



EDITOR'S SPECS

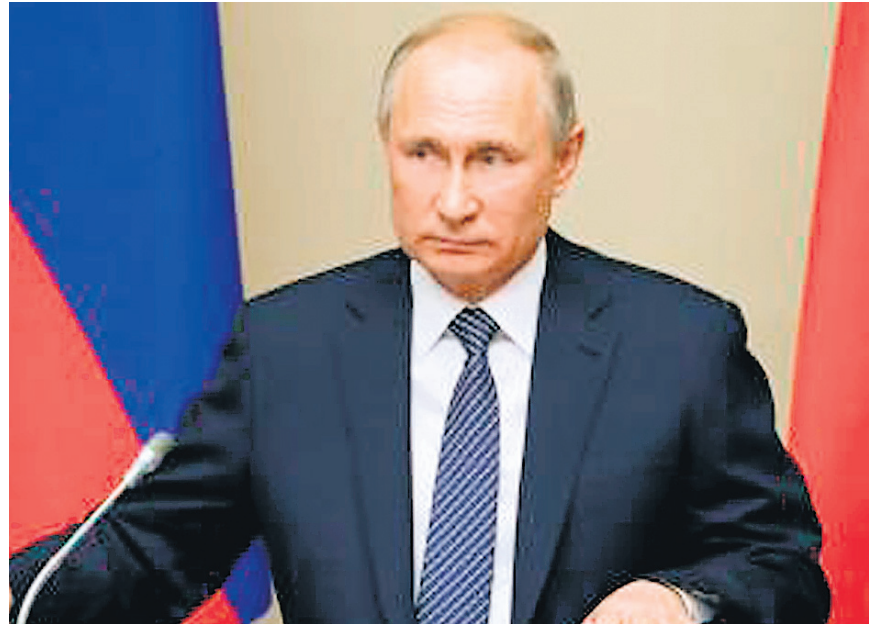
More than 40 countries willing to join BRICS

More than 40 countries have shown an interest in joining BRICS, Anil Sooklal, South Africa's ambassador-at-large responsible for ties with the economic alliance and Asian countries, has said. The diplomat said in Johannesburg that 22 countries have formally applied to join the group, while "an equal number" of states "have been informally asking about becoming BRICS members", RT reported. Sooklal described BRICS as an "inclusive" organisation that has always been open to dialogue with the larger global community. The group currently comprises Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, and accounts for over 40 per cent of the global population and nearly a quarter of the world's GDP, RT reported. Sooklal said that BRICS does not distinguish between the Global North and Global South and is ready to talk to any country that "has the same vision for a more inclusive and equitable global order where we do not marginalise large parts of the world", including many developing nations. The diplomat went on to point out that while the UN has yet to embark on comprehensive reforms that would give emerging countries a greater voice, BRICS has charted its own path to remedy the situation, RT reported. However, he stressed that the bloc "does not seek to become a dominant economic force", but rather wants to have "a major influence in an inclusive manner to work for change". Sooklal had earlier said in comments to journalists that Argentina, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates were among those countries looking to join the bloc, RT reported. South Africa will host the BRICS annual summit this year, which will take place in Johannesburg from August 22-24, with President Cyril Ramaphosa having sent invitations to nearly 70 global leaders.

VLADIMIR PUTIN FACING TOUGH TIMES AHEAD

Asad Mirza

Russian President Vladimir Putin has been forced to cancel plans to attend BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, next month, due to fears over war crimes arrest. Moscow feared that Putin might be arrested in South Africa for war crimes if he attends the annual event in Johannesburg. The International Criminal Court (ICC) earlier in 2023 had issued an arrest warrant for Putin over his alleged role in the mass abduction of Ukrainian children. As an ICC signatory nation, South Africa would have been expected to arrest Putin if he entered the country. Putin's travel plans had put South Africa in a tough spot, as though it remains an ally of Russia, the relations between the two have gone cold since the start of the Ukraine War. Also South Africa didn't want the relations to deteriorate further. For months, South African diplomats tried to prevent a potential diplomatic confrontation with the Kremlin over the issue. The issue weighed so much on South African politicians that to avoid any unnecessary controversy, the South African President Cyril Ramaphosa even reportedly requested permission from the ICC for an exemption in order to avoid arresting Putin during the summit. With tensions mounting ahead of the summit, South Africa Deputy President Paul Mashatile admitted in a 14th Jul interview that the best option would be for Putin to stay away. "The Russians are not happy, though. They want him to come," he commented. The Russian strong man under whose rule Russia's relationship with the Western bloc has reached its lowest point since after the Cold war, wanted his attendance at the BRICS Summit to show his internal audience that still Russia carries weight at the global level, in addition to showing to the western nations that Russia can survive their indifference by engaging with emerging non-west-



ern powers. To achieve these two objectives the Russian diplomats continued to pressurise their South African counterparts. To counter this, in a court affidavit made public earlier this week, President Ramaphosa had claimed any attempt to detain Putin could lead to war between Russia and South Africa. "I must highlight, for the sake of transparency, that South Africa has obvious problems with executing a request to arrest and surrender President Putin," he said, as "Russia has made it clear that arresting its sitting president would be a declaration of war". Though South Africa might have saved its relations with Russia, but in reality for the Russian government this has ended in a negative perception around Putin and the Russian might. Now the common Russian is aware that Putin is a declared war criminal, and though he might justify him not being so, using the state media machinery, the result is clear that Putin has not been able to achieve what he urgently wanted to prove to the western world. In the end, Russia was forced to end the speculation and declare that Putin would not be travelling to Johannesburg for the summit. Though salvage efforts are still on and Putin may address the summit leaders virtually. The year 2023 has not been kind to Putin so far. First came the ICC decision in March to charge him with war crimes, resulting in severely damaging his reputation, then weeks later he was forced to announce cancellation of the traditional May Day parades in Moscow and around Russia, without giving any reason, but obviously it was done due to the shortage of troops and other military hardware being lost in the Ukraine war, as the rumour mills propounded. This also showed him faulting to maintain his authority and control of his country, in question. Later in June, units of Russian military-funded private paramilitary group,

Wagner added to his woes, as reports of a mutiny and control of the county's military control by Wagner troops emerged in the western media. Though the so-called 'mutiny' was suppressed but not before the world saw the mutinous troops controlling major Russian cities and marching within 200 kms distance of Moscow, perplexing both the western world, Russian citizens and pushing Putin to a tough spot, as various images showed Russian masses cheering-up the mutineers meaning lack of popular support for the iron man. At the moment Putin looks his weakest during his 23-years as the Russian strongman. But these incidents might have forced him to reconsider plans to travel to South Africa, as his gamble to restore his international prestige might have cost him his country. As history tells us, most mutinies or coups happen when the dictators leave their country's shores. The whole episode has left Kremlin facing harsh realities and rather harsher measures needed to restore Putin and Russia's image at the global level, which has certainly waned during 2023. The Russian disquiet is evident in the wordings of spokesman Dmitry Peskov, who commenting on Putin's decision not to travel to South Africa used very severe wording: "In this world, it is absolutely clear to everyone what an attempt to encroach on the head of the Russian state means. Therefore, there is no need to explain anything to anyone here." Brave words indeed, but to restore his personal and his country's image as a global power, Putin might have to resort to some quick and tough measures, the only concern is that this may not result in him committing a blitzkrieg against the Ukrainians. The coming days indeed might be tough for Putin, even putting his survival at stake.

international

INDIAN-AMERICANS HOLD PROTESTS AGAINST MANIPUR VIOLENCE IN 3 US STATES

Washington | Agencies

Indian-Americans and allies held protests in US states of California, New Jersey, and Massachusetts throughout the weekend to condemn the ongoing ethnic violence in Manipur, which has left hundreds of people dead and thousands displaced. The protests were in part a response to a horrific video last week, showing two young tribal women being paraded naked while being molested by a group of men in the violence-hit state. In California, Indian-Americans and allies gathered on the steps of Oakland City Hall for a protest organised by several advocacy groups, including the North American

Manipur Tribal Association (NAMTA), Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC), and Ambedkar King Study Circle. "They chased us out of our homes. They burned our homes, our properties. They looted, they killed, they raped, they immolated, they beheaded, they left us broken and everything we own reduced to ashes," said Niang Hangzo, founding member of NAMTA. "This is the butchery being done to the Kuki-Zomi... How long will the world stay silent? We want the House to bring this issue and discuss it like the EU (Parliament) has done." The European Parliament had adopted a resolution earlier this month, calling on Indian authorities to take "all necessary" measures to stop the vio-

lence in Manipur and protect religious minorities, especially Christians. India condemned the resolution, calling it an "interference" in its internal affairs. In Ilesin, New Jersey, IAMC organized a protest and candle-light vigil attended by people from diverse faith and ethnic backgrounds, including members of local churches, NAMTA, and the National Association of Asian Indian Christians. "If those two women could be dragged and paraded, it could happen to any other woman, no matter what religion," said Pastor Prem Kankanala, representing the United Telugu Christ Church. "Let us be united and raise our voices to protect women and to protect minorities," he

added. In Boston, Massachusetts, several Indian-Americans and allies came together to express solidarity with the victims and urging President Joe Biden's administration to intervene and call on Prime Minister Narendra Modi to halt the escalating violence in Manipur. Following the protests, a senior Biden administration official said on Tuesday that the US is "shocked and horrified by the video of an extreme attack on two women in Manipur". "We convey our profound sympathies to the survivors of this act of gender-based violence and support the Indian Government's efforts to seek justice for them," Vedant Patel, Deputy Spokesperson of the State Department, said.

51 stranded whales die in Western Australia

Perth: Western Australia's Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) confirmed on Wednesday that 51 stranded whales died overnight at Cheynes Beach in the state's south-west. "Parks and Wildlife Service personnel are working in partnership with registered volunteers and other organizations to try to return the remaining 46 whales to deeper water during the course of the day," said the Department. It also urged members of the public to stay away from the beach for safety concerns, reports Xinhua news agency. Cheynes Beach Caravan Park noted that an incident management team has been established by DBCA. "Experienced staff from DBCA are currently being deployed, including Perth Zoo veterinarians and marine fauna experts, along with specialized equipment, including vessels and slings," the park updated on its social media. On Tuesday morning, DBCA received reports that a large pod of long-finned pilot whales clustered about 150 metres off Cheynes Beach. The mass whale stranding incident triggered a shark alert issued by the state government of Western Australia, as the possible dead and injured animals may attract sharks to come closer to the shore.

18 aid workers killed in Sudan conflict: UN



United Nations | Agencies

The UN humanitarian coordinator in Sudan has reported that 18 aid workers were killed in the ongoing violent conflict in the country since it erupted on April 15. Citing the figures provided by the coordinator Clementine Nkweta-Salami, Farhan Haq, the deputy spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, said that more than two dozen humanitarian personnel were detained, and some remain unaccounted for, reports Xinhua news agency. At least 50 humanitarian warehouses were looted, 82 offices were ransacked and over 200 vehicles were stolen. "The humanitarian coordinator strongly condemned these attacks, which strike at the heart of our ongoing efforts to deliver essential aid to those in need," he said. "She reminded all of the parties to the conflict in Sudan of their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law." In a statement, Nkweta-Salami said the conflict is "a crisis that turned a dire humanitarian situation into a full-blown catastrophe". "The humanitarian community remains steadfast in its commitment to support the people of Sudan, making tremendous and brave efforts to provide assistance amid very difficult circumstances. "Yet relief workers are not spared from the horrendous acts of violence and abuse," she was quoted as saying. Meanwhile, the World Health Organization has warned of increasing reports of attacks on health-care in Sudan, with more than 80 per cent of the country's hospitals out of service because of the conflict. Sudan has been witnessing deadly clashes between the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces in Khartoum and other areas, resulting in over 3,000 deaths and more than 6,000 injuries, according to figures released by the Sudanese Health Ministry. In the latest attack on Tuesday, 16 civilians were killed in air and artillery strikes at a neighbourhood in the city of Omdurman, west of the capital Khartoum.

Italy hit by wildfires, heat and hail



Rome | Agencies

The southern Italian island of Sicily was ravaged by fires while storms and hail have battered the northern part of Italy. The airport in the Sicilian capital of Palermo was closed to air traffic on Monday and early Tuesday, as smoke from a nearby blaze had limited visibility in the area. Officials said the airport reopened later on Tuesday, although the number of flights was severely reduced, Xinhua news agency reported. Catania Airport, Sicily's other main air hub, was closed last week due to a

fire in one of the terminals. As of Tuesday, it is also operating at a fraction of full capacity. In total, there were over 50 major wildfires across Sicily, with Italian news sites showing images of grasslands and hillsides on fire. The 2,500-year-old Greek-built Segesta Temple in northwest Sicily, one of the world's best-preserved Doric temples, has also been threatened by fires. On Tuesday, Palermo's Cervello hospital was evacuated, and at least 1,500 residents of the city were forced to leave their homes. The widespread nature of the fires is making it difficult for authorities to know where to evacuate people, according to media reports. The partial closure of the island's two main airports has limited access to the Italian mainland for tourists, as well as the island's population of 5 million residents.

China issues top alert for typhoon Doksuri

Beijing | Agencies

China's National Meteorological Centre (NMC) on Wednesday issued a red alert for typhoon Doksuri, the most severe warning in its four-tier warning system, as the fifth typhoon of this year is expected to bring gales and heavy rain to the eastern and southern parts of the country. The typhoon, observed over the ocean about 350 km south of Taiwan at 8 a.m. on Wednesday, is expected to move northwest at a speed of 10 to 15 km per hour, the Centre said in a statement. It will enter the northeastern part of the South China Sea between Wednesday evening and Thursday morning and then move to the coastal areas of Fujian and Guangdong, Xinhua news agency quoted the statement as saying. The severe typhoon will most likely make landfall in the coastal areas of Jinjiang city in Fujian province and the bordering areas



of Fujian and Guangdong, the NMC said. Some coastal areas around the Bashi Channel, the South China Sea, the Taiwan Strait, as well as coastal regions of Taiwan and Fujian, will experience gales from 2 p.m. Wednesday to 2 p.m. Thursday. The maximum wind force in some of the aforementioned regions will reach 20.8 to 36.9 meters per second, according to the Center. During this peri-

od, parts of the east Zhejiang province will experience downpours of 100 to 150 mm and parts of Taiwan will experience heavy downpours of 250 to 400 mm, it added. The meteorological centre has issued an advisory suspending both indoor and outdoor gatherings, as well as dangerous outdoor operations, and recommended the timely transfer of people living in vulnerable housing.



MY GOVT PULLED DOWN BY CRABS: THACKERAY ATTACKS SHINDE GROUP

Targetting the Centre, Shiv Sena (UBT) President and former Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Wednesday asked 'why does the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) need a 38-party National Democratic Alliance' since it has the ED, I-T and CBI. He claimed that many parties in the NDA do not have even a single MP, the 'real Shiv Sena' (led by Thackeray) is not a part of the NDA, but the Shiv Sena (of CM Eknath Shinde) only comprises traitors.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a stinging attack, Shiv Sena (UBT) President and former Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said that his government was brought down in June 2022 by crabs who were hiding in the dam and broke it. "My government was not washed away in the heavy rains last year... The crabs broke the dam, they were hiding there in the mud. We could do nothing as a crab is a crab, whatever effort you make to straighten them, they keep going sideways," said Thackeray. He pointed out that crabs have a certain mindset, there's no need to cover a basket containing crabs, as when one goes up the others will put it down -- referring to the rebellion in the erstwhile Shiv Sena, and Eknath Shinde becoming Chief Minister after toppling the Maha Vikas Aghadi government headed by Thackeray. He also slammed Shinde for going to perform a 'mujra dance' before the Delhi Darbar when the state was reel-



ing under the huge hillside tragedy in Irshalwadi, Raigad on July 19, which killed 27 people.

Thackeray's sharp comments came in his annual marathon multi-media interview on the eve of his 62nd birthday on Thursday, given to Saamana Group Executive Editor Sanjay Raut the first instalment of which was published on Wednesday.

Expressing serious concerns over the ongoing violence and atrocities against women in Manipur, former Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray raised questions addressing the President of India, Droupadi Murmu and the state Governor, Anasuya Uikye, here on Wednesday. "Another incident of a woman being stripped naked and paraded

has just come to light... Such incidents had happened even earlier. Unfortunately, it was not taken seriously then. These matters were taken cognizance only after the videos came to light and there may have been many more such instances," said Thackeray. "The country has a President who is a lady, and Manipur has a woman Governor, but how does it help," he wondered. "I request Madam President, that you are a woman, so what role will you play on the goings-on in the country? We call our country Bharatmata. If that mother is being insulted and such a spectacle is being made, then what are you doing as a woman, Madam President?" the Shiv Sena (UBT) President urged. Thackeray posed the same questions to Manipur Governor Ujkey who had herself admitted that she had never witnessed such violent incidents in her entire life, even as the issue is currently hotting up before Parliament.

What about BJP's 'toll-free Maharashtra' promise, asks Raj Thackeray

Team Absolute | Pune

A day after a slanging match with ruling ally Bharatiya Janata Party, the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena President Raj Thackeray questioned the BJP on its poll promise of a 'toll-free Maharashtra', here on Wednesday. "What happened to your announcement of making the state 'toll-free'? When the roads are so bad, full of potholes and traffic jams then why should you collect toll and road taxes," demand Raj Thackeray, upping the ante against the government. He rued that though a Marathi is the Union Minister for Highways (Nitin Gadkari), the situation of roads in his home state is pathetic, yet people have to start paying whenever a new road comes up, but "where's all the money collected in tolls going?" "What about the huge delays in implementing projects... The Mumbai sea-link took 10 years to build, the Mumbai-Goa highway has been incomplete for 17 years... The Mumbai-Nagpur SuperExpressway (Samruddhi Mahamarg) has no amenities, no safety and over 400 people have been killed in accidents since its inauguration..." Raj Thackeray, adding the BJP should answer.



His sharp comments came a day after the BJP-MNS bitterly pounced on each other on social media after the latter's activists allegedly vandalised a toll-post in Sinnar, Nashik late on Saturday. The incident, which was used by the BJP to target the MNS, took place hours after the MNS scion Amit Raj Thackeray was reportedly delayed and harassed at the toll-booth venue a few hours earlier. "Now, Amit

Thackeray is in politics, so there are bound to be accusations... But what about the sufferings of the people who pay up the toll without getting the promised amenities," demanded Raj Thackeray, in Pune for some party meetings. The issue of traffic snarls on highways had figured in the Maharashtra Legislative on Tuesday with heated exchanges between the Opposition and the government.

IIT-Bombay names its main building after Alumnus Nandan Nilekani

Team Absolute | Mumbai

IIT Bombay has named its iconic main building after alumnus and Infosys co-founder Nandan Nilekani in recognition of his philanthropic support to the Institute. The main building of the institute will be named "Nandan Nilekani Main Building", said Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay in an official release. Last month, Mr Nilekani donated Rs 315 crore to his alma mater to mark 50 years of his association with the institute, following which the IIT-Bombay students had highlighted the poor state of some of the infrastructure at the premier institute. "In recognition of his esteemed service and philanthropic support to the Institute, IIT Bombay's Board of Governors deliberated and decided to dedicate its iconic Main Building to him," the release said. "I am deeply grateful to the Board of Governors of IIT Bombay for this incredible honour. IIT Bombay has immeasurably shaped my life, and I acknowledge the contributions of the team at IIT Bombay, alumni and everyone else who have enabled



me to give forward to the Institute," said Nilekani, who had joined the institute in 1973 for his graduation in electrical engineering. "I dedicate this honour to every student who walks by the iconic building - I hope it inspires them to imagine and forge a better tomorrow," the Infosys co-founder added. Nilekani had tweeted on June 20 his decision to donate Rs 315 crore to IIT-Bombay to mark 50 years of his association with the institute. Following this, the students there had said they want a part of his donation to be used for improving the institute's infrastructure.

Bombay High Court stays proceedings against NCP MLA Rohit Pawar's sugar factory

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bombay High Court has stayed any further proceedings to be initiated on an FIR filed against Baramati Agro Ltd, a firm controlled by NCP MLA Rohit Pawar, on charges of alleged disobedience of order passed by a public servant. Rohit Pawar is the grandnephew of NCP chief Sharad Pawar and nephew of Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar. The company's executive director, Subhash Gulave, had filed a petition in the High Court, seeking to quash the FIR registered pursuant to a complaint lodged by BJP legislator Ram Shinde, who lost to Rohit Pawar in the 2019 assembly elections from Karjat-Jamkhed constituency. A division bench of Justices N W Sambre and R N Laddha in its order passed on July 21 said it would hear the plea on September 11. "Till then further proceedings shall remain stayed," the court said. As per the plea, in September 2022, a decision was taken in the state cabinet meeting that the



crushing season for 2022-23 would start on October 15 and appropriate criminal action would be initiated against erring factories. Shinde in his complaint to the sugar commissioner alleged the Baramati Agro started sugarcane crushing on October 10, 2022 itself. The sugar commissioner appointed a special auditor to probe the charges. Gulave in his plea claimed the auditor appointed had given a factual report stating there was no irregularity. However, he was suspended and a new inquiry officer was appointed to conduct a probe into Shinde's allegations, the petition said. In December 2022, the second auditor submitted a report confirming the allegations made by Shinde. Gulave in the plea said the company was not given the auditor's report and that it came to know of the contents after a show cause notice was issued to the firm in March 2023. After that, an FIR was registered by the police under section 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) of the Indian Penal Code, the plea said.

BABY CROCODILE RESCUED FROM RESIDENTIAL AREA NEAR MUMBAI

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A baby marsh crocodile was rescued from a 'chawl' in the eastern Mumbai suburb of Mulund, an honorary wildlife warden said on Tuesday. Two local snake catchers rescued the reptile from a 'chawl' (old row tenement) in the Ghati Pada area of Mulund (west) on Saturday and handed it over to the Mumbai range of the Thane Forest Department, said honorary wildlife warden Pawan Sharma. The reptile was subsequently given to the Resqink Association for Wildlife Welfare (RAWW) for medical examination and further rehabilitation, he said. The baby crocodile was in trauma and had been starving since many



days, he said, adding it might have been displaced due to heavy rains. The reptile will be medically examined, stabilized and then released back to its natural habitat, he said. The Maharashtra forest department is trying to find out how the reptile was found so far from its natu-

ral habitats at Tulsi, Vihar and Powai lakes, the official added. This is a season for crocodile eggs to hatch and young ones are born and found near water habitats so finding such a small crocodile is quite strange, said Pawan Sharma. "There can be few reasons, natural or man made, behind this occurrence. Natural reason can be displacement from its natural habitat where as man made reasons can be illegal fishing or illegal wildlife trade," he said. However, this is not the first time that a crocodile has been found or rescued from suburbs, he said. "Mumbai and surrounding areas are rich biodiversity hotspots for wildlife and there are regular interactions between humans and wildlife," said Pawan Sharma.

Guardian minister's office in BMC will play important role in 'looting' Mumbai: Aaditya

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Slamming the Maharashtra government over Mumbai guardian minister Mangal Prabhat Lodha's decision to set up his office in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation headquarters, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray on Tuesday said the move will play an important role in "looting" the metropolis. Talking to reporters here, Thackeray said never in the past civic body buildings have housed offices of ministers in the state. Last week, Lodha, the guardian minister of Mumbai (suburbs), set up his office in the BMC headquarters in south Mumbai, a move that invited criticism. The BJP leader is a cabinet minister handling skill development, employment and entrepreneurship portfolios. "It has become the office of builders, con-



tractors, and former BJP corporators. They have planned to loot Mumbai and this (office) will play an important role in doing that," Thackeray said, hitting out at the BJP minister. Thackeray said when he was the guardian minister of Mumbai suburbs, he used to hold meetings in the mayor or BMC commissioner's office.

Police personnel won't be taken on contract: Fadnavis

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday said in the state assembly that police personnel will not be taken on contract. Fadnavis, who is also the state home minister, said he will give a detailed statement on the matter. Raising the issue in the House, state Congress chief Nana Patole said, "You (the government) are recruiting police personnel on a contract basis. Your ministers are also on contract. When they take a briefing (from officials), they twist answers which is why questions take time to be answered. Give



personnel from the Maharashtra State Security Corporation (MSSC). The state home department issued an order to this effect on Monday. The opposition in Maharashtra, in the meanwhile, on Tuesday raised concerns over the plan to rope in "contractual personnel" by the Mumbai police and said the "risky" move will be detrimental to the force as well as to the public. Raising the issue in the legislative council, Leader of Opposition Ambadas Danve said the control of police should be under the state government. "It is dangerous and risky," he said in the state legislative council.

pointed replies." Responding to this, Fadnavis said no ministers are on contract. "If you want to come on contract then we will think about it. Nowhere are police personnel taken on contract and it will not be done. I will give a detailed statement on it," the deputy CM said. In a bid to overcome the shortage of constables in the Mumbai Police force, the state government has given the nod to outsource 3,000

India Couture Week has a grand opening; Kiara turns showstopper

Tanya Banon | Mumbai

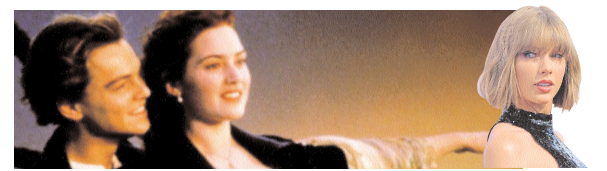
Mumbai-based designers Falguni Shane Peacock opened India Couture Week with a presentation of dazzling bridal couture. Not only did they show present heavily embellished ensembles perfect for the upcoming wedding season, but also featured newly wed Kiara Advani as their show stopper, to drive home the message. The collection titled 'Renaissance Reverie' is a reflection the designer duo's love for art and the treasures, encountered during their travels. Drawing inspiration from the renaissance era, the silhouettes were grand and rich with intricate embroidery. The ensembles showcased the techniques and meticulous workmanship of India's skilled artisans, who have brought the designer duo's vision to life by marrying Western ethos with the richness of Indian heritage.

The designers believe "Each garment in the collection is a testament to cultural exchange and celebrates the invaluable lessons they have learned from the past." The colour palette feature pink in its soft and brighter hues, pastel blues and a series of whites and ivories. Bollywood beauty Kiara walked the runway in a hot pink lehenga with sequin details, looking every bit the belle off the ball. The Couture Week is India premier fashion event and one is expected to see a number of Bollywood stars make an appearance for this year's fashion extravaganza. The runway too was a unique fusion of East and West. The colour was muted sandstone and feature life sized elephants to showcase the artistic mastery of Indian influences and inspirations. Falguni and Shane Peacock are well known in the Indian and Global fashion platform having created red carpet ensembles for leading movie and music icons like Jennifer Lopez, Beyonce,



Katy Perry, and Lady Gaga. The duo are celebrated for their statement fashion creations.





Helen Flanagan

Hits Barbados beach in tiny bikini embraces her body after surgery

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Helen Flanagan looked sensational sporting a sizzling white bikini while on holiday in Barbados recently. The 'Coronation Street' star, 32, has jetted off to the Caribbean with her kids, Matilda, Delilah and Charlie, reports 'The Mirror'.

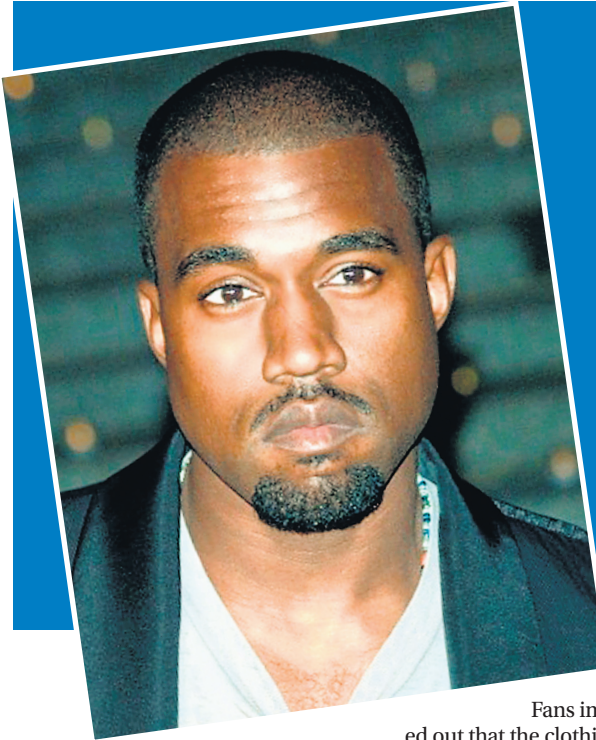
The actress looked happy and relaxed as she strolled along the sand in Bridgetown with her eldest daughter, who she shares with footballer Scott Sinclair.

Wearing a striking white two-piece with bejewelled tassels, Helen swept her blonde locks off her face in a top knot while keeping the sun's glare out of her eyes with a pair of designer sunglasses.

Speaking about life as a working mum, she said: "It's important to be yourself and with the summer and everyone being in bikinis, I've had three children, I'm really proud of my body and it's really important to embrace being you. The older you get, I'm going to be 33 this summer, I do think you (embrace) yourself and your body more. When you're in a bikini you should embrace being yourself and be comfortable in your own skin."

The 'I'm A Celebrity' star recently won the praise of fellow mum-of-three Christine McGuinness after her 'relatable' post on Instagram. Sharing a snap of her three kids, Helen wrote: "Don't know what I'd do without them (tired, hungover mum doing her best in this crazy life x)".

Helen co-parents her three children with her former fiancé Scott, 34. She recently revealed the footballer made the decision to move in with his mum following their split, which she reckons she's fine with because she gets on with his family.



Los Angeles | Agencies

Kanye West faces backlash for dressing up daughter North in 'racist' clothes

reports 'The Mirror'

Fans immediately pointed out that the clothing actually looks like a white Ku Klux Klan hood. The pointed shape of the hood and the focus on covering the wearer's face to offer anonymity are close parallels to white supremacist group.

The Season 9 drop happened in October 2022 and included hooded jumpers as well as a full body covering morphsuit.

This "KKK aesthetic" piece, as one fan dubbed it, didn't make the cut for that particular drop. Kanye is facing intense backlash, especially, for including his daughter in the clothes.

As per 'The Mirror', a fan on Reddit wrote: "I live in

the south and I don't like it. Makes me mad his little blk (sic) daughter is wearing it and she doesn't understand the disdain for this look. Maybe if it was purple or blue I wouldn't feel the same."

Many fans agreed that at minimum a colour change was necessary to make the jumper less offensive. After all, the white hood is a signature look of a KKK member.

Other fans pointed out that the Internet is forever and a photo like this could follow North for the rest of her life now.



When Idris Elba nearly lost his life in US

London | Agencies

English actor Idris Elba, who is well known for his roles in films such as 'The Suicide Squad', 'Pacific Rim', 'Mandela: Walk to Freedom' and the detective series 'Luther', has revealed that he once nearly lost his life in the US as he was held nearly at gunpoint while trying to protect a woman.

According to 'The Mirror', the actor recalling the terrifying incident said: "I nearly lost my f***ing life. A guy (was) whaling on his missus, screaming in her face, 'I'll f***ing kill you,' and so on. I come round and I go 'Look how beautiful she is. Why would you talk to this beautiful princess like that?'"

"He pulled out a gun, stuck it right in my face, and goes, 'You talkin' 'bout my girl?' He thought I was trying to hit on her. I remember thinking, 'Don't play negotiations like that... Consequences, man!'"

While it is unknown how the rest of the situation played out, it would seem that Elba was able to talk his way out of the situation, and resolve it without many hiccups, leaving without any harm to himself, his girlfriend or even the gunman.

The 50-year old actor, who is married to the Canadian model Sabrina Dhowre (33) in an interview with Smartless podcast, revealed that he and Prince Harry first met at a nightclub and quite instantly became friends.

"I was DJ-ing in all these clubs where Harry would show up and he was like 'Yo!' and I'm like 'Yo'. And then at one point he was like, 'Listen man, I'm getting married'. I was like, 'Yo! That's amazing'. He goes, 'I want you to DJ'."

Harry went on to make a request. "I was like, 'I don't do requests'," Elba recalled.

Matt Damon reveals why he turned down 'Avatar' offer

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood A-lister Matt Damon was "desperate" to work with James Cameron on the 'Avatar' franchise, but he has no regrets about turning down the offer to continue with the 'Bourne' franchise.

The 'Bourne Identity' star, 52, is thought to have missed out on a \$250 million payday by turning down the role of Jake Sully, which went to Sam Worthington, in Cameron's 2009 sci-fi epic.

But Damon has insisted he couldn't have left his friends "in the lurch" by quitting the 'Bourne' movies.

"I desperately wanted to work with Cameron. I mean, because he worked so rarely", he added.

'Avatar' remains the highest-grossing movie of all time with \$2.9 billion worldwide.

Asked if he would've "put off the 'Bourne' series" if he had known 'Avatar' was going to be the biggest grossing movie of all time, he



said: "This is like ... this is like that question.

He said, "No it's less much less consequential, that was just a joke. Dumb ... but no, I mean, I don't know how I could have left all my friends in the lurch. You know what I mean? It would have ... my favourite reaction to this was, I told John Krasinski, we were writing this little movie a long time ago called 'Promised Land' and we were in my kitchen and it was a Saturday morning and we were on a break."

"I said, 'Yeah, I tell him about 'Avatar', and he launches himself out of the chair. He starts pacing the kitchen, he goes, 'OK, OK, OK, OK, OK. Nothing in your life would be different today if you had done that movie, except you and I would be having this conversation in space. I would have been the same guy, I just would have had a space station", he added.

In May, Damon said turning down a role in 'Avatar' was the "dumbest thing an actor ever did".

The 1975 looking at potential legal action after Matty Healy's kiss with male bandmate



Los Angeles | Agencies

The English pop rock band, The 1975 could face legal action after singer Matty Healy's kiss with a male bandmate at Malaysia's Good Vibes festival led to the event being cancelled.

The English pop rock band, The 1975 could face legal action after Matty Healy's kiss with a male bandmate at Malaysia's Good Vibes festival led to the event being cancelled.

The singer spoke out in protest against the country's laws, where LGBTQ+ people can face up to 20 years in prison, reports 'Mirror.co.uk'.

While on stage, he attacked the government and also said he was "furious" he had made "a mistake when we were booking shows". Some have claimed the kiss and speech has been successful in highlighting the human rights issue around the world. But others fear a backlash in Malaysia. Local artistes and firms were left out of pocket

after bosses were forced to pull the plug on the event. As per 'Mirror.co.uk', lawyers have since volunteered to work pro bono for those affected. The Malaysian lawyers are drafting a class action suit against the band, naming all four members.

It states that it seeks damages for local artists and vendors for losses resulting from the group's alleged "negligence". Lawyers are also appealing for more -potential claimants who have lost earnings.

Amid the furore, The 1975 cancelled their performances in Jakarta and Taipei, while Matty made light of the event, saying that he usually struggles not to kiss his good looking bandmate, bassist Ross MacDonald.

But he has also thanked Peter Tatchell for defending him against accusations that he behaved like a "white saviour". Police in Kuala Lumpur said "there is not much that can be done" personally against the band, after they left the country on Saturday morning but vowed to hold organisers "responsible for their actions".

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Megan Fox



'Lakadbaggha' wins in Stuttgart

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The vigilante action thriller 'Lakadbaggha' starring Anshuman Jha and Ridhi Dogra, has achieved international acclaim by winning the German star of India 'Director's Vision' award at the 20th Indian Film Festival Stuttgart 2023. The categories in the 'German Star of India' Award 2023 are: Best Feature Film bagged by 'MAX, MIN & MEOWZAKI' by PadmakumarNarasimhamurthy; Best Documentary bagged by 'To Kill A Tiger' by NishaPahuja; Best Short Film went to 'Nocturnal Burger' by Reema Maya; Best TVC bagged by 'Mental Health' by BaudhhayanMukherji; and the Audience Award bagged by 'The Storyteller' by Ananth Narayan Mahadevan. Directed by Victor Mukherjee, 'Lakadbaggha' is a love letter to dogs and is the story of an animal lover vigilante against an animal abuser kingpin. The film deals with the underbelly of illegal animal trade and the inhuman treatment of the voiceless creatures. Expressing his excitement, actor and producer, Anshuman said: "Portraying the character of Arjun in 'Lakadbaggha' has been an immensely gratifying journey for me as an actor and producer. This film holds a special place in my heart as it not only entertains but also leaves a lasting impact on the audience, championing the cause of animal welfare." "Winning the prestigious German Star Of India 'Vision' Award is a true honour and a validation of our team's collective effort to create impactful cinema. 'Lakadbaggha' aims to stir emotions, spark conversations, and inspire positive change, and I couldn't be prouder of the resounding recognition it has garnered on the global stage," he added.

'Validation of effort to create impactful cinema,' :Anshuman Jha

TREVOR NOAH SET FOR INDIA DEBUT TOUR

India is one of the most exciting countries in the world



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Comic artiste Trevor Noah is all set to come to India with his 'Off The Record Tour' kicking off his Asia tour.

Commenting on his India Tour, Noah said: "After a lifetime of loving India's culture, I'm so excited to finally have the privilege of bringing my current stand-up comedy tour to one of the most exciting countries in the world!"

With sold out-shows through US and Europe between 2022 and 2023, Trevor's 'Off The Record' Tour will travel to Asia, with its first pit stop in India, followed by Dubai.

Noah was the host of The Daily Show. He has won various awards, including a Primetime Emmy Award from 11 nominations. He was named one of "The 35 Most Powerful People in New York Media" by The Hollywood Reporter in 2017 and 2018.

In 2018, Time magazine named him one of the hundred most influential people in the world. In 2023, he won the Erasmus Prize.

Born in Johannesburg, Noah began his career in South Africa in 2002. He was the runner-up in the fourth season of South Africa's iteration of Strictly Come Dancing in 2008. From 2010 to 2011, he hosted the late-night talk show Tonight with Trevor Noah. He hosted the 63rd, the 64th and the 65th Annual Grammy Awards as well as the 2022 White House Correspondents Dinner.

Abish Mathew tells Taapsee, 'Both eyes shut is best way to watch anything you do on screen'



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Stand-up comedian and chat show host Abish Mathew recently roasted actress TaapseePannu on his Instagram Story.

Taapsee is inviting people in her social circle for a roast session ahead of her birthday on August 1.

The actress recently took to the Instagram Stories and invited her close friends to roast her on her online platform.

Calling Abish, the 'roast king', Taapsee, who has been on the comic's chat show 'Son of Abish' shares a good camaraderie with Abish and said that he already knows a lot about her which sets a good premise for a roast session.

Responding to the same, Abish took to the Stories section of his Instagram and shared a video of himself thanking Taapsee.

"Thank you so much, Taapsee. Thank you for inviting me, and of course we know so much about you. For instance, I know that you can't wink. Everytime you try, both eyes shut and both eyes shut is the best way to watch anything you do on screen," he said.

Taapsee shared this primer of a roast on her Instagram Story appreciating the comic.

The actress appeared on the chat show along with another comic artiste Zakir Khan.

The second time she appeared on the show along with choreographer Shakti Mohan, back in 2019.

She recently appeared on the show for the third time with 'Mirzapur' actress ShriyaPilgaonkar and stand-up artiste SapanVerma.



'I FEEL THE MOM GUILT WHEN ON SHOOT,' ANITA HASSANANDANI

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Anita Hassanandani, who made her debut on television in 1998 with 'IdharUdhar', said being the mother is the most challenging role to play, and she feels the mom guilt when on the shoot.

Anita and her husband Rohit welcomed their first child, a baby boy Aarav in February, last year. With the shoot of the shows, managing mommy duties, etc, Anita said it does become challenging to play every role, when you are an actor.

"But being a mother is the most challenging, I would say. I love being Aarav's mom, and when I go to the shoot, I do feel the mom's guilt to be honest, but a mother can never leave a child," Anita said.

The 'Krishna Cottage' fame actress said it's always going to be difficult, but she took that call, as she had the family support. "My mother-in-law comes over and takes care of Aarav. So it kind of falls into place, with the kind of family support I have. And when I go out for work, 100 percent miss Aarav like crazy." Anita said the only 'mantra' she follows while performing all the roles of an actor, mom, wife, and entrepreneur, is to take all decisions that make you happy.

"You have to be happy with the decision you made, and once you are happy, everything falls into place," she said.

The 42-year-old actress called her journey wonderful, amazing, and welcoming, adding that she has no regrets.

"But sometimes, I do feel that after being a mom, I mean people say that nothing changes, it's still easy to get back and all, but after being a mom, people look at you slightly differently, and things 100 percent do change. So yeah that's how I feel," said Anita.

'Heeriye' tells dreamy love story of HeerRanjha with modern twist



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Music composer and singer Jasleen Royal has released her new song 'Heeriye', and it's a song which will have a calming effect on the audience especially in times when the world is overwhelmed by forces of nature and chaos all around.

The song has been crooned by India's superstar singer Arijit Singh, and the music video of the song features Malayalam star DulquerSalmaan and Jasleen. The music video begins with Jasleen picking the classic tale of HeerRanjha from a shelf with the character of Ranjha.

As she gets engaged while reading the book, Dulquer's character of the Ranjha from the book transcends the boundaries of reality and illusion and makes a stunning entry riding a horse into the

life of Jasleen's character in the video.

The two then go about spending some quality time as their dreamy love story soon fills the screen with warmth and a fuzzy feeling.

Jasleen has not only composed and sung the track but also produced the music video. 'Heeriye' marks Dulquer's first ever non-film project. Sonically, the track makes the use of both live instruments and minimal use of VSTs.

Jasleen and Arijit perform the duet as the song progresses forward. Visually, the song features several beautiful locations, particularly the beach. As Dulquer's character sets the race against the time to go back into his native world, Jasleen burns the page of the classic love story of HeerRanjha leading to Ranjha forever staying in Jasleen's world. The narrative loop closes as Jasleen rides the horse to the beach to get back her Ranjha.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Ridhi Dogra