, there are incidents of chaos, overcrowding by people and non-availability of vaccines at vaccination centres reported from many areas.

Expressing concerns about the overcrowding by people in the state for vaccination, former Chief Minister Kamal Nath said, "There have been reports of huge crowd gatherings and stampede-like situations in many areas during the vaccination drive undertaken in the state. The state government should increase the number of vaccination centres and the days of conducting vaccination. To gather people at a particular place amid fear of a third wave of Covid-19 is putting their lives at a risk."



EDITOR'S SPECS

Covid infection changes blood cells

Covid-19 infection has the potential to significantly change the size and stiffness of red and white blood cells, a team of German scientists has found. In some cases, the effect may continue for months, a possible reason why some affected people continue to complain of symptoms long after an infection (also called long covid). During Covid disease, blood circulation is often impaired, and dangerous vascular occlusions can occur, and oxygen transport is limited. These are all phenomena in which the blood cells and their physical properties play a key role. To investigate this aspect, a team of scientists from the Max Planck Institute for the Science of Light (MPL), the Friedrich Alexander University Erlangen-Nuremberg and the German Centre for Immunotherapy measured the mechanical states of red and white blood cells. The team examined more than four million blood cells from 17 patients acutely ill with Covid-19, from 14 people who had recovered and 24 healthy people as a comparison group, using a self-developed method called real-time deformability cytometry (RT-DC). In this method, the researchers send the blood cells through a narrow channel at high speed. In the process, the leukocytes and erythrocytes are stretched. A high-speed camera records each of them through a microscope, and custom software determines which cell types are present, and how big and deformed they are. They found that the size and deformability of the red blood cells of patients with the disease deviated strongly from those of healthy people.

SRI LANKA MORPHING INTO 'XI-LANKA'?

N. C. Bipindra

As the Communist Party of China (CPC) celebrates 100 years of its founding today, much has been said and written about Communist China's infrastructure and development activities in Sri Lanka. While commentaries have waxed eloquent on how Sri Lanka's landscape is being transformed, precious little has been done to critically examine whether the average Sri Lankan on the street has actually benefited.

CPC-funded projects in Sri Lanka are executed by Chinese entities and undertaken using equipment, machinery, and material from China. A significant proportion of labour and most of the top management is also from China. In effect, while Sri Lanka pays for the project, plough-back is into Chinese coffers.

Chinese infrastructure projects have also been associated with a steep rise in Chinese imports into Sri Lanka and reduction of exports to China. This has resulted in a growing trade deficit with China, putting tremendous pressure on the Sri Lankan Rupee.

The only way to offset this trade deficit is by substantial export-oriented Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flowing into Sri Lanka from China, which is unfortunately not in the Chinese scheme of things.

Chinese projects have also not provided any significant benefit to the average Sri Lankan. More often than not, these are vanity projects, which have been used by powers-that-be for enrichment of self, kith, and kin.

The Lotus Tower, cricket stadium and port at Hambantota and Mattala airport have had no impact on the citizens, who are left struggling with rising prices and dropping income.

The \$104 million Lotus Tower was inaugurated in September 2019 with much fanfare. Yet, as with other Chinese projects, it was mired in controversy, with then President Maithripala Sirisena claiming that Chinese contractors were absconding with US\$11 million. The \$20-million airport built at Mattala is now infamous as the 'World's Emptiest Airport'. Sri Lanka's Strategic Enterprise Management Agency had opposed construction of this airport and recommended that Colombo airport be expanded instead.

The Mattala airport, located in then President Mahinda Rajapaksa's home constituency, was built anyway, while Colombo airport continues to burst at its seams. Was it a coincidence that Mattala airport was financed by a loan from EXIM Bank of China while expansion of the Colombo airport was to be financed by Japan?

Similar issues have dogged Hambantota Port, which was built at a cost of \$1.4 billion.



Sri Lanka was forced to lease out the port for the long-term to the Chinese since the revenue generated by the port was not even enough for repayment of the interest component of the project's Chinese loans.

In 2017, the port earned only \$2 million, whereas the annual loan repayment was in excess of US\$70 million. Even at an annual growth rate of 20 per cent, the port would not have been able to cover its interest payments for the next 30 years. Clearly, this port was never intended to be viable in Sri Lankan hands! Notwithstanding pronouncements to the contrary, the Sri Lanka Ports Authority has an extremely limited role in running and controlling operations at Hambantota. The Sri Lankan Navy also has to plead with the Chinese to berth their own ships at the port.

The Chinese authorities are now pushing for acquisition of 15,000 acres of land around the port to set up an export zone, claiming that the port does not make economic sense without this zone.

Pushed by Communist China, government officials are forcing families to part with fertile agricultural land. This is a standard Chinese tactic seen all over the world and particularly evident in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Maldives. However, violent protests by locals have stalled creation of this zone, for now.

The much-publicised US\$1.5-billion Colombo Port City being built by CHEC (China Harbour Engineering Company) has

also seen its share of controversies. One of the members for the Environmental Impact Assessment of the project was also a consultant for the parent company of CHEC.

When the project was initiated, it was decided that dredging would be done at least five km away from the coast to prevent erosion and damage to local fishing activity. Due to sustained protests by local fishermen who stood to lose their livelihood, dredging was shifted to 10 km away from the coast.

This was subsequently quietly re-established to 8 km, under pressure from CHEC. Dredgers were, thereafter, observed to be operating as close as 3 km from the coast, due to connivance of local authorities and CHEC.

CHEC has also subverted the political and bureaucratic apparatus to ensure that the project is executed in accordance with Chinese requirements. It is being claimed that 83,000 jobs would be created for locals and investment of up to \$15 billion would flow into the country.

These claims by the Chinese seem unrealistic and it is likely that the project would only bring gains to a select few. Contrary to assertions being made of the overall benefit of the Colombo Port City project, the livelihood of fishermen along the coast to the North and South of Colombo has already been affected by the project.

Large-scale sand mining and quarrying for granite being undertaken for the project will also impact Colombo, Gampaha and Kalutara, the three most populous districts in the country and home to a quarter of the country's population.

The malignancy of Chinese infrastructure projects is not restricted to economic and environmental domains but is beginning to have a societal impact as well since Chinese projects have not resulted in any job opportunities. The Port City Project is estimated to have 22 per cent Chinese workers. An average Chinese construction worker is paid 1,000 LKR a day compared to 1,500 LKR that has to be paid to a Sri Lankan. In addition, the Chinese worker is also expected to work longer. This has obviously made Chinese labour more desirable. Whilst official estimates state that there are 15,000 Chinese workers in Sri Lanka, the unofficial figure is closer to 100,000.

There is also no transfer of skill and knowledge to the local labour force. In a telling indication of the Chinese stranglehold on the local labour market, most major projects came to a standstill when Chinese workers, who had gone home for the Chinese New Year, could not return due to Covid-19 crisis.

Sri Lankan fishermen also face the brunt of poaching by Chinese IUU fishing vessels. IUU stands for Illegal Unreported and Unregulated. Recently, Chinese fishing vessels were found to be operating just outside the territorial waters of Colombo, but government authorities, unable to confront the Chinese, let these vessels off on a technicality. The tourism sector has also not been spared. A controversy erupted when it emerged that Chinese nationals were moonlighting as unauthorised guides for visiting Chinese tourists. It is also commonplace to see Chinese symbols and signage on business establishments. The mushrooming of Chinese shops throughout Sri Lanka had reached such alarming proportions that former president Sirisena had raised this issue in one of his Cabinet Meetings.

There is indeed a strong case to examine whether Sri Lanka has actually benefitted from Chinese projects. While some projects have proven to be beneficial, such as the China International Container Terminal and expressways, a vast majority have only benefited the Chinese at the expense of the common Sri Lankan citizen. Word on the street is - Sri Lanka will soon be called Xi-Lanka.

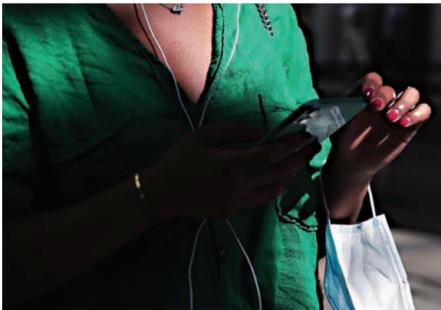
international

EUROPE EXPECTED TO BE 'DELTA DOMINANT' BY AUG, WARNS WHO

Copenhagen | Agencies

The World Health Organization (WHO) has warned that Europe is expected to be "Delta dominant" by August, adding that increased mixing, travel, gatherings, and easing of social restrictions have ended a 10-week decline in the number of new Covid-19 cases across the continent.

"Last week, the number of cases rose by 10 per cent. This is taking place in the context of a rapidly evolving situation, a new variant of concern, the Delta variant, and in a region where despite tremendous efforts by the member states, millions remain unvaccinated," the WHO's Regional Director for Europe, Hans Kluge said at an online press conference in here on Thursday. He noted that the "Delta variant overtakes the



Alpha very quickly through multiple and repeated introductions, and is already translating into increased hospitalisations and deaths", reports Xinhua news agency. The WHO European Region, according to Kluge, is expected to be "Delta dominant" by August. He also warned that new variants, deficit in vac-

cine uptake and increased social mixing would cause a new wave of excess hospitalisations and deaths before the autumn in the region.

To counter the expected upsurge, Kluge again called upon the region to "remain disciplined" and for citizens to take up vaccines when offered.

US FORCES EVACUATE LARGEST MILITARY BASE IN AFGHANISTAN

Kabul: After nearly two decades, the US military has left the Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan and has handed it over to Afghan National Defense and Security Forces, sources confirmed on Friday. At its peak, the airfield, the largest in Afghanistan and located 69 km north of Kabul in the central province of Parwan, witnessed the deployment of more than 100,000 US troops, TOLO News. The handover of the airfield to Afghan forces shows that last of the roughly 2,500 to 3,500 US troops have left Afghanistan, according to the Defence Ministry sources. Ahead of leaving the base, dozens of trailer trucks loaded with scrap from destroyed vehicles and equipment that belonged to American troops left the airfield on a daily basis. Those who purchase the material say that so far, the scrap has been worth millions of dollars, TOLO News reported citing the sources. Some residents of Bagram said that such equipment should have been handed over to Afghan forces instead of being scrapped by the US military. But US forces have said the equipment will be scrapped so it does not fall into enemy hands.



Pakistan will not give bases to US

Hamza Ameer | Islamabad

In a bold decision, Pakistan has decided and announced that it will not provide any bases on its soil to the US to operate from, after its troops exit Afghanistan.

The decision came after the briefing of the National Security Committee, which was attended by senior members of the Parliament from both the government and opposition, along with the Chief of Army Staff (COAS), and the Directors General of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and the Military Intelligence (MI).

The meeting continued for at least eight hours, where the committee members were given a detailed briefing on the security situation of the country and the region at large, the situation with India and the Kashmir issue, and Pakistan's role in the Afghan peace process, especially on



the US demand to Pakistan for providing bases to operate after its withdrawal from Afghanistan.

During the all-important meeting, the members were informed that US seemed to be deliberately leaving a "mismanaged and unstable" Afghanistan as it wanted to undermine China, Pakistan and the region.

However, Pakistan has decided that it is ready to face

any consequences of its decision to not provide any bases to the US.

"Pakistan is not going to give military bases to the US; we are not going to fight their proxy war. Nearly 70,000 people were martyred since the US did it the first time," said a member of the parliament, who was present during the briefing. "The US is once again leaving behind an unfinished job," he added.

Deaths spike as heatwave scorches parts of US, Canada

Washington/Ottawa | Agencies

Hundreds of deaths in Canada's British Columbia province and in the US states of Washington and Oregon have been linked to a record breaking heatwave scorching the two countries, sending thousands of people scrambling for relief, according to authorities.

Lisa Lapointe, British Columbia's chief coroner, said on Thursday 486 deaths had been reported in the province between June 25, a period in which about 165 deaths would normally be documented, reports Xinhua news agency.

Deaths were expected to increase, she said. "While it is too early to say with certainty how many of these deaths are heat related, it is believed likely that the significant increase in deaths reported is attributable to the extreme weather British Columbia has experienced." Oregon's state medical examiner's office on Wednesday



attributed at least 63 deaths in five days to the punishing heat in the state, including 45 in Multnomah County, which includes Portland, where temperatures reached a record 46 degrees Celsius. In Washington,

officials reported nearly a dozen lives lost to hyperthermia on Wednesday alone in King County, which includes Seattle; two heat-related deaths were reported there the day before. In Snohomish County, Washington, at

least three people died this week from heatstroke, according to the medical examiner's office, which added that investigations are pending into at least two more suspected heat-related deaths.

Global Covid-19 caseload tops 182.5mn



Washington | Agencies

The overall global Covid-19 caseload has topped 182.5 million, while the deaths have surged to more than 3.95 million, according to the Johns Hopkins University. In its latest update on Friday morning, the University's Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) revealed that the current global caseload and death toll stood at 182,582,291 and 3,954,621, respectively. The US continues to be the worst-hit country with the world's highest number of cases and deaths

at 33,678,270 and 605,012, respectively, according to the CSSE. In terms of infections, India follows in the second place with 30,411,634 cases.

The other worst countries with over 3 million cases are Brazil (18,622,304), France (5,839,929), Russia (5,472,722), Turkey (5,430,940), the UK (4,844,872), Argentina (4,491,551), Colombia (4,269,297), Italy (4,260,788), Spain (3,821,305), Germany (3,736,959) and Iran (3,218,860), the CSSE figures showed. In terms of deaths, Brazil comes second with 520,095 fatalities.

NATO BLACK SEA DRILLS DESTABILISING: RUSSIA

Moscow: The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is purposefully destabilising the situation along Russia's border with the Sea Breeze 2021 military exercises, the Foreign Ministry in Moscow said. With the involvement of more than 30 countries and 5,000 military personnel, these exercises cannot be called "friendly" or considered regular drills but are clearly politically driven, Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said at a briefing on Thursday. "The Black Sea space is consistently being transformed by Washington and its allies from an area of cooperation into an area of violent confrontation," Xinhua news agency quoted the spokesperson as saying.

While discussing the recent incidents in the Black Sea with British and Dutch warships, Zakharova explained that these activities were clearly coordinated.



CHRIS PRATT: 'THE TOMORROW WAR' IS A STORY ABOUT SECOND CHANCES

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor Chris Pratt is back in the sci-fi action drama "The Tomorrow War", a film he has also executive-produced. He describes the film as a story about second chances. "It's a story about second chances. Dan (his character in the film) is a guy who feels like he's always been destined to do something about second chances. Dan is a guy who feels like he's always been destined to do something too," said Pratt. He added: "At one point or another, we have all wondered if the life we are living

might not be the one we were meant for." To infuse the character with additional nuance and emotional depth, Pratt incorporated elements from his personal life. "As you see in the film, Dan has a really complicated relationship with his father, and I felt like that was something I could bring my own experiences to," he says, adding: "Although my situation and Dan's are quite different, there were definitely a few aspects of this character I mined from my own background." In "The Tomorrow War", the world is stunned when a group of time travellers

arrive from the year 2051 to deliver an urgent message. The only hope for survival is for soldiers and civilians from the present to be transported to the future and join the fight. Among those recruited is high school teacher and family man Dan Forester. Determined to save the world for his young daughter, Dan teams up with a brilliant scientist and his estranged father. Directed by Chris McKay, "The Tomorrow War" is set to stream on July 2 on Amazon Prime Video.

Charlize Theron confirms 'The Old Guard' sequel is in works

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Charlize Theron has confirmed that she and co-stars Marwan Kenzari and Luca Marinelli are "definitely" returning for another installment of "The Old Guard". Theron confirmed to Variety that the script is already done and that they plan to start shooting the action flick early next year, reports etonline.com. The first film of "The Old Guard" series, an adaptation of the graphic novel of the same name, followed Theron's character Andy and a covert team of immortal mercenaries who are suddenly exposed and must now fight to keep their identity a secret. "The Old Guard" was directed by Gina Prince-Bythewood.



Linda Robson denies feud with 'Birds of a Feather' co-star Pauline Quirke

Los Angeles | Agencies

Robson has denied feuding with Birds of a Feather co-star Pauline Quirke and insisted it wasn't why the show ended. The Loose Women panellist, 63, played Tracey, the sister to Pauline's character Sharon on the classic BBC sitcom from 1989 to 1998. The show was rebooted by ITV in 2014 before finally facing the chop in May of this year. It was originally reported Pauline and Linda fell out, leading to "real and tense issues" behind-the-scenes. This allegedly led to Pauline dropping out of the 2019 festive episode. However, Linda appeared to rubbish rumours of a rift today - insisting the pair are still pals.



KATE FERDINAND ADMITS BEING A STEP-PARENT CAN BE THE 'HARDEST THING'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Kate Ferdinand has admitted that being a step-parent can be the "hardest thing" as she urged followers not to "give up". The reality star, 30, shared a post to her Instagram Story about raising 14-year-old Lorenz, 12-year-old Tate, and 10-year-old Tia - Rio's children with late wife Rebecca. She gave a rare insight into how she has coped over the past three years being a step-parent. Kate posted: "Even if you are a totally confident parent, being a step-parent can be the hardest thing you'll ever do. "Don't give up. You make an important difference. It may take years, but you'll learn things and said that changed their lives for the better. You've been placed in their lives for a reason." Alongside the honest story, the former Towie star wrote: "I always think and wonder how other step parents are doing, are you all ok??"



ANNA RICHARDSON AND EX SUE PERKINS 'SHARING CUSTODY OF THEIR DOG' AFTER SPLIT

Los Angeles | Agencies

Naked Attraction's Anna Richardson and ex Sue Perkins are "sharing custody" of their beloved dog Tia after their shock split. On Tuesday, it was revealed that the two stars called time on their seven-year relationship, with it now being revealed they'd clashed over kids. It has been reported that the pair have been living apart since autumn, with 50-year-old Anna moving out of their shared £2million home in London and closer to her mum. She and 51-year-old Sue are only see each other when exchanging custody of their pet dog, who they adopted together in 2017. Discussing the reasons behind the split, a source added to the publication: "We know Anna was really keen to be a mother, but Sue just didn't feel it was the right time for her. "She loves travelling and working on various projects and she appreciates that lifestyle and the responsibility of being a parent doesn't marry well."



AMBER HEARD WELCOMES BABY GIRL VIA SURROGATE FIVE YEARS AFTER JOHNNY DEPP SPLIT

Los Angeles | Agencies

Amber Heard has welcomed a baby girl five years after her split from Johnny Depp, telling fans: "I hope we arrive at a point in which it's normalized to not want a ring in order to have a crib." The actress took to Twitter to reveal the unique name - Oonagh Paige Heard - for the newborn. The 35-year-old shared the happy news in a series of tweets on Thursday. Alongside a photo of herself cradling the newborn, Amber wrote: "I'm so excited to share this news with you. "Four years ago, I decided I wanted to

have a child. I wanted to do it on my own terms. "I now appreciate how radical it is for us as women to think about one of the most fundamental parts of our destinies in this way." After noting she doesn't need to be married in order to want children, the actress continued: "A part of me wants to uphold that my private life is none of anyone's business. "I also get that the nature of my job compels me to take control of this." The series of tweets concluded: "My daughter was born on April 8, 2021. Her name is Oonagh Paige Heard.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Maisie Smith



3RD WOMEN'S ODI:

INDIA TO FIGHT FOR PRIDE AGAINST ENGLAND

Worcester | Agencies

The Indian women's team will look to fight for pride on Saturday in the third and final ODI against England, who have already taken an unassailable 2-0 lead in the series.

India lost by eight wickets in the first game, which turned out to be a one-sided affair. Mithali Raj's team though put up a fight while defending 221 in the second match but the total proved too little.

India have struggled with the bat as well as with the ball in the two matches.

Apart from Mithali, who scored half-centuries in both the matches, no other batter has clicked. While Shafali Verma made a notable contribution in the second ODI after failing in the first, her debut ODI, the other opener Smriti Mandhana failed to click in both matches.

The biggest concern for Indian women is the form of Harmanpreet Kaur. The right-handed batter has aggregated 20 in two innings and her failure is one of the reasons why the Indians haven't gone on to post



a big score. The Indian women bowlers too have struggled to make regular breakthroughs. While they failed to

make regular inroads in the first ODI, they were successful in sending back half the England side early but got stuck into newcomer Sophia

Dunkley. With there being not much help for spinners, the Indians will have to rely on tight line and length to get the job done.

Uncertainty over 2021 Jr Men's Hockey World Cup allotted to India



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Even as there is confusion and uncertainty over the hosting of the 2021 hockey men's Junior World Cup allotted to India, the International Hockey Federation (FIH) on Friday announced Malaysia as host for the 2023 men's Junior World Cup. Hockey India has not yet decided on the host city for the 2021 World Cup, the 12th edition of the showpiece event that is scheduled to be held from November 24-December 5. With the COVID-19 pandemic having halted domestic hockey in March last year, Hockey India is still awaiting for con-

firmation from a state government it had approached to host the event. Hockey India sources said confirmation has been delayed because the state has had elections recently and is going through a regime change. When asked when will the decision on the venue be announced, a Hockey India representative said: "We will announce the venue in due course". Uncertainty also persists about the competing teams in the 2021 World Cup as only seven, including host India, have sealed their berths. Belgium, England, France, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands have quali-

fied through the 2019 Euro Hockey Junior Championships while India got a direct entry as the host. The remaining teams had to be decided through the Continental qualification events for Oceania, Asia, Africa, and Pan America, which have been stalled by the Covid pandemic. Some of these events are now scheduled to be held in August. India are the reigning men's junior world champions, having bagged the title in Lucknow in 2016. The Indian junior men's team is currently in a camp at the Sports Authority of India Centre in Bangalore, preparing for the Junior Asia Cup.

Wimbledon: Sania-Bopanna enter second round of mixed doubles



London | Agencies

India's Rohan Bopanna and Sania Mirza on Friday advanced to the second round of the mixed doubles competition at Wimbledon here after beating compatriots

Ramkumar Ramanathan and Ankit Raina in an all-Indian match. It was the first time that two Indian pairs were facing each other at a Grand Slam.

Experienced duo Sania and Rohan beat Ankit and Ramanathan 6-2, 7-6(5) in just over an hour on Court 8. Sania, 34, and Bopanna, 41, were always in control in the first set but faced some resistance in the second. They won 74% points on first serve as compared to 68% by their opponents, who also committed a double fault.

Ramanathan and Ankit, who stormed to a 4-1 lead in the second set before their opponents reeled them in to take the issue to a tiebreaker, had three break points in the second set, but could convert only one.

It was a good start for Sania and Bopanna, who have reunited on the circuit for mixed doubles in view of the Tokyo Olympic Games. They now face the British pair Aidan McHugh and Emily Webley-Smith in the next round.

MAANA BECOMES THIRD INDIAN SWIMMER TO MAKE IT TO OLYMPICS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Female swimmer Maana Patel will compete at this month's Tokyo Olympic Games in the women's 100m backstroke as she has earned a Universality quota place, the Swimming Federation of India (SFI) said on Friday.

The 21-year-old from Gujarat is the third Indian swimmer to get a ticket to Japan. Last month, Srihari Nataraj (100m backstroke) and Sajjan Prakash (200m butterfly) had cracked the Olympic A qualification mark to earn automatic berths in their respective events. Maana's first international competition of the season was the Uzbekistan Open Swimming Championships in April. She had clocked 1:04.47 seconds for gold medal in women's 100m backstroke.

Last month at the Sette Colli Trophy in Rome, Sajjan Prakash became the first ever Indian swimmer to achieve Olympic A qualification time in men's 200m butterfly. The 27-year-old had clocked 1 minute 56.38 seconds in the men's 200m butterfly event which was better than the Olympic A qualification time of 1:56.48. Nataraj was the second Indian swimmer to achieve Olympic A qualification time. He clocked 53.77 secs during the time trial at Sette Colli Trophy in Rome which was better than the Olympic A qualification mark of 53.85 secs.



'Kohli only expressed opinion on 3-Test WTC final, not demanded it': Ravichandran Ashwin

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Indian spinner Ravichandran Ashwin has said that skipper Virat Kohli never demanded that the World Test Championship final should be a three-match affair, but only expressed his opinion when asked what could be done differently to decide the winner. India lost the WTC final to New Zealand by eight wickets at Southampton recently. "I happened to hear people saying that Virat Kohli asked for three Tests to be played for the WTC final but it is ridiculous. After the match got over, (former England cricketer) Michael Atherton had asked what he could have done differently in the WTC. Virat replied in a particular context that if three matches are played, then adaptability and comeback for a team are possible. But he never demanded something," Ashwin said on YouTube on Thursday. Following the

WTC final loss, Kohli had said in response to a question that, "Look, firstly I am not in absolute agreement of deciding the best Test side over the course of one game, to be very honest. If it is a Test series, it has to be a test of character over three Tests. Which team has the ability to come back into the series (should be a factor) ... It can't just be (about) pressure applied over two days of good cricket and you suddenly are not a good Test side anymore. I don't believe in that." Ashwin added the team will move on from the WTC final disappointment and win some other ICC tournament. "When we lose a final, fans would be disappointed. Perhaps, billion Indians were looking forward to good news after lockdown and stuff. But it didn't happen. Fingers crossed. Just hoping we win some other ICC tournament." India next play a five-match Test series against England starting August 4 in Nottingham.



NZ SKIPPER KANE WILLIAMSON WITHDRAWS FROM THE HUNDRED

London: New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson has decided to pull out of The Hundred tournament -- where he was contracted with Birmingham Phoenix for 80,000 pounds -- due to an elbow injury. Williamson had decided to stay back in England to play The Hundred even as the New Zealand team -- which defeated India in the World Test Championship final at Southampton recently -- had returned home. But the elbow injury the Black Caps skipper has been managing for the last six months -- which forced him to miss an ODI series against Bangladesh, the start of the IPL and the second Test against England -- is reported to be the reason for Williamson's pull-out of the tournament. Williamson's compatriot, Finn Allen, will be his replacement in the Birmingham Phoenix, while the Black Caps skipper will be with the Edgbaston-based team in a mentoring role, reports ESPNcricinfo. Allen, who plays for county side Lancashire, has scored 215 runs in eight innings, averaging 30.71. Pakistan pace bowler Shaheen Afridi too has withdrawn from Birmingham Phoenix, citing his country's international commitments. Pakistan are scheduled to tour West Indies between July 21 and August 21, the period when The Hundred will be played. Australia's Glenn Maxwell, who was contracted to London Spirit for 100,000 pounds, had recently withdrawn from the inaugural The Hundred season, adding to the list of players pulling out due to personal reasons or bio-bubble fatigue. Australian cricketers David Warner and Marcus Stoinis, who were contracted by Southern Brave franchise for 100,000 and 80,000 pounds, have also pulled out.

Warholm breaks 29-year old 400m hurdles world record

Oslo | Agencies

Norwegian star Karsten Warholm clocked 46.70 seconds in men's 400 metres hurdles to smash Kevin Young's long standing world record of 46.78 secs at the Bislett Games, which is also the fourth Diamond League, here on late Thursday night. Young's world record was set at the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona. "Your competitors are what really push you towards bigger things. If it was only me running quick times, I wouldn't need to push it any further, but with people there running fast times, I need to take a step up as well," Warholm had said in a pre-event press conference. Last week Rai Benjamin had run 46.83 secs at the US Olympic



Trials in Eugene. Benjamin's performance in Eugene had replaced Warholm's previous best of 46.87 secs, set in Stockholm last August, as all-time second best behind Young's 46.78 secs.

Cheered by a home crowd of 5000, the biggest gathering since the start of the pandemic in 2020, Warholm sailed over the

hurdles to etch his name in record books. Running in lane seven with Brazil's Alison dos Santos to his left and France's Ludvy Vaillant on his right, Warholm rocketed from the blocks and had clearly closed the stagger by the first barrier.

He was well ahead going into the final bend and crossed the finish line with a time of 46.70 secs to improve the previous world record by 0.8 secs.

Dos Santos was second, improving his South American record to 47.38 secs while Turkey's Yasmani Copello was third in 48.86 secs.

With Sydney McLaughlin having clocked 51.90 secs in 400m hurdles at the US Olympic Trials on Sunday, both women's and men's world records have been broken within the same week.

BRAVO BAGS 4 AS WINDIES LEVEL T20I SERIES VS SOUTH AFRICA

St George's | Agencies

A career-best haul of 4/19 by Dwayne Bravo led the West Indies to a series-leveling 21-run victory over South Africa in the fourth match of the T20I series here. With two wins each, the winner of the series will be decided in the fifth and final ODI to be played here on July 3. Set a target of 168 after skipper Kieron Pollard smashed an unbeaten 51 off 25 balls, with five sixes and two fours to lift the West Indies to 167/6, the Proteas relied heavily on their dependable batsman Quinton de Kock in their quest to clinch the series on Thursday. However, his dismissal to Bravo for a top score of 60 at the start of the 18th over saw the Proteas's challenge fizzle out. The West Indies all-rounder added two more wickets in his fourth over as South

Africa finished on 146/9 in their 20 overs. Earlier, Pollard's match-winning innings and an unbroken seventh-wicket partnership of 66 with Fabien Allen (19 not out) were critical in giving the home side a fighting chance after they were put in to bat for the first time in the series. Pollard smashed 25 runs off the penultimate over of the innings from South African pace bowler Kagiso Rabada to get the hosts to a fighting total. Pollard won the Player-of-the-Match award. "I was just happy to be there at the end to make an important contribution.



De Silva's knock in vain as England clinch ODI series vs Sri Lanka

London | Agencies

Sri Lanka batsman Dhananajaya de Silva struck a run-a-ball 91 in the second One-day International (ODI) against England at The Oval but his efforts went in vain as Joe Root and Eoin Morgan smashed unbeaten half-centuries to defeat the visitors by eight wickets and take a 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

Despite de Silva's knock, Sri Lanka were restricted to a modest 241/9 in 50 overs, thanks mainly to Sam Curran's maiden international five-wicket haul (5/48 in 10 overs) and left-arm David Willey's 4/64.

With three England batsmen -- Jason Roy (60), Joe Root (68 not out) and Eoin Morgan (75 not out) -- scoring half centuries, the hosts lost two wickets on way to 244 with seven overs remaining.

Put in to bat, Sri Lanka started disastrously, losing four wickets for 21 runs in 29 balls with skipper Kusal Perera trapped leg-before



for duck, Pathum Nissanka for 5, Avishka Fernando for 2 and Charith Asalanka for 3, with the first three wickets going into Curran's account. But de Silva, who missed the opening fixture due to injury, steadied the innings with Wanindu Hasaranga -- who took strike at No.6 -- adding 65 runs off 82 balls for the fifth wicket when the latter was caught by Sam Billings off Curran for 26. It brought Dasun Shanaka to the wicket. Shanaka and de Silva were involved in a 78-run partnership, before the latter was undone nine runs short of a century by Willey who had him caught by Root. England's Morgan then scored a 75 off 83 deliveries, showcased with eight boundaries and a six, while Root hit 68 off 87 with five boundaries after opener Jason Roy (60 off 52 balls) had given the hosts a quick start, pounding 10 boundaries.

Wimbledon: Rublev leads Russian charge into fourth round

London | Agencies

Fifth seed Andrey Rublev defeated Fabio Fognini 6-3, 5-7, 6-4, 6-2 in under three hours to enter the fourth round of Wimbledon Championships on Friday. Rublev converted five of the 13 break-points, fired 13 aces and won 73 per cent of first service points. The 23-year-old, who is world No. 7, won the first set in 43 minutes. The Italian came back in the second set after having conceded an early lead. He won three straight games after being 2-4 down to clinch the set. However, the Russian took the third set



and in the fourth, he simply cruised. He won five straight games after being 0-1 down. Earlier, Rublev's fellow countryman Karen Khachanov defeated Frances Tiafoe 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 in one hour and 46 minutes. Tiafoe's straight-set loss was a surprise considering he

had beaten third seed Stefanos Tsitsipas in the first round in straight sets. The 25th seed Khachanov converted three of the six break-points and won 81 per cent of the first service points. If world No. 2 Daniil Medvedev beats Marin Cilic in the third

round match on Saturday, then it will be only the third time since 1968 -- when the Open era began -- that three Russians would reach the fourth round of a Grand Slam tournament. Igor Andreev, Nikolay Davydenko, and Mikhail Youzhny reached fourth round at 2007 Australian Open while Medvedev, Rublev and Aslan Karatsev did that at this year's Australian Open. Among other early winners on Friday were 17th seed Cristian Garin, who defeated Pedro Martinez 6-4, 6-3, 4-6, 6-4, and Roberto Bautista Agut, who beat Dominik Koepfer 7-5, 6-1, 7-6(4).



RAPPER D'EVIL: 'TODUNTAAK' IN 'TOOFAAN' INSPIRED FROM SPIRIT OF MUMBAI

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Rapper D'Evil, or DhavalParab, has penned the lyrics and lent his vocals to the latest track "Toduntaak" featuring Farhan Akhtar, in the upcoming sports drama film "Toofoan". The song was released on Friday.

The track, composed by Dub Sharma, pays a tribute to never-say-die attitude.

Talking about how his Bollywood debut song materialised, D'Evil shared: "When I got a message from Farhan Akhtar asking if I would be keen on creating a rap song for him, I jumped with joy. I've been a huge fan of his artistry. Further when I learnt that the film will be directed by a stalwart like RakeyshOmpurkashMehra, it was a double whammy and my excitement hit the roof. I penned down the song as per the creative brief keeping in mind the lead protagonist's character."

Throwing light on the song, the Mumbai-based rapper added: "The lyrics are inspired from the spirit of Mumbai, a city that never sleeps and a city that gives an ordinary commoner the ability to dare to dream and wings to fly. With this song I tried to bring to the fore the passion of a determined man hailing from the slums but with dreams large enough to touch the skies."

"Toofoan", directed by RakeyshOmpurkashMehra, features Farhan Akhtar, Mrunal Thakur, PareshRawal, Supriya Pathak Kapur, Hussain Dalal, Dr. Mohan Agashe, DarshanKumaar and Vijay Raaz. The film is slated to release on Amazon Prime Video in Hindi and English on July 16.



PreityZinta: I am so proud of our little organic home garden

Team Absolute | Mumbai

PreityZinta can't stop gushing about her organic garden in her Friday social media post. On Instagram, the actress shared a video clip of plucking ripe strawberries from her garden. "I cannot explain how excited I am to see fruits and vegetables grow in our backyard. Mom was with me during the lockdown last year and we planted all sorts of herbs, fruit and veggies. I am so proud of our little organic home garden."

"Thank you ma for making this possible," wrote the actress, sharing her excitement about her veg-

etable and fruit garden at her Los Angeles home.

"Now, I have strawberries, oranges, peaches, guavas, tomatoes, green and red peppers, green and red chillies, eggplant, mint, basil and lemon grow around the house. I am loving every bit of this."

Try it at home folks -- you will be amazed by your own gharkikheti #organicgarden #gharkikheti #strawberries #ting," wrote Preity, who is seen dressed in a lemon yellow suit in the clip.

The actress currently resides in Los Angeles with husband Gene Goodenough.



MilindGaba: Nikki Tamboli is savage, I had an amazing experience working with her

chemistry, which reflects in the video," he recalled. Gaba's popular songs include "SaddiDilli", "Welcome back", "Malamaal", "Nazar lag jayegi", "Zindagi di paudi" and "She don't know".

Talking about his upcoming tracks, he informed: "There are a few good collaborations and a Bollywood number in the pipeline. There will hopefully be a surprise video from my last album 'Blessed'."

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Actress Jacqueline Fernandes looks stunning in a picture she shared on social media describing herself "Persephone Girl". Jacqueline posted two photographs on social media, where she is seen wearing a beige V-neck crop-top and pants. The actress is seen smiling for the camera.

"Persephone Girl," she captioned the image, which currently has one million views

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Singer MilindGaba's gamechanger track "Yaar mod do", which he created in collaboration with Guru Randhawa, is still a favourite among youth after years. "The essence of the song 'Yaar mod do' is based on true friendship. Hence, people relate to it deeply. Till the time there is friendship in this world, the song will always play. Guru Randhawa has a huge following among the youth and my collaboration with him helped in diversifying the audience," said Gaba.

His new song "Shanti" has Gaba multitasking as a musician, singer, and lyricist. He stars in the music video, too, with "Big Boss 14" fame Nikki Tamboli who was also recently seen on "Fear Factor: KhatronKeKhilladi 11".

Gaba informed Nikki Tamboli was always the first choice for his video. "She was the first one to come to my mind to be featured on this track. We approached her and she loved the vibe of the track," said the singer, who has lent his voice to various Punjabi and Hindi songs. The song track has received over 19 million hits at the last count, since it was dropped on June 21.

Talking about Nikki Tamboli, he added: "She is savage, I had an amazing experience working with her. She is full of enthusiasm and positive energy."

He met Nikki for the first time for the shooting of the song that went on for almost three days. "On the first day we both were awkward with each other as we met for the first time."

However, while we began our dance practice sessions we started bonding well and had good

chemistry, which reflects in the video," he recalled. Gaba's popular songs include "SaddiDilli", "Welcome back", "Malamaal", "Nazar lag jayegi", "Zindagi di paudi" and "She don't know".

Talking about his upcoming tracks, he informed: "There are a few good collaborations and a Bollywood number in the pipeline. There will hopefully be a surprise video from my last album 'Blessed'."

Jacqueline Fernandez is 'Persephone Girl'



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on social media.

Speaking about her work, the actress recently featured in the music video "Paanipaani" by rapper Badshah and singer Aastha Gill.

Jacqueline has a packed schedule right now. She has "Ram Setu" and "Bachchan Pandey" coming up with Akshay Kumar, "Kick 2" with Salman Khan, "Cirkus" with Ranveer Singh and the multi-star cast horror comedy "Bhoot Police".

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AAHANA KUMRA: I MISS SHOOTING AND MORNING CALL TIMES



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Actress AahanaKumra is in a major missing mood. She took to Instagram on Friday to share that she yearns for shoots and much more. "I miss shoots!! I miss early morning call times! I miss being frozen yogurt! I miss real locations! I miss you Uzbekistan!" wrote Kumra.

She shared pictures in the flashback post from the set of last year's release "KhudaHaafiz", where she played the role of an Arab police officer named Tamena Hamid.

"#TamenaHamid on the sets of #KhudaHaafiz in Khiva 2019 #FlashBackFriday," she wrote as caption.

In the pictures, she is seen dressed in character, and the shots are captured at the real location of Ichan Kala, Old City of Kava, Uzbekistan. She wears a black top and grey trousers for the early morning shoot. "KhudaHaafiz", starring VidyutJamwal and Shivaleeka Oberoi, released in 2020 on OTT. Aahana will next be seen playing a pivotal role in MadhurBhandarkar's upcoming film "India Lockdown".

RADHIKA MADAN OPENS UP ON HER 'FEELS LIKE ISHQ' ROLE



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Radhika Madan, who will be seen in the upcoming romantic anthology "Feels Like Ishq", says her character Avni is a modern-day Geet, referring to Kareena Kapoor's character in the 2007 hit "Jab We Met".

Radhika essays Avni in director RuchirArun's segment of the anthology, titled "Save The Da(y)te", she features opposite AmolParashar.

"I think the best way to describe Avni would be a modern-day Geet. You know, a social media era Geet, a Gen-Z Geet, where you have influencers. And she's really vibrant. She's really quirky," Radhika said.

She added: "She knows how to get things done. She has her own ways. She's fun and she's funny. I love her. So, I connected with Avni straightaway, and, yeah, I'm excited to play her."

"Feels Like Ishq" brings together six directors -- RuchirArun, TahiraKashyapKhurana, Anand Tiwari, Danish Aslam, Jaydeep Sarkar, Sachin Kundalkar and DevrathSagar.

The anthology stars Kajol Chug, Mihir Ahuja, SimranJehani, RohitSaraf, Saba Azad, Sanjeeta Bhattacharya, Zayn Khan, NeerajMadhav, Tanya Maniktala and Skand Thakur in leading roles.

"Feels Like Ishq" will stream on Netflix on July 23.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Neha Malik