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VETERAN CONGRESS LEADER ALVA TO BE OPPOSITION'S VP CANDIDATE

Veteran Congress leader and former Union Minister Margaret Alva was on Sunday announced as the opposition's Vice Presidential candidate.



New Delhi: Veteran Congress leader and former Union Minister Margaret Alva was on Sunday announced as the opposition's Vice Presidential candidate. The name of Alva, who has also been Governor of Uttarakhand and Rajasthan, and hails from Karnataka, was decided after opposition parties met at NCP supremo's Sharad Pawar residence. The NDA has fielded West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar for the post. BJP chief JP Nadda announced the name of Dhankhar after the Parliamentary Board meeting at party headquarters on Saturday evening.

OPPN HAS PLENTY OF AMMUNITION TO FIRE AWAY IN THIS MONSOON SESSION

The Monsoon Session of Parliament beginning Monday will be a memorable session for the government despite Opposition's preparation to corner it.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Monsoon Session of Parliament beginning Monday will be a memorable session for the government despite Opposition's preparation to corner it. On the first day of the session, the Presidential election will be held in which members of both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha will vote to elect a new President. The BJP, which has played a masterstroke by fielding tribal woman Draupadi Murmu as its Presidential candidate, is eyeing to win by a huge margin.

During the Monsoon Session, Vice-Presidential poll will be held on August 6. The BJP has fielded West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar, who hails from Rajasthan's Jhunjhunu, for the post. Seeing the numbers in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, Dhankhar is almost certain to win the election.

However, despite strong prospects of NDA winning both the



Presidential and Vice-Presidential elections, the opposition is making all out efforts to corner the government inside and outside the Parliament. In the all-party meeting convened by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla ahead of the Monsoon Session, the opposition parties made their stance clear by demanding discussion on several issues, including the Agnipath scheme,

among others. The way the opposition has reacted to Lok Sabha Secretariat's circular banning demonstration inside the Parliament premises, it shows that it is ready to take on the government. While Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrababoo Naidu, along with other opposition parties, wants to pressurise the government, his West Bengal counterpart

Mamata Banerjee wants to lead the opposition parties as was seen in fielding Yashwant Sinha as the opposition's Presidential nominee.

And in between these two regional parties is Congress, which is facing a crisis to maintain its national relevance. The impact of mutual competition among these three parties is also set to be seen during the Monsoon Session.

With the Trinamool Congress, SP, BSP, TRS, NCP, National Conference, AIMIM, Shiv Sena, among others, skipping the all-party meet, chances that the session will be a fiery one has increased.

The opposition wants to corner the government by demanding discussion on the Agnipath scheme, inflation, falling value of rupee against dollar, farmers' problems, MSP, unemployment, India-China border situation, Nupur Sharma case, among others. The Monsoon Session will conclude on August 12.



CRPF trooper killed in terror attack in Kashmir

► ONE CRPF ASSISTANT SUB-INSPECTOR (ASI) WAS KILLED AFTER TERRORISTS FIRED UPON THE TROOPERS AT GANGOO IN SOUTH KASHMIR'S PULWAMA DISTRICT, OFFICIALS SAID ON SUNDAY.

Team Absolute | Srinagar

One CRPF Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) was killed after terrorists fired upon the troopers at Gangoo in South Kashmir's Pulwama district, officials said on Sunday. "Terrorists fired upon Naka party at Gangoo Crossing Pulwama from nearby Apple orchard. In this terror incident one CRPF personnel ASI Vinod Kumar got seriously injured. He was shifted to hospital for treatment where he attained martyrdom. Area cordoned off. Search in progress."

Additional police parties have reached the spot and an operation has been started to nab the attackers.

All-party meet: Oppn rakes up attacks on Kashmiri Pandits, Chinese incursion

In the all-party meeting called by the government on Sunday, the opposition demanded discussion on 13 prominent issues including the attacks on Kashmiri Pandits and Chinese incursion.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In the all-party meeting called by the government on Sunday, the opposition demanded discussion on 13 prominent issues including the attacks on Kashmiri Pandits and Chinese incursion. Leader of opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge said, "The issue of Chinese incursion, foreign policy, changes in Forest Conservation Act and attack on Kashmiri Pandits and Congress leaders need to be discussed in the House."

The opposition took up 13 issues in the meeting while the government wants to pass 32 Bills, Kharge said.

The government, on the other hand said they are open to discussion. Pralhad Joshi Minister of Parliamentary affairs said that an all-party meeting has been convened on Tuesday to discuss the issue of Sri

Lanka where Minister of External Affairs Minister will be present.

The AAP raised the issue of Arvind Kejriwal's Singapore visit, saying that the LG was not clearing the file, sources said.

Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh said the Prime Minister was not present in the meeting. "Today in the all-party meeting many political parties, including those supporting NDA, pointed out the contradiction in the Modi Sarkar. On one hand it is claiming credit for its Presidential candidate on the other hand it is killing off the Forest Rights Act, 2006."

As many as 24 new Bills will be introduced in the upcoming Monsoon Session of Parliament, including the Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2022. "The Bill seeks to replace the Press and Registration of Books

(PRB) Act, 1867 by decriminalisation of the existing Act, keeping the procedures of the extant Act simple from the view point of medium/small publishers and uphold the values of Press Freedom."

The Bill may see stiff opposition as it is said that it is being brought to control the small publishers and digital media. The Opposition has already alleged that the government is trying to stifle the voice of dissent in the country.

Another important Bill is the Energy Conservation (Amendment) Bill, 2022, which seeks to provide a regulatory framework for Carbon Trading in India, to encourage penetration of renewables in energy mix, and effective implementation and enforcement of the Energy Conservation Act.

Four other Bills have been referred to the standing committee: Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Bill, 2021; Anti-Maritime Piracy Bill, 2019; Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens (Amendment) Bill, 2019; and National Anti-Doping Bill, 2021.

INDIA REPORTS 20,528 NEW COVID CASES, 49 DEATHS



New Delhi: India reported 20,528 new Covid cases in the last 24 hours, which is a marginal rise against the previous day's count of 20,044, said the Union Health Ministry on Sunday. In the same period, the country reported 49 more Covid deaths, taking the nationwide toll to 5,25,709.

The active caseload has also risen to 1,43,449 cases, accounting for 0.33 per cent of the country's total positive cases. The recovery of 17,790 patients in the last 24 hours took the cumulative tally to 4,30,81,441. Consequently, India's recovery rate stands at 98.47 per cent. Meanwhile, India's daily positivity rate has increased to 5.23 per cent, while the weekly positivity rate in the country currently stands at 4.55 per cent. Also in the same period, a total of 3,92,569 tests were conducted across the country, increasing the overall tally to over 86.94 crore. As of Sunday morning, India's Covid-19 vaccination coverage exceeded 199.98 crore, achieved via 2,63,22,345 sessions. Over 3.79 crore adolescents have been administered with a first dose of Covid-19 jab since the beginning of vaccination drive for this age bracket.

Inspired by TV crime show, 5 boys in UP kidnap and kill 7-yr-old

Bulandshahr | Agencies

Five minor boys watched a popular TV crime serial and went on to kidnap a seven-year-old boy for ransom and then murdered him.

The accused boys are aged between 15 and 16 years and study in Class 10.

Bulandshahr Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Shlok Kumar said. "The boy was picked up by the teenagers from his school on July 9 and then taken to Aligarh where they choked him to death using a handkerchief. They then dumped his body in a river which was recovered later."

An FIR was first lodged under IPC section 363 (missing) on the basis of a complaint by the child's father, who lives in Shekhupur village under Chhatari police station limits.

"After the probe and findings, the accused have been booked under IPC sections 302 (murder) and 201 (causing disappearance of evidence) also," the police said.

The SSP said one of the teenagers had mistakenly lost Rs 40,000 while carrying out a financial transaction and was worried about it. He later narrated his ordeal to his friends after which they all decided to kidnap a child from the school for ransom to make up for his loss.

"On July 9, the victim was among the first few students to reach the school. The accused had not specifically planned to kidnap him but he was picked up since he reached the school early and there were not many people at the time," the SSP said.

"The teenager, who also studied in the same school, saw the boy playing outside his class and then took him to the boundary of the school where his other associates, who studied in a different school, were already present," he said.



The two accused took the boy on a motorcycle to Aligarh while the other reached there by bus. They had taken the boy to Aligarh because one of the accused had a house there and the boy was kept hostage there.

However, later the teenagers panicked thinking what they would do if their plan does not succeed and thought they might land in trouble.

The SSP added that they then decided to kill the boy and dumped his body in a river. They threw his handkerchief in bushes in an isolated area and returned to Bulandshahr.

The next day the child's body was found from the river in Aligarh and he was identified as the boy missing from Bulandshahr, he said.

Six teams were formed which analysed over 100 CCTV footages and questioned more than 200 people in connection with the case.

The accused were presented before a juvenile justice board for further legal action in the case.

Violence erupts in Kannauj after meat found in temple

Kannauj | Agencies

Communal clashes took place in Kannauj district of Uttar Pradesh after some unidentified miscreants allegedly threw pieces of meat in the compound of a village temple and desecrated idols at two places which led to protests during which several shops were set on fire, police said. The police added that the gate of a graveyard was also damaged in the violence that ensued. According to police, the incident took place in Rasoolabad village located within the Talgram police station limits when the temple priest, Jagdish Chandra found the pieces of meat inside the temple and informed the police about it.

Circle officer Shiv Pratap Singh and Station House Officer Hari Shyam Singh reached the site and got the entire place cleaned. However, a mob gathered on the road accusing the police remaining silent over the incident and blocked the Talgram-Indergarh road.

The blockade continued for three hours before the police managed to pacify the protestors. As the blockade was lifted, there was information

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that idols were desecrated at two places. The mob became angry and burnt four shops as well as entered a graveyard where they damaged its gate. Late on Saturday evening, Inspector General (Kanpur range), Prashant Kumar and Commissioner (Kanpur division), Raj Shekhar also reached Talgram. According to police officials, they were identifying those behind the incident. The officials said the situation was under control and they had increased police patrolling on foot in the entire city. District Magistrate Rakesh Mishra said that two FIRs had been registered in connection with the incidents. "Strictest action will be taken against those who are trying to disturb peace," he added.

India achieves historic milestone of 200 cr Covid vaccination mark

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India on Sunday reached the historic milestone of 200 crore mark in Covid-19 vaccination. The milestone has been achieved after 18 months when the nation began the mass vaccination on January 16, 2021.

According to the Co-Win Portal, with a total 1.91 lakhs of vaccine being administered so far on Sunday, the number crossed the milestone mark of 200 crore. A total of 199.97 crore Covid vaccine doses were administered across the country until Saturday night, which includes 5.48 crore doses of the precaution dose.

On January 16, 2021, two Made-in-India vaccines Covaxin and Covishield were made available for the Indian citizens. After nine months, India completed the first 100 crore vaccination mark on October 21, 2021. The nation has completed 200 crore mark again after nine months on July 17, 2022. It took 277 days to reach the earlier milestone of 100 crore doses. On September 17 last year, the highest 2.5 crore vaccine doses were administered in a single day. Congratulating the nation on this historic mark, Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said that India has made a new record. "India has set a new record by completing the target of 200 crore vaccinations in just 18 months. Hearty congratulations to all the countrymen on this achievement," said Mandaviya in a tweet. He said that this day is to be remembered forever. Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh,



Regional Director WHO South-East Asia, also congratulated India on administering 2 billion Covid-19 vaccine doses. "Congratulations India for administering over 2 billion Covid-19 vaccine doses. This is yet another evidence of the country's commitment and efforts to minimise the impact of the ongoing pandemic." Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh said. India's first patient infected with Covid virus was reported in Thrissur District of Kerala on January 30, 2020. However, the global health body World Health Organisation also declared Covid outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on January 30, 2020. Later on, March 11, 2020, the WHO declared the coronavirus outbreak as a pandemic.

INDIA'S VACCINATION DRIVE UNPARALLELED IN SCALE AND SPEED: PM NARENDRA MODI

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed India's vaccination drive as 'unparalleled in scale and speed'. Congratulating the nation on the occasion, the prime minister said that India has created history again. "India creates history again! Congrats to all Indians on crossing the special figure of 200 crore vaccine doses. Proud of those who contributed to making India's vaccination drive unparalleled in scale and speed. This has strengthened the global fight against COVID-19," said PM Modi in a tweet. In a subsequent tweet he added, "Throughout the rollout of the vaccine, the people of India have shown remarkable faith in science. Our doctors, nurses, frontline workers, scientists, innovators and entrepreneurs have played a key role in ensuring a safer planet. I appreciate their spirit and determination." India's nationwide Covid-19 vaccination programme was launched by PM Modi on January 16, 2021. Despite the decline in cases across the country, consistent efforts are ongoing to vaccinate all eligible citizens.





DMK MP PROTESTS BHOOMI POOJA BY ONLY A HINDU PRIEST

► LOK SABHA MEMBER FROM TAMIL NADU'S DHARMAPURI CONSTITUENCY AND DMK LEADER, S. SENTHILKUMAR HAS OBJECTED TO THE 'BHOOMI POOJA' OF A ROAD PROJECT BY A HINDU PRIEST, AND SCOLDED THE OFFICIALS FOR INVITING ONLY A HINDU PRIEST.



The official at whom the MP shouted was identified as the Executive Engineer of Public Works Department. The DMK leader also later shared a short video of the episode in his Twitter handle. He was heard saying: "Trying to keep my cool... at times, they make me lose my patience."

Meanwhile, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has objected to the MP's behaviour. The party's Tamil Nadu unit vice president Narayanan Thirupathy questioned Senthilkumar whether he would have reacted in the same manner had an Imam been present, and would have conducted rituals according to the Muslim belief.

The BJP leader called for the MP to apologise to the public for "disrespecting people's faith".

In a tweet, the BJP leader wrote: "I strongly condemn @DrSenthil_MDRD for Hindu beliefs and rituals at a workplace where poojas were about to be performed by the workers to their beliefs. His abuse and behaviour have once confirmed that @arivalayam is an anti-Hindu party."

He also asked for the presence of atheist leaders as well as Dravidar Kazhagam representatives.

"Do you have instructions or not that the government functions should not be held like this. Are you aware or not?" he asked an official.

The MP also urged the authorities present to clean everything -- presumably the pooja materials that the Hindu priest had brought for the Bhoomi Pooja on Saturday.

Chennai | Agencies

Lok Sabha member from Tamil Nadu's Dharmapuri constituency and DMK leader, S. Senthilkumar has objected to the 'Bhoomi Pooja' of a road project by a Hindu priest, and scolded the officials for inviting only a Hindu priest.

The MP shouted at an official, and sought to know why the 'Imam' and Christian priest were not present.

CONGRESS REMOVES FORMER GOA CM KAMAT FROM THE CWC

New Delhi: The Congress on Sunday announced that it had removed former Goa Chief Minister Digambar Kamat, whom it blamed of trying to split its MLAs in the state, from the Congress Working Committee, its highest decision-making body. The Congress President has removed Digambar Kamat from his current position as Permanent Invitee to Congress Working Committee with immediate effect, a party statement said.

The Congress has moved for disqualification of him and its former CLP leader Michael Lobo from the Goa Assembly, and had requested Speaker Ramesh Tawadkar to issue notice to both. Congress had earlier removed Lobo as Leader of Opposition, alleging he was the one who hatched a conspiracy, along with Kamat, with the ruling BJP to split Congress MLAs.

Passenger train services to resume in NE states on July 22

Guwahati | Agencies

After around 70 days, the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR), following the restoration of the damaged railway tracks, will resume passenger train services in the Lumding-Badarpur section in Assam on July 22 to connect Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur and the southern part of Assam with the rest of the country, officials said on Sunday.

NFR's Chief Public Relations Officer, Sabyasachi De said that freight train services were started on July 12 in the Lumding-Badarpur section via Dima Hasao mountainous district, which is the only rail route to connect Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur and the southern Assam with the other parts of the country.

In the hill section under Lumding Division both passenger and freight train services were cancelled due to the heavy rains and unprecedented landslides on May 14.

"Railway officials, engineers, workers worked day and night to bring back the national transporter on track in these affected areas so that scarcity of essential items in states like Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram and Barak Valley (southern Assam) areas could be avoided," the CPRO said.

Due to unprecedented landslides trig-



gered by heavy rain since May 13, massive damage has been caused to stations and railway tracks at over 61 locations in NFR's Lumding-Badarpur single line railway route.

In many places, due to heavy rain, the soil from the railway tracks got washed away and huge landslides covered the tracks and other railway assets. Even in such bad weather, thousands of workers and hundreds of machines worked day and night in these areas under the supervision of top Railway officials. In view of the snapping of the railway services, Tripura and Mizoram had earlier approached the External Affairs Ministry to bring essential supplies and transport fuels via Bangladesh.

Question on caste in TN's Periyar University MA exam sparks row

Chennai | Agencies

A question in the second semester MA exam of Periyar University, seeking to know "the lowest caste" in Tamil Nadu has sparked a major controversy in the state.

The varsity has said that it will set up an enquiry committee to look up into the matter.

The question was under Part A - Freedom movement in Tamil Nadu from 1880 to 1947, with 15 multiple choice questions of 1 mark each. The 11th question in this series read: "Which one is the lower caste belongs to Tamil Nadu (sic)?"

A press statement from the Periyar University said that the varsity will take action against the wrong doers.

Registrar D. Gopi, talking to media, said: "When we conducted an enquiry, teachers who set the question paper said that it is part of the syllabus. This could have been avoided." Social media users slammed the Periyar University and its Department of History for setting such a question. "It's really bad on the part of the university to have set such a ques-



tion for the History exam paper. They should at least understand that the University is named after one of the greatest social reformers of the state on whose ideology Dravidian politics have evolved in the state," Salem-based social activist Rajesh Chandran told IANS. AIADMK leader and former Chief Minister, K. Palaniswami said: "Is the DMK's Dravidian politics of social justice now revolving around ridiculing the ideology of Periyar and promoting caste inequality among students through such questions in a semester examination."

Lookout circular against 3 Chinese nationals in loan app scam

■ A lookout circular has been issued against three Chinese nationals for their alleged involvement in a mobile loan app scam, Odisha Police said on Sunday.

Bhubaneswar | Agencies

A lookout circular has been issued against three Chinese nationals for their alleged involvement in a mobile loan app scam, Odisha Police said on Sunday.

The action was taken by the Bureau of Immigration on the request of the state police's Economic Offences Wing (EOW).

The three, identified as Shen Zhenhua, alias Tony of Jiangsu, Quan Hongwei alias Paul of Jiangsu, and Yang Haiying, alias Doris of Sichuan, China, are the main accused in a case registered against Kredit Gold loan app. This is the second illegal loan app case investigated by EOW.

There are more than one lakh victims of Kredit



Gold loan app across the country including many from Odisha, the EOW officials said.

The officials suspect that the Chinese nationals are also running a similar scam in countries like Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh.

"They also have links in the US and Hong Kong. They are in the process of expanding their financial criminal network in African and Middle East countries," an official said. The mastermind operates in India in connivance with many shell companies and Indians are made directors of

these companies. They also take help from some unscrupulous officials of mobile companies, chartered accountants/company secretaries, fintech companies, recovery agents/ call centers etc., it said. The Odisha Police also suspect that these accused, along with some other Chinese groups, are running hundreds of illegal digital loan apps and extorting from/abusing/mentally torturing lakhs of innocent loanees, mainly from lower middle-class. The EOW also said that it will move Interpol through proper channels for extradition of these criminals to India and also to alert law enforcement agencies of other countries. It has already arrested several persons in connection with a fake loan app scam and written twice to Google to take down the illegal apps from its play store. It has also requested the RBI to impress upon Google for early taking down of the illegal apps and requested Registrar of Companies to inquire and take necessary action against suspected shell companies.

Earlier, the Bureau of Immigration had issued a lookout circular against Chinese national Liu Yi, the main accused in another case registered by the EOW in against mobile loan app scam.

BJP ADOPTS WAIT-AND-WATCH POLICY ON POWER TUSSELE WITHIN ALLY AIADMK

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Keeping a beady eye on the recent developments in Tamil Nadu's AIADMK, the BJP is following a wait and watch policy on the ongoing power tussle in the regional party.

Earlier this month, AIADMK general council appointed Edappadi Palaniswami (EPS) as party interim general secretary. The AIADMK general council also annulled the dual leadership posts of coordinator and co-coordinator which was held by O. Panneerselvam (OPS) and EPS respectively. The dual leadership policy was adopted after the demise of J. Jayalalithaa. After taking control of AIADMK, EPS expelled OPS from the party.

A senior BJP functionary maintained that the power tussle between EPS and OPS is an internal matter of AIADMK. "We are keeping a close watch on the latest developments in the AIADMK and adopting a wait and watch policy in this regard," he said. The BJP is working hard to strengthen its organisational structure and in the last Assembly polls in



2021 won four seats.

Another senior party leader noted that it is for the BJP institution that matters and not individuals. "We are gaining ground to become a political force in Tamil Nadu. We contested the last Assembly election in alliance with AIADMK. The party has decided that it is an institution like the

AIADMK that matters to us, not an individual," he said.

The BJP claims a good relation with both EPS and OPS and recently BJP leaders met both of them to seek support for NDA Presidential candidate Droupadi Murmu.

"We seek support from both EPS and OPS for NDA Presidential candidate Murmu. We deal with the party not with an individual. For us institutions that matter and not individuals," he said. The BJP feels that the impact of the fight will be only known after 2024 Lok Sabha polls as there is no immediate election in the state. "Assembly poll was held last year, local bodies polls were also held. There is no election in the state before the Lok Sabha polls. So the exact impact of internal fighting in AIADMK will be known after the Lok Sabha polls," a party insider said. Amid the infighting in alliance partners, the BJP is concentrating on its ground work to increase its electoral presence in Tamil Nadu. Another senior party leader pointed out that a robust party structure has been created at ground across the state and now efforts are on to strengthen party reach out to new people.

Students clash with police, burn vehicle in TN's Kallakurichi

Chennai | Agencies

Striking students of Kallakurichi in Tamil Nadu set a police vehicle on fire during clashes after the police fired in air.

The students owing allegiance to the Left parties and some connected with the Dravidian movements were striking after a plus two student of a government school here committed suicide a couple of days ago. In the suicide note, the student had alleged abuse by two teachers. Inspector General of Police, Pandyan told the mediapersons that

the two teachers, who were allegedly named in the suicide note, were questioned but they were not arrested.

The striking students wanted the police to immediately arrest the teachers. Police sources told IANS that the students attacked the police contingent with stones and bottles, and to disperse the crowd, the police resorted to firing in the air. This agitated the students and they burnt a police vehicle. The Inspector General of Police, Pandyan has also reached the spot and a heavy police posse is deployed in the area.

NO STONE PELTING AT NAVEEN JINDAL'S RESIDENCE: DELHI POLICE

New Delhi: Delhi Police on Sunday clarified that there was no stone pelting at the suspended BJP leader Naveen Jindal's residence in the national capital. "Some media channels are wrongly stating that there has been stone pelting at the residence of Sh. Naveen Jindal," Delhi Police spokesperson Suman Nalwa said. She informed that the back glass of PCR Van outside his house broke due to a spinning stone from the wheel of a passing vehicle. "All are advised not to propagate false information," Nalwa averred.

Additional DCP (east) Sachin Sharma also denied all media reports that claimed that stone pelting on a security vehicle of Jindal. "There is some construction going on near the residence of Naveen Jindal. From there some construction material came below the wheel of a vehicle and hit the windshield of a PCR van. There was no stone pelting," he said. Jindal was last month expelled from the Bharatiya Janata Party from allegedly making insulting comments against Prophet Muhammad on social media.

Corruption charges dogging TMC bring Left, Cong closer in Bengal

Kolkata | Agencies

Will the Congress and the Left Front led by the CPI(M) have some kind of understanding for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls? Some recent initiatives by the leaders of both the forces like a joint movement against the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress state government has evoked the possibilities of a long-term Congress-Left Front arrangement in West Bengal.

Massive irregularities and scam in the teachers' recruitment at all levels is an issue on which both the Congress and the CPI(M) want to start a joint movement in the state. The proposal was mooted by state Congress president Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury.

"We want the Leftist parties to organize a mass movement throughout the state in association with us. A joint movement on this count is absolutely necessary to give it the shape of a nationwide mass movement," Chowdhury said.

CPI (M) state secretary and party politburo member Md Salim did not delay in reacting. According to him, although protests against the teachers' recruitment irregularities are taking place in different parts of the



state, the movements was highly unorganised and scattered.

"There have been massive irregularities in recruitment for the West Bengal School Service Commission, West Bengal Board of Primary Education and West Bengal Public Service Commission. There is an urgent necessity of bringing this fragmented movements under one umbrella and for that purpose we welcome the proposal for a Congress-Left Front joint movement on this issue," Salim said. However, both Salim and Chowdhury do not view this joint movement initiative as a foundation for greater election arrangements in the long term.

According to Salim, they are giving calls to all political forces, who are against both the BJP and the Trinamool Congress. There is no reason to see a larger political equation behind this joint movement initiative, Salim said. Chowdhury also stated that a long term political equation is not a matter of thought at this moment since a lot of time is left for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. According to political analyst Amal Kumar Mukhopadhyay mooted the joint movement is the best political decision that can be taken by the Congress and the Left Front to regain strength in the state considering that both forces have been

reduced to zero in the assembly. "The BJP could not hold on or accelerate whatever successes it got in the state, be it in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections or the 2021 West Bengal elections just because they could not organize mass movements on these burning issues of corruption. The BJP just depended on giving firebrand media bytes on the basis of the activities of the central agencies which are conducting probes into these issues. Now, whether this joint movement will result in a greater understanding between the Left Front and the Congress will depend on how far this initiative receives mass support," he said. Another political analyst, S Sanyal does not see the probability of a Left Front-Congress seat sharing arrangement for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. "First in the 2016 West Bengal assembly elections Congress and Left Front had a seat sharing agreement. Though the Congress slightly benefitted from that agreement, the Left Front was shocked. Although committed Left Front voters backed the Congress candidates, the reverse trend did not happen. In the 2021 West Bengal assembly elections, the Congress, Left Front and the All India Secular Front had a seat sharing agreement.

5 UP MLAS TO VOTE OUTSIDE STATE IN PREZ POLLS

Lucknow: Five Uttar Pradesh MLAs will vote outside the state during the voting for the country's new President that takes place on Monday.

Brij Bhushan Dubey, Assistant Returning Officer and Special Secretary, Uttar Pradesh Assembly, said, "Five MLAs had opted to cast their vote out of the state. While four had decided to cast their votes in New Delhi, another MLA would cast his vote in Kerala." He added that information about Monday's voting had been sent to all the 403 MLAs of the state. "We have made all arrangements in Tilak Hall of Vidhan Bhawan. Polling booth has been set up for voting there," he said.

Election Commission observer Rajiv Singh Thakur has inspected the poll arrangements. Thakur is an IAS officer of Rajasthan cadre and working as Additional Secretary with the Union government.

CHANGE OF NAME
I JAYASHREE SUTAGATTI is legally wife of No. JC820284X SUB BALAPPA SUTAGATTI presently residing at 392/14 Vill-Panthnagar Post-BaleKundri (B.K) Dist-Belagavi state Karnataka Pin: 591103 have changed my name from JAYASHREE to JAYASHREE SUTAGATTI vide affidavit No. BC 688425.

CHANGE OF NAME
I DEEPAK B SUTAGATTI is S/O No. JC820284X SUB BALAPPA SUTAGATTI presently residing at 392/14 Vill-Panthnagar Post-BaleKundri (B.K) Dist-Belagavi state Karnataka Pin: 591103 have changed my name from DEEPAK B SUTAGATTI vide affidavit No. BC 688423.

CHANGE OF NAME
I DIXITA BALAPPA SUTAGATTI is D/O No. JC820284X SUB BALAPPA SUTAGATTI presently residing at 392/14 Vill-Panthnagar Post-BaleKundri (B.K) Dist-Belagavi state Karnataka Pin: 591103 have changed my name from DIXITA to DIXITA BALAPPA SUTAGATTI vide affidavit No. BC 688424.



Mayoral Polls : BJP WINS 7 SEATS, CONGRESS 3 AND AAP 1

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Of the 11 civic bodies where mayoral elections were held on 6 July, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has won seven seats, while the Congress has won three so far in the results declared on Sunday, 17 July.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which contested civic elections in the state for the first time, has

emerged victorious on one seat.

The local body elections in the state for 413 municipalities were held in two phases on 6 and 13 July. Under the first phase, the counting for which began 9 am Sunday, 11 municipal corporations, 36 nagar palikas, and 86 nagar parishads went to polls.

While the BJP candidates have won in Burhanpur, Satna, Khandwa, Sagar, and Ujjain;

Congress won in Chhindwara and Jabalpur; and AAP in Singrauli. Counting in Bhopal, Gwalior and Indore was underway.

This is the first time the Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP is contesting civic elections in Madhya Pradesh. Kejriwal had recently held a roadshow in support of Agrawal.

Meanwhile, the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) registered its first electoral

victory in Madhya Pradesh with Shakira Bilal winning the corporator's post in Khandwa.

The AIMIM candidate, Shakira Bilal, won the election from ward number-14 of the Khandwa municipal corporation by defeating her nearest Congress rival Noorjahan Begum by a margin of 285 votes, an official said.

It should be noted that the ruling BJP had control on all 11 seats earlier but managed to

retain only seven. The saffron party lost in Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia's stronghold and saw similar results in Narendra Singh Tomar's bastion Chambal.

Despite gaining three seats, Congress lost from its senior leader and former Madhya Pradesh CM Digvijay Singh's hometown Bhopal. However, it emerged victorious in Kamal Nath's Chhindwara region.

AAP MAKES ENTRY IN MP, WINS SINGRAULI MAYORAL POST

The debutant Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has made its entry in Madhya Pradesh politics after winning mayoral post of Singrauli Municipal Corporation, the district which is filled with coal mining and also called - 'energy capital of India'. AAP candidate Rani Agrawal has won the election for mayoral post against BJP's Chandra Prakash Vishwakarma.

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The debutant Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has made its entry in Madhya Pradesh politics after winning mayoral post of Singrauli Municipal Corporation, the district which is filled with coal mining and also called - 'energy capital of India'. AAP candidate Rani Agrawal has won the election for mayoral post against BJP's Chandra Prakash Vishwakarma.

Agrawal won the election by a margin of 9,159 votes, leaving the BJP and Congress at second and third position. AAP candidate received a total 34,038 votes, BJP 24,879 and Congress nominee Arvind Chandel got 24,600 votes.

A year before the Assembly elections to be held in 2023, Agrawal's victory has come as a morale



booster for AAP cadre in Madhya Pradesh.

AAP convener and Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal had campaigned for her in a road show in Singrauli. After Agrawal's victory, Kejriwal congratulated her in a tweet, saying, "I congratulate Singrauli mayor elections winning candidate Rani Agrawal ji, other winners and party workers. You should continue to work hard for the people. The people across the

country are liking the honest politics of the Aam Aadmi Party."

Born in 1976, Rani Agrawal has been a sarpanch of Baragwa village panchayat. She was also elected from ward 3 as a zila panchayat member. Agrawal had also contested the 2018 Assembly elections from the Singrauli seat, but had lost. She stood third and secured 32,500 votes.

While the counting of votes for 11 municipal cor-

porations in the first phase was underway (till the story was filed), the Congress won Jabalpur and led in Gwalior seats and the BJP was leading in both Bhopal and Indore.

The All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen registered its first electoral victory in Madhya Pradesh in the urban body polls with its woman candidate winning the corporator's post in Khandwa city.

Polling was held for mayoral posts in 11 municipal corporations, including Bhopal, Indore, Gwalior, Jabalpur, Sagar, Satna, Singrauli, Chhindwara, Khandwa, Burhanpur and Ujjain. A total of 101 candidates are fighting for the mayoral posts.

The counting of votes for the second phase of the MP municipal elections will be held on July 20.

AIMIM also makes political debut in MP through civic polls, plays spoilsport in Burhanpur

A party corporator in Khandwa, two in Jabalpur emerge victorious



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The Aam Aadmi Party opened its account in Madhya Pradesh winning the Singrauli mayoral post, Asaduddin Owaisi-led The All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) too has registered presence in Madhya Pradesh as results for civic polls' first phase were announced on Sunday.

The AIMIM candidate, Shakira Bilal, won the election from ward number-14 of the Khandwa Municipal Corporation by defeating her nearest Congress rival Noorjahan Begum by a margin of 285 votes.

Out of 50 wards in Khandwa, the AIMIM had fielded candidates in 10 wards, besides mayoral nominee Kaniz Fatima.

The results for first phase of civic polls in Madhya Pradesh including 11 municipal corporations were announced on Sunday.

AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi had addressed a public meeting in Khandwa to campaign for the party candidates for the polls held earlier this month. Owaisi had also held public meetings in the state capital Bhopal, industrial hub Indore and Jabalpur seeking votes in favour of his party

nominees in the urban body polls.

Later on the party also tasted win in Jabalpur as party candidate from ward no 49-Saman Parveen Mateen and ward 51, Samreen Qureshi, were adjudged winners.

Meanwhile the party also played an important role in electoral outcome in Burhanpur where the BJP won the mayoral poll with a razor thin margin. Madhuri Patel of BJP who secured 52,823 votes, defeated Congress party's Shahnaaz Bano who followed closely, secured 52,281 votes. The thin margin (542) was affected by NOTA which got 677 votes.

In between, the AIMIM's candidate pocketed 10,274 votes while AAP too played a spoilsport garnering 2,221 votes. In such a situation, the Congress supporters were seen blaming AIMIM for eating into the vote bank of their party.

During his stay in Bhopal, the Hyderabad parliamentarian had strongly dismissed allegations that his party was a B team of the BJP. Taking a swipe at Congress, he also said Narendra Modi could become the prime minister twice because of Congress' (performance). He rejected the allegation that the AIMIM cuts into the votes of Congress in elections.

CM plants Banyan, Neem and Cassia saplings

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted Banyan, Neem and Cassia saplings in Smart Park. Members of TV news channel Hindi Khabar and National Human Rights Foundation also planted saplings. Chouhan received information about the environment friendly activities of the Foundation. The members of the Foundation included Manoj Agarwal, Deepa Thakur, GD Thakur and Arora. News channel Hindi Khabar's Kushwah, Shah Nawaz and Nasir also planted saplings. Banyan has religious and medicinal importance. According to Ayurveda, many diseases can be treated using Banyan leaves, bark etc. Drinking its decoction boosts immunity. Similarly, Neem abounding in antibiotic elements is acknowledged as the supreme medicine. Ayurvedic medicines are made using the bark and leaves of Cassia Javanica.

Yuva Mahapanchayat to connect Shivraj govt with MP's Gen Next

To increase its reach to the youth of the state, the Shivraj Singh Chouhan government in Madhya Pradesh is going to organise a Youth Mahapanchayat this month in which the CM will communicate directly with youth.

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To increase its reach to the youth of the state, the Shivraj Singh Chouhan government in Madhya Pradesh is going to organise a Youth Mahapanchayat this month in which the CM will communicate directly with youth.

The results of the panchayat elections are out, while the results of the urban body polls will be declared by July 20. Assembly elections are scheduled to be after about one-and-a-half years. Keeping these in mind, the government has started work on preparing an action plan to reach out to all sections of the society. The government has decided to organise a state-level Youth Mahapanchayat to mark the 116th birth anniversary of Shaheed Chandrashekhar Azad on July 23 and 24. The purpose of this panchayat is to step up the efforts to

ensure the participation of youth in the creation of self-reliant and golden Madhya Pradesh. In view of the Mahapanchayat, youth panchayats were organised at the district level, and on the basis of performance, six youth from each district would be selected, who would be called to participate in the Youth Mahapanchayat.

On the organisation of this Mahapanchayat, Chouhan said that the purpose of this event is to provide a platform to the enthusiastic youth of the state by carrying forward the legacy of Shaheed Chandrashekhar Azad, so that they can identify the socio-economic and political challenges pertaining to the state, country and world, and suggest possible solutions. "Efforts will be made to ensure participation of youth in the vision of self-reliant Madhya Pradesh in this two-day event, as well as developing leadership skills in them," he added.

Political analysts believe that the BJP's special focus is on first-time voters, i.e., those who have crossed 18 years of age.

"This is the reason why it is organising the Yuva Mahapanchayat. It is easy to reach out to this class, and the first-time voter is not very much aware of the government or the other political parties. Besides, this class is completely dependent on social media," an analyst said. The vice-president of MP Congress' media department, Abbas Hafeez, said that BJP's mass base in Madhya Pradesh is slipping, that is why it is organising this Mahapanchayat to mislead the youth. "The BJP has not only ruined democracy, but it has also toppled elected governments illegally. The party wants to mislead the first-time voters, but its effort will fall flat. The people of the country know the real face of BJP now," Hafeez said.

TRICOLOUR WILL BE HOISTED OVER 1.5 CRORE HOMES UNDER "HAR GHAR TIRANGA" CAMPAIGN: CM

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that the tricolour flag will be hoisted on more than 1.5 crore homes of the state in the "Har Ghar Tiranga" campaign in the Amrit Mahotsav of Independence. He instructed to start extensive preparations to take this campaign to the masses. Chouhan was discussing with the officials at the residence office on Sunday after attending the video conferencing of "Har Ghar Tiranga" campaign under the Amrit Mahotsav of Azadi along with Union Home and Cooperatives Minister Amit Shah and Union Culture Minister G Kishan Reddy.

Chouhan said that a detailed review will be done again regarding this campaign. To make this campaign a success, all the officials should work together and bring awareness among the people of the state to hoist the tricolour flag at their homes.



Shah, in a virtual discussion with the Chief Ministers of the states, said that the Amrit Mahotsav of Azadi is a matter of pride for every citizen. The "Har Ghar Tiranga" campaign will be an event the world has never celebrated. Shah said that it is our duty to strengthen the feeling of patriotism in the heart of every citizen and to inculcate patriotism in the younger generation. Let us all work together to

spread this message to the masses. Reddy said that "Har Ghar Tiranga" campaign is a campaign to awaken India. It aims to spread the message of patriotism by unfurling the tricolour at every home. All state governments should make coordinated efforts for this. People themselves should buy the flag and come forward to hoist it in their home.

Assembly Speaker speaks out against sessions being shrunk; 'a wrong precedent'

Trend of curtailment of the Assembly sessions has set up a wrong precedent and should be reversed to save the essence of Legislative system, said Madhya Pradesh Assembly Speaker Girish Gautam in an exclusive interview with

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Trend of curtailment of the Assembly sessions has set up a wrong precedent and should be reversed to save the essence of Legislative system, said Madhya Pradesh Assembly Speaker Girish Gautam in an exclusive interview with IANS. The Monsoon session of the state Assembly scheduled to start from July 25, is likely to be deferred due to various reasons, including unavailability of senior leaders from the opposition. However, the speaker is yet to receive a fresh proposal from the government in this regard. Here are the excerpts from the interview -

Q: The Assembly session durations are shrinking and even the annual budget sessions are concluding within a week. Being a speaker and also a member of the Legislative Assembly, what is your view on it?

Gautam: Of course, it's a matter of grave concern which needs immediate redressal or the legislative system will gradually lose its real value. If an Assembly having 230 MLAs meets for

just one week, it will not give them time to discuss public issues. If the trend continues, it will be harmful for both - the Legislative and the Executive (government) system of the democracy. The people have started to react to it, directly and indirectly.

Q: Being one of the pillars of democracy - the Legislative Assembly has its own power to function, then why are session days shrinking?

Gautam: See, the Assembly is a democratic platform where the Legislators would assemble and discuss public issues. It also empowers the MLAs to raise the concern of people of their respective constituencies and also to ensure that the voice of each member is heeded. But, the sessions are held on the proposal of the ruling party with consensus of the opposition.

The opposition has a crucial role to play in the duration of the Assembly, but mostly, the ruling and opposition parties reach a consensus outside the House, which is a wrong precedent.

Q: The opposition Congress claimed that

it has demanded that the coming monsoon session of the Madhya Pradesh Assembly should last for 15-20 days. Will the Assembly consider their proposal?

Gautam: Opposition often would make such statements to the press that they have demanded for a longer session. But, to make it practical, they need to follow the process, which they do not do. They have to put their subjects/agendas they want to discuss in the assembly, and then the assembly will try to make a consensus on this issue.

Q: From rural to urban, Madhya Pradesh has 230 constituencies for its legislators, but the Assembly sessions are often concluded within a few days. Being a member and more importantly head (speaker) of the state Assembly, is it justifying the faith of people in the democratic process?

Gautam: If public issues are not discussed at the right platform, for which this system has been set up, then of course, it is injustice with them. It pains me and I am trying my best to bring some

changes. The issue had been discussed in a meeting with Lok Sabha Speaker Om Prakash Birla recently in New Delhi. We should also note that at least 1,400-1,500 employees are working with the MP Assembly and the government is paying a huge amount of money as part of salary and other expenses to them. Therefore, I would say that if a big chunk of money is being invested, it should have an oriented result. In five years of tenure, if the Assembly sessions are held for merely 35-40 days, then the system is not serving its purpose. It should be at least 100 days of session in states like Madhya Pradesh.

Q: Can people expect that this current system would change in future and its duration will increase?

Gautam: It can happen, but to bring changes in the system, assemblies should be empowered with the financial system. Currently, the Assemblies are fully reliant on the state government's funds for its functioning. It should have financial autonomy and

when the assemblies will be made self-reliant on financial subjects, it can make changes.

Q: Is this subject of making the state Assemblies financially autonomous under discussion?

Gautam: Yes, all state Assembly speakers have stressed on this subject during the meeting with Lok Sabha Speaker Om Prakash Birla. Assembly speakers have been requested to make a consensus on this subject.

Q: Recently, all state assembly speakers were called for a meeting in New Delhi for the preparation of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC). What are the subjects which would be presented?

Gautam: The 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference is scheduled from July 20 to July 26 in Canada. There would be various subjects to be highlighted during the conference, which includes - role and responsibilities of Parliament in response to Covid-19 pandemic, and role of achieving sustainable development.



EDITOR'S SPECS
CJI EXPRESSES CONCERN ON PASSING OF BILLS WITHOUT DEBATES

Chief Justice of India Justice N.V. Ramana on Saturday expressed his concern over the decline in legislative performance and passing of bills without debates. "The country is witnessing a decline in the quality of legislative performance. We have a form of government where the executive is accountable to the legislative. However, space for Leaders of opposition is diminishing in absence of thorough debate and politics has become acronymous. Political opposition should not transform into hostility which is being seen these days which are not signs of healthy democracy," he said. He further said: "Lack of debate in legislative bodies I mentioned is not criticism. My only concern was the burden imposed on the judiciary because of imperfection of law making. If bills are debated perfectly, we will have better laws." He further said that India is the largest parliamentary democracy in the world. "The role of the judiciary is most important in a democracy. Acting as a bridge between the aspirations of the common people and the truth in the 75 years of independence, the judiciary has written the story of India's growth and transformation as a result of progressive laws and policies. He said that democracy defines our identity, determines our liberties, rights and duties." Calling upon the youth, Ramana said that youth is the basis of democracy and youth is the builder of India's future. Therefore, the youth of today should become aware and knowledgeable and ensure their participation in the democratic system. On the occasion, Justice Ramana inaugurated the Digital Museum and said that this museum displays the rich culture along with political and historical features of Rajasthan. He said that this museum is not just a building but a bridge between our past and our future. This museum will undoubtedly make the youth curious.

CHAR DHAM RAIL TUNNEL LEAVES UTTARAKHAND VILLAGE HIGH AND DRY

Satyam Kumar

Wherever tunnels are built in the hilly areas of Uttarakhand, water sources dry up. This is a plain fact, irrespective of whether these constructions are for hydroelectric projects or for rail connectivity," says Hemant Dhyani, who has been a member of the Supreme Court-appointed high-powered committee to assess the environmental impact of the Char Dham highway project. Nobody can attest to this claim better than the people of Panai Pokhari, a hilltop village located in Karnaprayag block of Chamoli district. The 50 families that reside here mostly depend on agriculture and daily-wage labour to make a living. "Up until two months ago, we used to draw fresh water from a natural spring to meet our daily needs. Trees on the hills absorb water during the rainy season and release it slowly throughout the year. Our village had one such spring, but not anymore. The tunnel being dug at a depth of around 70 metre underneath our village for the Char Dham rail line has left us high and dry since April," laments Vinod Gusan, the village head. "We don't know when the train will pass through here, or how important it will be for us, but we clearly know that our only source of water has been irreparably lost due to this project." The villagers of Panai Pokhari have been bearing the brunt of the excavation activities for the tunnel since construction began in December 2020. Many houses developed cracks due to the explosives used in the process. "The panchayat immediately brought the matter to the notice of the district administration, tunnel contractor Dilip Buildcon Limited and the Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL). The villagers also petitioned the Karnaprayag Sub-



Divisional Magistrate (SDM), who is in charge of all the work related to the rail route," Gusan says. However, the residents have not received any positive response so far. They say Dinesh Chamola, the RVNL Deputy General Manager appointed by the administration to deal with railway development-related complaints, has often asserted that the project has nothing to do with Panai Pokhari and its lands.

A pipe dream

Panai Pokhari has had a pipeline in place for the past 20 years, but the water that comes through it belongs to an open source -- a small river formed by streams emerging in the hills. "Sometimes, heavy downpour or landslides lead to pipeline breakage, which takes a long time to be rectified," says Girdhar Singh, a resident. The water gets dirty during the monsoon and is not the best quality even the rest of the year. Hence, the villagers use it primarily to wash clothes. But now, with the contamination of their sole source of drinking water, they have no option but to boil and drink it. "That was not the case earlier. Irrespective of the season, we used to get sufficient quantities of clean water from the now-dry source. Be it a wedding or a religious event, the natural spring was worshipped first. It was of such significance to us," Singh adds. Janaki Devi, an elderly woman, adds: "I have had this water ever since I got married here. Even after the

pipeline installation, we used to drink this only. There is no desire to use pipe water even now, but what can we do?" Jaial Singh, another resident of the village, says, "The vegetables and crops such as red paddy and maize that we usually plant around our homes have never been affected by water shortage, as the presence of the stream ensured moisture content in the soil. However, in the new scenario, we are solely dependent on rainwater to save our crops. Unfortunately, it has rained less this time." As Girdhar Singh claims, "It would be absolutely wrong to state that there won't be water shortage in the village." Which leads one to wonder how authorities are concerned with the situation...

The rail scheme

In 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced the Char Dham Railway Project connecting the famous Himalayan shrines of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Yamunotri and Gangotri. Since then, the RVNL and Uttarakhand government have been working in unison to complete the project. According to the RVNL's official YouTube channel, the 327-km line is expected to cost around Rs 75,000 crore. At least 16 bridges and 17 tunnels are part of the Rishikesh-Karnaprayag line. The tunnel to be built in Devprayag will be the longest in the country, at about 15 km in length. The Karnaprayag-

Joshimath extension line will touch the Badrinath Dham, with 12 bridges and 11 tunnels proposed in this path. The Karnaprayag-Sonprayag line connecting the Kedarnath Dham will have 20 bridges and 19 tunnels. Similarly, a proposed line from Doiwala in Dehradun to Uttarkashi will connect Gangotri and Yamunotri. The construction of tunnels and stations in the Rishikesh-Karnaprayag line has started, and the final survey for the remaining phases has been completed. However, environmentalists in the region are least impressed by the developmental works. Dhyani, also the Convenor of the 'Ganga Ahwan movement', cites the case of a hydropower project work in Joshimath to prove his point. "Water just gushed out of the hill when a tunnel was being dug for this project in 2009-10. That was the elixir the hill kept locked inside during the rains and slowly let out as a source of water during the dry months. With the tunnel work disturbing this delicate balance of the ecosystem, water sources present on the hill that housed Joshimath city were affected. The result is clearly visible today, with many houses on the verge of collapse in the region." Such activities in the name of development not only kill the water sources used by humans but also affect wild animals, which then stray into human habitats in

search of water. Such projects also seriously hamper the capacity of the hills to absorb and retain water. As a result, the water level in rivers no longer remains steady throughout the year. All these factors reduce the moisture content in surface soil, which further increases the risk of forest fires," Dhyani explains. In this context, S.P. Sati, Associate Professor of Environmental Sciences, College of Forestry in Ranichauri, says, "Even if eco-friendly technology is used for tunnelling, the drainage system of the hills is affected, and water sources go dry." So is there any technique to restore these resources? Sati says it is near impossible. "Yes, water does fill them up during the rains, but it does not stay for long." Knowing this fact well, Gusan has been demanding that alternative arrangements for clean drinking water be made for Panai Pokhari. However, no one from the administration has reached out to them so far. The demand for compensation for the houses that developed cracks has not been heard either. "If our demands are not met, we will be forced to stage protests before the district administration," he says. Asked about the discontent brewing in Panai Pokhari, SDM Santosh Kumar Pandey says he has no information about any water resource drying up in the region, though such an issue has been reported in the neighbouring Siwai village. "We resolved the issue by holding a meeting there. Similarly, appropriate steps will be taken if we are informed about Panai Pokhari," he clarifies. Incidentally, a meeting with the residents of Siwai was held only after they protested before the administration.

(The author is a Uttarakhand/Uttar Pradesh-based freelance journalist and a member of 101Reporters, a pan-India network of grassroots

international

SPORADIC INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE IN PAK'S PUNJAB PROVINCE BYPOLLS

Islamabad: Sporadic incidents of violence were reported in by-polls to 20 constituencies in Pakistan's Punjab province on Sunday. Of the total 3,140 polling stations, clashes were reported at 14. Thirteen PTI workers in Lahore's PP-167 were arrested for violating the election code of conduct by holding rallies in the constituency, Dawn reported. Post the reports of violence, CEC Sikander Sultan Raja said in a statement that strict action will be taken against "those involved in creating issues in the election process" and that if candidates participate in such acts "they may also be disqualified". PTI worker Rana Naeem was arrested for causing a head injury to a PML-N worker at an irrigation canal polling station. Complaints of voting area alterations were also received from the same constituency. Polling was also halted in PP-168 for some time following agitation between PTI and PML-N workers.



G20 members denounce Russia's war against Ukraine

Kiev | Agencies Many participants in the G20 meeting of finance ministers in Indonesia's Bali have strongly condemned Russia's war against Ukraine and called for an end to it. Indonesia's G20 presidency said this in a statement after the meeting of the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors held on July 15-16, Ukrinform reported. "Many [G20] members agreed that the recovery of the global economy has slowed and is facing a major setback as a result of Russia's war against Ukraine, which was strongly condemned, and called for an end to the war," the statement said. "The majority of members agreed that there is an alarming increase of food and energy insecurity, which are felt disproportionately by vulnerable groups. Some also expressed concerns about fertilizer availability which has the



potential to further exacerbate the food crisis. Members affirmed their commitment to use all available policy tools to address current economic and financial challenges, including the risk of food insecurity," the statement said.

S KOREA, US DEFENCE CHIEFS TO MEET IN WASHINGTON NEXT WEEK

Seoul: The defence chiefs of South Korea and the United States have agreed to hold talks in Washington next week to discuss the bilateral alliance and combined defence posture against North Korea. Defence Minister Lee Jong-sup plans to meet his US counterpart, Lloyd Austin, when Lee visits Washington, D.C. to attend a dedication ceremony for a Wall of Remembrance at the Korean War Veterans Memorial, slated for July 27, Seoul officials said Sunday. The two sides are currently coordinating a detailed schedule and meeting agenda, Yonhap news agency reported quoting the officials. It would be their second in-person discussion in about a month, following their meeting held on the sidelines of a security forum in Singapore. The defence chiefs are expected to discuss how to strengthen their combined defence posture and extended deterrence against North Korea's growing missile and nuclear threats. Last week, South Korea and the US conducted their first combined air drills involving F-35A stealth fighters, amid concerns over Pyongyang's preparation for its seventh nuclear test or other provocative acts. The allies are also considering the resumption of combined field training during their regular military exercise set for next month, according to informed sources.

Powerful western countries offered Pakistan to launch candidature for UN Security Council

Islamabad | Agencies Some powerful western countries offered Pakistan to launch its candidature for the permanent membership of the UN Security Council in order to break the ongoing deadlock to reform the UN's top decision-making body, local media reported. Pakistan, however, rejected the offer as it viewed the move as part of a tactic by certain countries to weaken the group that is opposed to the expansion of permanent seats at the UNSC. "Some powerful countries have approached us and said Pakistan should launch its bid for the permanent seat at the UNSC," revealed a Pak Foreign Office official while requesting anonymity, The Express Tribune reported. The official said Pakistan turned down the idea since it knew the offer was not genuine but a ploy to push Islamabad to leave the Uniting for Consensus (UfC) group that is opposed to the expansion of the UNSC. The UfC comprising 13 countries, including Pakistan, Italy, Canada, South Korea, Argentina, Spain and Turkey, is lobbying against increasing the permanent seats at the



UNSC. The UN General Assembly recently decided to roll over the inter-governmental negotiations (IGNs) on the Security Council reform to the next General Assembly session, something that is seen as a success for countries part of the UfC. The UfC, unlike the G4, has proposed additional non-permanent seats with longer duration in term and a possibility to get re-elected. Brazil, India, Germany and Japan on the other hand have been pushing for expanding the current five permanent members of the UNSC to 11. They have been laying claims to become permanent members of the UNSC while proposing two other members from the African region, The Express Tribune reported.

RUSSIA DOESN'T WANT TO END WAR: ZELENSKY

Kiev: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Sunday said that Russia started a war and does not want to end it, whereas Ukraine is defending its own land and fighting for peace. Ukrainian President Zelenskyy published several photos of Ukrainian forces, and posted, "This is a war in Ukraine that Russia started, that Russia does not want to end. Ukraine defends its own land, its sovereignty, its territory. Ukraine is fighting for peace." He added that this is a cruel paradox of the 21st century, and it is a reality for Ukrainians, Ukrinform reported. Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24. Russia has been shelling and bombing Ukrainian cities and villages since then.



Global dominance of West is coming to an end, says Tony Blair

London | Agencies For the first time in modern history, the East can be on equal terms with the West, as the global dominance of the US and its allies comes to an end, former British prime minister Tony Blair has said. Due to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine, "for a large part of the Western population, living standards are stagnating", Blair noted in his annual lecture at the Ditchley Foundation on Saturday, RT reported. "Western politics is in turmoil - more partisan, ugly, unproductive; and fueled by social media," which affects both domestic and international affairs, Blair said, arguing that Russia's military operation in Ukraine "should become a pivot point reviving our [Western] sense of mission". However, according to the 69-year-old, who led the UK government from 1997 to 2007, "the biggest geopolitical change of this century will come from China not Russia". "We are coming to the end of



Western political and economic dominance. The world is going to be at least bi-polar and possibly multi-polar," he predicted, RT reported. China, which is "already the world's second superpower", will compete with the West "not just for power but against our system, our way of governing and living," the Labour politician warned. Beijing "will not be alone. It will have allies. Russia now for sure. Possibly Iran". "It is the first time in modern history that the East can be on equal terms with the West," he added. The former premier said the events in Ukraine have made it clear the West "cannot rely on the Chinese leadership to behave in the way we would consider rational. Don't misunderstand me. I am not saying in the near term that China would attempt to take [the self-governed island of] Taiwan by force. But we can't base our policy on the certainty that it wouldn't".



SUPREME COURT TO HEAR PLEAS OF UDDHAV & SHINDE CAMPS ON JULY 20

BOTH THE UDDHAV THACKERAY-LED SHIV SENA AND THE FACTION LED BY CHIEF MINISTER EKNATH SHINDE HAVE MOVED THE SUPREME COURT OVER DISQUALIFICATION OF MLAS FROM THE OTHER CAMP.



Maharashtra till the constitution bench of the Supreme Court gives its verdict on the plea seeking disqualification of the rebel MLAs.

"Article 164 (1-A) of the Constitution says that the number of ministers including CM of the state shall not be less than 12. For the last 2 weeks, the cabinet consisting of just 2 ministers is taking decisions that are not Constitutionally valid.

Honourable governor sir, what's going on?" he wrote on Twitter. Taking a dig at the newly formed Shinde government over the delay in the formation of the new cabinet, the Sena MP further said, "Barbados has a population of 2.5 lakh and yet has a cabinet of 27. Maharashtra's 12-crore population has a cabinet of 2 members that are taking arbitrary decisions.

bench, led by CJI NV Ramana, will hear the matter. Both the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena and the faction led by chief minister Eknath Shinde have moved the top court over disqualification of MLAs. Besides the CJI, Justices Krishna Murari and Hima Kohli will comprise the bench that will hear the bunch of petitions on July 20. A three-judge

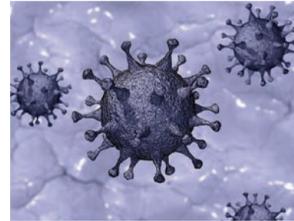
sion on disqualifying Shiv Sena MLAs after the legislature secretary, Rajendra Bhagwat, issued show cause notices to 53 legislators over not following of whip. Forty of the notices were sent to the faction led by Shinde, while the other 13 are loyalists of Thackeray. Both the groups have sought the disqualification of legislators from the rival faction. Earlier in the day, Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut demanded the imposition of President's rule in

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Supreme Court is likely to hear the bunch of petitions on the Maharashtra political crisis on July 20. A three-judge

Maharashtra logs 2,186 new Covid cases, 3 deaths; positivity rate at 5.86%

MAHARASHTRA ON SUNDAY REPORTED 2,186 NEW CORONAVIRUS POSITIVE CASES AND THREE DEATHS LINKED TO THE INFECTION, THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT SAID.



Yavatmal districts. Of the total 15,525 active cases in the state, the highest number of 5,545 cases are in Pune, followed by 2,300 and 1,270 cases in Mumbai and Thane districts respectively.

A total of 78,55,840 patients have recuperated from the infection so far, of whom 2,179 recovered in the last 24 hours, the department said.

Maharashtra's recovery rate is 97.96 per cent and the fatality rate is 1.84 per cent. As per the report, out of 2,186 new COVID-19 cases, the highest 777 are from Pune circle, followed by Mumbai (549), Nagpur (358), Nashik (180), Aurangabad (96), Akola (80), Kolhapur (75), and Latur circle (71), the department said.

Of the three deaths reported in Maharashtra, two were from Mumbai city and one from Chandrapur district.

As 37,268 coronavirus tests were conducted in the last 24 hours, the overall test count in Maharashtra rose to 8,26,36,788. Its positivity rate is at 5.86 per cent. The coronavirus figures in Maharashtra are as follows: Positive cases 80,19,391, new cases 2,186; death toll 1,48,026, recoveries 78,55,840, active cases 15,525, total tests 8,26,36,788.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra on Sunday reported 2,186 new coronavirus positive cases and three deaths linked to the infection, the health department said.

With this, the caseload in the state rose to 80,19,391 and the death toll to 1,48,026.

On Saturday, the state had reported 2,382 cases and eight fatalities.

There are now 15,525 active cases of the infection in the state.

Eighteen patients were found infected with the BA.5 sub-variant of Omicron, 17 others with the BA.2.75 variant, and one with BA.4 variant as

per the latest report from the B J Medical College in Pune, it said.

All these patients are from Pune and the samples of these patients had been taken between June 25 and 4 July. These samples were tested at the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) labs in Pune and Mumbai.

With this, the tally of BA.4 and BA.5 patients rose to 132 and that of BA.2.75 patients to 57. This raised the count of BA.4 and BA.5 sub-variant cases from Pune to 84, from Mumbai to 32 and four each from Nagpur, Palghar and Thane and three from Raigad district, it said.

Of the total number of cases of BA.2.75 sub-variant, 37 were found in Pune district, 14 in Nagpur, four in Akola and 1 each in Thane and

Tussle of the Senas: Thackeray sacks, Shinde reinstates

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Shiv Sena President Uddhav Thackeray on

Saturday sacked former minister of state Vijay Shivtare from the party and scrapped his primary membership citing antiparty activities. While Uddhav is continuing with his spate of sackings, CM Eknath Shinde has been reappointing sacked MLAs and leaders back to the same posts. On Saturday, Shinde reappointed Naresh Mhaskare as the zilla pramukh (district chief) for Thane.

Mhaskare's is the second reappointment by Shinde of a Sena office-bearer dis-

missed by Uddhav. Thackeray had sacked Mhaskare earlier in the week after Mhaskare backed Shinde.

The first to be reinstated was rebel Sena MLA Santosh Bangar. A day after he was sacked from his post by Thackeray, CM Shinde met Bang zilla pramukh of Hingoli. Sena has been announcing sacking of rebel MLAs and leaders though Saamna. The removal of Naresh Mhaskare was illegal. The Shiv Sena mouthpiece has no rights to sack a leader from his post who is holding aloft the flag of Hindutva based on the ideology of Balasaheb Thackeray and Anand Dighe. As per the Sena's constitution, any per-

son who is being sacked has to be given a proper notice and has to be heard before any action is taken. Sacking people in a hurry like this is illegal. So I have decided to reappoint Naresh Mhaskare," Shinde said.

Shivtare, who was MLA from Purandar, slammed Sena MP Sanjay Raut after being sacked. "I had left Sena before they could expel me. This is not just about politics but about the larger interest of our constituencies. Sanjay Raut is responsible for this, and everyone knows where his loyalty is, with Uddhavji or with Pawar sahib. Raut is my friend, but he has illusions and is misleading everyone," Shivtare said.

102 lives lost due to heavy rains, floods in Maharashtra since June 1

SEVERAL PARTS OF MAHARASHTRA HAD BEEN WITNESSING HEAVY RAINFALL IN THE PAST FEW DAYS AMID THE TORRENTIAL MONSOON.

A TOTAL OF 102 LIVES HAVE BEEN LOST IN RAIN AND FLOOD-RELATED INCIDENTS THAT STRUCK MAHARASHTRA SINCE JUNE 1

A TOTAL OF 13 NATIONAL DISASTER RESPONSE FORCE (NDRF) AND THREE STATE DISASTER RESPONSE FUND (SDRF) TEAMS HAVE BEEN POSITIONED BY THE GOVERNMENT IN DISTRICTS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A total of 102 lives have been lost in rain and flood-related incidents that struck Maharashtra since June 1, according to the Maharashtra State Disaster Situation Report Index. As per the SDMD, the death toll of animals stands at 189 so far. A total of 13 National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and three State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) teams have been positioned by the government in several districts of the state. Around 11,836 persons have been evacuated so

far, and 73 relief camps have been set up. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) issued a red alert for Maharashtra's Palghar on Thursday.

The major rivers of the district - Vaitarna, Tansa are flowing above the danger mark. The IMD has predicted heavy rainfall (64.5 to 115.5 mm) at isolated places over Madhya Maharashtra on July 17. Several parts of Maharashtra have been witnessing heavy rainfall over the past few days amidst the wet spell on the state since the onset of a torrential monsoon.

A number of 28 districts have been reported affected due to heavy rainfalls in the state including Pune, Satara, Solapur, Nashik, Jalgaon, Ahmednagar, Beed, Latur, Washim, Yavatmal, Dhule, Jalna, Akola, Bhandara, Buldhana, Nagpur, Nandurbar, Mumbai Sub, Palghar, Thane, Nanded, Amravati, Wardha, Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg, Gadchiroli, Sangli, Chandrapur, Kolhapur, Palghar, Nashik, Pune, and Ratnagiri districts for heavy rains were on red alert till July 14, with an orange alert over Mumbai.

Fly ash bund burst inundates five villages, contaminates river near Nagpur

Five villages were inundated with toxic fly ash slurry and a river from where Nagpur draws drinking water was contaminated after a fly ash bund of Koradi Thermal Power Station (KTPS), near Nagpur suffered a breach owing to heavy rainfall.



Khairi, Kawtha and Suradevi villages. Spreading over smaller nullahs and stream, the slurry ultimately flowed down to Kanhan river. This is nearby to the pumping station site to lift water for Nagpur.

Leena Buddhde, Centre for Sustainable Development (CSD) Director, in Nagpur told IANS: "We have been drawing attention of the authorities regularly but to no avail. KTPS regularly dumps fly ash slurry at this pond near Khasala. During a meeting in June, officials had admitted to a

legacy fly ash of 6.27 crore tonne. They don't treat it further and instead, keep on increasing the height of the bund every now and then to accommodate more slurry." CSD was one of the four organisations that had conducted a study in November 2021 which had revealed the extensive and rampant pollution in the areas around Maharashtra State Power Generation Company (MahaGenCo's) 2,400 MW Koradi and 1,340 MW Khaparkheda thermal power plants, both near Nagpur, with both surface and

ground water contaminated with toxic metals such as mercury, arsenic, aluminium, lithium etc.

While the Khasala fly ash pond is old one, the new one near Khaparkheda was supposed to be an engineered pond complete with lining. "But nothing such was done. The company keeps dumping without following any environmental norm," Buddhde said and demanded that Koradi's CMD be made personally liable for stringent punishment for playing with the lives and livelihoods of hundreds of vulnerable people.

KTPS officials were not immediately available.

Former Maharashtra Energy Minister and also the State BJP General Secretary, Chandrashekhar Bawankule visited the area later on Saturday afternoon. He assured the people of drawing attention of the state government and ensuring that they received relief soon.

Ailing teen rescued from village cut off by flood waters in Chandrapur

Team Absolute | Nagpur

A 17-year-old boy, who was critically ill and in urgent need of medical treatment, was rescued from a remote village cut off by flood waters in Chandrapur district in a joint effort by the locals and authorities.

Sahil Waghade, a resident of Tohogaon village, was rescued on Saturday in a joint effort by the local gram panchayat, the Forest Development Corporation of Maharashtra (FDCM), the police and district administration.

Sahil was suffering from fever and was undergoing treatment at a local primary health centre, but his condition deteriorated over the last few days, said Firoz Pathan, the former deputy sarpanch of Tohogaon village.

The village in Gondpipri taluka, which has a population of 1,500, was completely cut off from surrounding villages due to flood waters following incessant rains in the district since earlier this week.

The backwaters of Wardha river

blocked Tohogaon village, which was surrounded by flood water, with the access road being a forest patch.

"The doctor treating Sahil at the primary health centre advised that he be shifted to a hospital in Chandrapur. I contacted the tehsildar of Gondpipri KD Meshram intimating him about the emergency. As the roads are blocked because of flood waters, the tehsildar decided to reach the village through a forest patch via Jharan Kanagaon camp no 4," Pathan said.

Though the tehsildar travelled 25 km on a forest road with an ambulance on Friday, he could not reach the village as a tree had fallen on the road, blocking it. There was no manpower to clear the path and he was forced to turn back, he said.

"Subsequently, we contacted the forest department to clear the road. The department also alerted the Kothari police station in-charge and FDCM, who removed the fallen tree late in the night,"

Pathan said. On Saturday, Sahil and his father were brought to the forest patch in a small boat, from where the police and tehsildar shifted the boy to the Chandrapur Medical College and Hospital in an ambulance, he said.

Talking to PTI, tehsildar Meshram said, "I phoned the doctor in-charge of Tohogaon primary health centre where Sahil was admitted and he told me that the boy's condition was turning critical and he showed symptoms of malaria and dengue."

Tohogaon and a few more villages were still cut off due to flood waters. The boy had to be rescued through a forest road, which he could reach by a boat, the official said.

Pathan, villagers from Tohogaon, FDCM officials and police inspector Tushar Chavhan worked day and night to clear the path and ensure that Sahil was brought out safely, Meshram said, adding that the boy's condition was stable.

Cement mixer vehicle hits bike killing two at Kharigaon toll bridge

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a tragic incident that occurred on Saturday (July 16) at around 8:30 pm, two friends, heading towards their home at Govandi in Mumbai on their bike, were hit by a cement mixer vehicle and lost their lives in the mishap right there.

The driver of the cement mixer fled from the spot after the accident, said police officials from Narpoli police station.

The deceased were friends and colleagues working as a worker in a company at Bhiwandi in the Thane district. Narpoli police station senior police inspector Madan Ballal speaking with FPJ correspondent said, "Two friends, both working as a worker in a company at Bhiwandi in Thane district, were heading towards their home at Govandi in Mumbai on their bike when the

cement mixer vehicle hit them from behind at Kharigaon toll bridge in Thane on Saturday. Soon after getting hit by the vehicle, both of them fell from the bike and died on the spot. The deceased have been identified as Muzammil Bharkatullah Shaikh (25) and Naushad Alam Nizamuddin Ansari (25). The bodies were sent for the postmortem at a nearby hospital.

"The cement mixer vehicle driver ran away from the spot fearing that he would be beaten by the passer-by. We have taken the vehicle into our possession and have registered a case against the driver under Indian Penal Code sections 279 (Rash and Negligent Driving) and the Motor Vehicles Act.

The driver has not been arrested yet but we are sure that he will be arrested soon as the vehicle is in our possession," the senior inspector said further.

Maharashtra records 21.52% rise in water storage across 3267 dams till mid-July

Team Absolute | Mumbai

With monsoon at its peak, the water storage level in the 3,267 dams across Maharashtra has recorded a 21.52 per cent increase till mid-July as compared to the same period last year. The incessant rain across the state in the last 10 days this month is being attributed to the sharp rise in the water levels of the dams.

At present, it stands at 51.52 per cent compared to only 30 per cent last year and as against the total water storage capacity of 40,779,220 million litre, it has crossed 21,009,610 million litre. The drought-prone Marathwada region with eight districts-Aurangabad, Beed, Latur, Parbhani, Jalna, Osmanabad, Hingoli, and Nanded-has the highest number of dams at 964. As against its optimum storage capacity of 7,259,000 million litres, the water level here is now at 3,224,400 million litres. As against last year's 29 per cent, the water storage stands at 44.42 per cent. Although heavy rain has lashed Beed, Nanded, Aurangabad, Jalna, and Latur adversely impacting agricultural land, the overall water



level rise in its dam is lowest compared to other regions. The Jayakwadi dam in the Paithan taluka under the Aurangabad district has 1,247,270 million litre of water as against its maximum capacity of 2,170,930 million litre. The water level in the Jayakwadi dam, which is the main source for irrigation, drinking water, and industrial use in eight districts of the Marathwada region, is 22.45 per cent more this monsoon. Currently, the water storage in this dam is 57.45 per cent as compared to 35 per cent in the previous year till mid-July.

The Gosikhurd dam, which is the biggest

While the Marathwada region of Maharashtra shows the lowest 15.42 per cent rise in water storage in its 964 dams, Konkan leads with a striking 36.19 per cent rise in the 176 dams.

dam in the Vidarbha region, has seen a marginal increase in its water level at 3.82 per cent. The Gosikhurd dam has a maximum water storage capacity of 7,40,000 million litres. At 2,72,490 million litre, its water level stands at 36.82 per cent. Last year, it was 33 per cent. With moderate monsoon, the dam water in this region has increased. In the Nagpur division with 384 dams, the water storage is at 51.20 per cent compared to 35 per cent last season-showing a 16.20 per cent higher water storage. Similarly, the water storage level in the Amravati division with 446 dams is at 52.36 per

cent and is much higher compared to 36 per cent the previous year. The coastal Konkan region, with the lowest number of dams in the state at 176, has the highest water storage level. As against last year's 40 per cent, it stands at 76.19 per cent. The total water storage capacity of these dams is 3,51,100 million litre and it is 2,674,860 million litre at present. This region received the highest rainfall and it has resulted in the quick rise in the water level in its dams. The 571 dams in the Nashik region, which has seen floods with the Godavari crossing the danger level after heavy rain lashed the districts, has water storage of 3,002,110 million litre. These dams have been built to store up to 5,823,000 million litres of water. So far, it has crossed 50.51 per cent and last year, the water storage was just at 20 per cent a jump of 31.56 per cent. The scenario in the Pune division in Western Maharashtra is very satisfying. With a 21.15 per cent increase, 726 dams in this division recorded a 50.15 per cent rise in water storage level as compared to 29 per cent a year ago. Against its water storage capacity of 15,199,000 million litre, it already has 76,22,310 million litre.



Britney Spears hints her big music comeback may be coming soon

Los Angeles | Agencies

Pop-singer Britney Spears has signalled that she may soon return to making music as she showed off her infamous vocal skills. The 40-year-old chart topping star first burst onto the music scene back in 1998 with the release of her debut single, 'Baby... One More Time', which rocketed to the top of the charts on both sides of the Atlantic, reports mirror.co.uk. But for fans of the singer's music, it has been six long years since the release of her last album, titled 'Glory', back in 2016.

She has revealed she longs to release a new version of her debut single - and also teased her vocal skills with a video that she shared via Instagram on Friday.

Sharing a clip of herself singing a cappella, Spears wrote: "This is me yesterday doing laundry and separating clothes... I haven't shared my voice in an extremely long time a maybe too long. She continued: "and here's me playing at my house with a different version of Baby."

Spears, who warned fans she may never perform again after ending her conservatorship last year - went on to explain that she had plans to release new versions of her old single.

She wrote: "Well, I have asked for what I wanted for 14 years... a different version of Baby but have the producers actually work for me and put it together... a start..."

"But as the TEAM said NO and serves me with 4 girls, my sister included, doing a 5 minute version of 4 remixed songs to a T not even having to give effort or dance... just shot it beautifully and the sound was NEW!!"

"They ruined it for me, embarrassed me and made me feel like absolutely nothing!!! The truth is a f***ing b***h!

However, she also poured cold water on hopes she might release the track as she pre-empted some fans suggesting she should release her preferred version of the track anyway.

She wrote: "Pssss you say go do it NOW after 14 years of asking and telling... I worked my a** off then I was locked up in one place... It's too late... Like I said, they ruined it for me."

Pop-singer Britney Spears has signalled that she may soon return to making music as she showed off her infamous vocal skills.

DRUG LORD PORTRAYED IN 'NARCOS: MEXICO' CAPTURED DURING MANHUNT

Notorious cartel leader Rafael Caro Quintero, who is portrayed in the Netflix series 'Narcos: Mexico', has been captured after a lengthy manhunt that turned deadly.



Los Angeles | Agencies

Notorious cartel leader Rafael Caro Quintero, who is portrayed in the Netflix series 'Narcos: Mexico', has been captured after a lengthy manhunt that turned deadly. According to ev.com, Quintero, a longtime target of US law enforcement, was arrested Friday after a search a team aided by a search dog named Max found him hiding out in the town of San Simon in Sinaloa, Mexico, according to Mexican officials. But in a tragic twist fit for the drama series, 14 members of Mexico's navy died and one more was injured after their Blackhawk helicopter crashed following the mission. The cause of the crash is not yet known. According to ev.com, the drug lord had long been one of the FBI's most wanted criminals, with a \$20 million bounty placed on him through the State Department's

Narcotics Rewards Program. Known as the "narco of narcos," Quintero is considered to have run one of the most powerful drug trafficking units, the Guadalajara Cartel, in Mexico in the 1980s. He and his men were convicted of the 1985 kidnapping, torture, and murder of US DEA agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena, whom Quintero blamed for a raid on his marijuana plantation the year prior. After serving 28 years behind bars, Quintero was freed by a Mexican judge on a technicality in 2013, and subsequently disappeared only to reemerge as a member of the Sinaloa Cartel.

Camarena's horrific killing was brought to life for season 1 of the Netflix crime drama, with actor Tenoch Huerta taking on the role of the drug trafficker and Michael Pena starring as Camarena for the show's haunting storyline. In a statement after Quintero's arrest on Friday, US Attorney General Merrick B. Garland marked the end to the manhunt and paid tribute to Camarena.

"There is no hiding place for anyone who kidnaps, tortures, and murders American law enforcement. We are deeply grateful to Mexican authorities for their capture and arrest of Rafael Caro-Quintero," Garland stated.

"Today's arrest is the culmination of tireless work by DEA and their Mexican partners to bring Caro-Quintero to justice for his alleged crimes, including the torture and execution of DEA Special Agent Enrique 'Kiki' Camarena."

"We will be seeking his immediate extradition to the United States so he can be tried for these crimes in the very justice system Special Agent Camarena died defending."

Garland also offered condolences to victims of the helicopter crash: "We join in mourning the 14 Mexican service members who gave their lives in service to their country and extend our condolences to the loved ones they left behind."

The news comes just days after President Joe Biden met with Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador in the White House to discuss tensions between the new nations over drug enforcement policies.

The US government has requested Quintero be extradited to the US.

Rapper Kodak Black, whose real name is Bill Kahan Kapri, was arrested Friday after a traffic stop in Florida.

Rapper whose jail term Trump commuted, caught again with drugs

Los Angeles | Agencies

Rapper Kodak Black, whose real name is Bill Kahan Kapri, was arrested Friday after a traffic stop in Florida.

The rapper was pulled over when Florida Highway Patrol flagged his car as having tinted windows "which appeared to be darker than the legal limit," according to a release obtained by CNN, reports Variety.

Upon stopping Kapri, authorities discovered that the vehicle's registration had expired.

According to Variety, a small bag of 31 white tablets of oxycodone, an opioid drug, and \$75,000 in cash were uncovered upon further search.

Kapri was subsequently arrested, with online police records indicating that the rapper was taken into custody on Friday for

"possession of a controlled substance without prescription."

"Never judge a case based on an arrest," Kapri's lawyer, Bradford Cohen, said in a statement.

"There are facts and circumstances that give rise to a defense, especially in this case. We negotiated a bond of 75,000 (dollars) and we will move forward with resolving the matter quickly.

Florida Highway Patrol was not immediately available for comment.

A Florida native, Kapri was sentenced to three years in prison in November 2019 after pleading guilty to knowingly making false statements in order to unlawfully acquire firearms from a Miami-area gun shop.

His sentence was later commuted in January 2021 by former US president Donald J. Trump during the final days of his term. His

White House administration described Kapri as "a prominent artist and community leader."

Prior to his weapons charge, Kapri was indicted by a South Carolina grand jury in 2017 on charges of first degree criminal sexual conduct.

This year, Kodak Black landed a No. 2 debut on the Billboard 200 chart for his album 'Back for Everything'.

It marked his fifth album on the chart's top five. Kapri was also hospitalised after sustaining injuries in February in a shooting outside of a Los Angeles lounge.



BEYONCE DISAPPROVED OF LOOKING THIN ON 'AUSTIN POWERS IN GOLDMEMBER' 2002 POSTER

Singer-actress Beyonce starred in 'Austin Powers In Goldmember' in 2002 as Foxy Cleopatra. She wanted to stay true to herself and her character's image as she looked too skinny in the film's poster.

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer-actress Beyonce starred in 'Austin Powers In Goldmember' in 2002 as Foxy Cleopatra. She wanted to stay true to herself and her character's image as she looked too skinny in the film's poster. The film's makeup artist Kate Biscoe stated that the singer mentioned that she looked too skinny on the movie poster, reports Deadline. "She says, 'You made me too skinny. It's not me,'" Biscoe said. "Then she did this hourglass shape. And he said, 'Okay, we'll fix that.' She walked away to go do the scene, and I looked at him and smiled, like, 'Is that the first time that you've ever had an actress ask to make her body bigger?'" "He was like, 'Yes. It's going to cost me thousands of dollars, but I am going to do it.' Of course they did it because it's Beyonce!" 'Austin Powers In Goldmember' was the second movie she starred in. At the time Beyonce was still building a solo career and was on her way to becoming the powerhouse she is today. Beyonce isn't the first, and won't be the last. Kate Winslet is known for advocating against such practices.



Grammy Award-winning popstar Ashanti, whose full name is Ashanti Shequoiya Douglas, said that her unique name had caused confusion to other children growing up but revealed that it means "woman of strength", and originates from a tribe in the West African country of Ghana.

Los Angeles | Agencies

Grammy Award-winning popstar Ashanti, whose full name is Ashanti Shequoiya Douglas, said that her unique name had caused confusion to other children growing up but revealed that it means "woman of strength", and originates from a tribe in the West African country of Ghana. She said, "Growing up having a very unique name, there were moments. I remember there was circle time and the teacher would call out names."

Ashanti added, "The kids would go, 'Why doesn't her name sound like this or that?' My name originates in Ghana." "When you travel outside of the country, sometimes the women are considered low on the totem pole. But there's a tribe of people called the Ashanti and in this specific tribe, the women run things. It means woman of strength and I thought this is perfect for me." The 'Rock Wit U' hitmaker, who is currently single but previously had a ten-year relationship with fellow musician Nelly, has penned her first children's book titled 'My Name Is a Story' and was inspired by her own life to write a book about "embracing" unusual first names, reports aceshowbiz.com.

She told E News! that "I want this to resonate with kids who don't necessarily have a unique name so they know not to make fun of a person that has a unique name and to know it's okay if that name doesn't sound familiar to you."

"Don't make fun of it, embrace it. Stop to think about how someone else may feel. There's a story behind that. That's why that name is different."

Popstar Ashanti reveals why her name often causes confusion



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Larsa Pippen



3rd ODI

HARDIK, PANT HELP INDIA HAMMER ENGLAND BY 5 WICKETS, WIN SERIES 2-1

Manchester | Agencies

Hardik Pandya's impressive all-round show along with Rishabh Pant's fantastic maiden century in the 50-over cricket helped India thrash England by five wickets in the third and final ODI and win the three-match series 2-1 at Old Trafford, here on Sunday.

All-rounder Hardik Pandya (4/24) and leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal's (3/60) superb bowling efforts helped India bowl out England for 259 in 45.5 overs.

Skipper Jos Buttler played a vital knock (60 off 80) for England, who were invited to bat first by India captain Rohit Sharma. Apart from Buttler, Jason Roy (41), Moeen Ali (34), and Craig Overton (32) were the other main contributors with the bat for the hosts. Besides Pandya and Chahal, Mohammed Siraj (2/66), and Ravindra Jadeja (1/21) were the other wicket-takers for India. Chasing a challenging total, India were in deep, deep trouble at 72-4 in 16.2 overs after losing the wickets of



Shikhar Dhawan (1), Rohit Sharma (17), Virat Kohli (17), Suryakumar Yadav (16).

But Hardik and Pant batted sensibly, found regular boundaries and stitched a match-winning stand of 133 runs. Pandya (71 off 55) got

out in the 36th over of the innings when India needed 55 runs. However, Pant became even more aggressive and went on to hit his first ODI century. He remained not out (125 off 113) and along with Ravindra Jadeja (7 not out off

15) helped India to a thumping five-wicket victory in 42.1 overs. Reece Topley (3/35) was England's most successful bowler while Brydon Carse (1/45) and Craig Overton (1/54) also chipped in with one wicket each.

Brief scores

England 259 all out in 45.5 overs (Jos Buttler 60, Jason Roy 41; Hardik Pandya 4/24, Yuzvendra Chahal 3/60) lost to India 261-5 in 42.1 Overs (Rishabh Pant 125 not out, Hardik Pandya 71; Reece Topley 3/35) by five wickets

PRESIDENT, PM, SPORTS MINISTER LAUD, CONGRATULATE SINDHU ON WINNING SINGAPORE OPEN TITLE

Team Absolute | New Delhi

President Ram Nath Kovind, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Sports Minister Anurag Thakur on Sunday congratulated ace Indian shuttler PV Sindhu on winning her first-ever Singapore Open title.

Double Olympic medallist Sindhu clinched the women's singles title at the Singapore Open 2022 BWF Super 500 tournament after beating China's Wang Zhi Yi 21-9, 11-21, 21-15 in the final, which lasted for 58 minutes in Singapore.

This was her third title of the year after she won the Syed Modi International in January and the Swiss Open in March, which were BWF Super 300-level meets.

"Heartiest congratulations to PV Sindhu for winning the Singapore Open 2022 tournament for the first time. Your resilience and enthusiasm are inspiring. May you continue to bring glory and pride to our country," said the President of India in a tweet.

According to Prime Minister Modi, Sindhu's win is a proud moment for the country and her victory will inspire upcoming players.

"I congratulate PV Sindhu on winning her first ever Singapore Open title. She has again demonstrated her exceptional sporting talent and achieved success. It is a proud moment for the country and will also give inspiration to



upcoming players," Modi tweeted.

The Sports Minister felt that the star Indian badminton player is looking in great form with her third title of the year.

"A stunning performance by @Pvsindhu1 to clinch her first-ever #SingaporeOpen title with a 21-9, 11-21, 21-15 defeat of #WangZhi. With her third title of 2022, @Pvsindhu1 is looking in great form!" said Thakur in a tweet. Meanwhile, Badminton Association of India (BAI) president Himanta Biswa Sarma also congratulated Sindhu on her achievement.

"Bravo! Absolutely brilliant performance. Heartiest congratulations to @Pvsindhu1 on winning #SingaporeOpenSuper500. You have once again made us proud!" said Sarma in a tweet.

"Keep shining and keep inspiring with many such victories #SingaporeOpen @BAI_Media," he added.

Before Sindhu, the last time an Indian won the Singapore Open was in 2017 when B Sai Praneeth clinched the men's singles title. Saina Nehwal won the women's singles title in 2010.

Pramod Bhagat sails through to final of 4 Nations Para-badminton International

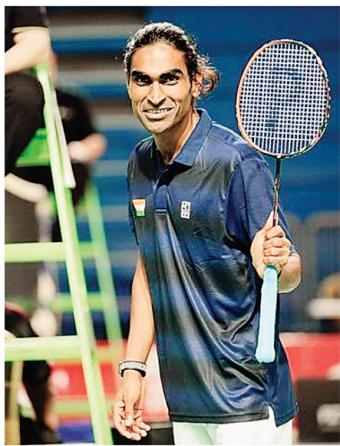
Team Absolute | New Delhi

World No. 1 Pramod Bhagat has sailed into the final of the 4 Nations Para-badminton International 2022. The ace shuttler defeated Japan's Daisuke Fujihara and will now face arch-rival England's, Daniel Bethell.

Pramod Bhagat breezed past Japan's Daisuke Fujihara in straight sets. The scoreline read 21-15, 21-15 and now will face England's Bethell, whom Pramod defeated to win the first gold medal in badminton by an Indian in Paralympics/Olympics.

Daniel Bethell defeated India's Kumar Nitesh in straight sets, the scoreline reading 21-14, 21-13.

Talking about the match, Padma Shri awardee Bhagat said, "Fujihara played really well but I was able to keep my rhythm going. As the job is not finished yet I am looking forward to the final."



I have waited for three years to join Kerala Blasters FC, says Victor Mongil

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Kerala Blasters FC's latest signing Victor Mongil has revealed that it was always a dream for him to play for the club since arriving in the Indian Super League (ISL) for the first time in the 2019-20 campaign.

Mongil, a Spanish professional footballer, returned to the ISL in 2021, but he could not get his dream move to Blasters and joined Odisha FC instead.

The centre-back had a good season with the Juggernauts that paved the way to his dream move to Kochi ahead of the 2022-23 season.

"I have been lucky to play for some really top clubs in ATK FC and Odisha FC but for me, this move was the best because Kerala Blasters FC, for me, are the biggest club in India because of their support and love of the fans," Mongil said on the



Kerala Blasters FC's Instagram page.

"I've been waiting for three years for this (chance to play for Kerala Blasters FC) but now it's a reality. I am very excited for this new chapter and I can't wait to play my first game in front of our fans at

Kochi," he added. Mongil has played 28 matches in the ISL across his two stints and has a staggering passing accuracy of 80.78 percent during these matches. He will thus slot in directly into head coach Ivan Vukomanovic's technical style of play and thereby improve the team.

"I like the project as Kerala Blasters FC want to always fight for the top position and every player wants to be part of such big projects," he said.

"Last season was great but we want to continue in the same way. The new season presents us with another opportunity to play in a final. So we want to keep fighting till we reach another final," added Mongil.

Mongil, who has the experience of playing in the second and third tiers of Spanish football, will bring a lot of experience to the table which will certainly help the youngsters that form a big part of the team's core.

Babar surpasses Kohli in becoming fastest Asian batter to reach 10,000 runs in international cricket

Galle | Agencies

Pakistan skipper Babar Azam on Sunday became the fastest batter from Asia and eleventh overall from his country to cross 10,000 runs in international cricket.

Babar achieved the landmark during his unbeaten knock of 34 off 72 balls in Pakistan's first innings against Sri Lanka during the first Test at Galle International Stadium. He is now the fastest batter from Asia to get 10,000 runs in international cricket, going past the previous record set by talismanic India batter Virat Kohli in 232 innings.

Amongst all Pakistan batters to reach the 10,000 runs mark in international cricket, Babar is the fastest to reach the landmark in 228 innings, surpassing the previous record of 248 innings held by legendary batter



Javed Miandad.

As per innings taken to reach 10,000 runs in international cricket, Babar is fifth fastest batter to reach the mark in 228 innings after Viv Richards (206 innings), Hashim Amla (217 innings), Brian Lara (220 innings) and Joe Root (222 innings). "10,000 international runs. Congratulations skipper @babarazam258 on becoming the 11th Pakistan batter to accomplish this major milestone," tweeted the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB).

At lunch on day two, Babar now has 10013 runs in 228 innings at 51.08, including 24 centuries and 66 half-centuries. With Pakistan at 104-7 in 46 overs and still trailing by 118 runs, Pakistan will be hoping that Babar continues to hold fort for them at Galle.

FIBA Asia Cup: India lose to Lebanon, end campaign without a win

Jakarta | Agencies

The Indian men's basketball team's campaign at the FIBA Asia Cup 2022 came to an end after a crushing 63-104 loss against Lebanon in its final Group D match at the Istora Gelora Bung Karno Stadium, here on Sunday.

The loss meant India finished their outing at the fourth and last position in Group D. Only the top team from each group progressed to the quarter-finals, while the second and third placed nations advanced to the play-offs. This was India's third straight defeat in the competition, having earlier lost to New Zealand (47-100) and the Philippines (59-101). The match against world



No 54 Lebanon started off on a dismal note for India as they were down 18-4 within the first four minutes. Ranked 82 in the world, India failed to provide any resistance to the surging Lebanon team and further slumped to 57-23 before half-time. The match ended 104-63 in Lebanon's favour, putting an end to India's dismal campaign at

the continental showpiece, an olympics.com report said.

Muin Bek Hafeez and Pratyanshu Tomar were the top scorers for India in the match with each of them scoring 11 points. Amritpal Singh was the next best with 10 points. Lebanon, on the other hand, were aided by Yousef Khayat's 15 points and Jonathan Alredge's 14.

HOSTING OF 2022 ASIA CUP COULD BE MOVED FROM SRI LANKA TO THE UAE: REPORT

Dubai | Agencies

The hosting of 2022 Asia Cup could be shifted out of Sri Lanka despite the island nation successfully hosting an all-format tour of Australia men's team, a white-ball tour of India women's team and is currently hosting a two-match men's Test series against Pakistan without any major issues.

A report in ESPNcricinfo says that despite the possibility of the tournament being moved to the UAE, Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) will remain the official host of the 2022 Asia Cup. The report added that a decision was taken at an Asian Cricket Council (ACC) meeting this week, which remains concerned by the acute shortage of fuel which has played a big part in grinding Sri Lanka down to a halt.

Since April this year, Sri Lanka has been in acute economic and social crisis due to daily power cuts, rising fuel prices and massive shortages of basic essentials like food and medicines which prompted resignation of president Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who fled to Singapore via Maldives.

"Hosting two teams is not the same as host-

ing ten teams. You have to provide ten buses with fuel for all of them. You have to give every team a luggage van with fuel, and transport for the managers. You also have to give the sponsors transport and ensure that they are getting the mileage that they want from their sponsorship. The fuel for the generators to run the floodlights will also have to be found," SLC chief executive officer Ashley de Silva was quoted as saying in the report. The report further said that the ACC is set to announce the 2022 Asia Cup schedule on July 22 and it will likely have India and Pakistan facing each other



twice in the league phase. De Silva added that with Sri Lanka in a dire state due to fuel short-

"The ACC had limited options regarding back-up venues considering June through

age and political instability would have stopped many fans from India and Pakistan to fly in to the country.

"There are also two India vs Pakistan matches, and there will be people who want to travel and watch those matches. People might not be happy to travel to Sri Lanka because of the situation."

The report also said that with the operational costs for the Asia Cup borne by ACC, SLC won't see any revenue loss, but the local economy in Sri Lanka will lose substantially with hotels and transport operators missing out.

September is monsoon season over most of the Indian subcontinent. In terms of the infrastructure and travel, the UAE has proved to be a successful venue, but late August and early September generally witness extreme temperatures of over 40 degree celsius with humidity also expected to be a factor. Accordingly, the matches could start early evening," added the report. The 2022 Asia Cup, in 20-over format, will see India entering the competition as defending champions, having won the competition in the 50-over format in 2018 in the UAE. Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh will feature in the tournament and will be joined by another Asian side, which could be either of UAE, Kuwait, Singapore or Hong Kong, to be decided after a qualifying tournament, for which the schedule is yet to be known. The 2022 Asia Cup will be the 15th edition of the tournament, having started from 1984 in Sharjah. India are the most successful team of the tournament, winning it seven times, including the T20I edition in 2016. Sri Lanka have won the competition five times while Pakistan emerged as the winning team twice.



BIGG BOSS 16:

HERE IS WHAT WE KNOW

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bigg Boss is one of the most loved and successful reality shows on television and it has had fifteen blockbuster seasons. In the last season, Tejaswi Prakash emerged as the winner of the show and buzz for the next season is already paving the way. The preparation for the upcoming season is on and the makers have already approached many celebrities for the show. If reports are to be believed, Arjun Bijlani, Sanaya Irani, Shiny Ahuja, and Divyanka Tripathi are amongst the few celebrities who have been approached for the show. As per the latest reports, stand-up comedian Munawar Faruqui has become the first confirmed contestant of the upcoming season. Yes! You read that right.

Earlier, Faruqui participated and won Kangana Ranaut hosted Lock Upp. Meanwhile, Munawar was also supposed to take part in Khatron Ke Khiladi 12 but things could not work out at the last minute.

Munawar Faruqui becomes the first confirmed contestant?



Varalaxmi Sarathkumar tests Covid positive, urges fans to be cautious and mask up

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Covid-19 appears to be back with a firmer grip this time. Varalaxmi Sarathkumar, a fellow actress, tested positive for the virus after Shruti Haasan. She posted a video on Twitter with the caption "Covid Positive...inspite of all precautions...actors plz start insisting on masking up the entire crew bcos we as actors cant wear masks.. Those who have met me or been in contact with me plz watch out for symptoms and get checked...Plz be careful and mask up..covid is still here."

In the meantime, Varalaxmi Sarathkumar has joined the cast of the multilingual drama Sabari. The film started production in April of this year. When asked about her future project, the actress was reported as responding, "I am overjoyed and delighted to begin this project. I can't wait to be a part of the shoot. I feel the audience will definitely enjoy this film."

Sabari, directed by Anil Katz, is a psychological thriller. Varalaxmi Sarathkumar will appear in this suspense thriller alongside Ganesh Venkatraman, Sashank Siddhamsetty, and Mime Gopi, among others.

The filmmaker said about this highly awaited picture, Sabari, that it is the narrative of today's lady, whose characterisation echoes the goals of an individual soul. A strong woman who is prepared to go to war to attain her goals. Varalaxmi Sarathkumar, who has a bright personality both on and off screen, embodies today's powerful women.



AKANKSHA PURI REALISED SHE HAD FEELINGS FOR MIKKA, AFTER SEEING HIM WITH OTHER WOMEN

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Swayamvar: Mika Di Vohti is going to come to an end. Mika Singh will soon select who his ideal girl would be. In the episode, we saw 12 potential brides. However, four of them were removed on the first day. We thereafter saw two wild card competitors enter the competition. Following that, Mika's best friend for the past 12 years Akanksha Puri joined the show. They have been quite close and are very familiar with one another. There have been rumours that they are dating.

They had, however, disputed the rumours.

Everyone, even Mika, was taken aback by Akanksha's appearance. She stated that after seeing Mika with all the females, she realised she had feelings for him. They believed it was unjust because Mika and Akanksha already knew one another and had a deep relationship. Many participants thought Akanksha had 12 years to realise her sentiments, but she didn't.

Mika has already visited Prantika and Akanksha's families and will shortly visit Neet and Riya's. Chandrani Das was one of the show's most talked-about participants. Mika had also compared her to Shweta Tiwari. She was voted out soon before the finale.

Chandrani Das discussed Akanksha's appearance on the show in an exclusive chat with Zoom Digital. She has questioned whether Akanksha's entry was fair. She stated, "There were friends for 12 years but Mika Singh never thought about her in that way. After 12 years she suddenly thought of getting married to Mika and going to his swayamvar. People can have feelings for anyone at any time. It can happen in a year or after 12 years. Maybe Akanksha wasn't sure about her feelings before."

"I feel when two people know each other very well, their relationship grows strong. We all went there but we did not know how Mika is. We got time with each other and we started getting to know each other slowly. But Akanksha and he have known each other for years and I feel this will be a perfect relationship," she said.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

RANBIR AND ALIA BHATT STARRERS FIRST SONG OUT!

Brahmastra, starring Ranbir Kapoor and Alia Bhatt, is one of the most awaited films.

The film also stars Amitabh Bachchan, Nagarjuna, and Mouni Roy in crucial parts and is set to be released in four additional languages - Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam - on September 9. The film is being presented in all four languages by director SS Rajamouli. The fantasy adventure drama is designed to be the first of a trilogy as part of its cinematic world named Astraverse.

After a long wait, Brahmastra's song Kesariya was released a few hours ago. Prior to the song's release, Alia Bhatt, Ayan Mukerji, and Ranbir Kapoor participated in an Instagram LIVE and shared tales about the song with their fans. During the online conversation, the Gangubai Kathiawadi actress said that the song has a unique significance to THEIR love story. Alia stated, "In Maasai Mara, Ranbir asked me during lunch, 'Alia what is our song?' We don't have a song, which is weird. But, Ayan, you gave us Kesariya."

Ranbir also commented on the Brahmastra buzz, saying, "I don't remember the last time there was so much anticipation for a song. So I feel really lucky." "We actually changed our release plans to go release the Kesariya music video first," Alia revealed. Brahmastra is Ranbir and Alia's first movie together post their marriage.



IBRAHIM ALI KHAN AND MAHIKAA RAMPAL ARE SPOTTED PARTYING TOGETHER, FANS SPECULATE WHAT'S BREWING BETWEEN THEM!



When it comes to star kids, whether or not they have entered the film industry, they are constantly under scrutiny and fans like to stay updated with all the latest gossip about them. Saif Ali Khan's son Ibrahim Ali Khan is paps favourite and there are no two opinions on that. Recently, Ibrahim Ali Khan was seen partying with Arjun Rampal's daughter Mahikaa Rampal in London over the weekend. One of their mutual friends posted pictures and videos from their night out on social media. Ibrahim and Mahikaa were seen posing in only one photo, and they appeared to be having a great time. While Ibrahim looked dapper in a black t-shirt, Mahikaa, on the other hand, looked gorgeous in a black top that she teamed with black trousers. Reacting to the picture, one netizen asked, "Ibrahim Mahikaa ko date kar reha hai?" Ibrahim Ali Khan was previously rumoured to be dating Shweta Tiwari's daughter Palak Tiwari after the two were photographed leaving a restaurant.

Meanwhile, Ibrahim is currently working as an assistant director with Karan Johar in his upcoming film 'Rocky Aur Rani Ki Prem Kahani'. The film stars Alia Bhatt and Ranveer Singh in lead roles and Dharmendra, Shabana Azmi, and Jaya Bachchan in supporting. Talking about Mahikaa, although she is away from the showbiz world.

IS ILEANA D'CRUZ DATING KATRINA KAIF'S BROTHER SEBASTIAN LAURENT MICHEL? HERE'S WHAT WE KNOW

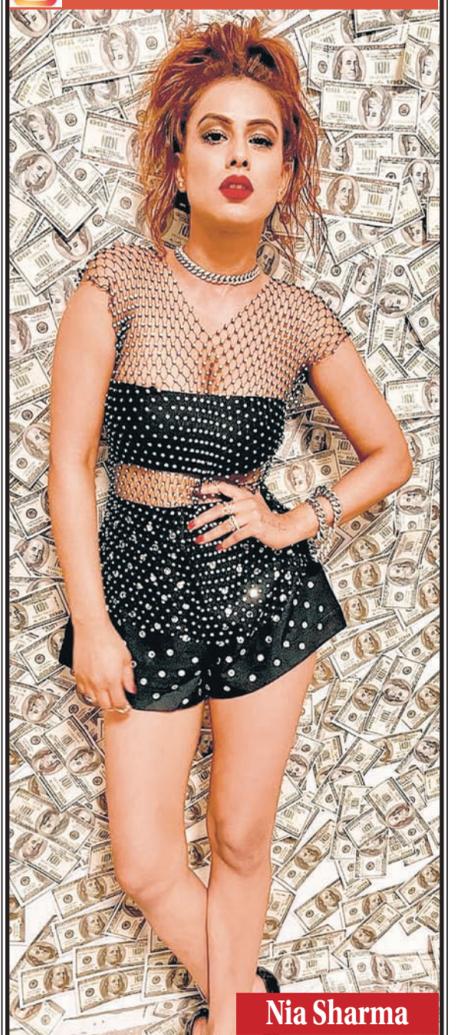
Actress Katrina Kaif recently jetted off to the Maldives to celebrate her birthday with her close pals. The actress took to her social media and shared pictures with her girl gang. What grabbed our attention was actress Ileana D'Cruz's presence in the picture. If reports are to be believed, Bollywood actress Ileana D'Cruz has reportedly found love again. The actress is dating Katrina Kaif's brother Sebastian Laurent Michel. However, Ileana D'Cruz and Sebastian Laurent Michel are yet to confirm their relationship.

To note, Sebastian, who keeps his account private, and Ileana follow each other on Instagram.

Ileana was earlier in a relationship with Andrew Kneebone. While the actress once addressed him as 'hubby', it wasn't confirmed whether the two were married or not. However, in 2019, they parted ways.

On the work front, Ileana was last seen in The Big Bull. She has been paired opposite Randeep Hooda in Tera Kya Hoga Lovely. Ileana also shot with Vidya Balan, Pratik Gandhi and Sendhil Ramamurthy for an untitled romantic comedy.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Nia Sharma