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GOVT AIMS TO PASS MORE BILLS IN RS AMID OPPOSITION PROTESTS

With the Monsoon Session entering its last week from Monday, the government has listed four bills related to the Finance Ministry for passage in the Rajya Sabha to get them Parliament's nod.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

According to the list for business for Monday, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will move The Tribunals Reforms Bill, 2021, which seeks to amend the Cinematograph Act, 1952, the Customs Act, 1962, the Airports Authority of India Act, 1994, the Trade Marks Act, 1999, and the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act, 2001.She will also move The General Insurance Business (Nationalisation) Amendment Bill, 2021 for passageBoth these bills have been passed by the Lok Sabha.The Appropriation (No.4) Bill, 2021 and The Appropriation (No.3) Bill, 2021, pending in the upper house since last week, will also be moved.

The government rushed through eight bills through the house in 3 hours 25 minutes, amid the opposition alleging that the government is undermining Parliament, and the government blaming the opposition for the stalemate and not resolving the issue.The Constitution (Scheduled Tribe) Order (Amendment) Bill, The Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Bill, The Essential Defence Services Bill, 2021, The Limited Liability Partnership (Amendment) Bill, 2021, the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee (Amendment) Bill, 2021, the Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India (Amendment) Bill, 2021, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill, 2021 and The Inland Vessels Bill, 2021 have been passed.

The work in the third week increased by 24.20 per cent corresponding to previous week, while 21.36 hours was wasted. In the debates, opposition members tried raise issues related to farm laws, the Pegasus snooping row, and fuel hike but were not allowed by the chair.

Congress leader Deepender Hooda alleged that "as you take name of farmers in the house the mic is put off".

Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge tweeted on Sunday: "PM @narendramodi seems to have lost his nerves. Why is he not keen on answering questions in the Parliament?

"The opposition parties are ready for discussions in the Parliament, but @BJP4India Govt is stalling the proceedings so that the truth doesn't get to the people."

But the Government claims that the opposition is raising a "non-issue".The opposition wants that the government should allow a discussion on the snooping row, farm laws and fuel price hikes under Rule 267. However, the government says that on the snooping row, only clarifications can be sought after the minister's statement while on the farm laws a short duration discussion has been allowed in the House but the opposition is not ready to discuss it before discussing the Pegasus issue.

UP COURT TO HEAR CASE RELATED TO PAK PM ON AUG 26

Pratapgarh:A court in Uttar Pradesh's Pratapgarh will hear a petition seeking the registration of an FIR against Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on August 26 to discuss the maintainability of the same. A criminal complaint had been filed against the Prime Minister at the Pratapgarh court, seeking registration of an FIR against him for permitting the destruction of a temple of Lord Ganesha in Pakistan. The complainant, Gyan Prakash Shukla, a lawyer and national president of the All India Rural Bar Association, has alleged that the alleged destruction of the temple was wilfully done by an unruly mob in order to disturb the communal harmony of India.He further alleged that Khan was hand in glove with perpetrators of this crime, as a leader of his party has made a video showing destruction of the temple viral on social media.

Terror funding case:

NIA raids 56 locations of banned J&K Jamaat

SRINAGAR | Agencies

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Sunday raided 56 places in 14 districts in Jammu and Kashmir following registration of an FIR against prominent members of the banned J&K Jamaat-e-Islami in the terror funding case, officials said.

An NIA spokesperson said that the anti-terror probe agency, along with the CRPF and the Jammu and Kashmir Police, carried out searches in Srinagar, Budgam, Ganderbal, Baramulla, Kupwara, Bandipora, Anantnag, Shopian, Pulwama, Kulgam, Ramban, Doda, Kishtwar, and Rajouri districts. The official said that the agency had registered a case on the orders of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs on February 5 this year relating to separatist and secessionist activities of J&K JeI, an unlawful association under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, following its proscription on February 28, 2019.

Members of the organisation have been collecting funds domestically and abroad through donations, particularly

in the form of "Zakat, Mowda and Bait-ul-Mal" purportedly to further charity and other welfare activities, "but these funds are instead being used for violent and secessionist activities," the official said. The official said that the funds raised by JeI are also being channelised to proscribed terrorist organisations such as Hizbul-Mujahideen (HM), Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and others through well organised networks of JeI cadres."JeI has also been motivating impressionable youth of Kashmir and recruiting new members (Rukuns) in Jammu and Kashmir to participate in disruptive secessionist activities," the official said.The official said that the searches conducted on Sunday included the premises of office-bearers of the proscribed association, its members and also offices of trusts purportedly run by the JeI."During the searches, various incriminating documents and electronic devices were seized from the premises of the suspects," the official said.Reports here said the Falah-e-Aam trust, owned by the JeM and situated in Nowgam outskirts area of Srinagar has also been raided.

NIA sources said the focus of these raids is to probe the funding sources of the banned organisation.

The source said that searches are also being held at the premises of Gul Mohd War, a resident of Manigam Ganderbal and the district head of JeI, Abdul Hamid Bhat, a resident of Gamchipora Batweena, Zahoor Ahmad Reshi, a JeI member and former teacher now running a shop at Safapora, and the premises of Mehrajdin Reshi in Safapora.

Reshi is a former terrorist and now runs a shop.The official, however, remained tight-lipped on sharing the names of other people whose premises were searched by the agency.

CJI: Threat to human rights highest in police stations, even privileged not spared

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Chief Justice NV Ramana on Sunday said the threat to human rights and bodily integrity are the highest in police stations and even the privileged are not spared the third-degree treatment.

Justice Ramana was delivering the keynote address at an event organised by the National Legal Services Authority of India (NALSA) to launch the "vision and mission statement" and the mobile app for NALSA.

Emphasizing human rights and dignity are sacrosanct, the Chief Justice said: "The threat to human rights and bodily integrity are the highest in police stations. Custodial torture and other police atrocities are problems which still prevail in our society. Going by the recent reports even the privileged are not spared third-degree treatment".e stressed that in spite of constitutional declarations and guarantees, lack of effective legal representation at the police stations is a huge detriment to arrested or detained persons. He emphasized that the decisions taken in these early hours will later determine the ability of the accused to defend himself."To keep police excesses in check dissemination of information about the constitutional right to legal aid and availability of free legal aid services is

necessary. The installation of display boards and outdoor hoardings in every police station/prison is a step in this direction", he said.For a society to remain governed by the rule of law, the Chief Justice said it is imperative to bridge the gap of accessibility to justice between the highly privileged and the most vulnerable.

"The realities of socio-economic diversity which prevail in our nation, cannot ever be a reason for denial of rights. If, as an institution, the judiciary wants to garner the faith of the citizens, we have to make everyone feel assured that we exist for them. For the longest time, the vulnerable population has lived outside the system of justice," he added.

He added that despite the Covid-19 pandemic, we have successfully been able to continue our legal aid services."Majority of those who do not have access to justice are from rural and remote areas which suffer from lack of connectivity. I have already written to the government emphasizing the need to bridge the digital divide on a priority basis", he added.

Citing NALSA has roped in Department of Post, the Chief Justice said: "The services of the existing postal network can be utilized to spread awareness regarding the availability of free legal aid services and to increase the outreach of legal services to the eligible category of persons, especially to the persons residing in rural and far-flung areas of the country".

Concluding the address, he cited Martin Luther King Junior, "Every step towards the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering and struggle, the tireless exertion and passionate concern of dedicated individuals."

Politics on caste census heats up as parties step up pressure

Politics on the caste census has escalated after the regional parties demanded that caste should be included in the census. Even the BJP ally, Janata Dal United is also pushing for the caste-based census in the country.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Shakiluzzaman Ansari, former OBC commission member said, "The country should know what is the population of the OBC in the country and what is their social status so that welfare schemes may be diverted towards that particular community."

Though Nitish is an ally of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) but he said last week during his visit to Delhi, "Our job is to put forth our views, it is up to the Centre to do or not to do the caste census, and I do not think that one caste will like and another will not. It is in everyone's interest."He further said that this will not bring any rift or tension in the society. There will be happiness. People will be benefited from the schemes, and such a census "happened under British rule too."Not only the JDU, other political parties such as the RJD, the Samajwadi Party and the DMK are also demanding caste-based census. RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav had raised the issue of the caste census and had even met Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who has also supported the demand for the caste-based census in the country.

Ansari alleges that, "The UPA government after direction from the OBC commission did a caste survey but data analysis was not published by the NDA government citing errors."

In 2011, Socio Economic and Caste Census conducted by the Registrar General of India had come out with 46,73,034 categories of caste, sub-caste, but in July 2015, the Government of India stated that errors were found and some of them have been rectified since then.

The first caste census was conducted in India in 1881 after Britishers took over India and the last census based on caste was carried out in 1931.

CONG FIELDS WOMEN SPOKESPERSONS TO QUESTION MINISTERS ON DELHI RAPE

New Delhi: The Congress on Sunday fielded a panel of its woman spokespersons to question the silence of the Modi government's women ministers on the issue of rape and murder of a 9-year-old girl in the national capital. The press conference was jointly addressed by Alka Lamba, Supriya Shrinate, Ragini Nayak, and Amrita Dhawan. Lamba said: "Despite the Congress' notice on the issue in the Rajya Sabha, a debate was not allowed while women ministers were busy in shopping for sarees at Delhi Haat." Shrinate asked: "Why is the Home Minister silent when Delhi Police is directly under him."The Twitter account of former Congress President Rahul Gandhi was blocked on Saturday, after the NCPCR flagged the issue, of his photos with the victim's parents, with the social media platform.The Congress alleged that BJP is trying to silence its voices but it will not stop. "The rape and murder of the 9-year-old is not an issue, but the tweet is," said Nayak.Gandhi on Wednesday met the family members of the 9-year-old victim who was raped and killed and demanded justice for them. The minor girl was allegedly raped, murdered, and cremated without her parents' consent in Old Nangal crematorium recently.But the BJP alleged that Rahul Gandhi has revealed the identity of the victim's family which is unlawful.Following the complaint by the NCPCR, Gandhi's Twitter account had been temporarily suspended and the party, from his official handle, tweeted that due process is being followed for its restoration.It said that until then, Gandhi will stay connected with all through his other social media platforms and continue to raise his voice for people and fight for their cause.

2 weeks after clash, goods vehicles back on Assam-Mizoram highway

After the withdrawal of "economic blockade", hundreds of Mizoram-bound goods vehicles, stranded since the July 26 clash, were moving normally on National Highway 306 on Sunday, ensuring supply of essentials, transport fuels, and vital medicines to the border state, officials said.

GUWAHATI/AIZAWL | Agencies

Police and district administration officials in Mizoram's Kolasib, which borders Assam's Cachar, said that till Sunday evening, over a hundred loaded goods trucks and other vehicles entered the state from Assam.

There are no obstacles and problems faced by the drivers and their assistants in plying their vehicles, Kolasib police chief Vanlalfaka Ralte told the media.

Mizoram Police remains on alert to facilitate the smooth movement of all types of goods and passenger vehicles all along to Aizawl, he added.Officials said that on the instructions of Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, state Urban Development Minister Ashok Singhal and Environment and Forest Minister Parimal Suklabaidya, accompanied by Cachar's Deputy Commissioner and Superintendent of Police, held talks with all stakeholders at Lailapur, the entry point to Mizoram, since late Saturday.

"With the two ministers' persuasion, movement of vehicles began since Saturday night. Most stranded vehicles went to Mizoram on Sunday. There are no problems on the Assam side. We would provide all help and security to the drivers and others, if necessary," Cachar Superintendent of Police Ramandeep Kaur told IANS over phone.

Due to the "economic blockade" on NH-

306, the life line of Mizoram, supply of essential commodities, transport fuels and medicines was acutely hit since the July 26 bloodiest border clash that left six Assam Police personnel dead and 100 others including civilians of the two states injured.However, several local organisations, civil society groups, and traders' bodies including the Barak Democratic Front, Youth Against Social Evils and Barak Upatyaka Banga Sahitya Sammelan, protesting against the "forceful withdrawal of economic blockade against Mizoram", separately told the media that the Assam government had "surrendered" to the Mizoram government despite six state policemen being killed.Mizoram Health Minister R. Lalthangliana said in Aizawl that besides the essential commodities and transport fuels, Mizoram has been facing a severe crisis of vital medicines during the past two weeks due to the "economic blockade".

"Covid patients are dying for want of medicines. Seriously ill patients are in dire need of life-saving drugs..." he said in a video message.Assam and Mizoram held a crucial ministerial level meeting on August 5 in Aizawl where they decided to maintain peace along their border, and agreed that they would not send their respective forces and officials to the troubled areas.

A joint statement, issued after the meeting, said that both state governments also welcomed and agreed to take forward the initiatives taken by the Union Home Ministry and their Chief Ministers to remove tension prevailing on the inter-state border and to find lasting solutions to the disputes through discussions.Home Minister Lalchamliana, Revenue Minister Lalruatkima, and Home Secretary Vanlalngaihsaka represented Mizoram and Border Protection and Development and Agriculture Minister Atul Bora, Singhal, and state Commissioner-cum-Secretary, Border Protection and Development, G.D. Tripathi comprised the Assam delegation.

After the meeting, the Assam government on August 6 withdrew its advisories and other circulars to facilitate return of normalcy along the inter-state border. Soon after the July 26 violence, it had asked its residents not to visit Mizoram and those staying in the neighbouring state to maintain utmost caution.

Mild tremors felt in parts of Andhra, Telangana

Team Absolute | Hyderabad

Tremors were felt in parts of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana Andhra Pradesh on Sunday.

Pulichintala in Guntur district and parts of Suryapet district recorded three earthquakes between 7.15 a.m. and 8.20 a.m. According to seismologists at National Geophysical Research Institute (NGRI), their intensity on the Richter Scale was recorded at 3.0, 2.7 and 2.3.

The tremors were felt in Chintalapalem and Mellacheruvu mandals of Suryapet district of Telangana. No loss of life or property was reported from any area. However, the tremors sent panic in some villages, and people ran out of their houses.

Pulichintala area on the banks of river Krishna that divides Andhra Pradesh and Telangana has been experiencing mild tremors for the last one week. On July 26, an earthquake, measuring magnitude 4.0 on the Richter Scale, had rocked parts of the two Telugu states. The epicentre of the earthquake was in Andhra Pradesh, 156 kilometers south of Hyderabad.

Pulichintala area has been experiencing seismic activity for some time. A 4.6 magnitude quake struck the region on January 26 last year. Since then the region had been witnessing hectic seismic activity. Till June last year, over 900 micro earthquakes were recorded. The epicenter of these microquakes was 5 km downstream of Pulichintala dam.Microquake is a very low intensity earthquake which is 2.0 or less in magnitude.

Indians first, says Vice President on eve of Quit India Day

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Vice President of India, M Venkaiah Naidu has greeted the people on the eve of the anniversary of Quit India Movement Day. In his message to the nation, he said that despite diversity we are "Indians First."

He said, "I convey my warm greetings and best wishes to all our citizens on the anniversary of Quit India Movement Day. The movement started with Gandhiji exhorting the countrymen with his powerful slogan, 'do or die' which infused a new energy into our independence movement and eventually forced the British to leave India in 1947."

He said, on this occasion, we should remember the countless sacrifices made by the brave sons and daughters of India who participated in the Quit India Movement to free India from the colonial rule.

Naidu said, that the people should rededicate themselves for eradicating poverty, illiteracy, inequality, corruption and social evils like casteism, communalism and gender discrimination from India.

"Indian civilisation is rooted in the foundational values of 'share and care'. This should be our guiding light as we foster harmony, brotherhood, mutual respect and shared responsibility in our society." Naidu said despite all the differences in the way we dress, the language we speak or the religion we practice, we are all Indians first and we should be proud of that. This beautiful land is for each and every one of us and we are together in this journey of creating a better tomorrow."

He said let's welcome 'Bharatheeyata' back into the lives - be it in the use of the mother tongue, attire and respect for Indian traditions.

"Let us take strides together for a more inclusive, confident Atmanirbhar Bharat," he added.

PM Modi to launch Ujjwala 2.0 on August 10

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch Ujjwala 2.0 (Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana - PMUY) by handing over LPG connections at Mahoba in Uttar Pradesh on August 10.

During the event, to be held via video conferencing, the Prime Minister will interact with beneficiaries of the Ujjwala scheme and will also address the nation, a government statement said on Sunday.

Describing the journey from Ujjwala 1.0 to Ujjwala 2.0, the release said, during Ujjwala 1.0 launched in 2016, the target was set to provide LPG connections to five crore women members of BPL households.

Subsequently, the scheme was expanded in April 2018 to include women beneficiaries from seven more categories: SC/ST, PMAY, AAY, Most backward classes, tea garden, forest dwellers, Islands. Also, the target was revised to eight crore LPG connections.

"This target was achieved in August 2019, seven months ahead of the target date," the statement added.

In the Union budget for FY 21-22, provision for an additional one crore LPG connection under the PMUY scheme was announced. These one crore additional PMUY connections (under Ujjwala 2.0) aim to provide deposit-free LPG connections to those low-income families who could not be covered under the earlier phase of PMUY.

"Along with a deposit free LPG connection, Ujjwala 2.0 will provide first refill and hotplate free of cost to the beneficiaries. Also, the enrollment procedure will require minimum paperwork. Ujjwala 2.0 will help achieve the Prime Minister's vision of universal access to LPG," the release claimed.

North Indian ex-CM likely to be Congress working president

Team Absolute | New Delhi

As the Congress is contemplating a change in its setup, a serious churning within it is happening about an impending reshuffle at the General Secretary and state in-charges level. The party is also mulling the appointment of a working President to lessen the burden on Sonia Gandhi.

Sources say that a Hindi speaking north Indian former Chief Minister is being considered for the post. There are currently three former Chief Ministers in the party -- Digvijaya Singh, the former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister; Bhupinder Singh Hooda former Haryana Chief Minister both had a two-term chief ministership in their respective states.

The other name is Kamal Nath, who was the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh recently and has also been the Union Minister many times in the Centre. The fourth person is Ghulam Nabi Azad, who was the leader of opposition in the Rajya Sabha and former Chief Minister of Jammu Kashmir.

Sources say that Kamal Nath is likely to be appointed as a working president as he has vast experience and has good working relations with most of the political parties, including Left, Trinamool and NCP. He has been seen as a person with a good networking within the political set up, including those parties which are at fence.

Kamal Nath has been meeting Sonia Gandhi more frequently since the demise of veteran Ahmed Patel and had been instrumental in organising a meeting between the G-23 and Sonia Gandhi last December.

Bhupinder Singh Hooda was one of the signatories in the letter written to Sonia Gandhi last year in which Ghulam Nabi Azad was also a signatory.

Digvijaya Singh is most vocal on issues which are close to Rahul Gandhi like attacking the RSS, and this week he was taken into custody for participating in the Youth Congress agitation in which Rahul Gandhi was part. But there are critics who question his decision on various issues while being the General Secretary in the party and his tiff with Jyotiraditya Scindia which led to the collapse of the previous Congress-led government in Madhya Pradesh.

Kamal Nath is being seen as a potential candidate as he has been meeting Sonia Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra often and has been a trusted leader from the family point of view. Though sources close to him say that he is not keen to leave Bhopal and has forwarded many suggestions before the Gandhis. Sources also said that he wants no interference from the Secretariat of Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra but only the Gandhis themselves.

Observers say that Kamal Nath has been part of the troika of Late Ahmed Patel and Murli Deora. The three were seen as smooth political players and those who knew which string to be pulled when to set right the political equations. The other Chief Ministers like Hooda, late YSR Reddy and Ashok Gehlot, late Vilas Rao Deshmukh were part of the second rung during 2000 to 2014 when Sonia Gandhi was at the helm.

But, the Congress insiders feel it is too early to say anything as Sonia Gandhi wants to settle the in house problems of states before making any such decision. She wants states like Rajasthan to be settled and preparation in elections going in states be firmed up. She is trying to pacify many other leaders, including Hooda. In Delhi, she has appointed MLAs, who are supporting Hooda as observers for the MCD polls.

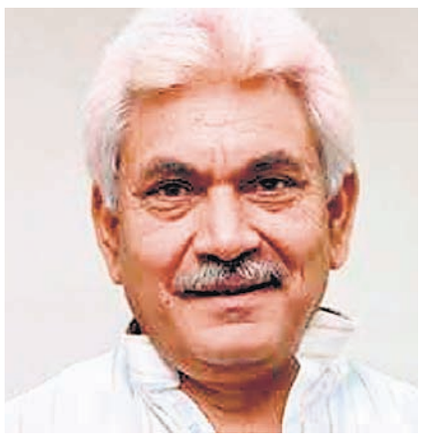
BANERJEE LIKELY TO BE EXPELLED FROM BJP

Kolkata | Agencies

Former West Bengal minister Rajib Banerjee's expulsion from the BJP seems only to be a matter of time, party sources said, in wake of the rebel leader's meeting with Trinamool Congress's national General Secretary, Abhishek Banerjee, at the latter's South Kolkata office on Saturday evening.Rajib Banerjee, who switched from the Trinamool to join the BJP just before the Assembly polls, was cautioned twice for anti-party activities but that hardly made any effect."He has been given two show cause notices but he has not given an answer to even one of them even. So, it is expected that he is not willing to continue on with the party," a member of the BJP's disciplinary committee told IANS on condition of anonymity."He continues to be a member of the BJP and he holds secret meetings with opposition party leaders. This is equivalent to anti-party activities. So, we are now determined to take a major decision, which will be announced within a week or two," the member said. So, before Banerjee can leave the saffron brigade, the party wants to expel him and accordingly, the details have been sent to the party high command in New Delhi. Now, the members of the disciplinary committee are just waiting for the green signal from them. Banerjee was a minister in the previous Trinamool government, but quit to join the BJP and contested on behalf of the saffron party from Domjur Assembly seat, where he was the MLA before, but lost. Soon after his defeat, he became a rebel and started making anti-party statements or avoiding party meetings.

NO MERCY FOR MILITANTS AND THEIR SUPPORTERS: MANOJ SINHA

Team Absolute | Srinagar



Jammu and Kashmir Lt governor, Manoj Sinha said on Sunday that there will be no mercy for militants and their supporters.

Addressing an official function in south Kashmir's Kulgam district, Lt governor, Manoj Sinha said, "There will be no mercy for militants and their supporters as there is no place for violence in the land of sufi saints. Misguided youths must shun violence and choose a better future for themselves."

Sinha urged local religious leaders to keep an eye on children so that they are prevented from treading the wrong path.

He praised a local youth, Tanveer Ahmad Khan who cracked the Indian Economic Service (IES) exam 2020.

Sinha said his administration is committed to ensure peace and development in Kashmir.

"In a place like Kashmir, where there are sufi saints everywhere, there is no place for violence and militancy."

"Sufi saints like Syed Simnani, who gave blood and sweat to promote peace and to defeat violence, there is no place for any sort of violence."

"UT administration is committed to promote the vision of Sufi saints like Syed Simnani and promote the culture of peace and progress in the region."

"Unfortunately some elements and the neighbouring country do not want peace to be promoted in Kashmir.

"Youth who have chosen the wrong path must shun violence. Those trying to mislead youth by pushing them towards violence are playing with the sentiments of the people of Kashmir", Sinha said.

Former Goa AAP convener Elvis Gomes joins Congress

Team Absolute | Panaji

Former Goa Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convener Elvis Gomes joined the Congress party on Sunday, even as state Congress president Girish Chodankar said that the opposition party would now use Gomes, a former bureaucrat, to expose the Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal-led party's pro-RSS agenda.

At a formal induction ceremony at the Congress state headquarters in Panaji, Gomes said that he had joined the opposition outfit to further the agenda of 'Goa First.'

"He (Elvis) knows how the AAP thinktank and its strategies work to finish the Congress. We have always been saying that the AAP is a wing of the RSS which has an agenda to finish the Congress by splitting the Congress vote to create a Congress-mukt Bharat. Elvis has experienced it," the state Congress president said while welcoming Gomes into the party.

"He is secular at his core. We will use Elvis' experience everywhere in Goa to create awareness in the people, who are trapped by the topis (AAP's trademark caps), about this AAP agenda," Chodankar further said.

Apart from being the AAP convener in Goa, Gomes was also the chief ministerial candidate of the Kejriwal-led party in the 2017 state assembly polls, where it performed poorly, with Gomes himself losing his election deposit in the contest.

Gomes quit AAP in December 2020. He had served as a state cadre bureaucrat in Goa for nearly two decades and resigned from service soon after he was promoted into the Indian Administrative Service.

The former AAP leader, who had been critical of the Congress in his former role, especially the steady stream of defection of its MLAs, said that he had been assured by the state Congress leadership that the MLAs who had defected would not be taken back into the party.

"I stand by every word I had said that time. Was there no defection? There have been defections earlier too. The last defection of 10 persons, a sword was put through the backs of Goans. I had expressed the emotions of Goans," Gomes told reporters after his induction.

"I asked (Chodankar) a hundred times as to whether defectors will be taken back. Till today, the stand is that they will not be taken back. This will be a good cleansing process and those who want a good future for Goa and their children will come to the Congress fold," Gomes claimed.

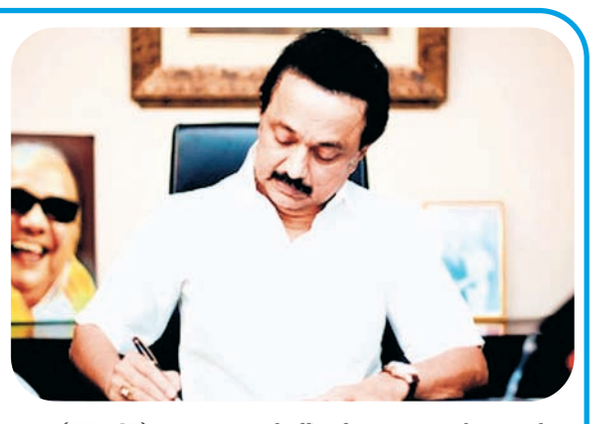
He also said that he could not be branded as a "party hopper" because he had taken eight to nine months to join a new party after quitting AAP.

"I was in touch with the Congress leaders. Although I have switched parties... I quit one party eight to nine months back. I did not just jump. I took time to make the switch," Gomes said.

"I have taken a step. The Congress is one of the oldest political parties in the world. It has a rich history and ideology, the main thing is the ideology. (It believes in) the Constitution of India and secularism. People have come and gone, but the ideology is intact," Gomes said.

TN to crackdown on religious intolerance, pushing for new law on communal harmony

Team Absolute | Chennai



After the Kanyakumari district police in Tamil Nadu arrested Father George Ponnaiah under the Kuzhithurai archdiocese on delivering hate speech hurting the sentiments of the Hindu community, the DMK government of MK Stalin has given a stern message that the state would not tolerate religious bigotry. The government was also keen that there were no untoward incidents of communal violence in the state.

The arrest of the Catholic priest took place on July 24 and he was subsequently remanded to judicial custody for 15 days. While the priest denied the charges, the Kuzhithurai archdiocese came out against the speech of the priest.In another incident of religious intolerance a few miscreants placed an Idol of Lord Ganesha at a barren land near a church property in Tiruchengode, the police immediately swung into action and arrested four people. The incident occurred on August 2.These two incidents are a clear example of the DMK government taking an intolerant stand against hate speeches and actions tantamount to hurting the communal sentiments of a community or religion. While Tamil Nadu has had a history of communal amity, there have been incidents of miscreants trying to break the peace and amity among various religions and turning into major incidents of violence.Chief Minister MK Stalin, planning to convert the state into an investment destination and focusing on Rs 1,00,000 crore investments in the five years of his tenure, has already communicated to the religious groups and communities in no uncertain terms that he would not allow any communal fights or communal violence to erupt in the state.The state to bring in communal harmony and to project the state as a place for communal harmony is planning a new law for communal harmony. Tamil Nadu Congress leader and Chairman of State minority commission, Peter Alphonse has already come out in the open advocating a new law for communal harmony in the state. Taking a cue from this Chief Minister has called upon the state law department and home department to moot a proposal regarding the same.

With the state focusing more on investments and modernisation and to increase its GDP, Stalin is clear that he would not tolerate any untoward incident that disturbs his goal for converting Tamil Nadu into the most industrial friendly state in the country.

Balamurali Narayanan of Action and Care, Tamil Nadu and based out of Madurai told IANS, "The arrest of Father George Ponniah and his subsequent remand in judicial custody is a clear message given by the Chief Minister that he and his home department would not tolerate any communal hatred. The removal of the idol planted at a barren land by certain miscreants was also removed and the people behind it booked is again a message of the Chief Minister as to where his mind is. With the new law on communal harmony also being mooted, Stalin is clearly bringing out a message that he is for communal harmony and peace and that he means it."

He said that these are clear indicators and measures to portray before the world at large that the state government is strong against any communal hate and that he won't tolerate any communal skirmishes in the state.

The Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment (HR&CE) ministry of the state government has taken a bold step of converting the chanting of 'archanas' in Tamil, and 47 big temples have commenced this, which is another indicator that the government would pro-actively involve itself in the religious affairs. The HR&CE department is also active in retrieving the 40,000 acres of the temple land which was lost since 1985 as per the records showing disparity between the temple title documents of 1985 and 2020. The HR& CE department has already taken over around 650 acres of land ever since the government assumed office from encroachers and other people who had taken over the temple land. This again is an open measure that the state government would not tolerate any encroachment on religious properties, at the same time would not give up to any religious extremism or communal rift.With taking strong measures against communal hatred and involving actively in the religious affairs within the ambit of the government, the DMK, and in particular Chief Minister is giving a message that the government means business and that he and the government would not remain a silent spectator in these issues.

MP ASSEMBLY'S MONSOON SESSION FROM MONDAY

In view of the prevailing Covid-19 situation, the Speaker has directed that visitors should not gather collectively in the Secretariat premises. The wearing of masks has been made compulsory and only those who are vaccinated will be allowed to enter the Assembly premises.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The four-day monsoon session of the Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly will begin from Monday. Speaker Girish Gautam convened an all-party meeting here on Sunday for the smooth functioning of the House.

On this occasion, a booklet of unparliamentary words and phrases was also released.

Leader of the House, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Leader of Opposition Kamal Nath and other senior members were present in the all-party meeting.

During this meeting, a booklet of un-parliamentary words and phrases prepared by the state Assembly Secretariat for use by the Assembly members was also released.

According to AP Singh, Principal Secretary of the MP Assembly, since the notification of the session, a total of 1,184 questions have been received, apart from calling attention, adjournment motions and other notices of urgent public importance.

In view of the prevailing Covid-19 situation, the Speaker has directed that visitors should not gather collectively in the Secretariat premises. The wearing of masks has been made compulsory and only those who are vaccinated will be allowed to enter the Assembly premises.

The monsoon session is being held at a time when the Gwalior-Chambal region is completely devastated due to heavy rains and floods. There has been massive destruction to life and property and the issue is likely to create ruckus in the assembly.

The BJP-led state government claims that all possible help is being provided to the flood-hit victims while questions are being raised on the working of the government.

During the monsoon session, an exhibition of bamboo-based products is being organized in the Central Hall of the Legislative Assembly, which will be inaugurated by Assembly Speaker Gautam and Chief Minister Chouhan on Monday.

Madhya Pradesh floods:

Death toll climbs to 24; 145 stranded villagers rescued from Guna district

The death toll in flood-related incidents in the Chambal-Gwalior region of Madhya Pradesh climbed to 24 on Sunday after heavy rains wreaked havoc over the past week.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The death toll in flood-related incidents in the Chambal-Gwalior region of Madhya Pradesh climbed to 24 on Sunday after heavy rains wreaked havoc over the past week.

Around 1,250 villages are still reeling in the aftermath of floods triggered by torrential rains in the districts of Gwalior, Shivpuri, Guna, Sheopur, Datia, Ashoknagar, Bhind and Morena.

"The death toll in the rain-related incidents in the flood-hit parts of the state has risen to 24. These fatalities were recorded between August 1 and 7," Revenue Secretary Gyaneshwar Patil told PTI.In Guna district's Sunda village, at least 145 people were trapped in their homes after the Parvati river overflowed its banks on Friday night. The government dispatched helicopters and boats and all the trapped persons were successfully rescued and evacuated to Chabra in Rajasthan the next day.So far, 8,800 people stranded due to the floods have been rescued by the NDRF, SDRF, Army and the air force. As many as 29,000 people have been evacuated to safe places.The state has incurred massive loss of property, with over 25,000 houses and buildings damaged in the floods. Six bridges were washed away due to the force of the current in river.

At present, the Army has five units deployed for rescue and relief operations in Morena, Shivpuri, Bhind, Sheopur and Ashoknagar districts. Twenty-nine teams of the SDERF have been pressed into service and nine NDRF units are stationed in Morena, Bhind, Guna, Ashoknagar and Shivpuri. Three Air Force helicopters are aiding in rescue efforts.

Divisional Commissioner Ashish Saxena told PTI that "no life threatening situation" due to flooding is prevalent in the Gwalior and Chambal divisions of the state.Meanwhile, Madhya Pradesh Congress leader Kamal Nath cornered the BJP regime in the state, saying that the Shivraj Singh Chouhan-led government was busy playing politics while the people suffered in the wake of the rains and floods."I have never seen such a disaster in life... How you (the government) are going to assess the losses to pay compensation. How much help you are going to provide? When will the bridges damaged by rains will be repaired and houses will be provided to the people rendered homeless due to the flood," Kamal Nath questioned after conducting an aerial survey flood-affected areas in Sheopur and visits to other districts.

Sheopur Collector removed after MP flood situation worsens

According to the order directed by the state administration, Sheopur Collector has been removed and the Gwalior Municipal Corporation Collector Shivam Verma has been appointed in his place.

Team Absolute | Bhopal/Sheopur

The Madhya Pradesh government on Sunday removed Sheopur Collector Rakesh Kumar Srivastava after the locals protested before the Union Agriculture Minister, Narendra Singh Tomar for worsening flood situation in the district.

The protests were held before the Union Minister against the worsening flood situation in the Gwalior-Chambal area. People are protesting against the BJP-led state government and the district adminstration for their failure to help the flood-affected victims in many areas.

According to the order directed by the state administration, Sheopur Collector has been removed and the Gwalior Municipal Corporation Collector Shivam Verma has been appointed in his place.Tomar reached out to the flood-affected people in Sheopur on Saturday. During his visit, the flood victims protested before his convoy and raised slogans against him. Later, Tomar got down from his vehicle and listened to the problems of the people, who also demanded the removal of the Sheopur Collector.

During his stay, Tomar took stock of the damage caused to people's houses and essential goods due to heavy rains at Pul Darwaza, Mali Mandir, Ganesh Mandir and Todi Bazar in Sheopur city.

He assured the people that the central and state governments stand firmly with the families of the flood victims and will provide them financial assistance.

However, the opposition Congress has questioned the action taken by the government. Madhya Pradesh Congress spokesperson Ajay Yadav said, "Floods across the Gwalior-Chambal region have worsened the situation, administrative negligence is continuously coming to the fore. When Union Minister Narendra Singh Tomar reached Sheopur, people protested against him following which the Collector has been removed as a mere formality by the state government."

MP BJP TO EVALUATE WORK OF ITS OFFICE BEARERS

Rao said that this whole exercise will be done to fix accountability which comes with the party position from bottom to top. Everyone has to be accountable for work he or she is entrusted with by the party and not fulfilling it will not go unnoticed.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The BJP's Madhya Pradesh unit will be starting evaluation of work of its office bearers soon. Party leadership feels that it will improve the functioning and fix accountability among cadre.

Madhya Pradesh BJP incharge, P Muralidhar Rao told IANS that party leaders and workers will be evaluated at all organisational levels. "We will be starting evaluation work of workers and leaders from grassroots level to the top. Evaluation will be held from block to state level and the exercise will help the party know the working potential of each and every leader," Rao said. He mentioned that this whole exercise will be done to fix accountability which comes with the party position from bottom to top. "Everyone has to be accountable for work he or she is entrusted with by the party and not fulfilling it will not go unnoticed," he said.

Rao emphasised that based on the evaluation, workers and leaders will be rewarded accordingly in organisational responsibility. "Based on the finding of evaluation, workers will be accordingly assigned work and responsibilities. Hard working and dedicated workers will be identified and assigned work accordingly," he said.Rao pointed out that the whole exercise also addressed the workers' regular demand that non deserving people were given key positions and responsibility. "It's a human nature, everyone claims he is more capable and feels undermined by the works of others. In the evaluation process, the BJP will find out the real strength of working with fixed parameters and transparent processes.

Publication of "Asansadeeya Shabd evam Vyakyansh Sangarah" is a commendable effort: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that our culture, morals, life values and civility say that proper selection of words is necessary. While presenting various subjects in Parliament and Vidhan Sabha, sometimes words which are outside the purview of common etiquette come out in anger, passion or indignation. The choice of words should be such that no one gets hurt. Chief Minister was addressing the programme on the occasion of the release of the book "Asansadeeya Shabd evam Vyakyansh Sangarah" (Compilation of Unparliamentary Words and Phrases) prepared by the Vidhan Sabha Secretariat. Speaker of the Assembly Girish Gautam, Leader of Opposition Kamal Nath, Home and Legislative Affairs Minister Narottam Mishra and former Legislative Affairs Minister and Chief Whip of the Opposition Govind Singh were present in this programme organised at Mansarovar Auditorium located in the Vidhan Sabha.

Chouhan said that Parliament and Vidhan Sabha are temples of democracy. Here the members have the right to express their viewpoint. Parliament has a rich tradition of parliamentarians like Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Indrajit Gupta, Somnath Chatterjee. Senior and experienced speakers have also made statements in the Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly. The publication of the book "Asansadeeya Shabd evam Vyakyansh Sangarah" by the Madhya Pradesh Vidhan Sabha is a commendable effort. This will increase the dignity of the MLAs and the House. This book will prove useful for everyone. Speaker of the Assembly Girish Gautam, Leader of the Opposition Kamal Nath, Chief Whip of the Opposition Govind Singh also expressed their views on the occasion of book release.

NATIONAL MEMBERS IN MP TO REVIEW OF DIVYANGJAN SCHEMES

Bhopal: To review the welfare schemes, activities and facilities being provided to the Divyangjans in Madhya Pradesh, Sukumar, a member of the Central Advisory Board and Pawan Sthapak, a member of the National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Visual Disabilities (Divyangjan), will visit the state from August 8 to 11. This 2-member team is reaching Indore on the evening of August 8. The members will take a Divyangjan Advocacy meeting on 9th August in Indore and 11th August at Bhopal.Commissioner Disabled Welfare Sandeep Rajak informed that in the meeting of Disabled Welfare Advocacy to be held in Indore and Bhopal, representatives from departments like Home, Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe Welfare, Animal Husbandry, Social Justice, Health, Industry, School Education, Public Works Department, Rural Engineering, Transport, Women and Child Development etc. will also participate.

Tomar Faces Protest At Visit To Flood-Hit Area

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar had to face massive protests by residents in Madhya Pradesh's flood-hit Sheopur on Saturday.

Residents tried to block the Union Minister's motorcade, showed black flags and threw mud on the motorcade. The protesters also tried to push Tomar at the town's main market while he was walking there.The police said they had a tough time trying to control the crowd.

The protesters alleged mismanagement of the unprecedented floods in Amral and Seep river, which marooned the entire Sheopur area. Six people have died in flood and rain related incidents since July 28.The protesters complained to Tomar that they were not alerted about the floods in time and it was the district administration's failure.Sheopur police chief Sampat Upadhaya said people complained to the minister that relief reached them late. "But no vehicle in his motorcade was damaged," the police officer said.In the eight districts of Gwalior-Chambal region, the number of dead is 24. At least 1,250 villages in eight districts of the region have been affected by rains and floods and around 9,000 people have been rescued from worst-hit areas.The Union Minister said heavy rain and floods have led to extensive damage and loss in Gwalior-Chambal region. "We are committed to rehabilitating people and rebuilding infrastructure. Both the Madhya Pradesh and central governments are committed to rehabilitating flood-hit people. Four officials have been deployed in Sheopur to take care of the district," Tomar said.

Tomar later told reporters that confusion created by rumours about a dam having been breached created problems.

CM PLANTS KACHNAR SAPLING

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted a sapling of Kachnar in Smart Garden today in his resolve to plant one sapling every day. Kachnar is a beautiful flowering tree. Small or medium height trees of Kachnar are found everywhere in India. Nature has made many trees and plants full of medicinal properties. Kachnar is one of them. The leaves, stems and flowers etc of this tree, which are laden with flowers after mid-March, are all useful. Kachnar is counted among beautiful and useful trees.

GOVERNOR DEDICATES RED CROSS AMBULANCE

Bhopal: Governor Mangubhai Patel dedicated and flagged off the ambulance of the Red Cross Society State Unit at Raj Bhavan on Sunday. Patel was informed that the ambulance is equipped with emergency, state-of-the-art medical services. The ambulance is fitted with ventilator, cardiac monitor, infusion pump, suction pump, oxygen cylinder, air conditioner autoloader, spin board, head immobilizer, wheelchair, UPS and fiber interiors. In addition, the ambulance is equipped with critical care and life saving equipment.Additional Secretary to Governor anoj Khatri, Law Officer DPS Gaur, Governor's Physician Dr. BK Shrivastava, Civil Surgeon JP Hospital Dr. Rakesh Shrivastava and other officers of Red Cross were present on the occasion.

Unemployed Man Ends Life After Uploading Facebook Post

Rohit Mahajan was unemployed and apologised in his Facebook post to his kin and friends for taking this step due to the troubles he was facing, Begumganj police station in charge Indraj Singh said.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A 25-year-old unemployed man allegedly died by suicide in Raisen on Sunday and his kin, including his mother sitting in an adjoining room, came to know about it after a man who saw the deceased's post on Facebook prior to the act reached there with police, an official said. Rohit Mahajan was unemployed and apologised in his Facebook post to his kin and friends for taking this step due to the troubles he was facing, Begumganj police station in charge Indraj Singh said.

A local BJP leader, Hari Sahu, saw the post and informed police, who reached Mahajan's home, where his mother was sitting unaware in another room, he said.

"Mahajan had locked his room from inside. When we broke open the door, we found him hanging from the ceiling. Further probe is underway," he said.

The deceased used to work in a private company, had dabbled in journalism and was also associated with the BJP, his father Tikaram said. "He was under stress due to being unemployed and this may have been the cause behind this extreme step," the deceased's father said.

DRINKING WATER SUPPLY RESTORED IN SHEOPUR: SINGH

Bhopal: Urban Development and Housing Minister Bhupendra Singh has informed that drinking water supply has been restored in all the wards of Sheopur city. After the flood disaster, 103 out of 106 tubewells have been made operational. As per the requirement, 15 tankers have also been pressed into service for water supply. Drinking water supply has also started in Baroda, a flood-affected city of Sheopur district. The survey of damaged houses in the flood affected urban bodies is going on.In Sheopur city, the cleaning work is going on in 3 shifts day and night.

Social media platform becomes support of Aastha and Namami

Bankhedis Aastha had sought help from the Chief Minister on social media platform, got Benefits from the sponsorship scheme of Women Child Development

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Aastha Sharma, a resident of Block Bankhedi of Hoshangabad, and her sister Namami have been benefitted from the sponsorship scheme run under the Department of Women and Child Development by using the social media platform properly. Under the scheme, 2 thousand rupees each per month will be given to both the sisters for education, health, nutrition and other essential needs.

Help was sought from Chief Minister on social media platformSignificantly, the father of the girls had died due to Covid. Their mother is also suffering from a serious illness. Due to the weak financial condition, the girl Aastha Sharma had sought help from the Chief Minister on the social media platform-'Twitter.'On the basis of information received from social media platform, oshangabad district administration and Director, Women and Child Development, Swati Meena Naik took prompt action and within 24 hours the girls were benefitted with the sponsorship scheme. Girl Aastha Sharma has expressed her heartfelt thanks to Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Women and Child Development Department for quick assistance.District Programme Officer, Women and Child Development Department, Hoshangabad Lalit Dehria informed that under the sponsorship scheme an amount of Rs. 2 thousand each per month will be provided in the bank accounts of both the girls for their education, health, nutrition and needs.

Maharashtra Lockdown Update:

RELAXATIONS ANNOUNCED; COVID CURBS EASED FOR MALLS, SHOPS, HOTELS

Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra Ajit Pawar on Sunday announced relaxations for Pune and Pimpri Chinchwad amid improving Covid-19 situation in these cities.

Team Absolute | Pune

Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra Ajit Pawar on Sunday announced relaxations for Pune and Pimpri Chinchwad amid improving Covid-19 situation in these cities.
Addressing a press conference, Pawar announced relaxations for shops, malls and also permitted the reopening of hotels and restaurants with restrictions. The new set of Covid-19 relaxations will come into effect from August 9, 2021.

In Pune and Pimpri Chinchwad, all the shops can remain open till 8 pm for six days a week. All hotels and restaurants have been allowed to operate with 50% seating capacity till 10 pm on all days. Shopping malls can remain open till 8 pm on

all days but entry will be only allowed to those who're fully vaccinated. Complete staff in the malls must be vaccinated. Indoor and outdoor activities/sports have been permitted on all days.

The announcement in Covid-19 relaxations came a day after Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said his government was planning more relaxations in the coming days for hotels and restaurants. He also said that the relaxations may be announced for Mumbai local trains as well.

Maharashtra reported 6,061 new coronavirus cases and 128 fatalities on Saturday which took the state's infection tally to 63,47,820 and death toll to 1,33,845, a health department official said. As many as 9,356 patients were discharged from hospitals, pushing the number of recoveries to 61,39,493.

Maharashtra has 71,050 active coronavirus cases now. As many as 4,31,539 people are in-home quarantine and 2,761 are in institutional quarantine. The state's case recovery rate is 96.72 per cent, while the fatality rate is 2.1 per cent.

South Mumbai gets an all-electric BEST bus fleet

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a major eco-friendly initiative, the entire fleet of the iconic red BEST fleet of public buses catering to South Mumbai has gone electric with the launch of 24 new e-buses on Saturday.

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday afternoon flagged off the new electric buses, taking the total BEST fleet of such e-buses to 270.

From next week, South Mumbai will be entirely served the e-buses and another 140 buses shall join the fleet by the month-end, said state Tourism Minister Aditya Thackeray.

The sleek, 12-metre-long e-buses under the FAME-II Project are airconditioned, noise-free and zero-pollution vehicles with a capacity of 35 passengers each, said Aditya Thackeray.On the occasion, the Chief Minister announced that the government is planning to issue a BEST single-pass or ticket,

which will be valid even on suburban trains and Metro rails for hassle-free commute for the citizens. Besides the Chief Minister and Aditya Thackeray, Mayor Kishori Pednekar, Deputy Mayor Suhas Wadkar, BEST General Manager Lokesh Chandra, BEST Committee Chairan Ashish Chemburkar, Additional Municipal Commissioner P. Velarasu, along with legislators and municipal corporators were present on the occasion.

Chandra informed that under the new EV policy, the number of e-vehicles in the BEST fleet would increase by 15 per cent, and the BMC has set a target of inducting 1,800 (45 per cent of total fleet) e-buses by mid-2023.

The development came on the 74th foundation day celebrations of the BrihanMumbai Electric Supply & Transport (BEST), which came under the control of the BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation on August 7, 1947.

Its forerunner, the Bombay Electric Supply & Tramways, was launched 148 years ago in 1873 and later it became Bombay Electric Supply & Transport and then the existing BEST, serving commuters of Mumbai and parts of Thane and Raigad.

Maha govt to launch yearly commercial pilot training programme

Maharashtra government is trying to collaborate with aviation companies to train 25 people every year as commercial pilots.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra state Disaster Management Minister Vijay Wadettiwar on Saturday told reporters that the Maharashtra government is considering giving training to 2,000 OBC students for the Maharashtra Public Service Commission (MPSC) exams and 1,000 for the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) exams. The minister also said the government is in talking terms with aviation companies to impart pilot training to 25 students each year.

The state government has sanctioned funds to the tune of Rs 150 crore for Mahajyoti (Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Research and Training Institute), of which Rs 40 crore have been disbursed, he said. "Under Mahajyoti, we are going to train 2,000 OBC students for the MPSC exam and 1,000 for UPSC exams," Wadettiwar said.

The Maharashtra government will also train 25 people as commercial pilots, and 33 per cent of the 25 people will belong from the VJNT class and 67 per cent from the OBC category.

He said the state government is planning to set up a separate commission to gather the required data in court for the political reservation of OBCs. The minister further criticised the Union Cabinet for clearing a constitution amendment bill that seeks to give states the power to make their own OBC lists.

"The bill presented in the Parliament is incomplete. The Central government has pushed its responsibility on states regarding the reservation. Without Constitutional amendment, reservation beyond 50 per cent is not possible," he said.

Maharashtra to soon start programme to eradicate child begging: Thakur

State Women and Child Development Minister Yashomati Thakur, who was on a visit to Jalgaon and Dhule districts, expressed anger and disappointment towards police and raised concern over the growing problem of child beggars in the state

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A skill development programme to eradicate child begging will soon be implemented in Maharashtra, state Women and Child Development Minister Yashomati Thakur has said and also assured all help to children orphaned due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Thakur made the announcement in Jalgaon district on Saturday when a

small girl approached her and told her that she earned her living by begging.The minister, who was on a visit to Jalgaon and Dhule districts, expressed anger and disappointment towards police and raised concern over the growing problem of child beggars in the state.

"A skill development programme has been undertaken for child and adult beggars and its strategy will be implemented soon. There are gangs of beggars in many places, so we need to be sensitive about such issues. Begging is a crime under law," Thakur told reporters.

During her visit to Dhule, Thakur met children who were orphaned and rendered homeless due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

She held discussions with officials on how government schemes could benefit them.On the occasion, the minister also provided an immediate financial help to such children. "We need to think beyond the government aid and policy for orphans," Thakur said.

She expressed the need for education, nutrition and safety of children orphaned due to COVID-19.

The government will always be ready to help such children. Immediate action should be taken to provide these children with various government benefits, including ration cards, the minister said.

These children should also be counselled from time-to-time, she said.Problems related to their properties should also be looked into immediately, she added.

FIR AGAINST UNKNOWN DRIVER FOR BLINDING STRAY DOG

Mumbai: The police has registered a case against the unknown driver, who rammed his car into the stray dog in Thane district of Maharashtra.

In the incident, the dog lost its eyesight, an official said.

The incident occurred on Friday morning near Raheja Garden, in which the eight-year-old dog suffered injuries to its left eye and face, the official said.

Police registered a case against the car driver under sections 429 (Mischief by killing or maiming cattle, etc., of any value or any animal of the value of fifty rupees) and 279 (Rash driving or riding on a public way) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, he said Until now no one has been arrested.

SP corporator proposes ban on concrete walls along riverbanks

Rukhsana Siddiqui said that concretisation would kill biodiversity of rivers, prevent groundwater percolation and also obstruct wild animals who visit riverbanks for drinking water.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

To save biodiversity and push for ground-level water recharge in Mumbai, a corporator from Samajwadi Party has proposed ban on construction of concrete walls along riverbanks.Rukhsana Siddiqui, Corporator from Samajwadi Party, has moved a notice of motion demanding to

stop concretisation of basin and banks by constructing walls. Siddiqui said that concretisation would kill biodiversity of rivers, prevent groundwater percolation and also obstruct wild animals who visit riverbanks for drinking water.Currently, the BMC has taken up work of constructing concrete wall along rivers like Mithi, Dahisar, Poisar and Oshiwara."The use of cement concrete in constructing boundary walls along with the river banks is not environment-friendly.

MOTORCYCLISTS ROB AUTO-RICKSHAW PASSENGERS

Pune: Two motorcycle-borne men stopped an auto-rickshaw and robbed the gold chain of a woman passenger at gunpoint on Khadki Road late on Friday.

Police said the woman and her family members were going from Kharadi to Pimple Gurav in the auto-rickshaw. Around 1.30 am, a motorcycle intercepted the auto near Chandrama Chowk on Khadki Road.The motorcycle rider pointed a gun at the passenger, while the pillion rider ripped off the gold chain from the woman's neck. Though the woman tried to stop the robbers, they snatched the gold chain, worth Rs 80,000, and escaped towards Holkar bridge.

'Hindu religion is in danger:' BJP's Nitesh Rane hits out at Maharashtra govt over Ganesh Utsav guidelines

Amid the COVID pandemic, the Maharashtra government has decided to restrict the height of idols installed by Ganpati Mandals in public places to only four feet during the coming Ganesh festival.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA Nitesh Rane on Sunday hit out at the Maharashtra government over its guidelines for the upcoming Ganpati festival amid the COVID pandemic.

Lashing out at the Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray-led Maha Vikas Aghadi government in the state, the BJP leader said the situation in Mumbai is similar to that of West Bengal, where Durga Puja celebrations were restricted. "It's difficult for Ganesh Utsav Mandals to celebrate the festival in accordance with new rules. We raised our concerns with the Governor," ANI quoted Rane as saying.

While asserting that the Hindu religion is in danger, the leader of the saffron party alleged that the Thackeray govt will gradually end the festival celebrations in Maharashtra.

"Some time ago, other religious festivals were celebrated, they didn't face any inconvenience. Then why only Hindus? Hindu religion is in danger. We told the Governor to protect our festival, or else, Thackeray govt will gradually end the festival...(celebrations)," he said.

Earlier in June, the Maharashtra government had issued guidelines for the Ganpati festival and asked those organising Ganesh festivities to keep the height of public idols at four feet and the domestic ones at two feet.

Baby boy up for adoption with cops' aid after his parents disappeared twice

An infant is up for adoption with cops' aid as a seven-month-old boy abandoned twice by his parents in the hospital.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A seven-month-old boy Raj (name changed) was born at a public hospital in December last year. The infant was abandoned twice by parents. Her mother was hospitalised in another healthcare centre as she developed complications and the baby was moved to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) for treatment.

Raj's parents disappeared from the hospital after her mother recovered fully. The hospital raised a complaint with the Juhu police as no one was taking responsibility for the kid. Based on instruction from senior inspector Shashikant Mane, the police team traced the couple.

When asked why she left Raj, she replied that she was upset as she was not allowed to see the baby. Amid deadly Covid conditions, the hospitals were not allowing visits to NICU.

The report further suggests that as his mother developed complications, the infant was sent to the intensive care unit for neo-natal. After her recovery, she and her husband disappeared from the hospital and also left their rented space. ccording to the police officer, at the police team's request, the mother was allowed to visit the kid at NICU but she disappeared again. When the Juhu police team tried to reach out to them, they had already left their rented apartment. The kid's parents have also destroyed their phones so that police won't be able to trace them. While commenting on the incident, an officer said, "We have been fielding inquiries from colleagues and their families keen to adopt the baby. CWC will interview them and take a decision," as saying was quoted by The Times of India.A team led by sub-inspector Poonam Mirgane is looking for Raj's parents to take him home.

Auto-rickshaw drivers write to CM seeking action against loan recovery agents

Earlier this week, auto-rickshaw driver Kishore Pawar was beaten up mercilessly by loan agents over non-payment of dues, triggering protests

Team Absolute | Pune:

Auto-rickshaw drivers in the state have written to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray seeking strict action against loan recovery agents after the image of an auto-rickshaw driver who was beaten up mercilessly by agents in Kharadi area of Pune went viral recently.

Earlier this week, Kishore Pawar was beaten up by agents of Bajaj Finance Ltd over non-payment of dues, triggering protests among auto-rickshaw drivers. In the viral image, Pawar is seen sprawled on the ground in a semi-conscious state.

The company has said that it is looking into the matter.

Pawar, who was admitted to the hospital by fellow auto-rickshaw drivers, has lodged a complaint with Chandannagar police station. When contacted, Police Inspector Sunil Jadhav said, "We have registered a non-cognisable offence against the recovery agents. Pawar has suffered some injuries but was discharged from the hospital. However, two days ago he complained to us that his condition has

worsened. We are investigating the matter." The officer added that MNS workers met him seeking strong action in the matter.President of Maharashtra Rickshaw Panchayat Baba Kamble said Pawar had told the agents that his earnings had dropped drastically. "Due to the Covid curbs he was not in a position to repay the loan," Kamble said."All of them pounced upon him, beat him up mercilessly, smashed his mobile phone and threw him on the ground. He lay there for a while in a semi-conscious state before being shifted to the hospital. I heard he has suffered serious injuries," he elaborated.In a statement, Bajaj Finance Limited said, "We value customers and hold them in high esteem. We have a standard policy and process in dealing with customers and do not tolerate any inappropriate conduct or breach of the same, either by employee or agency personnel. We are in the process of ascertaining details of the incident and will work with the concerned authorities to take the matter to its appropriate conclusion."The panchayat has written to the Chief Minister and to Home Minister Dilip Walse Patil, urging them to extend support to auto-rickshaw drivers who have been hit hard by the pandemic-induced curbs."For the last 14 months, the sector has suffered due to the Covid restrictions. If auto-rickshaw drivers have no money to feed their families, how will they repay their loans?," Kamble asked. He said the organisation has urged the Chief Minister to ask finance companies to postpone their recovery drive till curbs are fully relaxed. "Our delegation will also personally meet the Chief Minister."

The organisation's chief alleged that finance companies even forcibly take away the vehicles of those unable to repay their loan. "This is illegal and inhuman. The companies should first approach the courts and only on the court's direction will they be able to seize the vehicles," he said.Responding to this Inspector Jadhav said, "The finance companies are expected to inform the nearest police station about their action. However, they give us general intimation, not specific details," he said.

EDITOR'S SPECS

Glimmer and darkness

In spite of India's promising performance at the Tokyo Olympics, persistent problems plague Indian sports

The value of perspective cannot be overstated, especially when the odds that have to be battled are formidable. Indian athletes, in particular, are regularly expected to perform in situations where the odds are heavily stacked against them; that they are often able to give the nation the honour of a podium finish in spite of innumerable roadblocks is a testament to their grit and excellence. India's medal tally at the London Olympics was impressive - it had won six medals, of which two were silver and four were bronze. At the Tokyo Games, that concluded on Sunday, India has surpassed all expectations by putting up its best-ever performance at the Olympics it has won a gold, two silver and four bronze medals. For this, the nation's Olympians must be lauded, not least because their achievements come at a time when training for sportspersons has run into immense challenges owing to the global pandemic.

There are other, equally pressing, reasons for acknowledging the athletes' achievements. Their success seems to be falling prey to the oldest trick in the book of the political fraternity politicians claiming credit for the achievements of sportspersons. An Olympic gold in a track-and-field event is inspiring, but India's total kitty of medals remains modest, especially in view of its population and the fact that it sent its biggest-ever contingent of athletes to Tokyo. The absence of institutional support is one part of the problem; Indian sportspersons also have to contend with the lack of a thriving sporting culture that prioritizes excellence.

HOW WARS ARE CREATED ON TV CHANNELS TO BOOST RATINGS

I have been holding my sides watching two films, back-to-back, to dispel the Corona blues. There is an abiding moral in both.

In Michael Moore's Canadian Bacon, the US President builds up a war with Canada because his ratings in peace time are plummeting after the Soviet threat melted away in 1990-91. Peace destroys the business of his friend Hacker, an arms manufacturer.

The other movie, Wag the Dog, has spin doctor Robert de Niro and filmmaker played by Dustin Hoffman, collaborate, to salvage the election campaign of a Bill Clinton look-alike, caught in a sex scandal two weeks before voting. The duet create a national hysteria about a war with Albania even though there is no war. It takes place entirely on TV channels. The De Niro-Hoffman team has made the media eat out of their hands. The 72 days bombing of Serbia under Clinton's watch and the carving out of Kosovo with its large Albanian population created a certain familiarity with Albania which otherwise would be totally unknown.

In Canadian Bacon an attempt is also made by the President's men to persuade Russian President named Vladimir Kruschkin to start a mutually beneficial Cold War. A Cold War with Russia would help boost the arms industry. Kruschkin takes the sensible decision: he refuses to initiate a Cold War.

The media is central to Canadian Bacon. When the Commander of US forces, itching for action, gets ready to invade, the National Security Advisor intervenes. Military action with a weak country would end in a day. A huge quarrel with Canada has to be dragged on for a reasonable period, giving enough time for the American people to be mobilized. The President's ratings would then skyrocket. The channels, with an eye on their own ratings, serve the national purpose by saturating the media space with war drums and startling revelations. Canada now has a nuclear bomb directed at America, an anchor announces, emoting with suitable anger.

A charged-up Sheriff of Niagra county, Bud Boomer, distributes guns to an equally frenzied beer drinking clientele in the crowded bar, all riveted on TV which is focused relentlessly on the Canadian enemy.

Boomer's girlfriend, Honey who is also his well-armed Deputy Sherriff, will not wait for

Washington to announce action. She has ideas of her own. To cut the story short, Honey climbs the pinnacle of the Toronto tower to hunt out secret codes designed to fire missiles aimed at America. The last scenes of the film show her firing automatic weapons in all directions. She earns for herself high praise in the ending montage: she is named the "Humanitarian of the Year" by the National Rifle Association. The delicious irony, in this vein permeates the body not only of Canadian Bacon but numerous satirical films.

Will Bollywood ever have the courage to mount such satire on the establishment? I suppose it is insensitive to ask such a question when a new Bill for double distilled censorship is being scripted.

An overriding reason why such audacity cannot be on show here is because we are primarily a feudal people: irreverence is alien to our ethos. We have our parochial humour, but cannot laugh at authority. Iconography comes easy to us. We cannot satirize 'Mai Baap'. Some youthful standup comedians are trying but not without incurring the wrath of the cultural constabulary.The baby must not be thrown out with the bathwater. Indian cinema has after all set high standards in portraying social reality. This was particularly true during the early days of Indian cinema. Penury inflicted on a peasant (Balraj Sahni) deprived of his patch of land for a factory, is the theme of Bimal Roy' s classic Do Bigha Zameen. In fact, as early as the late 40s, Chetan Anand's Neecha Nagar has the landlord divert sewage water towards the township below to enhance the value of his land on high ground. The film was made 60 years before Roman Polanski's Chinatown focused on the water wars in California, including in Los Angeles.

Japanese maestro Akira Kurosawa' s remark was on Satyajit Ray's social realism. "Those who have not seen Ray, have not seen the sun."

Even though I have a sense of the reality, I was astonished nevertheless at the way Indian theatre or cinema ignored Enron, a scandal which had its centre of gravity in Maharashtra, home to Bollywood. There was an uproar, with the Shiv Sena and the BJP taking the lead. The opposition to the deal was over high electricity tariffs beyond the reach of the poor. It collapsed. Enron, facing a host of other problems, declared bankruptcy. The CEO, Kenneth Lay, friend of George W Bush, died a broken man.

Lucy Prebble wrote a superb play, Enron, which ran to packed houses at the Noel Coward theatre in London. Reception to the play at its Broadway premiere in 2010 was tepid. The Corporate World smarting under the Lehman Brothers collapse did not accord the show much encouragement. Even though earlier David Hare's "Stuff Happens" actually mimicked Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and Condoleezza Rice for manufacturing the Iraq war. Much of the script for Enron was centred on characters who negotiated the deal with the Dabhol power project. Surely there is a vigorous enough amateur theatre in Mumbai to have picked up the script.

However, even in the West the audacity of screen and stage is singularly missing in mainstream media. This is particularly so since post 9/11 wars for which the media, by and large, became the drum beaters, compromising its own credibility. The adage makes sense. "When wars break out, the first casualty is the truth." This has resulted in the media's declining credibility and, in consequence, a rise of "illiberal" democracies. When Donald Trump complained that "China is going ahead of us", Jimmy Carter's response was succinct. "China has not been to war since 1978; we have never stopped being at war."

international

HEAVY FIGHTING UNDERWAY IN 3 AFGHAN PROVINCES

New Delhi/Kabul | Agencies

Heavy fighting between Afghan security forces and the Taliban is currently underway the three northern provinces of Kunduz, Sar-e-Pul and Jawzjan with reports of civilian casualties in the clashes, a media report said on Sunday.

Citing sources, the TOLO News report said the clashes in Kunduz have reached the centre of the city of Kunduz and some key government buildings have fallen to the Taliban.

At least 11 people have been killed and 39 more have been wounded in Kunduz clashes that started on Friday evening, the provincial public health directorate said.

A source from the province said clashes have intensified near the police headquarters and the main roundabout in the centre of Kunduz city.

Taliban spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid in a social media post confirmed that the fighters have entered Police District 2 of Kunduz city.

The group has also reportedly attacked the province's central prison releasing inmates.

The Afghan government is however, yet to comment on the issue.

Meanwhile, the sources said that the fighting in Sar-e-Pul has reached the capital of the province and the Sancharak district.

The sources added that Babur Ishchi, head of Jawzjan provincial council, surrounded to the Taliban along with his 20 fighters after hours of clashes against the group in Khawja Do Koh district, which is the hometown of former Vice President Marshal Abdul Rashid Dostum and was one of the two areas under government control in the province.Sources said that Taliban has released Ishchi's fighters but has "taken him and his brother" with them.The Taliban in a statement claimed that Ishchi and his men have surrendered to the group.The Afghan Defence Ministry also announced that airstrikes targeted a Taliban get-together in Jawzjan on Saturday night.It said that 40 Taliban militants were killed and 14 others injured in the strikes.The airstrikes come only hours after US President Joe Biden ordered the use of B-52 bombers and Spectre gunships to target the Taliban positions.The bombers have recently targeted Taliban positions in Kandahar, Herat, and Helmand provinces.

President Joe Biden ordered the bombers after the Taliban toppled two provinces in a matter of 24 hours.

Iraqi PM says govt determined to hold polls as scheduled

Baghdad: | Agencies

Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi announced that his government and the political parties are determined to hold the parliamentary elections as scheduled on Oct.ober 10.

Al-Kadhimi's comment came during his meeting with leaders of the political parties in the presence of Parliament Speaker Mohammed al-Halbousi, head of the Supreme Judicial Council, the country's electoral commission, and the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, the Prime Minister's media office said in a statement. He stressed his government's insistence on holding the elections on time and confirmed its ability to provide an appropriate atmosphere for them, Xinhua news agency reported."Al-Kadhimi and the political parties renewed the call for the political blocs that boycotted the elections to reverse their decision," the statement said.He also suggested forming a committee of political parties to open a dialogue with the boycotting parties to persuade them to change their decision, it added.Earlier in July,

a political bloc led by prominent Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr announced the withdrawal of his bloc from the parliamentary elections, citing "rampant corruption and unfair competition" among political parties.About a week later, the Iraqi Communist Party also withdrew from the elections, saying the political parties are "not serious" in achieving the demands of popular protests that broke out in 2019, and "the upcoming elections are nothing but a change of faces".Late last month, the Iraqi National Dialogue Front led by Salih al-Mutlak announced in a statement the withdrawal from the elections due to "the failure to provide a safe environment for early elections and the proliferation of out-of-control weapons".

Biden pushes harder for masks, vaccines amid resurgence

Washington | Agencies

US President Joe Biden is pushing harder on vaccines and masks as Covid-19 cases are surging across the country due to the spread of the highly contagious Delta variant.

Covid-19 cases, hospitalisations, and deaths have continued to increase in most parts of the country, especially in communities with lower vaccination coverage, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The outlook is especially dire in the South. The states of Florida and Louisiana recently set seven-day case records, Xinhua news agencuy quoted report by The New York Times as saying on Saturday.

In Florida, coronavirus hospitalizations are roughly equal to their previous peak from last summer.

In Louisiana, intensive care units are strained and young adults are contracting serious cases of the virus.

The resurgence has prompted the CDC to issue new guidelines on mask wearing, and some areas are returning to restrictions seen last year during the height of the pandemic.

Mask wearing has been a subject of controversy in the United States for more than a year, with a significant chunk of the population refusing to wear masks for many different

reasons. Some believe such choices are up to the individual, others believe - against current data - that masks do not necessarily protect against the virus. Recent weeks have also seen a marked increase in the number of private sector companies promoting vaccinations for those who want to return to the office.

In a sharp about face of previous statements, recent days saw Biden say he would like to see companies move toward mandates.

Biden has announced that all federal workers must be vaccinated or be required to wear masks and undergo regular testing.

The President also said he believes more cities and states should institute rules like those in New York City, where customers at restaurants, gyms and other venues are required to be vaccinated.

So far, 50 per cent of the US. population, or more than 165.9 million people, have been fully vaccinated against Covid-19, according to the CDC.

Brookings Institution Senior Fellow Darrell West told Xinhua: "Many public and private sector organizations have instituted mask and vaccine requirements. Some leaders oppose this but they are in states with low vaccination rates and high Covid rates."

An article published on Yalemedicine.org, one of Yale University's websites, said people who are fully vaccinated "appear to have strong protection against Delta compared to those who aren't... But anyone who is unvaccinated and not practicing preventive strategies is at high risk for infection by the new variant".

As an increased number of cities call for employee vaccinations, they are seeing pushback from some labour unions.

New York unions were outraged last week after the city implemented employee vaccination requirements."We are absolutely against an absolute mandate to vaccinate everyone," said Henry Garrido, executive of New York's health union.The New York Fire Department (FDNY) also expressed anger about the possibility of weekly Covid-19 testing paid for by employees."This testing will not be done on our own time or our own dime," FDNY union president Andrew Ansbro said. "If the city wants this, they can make it possible and they can pay for it."

In its latest update on Sunday morning, the Johns Hopkins University said that the US continues to be the worst-hit country with the world's highest number of cases and deaths at 35,738,154 and 616,713, respectively.

Iran dismisses G7's tanker attack allegations as 'baseless'

Tehran | Agencies

Iran's Foreign Ministry on Saturday dismissed as "baseless" the recent Group of Seven (G7)'s allegations over a tanker attack, according to the ministry's website.

On Friday, the foreign ministers of G7, including Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States, as well as the high representative of the European Union, accused Iran of being behind a "reportedly" drone attack on July 29 against an Israel-linked oil tanker in the Arabian Sea off the coast of Oman, which killed a British national and a Romanian national, Xinhua reported.

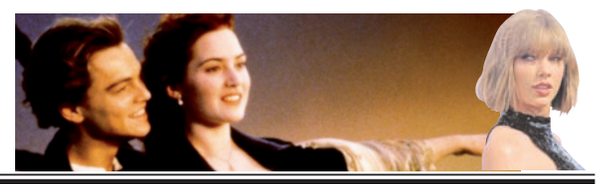
"We strongly condemn the baseless statement by the G7 foreign ministers... in which baseless allegations have been made against the Islamic Republic of Iran," said Saeed Khatibzadeh, spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Khatibzadeh called the incident as a "scenario" which took place a few days before the inauguration of the new president of Iran.

Such "baseless scenarios" are designed to confuse the political climate, he was quoted as saying.

The Islamic Republic is fully committed to securing the strategic waterway of the Gulf region and the Strait of Hormuz, considers it as part of its own security and will not hesitate defending its sovereign right, he said.

In the meantime, Iran is "ready to cooperate with the regional countries in establishing a collective security system in the region," he added



Ant overwhelmed as Anne-Marie walks down the aisle

Los Angeles | Agencies

Telly star Ant McPartlin hailed his 'beautiful' wife at their celeb-packed wedding in Heckfield, Hants. Ant and best pal Declan Donnelly were first to arrive for the showbiz wedding of the year at St Michael's Church. During his wedding speech Ant told guests, "When Anne-Marie walked into the church, I had to fight to hold it together as she looked so beautiful."

His bride walked down the aisle in a £15,000 Suzanne Neville gown, with corseted bodice overlaid with a sheer floral embellished tulle, and a bouquet of white and purple roses with a small picture of her late father.

Her two daughters - from her previous marriage to ex-hubby Scott - performed readings, including Richard Bach poem The Bridge Across The River telling all about soulmates.

David, Victoria Beckham's 'Special night in NYC'

Los Angeles | Agencies

David Beckham, along with his wife Victoria and three of his four children, Harper, Cruz and Brooklyn headed to Lucali restaurant in the NYC borough of Brooklyn on Saturday. Fashion designer Victoria took to Instagram to share a sweet shot of her famous family during the evening out, with son Romeo, 18, notably missing. She captioned the image: 'Special night tonight in NYC. I love you so much @davidbeckham @brooklynbeckham @cruzbeckham #HarperSeven We miss you @romeobeckham x Kisses from Brooklyn X VB.' Giving fans a glimpse into their movements in the Big Apple, the former Manchester United player took to his own page on the photo-sharing site to share delicious snaps of the family's orders. Declaring that his grub was 'the best in NYC', David filmed a pair of chefs tossing and kneading the dough in the kitchen.

SELENA REFLECTS ON SIGNING HER 'LIFE AWAY TO DISNEY'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Selena stars with comedy legends Steve Martin and Martin Short in the upcoming Hulu series Only Murders In The Building. Selena Gomez recalled during a panel at the TCA Summer 2021 Tour that she didn't always have the freedom and control necessary to work with such esteemed collaborators.

"I signed my life away to Disney at a very young age and I didn't know that's what I was doing," said the 29-year-old actress with a laugh, according to Us Weekly.

Selena added that her tastes had matured since joining the Disney Channel series Wizards Of Waverly Place - which ran from 2007 to 2012 - when she was only 15.

She added, 'But I don't know. I was just a kid and I didn't know what I was doing [on Wizards Of Waverly Place]. I was just running around the set.'

Now that she's working with esteemed collaborators like Martin and Short, she tries to learn by their example whenever possible.

CHELSEE HEALEY CELEBRATES 33RD BIRTHDAY IN STYLE

Los Angeles | Agencies

Chelsee Healey recently turned 33 and she celebrated in style as she stepped out in a nude skin-tight jumpsuit. The Hollyoaks star made a statement in the slinky Marine Serre ensemble as she hit up Rosso Restaurant in Manchester. She posed up a storm in the figure-hugging one-piece that boasted a busy moon crescent pattern all over. The starlet stepped out in the city in a pair of white and rose-gold sandal butterfly heels, which she interestingly wore fastened over the leggings.

The actress teamed her birthday look with matching long-length gloves and a mustard yellow purse.Chelsee wore her brunette locks in a long, sleek hairstyle which boasted two E-girl-inspired, face-framing blonde streaks at the front of her hair as she prepared to mark her special day. She sported a glamorous palette of makeup for her night out, wearing oversized eyelashes and a nude gloss on her pout.

Jake Quickenden is engaged!

Los Angeles | Agencies

The former X Factor star Jake Quickenden is engaged to his girlfriend Sophie Church. Jake shared the happy news on his Instagram page on Saturday afternoon, as he posted a sweet snap of himself sharing a passionate kiss with his bride-to-be Sophie, alongside the caption: 'She said yes!'

Jake, who shares son Freddie with Sophie, wrote: 'The love of my life the mother to my beautiful Leo and Freddie, I love you so much... this isn't a drill it's actually happening.' The couple appeared completely loved-up in a stunning snap they both shared to their respective Instagram pages. Therapist Sophie posted her own version of the version on her Instagram account, Sophie, who is also mum to Leo from a previous relationship, wrote: 'I said YES to the love of my life & my future husband.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY

Sharon Gaffka

James Corden offered £7 mn to extend Late Late Show

Los Angeles | Agencies

Talk show host James Corden is offered £7 million to extend his Late Late Show contract for a further two years which would see him host series until at least 2024.

The Brit actor is currently contracted until 2022, and is under a £4.6 million deal to do so.

A source told The Sun: "The network loves him. They are delighted with his work and reach in that tough late-night slot. Previously, James passed on a five-year deal to remain for 24 months, but he has lots more to give and he is very much in the driving seat." This would see James in the hosting role for a decade, having taken the job in 2014 - relocating his family to LA to do it. He took over from Scottish comedian Craig Ferguson and launched the Carpool Karaoke segment, which has seen the likes of Adele, Victoria Beckham and Michelle Obama join him for his now-famous driving singalongs.

SAYONARA TOKYO

'YOU INSPIRED US': IOC PRESIDENT THANKS ATHLETES AS OLYMPIC FLAME EXTINGUISHED

In between an unrelenting virus and an approaching typhoon, the extraordinary Tokyo Olympics drew to a close on Sunday, having oscillated between trials and triumphs with an unprecedented show of hope and tenacity.

Tokyo | Agencies

With a large firework display adding a burst of sound to the dancing, singing and merry-making, the Japanese capital pulled the curtains down on one of history's most unique Games, handing over the flag to Paris with the message of moving forward while remembering those who lost their lives during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite the global health crisis, the one-year delay, the soaring costs and strongly divided opinions among locals, the spectacle saw the light of the day after staving off numerous challenges on the way.

The ceremony opened with a video that looked back on the 17 days of events and competition.

In sync with the time he is living in, International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach, after closing the Games, said, "Athletes went faster, went higher and were stronger because they all stood together in solidarity.

"You inspired us with this unified symbol of sport. And it was even more remarkable because of what you faced in the pandemic."

The festivities began in front of the athletes, dignitaries and officials from across the world after the Japanese flag was raised at the 68,000-seater National Stadium, which was out of bounds to spectators owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The athletes entered the stadium and formed a circle around the rostrum. Unlike the opening ceremony which is a formal affair with the athletes dressed in formal attire, the closing was a time for the achievers to relax and enjoy the occasion.

The theme of the closing ceremony was the 'Worlds We Share' and featured a whole lot of items, from lights to music shows, dazzling fireworks and stunts.

Before extinguishing the Olympic flame that has been burning in the cauldron since the opening ceremony, the closing of the Tokyo 2020 Games broke away from history and propelled hundreds of millions of viewers right into the very heart of Paris.

For the first time in a handover ceremony, the next host country's national anthem was broadcast as a film shot entirely in the future host city.

In another first, the closing ceremony featured live and spectacular celebrations from the next host city as the people of Paris and France embraced their role as host of the 33rd Olympics.

With bronze-winning wrestler Bajrang Punia as its flag-bearer, the largest Indian contingent bid the Games a goodbye after finishing their campaign with the best medal tally in history. India certainly could look towards that brighter future after claiming its best ever haul of seven medal, including their first gold medal in 13 years, from javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra, who is also going back as the country's first track-and-field medallist at the Games

The country's haul also had two silver and four bronze medals.

The USA topped the medals tally with 113 podium finishes, including 39 gold, while China came second with 88 podiums that comprised 38 golds.

Hosts Japan finished a creditable third with a totals of 58 medals, including 27 gold.

US Embassy India celebrates 7 medals success of nation's athletes

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The United States Embassy in India on Sunday dedicated its Twitter page to the seven Indian medallists and other top achievers from the country at the Tokyo Olympic Games, sending out a message to the sporting fraternity of the country that the global superpower was with it in its hour of celebration."Olympic Games bring the world together in sport. Congratulations #TeamIndia for your spectacular performance & the best-ever medal tally at #Olympics. You're all true champions! To celebrate #TeamIndia, we highlight the #Tokyo2020 achievers on our page today. #SportsBuildBridges," tweeted US Embassy India on Sunday afternoon.While the United States contingent finished on top with a tally of 113 medals (39 gold, 41 silver and 33 bronze) and India was placed 48th with a total of seven medals (one gold, two silver and four bronze), the US recognised India's effort in Tokyo, which was the best ever at the quadrennial showpiece, by posting small writeups on the medal winners.

The embassy also posted a picture of the Indian contingent marching on the opening day of the Tokyo Olympic Games.

Aditi's game will bring about a positive change in golf: Lahiri

Tokyo | Agencies

Top Indian golfer Anirban Lahiri, who had finished joint 42nd in the men's event at the Tokyo Olympic Games, has said that woman golfer Aditi Ashok's monumental effort of finishing fourth at the quadrennial showpiece on Saturday should "brings a change in attitude in people" about the sport.Despite India having produced some top golfers, who have played and won on tours across the world, golf is still considered an elitist sport and Lahiri said that the 23-year-old Aditi's performance in Tokyo should bring about a "positive change" in the game's ecosystem in the country. The world No. 200 carded a 3-under 68 in the final round to register a combined score of 15-under and missed out on a medal spot by one shot.

India's No.1 men's golfer Lahiri appreciated Aditi's performance and said, "I hope it brings a change in attitude in people and golf as a sport can grow like any other Olympic sport in India.""The biggest win for Aditi is that so many more Indians now know what golf is, how it works. And then, really just putting golf on the map in India, I think this is really quite a turning point for golf," Lahiri told Olympics.com. Lahiri added that the fact that a large number of Indians woke up early on Saturday to watch Aditi's final round in Tokyo was a "big win" for the sport.

Also Lahiri felt Aditi's performance will inspire a whole generation to take up the sport and represent the country on a big stage.

1ST TEST: RAIN PLAYS SPOILSPORT AS MATCH ENDS IN A DRAW

Nottingham | Agencies

India's hopes of starting their Test series against England on a winning note were dashed by inclement weather as the first Test ended in a draw after no play was possible on the fifth and final day due to heavy rains.The stage was set for an intriguing finale as India had reached 52 for one wicket in their second innings chasing a target of 209 runs. India needed 157 more runs to win the match with nine wickets in hand.But the weather played spoilsport in a match in which the Indians had done well despite losing out some key players to injuries and held the upper hand.

The Indians could, however, claim psychological advantage as they definitely would have fancied their chances.

Though they had never successfully chased a target of 200 in the fourth innings of a Test match in England, they would have still fancied their chances as they were in a good position with Rohit Sharma and Cheteshwar Pujara batting on 12 apiece. The Indians had shot out England 183 in their first innings with Jasprit Bumrah claiming four wickets for 46 runs and Mohammad Shami bagging three for 28. They then gained a handy 95-run lead thanks to opener K.L. Rahul's 84 and a fighting fifty by Ravindra Jadeja (56) as well as the tail that wagged.England could also take some positives from this match, especially skipper Joe Root who struck a fighting 109 to help them reach 303 in their second innings.

Bumrah claimed five wickets for 64 runs in the second innings, once again proving that he would be a thorn in the flesh of the hosts as the two teams battle out in the next four Tests for supremacy. With the first Test ending in a draw, both India and England got four WTC points each from this match.The next Test begins on August 12.

England 183 & 303 all out in 85.5 overs (J Root 109, S Curran 32, J Bairstow 30, J Bumrah 5/64, M Siraj 2/84, S Thakur 2/37) vs India 278 & 52/1 (K.L. Rahul 26, S Broad 1/18).

MESSI BREAKS DOWN IN TEARS AS HE BIDS FAREWELL TO FC BARCELONA

Barcelona: Argentina and Spanish football club FC Barcelona legend Lionel Messi broke down in tears as he was given a standing ovation at a farewell press conference here on Sunday. The 34-year-old striker, who is departing after more than two decades of playing for the club and setting several goal-scoring records for Barca, has been a free agent since July 1 when his contract with the club expired.

Speaking at a press conference, which was also attended by the entire first team, Messi reiterated that he wanted to continue with the club and did "everything he could" to stay.

"I'm been here so many years, my entire life, since I was 13. After 21 years I'm leaving with my wife, with my three little Catalan-Argentine kids and I can't tell you everything we've lived in this city and I can't say that in a few years we won't come back, because this is our home and I promised my children that. "I'm just really grateful for everything, all my teammates, all my former teammates, everyone at the club, everyone who has been by my side."

Top 10 medal winners at the Tokyo Olympics

Tokyo | Agencies

The Tokyo Olympics finally began on July 23 after a year's delay. More than 11,000 athletes across 33 sports competed in the showpiece event. New names were made and reputations established. They showed their peak game and mesmerised everyone.

Here's a look at the 10 individuals who took the most medals in the Tokyo Olympics:

1. Emma McKeon

With seven medals, the swimmer from Brisbane earned the most medals by an individual athlete in Tokyo. She is now tied with gymnast Maria Gorokhovskaya for the record for most medals won by a woman in a single edition of the Olympics. The 27-year-old picked four gold and three bronze medals.

2. Caeleb Dressel

The star swimmer was selected as a co-captain for the USA men's swimming team. The 24-year-old was on a gold rush in Tokyo, collecting five gold medals on top of the podium. Dressel becomes the 4th male USA swimmer in the history to achieve the feat after Mark Spitz, Matt Biondi, and Michael Phelps.

3. Kaylee McKeown

The 20-year-old Queenslander made a splash at the biggest stage of swimming. She took the gold in 100m, setting a new Olympic record. All together she won gold at Tokyo and a bronze in the mixed 4x100m medley relay.

4. Zhang Yufei

One of the breakthrough stars of the Tokyo Olympics, Zhang won the gold in the 200m butterfly, setting a new Olympic record. She took two golds and two silver at Tokyo Olympics.

5. Kathleen Ledecky

The most decorated female swimmer of all time bagged four medals in Tokyo. She began with a silver medal in 400m freestyle, losing to Australia's Ariarne Titmus. This was her first loss in an individual event. She overall won two gold and two silver medals in Tokyo.

6. Ariarne Titmus

Nicknamed 'Terminator', the Tasmanian swimmer was the cynosure of all eyes. Ariarne lived up to the billing by winning the gold in both events, edging out the competition from Kathleen Ledecky. In 200m freestyle, she set a new Olympic record. The Tasmanian booked two gold, one silver and one bronze medal in her name.

7. Duncan Scott

The man from Glasgow became the first swimmer from the Great Britain contingent to win four medals at the Olympics. He won a gold and three silver at Olympics. The four medals at Tokyo have resulted for calls for him to be given knighthood.

8. James Guy

The freestyle and butterfly specialist had an Olympics to remember. The 25-year-old was a member of the gold-medal winning 4x100m mixed medley and 4x200m freestyle relays. He also clinched a silver in 4x100m medley relay.

9. Adam Peaty

The swimmer played a major hand in Great Britain having its best-ever time at the Olympics. Peaty became the first British swimmer to defend his title by winning the 100m breaststroke. He won two gold and a silver medal here. He has now taken a break from the game to focus on his mental health.

10. Daike Hashimoto

The 20-year-old artistic gymnast from Chiba became the first Japanese man to win two individual gold medals in one edition of the Olympics since 1984. He won two gold and a silver at Tokyo Olympics.

DEEPIKA OUT OF BAIJU BAWRA FOR DEMANDING EQUAL PAY

Team Absolute | Mumbai

It's been reported that Deepika is now out of consideration for Sanjay Leela Bansali's Baiju Bawra as she asked for the same fee as Ranveer Singh, who has been roped in as the titular character.

Bollywood Hungama reported a source quoting, "Apparently, Deepika wants the same remuneration as her husband. Not a penny more, not a penny less."

"In a way, it works out for the better. Four Ranveer - Deepika films in a row from Sanjay Leela Bhansali would have been excessive, don't you think?," the source further added.

Deepika Padukone has been a champion for equal pay in Bollywood. The actress has often spoken out about the shocking pay disparity between male and female actors in Bollywood.

"Baiju Bawra is the remake of the 1952 film of the same name, starring Bharat Bhushan and Meena Kumari. The film chronicled the story of a young musician who challenged musical maestro Tansen in Mughal ruler Akbar's court.

SHWETA TIWARI: DAUGHTER PALAK IS A BETTER ACTOR THAN I AM

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Popular television actress Shweta Tiwari feels her daughter Palak, who is all set to make her debut in Bollywood with the horror film 'Rosie: The Saffron Chapter', is a better actor than her.

The 40-year-old actress added that she would love to share screen space with Palak if she gets a chance.

Shweta revealed: "I would love to work with her. At times she does these auditions and she does these scenes. I feel that she is a better actor than me. How easily she does. It is so effortless, I just keep looking. Sometimes I get emotional when I see her performing." "So, she is a better actor and I would love to perform with her if I ever get a chance," she added. Shweta has been a part of the small screen industry for over 20 years now. She gained the spotlight with her performance as Prerna Sharma Bajaj in 'Kasautii Zindagii Kay', and later featured in shows such as 'Parvarrish' and 'Begusarai', among others.

Huma Qureshi: *I still have a lot to accomplish*

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Huma Qureshi made her debut in Bollywood in 2012 with the two-part 2012 crime drama 'Gangs of Wasseypur'. She was later seen in popular films such as 'D-Day', 'Badlapur', 'Jolly LLB 2', among many others. Touching almost a decade in the Hindi film industry, the actress says she is grateful with her journey but feels she has a lot to accomplish. Talking about her journey in Bollywood, Huma said: "I feel grateful and happy. I feel I still have a lot to accomplish."

The 35-year-old actress, who hails from New Delhi, is now gearing up for the release of her upcoming film 'Bell Bottom' starring Akshay Kumar. The espionage thriller is set for a theatrical release on August 19. "I think the whole fascination with the spy genre itself. So, I think that always plays like a big hook with the younger audience. It is the kind of story that will appeal to both the younger demographic in terms of style and also in terms of the older generation," said Huma.

NIMRAT KAUR WRAPS SHOOT OF DASVI

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Nimrat Kaur has finished shooting for her upcoming social-comedy Dasvi and says the journey that began 10 months ago has finally come to its "joyous culmination". Nimrat took to Instagram and posted pictures from the film's set. Without divulging details, the actor called her character Bimla Devi Choudhary as one of her most cherished roles. "There are unforgettable roles in an actor's life and there are unexplored places you visit that come with it. Rarely do the twain meet. Bimla Devi Choudhary (aka Bimmo) is one such gift who'll forever be etched in my heart as the happiest, most thrilling and fun place I got to explore through a part entrusted so encouragingly and lovingly to me." Kaur captioned the picture.

"I already miss her...and can't believe a journey that began 10 months ago for me finally came to its joyous culmination through some of the most surreal times of all our lives. Nothing but the utmost gratitude to all the stolid pillars of #TeamDasvi!! See you at the movies," Kaur added.

Directed by Tushar Jalota, Dasvi is written by Ritesh Shah, known for films like Pink and Batla House. The movie also stars Abhishek Bachchan and Yami Gautam.

SHAHID TO ROMANCE BHUMI IN ALI ABBAS ZAFAR'S NEXT

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Bhumi Pednekar is likely to play the female lead in Ali Abbas Zafar's film that has Shahid Kapoor as the male lead. Rumours about her being part of the film began after she was spotted outside Ali Abbas Zafar's office a few days ago.

An industry source revealed, "Bhumi could be finalised soon. The makers are keen on casting her because she hasn't worked with Shahid before, so their pairing will definitely be a fresh casting coup."

The film is a remake of a foreign thriller film. The movie will be shot in Abu Dhabi later this year.

Bhumi has just wrapped up the shoot of her film 'Rakshabandhan'. She also has 'Badhai Do' which is also canned and then 'Mr. Lele' with Vicky Kaushal.

Shahid Kapoor too has finished the shooting of his OTT film 'Operation Cactus' and has 'Jersey' ready for release.

Ali Abbas Zafar's last offering was 'Tandav' starring Saif Ali Khan, which ran into trouble with political parties. There were allegations that the makers had hurt the religious sentiments of a certain community and the OTT platform was forced to delete objectionable scenes.

Matchmaker Sima Taparia to enter 'Bigg Boss OTT'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Sima Taparia, a Mumbai-based elite matchmaker, is all set to enter 'Bigg Boss OTT' as a contestant. She hopes to find matches for the contestant inside the house.

"Bigg Boss OTT will be an Over the Top Experience for me. I just couldn't say 'No'. I'm known for finding the right matches for people, 'andar ja kar bhi mein wahi karna chahungi' (I would love to do that there too)."

She added: "Inside the house, I hope to find matches for the contestants...The contestants can Love me! Can Hate me! But can't Ignore me! Stay Tuned to watch my Over The Top matching skills."

Sima gained instant popularity as "Sima aunty" and due to her catchphrase, "Hi, I am Sima Taparia from Mumbai" through her show 'Indian Matchmaking'.

In the eight-part series, which has been nominated at the upcoming 73rd Emmy Awards, Sima goes about trying to find suitable matches for her affluent clients in India and abroad.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY

Mouni Roy

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