

absolute india

VOL. 6, ISSUE 252, BHOPAL | SATURDAY, JULY 31, 2021 | ₹5 | PAGE 08

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM BHOPAL, MUMBAI AND NEW DELHI



NATION > 02
Maken hints at dropping few ministers from Gehlot cabinet...



HOLLYWOOD > 06
Singapore rapper Yung Raja's 'Spice Boy' ode to Rajinikanth...



SPORTS > 07
Reality takes time to sink into 'Magnificent Mary'...

SC seeks Centre's stand on plea for women in NDA



New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday gave the final opportunity to the Centre to file its response on a petition seeking directions to allow eligible women candidates into National Defence Academy (NDA), where only men can join now.

A bench of Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Hrishikesh Roy observed notice was issued on the petition earlier this year, but the Centre has not filed a counter-affidavit so far.

Senior advocate Chinmoy Pradip Sharma, representing petitioner Kush Kalra, submitted the next round of examination is scheduled on September 5.

In a fresh application, Kalra pointed out that the UPSC on June 9 had issued notice declaring the date of examination for admission to the Army, Navy, Air Force wings of the NDA. "It is further submitted that willing female candidates shall suffer irreparably if the said notification issued by Respondent No 4 (UPSC) is not stayed as the examination is to be conducted on September 5, 2021, it said. After hearing arguments in the matter, the bench posted the matter to August 18 to consider the issue of grant of interim relief.

SC agrees to hear Pegasus snooping plea next week

SNOOPING UNDER SURVEILLANCE!

The plea claimed that hacking constitutes a criminal offence punishable under inter alia Section 66 (computer related offences), 66B (punishment for dishonestly receiving stolen computer resource or communication device), 66E (punishment for violation of privacy) and 66F (punishment for cyberterrorism) of the IT Act, punishable with imprisonment and/or fine.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to hear a plea by veteran journalists N. Ram and Sashi Kumar seeking a direction for an independent probe by its sitting or retired judge into the alleged Pegasus snooping scandal.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal mentioned the matter before a bench headed by Chief Justice N.V. Ramana and Justice Surya Kant stating that civil liberties of citizens, politicians, belonging to Opposition parties, journalists, and court staff have been put under surveillance.

He insisted that it is an issue, which is making waves in India and world over and this issue requires an urgent hearing. After Sibal's submissions, the bench said it may hear the matter next week.

The plea filed by scribes said mass surveillance using a military-grade spyware abridges several fundamental rights and appears to represent an attempt to infiltrate, attack and destabilise independent institutions, which are critical pillars of country's democratic set-up.

The petitioners sought direction to be issued to the Centre to disclose if any of its



agencies have obtained license for Pegasus spyware or used it either directly or indirectly, to conduct surveillance as alleged.

SC seeks Centre's stand on plea for women in NDA

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday gave the final opportunity to the Centre to file its response on a petition seeking directions to allow eligible women candidates into National Defence Academy (NDA), where only men can join now. A bench of Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Hrishikesh Roy observed notice was issued on the petition earlier this year, but the Centre has not filed a counter-affidavit so far. Senior advocate Chinmoy Pradip Sharma, representing petitioner Kush Kalra, submitted the next round of examination is scheduled on September 5. In a fresh application, Kalra pointed out that the UPSC on June 9 had issued notice declaring the date of examination for admission to the Army, Navy, Air Force wings of the NDA. "It is further submitted that willing female candidates shall suffer irreparably if the said notification issued by Respondent No 4 (UPSC) is not stayed as the examination is to be conducted on September 5, 2021, it said. After hearing arguments in the matter, the bench posted the matter to August 18 to consider the issue of grant of interim relief.

ISRAEL LAUNCHES PROBE AGAINST NSO GROUP

Jerusalem: The Israeli government has launched a probe into the allegations of wrongdoing against the NSO Group in the Pegasus snooping scandal, with authorities inspecting the cybersecurity company's offices over alleged abuses of its spyware by several government clients which have raised eyebrows the world over. Representatives of several bodies visited the office of NSO Group to assess the allegations raised with regard to the company on Wednesday, a spokesperson for Israel's Ministry of Defence said. When asked to share details, she said that "we aren't elaborating at the moment". Local media reports said that the bodies conducting the inspection are the Export Control Division of the Ministry of Defence and the National Security Council, which is also authorised to conduct investigations if necessary. The focus of the investigation is to examine whether the company acted in accordance with the permits and powers granted to it by the Export Control Division of the Ministry of Defence, the reports said. The alleged use of the Pegasus software to spy on journalists, human rights defenders, politicians and others in a number of countries, including India, triggered concerns over issues relating to privacy.

Israel's priority was "to review this whole matter of giving licenses", he then stressed. NSO's chief executive, Shalev Hulio, had welcomed the move in an interview to Army Radio saying that he would "be very pleased if there were an investigation so that we'd be able to clear our name". Hulio claimed that there was an effort "to smear the whole Israeli cyber industry".

Pegasus Row "Non-Issue": Minister

New Delhi: As Opposition protests over alleged snooping using Pegasus spyware continue to disrupt Parliamentary proceedings, Union minister Pralhad Joshi on Friday said the controversy was a "non-issue" and that the government was ready for discussions on people-related issues. The Pegasus spyware issue has snowballed into a political controversy, disrupting Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha since the start of the Monsoon session on July 19. IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw has given a statement on the issue in both the Houses but the Opposition parties are not satisfied and are demanding specific answers. As yet another day of Lok Sabha proceedings were adjourned due to vociferous protests, Pralhad Joshi, the Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister, while describing the Opposition's behaviour as "unfortunate". Noting that the IT Minister has already given a detailed statement on the issue in both the Houses, Pralhad Joshi said the protests are over a "non-issue, non-serious issue".



CBSE Class 12 results

99.37% pass, girls fare marginally better than boys (99.13 percent)

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) declared the Class 12 results on Friday. A total of 99.37 per cent students have passed the exam. Among the passing students, 99.13 percent are boys and 99.67 per cent are girls.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

The CBSE said that the pass percentage of girls in the board results is 0.54 per cent more than boys.

This year the Class 12 result in Kendriya Vidyalayas is remarkable with a 100 per cent success rate. Similarly, the result of the Central Tibetan Schools is also 100 per cent. This year the board had cancelled the Class 12 examinations due to coronavirus. The result was prepared through an internal assessment system.

The Class 10 results are likely to be declared next week. Like last year, this year also Class 12 results were released before Class 10 by the CBSE.

The board released the results on its official website. Students can download their result through their roll number and date of birth. The results can also be downloaded in Digilocker. Students can also download and print their results.

Students can check their result through the official website of CBSE and UMANG app. Apart from this, students can also get the result through SMS.

This year the board examinations could not be conducted due to the Covid pandemic. In view of this, CBSE decided to prepare the Class 10 and 12 board results under a special formula.

Delhi woman doc gets Covid thrice, twice post vax

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A 61-year-old Delhi doctor, infected with Covid thrice and contracting both the Alpha and Delta variants after vaccination, presents the first such documented case of two reinfections and two breakthrough infections.

Dr Veena Aggarwal, wife of late Dr K.K. Aggarwal, first tested positive on August 16, last year and was asymptomatic. She took her first dose of Covishield vaccine on February 1 this year, followed by the second dose on March 15. On April 12, she tested



positive for the second time and had symptoms such as acute abdominal pain, fever, myalgia, and fatigue. Within 19 days, on May 3, she tested positive for the third time. The infection resulted in hypoxia, hospitalisation, and illness lasting seven weeks. Whole genome sequencing showed the second infection was caused by Alpha variant and third by Delta variant.

Dr K.K. Aggarwal, a cardiologist at the HCFI, passed away at Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences after a long battle with the virus in May.

India, China to hold 12th round of military-level talks on Saturday

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India and China will hold the 12th round of Corps Commander-level talks at Moldo on the Chinese side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) on Saturday to iron out an agreement for the next phase of disengagement in Eastern Ladakh. "The talks will begin at 10.30 am," said a military source.

The latest round of talks will take place after a gap of three months. Indian military delegates will meet their counterparts to discuss disengagement of troops at the friction areas such as the Hot Springs, Gogra and the Depsang plains spread over 900 sq km land.



India has reoriented around 50,000 troops whose main focus is on the disputed borders with China. The reorientation comes at a time when China is refurbishing its existing air-fields in the Tibetan Plateau that will allow twin-engine fighter aircraft to be stationed, sources said. In addition, China has also brought troops from the Tibet military region to the Xinjiang region. The Chinese side is also rapidly building infrastructure in the Tibetan Plateau.

IT rules: Google purged over 11.6 lakh harmful content in India

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Google on Friday said that it removed over 11.6 lakh pieces of harmful online content in the months of May and June in India, in accordance with the new IT (Guidelines for Intermediaries and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. As part of its monthly transparency reports for the two months, Google said that in addition to the details of complaints received from users in India and the actions taken thereon, the reports now include the removal of actions taken as a result of automated detection processes across Google's platforms, classified as "Significant Social Media Intermediaries" ("SSMIs") under the IT Rules.

Google removed 634,357 pieces of harmful content for May and 526,866 for June 2021 via its automated detection processes. Google said that it invests heavily in fighting harmful content online and uses technology to detect and remove it from its platforms. The Google report now contain further breakdown categories in terms of type of user complaints received, such as impersonation, graphic sexual content, and others.

Pan India rainfall deficit for season now at minus 2 per cent

Fairly widespread to widespread rainfall with isolated heavy to very heavy falls is very likely over Odisha, Gangetic West Bengal, Jharkhand, and Bihar during July 29-31 and over east Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh during July 29 and August 2. Its intensity is likely to decrease thereafter. Isolated extremely heavy falls are likely over Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh on July 30 and over east Madhya Pradesh on July 31.



above normal rainfall is likely to continue during week 1 over central parts of India and adjoining north-west plains of India, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal with slight reduction over these areas in week 2. Subdued activity is likely to continue during week 1 over Peninsular India with slight improvement over southwest coast of India (coastal Karnataka and Kerala) during the week," the IMD said in a release.

Fairly widespread to widespread rainfall with isolated heavy to very heavy falls likely to continue over east Rajasthan and west Madhya Pradesh during July 30-August 2. It is likely to increase from July 30 with isolated extremely heavy falls likely over east Rajasthan during July 30 to August 1 and over west Madhya Pradesh on July 31, 2021. It is likely to decrease in intensity thereafter with possibility of isolated heavy falls over these areas.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The weekly cumulative percentage rainfall departure for the country, as a whole, is 15 per cent from its Long Period Average (LPA) during the week while the seasonal cumulative percentage rainfall departure from LPA since June 1 till July 28 is minus 2 per cent, the India Meteorological Department said on Thursday. Seasonal cumulative is calculated from June 1.

Forecast for next two weeks, based on NWP model consensus, shows that "on-going normal to

BORDER TENSION: ASSAM ASKS RESIDENTS NOT TO VISIT MIZORAM

Guwahati: In wake of the bloody border clash on Monday and subsequent developments, the Assam government on Thursday asked its citizens not to visit Mizoram and those staying in the neighbouring state to maintain utmost caution. The unprecedented travel advisory, issued by Commissioner and Secretary, Home and Political, M.S. Manivannan said that given the critical prevailing situation, the people of Assam are advised not to travel to Mizoram as any threat to their personal safety cannot be accepted. "People of Assam, staying in Mizoram due to work related compulsion, should exercise utmost caution," it said.



Maken hints at dropping few ministers from Gehlot cabinet

Team Absolute | Jaipur

A few members of Rajasthan's Ashok Gehlot ministry may be dropped before the much-awaited cabinet expansion in the state.

This was indicated by Congress in charge Ajay Maken on Friday before he left for Delhi, after finishing his one-on-one interaction with all 115 Congress MLAs, and senior party leaders, on Wednesday and Thursday for making a report card of various ministers.

He said that some ministers have expressed their willingness to resign and work for the party. "Some people want to leave cabinet positions and work for the organisation. We are proud of such people," he said. The statement makes it clear that some ministers will be sacked to induct new faces in the Gehlot government.

"The Congress will form the government once again



in 2023," said Maken, who was in Rajasthan to break the impasse between two camps, led by Chief Minister Gehlot and former Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot. Responding to a query on the possible role of Pilot, he said: "Everyone trusts the high command and all have said in a united voice that they shall accept any role given by the high command." Meanwhile, the report, prepared after talking to 115 MLAs and senior

leaders on Wednesday and Thursday, will now be handed over to the party high command, said Congress officials.

It is likely to usher in cabinet expansion and political appointments which are much awaited by party workers. On Thursday, Gehlot called an informal meeting with party MLAs over dinner and asked everyone to forget and forgive to start a new development chapter in the state.

Everyone must work together to save democracy: Mamata

Team Absolute | New Delhi

At the end of her visit to the national capital, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said on Friday that everyone must work together to save democracy in the country, besides stating that she would be visiting Delhi every two months. Before leaving for Kolkata, Banerjee said, "The visit was successful. I believe that democracy must go on and everyone has to work together to save it. When democracy is in danger, the country is in danger. 'Save democracy to save the country' is our slogan," she said.

Banerjee also talked about working for the farmers, labourers, unemployed youth and others.

After a thumping victory for her party Trinamool Congress in the West Bengal Assembly polls held in March-April, Banerjee reached Delhi on Monday evening.

During her first visit to the national capital after being sworn-in as West Bengal CM for the third time, Banerjee met Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union minister Nitin Gadkari and opposition leaders such as interim Congress President Sonia Gandhi and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, among others.



Though an expected meeting with NCP chief Sharad Pawar did not take place, Banerjee said that "I have talked to Sharad Pawar."

After her meeting with the Prime Minister on Tuesday, Banerjee had said, "It was a courtesy meeting. I told the Prime Minister about the need for more vaccines and medicines in West Bengal."

On Thursday, she met Union

Transport Minister Gadkari and discussed several road and infrastructure projects related to West Bengal.

On the political front, she met Sonia Gandhi, former Congress President Rahul Gandhi and Kejriwal on Wednesday. She also met Congress leaders Kamal Nath, Anand Sharma and DMK leader Kanimozhi.

Ever since her third straight election triumph in West Bengal, Banerjee has been strongly pitching for opposition unity against the BJP ahead of the general elections scheduled in 2024. "Everyone has to come together to defeat the BJP. Alone, we (Trinamool) are nothing, and everyone has to work together," she had said. On the opposition face against Modi in 2024, she had said, "All the opposition parties will sit together and decide who will lead the fight against Modi."

MPs demand JPC to probe Tomar's assertion on farmer deaths

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) on Friday led an eight-party delegation demanding Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to constitute a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) to probe Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Tomar's assertion in the Parliament that the Union government did not have any record on farmer deaths during the ongoing farmers' agitation. A representation in this regard was submitted to the Lok Sabha Speaker by MPs representing SAD, BSP, NCP, CPI, CPI-M, RLP, National Conference (J&K) and Shiv Sena.

Former Union minister and Bathinda MP Harsimrat Kaur Badal also requested the representatives of all the opposition parties, including the Congress, to join the delegation of MPs meeting President Ram Nath Kovind on Saturday to demand his intervention and

direction to the Union government to discuss repealing of the three Central farm laws. Giving details of the memorandum submitted to the Speaker, Harsimrat said that the MPs pointed out that the Agriculture Minister had committed a serious lapse by stating that the Union government did not have any record of farmer deaths during the ongoing 'Kisan Andolan'. "This amounts to whitewashing the sacrifice of the 'annadaatas' who have been agitating against the three black agricultural laws for eight months now," she said. She said the MPs were shocked that the Agriculture Minister has made this assertion despite there being clear proof of 537 farmers being 'martyred' during the course of the Kisan Andolan.

Requesting the Speaker to intervene in the matter immediately, the MPs said that Tomar should be advised to apologise to the farming community for his intemperate remarks.



'Not just road accident': SC seeks report on Jharkhand judge death

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday took suo motu cognisance of the alleged mowing down of Dhanbad Additional District Judge Uttam Anand by an auto-rickshaw and sought a status report of investigation from the Jharkhand government through the Chief Secretary and the DGP within a week.

A bench of Chief Justice N.V. Ramana and Justice Surya Kant said: "This gruesome incident has been widely reported in newspapers, and video clippings of the incident are also being circulated on social media platforms, suggesting that it was not a case of simplicitor



road accident." SCBA President and senior advocate Vikas Singh on Thursday asked the top court to take suo motu cognisance

of the alleged killing of Anand. The bench said it is cognizant of the fact that the Jharkhand High Court has taken note of the nature of

the incident and initiated necessary action to ensure that the state government protects the law and order situation within and outside the court premises. "Having regard to the seriousness of the issue and its larger ramifications, we direct the Chief Secretary and Director General of Police, State of Jharkhand to jointly submit a status report of inquiry vis-a-vis the sad demise of Judicial Officer, Uttam Anand, with the Registry of this Court within a week's time," said the bench. The bench made it very clear that it is not interfering in the proceedings going on before the high court and added similar incidents are happening across the country.

SIKHS FOR JUSTICE ISSUES THREAT TO HIMACHAL CM

Shimla: US-based banned Pro-Khalistan group Sikhs for Justice has issued a threat to Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur, saying the latter won't be allowed to hoist the national flag in the hill state.

In recorded telephonic calls to journalists, the caller identified himself as Gurpatwant Singh Pannun and said, "We will not allow Jai Ram Thakur to hoist the Indian tricolour. Himachal Pradesh was part of Punjab and we are seeking a referendum in Punjab. Once we liberate Punjab, we will make sure that we take over areas of Himachal Pradesh which were parts of Punjab." Responding to the threat calls, the state police informed in a tweet: "We are in receipt of pre-recorded message from pro-Khalistani elements from overseas sent to some journalists. 'Himachal Pradesh police are fully capable of securing the state and preventing anti-national elements from thwarting peace and security in the state in corporation with the central security and intelligence agencies."

KERALA RECORDS OVER 20,000 COVID CASES FOR FOURTH SUCCESSIVE DAY

Thiruvananthapuram | Agencies

Kerala on Friday saw over 20,000 Covid cases for the fourth day in succession, making it account for 50 per cent of the country's daily tally.

In a statement issued here, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said 20,772 people turned positive after 1,52,639 samples were tested in the past 24 hours.

The test positivity rate was 13.61 per cent, while the total number of active cases was 1,60,824.

Incidentally all these basic indicators for the past few days have been showing that Kerala is leading in all the respects, and a special health team from Delhi has arrived in the state

and will now split into two and travel around to find out how best things can be contained.

Friday also saw 115 new deaths,

taking the death toll to 16,701.

Meanwhile with the state observing lockdown based on the TPR, there were 323 local bodies with a



TPR of above 15 per cent, while in 355, it is between 10 to 15 per cent, in 294, between 5 to 10 per cent and in 62, it was below 5 per cent.

Congress discussing PK's revival plan, entry into party

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Poll strategist Prashant Kishor has met Congress leader Rahul Gandhi quietly for a few times now, to discuss the party's revival ahead of a spate of Assembly elections next year, including in Uttar Pradesh, sources said.

Rahul Gandhi has informally discussed the plan with the Congress leaders and sought their view for Kishor's entry into the party, and to what extent he can be given responsibility for the party's poll strategy, say party leaders, who were part of these deliberations.

Kishor, who has also met General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi and interim chief Sonia Gandhi in these deliberations, has given a plan to the Congress leadership and the talking points are being discussed amongst the senior leaders. Kishor who is likely to take political plunge soon in the Congress but debate on his position



in the party is on.

Sources said that Kishor may be appointed as General Secretary in charge of election management, but party seniors insist that giving sole responsibility of elections to one person is not a good idea as Kishor cannot be trusted in totality, but nobody is averse of his joining the party.

Since Kishor met Rahul Gandhi on July 13 and submitted his plan, many rounds of meetings have taken place within the Congress setup, and some party leaders feel his skills may be used in the elections.

BROWN SUGAR WORTH RS 1 CR SEIZED IN ODISHA, 1 HELD

Bhubaneswar | Agencies

A team of Special Task Force (STF) of the Odisha Police on Friday seized brown sugar worth over Rs 1 crore in Puri district and arrested one person in this connection, officials said.

The arrested person has been identified as Imataj Khan of the Pipili area. On the basis of an intelligence input, the STF team raided near Pipili-Nimapara over bridge and recovered 1.48 kg of brown sugar worth over Rs 1 crore from his possession, the police said.

The accused person could not produce any valid authority in support of possession of such contraband material, for which the accused person was arrested and will be presented before the court of District & Sessions Judge, Puri, they said.



The STF has registered a case under section 21(c) 29 of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985 and further investigation is on.

Since 2020, the STF has seized more than 35 kg of brown sugar/heroin and more than 67 quintals 52 kg (6752 kg) of ganja /Marijuana and arrested more than 100 drug dealers/peddlers, sources said.

Can't post a cop each for every girl's safety: Goa Minister

Team Absolute | Panaji

Days after Chief Minister Pramod Sawant was slammed by the Opposition for blaming parents for the rape of two minors on a beach, Goa's Arts and Culture Minister Govind Gaude on Friday said that it was logistically not possible for a government to post policemen to guard every girl in the state.

"The problem is, if one has to post a policeman for every person, every girl, how many police will we require? This is what it is. Government is not running away from responsibility. Government is protecting,



Government is there with the people," Gaude told reporters on the sidelines of the ongoing Monsoon Session of the state Legislative Assembly.

Gaude, who is also a lone independent MLA supporting the BJP-led coalition government, also said that

taken hands off and is running away from holding responsibility," Gaude said.

"CM has already clarified about this. Being a parent, he has said that parents, especially in minor cases, have to look where children are going, have children taken permission, whether they are staying at somebody's place. It is the responsibility of the parents and governments also," Gaude said.

The Opposition had demanded an apology from the CM over his comments made on Wednesday.

On Wednesday, Sawant in a discussion during the Monsoon Session of the Assembly had said that par-

ents should introspect why their minor wards are allowed to spend time on beaches after dark.

"Ten children went for a party on the beach. Out of the 10, six returned home. The remaining four, including two boys and two girls, stayed on the beach the whole night. When a 14-year old girl spends the night on the beach, the parents too have to introspect, they too should be taking care," Sawant had said.

On the night of July 24, two minor girls were raped at the Colva beach in South Goa. Four persons, including a government servant, have been arrested in connection with the crime.



CM reviews status of Corona and related vaccination work

CORONA VACCINATION WORK SHOULD BE ACCELERATED IN THE STATE: CM

THERE SHOULD BE NO CARELESSNESS IN THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE THIRD WAVE

Chouhan said that the work of corona vaccination should be accelerated in the state. The state is getting sufficient number of vaccines from the Center and it will continue. The state ranks fourth in the country in Corona vaccination.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the second wave of Corona has been controlled in the state, but the possibilities of a third wave still exist. A large number of Corona cases are still being reported in the states of Kerala and Maharashtra. Therefore, full vigilance and precautions must be taken while preparations continue in full swing for the third wave. There should be no negligence in this work.

Chouhan said that the work of corona vaccination should be accelerated in the state. The state is getting sufficient number of vaccines from the Center and it will continue. The state ranks fourth in the country in Corona vaccination.

Chouhan was reviewing the situation of Corona in the state, preparations for the third wave and vaccination work through video conferencing at Mantralaya on Friday. Public Health and Family Welfare Minister Dr. Prabhuram Chaudhary,



Chief Secretary Iqbal Singh Bains, Additional Chief Secretary Health Mohammad Suleman, Health Commissioner Akash Tripathi etc. were present in the meeting.

It was told during the review of Corona, that there are 121 active cases of Corona in the state. Also, 10 new cases have been reported. About 70 thousand tests are being conducted daily in the state. The positivity rate is 0.01 percent. The state ranks 30th in the country in Corona infection. Chief Minister Chouhan directed all the collectors

to ensure timely preparations for the third wave in their respective districts, which includes increasing number of beds in hospitals, establishment of oxygen plants, ICU wards, CT Scan and other testing arrangements, arrangement of essential medicines, specialist doctors, paramedical staff, technicians etc. Chouhan said that 47 percent eligible persons of the state have been administered the first dose of Corona vaccine, while 9 percent have received the second dose. Special attention is must for the sec-

ond dose. Chief Minister Chouhan directed that separate arrangements should be made at the vaccination centers for the second dose of corona vaccine. Special arrangement for vaccination of pregnant women should continue. It was found during the review that vaccination work in Panna, Sidhi and Alirajpur districts is comparatively slower. Instructions have been given to give pace to vaccination work in these districts. People should be made aware about vaccination.

Twitter tells Newsclick journalist to delete post on MP lawmakers

Kashif Kakvi tweeted, in the backdrop of the ongoing debate on population control, that several MLAs and MPs in the state had more than two children.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Kashif Kakvi, a Newsclick journalist, had to take down a tweet on July 28 after getting a notice from Twitter. The tweet, posted on July 20, featured in a thread promoting Kashif's report about how several legislators and MPs in Madhya Pradesh had more than two children. The report, in turn, was occasioned by the population control bill brought by Uttar Pradesh's Adityanath government seeking to implement a two-child norm. Similar reports were subsequently carried by other media houses.

"This document has been taken from the website of the MP Assembly. It is based on information submitted by the MLAs themselves. Since #PopulationControl is an election issue which has been brought into limelight with respect to a particular community, I would like to tell everyone that in Madhya Pradesh, minorities consti-

tute 10 percent but it would be 90 percent who will face trouble," Kashif said in the tweet.

On July 28, he received a warning from Twitter. His tweet "had violated rules specifically for posting private information", the social media company said. "You may not publish or post other people's private information without their express authorisation and permission."

As a result, the notice added, "We've temporarily limited some of your account features... You can still browse Twitter, but you are limited to only sending Direct Messages to your followers, no Tweets, Retweets, Fleets, follows or likes." To restore his account to full functionality, Kashif could either delete the tweet or file an appeal. "I filed an appeal at around 8.30 am and again at around 6.30 pm. Since there was no reply and I was facing inconvenience due to the restricted activity, I decided to delete the tweet," Kashif

said. The journalist, however, insisted that he had not violated any privacy guidelines. "Since the document was from the official website of the MP assembly, all this information was already in the public domain," he explained. "I had also blurred the headline numbers of MLAs before sharing the list on Twitter. So how does it imply sharing private information?"

In May this year, Kashif had got a similar notice for tweeting a picture of a half-burnt body at a Bhopal crematorium with the caption noting that "there is not sufficient wood available to perform last rites" of all the bodies. Kashif claimed that he'd blurred the picture of the corpse before posting it but still got the warning, which led him to delete the tweet. Amrita Tripathi, head of news partnerships, Twitter India, wasn't immediately available for comment. We will update the report if there's a response.

Extremely Heavy Weekend Rains on Horizon

State to Witness Intense Monsoon Activity from July 31 to August 3

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Amid the prevalence of enhanced monsoon showers, Madhya Pradesh is in for an even wetter weekend, as extremely heavy showers have been forecast across the state of July 31 and August 1.

As per the India Meteorological Department (IMD), a well-marked low-pressure area currently lies over the interior parts of Gangetic West Bengal and its neighbourhood. In the next 48 hours, it is likely to move west-north-westwards and cross Jharkhand, south Bihar and the southern parts of Uttar Pradesh.

The system is expected to cause intense precipitation over East India for the next 24-48 hours. But as it moves further inland, the focus of the rainfall activity will gradually shift over Central India.

Accordingly, the IMD has predicted fairly widespread to widespread showers with isolated heavy to very heavy falls over East Madhya Pradesh on Friday and Saturday. Similar conditions will also prevail over the neighbouring states of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh.

Moreover, this eastern sub-division of Madhya Pradesh will also experience isolated extremely heavy falls on Saturday, July 31.



Thereafter, as the low-pressure moves further west-northwest, it will bring along widespread rainfall with isolated heavy to very heavy showers over West Madhya Pradesh from Friday to Tuesday, July 30 to August 3.

Furthermore, isolated extremely heavy falls are also likely over this western sub-division on Saturday and Sunday, from July 31 to August 1.

In view of these predictions, the IMD has issued an orange alert over Eastern MP from Friday to Sunday, while Western MP will remain under this warning from Friday to Tuesday. The advisory urges the residents to 'be prepared' for rough weather.

Within the state, the IMD's regional met centre in Bhopal has indicated a strong likelihood of extremely heavy rainfall over the districts of Mandsaur, Neemuch, Sheopur, Annapur, Shahdol, Sidhi and Singrauli on

Saturday. Heavy to very heavy showers are also possible over the districts of Ashoknagar, Guna, Shivpuri, Annapur, Shahdol, Sidhi and Singrauli on Friday; in Rajgarh, Agar Malwa, Guna, Umaria, Dindori, Rewa and Satna on Saturday; and over Jhabua, Mandsaur, Neemuch, Bind, Morena, Sheopur, Rewa, Satna and Tikamgarh on Sunday.

Meanwhile, the district of Bhopal, where the state capital is located, will witness light to moderate showers at most places in this forecast period.

Overall, the total amount of rainfall over the Central Highlands during this projection period will reach 200-250 mm, with possible downpours of over 100 mm per day. There is also a risk of flooding, waterlogging and landslides in the region. The Weather Channel's met team has predicted.

4 seats, 40 ministers and leaders in charge; Shivraj 'formula' to win MP bypolls

As one parliamentary constituency and 3 assembly segments are set to go to polls, it's a big test for the CM's popularity ahead of the 2023 state polls.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Months after scoring a victory in the keenly-contested bypolls on 19 assembly seats, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan is back to preparing for the next set of by-elections one parliamentary constituency and three assembly segments.

For this big test of his popularity and administration ahead of the 2023 assembly elections, Chouhan has deputed over 40 Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders for a sum total of four elections.

The 40 include 12 ministers (out of 26 cabinet members), five MPs and over 25 organisational leaders such as general secretaries and vice-presidents, according to sources.

In the 2020 assembly by-polls, Chouhan had deputed 70 leaders for the 28 seats, of which the party won 19. The latest round includes the Khandwa Lok Sabha seat, which has been vacated after the death of former state BJP president Nand Kumar Chouhan. The three assembly seats have been vacated after the demise of MLAs Jugal Kishore Bagri (Raigaon), Brijendra Singh Rathore (Prithvipur) and Kalawati Bhuria (Jobat). Of these three seats, two were held by the Congress and one by the BJP.

The dates for the by-polls are yet to be announced. In the Khandwa parliamentary constituency, there are eight assembly segments. The BJP has deputed one cabinet minister for each segment, along with a bunch of other organisational leaders.

Cabinet ministers Kamal Patel, Vijay Shah, Tulsi Silawat, Inder Singh Parmar, Mohan Yadav, Usha Thakur, Jagdish Devda, Arvind Bhadoria, Bisahu Lal Sahu, Brijendra Pratap Singh, Ramkhelawan Patel, Vishwas Sarang



and Prem Singh Patel have been given the charge to handle the four by-polls. Moreover, MPs Shankar Lalwani has been deputed for Pandhara assembly segment in Khandwa, Ganesh Singh for Marigaon assembly segment and Gajendra Patel for Jobat.

Chouhan's model of fighting by-polls is different from other chief ministers, insisted BJP sources.

In 2020, the CM didn't make one or two leaders in-charge of the bypoll campaign, but deputed almost the entire cabinet for it. This time too, nearly half of the cabinet is holding responsibility for the polls.

The senior cabinet members include Finance Minister Jagdish Devda, Farmers Welfare and Agriculture Development Minister

Kamal Patel, and Water Resources Minister Tulsi Silawat, who is a loyalist of Union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia. Indore BJP MP Shankar Lalwani, who is in charge of one assembly seat, said there are three tiers of duties for the by-polls.

"First layer is the minister. Then for every seat, there is an MP to fix gaps, and the third layer is from the organisation, who reviews everyday happenings and campaigns on these seats. The CM has started campaigning although the poll dates are not announced," said Lalwani. "This is how seriously we take elections."

Another BJP vice-president in the Madhya Pradesh unit said: "In Uttar Pradesh, BJP lost the local body polls as it didn't take the elections seriously. But Shivraj knows he is in power till he continues to win. A poll defeat here will not affect the stability of his government but a loss can initiate murmurs among rivals who are waiting for Shivraj's downfall."

The party saw a defeat in Damoh by-polls in May, where BJP infighting played a role in the victory of Congress candidate Ajay Tandon and defeat of Rahul Lodhi, who had defected from the Congress. Former minister Jayant Malaiya and his son sabotaged BJP chances as the former didn't campaign for Lodhi.

Taking a cue from that loss, Shivraj Singh Chouhan is in no mood to take chances in Khandwa, where a former state unit chief was the sitting MP. Any defeat in Khandwa can send a wrong political message to the BJP high command.

Congress leader Kamal Nath, who has a chance here to dent the CM's clout before the assembly elections, has deputed 10 Congress MLAs per assembly segment to counter Shivraj's model.

PTR HONORED FOR MEETING INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION STANDARDS

Bhopal: Panna Tiger Reserve has been awarded the Conservation Assured Tiger Standards (CATS) certificate by the National Tiger Conservation Authority, for fulfilling the international standards established for tiger conservation and management. Forest Minister Kunwar Vijay Shah has congratulated the officers and employees of the Forest Department, including the field director of Panna Tiger Reserve, on this achievement. The Forest Minister has said that Madhya Pradesh is considered as Tiger Capital of not only the country but of the world. The management of Kanha and Panch Tiger Reserves has been recognised as the best in the country. Panna Tiger Reserve has attracted the attention of the whole world in increasing the population of tigers and their conservation and management.

Governor seeks information regarding universities

Implementation work of National Education Policy should be done within time-limit: Patel

All universities should make Covid cells: Governor

Governor Patel has said that experts have warned of the possibility of a third wave of Covid. We pray to God that the third wave does not come. But precautions must be taken. The situation should be continuously monitored by the Covid cell and necessary preparations should be made.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Governor Mangubhai Patel has given instructions to set up Covid cells in all the universities. He has also instructed all the Vice Chancellors to reside within the university campus. He has said that the works related to implementation of National Education Policy 2020 should be completed within the time-limit. Continuous monitoring should also be arranged for effective implementation. The Governor held a discussion with the Vice Chancellors of BR Ambedkar University of Social Sciences Mhow, Madhya Pradesh Bhoj Open University Bhopal, Pt. SN Shukla University

Shahdol and Atal Bihari Vajpayee Hindi Vishwavidyalaya Bhopal and sought information regarding the activities of the universities.

Governor Patel has said that experts have warned of the possibility of a third wave of Covid. We pray to God that the third wave does not come. But precautions must be taken. The situation should be continuously monitored by the Covid cell and necessary preparations should be made. By doing this, there will be no problems in the implementation of arrangements to face the third wave. He said that the university should make full use of the digital platform. Guidance from technical experts and expert services can also be obtained when required. He said that the Vice Chancellors should stay in the residence located on the University campus, which will facilitate regular moni-



toring of the campus arrangements. He said that the Vice Chancellor is the center of inspiration of the university and the society, his work style should be ideal and

transparent. Patel said that children are the future citizens of the country. They should not be dependent only on bookish knowledge. They should be made aware of social responsibilities also. The teachers of the university should infuse the values of social concerns in the students through their experiences and their behaviour. He said that an educated person first educates his family,

then the society similarly, the state and the country in the long run. Therefore, students should also be motivated to contribute in the efforts of social upliftment through education. He directed the Vice Chancellors to study the interest of the students in whichever courses, subjects, diploma and certificate courses are being run by the university. This information should be circulated on a regular basis. This will enable courses to be conducted as per the needs of the students. He said that information regarding the commercial utility, study, future in the field of research and practical importance etc. of the new courses started by the university should be publicized widely so that the student can easily choose the subject as per his needs.

The Vice Chancellors of the universities gave a presentation regarding the administrative structure of the university and its academic activities in the meeting. Principal Secretary Higher Education Anupam Rajan, Principal Secretary to Governor DP Ahuja along with senior officials of Raj Bhavan were present in the meeting.

CM PLANTS KADAMBA SAPLING IN DELHI



Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted a Kadamba sapling on Friday morning during his stay in Delhi. Chief Minister Chouhan plants a sapling every day in fulfillment of his resolve. Kadamba plant is also known as Kadam at some places. Kadam tree is considered to be the tree of gods. Kadamba is famous in Ayurveda for its medicinal properties. Its fruits are like lemons. Kadamba flowers have their own importance. The mention of these fragrant flowers is found in ancient Vedas and compositions.



SC GIVES NO RELIEF TO FORMER MAHA HOME MINISTER, TO HEAR PLEA AUG 3

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday did not grant any protection from arrest to former Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh on his plea seeking protection from any "coercive action" in the money laundering case registered against him by the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

A bench headed by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar has scheduled the matter for hearing on August 3. "List this plea on August 3 along with connected cases, so that similar orders are passed in all cases with regard to no coercive action," said the bench.

The ED had issued summons to Deshmukh, a Nationalist Congress Party leader, and his son Hrishikesh seeking their appearance. Deshmukh, who had skipped the previous summonses by the agency, had, in the plea to the top court, challenged these summonses and sought protection for both himself and his son.

Deshmukh has been accused of extortion from a bunch of Mumbai orchestra bars and money laundering, and the matter is being probed by the ED. It has been alleged that Rs 4.7 crore was collected as "extortion" from the orchestra bars by now-dismissed Mumbai police officer Sachin Waze allegedly on Deshmukh's instructions. Later, this amount was transferred to Deshmukh's Nagpur-based educational trust by his son, Hrishikesh. According to the allegation, the transaction was routed



via two hawala operators and was showed as a "donation".

The 71-year-old NCP leader is the president of the trust and his two sons, Salil and Hrishikesh, are trustees.

On May 11, a case was registered against the former minister and on June 25, the ED raided Deshmukh's residences in Nagpur, Mumbai, and three other places. In April, the CBI had conducted raids at four premises of Deshmukh after registering an FIR against him in connection with the case.

Param Bir Singh, former Commissioner of Mumbai Police, in his letter to Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, alleged that Deshmukh had indulged in "malpractices" and asked Waze to collect Rs 100 crore every month.

Earlier this week, the top court had adjourned the matter for a hearing on Friday and asked Deshmukh's legal counsel to provide a copy of the plea to the ED and the Maharashtra government.

Axis Bank sacks Manager who looted ICICI Bank, killed woman officer

Team Absolute | Palghar

In a scene out of a crime thriller, a debt-ridden Axis Bank Branch Manager allegedly committed an unsuccessful heist on an ICICI Bank branch, stabbed a woman deputy branch head to death, attempted to flee but was caught by locals, police said here on Friday.

The incident happened on Thursday around 8 p.m., after the close of banking hours at the ICICI Bank's Virar East Branch, when most staffers had left for the day, barring two women officers.

"The prime accused Anil Dubey -- the Naigaon Axis Bank Branch Manager, who is a former employee and ex-Manager of the ICICI Bank, has been arrested. There is no other person involved as of now," Virar Police Station Senior Police Inspector Suresh Warade told IANS.

Taking a serious note, the Axis Bank on Friday sacked Dubey from service and has launched an internal probe into the matter besides cooperating with the Palghar Police investigations. At the dark hour on Friday, Dubey drove down from Naigaon to the ICICI Bank Virar East branch, stepped inside, whipped out a sharp weapon and threatened the on-duty Deputy



Manager Yogita Nishant Choudhary and her cashier colleague Shraddha Devrukhkar.

He ordered them to hand over all the cash and jewellery which he dumped into a bag and attempted to flee the branch premises. Unwilling to give up without a fight, the two women started screaming for help and attempted to pin down Dubey who retaliated by attacking them both with the knife several times before breaking free to run out. By then, a few people from neighbouring shops had gathered who managed to grab hold of Dubey, took the booty-filled bag and kept it in the ATM cabin and summoned the police. On entering the branch, they witnessed the horrifying scene of Choudhary and Devrukhkar lying in

pools of blood with multiple stab wounds. Vartak, 36, who suffered gashes in the throat, shoulder and other parts of her body, succumbed to her injuries later.

Devrukhkar, 32, who was hit in the neck and shoulder, is undergoing treatment at a local hospital and further probe is on in the sensational case, said Warade. According to Warade, the accused Dubey had ostensibly run up huge debts of over Rs 1 crore and may have resorted to the shocking heist to clear off his dues, though details are not available. "As a responsible institution, Axis Bank has zero tolerance towards unscrupulous elements and is committed to fully cooperate with the relevant authorities in resolving this issue. We have taken strict disciplinary

action immediately," an official spokesperson told IANS.

Though ICICI Bank declined to comment on the issue, banking expert and Maharashtra State Bank Employees' Federation General Secretary Devidas Tuljapurkar termed it as "an unfortunate and unprecedented incident".

"The question that arises is whether the Axis Bank had taken the mandatory statement of assets & liabilities of the accused person before he was given a job, especially since he came from a competitive bank. The absence of the security guard outside ICICI Bank points to a larger conspiracy which must be probed thoroughly," Tuljapurkar told IANS.

Industry sources reveal that a banking professional with 15 years' experience, Dubey had worked in several private banks, including with ICICI Bank for 15 months, but had piled up massive debts, indulged in some high-finance property purchases, allegedly through some siphoned money and other irregularities. Though police kept mum, the accused had reportedly called up before going to the desolate branch where only the two women officers were busy tallying and winding up the month-end accounts data.

HC allows commercial suit of Rs 938cr against NSEL defaulter NK Proteins

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The National Spot Exchange Ltd (NSEL) has got a shot in the arm with the Bombay High Court converting its suit for recovery of Rs 937.89 crore against NK Proteins and others into a commercial suit which would ensure stringent procedural formalities for speedy disposal of the case against the defaulter.

In its order, the court came down very heavily on NSEL largest defaulter NK Proteins Group for opposing the conversion of a regular suit into a commercial suit.

The High Court observed that the present case fell under the definition of "Commercial Dispute" under the Commercial Courts Act, 2015, which requires urgent and quick resolution of the matter.

The court's ruling, on the application made by NSEL in September 2015, set the way for priority hearing that the Commercial Courts Act demands. Notably, the Commercial Courts Act contains extensive rules of procedure and provides for mechanisms for fast-tracking the matter. It sets strict timelines and endeavours to make attempts at delaying the suit exceedingly difficult and expensive. In a statement, the NSEL said the order



recorded opposition by defaulting entity as "benefit of substance" and "opposition for the sake of it".

"The High Court order is a major boost to NSEL's fight against defaulters and strengthens its efforts in recovering the defaulted money," it added.

NK Proteins Ltd is one of the largest defaulters in the Rs 5,600 crore NSEL payment default crisis with a liability of Rs of about Rs 935 crore.

Last week, an order by the Punjab and Haryana High paved the way for a criminal investigation against NSEL defaulter LOIL Group and an arrest of its owners Balbir Uppal and Janak Raj Singh for the recovery of Rs 720.31 crore. "NSEL is getting booked all the defaulters one-by-one under the law, who were let go scot-free by the then Forward Markets

Commission Chairman Ramesh Abhishek in 2013, in conspiracy with the then Additional Secretary in Department of Economic Affairs K.P. Krishnan and former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram," said the company. Pointing out that the NSEL payment default was an engineered crisis, the company said it was solvable, though it was not solved by then FMC Chairman Ramesh Abhishek who conspired with K.P. Krishnan and P.Chidambaram.

"Even though the Economic Offences Wing, Mumbai, had submitted its report, Ramesh Abhishek deliberately did not take any action against the defaulters and brokers. He let every broker and defaulter escape scot-free," NSEL alleged. Despite being unjustly targeted, it stated, NSEL had been continuously striving to recover the default amount from the 22 defaulting entities, which has resulted in obtaining the decree of Rs 3,364.71 crore and crystallisation of liability by the High Court Committee to the tune of over Rs 930 crore.

NSEL said the entire recovery process has been possible on account of its single-handed efforts and added that the Decrees were under execution at respective jurisdictions across India where it has achieved injunction or attachment in the Execution Proceedings as well.

Pune woman IPS officer's 'free biryani' order lands her in soup

Team Absolute | Pune

A Pune woman IPS officer's alleged instructions to an aide to arrange "free" biryani and other mouth-watering dishes has landed her in soup.

Taking strong note of a viral audio-clip on her culinary "order", Maharashtra Home Minister Dilip Walse-Patil has ordered a probe into the matter, even as the incident created ripples in officialdom.

Despite repeated attempts by IANS, the Pune police top brass and the Home Department officials were not available for comment.

In the undated video-clip, the officer is ostensibly heard ordering chicken biryani, mutton biryani for her husband who loves it, besides prawn masala, and some fried fish, through her unidentified orderly.

To a hesitant query by him



on payment, she is heard asking in an incredulous tone: "Do we have to pay for these things in our jurisdiction? You manage it or ask the beat cop to handle it... Do you want me to speak with him?" When the subordinate mumbled that such things are not the norm and offered to foot the bill in cash, the officer seemed in no mood to listen and repeated her sumptuous dinner order, which the former obediently

took down and promised to deliver.

Stung by the reactions to the audio-clip, Walse-Patil has asked Pune Police Commissioner Amitabh Gupta to submit a probe report and take action in the matter.

The Pune Cyber Cell is likely to check out the authenticity of the audio clip and ascertain whether it has been tampered with.

Bombay HC to resume partial physical, virtual hearings from Monday

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a significant move for lawyers and litigants, the Bombay High Court will re-start a hybrid system of physical and virtual hearings from August 2 in view of the improved Covid-19 situation in the state, officials said on Thursday.

The development follows a meeting of the Bombay HC Administrative Committee presided over by Chief Justice Dipankar Datta where it was decided to conduct three days of physical hearings and one day of virtual court hearings. In a statement, the Bombay Bar Association said that circulation of matters would be

via precipice sent by emails for the time being and mentioning on virtual platform would be also permitted. The Centre and Maharashtra government would chalk out the modalities to facilitate train travel by lawyers and other legal staff who are fully vaccinated on a monthly pass basis. However, litigants shall only be allowed inside the courtroom on if their presence is required by the court and the relevant instructions/SOPs for facilitating these new measures shall be issued in a couple of days. The decision is pursuant to the outcome of a meeting this week with the

BMC Commissioner IS Chahal and state government officials along with Law Department officers and members of various bar associations.

It was stated that due to the reducing number of Covid-19 daily positive cases couple with the increase in the numbers of people getting vaccinated, physical hearings could commence. After the outbreak of the second wave of the Covid-19, the Bombay High Court in Mumbai, and its benches at Aurangabad, Nagpur, and Goa have been conducting only virtual hearings since April, and mainly for urgent matters.

CHEF KAPOOR TO DISTRIBUTE 15K MEALS DAILY TO FLOOD VICTIMS

Mumbai: With many parts of Maharashtra getting badly affected by devastating floods, celebrated chef Sanjeev Kapoor, along with the World Central Kitchen (WCK) founded by chef Jose Andres and Taj Hotels, has launched an initiative to provide fresh-cooked meals in the flood-hit regions of Chiplun and Mahad.

The meal distribution drive started on Friday.

Talking about the initiative, Kapoor said, "Several areas in Maharashtra are flooded due to incessant rains, causing many people to lose their lives and homes. Chiplun and Mahad are such regions. People in these flood-ravaged areas do not even have food to meet their basic nutritional needs. We believe a small step forward in humanity can make a big difference in the lives of many. With our initiative, we are preparing high-quality meals to provide basic nutritional needs to these affected families. The mission is to feed as many flood-affected victims in these regions and beyond."

Maharashtra govt 'loves' lockdown: Raj Thackeray

"They (the government) are talking about the possibility of a third wave, but many people, small vendors and businesses have been affected by the lockdown and restrictions," he said.

Team Absolute | Pune

The Maharashtra government "loves" lockdown and is reluctant to take steps towards removing the coronavirus-induced restrictions, Maharashtra Navnirman Sena chief Raj Thackeray said here on Thursday.

Other states have already relaxed several restrictions, he said, speaking to reporters here.

"They (the government) are talking about the possibility of a third wave, but many people, small vendors and businesses have been affected by the lockdown and restrictions," he said.

"There is a book by (journalist) P Sainath, titled 'Everybody loves a good drought.' On those lines,



one can say the state loves lockdown," the MNS chief said.

On the floods in Konkan and Kolhapur region, Thackeray blamed the state government's 'faulty' planning. "Everywhere in the world, eight to ten hours before water is released from the dams there is a siren system to alert people. But it does not happen here," he said.

Pawar calls for structures that allow free flow of flood water underneath

Team Absolute | Pune

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on Friday said that residential structures in flood-prone areas should be built in such a way that they allow free flow of floodwater on the ground, which would avoid damage.

He was speaking after flagging off the first trial run of the Pune Metro rail on Vanaz-Ramwadi route.

Talking about the last week's flood situation in the Konkan region's Ratnagiri and Raigad districts as well as Kolhapur and Sangli districts of western Maharashtra, Pawar said, "Cities like Mahad (Raigad), Chiplun (Ratnagiri) face flood situation. If these areas witness floodwater reaching up to the level of 10 feet, then we would suggest that the residential structures



there should be elevated with columns of up to that height."

"This should be done in such a way that the floodwater flows smoothly underneath such structures without any restriction...This method of development can

be adopted in these areas," he said. Pawar also shared the examples of China and Germany, where floods caused large-scale damage, and said, "We need to take precautions to tackle such natural calamities." He added that the Maha Vikas

Aghadi (MVA) government in the state was taking measures to avoid damages due to such calamities in the future.

Sharing the progress of the Pune Metro rail project, the deputy CM said the Vanaz-Ramwadi route will start functioning by June 2022. On relaxing the COVID-19 restrictions in the state, Pawar said, "During a recent meeting, we discussed about easing curbs. This will be done in areas where the COVID-19 positivity rate is around one per cent. The deadline for operation on shops and other establishments could be extended from the present 4 pm to 8 pm in such areas. Also instead of complete closure of such units during the weekend, the restrictions will be relaxed on Saturdays, while the curbs would continue on Sundays."

Maoists Using Drones For Surveillance, Claim Maharashtra Police: Report

The drones being used by the Maoists are not advanced machines but are like those used for video shooting at weddings, senior police officer of Gadchiroli range Sandip Patil said.

Team Absolute | Nagpur

Maoists in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district are using drones to keep an eye on the movement of police, a senior official said on Friday.

Drones or unmanned aerial vehicles have been sighted near armed outposts and sub-police stations along the state's border with Chhattisgarh in the last few months, senior police officer of Gadchiroli range Sandip Patil told IANS.

The rebels use these devices for surveillance of police movement, he said. In the last two days, drones



were sighted at Pipripata area of Gondia district and Venkatapur in Gadchiroli district, he said.

The police are taking counter measures as per the Union government's standard operating procedure (SOP) to deal with such threat,

Mr Patil said. The drones being used by the Maoists are not advanced machines but are like those used for video shooting at weddings, he said.

As per the preliminary probe, they are being sourced from Hyderabad, he said.



EDITOR'S SPECS

Technology and tiger conservation efforts

Conservation efforts are on across the world to save tigers, but these big cats are facing unprecedented threats from exponential spurt in Internet users and encrypted messaging services available on mobile phones...

2,550-YEAR-OLD INSCRIPTION REVEALS MESOPOTAMIA'S ANCIENT FOOTPRINT ON ARABIAN PENINSULA

S.Ravi

An important inscription has been recovered in Saudi Arabia recently which assumes historical significance as it could shed light on the ancient ties and historical bonds between the Arabian Peninsula and its ancient neighbours, namely Mesopotamia.



The experts and scholars feel that these images are of religious significance. They are still trying to determine what exactly these etchings mean and signify and for that they are comparing it to other ones of similar nature that have been discovered earlier.

The inscription was found. It was discovered in the town of Al Hait, which in the past used to be known as Fadak. According to Jarus, Al Hait is home to the ruins of fortresses, rock art and water installations.

before his rule was finished when the kingdom fell to Cyrus of Persia, according to Arab News report. When the Babylonian Empire was its zenith, it was spread out from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea.

Fear and anxiety dominates Chinese foreign policy

The Chinese have been pursuing an aggressive foreign policy aided and abetted by the 'Wolf Warrior' diplomats of the country's Foreign Ministry across the world.

leadership. An element of accommodation, appreciation and pragmatic approach should form part of the foreign policy narrative of a mature and confident nation such as China.

(MCC) deal between Kathmandu and Washington, wherein the Himalayan nation is to get \$500 million worth aid. While the entire objective of the MCC is to ensure infrastructure development and economic upliftment of a struggling nation, the Chinese have construed the aid as part of the Indo-Pacific strategy and have linked the same to an intended military venture by the Indians and the Americans in Nepal.

reacting to every activity relating to the Quad and any statement made by members of the Quad pointing to strengthening of the entity. The Chinese have reacted to the statement made by the visiting US Secretary of State Blinken on the Quad.

indicates a hollowness in their foreign policy approach. Most significantly, as a result of these highly reactive behavioural tendencies, China has actually exposed its sore points enabling the global community to play on these nodes to either irritate China or to calibrate their policies towards China.

international

KIM JONG-UN ASKS MILITARY TO PREPARE FOR COPING WITH ANY PROVOCATION

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has instructed the country's military to complete preparations for coping with "any military provocation of enemies", a state media report said on Friday.

According to the report by Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), Kim made the remarks while when chairing a workshop for military commanders and political cadres in here on July 24-27.



all work, and find ways to overcome shortcomings and deviations and exchange good experiences, Xinhua news agency reported citing the KCNA report as saying.

PHILIPPINES EXTENDS TRAVEL BAN TO INDIA, 9 OTHER NATIONS

Manila: The Philippines has extended an ongoing travel ban for all inbound travellers from India and nine other countries from August 1 to 15 to prevent the spread of the highly infectious Covid-19 Delta variant, presidential spokesperson Harry Roque said on Friday.

Pentagon issues vax mandate following Biden's order

The US Department of Defense (DoD) has issued a mandate requiring members of the military to provide a proof of their vaccination status or be subject to strict safety protocols aimed at curbing the spread of Covid-19, hours after President Joe Biden announced the requirements for all federal workers.



every federal government employee and the onsite contractor should attest to their vaccination status, or they will be required to wear a mask on the job, comply with a regular screening testing requirement, and be subject to restrictions on official travel, reports Xinhua news agency.

ed the Pentagon to look into adding the Covid-19 shot to its list of required vaccinations for members of the military. In response to the presidential directive, Brown said in the statement that Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin will "begin consulting our medical professionals, as well as the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to determine how and when to make recommendations to the President with respect to adding the Covid-19 vaccines to the full list of requirements for military personnel".

New dawn to usher under Deuba's leadership

The restoration of Nepal's dissolved lower house of Parliament by the Supreme Court and Sher Bahadur Deuba becoming the Prime Minister for the fifth term by winning the trust vote by a comfortable margin, has finally helped the Nepalese to heave a sigh of relief.

Nepal under the Prime Minister-ship of KP Sharma Oli had been occupying the international headlines for all the wrong reasons and the Himalayan nation plunged into uncertainties and political instability.



The MoUs largely helped in reconstruction of Nepal that was badly hit by an earthquake in 2015. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was among the first to congratulate Deuba after he won the confidence vote is a clear cut indication that the unique and millennia-old people-to-people linkages that underpin the special friendship between the two countries would take greater heights.

Modi has also assured of supply of Covid-19 vaccines. It is expected that the supply of one million doses of vaccines from India which was stalled, will soon resume. Deuba's diplomatic and political statements, including the one when he visited India in 2017 as the Prime Minister, proved his maturity in regard to how to maintain a balanced ties with both India and China.

Similarly MoUs on implementation of reconstruction packages in the education sector, cultural heritage sector and in the health sector in Nepal, were the testimony of how Deuba was a pragmatic leader who could easily visualise the issues and prioritize them.

Covid infection from banknotes, coins unlikely: Study

While the fear of getting Covid infection from banknotes and coins has driven much more contactless payments during the pandemic, researchers say the risk is far too less. Experts at the European Central Bank, in collaboration with researchers at Ruhr-Universität Bochum in Germany, wanted to clarify how long do coronaviruses remain infectious on banknotes and coins?





My youngest child is transgender: Jamie Lee Curtis

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Jamie Lee Curtis has talked about her transgender daughter and said that she "watched in wonder and pride" as her son became her daughter Ruby. In an interview to AARP The Magazine, the 62-year-old actress, who is married to Christopher Guest, opened up about Ruby, reports people.com. Describing her life as a "constant metamorphosis", Curtis shared that Ruby, 25, works as a computer gaming editor while her oldest child, 34-year-old daughter Annie, is currently married and works as a dance instructor. Ruby and her fiancé now have plans to get married next year during a wedding that the actress will officiate.

Curtis doesn't currently have any grandchildren between her two kids, she said that she and Guest "do hope to" have them sometime soon. The actress also spoke about her family life and how she still feels most at home wherever her husband is.

"I feel safe when I drive up and see that (he is) home. That's the long marriage. It's the safety of knowing his car is in the garage, that I'm not alone."

The couple, who tied the knot in 1984, will celebrate 37 years of marriage this December.



SINGAPORE RAPPER YUNG RAJA'S 'SPICE BOY' ODE TO RAJINIKANTH

Singapore | Agencies

Singaporean rapper Yung Raja revealed his brand-new single "Spice Boy", paying an ode to superstar Rajinikanth.

The 26-year-old bilingual rapper said: "Rajinikanth has been my idol all through my growing-up years. He's such a legend world over."

"I wanted to give an ode of sorts to him and celebrate his supremacy in my music video and for as long as I'm creating, I'll look back to the moments he has given me as inspiration - his style mainly, and as inimitable as it is, I belong to the generation of fans that have his swagger permanently etched in our

minds." The three-minute cinematic video is fused together by madcap action, curly wigs, inflated sumo costumes, and disorienting close-ups.

All of this is captured by Vadbibes director Jas Tan with a carefree sense of the surreal and produced by Flightsch and RIIDEM. Comical antics are set in formidable locations looking straight out of Christopher Nolan films, but

Yung Raja takes centre stage by invoking the brash spirit of Rajinikanth's characters. Yung started his career in 2018 with his single

"Poori Gang" and went on to become Southeast Asia's rising hip-hop artist with "Mustafa", "Mad Blessings", "The Dance Song". His recent track "Mami" recently got featured on the American late-night talk show "The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon". His latest single "Spice Boy" tries to break free from homogenous expectations of popular culture.

CAN'T MATCH THE ROCK



Jack Whitehall suffered injury while exercising with Dwayne Johnson

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor Jack Whitehall dislocated a rib working out with Hollywood star and his "Jungle Cruise" co-star, Dwayne Johnson. Whitehall and

Johnson exercised together while working on the film, which is based on the Disney ride "Jungle Cruise" and he suffered a nasty injury, reports aceshowbiz.com. "The Rock has his own gym that travels around with him called the Iron Paradise. I was invited in. It's a very sacry space and very few are allowed in. I went on one exercise bike he had in the gym and he was doing the lifty one with a big chain around his neck," Whitehall told the "Private Parts" podcast. The British actor managed to dislocate his rib while on the bike, as he shared on Instagram at the time.

"I pop on an exercise bike for twenty minutes and end up in Hospital with a

dislocated rib. Doctor asked if I was in an unnatural position. Indeed - the TV monitor had the movie 50 First Dates on and I was craning forward to read the subtitles," he had written. Whitehall added: "X-Ray, two shots, trip to a chiropractor and a sports massage later and it looks like I will survive." Despite the injury, Whitehall is still trying to copy Johnson's muscles. "I am trying to cut down on carbs. I have got a personal trainer and I am trying to get in shape," he added. "Jungle Cruise" also stars Emily Blunt, Edgar Ramirez, Jesse Plemons, and Paul Giamatti and is keenly awaited as it ignites similar emotions like the 1997 hit "Anaconda".

'I'm shocked by his behaviour'

London | Agencies

Lucinda Strafford has laid into former Love Island co-star Liam Reardon for kissing girls behind best pal Millie Court's back. The Islander, 21, told MailOnline she's 'shocked' by Liam's behaviour after he was intimate and shared a bed with Lillie Haynes, 22, despite his connection with Millie, 24, during his stint in rival villa Casa Amor. In an exclusive interview, Lucinda revealed Millie 'really likes' Liam and she'll be devastated if he betrays her, while insisting Hugo Hammond, 24, is a 'lovely, kind-hearted guy.'

She said: 'Millie is my absolute girl in there and she and Liam were going amazingly and were so strong when I left but since Casa Amor I am praying, I am keeping everything crossed that Liam does not leave Millie. I am shocked by his behaviour. Jake and Teddy stayed outside, and Liam slept in a bed with Lillie... I know Millie really likes Liam and I really hope they don't break up to be honest. They were like my mum and dad in there.'

Love Island's Lucinda Strafford lays into Liam Reardon for kissing girls behind best pal Millie Court's back and is adamant Hugo Hammond is a catch



LOVE IN THE AIR, EVERYWHERE

Los Angeles | Agencies

They've been cruising around Europe on a \$130million yacht for her luxury 52nd birthday trip.

And Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck, 48, could not keep their hands off each other as they enjoyed a very steamy dinner date during their romantic stop in Nerano, Italy, on Wednesday. The singer beamed a smile as she perched on her hunky beau's lap during the meal at Le Scoglio and shared passionate kisses while still sitting at the table.

Jennifer, who looked sensational in a red and white striped shirt, was full of smiles and struggled to hide her delight as she wrapped an arm around the actor and lovingly gazed into his eyes. Jennifer wore an elegant ensemble for the dinner, opting for a ab-flashing crop top and wide-leg white trousers.

She tied her caramel tresses back into a chic up-do, letting the front of her locks fall down to frame her pretty features, but being careful not to have too much hair in the way of any passionate kisses from Ben.

'FACE THE TRIAL'

Shakira appears on Lorraine but there is no mention of singer's £13million tax evasion scandal after judge rules she must face trial in Spain over claim

London | Agencies

On Thursday, a judge concluded there are 'sufficient indications' for her to go to trial for allegedly avoiding the payment of 14.5 million euros, according to Euro Weekly.

And on Friday, Shakira, 44, appeared on ITV's Lorraine but there was no mention of singer's £13million tax evasion scandal, just a day after Spanish prosecutors accused her of six offences, which could

result in jail time if she is convicted. Instead of being grilled about the situation, the Colombian superstar opened up about motherhood, making music and her passion for surfing, while promoting new single Don't Wait Up.

20 years since her first hit single Whenever Wherever, stormed the charts and catapulted her to worldwide fame, Shakira has been on UK television to celebrate.

Speaking via videolink to Ross King, the

singer enthused about being able to resume making music after lockdown, admitting: 'It was hard to make music [during lockdown], being isolated from everybody.'

'But now that it is a little safer to be in a room with collaborators, I'm seizing the opportunity and I feel like a horse that's running wild after being for so long in a box.' The fitness fanatic also insisted: 'I surf for real' when asked if she had a stunt double for her new music video.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Jasmine Tookes

OLYMPICS ROUNDUP: LOVLINA ASSURES MEDAL, SINDHU LIGHTS UP GLOOMY DAY

Tokyo | Agencies

Lovlina Borgohain on Friday assured India a medal from the Olympic Games boxing ring when she stormed into the semi-finals of the welterweight (69 kg) while PV



beating the higher-ranked Ireland 1-0, only their third win ever in India's third appearance at the Olympics. They now have to beat South Africa in their final league match on Saturday and hope Ireland lose to Great Britain to finish fourth in the group and secure a place in the quarterfinals.

Apart from these performances, Friday was otherwise a disappointing day for India as archer Deepika Kumari crashed out, losing tamely to South Korea's An San. Deepika had reached the quarters by beating Russia's Ksenia Perova in a shoot-off.

The day, however, belonged to Lovlina, the 16-year-old from Assam who had outplayed 2018 world champion Chen Nien-Chin of Chinese Taipei, a boxer to whom she has lost three times. Lovlina boxed with aggression and without fear as she dominated Chen to

Sindhu remained on course for a medal in badminton by authoritatively marching into the last-four stage by putting it across a tough Japanese opponent.

The men's hockey team defeated hosts Japan 5-3 for their third successive win and finished second in their pool for the first time since 1972 when they reached the semi-finals the last time at the Olympics. Friday's win set up a quarterfinal clash with Great Britain, the team that proved the stumbling block in 2008 when India failed to qualify for the Olympics for the first time since 1928.

The women's hockey team kept alive its hopes of making it to the quarterfinals by



emerge 4-1 winner and assure India another medal to add to the silver bagged by



weightlifter Mirabai Chanu on July 24.

Lovlina will meet Surmeneli Busenaz of Turkey in the semi-finals on August 4 and a victory will assure her of at least a silver.

Sindhu, the 2016 Olympics silver medallist, has emerged as the lone flagbearer of Indian badminton in Tokyo after three other shuttlers crashed out in the group stage. On Friday, she came up with one of her best performances against a dangerous opponent in Akane Yamaguchi of Japan, the fourth seed, and outfoxed her for a straight games victory, 21-13,



22-20. Sindhu used her deceptive shots and superior net play to dominate the Japanese in the first game. Though Akane launched a superb fightback in the second set, Sindhu won four successive points from 18-20 to emerge a winner. Sindhu will now take on



world No 1 Tai Tzu-Ying of Chinese Taipei in the semi-finals.

There were disappointments galore as athletics competitions started with none of the Indians getting past their preliminary round heats. In women's 100m, Dutee Chand finished seventh in her heat with 11.54 seconds; in 400m hurdles, MP Jabir finished seventh in her heat with a below-par effort, while the much-touted 4x400m mixed relay team finished eighth and last in heats.

Steeplechase Avinash Sable was the only bright spot on an otherwise gloomy day in track and field as he bettered his own national record by clocking 8:18.12. He finished seventh in his heat and failed by 0.81 seconds to make it to the next stage.

In sailing, first-timers Nethra Kumanan and Vishnu Saravanan failed to make it to the final in laser radial and laser standard class respectively. Nethra finished 35th overall while Saravanan ended 20th in laser standard.

China's Ma wins unprecedented back-to-back Olympic singles titles

Tokyo: China's Ma Long on Friday became the first male table tennis player to win back-to-back Olympic singles titles after outclassing world No.1 and teammate Fan Zhendong 4-2 in the final here on Friday. Ma won the duel 11-4, 10-12, 11-8, 11-9, 3-11, 11-7 in front of International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach at the Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium, reports Xinhua. It's the third straight final contested between the Chinese duo in major events, after the ITTF World Cup and the ITTF Finals in November. They won one title each in the previous two clashes. In an earlier match, Germany's Dimitrij Ovtcharov bagged bronze after beating Lin Yun-Ju of Chinese Taipei in a seven-set thriller.



Vitalina wins 25m pistol gold as Manu, Rahi challenge ends in qualification

Tokyo | Agencies

Russian shooter Vitalina Batsarashkina defeated Kim Min-jung of South Korea in a shoot-off to win the women's 25m pistol gold at the Asaka Shooting Range here on Friday, even as India's Manu Bhaker and Rahi Sarnobat got eliminated in qualification, finishing 15th and 32nd respectively.

Both Vitalina and Kim had 38 hits in the final, but Kim made only one shot in the decisive shoot-off set, while Vitalina hit four for the gold. This is the third medal and second gold for the 24-year-old Vitalina, who triumphed in 10m air pistol and bagged silver in the mixed team event earlier this week. She thus became the first female shooter to claim more than two medals at the same Olympic Games. China's Xiao Jiaruixuan survived the shootoff round twice to take a bronze. At the age of 19 years and 56 days,



she became the youngest Olympic medallist in women's 25m pistol. Defending champion Anna Korakaki of Greece finished sixth.

Earlier, India's Manu Bhaker and experienced Rahi Sarnobat bowed out of the event

on Friday after finishing 15th and 32nd respectively following two days of qualification. This was the Indian pistol shooters' final event at Tokyo 2020. India's gold drought in shooting, which started at the 2016 Rio Olympics, has continued in Tokyo so far and only a few events are left for the country's shooters to salvage their pride.

Only the top-eight from the qualifying round made it to the eight-shooter finals.

Bulgaria's Antoaneta Kostadinova, the silver medallist in women's 10m air pistol, topped the qualifying with 590 points, followed by China's Xiao Jiaruixuan and ROC's Vitalina Batsarashkina. South Korea's Minjung Kim was the eighth shooter to make the final cut. Manu and Rahi's exit has ended the Indian pistol shooters' campaign at the Olympics. Any medal hopes for India in shooting now rests on the men's and women's 50m rifle 3 positions shooters.

CROATIANS MEKTIĆ-PAVIĆ WIN MEN'S TENNIS DOUBLES GOLD

Tokyo:

Croatia's Nikola Mektić and Mate Pavić got past compatriots Marin Cilic and Ivan Dodig to claim the men's tennis doubles gold medal at the Tokyo Olympic Games here on Friday.

Mektić and Pavić took away the first set 6-4. After Cilic-Dodig levelled the score at 6-3, Mektić-Pavić emerged victorious in the deciding set at 10-6, reports Xinhua.

The bronze medal went to Marcus Daniell and Michael Venus, as they defeated Americans Austin Krajicek and Tenny Sandgren 7-6(3), 6-2 to capture an historic first Olympic tennis medal for New Zealand.



Tennis: Zverev ends Djokovic's Golden Slam dream in semifinal

Tokyo | Agencies

World No. 1 Novak Djokovic's dream of a Golden Slam came to an end as world No. 4 Alexander Zverev of Germany defeated the Serbian in the semifinals of the men's singles tennis competition at the Tokyo Olympics on Friday.

The Serbian had clinched the first set 6-1. But his German opponent made a strong comeback to win the next two sets 6-3, 6-1 in a match which lasted two hours and three minutes under the sweltering heat at the Ariake Tennis Park.

It is the first time Zverev has beaten Djokovic since 2018, when the German



overcame the Serbian in the final of the ATP Finals tournament in London. With this win, Zverev will now face world No. 12 Karen Khachanov of the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) in the gold-medal match.

Djokovic had been aiming to become the first man to

win all four majors and Olympic gold in the same calendar year. Friday's loss to Zverev means that he can't match the feat Steffi Graf achieved in 1988. He now moves into the bronze-medal match against Pablo Carreno Busta of Spain on Saturday.

They have to keep improving and getting better: Dravid

Colombo | Agencies

Indian head coach Rahul Dravid has said that he was not disappointed by the performance of the young batsmen in the T20I series against Sri Lanka. He believed that the youngsters have to keep getting better in future. In Thursday's decider at the R Premadasa Stadium, India managed to get just 81 in the first innings. Sri Lanka chased 82 with seven wickets in hand. "I'm not disappointed. They are young batters; they have to keep improving and getting better. The Sri Lankan team's bowling attack is their international bowling attack. They're missing a few batsmen because of various reasons, but this is a top-quality attack. So, it's a great opportunity to reflect on these performances, reflect on these conditions, and maybe come up with some slightly better strategies," said Dravid in the post-match press conference. Apart from skipper Shikhar Dhawan, India had just four batsmen for the last two T20Is in Ruturaj Gaikwad, Devdutt Padikkal, Sanju Samson and Nitish Rana. Among the four, Samson had the most experience with just seven T20Is.

Test series vs India: Stokes withdraws to attend to mental health

London | Agencies

England all-rounder Ben Stokes has withdrawn from the Test squad for the forthcoming series against India due to concerns over his mental health and injured finger, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said on Friday.

The Test series begins on August 4 in Nottingham. "Stokes has withdrawn from England's Test squad ahead of the Test series against India starting next week to prioritise his mental wellbeing and to rest his left index finger, which has not fully healed since his return to competitive cricket earlier this month," said the ECB statement.

"The ECB can confirm that England men's all-rounder Ben Stokes will take an indefinite break from all cricket with immediate effect," the ECB added in a statement.

Stokes, who had fractured his left index finger during the Indian Premier League (IPL) and had withdrawn from it, had taken rest from cricket.

Post-surgery, Stokes was called upon by his county Durham to feature in T20 Blast matches. He played six T20 Blast matches. The all-rounder was



not scheduled to play the limited-overs series against Pakistan in but had to be called upon to lead after seven Covid-19 cases in the regular team forced the entire squad into self-isolation.

Although England won the ODIs against Pakistan 3-0 this month, Stokes confessed to have played with great pain.

The ECB said it supports Stokes's decision to withdraw from the series against India for an indefinite break.

REALITY TAKES TIME TO SINK INTO 'MAGNIFICENT MARY'

Tokyo | Agencies

MC. Mary Kom, the six-time world champion and 2012 Olympic bronze-medallist, bowed out of Tokyo Olympics gracefully though in disbelief after losing to Colombia's Ingrid Valencia in a closely-contested pre-quarter final bout on Thursday. The 38-year-old forced her hand up as soon as the referee raised Ingrid's and in a show of sportsmanship, hugged her opponent after what may be her last bout at the quadrennial Games.

Though she managed to keep her emotions in check in the ring as she congratulated her opponent, the reality of the end of an Olympic career sank in only after she had reached the doping centre.

"When I reached the doping centre, I could not believe that I have lost," Mary Kom told India Today channel. The coach con-

soled her saying that she fought well and should have been the winner of the close bout which she had lost 2-3.

"My coach explained to me that you have won. And then I saw social media (where people praised her and said she should have won the bout), and I was in shock and was upset. In my fight, such [close] decisions do take place. What do I say? I can't protest," she added. The boxing competition in Tokyo is being run by the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) Boxing Task Force after the International Boxing Association (AIBA) was suspended in 2019 for alleged mismanagement and financial wrongdoing.

Mary Kom, 38, who had beaten the Colombian opponent twice before, including in the quarterfinal of the World Championships in 2019, lost the first round as Ingrid was quick to take advantage.

The 32-year-old Colombian, who had won



the bronze at the 2016 Rio Olympics, took 10 points each from four of the five judges in the first round, unlike the 2012 Olympic bronze medallist Ingrid, who could earn 10 from only one judge.

That first round clearly weighed heavily against Mary Kom as the remaining two rounds were won by her by the thinnest of margins. Mary Kom managed 10 points each from three judges in the second and third rounds while two judges gave 10 to Ingrid in those rounds.

But due to Ingrid's big advantage in the first round, the result expectedly went against the Indian boxer.

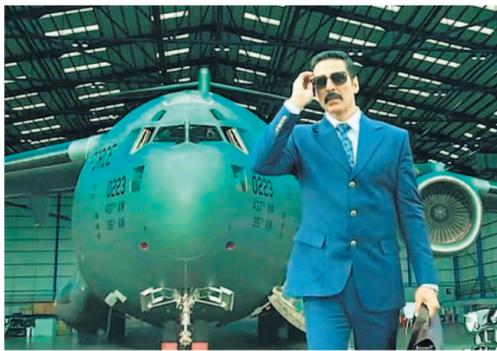
The loss brought to an end to a glittering career for the boxer who has earned multiple adjectives against her name, 'Magnificent Mary' being the most popular among them. She is also known as 'India's Ageless Wonder'.

ODISHA FC SIGNS ISL TITLE WINNER JAVI HERNANDEZ

Bhubaneswar: Odisha FC on Friday announce the signing of Spanish attacking midfielder Javi Hernandez ahead of the eighth edition of the Indian Super League (ISL). Hernandez has an experience of playing 37 matches in the ISL and even scored two goals in the final of the 2019-20 season against



Chennaiyin FC. He has also represented the Spanish U-19 national team. After his youth career at CDF Pizarrales, Salamanca and Real Madrid, the Spaniard made his senior debut for Real Madrid B. After playing for various Spanish clubs, the 32-year-old footballer joined Romanian professional club ACS Poli Timisoara. Hernandez also played professional football in Poland and Azerbaijan before signing for ATK in 2019. After winning the title with the Kolkata-based side, he was retained by the newly-formed ATK Mohun Bagan in 2020.



'Bellbottom' release date announced

Pooja Entertainment's espionage biggie 'Bellbottom', to hit BIG screens on August 19

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The big conversation starter in the film industry today is that Akshay Kumar has announced the release date of his eagerly-awaited 'Bellbottom.' He took to social media in style to announce the release date of Bellbottom-unleashing a ripple of excitement across trade circles. The film will now hit the BIG screens on August

19 and industry watchers hope this espionage epic will bring audiences back to experience the thrill of cinema in all its glory. Headlined by Akshay Kumar, the film also stars Vaani Kapoor, Lara Dutta, and Huma Qureshi and is directed by Ranjit M Tewari and produced by Vashu Bhagnani, Jacky Bhagnani, Deepshikha Deshmukh, Monisha Advani, Madhu Bhojwani, and Nikkhil Advani. This Pooja Entertainment production recreates

the eighties and its teasers have excited viewers with its near-perfect detailing and retro vibe. A tidal wave of relief seems to have hit trade circles after the release date was announced as the film is expected to banish the accumulated gloom of the past two years from theatres. Fans are already saving the date to savour this joyride of a lifetime and to relive all the magic, nostalgia and excitement of going to the movies again.



Every character teaches her something, says Vidya Balan

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Actress Vidya Balan, who has always wowed the audience with her power-packed performances and strong roles, has

opened up about how each character she has portrayed till now has educated and changed something for her. Ever since she made her Bollywood debut with "Parineeta" in 2005, Vidya has treated fans with her dynamic portrayals in films such as "Bhool Bhulaiyaa", "No One Killed Jessica", "The Dirty Picture", "Paa", "Kahaani", "Ishqiya", "Mission Mangal", "Tumhari Sulu" and "Shakuntala Devi". Her latest release is "Sherni", where she plays an upright forest officer battling social barriers set by the patriarchal society and lackadaisical attitudes within her department. Asked if she takes back anything from her character or if they educate her in any way, Vidya told IANS: "Yeah absolutely. It's like you always take back something after you have an interaction with another individual. It's the same. You live this person's life for one and a half months or two or maybe more because you start prep before that."

The 42-year-old actress says it is difficult not getting impacted by a character. "So, I almost stay with one character for at least four months. So, it's difficult not to let that character impact you. I feel sometimes, you can articulate how the characters touched your life or changed you and sometimes you can't but there is always it changes for me," she concluded.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Drashti Dhami's first look from the upcoming epic period drama "The Empire" was unveiled on Friday. The actress said that it reflects royalty and also allows her to shapeshift into the warrior she can be. Drashti will be seen making her digital debut as she plays a warrior

Drashti Dhami: My look in 'The Empire' reflects royalty

princess for the first time in her acting career. Talking about her look in her digital debut, Drashti said: "I have played a myriad characters in my years in television but this is a first for me. My look in The Empire reflects royalty but also allows me to shapeshift into the warrior that she can be. Every look test was a thrilling experience that helped me understand her even more." Created by director Nikkhil Advani of Emmay Entertainment, "The Empire" traces the beginning of a dynasty. Co-directed by Mitakshara Kumar and produced by Monisha Advani and Madhu Bhojwani, "The Empire" will release soon only on Disney+ Hotstar.



MY RELATIONSHIP WITH FOOD HAS EVOLVED OVER TIME: BHUMI PEDNEKAR

Arundhuti Banerjee | Mumbai

From gaining 12 kgs for her debut film 'Dum Laga Ke Haisha' to losing all the extra pounds for her next film 'Toilet: Ek Prem Katha' and changing her shape with her each film, actress Bhumi Pednekar is on a long journey with food and healthy diet. As the actress recently tried her hand at cooking pasta for a digital food show, Bhumi opens up on her best food destination, memories and why her relationship with food is a crucial part of who she is. Bhumi will appear in the finale episode of 'You Got Chef'd - Season 3' that releases on Gobble, the lifestyle channel of Pocket Aces, as well as on YouTube.

Sharing her cooking experience Bhumi told reporter: "Well it was a virtual episode in which I cooked with Chef Ranveer Brar and I must say that even though I thought cooking is such a tough task, if you are guided right, it actually is not! I am not a cook at all, I am a super foodie! But when I started cooking the pasta, of course, the chef guided me, but I ended up making a portion of good pasta. I think I am not as bad a cook as I assumed I am. We cooked pasta as the theme of the episode was Italian food memory, it was delicious. Can I say this, that combination of few things could never go wrong, and our pasta was one of such things. We cooked a portion of pasta in butter, garlic, mushroom and asparagus sauce...it was mouthwatering! I must say that pasta is one of the versatile dishes, with so many easy tasty combinations that if you learn to cook one of them, trust me, you could impress all your friends and family with one meal of pasta! I was so excited when eventually I made it...yessss!! (she laughs)"

'Excited and Nervous' for 'Rudra'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Raashii Khanna, known for her work in Telugu films, has started shooting for the Hindi webseries 'Rudra: The Edge of Darkness'. She is thrilled to finally start the shoot here. Directed by Rajesh Mapuskar, 'Rudra- The Edge of Darkness' also stars Ajay Devgn, Atul Kulkarni, Esha Deol, Ashwini Kalsekar and Ashish Vidyarthi. The web show is the Indian adaptation of the British show - 'Luther'. Talking about starting the shoot, Raashii tells reporter: "I am really excited and nervous at the same time. It's something I am really looking forward to." Besides this, Raashii will be seen in Raj and D.K.'s next webseries alongside Shahid Kapoor, Tamil films 'Aranmanai 3', 'Methavi', Telugu film 'Thank You', and Malayalam film 'Bhramam'.

VIJAY VARMA: SUPER COOL AND STYLISH

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Vijay Varma is one of the 'coolest' and most talented actors of the industry, keeping his fans entertained with his uber cool style and witty humour on social media. He treated his fans with some super fashionable pictures recently. Taking to his social media Vijay shared photos in a trendy outfit, as he made a reference to his character Moeen Bhai from Gully Boy in captions as he gave a tribute to hip hop writing, "For all the love I have for hip hop my only contribution is meagre Wade Wade Wow Wow. Sigh" As he made a tribute to the hip hop legend, Eminem in his recent posts, Vijay now shared pictures in a black t-shirt and black jacket and a turned black cap with blue jeans as he dropped the coolest poses on a black couch, inspired by Eminem while he topped the look with light black sneakers and a cool chain.



INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Zareen Khan