For Generation Ace

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THAT RS 20L-CR PANDEMIC PACKAGE EXPIRES, BEQUEATHING @ 15% AS 'LOANS'!

It's official. The much-touted Rs 20-Lakh-crore special pandemic package, announced in May 2020 to revive the Covid-hit economy, was apparently a dud, according to reply under RTI released here on Wednesday. Hoping to unravel the exact benefits of the historic financial package after its validity ended in March 2021, a Pune businessman Prafful Sarda filed a query under RTI, but after over four months, got a shocking reply from the Centre.

- *Interestingly, the Centre had earlier said that under the same package, an Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme was introduced till October 31, 2020, or till the Rs 3-LCr sanctioned under it was exhausted, but even under that by December 2020, the government disbursed only Rs 1.20-LCr (@ 40 per cent) as 'loans' to various states.*
- *Referring to past instances, Sarda wondered whether "the Finance Ministry will now reveal some new data" to overturn its own RTI reply (Aug 10, 2021), issued by an authority, Sumit Agrawal, the CPIO and Assistant Director, Public Finance State Division.*

Quaid Najmi | Pune

The Centre has said that in view of the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic, "additional borrowing limit of up to 2 per cent GSDP was allowed to the state" under the 'Atmanirbhar Package' for the year 2020-2021.

Accordingly, under this head, the Centre permitted states to make 'additional borrowings amounting to Rs 319,939-crore during the fiscal 2020-2021, the RTI response said.

Sarda pointed out that this innocuously-worded 'additional borrowings' are repayable sometime in the future, maybe with interest and this comes to Rs 24 per head loan on each Indian, against the promised Rs 150 per Indian under the total (Rs 20-LCr.) package. "If that's so, then what about the so-called 'stimulus package' that was announced with much fanfare by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman? When the intention was to allow only 'additional borrowings', states could have anyways done it without the green signal from Centre, Sarda said.

Moreover, he argued that out of the total Rs 20-LCr, package, even under the garb of 'additional borrowings', barely 15 per cent has actually been given, so what is the fate of the remainder of the 'Atmanirbhar Package', lauded by Prime Minister Narendra Modi repeatedly."The major question is where is the remaining amount of the Rs 17-LCr, over a year after it was announced and nearly six months after the grandiose scheme ended. Was this another mega-jumla (fraud) on the Indians," Sarda asked pointedly.

- Of this (Rs 319,939-crore), the states which availed the highest 'additional borrowings' are: Maharashtra (Rs 30,788-crore), Uttar Pradesh (Rs 29,108-crore), Tamil Nadu (Rs 28,880-crore), Karnataka (Rs 27,955-crore), Gujarat (Rs 26,112-crore), and Rajasthan (Rs 21,301-crore) in the upper bracket.
- State like Andhra Pradesh (Rs 19,192-crore), Kerala (Rs 18,087-crore), Madhya Pradesh (Rs 18,034-crore), Telangana (Rs 17,558-crore), West Bengal (Rs 13,574-crore), Haryana (Rs 12,878-crore), and Punjab (Rs 10,917-crore) - are in the middle bracket.
- Rest include: Odisha (Rs 9,716-crore), Bihar (Rs 7,754-crore), Uttarakhand (Rs 5,617-crore), Assam (Rs 5,418-crore), Chhattisgarh (Rs 5,374-crore), Jharkhand (Rs 3,530-crore), Himachal Pradesh (Rs 2,892-crore), Goa (Rs 1,738-crore), Tripura (Rs 1,127-crore) fall in the lower bracket.
- Incidentally, all the smaller states of north-east dared to avail 'additional borrowings' of less than Rs 1-K-crore: Meghalaya (Rs 542-crore), Manipur (Rs 497-crore), Arunachal Pradesh (Rs 399-crore), Sikkim (Rs 373-crore), Nagaland (Rs 314-crore), Mizoram (Rs 264-crore) totaling to just Rs 2,389-crore.

10 killed, 25 feared trapped in massive Himachal landslide

The authorities suspect a truck, a state roadways bus, and other vehicles were buried in the landslide that occurred over a 60-70 metre stretch of the Shimla-Reckong Peo highway near Nigulsari, some 180 km from the state capital. The bus has not been traced yet, Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) PRO told the media.

SHIMLA | Agencies

At least 10 people were killed in a massive landslide on National Highway 5 in challenging terrain of Himachal Pradesh's Kinnaur district on Wednesday, while 13 others were extricated as rescue operations were launched to retrieve over 25 people feared trapped in the debris, police said.

"The terrain is really tough. The main cause of the concern is that the bus has not been traced yet. There were more than 20 people in the bus. And the only worry is that the bus may have rolled into a 300-feet deep gorge and fallen into the Satluj river," ITBP PRO said.

"All other four vehicles were (buried) at the site... right now it is very difficult to tell anything about the number of casualties." He added.

Besides the ITBP, local authorities, the Army and the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) are involved in rescue operations, which is likely to continue in the night also.The Himachal Road Transport Corporation bus was on its way to Hardwar from Rekong Peo via Shimla.

Relatives of missing bus passengers approached the local authorities to know about their whereabouts. Most of the victims belong to nearby villages.A statement by the state emergency operation centre said one Tata Sumo was recovered from the debris and eight bodies found in it. Around 25-30 people are still buried under the boulders.Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah spoke to Chief Minister of state and assured him of all possible help. This is the second major natural disaster in Kinnaur in less than a month.

Gold smuggling prime accused Swapna now claims forex sent to Vijayan in UAE

KOCHI | Agencies

In what could spell further trouble for Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, gold smuggling case prime accused Swapna Suresh has alleged that a packet of foreign currency was sent to him while he was on a visit to the UAE in 2017, through a diplomat of its Consul General's office here.

Her allegation came in response to a show cause notice issued by the Customs to her on the issue of illegal export of dollars abroad.The show cause notice, dated July 29 and surfacing in the media on Wednesday, has statements of Swapna Suresh and others. According to it, Swapna, asked who were all these senior politicians she has accused, replied that present Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and then Assembly Speaker P. Sreeramakrishnan had sent foreign currency to the UAE through Ahmed Al Doukhi, a diplomat of the Consul General Office, and Consul General, Jamal Al Zaabi, respectively.

'WHY CREATE POSTS...": SC SLAMS STATES ON CONSUMER PANEL VACANCIES

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Wednesday took strong objection at vacancies in state consumer disputes redressal commissions, saying that the states are defeating laws enacted for welfare of people.

What is purpose of creating posts and not filling them, it said, asking all states and Union Territories to fill all vacancies within a period of eight weeks.

A bench of Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Hrishikesh Roy, while hearing counsel for various state governments, remarked: "Are you waiting for an auspicious occasion to take steps. We just want persons in positions. States defeating laws enacted for welfare of people. What is purpose of creating posts and not manning them?"The bench noted it appears that some of the states and UTs have not even set up selection committees, and directed it should be done within 4 weeks.It added that all states should notify rules within two weeks and if there are large number of vacancies, then "we direct that all vacancies be advertised within two weeks". The bench directed all state secretaries to notify the rules in two weeks.

OPPN DEMANDS CASTE-BASED CENSUS, REMOVAL OF 50% CAP

New Delhi: Participating in the discussion on a Constitution amendment bill in the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday, the opposition demanded a caste based census and removal of the cap of 50 percent on reservations as the House unanimously passed the OBC Bill. Mallikarjun Kharge, Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, said that the reservation cap should be removed which is now 50 percent. If it is not removed then the purpose of the bill will be defeated as the states should get the power to increase the reservation.This Bill was passed by a two-third majority of the Members present in the House.

Covid variants will emerge, world must learn to co-exist: Bat Woman

BEIJING | Agencies

As the virus continues to mutate, new variants of Covid-19 will emerge so the world must prepare to coexist with them, top Chinese virologist Shi Zhengli has said.

Zhengli, also known as the "bat woman", renewed calls for the public to get vaccinated against the coronavirus, the South China Morning Post reported.

"As the number of infected cases has just become too big, this allowed the novel coronavirus more opportunities to mutate and select. New variants will continue to emerge," she was quoted as saying.

The coronavirus that causes Covid-19 was documented first from the central Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019. It has since, evolved into several variants, spreading across the world.The public should be prepared to coexist with the virus "for a long time or forever", Professor Jin Dongyan, a molecular virologist with the University of Hong Kong was quoted as saying.However, Dongyan also suggested that SARS-CoV-2 could eventually be eradicated like smallpox or polio as vaccines were improved.

DCGI APPROVES MIXING OF COVAXIN & COVISHIELD, TRIAL IN VELLORE

New Delhi: The Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) has given the approval to conduct a study on mixing of ovishield and Covaxin vaccines. The step has been taken to boost the mass vaccination drive against the coronavirus across the nation. The DCGI has said that the study and its clinical trials will be conducted by Christian Medical College in Vellore.

The study aims to find out whether a person can be given two different vaccine shots -- one each of Covishield and Covaxin -- to be fully vaccinated against the coronavirus disease, instead of the existing practice of administering twin shots of the same vaccine.

WHATSAPP TO ALLOW USERS TO SWITCH OS WITH CHAT HISTORY

New Delhi: WhatsApp on Wednesday announced a new feature that will allow users to take their WhatsApp chat history with them when they change mobile operating systems. The company said it will be introducing the ability to move the entire WhatsApp chat history -- including voice notes, photos and conversations -- seamlessly and securely if users choose to switch mobile operating systems.The feature will be available to users of both Android and iOS platforms, which means that people will be able to switch from both Android to iOS and vice versa.The company said that it will start to roll out on Android initially, and on Samsung's newest Galaxy smartphones unveiled on August 11.To start, users will be able to take their WhatsApp history from iOS to an Android device and will subsequently be able to do the same on iOS devices.

No sign of rains, dry spell likely to continue for 5 days: IMD

The current spell of weak monsoon over the country is likely to continue for the next five days, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Wednesday.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

However, the intense rainfall spell over northeast and adjoining east India, northern parts of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, is expected to last till August 14 and reduce thereafter, the IMD said.

Subdued rainfall is very likely over north Indian plains (Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan), adjoining central India and most parts of peninsular India (outside Tamil Nadu and Kerala), including Maharashtra and Gujarat till August 15, it said. Rainfall activity will increase over peninsular India from August 16 onwards, the IMD said.

Scattered to widespread rainfall is very likely over Tamil Nadu and Kerala during next five days with isolated heavy falls over Tamil Nadu during August 11-14 and over Kerala during August 11-12.

According to the IMD data, from June 1 to August 10, the country received 5 per cent less rainfall than normal.

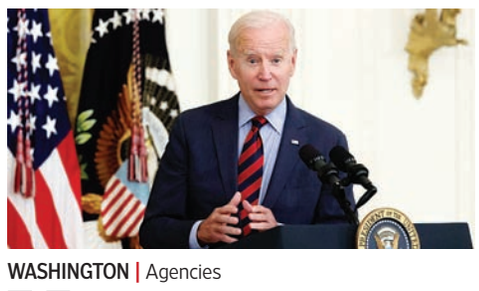
Widespread rainfall with isolated heavy falls are very likely to continue

over east Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Gangetic West Bengal during August 11-14 and isolated very heavy falls over Bihar on August 11 and 12, it said.

Scattered to fairly widespread rainfall is very likely over the western Himachal region during the next five days.

The IMD said isolated heavy rainfall is expected over Uttarakhand during August 11-15 and over Himachal Pradesh during August 12-14.

Afghan forces must fight for themselves: Biden



WASHINGTON | Agencies

US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that the Afghan troops must fight for themselves as multiple cities have fallen to the Taliban in the past few days."We spent over a trillion dollars over 20 years. We trained and equipped with modern equipment over 300,000 Afghan forces. And Afghan leaders have to come together," Biden told reporters at the White House. "They've got to fight for themselves, fight for their nation."

The US will continue to provide Afghan forces with close air support, food, equipment, salaries and make sure the Afghan air force is operable, said Biden. "But they've got to want to fight. They have outnumbered the Taliban," the Xinhua news agency reported."We are going to continue to keep our commitment," he added, saying he does not regret his decision to withdraw US troops from the country.

COUNSELING FOR NEET-MDS FROM AUG 20 TO OCT 10

New Delhi: The Centre on Wednesday informed the Supreme Court that it will conduct the counseling for the NEET-MDS admissions from August 20 to October 10, 2021.Senior advocate Vikas Singh, representing the petitioners, submitted before the top court that that Centre, in its affidavit, said that they will conduct the counseling for the NEET-MDS admissions, for which exams were held last year on December 16, from August 20 to October 10, 2021. The results were declared on December 31, 2020.

After taking Centre's statement on record, a bench of Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and M.R. Shah disposed of the matter.

INITIATE STEPS TO REPEAL FARM LAWS, PUNJAB CM URGES PM

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi here on Wednesday and urged the latter to initiate immediate steps to repeal the three 'contentious' farm laws, besides amendming the relevant law to include the farmers in the free legal aid category.

Amarinder Singh's media advisor Raveen Thukral tweeted after the meeting: "Punjab CM @capt_amarinder calls on PM @narendramodi, seeks immediate steps for repeal of #FarmLaws & amendment to relevant law for including farmers in free legal aid category. #FarmersProtests."

The Punjab Chief Minister, who called on the Prime Minister here on Wednesday evening and submitted two separate letters, called for immediate review and revocation of the three farm laws which have triggered widespread resentment among the farmers of Punjab and other states, who are protesting on the borders of Delhi since November 26 last year.

Pointing at the prolonged agitation, during which scores of farmers have lost their lives, the Chief Minister said the stir had the potential of posing security threats for Punjab and the country with Pakistan-backed anti-India forces looking to exploit the farmers' disgruntlement with the government.

Urging the Prime Minister to intervene for expeditious redressal of the farmers' 'legitimate' concerns, the Chief Minister said the continued agitation is not only impacting economic activities in Punjab, but also has the potential to affect the social fabric, especially when political parties and groups take strong positions.

Amarinder Singh noted that earlier too, he had sought the Prime Minister's appointment for a meeting with an all-party delegation from Punjab.He further underlined the need to compensate the farmers for the management of paddy straw at Rs 100 per quintal and also to address the fears of DAP shortage, which could aggravate the farmers' problems and the crisis triggered by the farm laws.

Stressing the need to reduce the farmers' financial burdens as a result of such litigation, he noted that the Central Legal Services Authorities Act of 1987 provides free legal aid to certain categories of persons, who are perceived to be the vulnerable sections of the society.

Pointing out that the country's farmers are also very vulnerable, he said that they are, at times, compelled to commit suicide due to financial problems, even though they remain proud and prefer to till their land even at the cost of their lives.

50% grads jobless after getting degree: Goa CM

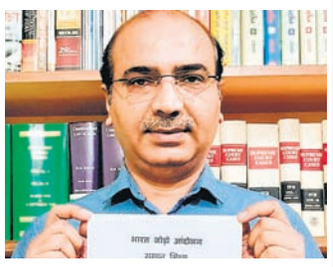
Team Absolute | Panaji

Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on Wednesday criticised the lack of quality skills among fresh graduates passing out of educational institutes in the state. He said 50 per cent of the graduates who have passed out of colleges are sitting idle at home."There is a need for out-of-the-box thinking. For so many years, we have been grooming graduates with B.A, B.Com and B.Sc degrees. It feels sad to even wonder if we are grooming enough quality students. How many of them are working towards their future on their own?" Sawant added while speaking at a National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) seminar here. "We will have to shut down some courses at the higher secondary level. We will not be able to permit more and more B.A and B.Com colleges. People come to me for sanction to start B.A and B.Com colleges and I ask them why? Nearly 50 per cent of the students after completing their graduation are sitting idle at home," the Chief Minister said."You know why I feel bad, that after postgraduation or completing their M.A, M.Com or M.Sc, students ask me, 'what should I do now. I do not know what to do'," he added. Sawant said skilling and innovation in the education sector was the key to future success of students and adequate skilling even thinned out competition when it comes to applying for government jobs.

"If there is a vacancy for a stenographer, the application (ratio) is 5:25, if it is for the post of LDC it is 5:25,000. This is an example of an interview conducted six months back," he added.The Chief Minister said his government would be implementing the New Education Policy 2020 from next year."We will implement the New Education Policy in the state next year after taking all stakeholders into confidence. We will work towards ensuring how the policy will benefit pre-primary and primary students," Sawant added.

BJP LEADER GETS BAIL IN ANTI-MUSLIM SLOGANEERING CASE AT JANTAR MANTAR

Team Absolute | New Delhi



A Delhi court on Wednesday granted bail to BJP leader Ashwini Upadhyay, arrested in connection with anti-Muslim speeches made at Jantar Mantar on August 8.Metropolitan Magistrate Udbhav Kumar Jain observed: "As far as the offence u/s 153A IPC is concerned, except for mere assertion, there is nothing on record to show that the alleged hate speech to promote enmity between different groups was done in the presence or at the behest of the applicant/accused." Upadhyay was allowed bail, subject to filing a personal bond of Rs 50,000 with one surety in the like amount. However, the court imposed certain conditions. "The applicant shall continue to cooperate with the ongoing investigations and shall join the investigation as and when summoned by the IO. The applicant shall scrupulously appear at each and every stage of the proceedings before the concerned court so as not to cause any obstruction or delay to its progress," it said.

Case filed against TMC's Abhishek Banerjee, others in Tripura

Agartala/Kolkata | Agencies

The Tripura police has registered a case against six TMC leaders including the partys national General Secretary Abhishek Banerjee, West Bengal Education Minister Bratya Basu and Rajya Sabha Member Dola Sen, for allegedly obstructing police officers from performing their duties.

Director General of Tripura Police V. S. Yadav on Wednesday said that a suo-moto complaint was filed on Tuesday against the six TMC leaders for "obstructing official duties and misbehaving" with the police officers of Khowai police station on Sunday.

"Police would investigate the case now and if necessary they would be summoned," the police chief told reporter.Another police official of Khowai district said that the TMC leaders were booked under Section 186 (obstruction to public servants in discharge of his public function) and 36 (common intention) of the Indian Penal Code.Besides Banerjee, Basu and Sen, the three other leaders who were booked by the police include TMC's Chief Spokesman Kunal Ghosh, Subal Bhowmik and Prakash Das (ex-Tripura Minister).

West Bengal's PWD and Law Minister Moloy Ghatak said that the TMC would fight to restore democracy in Tripura.

MAMATA BANERJEE INVITED TO ROME BY COMMUNITY OF SANT' EGIDIO

Kolkata | Agencies

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has been invited to Rome by the Community of Sant' Egidio -- a Catholic association dedicated to social service -- to participate in the World Meeting for Peace, "Peoples as Brothers, Future Earth", on October 6 and 7 this year where Pope Francis, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I and German Chancellor Angela Merkel are likely to be present.

In a letter written to Mamata Baenrjee, Marco Impagliazzo, President of the Community of Sant' Egidio Ait, has said, "The core of the event is always the open air Final Ceremony in which the yearly Appeal for Peace is proclaimed and subsequently signed by all the religionists. In the framework of this human, social and spiritual dimension I would like to invite You, Excellency, to honour us with Your relevant presence and your meaningful and enriching contribution to the international event in Rome: The World Meeting for Peace "Peoples as Brothers, Future Earth", on the next 6 and 7 October 2021."

Court discharges Kejriwal, 9 other AAP leaders in CS assault case

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A special Court on Wednesday discharged Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and nine Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders in a controversial case of alleged assault on former Chief Secretary of Delhi, Anshu Prakash.

However, the court has ordered to frame charges against two AAP leaders - Amantullah Khan (MLA - Okhla) and Prakash Jarwal (MLA- Deoli) in the case.

A special MP/MLA court, presided over by Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Sachin Gupta at Rouse Avenue court, pronounced the discharge order on Wednesday.

Soon after the order was pronounced by the court, senior AAP leader and Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia called it the victory of truth.

Kejriwal and 12 other AAP leaders were booked in the case under sections 186 (Obstructing public servant in discharge of public functions), 353 (Assault or criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of his duty), 332 (Voluntarily causing hurt to deter public servant from his duty), 323 (Causing hurt), 342 (Punishment for wrongful confinement), 504 (Intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of peace), 120-B (Punishment of criminal conspiracy), and 149 (Every member of unlawful assembly guilty of offence committed in prosecution of common object), among others of the Indian Penal Code.

CHENNAI CORPN TO STERILISE 80,000 STRAY DOGS

Chennai: The Greater Chennai Corporation is planning to sterilise around 80,000 stray dogs over a period of two-and-a-half years.The civic body is planning to revamp its buildings and other facilities at Kannamapettai and Pulianthope to conduct 100 sterilisations per day. It is also revamping its facility at Lloyds colony.The corporation has allocated Rs 10 crore for the renovation of the three shelters for stray dogs. The designs have been finalized and according to veterinary officials of the Greater Chennai Corporation, work would commence in a month. Chennai Corporation is the only civic body in the country to have a separate crematorium for stray dogs at Kannamapettai.

Eyes gorged, body mutilated: Missing Bihar journalist found dead

Patna | Agencies

A journalist associated with a private news channel and son of a leading state vernacular newspaper editor was killed in Bihar's East Champaran district, an official said.

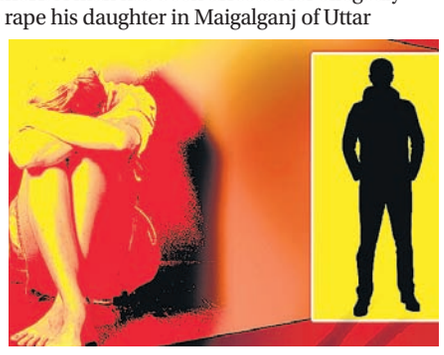
The decomposed body of Manish Kumar Singh was found on Tuesday from Mathlohiar Gaddi Tola -- three days after his disappearance. The killers removed both of his eyes.

Singh is a native of Paharpur village in the same district and his father Sanjay Kumar Singh is an editor of a Hindi news paper (Areraj Darshan).

Santosh Kumar, the DSP of Areraj sub-division in east Champaran district earlier said: "As the family members of the deceased are worried about him. They were suspecting some untoward incident might have happened with him. Hence, they have lodged FIR against 12 persons including those two alleged journalists.""The villagers on Tuesday, spotted a pair of shoes in the farm land. When they searched further, the dead body was found from a Sareh village. The dead body was in a semi-decomposed state," the officer said.

UP: Man attempts to rape daughter, arrested

Lakhimpur Kheri: A man has been arrested for allegedly attempting to rape his daughter in Maigalganj of Uttar Pradesh's Lakhimpur Kheri district. The man has confessed to the crime.



According to reports, the incident took place on Monday when the girl, who was married recently, was sleeping in her parents' house.Her father came home in an inebriated condition and touched her inappropriately. The victim, however, screamed for help, which woke up her mother who then called the police.

The victim reportedly told police that her father had sexually assaulted her in the past but she had remained quiet.

Meanwhile, the victim was sent for a medical examination on Tuesday.

Maigalganj SHO C.P. Singh said, "The accused was heavily drunk when we arrested him. His daughter and wife have given a statement against him at the police station. We will now present the victim in court to record her statement under section 164 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). The accused has been sent to jail after he confessed to having committed the crime."

COUNTDOWN BEGINS FOR INDIA TO OPEN ITS SKY EYE GISAT-1

The Indian space agency had earlier said the 2,268 kg GISAT-1 would provide a realtime image of a large area of region of interest at frequent intervals. It will also enable quick monitoring of natural disasters, episodic events, and any short-term events. The satellite will have payload imaging sensors of six band multi-spectral visible and near infra-red with 42 metres resolution, 158 bands hyper-spectral visible and near infra-red with 318 metres resolution, and 256 bands hyper-spectral short wave infra-red with 191 metres resolution. A four-metre diameter Ogive shaped payload fairing (heat shield) made with composite will be used in the rocket for the first time, ISRO had said.

Team Absolute | Chennai

The Indian space agency early morning on Wednesday began the countdown for the launch of its GSLV-F10 rocket carrying the country's first Geo Imaging Satellite-1 (GISAT-1) renamed as EOS-03. The 51.70 metre tall weighing 416 ton Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle -F10 (GSLV-F10) is scheduled to blast off from the second launch pad at the Sriharikota rocket port in Andhra Pradesh on Thursday at 5.43 a.m.

The rocket will be carrying the 2,268 kg earth observation satellite (EOS-03) or GISAT-1 and just over 18 minutes into its flight, the satellite will be placed at the geosynchronous transfer orbit (GTO).

From the GTO, the satellite will be taken up to its final position firing its onboard motors, said India Space Research Organisation (ISRO).The GSLV is a three stage/engine rocket. The core of the first stage is fired with solid fuel and the four strap-on motors by liquid fuel. The second is the liquid fuel and the third is the cryogenic engine.During the countdown, the liquid and cryogenic fuel will be filled. The rocket and the satellite systems will also be checked.

The GISAT-1 will be the country's first eye in sky or earth observation satellite to be placed in geostationary orbit.Once placed in geostationary orbit, the satellite will have a steady eye on the areas of interest -- moving in sync with the rotation of the earth and hence seeming stationary -- unlike other remote sensing satellites placed in lower orbit that can come over a spot only at regular intervals. Originally the GISAT-1 was slated for launch on March 5, 2020, but hours before the launch, the ISRO announced postponement of the mission owing to some technical glitch.Soon after, the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown delayed the mission. The rocket had to be dismantled and cleaned up.Subsequently, the GISAT-1 launch was slated for March 2021 but due to problems in the satellite's battery side, the flight got delayed again.With the replacement of the battery, the satellite and the rocket were being readied for their flight at Sriharikota when the second wave of Covid-19 swept in, affecting many at the rocket launch centre.

Unbelievable: HC Surprised Over State Govt's Reply that Oxygen Shortage Caused No Deaths

- The HC observed this while hearing a set of petitions filed with it seeking compensation for deaths allegedly caused by the dearth of oxygen supply during the second wave.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Expressing surprise over the Madhya Pradesh government's reply that none died of oxygen shortage during the Covid-19's second wave, the Jabalpur principal bench of MP high court observed that 'it's something which is hard to believe.

The HC observed this while hearing a set of petitions filed with it seeking compensation for deaths allegedly caused by the dearth of oxygen supply during the second wave.

The HC itself had listed 77 deaths due to oxygen shortage district wise early this year but the State government later presented an affidavit with the court affirming that none died due to shortage of oxygen. The HC bench expressed surprise when the matter of compensation over oxygen shortage deaths came up on Tuesday.The division bench of the HC headed by the Chief Justice has asked the Shivraj Singh Chouhan government to furnish a reply on the matter. The court has sought to know when the State government has denied deaths due to oxygen shortage so what will it do on the compensation demands.The HC has asked the government on this issue so that it could decide on the petitions.Offering three weeks to the state government for furnishing the reply, the HC has posted the matter for hearing on September 6.The MP government also presented an Action Taken Report, 11th one, with the HC claiming 18 plus population will be inoculated by December end this year. The government said it's installing 188 oxygen plants in the State and 61 of which are already been made operational. Saying that CT scan machines were with 14 district hospitals and tenders have been floated for the remaining ones. A total of 13 medical colleges have been allocated 1,280 ventilators while 16,977 hospital beds will be made available by September 2021, the report said.

Police Use Water Cannons to Disperse Protesting Youth Cong Workers

YC Workers Stage Protest Against Unemployment, Fuel Price Hike

Youth Congress leaders staged a massive protest in front of CM's residence over issues like unemployment, petrol and diesel price hike. Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Ankit Jaiswal said "six busloads" of protesters were arrested. They will be released after some time," he added.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A massive protest was staged in Bhopal where the Youth Congress leaders had gathered in large numbers in front of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's residence. Many Congress leaders including Kamal Nath and Jitu Patwari are holding a protest against the anti-people policies including inflation and unemployment.

National President of the Indian Youth Congress Sriniwas BV, was seen climbing the barricade to enter CM's residence. Initially, the protest was planned to take place in front of the Vidhan Sabha.

Several persons were injured as police used water cannons to disperse protesting Youth Congress workers here on Wednesday, the party claimed. The Youth Congress had organized a protest march from the party office on the Link Road no 1 to the chief minister's residence against inflation, rising fuel prices and unemployment. But police stopped the march near the Congress office by putting up barricades. As protestors tried to climb the barricades, police used water cannons and arrested many of them.

Youth Congress workers led by its national president Srinivas B V had gathered here from across the state to take part in the protest, said a party leader. Rakesh Goyal, a worker from Badnagar in Ujjain, was seen with his head bleeding.Police hit him with batons resulting in an injury to the head, he alleged.

Congress MLA and former minister Jaivardhan Singh, whose clothes were torn in the melee, claimed that several protestors were injured due to the use of force by police. Our struggle for people will continue despite Shivraj Singh Chouhan government's dictatorial attitude," Singh said.

Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Ankit Jaiswal said "six busloads" of protesters were arrested. They will be released after some time," he added.

A First Information Report (FIR) was registered against Srinivas B V, state unit president Vikrant Bhuria, MLAs Jaivardhan Singh and Kunal Choudhary and others under IPC sections 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) and 147 (rioting), the ASP said.

The protest was planned to be held outside the state Assembly but as the Assembly session ended on Tuesday the venue was changed, said a Congress leader.

Earlier on Tuesday, Former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister and senior Congress leader Kamal Nath hit out at the Shivraj Singh Chouhan-led Bharatiya Janata Party government over unemployment, farmers' issue, and the worrying flood-hit situation of the state.

According to the State Economic Survey, conducted on March 1, more than 21.5 lakh unemployed registered with the government are literate. As per the data available on the Rojgar Portal, Gwalior topped in the unemployed registration chart with 35,443 people, followed by Morena with 32,236 registered unemployed, while Rewa and Indore came to third and fourth-position with over 29,000 registrations each.

Maoist With Rs 8 Lakh Bounty Arrested After Encounter

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A 25-year-old Maoist carrying a reward of Rs 8 lakh on his head was arrested after an encounter with the police in Balaghat district, state Home Minister Narottam Mishra said on Wednesday.

"In an encounter with the police on Tuesday in the Balaghat district, a Maoist, identified as Sandeep Kunjam aka Lakkhu, was arrested," Mishra told reporters.

He said the arrested ultra was carrying a total reward of ? eight lakh, including Rs three lakh in Madhya Pradesh and Rs five lakh in neighbouring Chhattisgarh, on his head.

Police and Maoists exchanged fire in a village under Birsa police station limits on Tuesday, Mishra said."The MP government is running an operation to eliminate Maoists from the state. Police are successful in this endeavour," he added.

CM PLANTS KARANJ SAPLING IN SMART GARDEN

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted a sapling of Karanj in Smart Garden today. Khargapur MLA Rahul Singh and former Mayor Alok Sharma were also present. Chouhan is planting saplings every day as per his resolve. Karanj has important uses in medicine. Its species include karanj, kat karanj and chirbilva.

Mukhyamantri Covid-19 Bal Seva Yojana News

State government became guardian of 1001 children

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In many families Covid-19 has resulted in the sudden death of parents earning livelihood. The state government is playing the role of guardian for the children of such affected families. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan launched Mukhyamantri Covid-19 Bal Seva Yojana on May 21, 2021 to help such children. So far, financial and food security has been provided to 1001 child beneficiaries under the scheme. In 34 districts of the state, cent percent cases have been resolved. The state government will also take up the responsibility of the education of these child beneficiaries.

So far 1001 children have benefitted under the Mukhyamantri Covid-19 Bal Seva Yojana. Under the Mukhyamantri Covid-19 Bal Seva Yojana, an assistance amount of Rs. 5 thousand per month is provided to each child beneficiary. If the age of the beneficiary is less than 18 years, then it will be deposited in the joint account of the identified guardian and the child and after attaining the age of 18 years, it will be deposited in the personal account of the beneficiary. Apart from this, free monthly ration is provided to each child beneficiary and their guardian under the National Food Security Act. Under the education assistance, free education will be provided to the child beneficiaries in government schools, colleges, universities for school education, higher education, technical education, medical education and legal education

COACHING OPERATORS SHOULD ENSURE ADHERENCE TO CORONA APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR: CM

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that coaching operators should ensure cent percent adherence to corona friendly behaviour in their institutions. The state government is considering the permission to conduct coaching classes. Chouhan said this to the office bearers of Madhya Pradesh Coaching Owners Association who came to meet him at his residence.The delegation of coaching operators of the state met Chief Minister in the presence of MLA Ramesh Mendola on Wednesday. MLA Sanjay Pathak was also present on the occasion. President of Madhya Pradesh Coaching Owners Association, Laxmi Narayan Bakoria told Chief Minister Chouhan that for the students whose parents have passed away due to corona pandemic, free coaching and hostel arrangements have been made by the association.

Indore becomes country's first water plus city; CM extends congratulations

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Indore, which is the number one in the country for four times in cleanliness, has achieved another remarkable achievement in its victorious journey of cleanliness. Indore has been declared as the first water plus city of the country in the results released by the Government of India today. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Urban Development and Housing Minister Bhupendra Singh have congratulated the officers and employees of Indore Municipal Corporation as well as the citizens for this achievement.houhan has said that Indore has now become the first water plus city in the country after acquiring the status of the cleanest city. Congratulations to all the people of Indore for creating this history. The entire state is proud of you, your style of work and your discipline.

It may be noted that 84 cities of the country had applied in the selection process of Water Plus, out of which only 33 cities were found suitable for ground verification. The hard work of the residents of Indore has once again created history in ground verification.

Under the Swachhtaa Bharat Mission Urban, the cities of the country are tested on the basis of various parameters of cleanliness in various categories which includes ODF Plus, ODF Double Plus and Water Plus. The Water Plus certificate is awarded to cities that have met all the standards of ODF Double Plus. Also, the residual sewage from residential and commercial establishments is released into the environment only after treatment. Re-use of treated waste water is also ensured.

CM pays tribute to Khudi Ram Bose

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan paid homage to the freedom fighter Late Khudiram Bose on his death anniversary. Chouhan paid floral tributes to his photograph at his residence.

Khudiram Bose was hanged for the freedom of the country at the age of just 19. According to many scholars, he was the youngest revolutionary and patriot to be hanged for the country. He was hanged on August 11, 1908.Khudiram Bose was born on December 3, 1889 in Midnapore district. After the partition of Bengal in 1905, Khudiram Bose got involved in the freedom movement.

He joined the Revolutionary Party and was instrumental in many revolutionary activities including distribution of Vande Mataram pamphlets.

Two European women were killed in an attempt to throw a bomb at Kolkata's magistrate Kingsford. Khudiram Bose was arrested and tried and then sentenced to death.

SHOP OWNER ATTEMPTS TO SEXUALLY ABUSE MINOR GIRL

A 30-year-old shopkeeper allegedly dragged a 10-year-old girl inside his garments shop and sexually harassed her after locking the entrance door in Kotwali locality on Tuesday night.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Fortunately, an alert jewellery shop owner and others, who were passing from the spot, heard her screams and rescued the girl from the clutches of the accused. They took the accused to Kotwali police station and filed a complaint against him.

Police registered a molestation case against the accused under relevant sections of IPC and POCSO Act and arrested him.

Kotwali (SHO), Shahbaz Khan said that the survivor is a resident of Koh e Fiza locality. She told police that on Tuesday night she had gone to buy a scarf from a garments shop located on Nadeem Road. As she approached a garment shop around 11 pm, and asked for a scarf, the shop owner grabbed her hand and dragged her inside the shop.SHO Khan said that the accused closed the door and allegedly sexually harassed her. He tried to disrobe the minor while she was screaming for help. "During that period around 11.07 pm, a jewellery shop owner was passing by the spot and heard the scream coming out from the basement of a shop. When he went to check in the basement, he found that all the shops were closed but lights were on at one shop but the door was closed," said SHO Khan adding that as he approached the shop and opened the door to check. He was shocked to find that a man was sexually harassing a minor girl.SHO Khan said as the accused spotted the passerby, he left the girl. When he enquired about the incident, the accused remained silent in fear and the girl revealed that she had come to buy a scarf and the accused shopkeeper allegedly grabbed her hand and dragged her inside his shop to harass her.Subsequently, the accused was handed over to cops at Kotwali police station. The accused has been identified as

Mansur Khan (30), a garments shop owner, who resides in Khanugaon Koh e Fiza.

It was informed that the survivor's parents passed away and she was residing with her maternal grandparents in Koh-efiza locality. She resided in Kotwali area in the past so she went there at night to buy a scarf. A case was registeredagainst the accused under relevant sections of IPC and POCSO Act and he was arrested. He was produced before the court from where he was sent to jail.

Huge Shivling found in the excavation near Mahakal temple

Team Absolute | Ujjain

A huge Shivling has come out on Tuesday in the ongoing excavation near the world famous Jyotirlinga Mahakal temple. At present, the excavation site has been secured by the officials of the temple administration. The matter has been given to the research officer of the Archaeological Department, Dhruvendrasinh Jodha. Two days ago, due to rain, the department had stopped the excavation work here. It is said that the Shivling has started appearing due to the removal of soil due to continuous rain.

Mahakal Temple Ujjain: Ujjain (Representative of New World). A huge Shivling has come out on Tuesday in the ongoing excavation near the world famous Jyotirlinga Mahakal temple. At present, the excavation site has been secured by the officials of the temple administration. The matter has been given to the research officer of the Archaeological Department, Jodha. Two days ago, due to rain, the department had stopped the excavation work here. It is said that the Shivling has started appearing due to the removal of soil during continuous rain. The courtyard of Mahakal has been spewing new secrets of religion, culture, architecture and ancient history for the past two months. In the excavation being done by the Madhya Pradesh Archaeological Department, so far the base part of the ancient temple, the architectural block, the pottery made in Shunga and Kushan period and the huge circumambulation path of black basalt have come to the fore. After the huge Shivling emerged from the ground on Tuesday, the possibility of a chain of temples here has got a boost. Moolchand Junwal, assistant administrator of the Mahakal temple, said that the Shivling was first seen by the laborers and informed the temple administration.

After this the temple officials inspected the excavation site. Prima facie the Shivling and Jaldhari are visible. The site is being excavated by the Archaeological Department. That's why we have not tried to remove the soil from around the Shivling. Rather, that place has been secured by covering it with a sheet of iron. The matter has been reported to the research officer of the Archaeological Department, Jodha. Further digging will be done under his guidance. Research Officer Jodha said that the Archaeological Department has stopped the excavation work since Sunday due to rain. The place where the Shivling is being said to have come out, the layer of stone was visible in the excavations being done by us. Due to the removal of soil in two days of rain, part of the Shivling would have been visible. I had a discussion with the temple officials on Tuesday evening. The status quo will remain till Friday, after which the department team will start digging to get the Shivling out safely.

Paramhans Saint Awadheshpuriji Maharaj said that part of the ancient temple, architectural fragments, idols and now a huge Shivling have been found in the Sipam excavation of Mahakal temple. This place will become a big research center of Shaivism in the coming time. I have written a letter to RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi a week ago, demanding to set up a research center here.

CIPET centres to setup in Indore and Jabalpur

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Like Bhopal, now CIPET centres will be established in Indore and Jabalpur soon. Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Science and Technology Minister Omprakash Saklecha met Union Chemicals and Fertilisers Minister Mansukh Mandaviya during his visit to Delhi on Wednesday and urged for setting up of CIPET Centres in Indore and Jabalpur like Bhopal in the state.

Saklecha informed that the discussion with Union Minister Mandaviya was positive and fruitful. He has given consent for the establishment of new CIPET centres in Indore and Jabalpur. Saklecha will also call on Union Minister for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Narayan Rane. Will request to make the MSME Department of the state the nodal agency for implementation and monitoring of facilities provided to MSMEs by various ministries of the Government of India.

NOW, MAHA MALLS, RESTAURANTS, SHOPS TO REMAIN OPEN TILL 10 P.M.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Spelling cheers, the Maharashtra government on Wednesday permitted malls, restaurants, bars, hotels, gymnasiums, saloons, beauty parlours and all shops in the state to remain open till 10 p.m.

The significant decision came after a meeting, presided over by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, accepted the recommendations of the Maharashtra Covid-19 Task Force to further boost the economy reeling under the series of pandemic lockdowns.

Panel chef Dr Sanjay Oak had said that they had no objections to extend the timings for hotels and restaurants - even as the state is showing signs of improvement in the second wave.

Hotel & Restaurant Association of Western India President Sherry Bhatia has wholeheartedly welcomed the move to ease curbs on their businesses - until now permitted to operate till 4 p.m. with 50 per cent seating, though food parcel deliveries were permitted till 11 p.m.

Under the revised rules, though the 50 per cent condition is retained, parcel delivery is allowed for 24 hours.

All shops and malls shall remain open till 10 p.m., though cinemas and multiplexes as well as places of worship will remain closed till further orders.

After nearly 17 months, for weddings and such social events, a maximum of 200 guests shall be permitted at outdoor and indoor locations, subject to other conditions.

The government has also given further relaxations to government and private offices to function with additional capacity depending on the Covid-19 vaccination of their employees and other protocols.

The easing measures come barely four days before the Indian Railways plans to throw open the Mumbai suburban trains from August 15, for all fully-vaccinated commuters, following a request by the state government.

The Central Railway and Western Railway officials indicate that the move is likely to benefit around 70 per cent of the total commuting public spread across Mumbai, Thane, Palghar, and Raigad.

This is the first time that the ordinary people will be able to travel in local trains after nearly 17 months since the pandemic lockdown was declared in March 2020 and the CR and WR are making all-out preparations for this.

Pawar seeks PM's intervention in Maharashtra-Karnataka border row

In the letter dated August 9, Pawar appealed to Modi to take the lead in stopping the Karnataka government's 'atrocities' on Marathi-speaking people and include the disputed areas in Maharashtrahectare area in the Arabian Sea which is 12 times the size of Oval Maidan at Mumbai's Churchgate.

Team Absolute | Pune

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar has written a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking his intervention to resolve the state's long pending boundary dispute with neighbouring Karnataka.

In the letter dated August 9, Pawar appealed to Modi to take the lead in stopping the Karnataka government's "atrocities" on Marathi-speaking people and include the disputed areas in Maharashtra.

Maharashtra claims certain areas, including Belgaum, Karwar and Nippani which are part of Karnataka, contending the majority of population in these areas is Marathi-speaking.

The dispute between the two states over Belgaum and other border areas is pending before the Supreme Court for many years.

Pawar said it has been more than 60 years since the formation of Maharashtra state, with Mumbai as its capital, but, Belgaum, Karwar, Bidar, Bhalki, Nippani and other Marathi-speaking areas of Karnataka are still not in Maharashtra."People of Maharashtra and those living in the Marathi-speaking areas of Karnataka bordering Maharashtra regret that the issue hasn't been resolved yet," the NCP leader said.Maharashtra will not rest till the dream of a "Sanyukta Maharashtra", including Marathi-speaking areas along the border, is realised, he said."The fight through legal means will continue. We want you to take cognisance of wishes of the people of Maharashtra and ensure justice," Pawar said in his letter to the PM.

Currently, the legal battle is on in the Supreme Court and "we are confident that Maharashtra will get justice", he said.

"We seek your help in ensuring justice to Marathi people from border areas of Karnataka. I am sure you will do so," the deputy CM said in the letter.

8 Maha historical sites figure on 'Fit India Freedom Run 2.0'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

At least 8 renowned historical locations in Maharashtra shall figure on the much-anticipated 'Fit India Freedom Run 2.0' as part of the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, or the Platinum anniversary of India's Independence, officials said on Wednesday.

Union Youth Affairs and Sports Minister Anurag Thakur will flag off the nationwide programmes which will be held in 75 villages and 75 districts each week till October 2, 2021, covering all 744 districts in the next six weeks.

In Maharashtra, the top freedom movement related sites to figure include Mumbai's historic August Kranti Maidan where the Indian National Congress organised its session and Mahatma Gandhi gave the clarion call to the British rulers to 'Quit India' on August 9, 1942.Besides, there is the famed Aga Khan Palace in Pune, the Sevagram Ashram in Wardha, the Sitabuldi Fort in Nagpur, Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak's birthplace in Ratnagiri, and places in Akola, Gondia, and Chandrapur.Similar Freedom Runs shall be held in Ahmednagar and Amravati on August 14, and other districts in the state shall be covered subsequently.The national programme will involve organisations like the Indian Railways, the Nehru Yuva Kendra, the ITBP, the NSG, the BSF, and the CISF joining virtually from different locations around the country.1The activities of the Fit India Freedom Run 2.0 include a pledge, rendering of National Anthem, Freedom Run, cultural functions at venues, awareness among youth volunteers to participate and also organise similar activities in their villages.Prominent people from different walks of life including public representatives, panchayat leaders, social workers, sportspersons, media, doctors, farmers and Army personnel are expected to participate, encourage and motivate the people by attending these events at various levels.

Maharashtra govt announces new Rajiv Gandhi award

The BJP said it had no objection to the new award but sought to know why the Congress did not name the IT award after Rajiv Gandhi despite being in power for 15 consecutive years.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra government has announced a new award named after Rajiv Gandhi, days after the central government changed the name of the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award to Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award.

Minister of State for Information and Technology Satej Patil said the award will be given to institutions and companies for outstanding performance in the information technology sector, the birth anniversary of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi.

The BJP said it had no objection to the new award but sought to know why the Congress did not name the IT award after Rajiv Gandhi despite being in power for 15 consecutive years. BJP spokesperson Madhav Bhandari said, "We have no opposition to the award being given in the name of Rajiv Gandhi. But Congress should explain as to why despite being in power for 15 consecutive years, it did not name the IT award after Rajiv Gandhi? They are playing politics, their politics only revovles around the name of Gandhi-Vadra family."He added, "It seems the Congress was not aware of the contribution of Rajiv Gandhi all these years and now they have suddenly realised that he made a big contribution to the IT sector."Patil tweeted on Tuesday evening, "...The award, which will be announced on August 20, will be a lasting tribute to Late Shri Rajiv ji for his pioneering work in the technology sector in India." Patil denied that there was any political motive in naming the award after Rajiv Gandhi. "The world knows about Rajiv Gandhi's contribution to the IT sector. He ushered in the IT era, which has helped change the face of the country," he said. It was decided to announce the award at a meeting of the IT department on July 7, Patil said, adding, "The file was put before the Chief Minister, who approved it two days ago and then I tweeted it late in the evening," he said.

The government will talk to various organisations like NASSCOM to finalise the modalities of the award, Patil said. "It will be given to companies or institutions which excel in the field with new ideas and innovations. The award will be given out by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray," he said.

"This year, the award will be announced on August 20, the selection procedure will be completed and the award will be given before October 30. From next year, the distribution of the award will be given on August 20. Maharashtra IT Corporation Limited (MAHA-IT), the state government enterprise, has been appointed the nodal agency to propose the award," Patil said.

Rajiv Gandhi served as the sixth Prime Minister between 1984 and 1989.Congress spokesperson Atul Londhe said, "The IT revolution ushered in by Rajiv Gandhi lifted 24 crore people above the poverty line. It is the BJP which is playing politics by changing the name of Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award. We have not changed any name...We have no objection to an award being named after Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his contribution to GST and demonetisation."

Maharashtra State Cooperative Bank to lease out 12 sugar mills

The current batch of 12 mills on lease include those in Aurangabad, Wardha, Buldhana, Beed, Dhule, Latur, Solapur and Yavatmal. The total outstanding amount of these mills is Rs 1,480.34 crore.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra State Cooperative (MSC) Bank has decided to lease out 12 sugar mills, including the Yashwant Cooperative Sugar Mill in Theur near Pune, for the upcoming sugar season of 2021-22. These mills were earlier impounded by the bank due to their failure to repay loans.

The current batch of 12 mills on lease include those in Aurangabad, Wardha, Buldhana, Beed, Dhule, Latur, Solapur and Yavatmal. The total outstanding amount of these mills is Rs 1,480.34 crore.

The Yashwant Cooperative Mill, which has been closed since 2010, has been in the eye of the storm with the farmers' outfit Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana alleging political interference as the reason behind the mill lying idle. Located close to Pune, the cooperative mill has substantial land assets, which are considered as prime real estate.

MSC Bank, the apex cooperative bank in the state, finances cooperative sugar mills with short term as well as long-term loans. Sugar mills pledge their stock and raise working finance from the bank before the season. The bank then recovers the loan with interest from the amount received by the mill from selling their sugar stock.However, when cooperative mills default in payments, the bank and other financial institutions take over the mills and sell them off. As many as 48 cooperative mills have been sold by MSC Bank to private players to recover pending loan amounts.Jijamata Cooperative Sugar Mill in Sindhkhedraja taluka of Buldhana and Vinayak Cooperative Sugar mill in Vaijapur taluka of Aurangabad have been idle the longest, with the last crushing season taking place in 2000.Sangola Taluka Cooperative Sugar mill in Sangola taluka of Solapur district, which had a crushing season in 2012, has been shut for the least amount of time.

Chairman of MSC Bank, said the bank had leased out six sugar mills last season. "They ran their operations well and have been regular in repayment of their loans and rent. These mills also gave a boost to the rural economy," he said.

However, sale of defunct cooperative sugar mills by the MSC and other cooperative banks has been a major issue in the state, with the opposition BJP often accusing the NCP and Congress of corruption in such deals. The Bombay High Court had earlier pulled up the then board of directors of MSC Bank for its alleged role in selling the mills much below their value.The Enforcement Directorate has recently taken over the Jarandeshwar Sugar Mill in Satara district, with Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar being mentioned in the FIR. Pawar has denied all wrongdoing in the matter.

Maharashtra govt resumes discussion on buying Air India building

While the MVA government is keen on purchasing the building at Rs 1,400 crore, Air India told the state government in the Tuesday meeting that its internal valuation was around Rs 2,000 crore.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The state government has reinitiated discussions over the purchase of the iconic Air India building at Nariman Point, with Maharashtra Chief Secretary SJ Kunte holding a meeting with Air India CMD Rajiv Bansal on Tuesday to deliberate on the deal.

While the MVA government is keen on purchasing the building at Rs 1,400 crore, Air India told the state government in the Tuesday meeting that its internal valuation was around Rs 2,000 crore.

A senior state official said that the land on which the AI building stands is owned by the state government and AI is supposed to pay Rs 400 crore as various outgoings. As a result, the entire deal will cost Rs 2,400 crore. The state government is said to have asked Air India to give a copy of its valuation report if they want to proceed with the sale of the building.

Kunte acknowledged that a meeting had taken place with AI officials over the proposed sale of the building. "We are examining various legal and valuation issues," Kunte said.

AI CMD Bansal refused to comment, stating that it was an internal meeting.

The national air carrier had in the face of mounting losses decided to put up for sale leasehold rights of the land and the building in December 2018.

The previous BJP government led by Devendra Fadnavis had evinced interest in buying the building to house its various offices scattered across Mumbai.

The state had bid Rs 1,400 crore for the 23-storey property. The offer, however, is Rs 200 crore less than the building's reserve price in 2019. AI now claims that the price is Rs 2,000 crore as per current valuation.

Empty liquor bottles found in Mantralaya, investigation ordered

The bottles were found lying under the staircase leading to the canteen on the ground floor of the Mantralaya.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A stack of empty liquor bottles were recovered from the ground floor of Mantralaya on Tuesday, resulting in the BJP to attack the Maha Vikas Aghadi government and seeking an explanation on how liquor was smuggled into a high security area.

The bottles were found lying under the staircase leading to the canteen on the ground floor of the Mantralaya, where offices of the chief minister, ministers, the chief secretary and other bureaucrats are located. The incident has raised questions about the apparent loopholes in the security system at the state government's seat of power. Maintaining that Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray must answer how the liquor bottles entered Mantralaya, BJP vice-president Chitra Wagh said, "This is very sad and make our heads hang in shame. Due to Covid-19, visitor entry has been stopped in Mantralaya... it is quite difficult to enter." "In the last one-and-a-half years, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has not visited Mantralaya," he added.

A senior PWD official said, "I have visited the place where the bottles were found. They were was in a shaft, which was locked. The only place from where the bottles can be thrown is the canteen. But the bottles would have broken if thrown from such a height . Our initial assessment is that the bottles were planted... The home department will investigate."

When contacted, Deputy Commissioner of Police Deepak Sakore, in charge of Mantralaya security, said an inquiry is on.

Speaking to a regional news channel, Minister of State for General Administration Dattatray Bharane suspected the role of private contractors and labourers who visit the Mantralaya for construction works in bringing in the liquor bottles. "It is my personal opinion that the bottles could have been brought inside the Mantralaya by employees of some private contractors carrying out various works in the premises. I will inform Home Minister Dilip Walse Patil about the dumping of liquor bottles," he added. Bharne said a detailed investigation will be conducted and the guilty will face stringent action. "No person can enter the Mantralaya without a valid pass issued by security officials," he said when asked whether the incident is a security lapse.

No illegality in awarding Maharashtra Sadan construction contract: Court

The court held there was no direct or circumstantial evidence to show illegal means were adopted in awarding the contract. The detailed order of the court was made available on Tuesday

Team Absolute | Mumbai

There was no illegality in awarding the contract for construction of Maharashtra Sadan in New Delhi in the noughties, a special court has ruled while discharging five accused including directors of a construction firm. The court on July 31 said it also found no substance in the allegation that the firm, KS Chamankar Enterprises, allegedly paid ?13.5 crore to family members of Maharashtra minister Chhagan Bhujbal.

Bhujbal was then the Public Works Department (PWD) minister and his plea for discharge in the case is pending. He has insisted there is no evidence to prosecute him.

The court held there was no direct or circumstantial evidence to show illegal means were adopted in awarding the contract. The detailed order of the court was made available on Tuesday.

The court discharged former superintending engineer Arun Deodhar, and Krishna Chamankar, Pravina Chamankar, Pranita Chamankar, Prasanna Chamankar, the directors of the firm.

"The developers M/s KS Chamankar Enterprises cannot be held responsible as there was neither any illegal act nor while doing legal act, illegal means were adopted, which is a basic and essential requirement of the criminal conspiracy. Whether the amount of ?13.5 crore received by accused No. 1 (Chhagan Bhujbal) and 12 to 17 (Bhujbal's family members and close aides) was of corruption or undue advantage or not, is a question of fact, which can be determined on the basis of the relevant materials," said the court.The court said the prosecution is uncertain whether the conspiracy started in 2001 or 2005. "There is no specific allegation as to on which day and stage the alleged conspiracy started. In absence of specific allegations, the details, and in absence of specific evidence to even infer such conspiracy of various officers at different level and at different places, it is difficult to hold even prima facie hatching a plan by the public servants to cause undue benefit to the developer in the project." According to the prosecution, the redevelopment project commenced in 1998. From 2001 onwards, a proposal of KS Chamanakar Enterprises for the redevelopment was under consideration of the various departments including the PWD. "It is a matter of record that since 2001, the process of the project started, and it was completed in the year 2006-2007. In the period of 2001 to 2007, several officers might have changed or retired," said the court.The state's Anti-Corruption Bureau, in its charge sheet filed earlier this year, alleged the PWD, which was then headed by Bhujbal, conspired to ensure the firm benefits from the project.

EDITOR'S SPECS

WAKEUP, BELL IS ALARMING

Britain, host to the UN Climate Change Conference named COP26, called for urgent global action in response on the science of climate change that says the planet has warmed more than previously estimated. The report warns that climate change is already affecting every region across the globe and that without urgent action to limit warming, heatwaves, heavy precipitation, droughts, and loss of Arctic Sea ice, snow cover and permafrost, will all increase while carbon sinks will become less effective at slowing the growth of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. The report highlights that cutting global emissions, starting immediately, to net zero by mid-century would have a good chance of limiting global warming to 1.5C in the long-term and help to avoid the worst effects of climate change. As extreme events are felt across the globe, from wildfires in North America to floods in China, across Europe, India and parts of Africa, and heatwaves in Siberia, COP President Alok Sharma has been negotiating with governments and businesses to increase global climate ambition and take immediate action to help halve global emissions in the next decade and reach net zero emissions by mid-century in order to keep the 1.5C goal set out in the Paris Agreement within reach. The UK is already showing leadership with clear plans to reduce its emissions by 68 per cent by 2030 and 78 per cent by 2035, leading to net zero by 2050. Currently, more than 70 per cent of the world's economy is covered by a net zero target -- up from 30 per cent when the UK took over as incoming COP Presidency. May saw the establishment of the first net zero G7, with all countries coming forward with 2030 emission reduction targets that put them on a pathway to reaching this goal by 2050. However, report shows that more action is urgently needed.

Why aircraft carriers are inalienable from India's maritime security?

Binay Kumar Singh

As India's first indigenous aircraft carrier, Vikrant, begins its sea trials this year, it not only epitomises a significant milestone in the country's native techno-industrial prowess but also marks the fulfilment of a dream long nurtured by a nation aspiring to revive its maritime tradition and restore to itself the prestige it held among seafaring countries in the past.

Indeed, the impact of seapower in shaping India's past and the role that it would play in forging her future had been well understood by our national leadership and strategists alike, and soon after independence the Indian Navy (IN) embarked on a cogently articulated plan to strengthen its capabilities. Specifically, within six months of Independence, the Navy drafted a ten-year expansion plan which, inter alia, included two light fleet carriers to be later replaced by four fleet carriers. This focus on carrier borne airpower emerged from the experiences of the Second World War where aircraft carriers indubitably played a central role on both sides. But it wasn't the Navy alone which sought to bolster its aviation capabilities. The eminent civil servant, historian and strategic thinker, Sardar KM Panikkar presciently noted in his book titled India and the Indian Ocean: An Essay on the Influence of Sea Power on Indian History (1945).

"Equally important, especially for a country like India, with a vast coastline is the development of a naval air arm, as an integral part of the sea forces. The naval air arm has an important part to play in naval warfare, by patrolling the coasts, by keeping the sea clear and affording air cover to the navy."

Sure enough, the Indian Navy created a Directorate of Naval Aviation in 1948, five years before the first Sea-land aircraft were inducted. However, due to the vicissitudes of limited budget versus enormous demands for public spending from all sectors, the Navy's requirement of a strong air arm and aircraft carriers was trimmed in 1950 to only a Fleet Requirement Unit (FRU) with 12 aircraft. Notwithstanding the vagaries of defence budget, Indian naval aviation followed a sure-footed trajectory of growth - from Sea-land aircraft to Firefly, Vampire, Alize, Sea Harrier and Mig 29K; from Super Constellation to IL 38, Tu 142, Dornier and P 8I; a variety of helicopters and augmentation of infrastructure, technological base and quality manpower.

Carrier aviation is ostensibly the bellwether of a navy's aviation prowess. That is perhaps the reason why those who possess it desire to preserve it and those who do not, aspire for it. The operational history of the IN's carriers is illustrative of the capabilities of carriers. Late Vice Admiral GM Hiranandani has accurately chronicled the deployment of INS Vikrant during the 1971 Indo-Pak war in his book Transition to Triumph: The Indian Navy. In this war, INS Vikrant dominated the Eastern maritime theatre where it repeatedly struck ports in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), destroyed about 60,000 tons of merchant shipping and sank a number of Pakistani war vessels. In sum, Vikrant was instrumental in enforcing a maritime blockade of East Pakistan.

In recent years, aircraft carriers have proven their capability in various conflicts such as the First Gulf War in 1990 (Operation Desert Storm), the War on Terror in Afghanistan in 2001 (Operation Enduring Freedom) and the Second Gulf War in 2003 (Operation Iraqi Freedom). Significantly, carriers have played an equally crucial role in containing and managing less than war situations, demonstrating national will and supporting friendly countries. In India's context, the possible roles of aircraft carriers could be supporting the land battle, security of Sea Lines of Communication, protecting vital interests overseas and defence of island territories. Captain Gurpreet Khurana of the Indian Navy has elucidated these roles in an article titled eAircraft Carriers and India's Naval Doctrine'.

While most advanced navies accept the importance of aircraft carriers, critics have often called these versatile platforms as a "self-licking ice-cream cone" and a "white elephant", highlighting the need for a large number of escorts to protect the carrier. Lee Willet has rebutted such criticism in the book 'British Naval Aviation : The First Hundred Years'. He calls attention to the fact that "no carrier has been sunk since 1945 and the vulnerability of carriers is not a military matter but an enduring one for budgetary and inter-service battles". Former Navy Chief Admiral Arun Prakash is of the view that rather than needing protection from a large number of escorts, the carrier actually provides protection to the force that may accompany it.

Although the debate on the cost effectiveness of aircraft carriers is likely to continue, their role and need in naval warfare cannot be overstated. The United States, for example, was only able to respond to the Korean crisis in time because it had readily deployable carriers on call. Similarly, it was the carriers HMS Hermes and HMS Invincible that enabled the United Kingdom to defend the Falkland Islands.

In an incisive article titled "Lessons from Modern Warfare: What the Conflicts of the Post-Cold War Years Should Have Taught Us", Benjamin Lambeth concludes that aircraft carriers can substitute land-based airpower and sometimes they are the only available option for wielding airpower. Very often, though, aircraft carriers supplement land-based airpower, as evidenced by the performance of the US Navy's carriers in Operation Iraqi Freedom. These characteristics of deck-based air power are critical for India's maritime security. With ever increasing maritime trade, investments overseas and presence of a large Indian diaspora across the globe, there is no way to guarantee security of our maritime interests other than an assured reach in distant regions and the ability to respond quickly in the face of a developing crisis. The navy, by virtue of its mobility, reach, sustainability and versatility can preserve our maritime interests overseas as well as at home in our maritime zones and island territories. However, when ships are deployed beyond the reach of shore-based aircraft, they require support from carrier-based aircraft. This ability of the aircraft carriers to protect own forces and project power ashore is what makes them a key component of naval power.

As India prepares to secure its maritime interests in a gradually changing global strategic stage, there is an emergence of a complex security scenario in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and beyond. The rise of an assertive China and its far-reaching repercussions across economic, geo-strategic and cultural domains symbolises the turbulence in global affairs in general and the Indo-Pacific in particular. The rapid modernisation of the Chinese Navy - which is now the world's largest navy, according to a report released earlier this year by the United States Department of Defence - is of primary concern to its neighbours. The Chinese Navy presently operates two aircraft carriers and is building two more which would be significantly larger and more capable. The consequences of such an exponential growth in China's naval capability will most likely have consequences for India's maritime security. The pan-IOR vision of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) articulated by the Indian Prime Minister requires a robust and agile Navy which is capable of ensuring secure seas in our areas of maritime interest and responding to a wide range of potential crises in the region. Aircraft carriers are the sine qua non for such a Navy which aspires to secure core national interests. It is through perspicacity of the Navy's earliest leadership and the consistent guidance and course corrections of their successors, that the Indian Navy has built a credible and effective air arm today. This needs to be preserved and further bolstered in order to forge an adaptive capability to address the emerging regional maritime challenges.

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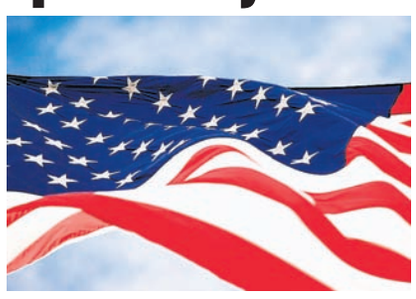
international

US wants Af neighbours not to recognise govt imposed by force

Washington | Agencies



The US wants Afghanistan's neighbours not to recognise any government in Kabul that has been imposed by force, Dawn reported.The demand -- made at a US State Department briefing, preceded a meeting of the Troika Plus nations in Doha on Wednesday.The group, which includes the US, Russia, China and Pakistan, is aimed at finding a political solution to the decades-old war in Afghanistan.During the news briefing, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said that two key meetings were being held in Doha this week, bringing together representatives from the region and beyond and from multilateral organisations.The participants will press for a reduction in violence, a ceasefire and a "commitment by the part of these regional and broader governments and multilateral and international institutions not to recognise any government that is imposed by force," Price said, as per the report.The meetings in the Qatari capital come as the Taliban have stepped up their campaign to defeat the government as foreign forces withdraw.US Special envoy for Afghanistan Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad is representing Washington in the talks in Doha.Pakistan has sent its special envoy Muhammad Sadiq and its ambassador to Kabul, Mansoor Khan. Kremlin's envoy to Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov and the newly appointed Chinese envoy for Afghanistan Yue Xiao Yong are representing their countries.All these countries have major stakes in bringing peace to Afghanistan and are seeking a regional consensus on the Afghan conflict despite their differences.In the press briefing, Price said that Khalilzad had been sent to Doha to "advance a collective international response to what can only be termed as a rapidly deteriorating security situation".US Special envoy for Afghanistan Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad is representing Washington in the talks in Doha.Pakistan has sent its special envoy Muhammad Sadiq and its ambassador to Kabul, Mansoor Khan. Kremlin's envoy to Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov and the newly appointed Chinese envoy for Afghanistan Yue Xiao Yong are representing their countries.In the press briefing, Price said that Khalilzad had been sent to Doha to "advance a collective international response to what can only be termed as a rapidly deteriorating security situation". However, the US media on Tuesday reported that Khalilzad was there to warn the Taliban against pursuing a military victory on ground. He will "deliver a blunt message: A Taliban government that comes to power through force in Afghanistan will not be recognised," media reported.

SYRIAN PRESIDENT ORDERS FORMATION OF NEW GOVT

Damascus: Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has ordered the formation of a new government with most ministers remaining unchanged.According to a list of names released by the state news agency SANA, most ministers -- including top names like Prime Minister Hussein Arnous, Minister of Defence Ali Abdullah Ayoub, Interior Minister Muhammad al-Rahmoun and Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad -- remained the same, Xinhua reported.

The new change covered five ministers in total, namely the ministers of information, social affairs, as well as internal trade, and two state ministers.The new information minister is Boutros Hallaq, who holds several positions at the Damascus University, such as vice president of Damascus University for scientific affairs, the head of the department of public relations and media at the faculty of mass communication, and a professor of public relations and advertising in the same college.He was also the dean of the faculty of mass communication between 2013 and 2017 and holds a doctorate in the management of media institutions in 1999 from Cairo University, a master's degree in public relations and advertising in 1996 from the same university, and a BA in journalism in 1987.Amru Salem was named as the minister of internal trade. Salem previously held the positions of minister of communications and adviser to Assad.

The third new minister is Muhammad Seif al-Deen who was named as the minister of social affairs.

Seif al-Deen held the position of assistant minister of public works and housing for administrative and legal affairs, and also held the position of director of social affairs in the same ministry.Earlier this month, Assad tasked Prime Minister Hussein Arnous with forming a new government following the presidential election held in May, which extended Assad's presidency into a fourth term in office.

US wants to continue improving ties with Pak: Pentagon

Washington | Agencies

The Pentagon has said that US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin conveyed to Pakistan Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa about Washington's interest in continuing to improve the US-Pakistan relationship.

Secretary Austin "expressed his interest in continuing to improve the US-Pakistan relationship and build upon our multiple shared interests in the region", a statement said, the Dawn reported on Wednesday.

"Secretary Austin and General Bajwa discussed (during a telephonic conversation) the ongoing situation in Afghanistan, regional security and stability, and the bilateral defence relationship more broadly," Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said.

Austin also discussed the mutual goals of security and stability in the region, he said.

Responding to a journalist's question, Kirby said the US continues to have conversations with the Pakistani leadership about the safe havens that exist along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

"We are mindful that those safe havens are only providing a source of more insecurity and more instability inside Afghanistan. We are not bashful about having that discussion with Pakistani leaders," he said.

"We are also mindful that Pakistan and the Pakistani people also fall victim to terrorist activities that emanate from that region. So, we all have a shared sense of the importance of closing down those safe havens and not allowing them to be used by the Taliban or other terrorist networks to sow discord," Kirby said.

"And again, we're having that conversation with the Pakistanis all the time," he said.

Asked what role India and Pakistan should play in Afghanistan, the Pentagon spokesperson said: "We want all neighbouring countries not to take actions that make the situation in Afghanistan more dangerous than it is already, and to continue to try to use international pressure to get a negotiated peaceful political settlement to this war."

Pak top envoy in UK hopeful of red list exit

Islamabad/London | Agencies

Pakistan High Commissioner to UK Moazzam Ahmad Khan has said he is optimistic that the Boris Johnson-led British government will remove Pakistan from its red list in the upcoming travel update on August 26.

In a briefing to journalists in London on Tuesday, Khan outlined the mission's engagement with the British authorities on their decision to keep travel from Pakistan restricted, and said officials should re-examine data from Pakistan taking all elements into account, the Dawn reported on Wednesday.

He also dismissed reports of a communication gap between Pakistan and Britain on the Covid-19 issue.

"We feel the system they (British authorities) have adopted to assess Pakistan does not present an accurate picture of our Covid-19 situation, and this needs to be corrected," he said.

"This is not criticism, but it is important to share our point of view. There is no communication gap, we are constantly in touch with them. In fact, I had an opportunity to speak to UK PM Johnson and brought it to his attention that keeping Pakistan on the red list has left both people in Pakistan and the diaspora frustrated and disappointed. He said 'we are looking into it'."

Khan said that two of the key reservations communicated by British authorities regarding Pakistan are insufficient genomic surveillance of new variants, and low testing. He added that lack of data was not a concern raised by UK authorities.

The high commissioner said: "Perhaps comparatively this (lower testing) may be the case, but we feel the sample size of our daily tests is adequate to make informed decisions."

He said that alongside daily cases data, the British authorities have been requested to look at daily deaths. "Those cannot be hidden, and the demand for oxygen and ventilators too cannot be concealed. So their decision should not be based on one thing, but after considering all factors. We feel when assessing Pakistan's situation, all elements were not considered."

Khan said the UK government's main aim was to prevent entry of infected passengers, especially the entry of a new variant, into the UK. He felt that through PCR and antigen tests, this goal could be achieved.

N Korea slams South over joint military drills with US

Pyongyang | Agencies

North Korea on Wednesday slammed South Korea for pushing ahead with the planned military drills with the US, and warned of "serious security crisis".

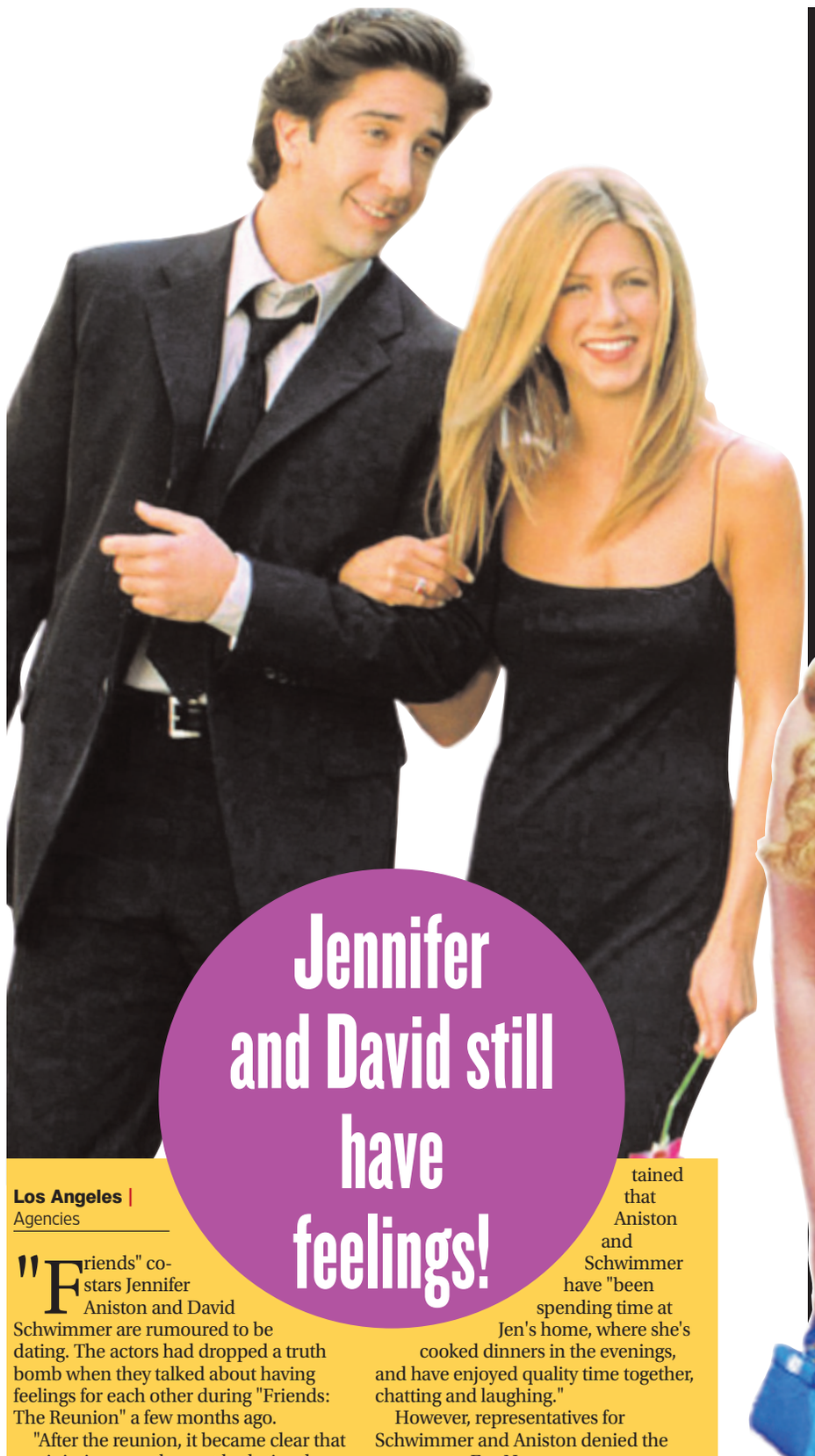
In a press statement published by the official Korean Central News Agency, Kim Yong Chol, department director of Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK), said: "As we have already clarified, we will make them realise by the minute what a dangerous choice they made and what a serious security crisis they will face because of their wrong choice."

Kim Yong Chol made the remarks one day after Kim Yo Jong, vice department director of the Central Committee of the WPK, issued a similar warning: "the choice of hope or despair is totally up to the South Korean authorities", Xinhua news agency reported.

He stressed that the military exercises slated by South Korea with the US "would be an unfavourable prelude further beclouding the future of the inter-Korean relations."

"But the South Korean authorities have now revealed that peace and trust much touted by them whenever an opportunity presented itself were just a wordplay," said Kim Yong Chol, who is in charge of South Korea affairs in the country. South Korea "must be made to clearly understand how dearly they have to pay for answering our good faith with hostile acts after letting go the opportunity for improved inter-Korean relations," he added.

Despite strong opposition from Pyongyang, South Korea and the US started their four-day preliminary drills on Tuesday and the joint military exercises are expected to run through next week from August 16 to 26.



Jennifer and David still have feelings!

Los Angeles | Agencies

"Friends" co-stars Jennifer Aniston and David Schwimmer are rumoured to be dating. The actors had dropped a truth bomb when they talked about having feelings for each other during "Friends: The Reunion" a few months ago.

"After the reunion, it became clear that reminiscing over the past had stirred up feelings for both of them and that chemistry they'd always had to bury was still there," a source told Closer, reports foxnews.com.

The source added, "They began texting immediately after filming and, just last month, David flew from his home in New York to see Jen in LA."

The insider maintained that Aniston and Schwimmer have "been spending time at Jen's home, where she's cooked dinners in the evenings, and have enjoyed quality time together, chatting and laughing."

However, representatives for Schwimmer and Aniston denied the rumours to Fox News.

Schwimmer admitted he "had a major crush on Jen" during the popular reunion special in May and Aniston told host James Corden "it was reciprocated" during the show's run from 1994 to 2004.

BEYONCE: TOURING TOOK A TOLL ON MY BODY

Los Angeles | Agencies

American pop star Beyonce Knowles has described how touring has taken a toll on her body, leaving with muscle aches, pains, and a stressed hair and skin. "I think like many women, I have felt the pressure of being the backbone of my family and my company and didn't realize how much that takes a toll on my mental and physical well-being. I have not always made myself a priority, Beyonce told Harper's Bazaar's Icons issue, reports femalefirst.co.uk. The 39-year-old added, "I've personally struggled with insomnia from touring for more than half of my life. Years of wear and tear on my muscles from dancing in heels. The stress on my hair and skin, from sprays and dyes to the heat of a curling iron and wearing heavy makeup while sweating on stage." The 'Black Is King' hitmaker is aware she needs to "take care of (herself) and listen" to her body to be at her "best", she said that she used to struggle with body image and was fixated on her physique.

Tom Hardy's career alternative- 'a sourdough café'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor Tom Hardy or Max Rockatansky from 'Mad Max: Fury Road' is actually at peace with himself and the pandemic has taught him a lot about that. He enjoys baking his own bread. While being locked down he figured out an alternate career that just suits him fine.

"Fifteen-minute workouts in the garden, homeschooling and making sourdough. I still have the leaven! You have to feed that every day. That's a commitment. I've actually managed to back it up so I've got two," Hardy said, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

The actor added, "Just in case someone drops one on the floor or the jar explodes and it's like, 'That's a year-and-a-half's work! I was thinking I might open up a sourdough cafe. Coffee and sourdough and jiu-jitsu and ... meetings. You can bring your dog."

The 43-year-old star, who has two children, aged five and two, with wife Charlotte Riley and a 13-year-old son from a former relationship, has had a lot of time to reflect over the last year and has learned to care less about what people would think.

ANYTHING KYLIE CAN DO... NORTH CAN DO BETTER!

Los Angeles | Agencies

Kim Kardashian famously caused a storm when she showed off North West's impressive art skills earlier this year - with critics claiming the eight-year-old couldn't possibly have painted it herself.

Yet it seems artistic flair runs in the family as Kylie Jenner also proved to be a dab hand with a paintbrush at her 24th birthday party on Tuesday.

The beauty mogul opted for a wholesome start to her day of celebrations as he joined friends for a relaxing group painting session, hosted by Timree Gold of Paint Club.

Though she didn't show off her final product, Kylie was eager to showcase some of her friends' impressive paintings via Instagram Story video.

Several of Kylie's closest pals, including former assistant Victoria Villarroel and BFF Stassie Karanikolaou, shared snaps and videos from the painting party to their own Instagram Stories.

Christina Applegate reveals her 'strange journey'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Emmy award-winning actor Christina Applegate has shared that she has multiple sclerosis and revealed that it has been a "strange journey". Applegate announced it in a post on Twitter, reports variety.com. "Hi friends. A few months ago I was diagnosed with MS. It's been a strange journey. But I have been so supported by people that I know who also have this condition. It's been a tough road," the "Dead to Me" actor wrote. Applegate won a Primetime Emmy for an outstanding guest appearance in a comedy series for "Friends" in 2003. She was nominated in the same category for the same show in 2004. Applegate is also a breast cancer survivor. She was detected with the cancer in 2008 and underwent a bilateral mastectomy.

VEMRA FARMIGA: IT'S AMAZING GROWING OLD WITH PATRICK

Los Angeles | Agencies

Vera Farmiga-starrer "The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It" is all set to hit the Indian screens. The actress, who plays Lorraine Warren, has spoken about her friendship with actor Patrick Wilson, who essays Ed Warren in the movie. Talking about her friendship with Wilson over the last nine years of making the Conjuring movies how it has affected the on-screen relationship between Ed and Lorraine, Farmiga says she finds it amazing growing older with him. "Patrick Wilson. Yeah.... I mean, it's amazing growing older with my fake spouse... There's never a lukewarm attitude when it comes to working so intensely and so intimately over time with a costar... At the risk of sounding corny, my love for old Patrick Wilson continues to run feverish... We are such good friends... We respect each other," said Farmiga.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY

Jade Thirlwall

TOKYO PARALYMPIC GAMES TO SET RECORD IN WOMEN PARTICIPATION

Tokyo | Agencies

The Tokyo Paralympic Games 2020, scheduled to be held from August 24 till September 5, will be an event of many firsts, with the most striking being a record number of female athletes who will be competing in the quadrennial showpiece.At least 40.5 per cent of all the athletes will be women, according to the IPC Qualification Criteria. This equates to 1,782 athletes, an increase on the 1,671 women who competed at Rio 2016 (38.6 per cent).

Tokyo, which will make history as the first city to stage the Paralympic Games for a second time -- having hosted the event in 1964 -- will also see badminton, a sport with mass viewership, make its debut along with taekwondo.

Despite the pandemic restrictions, the Tokyo organisers are expecting to surpass the viewership numbers

logged at the 2016 Rio Paralympics, which had a cumulative audience of 4.1 billion on television.

In India, the Paralympic Committee of India (PCI) has awarded the rights to broadcast the Games to Eurosport India. This will be the first time Eurosport will broadcast a global multi-sport event in the country and expand on a diverse range of sports already available to fans across its platforms.

With a focus on local heroes, Eurosport India's coverage of the Tokyo 2020 Summer Paralympic Games will start on August 27 to coincide with the men's and women's archery events at Yumenoshima Park Archery Field. The Eurosport feed will also be live on the discovery+ app for the fans to stay up to speed with all the action from Tokyo.

India will be fielding its largest ever contingent this year with 54 Paralympic athletes participating across nine disciplines. Among those in medal contention are, world No. 3 and world No. 2 in javelin, Sumit Antil and Sandeep Chaudhary; Manish Narwal (10m air pistol), Singhraj (10m air pistol) and Avani Lekhara (10m air rifle, 50m air rifle) in shooting and Mariyappan Thangavelu in high jump.

INDIA LOOK TO BREAK LORD'S JINX

London | Agencies

India and their frontline batsmen will have history against them when they take on England in the second Test here at Lord's from Thursday.India have won only two of the 18 Test matches they have played at the venue, considered to be the home of Test cricket. The last of their victories came on the 2014 tour, 28 years after their first win in 1986.

India's top batsmen, skipper Virat Kohli, Ajinkya Rahane and Cheteshwar Pujara don't have a flattering record at the venue, where the slope can have great impact and affect a batsman's stance.Kohli, Pujara and Rahane have played two Tests each at Lord's. While No. 4 batsman Kohli averages 16.25, No. 3 batsman Pujara averages 22.25. Rahane is a shade better with 34.75 thanks to a century he scored in 2014.There has been only one century from the six outings made by India's top three batsmen and that came off Rahane's bat in 2014.India will also have to look at their bowling combination. It is likely that India may go in with four seamers and one spinner in the Test match as Kohli has made it clear.

Whether they bring in R Ashwin is the question. Ashwin has had a good outing in England so far -- in the World Test Championship final against New Zealand and a county game for Somerset -- and his omission from the first Test surprised many ex-cricketers.Shardul

Thakur too is not available for the second Test, confirmed BCCI.

India may also consider pace bowler Ishant Sharma who drove India to victory when they last won a Test at Lord's in 2014.

The 32-year-old 102-Test veteran had picked seven wickets for 74 runs in 23 overs to lead India to a 95-run win in the second Test in 2014 to help India take 1-0 lead in the series before England came back to win the last three Tests.In a unique innovation to help those with vision impairments recognise the different Tokyo 2020 Paralympic medals by touch, a series of circular indentations have been included on the side of the medals for the first time in Paralympic history. One indentation represents gold, two distinguishes silver and three identifies bronze. Braille letters also spell out "Tokyo 2020" on the medals' face.

Shakib, Stafanie named ICC players of the month

Dubai | Agencies

Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan and West Indies women's team captain Stafanie Taylor were voted as ICC Player of the Month for July 2021 in men's and women's categories respectively on Wednesday.Shakib, who was nominated alongside West Indies' Hayden Walsh Jr and Australia's Mitchell Marsh, put up an outstanding performance in July.

The Bangladesh all-rounder starred in his side's series wins against Zimbabwe -- scoring 145 runs and picking eight wickets in the ODIs. He followed that up with three wickets in T20Is at an economy of 7. He also picked five wickets in the one-off Test -- with a spell of 4/82 in the first innings -- as Bangladesh won by 220 runs. He is also the top all-rounder in ICC Men's T20 Rankings.Taylor was the standout performer for West Indies in the lim-

ited-overs series against Pakistan.She was nominated for the award alongside teammate Hayley Matthews and Pakistan's Fatima Sana, but her all-round performance in the series helped her claim the most votes.In four ODIs against Pakistan, Taylor scored 175 runs with a strike-rate of 79.18, and also picked three wickets at an economical 3.72. She also picked four wickets in the T20Is at 9.25, and a stunning economy rate of 5.55.

2nd Test: England set to miss Broad, Anderson doubtful

London | Agencies

England are likely to play the second Test against India at Lord's beginning Thursday without frontline pace bowlers James Anderson and Stuart Broad who are down with niggles.

Broad, who pulled up during warm-up on Tuesday, is highly doubtful as the England team management have already summoned pace bowler Saqib Mahmood as his cover.

Anderson, who became Test cricket's third highest wicket-taker during the first Test in Nottingham, missed the training session on Wednesday morning due to thigh strain.

England are already without four of their top pace bowlers. Ben Stokes and Jofra Archer are not playing this series due to mental health and injuries whereas Chris Woakes too

has not recovered from injury. Olly Stone is also out of the entire season due to stress fracture.

England have been playing Broad and Anderson in alternate Test matches but decided to press them into service together in the first Test due to absence of options.

Anderson (621 wickets) and Broad (524 wickets) have together taken 1145 Test wickets and have a combined experience of 312 Test matches.

The 39-year-old Anderson had said prior to the first Test that preparations for the series weren't up to the mark.

THAKUR OUT DUE TO HAMSTRING INJURY

Pace bowler Shardul Thakur has been ruled out of the second Test, beginning at Lord's on Thursday, due to hamstring injury.

"Shardul Thakur is not available for the second Test," a Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) official told the media on Wednesday.Indian skipper Virat Kohli said that Thakur will be available for the third Test."From what we were told, he should be okay for the third Test. I think it is a myofascial strain on his left hamstring,"

JASPRIT BUMRAH MAKES ENTRY INTO TOP-10 OF ICC TEST RANKINGS

London: Indian pacer Jasprit Bumrah has made an entry into the top-10 of the ICC Test rankings for bowlers after his nine-wicket haul in the first Test against England, the International Cricket Council (ICC) said on Wednesday.

Bumrah, who held a career-high third position in September 2019, jumped 10 spots to sit at ninth place with 760 rating points. He gained 77 points after the first Test against England at Trent Bridge.

It is the first time Bumrah has been in the top 10 after late March. He is now sandwiched between Stuart Broad (eighth place) and Mitchell Starc (10th place).

Bumrah picked 4/46 in the first innings. In the second innings, the pacer took 5/64, bagging his sixth five-wicket haul in Test cricket. The 27-year-old played a crucial hand with the bat too, making 28 off 34 balls with three fours and a six, increasing India's lead in the first innings to 95 runs.

England, India fined; docked two WTC points for slow over-rate

London | Agencies

England and India were fined 40 per cent of their match fees and had their World Test Championship points reduced by two for slow over rate during the first Test at Nottingham on Wednesday. The match also marked the opening of the new WTC cycle running till 2023.

The fines were imposed by ICC match referee Chris Broad. As per Article 16.11.2 of the WTC playing conditions, a side is penalised two points for each over short.

Additionally, as per Article 2.22 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel, which relates to minimum over-rate offences, players are fined 20 per cent of their match fees for every over their side fails to bowl in the allotted time.

Post the deductions, both teams now have two points each in their standings ahead of the second Test at Lord's, which begins from Thursday.

The first Test between England and India at Trent Bridge ended in a draw. With India at 57/1 needing 157 runs to win and go 1-0 up in the series on the final day, rain played spoilsport.

ATP TOUR: MEDVEDEV ADVANCES; NADAL PULLS OUT DUE TO FOOT INJURY

Toronto | Agencies

Top seed, Russian's Daniil Medvedev made a winning return at the National Bank Open -- an ATP Masters 1000 tournament --, even as second seed Rafael Nadal of Spain has withdrawn due to a left foot injury, putting a question mark on his US Open preparations later this month.Medvedev, who had enjoyed a breakthrough run to his first ATP Masters 1000 final in 2019, overcame Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 in a rain-disrupted clash to kick start his North American hard-court swing on Tuesday evening. However, Nadal withdrew before his match, the tournament organisers announced. "I have had this issue for a couple of months, as people know. Of course, it is not a happy situation after all the success that I had here in Canada, not being able to play this year after missing a year." Nadal said. Nadal's left foot injury forced him to miss Wimbledon and the Tokyo Olympics. The winner of 20 Grand Slams returned last week at the Citi Open in Washington, where he battled through his opening match against Jack Sock in a final-set tie-break before losing against South African Lloyd Harris in three sets in the third round.

My goal is to win Champions League once more: Messi

Paris | Agencies

Argentina captain Lionel Messi said on Wednesday that he dreams about winning the Champions League with his new side Paris Saint Germain (PSG).The 34-year-old Messi has won four Champions League titles with his ex-side Barcelona. The last Champions League title which Messi won with Barcelona came in 2015.

PSG are still searching for their first title in the competition after losing to Bayern Munich in the 2020 final and losing in the semi-finals in the previous season. "My goal and my dream is to win the Champions League once more. I think we have the team to do it here," said Messi in a press conference at Parc des Princes, where he was unveiled as PSG's new signing for two years with an extension option for another year.Messi made a tearful exit from Barcelona, ending his association with the club he joined as a 13-year-old as the Nou Camp-based club was unable to afford a new deal under La Liga's financial fair play rules.Considered as one of the greatest football players of all time, he scored a record 672 goals in 778 games for Barcelona. He won a record 35 trophies with the club.

WI to host South Africa ahead of women's World Cup Qualifiers

Antigua | Agencies

West Indies and South Africa women's teams will compete in a three-match T20I series followed by a five-match ODI series, starting August 31 in Antigua.After a successful white-ball series against Pakistan last month, West Indies have announced that they will host South Africa for an eight-match tour.The series will form an important part of the preparations for the ICC Women's World Cup Qualifiers that will help West Indies secure a spot in the

ICC Women's Cricket World Cup next year in New Zealand.However, for South Africa, this series presents an opportunity for the players to showcase their skills on the international stage and test their readiness and bench strength, given that they have already qualified for the World Cup. West Indies will hold a high-performance training camp ahead of the series under head coach, Courtney Walsh, who believes that the team is going in the right direction and is prepared for the upcoming challenge.

J'khand rewards both woman hockey players Rs 50 lakh each

Ranchi | Agencies

The Jharkhand government on Wednesday presented a cash award of Rs 50 lakh each to two women hockey players from the state who took part in the Tokyo Olympics.

The Indian team finished at fourth position in the Olympics, after losing their bronze medal match to Britain.As Salima Tete and Nikki Pradhan arrived in Ranchi on Wednesday, they were accorded a warm welcome by the state government at the airport with traditional music and dance.

From the airport, both players went to the Secretariat where Chief Minister Hemant Soren felicitated them. Both were given a Rs 50 lakh cheque, a scooty, laptop, and a smartphone.

Soren announced to convert their houses from a hut to a 'pucca house'. He also announced that if women hockey players and coaches face any medical issues while playing, the state government would bear their treatment cost.

"The girls are making us proud despite a lack of facilities such as roads, electricity, and water. It is our responsibility to look after their facilities and resources. The state government has decided to implement the dream of a residential sports centre which will be equipped with sports facilities for badminton, football, hockey and other sports," said Soren.

SUNNY DEOL TO JOIN POOJA BHATT IN BALKI'S NEXT

Team Absolute | Mumbai

R. Balki has announced his new film, a thriller starring Sunny Deol, Dulquer Salmaan, Pooja Bhatt and Shreya Dhanwanthary in lead roles. The writer-director is best known for directing 'Cheeni Kum', 'Paa' and 'Pad Man'. He'll be trying his hand at the thriller genre for the first time.

Talking about being back to shooting films, Balki said, "After months of waiting, it is exciting to start shooting anything. And to make a film in a genre that I haven't attempted before is even more exciting."

On getting Sunny Deol to join the ensemble, Balki couldn't hide his excitement: "I am ecstatic to be working with Sunny, an actor whose booming screen presence conveys so much. Am glad he is back and hoping this new adventure will add a new dimension to his glorious filmography."

The upcoming film is expected to be released in early 2022.

SIDHARTH, KIARA CHEER 'INDIAN IDOL 12' FINALISTS IN I-DAY SPECIAL

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actors Sidharth Malhotra and Kiara Advani will be the chief guests during the final episode of 'Indian Idol Season 12'. With an array of performances dedicated to Independence Day, Sidharth and Kiara will also be seen promoting their upcoming film 'Shershaah'.

"It is amazing that the 'Indian Idol Season 12' finale is 12-hour long. I would like to wish everyone lots of luck and love," says Actor Sidharth Malhotra.

The finale episode of the show will have more than 40 acts spanning 12 hours which will be a mix of several tributes like 'Lata Mangeshkar Tribute', 'Golden Era', 'Fauji Special' and 'Independence Day Special'.

Both Sidharth and Kiara cheered for the six finalists -- Pawandeep Rajan, Arunita Kanjilal, Mohd. Danish, Sayli Kamble, Nihal Tauro and Shanmukha Priya.

KUNAL SINGH TO JOIN THE CAST OF 'PAVITRA RISHTA'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Kunal Singh who was seen as an antagonist in television show 'Naagin: Bhagya Ka Zehreela Khel' will now appear in Ekta Kapoor's 'Pavitra Rishta 2'. The actor will be in a cameo role portraying actress Ankita Lokhande's on-screen love interest. About his role the actor says, "I am playing Archana's (Ankita) boyfriend 'Gaurav'. It's a cameo but till the time I am in the show, I have got a very good screen presence. I feel blessed to be part of most loved show. And sharing screen space with popular actors like Ankita, Usha Nadkarni ma'am and Shaheer Sheikh is just like another opportunity."

Kunal is also known for his role of 'Sharavan Suryavanshi' in the show 'Saath Nibhana Saathiya'. He feels like a homecoming on getting an opportunity to work again with Ekta Kapoor.

Aahana Kumra heads to London for next film shoot

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Aahana Kumra, who is quite excited about her upcoming film for which she has travelled to London, said that the new film is taking her out of her comfort zone. The actress said, "I am super duper excited about the movie and one of the reasons for the same is because it is a crime thriller." "The movie will see me in an unseen avatar for which I will be stepping out of my comfort zone. In the end, that's what an actor looks for -- to be able to push the boundaries every day," Aahana added. Aahana has worked across all mediums and is popular for her roles in films like Lipstick Under My Burkha, Khuda Haafiz, and TV series like Agent Raghav - Crime Branch, Yudh, among others. About her next, an official announcement on the project is yet to be made.

Sara Ali Khan unveils her 'Mission Frontline' look

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Sara Ali Khan unveiled the poster 'Mission Frontline' on Wednesday. The actress took to her Instagram and shared the poster of her upcoming show on discovery+. Sara will be seen in action with the Veerangana Force in Assam for the show. The audience will get to see her in a never-seen-before avatar performing extreme physical training routines alongside the Veerangana Force, India's first female commando unit to tackle rising crime against women in the state.

Veerangana Force was launched in November 2012, after a year's training in Tamil Nadu. They are a group of women commando force of the Assam Police. They have been trained in 'silent drill' known only to US marines, martial arts, bike riding, horse riding, use of weapons to take on eve-teasers, or anyone trying to harm women's modesty. They wear black uniforms and violet caps.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY

Rhea Chakraborty

DHAMAKA RECORDS FEATURES ONE OF A KIND COLLABORATION

Team Absolute | Mumbai

DHMK - Dhamaka Records, a new music label is all set to release its one of a kind track which features 15 music industry stalwarts for the first time ever, collaborating and showcasing unity to fight against the pandemic.

The song, titled 'Hum Hindustani' will witness industry legends like Lata Mangeshkar, Amitabh Bachchan, Padmini Kolhapure, Anil Agarwal, Sonu Nigam, Kailash Kher, Alka Yagnik and Shabbir Kumar lending their voices for this phenomenal track. Also next-gen stars like Shraddha Kapoor, Sonakshi Sinha, Shruti Hassan, Tara Sutaria, Ankit Tiwari, Siddhanth Kapoor & Jannat Zuber too will be singing this song. This song is produced by Priyaank Sharma & Paras Mehta for their music label 'Dhamaka Records' and features legendary personalities soulful voices crooning to the patriotic tune. 'Hum Hindustani' is all set to launch this Independence Day weekend on 13th August.

Owned, Published and Printed by Yogenra Chaturvedi at Indian Express, A-8, Sector-7, Noida (UP) and Published from 23, Hanuman Road, Cannaught Place, New Delhi-110001 Editor- Yogendra Chaturvedi, (responsible for selection of news under PRB ACT). RNI Code DELENG/2017/19576, Phone No. 011-23346744, www.absoluteindianews.com,E-mail: absoluteindiadesk@gmail.com (Bhopal will be the jurisdiction of any dispute.)