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Root takes England to 119/3 after India score 364 on Day 2...

BOMBAY HIGH COURT QUESTIONS CENTRE ON NEW IT RULES

WHAT WAS THE NEED?

- ADVOCATE KHAMBATA, WHO APPEARED FOR LEAFLET, AND ADVOCATE ABHAY NEVAGI, WHO APPEARED FOR WAGLE, FURTHER ARGUED THAT THE UNION GOVERNMENT HAD BROUGHT IN THE NEW RULES, WITH MORE DRASTIC CHECKS ON PUBLISHING CONTENT ONLINE, BY WAY OF A DELEGATED LEGISLATION. HOWEVER, THE RULES, IN EFFECT, WOULD ACT LIKE A SUBSTANTIVE LAW.
- HE SHOWED THE BENCH A PORTION OF THE CENTRE'S AFFIDAVIT, FILED IN THE CASE ON THURSDAY, WHICH STATED THAT THE PROTECTION TO AN INTERMEDIARY UNDER SECTION 79 CAN BE TAKEN AWAY IF THERE IS NON-COMPLIANCE WITH THE NEW RULES.
- THE HC SAID THIS WAS "VERY SERIOUS" AND ASKED HOW COULD THE RULES TAKE AWAY PROTECTION GRANTED BY A LAW.
- "UNDER 69A (I) (II) OF THE IT ACT, THE 2009 RULES HAVE BEEN FRAMED. WHAT WAS THE NECESSITY FOR THE UNION GOVERNMENT TO BRING IN SUBSEQUENT RULES WITHOUT SUPERSEDING THE PRIOR RULES AND CREATE A SUBSTANTIVE LAW THROUGH THE RULES?" THE HC FURTHER ASKED.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bombay high court on Friday asked the Union government what was the need to introduce the recently notified Information Technology Rules, 2021 without superseding the existing IT Rules that came into effect in 2009. A bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice GS Kulkarni reserved its order on two petitions pleas seeking an interim stay on the implementation of the new Rules.On Friday, the bench said orally that it was inclined to grant limited relief to both petitioners over serial number nine of the new Rules that related to adherence to a code of ethics.

Earlier, during the day's hearing, Additional Solicitor General Anil Singh, appearing for the Centre, defended the prescription of such ethics saying that even the Press Council of India (PCI) prescribed a code of ethics to be followed by journalists.The bench, however, pointed out that PCI guidelines were advisory norms on behaviour and did not carry any drastic punishment for their breach. "How can you put such an exalted status on the PCI guidelines? That not following those guidelines will lead to penalty? Unless you have the liberty of thought, how can you express anything? How can you restrict one's liberty of thought?" the bench said.Singh, however, said the petitioners' fear of adverse action on breach of the new Rules were premature. The HC, however, said the above argument could not be accepted. "There is a catch here. You may say there is no urgency, or no committee. But the sword is hanging on their heads," the HC said. The HC said will pronounce its order on the interim relief sought via the pleas on Saturday.

TWITTER INDIA HEAD TRANSFERRED OUT OF COUNTRY

New Delhi: Twitter on Friday said its India MD Manish Maheshwari has moved to a bigger role at the company's headquarters in the US, as the micro-blogging platform faces a political storm over blocking Congress and its leaders' accounts. Maheshwari joined Twitter in April 2019 as Managing Director for the country operations, is moving into a new role based in San Francisco as Senior Director, Revenue Strategy and Operations focused on 'New Market Entry'. Twitter was yet to announce a new India head. The departure of Maheshwari comes as Twitter has blocked accounts of Rahul Gandhi and many Congress leaders for violating their policy.

BLOCKING MY ACCOUNT IS INTERFERENCE IN POLITICAL PROCESS: RAHUL GANDHI

"By shutting down my Twitter they are interfering in our political process. A company is making its business to define our politics. This is an attack on the democratic structure of the country. So, this is not only patently unfair, this is their breaching the idea that Twitter is a neutral platform. And for the investors this is a very dangerous thing because taking sides in the political contest has repercussions for Twitter. And I thought there was a ray of light where we could put what we thought on Twitter. But obviously, that's not the case. It's obvious now that Twitter is actually not a neutral, objective platform. It is a biased platform. It's something that listens to what the government of the day says."

BJP MOCKS RAGA OVER TWITTER ACCOUNT SUSPENSION

"Now, Gandhi cannot take umbrage behind the 'freedom of expression' argument after he tweeted the picture of a rape and murder victim's family. The only place he was active was Twitter. Unfortunately, even Twitter has shown him the door."

Tejasvi Surya, MP,BJP

Mixing of two vaccine doses is "Very Wrong": Poonawala

Team Absolute | Pune

Dr Cyrus Poonawalla, Serum Institute of India (SII) chairman, today said that he was not in favour of administering two different Covid-19 vaccines for better efficacy. Mixing doses of two Covid-19 vaccines is "very wrong", the SII chairman said.

Poonawalla, whose firm makes the Covishield vaccine, was speaking to reporters after receiving the Lokmanya Tilak National Award in Pune. "I am against the mixing of two different vaccines. There is no need to mix two different vaccines," Poonawalla said, when asked about a recent ICMR study that a cocktail of Covishield and Covaxin could generate better immunity.

"If cocktail vaccines are administered and if the result is not good, then SII may say that another vaccine was not good, vice versa, the other company might say that since you mixed Serum's vaccine, it did not give desired results," Poonawalla said.

This comment comes days after the Drugs Controller General of India approved a proposal to conduct a study on mixing Covaxin and Covishield vaccines in India. The study, involving 300 health individuals, will be carried out by Christian Medical College, Vellore.The efficacy of this approach has not been proven in field trials involving thousands of participants, he added.

Bharat Biotech's intranasal vaccine gets nod for Phase 2/3 trials

New Delhi: India's first intranasal vaccine, being developed by Bharat Biotech in collaboration with the Department of Biotechnology and its PSU, the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), on Friday got regulatory approval for Phase 2/3 trials. "Bharat Biotech's intranasal vaccine is the first nasal vaccine that has received the regulatory approval for Phase 2/3 trials. This is the first of its kind Covid-19 jab to undergo human clinical trials in India. BBV154 is an intranasal replication-deficient chimpanzee adenovirus SARS-CoV-2 vectored vaccine.BBIL has in-licensed technology from Washington University in St Louis, USA," a Ministry of Science & Technology statement said.

Plastic plates, cups, cutlery banned from July 1,2022

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Centre has notified the Plastic Waste Management Amendment Rules, 2021, prohibiting manufacture, import, stocking, distribution, sale and use of identified single-use plastic (SUP) items, including candy sticks, plates, cups and cutlery, from July 1, 2022.

The thickness of plastic carry bags will be increased from 50 microns to 75 microns from September 30, 2021, and to 120 microns from December 31, 2022, according to the notification dated August 12. This will also allow the plastic carry bags to be reused, it stated.

Non-woven plastic carry bags should not be less than 60 gram per square metre (GSM) with effect from September 30, 2021, the notification said. "The manufacture, import, stocking, distribution, sale and use of following single-use plastic, including polystyrene and expanded polystyrene, commodities shall be prohibited with effect from July 1, 2022: ear buds with plastic sticks, plastic sticks for balloons, plastic flags, candy sticks, ice-cream sticks, polystyrene (thermocol) for decoration; plates, cups, glasses, cutlery such as forks, spoons, knives, straw, trays; wrapping or packing films around sweet boxes, invitation cards, and cigarette packets, plastic or PVC banners less than 100 micron, stirrers," it read.

The provisions will not apply to commodities made of compostable plastic, the notification said.

Assam Rifles thwarts NSCN (KYA) attack on villagers in Nagaland

Team Absolute | New Delhi/Kohima

The Assam Rifles personnel have thwarted a banned National Socialist Council of Nagaland NSCN (KYA) attack on local people in Nagaland's Chenloiso area. The security force stated that on August 10, the Chairman of Chenloiso approached Assam Rifles at the contingency operating base at Chenloiso for help in clearing a landslide from the track of the Chenloiso-Hydro project. "The Assam Rifles company commander immediately gave confirmation for support to the village chairman," said a senior officer. On August 11, a team of security personnel carried out the assessment of the landslide areas along with the village Chairman. A JCB was also arranged by Assam Rifles to expedite the clearance work.

TRANS-HIMALAYA LANDSLIDES IN HIMACHAL BLOCK RIVER

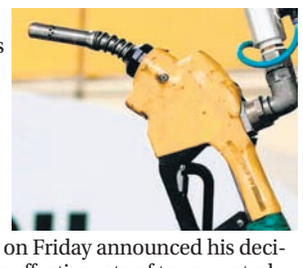
Team Absolute | Shimla

A major landslide in trans-Himalayas of Himachal Pradesh on Friday blocked the flow of the glacial-fed Chandrabagha river, raising flood fears in downstream villages in Udaipur tehsil, officials said. However, the river made its natural course over the landslide after several hours of the lake formation.

The disaster-hit spot is located some 30 km from district headquarters Keylong in Lahaul-Spiti district.

"The river was blocked due to the heavy landslide in the morning. Villages were evacuated and a helicopter aerial survey and the NDRF team deployment planned," State Disaster Management Director Sudesh Kumar Mokhta told reporter here. He said after some hours the Chandrabagha water flow has started over the landslide blockade. "Things are under control and all downstream villages have been evacuated as a preventive measure," Mokhta added.The dramatic pictures and videos of the river being blocked by a huge landslide in Lahaul gone viral on the social media. The natural calamities are happening so often these days in the hill state.

MAJOR RELIEF IN TN AS FUEL PRICES SLASHED IN STATE BUDGET



Chennai: Braving a loss of Rs 1,160 crore a year revenue, Tamil Nadu Finance Minister Palanivel Thiaga Rajan on Friday announced his decision to cut the effective rate of tax on petrol by Rs 3 per litre, thereby providing major relief to the toiling working class people in the State.

Contrary to the 'once in a generation reforms a must' statement made in the White Paper on the state finances, Rajan presented a relatively populist budget by not just reducing taxes on petrol, but also waiver of cooperative loans to self help groups, and tax amnesty scheme among others.

Fuel prices have been going up across the country and has touched Rs 100/litre. The DMK had promised to reduce petrol price by Rs 5/litre if voted to power. Now with the Rs 3 cut per litre, some relief will be offered to the consumer.

Taliban capture Kandahar in crushing blow for Afghan govt

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Taliban on Friday captured Kandahar, Afghanistan's second largest city, delivering a crushing blow for the government in Kabul and a major win for the militants.

The city was once the Taliban's stronghold, and is strategically important as a leading trade hub, the BBC reported. Kandahar is the latest provincial capital to fall, after Herat and Ghazni on Thursday.

Meanwhile, the US said it is sending nearly 3,000 troops back into Afghanistan to help evacuate staff from the American embassy. The US said it was sending troops to the airport in Kabul to help evacuate a "significant" number of embassy staff on special flights. The UK said it was also deploying about 600 troops on a short-term basis to provide support to British nationals leaving the country.

The insurgents have moved quickly, seizing new territories as the US and other foreign troops withdraw after 20 years of military operations. Within hours of each other on Thursday some of Afghanistan's most important cities were captured - Herat, Ghazni and Qala-I-Naw came under Taliban control. A Taliban spokesman also announced that "Kandahar is completely conquered".

US EXIT FROM AFGHANISTAN COULD BE 'SEQUEL' TO VIETNAM HUMILIATION

Washington: US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell has warned that Americas retreat from Afghanistan risks a replay of the nations humiliating withdrawal from Saigon at the end of the Vietnam conflict in 1975. As thousands of American soldiers were ordered back to Kabul to evacuate the Embassy staff amid a rapid advance by the Taliban, McConnell said the US is "careening toward a massive, predictable, and preventable disaster", The Guardian reported.

The remark came as officials confirmed on Friday that the Taliban had captured Afghanistan's second biggest city, Kandahar, as well as Lashkar Gah in the south. The Taliban also claimed that they have captured the western city of Herat, the country's third-largest city, and Qala-e-Naw in the north-west.

BHOJPURI ACTRESS TROLLED AFTER PRIVATE VIDEO GETS LEAKED

Patna: Popular Bhojpuri actress Trisha Kar Madhu is making headlines for all the wrong reasons after a private video of her was leaked online.Madhu was spending a private time with her so-called boyfriend. After the video got leaked, Madhu took to social media to warn the people who reportedly made the video go viral on social media. However, she did not clarify as to who shot the video, or how did it reach the social media platforms.Madhu also put out a Facebook post where she said: "God is watching everything. In a bid to defame me, some people made this video viral. I did not even imagine that some people of Bihar are having such low standards."After the video went viral, the actress was even trolled on social media, with many saying that she did this intentionally to get publicity. The 27-year-old actress is a native of West Bengal and made her screen debut with the Bhojpuri serial "Ham Hai Hindustani". She has also featured in many item songs with the leading actors of the Bhojpuri film industry.

BRAVERY OF GALLANT HEROES LIKE VIKRAM BATRA TO INSPIRE GENERATIONS: RAJNATH

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Remembering Captain Vikram Batra, who made the supreme sacrifice during the Kargil war, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Friday that the bravery and deep-rooted passion of the gallant heroes will always be an inspiration for generations to come.

Speaking during the launch of a series of events on Friday to mark the 75th anniversary of India's Independence, Singh paid homage to all the bravehearts who laid down their lives defending the sovereignty and integrity of the country.

He congratulated the ministry and the armed forces for organising various events across the country, which will instill a sense of national pride among the people.

He said that such events represent the Indian ethos of 'Unity in Diversity'.

Singh also threw light on the five pillars -- Freedom Struggle, Ideas at 75, Achievements at 75, Actions at 75 and Resolves at 75 -- envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi when he kicked off the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' celebrations in March 2021.

Singh stated that the five pillars will act as guiding force for the country to move forward in the path of development.

Echoing the government's resolve, Singh said, "We aim to develop a powerful and self-reliant 'Bharat' which is peace-loving, but fully capable of giving a befitting reply whenever challenged."

He also assured the nation that the armed forces are fully equipped to deal with any challenge that endangers the safety, security, unity and integrity of the nation.

He said the decisions aimed to promote jointness among the armed forces will

play a pivotal role in bolstering the security infrastructure of the country.

Reiterating the government's action plan to make India 'Aatmanirbhar' (self-relaint), Singh said no stone is being left unturned to make the country self-reliant in defence manufacturing.

Singh said the country's dependency on imports has decreased considerably due to the measures taken by the government, including notifying two positive indigenisation lists to promote self-reliance and defence exports.

He also made special mention of the Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC) Vikrant, the first aircraft carrier to be built in India, saying that it was a moment of immense pride for the entire nation when the aircraft carrier undertook its maiden sea voyage recently.

Singh also lauded the armed forces and different organisations of the Defence Ministry for providing continuous support to the civil administration in the fight against Covid-19.

He highlighted the crucial role played by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) in setting up Covid care hospitals across the country and developing the anti-Covid drug '2-DG'.

He also commended the armed forces for providing logistic support to civil authorities to meet the oxygen requirement.

The Defence Minister also congratulated the Indian contingent for its excellent performance in the recently concluded Tokyo Olympics, especially Subedar Neeraj Chopra who bagged India's only gold in Tokyo in javelin throw.

Centre releases another instalment of ECRP-II package for states

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Centre on Friday released the second instalment of 35 per cent of the Emergency Covid Response Plan II funds of Rs 14,744.99 crore to all states to effectively combat the pandemic.

Earlier, Rs 1,827.80 crore was released to all states and UTs as 15 per cent advance to undertake preparatory activities to speed up the implementation of the ECRP-II.

With the latest disbursement, 50 per cent of the funds have been released so as to ensure implementation of critical activities at the state and district levels to prepare the public healthcare systems in response to the covid pandemic.

In view of the second wave and its spread into rural, peri-urban, and tribal areas and the evolving pandemic situation, the Union Cabinet had, on July 8, approved the India Covid-19 Emergency Response & Health System Preparedness Package: Phase-II (ECRP-II package), amounting to Rs 23,123 crore.

To be implemented from July 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022, the scheme aims to accelerate health system preparedness for immediate responsiveness for early prevention, detection and management, with a focus on health infrastructure development, including for paediatric care, and with measurable outcomes.Under the Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) components of the ECRP-II, states/UTs have been supported by way of approvals for Emergency Covid Response Plans (ECRP) to the tune of Rs 14,744.99 crore.

The ECRP-I for Rs 15,000 crore was released to all states/UTs in April 2021 to prevent, detect and respond to the threat posed by Covid-19.

AFTER VILLAGERS PROTEST, NAVY CANCELS I-DAY FLAG HOISTING ON GOA ISLAND

Panaji: Following public pressure, the Indian Navy on Friday cancelled a flag hoisting ceremony on St. Jacinto island in South Goa, amid accusations from local villagers and politicians who alleged a government plot for a 'takeover' of the island.

"As part of 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav' to commemorate 75 years of Independence, (the) Ministry of Defence has planned unfurling of National Flag in Islands across the nation between 13 and 15 Aug, 21. A team from Goa Naval Area visited islands of Goa including Sao Jacinto Island as part of this pan India initiative," the Indian Navy said in a statement on Friday. "However, the plan at Jacinto Island had to be cancelled as the same was objected to by the residents. This initiative was taken nationwide to instil a sense of patriotism and celebrate the run up to the 75th year of independence," the statement said. Earlier on Friday, villagers, led by state Nationalist Congress Party president Jose Phillip D'Souza, gathered in the church square on the island to protest against the flag hoisting ceremony planned by the naval authorities.

Supreme Court allows auction of 9,600 unclaimed flats in Amrapali projects

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court was informed on Friday that nearly 9,600 home buyers, in various Amrapali housing projects, have not come forward to claim their flats.

A bench comprising Justices U.U. Lalit and Ajay Rastogi allowed the plea of the court-appointed receiver to treat these flats as unsold inventory, and if nobody comes forward to claim them, then the next step should be the cancellation of their allotment and auctioning them to raise money for construction of the remaining unfinished projects.

The top court was informed that senior advocate R. Venkataramani, the court-appointed receiver, and the NBCC have made several joint efforts to reach out to all home buyers, to whom units are said to have been sold in various housing projects. According to a note, submitted by the receiver, in the top court, "it has emerged that about 9,583 home buyers have neither registered so far in the customer data maintained by the office of the receiver, nor have made any payments, subsequent to the judgment of the court in July 2019".

The bench added that a final notice should be given to these home buyers and if they don't come forward to claim these flats within 15 days, then the receiver can proceed to cancel the allotment. According to the court-appointed forensic audit report, these flats could be benami or bogus bookings.

INDIA COMMITTED TO PROVIDE GLOBAL STANDARDS OF SAFETY AND QUALITY TO CITIZENS: MODI

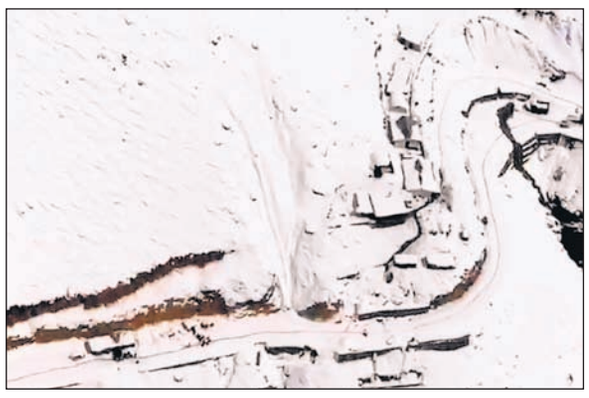
Gandhinagar | Agencies

Launching the national vehicle scrappage policy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said that the BJP government was committed to provide the people with global standards of safety and quality. The PM was virtually participating in the Investors Summit where seven pacts were inked between the government and industrial stakeholders regarding scrapping of vehicles. The Prime Minister requested youths and start-ups to join the programme.

The PM said, "India is committed to provide global standards to its citizens as far as safety and quality is concerned. The direct transition from BS-4 to BS-6 is a part of the very same thought process. The government is working extensively at every level from research to infrastructural facilities for providing Green and Clean mobility in the country.""Currently the present scrapping procedure in the country is not productive. The energy recovery is next to nil. High strength steel alloy cannot be recovered to its full value. Precious metals also cannot be recovered. Last year, we had to import scrap steel worth Rs 23,000 crore," Modi said.

Largest group of people with disabilities to reach world's highest battlefield Siachen

Team Absolute | New Delhi



People from across the country with disabilities will undertake an expedition to Siachen Glacier to create a new world record for the largest group of specially abled people to reach the world's highest battlefield.As per the ministry of social justice and empowerment, recently the government has permitted a team of people with disabilities to scale Siachen Glacier.

"The team of people with disabilities was trained by 'Team CLAW' a team of Armed Forces veterans," the ministry said.The selected people will undertake an expedition till Kumar Post (Siachen Glacier) to create a new world record.

On the occasion of Independence Day, union minister for social justice and empowerment Virendra Kumar will flag off the vehicles carrying the Divyangjan Siachen Glacier expedition team from Ambedkar International Centre, which is a premier autonomous research body mandated to research and provide policy feed to empower marginalised communities and to bring in Socio Economic transformation in the society.

BJP rebels in touch with us, but Cong not in a hurry: Harish Rawat

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Congress in Uttarakhand is adopting a wait and watch policy in the wake of the internal rift in state BJP in the run up to the Assembly elections scheduled early next year.

Former Uttarakhand Chief Minister and the chairman of Congress' campaign committee, Harish Rawat, told IANS, "The Congress is not in a hurry to take any decision on BJP rebels. However, many of them are in touch with us and a final call will be taken at an appropriate time."Though he did not disclose any names, sources said that those who had jumped ship from the Congress to the saffron camp are eyeing a comeback, while some from the BJP too are looking to join the party, though the Congress will only back those who will prove to be beneficial to the party.Many prominent leaders, including ex-Chief Minister Vijay Bahuguna, former ministers Harak Singh Rawat, Satpal Maharaj and Yashpal Arya had left the Congress for the saffron party, but some of them are reportedly upset ever since the BJP last month appointed Pushkar Singh Dhami as the new Chief Minister of Uttarakhand. Rawat alleged that the BJP has changed three Chief Ministers in the state in recent times and its leaders are fighting for themselves, and not working for the state.Stating that there is no dearth of issues in the state as unemployment and inflation are on the rise, Rawat said the government is in a denial mode, but the public is very much aware of the hardships they are facing.

Terrorist killed in Kashmir gunfight

Team Absolute | Srinagar

One terrorist has been killed in an ongoing encounter between the terrorists and security forces in South Kashmir's Kulgam district, officials said on Friday.

Two security forces' personnel and two civilians have been injured in the encounter that started on Thursday.

"So far one terrorist killed. Complete search of building yet to be done," Kashmir police quoting Inspector General, Kashmir Vijay Kumar tweeted.Earlier, the police said on Thursday at about 3 p.m. terrorists fired upon a convoy of the BSF on the Srinagar-Jammu National Highway near the Malpora Mir Bazar area of Kulgam.However, the fire was retaliated by Road Opening Party (ROP) of police and security forces. Reinforcement of the police and Army reached immediately and cordoned off the area. Besides, the joint party ensured not to give any chance to the terrorists to escape from the spot and the terrorists managed to took shelter in a nearby building.

The holed up terrorists fired indiscriminately upon the joint party of the police and security forces which retaliated leading to an encounter.

Assam, Bihar, UP, Jharkhand continue to face flood situation

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Assam stay threatened by floods as per data from over 50 Central Water Commission (CWC) stations across these states, the CWC said on Friday.

One station in Bihar is showing extreme flood situation, 28 - 18 in Bihar, seven in Uttar Pradesh and one each in Assam, Jharkhand, and West Bengal - a severe flood situation and 24 stations - 12 are in Bihar, seven in Uttar Pradesh, and five in Assam, above normal flood situation, the CWC flood bulletin said.

Meanwhile, the Ganga basin comprising large parts of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand & West Bengal has been witnessing continuous flooding due to combined effect of river runoff from Yamuna and northern tributaries of Ganga, including those coming from Nepal.

The main Ganga is flowing in severe flood situations from Patna (Bihar) to Murshirabad (West Bengal), from Praygraj to Ballia (both Uttar Pradesh), it is in falling to steady state, where as from Patna and downstream, it is flowing with rising trend.

Currently, Ganga, at the CWC site Hathidah in Patna district, is flowing above high flood level mark. The present water level observed at site is 43.22 m and expected water level at 8 a.m. of Saturday is 43.29 m.

The middle reaches of the Ganga in districts such as Badaun and Farrukhabad (Uttar Pradesh) are in above normal flood situations. River Ghaghra in Barabanki, Ayodhya and Ballia (UP) and Siwan and Saran (Bihar) districts is flowing in above normal flood situation.

Rivers Sone and Punpun are flowing in severe flood situation in Patna, and the Rapti is flowing in above normal situation in Balarampur district (UP), it said.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecasted heavy rainfall over the Rapti in next 24 hours, the release said, and suggested alert may be kept in Shravasti, Siddharth Nagar, Basti, Sant Kabir Nagar and Gorakhpur (UP) districts.

Currently the flood originated in tributaries of Yamuna last week is passing through Ganga and it may take another three to five days to pass through completely; in such situation, a further runoff created due to intense rainfall in the catchments of north tributaries of Ganga may not stream into Ganga easily. The flooding situation in districts such as Ballia and Praygraj (UP), and Saran, Bhagalpur, Katihar (Bihar) may get accentuated, the CWC said.

MEMU trains will be equipped with all modern facilities

Rail, road and phone connectivity is continuously increasing in the state. Chief Minister Chouhan flagged off Satna-Itarsi, Satna-Manikpur and Katni-Bina MEMU trains.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that three new MEMU (Main Line Electric Multiple Unit) trains are being started today for the convenience of the general public.

These trains will be equipped with all modern facilities like GPS, Digital Display, CCTV, Bio toilet etc. Through these, the general public will be able to travel conveniently at a faster speed. This will be very useful especially for everyday commuters.

Chief Minister Chouhan said that rail, road and phone connectivity is increasing continuously in Madhya Pradesh. India has a rail network of more than 67 thousand kilometers and more than 13 thousand passenger trains and 8,000 goods trains. Madhya Pradesh has more than 700 railway stations and a rail network of 4,800 km. There is continuous development of railway facilities in the state.

Lalitpur-Singrauli rail line will also prove to be very important in the development of the area.

Chief Minister flagged off three new MEMU trains Satna-Itarsi, Satna-Manikpur and Katni-Bina under West Central Railway Jabalpur division through video conferencing from his residence. The main event was held in Satna.

Sitting in Indian Railways, there is a philosophy of unity in diversity

Chief Minister Chouhan said that the culture of unity in diversity can be seen by sitting in the Indian Railways. Indian Railways binds the country in one thread from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. Due to the geographical location of Madhya Pradesh, almost all the trains going from north to south and east to west pass through here.

Equipped with modern facilities

MP Ganesh Singh said that these MEMU trains are equipped with modern facilities. These have facilities like Passenger Information System, GPS, CCTV, Bio toilet etc. Their speed will be 100 kilometers per hour. Each train will have 8 coaches, in which 650 passengers will be able to travel. All these trains will be unreserved and will stop at all the stations in between.

THE STATE WILL SOON BECOME SELF-RELIANT IN OXYGEN PRODUCTION

4 oxygen plants will be started simultaneously. A big achievement for the region. Chief Minister Chouhan has virtual dedicated 4 oxygen plants of Rewa region.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that Madhya Pradesh is progressing rapidly in the direction of fulfilling Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a self-reliant India. A large number of oxygen plants are being set up in the state with the cooperation of the central government, private enterprises and public. We will soon achieve self-sufficiency in terms of oxygen and we will not need to take oxygen from other states.

Chief Minister Chouhan said that starting four oxygen plants simultaneously is a big achievement for Vindhya and Rewa regions. Of these, three plants have a capacity of 500-500 liters per minute and one plant has a capacity of 100 liters per minute. Chief Minister said that the state government is giving 50% capital grant for setting up oxygen plants by private enterprises. Two plants are set up by private companies. Plant installed by Varsham Construction Pvt Ltd at Industrial Park Rewa at a cost of Rs 310.91 Lakh 500 LPM. of capacity. JP Ltd. by J.P. Plant installed at Hospital Rewa 500 LPM of capacity.

Chouhan said that 500 L.P. at the cost of Rs.98.71 lakh in Super Specialty Hospital Rewa. M capacity plant has been installed with public participation. All concerned are to be congratulated for this. Also 200 LPM at a cost of Rs 44.72 lakh from Chief Minister's Relief Fund in District Hospital Rewa. Capacity oxygen plant has been installed.

Speaker of the Vidhan Sabha, Girish Gautam said that on behalf of the people, I thank the Chief Minister Chouhan for setting up four oxygen plants simultaneously in the area. The state government is working continuously for the development of Vindhya region. Bansagar project has changed the fate of the farmers of the region.

Center's PM Cares for Children scheme for children orphaned by Covid epidemic

10 lakh rupees will be available at the age of 23. Beneficiaries of Chief Minister Covid-19 Child Service Scheme will also be eligible

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Children whose parents, legal guardians or adoptive parents have died due to corona epidemic by the central government, they will be supported in the "PM Cares for Children" scheme. For this scheme the Chief Minister of the state Kovid- Child beneficiaries of 19 Bal Seva Yojana will also be eligible.

Assistance to child beneficiary in the scheme

In the PM Cares for Children scheme, a provision of Rs 10 lakh corpus has been made in the name of the child on the child beneficiary attaining the age of 18 years. Monthly financial assistance will be given to the child from this corpus. 10 lakh will be given to the child beneficiary on attaining the age of 23 years. Under the Ayushman Bharat scheme, a health insurance cover of up to Rs 5 lakh will be given to the child beneficiary.

Under the scheme, by admitting the child beneficiary as a non-residential student in the nearest Kendriya Vidyalaya or private school till the age of 10 years, the fees will be borne by the Central Government as per the provisions of the Right to Education. Apart from this, expenditure on books, notebooks, uniforms will also be provided to them.

Under PM Cares for Children scheme, when the child beneficiary is in the age group of 11 to 18 years, he will be admitted to Kendriya Residential Schools like Navodaya Vidyalaya, Sainik School etc. If the beneficiary is residing in a joint family, then the nearest Kendriya Vidyalaya or private school will be admitted as a non-residential student.

Application procedure

The process of identification of eligible children under the scheme will be done by the District Collector. The entry of all eligible children will be uploaded on the portal pmcaresforchildren.in. Apart from this, the application can be filled directly from the "Citizen Login" or the application can also be made from the login of the Child Welfare Committee. It is not mandatory for the parents to have a death certificate from Covid in the scheme. But the child will be benefited only after the collector is satisfied and verified about the death of the parents of the child due to Covid. Maximum 10 applications can be fed from one mobile number under Citizen Login.

Now, 24x7 COVID-19 vaccination centre in Bhopal

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In a bid to speed up vaccination against COVID-19, the Madhya Pradesh health department on Friday set up another 24x7 centre in Bhopal, where citizens can get inoculated any time of the day, an official said.

The state government had earlier set up two such facilities at Katju Hospital and Rashidiya School in the state capital, the official said.

State Medical Education Minister Vishvas Sarang inaugurated the new centre at Sardar Patel School in his constituency Narela in Bhopal district, he said.

Speaking on the occasion, the minister said the 24x7 vaccination facility will give people an option to take either doses of the vaccines and the registration can be done online or at the centre itself.

The state government is working hard to ensure that all eligible persons in the state are inoculated at the earliest, he added.

As per an official release, a total of 3,66,86,401 COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered in Madhya Pradesh so far.

Restrictions on direct recruitment in civil services relaxed

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The state government has relaxed the restrictions on recruitment for civil services. It is noteworthy that the state government has authorized the administrative department, relaxing the condition imposed by the Finance Department in the year 2019 to fill up to 5 percent of the vacant posts of the total sanctioned posts for civil services. Concurrence of Finance Department will be necessary for approval to fill vacancies of more than five percent direct recruitment. Instructions have been issued by the Finance Department to complete the process of appointment on the vacant posts of direct recruitment expeditiously.

According to the circular issued by the Finance Department, the number of vacancies in direct recruitment will be counted in every civil service on the first January of the year. Those working on non-numbered posts will be taken into account against regular posts. 5 percent will be calculated on the basis of the total number of sanctioned posts in the cadre. Only 5 percent of the total number of posts of the cadre or the number of vacancies of direct recruitment of the cadre, whichever is less, the process of appointment can be done by the administrative department. For the process of appointment to the posts in excess of the limit, the procedure laid down by the Finance Department will have to be followed. It will be the responsibility of the concerned department to follow the other conditions prescribed for direct recruitment like reservation rules etc.

CHIEF MINISTER CHOUHAN SALUTES VEER DURGADAS RATHORE AND MATA AHILYA BAI HOLKAR

Bhopal : Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan paid homage to Veer Durgadas Rathore on his birth anniversary and Mata Ahilya Bai Holkar's death anniversary today in the Chief Minister's residence hall. Chief Minister Chouhan paid homage by offering flowers to the pictures of Veer Durgadas Rathore and Mata Ahilya Bai Holkar. On this occasion, he remembered the contribution of Veer Durgadas ji and Mata Ahilya. Former Minister Harishankar Khatik was also present on the occasion.

Application for admission in the B.Ed course from 16 August

Bhopal: B.Ed. conducted by the State Education Center in 7 Teacher Education Colleges and 2 Institutes of Advanced Educational Studies in the state. Online admission in the course is being started from 16 August 2021. It is noteworthy that from this year private students will also be able to take admission in B.Ed courses of these government institutions. Earlier, all the seats in these institutions were reserved for departmental teachers. Director State Education Center Dhanaraju S. Told that interested departmental and non-departmental candidates can register for admission on MP Online portal https://rsk.mponline.gov.in/ . In this regard, instructions have been issued to the principals of all teacher education colleges and institutes of advanced educational studies.

Chief Minister Chouhan planted saptaparni sapling

Bhopal : Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted saptaparni plant in Smart Udyan. Chief Minister Chouhan is planting saplings every day as per his resolve. Saptaparni, an evergreen medicinal tree, has great importance in Ayurveda. Former Minister Harishankar Khatik and Dr. Kailash Jatav were present on the occasion.

Madhya Pradesh becomes ideal state in wildlife conservation

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The beauty of nature increases manifold due to the free movement of wild animals. Wild animals keep reminding them of the state of coexistence while living around the common people. Nature has made Madhya Pradesh a very rich green state. Therefore, Madhya Pradesh has spared no effort in creating a wildlife-rich state by paying special attention to wildlife conservation and management. The result is that the state has got the status of Tiger State. Now the number of leopards is also the highest in the country. In terms of number of alligators and vultures, it has come in a position to become number one at the national level. The pleasant aspect is that the Satpura Tiger Reserve has been included in the potential list of UNESCO World Heritage Site. Satpura Tiger Reserve is the ideal shelter for many wildlife including tigers and the most favorable place for breeding.

Vulture and alligator become pride

According to the state-wide vulture census conducted this year, there were 9446 vultures in the state, which is the highest in comparison to other states. The Vulture Conservation and Breeding Center was established in 2013 in the Kerwa area of the capital Bhopal. It is jointly operated by the Bombay Natural History Society and the state government. In the report presented by Wildlife Trust India, maximum 1859 gharials are in Chambal Sanctuary. Four decades ago, when the number of alligators was on the verge of extinction, there were only 200 alligators left in the world. Of these, then there were 96 in India and 46 in Chambal river. There are gharial breeding centers established at Deori in Morena district. The eggs of alligators are hatched safely. Alligator eggs are kept in the sand of hatchery at a temperature of 30 to 36 degrees. During this, calling comes from the eggs and the babies start coming out of it. When they grow up, the habitat is left naturally in the water area.

MADHYA PRADESH WILL REMAIN TIGER STATE

Three years ago in the year 2018, the state got the status of Tiger State with 526 tigers in the tiger census. About 60 percent of these tigers are available in tiger reserve areas and 40 percent in other forest areas. Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve has maximum 124 tigers. Based on the preliminary trends of tiger census to be held in three phases in October this year, it can be said with confidence that Madhya Pradesh will again be on top in terms of tiger population. This number is expected to exceed 700. The name of "Kalar Kali" tigress of Pench Tiger Reserve, which has made a very special contribution in getting the status of Tiger State, also holds the unique record of highest number of deliveries and birth of cubs in the world.

During the last one and a half decade under the leadership of Chief Minister Shri Shivraj Singh Chouhan, this position has been achieved due to efforts of excellent and sustainable wildlife management. Efficiency and speedy disposal of animal-loss, human-injured and human-loss cases in forests outside protected areas, best management of human-wild-life conflict, strict control on wildlife crime, wildlife These proud achievements have been achieved by better management of habitats, participation of local communities in conservation efforts, displacement of villages from protected areas and availability of high quality additional wildlife habitats.

The number of tigers in the regional forest divisions of Balaghat district was zero till 9 years ago, whereas Kanha is an important component of the Pench corridor and has always been an excellent forest area of these forest divisions. As a result of the continuous efforts of the department, the presence of 30 to 40 tigers is now found in these forest divisions. The forest areas of districts like North Shahdol, Umaria, Katni, Dakshin Seoni, Chhindwara, Betul, Hoshangabad, Bhopal and Sehore etc. are examples of such.

DELTA+ : MAHA RECORDS 3RD DEATH IN RAIGAD

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra has reported its third death of a patient infected with the Delta Plus Covid-19 virus variant, as the total number of patients with the variant stood at over 65 till date, officials said.

A 69-year-old man diagnosed with Delta Plus has succumbed in Nagothane, Raigad, while a middle-aged woman infected by the same variant is under treatment in nearby Uran town.

Late Thursday, the BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) received the Delta Plus positive sample reports of a 60-year-old woman from the eastern suburbs of the city, who had passed away on July 24.

Prior to that, the first patient of Delta Plus in the state -- an 80-year-old man -- had expired in Ratnagiri on June 25, said the officials.

On Wednesday, the Maharashtra Health Department had pegged the number of Delta Plus variant patients in the state at 65 till date, as per data from the Institute of Genomics Integrative Biology lab.

Among these 65, the highest 13 are from Jalgaon, 12 from Ratnagiri, 11 from Mumbai, six each in Thane and Pune, three in Palghar, two each in Raigad, Nanded, and Gondia, and one each from Sindhudurg, Aurangabad, Kolhapur, Sangli, Beed, Nandurbar, Akola, and Chandrapur.

The patients include 33 women and 32 men, and a whopping 33 cases -- or nearly half -- of those infected are in the 19-45 age group, while 17 are 46-60 years and seven in above-60 age group.

As a precaution, the Health Department has started searching for the close contacts of these infectees on a war footing, their travel history, vaccination status, recent medical status and other relevant details to prevent more infections, said the officials.

Bombay HC hopes Maha Governor will clear list of 12 MLCs soon

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Commenting on the delay by the Maharashtra Governor in clearing the list of 12 nominated Members of Legislative Council, the Bombay High Court on Friday said that "eight months was more than enough time" and expressed hope that the matter would be resolved soon.Disposing off a PIL, a division bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice G.S. Kulkarni said that under Article 361 of the Constitution, the court could not give any directions to the Governor on the matter.

However, it also expressed the clear view that it was the Governor's duty to inform the Chief Minister about his reservations to the nominations "within a reasonable time", failing which "the statutory intent would stand defeated".The Maha Vikas Aghadi's council of ministers, headed by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, had, in November 2020, submitted the list of nominated MLCs to Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari and the bench felt that "eight months on facts seems to be beyond reasonable time".

The court added that considering the gravity of the issues involved and the necessity to fill up the 12 vacancies as well as the aims of the Constitution, "would consider it desirable" if the government's application "is discharged without undue delay".

Drug peddlers again attack Mumbai NCB sleuths

Team Absolute | Mumbai

For the third time in nine months, a Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) team was attacked by armed drug peddlers, including some foreigners, during a raid late on Thursday, officials said here on Friday.

The shocking incident happened at Mankhurd in the northeast suburbs of Mumbai when the NCB team was following a tip-off on a gang of foreigner drug peddlers operating from the forests near the railway lines, NCB Zonal Director Sameer Wankhede said."The gang of drug-peddlers suddenly pounced on the NCB team with weapons, machetes, and stones. One of the officials suffered a head injury while 4 others suffered superficial wounds," he said.

This is the second attack on the NCB sleuths in a week and the third in 9 months, since the November 2020 incident in Goregaon by aggressive drug peddlers fighting the anti-narcotics actions against them.

However, the NCB managed to nab one Nigerian and seized a huge haul of drugs comprising 7.5 gms cocaine, 254 gms heroin and 52 gms Mephedrone, totally valued over Rs 1 Crore in the illicit markets, he said.

Following secret tips that a gang of 4-5 foreigners was conducting the illicit drug peddling business, the NCP laid a trap and intercepted Obiorah Ekwelar of Nigeria's Onisha.

The gang, carrying weapons had become a nuisance for the entire area as they operated from the swampy area near the Mankhurd railway lines with the Thane Creek on one side, and many locals had complained of the menace. While Ekwelar was arrested, the others managed to escape taking advantage of the difficult terrain and the darkness, said the NCB.

NO CHANGE IN FUEL PRICES

Mumbai: Petrol and diesel prices in the country remained static for the 27th consecutive day on Friday. Accordingly, in the national capital, petrol continued to be sold at Rs 101.84 per litre, while diesel was unchanged at Rs 89.87 a litre.Global crude prices have now softened to just around $71 a barrel after it swung in all directions in July starting with a low of $70 a barrel to quickly rise to over $77 a barrel, only to fall soon below $70 a barrel and crossing $75 a barrel later in the month.

Lower oil and product prices prices should have actually resulted in consumers getting relief by way of a cut in retail price of petrol and diesel, rather, the OMCs have decided it's best to wait and watch the disruption now as crude price are still swinging.The pump price of fuel has been static since July 18. In Mumbai, petrol is at Rs 107.83 per litre and diesel at Rs 97.45, the highest among metros.

ED files charge sheet against ex-Maha MLA in money laundering probe

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has filed a charge sheet against against former Maharashtra MLA Vivekanand Shankar Patil and Karnala Nagari Sahakari Bank Ltd in connection with an Rs 560 crore money laundering probe, officials said.

An ED official here said that the agency filed a charge sheet against Patil, a four time Peasants and Workers Party MLA and also ex-Chairman of the Panvel-based cooperative bank, and against the bank under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act.

The ED case of money-laundering is based on the FIR lodged by the Economic Offences Wing of Navi Mumbai police last year against 76 persons after the Reserve Bank of India detected the fraud following an audit.The official said that the audit revealed that Patil was siphoning off funds since 2008 from the bank through 63 fictitious loan accounts to the loan accounts of Karnala Charitable Trust and Karnala Sports Academy, which were founded by him. It was found that management of the bank was under his control.

The ED arrested him on June 15 this year. The official said that the PMLA probe against Patil revealed that the defrauded amount was to the tune of approximately Rs 560 crore, including interest in respect of 67 fictitious accounts. He said that to hide the siphoning, the available funds were routed to these fictitious accounts and from these accounts to the several bank accounts of entities founded or controlled by Patil. "These funds were utilised by the Karnala Charitable Trust, Karnala Sports Academy etc for construction of properties such as Sports Complex, College and Schools and for other personal gains, thereby using the proceeds of crime and projecting the same as un-tainted in contravention of offence of money laundering," he added.

Maharashtra Adds 6,388 Fresh Covid Cases, Deaths Top 200 After 11 Days

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The official said among the eight regions of Maharashtra, the Pune region reported the highest 2,828 new COVID-19 cases followed by 1,472 cases in the Kolhapur region. Maharashtra reported 6,388 new coronavirus cases and 208 fresh fatalities on Thursday, taking the infection tally to 63,75,390 and the death toll to 1,34,572, a health department official said. Notably, the daily coronavirus infections in the state have gone over 6,000 after a gap of four days, while for the first time since July 31, the fatalities have crossed the 200-mark.

The state witnessed an increase in Covid-19 cases and fatalities as compared to Wednesday, when it had reported 5,560 infections and 163 deaths.The official said 8,390 patients were discharged from hospitals across the state in the last 24 hours, taking the cumulative number of recovered cases to 61,75,010.

Maharashtra now has 62,351 active cases, he said.The state has 3,98,397 people in home quarantine and 2,507 in institutional quarantine, according to the official.

Maharashtra's Covid-19 recovery rate now stands at 96.86 per cent, while the fatality rate is 2.11 per cent, he said.The cumulative number of tests conducted in the state climbed to 5,03,26,812, of which 2,10,674 were done in the last 24 hours, the official said.

He said Mumbai city witnessed 281 new COVID-19 cases and seven deaths, while Pune city reported 313 fresh infections and two fatalities. Among 62,351 active cases in the state, Pune district has the highest at 14,423, according to the official.

He said among the 61,75,010 recovered patients across the state, the highest - 10,67,600 - were are from Pune district. Coronavirus figures for Maharashtra are as follows: Total cases 63,75,390; new cases 6,388; total deaths 1,34,572; total recoveries 61,75,010; active cases 62,351; total tests 5,03,26,812.

2 callers impersonate Sharad Pawar, police nab one suspect

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a bizarre development, two persons allegedly impersonated Nationalist Congress Party President Sharad Pawar in two different incidents in Mumbai and Pune, sending shockwaves in the political circles on Thursday.Separate complaints were lodged with the Chakan Police in Pune and the Gamdevi Police in Mumbai, leading to the detention of one suspect. Further investigations are underway.In both instances, the callers made calls from a number purportedly belonging to Pawar's residence -- Silver Oaks in south Mumbai -- and 'spoke' in his voice.

In the first instance, a call was made to a senior bureaucrat in the Mantralaya seeking some official favour, with the caller claiming to be calling from the home of Pawar.

The alert officer, smelling something fishy, called back Silver Oaks to verify the call, only to discover that the 81-year old leader was even not present at home.

Thereafter, a complaint was lodged with the Gamdevi Police, who are investigating the matter after detaining one suspect from Pune.

In the Pune incident, the caller imitating Pawar's voice allegedly made some demands pertaining to an old business deal, but the other party smelt a rat and lodged a police complaint.However, the exact nature of the conversations in both the incidents is not clear yet.Senior NCP leaders like Jitendra Awhad, Mahesh Tapase, besides opposition leaders Devendra Fadnavis and Pravin Darekar have expressed shock over the incidents, raising security and other implications. They have demanded that the police should track the culprits and take stringent action against them for impersonating one of the senior-most political leaders in the country.

NIO BACKS DOWN ON STUDY ON MICROPLASTIC TRACES IN GOA TAP WATER

Team Absolute | Panaji

A day after a scientist attached to the Goa-based National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) confirmed the presence of microplastics in government tap water in various parts of the state, the top marine research institute in a clarification on Thursday said that the study conducted along with a consultancy firm was preliminary in nature and "firm conclusions on the risk associated with ingestion of microplastic particles through drinking-water" could not be determined.

The clarification was issued by the NIO, along with an official statement from the Chief Minister's office on Thursday, which also questioned the authenticity of the study, adding that the state government had not been officially contacted during the research.

"The report only indicates the presence of microplastics in tap water and in water reservoirs. The findings of the current report does not make any assessment on the quality of drinking water... Although this study is made on the tap water collected from Goa but presence of microplastics can be identified in tapwaters from other states and cities too," the NIO said in its clarification on Thursday.

"The sole purpose of the study is academic and finding scientific data. We have just reported the preliminary study based on a one time sample collection. Based on this limited body of evidence, firm conclusions and the risk associated with ingestion of microplastic particles through drinking-water cannot yet be determined," the report states, adding that the "no data suggests overt health concerns associated with exposure to microplastic particles through drinking-water".

On Wednesday, NIO scientist Mahua Saha, along with a research consulting agency, Delhi-based 'Toxic Links' at a press conference had said that 26 types of polymers were detected in samples sourced from tap water and treatment plants in Goa, which raised serious concerns about exposure of microplastic exposure for the residents of the state.

In a statement, the Chief Minister's Office has questioned the authenticity of the study's findings, basis and methodology.

"The research agency nor Dr. Mahua Saha during their research study never approached this Department and the findings of their research study was also not shared with the Department and why Goa was selected for the study is also surprising," the CMO statement said.

"Hence, the authenticity of this team led by Dr. Mahua needs to be looked upon and the team has to indicate/inform the reasons why testing was not carried out in other states and also for bottled water and what are their future plans," the statement said.

EDITOR'S SPECS

Pollution Control Boards are non-transparent

A majority of India's pollution control agencies remain closed entities when it came to sharing information with the public with a mere handful of India's pollution control boards and authorities are adequately putting out environmental and governance information into the public domain, a new rating study by Centre for Science and Environment (CSE). For calculating the Transparency Index and rating of pollution control boards on public disclosure - as the study is titled - the CSE assessed the data disclosure performance of 29 state pollution control boards (PCBs) and six pollution control committees from across the country. Of these, only 17 boards and committees scored 50 per cent or above. These are from Odisha, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Goa, Karnataka, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Kerala, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan. CSE says that Governance and functioning-related data remains paper-bound: Information on functioning, actions taken by a board against polluting industries, public hearing data on new projects etc are rarely disclosed or remain difficult to access on the websites. Only 12 states have shared their latest annual reports on their websites and only five boards have shared minutes of their board meetings on their websites: It is mandatory for SPCBs to meet at least once every three months. Board members in these meetings are supposed to discuss issues related to the functioning of the board, action plans, compliance and monitoring, and devising innovative methods to improve enforcement of laws. Putting in the public domain the crucial pollution-related information, data and details of actions taken is critical - it can help policy-makers take the discussions to the next level of pollution management. SPCBs and SPCCs, therefore, must focus urgently to become more transparent by putting out data and improving the quality of their outreach for public engagement."

IMRAN KHAN BLOWS UP THE COVER -- REVEALS PAKISTAN AND TALIBAN ARE CONJOINED TWINS

Mrityunjoy Kumar Jha

Pakistan's garrulous Prime Minister Imran Khan has made an astounding foot-in-the mouth statement. Speaking on behalf of the Taliban, he revealed that the extremist will not hold peaceful negotiations so long as Afghanistan's elected president remained in power.

By making, some would say, a not-so-smart statement, the Pakistani Prime Minister has blown up the cover. He has simply confirmed, which insiders always knew, that Islamabad and the Taliban were conjoined twins, and any attempt to separate the two was fiction, scripted by the generals occupying the General Headquarters in Rawalpindi, amplified by their bullhorns in high places.

In an open confession that the Taliban is in touch with Pakistan on the inside, the Pakistani Prime Minister made it clear that the Taliban will not talk to the present Afghan government led by the president Ashraf Ghani. According to the Dawn newspaper, Khan told the media that he did try to persuade the Taliban leaders when they were visiting Pakistan to reach a settlement.

"The condition is that as long as President Ashraf Ghani is there, we (Taliban) are not going to talk to the Afghan government," Khan said, quoting the Taliban leaders as telling him.

Talking to foreign journalists in Islamabad, the Pakistani PM said he tried to persuade the Taliban to negotiate with the Afghan government, but Taliban leaders refused to talk about the political settlement, saying that it is difficult in the current Afghan situation. But it was equally obvious that no attempt was made to pressurise the Taliban, dependent on Pakistani supplies lines to change course.

According to Pakistani sources, Imran Khan told foreign journalists that the group viewed Ghani and his government as US puppets and that was the reason why the Doha talks had been "stalled" by the Taliban.

When asked about Pakistan providing safe heavens to the Taliban and Pakistani soldiers fighting in Afghanistan, Khan once again denied and called this anti-Pakistan propaganda.

"When they say that Pakistan gave safe havens, sanctuaries to Taliban, where are these safe havens? There are camps of 100,000 people. And Taliban are not some military outfits. They are normal civilians. And if there are some civilians in these camps, how is Pakistan supposed to hunt these people down?" Khan repeated the same argument. He added the world has pressurised Pakistan to take military action. No country has done more than Pakistan to bring the Afghan Taliban to the negotiating table and it is very unfair to blame Pakistan for what is happening in Afghanistan.

Blaming the US and president Joe Biden, Khan said that the US is currently putting pressure on Pakistan to influence the Taliban to come back to the negotiation table. But that is not possible.

Pakistan is useful only in the context of the "mess" it is leaving behind in Afghanistan after 20 years of fighting, Khan observed.

The former cricketer is miffed with US president Joe Biden has not called him -- a call that he has been waiting for since Biden took charge of the US presidency in January this year. Khan's problem is that Biden has been talking to his neighbours -- Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani.

"I think that the Americans have decided that India is their strategic partner now, and I think that's why there's a different way of treating Pakistan now," Khan observed.

In an interview with The Financial Times, National Security Adviser Moeed Yusuf said Pakistan has other "options" if President Biden keeps ignoring "calls" from the Pakistani PM.

For the last two days #SanctionPakistan hashtag has been trending on twitter with more than eight lakh tweets as the Taliban's onslaughts on Afghans are on rise. Netizens believe that without Pakistan's active support, the Taliban could not have come so far. One of the main proponents of the trend has been a prominent Afghan journalist Habib Khan Totakhil.

"If you are Afghan or a friend of Afghanistan, speak up," he tweeted.

Pakistani Information minister Chaudhry Fawad Hussain and NSA Moeed Yusuf were quick to blame India for the tweets.

Releasing a "Deep Analytics Report" on "Anti-State Trends prepared by the Digital Media Wing of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Yusuf said that Pakistan will expose those who are behind this anti-Pakistan campaign.

Reacting to this, Reham Khan said in a post, "I'm embarrassed to share this by the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting of Pakistan. Naming me & others as Anti State because we raise human rights violations, the issue of missing persons & mysterious killings is only humiliating the state. Don't defame Pakistan officially."

(The content is being carried under an arrangement with indianarrative.com)

NE India's 2nd Toy Train service to launch in Arunachal

Sujit Chakraborty

To attract tourists, northeast India's second Toy Train service after eastern Assam's Tinsukia district would be introduced in the picturesque town of Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh on the international borders with China and Bhutan, top officials said on Friday.A senior official of Arunachal Pradesh government said that Chief Minister Pema Khandu, while meeting the officials of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) led by its General Manager Anshul Gupta on Thursday, gave his nod to the proposal of the NFR to launch the 'Toy Train Project' in Tawang in western Arunachal Pradesh.

Gupta told the Chief Minister that the project envisages a tourist-centric Toy Train service in and around Tawang that would include a park with facilities like food courts and craft bazaar, among other amenities.The Toy Train would have at least three bogies carrying 12 passengers each.A team of NFR officials and engineers is set to visit Tawang next week for a joint survey and finalisation of the project with the Tawang district administration. "Gupta has assured that once everything is settled, NFR would complete the project within six months," an official from the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) told correspondent.The NFR is already in the process of constructing a broad-gauge railway line from Bhalukpong in the foothills to Tawang, covering a distance of 378 km reaching a height of 10,000 ft, of which about 80 per cent will pass through tunnels. Tawang houses India's largest Buddhist monastery, which was founded with the help of the local people by Mera Lama Lodre Gyatso in late 1681.The NFR's Chief Public Relations Officer (CPRO), Subhanan Chanda, said that the entire cost of Rs 4 crore for the Toy Train Project would be borne by the state government and the Railways would lay 400 to 500 metre new railway track for introducing the service in Tawang, which is situated at a height of 3,500-metre from the sea level on the mountainous range of northern Himalayas. "The Toy Train service would be the second of its kind in northeast India after the facility operational for many years in the Railway Heritage Park-cum-Museum in eastern Assam's Tinsukia district. The museum also seeks to promote and preserve the rich heritage of Indian railways," Chanda told correspondent.Tinsukia's Railway Heritage Park-cum-Museum includes centuries-old trains ranging from Britain-built original turntable manufactured in 1892, and railway wheels used by the US Army during the Second World War, among others.The NFR, which has already connected Guwahati (adjoining capital Dispur), Tripura and Itanagar, is laying tracks to connect the capital cities of three more northeastern states -- Imphal, Aizawl and Kohima -- by 2023-24.The NFR, one among the 17 railway zones in India, operates fully and partially in six of the eight northeastern states, excluding Meghalaya and Sikkim, along with seven districts of West Bengal and five in north Bihar.

international

HERAT GOVERNOR, ISMAIL KHAN SURRENDER TO TALIBAN AS CITY FALLS

Kabul: Former mujahedeen leader Mohammad Ismail Khan has surrendered to the Taliban as Herat, the third-largest city in Afghanistan, fell to the Taliban on Friday.

All key government institutions were captured by the group. All government officials, including Herat Governor, police chief, head of the NDS office in Herat, former mujahedeen leader Mohammad Ismail Khan, the Deputy Minister of Interior for Security, and the 207 Zafar Corps commander surrendered to the Taliban after the province fell to the group, media reports said.

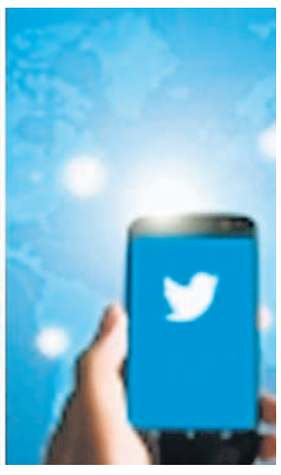
Clashes on the outskirts of Herat city were underway for almost three weeks as the Taliban faced resistance by the security and defense forces who were accompanied by public uprising forces led by Ismail Khan.

This comes as Nimroz, Farah, Ghor and Badghis provinces, all located in the west zone, have also fallen to the Taliban in the last one week.

The Taliban so far have captured at least 17 provincial capitals. Heavy clashes are underway in the centre of Logar province, 70 km south of Kabul city.

Zambia 'restricts' WhatsApp, Twitter on polling day

Team Absolute | New Delhi



As social media platforms face greater scrutiny in several countries, including in India, Zambia has restricted the use of WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Messenger on the general election day on Friday.

Several users from the country took to Twitter informing that WhatsApp has been restricted amid the ongoing general elections.

Internet monitoring firm Netblocks tweeted that Zambia has restricted access to various social messaging platforms.

"Warning sign Update: Real-time network data confirm that social media and messaging platforms including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Messenger are now restricted in #Zambia on election day in addition to the earlier WhatsApp restriction," the organisation posted.

"WhatsApp messaging app restricted in #Zambia on election day; real-time network data show loss of service on multiple internet providers as polls get under way, corroborating widespread user reports," it added.

The Zambian government, however, denied the reports, calling them "malicious."

"The government expects citizens to use the Internet responsibly. But if some people choose to abuse the internet to mislead and misinform, the government will not hesitate to invoke relevant legal provisions to forestall any breakdown of law and order as the country passes through the election period," Information and Broadcasting Services Permanent Secretary, Amos Malupenga was quoted as saying in reports.

Several African nations like Cameroon, Congo, Uganda, Tanzania, Guinea, Togo, Benin, Mali and Mauritania have faced social media restrictions and Internet shutdowns during elections in the past.

FLASH FLOODS KILL 27 PEOPLE IN TURKEY

Ankara | Agencies

Flash floods that hit three provinces in Turkey's Black Sea region have killed at least 27 people, the country's disaster management authority said on Friday.

Turkey's Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency said that 25 people died in Kastamonu province and two others in Sinop, while one person was reported missing in Bartin, reports Xinhua news agency.

Rescue workers evacuated more than 1,700 people by boat and helicopter, it said.

Nearly 1,000 people took shelter in student dormitories.

However, some media reported the number of missing at 100.

"This is the heaviest flood disaster I have ever seen," Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu told reporters on the scene.

Soylu said the damage in infrastructure was significant, and efforts to bring life back to normal continued non-stop.

Videos aired by broadcasters showed extensive damage in the area, including collapsed buildings, damaged bridges, heavy debris along the roads, and cars piled up.

DOHA MEETING ON AFGHANISTAN CALLS FOR CEASEFIRE

Doha | Agencies

Representatives of countries taking part in the Doha meeting on Afghanistan have called on the Afghan warring parties to expedite the peace process, reach a political settlement and comprehensive ceasefire as quickly as possible, stressing their rejection of any government imposed by force.

Issued on Thursday evening at the final session of the meeting, a joint statement made it clear that the participants have agreed on the need to accelerate the peace process as a very urgent and key issue for negotiating concrete proposals between the Afghan government and the Taliban, reports Xinhua news agency.

The participants said that they would not recognise any government in Afghanistan that is forcibly imposed and are much concerned about the ongoing violence, large numbers of civilian casualties, allegations of human rights violations, and destruction of infrastructure, which prolongs conflict and makes reconciliation efforts more difficult.

They pledged to provide assistance to reconstruction process once a viable political settlement is reached between the two sides.

The statement stressed the guidelines of the political settlement, which include all-out governance, respect for human rights including the rights of women and minorities, mechanism for forming a representative government, the commitment not to make Afghan territory a threat to other countries, and respect for the international law, including international humanitarian one.

The participants called upon all Afghan parties to act in accordance with these guidelines and build upon them in the future political settlement, according to the statement.

At the invitation of Qatar, special envoys and representatives from China, Russia, Pakistan, the US and the UN, as well as other regional countries and international organisations, have gathered in Doha since Tuesday to hold talks over the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan.

Through exchanging views with the representatives of the Afghan government and Taliban, the participants have been discussing contributions that the international community can make to helping the peace process.

Since the withdrawal of the US-led forces on May 1, the Taliban has continued to gain ground in Afghanistan.

On Friday, the Taliban took control over the key southern Afghan cities of Lashkar Gah and Kandahar, after weeks of heavy clashes.

The insurgent group captured Ghazni city, the capital of eastern Ghazni province on Thursday, bringing the number of provincial capitals captured so far to more than 10 in less than a week.

SEVERAL KILLED IN SHOOTING IN UK'S PLYMOUTH

London: Several people were killed in a shooting in Plymouth, a port city in Devon in southwest England, on Thursday evening.

Devon and Cornwall Police said in a series of tweets that police were called to "a serious firearms incident" in the Keyham area of Plymouth at around 6.10 p.m., the Xinhua news agency reported.

"There have been a number of fatalities at the scene and several other casualties are receiving treatment. A critical incident has been declared," it said."The area has been cordoned off and police believe the situation is contained," it added.

Luke Pollard, Member of Parliament for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport, called it "a very grim day for our city and our community" on Twitter and advised people not to share any images or videos of any of the victims.

"The incident in Plymouth is shocking and my thoughts are with those affected," British Home Secretary Priti Patel tweeted.

Global Covid-19 caseload tops 205.3 mn

Washington | Agencies

The global coronavirus caseload has topped 205.3 million, while the deaths have surged to more than 4.33 million and vaccinations soared to over 4.57 billion, according to the Johns Hopkins University.

In its latest update on Friday morning, the University's Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) revealed that the current global caseload, death toll and vaccination tally stood at 205,368,850, 4,334,088 and 4,570,571,196, respectively.The US continues to be the worst-hit country with the world's highest number of cases and deaths at 36,305,005 and 619,098, respectively, according to the CSSE.

In terms of infections, India follows in the second place with 32,077,706 cases.

The other worst countries with over 3 million cases are Brazil (20,285,067), France (6,469,753), Russia (6,447,229), the UK (6,208,908), Turkey (6,018,455), Argentina (5,066,253), Colombia (4,856,595), Spain (4,677,883), Italy (4,420,429), Iran (4,320,266), Germany (3,814,335), Indonesia (3,774,155) and Mexico (3,020,596), the CSSE figures showed.

In terms of deaths, Brazil comes second with 566,896 fatalities.

Nations with a death toll of over 100,000 are India (429,669), Mexico (246,203), Peru (197,146), Russia (165,201), the UK (131,016), Italy (128,334), Colombia (123,097), Indonesia (113,664), France (112,700) and Argentina (108,569).

Liam Payne won back ex-fiancée Maya Henry

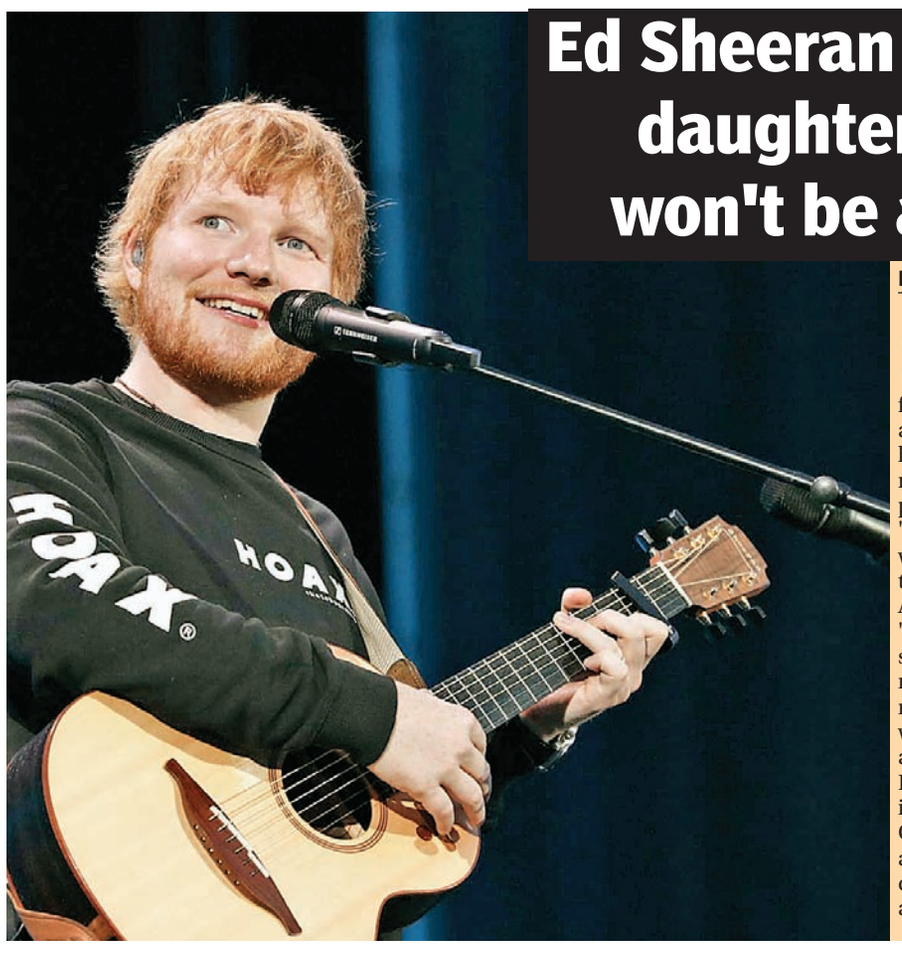
Los Angeles | Agencies

Liam Payne is said to have 'won back' his former fiancé Maya Henry with a 'romantic gesture', two months after calling off their engagement. The singer, 27, shocked fans when he announced the couple had split in a surprise announcement in June, but the pair have since reconciled. A source close to the pair told MailOnline that Liam and Maya, 21, are so sure of their rekindled romance that they've moved back in together. The insider revealed: "Liam started to win Maya back after she returned from the UK and eventually succeeded after a romantic gesture. His friends and family all love Maya because she's such a healthy influence on him, so that probably contributed it." The reports come after Liam and Maya sparked speculation they had reunited after being spotted on a low-key date in Buckinghamshire in late July.

Zoe Kravitz has lost count of her tattoos

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Zoe Kravitz does not know how many tattoos she has and sees the ink as a "beautiful form of adornment". The 32-year-old actress reportedly has as many as 56 tattoos across her body, but she can neither confirm nor deny that number, reports femalefirst.co.uk. Kravitz told InStyle magazine:: "I think tattoos are a beautiful form of adornment, just like makeup or jewellery. It's funny because I don't even know how many I have. I hardly see them anymore because I am so used to them. There are some I like more than others." She plans to get inked some more. Kravitz added: "I have gotten a few removed, but I plan on getting more tattoos. Once you're into it, it's hard to stop.



Ed Sheeran hopes daughter Lyra won't be a singer

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer Ed Sheeran is reluctant that his daughter Lyra Antarctica Seaborn Sheeran follows in her father's footsteps and become a musician because he worries any songs she released would always be compared to his back tracks. The 'Shape of You' hitmaker and his wife Cherry Seaborn welcomed their first child Lyra Antarctica in August last year. Speaking on the 'Table Manners' podcast, Sheeran said, "I think it's from being in the music industry - I'm like, 'I would not wish this on my child.' I would hate for her to be known as my daughter rather than just Lyra, I want her to have own identity." Lyra's mother Cherry is a hockey player and Ed feels their daughter is destined to be sporty like her, reports aceshowbiz.com.

Cameron Diaz: QUIT ACTING TO MAKE LIFE MANAGEABLE

Los Angeles | Agencies

Former actress Cameron Diaz, who has not appeared in a feature film since the 2014 film 'Annie', has revealed that she quit acting in order to make all parts of her life more manageable. Asked by Kevin Hart on his talk show 'Heart to Heart' what had motivated her to quit, the 48-year-old actress said: "When you do something at a really high level for a long period of time, (other parts of you have) to sort of be handed off to other people." Diaz began to realise when she was 40 that things needed to change, reports femalefirst.co.uk. She said: "(There were) so many parts of my life ... that I wasn't touching and that I wasn't managing. It's fun to do, I love it. I love acting. For me, I just really wanted to make my life manageable by me. My routine in a day is literally what I can manage to do by myself." The actress, who has daughter Raddix with husband Benji Madden, feels she made the right decision because she now has time for "all those things I didn't have time for before".

Jess Wright stuns at her Ibiza hen party

Los Angeles | Agencies

Jess Wright looks captivating in a stunning green crop top and maxi skirt set as she enjoyed the first night of her hen party on the White Isle, ahead of wedding to fiancé William Lee-Kemp. She jetted off to Ibiza with her closest female friends and family members. The TOWIE star took to Instagram on Friday morning to show off her ensemble she wore while spending the evening at Casa Maca in Ibiza, Spain. The reality star boosted her height with perspex slip-on stilettos and carried her belongings in a marble white 'Bridey' box clutch. While the bride-to-be was dressed in green, all of her female friends - including her sister Natalya and mum Carol- wore white outfits for the evening.

Dolly Parton to publish her first novel next year

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer Dolly Parton, who is known for her numbers such as "Jolene" and "I will always love you" among many others, has teamed up with author James Patterson to write her first novel titled "Run Rose Run", which will be accompanied by a new album. The book will release on March 7, 2022, reports femalefirst.co.uk. The 75-year-old country legend said: "All-new songs were written based on the characters and situations in the book. I hope you enjoy the book and the songs as much as we've enjoyed putting it all together." The book will also incorporate lyrics from the 12-song album in a story which follows a young woman who moves to Nashville, Tennessee, in a bid to make her musical dreams come true. The author, who has previously co-written two books with former US President Bill Clinton, hailed teaming up with Parton "an honour" and promised the book and music collaboration will be a hit with fans.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY

Georgia Steel

2ND TEST:

ROOT TAKES ENGLAND TO 119/3 AFTER INDIA SCORE 364 ON DAY 2

London | Agencies

Skipper Joe Root defied Indian bowlers (48 not out off 75 balls) as England went to stumps at 119/3 on Day 2 of the second Test here at Lord's on Friday. They are still 245 runs adrift of the 364 that India made in their first innings.England, who lost two wickets off successive balls immediately after tea to Mohammed Siraj (2/34), were reduced to 23 for two before Root and opener Rory Burns (49) added 85 for the third wicket to stabilise the innings.

However, towards the end of play on Friday, pacer Mohammed Shami struck to get rid of Burns leg-before to bring India back.Jonny Bairstow (6 off 17 balls) saw off the day in the company of Joe Root. India were earlier bowled out for 364, adding only 88 to their overnight 276/3 as James Anderson (5/62) took his 31st five-wicket haul. India lost centurion K.L. Rahul and vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane early. Though Rishabh Pant and Ravindra Jadeja offered resistance, the tail failed to wag as India were all out soon after lunch.Centurion Rahul was the first to go. He could add only two runs to his overnight score and fell for 129, lobbing a catch to cover off Ollie Robinson on the second ball of the day.

Five balls later, Anderson forced Ajinkya Rahane to nick his first ball of the day to slips as India were reduced to 282/5 from the overnight 276/3.Wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant and Ravindra Jadeja added 49 in 18.5 overs for the sixth wicket before the former fell when he nicked an attempted cut off Mark Wood to wicketkeeper Jos Buttler, 30 minutes before the end of the first session.

Mohammed Shami was dismissed by Moeen Ali soon after as India went for lunch at 346/7. With Jadeja at crease, India were hoping they would get close to 400. Both Jadeja and pace bowler Ishant Sharma hung around after lunch before the latter fell to an Anderson beauty which jagged back in and caught him LBW.

Bumrah was dismissed by Anderson for his fifth wicket on the last ball of his 29th and Indian innings' 126th over and on the first ball of the next over by Mark Wood, Jadeja was caught at mid-on.

Brief scores: India 364 all out in 126.1 overs (K.L. Rahul 129, Rohit Sharma 83, Virat Kohli 42, Rishabh Pant 37, Ravindra Jadeja 40; James Anderson 5/62, Ollie Robinson 2/73, Mark Wood 2/91) vs England 119/3 in 45 overs (Rory Burns 49, Joe Root 48 batting, Mohammed Siraj 2/34, Mohammed Shami 1/22).

Thakur launches Fit India Freedom Run 2.0

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur on Friday launched the nationwide programme of Fit India Freedom Run 2.0 as part of "Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav", which celebrates 75 years on India's Independence.

While Thakur flagged off the Freedom Run from Delhi's Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium and participated in the Freedom Run at the stadium, the event was also held at 75 other locations across the country, including iconic locations such as the Cellular Jail in Port Blair, Kaza Post in Lahaul Spiti, Mumbai's Gateway of India and the Attari Border in Punjab, among others. Interacting with participants at various locations across the country, Thakur said that as India celebrates 75 years of Independence, the Fit India Freedom Run 2.0 campaign is being organised as part of 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav'.

He reiterated, "A youthful mind, body and soul is key driver of a healthy and fit India. Only a 'Fit India' will make a 'Hit India'."

"The Freedom Run will start on August 15 and will go on till October 2, 2021. With this, we aim to reach more than 7.50 crore youth and citizens across the country."

Biggest-ever Indian Paralympic contingent given virtual send-off

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A 54-member Indian contingent for the Tokyo Paralympic Games was given a virtual send-off late on Thursday evening by Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports Anurag. The athletes were addressed and sent best wishes by Thakur via a video message.

"India is sending its largest-ever contingent to the Paralympic Games in Tokyo -- 54 para-sportspersons across nine sports disciplines. The passion of our Para-Athletes shows their phenomenal human spirit. Remember that when you play for India you will have a 130 crore Indians cheering for you!

Minister of Tourism, GK Reddy said, "Blessings of the whole nation are with the athletes and national flag should fly high again in Tokyo. It is dream of every player to do good at international level and make the country proud and we firmly believes that Paralympic athletes will fulfil this dream."

Deepa Malik, president of Paralympic Committee of India (PCI) said, "Everyone has worked very hard and we are looking at very amazing competition at Tokyo 2020 and are very confident that we are going to bring lot of joy, lot of glory to the tricolour." A total of 54 athletes in nine disciplines including archery, athletics, badminton, swimming and weightlifting, among others will compete in Tokyo.

AFC Cup 2021 action set to begin

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Indian club football action returns in August with the arrival of the AFC Cup 2021, with potentially two Indian clubs -- ATK Mohun Bagan and Bengaluru FC -- in action in the competition's Group Stage (South) from August 18-24, 2021.

Group D consists of ATK Mohun Bagan FC, Maziya Sports & Recreation from the Maldives, and Bangladeshi side Bashundhara Kings, along with the winner of the South Asia play-off match between Bengaluru FC, who are 2016 AFC Cup runners-up, and Maldives' Club Eagles. The play-off will take place on August 15 in Male.

ATK Mohun Bagan are direct entrants to the group stage of the AFC Cup 2021 by virtue of being winners of the I-League 2019/20, after their agreement to form a joint venture, and will be confident of making a mark on the continental stage and move forward together.

Bengaluru FC earned their AFC Cup 2021 Preliminary Round 2 entry by virtue of a third-place finish in the Indian Super League's league phase in 2019/20 and defeated Nepal's Tribhuvan Army FC 5-0 in April 2021 to enter the play-off round. Bengaluru FC will be led by Indian team skipper Sunil Chhetri.

The teams in Group D will face off against each other in a single-leg round-robin format across three matchdays -- August 18, 21 and 24, with all matches being held in the Maldives. The eventual group winner will proceed to the next round, which is the single-leg Inter-Zone semi-final.

Group D fixtures:

August 18: Bashundhara Kings vs Maziya Sports & Recreation

August 18: ATK Mohun Bagan vs Bengaluru FC/Club Eagles

August 21: Maziya Sports & Recreation vs ATK Mohun Bagan

August 21: Bengaluru FC/Club Eagles vs Bashundhara Kings

August 24: Maziya Sports & Recreation vs Bengaluru FC/Club Eagles

August 24: ATK Mohun Bagan vs Bashundhara Kings

IPL 2021:

MS DHONI-LED CHENNAI SUPER KINGS TAKE OFF FOR DUBAI

Team Absolute | Chennai

The Chennai Super Kings (CSK) on Friday left for Dubai from Chennai for prepare for the remaining leg of IPL 2021 in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The three-time IPL champions shared a black and white picture of captain MS Dhoni seen with a suitcase at the airport. "Get ready folks!" CSK tweeted. Dhoni had arrived in Chennai on Tuesday with the franchise posting a picture with the caption as 'Lion Day Entry.'Chennai Super Kings also shared pictures of Suresh Raina, Ambati Rayudu, Robin Uthappa, Ruturaj Gaikwad, Deepak Chahar, Karn Sharma and KM Asif waiting at the airport to board the flight to Dubai. Chennai Super Kings will be back in action when the UAE leg of the IPL resumes on September 19 against Mumbai Indians in Dubai. Earlier in the day, defending champions Mumbai Indians also departed for Abu Dhabi, the capital of UAE.

The franchise shared a picture through its Instagram handle on Friday, showing talent scout R Vinay Kumar in the flight with the caption as 'Abu Dhabi bound'. They also posted a video of off-spinner Jayant Yadav in full travel gear with caption as "Off we go! The countdown has begun." The second half of the IPL 2021 will be held in UAE after the outbreak of COVID-19 in various team bubbles at Ahmedabad and New Delhi. Chennai is currently at second place in the points table with 10 points from seven matches.

JAMSHEDPUR TO HOST NATIONAL WOMEN'S FOOTBALL TEAM CAMP

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The state of Jharkhand will host the Indian women's national team camp at Jamshedpur from August 16 for preparation for the AFC Women's Asian Cup India 2022 -- the flagship continental championship, which will be held from January 20-February 6, 2022.

India is hosting the event for the second time -- first in 1979 -- and the camp at Jamshedpur will go a long way in India's preparation for the Asian Cup which will be held at three venues -- Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, and Pune. Twelve teams including hosts India will participate in the event.

Having taken charge of the senior women's team, Head Coach Thomas Dennerby has named 30 probables for the camp at Jamshedpur. A decorated coach with over three decades of experience behind him, Dennerby has previously guided Sweden's women's national team to third place in the FIFA World Cup in 2011, and a quarter-final spot in the 2012 London Olympics.

In addition to the 30 players named by Dennerby, Bala Devi who is currently under rehab will be joining the camp to assess her medical condition, while Dalima Chibber will be training for the first 10 days after which she will be returning to play League football in Canada as per her prior commitment, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) informed on Friday.

UNMUKT CHAND ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT, YES FRESH CRICKETING PASTURES IN USA

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi batsman Unmukt Chand, who shot to prominence by being the 2012 U-19 World Cup winning captain, has announced his retirement from cricket in India. Chand had made an unbeaten 111, leading a tense victory over Australia in the 2012 U-19 World Cup final in Townsville, Australia.

The 28-year-old, who also led India A as well as Delhi and Uttarakhand in domestic cricket, had represented Mumbai Indians, Delhi Capitals and Rajasthan Royals in the IPL. In a statement posted on his social media accounts, he has said that he is now "ready to take the leap of faith and enter into a new territory and contribute my best". " I have always been honest to my game with my hard work and determination. But sometimes things don't pan out as imagined. I am a firm believer in hard work and destiny has its own ways to unfold the life in front of us," said Chand.

He added, "I feel more complete as a cricketer and a human being and I am ready to take the leap of faith and enter into a new territory and contribute my best." Since his debut in 2010, Chand played in 67 First-Class matches, scoring 3379 runs with an average of 31.57. In 120 List A matches, Chand amassed 4505 runs at an average of 41.33. In 77 T20s, he made 1565 runs at an average of 22.35.

England's matches in Pakistan shifted to Rawalpindi

London | Agencies

England men's and women's cricket teams will play all their limited-overs matches in Rawalpindi during their tour of Pakistan in October, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) confirmed the revised schedule on Friday. "The schedule for England Men's and England Women's joint tour of Pakistan has been updated," said the ECB in a statement. "All fixtures have been moved to Rawalpindi, and moved forward one day to assist with England Men's and Pakistan Men's preparations for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup," added the statement. "The teams will travel together and will depart the UK on October 9. Both teams will play two IT20s, before the England Men's team departs to Dubai, and England Women will take part in three ODIs." The two T20I matches were initially set to be played at the National Stadium in Karachi. It will be England's first tour of Pakistan since 2005. While England men's team will tour Pakistan after 16 years, England women's team, captained by Heather Knight, will tour Pakistan for the first time.

LUKAKU RETURNS TO CHELSEA FOR 97.5M POUNDS

London | Agencies

Chelsea have confirmed the signing of Belgian international striker, Romelu Lukaku for a club-record fee of 97.5 million pounds beating the previous club record of 89.7 million euros paid for Kai Havertz a year ago. Lukaku returns to the club he joined from Anderlecht for the first time as a 17-year-old in 2011, on a five-year deal, seven years after leaving Stamford Bridge to join Everton.

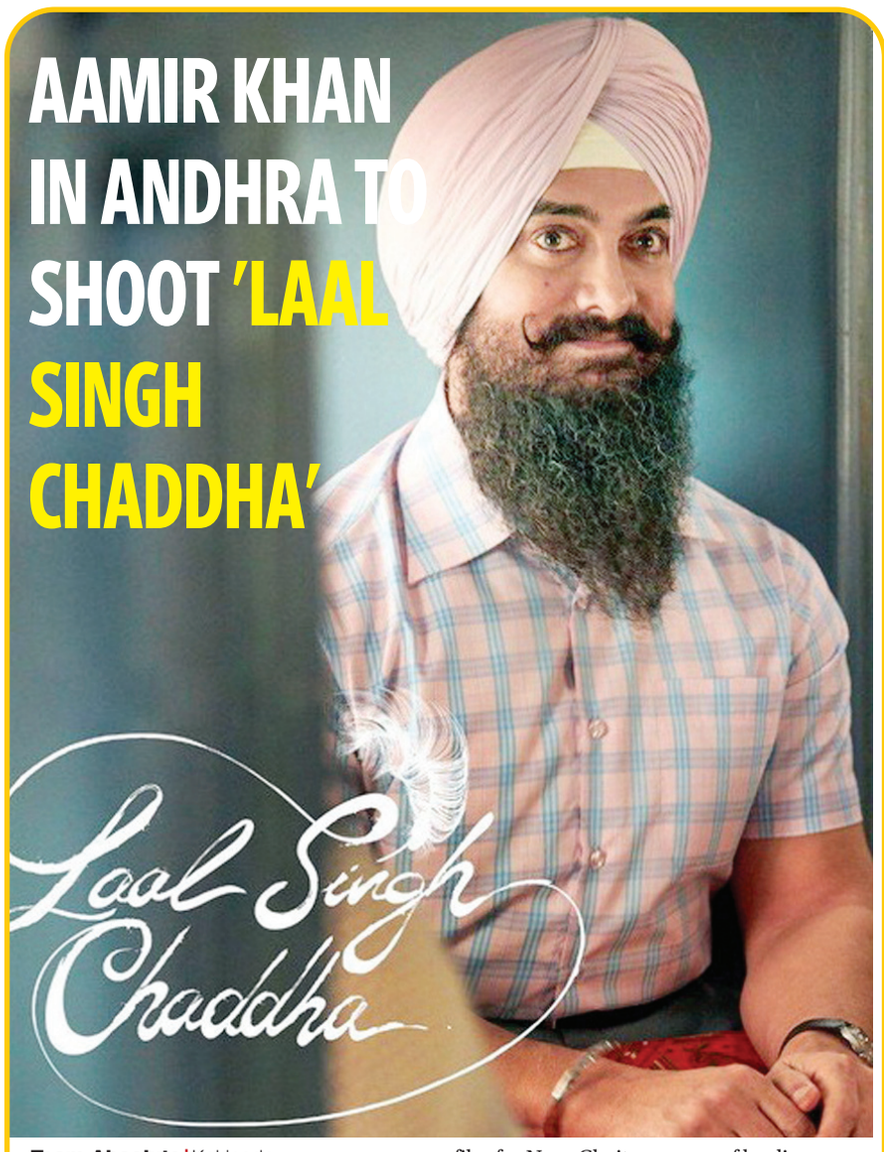
"I'm happy and blessed to be back at this wonderful club. It's been a long journey for me: I came here as a kid who had a lot to learn, now I'm coming back with a lot of experience and more mature," Lukaku told the Chelsea website, Xinhua reports.

"Since I left Chelsea, it's been a long journey with a lot of ups and downs, but these experiences made me strong and the challenge is to try to help the team win some more trophies. I can't wait to get started and to help the club achieve more success," said Lukaku, who could straight into the squad for Chelsea's Premier League opener at home to Crystal Palace on Saturday.

Anand, Vidit Gujrathi in FIDE Grand Swiss League

Mumbai: India's Grandmasters (GM) Viswanathan Anand, Vidit Gujrathi, Pentala Harikrishna and Bhaskaran Adhiban have qualified for the FIDE Grand Swiss league, which is one of the qualifying events for the FIDE Candidates Tournament 2022 the winner of which will challenge the World Champion in 2023. The FIDE Grand Swiss League will take place in Riga, Latvia from October 25 to November 8, 2021. The Indian quartet features among the top 114 players, who will figure in an 11 round Swiss format. Qualification for the event was based on the players' average rating from June 2020 to July 2021.

AAMIR KHAN IN ANDHRA TO SHOOT 'LAAL SINGH CHADDHA'



Team Absolute | Kakinada

Aamir Khan has arrived in Andhra Pradesh town in East Godavari district for shooting of his upcoming movie 'Laal Singh Chaddha'.

The actor along with other unit members will visit various locations on Friday and Saturday for the shoot.

'Laal Singh Chaddha' stars Kareena Kapoor in the female lead. Telugu actor Naga Chaitanya is also playing the role of an army officer. This is the first Bollywood film for Naga Chaitanya, son of leading Tollywood actor Nagarjuna.

Being produced by Aamir Khan Productions, Viacom18 Studios and Paramount Pictures, 'Laal Singh Chaddha' has already completed most of the shooting in Srinagar, Ladakh, Kargil, Chandigarh and other locations.

Directed by Adavit Chandan, the film is adaptation of the 1994 American film 'Forrest Gump' which was based on Winston Groom's 1986 novel of the same name.

Urvashi Rautela: Our champions deserve better

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Urvashi Rautela expressed her opinion on the lack of sports amenities provided to Indian athletes in India. The 'Hate Story 4' actress said, "Our nation won numerous medals at the Tokyo Olympic Games 2020 that made India proud. India won 7 medals which is the highest of all time. These Olympians made us proud and renowned around the globe. These athletes have scripted history for India by giving it all they had." She added: "I somehow feel the system needs to do better for its champions. After hearing the stories of Mirabai Chanu, Neeraj Chopra, and Ravi Dahiya, I realised how difficult it was for them to receive basic amenities, other than training."

Urvashi will be seen next in 'Black Rose'.

MANNAT NOOR: THERE CAN'T BE ANOTHER SONG LIKE 'LAUNG LAACHI'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Singer Mannat Noor, known for her popular song 'Laung Laachi', is back with a new soundtrack titled 'Mera Mahi'. 'Mera Mahi' features Mannat with Yuvraaj Hans, son of Hans Raj Hans. The singer has given her voice for films like 'Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweety', 'Indoo Ki Jawani' and several other Punjabi films. Talking about her new song, Mannat said: "Mera Maahi is the kind of song every girl would relate to. While I've sung a lot of songs, this was special because I got to feature in it as well, alongside Yuvraaj Hans, my co-artiste." As she continues to get recognition for her song from music aficionados, Mannat shared that the success of the song built up her confidence. "Whenever your work is loved, it gives you a different high altogether. 'Laung Laachi' is an extraordinary song and I believe there cannot be another song like that." 'Mera Mahi' directed by Teji Sandhu released on MN Melody's YouTube channel.

GOVINDA, SHAKTI KAPOOR REVISITS 'RAJA BABU' LANE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actors Govinda and Shakti Kapoor are all set to bring alive their characters "Raja babu" and "Nandu" from the 1994 film "Raja Babu" in an Independence Day special episode. The two will be seen reprising the iconic characters after 27 years for special episodes of the "Zee Comedy Show". While 'Nandu' essayed by Shakti is seen in boxer shorts and a vest, Govinda as 'Raja Babu' can be seen in a kurta pyjama and a koti. Farah Khan, who judges the show, said: "It was an epic act, we all know that they are legends and seeing them perform such an act was a treat for everyone. It made us all laugh out loud."

Ranvir Shorey, Vinay Pathak re-unite as comedy show host

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actors Ranvir Shorey and Vinay Pathak reunite as co-hosts in the upcoming satirical-comedy show 'Chalo Koi Baat Nahi'. The duo goes a long way back to hosting shows together like 'Ranvir Vinay Aur Kaun?', 'OYE', 'House Arrest', 'Duniya Goal Hain' and 'Cricket Crazy' on television.

This time both will be seen together on digital space with 'Chalo Koi Baat Nahi', a satire-based show. Talking about the chemistry the two share, Vinay said, "Collaborating with Ranvir has always been a fun, fruitful experience for me. I have known him for a very long time and we even started our careers together as TV hosts, so coming back again as co-hosts for 'Chalo Koi Baat Nahi' is extremely exciting." Added Ranvir, "Vinay and I have amazing chemistry that allows us to complement each other on-stage. I have always enjoyed working with him. The show will release soon on Sony LIV.

Yami Gautam: Not easy to switch characters

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Yami Gautam has some career boosting films- 'A Thursday', 'Dasvi' and 'Lost'- lined up this year. The actress says it isn't easy to shift from one character to another and believes a character should not suffer because of tight schedules. The actress will play a crime reporter in Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury's 'Lost', a kindergarten teacher, who takes children as hostages in 'A Thursday' and an IPS officer in 'Dasvi.' She also has the spooky adventure comedy 'Bhoot Police' in the pipeline. Yami said, "I have always wanted to play versatile roles. I am glad that filmmakers have faith in me with their material and are offering diverse projects. It isn't easy to shift from one character to another."

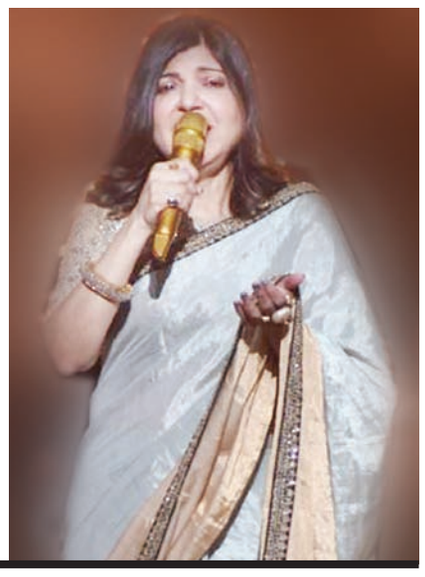
'Indian Idol 12' finale to be 200-song musical feast

Team Absolute | Mumbai

With over 40 acts and 200 songs, the 12-hour-long 'Greatest Finale Ever' episode of Indian Idol 12 will have some special guests to celebrate the Independence Day.

From singers like Udit Narayan, Kumar Sanu, Alka Yagnik, Javed Ali, rapper Mika Singh to Bollywood celebs Sidharth Malhotra and Kiara Advani, actress Soniya Kapoor and many more will be entertaining the audience with their songs and different acts.

Actor Jay Bhanushali would join the current host Aditya Narayan. Aditya and Jay will be seen indulging in some fun and musical banter with the top six contestants Pawandeep Rajan, Arunita Kanjilal, Mohd Danish, Sayli Kamble, Nihal Tauro and Shanmukha Priya and judges Anu Malik, Himesh Reshammiya and Sonu Kakkar. 'Greatest Finale Ever' of Indian Idol - Season 12 will air on August 15 on Sony Entertainment Television.



INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY

Radhika Apte

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