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Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav

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NFSA 2022 RANKING :

Odisha becomes role model for the world

- *FROM IMPORTING RICE FROM OTHER STATES IN THE PRE-2000 ERA, CHIEF MINISTER NAVEEN PATNAIK'S FOOD SECURITY MODEL HAS TRANSFORMED ODISHA INTO THE NO. I STATE IN INDIA IN THE DOMAIN OF FOOD SECURITY.*
- *IN THE RECENTLY RELEASED STATE RANKING INDEX FOR NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY ACT (NFSA) BY THE DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, ODISHA HAS BEEN PLACED AT THE TOP.*
- *APART FROM SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENTING THE NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMME BY PROVIDING FOOD GRAINS TO 3.24 CRORE PEOPLE OF ODISHA, THE STATE GOVERNMENT HAS ALSO MORE THAN DOUBLED THE PRODUCTION OF FOOD GRAINS IN THE COASTAL STATE. TODAY, ODISHA IS THE THIRD LARGEST CONTRIBUTOR OF RICE TO INDIA'S PDS SYSTEM.*

Bhubaneswar | Agencies

Odisha's transformational food security story is going to be a role model for the world as the state, which was known for its hunger issues in the pre-2000 era, has been ranked No. 1 in India in the domain of food security.

The United Nations' World Food Programme (WFP) headquartered in Rome recently invited Patnaik to share the transformational progress made by Odisha in strengthening livelihood and food security, with specific focus on marginalised communities and women.

The Chief Minister shared how Odisha attained food sufficiency, initiated large-scale growth-related programmes, designed and created climate-resilient livelihoods and nutrition, and focussed on partnerships so that the state consistently kept moving towards attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The UN-FWP Executive Director further praised and appreciated the transformational work of the state government in the fields of disaster management, food production and food security.

Odisha has become a role model for the world and especially for the developing nations on how to ensure food security for its people, he said.

Since the implementation of the National Food Security Act in the state in 2015, Odisha has followed it up with a robust end-to-end computerisation of TPDS operations. A digitised beneficiaries' database has been hosted in the public domain, and dynamically updated in 378 ration card management system (RCMS) centres, one each in 314 blocks and 64 Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).

VIVO INDIA REMITTED RS 62,476 CRORE ABROAD, ALMOST 50% TO CHINA: ED

DRAGON'S ECONOMIC WAR!

- *IT SAID THAT OUT OF THE TOTAL SALE PROCEEDS OF RS 1,25,185 CRORE, VIVO INDIA REMITTED RS 62,476 CRORE -- ALMOST 50 PER CENT OF THE TURNOVER OUT OF INDIA, MAINLY TO CHINA.*
- *VIVO MOBILES INDIA PVT LTD WAS INCORPORATED ON AUGUST I, 2014 AS A SUBSIDIARY OF HONG KONG-BASED MULTI ACCORD LTD, AND WAS REGISTERED AT ROC DELHI.*
- *THE GPICPL WAS REGISTERED ON DECEMBER 3, 2014 AT ROC SHIMLA, WITH REGISTERED ADDRESSES OF SOLAN, HIMACHAL PRADESH AND JAMMU.*
- *THE SAID COMPANY WAS INCORPORATED BY ZHENGSHEN OU, BIN LOU AND ZHANG JIE WITH THE HELP OF CHARTERED ACCOUNTANT NITIN GARG.*
- *LOU LEFT INDIA ON APRIL 26, 2018 WHEREAS OU AND JIE LEFT INDIA IN 2021.*
- *THESE REMITTANCES WERE MADE IN ORDER TO DISCLOSE HUGE LOSSES IN INDIAN INCORPORATED COMPANIES TO AVOID PAYMENT OF TAXES IN INDIA, THE ED SAID.*

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A day after it was reported that two top executives of its associated company likely fled India, following raids, the ED on Thursday said that Chinese smartphone company Vivo was involved in huge 'hawala' transactions.A senior ED official said that they carried out searches at 48 locations across the country belonging to Vivo Mobiles India Private Ltd and its 23 associated companies such as Grand Prospect International Communication Pvt Ltd (GPICPL), and so far, 119 bank accounts of various entities with gross balance to the tune of Rs 465 crore, including FDs to the tune of 66 crore, of Vivo India, 2 kg gold bars, and cash amounting to approximately Rs 73 lakh has been seized under the provisions of the PMLA.According to the ED, all due procedures as per law were followed during the said operations at each premises but employees of Vivo India, including some Chinese nationals did not cooperate with the search proceedings and had tried to abscond, remove and hide digital devices which were retrieved by the search teams.

In February this year, the ED initiated a Prevention of Money Laundering case against them on the basis of an FIR lodged at Delhi's Kalkaji police station under sections 417, 120B and 420 of IPC against GPICPL and its Director, shareholders and certifying professionals etc on the basis of complaint filed by Ministry of Corporate Affairs.As per the FIR, GPICPL and its shareholders had used forged identification documents and falsified addresses at the time of incorporation. The allegations were found to be true as the investigation revealed that the addresses mentioned by the directors of GPICPL did not belong to them, but in fact it was a government building and house of a senior bureaucrat.

The ED's investigation revealed that the same director of GPICPL, Lou, was also an ex-director of Vivo. He had incorporated multiple companies across the country spread across various states. A total of 18 companies were set up around the same time, just after the incorporation of Vivo in 2014-15, while another Chinese national Zhixin Wei had incorporated further 4 companies.

These entities include Rui Chuang Technologies Private Ltd (Ahmedabad), V Dream Technology & Communication Private Ltd (Hyderabad), Regenvo Mobile Private Ltd (Lucknow), Fangs Technology Private Ltd (Chennai), Weiwo Communication Private Ltd (Bengaluru), Bubugao Communication Private Ltd (Jaipur), Haicheng Mobile (India) Private Ltd (New Delhi), Joinmay Mumbai Electronics Private Ltd (Mumbai), Yingjia Communication Private Ltd (Kolkata), Jie Lian Mobile India Private Ltd (Indore), Vigour Mobile India Private Ltd (Gurugram), Hisoa Electronic Private Ltd (Pune), Haijin Trade India Private Ltd (Kochi), Rongsheng Mobile India Private Ltd (Guwahati), Morefun Communication Private Ltd (Patna), and several others, the ED said.

Indian American lawmaker moves to exempt India from CAATSA sanctions

The Congressman, who represents Silicon Valley in the US House of Representatives, argued that "India faces immediate and serious regional border threats from China, with continued military aggression by the Government of China along the India-China border" and India needs Russian weapons for its own defence.

Yashwant Raj | Washington

Ro Khanna, one of four Indian Americans in the US Congress, has moved a legislation to amend a law in order to exempt India from sanctions for purchasing high-value Russian military hardware, arguing that New Delhi needs them for the time being to defend the country against continued Chinese aggression.

The Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions (CAATSA) Act seeks to punish Russia for interfering in the 2016 presidential election, among other things, by imposing stiff US sanctions on countries that buy Russian weapons.

China and Turkey, a NATO member, have been sanctioned under this law since it was passed in 2017. India has been in the crosshairs for its purchase of S-400s, the Russian surface-to-air missile systems that have begun arriving in India, which would have technically triggered the sanction process, but hasn't yet.

"While India faces immediate needs to maintain its heavily Russian-built weapons systems, a waiver to sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act during this transition period is in the best interests of the United States and the United States-India defence partnership to deter aggressors in light of Russia and China's close partnership.," said Khanna's proposed amendment.

- *TALK OF IMPENDING CAATSA SANCTIONS HAS STALKED INDIA-US ENGAGEMENTS FROM THE TIME THE LAW WAS ENACTED IN 2017, UNDER THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION; IT WAS A BIPARTISAN CONGRESSIONAL INITIATIVE AND THEN PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP HAD NO OPTION BUT TO SIGN IT. THEN DEFENSE SECRETARY JAMES MATTIS AND SECRETARY OF STATE MIKE POMPEO HAD PUBLICLY PRESSED LAWMAKERS TO EXEMPT INDIA AND OTHER COUNTRIES THAT USED BE TO HEAVILY RELIANT ON RUSSIAN MILITARY HARDWARE.*

Khanna's legislation calls upon the US to "take additional steps to encourage India to accelerate India's transition off Russian-built weapons and defense systems while strongly supporting India's immediate defence needs".

There was no immediate word on the chances of the passage of the amendment, or the support of other members. A response is awaited from Congressman Khanna's office.

BORIS STEPS DOWN AS UK PM

London: Bowing to the inevitable after mass resignations across his government, including of top Cabinet ministers, in just three days, Boris Johnson on Thursday announced he is stepping down as leader of the Conservative Party, but will remain the UK Prime Minister, till his replacement is chosen.

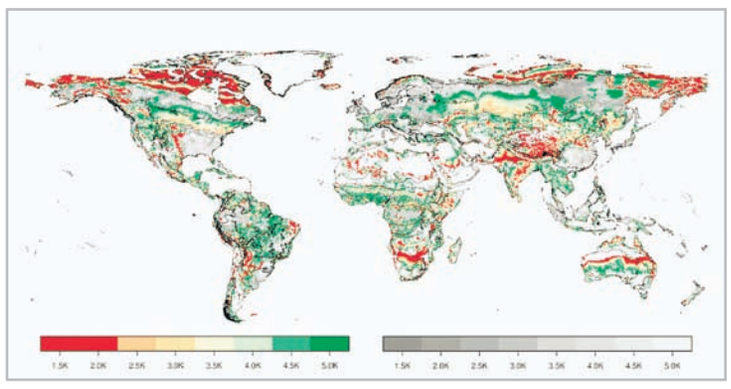
Addressing the media outside 10, Downing Street, the 58-year-old embattled British leader, who has faced controversies galore in his 1,079 days in power, said: "It is clearly now the will of the parliamentary Conservative Party that there should be a new leader of the party and therefore a new Prime Minister."

He said that the process of choosing the new leader should begin now and the timetable will be announced next week.

Stressing that in politics, no one is "remotely indispensable", he said that "our brilliant and Darwinian system will produce another leader" and assured of as as much support as he can give.Thanking millions of people who voted for his party in 2019 - "I regret to not be successful in arguments and it's painful not to see through so many ideas and projects. And to you, the British people I know that there will be many who are relieved but perhaps quite a few who will be disappointed... I want you to know how sad I am to be giving up the best job in the world," he said.

Mega cities 1-2 degrees Celsius hotter than larger region: CSE analysis

- *The CSE study looked into the temperature and humidity data collected by the real-time air quality monitoring network and found massive variations in temperature within the cities.*
- *In terms of absolute air temperature, Hyderabad with a 7.1 degrees Celsius variation had the most pronounced heat islands, while Kolkata with just 1.3 degrees Celsius had the least pronounced ones. Delhi had a 6.2 degrees Celsius variation, and Mumbai's was 5.5 degrees Celsius.*
- *From a heat index perspective, Mumbai leads the group with a 17.3 degrees Celsius variation. "From the land surface temperature perspective, it is Delhi in the lead with a 24.6 degrees Celsius variation," the analysis said.*



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Mega cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Hyderabad are much hotter than the larger region around them due to heat island effects caused by surface absorption of heat and local waste heat generated by traffic, industry and air conditioning, among other urban activities, an analysis by Centre for Science & Environment (CSE) said on Thursday.

Due to excessive hard and dark surfaces, cities tend to absorb the heat coming from the sun during the day, a city also generates a lot of waste heat due to human activities which adds to the natural heat, such as the use of air conditioners.

This extra heat should dissipate after sunset, but due to pollution and continuing generation of waste heat, the city fails to cool down, leading to warmer conditions compared to rural areas.

The difference among the cities can be explained by the environmental difference in the nature of the heat in their regions, as well as the differences in their topography and land use patterns. But the fact that all four cities show significant variations in their intra-city temperatures (in all three forms) is strong evidence of urban heat island problems within the cities, it said.

Monsoon is hotter than the pre-monsoon period on average, while winter and post-monsoon seasons are warming up faster, the analysis said. At an all-India level, the monsoon season - June, July, August and September, as per IMD classification - has been 0.3-0.4 degrees Celsius hotter than pre-monsoon (or summer)," CSE said and added, "What's more? It is getting hotter with time!"

Leena Manimekalai now shares pic showing 'Lord Shiva', 'Parvati' smoking

Chennai | Agencies

Controversial Tamil documentary film maker Leena Manimekalai, who is in the eye of storm for showing Goddess Kali smoking a cigarette, has now put out on her Twitter handle an image of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati smoking, hours after her documentary was pulled down from the site.

The documentary film director shared a photo of two individuals dressed as Hindu God Shiva and Goddess Parvati walking on the streets smoking cigarettes.

She has, however, clarified that this was not from her movie but from everyday rural India as to how folk artists chill out after a show.Leena Manimekalai is in Canada and was to screen her documentary "Kaali" at the Aga Khan Museum as part of the "Rhythms of Canada" programme of the museum. However, after the Indian embassy took up the issue that the director hurt the religious sentiments of Hindu community by portraying Goddess Kaali in bad light, the film was not allowed to be screened at the museum.

Microblogging platform Twitter also pulled down the documentary from its site after outrage from all corners against her depicting Goddess Kaali in poor light.

AMRAVATI MURDER: RANA COUPLE DENIES LINKS WITH PRIME ACCUSED

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Rana couple - Independent MP Navneet Kaur-Rana and her husband and Independent MLA Ravi Rana - on Thursday rubbished charges that the alleged mastermind of the June 21 murder of Amravati pharmacist was linked to their party.

"The allegations are absolutely baseless. We have never met him or even know him, he was never our worker. Whichever party they may belong to, strict action should be taken against them," said Ravi Rana, who is a 3-time MLA from Badnera. His wife is a first-time MP.

His dismissal came after some TV channels aired news alleging one of their party workers was the mastermind behind the murder of veterinary pharmacist Umesh Kolhe.

The Ranas have a political outfit called Yuva Swabhiman Party (YSP). The Ranas sought to counter the insinuations by pointing fingers at the former Congress Minister Yashomati Thakur tried to suppress the case when the erstwhile Maha Vikas Aghadi government was in power.

The City Kotwali Police Station, Amravati has arrested 7 accused including the mastermind Shaikh Irfan and the case was later taken over by National Investigation Agency (NIA).

Meanwhile, a Special NIA Court in Mumbai sent all the accused to the NIA's custody till July 15, as the central agency intensified its probe.

The NIA raided at least a dozen locations in the state and recovered hate pamphlets, mobile phones, memory and SIM cards, knives, from the homes of the accused.

The agency is also attempting to unravel if they have any links with global terror groups.

Late on the night of June 21 - when Maharashtra was in the throes of a major political crisis - two motorcycle-borne assailants stabbed Kolhe repeatedly in the neck when he was going home on his scooter.

The trigger for the killing was Kolhe reportedly forwarding some social media posts supporting ex-BJP spokesperson Nupur Sharma's denigrating posts on Prophet Mohammed last month.

Glitches disrupt supply as Narmada water reaches Gujarat's Kutch

Bhuj | Agencies

The residents of Mod Kuba vilage under the Mandavi taluka in Gujarat's Kutch district were pleasantly surprised on Wednesday when water from the Narmada river reached their area.

However, the happniess did not even last for 24 hours as a slab of the canal broke on Thursday, leading to disruption in water supply in the village. The water gushed out in all the surrounding farms. Many nearby villages faced water-logging after the slab of the canal broke.

The locals accused the state government of corruption in the construction of the canal, as the project was going on since 2017 and yet they did not not receive water.

However, Kutch MLA Virendresinh Jadeja said that the water reached the villages as part of a trial.

"Contractors conduct trials so that they can repair all the faults. A slab fell after the trial. But after five years of construction, it is the contractor's duty to maintain the canal... It's not the government's fault. This happened in the morning, and I guess it has been repaired by now," Jadeja said.

An official on condition of anonymity said that the trial of the project has been started. "The glitches will be restored in a few days and then again the water supply will be normal," he added.

Earlier on Wednesday, Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel had tweeted, "Water of Narmada river reaches Kutch. This was a dream project of PM Narendra Modi, and his efforts and inspiration made this possible. This project was started in 2017 so that water could reach the agricultural and industrial areas of Kutch."

With licence to fly, Akasa Air to start operations this month

Chennai | Agencies

India's new airline, Akasa Air, on Thursday got its Air Operator Certificate (AOC) from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

"The grant of the AOC is the final step of a comprehensive and rigorous process laid down by the DGCA and marks the satisfactory completion of all regulatory and compliance requirements for the airline's operational readiness," Akasa Air said in a statement. The airline added that it is the first airline whose end-to-end AOC process was conducted using the government's progressive eGCA digital platform.

The process concluded with the airline having successfully conducted a number of proving flights under the supervision of the country's aviation regulator, the company said.

"We now look forward to opening our flights for sale, leading to the start of commercial operations by late July. This will begin our journey towards building India's greenest, most dependable and most affordable airline," said Vinay Dube, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Akasa Air.Akasa Air, whose airline code is QP, received its first 737 MAX on June 21.

Later this month, the airline will commence commercial operations with two aircraft, subsequently adding to its fleet every month.

By the end of the 2022-23 fiscal, the airline will have inducted 18 aircraft and thereafter 12-14 aircraft every 12 months, which will make up its order of 72 delivered over five years, the company said.

Muslim mother cannot be a guardian of minor children, rules Kerala HC

Kochi | Agencies

A division bench of the Kerala High Court has observed that it cannot hold a Muslim woman can be guardian of her minor child's property since it is bound by the precedents of the Supreme Court.

The division bench of Justices P.B. Suresh Kumar and C.S. Sudha observed that even though the personal law which prevents Muslim women from being guardians can be argued to be violative of Articles 14 and 15 and hence void, they cannot go into the same since it is bound by the precedents set by the apex court.

The court observed this while hearing a petition filed by C. Abdul Aziz from Kozhikode and a dozen others over a partition deed in which a Muslim mother acted as a legal guardian of her son's property.

Relying on the 'Shayara Bano's case, in which it was held that the practices of the Muslim personal law-Shariat cannot be required to satisfy the provisions contained in Part-III - Fundamental Rights of the Constitution applicable to State actions, in terms of Article 13 of the Constitution.

"That being the position, as the Shariat Act has been held to be not a State legislation, it cannot be tested on the anvil of Articles 14 or Article 15 of the Constitution as argued on behalf of the appellants," the Court held in its judgment.

The court further pointed out that since there are numerous decisions from the apex court, which holds that a Muslim mother cannot be a guardian of her minor children, the High Court is bound to follow the law declared by the apex court as provided under Article 141 of the Constitution.

The court admitted that if succession and like matters of secular character has nothing to do with religion, the same would be the position with the case of guardianship also.

SC agrees to examine Zubair's plea seeking bail, quashing of UP FIR

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Alt News co-founder Mohammed Zubair on Thursday moved the Supreme Court challenging the Allahabad High Court's refusal to quash FIR registered against him for allegedly calling Hindu seers "hatemongers" and the top court agreed to list the matter on Friday.

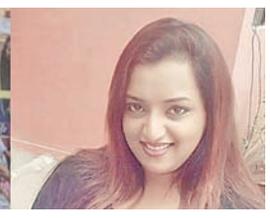
Senior advocate Colin Gonsalves, representing Zubair, mentioned the matter before a vacation bench of Justices Indira Banerjee and J.K. Maheshwari and sought urgent hearing on the plea.Gonsalves said that a look at the FIR shows that there is no crime and there are death threats against his client. He added that they went to the Allahabad High Court, but no relief was granted and the court said it was premature.

"Bail is sought on emergency. There are death threats on the Internet. If possible, list today at 2 pm...," said Gonsalves.

The bench agreed to list the matter and posted it for Friday.The top court, in its order, said: "It is mentioned that there is urgency in the matter. Let the matter be listed on 08.07.2022 before the appropriate Bench subject to assignment."

'DO WHAT YOU CAN', SWAPNA TELLS VIJAYAN; VOWS TO BRING OUT TRUTH

Kochi | Agencies



The prime accused in the gold smuggling case Swapna Suresh on Thursday slammed the probe officials of the Crime Branch of Kerala police, saying she will bring out the truth in all the things she has said against Veena Vijayan, the daughter of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan.

"Just the other day, I presented myself before the Crime Branch police probing the conspiracy case registered against me. They were saying that the 164(5) statement she recorded before a magistrate has no powers. They wanted me to see I change my present lawyer, then they wanted me to tell them the details that I have about the business dealings of Veena. They also wanted to know all the details that I gave in my statements under 164," said Swapna to the media here on Thursday.

"The Chief Minister has ensured I lost my job. The NGO I was working for has terminated me because the lady staff members working there are frequently being called by the police. I can understand their plight, so I decided to leave. So he (Vijayan) should be happy that I have no job and my income has stopped," added Swapna.

"Let him do what he (Vijayan) can, I will bring out everything what has happened from 2016 to 2020. If I have life in me, everything will be brought to light. I will fight till my last breath for this. I have been harassed in the name of the conspiracy probe. The probe officials said I will be made an accused in the 770 cases registered in the case following the protests that took place after I made my revelation in June. Let them make me an accused, I will not go back as I have everything to prove what I have said. They also wanted me to tell them where I have kept all the documents," added Swapna.

She went on to add that the Crime Branch police officials asked her if Veena can't do any business. "Have I ever said anything like that, she can't do business? Vijayan is concerned only about his daughter, but I will surely prove everything about her," said a stern Swapna.

Things have gone from bad to worse for Vijayan ever since Swapna made a confession to the magistrate in the first week of June, where she alleged that Vijayan, his wife and Veena indulged in smuggling of currency and gold through the diplomatic channel.

Samajwadi Party ally skips Yashwant Sinha's meeting

Lucknow | Agencies

The Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party (SBSP), an ally of the Samajwadi Party (SP) in Uttar Pradesh, stayed away from a meeting addressed by joint opposition Presidential candidate Yashwant Sinha, here on Thursday.

Sinha, who is on a campaign trail, arrived in Lucknow on Thursday evening.

An spokesman of the SBSP, which has six MLAs, said that the party had no information about any meeting. However, Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) President Jayant Chaudhary was present in the meeting.

Earlier, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav welcomed Yashwant Sinha and assured him of his party's support.While addressing the opposition MLAs, Sinha explained the circumstances prevailing in the country, and said that if elected, his allegiance would be to the Constitution alone.

Sinha said that though Presidential poll has been held several times, the situation is different this time because a sharp demarcation has taken place.

INDIA LOGS 18,930 NEW COVID-19 CASES, 35 DEATHS

New Delhi: In the last 24 hours, India logged 18,930 new Covid-19 cases, an increase against the 16,159 infections reported the previous day, the Union Health Ministry said on Thursday. In the same period, there were 35 additional deaths due to the virus which took the nationwide death toll to 5,25,305.

The active caseload increased to 1,19,457, accounting for 0.27 per cent of the country's total positive cases. The recovery of 14,650 patients in the last 24 hours took the cumulative tally to 4,29,21,977. Consequently, India's recovery rate stands at 98.52 per cent.

The daily positivity rate also marginally increased to 4.32 per cent, while the weekly positivity rate stood at 3.86 per cent.

Also in the same period, a total of 4,38,005 tests were conducted across the country, increasing the overall tally to over 86.53 crore.

As of Thursday morning, India's Covid-19 vaccination coverage exceeded 198.33 crore, achieved via 2,59,53,259 sessions.

Over 3.71 crore adolescents have been administered with a first dose of Covid-19 jab since the beginning of vaccination drive for this age bracket.

Over 66% of India's blue-collared employees earn below Rs 15K per month: Report

Team Absolute | New Delhi

More than two-thirds of blue-collared employees in India earn less than Rs 15,000 per month, according to a report on Thursday.

The report by payroll management app Salarybox stated that females in the workplace made Rs 12,398 on average, which was 19 per cent less than their male colleagues, which brings forth the country's wide gender pay disparity.

The data also highlights that less than 15 per cent of the employee base earns in the range of Rs 20,000-40,000 per month (on an average Rs 25,000), calling attention to the fact that a vast majority of Indians have difficulties securing even a livable wage.

Interestingly, the majority of firms pay wages below the minimum wage set by the Central Pay Commission (CPC), that is Rs 18,000 per month.

The report is based on a database of over a million employed workforce from more than 850 districts around the country.

"For a long time, the topic of jobs, or rather, the lack thereof, has dominated India's economic discourse. While the headline employment/unemployment numbers get a lot of attention, another set of numbers that is equally significant, who gets paid how much, doesn't get nearly as much attention. It is high time that the companies bring in interventions that highlight this huge gap," said Nikhil Goel, CEO & Co-Founder of SalaryBox, in a statement.The report also found that only 27 per cent of the workforce is made up of women, whereas 73 per cent of the workforce is made up of men. Employees working at supermarkets, grocery/kirana/general stores as well as the garments/textile industries are paid at the lower end of the scale, with an average monthly salary of Rs 8,300.

Logistics and transport, IT software, and tailoring /boutiques emerge as the businesses that pay the most to females, with primary roles being of telecallers, documentation executives, and recruitment associates. "Economic development is still not translating into enough jobs for the yearly influx of educated young people entering the workforce. A much bigger proportion of Indians work in the informal sector, and they have been hit hard in recent months by increasing inflation, particularly in food prices," Goel said.

Shiva temple removed from graveyard in Tripura, Sec 144 imposed

Agartala | Agencies

In a joint operation on Thursday, the West Tripura district administration and the Tripura police dismantled a Shiva temple constructed at a graveyard in Nandannagar on the outskirts of Agartala on Tuesday, officials said.

A senior police officer said that the district administration also imposed Section 144 of the CrPc in the area to quell tension and prevent any untoward incident.

The official said that on Tuesday, some "unidentified people" constructed a Shiva temple at a graveyard in Nandannagar following which several provocative posts surfaced on social media, creating tension in the area. "Section 144 has been promulgated in the area to maintain law and order. At present, there is no report of any disruption of law and order," the officer said.Stringent and impartial action would be taken against the miscreants involved in the incident, the police said.

"People have been advised not to believe in any rumour and strict action will be taken against the rumourmongers," a Tripura police statement said.

The police have registered a case and launched a search operation to nab the accused persons.

RAJ BABBAR GETS 2-YEAR JAIL IN A 1996 CASE

Lucknow: An MP/MLA court in Lucknow has awarded a two-year jail sentence to former MP Raj Babbar in a case related to 1996. The court has also imposed a fine of Rs 8,500 on the actor turned politician.

The former MP was present in court when the sentence was announced.

The Congress leader has been found guilty of interfering in government duties and physical assault.

Babbar was found guilty of roughing up a government officer during the 1996 Lok Sabha elections.

Babbar was then in the Samajwadi Party and was contesting the elections from Lucknow. The incident had taken place on May 2, 1996.

EKNATH SHINDE ASSUMES CHARGE AS MAHARASHTRA CM

Deputy chief minister Devendra Fadnavis was with him when Shinde started functioning from the chief minister's chamber

Team Absolute | Mumbai

With photographs of his "gods" Shiv Sena founder, the late Balasaheb Thackeray, and firebrand Sena leader the late Anand 'Dharmaveer' Dighe adorning the walls, Eknath Shinde on Thursday sat on the chair assigned to Maharashtra Chief Minister, surrounded by family and admirees.

Dressed in his trademark white trousers and white full-sleeved shirt, with a saffron tika on his forehead and black rimmed glasses, a smiling "Bhai" as he is popularly called by supporters took the chair in the CM's cabin on the sixth floor of Mantralaya, the state secretariat.Deputy chief minister Devendra Fadnavis was with him when Shinde started functioning from the chief minister's chamber.Shinde's father Sambhaji, wife Lata, son Dr Shrikant, daughter-in-law Vrushali and grandson Rudransh were present for the moment when he first ensconced himself on the chief minister's chair.Shinde and Fadnavis were sworn in by Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari on June 30 as the chief minister and deputy chief minister, respectively, and on July 4, the new Shiv SenaBharatiya Janata Party government won the trust vote in the state assembly.As soon as he reached Mantralaya, Shinde garlanded portraits of legendary Maratha warrior Chhatrapati Shivaji and Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar.

Thereafter, he went to the sixth floor in the state secretariat to the CM's office which was decorated with flowers to assume charge in person. Top officials of the state government were also present.

CM Shinde planning for Cabinet expansion? BJP may get cream berths

IF SOURCES ARE TO BE BELIEVED, THE EXPANSION WILL HAPPEN IN TWO PHASES - BEFORE AND AFTER THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION WHICH IS SCHEDULED TO BE HELD ON JULY 18. THE BJP, WHICH WHEELED BACK TO POWER, AFTER FORGING AN ALLIANCE WITH SHIV SENA IS EXPECTED TO GET IMPORTANT PORTFOLIOS, SOURCES SAID.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The newly-elected Maharashtra government led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde is planning for Cabinet expansion. If sources are to be believed, the expansion will happen in two phases - before and after the Presidential election which is scheduled to be held on July 18.

The BJP, which wheeled back to power, after forging an alliance with Shiv Sena is expected to get important portfolios, sources said. In the first phase, the Shiv Sena's Shinde faction and some BJP leaders will be administered the oath, sources added. Putting an end to the over a week-long political turmoil in Maharashtra, Shinde took oath as chief minister of the state on June 30. Fadnavis, after initial reluctance, took oath as deputy chief minister.

According to sources, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is likely to keep key portfolios like revenue, home and finance with it, while the Shinde camp of Shiv Sena may get urban development, and irrigation, and other departments.

The BJP is likely to get a larger share of cabinet berths given its numbers in the new government.

The Shinde camp-BJP government won the floor test with the support of 164 MLAs. The Shinde faction has the support of 50 MLAs, and the BJP has 106 MLAs. The government has support of several independent MLAs and other smaller parties as well.

Earlier on Tuesday, Deputy CM Devendra Fadnavis had in Nagpur told reporters that the Cabinet expansion will be done soon and he would hold talks with the CM to discuss the distribution of ministerial portfolios.

As per the Constitution, the Council of Ministers, including the Chief Minister, in any state shall not exceed 15 per cent of the strength of the Legislative Assembly. Accordingly, the number of ministers in Maharashtra cannot exceed 42.

Fresh cases of BA.4, BA.5 in Maharashtra renew calls for Covid-related precautionary measures

A spike in the number of BA.4 and BA.5 sub-variants of Omicron is detected in the western state of Maharashtra; it is time to put on our masks again and begin covid-appropriate behaviour to fight the renewed viral pandemic.

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Maharashtra has detected 9 new cases of BA.4 and BA.5 sub-variants of Omicron strain of COVID-19, increasing the tally in the state to 73, as informed by the health department. All the cases as of now belong to Pune, which has seen a surge in covid numbers drastically in the last few weeks.

According to officials, all the cases are asymptomatic and are recovering in home isolation.

Thane, Nagpur, Palghar, and Raigad are other places that have seen a steep rise in the number of covid cases recently. And with this increase, health officials have once again renewed calls for bringing back the covid-appropriate behavior that everyone followed till earlier this year, seriously.

Since the Omicron wave subsided, people stopped wearing masks, forgot all about social distancing, and went out in huge numbers during the recent summer vacations. It is time to get back to precautionary measures that we can follow:

Wear masks in public: It is now a well-known fact that masks reduce the virus effect drastically and hence whenever you go out in public, do wear a mask.

Use sanitisers/wash hands frequently: It is also the rainy season when infections are at their peak. So, make sure to use santisers, and wash your hands frequently, to keep the virus at bay.

Update your vaccinations: Make sure to check if any vaccination update is there. If you have been given both the vaccine doses, do check for the booster dose.

Maintain social distancing: Your visit to the mall or cinema hall can wait, but the virus won't. So, make sure to avoid crowded places and maintain a good distance when queueing up.

The WHO weekly epidemiological update on COVID-19, released July 6, said that globally, the number of new weekly cases increased for the fourth consecutive week after a declining trend since the last peak in March 2022.

During the week of June 27 to July 3, over 4.6 million cases were reported, a figure similar to that of the previous week. The number of new weekly deaths declined by 12 per cent as compared to the previous week, with over 8100 fatalities reported.

Team Shinde To Get 13 Ministers, 25 For BJP In Maharashtra: Sources

IN THE NEW CABINET, 25 MINISTERS WILL BE FROM THE BJP, 13 FROM EKNATH SHINDE'S SHIV SENA, SAY SOURCES.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde is likely to have 45 ministers, most belonging to ally BJP.

In the new cabinet, 25 ministers will be from the BJP, 13 from Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena, say sources. The rest will be independent.

Apart from the Chief Minister and his deputy Devendra Fadnavis - a former Chief Minister - most ministers will be new.

The BJP, say sources, wants to test new faces before it preps for the next Maharashtra election.

Eknath Shinde, 48, took power as the Chief Minister of Maharashtra after leading a coup in the Shiv Sena, which brought down the previous Uddhav Thackeray-led Maha Vikas Aghadi government.Devendra Fadnavis joined him as his Deputy, despite speculation that it would be the other way round.

The formula between the Shinde Sena and the BJP is being finalised, sources say. The Sena will get a ministry for every three MLAs and the BJP will get a post for every four MLAs, according to the formula.

The final decision will be taken only after the Supreme Court verdict on July 11 on the possible disqualification of 16 MLAs, including Shinde.

The Supreme Court hearing will decide on the validity disqualification notices sent by Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray to 16 from the rebel camp - which now claims it is the real Sena as team Thackeray is a minority.

Osmanabad teacher arrested for raping, impregnating Class 10 student

Aurangabad | Agencies

A 29-year-old teacher serving at one of the grant-in-aid Marathi medium high schools situated in Kalamb tahsil of Maharashtra's Osmanabad district was arrested on the charges of raping and impregnating a 10th standard student.

According to police, based on the complaint lodged by 17-year old victim, the teacher was slapped with the charges of rape and also the stringent sections of Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act were invoked in the FIR registered at Kalamb police station on June 5. Superintendent of police Atul Kulkarni said that taking cognizance of the incident, the accused was immediately arrested. On being produced before the court on Wednesday, he was remanded to two-day police custody. Another officer privy to the probe, said that the incident came to light earlier this week, when the girl while heading to school on her moped, suddenly fell ill and had to be rushed to the hospital. The doctors found her to be bleeding. Further examination revealed that she was two months pregnant.On learning about the same, her parents were left stunned.They took the victim in confidence and asked about the alleged rape committed on her. The minor revealed that she was in touch with her school teacher earlier this year, currently teaching in primary section. According to the girl, the accused obtained her mobile phone number and started chatting with her through WhatsApp. It was in the first week of April that the accused teacher found the minor alone at home. On the pretext of meeting her, he visited her home and raped her. Fearing social stigma and alleged threats by the accused, the minor did not confide about the incident with anyone including her parents.

UNIDENTIFIED MEN ATTEMPT TO BREAK INTO ATMS IN THANE

An offence under sections 380 (theft) and 511 (attempt to commit offence) 427 (mischief causing damage) of the IPC has been registered on Wednesday night following a complaint, the station house officer of Bhiwandi town police station said.

Thane: Two unidentified persons allegedly attempted to break in to two ATMs in Bhiwandi town of Maharashtra's Thane district, police said on Thursday.

An offence under sections 380 (theft) and 511 (attempt to commit offence) 427 (mischief causing damage) of the IPC has been registered on Wednesday night following a complaint, the station house officer of Bhiwandi town police station said.Two persons attempted to break into an ATM of Thane District Central Co-operative Bank at Mandai around 3.45 am on Wednesday and they later tried to extract cash from an ATM of PNB on Bhiwandi-Kalyan Road around 5:00 am, the official said.The accused tried to open the machines using a screwdriver to remove cash, he said, adding that both machines were damaged in the attempt.

SHIV SENA 'LEAKS' ON AS EX-THANE MAYOR, 67 LEADERS JOIN SHINDE GROUP

The 'leaks' in the Shiv Sena continued unabated as ex-Thane Mayor Naresh Muske along with 67 former municipal corporators joined Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's group, here on Thursday.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The 'leaks' in the Shiv Sena continued unabated as ex-Thane Mayor Naresh Muske along with 67 former municipal corporators joined Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's group, here on Thursday.

The move has come as a jolt to the former Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, ahead of the upcoming civic elections in Thane where the party has ruled for many years. Muske and others met Shinde -- who was also the Guardian Minister of Thane in the erstwhile Maha Vikas Aghadi regime -- at his residence and pledged to work together under his leadership for the progress of the city adjoining Mumbai.

Earlier, several leaders from Thane had issued veiled threats that if they are denied tickets for civic polls they would "follow Eknath Shinde's path".The latest development came a week after Shinde was sworn-in as the Chief Minister and Bharatiya Janata Party's Devendra Fadnavis took oath as Deputy CM after the MVA government collapsed on June 29.Besides, there are indications that many Sena elected law-makers, party leaders and office-bearers at various levels are likely to shift allegiance to the Shinde Group in the coming weeks.

The Shinde camp has claimed that several Sena MPs are also in touch with them and may join them soon even as the Shiv Sena Chief Whip in Lok Sabha Bhavana Gawali -- MP from Yavatmal-Washim constituency was removed on Wednesday and replaced by Thane MP Rajan Vichare.

The Sena is keeping hopes pinned on the Supreme Court verdict of July 11, after which the party would chart its future course of action even as Thackeray has launched interaction and communication with the grassroots workers.

2 WASHED AWAY AFTER HEAVY RAINS; IMD ISSUES RED ALERT FOR FRIDAY

At least 32 houses were partially damaged in different talukas of Palghar due to the heavy showers, an official said.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Two persons were washed away in floodwaters and one person was injured after a portion of his house collapsed following heavy rains in Palghar district, officials said on Thursday.

Continuous heavy rain and waterlogging have partially damaged at least 32 houses in different talukas of Palghar. NDRF teams have been kept on alert to provide assistance whenever required At least 32 houses were partially damaged in different talukas of Palghar due to the heavy showers, an official from the district administration said.

The district received an average 89.27 mm downpour in the 24-hour period ending at 10 am on Thursday, with Wada taluka receiving the maximum 135 mm rainfall.

A team of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) was kept on alert to provide assistance whenever required, district disaster cell chief Vivekanand Kadam said.

A 51-year-old man, Ramesh Janya Goshe, from Charoti in Dahanu taluka, was washed away in the flood waters on Thursday. The body was later recovered, an official from the district administration said. On Wednesday, the decomposed body of a man was found in a swollen drain in in Madhuban locality of Vasai township, an official from the Vasai Virar Municipal Corporation's fire services said.

A police official said they suspect that the dead person, identified as Rahul Vishwakarma, who worked in a local factory, might have slipped into the drain amid the heavy showers and got washed away.

As per a district administration official, a portion of a house collapsed at Vasuri in Vikramgad taluka on Thursday, injuring its resident Krishna Bhauji Bhoye (60).

The man has been hospitalised and is said to be stable, the official said.

District Collector Manik Gursal has instructed all sub-divisional officers and tehsildars to be on alert and take necessary steps to provide assistance in the present situation.The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued 'orange' alert for Thursday, while a 'red' alert has been sounded for Friday in Mumbai, Thane and Palghar.

"In last three-to-four days central Maharashtra and Konkan region received good rainfall due to favourable conditions of monsoon. It will remain same for next four-to-five days," IMD's Jayant Sarkar said.

The IMD has also issued red alert for Raigad, Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg till 9 July, while Palghar, Pune, Kolhapur and Satara are on red alert till 8 July. Water-logging on tracks and streets following incessant rains in Mumbai and adjoining areas has slowed the movement of trains and vehicles.The Central Railway and Western Railway officials said the local trains were operating "normally", but a number of passengers, mostly office-goers, took to social media and complained that the suburban services were running late by at least 15-20 minutes.A team of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) has been kept on alert to provide assistance whenever required, district disaster cell chief Vivekanand Kadam informed.

WATER-LOGGING NEAR CM EKNATH SHINDE'S HOUSE

Mumbai: Overnight heavy rains caused flooding at various places including Maharashtra's Thane district also led to water-logging around Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's house on Thursday morning.

Around 6.15 am on Thursday local firemen received a call about inundation near the CM's residence in Louiswadi area of the city following heavy showers throughout the night, Thane Municipal Corporation's regional disaster management cell chief Avinash Sawant said.

Civic personnel rushed to the spot and cleared the locality of the flood waters. There were also reports of tree falls at some places in the district, Sawant added.

Centre upset over Maharashtra's silence on MMR wetland burial

Team Absolute | Mumbai

BNHS has repeatedly said in its studies that the wetlands at Belpada, Bhendkhal, Panje, NRI, TS Chanakya and DPS Lake must be protected to act on the series of complaints from green groups against destruction of wetlands in Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR).

Taking a serious note lack of response from the state environment department and the wetland authority despite five e-mails from the Centre, Dr E. Arockia Lenin, Director and Scientist-C, from the MOEFCC has sent a fresh missive to State Environment Principal Secretary Manisha PatankarMhaiskar called for a time bound action and sending an Action Taken Report.

NatConnect Foundation director BN Kumar, who has been periodically complaining, received a copy of the letter to the state officials along with a 40-page annexure of the complaints and forward mails. Significantly, Dr Lenin's letter has the approval of the Competent Authority at MOEFCC.

In a press statement, Kumar has repeatedly pointed out to the MOEFCC that the Navi Mumbai International Airport Limited (NMIAL) has obtained Environmental Clearance based on a false claim that CIDCO was taking adequate steps to protect the wetlands as suggested by the BNHS. Farfrom ensuring protecting the wetlands, CIDCO has been ensuring that the water bodies are buried by ignoring even the High Court appointed committee's directives, he said. BNHS has repeatedly said in its studies that the wetlands at Belpada, Bhendkhal, Panje, NRI, TS Chanakya and DPS Lake must be protected as thousands of migratory birds land here.The Environment Impact Assessment submitted by NMIAL to MOEFCC states: "Maintaining the current state of this landscape especially wetlands and Protected Areas is essential for the air safety of the upcoming Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA).

EDITOR'S SPECS

New Omicron: More Dangerous

The latest Omicron sub-variants -- including the BA.4 and BA.5 forms causing new global surges in infections -- are even better at eluding vaccines and most antibody treatments than previous variants, finds a study. Subvariants BA.2.12.1, BA.4, and BA.5 are rapidly expanding worldwide, with BA.4/5 now making up more than 50 per cent of new Covid cases in the US. These sub-variants are thought to be even more transmissible than prior Omicron sub-variants, owing to several new mutations in spike proteins. "The virus is continuing to evolve, as expected, and it is not surprising that these new, more transmissible sub-variants are becoming more dominant around the world," said David D. Ho, director of the Aaron Diamond AIDS Research Center at Columbia University. In laboratory experiments, Ho and his team studied the ability of antibodies from individuals who received at least three doses of an mRNA vaccine, or got two shots and were then infected with Omicron, to neutralise the new sub-variants. The study, published in Nature, revealed that while BA.2.12.1 is only modestly more resistant than BA.2 in individuals who were vaccinated and boosted, BA.4/5 was at least four times more resistant than its predecessor. In addition, the scientists tested the ability of 19 monoclonal antibody treatments to neutralise the variants and found that only one of the available antibody treatments remained highly effective against both BA.2.12.1 and BA.4/5. Study suggests that as these highly transmissible sub-variants continue to expand around the globe, they will lead to more breakthrough infections in people who are vaccinated and boosted with currently available mRNA vaccines. Though the current study suggests that the new variants may cause more infections in vaccinated individuals, the vaccines continue to provide good protection against severe disease.

The nature of ongoing protests in PoJK/GB

Once again Pakistan occupied Jammu Kashmir (PoJK) and Pakistan occupied Gilgit-Baltistan (PoGB) are engulfed in a new wave of protests and sit-ins. Lack of electricity, wheat and water as well as of basic infrastructure plus exploitation of the natural resources in the occupied territories are at the heart of the current protests.

Hundreds of political activists including the chairman of Jammu Kashmir National Awami Party (JKNAP) have been arrested in Poonch and Muzaffarabad in PoJK. The attempt by JKNAP to stage a sit-in at the gates of the Legislative Assembly in Muzaffarabad did not materialize since one night before all main activists and the leadership was apprehended by the police.

In PoGB, at least two sit-ins are currently being staged in Gilgit city and in Nasirabad in Hunza that are worth a mention.

In 2008, 14 political activists who belonged to Shia sect of Islam were arrested and sent for trail to Rawalpindi in Pakistan.

For 15 years they have been languishing in prison and one has already died of 'natural' causes.

The 13 remaining political prisoners have been accused of participating in a protest back in 2005 during which at least five protesters and two members of the paramilitary rangers lost their lives. There has been no trial for 15 years to prove that the accused were involved in the killing of the ranger personnel.

The sit-in is being observed under a scorching sun and is being braved by young women and elderly mothers in the open in Gilgit city who demand that they will not leave until their loved ones are released.

The second sit-in is taking place in Nasirabad in Hunza. The protesters are disputing a mining lease issued to a non-local investor by the name of Mohmand Dada.

Up until 2014, the mining rights for the marble stone in the area were under the collective ownership of the Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society that represents the village where the mine is located.The villagers say that the lease was transferred to Dada after the agreement with the Cooperative Society was tampered with. The lively hood of around 10,000 locals depends on mining.

On July 4 and 5, spontaneous anti-load shedding rioting broke out in almost every town and city of PoJK. On July 6, sporadic riots and clashes between police and activists of Jammu Kashmir National Students Federation were reported. A young man was kidnapped by the police and handed over to the secret services for confronting a Pakistan military officer of Brigadier rank who was allegedly involved in land grab.

All of the above is only but a glimpse of a wider and deeper discontent imbedded in the political psychology of the people of both PoJK and PoGB. This is not the first time that both occupied territories find themselves engulfed in such protests, and this will not be the last. The problem, however, is that this time around, as during previous periods, the protests lacks political leadership and direction.

Unless the root cause of the political, cultural, economic and social exploitation is addressed there can hardly be a protest or a sit-in that will remain sustainable and bear fruit.

The hegemony of Pakistan's cultural and political narrative is the first and the biggest obstacle in the way of breaking free from the so-called Islamic, two-nation theory based indoctrination that our people have been subjugated to for the past 75 years.

A significant number of people living in PoJK and PoGB hate what Pakistan is doing to them but unless a counter Pakistani narrative is introduced into the movement, people will not be able to cut off the umbilical cord that connects them with the ideology of Pakistan and feeds them with the poison of jihadi Islam.

For that to cease we must patiently, persistently and consistently explain to the people of PoJK and PoGB that it was Pakistan that attacked the independent state of Jammu and Kashmir and that our relation with Pakistan is not of two equals but that of the coloniser and the colonised.

Secondly, we have to make the people living in the occupied territories realise that the instrument of accession signed between the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, Hari Singh, and the last governor general of India, Lord Mountbatten, not only binds us with India but more importantly makes us citizens of the Republic of India.

Unless the nature of the ongoing protests are turned into rebellions against the occupation of Pakistan and into a conscious political endeavor to reunite with Union Territory of Jammu Kashmir and Ladakh, the new wave of protests and upheaval in PoJK and PoGB will share the same fate as its predecessors; they will be brutally crushed leading to loss of hope among the subjugated population, until another time when a new wave of unrest overwhelms the region only to repeat the fate of its predecessor movements.

This vicious cycle of hope and despair can only be transformed into a revolutionary break through by transforming the protests into political rebellions against the colonial subjugation of Pakistan and a clear political program to reunite with India.

(is an author and a human rights activist from Mirpur in PoJK. He currently lives in exile in the UK)

international

200 shot, killed in holiday weekend gun violence across US

Gun violence spiked over the Fourth of July weekend and shootings were reported in nearly every US state, with at least 220 people killed and some 570 others injured, according to the Gun Violence Archive.

Washington | Agencies

Gun violence spiked over the Fourth of July weekend and shootings were reported in nearly every US state, with at least 220 people killed and some 570 others injured, according to the Gun Violence Archive.

Published tallies showed the number of weekend shootings was almost equal to the number of resulting injuries, with well over 500 instances of shootings documented nationwide between July 1-4, reports Xinhua news agency.

There were only five states where one or more shootings were not reported in that time frame. Of all gun violence incidents accounted for during the holiday weekend, at least 11 were classified as mass shootings by the Gun Violence Archive.

Any situation where four or more people, excluding the shooter, are killed or wounded by gunshots is considered a mass shooting.

The database lists 315 mass shootings across the country since the beginning of this year, and roughly 22,500 deaths caused by any form of gun violence.

The number of injuries so far traced to gun violence approaches the total death toll.

In 2021, more than 180 people were killed and 516 were injured in shootings that took place during the same holiday weekend.

NEW ZEALAND PM IN AUSTRALIA TO BOOST TRADE TIES

Sydney: New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern on Thursday attended the Australia-New Zealand Leadership Forum (ANZLF) in Sydney to boost trade ties between the two countries.

"Building on our trans-Tasman trade and economic links is fundamental to ensuring New Zealanders' economic security both now, and into the future," Xinhua news agency quoted Ardern as saying in a statement. Topics discussed on the form include reconnecting through travel and tourism; trans-Tasman innovation opportunities; labour shortages and the future of work, economic growth challenges post-Covid-19; and climate change collaboration.

Australia is New Zealand's second-largest trading partner after China, with two-way trade accounting for over $13.6 billion in the year to December 2021, statistics show.

Usually held around every 18 months, the forum last took place in 2019 in Auckland before Covid-19. Separate to the ANZLF, Ardern and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese will hold their first formal Australia New Zealand Leaders Meeting on Friday in Sydney.

Blinken welcomes 75th anniversary of US-Pak ties during call with Bilawal

Washington/Islamabad | Agencies

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken welcomed the 75th anniversary of ties between Washington and Islamabad during a phone call with Pakistan's Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari. The State Department said during the call on Wednesday, the two sides "reaffirmed our joint goals for enhancing US-Pakistan bilateral partnerships on economic stability, climate, and health." "The Secretary and the Foreign Minister also discussed coordination to mitigate the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, regional stability, commercial and people-to-people ties, and the devastating effects of (Russian President Vladimir) Putin's unprovoked war on Ukraine on food security in Pakistan and worldwide," the Department added. According to the Foreign Office in Islamabad, Bilawal told Blinken that he looked forward to "frequent exchange of high-level visits" to realise the full potential of bilateral cooperation across a vast range of areas, Xinhua news agency reported. Given the demographic and economic potential of Pakistan, the Foreign Minister said that the US may invest in the South Asian nation's growing market, adding that future engagement and meetings between the two countries would give further impetus to trade and commercial ties. Bilawal also tweeted about his conversation with Blinken."We agreed to expand our engagement in trade, energy, health & security marking 75 years of our relationship. We must increase people-to-people & business-to-business contacts," the Foreign Minister added.

Bilawal and Blinken had their first face-to-face meeting in New York on May 18 where the two had affirmed their shared desire for a strong and prosperous bilateral relationship.

FRENCH PM PRESENTS NEW GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAMME TO LAWMAKERS

Paris: French Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne presented her new government's policy programme to deputies in the National Assembly.

Borne said that one of her main aims will be to "find compromises" in political life. She said that each conviction and idea must and can be debated despite "divisions", reports Xinhua news agency"A new page in politics is opening and we are going to write it together," she told the deputies.

In the government program, the Prime Minister vowed to boost employment, support purchasing power, speed up the ecological transition and prioritise the economy, health and energy.

"We need to stop believing that the answer to every challenge is a tax. No tax increase," she stressed.Borne also confirmed her government's intention to hold "100 per cent" of French multinational electricity utility company EDF's capital to avoid depending on other countries for electricity."In 2026, we must start to reduce the debt, and in 2027, reduce the deficit below 3 per cent," the Prime Minister added.The development came days after President Emmanuel Macron reshuffled his Cabinet for the second time in six weeks.

SL PRESIDENT ASKS PUTIN TO HELP BUY FUEL

Colombo | Agencies

Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has asked his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to help the cash-strapped island nation buy fuel as the country is undergoing its worst-ever economic crisis since gaining independence in 1948.Taking to Twitter on Wednesday, Rajapaksa said: "Had a very productive telecon with the Russia President, Vladimir Putin. While thanking him for all the support extended by his government to overcome the challenges of the past, I requested an offer of credit support to import fuel to (Sri Lanka) in defeating the current economic challenges."In his tweet, the President said that he also requested Russian flag carrier Aeroflot to restart operations in Sri Lanka after the airline suspended services to the island nation last month.

"We unanimously agreed that strengthening bilateral relations in sectors such as tourism, trade and culture was paramount in reinforcing the friendship our two nations share," he added.Rajapaksa's appeal for help comes after Energy Minister Kanchana Wijesekera issued a stark warning on Sunday saying that the country only had enough petrol left for less than a day under regular demand.

Last week, authorities had suspended sales of petrol and diesel for non-essential vehicles in an attempt to preserve its dwindling fuel stocks, reports the BBC.

In an effort to tackle the soaring cost of living in the country, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka on Thursday raised its key interest rates by one percentage point.

The lending rate was raised to 15.5 per cent, while the deposit rate was increased to 14.5 per cent, the highest in 21 years.It comes as annual inflation hit a record high of 54.6 per cent June as the cost of food rose by more than 80 per cent amid the crisis.On Wednesday, hundreds of protesters gathered near Parliament building in Colombo as they launched their "final push" to remove Rajapaksa-led government.The island nation of 22 million people has witnessed its foreign exchange reserves shrink due to economic mismanagement and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.As a result it has struggled to pay for imports of essential goods, including fuel, food and medicine.

In May, it defaulted on its debts for the first time in its history after a 30-day grace period to come up with $78 million of unpaid debt interest payments expired.The country is currently in negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) over a bailout.

Sri Lanka's government has said it needs $5 billion this year in support from the international community, including the IMF.

YEMEN'S WARRING FACTIONS AGREE TO CONSOLIDATE TRUCE DURING EID AL-ADHA: UN

Sanaa | Agencies

UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg announced that the warton nation's warring factions agreed to consolidate the current truce in the upcoming Eid al-Adha."The parties agreed to consolidate their commitment to the current truce through a continued halt of all offensive ground, aerial, and maritime military operations, inside and outside of Yemen, and freezing current military positions on the ground," Xinhua news agency quoted a statement released by the envoy's office as saying.The commitment was made after the warring parties held a meeting in Amman, capital of Jordan, on Tuesday with the facilitation of Grundberg's military advisor Anthony Hayward, according to the statement.

Furthermore, they agreed to moderate rhetoric in public statements and media and show care for the safety, well-being, and protection of civilians.The envoy confirmed the UN readiness to support the Yemeni warring parties by providing technical assistance, capacity building, and facilitating decision-making.Since April 2, the warring parties in Yemen have been abiding by a nationwide ceasefire.Although the trce has largely been upheld, the internationally recognized government and the Houthi rebels frequently trade accusations of violations.

Yemen has been mired in a civil war since late 2014 when the Iran-backed Houthis seized control of several northern provinces and forced the Saudi-backed government out of the capital Sanaa.

The war has killed tens of thousands of people, displaced 4 million, and pushed the country to the brink of starvation.

ELEVEN INDUSTRIAL CORRIDORS WILL CHANGE FATE AND PICTURE OF STATES : CM

- FIRST MEETING OF INDUSTRIAL CORRIDOR MONITORING AUTHORITY CHAIRED BY UNION FINANCE MINISTER
- CM CHOUHAN JOINS MEETING FROM JABALPUR

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A meeting of the Industrial Corridor Monitoring Authority was held today under the chairmanship of Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. Chief Ministers of 6 states, including the Union Minister of Railways and Industries, virtually participated in the meeting. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan virtually joined the meeting from Jabalpur.

Chouhan said that it is due to Prime Minister Narendra Modi' remarkable vision, 11 industrial corridors are going to be built in the country, which will work to change the fate and picture of the states. Prime Ministers vision gives direction and strives to work at a fast pace. The Chief Minister said that the presentation of the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor has shown that Madhya Pradesh has worked at a fast pace. He expressed the commitment of development in Madhya Pradesh to realize the dream of the Prime Minister and said that 202 acres of land has been allotted to Vikram Udyogpuri. In this, 20 industrialists have also taken land and many have started work. Expressing happiness, he said that a company will start production in November. Chief Minister Chouhan said that applications of 15 companies have been received, to which land will be allotted very soon. Chouhan said that no stone will be left unturned in the development of Vikram Udyogpuri in Ujjain. Industrialists will have not face any difficulty. Madhya Pradesh is an investor friendly state anyway. He said that continuous efforts have been made for industrial development even during the Covid period, so that the pace of investment does not stop. He assured the Delegation of Power that he would complete the task immediately. In connection with the Delhi-Nagpur corridor, the Chief Minister said that the work of Atal Expressway is being started in 330 km under Bharatmala project in the area of Madhya Pradesh from where it will emerge. The work of developing industrial corridors on both sides has also been started. A plan has also been prepared to give land to industrialists. For this, 11 thousand acres of land has been identified.

Chouhan said that the vision of the Prime Minister for industrial development in Madhya Pradesh will be fulfilled earnestly by working on various projects within a time-limit. He told to prepare the proposal of Delhi-Nagpur Industrial Corridor on priority. With this, industries can be brought in Agra, Morena, Gwalior, Guna, Bhopal, Hoshangabad, Betul and Nagpur in a better way. He said that the work of giving land has been started by identifying different clusters at many places in Madhya Pradesh.

Chouhan said that apart from Delhi-Nagpur Industrial Corridor, Varanasi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor has been proposed, in which it has been told that eastern Madhya Pradesh has abundant mineral resources like aluminium, coal and other minerals. If East Madhya Pradesh is connected with West then better road connectivity and market will be developed in the region. The Chief Minister said that work will be done in Madhya Pradesh within a stipulated time frame. He told to fulfil the dreams of the Prime Minister by working step by step and shoulder to shoulder.

MP govt asks Twitter to check messages hurting religious sentiments

- After registering a First Information Report (FIR) against Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra at a police station in Bhopal, the BJP has now asked Twitter to check tweets aimed at hurting religious sentiments of Hindus.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

After registering a First Information Report (FIR) against Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra at a police station in Bhopal, the BJP has now asked Twitter to check tweets aimed at hurting religious sentiments of Hindus.

Briefing the press on Thursday, Madhya Pradesh Home Minister Narottam Mishra, who is also the spokesperson of the government, said that he is writing to Twitter to check alleged derogatory remarks made by some people, which have hurt the religious sentiments of Hindus.

"I am going to write a letter to Twitter on the issue. Twitter should check tweets posted by people having perverted mentality, like the Kali film director Leena Manimekalai, who posts a photo of goddess Kali smoking beedi. These people use Twitter as tool to hurt sentiments of Hindus," Mishra said. He further said that the MP government will also write to the Centre to issue a lookout circular against Canada based film maker and director of film Kali.

The controversy erupted after Manimekalai posted a poster of the film, depicting Goddess Kali smoking and holding an LGBT banner.

The controversy escalated further after Trinamool MP Mahua Moitra at a conclave in Bengal said she has every right as an individual to imagine Goddess Kali as a meat-eating and alcohol-accepting deity, as each person has his or her unique way of offering prayers.

Following this, separate FIRs were registered in BJP ruled Madhya Pradesh against Moitra and Manimekalai in Bhopal on Wednesday.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, who is relentlessly campaigning for the party in ongoing Municipal polls, has been attacking opposition highlighting this issue during public meetings.

WOMAN SET ON FIRE BY HER HUSBAND

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A 22-year-old woman was set ablaze by her husband in this capital city of Madhya Pradesh, police said on Thursday. Accused Raees Khan poured petrol on his wife Muskan on a busy road near Kabir Wali Masjid in old Bhopal, set her on fire and fled the spot. Police rushed the victim to a government hospital for treatment.

The couple, hailing from neighbouring Rajasthan, was living here for the past few years, police said. They had got married three years back in Rajasthan. Victim told police that after one year of their marriage, her husband started harassing her for dowry, due to which she decided to live alone. Around eight months back, she started working working in an old-age home in Bhopal.

On Wednesday night, when Muskan was coming out of the old-age home, she found her husband standing on the road side. Raees asked her to accompany him to Rajasthan, which she refused. At this, he took out petrol and doused Muskan with it and set her afire. Before anyone could react, Raees fled the spot. Locals informed the police and the victim was taken to a government hospital. "A manhunt has been launched for Raees Khan. Hearing victim's screams, locals rushed towards her and tried to douse the flames with water," said a senior police official. The victim suffered 8 to 9 per cent burn injuries and is undergoing treatment in Hamidia hospital.

Work with a token-to-total approach for disease eradication: Governor

Governor reviews activities for treatment management Sickle Cell Anemia and TB

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Governor Mangubhai Patel accompanied by officials of the Health Department reviewed the actions taken for disease treatment management of sickle cell anaemia and TB. He called for disease treatment management with token-to-total strategy. Intensive investigation should be done by marking the area for disease screening work. Patel said that the direction of disease screening work should focus on the identification of the target group of the disease and on intensive screening. For sickle cell screening, identification should be done in Anganwadi centres, primary, secondary and higher secondary schools by setting up testing camps. All family members should be investigated in positive cases. The same approach should be taken in the examination of expectant mothers as well. Patel told to take initiatives related to tuberculosis treatment efforts by expanding the institutional treatment systems in view of the arrangements related to nutrition, regular drug intake in tuberculosis treatment management. He stated the need to conduct training program of ASHA workers in a phased manner. He said that priority should be given to the workers posted in the tribal dominated development blocks. The Governor directed initiatives on inclusion efforts by certification of alternative treatment methods and strengthening coordination with universities in public awareness efforts of the Health Department.

Patel was informed that Madhya Pradesh ranks second in the country in community participation activities. Khargone district has been awarded gold and Ujjain district has been awarded bronze medal in certification works at the national level. In the Ayushman Bharat TB campaign also, the state has been awarded for the first position by the central government. Molecular testing facility is also available in all the development blocks of the state.

Tribal Cell President Deepak Khandekar, Additional Chief Secretary Health Mohammad Suleman, Principal Secretary to Governor DP Ahuja, Health Commissioner Sudam Khade, Managing Director National Health Mission Priyanka Das, Tribal Cell Member Secretary BS Jamod, National Tribal Health Research Institute Director Aproop Das, Tribal Cell members and departmental officers were present.

CM condoles deaths due to lightning

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has expressed grief over the untimely demise of citizens struck by lightning at different locations in the state including Gwalior, Chhatarpur, Shivpuri, Sheopur and Bhind districts. Chouhan has prayed for the peace of the departed souls and strength for family members to bear this immense loss. He gave directives to the collectors of the respective districts to provide financial assistance to the affected families.

BJP's civic poll ad provides fodder to Cong to attack ruling party in MP

- An advertisement of BJP's Mayoral candidate for the Bhopal Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections has provided fodder to the opposition Congress to attack the ruling party, which has been in power in BMC for the last 17 years.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

An advertisement of BJP's Mayoral candidate for the Bhopal Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections has provided fodder to the opposition Congress to attack the ruling party, which has been in power in BMC for the last 17 years.

The advertisement released in favour of BJP's Mayoral candidate Malti Rai made as many 15 promises, to be fulfilled if the party wins the polls.

The BJP has fielded Malti Rai as its Mayoral candidate from Bhopal against Congress' Vibha Patel, who is currently the President of the state Congress' women's wing.

Of the 15 promises made to the people of Bhopal, the first one read, "I will end corruption in Bhopal Municipal Corporation."

The promise surprised many as it is the BJP which has been in power in BMC for the last 17 years.

Taking a dig at the BJP, the Congress said, "This is an acceptance by the BJP that there is corruption in the BMC."

Some other promises made by Rai in the advertisement also drew the attention of the Congress, which indicated that the city still lacks a better drainage system, as one of the promises read: "I will make a master plan to resolve sewerage and drainage problems in the city."

State Congress media in-charge KK Mishra said, "The BJP has been in power in almost all the municipal corporations for the past several years. Today the party says it will end corruption in BMC. So what were they doing for the last so many years? It is an acceptance by the BJP that BMC is under the grip of huge corruption."

Mishra alleged that despite 17 years of rule in the state and in the BMC, the BJP could not provide potable water to the people of Bhopal and Indore.

"Every summer, people have to struggle for water in Bhopal, yet the BJP says it has turned the state capital into a world class city. Roads have been built on paper, but not on the ground, while drains get chocked even after a drizzle," he added.

Voting for the first phase of municipal elections in Madhya Pradesh was held on Wednesday. Polling for the second and the last phase is scheduled on July 13. The counting of votes will take place on July 17.

IGRMS includes terracotta mural exhibition

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya Bhopal included a mati tihar exhibit in the Mathological Trail open air exhibition. This exhibit has been depicted in a terracotta mural on the ritualistic processes of the traditional Mati festival celebrated in Bastar. This exhibit has been made by Sahdev Rana, a traditional artist of Kondagaon Bastar. This exhibition is very popular among the general audience.

P Anuradha, the coordinator of the mythological open air exhibition, told about the exhibitions. The soil festival is celebrated in a precise manner. It is celebrated for three days in the month of chaitra (March- April). Each village has a place called maati kot, where deity of soil is worshipped. On the first day of Maati Puja villagers make ceremonial worship of weapons, seek blessings from village deities and go hunting expeditions. The prey is carried over the shoulder in a procession and brought to maati kot. They sing, play and dance the entire night and rest there. On the second day any kind of soil related work is prohibited in the village as well as collection of leaf, wood and other work in the forest and. Entry of outsiders in the village is barred. On the third day, villagers bring goat, chicken, pig, fruits, rice, vegetables etc. from their respective homes for offerings. To appease the mother earth, Gayeta (maati priest) sacrifices the animal brought by the villagers. The head part of the animals belongs to the Gayeta and the torso part belongs to the one who took the vow. Community feast is arranged at the same place and all the male members of the village eat there. After the feast the villagers come home as early as possible because they have a belief that as soon as the evening falls, a lion comes to that place that is considered to be the real form of Mother Earth.

CM CHOUHAN PLANTED SAPLINGS OF PEEPAL, NEEM AND KADAMBA

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted saplings of Peepal, Neem and Kadamba in the Smart City Park. Madhya Pradesh Vidyut Mandal Karmchari Grih Nirman Sanstha Maryadit members BS Rajput, Ratnamala Sharma, Yashwant Sharma,. Anjali Subedar, Vaibhav Pandey and Rukmani Panthi participated in the plantation. The organisation has bagged the Swachh Colony award in the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission) of 2022 this year. The objective of the organisation is to make best eco-friendly residential committee, promote environment-protection and play an active role in the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. The residents and citizens are made aware by the organisation for environmental protection and cleanliness. Peepal planted today is a shady tree, which purifies the environment. It has religious and Ayurvedic significance. Neem is rich in antibiotic elements and full of medicinal qualities. Kadamba is famous for its medicinal properties. Its flowers have special significance. The fragrant flowers of Kadamba find a mention in Vedas and compositions.

VOTING ON JULY 8

Preparations for third phase of Panchayat elections completed, polling parties leave

Team Absolute | Bhopal

State Election Commissioner Basant Pratap Singh has informed that the voting for the third and final phase of the three-tier Panchayat General Election-2022 will be held on July 8 from 7 am to 3 pm. Counting of votes will be done at the polling centre itself immediately after polling. All preparations have been completed for peaceful polling. More than 40 thousand police force has been deployed in the third phase of polling.

In the third phase, voting will be held in 6607 village panchayats of 92 development blocks of 39 districts. 20 thousand 608 polling centres have been set up for voting. Out of these, 3 thousand 59 polling centres are sensitive. In the third phase, there are 243 posts of District Panchayat Member, 1955 of Janpad Panchayat Member, 6607 of Sarpanch and 1 lakh 5 thousand 293 posts of Panch. Polling will be held for 242 posts of District Panchayat Member, 1916 of Janpad Panchayat member, 6408 for Sarpanch and 22378 posts of Panch due to unopposed election on some of these posts. No nomination paper has been received for 14 thousand 699 posts of Panch. In the third phase, one crore 13 lakh 11 thousand 479 voters will be able to exercise their franchise. Out of these, 58 lakh 36 thousand 623 are male, 54 lakh 74 thousand 592 female and 264 are other voters.

Commissioner State Election Commission Singh has informed that voting will be held in development block Narsinghgarh, Sarangpur in district Rajgarh, Sanchi, Obedullaiganj in district Raisen, Ashta, Budhni in district Sehore, Kurwai, Gyagaraspur, Lateri in district Vidisha, Bhikangaon, Kasrawad, Gogaon, Khargone in district Khargone, Pandhana, Chhaigaonmakhan in district Khandwa, Sardarpur, Nalchha, Dhar, Tirla in district Dhar, Sondwa, Udaigarh in district Alirajpur, Pati, Barwani in district Barwani, Aron in district Guna, Pohri, Karera, Shivpuri in district Shivpuri, Mungawali, Chanderi in district Ashoknagar, Mohkhed, Junnardev, Chaurai in district Chhindwara, Keolari, Chhapara, Kurai in district Seoni, Balaghat, Lalbarra, Birsa in district Balaghat, Narayanganj, Niwas, Bijadandi in district Mandla, Samnapur, Bajag, Karanjia in district Dindori, Bahoriband, Rithi in district Katni, Mahidpur, Tarana in district Ujjain, Manasa in district Neemuch, Ratlam, Javra, Piploda in district Ratlam, Shujalpur, Kalapipal in district Shajapur, Susner, Nalkheda in district Agarmalwa, Garoth, Malhargarh in district Mandsaur, Rahatgarh, Khurai, Shahgarh, Jaisinagar in District Sagar, Naugaon, Lavkushnagar, Bijawar in District Chhatarpur, Tendukheda, Batiangarh, Patera in district Damoh, Jatara in district Tikamgarh, Sirmaur, Jawa, Tyonthar in district Rewa, Chitrangi in district Singrauli, Sidhi in district Sidhi, Rampur Baghelan, Maihar in district Satna, Narmadapuram, Makhannagar, Bankhedi in District Narmadapuram, Prabhatpattan, Bhainsdehi, Bhimpur in District Betul, Pali No. 1 Gohparu, Budar in District Shahdol, Anuppur, Kotma in District Anuppur, Mahgaon, Gohad in District Bhind, Vijaypur in District Sheopur and Sabalgarh, Kailaras and Pahargarh in District Morena.

1406 UNLICENSED ARMS SEIZED SO FAR

Continuous action is being taken by the police in view of law and order in the Panchayat and Urban Bodies General Election-2022. So far, 1406 unlicensed arms have been seized in the state and 2 lakh 58 thousand 131 licensed weapons have been deposited. Action has been taken against one lakh 82 thousand 649 persons in the Preventive Section of CrPC. So far 22 thousand 482 non-bailable warrants have also been executed.

LIQUOR WORTH RS 6 CRORE 41 LAKH SEIZED

Secretary State Election Commission Rakesh Singh apprised that from June 1 to July 6, 2022, 57 thousand 836 bulk 6 liters of liquor with estimated value is Rs. 6 crore 41 lakh 80 thousand 726 has been seized in the state. Maximum 13 thousand 440 bulk liters of liquor has been seized in Dhar. Singh has informed that instructions have been given to keep liquor shops closed from 48 hours before the end of polling.

BTS 'PROOF' STAYS HIGH ON BILLBOARD ALBUMS CHART

Seoul | Agencies

K-pop supergroup BTS has ranked high on the US Billboard's main albums chart for the third consecutive week with its anthology album 'Proof'.

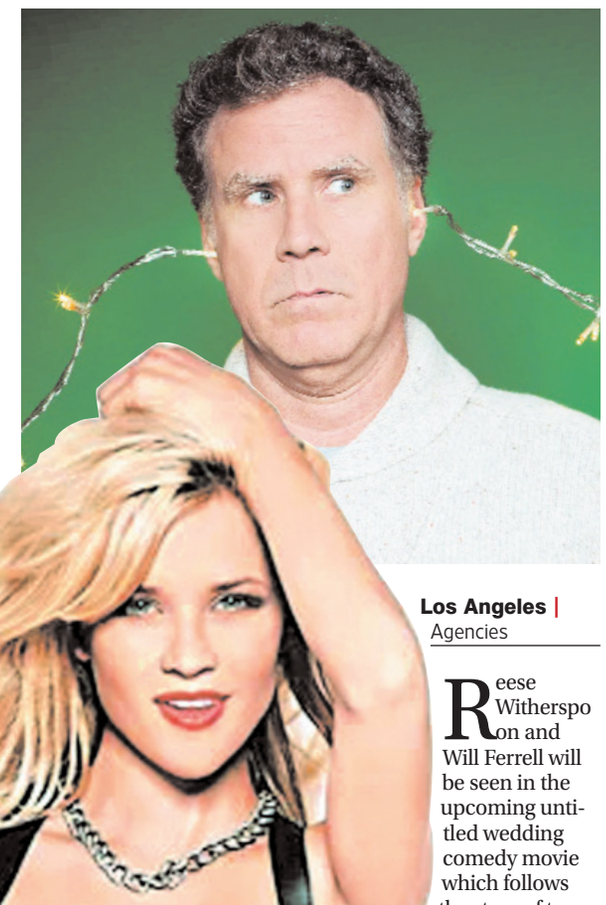
The album came in 13th, down nine notches from the previous week's fourth, on this week's Billboard 200 chart, released Wednesday, reports Yonhap, News Agency.

'Proof' is a three-CD album that wraps up the first chapter of BTS' nine-year career. Released on June 10, the album debuted atop the chart three weeks ago.

'Proof' has also ranked second on the World Albums chart, fifth on the Top Current Album Sales chart and 10th on the Tastemaker Albums chart.

The song also landed at No. 1 on Digital Song Sales, No. 2 on Canada Digital Song Sales and 17th on the Billboard Canada Hot 100 and 23rd on the Streaming Songs chart.

Reese, Will Ferrell to star in comedy film



Los Angeles | Agencies

Reese Witherspoon and Will Ferrell will be seen in the upcoming untitled wedding comedy movie which follows the story of two weddings that are booked at the same venue on the same weekend.

Jessica Elbaum and Ferrell will produce for Gloria Sanchez, with Witherspoon and Lauren Neustadter producing for Hello Sunshine and the company's Ashley Strumwasser serving as executive producer.

Stoller's gay rom-com movie 'Bros' which he directed and co-wrote with Billy Eichner, is slated to release on September 30.

According to 'Variety, he will also produce the untitled wedding comedy movie for his Stoller Global Solutions alongside Conor Welch.

Sources told 'Variety' that Amazon landed the rights to the project in a highly competitive situation with bids coming from both streamers and studios, which is logical given Witherspoon, Ferrell and Stoller's stellar comedy resumes.

Docu-Series on Donald Trump to release on July 10

Los Angeles | Agencies

'Trump : Unprecedented', the highly anticipated and sought-after documentary that features never-before-seen footage of former US President Donald Trump and his family will be released on July 10.

The docuseries show footage during the final six weeks of the 2020 presidential campaign and the reactions of the Trump family to the outcome of the election.

The series is created by AJH Films and Alex Holder. The three-part docuseries reveal unfiltered sit-down interviews with President Trump and his family, including his daughter Ivanka Trump and son-in-law Jared Kushner, sons Donald Trump Jr. and Eric Trump, as well as insights from the journalists who covered the events as they unfolded.

The series releases on discovery+.

PP SAYS SHE HAD A MENAGE-A-TROIS WITH MICK, MARIANNE

Los Angeles | Agencies

Soul singer PP Arnold, whose real name is Patricia Cole, has revealed she had a fling with Rolling Stones frontman Mick Jagger and claimed his then-girlfriend Marianne would sometimes join them in bed.

According to the Mirror, she writes in her new book, 'Soul Survivor: The Autobiography': "I was not a groupie, I was an artist, and I was picking and choosing who I wanted to sleep with.

"And I was crossing a very taboo line as a Black woman. Mick Jagger was cool, he was a busy boy, he's fun, and he was very kind to me. I wasn't really into women, it was a nice experience, it was cool and she was sweet, but I was into Mick."

She revealed Rolling Stones guitarist Brian Jones was worried about her, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

She said: "Brian was very kind because he thought Mick was a bit of a cad."

PP, who was one of The Ikettes, the backing singers for Ike and Tina Turner, met Mick when they supported The Rolling Stones on tour in the sixties.

She revealed she had an abortion after falling pregnant by the singer, who inspired her song 'Though It Hurts Me Badly'.

Actor Jerry Harris gets 12 years in Jail

Los Angeles | Agencies

'Cheer' actor Jerry Harris has been sentenced to 12 years in federal prison for soliciting sex from minors.

According to USA Today, Harris sentencing comes five months after the former reality star plead guilty to sexually assaulting a 15-year-old in a bathroom during a cheer competition and paying a 17-year-old to send him sexually explicit videos and photos, reports 'Variety'.

Harris also admitted to similar conduct with other minors, but those charges were dropped in a plea agreement.

According to 'Variety', Harris was first arrested for charges of child pornography in September 2020, months after the first season of 'Cheer' debuted in January of that year.

THOR : LOVE AND THUNDER

FILM REVIEW

SHACHI CHATURVEDI

Directed by : Taika Waititi
Runtime : 1 hr 55min
Cast : Chris Hemsworth, Natalie Portman, Christian Bale, Tessa Thompson, Russell Crowe
Rating : 2.5 /5

Synopsis : Thor sets out on a journey unlike any he's ever taken: a quest for inner peace. Gorr the God Butcher, a galactic killer who seeks the extinction of the gods, interrupts thor's retirement.

Review : Thor: Love and Thunder appeared to be a sure thing. Taika Waititi returns to direct the sequel to 2017's Thor: Ragnarok, starring Chris Hemsworth as the Asgardian Avenger.

Surprisingly, the 29th MCU film, which reaches cinemas on July 8, falls short. Thor's fourth solo adventure spreads itself too widely and ends up feeling hollow in its attempt to combine humour with drama and merge many classic comic themes into a single narrative. It begins promisingly, with a dramatic opening introducing Christian Bale's evil Gorr the God Butcher. After his daughter is killed in his harsh desert homeworld, his meeting with an indifferent, merciless deity inspires him to lead the fight to exterminate all heavenly beings in the cosmos. Thor meets his ex-girlfriend Jane Foster on Earth as Gorr attacks Thor's other Asgardians. The film just does not allow enough time for the task she undertakes to settle in, as if it is terrified of becoming too real and is too quick to take us off on another adventure.

Jane, in particular, makes remarkable use of her new powers, but neither the editing nor the cinematography allows us to enjoy this. It's doubtful that many scenes from this film will stick with you the way earlier MCU adventures have - nothing compares to Captain America's elevator brawl, three Spider-Men swinging into battle, or Scarlet Witch's confrontation with the Illuminati.

This film doesn't have nearly as many cameos as its immediate MCU predecessor, Doctor Strange and the Multiverse of Madness, but it does have a scene-stealing Russell Crowe as a selfish Zeus. Unfortunately, his role is essentially restricted to a single flashy set piece that quickly fades into oblivion as the main plot moves on.

Movie fall short of the wonderful stories that inspired it. It neither embraces its director's approach nor utilises the emotional potential of its performers, coming out as a weak, disappointing mashup. It's still fun, but it's hardly the traditional Thor journey its handsome hero appears to be on.

If you are a die-heart Marvel fan then this movie could disappoint you, but it will surely give some thrilling cliffhangers to make you like it.

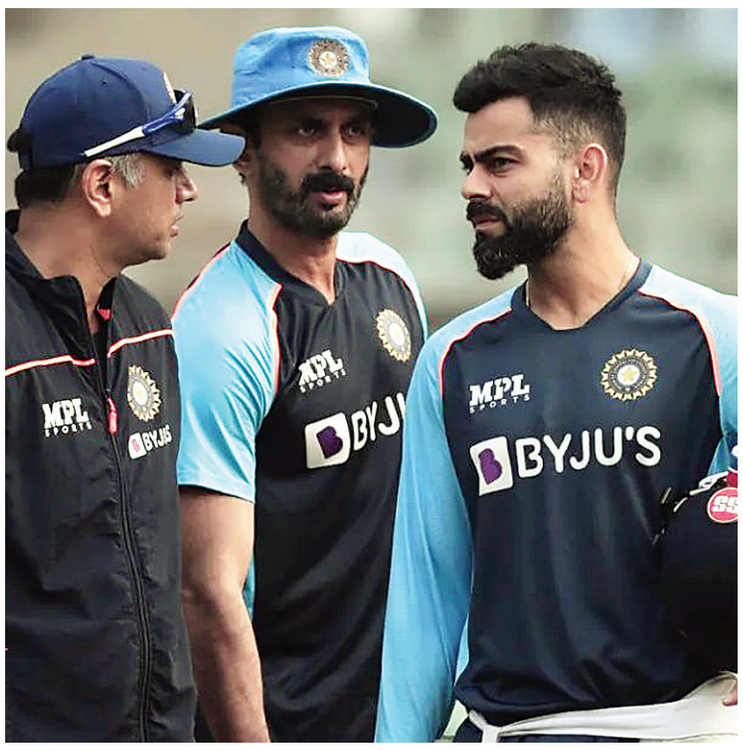
ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY

Antigoni Buxton

KOHLI MIGHT BE RESTED FOR T20IS AGAINST WEST INDIES : REPORT

On Wednesday, Sharma, Bumrah, Pant, Pandya and Kohli were rested from India's three-match ODI series against the West Indies, to be played in Port of Spain, Trinidad, on July 22, 24 and 27. After this, India and West Indies will play five T20Is, starting from July 29 in Trinidad, followed by the next two matches at St. Kitts and the final two T20Is to be played in Lauderhill, Florida, USA.

Team Absolute | New Delhi



Regular skipper Rohit Sharma, pacer Jasprit Bumrah, wicket-keeper Rishabh Pant and all-rounder Hardik Pandya are likely to return to Indias near full-strength T20I squad for the five-match series against the West Indies. At the same time, senior batter Virat Kohli might be rested from the T20I series in the Caribbean, says a report by Cricbuzz on Thursday.

"The India Twenty20 squad for the upcoming matches in the Caribbean will be in full force as all the senior players of the white-ball team with the possible exception of Virat Kohli, are expected to feature in the five-game series. Rohit Sharma, Jasprit Bumrah, Rishabh Pant and Hardik Pandya will be included in the squad expected to be announced after the third and final T20I against England on July 10," said the report.

Talking about the possibility of Kohli's absence from the five-match T20I series, the report said, "The absence of Kohli cannot be construed as not being in the scheme of things as he is very much part of the decision makers' plans for the World Cup. He is believed to have requested the selectors, team management and the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to not consider him for the West Indies series. It will be a case of rest rather than an axe."

The report went on to say that ace off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin might get a surprise recall for the T20I series against the West Indies. Ashwin made a comeback into the shortest format of the game during the Men's T20 World Cup last year and last played a T20I against New Zealand at Ranchi in November last year.

The West Indies series will be the second time India will play a bilateral T20I series of five matches this year, after drawing 2-2 against South Africa in June at home. It gives the Indian team management a further chance to zero on the personnel who will make it to the final squad for Men's T20 World Cup in Australia in October-November.

Malaysia Masters: Sindhu, Prannoy move into quarterfinals

Kuala Lumpur | Agencies

Top Indian shuttlers P.V Sindhu, and H.S Prannoy reached the quarterfinals while compatriot Parupalli Kashyap and B. Sai Praneeth made second-round exits at the Malaysia Masters 2022 at the Axiata Arena, here on Thursday.

Sindhu, seventh in the badminton world rankings, took just 26 minutes to beat China's Zhang Yi Man 21-12, 21-10 in her women's singles second-round match to set up a quarterfinal clash against world No. 2 Tai Tzu Ying of the Chinese Taipei.

Up against Yi Man, a former world championships bronze medallist and an opponent she had never beaten before, Sindhu took control of the game early after winning seven points on the trot to race to a 9-1 lead.

It was smooth sailing from there on for the Indian badminton ace, who never trailed throughout the duration of the match against world No. 32 Yi Man.

However, the quarterfinal clash against Tai Tzu Ying will be a much tougher affair for the two-time Olympic medal-winning Indian. Sindhu has a dismal 5-16 record against the Chinese Taipei shuttler and has not beaten her since 2019. Earlier this month, Tai Tzu Ying knocked PV Sindhu out of the Malaysia Open quarter-finals. In her second-round match, Tzu Ying came from behind to beat Malaysia's Goh Jin Wei 16-21, 21-7, 21-'.

In men's singles, H.S Prannoy ranked 19th also cruised into the men's singles quarter-finals after beating Wang Tzu Wei of Chinese Taipei 21-19, 21-16, in a second-round match that lasted for 44 minutes. The 29-year-old Prannoy will face Japan's Kanta Tsuneyama in the quarterfinal. However, other Indian male shuttlers -- Parupalli Kashyap and B Sai Praneeth -- bowed out after losing their respective second-round matches in the BWF Super 500 badminton tournament.

India complete 3-0 ODI series sweep of Sri Lanka

Pallekele (Sri Lanka) | Agencies

Captain Harmanpreet Kaur slammed 75 while left-arm spinner Rajeshwari Gayakwad took a three-wicket haul and Pooja Vastrakar shined with her all-round brilliance to help India defeat Sri Lanka by 39 runs in the third ODI at Pallekele to complete a 3-0 series sweep.

At one point, India were 124/6 in 29.2 overs and from there, Harmanpreet rescued India with her 16th ODI fifty, an 88-ball 75, laced with seven fours and two sixes. She also shared a crucial 97-run stand with Pooja, who remained unbeaten on 56 off 65 balls, hitting three sixes as India reached 255/9 in their 50 overs. In defence of 255, Harmanpreet removed Sri Lanka skipper Chamari Athapaththu for 44 off 41 balls to land a huge blow to the hosts' chase. Rajeshwari then took three wickets while conceding 36 runs in her ten overs while Pooja and Meghna Singh picked two late wickets as Sri Lanka were bowled out for 216 in 47.3 overs.Earlier, India lost opener Smriti Mandhana early, but youngster Shafali Verma hit five rollicking boundaries for a 50-ball 49 before being trapped lbw by leg-spinner Rashmi de Silva. From there, India slipped to 124/6 in 29.2 overs despite a 50-run stand between Shafali and Yastika Bhatia (30) as Rashmi, Inoka and Oshadi Ranasinghe triggered a middle-order collapse. But from there, Harmanpreet took charge of the batting and steadied the ship with Pooja being the perfect second fiddle.

Brief scores :
India 255/9 in 50 overs (Harmanpreet Kaur 75, Pooja Vastrakar 56; Inoka Ranaweera 2-22, Chamari Athapaththu 2-45) beat Sri Lanka 216 all out in 47.3 overs (Nilakshi de Silva 48 not out, Chamari Athapaththu 44; Rajeshwari Gayakwad 3-36, Meghna 2-32) by 39 runs

Wimbledon 2022

Ons Jabeur blazes trail into final after beating Tatjana Maria

London | Agencies

Tunisian tennis player Ons Jabeur's trailblazing took her all the way into the Wimbledon 2022 final after triumphing 6-2, 3-6, 6-1 over Tatjana Maria in a 1-hour, 43-minute semifinal clash, here on Thursday.

With the win, Jabeur becomes the first Tunisian, first Arab and first African woman to reach a Grand Slam final in the Open Era.

Ever since cracking the Top 50 in February of 2020, she has been setting records for her country and region. Having won 22 of her past 24 matches, the 27-year-old has given herself the opportunity to go for the biggest milestone of all.

Before Jabeur, the only Tunisian to reach the Top 100 of the WTA rankings was Selima Sfar, who peaked at No 75 in July 2001. Jabeur became the first player from her country to reach a WTA final at Moscow 2018 to make a Grand Slam quarterfinal at the 2020 Australian Open, and to crack the Top 50 a month later, to win a WTA title at Birmingham 2021, paving the way for a Top 10 debut in October last year.

This season began on a negative note for Jabeur when she was forced to pull out of the Australian Open due to a back injury. But since returning in February, she has gone from strength to strength.

Her overall 2022 record is 36-9, including final appearances in five of her last seven events and titles in two of them, Madrid on clay and Berlin on grass. Including the latter, Jabeur is now on her second 10-match winning streak of the year.

MS DHONI TURNS 41, CRICKET FRATERNITY EXTENDS WISHES

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Former India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni, who still commands a huge fan following among cricket fans, turns 41 on Thursday, July 7. The Ranchi-based Dhoni, recognised as one of India's most successful captains, led the team to victories in the 2007 Men's T20 World Cup, 2011 Men's Cricket World Cup in ODIs and 2013 Champions Trophy apart from going on top of Test rankings in 2009.

At the domestic level, he captained Chennai Super Kings to IPL titles in 2010, 2011, 2018 and 2021 apart from two now-defunct Champions League T20 titles in 2010 and 2014. Dhoni is fondly remembered for his attacking stroke play, keeping a calm head as a skipper in under-pressure situations, giving him the tag of "captain cool".

He etched his name in the minds of cricket fans forever with his match-winning six off Nuwan Kulasekara in the final of the 2011 World Cup at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai to give India the trophy on home soil, ending a wait of 28 years as World Champions in ODI format. In 538 matches in international cricket, Dhoni scored 17,266 at an average of 44.96, with 634 catches and 195 stumpings done as a wicketkeeper.

Currently, Dhoni, who retired from international cricket in 2020, is in the UK and celebrated his birthday with his friends and family, with India wicket-keeper Rishabh Pant joining in as well. He was also spotted watching Wimbledon matches in London on Wednesday. On social media, many former and current cricketers led the birthday wishes for "Captain Cool". "An idol & an inspiration. Here's wishing @msdhoni -- former #TeamIndia Captain & one of the finest to have ever graced the game - a very happy birthday," tweeted the BCCI.

World Athletics C'ship

Vetter pulls out with injury, no clash with Neeraj Chopra

Oregan (USA) | Agencies

The 2017 World Champion javelin thrower, Johannes Vetter of Germany has pulled out of the upcoming World Athletics Championship in Oregon due to an injury, which would mean that there will be no clash with Olympic gold medallist Neeraj Chopra.

Vetter, who was in superb form in the lead-up to the Tokyo Olympic Games, was the favourite to win the title in Tokyo but could not produce the same performance and finished out of the medals. Chopra went on to win the gold medal in Tokyo with a brilliant performance. After the disappointment of the Tokyo Olympics, Vetter has competed in only one event in 2022 -- the Ursapharm Speerwurf Meeting in Offenburg, Germany in May winning a silver medal with a throw of 85.64, way below his personal best of 97.76 metre.On Wednesday, Vetter informed the reason for his absence from the circuit since May and also announced that would not be competing in the World Championships."As you probably have noticed, I haven't shared much content over the past months. I have been fighting with shoulder problems since the beginning of the season. Therefore, we decided to not compete at the World Championship in Oregon," Vetter informed in a post on Instagram.He said that he was not sure when he will be able to compete again.

Edgbaston to deploy undercover crowd spotters during 2nd T20I to combat racist abuse

London | Agencies

The second T20I between England and India, which is set to be played at Edgbaston on Saturday, will be monitored by "undercover football crowd-style spotters", after Warwickshire County Cricket Club on Thursday unveiled a series of new measures to combat the instances of racist abuse.

England won the rescheduled fifth Test against India after chasing down 378 before lunch on the final day, of which 259 were scored on the fourth afternoon and evening. However, that passage of play was marred by reports of racial insults from a section of the crowd.

The racial insults issues during the Edgbaston Test were initially highlighted on Twitter by Azeem Rafiq, the former Yorkshire cricketer, which subsequently led to a criminal investigation by West Midlands Police.

"Nearly 100,000 people watched one of the most exciting Test matches in recent history earlier this week. But we cannot hide from the mindless racist abuse experienced by some fans following India in the Eric Hollies Stand," Stuart Cain, Warwickshire's chief executive, said.

India Under-17 women's football team goes down on penalties to Faroe Islands

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India U-17 women's team suffered a 2-4 defeat on penalties against the Faroe Islands, as the match ended with a goalless draw after regulation time at the Strommen Stadium, Norway on Thursday.

It was a cagey start to the match as both sides looked to find a stronghold in the middle of the park in the opening exchanges.

India had a couple of corners early on, but Shjaila's crosses into the Faroe Islands box were dealt with by the opposition defence. A little over the 30-minute mark, India had a free-kick from close range, as defender Naketa laced it towards the top corner, but the opposition goalkeeper pounced to parry it away. Minutes later, Lynda Kom Serto got on to a stray ball in the attacking third, and tried to make space for herself, but was dispossessed. Nitu Linda got on the rebound and smacked her effort straight at the keeper. Dennerby made a couple of changes after the half-time break, with Kajol Dsouza and Rejiya Devi replacing Neha and Shjaila, respectively.Lynda Kom was again in the thick of things when she nodded a corner towards goalpost but sent her effort whiskers wide.

With about 20 minutes left on the clock, India head coach Thomas Dennerby made more changes, as Misha and Varshika replaced Lynda Kom and Naketa, respectively.

Anita soon had a good run up the right flank, as she muscled her way past her marker, entered the box and squared the ball, only for it to be cleared.

With less than five minutes of regulation time left on the clock, a cross from Anita from the right found its way to Misha, whose header went just wide.The referee added four minutes of injury time, and on the first of these minutes, Rejiya Devi made her way down the right into the box, squaring it towards the penalty spot, but her effort was cleared.

The match ended with a stalemate, with India hogging 59 percent possession of the ball, as it went into a penalty shootout.

Faroe Islands won the shootout by a 4-2 margin, despite a stunning save by Indian goalkeeper Hempriya Seram in the fourth penalty. Nitu Linda and Anita Kumari converted their spot-kicks for India, while Varshika and Kajol Dsouza's efforts were saved.

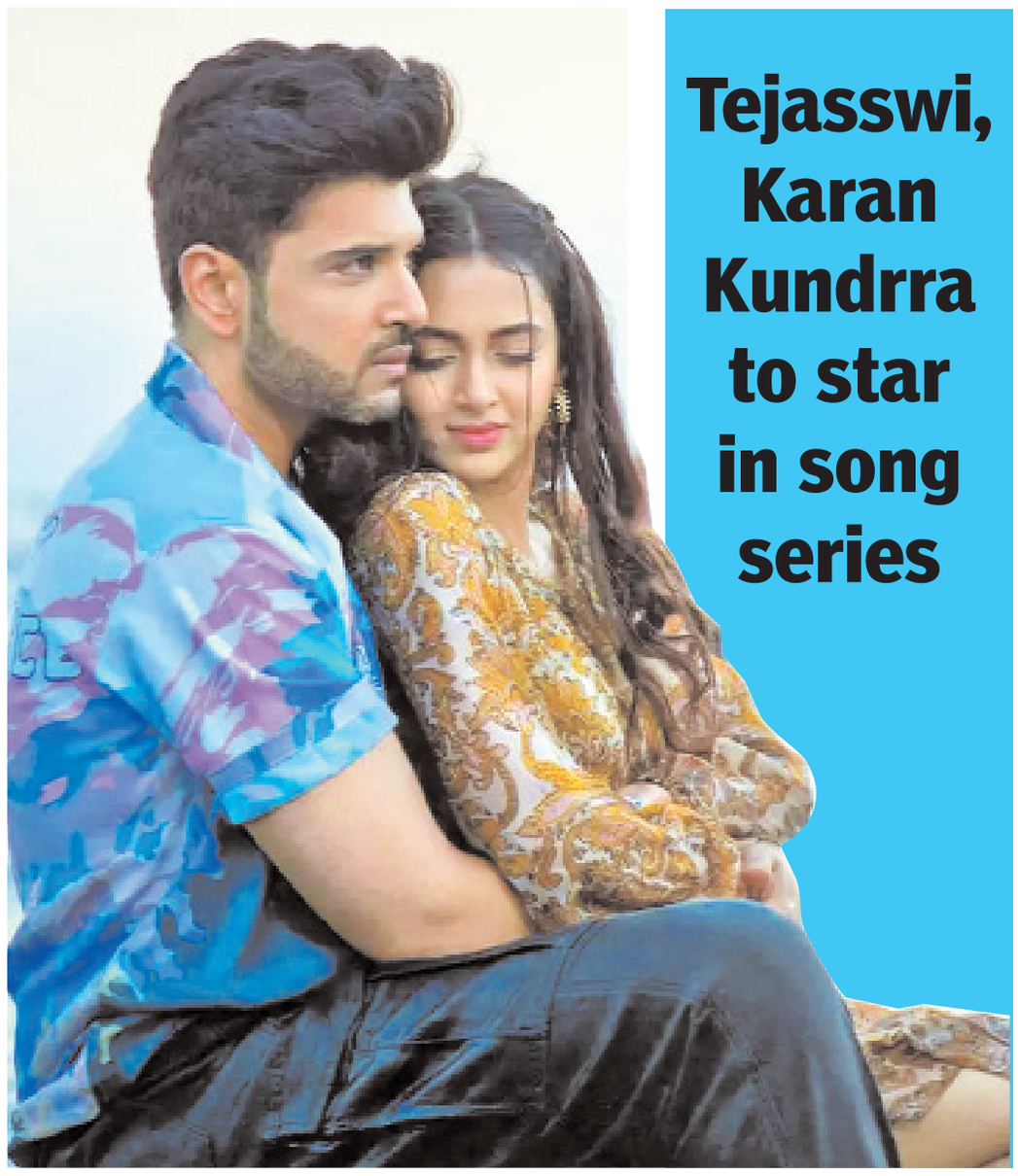
Netizens Praise Emraan Hashmi For flaunting his 'Real' Body

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Emraan Hashmi is one celebrity who has always stood out in a crowd in a social media-driven society when individuals and celebrities want to fake everything about themselves. Emraan Hashmi has decided to be genuine to himself in a world of phoney, photoshopped, and filtered photos and videos that circulate on a regular basis. And here's the evidence. Emraan's workout video speaks for itself, as he can be seen sweating it out at the gym. It is evident how hard he works out in order to stay fit. When it comes to himself, he does not like to pretend anything about himself, including his appearance and physical form.

Emraan Hashmi has already won the internet's heart. Netizens laud him for his real and 'natural' body, as well as his devotion to achieving the same. People are praising Emraan Hashmi since it is evident that he did not create the video to gain likes on social media.

Emraan Hashmi often works out at the gym, but he has never used stamina-boosting pills, powder, or steroids to improve his physique.



Tejasswi, Karan Kundrra to star in song series

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The superhit song series 'Baarish' crooned by Stebin Ben, will soon see one more addition, this time starring celebrity couple Tejasswi Prakash and Karan Kundrra, who fell in love during 'Bigg Boss 15'.

Titled 'Barish Aayi Hai', the track has been performed by Stebin Ben and Shreya Ghoshal and is touted to be the biggest monsoon song of the season.

The makers of the song released behind the scenes from the song's shoot on Thursday where the love birds can be seen in each other's company.

The music video's first track featured Mohsin Khan and Shivangi Joshi. The second track, which was released almost a year ago, had Hina Khan and Shaheer Sheikh.

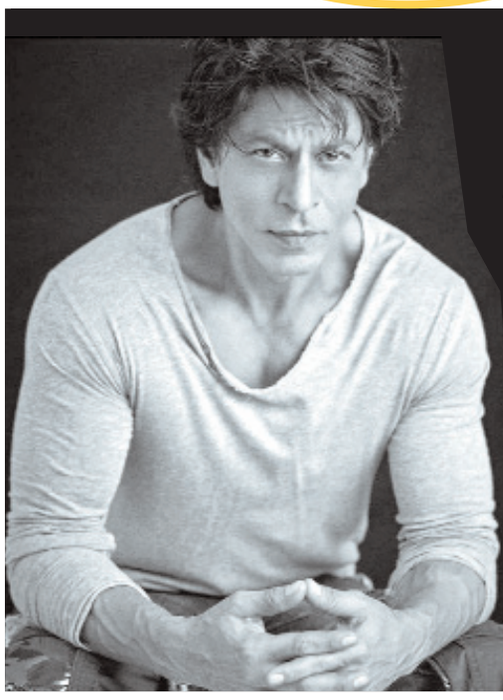
Song composed by composer duo Javed-Mohsin, has lyrics by Kunal Vermaa.

The song will hit the airwaves on July 14 under the music label VYRL Originals.

'WORKING WITH KANGANA WAS A MASSIVE MISTAKE' SAYS HANSAL MEHTA

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Acclaimed director Hansal Mehta has always impressed classes and the masses with his films. However, his 2017 directorial Simran with Kangana Ranaut, tanked miserably at the box office. Time and again, the director has expressed disappointment over it and took a dig at Kangana for interfering in the post-production process.During an interview, when the director was asked if Kangana had taken over his film's edit, he quipped, "Edit nahi takeover kia the usne, to be fair to her, but edit takeover karne ke liye kuch tha nahi kyunki material hi vahi tha jo usne shoot karvaya tha." Hansal further continued that Ranaut has become too self-centred, and that's what has gone against her. "She is a very talented actor, she is a very good actor, really really good actor who, I feel has limited herself by making films about herself. You need not make all the characters become what you want to believe you are." Hansal even took an example from her recent disaster Dhaakad and pointed out the issue with Kangana, "Abhi kuch gaana aaya uska... she is a woman on fire... you are basically talking about yourself. You know these are things you aspire for yourself, you put it there." "It's not even my place to criticise what choices she makes. She's a big star, even today and she is a very good actor, I maintain that and working with her, we didn't gel. Working with her was a massive mistake." Hansal concluded.



SRK's monochrome picture takes over the Internet

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan's latest black and white picture shared by his manager Pooja Dadlani has caused a tizzy on social media.

The picture was shared by Dadlani on Instagram and seems to be King Khan's recent images. In the photograph, the superstar is seen looking at the camera and smiling.

Sharing the picture, Dadlani wrote: "In a world full of Trends - A Timeless Classic!" On the work front, SRK, who has completed three decades in the Hindi film industry, will be next seen in director Siddharth Anand's upcoming 'Pathaan'. He will share screen space with Deepika Padukone and it also features John Abraham in a pivotal role.

He is also joining hands with Tamil filmmaker Atlee for 'Jawan' and also has Rajkumar Hirani's 'Dunki'.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY

Malavika Mohanan

Kartik has a 'Dam good time' in Europe

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Riding high on the mega success of 'Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2', Kartik Aaryan is currently enjoying his much-needed vacation in Europe, and keeping everyone updated as he just shared some glimpses from the trip. Taking to his social media, Kartik shared pictures with his team, all apparently having a great time on their vacation, relishing food and enjoying scenic rivers, dams and skyscrapers. Kartik looked dapper in a black and orange half button varsity jacket with jeans in some of the photos while he rocked an off white sweatshirt with blue joggers in another. He added in the caption - "Having a Dam good time.." Actor has brought cheer to the Bollywood brigade with his movie setting records at the box office. From crossing Rs 230 crore in worldwide box office collection to being declared a global blockbuster on the OTT, his film is ruling across the world.

Natasha Suri talks about her character in upcoming movie

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Former Femina Miss India World Natasha Suri is all set to appear in Deepak Tijori's 'Tipppsy'. She talks about her role in the movie which also features Kainaat Arora, Soniya Birje, Alankrita Sahai, and Nazia Hussain in lead roles.

Natasha says: "It's a complete entertainer and I loved playing Tanya in it. With laughter and madness, it also explores the emotional aspects of female friendships."

Natasha debuted as an actor in 2016 with Malayalam film 'King Liar'. She was last seen in 'Dangerous' starring Bipasha Basu and Karan Singh Grover. The actress says she liked the script and thus took no time in accepting the opportunity.

"I loved the script and it took me no time to grab the opportunity to be cast in it. The audiences will enjoy the film and its young and fun content. I hope to see it do well on screen and leave an impact," she adds.

Directed by Deepak Tijori, this movie revolves around five girls on a bachelorette trip to Goa. It is all set to release in September.

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