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SURVEY PROJECTS 4-1 SCORELINE IN FAVOUR OF BJP IN 2022 POLLS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The ABP-CVOTER-IANS battle for the states - wave 1 is projecting a 4-1 scoreline in favour of the BJP in the five states going to the polls in early 2022 -- Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Manipur and Uttarakhand. The BJP is ahead of the pack in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur. The Aam Aadmi Party is currently leading as the single largest party in Punjab, slightly short of the majority mark. AAP has emerged as a principal challenger or a close third party in Punjab, Goa and Uttarakhand. The Congress is facing severe infighting across all the state units with Punjab and Manipur being the worst-hit states.

UP has Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party vying for second and third spot, respectively, while the BJP being comfortably ahead of both.

The poll shows that anti-incumbency sentiments and the Covid pandemic have not dented the relative vote catching ability of the BJP.

The Congress, the only other national party, continues to be crisis-ridden and is unable to form a cohesive organisation that can offer a meaningful challenge, the survey found.

The sample size for the survey was 81,006 in five states covering 690 Assembly seats. This state poll is part of the largest and definitive independent sample survey tracker series carried out in India over the last 22 years, conducted by independent international polling agency CVoter.

Uttar Pradesh

In Uttar Pradesh, the BJP (NDA) is notching 42 per cent vote share as per the survey figures. This is despite the anger from certain section of influential Brahmin voters. SP is a distant second with a vote share projection of 30 per cent votes and BSP is projected to poll 16 per cent votes. The Congress remains a marginal player with 5 per cent projected vote share.The BJP is slated to comfortably cross the majority mark with a projected 263 seats. This number is 62 less than its 2017 tally. SP will emerge as the principal opposition party with a projected 113 seats. BSP's vote share to seat share conversion remains poor, it is projected to win only 14 seats.

Punjab

Aam Aadmi Party is projected to become the single largest party in Punjab with a seat share of 55 and vote share of 35 per cent. Faction ridden incumbent, the Congress is currently in the second position with 29 per cent vote share and 42 seat share projection.

In a striking observation, Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal is projected as the most popular leader in Punjab at 21.6 per cent affirmation. It is pertinent to note that this is partly due to non-projection of a CM face by AAP. Akali Dal chieftain Sukhbir Singh Badal is the second most popular leader (19 per cent), closely followed by incumbent CM Amrinder Singh (18 per cent).

Uttarakhand

Despite following a revolving door policy vis-a-vis its CMs, the BJP is projected to win the state. The BJP is projected to win 43 per cent vote share and 46 seats. The Congress is projected to poll 33 per cent vote share despite a spirited fight by its local unit. This vote share may translate into 21 seats.

Ironically enough, while the Congress is placed in the second spot, its leader continues to be the most popular leader as CM choice. Harish Rawat is preferred by 31 per cent of the state as CM choice, incumbent CM Pushkar Singh Dhami is placed second at 22.5 per cent popularity points

Goa

Goa is just like the case of Uttarakhand when it comes to BJP-INC-AAP dynamics. BJP is in the pole position with a projected vote share of 39 per cent and a seat share of 24 seats. Except that BJP's lead in the state is also reinforced by a popular leader.

BJP CM Pramod Sawant leads his nearest rival from the AAP by a full 19 per cent points. Currently he is preferred by 33 per cent Goans as the most preferred candidate for CM's post.

AAP is projected to emerge as the principal opposition party dethroning the INC. AAP is projected to win 15 per cent vote share and 5 seats. While the INC is projected to win 15 per cent vote share and 5 seats.

Manipur

BJP alliance is slated to win the state with 41 per cent vote share and 34 seats. It is significant as it signals the geographic diversity of BJP's ability to beat anti-incumbency across many regions of India.

Currently, the BJP is able to beat back anti-incumbency in North, East and West of India, this could be indicative of a larger subterranean trend that is not being picked up by political observers currently.

In Manipur Congress is holding onto its status of the principal opposition party, its former state unit chief Govindas Konthoujam defected to the BJP a few days ago.

Baradar to lead Afghan govt

New Delhi: Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar will lead a new Afghan government set to be announced shortly, sources in the Islamist group said on Friday.

Baradar, who heads the Taliban's political office, will be joined by Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob, the son of late Taliban co-founder Mullah Omar, and Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai in senior positions, three sources said, the report added.

Haibatullah Akhunzada, the Taliban's surpreme religious leader, will focus on religious matters and governance within the framework of Islam, another Taliban source said.

SC slams centre on delay in framing guidelines for Covid death certificates

3rd wave will be over

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday expressed discontent at the delay by Centre in simplifying the process for issuance of death certificates for people who succumbed to Covid-19.

A bench comprising Justices M.R. Shah and Aniruddha Bose directed the Centre to show compliance by September 11 to the directions issued by the top court on June 30, to frame guidelines to simplify the process of issuance of death certificates.

The bench remarked, "We passed the order a long time back. We have already extended the time once. By the time you frame the guidelines, the third wave will also be over."

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the Centre, assured the top court that the matter was already under process, and soon it would be finalised. Mehta sought for additional time to file the affidavit.

Advocate Gaurav Kumar Bansal, the petitioner-in-person in the matter, contended before the bench that the Centre should respect the court order.

After hearing arguments, the top court adjourned the matter, and directed the Centre to file the compliance affidavit on or before September 11.

During a hearing on the matter in August, the top court had sought a compliance affidavit with regard to the directions for guidelines on Covid death certificates by September 3.

'Accused can't be kept in jail without trial'

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday asked the Delhi Police on how long would it take to complete the probe involving former Fortis Healthcare promoter Shivinder Mohan Singh, who is accused of allegedly misappropriating about Rs 2,400 crore from Religare Finvest Ltd funds. Senior advocate Sidharth Luthra, representing Singh, submitted his client has been in jail for nearly two years, since October 2019, and the charges have not framed so far. A bench headed by Chief Justice N.V. Ramana observed: "How much time does it take to complete the probe in a criminal case? The accused cannot be kept in jail without trial."

Right to protest embedded in democratic polity

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court on Friday held that right to protest and express dissent is a right that occupies a fundamental stature in a democratic polity, therefore, the sole act of protesting should not be employed as a weapon to justify the incarceration of those who are exercising this right. A single judge bench of Justice Subramonium Prasad made this observation while granting bail to a woman and four men allegedly involved in the offences of rioting, murder of head constable Ratan Lal and injuring DCP Amit Sharma in northeast Delhi during the February 2020 riots.

SDRs boost India's forex reserves by over $16 bn

Mumbai: An exponential rise in India's Special Drawing Rights allocation aided in the accural of over $16.663 billion into India's foreign exchange reserves during the week ended August 27.

In financial parlance, SDRs are international reserve assets which are created by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and are periodically allocated to its members in proportion to their quotas.

The SDR balances are equivalent to liquid balances in convertible currencies in almost every aspect.

Accordingly, the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) forex reserves increased to $633.558 billion from $616.895 billion reported for the week ended August 20.

400 cases of mystery fever reported in Lucknow

LONDON | Agencies

The cases of mystery fever are now being reported from Lucknow. More than 400 viral patients, including 40 children, have been admitted to various government hospitals in the state capital in the past two days. More than 20 per cent of patients in the OPD are complaining of fever, cold and congestion.

While doctors term these cases as seasonal flu due to changing weather conditions, there is panic among the patients who fear that this may be the beginning of the third wave of the Covid pandemic.

There are instructions in the hospitals to not take patients in the OPD section without conducting a Covid antigen test.

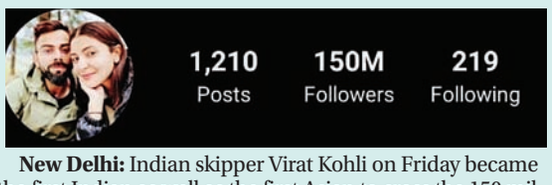
As per the hospitals, the number of viral patients has increased by about 15 per cent in the last week. In the third week of August, the number of fever victims was about 5 per cent.

Hospitals like Balrampur Hospital, Civil Hospital and Lohia Institute have seen a surge in recent viral cases. More than 300 patients have come to OPD with fever problems.

In the paediatrics department, 12 children suffering from fever have been admitted. Of these, seven are from Lucknow. The number of people getting tested for dengue, malaria, typhoid is also more than normal.

According to the medical superintendent of the Bhaurao Deoras hospital, Dr Manish, 10 to 15 children with fever are coming daily.

VIRAT KOHLI BECOMES 1ST INDIAN TO REACH 150MN FOLLOWERS ON INSTAGRAM



New Delhi: Indian skipper Virat Kohli on Friday became the first Indian as well as the first Asian to cross the 150 million followers' landmark on Instagram. In the overall list, Kohli is the fourth sporting celebrity to reach the 150 million mark on the photo-blogging platform.

Ronaldo tops the chart with 337 million followers, while Lionel Messi -- 260 million and Brazil's Neymar stand second and third in the list with 260 million, 160 million followers respectively. Kohli had earlier become the first Asian to reach 75 million followers on Instagram.

Apart from Instagram, Kohli also has a massive fan-following on other social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook. As of now he has 43.4 million followers on Twitter and over 47 million followers on Facebook.

Recently, Kohli had upstaged Bollywood stars Akshay Kumar and Ranveer Singh to retain the top spot in India's most-valuable celeb list. According to the Celebrity Brand Valuation Study 2020 by Duff & Phelps, the Indian skipper was reportedly crowned as India's most valuable celebrity with a brand value of $237.7 million. The Indian cricketer reportedly charges Rs 5 crore per sponsored post on the platform. In comparison, Ronaldo charges $1,604,000 (Rs 11.72 crore) per sponsored Instagram post.

'India Plastic Pact' for circular system for plastics launched

- *India generates 9.46 MT of plastic waste annually, of which 40 per cent is not collected; about half of all plastics produced in the country are used in packaging, most of it is single use in nature. Commitments made under the Pact aim to keep plastic packaging in the economy and out of the natural environment.*
- *The Pact's targets to be achieved by 2030 are: Ddefine a list of unnecessary or problematic plastic packaging and items and take measures to address them through redesign and innovation; 100 per cent of plastic packaging to be reusable or recyclable; 50 per cent of plastic packaging to be effectively recycled and 25 per cent average recycled content across all plastic packaging, the release said.*

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A first in Asia, the 'India Plastics Pact', which will bring together leading businesses at a national level to make commitments for building a circular system for plastics by 2030, was launched on Friday.

As many as 26 businesses committed to the Pact as founding members or as supporting organisations. The Pact that envisions a world where plastic is valued and does not pollute the environment is a joint initiative of the World Wide Fund for Nature-India (WWF India) and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), a release said."Through joint efforts by CII, WWF India, the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), UK Research and Innovation, and members of the India Plastics Pact, this first of its kind initiative in Asia will complement India's other bold initiatives in the renewables sector and efforts to limit single-use plastics," British High Commissioner to India, Alexander Ellis, said while launching the Pact at CII's 16th Sustainability Summit.WRAP, a global NGO based in the UK, provides operational and technical support to Plastics Pacts in Europe, the Americas, Australia, and Africa and fully supports the Pact in India, the release said.

NO CASE OF MU VARIANT IN INDIA, KEEPING CLOSE WATCH: CENTRE

New Delhi: The Union government has said that no cases of 'MU' variant of coronavirus have been detected from over 51,000 samples analysed so far in India.

This new coronavirus variant 'MU' was identified first in Colombia in January. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has designated the MU strain of coronavirus as a 'variant of interest'.

The Indian Council of Medical Research Director General Dr. Balram Bhargav said, "We are closely monitoring the new coronavirus 'Variants of Interest' named MU and no case has been detected so far in India".

The WHO has warned that the new MU variant shows signs of possible resistance to the vaccines. The WHO said in a statement, "Based on the latest round of assessments, B.1.621 was clas

Fresh troubles along Assam-Mizoram border over roads, camps

The two northeastern states share a 164.6-km border between Assam's Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj districts, and Mizoram's Kolasib, Mamit and Aizawl districts. Both states have officially had different interpretations of their territorial boundary lines. While Mizoram claimed that its border lies along the border line drawn up in 1875 to protect the indigenous people from outside influence, Assam goes by a district demarcation done in 1933.

Team Absolute | Aizawl/Silchar

Fresh tension was reported along the Assam-Mizoram border as the two states accused each other of constructing roads, security camps, and bunkers and urged all such activity be stopped and new structures dismantled.

Kolasib (Mizoram) Deputy Commissioner H. Lalthlangliana, in a letter to his Hailakandi (Assam) counterpart Rohan Jha, alleged that Assam Police personnel had, at gun point, kidnapped JCB operator Lalngaisanga on Thursday while he was constructing a private road on the request of the 'Jhum' farmers (shifting cultivators).

"The Assam Police went to disrupt their activity, damaged the door of the excavator, and snatched the keys from the JCB operator, who was blindfolded and kidnapped. He was then dragged by the river, his clothes ripped off, and life threatened. His mobile phone along with JCB keys was taken by the Assam Police," the Kolasib DC said in his letter.

Terming it "a very serious issue" and a "huge setback" towards the initiatives for peace until now, he said that it can further aggravate the situation.

Meanwhile, Jha, in his letter to his Kolasib counterpart, sought the dismantling of two camps and a bunker, set up by the Mizoram Police on August 26 in reserve forest at Kachurthal-Balicherra area along the border. "... but there was no action taken from your end to de-escalate the issue. A new camp and a road were being built by Mizoram Police at the same Kachurthal-Balicherra area within the constitutional boundary of Assam. Such instances of construction and force deployment are in clear violation of the joint statement issued by both the governments on August 5 and are very detrimental in the peace keeping efforts along the inter-state border," he wrote.

Dismissing the claims of his Mizoram counterpart, Jha said that Assam forest staff, along with the Assam Police, went to the Kachurthal-Balicherra area on Thursday and noticed that a road was being constructed inside the constitutional boundary of Assam and instructed the JCB driver to stop the construction and immediately return to Mizoram.

Police told the Mizoram resident that he has trespassed into Assam land and will be arrested, if the construction is not stopped. "The JCB driver immediately stopped the construction and on fear of arrest, went back to Kolasib district," Jha said.

He said that it is imperative that the 'Jhum' farmers residing along the inter-state border areas in Kolasib district should be counselled and instructed, not to start any new construction within the constitutional boundary of Assam.

After several incidents and tension for several months over the border dispute, six Assam Police personnel and a civilian were killed and around 60 people injured in firing and clashes between the police and civilians of the two states on July 26.

'Mysterious' tunnel found in Delhi Assembly, to open for public soon

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A "mysterious" tunnel, that leads to the Red Fort, was discovered in the Delhi Assembly recently and preparations are now being made to open it to the general public, Speaker Ram Niwas Goel announced on Friday.

Presently, its history is not fully known, but it is being estimated that the tunnel was used during the British times for movement of political prisoners.

With renovation works underway, it is expected that the tunnel will be opened for the general public by January 26 or August 15, 2022.

Addressing media, Goel said: "When I came here as an MLA in 1993, I got to know about a tunnel. Since then I asked to collect information on it but much details could not be gathered at that time."

"We are constantly trying to find out the old history so that it can be passed on to the common people," he added.

According to the Speaker, the then Britisher rulers, had in 1926, turned the premises of the present Assembly, into a court, wherein freedom fighters, kept in the Red Fort, were brought through this tunnel.

He also mentioned a 'Phansi ghar' (hanging chamber) was inside the premises, wherein freedom fighters, sentenced to death, were executed.

"As the hanging house was lying closed for a long time, the renovation works there are underway," the Speaker said.

"Meanwhile, some lights have been installed inside the tunnel and it is also a bit difficult to find out how far the tunnel can go," Goel said, adding that due to the sewer and the Metro related works, it is apprehended that the tunnel would have collapsed.

"For now, the mouth of the tunnel has been opened and soon tourists will get an opportunity to become aware of some unheard aspects of history," he added.

Infiltration bid foiled in J&K's Poonch, abandoned supplies seized

Jammu | Agencies

An infiltration bid by a group of heavily-armed Pakistani terrorists on the line of control (LoC) in J&K's Poonch district on Friday was foiled by alert Indian troops, officials said.

"On the intervening night of September 2 and 3, a group of heavily-armed Pakistani terrorists attempted to infiltrate in Poonch sector (J&K)."The infiltration attempt of Pakistani terrorists was detected by alert troops of Indian Army. The infiltrators were challenged and heavy firing ensued.

"Owing to undulating terrain and heavy undergrowth, the terrorists managed to break contact and escaped back towards Pakistan Occupied Jammu and Kashmir under the cover of darkness," Defence Ministry spokesman, Lt Col Devender Anand said.

He said that a thorough search of the encounter site was carried out and a huge quantity of administrative stores left behind by the terrorists were recovered to include clothing, packaged food items and medicines with Pakistani markings.

"Indian Army maintains a determined resolve to thwart any infiltration attempts or nefarious designs by anti-national elements," Anand added.On Monday, two infiltrators were killed after the army foiled an infiltration attempt along the LoC in Poonch.

K'taka man suspects wife has terror links, files police complaint

A man in Karnataka's Dakshina Kannada district on Friday filed a complaint with the police, alleging that his wife, who works in Dubai, has terror links and wants to take their daughter away with her.

Team Absolute | Dakshina Kannada

In his complaint to Superintendent of Police Sonawane Rishikesh, Chidananda K.R. also alleged his wife, Raji Raghavan, is threatening him with dire consequences if he did not agree to her demands. "She claims to be knowing certain organisations and she would get me and my family punished," he alleged.

He also claimed that a person from Lakshadweep is making frequent calls and forcing him to send his wife and daughter to Dubai.

"This person is asking me to come to Kerala and he would give lots of money for sending my wife and daughter to Dubai for one year," Chidananda said.

He said that his wife has been working in Dubai for 11 years, and came back home once a year and stayed for a month.

Whenever Chidananda asked about what happened to her savings, Raji Raghavan gave contact number of Mohammad Khasim who lived in Lakshadweep and told him that she has lent all the money to him.

He said when he spoke to Khasim, he asked Chidananda to send Raji Raghavan as his wife and if at all he wanted a mother for his children, he needs to wait. "Khasim has even threatened that if I don't send her, they knew how to take her," he said in his complaint.

"My wife, who went to sleep with daughter on July 26, gone away by the morning with a stranger without informing," he said in the complaint.

Chidananda said that he had lodged a complaint with Dharmasthala police station, and was told that she is getting treatment at an ayurveda hospital.

In the era of social media, voices are suppressed: Rahul

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Rahul Gandhi on Friday released a video about how his late father and former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi used to meet people, but now in the era of social media, the people's voices was suppressed, he alleged.

He said, "So the tragedy of politics of today is that, in a world of media, in a world of WhatsApp, in a world of Twitter, in Facebook, that voice is basically suppressed."

In the second video released within two days, he showed the picture of Rajiv Gandhi, where he can be seen talking to people, "This picture here. He's listening. Right, so it was constantly listening and he would make these connections -- he would be in this crowd, listen and then suddenly, he would say okay this can be transformed with this instrument," he said.

Rahul said it was a journey where he would go and listen and then go and look around to find instruments that could transform the voice of this nation that he was hearing.

"There is this tremendous voice here, but it is struggling to speak. Of course, that's been magnified today, it's not being allowed to speak, and it is being crushed with monopoly, you know media... it's been crushed with an authoritarian system," he alleged.

Rahul said, "This voice is... call it God. There's nothing more than this voice. It's not a singular voice. It's millions and millions of voices that speak together... have huge power when they speak and tremendous amount of nuance."

He said that his father Rajiv Gandhi during the tours was not only connecting with the people, he was actually trying to understand their needs and it was about listening to what they were trying to tell him and I remember a lot of it was just going there and listening."

JD(U) MLA GOPAL MANDAL ADMITS BEING IN UNDERGARMENTS IN TRAIN

Team Absolute | Patna

Facing criticism for roaming in undergarments in a train, Janata Dal (United) MLA Gopal Mandal on Friday admitted that he was in the Patna-Delhi Tejas Rajdhani Express on Friday."I admit that I was in the train and was in the undergarments but that is not a crime. Would you give me death penalty for it?" Mandal queried.

"I was suffering from stomach issues, had loose motion. When I boarded the train from Patna, I went to the washroom wearing a hosiery vest and underwear. I cannot tell lies. I always tell the truth," he clarified.

Mandal along with two of his aides boarded coach number A1 (Second AC) and their seat numbers were 13, 14 and 15. When the train was crossing the Dildarnagar station in Uttar Pradesh, the MLA removed his clothes and went to the washroom in undergarments, which was objected to by passengers.

Prahalad Paswan, a resident of Bihar's Jehanabad was travelling with his wife and children in the same compartment. He is reported to have told Mandal that women were travelling in the same compartment and removing clothes in front of them was reflecting on his decency.Mandal is said to have abused him and other passengers travelling in the coach.The situation reached such a state that the Railway Protection Force (RPF) personnel had to intervene. Due to the uproar, the train was briefly halted at Dildarnagar junction and RPF personnel of the station were informed about the incident. An official of RPF in Dildarnagar confirmed the incident.

Household items going up for sale on roadsides in Afghanistan

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Those who remain in Afghanistan are resorting to desperate measures, as household items are going up for sale on roadsides around the country.

"Many people are selling off whatever valuable they have," said Nematullah, a shopkeeper in Kabul, RFE/RL's Radio Azadi reported.For some, it is about survival, earning enough to feed their families each day. Others will use the money to flee their homeland and its new fundamentalist rulers."People are desperate. There are no jobs and no money. People don't have any other choice," said Nematullah.

Hundreds of Afghans stand along dusty roadsides in the capital, Kabul, desperately trying to sell their meager possessions, the report said.Many offer used pots, plates, and cups that are piled up on bedsheets. Others sell tattered mattresses and old rugs or hope someone will buy their television or refrigerator."There are no jobs and we don't have any money," said Haji Aziz, an unemployed cook who stands by a heap of kitchen utensils for sale along a busy road in downtown Kabul."I'm trying to sell whatever I can so I can feed my family," said Aziz, a weary, middle-aged man who is the sole breadwinner for his family of nine, the reports said.

He is among millions of Afghans who are reeling from the economic shocks of the Taliban's rapid takeover of Afghanistan, an impoverished, war-scarred country of some 38 million people, the report said.

Many businesses and stores remain closed. Government workers, many of whom have gone into hiding, have been unpaid. Thousands of people line up outside banks and ATMs as armed Taliban fighters attempt to keep order.

Since the militant group's capture of Kabul on August 15, residents have been hit by soaring food prices and cash shortages. Inflation has surged and the value of the national currency, the afghani, has plummeted.

'Children can't be exposed to risk': SC stays Kerala move on Class 11 exams

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday stayed the Kerala government decision to conduct offline exam for Class 11 students from September 6, citing the alarming situation in the state, which accounts for nearly 70 per cent of new Covid cases in the country.A bench headed by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar and comprising Justices Hrishikesh Roy and C.T. Ravikumar orally observed: "There is an alarming situation in Kerala. It accounts for nearly 70 per cent cases of the country, with over 30,000 daily cases. Children of tender age can't be exposed to risk."The top court passed the order on a plea by Rasoolshan A, represented by advocate Prashant Padmanabhan, challenging the Kerala High Court order declining to interfere with the state government decision to conduct offline exams.

BEYOND EXPECTATION SUCCESS IN COLLECTIVE EFFORTS TO PREVENT CORONA INFECTION: CM CHOUHAN

Necessary arrangements with full alertness for a possible third wave

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the collective efforts made to check the effect of corona infection in the state have been more successful than anticipated. According to medical experts, in view of the possible third wave of corona, the state government has made necessary arrangements with medical oxygen and essential medicines in the entire state with utmost care. Along with these arrangements, it is necessary that the people of the state adopt the appropriate behaviour of the corona protocol and remain aware and make other people aware as well.

CT scan system

Chief Minister Chouhan said that taking lessons from what we have lost in the first and second wave of corona, all those arrangements have been ensured, due to which we will not allow the effect of third wave of corona to increase. Chouhan said that we have also decided that the system of CT scan should be made available in all the districts by the month of October. So far, the work of installing 32 slice CT scan machines in 30 districts is in the final stage. Soon CT scan machines will also be installed in all the districts.

Competition in state for vaccination

Chief Minister Chouhan said that corona vaccine is the most effective way to prevent corona infection. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has done a great job by providing adequate vaccine dosages to Madhya Pradesh. The people of Madhya Pradesh have also got the vaccine administered on a large scale, respecting the sentiments of the Prime Minister. The result of the massive public participation of the people of the state in vaccination was that Madhya Pradesh has created a national record. The percentage of people getting vaccinated in the state is continuously increasing. In the metropolitan category, Indore city was the first to prove that the state is moving towards freedom from corona by giving the first dose of the vaccine to the target group. Along with this, information about cent percent vaccination is being received in many panchayats, urban bodies and now development blocks of Madhya Pradesh. He said that recently Budhni development block of Sehore district has also become cent percent vaccinated. There is an atmosphere of competition in the entire state for vaccination. At present, about 6 lakh vaccine doses are being administered daily even in the normal vaccination session.

Increase in ICU, oxygen beds

Chief Minister Chouhan said that facilities are being expanded continuously in government health institutions. 784 ICU beds have been made functional in these institutions. By September, 650 additional ICU beds will be functional. 11 thousand 156 oxygen beds have been made functional in these institutions. By the month of September, their total number will be 14 thousand 255. In the COVID-19 scenario, there were 2993 ICU beds in government medical colleges. By September, their number will increase to 3438 with an additional 445 beds. Keeping in view the possibility of babies getting infected in the third wave of Covid-19, in addition to the available 200 paediatric ICU beds, 350 new pediatric ICU beds are being arranged. Similarly, 320 new paediatric ICU beds and 992 new paediatric oxygen beds are being arranged for the treatment of children in the institutions of the health department.

Arrangement of physicians and staff

Chief Minister Shri Chouhan said that the process of filling up the posts of doctors, nursing and paramedical staff is also almost complete. The process of recruitment for 429 posts of Radiographer, Lab Technician and Ophthalmic Technician has also been completed.

Ayushman card

Chief Minister Chouhan has said that Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana is being operated with full sensitivity in the state. So far Ayushman cards have been issued to more than 2 crore 52 lakh beneficiaries under the scheme. There is a provision to provide free treatment up to Rs 5 lakh to the beneficiaries of the scheme in government hospitals as well as in identified private health institutions. So far, claims amounting to about 1200 crores have been sanctioned for the treatment of more than 9 lakh 13 thousand beneficiaries through a growing network of 898 empanelled private and government hospitals.

Avni makes India proud

CM Chouhan congratulates winners of medals

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has expressed joy over the continuous achievements of the India sportspersons in the Tokyo Para Olympics. Chief Minister Chouhan has congratulated Avani Lakhera, who created history by winning bronze medal in rifle shooting.

Avani has received two medals this week. On August 30, Avani Lakhera won the gold medal by securing first position in 10m air rifle shooting. Yesterday again she bagged a bronze medal in 50m rifle shooting. Avani has become the first Indian woman to have bagged two medals simultaneously in the Olympics or Paralympics. This is certainly not an ordinary achievement. Avani has made India proud.

Chief Minister Chouhan has also congratulated Harvinder Singh for winning bronze medal in Para Archery for India in Tokyo Para Olympics. He said that it is the result of the dedication and passion of the players that today we have got these medals. It may be noted here that today Praveen Kumar has also won silver medal for India in high jump. Congratulating the players, Chief Minister Chouhan tweeted 'always keep winning, my best wishes'.

Green Ganesh Abhiyan in MP

Team Absolute | Bhopal

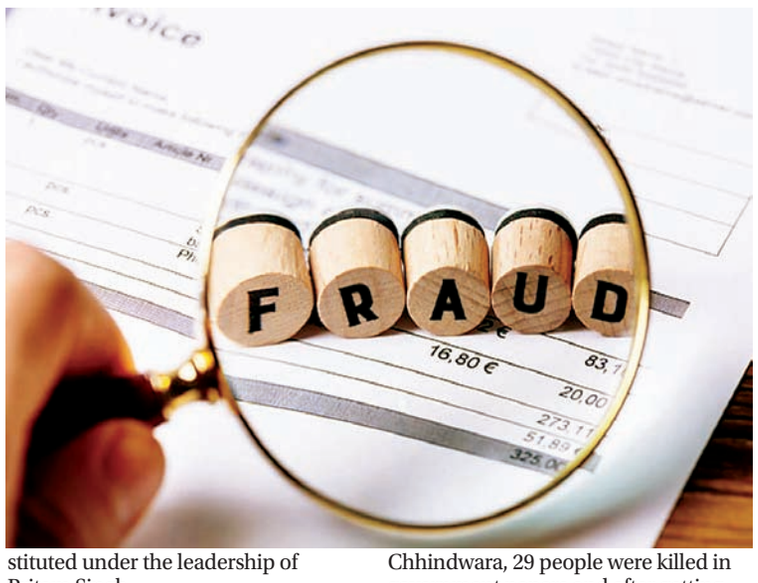
Many big festivals are coming in the recent time, idols are installed in these events, many idols are made using POP and chemical dyes, when these idols are immersed in water sources, the water gets polluted. The Green Ganesh Campaign is to be launched in Bhopal, the capital of Madhya Pradesh, for the purpose of not polluting the water and affecting the environment. According to the official information, APCO is going to run Green Ganesha campaign from September 4 to 8 for the construction of Ganesha idols. Under this campaign, free training in Ganesh idol making will be given every day from 3 pm to 6 pm in the environmental complex of Arera Colony.

It has been informed that soil will be made available to the participants in the camp and they will be able to make Ganesha idol with their own hands. Participants will be able to take the idols with them home for free with the help of instructors. In the camp, the technique of decorating the Ganesha idol with natural colors will also be taught. Participants will be able to immerse the idol at home after the pujan on the upcoming Ganesh Chaturthi.

It is noteworthy that Ganesh Utsav is celebrated every year in the country. Over the last several years, it has become common practice to replace clay idols with statues made of POP. The water of rivers, ponds etc. is poisoned by the immersion of POP idols. This creates environmental problems as well as a crisis on the lives of aquatic animals.

SIT TO PROBE CHHINDWARA'S FAKE DEATH CERTIFICATE CASE

Team Absolute | Bhopal



In Madhya Pradesh's Chhindwara district, the investigation of the case of grabbing the compensation amount by telling the alive people as dead has been handed over to the Special Investigation Team (SIT). It is to be known that in Bohnakheri gram panchayat of Chhindwara district, the amount of compensation was grabbed by making fake death certificates of 29 living people. After the disclosure of this matter, along with the suspension of Panchayat Secretary Rakesh Chandel, a case was also registered against him in the police station. Now a 13-member Special Investigation Team (SIT) has been formed to investigate the matter on the instructions of Kamal Patel, Minister in-charge of the district and Farmers Welfare Minister of the State Government. This SIT has been constituted under the leadership of Pritam Singh.

In Bohnakhari village of Chhindwara, 29 people were killed in government papers and after getting death certificates made in their names, an assistance amount of two lakh rupees each under the Corona guide line was also released from the government.

Based on the report of the preliminary inquiry, Rakesh Chandel, the Panchayat Secretary of Bohanakheri, was suspended and an FIR was also lodged at the Chaurai police station in the case of cheating, forgery and preparation of forged documents. After this, the in-charge minister Patel had instructed the collector to review all the certificates issued in the entire district under death certificates and other schemes.

Sources say that there is a possibility of cases of fake death certificates being made in other parts of the district as well, which is why SIT has been formed to investigate the matter. Many more cases may also be revealed from this investigation in the coming time.

Concerned officers will be responsible on receipt of complaint of power disruption

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Energy Minister Pradyuman Singh Tomar reviewed the operation and maintenance of electricity in Tikamgarh. He directed to ensure the supply of electricity as per the provisions laid down by the government, replace the burnt/defective distribution transformer as per rules and to redress the complaints of the consumers immediately. Along with this, he directed that the arrangement of uninterrupted power supply should be ensured in the urban and rural areas of the district. He said that the concerned officers would be held responsible on the complaint of power interruption and strict action would be taken against them.

Minister Tomar said that faulty cables and burnt transformers should be replaced immediately and complaints related to the bills should be redressed. He said that proper voltage should be available in urban and rural areas, meter reading should be taken regularly on time and there should be complete control in case of tripping. He asked the officers to rectify the electricity system of the district by coordinating with the public representatives; in this no negligence and laxity would be condoned. The Energy Minister directed to make a register for the maintenance of complaints and to visit the areas continuously. He said that the review would be done again in the meeting after three months.

Mumbai man absconding after killing his wife arrested in Itarsi

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Railway Protection Force has succeeded in nabbing the accused who fled after killing his wife from Mumbai at Itarsi Junction in Madhya Pradesh. He also had a three-year-old daughter with him. The accused was traveling in train number 2617 Mangaldeep. Devendra Kumar, station in-charge of RPF Itarsi said that his police station had received information from the crime branch Thane that a man was running away after killing his wife in Mumbai. On the basis of this information, checks were done at Bhusaval and Khandwa stations, but he was not found because the accused used to hide somewhere in the train before coming to the station. After this the photo of the accused was made available on WhatsApp and a team was formed for the search.

According to the station in-charge Devendra Kumar, the members of the team formed to search for the accused woke up the passengers of every seat of the train in plain clothes and checked. On which a young man was found sleeping with a three-year-old girl at berth number seven of coach number S10, on interrogation, he misrepresented his name, while he was the accused, as well as told the girl as his daughter. According to the information received from the Crime Branch Thane, he was identified as an accused. The accused was taken off the train and brought to the RPF station along with the girl and the information was given to the Mumbra (Mumbai) police station. The accused was kept in the RPF police station and the girl child in Jeevodaya Child Line Itarsi. The accused and the girl were handed over to the police team that came from Mumbra police station on Friday.

Wildlife Sanctuary of Bundelkhand region will be established in Sagar district

In-principle approval given in the meeting of the State Wildlife Board

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A new wildlife sanctuary will be set up in Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh. This will be a unique gift for nature and wildlife lovers of Bundelkhand region. In the meeting of the State Wildlife Board held recently under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, in-principle approval has been given to the proposal to this effect.

It is noteworthy that the Forest Department has taken this important initiative in compliance with the instructions given by Forest Minister Dr. Kunwar Vijay Shah to create 10 new sanctuaries in the reserved forest areas of the state while expanding the efforts of wildlife conservation. An area of 25 thousand 864 hectares (258.64 sq. km) of North Sagar Forest Division has been selected by the department for the sanctuary. Its headquarters will be Sagar and it is named as "Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar" Sanctuary North Sagar. There are 88 villages within a radius of 5 KM of the proposed sanctuary, whose nistar system is dependent on forests. In the sanctuary area 98.202 cubic meters of timber and 236 cubic meters of firewood having estimated amount of Rs 42 lakh and 4.96 lakh respectively will be affected annually.42 officers-employees will be deployed for the sanctuary. Among them 41 posts of Forest Officers, Forest Rangers and Forest Guards have been proposed in addition to one Deputy Forest Divisional Officer. The annual estimated expenditure on the staff will be Rs. one crore 48 lakh.

CHIEF MINISTER CHOUHAN PLANTS SAPLING IN SMART PARK

Bhopal : Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted Amla, Banyan and Putrajeevak saplings. Former Chief Minister Umashree Bharti was also present during the planting of saplings in Smart Park. Chief Minister Chouhan plants saplings every day in fulfillment of his resolve. Amla is called Amritphal or Dhatriphal in Ayurveda. Amla boosts the immunity of the body. It works as a medicine for many diseases. Banyan tree is also called Vat Vriksha or Bad. Banyan has religious significance, as well as according to Ayurveda, it is possible to cure many diseases from the banyan tree. Putrajeevak tree is found in hilly areas. Its tree is always green and its trunk has green bark. Its flowers are yellowish green in colour and in found in clusters.

EDITOR'S SPECS

UP POLLS: NOW, BRAHMINS ARE INTELLECTUALS FOR BJP

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Uttar Pradesh is joining the race for the votes of 'Prabuddha Varg' (read Brahmins) in the state ahead of the Assembly elections. The Bahujan Samaj party and Samajwadi Party are already racing ahead with 'Prabuddha Varg' Sammelans and both parties have promised to install statues of Lord Parshuram, the Brahmin sage. The BJP's 'Prabuddh Varg Sammelans' will be organised between September 5 and September 20 across all districts. Party state general secretary and in-charge of the conventions; Subrat Pathak said the sammelan should not be read as the one driven by caste factor only. Pathak, who is a party MP from Kannauj, accused the opposition of keeping caste at the core of their conventions. Prominent leaders who will address these sammelans include Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath (Varanasi), Radha Mohan Singh (Prayagraj), Swatantra Dev Singh (Ayodhya), Sunil Bansal (Lucknow) and Keshav Prasad Maurya (Kanpur). These leaders, in their speeches, will underline the fact that the BJP takes care of all castes irrespective of their numbers. They will also attempt to dilute the opposition campaign that the ruling party and the government is pursuing an anti-Brahmin agenda. The BSP, in particular, has been blaming the BJP for targeting innocent Brahmins. The BJP, on the other hand, has been strengthening its outreach to OBCs and playing the backward caste with a vengeance. It is noteworthy that in 2013 the Allahabad high court while hearing a PIL filed by one Motilal Yadav, had banned events by political parties in the state on the basis of caste. Hence, these conventions are being called Prabuddha Varg Sammelans, instead of Brahmin Sammelans. Brahmins constitute 13 per cent of the population and are considered as major opinion makers in Uttar Pradesh.

TALIBAN'S RISE MAY HELP FUEL SEPARATIST AGENDA IN KASHMIR

Deepika Bhan

The Taliban's rise in Afghanistan has given certain elements in Pakistan an opportunity to portray the Taliban victory as a gateway to Kashmir also. Their imaginations may be running riot, but the reality is that the happenings in Afghanistan may not be as helpful to Pakistan as it is claiming. But it may use the Taliban rise to stir up the 'Islamic sentiments in Kashmir to fuel the separatist agenda.The Taliban has too many challenges at hand. Its struggles to form a government, run it, sustain it and save it from many other virulent groups are too many for it to export its help to Pakistan in its Kashmir mission. The Taliban have brought the whole of Afghanistan under its control except the Panjshir province. But it is the Islamic State-Khorasan and the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) which have the potential of keeping it engaged.

The IS-K has already thrown a challenge to the Taliban by launching several attacks since the Taliban takeover, including the two at Kabul airport. The IS-K has refused to acknowledge Taliban's supremacy and is prepared to engage in a long-drawn battle that could result in civil war in Afghanistan and cause problems in neighbouring nations. Khorasan involves parts of Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia. Now that the US is not there, IS-K feels that it has an opportunity to take on the Taliban.

The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) or Pakistan Taliban has had an off-on relationship with the Taliban depending upon the situation and the timing. Pakistan regards it as one of the most dangerous terror outfits. As the Taliban was launching its offensive in Afghanistan, the TTP was carrying out attacks in north Waziristan. It wants an independent state comprising Pakistan's tribal areas which have faced subjugation for decades from those at the helm in Pakistan. The TTP also has ties with Uyghur groups and has targeted Chinese workers associated with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Since China is supporting the Taliban, controlling and containing the TTP will be a hard task.

What Taliban had been for the erstwhile Afghan governments, the IS-K and TTP could be the headaches for the new Taliban dispensation. Keeping Afghanistan intact and running it are the Taliban's foremost challenges. And the challenges are too engulfing for it to spare its men for 'jihad' in Kashmir.However, the feeling that terror activities may get a new push in Kashmir is not unfounded. Pakistan will increase activities on the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir, including infiltration and drone attacks. But, more dangerous is the fanning of the Muslim sentiments regarding the Taliban's resurrection and its 'successful' fight against the 'invader US'. The radicalization of the youth in Kashmir over the decades has been a major worry for the security forces. And this is what comes in handy for the elements which are working round the clock to fan the separatist agenda. Al-Qaeda has given a call for the 'liberation' of Kashmir and other so-called Islamic lands. This might pose more security challenges in the valley in the sense that Jaish-e-Mohammad and Lashkar-e-Taiba may increase terror activities in the valley to cash in on the rising sentiments of a Taliban win over the superpower US. 'If Taliban could overthrow the US, why can't a similar thing happen in Kashmir' -- this sentiment will probably become the new weapon for these terror outfits and their mentor, as has been flagged by Al Qaeda.

One of the conditions of the peace deal signed by the US and the Taliban in 2020 was that it should sever ties with all terror groups and not let its land be used for carrying out terror activities. And whether the Taliban will stick to this is a million dollar question.

After the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, the Central government took J&K's administration directly in its hands and a number of promises were made. Although political activity has been restored with the conducting of local body polls, the feeling of alienation has not ebbed. The Taliban's rise in Afghanistan is fodder for Pakistan's ISI to again work on the religious sensitivities of Kashmiri Muslims and that is the challenge for the Indian security agencies now.

Iran's gamble with Taliban

Shahram Akbarzadeh

The Talibans takeover of Afghanistan has led some to draw comparisons with the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. This is not an accurate comparison. The 1979 Revolution was a popular revolt, while the 2021 Taliban victory was a military take over. The Taliban do not have popular support in Afghanistan. They managed to walk into Kabul because the Afghan armed forces and political establishment had lost the will to fight. And that was the outcome of a growing belief in Afghanistan that Kabul could not withstand the Taliban advance. So self-preservation meant that local leaders simply let the Taliban walk into their cities and settlements.Although the leadership of the Taliban has learned to make noises not as pungent to the international community as its earlier avatar, the common Talib remains bigoted youth grounded in intolerance and a very

conservative interpretation of Islam. Even if those leaders who were based in Doha talk about tolerance and inclusiveness, the support base remains extremely conservative. This will bear heavily on the future direction of the Taliban and the policies it will adopt. Taliban is essentially a Deobandi Sunni group with the political agenda of imposing Sharia of the Hanafi School. That is an existential problem for Shias.

In fact, Iran nearly went to war with the Taliban in 1998 when the Taliban killed Iranian diplomats in Mazar-i-Sharif. This time around, Iran has been very practical in its relations with the Taliban. Iran established ties with the Taliban because it saw them as a useful tool to undermine the US in Afghanistan. And the US decision to withdraw was celebrated as a victory. But this presents difficult questions for Iran. The Taliban has been sectarian in its outlook and deliberately anti-Shia. Iran hopes that its new ties with the Taliban will prevent the revival of an anti-Iran policy.

The Iranian Supreme Leader has insisted that the Taliban have changed. But these hopes may be misplaced. While the Taliban have made all the right noises about having an inclusive government, there is little evidence that they will remain so 'flexible' once all foreign troops are out and international attention shifts away from Afghanistan. The very clear risk for Iran is that the Taliban will establish close ties with Saudi Arabia. Riyadh was among the handful of states that recognized the Taliban in power in 1996. It is not difficult to see why Riyadh would establish ties with the Taliban again. There is an obvious sectarian affinity between Saudi Arabia and the Taliban. This is a new opportunity for Saudi Arabia to gain some leverage against Iran. The regional rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia could escalate in a new arena, and Iran would be on the back foot here.

(Shahram Akbarzadeh is a Research Professor of Middle East & Central Asian Politics. He held the prestigious ARC Future Fellowship between 2013-2016. All views expressed are personal.)

international

NZ SUPERMARKET 'TERROR ATTACK' LEAVES PERPETRATOR DEAD

Auckland | Agencies

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern on Friday confirmed that the violent attack that took place at the New Lynn supermarket in Auckland was a "terrorist attack" carried out by a Sri Lankan national who was shot dead by the police.

A spokesperson of ambulance service St Johns said at least six people were injured during the attack that occurred at around 2.40 p.m., including three in critical conditions, reports Xinhua news agency.

"A violent extremist undertook a terrorist attack on innocent New Zealanders at

a New Lynn Countdown in Auckland," Ardern told a press conference in Wellington.

"This was a violent attack. It was senseless and I'm sorry it happened," she said, adding that the police shot the offender within roughly a minute of the attack happening.

The attacker was a Sri Lankan national who arrived in New Zealand in 2011 and has been closely monitored by the New Zealand Police from 2016 for his Islamic State-inspired ideology, according to Ardern.

However, it is unknown whether this man is a New Zealand citizen.

New Zealand Police Commissioner Andrew Coster also confirmed at the press conference that the individual behind the attack was under heavy surveillance over "concerns about his ideology". The offender was acting alone and there was no further threat to the public, said Coster.

The person travelled from where he lived in Glen Eden to Countdown at LynnMall in Western Auckland, and was closely watched by surveillance teams. He entered the Countdown supermarket where he obtained a knife.

Surveillance teams were as close as they could be, and when the commotion began they acted, according to Coster.

When the man approached them with the knife, he was shot and killed, said Coster.

Armed police have blocked off the roads nearby and at least 10 police vehicles were currently around the mall, where the supermarket is located.

CHINA IS OUR MAIN PARTNER, WE CARE VERY MUCH ABOUT SILK ROAD: TALIBAN

New Delhi | Agencies

Zabihullah Mujahid, the official spokesman for the Taliban regime, told an Italian newspaper that China was "our main partner and represents a fundamental and extraordinary opportunity for us as the Chinese government is ready to invest and rebuild our country", the Guardian reported.

Mujahid told the La Repubblica newspaper that the Taliban "care a lot about the 'One Belt, One Road' project. We own rich copper mines, which, thanks to the Chinese, will be modernised. Finally, China represents our ticket to the markets around the world".On Beijing, Mujahid said: "He is our main partner because he is willing to invest. We care very much about the Silk Road.".Asked about the Taliban's relationship with Russia, he told the La Repubblica that relations with Moscow were "mainly political and economic. Russia continues to mediate for us and with us to create the conditions for an international peace", the Guardian reported.The Taliban have promised to allow safe passage out of the country for any foreigners or Afghans left behind by the massive airlift that ended with the withdrawal of the last US troops on Monday, but the Kabul airport remained closed on Thursday.The Taliban are expected to announce a new government in Afghanistan within hours, as chaos in the country deepened and aid experts warned of imminent economic collapse, the report added.

SAUDI ARABIA'S 1ST BATCH OF FEMALE SOLDIERS GRADUATE

Riyadh: The first group of female Saudi Arabian soldiers graduated from the Armed Forces Womens Cadre Training Centre, after completing 14 weeks of basic training that began on May 30.

According to an Arab News report on Thursday, the results of graduates, as well as the names of the most outstanding students and those who had been rewarded with prizes, were announced at a recently-held ceremony, Xinhua news agency reported.

The Kingdom opened military recruitment to women in February this year, as part of the efforts to empower Saudi females.Military ranks from soldier to sergeant are now available for women in the Saudi Arabian Army, Royal Saudi Air Defense, Royal Saudi Navy, Royal Saudi Strategic Missile Force, and Armed Forces Medical Services.

Saudi Arabia started allowing women to drive vehicles in 2018 after a decades-old ban.It was one of many initiatives to integrate women into the Saudi society, especially by providing them with job opportunities.

Storm-triggered rain, floods kill over 40 people in US

New York | Agencies

Torrential rain and floods caused by the powerful storm Ida have claimed more than 40 lives across the northeastern region of the US, according to authorities.New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy announced on Thursday afternoon that 23 people died as a result of the storm, which made landfall inLouisiana as a Category 4 hurricane on Sunday, reports Xinhua news agency.

"The majority of these deaths were individuals who got caught in their vehicles by flooding and were overtaken by the water," Murphy tweeted.

At least 12 people died in New York City, Mayor Bill de Blasio said.Among them, four women, three men and a two-year-old boy died in the basements of residential homes in separate flooding incidents in Queens, according to an NBC report, citing New York Police Department Commissioner Dermot Shea.Many commuters were stranded overnight in the

New York subway stations, some sleeping on benches with service suspended and no way to get to their destinations, according to local media reports. Central Park in New York City on Wednesday recorded 3.15 inches of rainfall in just one hour, surpassing the previous recorded high of 1.94 inches in one hour during Tropical Storm Henri on August 21. There were three people reportedly killed in Pennsylvania, one in Maryland and one in Connecticut. Authorities also located the body of a Virginia resident missing in flooding earlier this week.

58 KILLED IN LARGE SCALE HOUTHI ATTACKS

Sanaa | Agencies

The Houthi militia have launched large-scale attacks against Yemen's government forces stationed in the country's oil-rich province of Marib, which killed 58 people from both sides, a military official said. "Several areas and positions controlled by the government forces were heavily attacked by the Houthis who are expanding their military operations aimed at capturing Marib," the official told Xinhua news agency on Thursday.Ferocious battles are still taking place between the two warring sides in various areas of Marib amid intensified airstrikes, the source said.During the past 48 hours, 40 Houthis and 18 soldiers of the Saudi-backed Yemeni government forces were killed, he confirmed.He clarified that scores of the Houthi fighters were left injured as warplanes of the Saudi Arabia-led coalition continued striking their positions in Marib.

Another official of the government forces told Xinhua that "a series of Saudi-led airstrikes largely participated in aborting the Houthi offensive against Marib".

He said that "hundreds of new Houthi fighters from other northern provinces were dispatched to Marib as reinforcements for the rebel militia".The Houthis also intensified their random shelling against the government-controlled areas in Marib's southern part, causing civilian casualties, according to the official.In February, the Houthis began a major offensive on Marib in an attempt to seize control of the oil-rich province, the government's last northern stronghold.

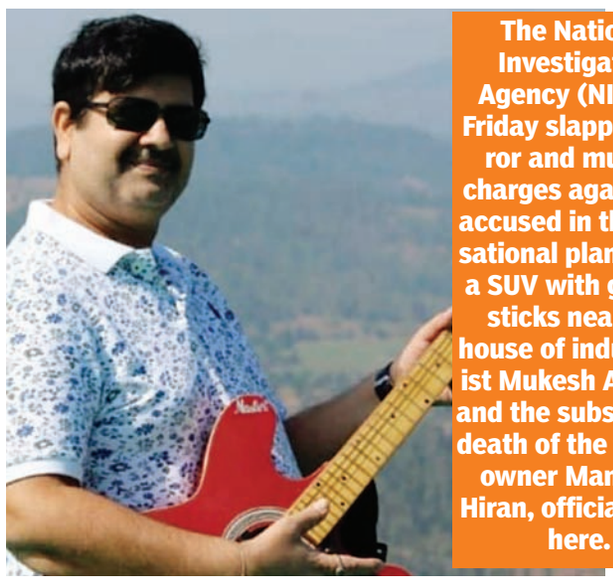
The UN has warned that the offensive on Marib, which hosts nearly 1 million internally displaced people, could lead to a major humanitarian catastrophe.

Yemen's civil war flared up in late 2014 when the Iran-backed Houthi group seized control of much of the country's north and forced the internationally recognised government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi out of the capital Sanaa.

The Saudi-led Arab coalition intervened in the Yemeni conflict in March 2015 to support Hadi's government.

NIA SLAPS TERROR, MURDER CHARGES ON 10 ACCUSED IN ANTILIA, HIRAN CASES

Quaid Najmi | Mumbai



The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Friday slapped terror and murder charges against 10 accused in the sensational planting of a SUV with gelatin sticks near the house of industrialist Mukesh Ambani and the subsequent death of the vehicle owner Mansukh Hiran, officials said here.

The voluminous charge sheet, filed with the Special NIA Court in Mumbai, has named the 10 accused in the twin cases that rocked the nation after they came to light in February-March this year.

They accused are dismissed police officials Sachin H. Vaze and Vinayak B. Shinde, both from Thane, and Mumbaikars - Naresh R. Gor of Grant Road, Hisamuddin Kazi of Jogeshwari, Sunil D. Mane, Santosh A. Shelar and Manish V. Soni, all from Malad, Anand P. Jadhav and Pradeep R. Sharma, both of Andheri, Satish T. Mothkuri of Goregaon, said the NIA. Taking a serious view of the twin cases which triggered a massive political row, all the accused have been slapped with Indian Penal Code sections pertaining to murder, cheating, conspiracy, besides various sections of the Arms Act, the Explosive Substance Act, and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

"The NIA has taken a very strong cognizance of the case given its ramifications. Besides the serious charges under IPC, they have also invoked terror charges against the accused," prominent criminal lawyer J.P. Mishra told correspondent.On the likely punishment, Mishra said that if proven guilty, the accused could face a maximum of life imprisonment since there was no explosion, and a minimum of life term or death sentence in the Hiran murder case.The IPC sections span criminal conspiracy, destroying evidence to escape the consequences, negligence with explosives, abduction with intent to kill, extortion with threats of death or physical harm, grabbing property, criminal breach of trust by public servant, forgery and forging documents of electronic evidence to pass them off as genuine, possession of a fake seal to commit forgery, common intentions, etc. "Under the UAPA, the NIA has invoked sections pertaining to terrorism, terror conspiracy and being members of a terror group. These are very serious charges slapped on the accused and attract heavy punishment," Mishra said.

The NIA has also referred to the three cases originally filed by the Mumbai Police at Gamdevi Police Station on the Scorpio SUV with explosives, planted on the intervening night of February 24/25 and discovered on the afternoon of February 25, along with a threat note issued to the Chairman of a top business group. It has also taken note of the FIR lodged by Vikhroli Police Station pertaining to the theft of the SUV and the death case registered by the Mumbra Police (Thane district) after Hiran's body was recovered from the marshes of Thane Creek on March 5.

"During investigations, incriminating evidences came to fore against the 10 arrested accused involved in various stages of conspiracy of placing the explosive-laden SUV, its theft and commission of murder of Mansukh Hiran. Further investigations are on," said an NIA official.

Nirupam meets Rahul Gandhi, discusses Maha politics

Former Mumbai Congress President Sanjay Nirupam met Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in New Delhi and discussed Maharashtra and Mumbai politics ahead of the BMC elections.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

After the meeting he said that, "after a long time I met Rahulji and discussed political issues of Maharashtra and Mumbai."

Nirupam who was the Mumbai Congress President till the Lok Sabha election but quit after the poll debacle has been a bitter critic of the Congress-Shiv Sena alliance. When asked about his discussion on the issue he said, "I can't reveal what was discussed but we have discussed major political issues in the state and I can't tell you more than that."

Nirupam had the meeting before the crucial BMC election where the Shiv Sena has been ruling the local body for a long time. The Congress is still undecided about the elections about whether to go in alliance or contest separately. Though Maharashtra Congress President Nana Patole has given a statement about contesting separately in the next election which was backed by Nirupam as well.But the MRCC which is headed by Bhai Jagtap has not given any clarity on the BMC polls. While the BJP is the single largest party, it is now pitted against the Shiv Sena. In the 227 member BMC, the Congress has 33 seats and the Shiv Sena has 65 while the BJP has 105. The election is slated for next year.

Boat stuck on rocks, crewman rescued after 30 hrs

Team Absolute | Palghar (Maharashtra)

The Indian Coast Guard on Friday rescued a lone crew member of a mini-barge which broke from its moorings near Ghodbunder and hit the rocks off Palghar coast, officials said here.

Resuming the rescue operation this morning, an ICG helicopter finally rescued the crew member -- identified as Rafique Shaikh -- and handed him over to the Palghar Police for further investigations.

As per preliminary information, the mini-barge had broken from its mooring when the master had stepped ashore for a meal near Ghodbunder on Thursday morning.

The tides and currents took the vessel and it got wedged in the rocks near the Amalapada lighthouse in the Arabian Sea, around 4 kms off Palghar coast, sparking a security scare on Thursday.

Further probe is underway, including whether the vessel master lodged a police complaint or not as multiple agencies got involved.

Smaller fund houses outpace major players in 2021

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The mutual fund space has grown over the pandemic and interestingly so far in 2021, several smaller companies have gained momentum and outpaced the growth of established major players.

In tandem with the rise in the equity market, small players made giant strides during the year.

Equity schemes of fund houses like Quant Mutual Fund, ITI Mutual Fund, PPFAS Mutual have been among the best performing schemes so far in the year.

The assets under management of Quant witnessed over five-fold rise during January-July 2021. Its AUM in December 2020 stood at Rs 521 crore and by July-end it reached Rs 2,842 crore, showed data from primemfdatabase.com. The AUM of ITI Mutual Fund rose over 100 per cent to Rs 1,879 crore and PPFAS Mutual Fund's AUM also nearly doubled to Rs 14,318 crore. Some of the schemes of relatively new fund houses have given blockbuster returns with several of them coming from Quant Mutual Fund. As per the market estimates, ICICI

Prudential Technology Fund, Quant Tax Plan Fund, PGIM India Midcap Opportunities Fund, Quant Infrastructure Fund and Quant Active Fund are the top five equity funds giving best returns ranging from 80 per cent to over 100 per cent.

Kotak Mahindra Mutual Fund, a major player in the segment, has the highest AUM of over Rs 2.58 lakh crore as of July 2021, 13 per cent higher than Rs 22.78 lakh crore, the Prime Database data showed.

More and more retail investors in the last one and half years have come to the capital market as various other kinds of investment markets are not providing the investment returns that they are used to.

The number of mutual fund investors in the country has doubled to 2.39 crore as of June 30, 2021 from 1.19 crore at the end of March 2017, thereby indicating that pandemic has actually had no impact on the inflows, he added.The mutual fund industry AUM rose 4.9 per cent in July 2021 to a record Rs 35.3 lakh crore due to inflows into both equity funds and debt fundsAn ICICI Direct Research report said that IT funds have been consistent outperformers in the last two to three years as the growth outlook improved for the sector in the post Covid world resulting in valuation re-rating of most stocks.

The sectors or segments like infrastructure, PSUs that lagged behind in the early part of the rally, have started to gain traction indicating the healthy trend of sector rotation, it said.

No coercive action against Varavara Rao till his plea on Sep 6: NIA

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Friday told the Bombay High Court in an oral statement that it will not take any coercive action against poet-activist Varavara Rao till September 6 when his plea for medical bail extension will be heard.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Rao, an accused in the Elgar Parishad-Maoist links case and currently on interim medical bail granted by HC in February this year, is supposed to surrender before the Taloja prison authorities on September 5.

Rao's counsel, senior advocate Anand Grover, sought an extension of bail before a bench of Justices SS Shinde and NJ Jamadar on Friday. However, due to paucity of time, the matter could not be heard. HC said it will hear Rao's plea on September 6.

Grover then urged HC to ensure no coercive action was taken against Rao until then.

Additional Solicitor General Anil Singh, who appeared for NIA, in an oral statement said, "We will not take any coercive action until the next hearing." On February 22 this year, a bench of Justices SS Shinde and Manish Pitale had granted Rao (82) interim medical bail on "humanitarian grounds." At the time, Rao, suffering from multiple ailments, was undergoing treatment at Nanavati hospital in Mumbai after being shifted out of Taloja jail following the court's intervention.

At the time, the HC had said if it did not grant Rao medical bail, it would be abdicating its duty to protect the principles of human rights, and a citizen's fundamental rights to life and health.The bench had imposed stringent bail conditions, including a direction to Rao to stay within the jurisdiction of the Mumbai NIA court for the period he was out on bail, as well as forbidding him from establishing any contact with his co-accused in the case.

CHIDAMBARAM POSES 20 TOUGH QUESTIONS ON RS 6 LAKH CR NMP

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Senior Congress leader and former Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram on Friday posed 20 questions on the Centre's proposed National Monetization Pipeline (NMP) intended to 'monetise' certain assets and earn Rs 6,00,000 crore revenue over the next four years.

Stating that the government should answer the questions, he demanded to know the NMP objectives and whether it was solely intended to raise the revenues over the next four years. Referring to the criteria adopted upfront to identify the PSUs that would be disinvested or privatised during the previous UPA government, Chidambaram queried whether the same is the case with the current NDA regime.

Pointing out that for infra projects like roads/highways, a PPP policy already exists, he asked what is the difference, if any, between this (PPP) model and the one that would be adopted by the Centre under the NMP, while addressing the media in the country's commercial capital.

Moreover, if an asset is 'monetised' for 30-50 years, what is the value of the piece of paper that declares the government to be the 'owner' of that asset, what kind of asset will be returned to the government at the end of the period or would it be a "fully depreciated asset" worth practically nothing.

Grief-stricken Shehnaaz runs towards hearse calling out Sidharth's name

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a heart-breaking video doing the rounds on social media, Shehnaaz Gill, the rumoured girlfriend of Sidharth Shukla, is seen running towards the hearse, calling out the late actor's name.

The 10-second video has been put up by a fan club going by the name Shehnaaz_ki_updates on Twitter. The clip, which currently has 188,000 views on the micro-blogging website, shows Shehnaaz calling out 'Sidharth' as she is seen running towards the hearse, which was carrying the mortal remains of the actor.

Shehnaaz's brother Shehbaaz can be seen walking behind his mourning sister. Sidharth and Shehnaaz, who have never openly spoken about their relationship, were popularly called as "SidNaaz", a term coined by their fans during their stint in the show 'Bigg Boss 13'.

A popular face on television, Sidharth died at the age of 40 after suffering a massive cardiac arrest on Thursday. His mortal remains were taken to Cooper Hospital.

The last rights took place on Friday in Oshiwara crematorium on Friday. Sidharth is survived by his mother and two sisters.

Mumbai's yucky Mahim Beach gets swank Rs 4 cr makeover

The grimy Mahim Beach, one of the smaller and less glamorous cousins of Chowpatty and Juhu beaches, just got a Rs 4 crore, environment-friendly makeover, along with the city's first 30-metre-tall beach watch-tower, making it a strong contender for tourists, BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) officials said here on Friday.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Tourism Minister Aditya Thackeray, in the presence of Mumbai Mayor Kishori Pednekar, Additional BMC Commissioner Dr Sanjeev Kumar and others, inaugurated the 200-metre long small beach spread across around 5,000 square metres, which had so long been virtually wasted as a permanent garbage dump.

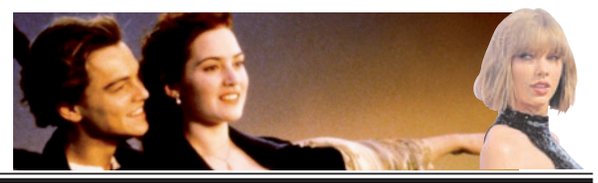
"Mumbai has now got a new beach. Its area is much less compared with the others like Chowpatty or Juhu beaches, but it has got the best of new amenities after the 'Mahim Beach Beautification Project' was completed," a Assistant Municipal Commissioner Kiran Dighavkar told reporter.

For decades, the approach to the Mahim sea stretch was clogged by illegally parked trucks, or other big and small vehicles, the northern part was encroached by several hutments, the wall of the Mahim Police Colony on the south was crumbling, and the entire seafront had become a den of local criminals.

"We first removed the five encroachments by giving them alternative accommodation, cleared the approach route of all obstacles, cleared up all the garbage, removed all stones, big or small boulders and finally made it a smooth, clean, sandy, people-friendly beach," said Dighavkar.

A dilapidated coastal retaining wall to prevent washing out of soil, has been rebuilt and the sand has been filled on the beach to a height of 5 feet, to cover the gaps and also prevent future erosion.

The sand was brought and dumped here from the excavation work of the ongoing Mumbai Coastal Road project, saving a bagful of money for the BMC, which carried out the major beautification project. The new retaining wall is stronger after the repairs, and now dons paintings depicting the cultural aspects of Mumbai and the Mahim region, and the beach is now easily approachable through a stony footpath.



DWAYNE JOHNSON, RYAN REYNOLDS, GAL GADOT TO STAR IN NETFLIX'S NEXT

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood stars Dywane Johnson, Ryan Reynolds and Gal Gadot will be seen headlining streaming giant Netflix's new movie titled 'Red Notice'. Netflix officially released the teaser of the upcoming film 'Red Notice', which is written and directed by Rawson Marshall Thurber. The film is slated to release on November 12.When an Interpol-issued Red Notice, the highest-level warrant to hunt and capture the world's most wanted, goes out, the FBI's top profiler John Hartley played by Dwayne Johnson is on the case.The film is produced by Beau Flynn for Flynn Picture Co, Dwayne Johnson, Dany Garcia, and Hiram Garcia for Seven Bucks Productions and Rawson Marshall Thurber.

The action comedy film marks the third collaboration between Johnson and Thurber after the 2016 film 'Central Intelligence' and 'Skyscraper'.

Kendall Jenner: Creative director of fashion label

Los Angeles | Agencies

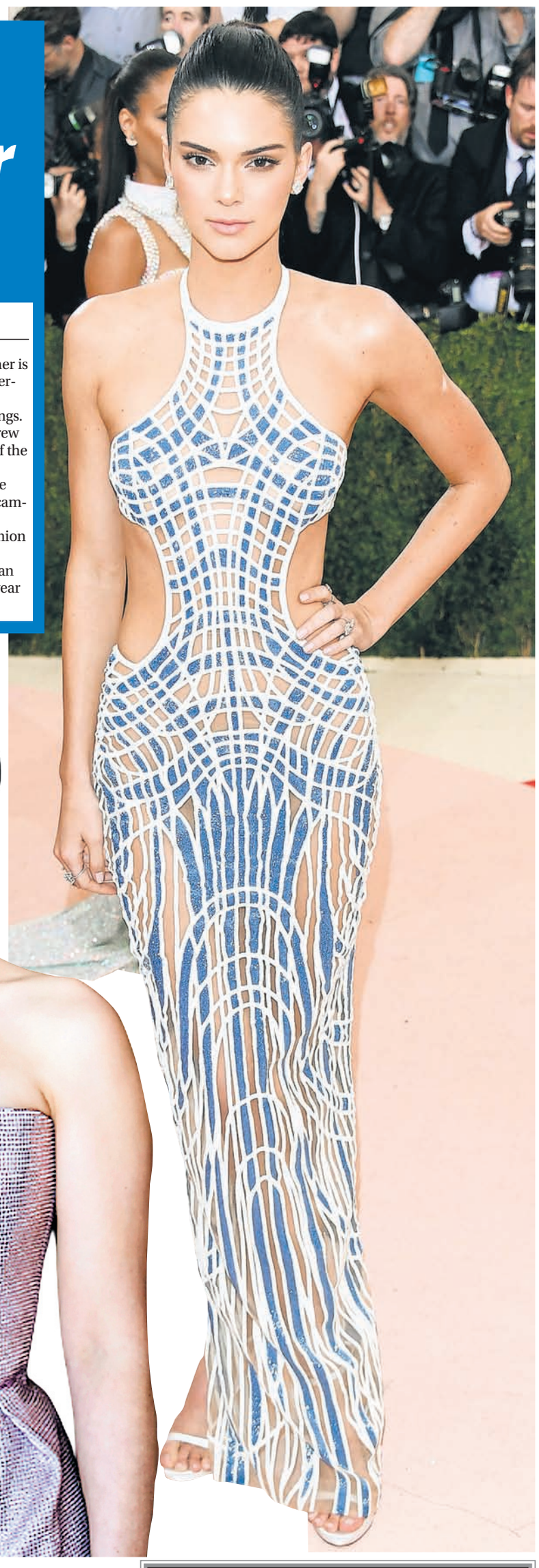
Supermodel and 'Keeping Up With The Kardashians' star Kendall Jenner is now a creative director of a fashion label FWRD. The 25-year-old supermodel, whose edit is available to shop now via FWRD.com, will work with designers and brands to shape the boutique e-commerce site's offerings.

In a statement posted on the online retailer's website, Kendall said: "I grew up loving fashion and have been incredibly fortunate to work with some of the most brilliant people in this business."

She added: "As FWRD's Creative Director, I am excited to help curate the site's offering with emerging designers and brands. Check out my FWRD campaign shot by Glen Luchford and styled by Carlos Nazario."

News of Kendall's latest role comes after she was hailed the "biggest fashion icon" in the world.

Kendall launched a limited-time 72-hour capsule collection with German online retailer About You last month with a second planned for later this year and she's been praised by those involved.



No more plastic surgeries to meet 'ridiculous beauty standards': Emilia Clarke

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Emilia Clarke's near-death experiences made her appreciate ageing.

The 'Game of Thrones' star underwent life-saving surgery after she suffered two brain aneurysms in 2011 and 2013, reports aceshowbiz.com.

Clarke feels lucky to be able to grow old and wants to be able to embrace the ageing process naturally after her brushes with death.

"The happy moments and being happy is what you're going to see on your death bed. You're not going to remember the times when you took that super cute selfie," Clarke told People magazine.

She added: "After the surgery, because I felt so scared and under-confident, I was putting all of that into how I looked. As I got older, I realised that people are at their most beautiful when they're not thinking about themselves and considering their own beauty."

The actress also said "getting older is a guarantee" so she doesn't feel negatively about ageing."I didn't have a carpe diem 'seize the moment' situation when I had my brain haemorrhages," she said.

She added: "It's happening. Getting older is a guarantee. I think the women who look most beautiful are the women who don't look younger."

The 34-year-old actress isn't a fan of cosmetic procedures to help her keep her youthful looks, as she has no interest in "ridiculous beauty standards"."The idea of me putting my face in the hands of someone else with a knife, no, no, no," she said.

ZOE KRAVITZ 'HAVING FUN' IN ROMANCE WITH CHANNING TATUM

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Zoe Kravitz was recently reported to have struck up a romance with the "Magic Mike" star Channing Tatum, and it has now been claimed the pair are enjoying their "easy and natural" relationship. A source told 'Entertainment Tonight': "(Zoe and Channing are)having so much fun together. They like each other and things are easy and natural between them. They're cute together. They've enjoyed being out and about together."

The two first sparked romance rumours in August when they were spotted on a bike ride around New York City, before later being photographed leaving a supermarket together.

A second insider said at the time: "Zoe and Channing are dating. It started out as a friendship and eventually turned to be more. The duo was recently spotted at a restaurant in New York City being very affectionate." Kravitz finalised her divorce from actor Karl Glusman after a judge signed off on the paperwork on August 23, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

Drake's 'Certified Lover Boy' album out

Toronto | Agencies

Drake's much-awaited album 'Certified Lover Boy' was released on Friday. After a cryptic video last week on ESPN's 'SportsCenter', Drake had confirmed the release date of his long-awaited new album 'Certified Lover Boy'.

'Certified Lover Boy' is the Canadian rap star's sixth studio effort and the follow-up to 2018's 'Scorpion', which hit No. 1 on the Billboard 200 and on charts around the globe. Later, he was named by the IFPI as the world's best-selling recording artiste of 2018.Drake is the highest-certified digital singles artiste ever in the United States, having moved 142 million units based on combined sales and on-demand streams. The pop star has won four Grammy awards along with several other accolades.On August 18, Drake revealed he contracted Covid-19 amid the pandemic, which led to temporary hair loss, a noted side-effect of the virus. Drake was also one of the first celebrities to publicly test for the virus in March 2020, having been in contact with Kevin Durant, who had tested positive.

Hollywood stars condemn controversial Texas abortion law

Los Angeles | Agencies

A string of Hollywood celebrities such as Reese Witherspoon, Kerry Washington and Alyssa Milano, among more than 100 stars, have expressed their anger over the new Texas abortion law.

The US Supreme Court on Wednesday night denied a request to issue emergency relief blocking Texas' new law that bans abortion at six weeks that opponents say effectively eliminates access to abortions statewide, reports deadline.com.

A group of prominent actors, musicians and other artists and companies swiftly responded to the news on social media.

Witherspoon, Milano, Dua Lipa, Kerry Washington, St. Vincent, Eva Longoria Baston, Bad Robot and P!nk were among them.Many shared an image with the text: "I stand in solidarity with Texans & people everywhere seeking reproductive freedom."

Washington also shared a link to a Planned Parenthood petition which, among other things, maintains that "health care - including safe, legal abortion - is a human right."The petition also warns that "the Supreme Court is months away from hearing a case that challenges the protections of Roe v. Wade."Others who have supported the sentiment are named below. The vast majority of the signatories are women. The names include: America Ferrera, Amy Schumer,Bella Hadid, Cyndi Lauper, Cynthia Nixon, Elizabeth Banks, Eva Longoria, Jameela Jamil, Kat Dennings, Kate Walsh, Mandy Moore, Mia Moretti, Michelle Monaghan, Mindy Kaling, Padma Lakshmi, Rachel Goldenberg, Rita Moreno, Tracee Ellis Ross, V Ensler, VÉRITÉ, and Yvette Nicole Brown, among many others.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY

Amy Day

FOURTH TEST: INDIA STAY AT ENGLAND'S HEELS

London | Agencies

India fought their way back on the second day of the fourth Test at The Oval to keep at England's heels by first restricting host to a lead of 99 and then gnawing at it with an unbeaten 43-run stand between opening batsmen K.L. Rahul (batting 22) and Rohit Sharma (batting 20).

India still trail by 56 runs against Joe Root's side which had made 290 in first innings. India had made 191 in their first essay.

The day began well for the Indians as pacer Umesh Yadav, who had removed Joe Root on Thursday evening, picking the wickets of overnight batsmen, the nightwatchman Craig Overton and Dawid Malan to reduce England to 62 for five early in the first session.

However, local star Ollie Pope (81) thwarted Kohli's men as he played with a straight bat and on the merit of deliveries. He stitched two crucial partnerships to stabilise England.

First he added 89 for the sixth wicket with wicketkeeper-batsman Jonny

Bairstow (37), who was dismissed by Mohammed Siraj. Then, he added 71 for the seventh wicket with vice-captain Moeen Ali (35) as England went past India's total.

Pope was excellent off his pads and clipped anything strayed on the leg-side to the fence. Above that, the right-handed batsman hit the ball straight down the ground with ease. The Indian bowlers found very little swing with even the pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah not getting much help. Bumrah, otherwise tight, leaked plenty of runs towards the end of England innings.

Even as Ali threw his wicket away to spinner Ravindra Jadeja after being well set, Pope found company in Chris Woakes (50 off 60 balls) who has been recalled to the England side.

The right-handed Pope added 28 with Woakes before he chopped a Shardul Thakur delivery onto his stumps.Ollie Robinson followed soon after but Woakes hung around and smashed crucial runs, adding 35 for the last wicket with James Anderson (1 not out).

The 32-year-old Woakes, who had last played a Test for England just over a year ago, has been an important addition to the England side. He picked 4/55 in the first innings and then chipped in with the crucial half-century.

India opener Sharma got a life after Rory Burns, the fielder in slips, failed to anticipate a catch from the edge of his bat.But other than that, the Indians looked comfortable during their stay for 16 overs in the last session.

Brief scores (Day 2, tea)

India 191 all out and 43/0 (Rohit Sharma batting 20, K.L. Rahul batting 22) vs

England 290 all out in 84 overs (Ollie Pope 81, Chris Woakes 50, Jonny Bairstow 37, Moeen Ali 35, Dawid Malan 31, Umesh Yadav 3/76, Jasprit Bumrah 2/67, Ravindra Jadeja 2/36)

Paralympics: Harvinder wins historic bronze in archery

Tokyo | Agencies

He had already won two shootouts in the day. So when he faced another in the bronze medal match in Mens Individual Recurve Open at the Tokyo Paralympic Games, India's Harvinder Singh was not fazed and approached it confidently.

South Korea's Kim Min Su took aim first and managed to shoot an 8 and Harvinder responded with a perfect 10 to win a historic bronze medal -- the first-ever medal for India in either Olympic or Paralympic Games. It was also India's third medal in the Paralympics on Friday and the 13th overall in Tokyo.

Harvinder, who had finished 21st in the ranking round, won three elimination duels on Friday before his storming run was halted by Kevin Mather of the United States, the eventual gold-medallist, in the semi-finals. He regrouped himself and went on to claim the bronze medal in very difficult conditions.In the bronze medal match, Harvinder started by winning the first set 26-24 but the Korean came back to level scores 2-2 by taking the second set 29-27.

In the third set, Harvinder tallied a score of 28 with two 10s while Kim managed 25. Leading 4-2, Harvinder had to win the next to seal the medal but they shared one point each as both managed a score of 25 each in the fourth set.

In the fifth set, Harvinder scored 26 and Kim edged him by one point to take the duel into shootout.

In the shootout, Kim shot an 8 and Harvinder a 10, the Indian winning his first Paralympic Games bronze medal.Earlier, he had defeated Bato Tsydendorzhiev of RPC in the pre-quarterfinals and had got the better of Stefano Travisani of Italy in Round of 16 in shootouts.

He had won two shootouts to win a gold medal in the Para Asian Games in Jakarta, in 2018.Last year, Harvinder had converted his farm in Punjab into an archery range to practice during the nation-wide lockdown. Though it was for a short period as the camp was started at the Sports Authority of India's Centre at Sonipat. However, the facilities helped him gear up for Tokyo 2020 during the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

That practice has paid rich dividend as Harvinder Singh bagged a historic medal that is sure to give Indian archery a big boost.

Javelin will become as popular as cricket bat: Sports Minister Anurag Thakur

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur on Friday felicitated four Paralympic Games medallists -- including javelin throw F64 gold medallist Sumit Antil -- who returned from Tokyo late on Thursday night.

While addressing a small gathering here, the Minister also expressed hope that the javelin will become as popular as the cricket bat in India. Thakur was referring to the four javelin throw medals won by Indians in the Paralympic Games soon after Neeraj Chopra's historic gold medal in the Olympics.

"I hope javelin in India will now become as famous as a cricket bat," he said. The athletes who were also present

were Devendra Jhajharia (Javelin Throw F46 Silver Medal), Yogesh Kathuniya (Discus Throw F56 Silver Medal) and Sharad Kumar (High Jump T63 Bronze medal)."On National Sports Day, India clinched four medals and there can't be a better tribute than this to Major Dhyan Chand ji. There is a lot of hard work by the athletes combined with the support given by the Government to the National Sports Federation and athletes. Prime Minister Narendra Modi Ji's encouragement has been a driving force," Thakur said.

"Government will improve the sports ecosystem in the country and through schemes like TOPS, it will keep supporting the athletes (both core and development) in an unprecedented way," he said. Minister of State, Youth Affairs and Sports, Nisith Pramanik and ministry officials were also present on the occasion.Jhajharia and Sharad Kumar spoke of the support provided by the Government in their Paralympic Games campaign. "In the last four years, the Government has supported us in a great way.

Good, friendly & supportive environment helps with good mindset: Avani

Niharika Raina

Shooter Avani Lekhara said on Friday that a good, friendly and supportive environment helps in readying a good mindset during the events in the ongoing Paralympics. She also considers herself very thankful for having a supportive team.

The 19-year-old Avani won the bronze medal in the 50m rifle 3 position SH1 event at the Tokyo Paralympics. Earlier, she had won the gold medal in the 10m air rifle standing SH1 event. Avani is now the first woman and second Indian overall to claim multiple medals in the same edition of the Paralympics.

"I have a very wonderful team. My coaches JP Nautiyal sir, Subhash Rana sir, Suma mam, my support staff here, all the team members and other athletes. We have a very good environment, friendly and very supportive. So, that helps a lot in readying a good mindset," said Avani in a virtual interaction organised by Eurosport and the Paralympic

Committee of India (PCI).

"In between changeovers when I was doing something wrong or some problem occurred, Suma mam motivated me a lot and has worked hard with me. So, it is like a team effort and I am very thankful that I have got a wonderful team like this," added Avani.Avani qualified at second place for the final of 50m rifle 3 positions SH1 event with a score of 1176, including 51 inner 10s. In the final, she shot a 10.5 compared to 9.9 by Iryna Shchetnik of Ukraine in the bronze shoot-off. After shooting 10.2, the total of 445.9 was enough to give her the bronze medal.

However, Avani was not satisfied with the bronze. "I was not satisfied with the gold only (laughed). I always wanted to fire my last shot better. This bronze is definitely not satisfying."

She revealed that her plan was to do well in the standing positions of the final. "My standing is stronger than other two positions. The plan was to give my best in standing. I just concentrated on myself and gave my full focus in standing position. Then it went like that.

"From the starting it was not that good because that's what finals do to you, you become nervous. I had never won a medal in 3P. This is my first international medal in 3P. So, I was more nervous. But I just kept my focus on the shots, like the last match when I was focusing on one shot at a time. And it

Bangladesh beat NZ by four wickets to take 2-0 series lead

Dhaka | Agencies

Bangladesh defeated New Zealand by four runs in the second T20 International to take 2-0 lead in the five-match series here at the Sher-e Bangla Stadium on Friday.

On a wicket, which did not support strokeplay, the home team scored 141/6 in the allotted 20 overs. Openers Mohammed Naim (39) and Liton Das (33) added 59 in just under 10 overs. Captain Mahmudullah scored unbeaten 37 off 32 deliveries. The 21-year-old Rachin Ravindra, who was playing only his second T20 International and was named after Rahul Dravid and Sachin Tendulkar took three wickets for 22 runs for the Kiwis in his four overs with his left-arm spin.

In response, the Kiwis were

restricted to 137/5. Captain Tom Latham top-scored with 65 off 49 balls. Spinners Mehedy Hasan (2/12), Nasum Ahmed (1/17) and Shakib Al Hasan (2/29) made things difficult for the New Zealanders as they conceded 58 runs in 11 overs and shared five wickets.

Brief scores

Bangladesh 141/6 in 20 overs (Mohammad Naim 39, Liton Das 33, Mahmudullah Riyad 37 not out, Rachin Ravindra 3/22) beat New Zealand 137/5 in 20 overs (Tom Latham 65 not out, Mehedy Hasan 2/12, Shakib Al Hasan 2/29)

GOA TO NAME ATHLETIC STADIUM AFTER MILKHA SINGH

Panaji: The Goa government will rename the Bambolim athletic stadium located near Panaji after the 'flying Sikh' and ace Indian athelete, late Milkha Singh, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said on Friday. "The Bambolim stadium will be named after the flying Sikh, late Milkha Singh. A formal decision will be taken in some days," Sawant said. Singh, 91, died due to Covid-related complications in June this year.

On August 31, the state government had also named a hockey stadium near Mapusa town in north Goa after legendary Olympian Major Dhyan Chand.

PARALYMPICS: CANOEIST PRACHI YADAV FINISHES 8TH IN FINAL

Tokyo:Indian canoeist Prachi Yadav failed to get into medal contention in the women's Va'a Single 200m VL2, finishing eighth and last in the Tokyo Paralympic Games on Friday.

Prachi, who had qualified for the final by finishing third in the semifinal race earlier on Friday, clocked 1:07.329 in the final and finished 10.301 seconds behind eventual gold medallist Emma Wiggs of Great Britain, who finished the 200m course in 57.028 seconds. Australia's Susan Seipel took silver in 1:01.481 and Great Britain's Jeanette Chippington got bronze in 1:02.149 minutes.

Earlier, Prachi, the 26-year-old from Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh who has paralysis below her waist due to polio and uses her upper body to move the boat, finished third in the semifinal race in 1 minute 07.397 seconds. She was placed behind Great Britain's Jeanette Chippington (1:01.167) and Canada's Brianna Hennessy (1:06.316) in the five-boat race at the Sea Forest Waterway.Friday's timing by Prachi was a big improvement on the 1:11.098 she clocked in the heats. Prachi had finished fourth in Heat 1 that got her a place in the semifinals.Prachi, who switched to para canoing from para-swimming in 2018 and initially started practicing on a makeshift boat designed by her coach Mayank Thakur, trains at the Lower Lake in Bhopal.

US Open: Zverev on course with crushing win over Ramos-Vinolas

New York | Agencies

Germany's Alexander Zverev continued to emerge as a top contender for this year's US Open crown, powering into the third round with a crushing 6-1, 6-0 6-3 win over Spains Albert Ramos-Vinolas.

The world No. 4 has been dominant on serve this week, not offering a single break point opportunity to Sam Querrey in the first round nor left-handed Ramos-Vinolas in Thursday evening's rout, which lasted just 74 minutes. He has dropped just eight points on his first serve through six sets.

"My serve is kind of the key to my game," Zverev said.

"When it's working I'm

playing great. When it's not, I'm losing matches like I did at Wimbledon… It's no secret that my serve is probably the most important shot in my game, and I'm happy with how it's working… The matches are not going to get easier and I will need that to be my weapon.

"I think it was always a problem of mine in the beginning of my career that I always spent a lot of hours, a lot of time in the beginning of Grand Slam tournaments. So it's nice to have kind of two matches… winning [them] in straight sets," Zverev told atptour.com.The Monte Carlo resident earned his 40th match win of the season and extended his winning streak to 13 matches, a run that includes clinching gold at the Tokyo Olympics and his fifth ATP Masters 1000 title at the Western & Southern Open in Cincinnati. The German, who came within two points of seizing his first major in last year's US Open championship match against Dominic Thiem, will next play the winner of No. 31 seed Alexander Bublik, of Kazakhstan, or American Jack Sock.

US Open: Djokovic dismisses Griekspoor in straight sets, enters third round

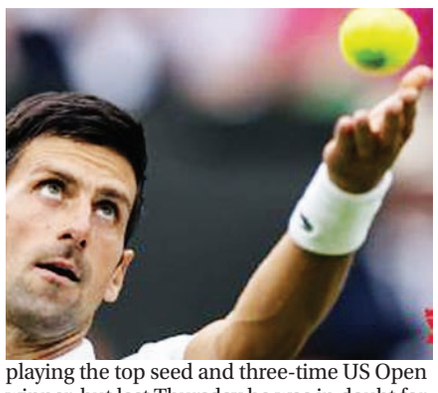
New York | Agencies

World No. 1 Novak Djokovic of Serbia moved closer to completing his Grand Slam dream by dismissing Dutchman Tallon Griekspoor 6-2, 6-3, 6-2 in the second round of the US Open.

Djokovic has won the season's first three majors at the Australian Open, French Open and Wimbledon. The Serbian kept his hopes of lifting the trophy at Flushing Meadows after one hour and 39 minutes.

Djokovic, who surprisingly lost a set in the first round against Holger Vitus Nodskov Rune of Denmark, got back on track against Griekspoor behind 32 winners and just 20 unforced errors in a Thursday evening match. The 34-year-old broke six times from 10 opportunities to triumph."

Great performance. Definitely better than the first-round match," Djokovic said. "Obviously I'm very pleased with the way I came out on the court. I served very well, I found the rhythm on the serve. It was important I came up with the goods." t was a tough challenge for Griekspoor in his first match inside Arthur Ashe Stadium. Not only was he



playing the top seed and three-time US Open winner, but last Thursday he was in doubt for the tournament due to visa issues and the 25-year-old had to practice on clay.Djokovic took full advantage, controlling the action against the world No. 121, who upset big-hitting Jan-Lennard Struff of Germany in the first round. Djokovic, the 20-time major titlist, was not perfect, dropping serve in the second set and facing a 0/40 deficit in one service game in the third -- from which he rallied to hold -- but he was never under pressure.

Google was the first coach of Paralympics silver medallist Praveen Kumar

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Having no knowledge about para-athletics, high jumper Praveen Kumar, who won the silver medal in Tokyo on Friday, depended on Google for basic information about the sport.

I would watch videos of high jump on Google and try and learn from it. There was nobody to teach me. Later, during a district-level meeting, I was told about coach Dr. Satyapal and met him and he agreed to train me," said Praveen Kumar, who won silver in Men's High Jump T44 at the Paralympic Games on Friday.

Asked about his journey thus far, Kumar talked about how he tried his hand at volleyball but fell in love with high jump. Kumar said that initially he did not believe he would reach thus far and be successful in para-athletics.

"I was a volleyball player but got to know about para-athletics and high jump in 2016. I got my initial knowledge by watching videos on Google. It was during a district-level athletics championship that I was told about coach Dr. Satyapal. I went and met him in 2018, he checked about my classifica-

tion and then he agreed to train me," said Kumar.

On Friday, Kumar was a bit low on confidence going for 1.97 metres in Tokyo. There was a slight drizzle in the Olympic Stadium and India's best high jumper Mariyappan Thangavelu had missed the gold medal in the T63 final in similar conditions a few days back. Kumar had all the reasons to be nervous and low on confidence.

But once he cleared 1.97 and the bar was raised to 2.01m and he soared over it easily, Praveen says he was confident of his chances as he was in the top three and thus was sure to get at least a bronze medal. He went for his next attempts with a lot of confidence. "When the bar was set at 1.97, I was a bit low on confidence as I had missed an attempt at that height and was worried whether I will be able to do it or not. I managed to clear it in the next attempt. But once the bar was raised to 2.01 and I cleared it without any issues, my confidence too rose as I was now in the top three and thus assured of a medal. "I went for my next few jumps with a lot of confidence. I decided not to think of any other thing, no other competitors, no rain or slippery conditions, just concentrated on my jumps, I decided that I had to give my best, the rain, the conditions notwithstanding," Kumar said during a media interaction facilitated by the Paralympic Committee of India (PCI) along with Eurosport, the Tokyo 2020 broadcast rights holders for India. Kumar has a personal best of 2.05m which he better on Friday and also set an Asian record with a jump of 2.07 metres.Kumar, who hails from Delhi, said there was a lot of pressure as he attempted to clear 2.10 metres that Great Britain's Jonathan Broom-Edwards, the eventual gold medallist, had already cleared.

Deepika contributes to save acid attack survivor's life

Team Absolute | Agra

Struggling for life, acid attack survivor Bala has found a new hope as star actor Deepika Padukone has extended a helping hand to save her life. The acid attack survivor, who is suffering from a life-threatening kidney ailment, urgently needs a kidney transplant to survive. After the word reached Deepika, she donated a generous amount of Rs 15,00,000 to the 'Save Bala' campaign.

Bala is a real-life star who was also featured in the Deepika Padukone-starrer movie 'Chhapaak', directed by Meghna Gulzar, besides appearing on 'The Kapil Sharm Show'. Her condition is deteriorating every day due to the failure of both her kidneys and she's somehow surviving on dialysis. Being an acid attack survivor, her weakened immunity is already a threat to her life.

Bala still requires further monetary help to come out of this tragedy and hence the Chhanv Foundation is seeking as much support as possible.

The fundraising campaign called 'Save Bala' has been started on the crowdfunding platform 'Milaap'.

Mika Singh replaces Farah Khan as judge on 'Zee Comedy Show'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Rapper Mika Singh has stepped in for Farah Khan on 'Zee Comedy Show' for two weeks starting September 11 as Farah has tested positive for Covid-19. Mika has shot for two episodes with Raveena Tandon and Mallika Sherawat as well this week, but he was missing Farah beside him during the shoot. Mika revealed: "It is unfortunate that Farah tested positive despite being double vaccinated and it clearly proves that you cannot predict anything in the current scenario. I have spoken to her, and it is great to know that she is doing fine, and I really hope she gets well soon. Last time around, I shot for 'Zee Comedy Show' as a special guest, and I really had a gala time with Farah, so I do miss her beside me.""But as you know, the show must go on and with an aim to spread cheer and joy amongst the audience in this gloomy time, we have shot for two episodes with Raveena Tandon and Mallika Sherawat. All the comedians made us laugh out loud and I hope everyone enjoys my presence on the show for two weeks. I will entertain everyone with my music and my witty comments, and I hope they shower the same amount of love on me too." 'Zee Comedy Show' airs on Zee TV.

Neetu Singh Kapoor reveals why she retired from Bollywood at age 20

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Neetu Singh Kapoor has revealed why she retired from Bollywood at an early age, on 'The Kapil Sharma Show'.

The mother-daughter duo of Neetu Singh Kapoor and Riddhima Kapoor Sahani will be the special guests and they will be revealing their life's extraordinary moments.

In a candid conversation, when host Kapil asked Neetu about the maximum films she did between the 70s to 80s, she replied: "Yes, I did maximum films between 1973 to 1980, around 70 to 80. I started at 5 and married at 20, it was 15 years of long experience in working."

When Kapil asked Neetu if she wished to do movies first or marriage to which the actress revealed: "I had nothing against fame because I was a superstar as in when I used to move out from my balcony, there were around 300-400 people standing and cheering baby Sonia. So, to be famous was not a big thing and then Rishi Kapoor came into my life who wanted my time, and due to which it was a bit chaotic to handle both films and Rishi, so I gave up on films."

"As I wanted to rest because I had worked for 15 years in which I used to study, shoot and more. So, it was too hectic in these 15 years of struggle. I married at age 20 and later in a year Riddhima was born that's why we are friends," she concluded. 'The Kapil Sharma Show' airs on Sony Entertainment Television.

Rasika says she finds the short film format challenging

Team Absolute | Mumbai

After several rounds of international festivals, 'The Miniaturist of Junagadh', a short film starring Naseeruddin Shah and Rasika Dugal, is being screened at the Bangalore International Short Film Festival, which concludes on September 5. Talking about the film, Rasika said, "I've always found the medium of short films interestingly challenging. To be able to tell a story in a short time requires cinematic acumen and a strong sense of detail. As an actor, I thrive on those tiny details which don't attract attention to themselves and might even seem inconsequential but go a long way in creating the world of the story. Kaushal has told a riveting story in a beautifully gentle way. This is a special film for me as it gave me the opportunity to act alongside Naseer Saab, who was my teacher at FTII. So, I got to be a student again!"The film is directed by Kaushal Oza.The film has travelled the world with its nomination as Best Short Film at the New York Indian Film Festival and screening at the Cincinnati Indian Film Festival, and it was officially selected for the International Film Festival of South Asia, Toronto and Indian Film Festival, Stuttgart.Now the film is in India to regale its homegrown audiences. Set in 1947, it follows the unravelling of a secret about a beautiful miniature collection that a family is determined to keep.

'Helmet': Protection to be taken in a lighter vein

FILM REVIEW

BY TROY RIBEIRO

(Streaming on Zee5)

Direction: Satram Ramani

Cast: Aparshakti Khurana, Pranutan Bahl, Abhishek Banerjee, Ashish Verma and Ashish Vidyarthi

Duration: 96 minutes

Ratings: **1/2

In our society, 'condom' is a taboo word used in hushed tones, but this film blatantly propagates its usage. Even the title, a synonym for the condom, is aptly applied. Nothing wrong about it. But the story -- or you may say the hurriedly drafted, deceptive script with daft humour and scant regard to the finer nuances of the written or spoken word -- used for the shadowy and complex propagation of the central thought, should be taken in a lighter vein.

Set in Kanpur, this film, packaged as an entertainer, hopes to change the mindset of the culturally and morally stifled population of this country, especially on matters such as using methods of birth control.

Lucky (Aparshakti Khurana), an unwanted child who grew up in an orphanage, is a singer in a brass band and is in love with Rupali (Pranutan Bahl), a rich man's daughter.

In order to make a quick buck so that he can start his own band, and thereby get married to Rupali, Lucky and his friends Sultan (Abhishek Banerjee) and Minus (Ashish Verma) hatch a plan to rob an e-commerce company truck carrying mobile phones.

They succeed is stealing the packages from the truck, but instead of the mobile phones, the stolen goods turn out to be condoms. How the trio dispose of the stolen warea and are later glorified by an NGO that's conducting research for the National AIDS Awareness Programme, forms the crux of the narrative.

On the performance front, all the actors are competent enough. With his boy-next-door features, Aparshakti as Lucky is in top form, delivering the full range of his talent. He is natural and believable, but unfortunately, he lacks charisma.

Pranutan Bahl, as the bold, modern, small-town girl Rupali, along with Ashish Verma, as the hard-of-hearing, dim-witted Minus, and Abhishek Banerjee as the chicken breeder Sultan appear to be forced and over-the-top.

Ashish Vidyarthi, as Rupali's father Jogi, has an insignificant role and is short-changed by the script. Similarly, Dino Morea is wasted in a passing scene.

Mounted with moderate production values, the film's cinematography or editing leave nothing to write home about. The sound and background score help in creating the right ambience for the film and visually the film captures the essence of a small town with precision.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY

Nora Fatehi

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