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INDIA WITNESSED DRIEST CONDITIONS SINCE 1901 IN AUG: WEATHER EXPERTS

Meteorological experts from India are set to unveil their forecast for September on August 31. According to a senior IMD official, India is poised to wrap up the June-September monsoon season with a deficit of no less than 8 per cent in rainfall, marking the largest such shortage since 2015, a period during which El Nino similarly led to diminished precipitation.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India has witnessed driest weather conditions since 1901 in August this year, a senior meteorologist said, adding it was a clear result of the intensifying El Nino conditions.

"Rainfall in August was subdued due to the influence of El Nino, and this is expected to adversely affect rainfall patterns in September," stated a senior representative from the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

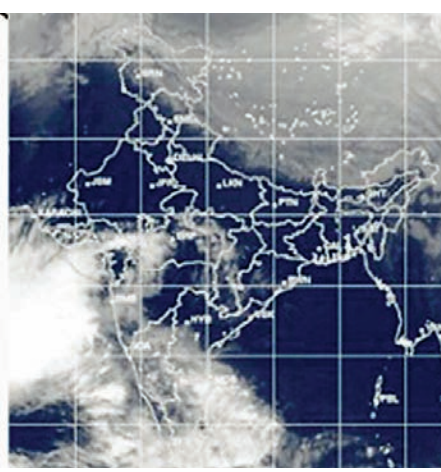
"The southwest monsoon will commence its retreat from northern India on or before September 17. The past four Septembers have witnessed rainfall levels above the average due to the prolonged departure of the monsoon," he said.

In the upcoming month, northern and eastern states may experience rainfall below the normal levels.

Conversely, the southern peninsula could see a resurgence in rainfall.

Earlier, the IMD had said that there are high probabilities for the development of El Nino conditions over the equatorial Pacific Ocean and positive Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) conditions over the Indian Ocean during July to September 2023.

A senior IMD official said that as sea surface temperature conditions



over the Pacific and the Indian Oceans are known to have strong influence on Indian monsoon and the weather department is carefully monitoring the evolution of sea surface conditions over these Ocean basins.

The IMD said that currently, warm El Nino-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) neutral conditions are prevailing over the equatorial Pacific and the sea surface temperatures (SSTs) across most of the equatorial Pacific Ocean are warmer than normal and near El Nino threshold value.

"The latest forecasts from Monsoon Mission Climate Forecasting System (MMCFS) and other global models indicate high probabilities for the El Nino conditions to develop during the middle of the monsoon season and continue till the first quarter of 2024," the IMD said.

"In addition to ENSO conditions over Pacific, other factors such as the Indian Ocean SSTs have also some influence on Indian monsoon. Currently, neutral IOD conditions are prevailing over Indian Ocean," it said.

Heavy rainfall activity to continue over extreme south Peninsular India

New Delhi: A fresh heavy rainfall spell is likely over Odisha-Chhattisgarh-north Andhra Pradesh, Telangana from Saturday and isolated heavy rainfall activity is expected to continue over Andaman-Nicobar islands and extreme south Peninsular India during next 3-4 days, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Wednesday. In Northeast India, there is a forecast for light to moderate scattered rainfall, becoming fairly widespread, with the possibility of isolated instances of heavy rainfall.

In East India, there is an anticipated increase in rainfall activity starting from Saturday. In Central India, there is a prediction of light to moderate fairly widespread to widespread rainfall. Along with this, thunderstorms and lightning are expected, with the possibility of isolated instances of heavy rainfall. This is particularly likely over south Chhattisgarh on Saturday and Sunday. The forecast indicates light to moderate scattered rainfall in South India, with the chance of isolated heavy rainfall.

Chinese army constructing bunkers, tunnels at Aksai Chin: Reports

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Chinese forces are learnt to have ramped up construction of reinforced bunkers and underground tunnels in Aksai Chin, according to reports citing data from satellite imagery.

As per the reports, construction activities are taking place in Aksai Chin, a territory held illegally by China, but historically claimed by India.

The reports further said that Chinese forces have started carving tunnels and shafts alongside a narrow river valley, to construct bunkers and shelters.

The development has come on the heels of China releasing a "standard map" showing parts of Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh under its jurisdiction, on Monday. Reacting to the map, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Tuesday that "China has put out maps with territories (that are) not theirs. (It is an) old habit.



"Just by putting out maps with parts of India... this doesn't change anything. Our government is very clear about what our territory is. Making absurd claims does not make other people's territories yours," he added.

Also on Tuesday, India lodged a strong protest with China on the release of a so-called "standard map".

"We have today lodged a strong protest through diplomatic channels with the Chinese side on the so called 2023 'standard map' of China that lays claim to India's territory," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said.

"We reject these claims as they have no basis. Such steps by the Chinese side only complicate the resolution of the boundary question," he added.

The release of the map comes just days before the G20 summit, which is scheduled to take place in New Delhi on September 9 and 10. Last week during his informal conversation with China's President Xi Jinping at the BRICS summit in South Africa, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had conveyed New Delhi's "concerns over unresolved issues along LAC and other areas along the India-China border."

India logs 61 new Covid cases

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India has registered 61 new Covid cases during the past 24 hours, taking the country's overall case-load to 4,49,97,117, the Health Ministry said on Wednesday.

On the other hand, 48



people recovered from the disease, taking the tally to 4,44,63,666, as per the

Ministry's latest update. The recovery rate stood at 98.81 per cent.

According to the Health Ministry's data, the death toll stood at 5,31,929, while active cases at 1,522.

More than 220.67 crore doses of Covid-19 vaccine have been administered so far.

After tomatoes, now onions set kitchen budget on fire

Lucknow | Agencies

Even as tomatoes have stopped seeing red, it is now the turn of onions to set the kitchen budget on fire.

The prices of onion have almost doubled in the last 15 days from Rs 20-25 per kg to Rs 40-45 per kg owing to crop damage and supply chain disruptions in Maharashtra, which is the country's largest supplier of onions.

Onion dealers claim that onion prices could go up to Rs 80 per kg by the end of September.

According to experts, the Rabi yield season, which is sown in December and harvested in April, was adversely affected by heatwaves, erratic rainfall patterns and supply chain disruptions.

As a result, they are not



receiving deliveries as scheduled. The number of trucks bringing in onions has gone down to 30-35 trucks from the earlier 45 trucks per day.

The Rabi production constitutes 60 per cent of Maharashtra's onion crop. Lucknow, in particular, is feeling the pinch of rising onion costs because the state

capital is the hub of Mughlai cuisine in which onion is a main ingredient.

Shamsi, the owner of a popular food chain in the state capital said: "The price of onion directly impacts the basic cost of our dishes because almost all of them require onion in ample measure."

PORTFOLIOS ALLOTTED TO NEW APPOINTED MINISTERS IN MP

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan has allotted portfolios among the three newly appointed ministers. Gaurishankar Bisen has been assigned Narmada Valley Development, Rajendra Shukla has been assigned Public Health Engineering and Public Relations and Rahul Lodhi (Minister of State) has been assigned Cottage and Village Industries (Independent Charge) and Forest Ministry. Madhya Pradesh State Planning Commission will now be named Madhya Pradesh State Niti Ayog. The Planning, Economic and Statistics Department issued its notification on Wednesday.

According to this, the officer holding the post of Member Secretary in the Planning Commission will now be called Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

SC to resume hearing on pleas challenging remission granted to Bilkis Bano case convicts

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court is slated to resume hearing on Thursday in a batch of petitions challenging the remission granted to 11 convicts in the infamous case of gang rape of Bilkis Bano and murder of her family members during the 2002 post-Godhra riots.

The final hearing is underway before a bench of Justices B.V. Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan in the matter against the release of convicts, including on the plea filed by Bilkis Bano herself.

On August 24, the top court had remarked that convicts, whose remission applications were considered by the Gujarat government pursuant to an earlier order of the top court, cannot argue that the remission orders setting them free cannot be challenged at all.

In the earlier judgment, the Supreme Court had directed the Gujarat government to consider and decide the application for



premiere release within two months in terms of remission of 1992 policy of the state.

The bench said that its earlier order was limited to the extent that the Gujarat government is the appropriate government to decide convicts' application for remission and remission order passed thereafter would fall under the category of 'administrative order.'

The 11 men convicted in the case were released on August 15 last year, after the Gujarat government allowed their release under its remission policy. The convicts had completed 15 years in jail.

FIVE DIE AFTER INHALING TOXIC GAS AT MP FACTORY

Bhopal: At least five persons were reported dead on Wednesday after inhaling toxic gas emanating from a tank at a food factory in Madhya Pradesh's Morena.

The gas leak occurred at a factory named 'Sakshi Food Product' in Morena district, the officials said.

As per the information, toxic gas started emanating from a tank at the factory around 11 a.m. and two labourers entered it to check it, but did not return. Subsequently, three more labourers went inside the tank and they also got affected. The affected persons were labourers working in the factory. Due to inhalation of poisonous gas, they fell unconscious.

Following which, they were rushed to a nearby hospital where the doctors declared them dead. Around half a dozen more labourers were also suspected to have inhaled the toxic gas and they have been admitted at a hospital. Morena SDM Bhupendra Singh Kushwaha said.

Local police have reached the spot and a rescue operation was carried out. Confirming more about the incident, Morena Superintendent of Police (SP) Shaileendra Chouhan said the labourers died in the boiler of a cherry factory. The bodies have been sent for post-mortem. The deceased persons have been identified as Ramesh Meena, Raju Meena, Mukesh Meena, Suresh Meena and Chhotel Meena, according to the police.



Centre extends deadline till Dec 31 for enabling Aadhaar-based payment for MGNREGA workers

- ▶ MGNREGA has not adopted Aadhaar-enabled payment, the ministry clarified, adding that the scheme has opted for ABPS.
- ▶ If a beneficiary does not demand for work, in such a case her or his status about eligibility for APBS does not affect the demand for work. Job cards cannot be deleted on the basis that the worker is not eligible for APBS, the ministry clarified further.
- ▶ Out of the total 14.33 crore active beneficiaries, the Aadhaar has been seeded for 13.97 crore. Against these seeded Aadhaar, a total 13.34 crore Aadhaar have been authenticated and 81.89 per cent of active workers are now eligible for APBS.
- ▶ In July 2023, about 88.51 per cent of wage payments had been made through APBS.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Central government has extended the deadline for enabling payment of wages for MGNREGA workers through the Aadhaar-based payment system (ABPS) till December 31.

The Centre had in February this year announced that MGNREGA workers will be paid wages on the basis of ABPS to prevent fake identities and irregularities in payments under the scheme. "The progress of Aadhaar-based Payment System (ABPS) has been reviewed and the mixed route of wage payment (NACH and ABPS route) has been extended till 31st December 2023 or till further order," the rural development ministry said on Wednesday. "It has been brought to the notice of the Central government that in many cases due to frequent changes in bank account numbers by the beneficiary and non-updating of the new account number by the concerned programme officer of the same, due to non-submission of new account by the beneficiary on time, several transactions of wage payment are being rejected (due to old account number) by destination bank branch," the ministry said, while giving the reason for extending the deadline. At the same time, it has made it clear to all the states that beneficiaries who come for work should be requested to provide



an Aadhaar number, but will not be refused work on this basis. ABPS is helping the genuine beneficiaries to get their due payment and is instrumental in curbing corruption by weeding out fake beneficiaries, official sources said.

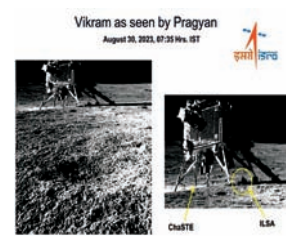
India's moon rover Pragyan takes snaps of moon lander Vikram

Chennai | Agencies

India's moon rover has clicked a snap of its carrier -- the moon lander -- on the lunar soil, and the Indian space agency on Tuesday released the same.

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in a post on the social media platform X on Tuesday said: "Smile, please! Pragyan Rover clicked an image of Vikram Lander this morning. The image was taken by the Navigation Camera onboard the Rover (NavCam). NavCams for the Chandrayaan-3 Mission are developed by the Laboratory for Electro-Optics Systems (LEOS)."

Interestingly, ISRO has now called its moon lander as Pragyan and the rover as Pragyani.



Earlier the Indian space agency termed them just as Lander and Rover. The Indian space agency had called the lander and rover of its Chandrayaan-2 mission as Pragyan and Vikram. However, while attempting a soft landing on the moon, Vikram crashed down. India on August 23 reached the Moon with its lander safely landing on the lunar soil in a textbook style. Later the rover rolled down and started doing experiments.



'PEOPLE OF INDIA WANT CHANGE', SAYS PAWAR ON EVE OF I.N.D.I.A. CONCLAVE

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Setting the tone for the two-day I.N.D.I.A. Conclave starting here on Thursday, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) President Sharad Pawar said on Wednesday that "the people of the country want a change", for which the Opposition leaders are gathering here.

Speaking at a joint media briefing, Pawar hinted at the possibility of discussing the prickly issue of seat-sharing for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections by the national Opposition parties.

The NCP chief said that the first two I.N.D.I.A. alliance meetings were very critical and now the joint strategy of the Opposition bloc to counter the Bharatiya Janata Party is likely to be discussed over the next two days.

He said a panel comprising some senior leaders may be formed and given the task of discussing the seat-sharing formula for the Lok Sabha



Narendra Modi at various national Opposition leaders, Pawar dared the Centre that "if they have the courage,

they should investigate the cases and bring out the facts" instead of just making such accusations.

On the likely stance of BSP supremo Mayawati, who is reportedly toying with the idea of joining I.N.D.I.A., Pawar said it remains to be seen, as "she is also having discussions with the BJP".

The 83-year-old leader was addressing a packed media conference on the eve of the two-day I.N.D.I.A. Conclave scheduled on Thursday-Friday to chart out the national Opposition parties' game-plan to dislodge the BJP from power.

So far, 28 Opposition parties have confirmed participation in the meeting from all over India. This is the first INDIA Conclave to be held in a state not ruled by any of the bloc's constituents, unlike the previous two meetings held in Bihar and Karnataka.

'Delhi Services Act': Officers openly rebel against written orders of elected govt, says Kejriwal

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday targeted the Central government saying that the Delhi Services Act has granted officers the licence to openly rebel against the written orders of the elected government of Delhi.

"Delhi Services Act gives officers the licence to openly rebel against written orders of the elected government. Officers have begun to refuse to obey the orders of elected ministers. Can any state, country, or institution function under such circumstances? This Act will harm Delhi, and this is what the BJP wants. The Act needs to be struck down as soon as possible," Kejriwal posted on X. Earlier in the day, Delhi Minister Atishi said that officials were openly rebelling



against the Delhi government. While addressing a conference, Atishi said that the Chief Secretary had previously declined to act on their order, and now the Finance Secretary had written a 40-page letter refusing to comply with their directive. "The statements previously made by officials about resisting orders now appear to be coming true. Following the Chief Secretary in Delhi, the Finance Secretary has also declined to adhere to the government's orders by composing a 40-page letter. With reference to the Delhi Services Act, there is an ongoing attempt to impede

all government activities," she said.

"I'd like to inquire again: Has the Central government instructed officials in Delhi to reject orders from the elected government and undermine the democracy? Does the notion of the 'Triple Chain of Accountability' mentioned in the Supreme Court's orders not hold any significance for them?" she asked.

Atishi said that the order given to the Finance Secretary pertained to a court case involving GST refunds. This order was initially issued by the then Finance Minister Kailash Ghetlot and subsequently by her. "Now, if officials do not comply with the elected government's orders concerning routine government processes, how will the government effectively serve the people's interests?" she asked.

Lot of corruption happening in judiciary, says Gehlot

Jaipur | Agencies

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Wednesday alleged that corruption is growing in the judiciary.

"Today, a lot of corruption is happening in the judiciary. What many lawyers take in writing, the same judgment comes. What is happening inside the judiciary? The situation is serious and the countrymen should think about," Gehlot told media-persons here.

"I have also recommended many names who went on to become judges, but I did not contact them afterwards. I never interfere with the judiciary, RPSC (Rajasthan Public Service Commission), or the ACB (Anti Corruption Bureau). I have never interfered in the affairs of these institutions in my life.

The Chief Minister also termed the allegations of corruption levelled by BJP



organisation. But where has its character and face gone today? Gehlot also said that no one can do what the Congress government in the state has done for the Hindus. "We are spending Rs 3,000 crore for cows. Rs 40,000 is being given for a cow dying due to lumpy disease. Who has taken such initiatives in the country? We are also coming up with the Kamdhenu scheme. We are building temples. A corridor is being built in the temple of Govind Dev Ji at a cost of Rs 100 crore.

"We are also building a Vedic school. We have built the first Sanskrit University. The BJP talks about Hindutva, but its secrets are getting exposed now. The public may be less educated, but their understanding is excellent. The (Atal Bihari) Vajpayee government had to leave amid slogans of 'India Shining,'" Gehlot said.

He added: "The RSS used to talk about its character and face. People used to think that RSS is a different kind of

organisation. But where has its character and face gone today? Gehlot also said that no one can do what the Congress government in the state has done for the Hindus. "We are spending Rs 3,000 crore for cows. Rs 40,000 is being given for a cow dying due to lumpy disease. Who has taken such initiatives in the country? We are also coming up with the Kamdhenu scheme. We are building temples. A corridor is being built in the temple of Govind Dev Ji at a cost of Rs 100 crore.

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Will implement Karnataka model of 'Gruha Lakshmi' scheme across country: Rahul

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday asserted that women are the foundation of India and the country will be strong only after they are empowered.

He said that the party will launch the Karnataka's Gruha Lakshmi model across the country.

His remarks came after, he along with party President Mallikarjun Kharge, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and senior party leaders Randeep Saingh Surjewala and KC Venugopal on Wednesday launched the direct benefit transfer of Rs 2,000 directly into the bank accounts of women in the southern state under 'Gruha Lakshmi' scheme.

After the programme, in a tweet in Hindi, the former Congress chief said, "The strength of a building lies in its foundation. Women are the foundation of India - the country will be strong only by their empowerment. Four out of five guarantees given to Karnataka are specially made for women."



"Gruha Lakshmi Yojana, which will deliver Rs 2000 per month to bank accounts, is India's biggest money transfer scheme for women. And, we are now going to implement this Karnataka model - women-centric system all over India," Rahul Gandhi, who represents Kerala's Wayanad parliamentary constituency in Lok Sabha said.

immense satisfaction to launch Gruha Lakshmi guarantee where Rs 2,000 per month shall be directly transferred to the accounts of more than one crore women," Kharge wrote on X.

"This would give them respite from the unprecedented price rise imposed by the Modi government and the BJP. BJP used every possible method to question and stall the implementation of our guarantees. The will of the people of Karnataka prevailed. Today crores are benefiting from these. Financial empowerment of women is the bedrock of progress, and we will continue to make women a central theme for the future of our people," Kharge, who is also the Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha said.

In the run up to the assembly elections in Karnataka, Congress had promised five guarantees in the state if voted to power.

The Congress had also launched a similar direct benefit transfer scheme for women in Himachal Pradesh after it won in the assembly elections in December last year.

Now, rural watchmen in Haryana to get honorarium of Rs 11,000

Chandigarh | Agencies

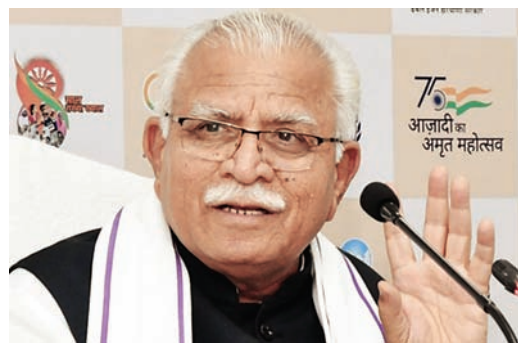
Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Wednesday announced that rural watchmen would get an honorarium of Rs 11,000 and uniform allowance of Rs 4,000 along with a bicycle after every five years.

Also, the watchmen will get Rs 1,000 annually for stick and torch batteries. At a meeting with representatives of village chowkidars from across the state, the Chief Minister said the government has done the work of transforming the system and has ensured that all sanitation workers and other workers get their honorarium on time every month.

"Works like making BPL ration cards, old-age pension and Ayushman Bharat Yojana cards are also being done through PPP (Parivar Pehchan Patra). This scheme is directly benefiting the villagers and there is a pleasant atmosphere among the people," said Khattar.

The Chief Minister said the rural watchmen are an important link in the rural areas. Apart from birth and death registration, now complete cooperation is taken from village watchmen in marriage registration work as well.

He said now the watchmen will get Rs 400 every



month instead of Rs 300 for their cooperation in death registration work.

He said online arrangements will be made for the honorarium of watchmen.

For this, the watchmen have to ensure their attendance online in the village secretariat and 'panchayat ghar' so that they can get their honorarium on time every month. The Chief Minister said the increased honorarium for watchmen will be implemented from October and will be given in the honorarium for November.

SISTER TIES RAKHI TO BROTHER'S BODY IN TELANGANA

Hyderabad: A woman in Telangana on Wednesday tied rakhi to her brother's body after he died of a sudden cardiac arrest.

The heart-wrenching incident took place in Peddapalli district where tragedy struck the family on the day of Raksha Bandhan.

Chowdary Kanakaiah of Dulikatta village died of cardiac arrest early on Wednesday. The sudden death of Kanakaiah, a registered medical practitioner (RMP), turned the festivities at home into gloom.

His sister Gouramma, who had come to tie rakhi to his brother from another village, was shocked to know that he is no more. Wailing over the dead body, the woman asked him to wake up and let her tie the rakhi. She then tied rakhi on Kanakaiah's wrist. The incident brought tears to the eyes of the villagers who had gathered there.

Criminal surrenders in UP with 'Don't Shoot Me' placard

Gonda (UP) | Agencies

A man surrendered before the police here with a placard hung around his neck that read "I have come to surrender, don't shoot me."

According to officials, the man, identified as Ankit Verma, has been on the run for the past six months.

Circle Officer (CO) Navina Shukla said, "The incident is a result of fear of the police among the criminals."

On Tuesday, Verma reached the Chhappia police station with a placard hung around his neck and shouted, "I have come to surrender, don't shoot me."

The placard carried the same message in his handwriting, the police officer said.

A person named Amarjit Chauhan from Mahuli Khori village had filed a complaint with the police alleging that when he was returning from college on February 20 on a motorcycle, two men stopped him near the Piprahi bridge and looted his two-wheeler, mobile phone and wallet at gunpoint, the offi-



cer said. Subsequently, a case of robbery was lodged and during investigation, the names of Ankit Verma and another person came up, Shukla said, adding that Superintendent of Police Ankit Mittal also announced a reward of Rs 20,000 on their arrest.

SHO Suresh Kumar Verma said Verma has been placed under arrest after completing the legal formalities.

FOUR CHILDREN DROWN IN U.P.'S BANDA

Banda (UP): A young woman and six children slipped into the Yamuna river at Gaila Ghat during the 'kajaria' immersion on Raksha Bandhan on Wednesday.

While the woman and two children were rescued, four other children died.

A huge crowd gathered at the spot as soon as the news spread. The locals entered the water to rescue the children but Vijaylaxmi (14), Pushpendra (8), Suryansh (5), and Rakhi (9), could not be saved in time.

The four children were taken to the community health centre where the doctors declared them brought dead.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath expressed grief over the incident and directed officials to provide compensation to the kin of the deceased.

Bihar Mahagathbandhan may adopt 2019 NDA formula in 2024 Lok Sabha polls

Patna | Agencies

With the third meeting of the national Opposition I.N.D.I.A. - commencing in Mumbai on Thursday - likely to discuss seat-sharing formula for next year's Lok Sabha elections, there is a buzz in Bihar that the Mahagathbandhan may opt for the formula adopted by the NDA in 2019.

At that time, JD-U was part of the NDA. In the general elections, the bigger parties like the BJP and the JD-U had contested 17 seats each in Bihar, while the Ram Vilas Paswan-led Lok Janshakti Party were given the six remaining seats.

This time, the two big political forces in Bihar -- the RJD and the JD-U -- are in the camp of Mahagathbandhan and they may contest 17 seats each, with four seats going to the Congress, and one each to CPI and CPI-ML, the



remaining constituents of the grand alliance. Mahagathbandhan leaders are also waiting for Mukesh Sahani and Pappu Yadav to take a final call. If they join the I.N.D.I.A., the RJD and the JD-U will give one seat each from their share to them, sources said. The sources also said that some of the MPs of the Pasupati Kumar Paras-led Rashtriya Lok Janshakti Party are also in touch with Lalu Prasad and Nitish Kumar. If they also join I.N.D.I.A., they will be accommodated by the RJD and JD-U.

Manipur: 5 injured in firing incidents; security forces recover more looted arms



Imphal | Agencies

At least five persons sustained minor injuries in sporadic incidents of firing in different districts of Manipur while the combined security forces recovered five looted sophisticated arms, 31 different types of ammunition, 19 powerful bombs, three packs of explosives from Kangpokpi and Imphal West districts on Wednesday.

The firing incidents took place between rival armed groups in Bishnupur and adjoining districts.

A police officer said that combined search operations continued in vulnerable areas of Kangpokpi, Thoubal, Churachandpur and Imphal West districts to recover looted arms and ammunition.

Strict security measures are taken up in all vulnerable, mixed populated locations and a security convoy was provided in sensitive stretches in order to ensure free and safe movement of vehicles.

To restrict the movement of inimical elements and armed groups, 130 nakas/checkpoints were installed in different valley and hill districts and police detained 1,646 people in connection with violations of various law and government's instructions.



AS I.N.D.I.A. GROWS, CHINA WILL RETREAT FROM LADAKH, ARUNACHAL: MAHA CONGRESS CHIEF



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Reiterating Congress' stand, the party's Maharashtra unit President Nana Patole said on Wednesday that China has captured Indian territories in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh, and the Opposition will now protect the country from foreign aggression.

"As the I.N.D.I.A. alliance grows stronger and marches ahead, China will retreat from the Indian territories... I.N.D.I.A. will protect and secure India," Patole told mediapersons here ahead of the two-day national Opposition bloc meeting on August 31-September 1 sched-

uled in Mumbai. Former Maharashtra Chief Minister Ashok Chavan said that as many as 11 CMs and 63 leaders of 28 opposition parties will take part in the Mumbai conclave, up from 26 parties which had attended the second I.N.D.I.A. meeting held in Bengaluru in July. Chavan also slammed the BJP for indulging in the politics of breaking parties and toppling elected state governments, which it did in Madhya Pradesh, Goa, and then even in Maharashtra, adding that the Opposition remains firm and strong, and will not be cowed by such threats. The prominent parties which have confirmed participation in the I.N.D.I.A. con-

clave include Shiv Sena (UBT), which is hosting the bloc meeting, Congress, Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad Pawar), Samajwadi Party, National Conference, Peoples Democratic Party, Janata Dal (U), Rashtriya Janata Dal, Aam Aadmi Party, Rashtriya Lok Dal, Trinamool Congress, DMK, and Peasants & Workers Party.

The others parties include Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, MDMK, Apna Dal, CPI, CPI (Marxist), Revolutionary Socialist Party, All India Forward Bloc, Indian Union Muslim League, Kerala Congress (M), KMDK, Kerala Congress (J), VCK and CPI(M-L), according to the organisers.

New tender for Mumbai's Dharavi slum redevelopment transparent, court told

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The new tender issued in 2022 for the Dharavi slum redevelopment project in Mumbai was transparent and no undue favour was shown to the highest bidder Adani Group, the Maharashtra government has submitted to the Bombay High Court.

The government earlier this month submitted its affidavit in response to a petition filed by the UAE-based company Seclink Technologies Corporation, challenging the government's decision awarding the project to Adani Properties Private Ltd.



February this year said the 2018 tender was cancelled and a fresh tender was issued in 2022 because of several factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia-Ukraine war which affected the financial and economic state of affairs.

In July, the petitioner company amended its plea to challenge the government resolution which awarded the slum redevelopment project to the Adani Group.

The government in its affidavit further claimed the new tender has factored in the rehabilitation and rehousing even of the non-eligible people (around 7 lakh) thereby making the whole redevelopment process more inclusive and more complex.

As per the government, in the old tender, non-eligible slum tenements were not entitled for rehabilitation and they could have approached the nodal agency under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna.

The new tender postulates accommodating the non-eligible slum tenements for which appropriate provision is made, it said.

"Under the new tender, the selected bidder will also be required to accommodate the non-eligible slum tenements in affordable housing or under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna and pertinently such requirement was not there in the old 2018 tender," the affidavit said. It was not open for the petitioner "to question the wisdom of tender conditions as it is the sole domain of the authority," the affidavit further said. The government said the new tender was issued with revised terms and conditions in a bona fide manner and on a rational basis after obtaining approval of the Committee of Secretaries and the Cabinet.

"The petitioner has made unfounded and reckless allegations such as actions of respondents being politically motivated without any basis or material as indeed none exists. For making such reckless allegations alone, the writ petition deserves to be dismissed with costs," the affidavit said.

A division bench of Chief Justice D K Upadhyaya and Justice Arif Doctor will hear the plea on Thursday.

The affidavit filed by the deputy secretary of the state housing department said the petitioner company has made "false and baseless accusations that the cancellation of the old tender was politically motivated" and these allegations are denied.

"I say that the cancellation of the tender process has been conducted after following proper process. I further deny that the new tender was floated to favour Respondent No. 3 (Adani). I say that the new tender process was conducted in an absolutely transparent manner and in fact the new tender attracted more bidders than those who had participated in the old tender," the affidavit

said. The allegations made by the petitioner are far-fetched and implausible, it added.

The government said the Dharavi redevelopment process was an extremely vital public purpose project which will change the lives of thousands of persons presently living in squalor and disrespectful conditions.

"Any attempt made by persons to derail this redevelopment project should be thwarted as any stay on such projects would seriously impede the execution of the redevelopment project (which are of vital public importance)," it said.

The Adani Group had emerged as the highest bidder for the 259-hectare Dharavi Redevelopment Project and bagged it with its Rs 5,069 crore bid in the 2022 tender process. In the first tender issued in 2018, the petitioner company had emerged as the highest bidder with its Rs 7,200 crore bid. The government's decision to cancel the 2018 tender and issue a fresh tender in 2022 with additional conditions was challenged in the HC by Seclink Technologies Corporation.

The government in an earlier affidavit filed in

BJP should tie Rakhi to Bilkis Bano, Wrestlers: Opposition ahead of mega meet

A COMMON MINIMUM PROGRAMME AND A DIALOGUE ABOUT SEAT SHARING MAY FIGURE IN THE AGENDA OF THE THIRD MEETING OF THE UNITED OPPOSITION BLOC INDIA, ITS LEADERS HAVE INDICATED AHEAD OF THE TWO-DAY MEET THAT BEGINS IN MUMBAI TOMORROW. 28 PARTIES WILL TAKE PART IN THE MEET -- TWO MORE THAN THE LAST ONE IN BENGALURU -- ALONG WITH SIX CHIEF MINISTERS OF OPPOSITION-RULED STATES.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

We will be sitting and discussing a Common Minimum Programme," veteran leader Sharad Pawar told reporters this evening.

"We have yet to start the dialogue for seat sharing. There is a chance that we might discuss this issue in this meeting and then give responsibility to leaders speak with state leaders about seat sharing," he added.

Uddhav Thackeray, whose party Shiv Sena UBT is hosting the meet, started his media address with a jab at the BJP.

"Today is Raksha Bandhan... The BJP should tie rakhi to Bilkis Bano, women of Manipur, women wrestlers... They should feel safe in the country and that's why we have come together," he said. There is expectation



that an 11-member coordination committee will also be named, "At that meeting in Mumbai, we will decide on who the 11 will be, who the Convenor will be, etc. These are small things," Congress's Mallikarjun Kharge had said after the meet in Bengaluru, where leaders had come up with the name of the Front - Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance - with the acronym INDIA.

Raksha Bandhan day tragedy: 4 of family burn in Pune electric shop blaze

Team Absolute | Pune

In a Raksha Bandhan day tragedy, a four-member family including two minor sons, perished in a major fire that broke out in an electrical hardware shop in Pimpri-Chinchwad early on Wednesday morning, police said.

The blaze was noticed by neighbours as the family slept on a mezzanine floor inside the shop, located in Pooja Heights building in the Chikhli area, around 5.30 am.

Locals, along with the fire brigade teams, attempted to douse the flames with buckets of water and sand, and the



Chimanram Choudhary, 48, his wife Namrata, 40 and their two teenage boys, Sachin, 13 and Bhavesh, 15 - who lived inside the shop.

The preliminary cause of the fire is suspected to be a short-circuit but a probe has been ordered to ascertain the exact reasons for the fire, whether there was a fire-extinguisher in the shop and how the victims could not reach out in time. The flames reduced to ashes almost the entire merchandise and stocks of an unknown value lying in the shop and also caused some damage to the upper floors of the building from where several panicked residents had rushed down at dawn.

conflagration was brought under control after nearly two hours. Later, the rescuers retrieved four bodies

Gas cylinder rates slashed due to I.N.D.I.A. meetings: Sanjay Raut

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bharatiya Janata Party government at the Centre was forced to reduce the prices of domestic cooking gas cylinders thanks to the I.N.D.I.A. conclaves, the third of which will be held here on Aug. 31-Sept. 01, claimed Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut here on Wednesday.

He said that after the National Opposition bloc meetings in Patna and Bengaluru, the BJP was compelled to slash the rates of gas cylinders, and even West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee held a similar view.

Raut said that "Mumbai is immersed in the I.N.D.I.A. mood" since the past few days for the conclave hosted by the Shiv Sena (UBT), and will be attended by at least 28 parties over the next two days.

His comments came in the opening remarks of a joint press conference organised by the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA)



comprising Congress-Shiv Sena (UBT)-Nationalist Congress Party (SP), here this afternoon, ahead of the conclave to be held at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Santacruz.

"Need clarity on Mayawati, not sure who she's with": Sharad Pawar

THERE'S A QUESTION MARK OVER WHO BAHUJAN SAMAJ PARTY PRESIDENT MAYAWATI IS WITH AND THERE IS SPECULATION THAT SHE IS ALIGNED WITH THE BJP, NATIONALIST CONGRESS PARTY CHIEF SHARAD PAWAR SAID ON WEDNESDAY.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

At a press conference ahead of the key meeting of the opposition Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), which begins in Mumbai tomorrow, Pawar was asked about the alliance's take on Mayawati, who has declared herself neutral.

"There's a question on who Mayawati is with. There is speculation that she is with the BJP. I am not saying that is true, but there needs to be clarity on that," the NCP chief responded.

Pawar's comments come on a day when Mayawati ruled out any alliance with either INDIA or the NDA. She said everyone is keen on an alliance with her party, but when she refuses, the opposition accuses her of collusion with the BJP.

In a series of posts on X, formerly Twitter, the BSP chief said both alliances largely consist of parties with anti-poor, casteist, communal, and capitalist policies. She said these are policies against which her party has been fighting.



SRK visits Vaishno Devi shrine ahead of 'Jawan' trailer launch and release

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Ahead of the release of his upcoming film 'Jawan', superstar Shah Rukh Khan paid a visit to Vaishno Devi shrine in the Himalayas.

According to reports, the actors offered prayers at the revered shrine atop Trikuta hills in Reasi district of Jammu and Kashmir. He reached the shrine late Tuesday night to pay his obeisance.

A video has been doing the rounds on social media, where the actor is seen at Vaishno Devi, dressed in a blue jacket and his face fully covered. In the clip, police officials of the Vaishno Devi shrine are seen, some policemen and personal staff of the star could also be seen in the clip. This is not the first time he visited the shrine. He visited Vaishno Devi nine months ago in December last year, over a month before the



release of his blockbuster hit 'Pathaan'.

'Jawan' is a Red Chillies Entertainment presentation directed by Atlee, produced by Gauri Khan, and co-produced by Gaurav Verma. The film will release worldwide in theatres on September 7, 2023, in Hindi, Tamil, and Telugu languages.

WESTERN RAILWAY TO EXTEND TRIPS OF SOME TRAINS FROM BANDRA TERMINUS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In an official statement, the Western Railway said that it will extend trips of train number 02133/34 Bandra Terminus- Jabalpur special train.

The Western Railway said, for the convenience of passengers and with a view to meet the travel demand, Western Railway has decided to extend the periodicity in Train No. 02133/34 Bandra Terminus- Jabalpur Special Train on Special Fare on existing composition, timings, stoppages, etc.

According to a press release issued by Sumit Thakur - Chief Public Relations Officer of Western Railway, the details of the train is as under:

- Train No. 02133 Bandra Terminus- Jabalpur Weekly Special which was earlier notified up to 30th September, 2023 has been extended up to 25th November, 2023.
- Train No. 02134 Jabalpur - Bandra Terminus Weekly Special which was earlier notified up to 29th September, 2023 has been extended up to 24th November, 2023.

The Western Railway had previously decided to extend Train No 14808/14807 Dadar - Bhagat Ki Kothi Express upto



Jodhpur on temporary basis on existing composition, timings, stoppages, etc. It has now been decided to continue this extension up to 30th September, 2023.

The booking for extended trips of Train No. 02133 will open from 1st September, 2023 at all PRS Counters and on IRCTC website. For detailed information regarding timings of halts and composition, passengers may please visit the official website.

1. Train No. 12471/12472 Bandra Terminus - Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra Swaraj Express has been provided with additional halt at Bannia station w.e.f journey commencing Ex Bandra Terminus on 31st August, 2023 and Ex Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra with immediate effect.
Train No. 12471 Bandra Terminus - Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra Swaraj Express will arrive Bannia station at 18.52 hrs and depart at 18.54 hrs. Similarly, Train No. 12472 Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra - Bandra Terminus Swaraj Express will arrive Bannia station at 07.20 hrs and depart at 07.22 hrs.
2. Train No. 12473/12474 Gandhidham - Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra Sarvodaya Express has been provided with additional halt at Bannia station w.e.f journey commencing Ex Gandhidham on 2nd September, 2023 and Ex Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra on 31st August, 2023.
Train No. 12473 Gandhidham - Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra Sarvodaya Express will arrive Bannia station at 18.52 hrs and depart at 18.54 hrs. Similarly, Train No. 12474 Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra - Gandhidham Sarvodaya Express will arrive Bannia station at 07.20 hrs and depart at 07.22 hrs.
3. Train No. 12475/12476 Hapa - Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra Express has been provided with additional halt at Bannia station w.e.f journey commencing Ex Hapa on 5th September, 2023 and Ex Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra on 4th September, 2023.
Train No. 12475 Hapa - Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra Express will arrive Bannia station at 18.52 hrs and depart at 18.54 hrs. Similarly, Train No. 12476 Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra - Hapa Express will arrive Bannia station at 07.20 hrs and depart at 07.22 hrs.
4. Train No. 12477/12478 Jamnagar - Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra Express has been provided with additional halt at Bannia station w.e.f journey commencing Ex Jamnagar with immediate effect and Ex Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra on 3rd September, 2023.
Train No. 12477 Jamnagar - Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra Express will arrive Bannia station at 18.52 hrs and depart at 18.54 hrs. Similarly, Train No. 12478 Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra - Jamnagar Express will arrive Bannia station at 07.20 hrs and depart at 07.22 hrs.



EDITOR'S SPECS

INDIA meet: For better coordination

With just two days to go for the third crucial meeting of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) in Maharashtra's Mumbai, several important decisions are likely to be taken including that of announcing separate convenors for the four zones. According to sources, during the two day meeting in Mumbai starting from August 31, which will be attended by several opposition parties, several important decisions will be taken after a detailed brainstorming and discussion. The source said that discussion of having four separate convenors will be come up for discussion during the meeting and a decision will be taken, if there is a requirement for separate convenors instead of one. The source said that as there are multiple parties in the INDIA alliance, and a separate set of convenors will help in smooth functioning of the alliance with leaders from the zone having better understanding of the issues and the language. The source further said a discussion on naming the chairperson of the INDIA will also come up for discussion and there are chances that Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge might be nominated for the same. The source also said that there are chances that there might be more than one convenor in the INDIA alliance. However, the source said that a decision on all the issues will be taken during the meeting after taking views and suggestions from every opposition party leader. The first meeting of the INDIA alliance took place in Bihar's Patna on June 23 while the second meeting of the opposition parties took place in Karnataka's Bengaluru on July 17 and 18. The opposition parties have come together to take on the ruling BJP ahead of the crucial Lok Sabha elections scheduled next year.

BRICS MARCHING AHEAD

Asad Mirza

The 15th summit of the BRICS bloc comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, was held in Johannesburg, and majorly focussed on two issues; first, admitting new members to the five-nation organisation and boosting trade using the local currency of the member nations.

Reportedly, encouraged by BRICS success on the economic and geopolitical fronts, a growing number of countries in the Global South consider it as an attractive agent of multilateralism.

More than 40 nations, including Algeria, Egypt, Thailand, and the United Arab Emirates, as well as key G20 countries such as Argentina, Indonesia, Mexico, and Saudi Arabia, had formally expressed their interest in joining the BRICS.

But finally only six more were added to the original members' list.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa formally announced BRICS expansion, and now Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE, Argentina and Ethiopia will join BRICS.

Overly this seems to be an attempt to reshape the global world order and provide a counterweight to the US and its allies.

Chinese President Xi Jinping, described the expansion as "historic".

Xi had leading the demand admitting new members, thus shaping-up an enlarged BRICS as a way for the Global South to have a stronger voice in world affairs.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, welcoming the expansion of the five-nation grouping, said: "Through this step, the faith of numerous nations in a multipolar world order will become stronger."

Media reports prior to the summit cited Chinese officials furthering the view that the bloc should be a rival to the G7. But they were silent on plans to enhance the group's clout on the global stage. It would depend on how far it will be



able to act in unison, as the addition of new members has made it even more disparate.

The Guardian quoted the director of the Asia and Latin America programme at the Inter-American Dialogue, Margaret Myers, as saying that this move is more symbolic than anything -- it's an indication of wide-ranging global south support for a recalibration of the global order.

The decision to admit Iran represented a win for both Russian President Vladimir Putin and Xi, giving the group a more anti-western nuance. Iran, which has been looking for ways to sidestep the US sanctions, was indeed elated and same could be said about Putin, who'll be hosting the next summit and addressed the Johannesburg summit virtually.

While India had not opposed the expansion of the BRICS, it did push for rules and procedures to be laid down, which would govern which countries could enter the bloc. China's push to incorporate Pakistan into the BRICS alliance earlier stirred a diplomatic conundrum, but ultimately it was not

amongst the lucky six.

For Argentina, facing dire economic problems, membership may provide a lifeline to escape from the deepening crisis. Its president, Alberto Fernandez, said it represented a "new scenario" for the country. Ethiopia became the only low-income country in the group. Its Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, described it as "a great moment" for his country.

Al Jazeera quoted Ayham Kamel, the head of Eurasia Group's Middle East and North Africa research team, as saying that in one move, the Middle East and North Africa region could have four members in an expanded BRICS organisation. This will structurally enhance their leverage regionally and globally.

A strengthened region would further pave the way for a multipolar world, Al Jazeera quoted Trita Parsi, vice president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, as saying. "As the world moves away from unipolarity, the US is also losing its ability to act as a gatekeeper, no one single state can any longer decide who is in the Community of Nations and who is

a pariah."

However the most important takeaway from the summit was described by Ryan Berg, the head of the Americas programme at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, quoted by the Guardian as saying: "For China and Russia, this is a win. They have been pushing for this for five plus years now. For China, it allows them to continue to build what they hope is a Beijing-centric order. For Russia, who is hosting it next year, it sees this as a tremendous opportunity in its current moment of significant isolation."

In addition, BRICS members also discussed sustainable development in the climate change era, global governance reform, and an orderly process of increasing trade in local currencies, which many emerging economies are exploring and where India is pushing for trade in the Indian rupee.

Hippolyte Fofack, chief economist and director of research at the African Export-Import Bank

(Afreximbank) told The Atlantic magazine that the dollar remains the global reserve currency, and the pace at which other currencies have chipped away at its dominance has been incremental.

But a growing number of experts, including senior US government officials, recognise that the aggressive use of economic and financial sanctions to advance US foreign policy could threaten the dollar's hegemony in the years ahead.

There were also rumours that the Summit may announce a BRICS-issued reserve currency to be used by members in cross-border trade. Though the member nations collectively enjoy a comfortable balance of payment surplus, they don't have the financial wherewithal, Hippolyte opined to establish such a currency as they lack the institutional architecture and the scale to sustainably achieve this end.

Reflecting on these challenges, Anil Sooklal, South Africa's ambassador-at-large to BRICS, had reiterated in July earlier that a BRICS currency will not be on the agenda during the summit, though expanding trade and settlement in local currencies will be.

According to Hippolyte BRICS countries are already making strides in the use of local currencies in cross-border transactions.

Their use is helping to sustain and boost cross-border trade between members, even amid a challenging operating environment of heightened geopolitical risks. It is also loosening the balance of payments constraints associated with dollar funding, bolstering local economies.

Lastly, the 15th summit served as a new foundation in advancing cross-border payment systems and embracing local currencies to fortify international trade, besides sending a warning light to US-led western democracies that the concerns of developing nations shouldn't be ignored any further.

international

GABON MILITARY CLAIMS TAKEOVER, CANCELS ELECTION RESULT

Libreville | Agencies

Just hours after Gabon's electoral commission announced that President Ali Bongo Ondimba had secured a third term in office after winning the August 26 election, the Central African nation's military on Wednesday claimed to have taken over after dissolving state institutions and cancelling the poll result.

In a video message, a group of senior Gabonese officers announced that they had seized power and also closed the country's borders until further notice, reports Xinhua news agency.

"In the name of the Gabonese people ... we have decided to defend the peace by putting an end to the current regime," the senior military officers said on national television after the results were announced.

The officers said that the



general election was not credible and the results stood annulled. They read a statement on behalf of the Committee for the Transition and Restoration of Institutions. "All the institutions of the Republic are dissolved, in particular the government, the Senate, the National Assembly, the Constitutional Court, the Economic, Social and Environmental Council, the

Gabonese Center for Elections," they added. The Gabonese presidency and the government are yet to issue official statements on the development.

Local media reported that gunfire was heard in the capital Libreville. Meanwhile, internet has been restored in Gabon after the government had cut off access and imposed a curfew after the end of voting, the BBC

reported. The government had said the move was necessary to prevent the spread of misinformation and outbreak of violence. Ondimba's overthrow would end his family's 53-year hold on power in Gabon. As in the previous general elections in Gabon, there were serious concerns about the process in the August 26 vote.

Main opposition candidate Albert Ondo Ossa com-

plained that many polling stations lacked ballot papers bearing his name, while the coalition he represents said the names of some of those who had withdrawn from the presidential race had still been on the ballot sheet, reports the BBC.

According to Reporters Without Borders, foreign media was banned from entering the country to cover the election.

As polls closed, the government announced a curfew and suspension of internet access for security reasons. Ondimba came to power when his father Omar died in 2009. In 2018, he suffered a stroke which sidelined him for almost a year and led to calls for him to step aside.

The following year, a failed coup attempt saw mutinying soldiers sent to prison.

Super typhoon Saola affects nearly 200,000 in Philippines

Manila | Agencies

Super typhoon Saola has triggered floods and landslides in seven regions of the Philippines, affecting nearly 200,000 people, the government said on Wednesday.

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council said at least one person was reported missing, but there has been no fatality so far, reports Xinhua news agency.

The disaster management agency said Saola flooded 193 areas and triggered 12 landslides on main Luzon island and the central Philippines.

More than 35,000 of the displaced residents are still in temporary shelters.

Saola intensified into a super typhoon at dawn on Sunday, dumping heavy rain and severe winds in the northern Philippines.

The Philippine State



Weather Bureau said Saola maintained its strength on Wednesday as it moved west-northwestward at 15 km per hour over the northernmost province of Batanes, packing sustained winds of 195 km per hour and gusts of up to 240 km per hour.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration said Saola will continue to bring heavy

rain, especially in mountainous areas, which could trigger more flooding and landslides.

Saola is the seventh typhoon to lash the Philippines this year, and will likely remain a super typhoon until Friday, the agency said, adding that severe tropical storm Haikui is also approaching the Philippines, threatening areas in northern Luzon.

'Drone strike' in Russia 'damages' four heavy transport planes

Moscow: A drone attack on Pskov city in northwestern Russia has reportedly damaged four heavy transport planes early on Wednesday.

"The defence ministry is repelling a drone attack in Pskov's airport," Regional Governor Mikhail Vedernikov wrote on social media, posting a video of a massive fire.

"I arrived on the site at the very start of the incident. According to preliminary information, there have been no casualties. The scope of damage is now being assessed," Vedernikov later wrote on his Telegram channel. An unconfirmed Russian media report says four Ilyushin 76 transport planes were damaged at the airport, the BBC reported.

Pskov is more than 600km (372 miles) away from Ukraine, close to the border with Estonia.

Separately, the Russian Defence Ministry said early on Wednesday that an aircraft of its naval fleet destroyed four "high-speed military boats in the Black Sea carrying assault groups of the Ukrainian special operations forces comprising 50 men in total".

US PROVIDES \$250 MN WORTH OF MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO UKRAINE

Washington | Agencies

The US has announced an additional package of military assistance to Ukraine worth \$250 million.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement on Tuesday that the new package includes AIM-9M missiles for air defence, munitions for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, 155mm and 105mm artillery ammunition, and over 3 million rounds of small arms ammunition, Xinhua news agency reported.

The latest assistance is executed under a previous directive from President Joe Biden using the Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA). Weapons and equipment being provided through this approach are drawn directly from the



Department of Defense's (DoD) inventories for Ukraine.

This is the Biden administration's 45th PDA-related military aid to Ukraine since August 2021, according to a DoD list of the latest weapons heading to Ukraine. The US has committed more than \$43.7 billion in military assistance to Ukraine since the Biden administration took office, including more than \$43 billion since the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022, according to the DoD.

93 potential unmarked child, infant graves found at ex-residential school in Canada

Ottawa | Agencies

A First Nation has found 79 suspected child grave sites and 14 potential infant grave sites at a former residential school in Saskatchewan, Canada, local media reported.

"This is not a final number. It breaks my heart that there are likely more," CTV News quoted English River First Nation chief Jenny Wolverine as saying during a news conference in Saskatoon, the capital city of Saskatchewan, on Tuesday.

"We were not sure what to expect and what we would find. But we did know the stories that were shared over generations about the treatment of the students and those students who never returned home," Wolverine said.

According to the report, the English River chief called upon the federal and provincial governments to provide resources for the First Nation's search effort.

English River started searching the site of



the former Beauval Indian Residential School in August 2021, using ground-penetrating radar, the CTV News report said, adding that the research team is preparing to move into the second phase of the search.

Beauval Indian Residential School was first founded in 1860 and operated for more than 100 years, according to the University of Regina.

In 2013, a former dormitory supervisor at the school was convicted of indecent assault and gross indecency for assaults on young boys between 1959 and 1967, CTV News reported.

The site is the latest of several Canadian locations being searched for possible unmarked graves of children who died while being forced to attend residential schools.



MP SHINES IN SETTING UP E-GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS

MADHYA PRADESH HAS WON AS MANY AS MANY AS 23 NATIONAL E-GOVERNANCE AWARDS SINCE 2007

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Encouraged by the Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's initiatives for ease of living with IT-based governance systems and practices, many departments have come out with innovative practices immensely benefitting the targeted stakeholders. Many of them have been nationally acclaimed for replicability and universality in context of identical socio-economic contexts of states.



Initiatives like integrated treasuries computerization in 2007, tele-Bhugtan at collectorate at Jabalpur in 2008, Forest Dwellers Survey System and mponline in 2010, Samagra portal, panch-parmashwar portal, Indore 311 App, State's Pension Portal Online social security schemes management system, MP ShramSeva portal, SARSH- a special project for assisting, rehabilitating and strengthening the handicapped - A Touch for persons with disabilities, State School Education Portal, automated metering project and fire alert and messaging system etc. have won appreciation at national level.

manual management into a modern electronic system are the key features. Benefiting population of Bhopal District and also supporting Bhopal Municipal Corporation.

Recently Bhopal Smart City Development Corporation Limited, Madhya Pradesh received Silver Award for Water SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) project. This aims to develop centralized system that enables real-time monitoring, control, and data management of water treatment plants, pump houses, and storage reservoirs, ensuring efficient water supply, accurate measurements, and effective energy management.

In 2021, Indore 311 Application initiative got the award in the category of district level initiative for e-governance. This application has played an important role in making Indore number one in cleanliness. Indore-311 is the easiest way to raise your concerns around such issues and influence the respective authorities to have them resolved.

Configurable alarms alert operators to abnormal conditions, ensuring prompt responses and minimizing risks. Integration with hardware components enhances communication and transforms

Indore-311 is a voice raising platform for Indore citizens to report civic issues, and governments to analyse, track, manage, and resolve. The goal is to make Indore better through transparency, collaboration, and co-operation and thus better crowd sourced. It is notably a grievance redressal platform but also used for getting many citizen-centric services like Birth, Death, Marriage certificate,

The Panch Parmashwar portal won Gold in 2018. So far Innovative Use of Technology in e-Governance ICT for Excellence in Sports won Silver Award by Directorate of Sports and Youth Welfare.

ANMOL State Adoption Resource Agency, Bhopal won Innovative Use of Technology in e-Governance category. ANMOL is the country's first

state level e-initiative for monitoring children residing in Specialised Adoption Agency (SAA) across various centres. ANMOL is a single window centre that provides information on the status of children, procedure for adoption, informs parents about their status on waiting list, provides information on availability of children according to their needs and tracks children status by gender. Monitoring of special cases and target monitoring is now possible.

The School Education Portal is a comprehensive portal designed as an integrated e-Governance System for enhancing the performance of school education sector by providing proactive, transparent & accountable governance and bringing perceptible systemic improvements to implement the objects and requirements of RTE Act, 2009 and fulfil the spirit of the RTI Act, 2005. The portal leveraged use of ICT to facilitate Process Re-engineering that was necessary for managing and administering the department in a manner so as to ensure better services and response to the large number of beneficiaries, stakeholders & partners and enhancing the quality of education by responsive and transparent governance. The portal facilitates control, supervision & ensuring the compliance of Government Instructions and has brought transparency with community ownership.

Other initiatives recognized for innovative use of IT for effective pro-people e-governance include integrated geomatics based application for planning rural road connectivity to habitations, Tele Samadhan call centre for citizen facilitation and grievances redressal, Jan Mitra Samadhan Kendra, Gwalior, Automated Building Plan Approval System, SMS based failed distribution transformer information and management system.

Centre's move to slash LPG cylinder prices triggers debate in poll-bound MP

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Centre's decision to reduce the price of domestic LPG cylinders by Rs 200 has triggered a political debate in poll-bound Madhya Pradesh, where the Congress has promised to provide the cooking gas cylinder at Rs 500. The new prices of the LPG cylinders, which would come into effect from Wednesday, will be around Rs 903 in the state.



As the announcement came on the eve of the Rakshabandhan, the ruling BJP hailed the decision as a 'gift for sisters', while the Opposition Congress is calling it a decision to influence voters in view of the Assembly elections in five states - Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Telangana and Mizoram.

In Madhya Pradesh, the Congress in its five-point 'Vachan Patra' or poll promises document has committed to provide the cooking gas cylinders at Rs 500. The announcement was made by Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra while launching the party's poll campaign from Jabalpur on July 12.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge while addressing a poll rally in Sagar on August 22 has also asserted that the 'five promises' made by the party were

implemented in Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka immediately after coming to power. The state BJP led by Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, which has been termed the Congress 'vachan patra' a 'poll gimmick', has now made a similar promise and announced to provide LPG cylinders at Rs 450. Addressing the 'Laadli Behna Sammelan', an event organised to celebrate Rakshabandhan with women in Bhopal on Sunday, Chief Minister Chouhan announced that the LPG gas cylinder would be provided at Rs 450.

On Tuesday while responding to the Centre's move to reduce LPG cylinder price by Rs 200, Chouhan reiterated the lines of Union Home Minister Amit Shah and said: "Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi has given a big gift to all the sisters of the country on the auspicious

occasion of Rakshabandhan. The decision to cut domestic LPG cylinder price by Rs 200 for all consumers shows the sensitivity and compassion of the leadership."

Madhya Pradesh Congress President Kamal Nath hit out at Chouhan saying that the Chief Minister two days back has announced to provide an LPG cylinder at Rs 450 in Madhya Pradesh and now, he is thanking the Prime Minister for a subsidy of Rs 200. "If this subsidy turns out to be true, then an LPG cylinder will still cost more than Rs 900. In this way, two days ago, you (Chouhan) had shown the dream of Rs 450 per cylinder to sisters and

within 48 hours, you are welcoming a gas cylinder worth Rs 903, which is twice the price you promised... You are riding on the bullet train of lies," Kamal Nath slammed Chouhan in a social media post on Tuesday.

FIR against ex-CM Digvijaya Singh in MP over 'misleading' social media post

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A member of the right-wing group Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has lodged a complaint against former chief minister Digvijaya Singh over his social media post regarding Jain pilgrimage Kundalpur in Madhya Pradesh's Damoh district.



Police said that a complaint has been received against the Rajya Sabha MP for his social media post, and the complainant Sambhu Vishwakarma (a member of VHP) has accused him of sharing misleading information. On the basis of the complaint, an investigation was conducted which found that Singh's social media post was misleading. "The user of the social media account (Digvijaya Singh) has been booked under Section 153-A, 177, 505 (2) of IPC. Our further investigation is underway and an action would be initiated as per law," Damoh SP Abhishek Tiwari told the media persons on Wednesday. No such incident had taken place, he added.

that a group of Bajrang Dal activists with Lord Shiva's 'pind' demonstrating at Kundalpur the Jain temple. Singh has raised apprehension saying the investigation needs to be done to avoid any untoward incident at the famous Jain shrine. "In Kundalpur, a famous Jain pilgrimage area of Damoh district, some workers of Bajrang Dal are sitting with 'pind' and creating ruckus, which the Chief Minister should take cognisance of. The situation can take a serious turn anytime," Singh has posted this message on his social media post on August 28.

On Sunday, Digvijaya Singh posted a message on his social media account mentioning

Contractor stages protest outside Shivraj's residence, says was asked to pay 50% commission

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A Gwalior-based couple on Wednesday sat in protest on a road outside Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's residence here on Wednesday, claiming they were fed up with the alleged 50 per cent commission being sought by government officials.



Identifying himself as Sanjay Mishra, the man said he had worked as a civil contractor in Gwalior. However, his bill, which stood around Rs 13 lakh, was not cleared by the Public Works Department (PWD) of the state government.

"When I asked for clearance of the bill, PWD officials demanded 50 per cent commission. I had written to CM Chouhan around four months back but no response was received. Today, I along with my wife, came to Bhopal to meet CM Chouhan but the police barred our entry. Hence, we

are sitting outside," Mishra said in a video message.

He also threatened that if his dues were not cleared in the next four-five days, he along with his wife would be forced to end their lives.

As the alleged 50 per cent commission matter had been a main weapon

of the Congress to target the ruling BJP in the run up to the Assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh, the Opposition found yet another opportunity to target the Shivraj Singh Chouhan government.

Reacting to the development, Congress' Madhya Pradesh unit pres-

ident Kamal Nath said: "The 50 per cent commission issue has now crossed all limits. Today, a contractor from Gwalior is sitting on a dharna along with his wife outside the Chief Minister's residence.

"Earlier, a contractor from Gwalior had written a letter to the High Court alleging 50 per cent commission. But, the Shivraj government became active against those who raised their voice, instead of providing justice to the people," a social media post by Kamal Nath read.

The post further added that Shivraj Chouhan had protected criminals involved in the Vyapam scam, and no action was taken till around 50 innocent people died suspiciously and the Supreme Court intervened.

"This 50 per cent commission matter is now becoming a life-threatening menace for the honest contractors and officers of Madhya Pradesh," it added.

3 Dead, Several Injured After Bus Collides With Pick-Up Truck In Seoni

Team Absolute | Seoni

Three individuals lost their lives in a road accident occurred in Seoni near Sahasna village, after a bus collided with a pickup truck on Wednesday. The pickup truck, carrying three passengers, collided with a bus that was traveling from Bhopal to Mandla.



The impact of the collision was severe, leading to the unfortunate deaths of the three individuals in the pickup truck. The identities of the deceased have not yet been released.

In addition to the fatalities, several passengers on the bus sus-

tained injuries in the accident. Immediate medical attention was provided to the injured, and they were transported to the Lakhnadaun hospital for treatment. Local authorities were present

at the accident site to manage the situation.

An investigation into the cause of the collision has been initiated to determine the factors that led to this tragic incident.

GIRLS AND SISTERS TIE RAKSHA SUTRA TO GOVERNOR PATEL

Bhopal: Governor Mangubhai Patel celebrated the festival of Raksha Bandhan at Raj Bhavan. Today, on the occasion of Raksha Bandhan, the girls of SOS Children's Village Khajuri Kala, officials of Prajapita Brahmakumari Ishwariya Vishwavidyalaya reached the Raj Bhavan. Raksha Bandhan was celebrated in traditional manner by tying Raksha Sutra to Governor Mangubhai Patel. Governor Mangubhai Patel gifted an amount of Rs 11,000 to the SOS Children's Village organisation. He distributed toffees and sweets to the children. On this occasion, Regional Director of Prajapita Brahmakumari Ishwariya Vishwavidyalaya, Bhopal B K Awadhesh was also present.



People seen with sick leopard in MP, video goes viral

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Some people in Dewas district of Madhya Pradesh were seen, in a viral video, walking along with a leopard who apparently seemed sick.



In the viral video, the leopard is seen surrounded by over a dozen persons and one of them was seen sitting on leopard's back. The villagers were seen playing with the animal and taking selfies.

Seeing the leopard roaming outside the forest area, the villagers got scared at first, but when they noticed that the animal wasn't aggressive,

they surrounded him. Upon receiving information, a team of forest guards reached the spot and took the leopard to a safe place. A forest guard said the leopard was wandering in the forest in a dizzy condition. Forest official Santosh Shukla said that the team has taken the two-year-old leopard to Van Vihar in Bhopal for treatment. A veterinary doctor also conducted a medical examination of the animal, he said.

"The condition of the leopard was critical. Despite this, people were troubling him. The veterinary doctor was called from Mhow in Indore," Shukla said.

CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan plants Karanj, Kadamba and Gulmohar saplings

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan today planted saplings of Karanj, Kadamba and Gulmohar in the Smart City Park in Shyamla Hills. CM Chouhan and the citizens present on the occasion also offered Shramdaan along with plantation.



Along with Chief Minister Chouhan, members of "Think and Support Foundation", public participation committee members of colleges, NCC officers, NCC cadets etc. also planted saplings.

Harsh Bansal, Akash Mishra, Chhaya Kushwaha, Kishore Gurwani, Sushri Rashi, Gunjan, Rashmi, Shubhshri, Deepshikha Trivedi, Alpna Sharma, Vimla Tiwari, Manoj

Katare, Barelal Ahirwar, Sanjay Jain, Khilan Singh, Tej Singh Thakur, Shivam Mishra, Sushri Samta Jain and Dhara Jain etc. also planted saplings.

Mangal Bhawan will be built in Chandgarh Kuti at a cost of Rs 25 lakh

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan reached Chandgarh Kuti Dham in Seoni Malwa of Narmadapuram district on Wednesday. Chief Minister Shiv Singh Chouhan prayed for the happiness and prosperity of the people of the state by offering prayers to Lord Shiva, Maa Narmada and Lord Ganesha.

Chief Minister Chouhan also approved an amount of Rs 25 lakh for the construction of Mangal Bhawan in Chandgarh Kuti on the suggestion of the area residents. Chief Minister Chouhan also met the villagers. Ladli Bahnas tied rakhis to their brother Shivraj Singh Chouhan on the occasion of Raksha Bandhan, the holy festival of brothers and sisters. Ladli Bahnas were very happy to have their brother Shivraj Singh Chouhan in their midst. They gave their best wishes to Chief Minister Chouhan by giving rakhi and shripthal. Ladli Bahnas told the Chief Minister Chouhan that he

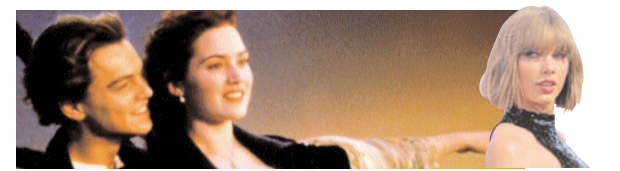


has increased our honour by initiating the Ladli Bahna Yojana. Due to this, our small requirements are being fulfilled on time. The Ladli Bahna amount

is being used in many auspicious activities including Teej festival. On this occasion, many Ladli Bahnas including Kanchan Keer, Anisha Bai, Kavita Bai, Sangeeta Bai, Kaushalya Keer and Kantabai etc. were present. Chief Minister Chouhan met the citizens and inquired about their well-being.

Chief Minister Chouhan said that a survey will be conducted of the beneficiaries who have not been able to avail the benefits of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana. CM Jan Awas Yojana will be started to provide housing assistance to the needy. He directed the district administration to conduct a survey of all the eligible beneficiaries who were left out.

Chief Minister Chouhan was accompanied by former minister Rampal Singh, Sohagpur MLA Vijaypal Singh, Seoni Malwa MLA Premshankar Verma, many public representatives and citizens of the area were present. Before this Chief Minister Chouhan also received blessings from Swami Shadmukhandpuri Maharaj. Chief Minister Chouhan's wife Sadhana Singh was also present.



Taiwan submits 'Marry My Dead Body' as official entry for 96th Academy Awards



Los Angeles | Agencies

The Taiwanese supernatural comedy mystery film 'Marry My Dead Body' Cheng Wei-hao has been selected as the official entry for the country's Oscar submission for the Best International Feature category for 96th Academy Awards.

The movie was selected by Taiwan's Bureau of Audiovisual and Music Industry Development (BAMID) as their Oscar entry. The film was one of Taiwan's biggest hits, with the supernatural comedy-crime thriller with its intriguing twist doing extremely well in markets of Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Philippines and the US as reported by Deadline.

BAMID, which is under Taiwan's Ministry of Culture, said that a total of nine films were submitted for consideration. The selection committee said it chose 'Marry My Dead Body' because the film "cleverly combines traditional customs with modern perspectives, has both humor and emotion, and showcases the characteristics of Taiwanese culture and life."

Starring Hsu Kuang-han, Austin Lin and Gingle Wang, the film tells the story of a homophobic cop who is forced into a same sex "ghost" marriage to appease the spirit of a man who has passed away.

Although terrified of both homosexuality and ghosts, he has no choice but to team up with his ghostly spouse to solve a long running drugs case. As such, the two partners need to overcome their differences and cooperate to solve the dead man's mysterious death.

The film, which is produced by Taiwan's Calendar Studios and Bole Film, also landed in Netflix's global top ten (non-English) chart during its first week of release on the platform. In addition, it also won best screenplay at the Taipei Film Awards.

Nominations for the 96th Academy Awards will be announced on January 23, 2024 with the winners to be unveiled on March 10, 2024. However, the SAG-AFTRA and WGA strikes present a likelihood that the Oscars too, may very well get delayed.

Beyonce becomes honorary Mayor of Santa Clara for her concert at Levi Stadium

London | Agencies

Pop star Beyonce will now be running the town of Santa Clara as she is given the key to the city and made the town's honorary Mayor for her concert at Levi Stadium.

Santa Clara City Council carried out a vote back on the night of August 29, to pass over the title for a day from Mayor Lisa Gillmor to the 'Crazy In Love' singer as reported by People magazine.

"The city of Santa Clara is excited about Beyonce's upcoming visit to the world-renowned Levi's Stadium. Her concert will certainly bring a great deal of energy and excitement," Santa Clara spokesperson Michelle Templeton said in a statement, as per The Mercury News, a day ahead of her concert.

As such, the city of Santa Clara has declared that Beyonce has become the honorary Mayor of Santa Clara for the whole duration of August 30, in celebration of her 'Renaissance' tour stop at the Levi's Stadium.

Beyonce is now the latest pop star to be

named honorary Mayor of Santa Clara. Prior to this, Taylor Swift was also given the title of City Mayor on July 28 and 29 as part of her 'Eras' tour dates at the Levi's Stadium. The city was also dubbed 'Swiftie Clara' for the duration of those two days.

Taylor Swift's Eras Tour has already done wonders, though Beyonce is not behind as it has been estimated that the 41-year-old singer's

'Renaissance' could be her highest-grossing concert tour ever, and may even exceed the revenue she has earned from all of her previous concerts combined.

Much like Santa Clara which is currently celebrating the singer's arrival, cities like Atlanta and Minneapolis had also similarly put into effect what they have titled 'Beyonce Day'.

The 'Formation' singer kicked off the Renaissance World Tour on May 12 in Stockholm, Sweden. After the European leg wrapped up in late June, and in early July, the performer began taking the tour across North America, which she will continue to do through late September.



Taissa Farmiga talks about returning to 'The Nun' franchise after four years



Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Taissa Farmiga, who is all set to return as Sister Irene in 'The Nun 2', has spoken about returning to the franchise after four years. She also revealed what she liked about her character and the script.

The sequel to the hit follows Sister Irene as she once again comes face-to-face with Valak, the demon nun. Farmiga is joined again by Jonas Bloquet as Maurice, along with Storm Reid as Sister Debra, Anna Popplewell as Kate and Bonnie Aarons (reprising her role from 'The Nun').

"What I really loved about the script is this beautiful partnership and friendship between these two empowered female characters..." says Farmiga as she talks about reprising her role as Sister Irene.

"Storm (Reid) plays Sister Debra, a young woman who doesn't know her place in this world, so she feels like she's lost. And what's so beautiful is that the layers that are written into these characters give an opportunity to play real people. I think it was such a collaborative effort from the very beginning to make sure the characters were real and had true distinct colors and layers."

"Tropes are not real people. So, I think it was beautiful in the script to be able to play a young woman who's confident and knows what she's doing and doesn't need somebody to tell her what to do. And not only do you have that with Sister Irene, but you also have that with Sister Debra."

Ask her what she loved about her character and returning to the world of The Nun franchise after four years, Farmiga said: "I feel like denial is a wonderfully terrible tool that a lot of people use, and I definitely think that Irene sort of held on to the expression 'out of sight, out of mind.' I think deep down, Irene knew that this couldn't just be it. The connection was too strong. I think Irene also is someone who probably always questions, 'Is she good enough?' She's come to accept her gifts to a degree."

"But she was tasked with this enormous thing-to banish a demon. I think absolutely part of her has been terrified every day of these past years that she didn't accomplish what she was supposed to. 4 "It's been four years since the first film. Irene and Frenchie have definitely gotten older. They're a bit more weathered. I would say that they both come back with a strong sense of self in this movie."

Jamie Foxx says, 'The Burial' tells 'great American story'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actors Jamie Foxx and Tommy Lee Jones are teaming up to bring true events to life in 'The Burial'. The two actors recently discussed working together and what appealed to them about the story.

'The Burial', which will have its world premiere on September 11 at the Toronto International Film Festival, follows the real-life story of Jeremiah Joseph O'Keefe's lawsuit against the Loewen Group, a Canadian funeral-home company, as documented by The New Yorker, reports 'People' magazine.

Asked about what drew him to 'The Burial', Foxx, who also co-produced the drama, told 'People' that it's "a great American story" and noted, "We actually heard about this project probably 15 years ago. So it tells you how projects can be special. You hear about it 15 years ago, but now, everything lines up."

"Maggie Betts lines up. [Producer] Datari Turner lines up. Everybody involved lines up, and then here we are embarking upon an incredible story, with an amazing character. It just feels good!" he said, adding that, upon learning Betts was involved as director, he was ready to "jump in."

Jones plays Mississippi funeral director Jeremiah O'Keefe, who, due to debts, is forced "to sell parts of his business to a corporation rapidly buying up funeral homes, cemeteries and insurance companies to profit from what its CEO, Ray Loewen (Bill Camp), refers to as 'the golden age of death,'" a synopsis from TIFF reads.

"I had a lot of fun working with Jamie," Jones said. "He's fun to be around, and every work day was highly energised. We did a lot of laughing and some pretty good work got done, too." And the feeling is mutual, as Foxx says of Jones, "When the artistic stars line up and certain people step into a role, it usually turns out really, really good. He's so special for the part."



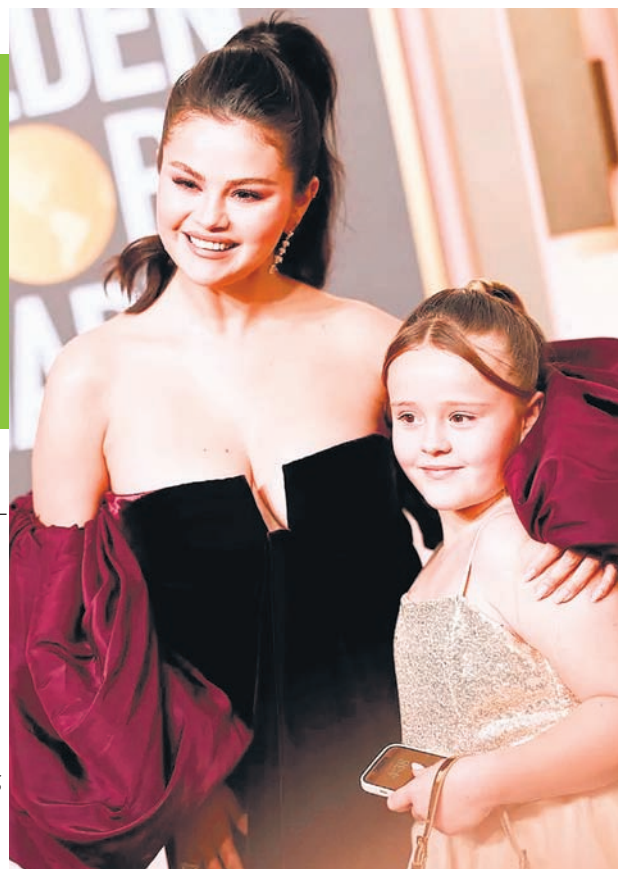
Selena Gomez shares pic of her sister shaving Brooklyn Beckham's head

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer-songwriter Selena Gomez's sister Gracie Elliot is showcasing her hairdressing skill. The 'Back To You' singer, 31, shared a snap of Gracie, 10, and friend Brooklyn Beckham on her Instagram story. In the photo, Gomez's little sister held onto clippers as she shaved a slightly smiling Beckham's head. "My. Babies," Gomez wrote over the photo, reports People magazine.

Rocking a pink Mean Girls top and silver wrist bangles, Gracie looked focused as she kept her eyes on the task at hand, while the eldest child of David Beckham and Victoria Beckham had his tattoo collection on display as he sat shirtless during the hair trim. As per People, Gomez's mother Mandy and stepfather Brian Teeffey welcomed Gracie in 2013. Despite the age gap - the actress and singer was 20 years old when her sister was born - the pair appear to have a close bond and are regularly pictured together on Gomez's social media.

In another Story post that is no longer available, a smiling Nicola Peltz Beckham - Brooklyn's wife - joined in the head-shaving fun. In the pic, she held her hand to her husband's neck, beaming at the camera as she appeared to shave the front part of Brooklyn's head using the clippers.



Scarlett Johansson



HARMANPREET, RICHA, DEEPTI, JEMIMAH, POOJA AMONGST PLATINUM PLAYERS IN WBBL OVERSEAS DRAFT

Melbourne | Agencies

India captain Harmanpreet Kaur, batter Jemimah Rodrigues, wicket-keeper Richa Ghosh, all-rounders Deepti Sharma and Pooja Vastrakar are amongst the platinum players in the inaugural WBBL overseas draft announced by the league on Wednesday.

Overall, 50 players have been given platinum status for the BBL and WBBL overseas drafts happening on September 3. The 25 players named in the platinum list are eligible to be drafted in the first round by teams within the top salary band.

Harmanpreet has played for Sydney Thunder and Melbourne Renegades in the league, while Richa represented Hobart Hurricanes in last year's WBBL season. Jemimah has turned out for Melbourne Stars and Renegades, while Deepti played for Sydney Thunder and Pooja represented Brisbane Heat in the past.

Chamari Athapaththu, Lauren Bell, Tazmin Brits, Alice Capsey, Kate Cross, Nida Dar, Sophie Devine, Deandra Dottin, Sarah Glenn, Shabnim Ismail, Marizanne Kapp, Amelia Kerr, Heather Knight, Hayley Mathews, Nonkululeko Mlaba, Stafanie Taylor, Chloe Tryon, Laura Wolvaardt, Issy Wong and Danni Wyatt are the other players in the WBBL platinum players list.

The BBL platinum players are domi-



nated by England, whose 14 players are Gus Atkinson, Sam Billings, Harry Brook, Joe Clarke, Zak Crawley, Tom Curran, Alex Hales, Will Jacks, Chris Jordan, Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Dawid Malan, Tymal Mills, Phil Salt and James Vince. Other BBL platinum players include Quinton de Kock, Faf du Plessis, Martin Guptill, Rashid Khan, Shadab Khan, Colin Munro, Nicholas Pooran, Harris Rauf, Mohammad

Rizwan, Rilee Rossouw and Mujeeb Ur Rahman.

"With only a few days until the Drafts, anticipation is growing and we are excited to share the Platinum player lists for each Draft. Both lists feature world-class T20 talent, promising an exhilarating showcase of cricketing excellence this summer. The number and quality of nominations for both Drafts are exceptional, and we eagerly

await Sunday night's Draft events," said Alistair Dobson, Cricket Australia's General Manager of Big Bash Leagues.

The drafts will feature four rounds, with clubs able to select a minimum of two and maximum of three players in total, each Club will be required to pass in at least one round. There will be four categories in which players can be selected on Draft night: Platinum, Gold, Silver and Bronze.

Salaries for each category have been set at globally competitive rates, with platinum the highest player payment. In the WBBL, platinum players will earn AUD 110,000, while gold, silver and bronze players will fetch AUD 90,000, 65,000 and 40,000 respectively. For the BBL, platinum players are set to earn AUD 420,000, while gold, silver and bronze players will earn AUD 300,000, 200,000, and 100,000 respectively. Players in both the WBBL & BBL Overseas Player Drafts will be an eligible retention player if they fit any of the following criteria: 1) Have been in a Big Bash team squad for a minimum of two seasons and haven't been contracted to another team since.

2) Have been in a Big Bash team squad the previous season. 3) Was in a team squad last season but did not play in the starting 13 and have been approved by the Big Bash Technical Committee. 4) Is otherwise approved by the Big Bash Technical Committee due to exceptional circumstances.

England equals international match fees of women's team with men's side with immediate effect

London | Agencies

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) announced on Wednesday that it is increasing match fees for the women's team.

It means that the parity in match fees will take effect from England women's upcoming white-ball home series against Sri Lanka. England also becomes the fourth cricketing nation after New Zealand, India and South Africa to equalise the match fees for its international men's and women's teams.

"The direction of travel for the women's game has always been the most important thing, creating a sustainable product that people want to watch and play, and I'm sure this will make cricket an increasingly attractive sport to girls and young women as we continue to grow the game."

"It's really important that we continue to drive the women's game forward and it's fantastic to see equal match fees for England Women and England Men. I would also like to thank the PCA and England



Women's Player Partnership for their support in representing the players and the growth of the professional game," said England skipper Heather Knight on the landmark move. This development comes on the back of record-breaking crowds of 110,000 at this summer's Women's Ashes series in June and July. England set new women's international attendance records at Edgbaston, the Kia Oval and Lord's and sold out matches at Taunton, Bristol and Hampshire in their series against Australia, with Heather proclaiming the series as "the best there's ever been in the history of the women's game".

ECB added that the additional investment follows increases to domestic salary

pot this year and salaries for women's players in The Hundred more than doubling last year. With increased earning opportunities in competitions around the world, the sport currently offers some of the best earning opportunities among female team sports.

"This summer's thrilling Metro Bank Women's Ashes series demonstrated how women's cricket is continuing to grow at pace in this country, with record attendances and TV viewing. Growing the women's and girls' game is a key priority for us, and in recent years we have considerably increased investment both in building a domestic women's structure to produce the players of the future, and in increasing player rewards."

"In the years ahead, we will continue to invest ahead of revenues. We are currently considering all the recommendations made by the Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket, but equalising match fees is one immediate step we are pleased to make now," said Richard Gould, ECB Chief Executive Officer.

US Open 2023

Venus Williams exits tournament in first-round

New York | Agencies

American Tennis player and two-time US Open Champion Venus Williams saw an early exit after getting knocked out in the first round of the tournament.

The 43-year-old lost to qualifier Greet Minen in two straight sets with a scoreline 6-1, 6-1, on Tuesday. In an on-court interview, the 26-year-old expressed her respect towards Venus and said, "In 1997, Venus already played a final here and I was just born, so for me, it was incredible to play a legend like her." "I have huge respect for her," she further added.

Williams seemed disappointed with the result of the match and stated her bad



luck for the loss. "First I have to give credit to my opponent. There wasn't a shot she couldn't make," Venus told the reporters. "Even when I hit really amazing shots, she just hit a winner or a drop shot, so I don't think I played badly. I think it was just one of those days where it's just unlucky,"

she further added. Seventime Grand Slam champion, Venus is also a legendary player in Tennis like her sister Serena. Serena retired last year after the US Open with 23 major titles under the name. Playing for the first without her sister, Venus said she was all prepared for this.

Asia Cup

Pakistan thrash Nepal by 238 runs

Multan | Agencies

Captain Babar Azam stood tall to slam a mammoth 151 off 131 balls and was well supported by middle-order batter Iftikhar Ahmed hitting 109 not out off 71 balls as Pakistan thrashed Nepal by 238 runs in the Asia Cup opener, here at the Multan Cricket Stadium on Wednesday.

Electing to bat first on a dry pitch, Pakistan lost their openers early and had suffered a middle-overs slump. But Babar and Iftikhar shared a sensational 214-run partnership for the fifth wicket, the highest-ever for Pakistan at this position in the ODIs, to make 342-6, setting up a very daunting chase of 343 for Nepal.

Playing in their first-ever Asia Cup match, Nepal were rolled over for 104 in 23.4 overs, to be thoroughly outclassed by Pakistan. Shaheen Shah Afridi had Kushal Bhurtel strangled down the leg and trapped Rohit



Paudel lbw on consecutive deliveries of the opening over. Naseem Shah had success as Aasif Sheikh sent a simple catch to first slip.

Aarif Sheikh and Sompal Kami shared a 59-run stand for the fourth wicket before the former was castled by Harris Rauf in the 15th over, followed by Kami nicking behind off him two overs later. From there onwards, the Nepal batting challenge slumped to give Pakistan a big win, with leg-spinner Shadab Khan taking four wickets.

Brief scores

Pakistan 342-6 in 50 overs (Babar Azam 151, Iftikhar Ahmed 109 not out; Sompal Kami 2-85, Karan KC 1-54) beat Nepal 104 in 23.4 overs (Sompal Kami 28, Aarif Sheikh 26; Shadab Khan 4-27, Harris Rauf 2-16) by 238 runs

We are so happy for Neeraj Chopra, but we too won a gold medal: Indian women's blind cricket team captain

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In a country where sporting victories are celebrated at a magnanimous level, where winning a gold medal calls for great fervor and celebration, sometimes the glitz and glamour of renowned sportspersons overshadow the remarkable achievements of new-age athletes who are still trying to make a mark in the field of sports.

The Indian women's blind cricket team last week scripted history as they won a gold medal after defeating Australia in the rain-curtailed finals of the International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA) World Games 2023 on the back of their scintillating show in Birmingham.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi also congratulated the Indian women's blind cricket team for winning the gold at the Games.

"Kudos to the Indian women's blind cricket team for winning the



Gold at the IBSA World Games! A monumental achievement that exemplifies the indomitable spirit and talent of our sportswomen. India beams

with pride," PM Modi posted on social media platform X (formerly Twitter). A day after the women's blind cricket team scripted history, Neeraj Chopra clinched a gold medal at the World Athletics Championship 2023 in Budapest. While the nation celebrated Neeraj Chopra's win, the gold medal victory of the women's blind cricket team remained unrecognized at the big stage signifying that not all gold medals are similar and equal in the eyes of the people.

Chopra's feat in Budapest is indeed a commendable result which is based on relentless training, skill, and determination but winning a maiden final at the World Games is not a small achievement. The Indian women's blind cricket team has not only battled on the field but also off the field. Winning laurels for the country despite lacking resources and support, the Women in Blue just want a little recognition and help from concerned authorities.

Asia Cup 2023 will check our character and personality: Hardik Pandya

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India's fast-bowling all-rounder and vice-captain Hardik Pandya delved into the significance of the much-anticipated 2023 Asia Cup, saying the six-team tournament will check the character and personality of the Rohit Sharma-led side ahead of the all-important Men's ODI World Cup.

India will open their 2023 Asia Cup campaign against Pakistan on September 2, before playing Nepal on September 4. Both of India's Group A matches will be played at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy.

"A lot of emotions are attached by fans. For us, it is about playing a good team, playing a match against a very good side who has done very well in the recent past. Couple of finals they've played and the tension between us is always there."

"So for me, we try to keep the outside noise outside, and we focus on how we can play good cricket. At the end of the day, we are cricketers. We can't get too emotional about it because then certain decisions can be reckless, which I don't believe in."



"But, at the same point of time, it's a mega event. It's an event which I've seen how it checks your character, checks your personality, and at the same point in time, you can see in how deep waters you can swim. So for me, all these factors excite me a lot and yeah, I can't wait," said Pandya to Star Sports.

Additionally, Pandya shed light on his approach to ODIs, stressing the need for adaptability in the 50-over format. He also talked about the nuances of preparing for high-stakes matches in the format, especially from a mental perspective.

World Cup 2023

Tickets for India matches in Chennai, Delhi and Pune go on sale on August 31

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Tickets for India matches to be held in Chennai, Delhi and Pune will go live on Thursday, August 31 from 8 PM (IST) onwards, the International Cricket Council said on Wednesday.

Tickets will be available on the official ticketing website tickets.cricketsportsworldcup.com.

India are scheduled to lock horns with Australia on October 8 at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai. On October 11, India will be up against Afghanistan at Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi. On October 19, India will take on



Bangladesh at the Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium (MCA) in Pune.

Tickets for other India fixtures at the World Cup 2023 will go on sale on September 1, 2 and 3. On September 1, tickets for India matches in Dharamsala, Lucknow, and Mumbai will go live. On September 2, tickets for India matches scheduled in Bangalore and Kolkata will go on sale while rickets for match in Ahmedabad will go live on September 3. Tickets for the semifinals and final will go live on September 15.

Earlier, tickets for the non-Indian matches in the 2023 World Cup began on August 24 (for Mastercard users), and August 25, for the general public.

Four teams move into round of 16 with perfect records in FIBA World Cup

Manila | Agencies

Lithuania won Group D in FIBA World Cup with a 91-71 triumph over Montenegro here, joining Germany, the Dominican Republic and Canada to move into the round of 16 with perfect records.

Both Lithuania and Montenegro had secured the spots in round of 16 by beating Egypt and Mexico respectively before Tuesday's games, so the showdown was a matter for the top place, reports Xinhua. Lithuania had won six of their last seven games in the preliminary round of the FIBA World Cup, with five of those wins ending with margins of 23 or more points while Lithuania had scored more than 90 points in four of their last five games in the preliminary round of the World Cup.

Despite Montenegro's 27-26 lead in the first quarter, Lithuania's superior three pointer per-



centage and rebounding allowed them to run away with 66-50 after three quarters and kept the opposite at bay. In another Group D fixture, Ehab Amin's 22 points, 10 assists and six rebounds surged Egypt to beat Mexico 100-72, picking up its first World Cup win since 1994. As of Tuesday, all five African teams have one win. Despite being guaranteed to

finish as the top finisher of Group E, Germany refused to become complacent, as evidenced by the way it took control of the Finland game in the middle quarters before cruising towards its third win, staying undefeated while keeping Susijewi winless. Also in Group E, Japan failed to extend its momentum against Finland as it fell to Australia 109-89, dropping into the 17-32 classification, while the Boomers finished the Group behind Germany.

After back-to-back defeats, France eventually registered its first win in Group H with a hard-fought 85-79 victory over Lebanon. A 17-point performance made Evan Fournier become the all-time leading scorer at the FIBA Basketball World Cup for Les Bleus.

In a blockbuster for Group H, Canada sank Latvia 101-75, securing the top place and leaving the European side to the second.



Content-driven films are back in trend: Vicky Kaushal

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood star Vicky Kaushal, who earlier delivered the superhit 'Zara Hatke Zara Bachke', is gearing up for yet another theatrical release. This time, too, it will be a content-driven family entertainer for Vicky. Titled

'The Great Indian Family', the film will see him essay the role of a devotional music singing sensation Bhajan Kumar, who makes a living by singing songs of Lord Krishna at different events.

At the song launch event of the film, Vicky discussed with the media that the content-driven films are back at the top after an extended lull induced by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The actor said: "Agar koi 3 mahine pehle ye kehta ki 'content-driven films are not working at the box-office', toh main maan bhi leta (If three months back someone told me that content-driven films are not working at the box-office, I would have still believed them). But now, things have changed. The trend about content-driven films not working at the box-office has changed for good."

He then went on to quote recent examples of films which are content-driven and are working at the box-office: "Look at 'Dream Girl 2', 'Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani', 'OMG 2' and 'Ghoomer', these are all high on content films, and are pulling the crowd back in the theatres. I hope our film 'The Great Indian Family' too works its magic and receives love from the audience."

'The Great Indian Family' which also stars former Miss World Manushi Chhillar, Kumud Mishra and Manoj Pahwa, has been produced by Yash Raj Films, and has been directed by Vijay Krishna Acharya. The film will debut in cinemas on September 22.



'IT'S TIME FOR INDIAN ACTORS TO THINK GLOBAL'

Allu Arjun opens up on his Hollywood plans

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Star Allu Arjun has plans for Hollywood, as the popularity of 'RRR' has propelled Indian cinema world-wide. The actor said that this phenomenon has opened the doors for Indian cinema to go international.

Speaking to Variety about his Hollywood plans, Allu Arjun said: "It has opened the doors and the minds of people that there is something beyond our regular traditional markets that we need to go explore and our reach as much as possible."

As part of this expansion, the actor said that he already has plans to sign up with a Hollywood agent: "It's time for all Indian actors to think globally, because India is going to be a global superpower. All businesses in India will flourish and so will the Indian film industry." "I feel in less than 10 years from now, Indian cinema will be viewed all over the world, like how Korean dramas have been watched all over the world, with a very high probability for India to be in the same spot in

the coming decade. It's really a golden era for entertainment industry in India."

Talking about his win at the National Indian Film Awards and becoming the first actor to do so, Allu Arjun told Variety: "Getting the national award is the highest official respect you can get. What we realised was that in 69 years of Telugu cinema, while other technicians and directors have won, no actor had won best actor at the National Awards."

"So that was a pathbreaking achievement and became the pride of the Telugu people. I was glad that I could contribute to it in a small way." He attributed the success of 'Pushpa' to its rootedness and rustic nature. "It's the common man factor, it's the character's attitude that really connected across all languages," Arjun said. "We wanted a very authentic, rustic, rooted storytelling."

"I think that authenticity and honesty paid off, we were not trying to be somebody else, we were trying to be who we are and still trying to appeal to everybody else. It's like how they say, going local is going global."



AMIT SADH'S BIKE EXPEDITION REACHES DELHI AFTER COVERING 1,500 KM



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Amit Sadh, who is known for his work in 'Sultan', 'Jeet Ki Zid', 'Avrodh', 'Breathe' and others, is currently on a bike expedition covering the key points in India. The actor recently reached the national capital covering 1,500 kilometres on his bike.

His journey encompasses the route from Balasor to Ahmedabad, Jodhpur, Jaipur, and finally, Delhi. In the spirit of celebrating Indian culture and the serenity of its landscapes, Amit Sadh embarked on this extraordinary adventure.

The actor hosted a press conference at the Press Club India in Delhi, to share insights into his bike trip, shedding light on the importance of biking and how it played a pivotal role in transforming his life.

He spoke about the challenges faced during the arduous Jaipur to Delhi leg of the journey, and how it was filled with demanding terrains and roads.

Talking about his incredible journey, Amit shared: "This expedition has been an experience like no other. Jaipur to Delhi was a challenging ride, but every moment on this journey has been a testament to the beauty of India and the warmth of its people. I'm overwhelmed by the love and support I've received throughout, and this reinforces my belief in the unity and diversity of our incredible nation."

The actor's journey will soon culminate in Leh Ladakh.

AP Dhillon says success of 'With You' reflects his goal to make Punjabi music global

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Singer AP Dhillon has been soaring high on Spotify with his new single 'With You', which has become one of the biggest streamed tracks on the platform. Regarding the success of it, the Canadian-Punjabi singer has said that it's his goal to take Punjabi culture to the world and 'With You' is a reflection of that.

"Taking Punjabi culture global has been at the heart of all the music I make. My goal is to create something that can appeal to all types of listeners and something that lasts for generations. My new single 'With You' reflects this and the love I've received for this single has been amazing to see," AP Dhillon said.

As for 'With You', the track has reached number 2 on the Spotify's Weekly Top Songs India chart and number 38 on Spotify Daily Global Charts. This success has only got him more excited, with the singer saying "Reaching number 38 on the Spotify Daily Global Charts is a milestone moment for me, and I can't wait to do more," he said. By August 24, the song had already hit over 25 million streams in just over two weeks. During the same period, AP Dhillon also became the seventh most streamed artist in the Weekly Top Artist India chart, going up 18 positions from being at #25 in the week before the song's release on August 10.

'With You' is one of the nine tracks by AP Dhillon that feature in the Weekly Top Songs India chart. Other songs that feature in this list are: Over half of these songs entered or reentered the charts after the Punjabi-Canadian artist dropped his new single. The singer has currently four million followers on Spotify, and the number is only increasing.

The singer has more followers on the Spotify that in any of his social media platforms. Earlier this month, he also gave his fans a peek into his journey as an artiste, through his docu-series 'AP Dhillon: First of a Kind'.

India is not the only country where his songs have been streamed so many times on Spotify, as AP Dhillon continues to make great strides across the world, with listeners from many international markets such as Canada, the US, the UK, Norway, Brazil, Greece, Chile, Mexico, Kenya and more.



INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Nargis Fakhari



Kriti shares video showcasing strong bond with sister Nupur Sanon

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Kriti Sanon is celebrating Raksha Bandhan with her sister Nupur Sanon and has shared a video talking about how much they have bickered and argued, though at the end, they still have a strong and unbreakable bond. Taking to Instagram, Kriti Sanon posted a reel of her YouTube video where the two narrate their relationship, with the two sisters wishing each other a "Happy Rakhi." Kriti Sanon captioned: "The Sanon Sisters!! @nupursanon" "Sisters are the best!!! Love you to the moon and back!!" "Happy Rakhi!!" The two shared a montage of their relationship as Kriti Sanon says in the video: "So in the morning it was really funny, because I was like 'Oh yay today we're shooting together!'"

"We're gonna post some Instagram stories, and cut to she's already left!"

Nupur Sanon said: "I left early and her spot dada was 'Aap itne jaldi jaa rahe ho? Kyun?' So I said 'Mujhe time se pohachana hai'" So they travelled in separate cars for the shoot, with ultimately Nupur revealing that she just planned all this because she does not like riding with her sister because she doesn't let her listen to her Punjabi songs. Kriti Sanon in response said: "Oof! Tantrums!" Then sharing snaps of her early make up, Kriti was not really much of a fan of her Vanity with Nupur saying that her sister wanted to actually keep her Vanity collection as she found it better.

Talking about their collective shoot, Kriti said: "You know it's really irritating at times, but in the end I still like shooting with her, because we also sort of break out into laughter."

Nupur who is gearing up for her debut said: "I usually just listen to my sister because she's smarter, obviously because she's worked on so much, so she knows much more."

The two tend to frequently annoy one another on set, though at the end, they have a strong bond which cannot be doubted, because even off-set the two are best friends, frequently playing pranks on one another, but also helping each other out and standing by their side when they need each other the most.