

absolute india

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Give students the respect they deserve: Rahul Gandhi makes fresh pitch for NEET debate

DISCUSS NEET ISSUE

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi said on Friday that the NEET exam issue should be discussed in Parliament and urged the government to hold a "good and respectful discussion".

While talking to the media at the Parliament premises, he said, "Yesterday, all the floor leaders of the opposition met, and it was unanimously decided that today, the NEET issue will be discussed. I would like to say to all the Indian students that this is your issue."

"We all, the INDIA bloc, think that your concerns are most important because you are the future of the country. This is why we all want the NEET issue to be discussed in the Parliament House before the discussion on the President's Address."



Gandhi said, "I request the Prime Minister that this is the issue of the youth of the country and hence, it should be discussed properly and respectfully. Youth is worried about what will happen, so the message should go from Parliament that the government and the opposition are together discussing this issue," said the Congress

leader. The NTA conducted the NEET-UG 2024 on May 5 with around 24 lakh candidates taking part in it. The results were announced on June 4. But were followed by allegations of

question paper leaks and other irregularities. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is investigating the alleged irregularities and has formed special teams to probe the case.

CBI ARRESTS PRINCIPAL, VICE PRINCIPAL OF JHARKHAND SCHOOL

New Delhi: The CBI on Friday arrested the principal and vice principal of a school in Jharkhand's Hazaribagh in connection with the NEET-UG paper leak case, officials said.

Ehsanul Haque, the principal of Oasis School, was made the city coordinator of Hazaribagh for the medical entrance exam conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA) on May 5, they said.

Vice Principal Imtiaz Alam was designated as the NTA's observer and the centre coordinator at the Oasis School, officials said, adding the CBI is also questioning five more people from the district in connection with the paper leak case. The federal probe agency arrested Haque and Alam after detailed questioning, they said. Both the accused came under scanner during a probe by the Bihar Police's Economic Offences Unit (EOU) which was investigating the case earlier. The team had found burnt question papers of NEET-UG during a raid at a hideout of the solver gang, officials said.

In a statement, the EOU had claimed the "leaked" NEET-UG question paper was allegedly obtained from the Oasis School in Hazaribagh by the notorious Sanjeev Kumar alias Lutan Mukhiya gang.

It had said the investigators had matched a partially burnt question paper found from the Patna safe house with the reference question paper provided by the NTA, confirming the leak's origin. However, it could not clearly establish who was behind the alleged paper leak, officials said.

CONG CLAIMS RAHUL'S MIC TURNED OFF, SPEAKER REJECTS CHARGE

New Delhi: The house witnessed some unusual scenes also as Rahul Gandhi claimed that his microphone was turned off and asked the Speaker to switch it on, to which the latter gave a quick rejoinder. The viral video, depicting the Congress leader and Speaker 'barb-trading' has been shared by the Congress on its X handle.

However, Rahul along with the Opposition persisted with his demand and said: "We wanted to give a joint message to the students of India, on behalf of the Opposition as well as the government that we consider this an important issue. So, we thought that to respect students, we should have a NEET discussion today, a dedicated discussion." Replying to Rahul's charge, Om Birla said, "I don't have any button to switch off the microphone. There existed a similar set-up earlier also. There is no mechanism to gag the microphone." A video posted by Congress on X shows Rahul asking the Lok Speaker to switch on his microphone. Sharing the video, Congress claimed that a conspiracy was being hatched to silence the voice of the Opposition and students despite lakhs of students staring at a bleak future.

India slams 'deeply biased' US religious freedom report

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India on Friday slammed the US State Department's International Religious Freedom report for 2023, calling it a "deeply biased" document "visibly driven by vote bank considerations and a prescriptive outlook".

"As in the past, the report is deeply biased, lacks understanding of India's social fabric, and is visibly driven by vote bank considerations and a prescriptive outlook. We therefore reject the report. The exercise itself is a mix of imputations, misrepresentations, selective usage of facts, reliance on biased sources, and a one-sided projection of issues," Randhir Jaiswal, spokesper-



son in the Ministry of External Affairs, said during the weekly MEA briefing on Friday. "It selectively picks incidents to advance a preconceived narrative, questioning the validity of laws and regulations enacted by

the Indian legislators," the MEA spokesperson said.

The report released on Wednesday alleges violent attacks on minority groups in India, and cites the violence in Manipur that broke out in May 2023.

FIVE KILLED IN BLAST AT TELANGANA FACTORY, 10 INJURED

Hyderabad: At least five workers were killed and 10 others injured in a blast in a factory in Telangana's Rangareddy district on Friday, officials said.

The blast occurred in South Glass Private Ltd on the outskirts of Shadnagar town, about 55 km from Hyderabad. According to officials, a compressor exploded at the factory resulting in the fire.

Firefighting personnel rushed to the spot and doused the fire. Police and firefighters undertook rescue and relief operations. Horrific visuals were seen at the spot as body parts of the deceased were found strewn around. The injured were shifted to a hospital and the condition of some of them was stated to be critical. Rangareddy Collector K. Shashank visited the accident site.

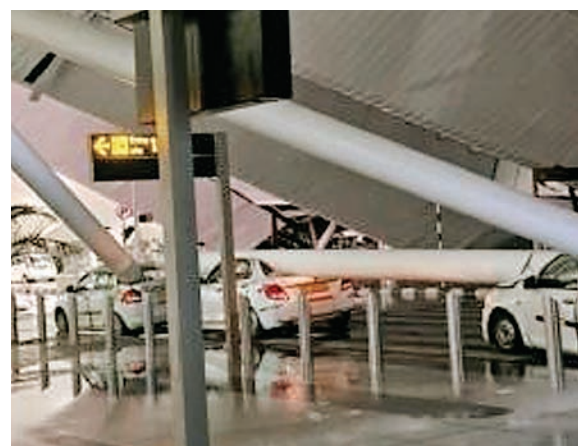
Delhi airport canopy collapse: One dead, several injured

Team Absolute | New Delhi

At least one person was killed and eight others injured after a canopy of Terminal-1 at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport collapsed on cars amid heavy rain on Friday.

Many vehicles, including cabs, were damaged in the incident reported to the Delhi Fire Services (DFS) around 5.00 a.m. The canopy sheet and the support beams collapsed, damaging the cars parked in the pick-up and drop area of the terminal. During the rescue operations, a driver was taken out from a cab on which an iron beam had fallen.

The NDRF officials, who reached the spot, were



involved in the rescue operations.

All departures from Terminal-1 have been temporarily suspended, and check-in counters closed as a "safety measure", a Delhi air-

p.m. Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL) spokesperson said. "Due to heavy rain since early this morning, a portion of the canopy at the old Departure forecourt of Delhi Airport's Terminal 1 collapsed around 5 a.m. There are injuries reported, and emergency personnel are working to extricate those affected and provide medical attention."

"As a result of this incident, all departures from Terminal 1 are temporarily suspended, and check-in counters are closed as a safety measure. We sincerely regret this disruption and apologize for any inconvenience caused," the DIAL spokesperson further said.

Rain submerges Delhi-NCR, breaks 88-year-old record

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Heavy rainfall in Delhi-NCR that started on Thursday, led to widespread waterlogging and severe traffic jams on Friday morning.

According to the Meteorological Department, Delhi received 228 mm of rainfall from 8:30 A.M. on Thursday to 8:30 A.M. on Friday, marking the highest 24-hour rainfall in June since 1936, when 235.5 mm of rain was recorded.

Typically, Delhi receives an average of 80.6 mm of rain in June. The deluge significantly impacted daily life in Delhi-NCR, with commuters facing severe waterlogging and traffic jams during their morning commute.

However, the downpour provided respite from the intense heat of the past two months, with the minimum temperature on Friday recorded at 24.7 degrees



Celsius, 3.2 degrees below normal. This unprecedented rainfall has highlighted the shortcomings in the city's infrastructure.

Despite claims by Delhi Mayor Shelly Oberoi on June 18 that the city was prepared for the monsoon, the first significant rain has already caused substantial waterlogging. Shelly Oberoi had previously assured that the storm drains were clean and ready, promising a hassle-free monsoon for Delhi residents. Major intersections like ITO saw about two to three feet of water accumulation, causing extensive traffic jams.

Centre unveils new draft rules for breath analysers used by cops, workplace testers

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Legal Metrology Division of the Department of Consumer Affairs, has unveiled new draft rules for Evidential Breath Analysers which aim to ensure the accuracy and reliability of breath analysers used by law enforcement agencies and workplaces so that public safety and trust are enhanced, according to an official statement released on Friday.

The rules provide for Stamping and Verification of Evidential Breath Analysers to be verified every year to protect individuals from wrongful penalties due to faulty equipment, the statement said.

The verified and standardised Evidential Breath Analysers will accurately measure blood alcohol concentration from breath samples, ensuring that intoxicated individuals are identified swiftly



and effectively. This helps prevent alcohol-related incidents on the road, contributing to safer travel for everyone.

The new rules require Evidential Breath Analysers to follow standardised

testing procedures, ensuring consistent and reliable results across different devices. This standardisation fosters public confidence in the fairness and accuracy of enforcement actions, the statement explained.

Evidential Breath Analysers provide a non-invasive way to measure blood alcohol content, offering quick and painless sample collection. The rapid analysis capabilities allow law enforcement officers to make swift, informed decisions, enhancing the effectiveness of roadside checks.

The availability of stamped and verified Evidential Breath Analysers to the public can raise awareness about the effects of alcohol on impairment and the legal limits for the safe operation of vehicles and machinery. This encourages responsible behaviour and informed decision-making, the statement said.

The draft rules outline several technical requirements for Evidential Breath Analysers, including:

- Displaying only the final measurement result
- Including a printer to record results and ensure the device does not operate without paper
- Providing additional printed information along with the blood alcohol concentration result
- Reporting results in different formats, such as blood alcohol concentration in blood

By ensuring that Evidential Breath Analysers are accurate, standardised, and easy to use, these rules will benefit the public through better enforcement, increased safety, and enhanced trust in legal and workplace alcohol testing, the statement added.

The draft rules are placed on the website for public comments up to 26.07.2024 at the link: https://consumeraffairs.nic.in/sites/default/files/file-uploads/latestnews/Draft_Rule_Breath_Analyser.pdf



THOUSANDS JOIN RALLY OPPOSING DIVISION OF MANIPUR

Imphal | Agencies

Thousands of people in Manipur participated in a rally demanding territorial and administrative integrity of the state and strongly opposed the demand for division of the state.

The rally, which was organised by the Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), an umbrella body of civil society groups of the Meitei community, began at Thau ground in Imphal West district and culminated at Khuman Lampak stadium covering 5 km in the heart of the state capital.

Thousands of people including students, women, youths, elderly persons and village volunteers took part in the march and shouted slogans against illegal immigrants from neighbouring Myanmar, militancy, illegal encroachments of forest land and drug smuggling.

Meanwhile, state BJP President Adhikarimayum Sharda Devi on Thursday held a meeting with



Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi and discussed the prevailing situation in the troubled state. BJP sources said that she urged HM Shah to take immediate steps to bring a permanent solution and peace to the state. Devi said in a post on X, "Met Hon'ble Home Minister, Mananiya Shri Amit Shah ji, for an extensive discussion on the current situation in Manipur.

Conveyed the people's aspirations and urged immediate attention to bring permanent solution and tranquility to the state, while appreciating the ongoing efforts."

The BJP leader said, "Additionally, highlighted the need for resettling IDPs and providing maximum support for smooth rehabilitation. He assured that the Centre was aware of the delicate sit-

uation on the ground and committed to uplifting the people's aspirations."

Various Kuki-Zomi-Hmar tribal organisations including Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF), and Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM) along with ten tribal MLAs, including seven BJP legislators, have been demanding separate administrations (equivalent to separate state) for the tribals. Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley. Nagas and Kukis constitute little over 40 per cent and reside in the hill districts. Over 220 people were killed, 1,500 injured and over 70,000 people displaced after the ethnic violence broke out on May 3 last year after a 'Tribal Solidarity March', organised in the hill districts to protest the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status. The rioting also left thousands of houses, government and non-government properties, and religious installations destroyed or damaged.

Over 60,000 cops trained in Madhya Pradesh on three new criminal laws

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The police in Madhya Pradesh are gearing up for the three new criminal laws that will come into force in the country from July 1.

The new criminal laws, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam (BSA) will replace the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), and the Indian Evidence Act, respectively, from July 1.

To prepare for the same, a series of training sessions have been carried out in Madhya Pradesh to train more than 60,000 police personnel, including IPS officers, under the supervision of DGP Sudhir Saxena.

Saxena said the training sessions will continue until every cop posted in remote villages becomes fully aware of the new laws. For this pur-



pose, a proper learning management system has been set up and senior officials have been appointed, the officer said. "The preparations began nearly six months back and after every training session, mock tests were conducted to assess the outcomes. More than 300 master trainers conducted extensive sessions in the district police

headquarters," Saxena said.

Public awareness programmes through posters, banners, and social media campaigns are also being carried out in the state for this purpose, he added.

"Training sessions will be held at every district police headquarters, and police station for the next six months," Saxena said.

Timely intervention by BSF saves woman's life in Bengal

Kolkata | Agencies

Prompt action by the Border Security Force (BSF) has saved the life of a young homemaker at a border village in West Bengal's Nadia district.

The woman had consumed poison in a bid to commit suicide.

"A villager from New Shikarpur rushed to the Shikarpur Border Outpost, under the jurisdiction of the 86 Battalion, BSF, South Bengal Frontier, on Thursday, claiming that his wife had consumed poison and her condition was critical.

"The man said he required assistance to move her to the hospital else she would die. The company commander immediately sent nursing assistance with a fully-equipped ambulance to the man's house. At the same time, contact was established with the Government Rural Hospital in Karimpur to keep everything ready for the patient," said A.K. Arya, DIG and spokesperson, BSF, South Bengal Frontier.

After administering first-aid, the BSF nursing assistant rushed her to the hospital in the ambulance. After further treatment, she has



been declared stable by doctors. The woman's husband expressed his gratitude to the BSF for providing timely assistance during the emergency.

Govt sets up 24x7 war room at Delhi airport for ticket refund, addressing passengers' woes

New Delhi: The Centre has set up a 24x7 war room to ensure full refunds for cancelled flights or provide alternate travel route tickets as per availability following the closure of Terminal 1 (T1) of Delhi airport following a roof collapse amid heavy rain.

At around 5 a.m. on Friday, a roof sheet and the pillars supporting them outside T1 came down crashing amid torrential rain, killing one person, injuring at least six others, and affecting flight operations in one of the world's busiest airports.

The decision to set up the war room was taken at a high-level meeting convened by Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu who emphasised that passenger safety and convenience are of utmost priority.

All refunds will be processed within a stipulated period of seven days. Contact details, including phone numbers, will be provided to the pas-



sengers for immediate assistance. The Civil Aviation Minister has also issued instructions for making

passenger comfort a top priority and implementing measures to handle the additional stress on T2 and T3

due to the temporary closure of T1. An advisory has been released to all the airlines to ensure that this situation does not lead to a steep increase in airfare. Airlines have been told to maintain fare stability to avoid passenger inconvenience.

Meanwhile, the Airports Authority of India (AAI) has been directed to issue a circular to all minor and major airports to conduct a thorough inspection of their structural strength. These inspections must be completed within the next 2-5 days, and the reports are to be submitted to the Ministry of Civil Aviation.

War room helpline numbers:

- Indigo airline
Terminal 2: 7428748308
Terminal 3: 7428748310
- Spicejet
Terminal 3: 0124-4983410/0124-7101600
Terminal 2: 9711209864 (Mr Rohit)

First batch of Amarnath Yatis reach Valley to begin Yatra today

Srinagar | Agencies

The first batch of Amarnath Yatis reached the Valley on Friday where senior district and divisional officers received them.

Yatis bound for the central Kashmir Baital base camp in Ganderbal district reached Srinagar district in the afternoon on Friday.

The convoy of Yatis was received at Pantha Chowk on Srinagar outskirts by DIG Central Kashmir range, District Development Commissioner Srinagar and SSP Srinagar.

The district administration officers presented flower bouquets to the Yatis. They will reach the Baital base camp in the evening.

Another convoy of Yatis was received with bouquets by Kulgam and Anantnag district administration officials while they were on the way to Nunwan (Pahalgam) base camp.

A total of 4603 Yatis left Bhagwati Nagar Yatri Niwas in the morning in two escorted convoys. The convoys of Yatis were given a traditional flag-off



amid chanting of hymns by J&K L-G. Of these, 1933 pilgrims are travelling in 115 vehicles to Baital while 2670 are travelling in 116 vehicles to Pahalgam. The annual Amarnath Yatra will start on June 29 and end after 52 days on August 19 coinciding with

Raksha Bandhan and Shraavan Purnima festivals. About 125 'Langars' (Community Kitchens) have been set up for the Yatis this year. Of these 40 have been set up on the Srinagar-Baital-Cave shrine axis and the rest on the Qazigund-Pahalgam-Cave shrine axis.

Over 7,000 Savadars (Volunteers) are serving the Yatis at these community kitchens. A three-tier security managed by the outer ring of the army, middle and inner rings of CAPFs and the police are providing security to this year's Yatra.

Bengal MLAs' oath: Speaker dials Guv Bose's predecessor VP Dhankhar for solution

Kolkata | Agencies

The Speaker of West Bengal Assembly, Biman Bandopadhyay, on Friday spoke over phone to Vice President and former state Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar over the issue surrounding the swearing-in of two new MLAs and sought his intervention in breaking the impasse.

Confirming the telephonic discussion, the Speaker said the Vice President assured him that he would look into the matter. Even as the Speaker tried to find a solution, the newly-elected Trinamool Congress MLAs Sayantika Banerjee and Reyat Sarkar continued their dharna for the third consecutive day on the Assembly premises. They are insisting that the Governor administer them the oath in the Assembly as it is their 'karma bhumi'.

Although the Speaker did



not divulge further details of the conversation with the Vice President, sources close to him said that Bandopadhyay requested Dhankhar to persuade Governor CV Ananda Bose to either administer the oath himself at the Assembly or nominate someone to do it.

On Thursday, the Speaker had written to President Droupadi Murmu seeking the latter's intervention in

resolving the matter.

On Thursday, he had also sent a letter to the office of the Governor requesting him to resolve the matter.

The Speaker had called up the Vice President on Thursday as well, but the latter could not attend the call.

Governor Bose is currently out of West Bengal and all eyes are now on the developments that will take place after he returns to Kolkata.

Bihar bridge, under construction for 4 years, collapses, 5th in 9 days

Madhubani | Agencies

An under construction bridge collapsed in Bihar's Madhubani region on Friday in the fifth incident of its kind in the state over the last nine days.

This incident took place at Madhepur Block of Bheja police station in Madhubani district where a 75 m long bridge was under construction.

The bridge, being built at cost of Rs 3 crore, had been under construction since 2021. It was being built by the Rural Works Department of the Bihar government.

As the water levels rose, a 25 m long supporting pillar crashed into the river below.

Pictures from the site showed the fallen pillars cov-



ered with huge tarpaulin sheets. Tejashwi Yadav, Opposition leader in Bihar assembly, was quick to spotlight the latest fall and take a swipe. A bridge caved in at Kishanganj district on Thursday. An under-construction small bridge collapsed in East Champaran

district on June 23.

On June 22, a bridge, built over the Gandak canal, collapsed in Siwan. On June 19, a portion of an under-construction bridge collapsed in Araria. The concrete bridge over the Bakra River, built after spending crores, came apart in seconds.

ANOTHER BRS MLA JOINS CONGRESS, SIXTH IN FOUR MONTHS

Hyderabad | Agencies

In yet another jolt to Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS), its MLA Kale Yadaiah joined the ruling Congress on Friday.

Yadaiah, who represents the Chevella constituency in Rangareddy district, joined the Congress in the presence of Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, AICC in-charge Deepa Dasmunshi and other leaders in Delhi.

Yadaiah is the sixth MLA of BRS to defect to the Congress party in the last four months.

The BRS has lost three MLAs to Congress during the last week.

Several senior leaders of BRS switched loyalties to Congress since the latter came to power in December 2023. It is a homecoming for Yadaiah, who had defected to BRS in 2015 a few months after he was elected to Assembly on a Congress ticket. In 2018, he retained the Chevella seat as BRS candidate.



In the Assembly elections held in November 2023, Yadaiah won Chevella seat for a third consecutive term, defeating Congress party's P. Beem Bharat by a slender margin of 268 votes.

Yadaiah had met Revanth Reddy in March, triggering speculations that he would join Congress soon. The MLA

had clarified that he met the Chief Minister to discuss development programmes in his constituency.

BRS MLA and former Speaker Pocharam Srinivas Reddy joined the Congress party on June 21. The MLA from Banswada in Nizamabad district is a prominent leader and a former minister. Two days later, BRS MLA

from Jagtial constituency M. Sanjay Kumar joined the Congress.

However, Sanjay Kumar's admission triggered dissent in the party with senior leader and former minister T. Jeevan Reddy threatening to resign as Member of Legislative Council.

Jeevan Reddy, who had lost to Sanjay in 2018 and 2023 from Jagtial, was unhappy with the Chief Minister for admitting Sanjay into the party without consulting him. The central leadership of Congress has summoned Jeevan Reddy to Delhi to pacify him.

The former minister also questioned the need for making BRS MLAs defect to Congress when the ruling party is strong with 65 members in the 119-member Assembly. BRS had won 39 seats in the 119-member Assembly. The series of defections and the defeat in the recent by-election to Secunderabad Cantonment constituency brought down its strength to 32.



ALL EYES ON THE APPOINTMENT OF CORPORATION BOARDS IN MADHYA PRADESH

Team Absolute | Bhopal

After the Lok Sabha elections in Madhya Pradesh, now everyone's eyes are on the appointment of the upcoming corporations and boards. The leaders of the ruling party BJP, who lost the assembly elections or could not get a place in Mohan Yadav's cabinet despite winning the elections, are now eager to get bigger responsibilities in the corporations to increase their political influence.

After the assembly elections held in the state in the year 2023, the command of the post of Chief Minister came into the hands of Dr. Mohan Yadav and about three months after assuming the post, he removed the presidents and vice-presidents of 50 corporations and dissolved the units. After this, Lok Sabha elections came closer and appointments could not be made.

Now the Lok Sabha elections have taken place and the activism of the leaders who are entitled to get posts in various boards and commissions including corporations has started increasing gradually. Any claimant who is close to an influential leader has started growing closer to the concerned leader.

If we look at the political situation in the state, during the last one year,



many MLAs have left the Congress and joined the BJP and some have even won elections on BJP tickets. Apart from this, many former influential leaders have also joined BJP. In this way, leaders who have defected are also included among the contenders.

A BJP leader, on the condition of anonymity, has said that at present there is a very long list of people seeking the post of corporation, board and commission. On one side there are old and loyal workers, while on the other side there are leaders who have switched parties and joined BJP. The defectors have also helped the party a

lot. Therefore, it has become necessary to accommodate them also on important posts. Now it has to be seen what kind of coordination the party and people associated with power establish.

Meanwhile, The state government issued an order late on Thursday night making major changes in the responsibilities of 14 senior IAS officers. These also include the names of 1989 batch officers JN Kansotiya and Vinod Kumar, who have been posted out of the ministry.

IAS officer Mohammad Suleman of the same batch is posted in the min-

istry itself. This is also being linked to the possible appointment of the Chief Secretary in the coming time.

Earlier he gave big responsibilities to the officers of his choice in the Chief Minister's Secretariat, now he has started the process of changing the responsibilities of senior officers.

According to the order issued by the state government late on Thursday night, Sudam Khade has been appointed as Public Relations Commissioner, Babu Singh Jamod as Commissioner of Rewa Division, Krishna Gopal Tiwari as Commissioner of Narmadapuram Division, Manoj Khatri as Commissioner of Gwalior Division, Rashmi Arun Shami as Food Commissioner. And Principal Secretary of Anand Department, JN Kansotiya has been made DG Administration Academy, Vinod Kumar has been made Director of Tribal Research, Dr. Sanjay Goyal has been made Secretary of School Education Department, S. Selvendran to Secretary of Farmers Welfare and Agriculture, Dhanraju S to Commissioner of Commercial Tax Labor, Harjinder Singh to Director of State Education Centre, Raghuraj MR to Secretary of Technical Education, Swatantra Kumar Singh to Director of Gas Relief and Rehabilitation, Ashok Varnwal to Has been made

After debacle, Congress set for major reshuffle in MP

Praveen Dwivedi | Bhopal

After two back-to-back defeats -- first in the Assembly and then in the Lok Sabha elections, the Madhya Pradesh Congress is all set for a major reshuffle and the new team led by its state president Jitu Patwari will be announced in the next couple of weeks.

In the meantime, the party's state headquarters is also being renovated and re-designed.

After the Assembly poll debacle, the Congress replaced party's state president Kamal Nath with Jitu Patwari -- a young leader, however, things went worse and the party failed to open its account in the state in the Lok Sabha polls. The party even lost from Chhindwara, its last bastion in the state.

Factionalism within the state Congress continue to persist and after the party lost all 29 Lok Sabha seats to the BJP recently, the knives were out for Jitu Patwari, however, the party's central leadership did not pay any heed to it.

Now, Jitu Patwari, who has direct backing from the party's top brass including Rahul Gandhi, is all prepared to set up his own team.

"A tentative list of new PCC (Pradesh Congress Committee) team was prepared with consultation of leaders from different sections, including the minority cell and woman wing, and has been sent to Delhi for approval. The AICC (All India Congress Committee) will finalise the list after the by-election for Chhindwara's Amarwara assem-



bly seat to avoid any rift within the party before the poll," a Congress leader told correspondent on condition of anonymity.

By the time Jitu Patwari gets node over his new team from the party's central leadership, Indira Gandhi Bhawan, the state Congress' headquarters located at Shivaji Nagar square in Bhopal, will be fully renovated with some added facilities, including a restaurant and guest rooms for the party leaders and workers who reach there from different parts of the state.

The four-storey PCC building is being fully re-structured and a special meeting room and an office for Jitu Patwari will be made, party sources told correspondent.

The foundation of the present PCC headquarters was laid down in 1997 and later in 2011, a life-size statue of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was installed there, since then, it has been known as the Indira Gandhi Bhawan.

Fake tanker scam in Indore: Leader of Opposition Umang Singhar

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Leader of Opposition in Madhya Pradesh Assembly Umang Singhar has alleged irregularities in the tankers being used for water supply in Indore Municipal Corporation. He says that 100 tankers are running fraudulently in the Municipal Corporation. Indore Municipal Corporation is using 400 tankers to provide water to the common people.

Leader of Opposition Umang Singhar has alleged that Indore Municipal Corporation has become a den of fraud. After the fake bill scam, now the fake tanker scam has come to light. Out of 400 tankers of the corporation running for water supply, more than 100 tankers are fake.

He said that the officers and councilors have included these tankers in the water supply list to earn money, but in reality they are engaged in some other work. Every summer, this fraud becomes a major source of income for officers and councilors.

He further said that Mayor Pushyamitra Bhargava where are your claims that I will not allow any scam to happen in IMC. Now what-



ever is happening, is happening under your eyes. Let us tell you that in view of the water crisis during the summer season, water supply is done with the help of tankers in all the urban bodies including Panchayats. At present, tankers are being used to provide easy access to water to the common people in various parts of the state.

Tribal students will get JEE, NEET and CLAT coaching in Akanksha Yojana

Tribal students of Madhya Pradesh will prepare for competitive exams on tablets

TRIBAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT WILL PROVIDE FREE COACHING FOR COMPETITIVE EXAMS TO TRIBAL STUDENTS IN BHOPAL, INDORE, AND JABALPUR

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Tribal Affairs department will provide free coaching to tribal students of Madhya Pradesh with the aim of increasing their educational participation in higher educational institutions. The department has created the 'Akanksha Yojana' to prepare tribal students for national-level competitive examina-



tions in the area of medical, engineering, and law (JEE, NEET, and CLAT). It is worth noting that tribal students have been gaining admission to these competitive examinations by preparing with the help of their government teachers and through self-study. In Akanksha

Yojana, online applications have been invited from interested Scheduled Tribe students studying in the 10th grade. Applicants will be selected for coaching based on merit, determined by the marks obtained in the entrance examination conducted by the coaching institute.

In Akanksha Yojana total 800 students will get the free coaching. 400 students will be selected for JEE coaching through a state-level entrance exam in the academic session 2024-25. JEE coaching will be conducted in Bhopal. NEET coaching will be conducted in Indore, where 200 students will be selected. Additionally, Jabalpur has been chosen for CLAT coaching, with 200 students to be selected.

In Akanksha Yojana, students selected for coaching will also be provided with residential facilities at the coaching center. Along with this, they will receive books, stationery and proper guidance related to their preparation. Tablets will also be made available to these students, along with free internet and data plan facilities.

Communicating Government Priorities, Achievements, and Best Works to Public is Essential: Chief Minister

CHIEF MINISTER APPRISES HIMSELF ABOUT THE PROCEEDINGS OF GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS FOR THE ASSEMBLY SESSION

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav emphasized the need for departments and their heads to prepare comprehensive reports on departmental accomplishments and promptly respond to queries in the upcoming Assembly session. The Assembly serves as a crucial platform for disseminating vital government information, highlighting its notable accomplishments to the public. Timely and thorough responses to inquiries from Assembly members are mandated, ensuring that the information provided is complete and relevant. During the meeting,

Chief Minister Dr. Yadav conducted a thorough review of preparations for the Assembly session and the ongoing efforts to furnish essential departmental information, issuing pertinent directives accordingly.

Chief Minister Dr. Yadav was apprising himself about the preparations for the session of the Madhya Pradesh Assembly starting from July 1 in a meeting in the Mantralaya Conference Hall today. In the meeting, Chief Minister Dr. Yadav also gave necessary instructions to senior officials of the departments regarding the action to be taken at the government level in connection with the session.

Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that



the necessary process related to the bill to be passed in the Assembly session should be completed as soon as possible before the session. Simultaneously, information related to incomplete questions and Zero Hour information should also be prepared and sent to the Assembly Secretariat. Nodal officers fixed by the departments should be present regularly during the session. The concerned officers should be present on duty even on the day the budget is presented in the session. Officials of the departments should provide detailed descriptions of the good work being done by the departments as per the requirement.

ADG UPENDRA KUMAR JAIN BECOMES SPECIAL DG, POLICE EMPLOYEES TRANSFERRED



Bhopal: The state government on Friday appointed ADG Upendra Kumar Jain as Special Director General of Police. Earlier he was holding the responsibility of Additional Director General of Police. At the same time, he also had the responsibility of Managing Director of Madhya Pradesh Police Housing and Infrastructure Development Corporation, which will remain the same. The government has transferred 145 police employees.

Corruption worth crores in hostel repair work in Dewas district, Lokayukta files FIR against 58

Team Absolute | Dewas

Case of corruption worth crores has come to light in the hostel repair work in Dewas district. In this case, Lokayukta has registered FIR against 58 people.

Actually, Lokayukta office Ujjain division had received a complaint of financial irregularities in the Tribal Welfare Department of Dewas district. Investigation into this matter was started by Superintendent of Police Anil Vishwakarma. According to the complaint, funds allocated for repair work in Scheduled Caste and Tribe hostels were misused.

During investigation, it was found by Deputy Superintendent of Police Sunil Kumar Talan that the amount received from the state government was to be used for repair work in the hostels, but Dewas district in-charge officer Vivek Nagvanshi made advance payment of almost the entire amount to contractor Rajendra Dubey. Gave. The contractor carried out incomplete and low quality work, causing financial loss to the government.

Dewas district had received a total allocation of Rs 3,28,81,808/- for the repair work. Vivek Nagvanshi along with his associates



Prakash Chauhan, Hemant Chauhan and other hostel superintendents hatched a criminal conspiracy and got the contractor paid and did not complete the work.

The list of accused in the investigation conducted by the Special Police Establishment, Lokayukta Office Ujjain Division Ujjain includes: Vivek Nagvanshi, then District Convener, Tribal Welfare Department Dewas; Rajendra Dubey, contractor; Hemant Chauhan, Computer Operator, Tribal Welfare Department Dewas; Prakash Chauhan, Hostel Superintendent and Nodal Officer, Tribal Welfare Department Dewas; Praveena Thakur, Superintendent, SC, Girls Hostel No. FIR has been registered against a total of 58 people including 2 from Dewas.

The poor and needy should get the benefit of cheap and quality medicines: Governor Patel

GOVERNOR INAUGURATES PRADHAN MANTRI JAN AUSHADHI KENDRA IN RED CROSS HOSPITAL. DENTAL UNIT STARTED IN THE HOSPITAL, 2 DENTAL CHAIRS PROVIDED THROUGH GOVERNOR'S GRANT

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Governor Mangubhai Patel said that service to afflicted humanity is service to a God. The poor and needy should benefit from Jan Aushadhi Kendras. We should spread the word about reasonable and quality medicines available in the aushadhi center.

Governor was addressing the gathering at the inauguration of Prime



Minister's Bharatiya Jan Aushadhi Kendra at Red Cross Hospital.

Governor Patel sought information about the operational activities

with the doctors, Patel said that they should provide spiritual and psychological support to the patients, It gives quick relief to the patients.

Governor Patel has approved a grant of Rs 5 lakh to the Red Cross Hospital. He provided 2 dental chairs to the hospital as well. Patel inaugurated the new dental unit of Red Cross Hospital.

Governor was greeted with a shawl and shripal in the inauguration of Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Kendra organized in the Red Cross premises. Patel planted Amla and Shami saplings on this occasion. Governor Shri Patel met the members of the Red Cross Management Committee and got their introduction. On this occasion, the Chairman of Red Cross Committee, Dr. Gagan Kolhe and other members of the Management Committee were present.



EDITOR'S SPECS

UP Assembly bypolls: BSP vs ASP

In a move that is bound to further rattle the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the Azad Samaj Party (ASP) led by Chandra Shekhar Azad has announced that it will contest all the 10 upcoming bypolls to the state Assembly. The BSP, which normally does not contest bypolls, has made an exception this time and has said that it will contest seats. The BSP will field candidates on 10 seats, of which nine fell vacant after the election of sitting legislators to the Lok Sabha. And the Sisamau seat in Kanpur was declared vacant after the disqualification of sitting MLA Irfan Solanki who was sentenced by a court in a criminal case. Mayawati has also made it clear that despite the LS poll debacle, the BSP will go solo in the bypolls as well. On the other hand, ASP chief Chandra Shekhar Azad said that he had appointed in-charges on four Assembly seats -- Khair (Aligarh), Meerapur (Muzaffarnagar), Kundarki (Moradabad) and Ghaziabad Sadar (Ghaziabad). ASP state president Sunil Kumar Chittod said the party will hold meetings in Phulpur (Prayagraj), Manjhua (Bhadohi), Katehri (Ambedkar Nagar), Milkipur (Ayodhya), Sisamau (Kanpur) and Karhal (Mainpuri). After this, the party will announce the names of in-charges for all remaining seats. Chittod said, adding the bypolls will be an opportunity for the ASP to expand its footprint in other districts after bagging the Nagina seat in LS polls. In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, Chandra Shekhar Azad secured victory defeating his nearest rival Om Kumar of the BJP. BSP candidate Surendra Pal Singh was pushed to the fourth position. The shift of Dalit voters to the ASP left the BSP worried. The Assembly bye-election will also set the stage for the show of strength for Akash Anand whom Mayawati reinstated on the key post of national coordinator earlier this week.

As LoP, Rahul's Biggest Task Is To Keep The Opposition Steady

Shubhabrata Bhattacharya

Voting has been avoided for the election of Lok Sabha Speaker, but embers of confrontation remain. Both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi have signalled that they intend to conduct business as usual. But while the ruling alliance seems united, the same cannot be said about the Opposition. The chinks became visible as soon as the 18th Lok Sabha started functioning on Wednesday. One of the first things Om Birla did after being named as the Lok Sabha Speaker on June 26 was accord recognition to Rahul Gandhi as the Leader of the Opposition (LoP) from June 9, the day on which the Congress Working Committee had announced his selection. A different Rahul Gandhi was visible on June 26. Clad in a formal kurta pyjama (and not the casual white t-shirt that over the past two years has become his style statement), he graciously walked up to the Treasury Benches to join Prime Minister Narendra Modi in escorting the Speaker to his podium. The handshake between him and Modi was starkly different from Rahul's dazzling move in July 2018, when he had walked up to the Prime Minister across the aisle of the House and hugged him. This bonhomie, however, was only customary. Body language betrayed the chasm. The two leaders did not exchange pleasantries, and the Congress did not formally congratulate Modi after he was elected the Leader of the House. No encomiums were forthcoming for the LoP from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) either. For the next five years, the Prime Minister and the LoP will have to sit together on a variety of occasions to select important appointees. As LoP, Rahul may also be the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), which scrutinises and acts upon the reports of the Comptroller & Auditor General of India (CAG). Rahul may choose to appoint a senior member of his party to head the PAC, but his overall superintendence will stand. By nominating K. Suresh for the Speaker's election, the Congress has made a symbolic assertion of its revived status in Parliament. However, the move triggered dissenting notes not only from the Trinamool Congress (TMC),



which had been at loggerheads with the Congress even as it proclaimed its allegiance to the opposition bloc, but from Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) as well. Both said they had not been informed about the decision. Already, the INDIA grouping seems to have run into a communication challenge. Also, the Congress decided not to seek a division of votes when, after a voice vote, pro-tem Speaker Bhatruhari Mahtab declared Om Birla the Speaker. But the TMC clearly wanted a division of the House. Later, Congress leaders clarified that they were not on the same page as the TMC on the issue. Differences within the Opposition were also visible when Birla read out a resolution to mark the 50th anniversary of the imposition of Emergency. He named Congress and its leader Indira Gandhi as he sought the Lok Sabha's condemnation of the period. The Congress protested but found itself isolated. The Samajwadi Party or SP (37 seats), the TMC (29), the DMK (22) and the Left parties (eight seats), did not join Congress members who rushed to Well of the House. They remained seated, indicating that they had no problem with the resolution. The next day,

some feeble defence of Congress was offered by these partners, saying that it had apologised for the Emergency and thus the resolution was not needed. These INDIA bloc parties together command 96 seats, as against 99 of the Congress. Meanwhile, Rahul flaunted a red-coloured pocket-book edition of the Constitution (somewhat reminiscent of Mao Zedong's Red Book brandished in China amid the 1966 cultural revolution) while taking oath in the Lok Sabha, proclaiming 'Jai Samvidhan'. Akhilesh Yadav also waved a copy of the document, but it had a blue cover. 'UP ke ladke', while acting in unison, seem to differ in perception. The SP is an offshoot of erstwhile Socialist parties and the Bharatiya Lok Dal, on whose 'chakra-haldhar' symbol the combined opposition had defeated the Congress post-Emergency in 1977. Its leaders were in jail during 19 months of the suspension of the Constitution. Many DMK leaders had also spent time in jail. The TMC's Mamata Banerjee, then a Youth Congress worker, had shot to national limelight in 1975

when newspapers splashed photographs of her dancing in protest on the bonnet of the car carrying anti-Emergency crusader Jayaprakash Narain. Today, the TMC's support for Om Birla's resolution is symbolic of the TMC's intent to assert its own identity, independent of the Congress. Soon after becoming LoP, Rahul reinstated Sam Pitroda as the chief of the Overseas Congress. BJP spokesman C.R. Kesavan, who had served as a Congress leader till last year, described Pitroda's reappointment as an 'egregious insult' to those who had been chagrined by his racist remarks two months back. In any case, battle lines have been drawn. The events on January 26 reflect that Narendra Modi knows how to turn the opposition's spin into a boomerang. His comments a day earlier on the Emergency were just a forerunner to the resolution the Lok Sabha adopted; they foregrounded the Congress's many adventures with the Constitution against its loud promises to protect it. Rahul, who is taking up a Constitutional position for the first time since becoming an MP in 2004, has to shoulder enormous responsibility. The Congress's 'Nyay Patra' envisages that the Houses of Parliament should meet 100 days a year and that one day a week ought to be devoted to the agenda suggested by the Opposition. To meet these objectives, cooperation, and not confrontation, is imperative. That was not seen today as the bedlam over the demands for a discussion on the NEET row led to the adjournment of Parliament. It is customary to debate a vote of thanks to the President when a session begins. That debate is open; a member can express himself on any issue, including NEET. But it seems that disruption has become the more favourable option over discussion, and thus, the 18th Lok Sabha ended its first week without any debate. Parliament is a forum for discussion, debate and collective decision-making. Digressing from this ought to be avoided as India celebrates 75 years of being a Republic that acts as a beacon to democracies the world over.

international

Biden looked 'nervous', 'panicked' in first presidential debate with Trump

Yashwant Raj | Washington
US President Joe Biden looked nervous and panicked during his first presidential debate with his challenger Donal Trump for the run-up to the 2024 elections setting the alarm bells for the Democratic camp, with many calling for a change in the candidate of the party. Biden looked lost for words and ideas in his responses to questions and attacks from his opponent former President Donald Trump and often gave the impression he did not know where he was and what he was doing. The 81-year-old US President had just one point to prove in a debate that he was capable of running the country for another four years. Biden's abysmal performance in the debate sent the Democratic party into panic and it was followed by fresh calls for him to step aside and make way for a more able and capable candidate to take



on his rival. The President ambled onto the stage with his usual shuffle. He looked grey, bewildered and confused. His responses to questions were stilted and seemed confused even if excused for his childhood stutter. There were reports of panic among Democrats as the debate unfolded as President Biden fumbled for answers. And the last straw for many Democrats was that he did not mention the abor-

tion issue in his closing remarks. The party base is agitated over the loss of abortion rights following the Supreme Court decision overturning decades-old constitutional protection. The two men faced questions on issues ranging from domestic to foreign but the focus from a very early point in the debate was President Biden. He looked old and out of sync with the pressing issues. And as the debate progressed he seemed increasingly challenged to formulate his responses. He stuttered more than usual which showed he was either nervous or panicky. This early debate was sought by him, in part to reverse his low poll numbers. The campaigners argued that Americans needed to hear of his administration's good work. However, Biden's abysmal performance on Thursday night is more likely to push voters away from the Democrats.

Russia to respond to US drone operations over Black Sea



Moscow | Agencies
Russian Defence Minister Andrei Belousov has directed the general staff of the Russian armed forces to propose a plan responding to US drone operations over the Black Sea, the Russian Ministry of Defense said on Friday in a post on social media. The ministry highlighted an increase in the frequency of US strategic drone flights over the Black Sea, which are conducting reconnaissance and targeting high-precision weaponry supplied to Ukrainian forces by

Indonesia arrests 103 foreigners linked to cybercrime in Bali

Jakarta | Agencies
Indonesia's Directorate General of Immigration arrested 103 foreigners at a villa on the resort island of Bali, alleging their involvement in cybercrime activities. "They are suspected of committing cybercrimes in their countries but operating from Bali," said Director General of Immigration Silmy Karim on Friday. Among the arrested individuals, there were 12 women and 91 men, reports Xinhua news agency. Despite initially suspecting



issues with their residence permits, evidence revealed their involvement in cyber fraud, cross-border skimming, and online gambling. During the arrests, police confiscated computers, laptops, hundreds of cell phones, and various software components.

7.2 magnitude quake jolts Peru

Lima | Agencies
A 7.2 magnitude quake rocked Peru on Friday, the US Geological Survey said. The temblor hit 8.8 kilometers from Atiquipa district, the USGS said. Initially, an alert warning of "possible" tsunami waves reaching up to 1 to 3 meters along some coastal areas in Peru was issued by the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center (PTWC) but it later dropped the alert, reports CNN. The PTWC said that there is no longer a tsunami threat from this earthquake.

35 rockets, missiles fired from Lebanon hit Israel

Jerusalem | Agencies
About 35 rockets and missiles fired from Lebanon struck the city of Safed in northern Israel on Thursday evening, causing fires, power cuts and property damage, the Israeli military said. "The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Aerial Defence Array successfully intercepted most of the launches," the Israeli military said in a statement. According to the country's Magen David Adom rescue service, no deaths or injuries were reported. A house was struck by one of the projectiles, the Merom HaGalil Regional Council said in a statement. The Fire and Rescue Authority reported that several fires erupted and civilians were stuck in elevators



due to power outages. Meanwhile, the Lebanese armed group Hezbollah said in a statement that it had attacked the Israeli air base in Safed with Katyusha rockets, in response to the Israeli attacks on the city of Nabatieh in southern Lebanon and the town of Sohmor in eastern Lebanon a day earlier, Xinhua news agency reported. Lebanese military sources told the news agency that some of the rockets were intercepted by Israeli Iron Dome missiles. The fresh Hezbollah attacks took place amid rising tensions along the Israel-Lebanon border as Israel warned it was "ready" to launch a "full-scale" offensive against Hezbollah. In a separate statement,

the IDF said Israeli warplanes, earlier in the day, struck a Hezbollah military structure in the southern Lebanese village of Ramyah and killed two Hezbollah operatives in the village of At Tiri. On the same day, unnamed Lebanese military sources confirmed to Xinhua that three Hezbollah members were killed and a fourth was wounded in two Israeli airstrikes on Ramyah and Haddatha. Tensions have been rising along the Lebanon-Israel border since October 8, 2023, following a rocket barrage launched by Hezbollah toward Israel to show its support for the surprise attack on southern Israel launched by Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip the day before.

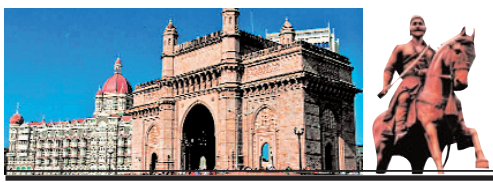
17 in custody after attempted coup in Bolivia

La Paz | Agencies
As many as 17 people, mostly members of the military, have been arrested in Bolivia for their role in a failed coup, Government Minister Eduardo Del Castillo has said. On Wednesday, hundreds of soldiers led by Gen. Juan Jose Zuniga marched on Murillo Square, the epicentre of Bolivia's political power, and forced their way into the old Government Palace, in a failed bid to oust President Luis Arce from office. Investigations show the



planning of the coup began in May and it was orchestrated by three well-defined groups, including the "preparation and planning group" led by Zuniga and Vice

"group" were arrested on Thursday and the third group, described by Del Castillo as "the most violent", was responsible for entering Murillo Square with tanks and deploying military weapons against the Bolivian people. Police are still looking for three soldiers who are currently fugitives. Ammunition and heavy-calibre weapons were found in the home of one of the soldiers, pointing to the seriousness and meticulous preparation of this insurrection, the official said on Thursday.



MAHARASHTRA BUDGET

Ajit Pawar proposes cut in taxes on diesel & petrol in Mumbai, Thane, Navi Mumbai limits

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, who holds the Finance portfolio, proposed a reduction in taxes on petrol and diesel in the areas of Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, Thane and Navi Mumbai as he presented the full budget for 2024-25 on Friday.

This is aimed to bring uniformity in tax on petrol and diesel following representations from petrol pump owners and vehicle owners.

The tax on diesel has been cut from 24 per cent to 21 per cent and on petrol from 26 per cent to 25 per cent per litre. This will bring in a relief of 65 paise per litre in petrol and Rs 2.07 per litre in diesel.

Pawar said that this would provide relief to the common citizens and industry and trade.



He also proposed exemption from professional tax to personnel of five Central armed paramilitary forces - the Assam Rifles, the Central Industrial Security Force, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police, the National Security Guard, and the Sashastra Seema Bal. This will benefit approximately 12,000 troopers.

Further, Pawar has proposed a reduction in the stamp duty penalty from 2 per cent to 1 per cent. "If the registered document is found to have paid less stamp duty, the penalty levied on the difference in stamp duty amount from the date of execution of the document is reduced from 2 per cent to 1 per cent per month," he said. He also proposed a refund of stamp duty with the initialisation of the online application process. The time limit for application will be one year from the date of purchase of the stamp, instead of six months.

Mumbai NCB busts major inter-state drug ring, seizes 31.5 kg mephedrone

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Narcotics Control Bureau's Mumbai Zone has smashed a major inter-state drug trafficking ring and seized 31.5 kg of mephedrone and Rs 69.13 lakh cash while arresting three peddlers, an official said here on Friday.

Following a tip-off that a Mumbai-based drug syndicate operated by J.K. Musharaf was active in trafficking huge quantities of drugs, a discreet probe was initiated, NCB Mumbai Zone's Additional Director Amit Ghawate said.

However, Musharaf remained elusive and it was becoming difficult to pin him down, so after round-the-clock surveillance, the NCB sleuths identified a few of his key associates.

On Wednesday, intel sources confirmed that a



bulk consignment delivery was to be made by Musharaf and an NCB team was rushed to the delivery point in Nagpada in, south Mumbai.

As indicated, Musharaf soon arrived in the area and NCB sleuths intercepted him and recovered 10 kgs of mephedrone. On questioning there, he revealed details of a storage place nearby and an NCB team rushed to that location, a room occupied by a woman named

Naushen. A search of the premises led to the seizure of another 10.5 kg of mephedrone and the drug sale proceeds of Rs.69.13 lakhs, said Ghawate.

Interrogation of the duo revealed that a drug mule, identified as Saif, was scheduled to deliver another consignment the next day, and he was caught in Wadala with another 11 kg of the drug.

"The contraband was meant for supply in various parts of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region. This syndicate was working in drug trafficking for a long period," said Ghawate.

The three accused are being questioned on their associates, the entire drug smuggling racket and related aspects while cracking the operation in the sensitive Nagpada-Dongri area, he added.

Maha budget an attempt to compensate Lok Sabha poll debacle: NCP-SP

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Nationalist Congress Party (SP) state President Jayant Patil on Friday called the 2024-25 state budget presented by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, who also holds the finance portfolio, an attempt to make up for the losses suffered by the ruling MahaYuti in the recent Lok Sabha elections.

"The MahaYuti's situation is akin to 'chadar lagi fatne, khairat lagi batne' (sheet is torn, so now dole). They are aware that they have to distribute all these (freebies) for the next couple of months, and later it will be the concern of the next government," Patil said.

Assembly elections in Maharashtra are scheduled to be held later this year.

Accusing Ajit Pawar of merely juggling with the budgetary figures, Patil said the state government has copied the big announce-



ments made by the Centre but nothing will come out of them.

Patil also referred to point No. 101 of the budget proposals in which Ajit Pawar said: "I have announced ambitious new schemes for various sections of society in this budget. It has been decided to form a high-level committee to evaluate the schemes and rationalise them so that the benefits reach directly to the eligible beneficiaries in the state."

"This implies that the schemes have been announced haphazardly. The high-level committee will strike down the proposals on different grounds, so none of the schemes will fructify. This is irresponsible and akin to cheating the people of the state," said Patil.

NCP (SP) chief spokesperson Mahesh Tapase also slammed the budget proposals as MahaYuti's "calculated ploy to hide the govern-

ment's failures in the past two years, just before the Assembly elections".

"The state has piled up a debt burden of over Rs 7 lakh crore. Ajit Pawar's budget is nothing more than a sugar-coated document designed to misguide the masses. It has failed to address critical financial issues, unemployment, and agrarian crisis. How it will attract big investors to the state and solve the other problems confronting Maharashtra," Tapase asked.

He also questioned from where will the government get funds to finance these populist schemes and initiatives while bereft of a realistic plan for debt reduction and fiscal stability.

Both Patil and Tapase claimed that people have already seen through the 'hoax' of the state government and in the next Assembly elections, the MahaYuti will be relegated to the Opposition benches.

ED raids Mumbai-based group in Rs 975 crore bank loan fraud case

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Luxury cars like Mercedes Benz and Lexus, and watch brands like Rolex and Hublot apart from more than 140 bank accounts and lockers were seized after the ED raided a Mumbai-based business group in an alleged Rs 975 crore bank loan fraud linked money laundering case.

The searches were undertaken against Mandhana Industries Limited (now GB Global Ltd.) and its promoters on Wednesday, the federal agency said in a statement.

The money laundering case stems from a CBI FIR filed against the company, its directors Purushottam Mandhana, Manish Mandhana, Bihari Lal Mandhana and others based on a complaint filed by the Bank of Baroda for allegedly defrauding a consortium of banks to the tune of Rs 975.08 crore, according to the statement issued on Thursday.

Mandhana Industries Ltd and its directors "hatched a criminal conspiracy" to cause loss to banks and corresponding wrongful gain to themselves by "diverting" loan funds through fraudulent transactions and circular trading, it



said.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) said the searches led to the unearthing of "crucial incriminating" documents including property documents.

More than 140 bank accounts, five lockers and shares and securities worth Rs 5 crore have been frozen and three high-end cars, including a Lexus and a Mercedes Benz, along with multiple watches of brands like Rolex and Hublot were seized during the raids, the ED said.

"Various fictitious entities were incorporated by the directors of Mandhana Industries Ltd. in the name of employees of the company for layering funds through the bank accounts of such entities. "Suspicious third-party transactions were made to divert funds to the accounts of promoter/directors and their family members and bogus purchases were booked against payments made to different entities providing accommodation (hawala) entries, it alleged.

Porsche case: Devendra Fadnavis defends Pune Police Commissioner

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Deputy Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, who also holds the Home portfolio, on Friday defended Pune Police Commissioner Amitesh Kumar in the Porsche hit-and-run matter, saying there was no need to take any action against the senior official as he has taken a pro-active stand in dealing with the case.

Fadnavis, however, announced in the Assembly that a probe will be conducted into the alleged rate card prevalent in Pune for the functioning of illegal and unauthorised pubs, open-terrace hotels and bars.

Besides, he also ordered an inquiry to check if an alleged nexus between the RTO officers and the family of the 17-year-old minor was involved in any manner in the Porsche car case.

Fadnavis said this while replying to Shiv Sena (UBT) legislator Sunil Prabhu and questions raised



by Leader of Opposition Vijay Wadettiwar, former home minister Anil Deshmukh, Nana Patole and others.

The Deputy CM said that no one will be spared in the Pune Porsche case, saying that the doctors

have been arrested for changing the blood sample reports while a few police personnel have been suspended for delay in conducting medical test of the minor after the filing of offence, and also for their failure not to alert the senior officers while registering the offence under section 304 (A) of the Indian Penal Code.

The offence was later registered under Section 304 after the Police Commissioner's intervention. Fadnavis further said that action has been taken against 70 pubs from Pune and their licenses have been cancelled.

He told the Assembly that artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled cameras are now being installed in pubs to check the timing of their closure at night and also to see whether they have checked the age of the visiting customers. If they fail to do this, a criminal case will be filed against the pubs.

Fadnavis reiterated that the government has zero tolerance for drug-related cases.

Oppn protests over Maha slipping to 6th rank in per capita income

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Opposition parties in Maharashtra on Friday stepped up their attack against the Mahayuti government as they staged a protest at the entrance of Vidhan Bhavan during the second day of the Monsoon Session. They shouted slogans against the Mahayuti government for not helping farmers in distress following damage to their crops because of unseasonal rains, hailstorms and even drought. The Opposition also targeted the Mahayuti government over Maharashtra slipping to the sixth rank in the per capita state income and trailing behind Telangana, Karnataka and Gujarat. They also expressed serious concern over the fall in the growth rate of agriculture and allied sectors by more than 2.50 per cent and in the service sector falling by 4.2 per cent in 2023-24. Opposition party legislators led by Leaders of Opposition in the state Council and Assembly Ambadas Danve and Vijay



Wadettiwar respectively demanded that the Maharashtra government give financial aid to farmers at the earliest. Besides, they also expressed serious concern over the rising public debt burden on Maharashtra. Wadettiwar said that the Economic Survey 2023-24 had shown a sharp fall in farm income and accused the government of neglecting the agriculture sector. He also blamed the Mahayuti government for the neighbouring state of Gujarat outpacing Maharashtra in per capita state income.

Infant girl falls into bucket full of water, dies

Team Absolute | Thane

An 11-month-old girl died after falling into a bucket filled with water at Mumbra in Maharashtra's Thane city, an official said on Friday.

The incident occurred in Amrut Nagar locality on Thursday and a case of accidental death was registered based on the information provided by the parents of the child, the official at the Mumbra police station.

The girl, Asmabano Niyaz Siddiqui, who was crawling in the house, went near the bucket full of water, kept outside the bathroom on Thursday afternoon. The child got up holding the bucket and fell into it while trying to peep in. Though her mother noticed her soon after, by that time the child was motionless, he said.

Her parents rushed the child to a local hospital, from where she was shifted to the Kalwa civil hospital. There, doctors declared her dead, the official said.

The local police are probing the incident. This is the second such incident in Mumbra in the past one month.

Licence to kill? Mumbai RTO audit says 76K DLs issued on fake driving tests

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a stunner, an audit by Maharashtra's Accountant General (Audit II) has revealed that the Regional Transport Office (RTO) at Andheri in Mumbai may have issued a whopping 76,000 driving licences on 'fake driving tests' on unauthorised vehicles, last year. Following the disclosure, the RTO has initiated a discreet probe into the matter and several heads dealing directly or indirectly with driving tests and documentation for driving licences (DLs) may be targeted, official sources indicated on Friday. The scam came to light during a test check of 1.04 lakh licences through the online data of SARATHI regarding the processing of applications of DLs after conducting the mandatory driving tests of the applicant/candidates. The outcome of the audit was disturbing - of the 1.04 lakh licences scrutinised, 76,354 DLs, or nearly 75 per cent - were issued in 2023-2024, with suspect driving tests conducted on invalid vehicles. Following a tip-off by Thane social worker Binu Varghese, the RTO officialdom got cracking on the revelations, with far-reaching implications and the doubtful driving skills of thousands of drivers speeding around on roads. The DL data threw up details of how four vehicles, comprising two-wheelers and cars were used repeatedly for conducting tests for different categories of vehicles ranging from scooters to cranes, on which the 76,354 questionable DLs were issued. While 41,093 DLs were issued on the two two-wheelers, another 35,261 DLs were cleared on the two four-wheelers, ostensibly blindly with probable murky dealings. The auditors concluded, "The licences for LMV were

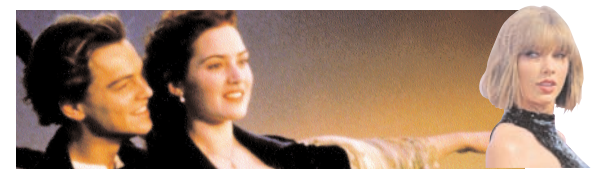


issued but the driving tests were carried out on two-wheeler (motorcycles) vehicles. DLs were issued for motorcycle/scooter category but driving tests were carried out on LMVs. The DLs were issued for the three-wheeler category but driving tests were carried out on motor-cars or two-wheelers. "Pulling up the RTO, the auditors said that it was clear how, while processing the documentation for conducting DL tests, neither the due procedures were followed nor were the vehicle details verified by the authorised RTO inspectors. "This creates doubts on whether the tests were conducted at all or not. The cases are only illustrative (only 4 vehicles test-checked by audit) in nature and similar cases may be identified and intimated to audit," noted the auditor in the report last fortnight. The break-up in the audit report shows: (two test two-wheelers - No. MH-02-BX-5817 & No. MH-02-BL-

3906) on which DLs issued for three-wheelers/goods vehicles (792); LMV and LMV-TR (3,501); MCWG/OG or motorcycles without gear (36,319); transport vehicles (385); and heavy vehicles like trucks, buses, cranes, etc (96) - totalling to 41,093 DLs.

For the two test cars (No. MH-02-AQ2409 & No. MH-02-BQ-9727). DLs were issued for three-wheelers/goods vehicles (881); LMV and LMV-TR (33,922); MCWG/OG or motorcycles without gear (121); transport vehicles (306); and heavy vehicles like trucks, buses, cranes, etc (31) - totalling to 35,261 DLs. When contacted, a RTO official, declining to be identified, admitted to IANS that this is the audit data of just one RTO (Andheri), and there are 53 more RTOs in Maharashtra (54), plus over 1,100 RTOs across India where such practices may be rampant, which issue around 1.20 crore DLs annually.

"They also must be audited to detect such dangerous malpractices on top priority by the states and Centre, plus, review the rules to make the learners driving courses longer and driving tests more stringent to ensure safety of people on Indian roads", urged the RTO official. On his part, Varghese contended that despite being aware of the ongoing frauds, why did the RTO top brass not initiate any action and alleged "obvious wheeling-dealings" in issuing thousands of DLs haphazardly daily. "It's difficult to imagine that lakhs of drivers may be on the roads who may have acquired their DLs without proper driving tests... Then we get examples like the Pune Porsche accident case involving a minor rich brat who snuffed out two youngsters in just seconds," said Varghese.



Sigourney Weaver to be feted with honorary Golden Lion at Venice FF

Los Angeles | Agencies

Oscar-winning actor Sigourney Weaver will be feted with the prestigious Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the 81st Venice International Film Festival. "To be gifted this award is a privilege I share with all the filmmakers and col-

laborators I have worked with throughout the years. I proudly accept this award in celebration of all who have helped bring these films to life," Weaver said.

Venice's director Alberto Barbera, whose mandate was just renewed, said: "An actress of the calibre of Sigourney Weaver has few rivals."

"Strengthened by her significant theatrical training, she won over the great film-going public with 'Alien,' directed by Ridley Scott, soon becoming an emblematic figure of the 1980s."

"During the course of that decade, she forged the image of a heroine unprecedented in the action film genre, able to victoriously rival the male models who, up to that point, had dominated epic and adventure movies," Barbera said.

"Not satisfied with having blazed the trail for powerful female actors, the actress



ceaselessly continued her search for a personal identity."

The artistic director also shared Weaver's collaboration with filmmakers including names such as James Cameron, Roman Polanski, Paul Schrader, Peter Weir, Michael Apted, Ivan Reitman, Mike Nichols and Ang Lee, reports variety.com.

"The Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement is just recognition for a star who has built bridges between the most sophisticated art-house cinema and movies that engage with the public in a frank and original way, all the while remaining true to herself," Barbera said.

Over the years, Weaver has featured in Season 4 of the International Emmy-winning French series "Call My Agent!"

KIM KARDASHIAN ACCUSES KHLOE HAVING A 'STICK UP HER ASS'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Kim Kardashian described her sister Khloe as Brendan Fraser in *The Whale* due to being such a homebody in the latest episode of *The Kardashians*.

"Khloe has really been pissing me off lately, so we're going to Aspen and I just want to get some things off my chest and just really clear the air with her before we go," expressed the 43-year-old SKIMS founder.

Throughout the season, the show documents how Kimberly is irritated by her sister never leaving her house despite the 40-year-old Good American founder expressing she is happy to be home.

Not having Khloe out and about much bugged Kim so she of course brought it to her attention prior to leaving for Aspen. "Well, I have a bone to pick with you," she shared in the clip.

She explained during a confessional that she "had a really hard week" and had sent her two youngest to her mother Kris Jenner to get them ready for school. As she was heading out the house her daughter Chicago applied hair gel on the way out.

Giving new life to the cherished items from my wardrobe : Elton John

Los Angeles | Agencies

Legendary singer Elton John has talked about selling some unwanted clothes on an e-commerce site to raise money for

his AIDS Foundation charity.

The rocker's "Rocket Man Resale" has items up for grabs including a Saint Laurent leopard print knee-length coat, Gucci loafers emblazoned with



the words 'S*** Me' and a blue Versace tracksuit. He said in a statement: "Giving new life to the cherished items from my wardrobe has always been special to me. For decades I've donated my closet's treasures to support the Elton John AIDS Foundation." This Pride Month, I'm excited to share my Atlanta treasure trove on eBay, hoping these items will inspire you to express your unique spirit and bring you as much joy as they've brought me. "Whether you're after high-end luxury or something more laid-back, there's a perfect find for everyone. Even better, every dollar goes to supporting the Elton John AIDS Foundation's work to end LGBTQ+ stigma."

As well as high-end designer gear, the star is also selling off less pricey items including concert T-shirts and baseball caps. John and his husband David Furnish launched the sale with a live-streamed shopping event live, reports femalefirst.co.uk. As well as his clothes and accessories, fans will be able to snap up pieces donated by his famous friends including fashion designers Donatella Versace and Betsy Johnson, singer Brandi Carlile, and TV hosts Robin Roberts and Andy Cohen.

I feel like I discovered Angelina Jolie : David Duchovny

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actor David Duchovny said that he knew Angelina Jolie "was a movie star" from the moment they first met.

Duchovny and Jolie starred together in the thriller 'Playing God' in 1997. The 'Californication' star appeared on SiriusXM's Andy Cohen Live and explained how he knew the actress would become such a big star one day.

"I feel like I discovered Angelina Jolie," Duchovny quipped while speaking with host Andy Cohen, reports people.com.

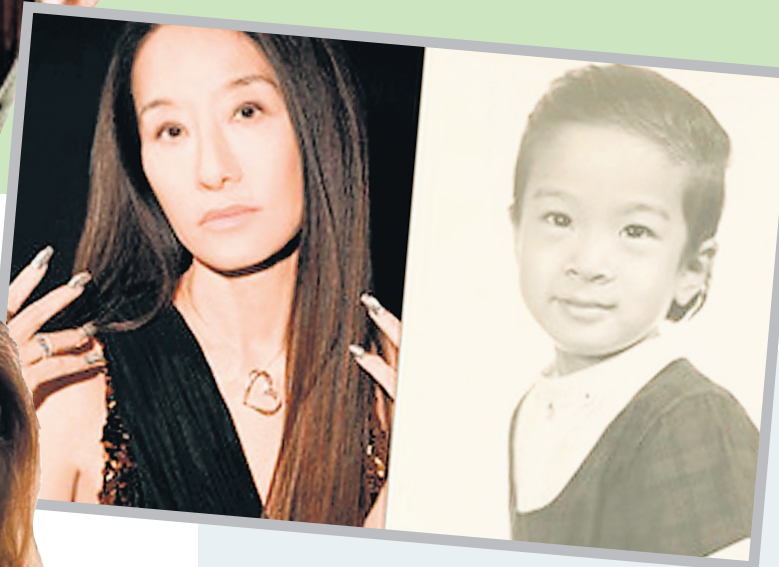
To which, Cohen asked, "Really?" and the actor said: "Yeah, because I was casting, I was part of the casting of, I didn't discover her, but you know, she came in, and I just knew she was a movie star, and I told everybody we've gotta cast her."

'Playing God' had Duchovny essay the role of Eugene Sands, a disgraced surgeon who reinvents himself as a "gunshot doctor" for criminals. The actress played Claire, one of the criminals' girlfriends.

It was in an interview in 1997, where Jolie shared that the role was "wild."

"(Playing God) was very rock-'n'-roll and fun and loud and say-what-you-want-to-say, dress wild and love wild — you know that fantasy. I really allowed myself to get into that world," she told the outlet.

"Being the age (I) am, I sometimes feel like a punk kid walking onto certain sets, but I didn't this time. I felt very much (like) a woman."



Vera Wang shares throwback picture as she turns 75

Los Angeles | Agencies

Renowned American fashion designer Vera Wang, who gained international recognition for her wedding dress designs, has turned 75. To celebrate the occasion, she shared a photograph of herself as a child.

The fashion designer, who started her career in figure skating, shared a picture of herself when she was just a little girl. The photograph had the mom of two smiling while wearing a checkered patterned dress.

Taking to Instagram, Wang wrote: "Circa 1956. Just me. 'Twas the night before my birthday and all through the house..." Wang also shared a short video that dates back to when she won the 2013 Geoffrey Beene Lifetime Achievement Award, which was presented to Wang by the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) for her "consistent, creative influence on fashion," reports people.com. "In celebration of my 75th birthday, one of the most treasured moments of my 55 years in fashion and 35 years in business. Thank you @cfda for this unforgettable honour," Wang wrote about the moment on Instagram.

In April, Wang said that her birthday plans were "up in the air" since "75 is a lot of pressure."

She did, however, emphasise that she is strongly looking forward to the future.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Irina Shayak



Rain likely to play spoilsport in India v South Africa final in Barbados



New Delhi | Agencies

After their thumping wins over respective opponents in the semifinals, India and South Africa will lock horns in the summit clash of the T20 World Cup in Bridgetown, Barbados on Saturday. India overpowered defending champions England in a match delayed by rain and a wet outfield in the second semifinal in Guyana while South Africa thumped Afghanistan in their first semifinal encounter to proceed to their first-ever World Cup final. Both teams remain unbeaten in the tournament, but rain is expected to play its part in

the final, as per the weather forecast for the day. However, there is a reserve day in place for the title game, but the forecast remains grim on that day as well. The chances of rain remain persistent in the afternoon with 99 per cent cloud cover. The weather prediction for the reserve day (June 30) is also gloomy with a forecast of rain and thunderstorms in the afternoon. "Mostly cloudy and humid; breezy in the morning, then occasional rain and a thunderstorm in the afternoon," reads Sunday's weather forecast for Bridgetown. If the final match gets washed out in Barbados, both India and South Africa will be declared joint winners of the tournament.

'England lost to a team who have had all bases covered', says Nasser Hussain

New Delhi | Agencies

After England came up short against India in the semifinal of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup, former skipper Nasser Hussain said that the Jos Buttler-led side lost to a team who have "had all bases covered" in this tournament. After a shaky group stage campaign, Jos Buttler's team secured a spot in the next round in style after beating the USA. However, they could not overcome India, who have been unstoppable in the tournament, remaining unbeaten since their campaign began. "The narrative will be that everything on Thursday was geared towards India reaching the T20 World Cup final — the surface, the venue, all seemed to be in their favour. But if you look at things in greater detail, they came into this semi-final against England having just beaten 50-over world champions Australia on a bouncer, good pitch in St Lucia, and reverted to a lower, slower pitch and won comfortably," Hussain wrote in his column for Daily Mail. "Fair play to them for the way they played and it feels right that India and South Africa, the two unbeaten sides in the tournament, go head to head in Barbados on



Saturday," he added. Captain Rohit Sharma's 32nd T20I fifty through a 39-ball 57 and Suryakumar Yadav's 47 off 36 balls helped India post 171/7. In response, England mustered only 103 all out as the Indian spinners Kuldeep Yadav (3-19), Axar Patel (3-23) and Ravindra Jadeja (0-16) combined to take six wickets between them to outclass the defending champions. "A combination of seamers keeping the ball low and spinners

turning it with no bounce made their 171 for seven a pretty decent score to defend, and Rohit Sharma showed his class by taking one of his favourite shots — the pull — out of the equation to make another half century," said Hussain in his column. He further pointed out that Buttler's decision to put India in to bat first is the one issue that could be levelled at the English skipper. "The one issue you could level at

Butler was his decision to insert India after winning the toss. Perhaps with rain around he was thinking about Duckworth Lewis, and it was a bit damp up front which might have given them a better chance of their opening bowlers Reece Topley and Jofra Archer nicking people off. "But it should not distract from the fact England lost to a team who have had all bases covered in this competition," he concluded.

'Rohit spends time in strategy, planning with all of us', says Dravid

New Delhi | Agencies

After sailing to the T20 World Cup final following a 68-run win against England, India head coach Rahul Dravid heaped high praise on captain Rohit Sharma's tactical brilliance and said he spends a lot of time off the field on strategy and planning. Rohit's leadership skills in the tournament kept India unbeaten in the campaign despite threats from Australia and defending champions England. India avenged their 2022 edition's 10-wicket drubbing against England in Guyana to head into the final of the tournament for the first time since 2014. Talking about Rohit's captaincy of the team, Dravid said, "About Rohit, whatever I say will fall short. The way he has worked with the team, his strategy, his maturity, the team's response to him, and the time he spends in strategy, planning, and discussion with all of us. I cannot speak more highly about him as a cricketer and also as a person." Dravid also backed Virat Kohli despite his dipping form



in the tournament and said he would come all guns blazing in the title clash. "You know with Virat, the thing is, when you play a slightly high-risk brand of cricket there can be times when it doesn't come off. Even today, I thought he hit a really good six to set the tempo but he was just unlucky that the ball seamed a little bit more. But I love the intent, I love the way he went about doing it. It sets a good example for the group as well if he's willing to do it. "And you know, for some reason, I don't want to jinx it

but I think there's a big one coming up. I'm just loving his attitude and that he's committing himself on the field - I think he deserves it," the head coach said. It is also Dravid's last assignment with the Indian team as the new coach will join the team following the conclusion of the T20 World Cup. The 51-year-old expressed his desire to finish his tenure with a silverware that eluded him in the ODI World Cup and World Test Championship finals last year. Speaking about the #DoltForDravid campaign that is doing the rounds in India, he said, "You know, I don't really believe in this 'Do it for somebody'. I love that quote about somebody asking somebody else, 'Why do you want to climb Mount Everest?' and he says 'I want to climb Mount Everest because it's there'. "I want to win this World Cup because it's there. It's not for anyone, it's not for anybody, it's just there to win. I just want to play good cricket and yeah, doing it for someone is totally against who I am as a person and what I believe in so I don't want to talk about it and discuss it."

COPA AMERICA: URUGUAY ROUT BOLIVIA 5-0 TO REACH QUARTERFINALS



New Jersey | Agencies

Darwin Nunez extended his rich vein of form as Uruguay secured a place in the Copa America knockout phase with a 5-0 victory of Bolivia. Facundo Pellistri gave the Celeste a perfect start at MetLife Stadium by nodding home from close range in the eighth minute after Ronald Araujo's headed cross. Nunez doubled the lead as he ran onto Maximiliano Araujo's through ball and lashed a first-time effort past goalkeeper Guillermo Viscarra. The Liverpool striker now has 10 goals in his past seven international appearances, reports Xinhua. Araujo then latched onto Nicolas de la Cruz's perfectly weighted pass by slotting a shot

that ricocheted in off Viscarra's legs. Real Madrid midfielder Federico Valverde made it 4-0 by expertly directing the ball into the bottom-left corner after Pellistri's cross from the right side of the penalty area. Rodrigo Bentancur, an 86th-minute replacement for Valverde, completed the rout when he headed home at the far post after Georgian de Arrascaeta's floating cross from the left flank. Uruguay is now guaranteed a berth in the quarterfinals while Bolivia will be eliminated, irrespective of the result of the team's last group match against Panama on Monday. Earlier, Panama kept alive its hopes of reaching the Copa America's last eight with a 2-1 victory over the United States in Atlanta.

T20 World Cup: 'South Africa will be hard to beat', opines Ponting ahead of final against India



New Delhi: Former Australia captain Ricky Ponting believes that South Africa do not need to do anything special and be the best versions of themselves in the final against India in the T20 World Cup. Both India and South Africa will head into the summit clash with an unbeaten streak in the tournament so far. South Africa pipped Afghanistan in the semifinal to their historic journey in the tournament while India outplayed defending champions England in the semifinal to eye their first World Cup title since 2011. Aiden Markram-led side will play their first World Cup final and Ponting feels it is a very big occasion for the Proteas players. "A lot of teams say 'It's just another game' and they try and hide away from how big the occasion is and it is no good doing that. It is all about embracing it for what it is," Ponting said on the ICC's Digital Daily show. "These players haven't been there before, so enjoy tonight, enjoy tomorrow. But make sure everything you do leading in is the same and your preparation is the same," he added. Ponting asserted that South Africa continue to back their skills in the final against India after their exemplary performance in the tournament so far. "They are undefeated upto here, so they don't need to change anything and they don't need to try any harder. They just need to turn up and be the best version of themselves and the best version of themselves as a team on the day and give themselves the best chance. If they do that, they will be hard to beat," said Ponting. India and South Africa will lock horns in the summit clash in Barbados on Saturday, June 29.

Wimbledon 2024: Nagal to face Kecmanovic in first round, Swiatek up against Kenin in tough opener

London | Agencies

India's Sumit Nagal will make his debut in the Wimbledon main draw against Serbia's Miomir Kecmanovic. This marks the second consecutive Grand Slam when Nagal has received direct entry into the main draw. He became the first Indian since Prajnesh Gunneswaran in 2019 to compete in the men's singles main draw. Nagal finds himself in the same section of the draw as the top seed and world no. 1 Jannik Sinner. Should he progress, he could potentially face the Italian in the third round. In a tricky draw, World no. 1 Iga Swiatek will face American Sofia Kenin in the first round of the women's singles in Wimbledon 2024. Defending champion Marketa Vondrousova, seeded sixth and in the same quarter of the draw as Swiatek, will take on Spain's Jessica Bouzas Maneiro. In the men's singles, reigning champion Carlos Alcaraz, seeded third, will take on Estonian qualifier Mark Lajal and finds himself in the same half of the draw as top seed Jannik Sinner. Italy's Sinner will take on German Yannick Hanfmann while Britain's two-time winner Andy Murray will play unseeded Czech Tomas Machac in his final appearance, ending doubts over his singles participation in the home Grand Slam after undergoing spinal cyst surgery last weekend. Seven-time champion Novak Djokovic, seeded second, has been drawn against Czech qualifier Vit Kopriwa. Germany's fourth seed Alex Zverev will commence his campaign



against Spain's Roberto Carballes Baena. Second seed Coco Gauff will play in an all-American first-round tie against Caroline Dolehide while third seed Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus, who Gauff could face in the semi-finals, takes on American Emina Bektas. Some other notable first-round draws in the women's singles include a clash of Grand Slam champions as Victoria Azarenka faces Sloane Stephens while British wildcard Emma Raducanu, the 2021 U.S. Open champion, is up against Russian 22nd seed Ekaterina Alexandrova.

Euros 2024: Bhaichung Bhutia hails Spain and Germany as favourites heading into knockout stages

New Delhi | Agencies

The Round of 16 is all set to begin on Saturday. Following the impressive performances by teams like Germany and Spain, many are wondering if the 2024 Euros is the tournament where these giants will end their trophy drought. In an exclusive conversation with IANS, former Indian captain Bhaichung Bhutia revealed that he believes the Germans are the favourites heading into the knockout stages. "I think Germany's got a history of it's like Real Madrid in the Champions League. It's the same with Germany, Spain and Italy, they always do well in all these knockout matches. Germany definitely is one of the favourites and they've started very well and they look a very strong, balanced side and is one of the few teams that have really played so far very well," Bhutia told IANS. A lot of questions currently revolve around Kai Havertz and his place in the German national team. The striker has performed well and got a goal and an assist in the opening game. Despite the two contributions, many are hailing for the inclusion of Niclas Fullkrug in the side after the Dortmund forward scored the late equaliser against Switzerland to secure the top place in Group A. "I think when the team is doing well, you don't want to make those changes upfront. Yes, we could have seen much more from Kai Havertz, especially getting a few more goals for



them, but it's not happened I think it's linking the team well. The substitutes have come in and really delivered. I don't think they should make many changes in terms because it's really working well for them. It's just that he needs one or two goals to, you know, get him going," he added. Alongside Germany, Spain have looked a lot like their past self. They started the tournament with a 3-0 victory over Croatia and were the only team to win all their games in the Group Stage. They now face Georgia in the Round of 16 and can potentially be pitted opposite hosts Germany in the quarterfinals. "I think there has been a great combination of youth and experience on their side. The captain (Alvaro

Morata) has been fantastic. He's getting back to his form and he's got two young players (Yamal and Williams) at the side playing alongside him. I think Spain has been the best team so far but again, with the team and players, young players like that, when it gets going, when you're leading, when you score goals, when you're winning, it's a great thing." "How do you react when you're a goal down and when you are in that pressure kind of situation? That is a time we'll have to see if they're a goal down, what is the kind of reaction these younger players can bring in? And sometimes it's quite difficult for younger players. The mindset is a bit difficult when you concede," concluded the former Indian striker.



Hina Khan diagnosed with Stage 3 breast cancer

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Hina Khan on Friday announced that she has been diagnosed with stage three breast cancer, saying she is strong, determined, and fully committed to overcoming this disease. Taking to social media, Hina shared a post which read: "Hello Everyone, To address the recent rumour, I want to share some important news with all the Hinaholics and everyone who loves and cares for me. I have been diagnosed with Stage Three Breast Cancer. Despite this challenging diagnosis, I want to reassure everyone that I am doing well. I am strong, determined, and fully committed to overcoming this disease. My treatment has already begun, and I am ready to do everything necessary to emerge from this even stronger."



"I kindly ask for your respect and privacy during this time. I deeply appreciate your love, strength, and blessings. Your personal experiences, anecdotes, and supportive suggestions would mean the world to me as I navigate this journey. I, along with my family and loved

ones, remain focused, determined, and positive. With the grace of the Almighty, we believe I will overcome this challenge and be completely healthy. Please send your prayers, blessings, and love. Love, Hina," the note ended.

Hello Everyone.

To address the recent rumour, I want to share some important news with all the Hinaholics and everyone who loves and cares for me. I have been diagnosed with Stage Three Breast Cancer.

Despite this challenging diagnosis, I want to reassure everyone that I am doing well. I am strong, determined, and fully committed to overcoming this disease. My treatment has already begun, and I am ready to do everything necessary to emerge from this even stronger.

Actor Jay Bhanushali commented: "Get well soon Hina". A fan wrote: "Stay strong, everything will be normal".

A user said: "u r strong daddy girl". One fan said: "Loads of prayers and strength to you".



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Playback singer Sonu Nigam, who attended the launch of 'Svaramini Asha', washed the feet of Padma Vibhushan awardee and veteran singer Asha Bhosle on Friday.

Sonu attended the event at the Deenanath Mangeshkar Auditorium in the Vile Parle area of Mumbai, and washed the feet of his 'Guru' with rose water and rose petals. Actor Jackie Shroff gifted a plant to the veteran singer as a symbol of making the earth green again.

Asha Bhosle expressed her heartfelt gratitude for the overwhelming love and support, sharing anecdotes from her illustrious career and her excitement about the book. The event witnessed an extraordinary gathering of the who's who of the music and film industry for the launch of

SONU NIGAM WASHES ASHA BHOSLE'S FEET WITH ROSE WATER

the book which is a tribute to Asha Bhosle. Asha Bhosle attended the event with her granddaughter Zana Bhosle. The event was inaugurated by Mohan Bhagwat. Eminent personalities from the industry, including Hridaynath Mangeshkar, Bharati Mangeshkar, Sonu Nigam, Ashish Shelar, Ashok Saraf, Jackie Shroff, Poonam Dhillon, Suresh Wadkar, Sudesh Bhosle, Shruti Bhosle, and Harish Bhamani, attended the event to honour Asha Bhosle.

Path to fitness requires discipline, dedication : Mallika Sherawat



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Mallika Sherawat is a fitness enthusiast and said that exercise is not just a routine for her but a celebration of what her body can achieve. Mallika, on Friday, shared a video of herself working out in the gym. In the clip, she is seen doing band workouts for her glutes, weighted lunges and core exercises using a ball. For the caption, the actress wrote: "Exercise is not just a routine for me but a celebration of what my body can achieve. The real path to fitness requires discipline and dedication." Mallika, who often shares workout videos of herself, said that genuine fitness cannot be bought. "The allure of an easy solution like these quick fixes and artificial procedures is tempting but genuine fitness can't be bought. It must be earned through hard work and commitment," she wrote.

Mallika is an ardent social media user as well. She often shares throwback pictures, clips and anecdotes from the films she has featured in. Recently, she shared three images from her Hollywood 2010 horror drama film 'Hiss' directed by Jennifer Lynch. In the movie, Mallika played a shape-shifting serpent. Late star Irrfan Khan starred alongside the actress. Talking about 'Hiss', Mallika wrote on Instagram that throughout her acting career, she has frequently faced ridicule and moral scrutiny for making bold choices on screen. "I feel the most beautiful woman in the world is a woman who protects & uplifts other women. Instead of judging each other for bold choices we should celebrate the courage it takes to break free from regressive traditional boundaries," wrote the actress, who was last seen in the comedy drama 'RK/RKY'.



'A genre I haven't explored much' : Vaani Kapoor



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Vaani Kapoor said that with her upcoming comedy film, she is exploring a genre that she hasn't had the chance to dive into yet.

Vaani, who is heading to the UK for the second schedule of the film, said: "Our next schedule is in the UK, and I'm looking forward to an exciting filming experience."

She said that the film, which is directed by Navjot Gulati, presents her in an all-new avatar.

"Badtameez Gill" presents me in a new avatar, which I'm really happy about. This project is significant for me and it means a lot that producers trust my acting abilities and are willing to support films with me in a leading role," said the actress.

She added: "I'm committed to giving it my best and showcasing my range as an artist."

Talking about the genre of the film, which also stars Aparshakti Khurana and Pooja Rawal, she said: "I'm also exploring a genre that I haven't had the chance to dive into that much, which is both fun and challenging for me as an actor."

Vaani is enjoying her work in 'Badtameez Gill'.

"Comedy, especially family-friendly comedies that everyone can enjoy together, is a genre I love. I'm thoroughly enjoying shooting for Badtameez Gill."

Don't go for fluff, work for passion : Manisha Koirala

New Delhi: Manisha Koirala, who recently made a comeback with OTT series Heeramandi, said that "fluff" is the wrong reason for newcomers entering the world of entertainment. Manisha Koirala was interacting on the sidelines of a media event when asked about tips for newcomers entering the arena of entertainment. She said: "I have always said it, don't go for the fluff, if you really passionately love acting, love cinema, love any technical aspect of it, just go for it." "No matter whatever hurdles you might face, you will sail through it, after putting long hours and hard work, you will still be joyful because this is something you love to do. But if you are going for the fluff, then your focus is never on what you are doing, but on the glamour, money and other stuff. If you're going for the fluff, you are going for the wrong reasons. Fluff is the by-product of the profession you have chosen out of love and passion," added Manisha. Manisha also spoke about the upcoming new season of Heeramandi, and her working with Sanjay Leela Bhansali. She said: "We don't know when and what is going to happen in Heeramandi 2, but I can talk about the first season, working with Sanjay Leela Bhansali was phenomenal, he is master of his craft, and the level of passion and commitment he has, that inspires everyone around him." "For me working with him was so timely because I have reached a stage where something needs to drive me passionately, demand commitment for me, then only I will do it. I was happily gardening in Nepal, when the offer of Heeramandi came to me, and I just jumped on it. It has been such a beautiful experience working with SLB, and talented co-stars," concluded Manisha.

Malayalam cinema's evergreen actress Jayabharathi turns 70

Team Absolute | Thiruvananthapuram

One of the Malayalam film industry's evergreen actresses Jayabharathi turned 70 on Friday.

In a career which spans over five decades, the veteran actress has acted in over 350 films in Malayalam, Tamil, Telegu and Hindi.

She entered the Malayalam film industry at the young age of 13 in the late sixties and rose to stardom along with Sheela. She became one of the most popular actresses in the Malayalam film industry.

In her glittering career, she starred with veterans like Prem Nazir, Madhu, Jayan (who is her cousin), Vincent, Soman and the present-generation superstars Rajnikant and Kamal Haasan.

She has won two Kerala State awards for best actress and a national award as well. She is known for her role in 'Rathinirvedam' and others.

At her peak, she married her fellow star known for villain roles - Sathar in 1979 but after eight years the couple split.

Later, she took an interest in dancing and performed at numerous temples. The actress is currently busy with her dancing schools in Kerala and in Tamil Nadu.



Ruhi Singh