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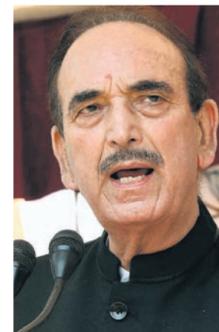
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OMICRON REACHES INDIA, TWO CASES DETECTED IN KARNATAKA

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Six contacts of Omicron infected person test positive, samples sent for genome sequencing. However, official sources said that one of them has already recovered, and the other in quarantine is asymptomatic and all right.

CONGRESS IS NOT WINNING 2024 GENERAL ELECTIONS: GHULAM NABI AZAD



“(Article 370) is in court. I will not talk about what is not in our hands just to please people. I can't promise you the stars and the moon. If anyone can do anything, apart from the court, it is the current government, which itself was responsible for the move. We are 300 MPs short. I can't even say that in 2024 if Congress wins 300 MPs, we can do something. God willing we will win but right now I don't see that happening. So I will not make any false promises.”

Wednesday, Ghulam Nabi Azad said he does not see the Congress winning 300 seats in the next general elections. He was talking about restoring Article 370, scrapped in 2019, and was explaining to the crowd that he was in no position to make promises that he couldn't possibly deliver on. The former J&K Chief Minister was speaking at a rally in Poonch. The Congress says the comments were in a particular context and shouldn't be taken beyond that.

Azad is a prominent and vocal member of the "G-23" or group of 23 Congress leaders who, in an unprecedented act of defiance, wrote to party chief Sonia Gandhi last year asking for sweeping changes in the organisation, including a visible and present leadership.

At a time the Congress is fighting questions around its leadership, its senior leader Ghulam Nabi Azad has all but declared his own party a write-off in the 2024 national election. Addressing a rally in Jammu and Kashmir on

▶ **AMONG THE TWO INFECTED INDIVIDUALS -- ONE IS A 66-YEAR-OLD PERSON FROM SOUTH AFRICA. HE CAME TO BENGALURU AIRPORT ON NOVEMBER 20 AND TESTED POSITIVE FOR COVID-19. LATER, BBMP SENT HIS SAMPLE TO GENOMIC SEQUENCING OF WHICH THE RESULT HAS COME ON THURSDAY.**

▶ **THE SAMPLE WAS COLLECTED FROM A 46-YEAR-OLD PERSON ON NOVEMBER 22 AND SENT TO THE NCBS LAB. HIS RESULT HAS ALSO SHOWN THAT HE IS POSITIVE FOROMICRON VIRUS. HE WAS KEPT IN HOME ISOLATION FIRST AND LATER SHIFTED TO HOSPITAL.**

▶ **ALL PRIMARY 24 CONTACTS AND 240 SECONDARY CONTACTS HAVE BEEN TRACED AND SAMPLES WERE TAKEN BY URBAN PRIMARY HEALTH CENTRE OFFICIALS. ALL HAVE BEEN TESTED NEGATIVE.**

“It is ‘highly likely’ that Omicron can escape immunity caused by previous infection or vaccination. Regardless of the variant, complete vaccination is likely to protect against severe disease and deaths, especially in older age groups.”



Dr Soumya Swaminathan, Chief Scientist, WHO

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Two persons in Karnataka have tested positive for Omicron, the newest variant of Covid-19, after genome sequencing, Balram Bhargava, Director General, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), said here on Thursday. Both cases have travel history to South Africa. “Two cases of Omicron have been detected in Karnataka so far through genome sequencing effort of INSACOG consortium of 37 laboratories established by the Ministry of Health. We need not panic, but awareness is absolutely essential. Covid appropriate behaviour is required,” Bhargava said. The contacts of the duo who tested positive for the latest variant have been identified and are under monitoring, he said.

“All Omicron related cases are found to have mild symptoms so far. No severe symptoms have been noticed in all such cases, both in the country and abroad. The WHO has said that the virus’ emerging evidence is being studied,” said Lav Agarwal, Joint Secretary, Union Health Ministry, adding that around 29 countries across the world have reported 373 cases of Omicron so far. Meanwhile, at least 380 passengers



‘VERY TRANSMISSIBLE, CAN BE DETECTED SOON’

New Delhi: The new super mutant Covid variant Omicron appears to be very transmissible. Global health body said, the variant has now spread to 23 other nations. In South Africa, it has led to an “exponential” spike with Covid infections doubling. According to top microbiologist and virologist Dr Gagandeep Kang, this will boost early detection of the variant. Once a PCR test is done, it looks for three target genes: Spike (S), nucleocapsid or inner area (N2), and envelope and outer shell. If an S gene is detected, it is unlikely to be Omicron, on the contrary if an S gene is not detected, the person is positive for Omicron. There is also no evidence at the moment that this can escape vaccines. India has the apt tools to fight the variant and avert an impending third wave in the country.



TALLY REACHES TO EIGHT

Bengaluru: Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) Chief Commissioner Gaurav Gupta on Thursday said as many as five persons who were primary and secondary contacts of one of the infected persons with Omicron variant, have tested positive for Covid-19, and their samples have been sent for genomic sequencing for confirmation. Genomic sequencing tests took 2 months to give results earlier. Now, results are available in 8 days.

from Omicron ‘at-risk’ countries have arrived in Odisha in just two days, officials said on Thursday. While 224 persons returned to Odisha on November 28, 156 persons arrived in the state on November 29, said state Public Health director Nimajan Mishra. “Till now, we have received this

much data from the concerned authority. We have shared the details of the travellers with the district administrations for further follow up action,” he said.

Ex-Mumbai police chief Param Bir Singh suspended

Team Absolute | Mumbai



In a first-ever for Maharashtra, serving DGP-rank IPS officer Param Bir Singh, who is also a former Police Commissioner of Mumbai and Thane, has been suspended, and disciplinary proceedings launched against him for various lapses, it was announced on Thursday. The decision by the state government to suspend the 1988 batch IPS officer - who was declared a ‘Proclaimed Offender’ by a Mumbai court in November.

Among other things, the report had recommended action against Singh for defying the All India Civil

Service Rules, sudden “unauthorised absence from duty” after which he became “untraceable” for nearly six months before he resurfaced a week ago (last Thursday) in Mumbai. “The Government of Maharashtra is satisfied that it is necessary and desirable to place Param Bir Singh under suspension in accordance with the Rule 3(1) and Rule 3(3) of the All India Service (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, 1969,” said the 3-pager signed by Joint Secretary, Home, Venkatesh Bhat, and sent through DGP Sanjay Pandey, this evening.

‘Induce creativity in bureaucracy’ SC sets 24-hour deadline for Centre, states to act

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday minced no words to slam the Centre and state governments over the severe air pollution in the national capital and expressed concern that nothing was happening on the ground to improve the air quality. The top court questioned the utility of having a commission for air quality management, if it ends up having on board people from different departments and seems like having no power to enforce decision, and gave 24 hours to the government to come up with concrete ways to curb air pollution.

The bench said the emergency situation needs emergency measures.



The top court made it crystal clear that it needs to take action within 24 hours to curb air pollution in the capital. The bench said: “If you do not act, we will step in...we have

extraordinary steps in mind.” The top court directed Centre and states to be serious on reducing air pollution and scheduled the next hearing on the matter on Friday.

VARUN GANDHI QUESTIONED GOVT ON UNEMPLOYMENT



Team Absolute | New Delhi

BJP MP Varun Gandhi on Thursday once again questioned own government on the job and paper leaks. He said that ‘first there is no government job and if there are some opportunities then paper gets leaked’. He questioned how long the youth of India have to be patient.

The BJP Lok Sabha member from Pilibhit, Varun Gandhi is regularly questioning his own party’s government on issues like the farmers’ protest, Lakhimpur Kheri incident.

“First, there is no government job, if some opportunity comes then the paper gets leaked, if you give the exam there are no results for years, then it gets canceled in some scam. 1.25 crore youths are waiting for Railway Group D exams for two years. Same is with the Army recruitment. How long should the youth of India have to be patient,” Gandhi tweeted.

On Sunday, the UPTET 2021 had to be cancelled after the paper was leaked.

8 fishermen missing off Gir Somnath Coast

Team Absolute | Gandhinagar



The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) on Thursday received information about an incident of drowning of fishing boats and missing fishermen off Gir-Somnath coast of Saurashtra region of Gujarat owing to unfavourable strong winds and turbulent seas. At least 8 to 10 fishermen are believed to be missing. The Coast Guard immediately launched a search and rescue operation in the area. The Indian Coast Guard on Thursday received info of sunk fishing boats at Navadra, Una Harbour-mouth due to bad weather. According to defence sources, the ICG immediately launched a

search & rescue operation in the area sending IBs & Helicopters. Other ICG assets are also being mobilized, informed the ICG. An aircraft of the Indian Navy is also active. The India Meteorology Department (IMD) on Thursday issued a bulletin warning the fishermen against venturing into the sea. The warning has been issued for the next four

days. High waves in the range of 1.5 - 3.2 meters are forecast up to December 3 along the coast of Gujarat from Diu to Okha and from Mandvi to Jakhau. Surface Current speeds vary between 40 and 95 cm/sec. Through unconfirmed sources, it is learnt that five fishermen swam to save their lives. They were taken to medical care facility as they had suffered injuries.

Now book Uber ride via WhatsApp

▶ **CURRENTLY, THE OPTION TO BOOK A RIDE VIA WHATSAPP WILL ONLY BE AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH BUT IT WILL BE EXPANDED TO OTHER INDIAN LANGUAGES SOON.**

▶ **WITH THIS INTEGRATION, RIDERS WILL NO LONGER NEED TO DOWNLOAD OR USE THE UBER APP.**

▶ **WHATSAAPP USERS CAN BOOK AN UBER RIDE THROUGH THREE SIMPLE WAYS: MESSAGING TO UBER'S BUSINESS ACCOUNT NUMBER; SCANNING A QR CODE; OR CLICKING A LINK DIRECTLY TO OPEN AN UBER WHATSAPP CHAT.**

▶ **THEY WILL BE ASKED TO PROVIDE PICKUP AND DROP OFF LOCATIONS.**

▶ **USERS WILL RECEIVE UPFRONT FARE INFORMATION AND THE DRIVER'S EXPECTED TIME OF ARRIVAL.**

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In a global-first move, ride-hailing major Uber and Meta-owned messaging platform WhatsApp on Thursday announced that people in India can now book an Uber ride via the company’s official WhatsApp chatbot.

The service is being rolled out on a pilot basis in Lucknow first, and will soon be expanded to other cities in the country.

“Riders get the same safety features and insurance protections as those who book trips via the Uber app directly,” the company said.

They will be informed of the name of the driver and license plate of the driver on booking; be able to track the location of the driver en route to the pickup point and be able to speak to the



driver anonymously using a masked number.

If the user selects the “emergency” option while on the trip, they will receive an inbound call

from Uber’s customer support team. Uber riders will also have access to its safety line number to call, if needed, until 30 mins after the trip ends.



LIGHT DRIZZLE IN DELHI-NCR, VISIBILITY HIT BUT AIR STAYS BAD

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi experienced poor visibility throughout Thursday with very light rainfall in the afternoon.

Palam IGI had reported visibility of 700-800m, in shallow fog in addition to smog, till 10 a.m. and then an improvement to 1,200m till 1 p.m. Thereafter, it was 500-800m in mist to light rainfall till evening.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), winds were calm in most parts of the day at some 5-10kmph for some time in the afternoon, whereas Safdarjung had visibility consistently poor at 600-800m due to mist, fog, and smog in the first half and then drizzle and mist, since 1 p.m. till 6.30 p.m. with winds almost calm or light winds of 5-7 kmph from 10 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. The maximum temperature at Safdarjung, the city's main observatory, was 19.8 degrees Celsius, significantly lower than normal, due to cloudy skies and



very light rains over Delhi. The temperature is five degrees Celsius below normal. "It is not a cold day as conditions of cold day over a station in this plains as a second criteria needs to be fulfilled i.e. its minimum temperature needs to be less than 10 degrees Celsius. But in last 24 hours, minimum actual tempera-

ture is 13.4 degrees Celsius and it is also four degrees Celsius above normal," the observatory added.

In the morning, the IMD had forecast possibility of light rainfall over parts of Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan.

At 5 p.m., IMD predicted very light to light intensity rain would

occur over and adjoining areas of many places of Delhi, NCR in the next two hours.

The Weather Department has predicted similar drizzle for the next 2-3 days as well. Along with rain, the Delhi-NCR region will also witness low to moderate fog in the next six days. However, despite a drizzle, Delhi-NCR's air quality continue to remain in the "very poor" category at 385. The national capital's AQI in the morning stood at 382.

The System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR) said: "The AQI today indicates 'very poor' air quality. For the next three days, winds are likely to be calm reducing ventilation leading to deterioration of air quality but within the same category. From December 6 onwards, winds are expected to increase dispersing pollutants but AQI likely to remain in 'very poor' category. Partly cloudy sky and low mixing layer height are preventing efficient dispersion of pollutants."

TMC, NCP, YSRCP coming together to stop Modi: Luizinho Faleiro

PANAJI | Agencies

Only a united Congress family can stop Prime Minister Narendra Modi's political juggernaut, national Vice President of the Trinamool Congress, Luizinho Faleiro, said on Thursday, adding that three out of the four parties in the Congress family, namely Trinamool Congress Party and YSR Congress Party, are already in talks with each other.

"Out of the four Congresses, three Congresses are showing signs of coming together and that is a good thing," Faleiro told a press conference in Panaji.

"As far as I am concerned, we know that TMC and YSRCP are already in talks and we are together at least for the 2024 elections. What is important is, if you want to ace the BJP and the Modi juggernaut, the Congress family has to come together," he also said. Faleiro, a former Goa Chief Minister, had resigned from the Congress to join the TMC a couple of



months back.

"I do not know what will happen. Definitely, we (TMC) are in talks with everybody because we have one agenda, which is to defeat the BJP. Our agenda is not like the Congress, to provide stepney tyres to the BJP and allow it to rule when its tyres are punctured," Faleiro said. When asked about the

likelihood of the Congress and its three breakaway units coming together, Faleiro said: "There is no magic wand. You have to work together to bring the Congress family together. And today with the new developments, out of the four Congresses, three Congresses are coming together. That's great news, at least for me."

Bihar DIG suspended on extortion charges

PATNA | Agencies

The Bihar government has suspended Munger range DIG Shaiful Haq following recommendation by the Economic Offences Wing (EOW), which claimed that Haq was extorting money in the name of Munger MP and national president of JD-U, Lalan Singh. The revelation came to light a few months back after a sub-inspector-rank officer named Harishankar Kumar submitted phone conversation details between him and Haq, before Lalan Singh approached Chief Minister Nitish Kumar with 'proof' against Haq. An EOW official said requesting anonymity that when Haq was DIG of Munger range, he had contacted Harishankar Kumar over WhatsApp. Haq said that he received some serious complaints against

Harishankar. "The charges are extremely serious and you (Harishankar) could lose your job," Haq said.

When Harishankar requested him to manage the complaints, Haq demanded Rs 15 lakh in cash. After hearing the demand, Harishankar said that he could manage Rs 1.5 to 2 lakh at the most," the EOW official said. "Haq claimed that he is facing pressure from the higher authority. When Harishankar asked him about the higher authority, he said that the amount would be sent to local MP Lalan Singh. As Haq was interacting with him on WhatsApp call, he thought that it can't be recorded. But Harishankar smartly put his phone on loudspeaker mode and recorded the entire conversation on another phone and presented it before Lalan Singh," the official said.

Cyberabad police bust fake SBI call centre in Delhi

HYDERABAD | Agencies

Cyberabad police on Thursday claimed to have busted the biggest cyber fraud racket in the country with the arrest of 28 members of two gangs, who were operating call centres from the national capital.

While one gang was running a fake call centre of State Bank of India (SBI) in Delhi, the other was operating a call centre in Noida by offering loans. The accused allegedly cheated people in different parts of the country to the tune of several crores.

Cyberabad Police Commissioner Stephen Ravindra said they busted the SBI Call Centre racket in Delhi's Uttam Nagar and arrested a gang of 14 members including a woman. They were involved in 14 cases in Cyberabad Commissionerate and 195 cases all over India. They pretended to be SBI employees and cheated citizens to the tune of crores of rupees, he said. The accused are Nikhil Madaan, Deepanshu Madan, Pinky Kumari, Rohit Mathur, Hitesh Chopra, Vikas, Sanjay Kumar, Prabhakar Singh, Saksham Raj, Anuj Kumar,



Sameer Mishra, Murshid Alam, Farman Hussain, and Gourav Bharara. Barring Alam and Hussain, who are from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh respectively, all the accused are residents of New Delhi. According to police, fraud-

sters have vast experience in the banking field and they have collected data of SBI credit card holders from agents.

Main accused Madaan established a call center in Uttam Nagar, and took reseller ids for the spoofing applications like MoSIP and Silver Dialer. Fraudsters use these applications to generate calls through the desired number to disseminate the original number. By using spoofing call applications, they contacted the SBI credit card holders as SBI employees by disguising the original customer care number. Then they collected card details and OTPs by misguiding the customers in the name of activation of card or deactivation of insurance or enhancing the credit card limit etc.

The police took up the investigation after a man lodged a complaint that he lost over Rs 1.64 lakh after he shared card details and OTP with the fraudsters, who contacted him to issue new credit cards as the old cards were about to expire. The police seized from them a four-wheeler, a bike, 30 mobile phones, three laptops and a router.

Ratan Tata to be given 'Assam Baibhav Award': Assam CM



LONDON | Guwahati: Agencies

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday, on the occasion of 'Assam Divas' (Assam Day), announced to confer the 'Assam Baibhav Award' -- the state's highest civilian award, upon industrialist Ratan Tata.

Sarma told the media persons in the national capital that Ratan Tata has made enormous contributions towards the cancer treatment in Assam. "Delighted to announce that the Government of Assam has decided to confer its highest

civilian award, Assam Baibhav, to Ratan Tata, Chairman TATA Trusts for his exceptional contribution towards furthering cancer care in Assam," the Chief Minister tweeted. An Assam government official said that the board of trustees of Tata Trust had earlier informed the state government that it has approved Rs 540 crore for setting up of a 3-level cancer care grid in the state and the district levels. Assam Divas or Assam Day is celebrated on December 2 to commemorate the rule of Swargadeo Chaolung Sukapha -- the first Ahom King and one of the architects of Assam.

Bihar minister boycotts assembly after his car stopped at gate

PATNA | Agencies

Bihar minister Jivesh Kumar on Thursday said he has decided not to participate in the proceedings of the assembly until the state government suspends Patna DM Chandrasekhar Singh and SSP Upendra Sharma.

Jivesh Kumar, Minister of Labour in the Nitish Kumar government, walked out from the Vidhan Sabha after sharing his ordeal with Speaker Vijay Sinha.

He alleged that his car was stopped by security personnel at the gate of the Vidhan Sabha as the convoy of the DM and the SSP was crossing from that gate.

"I request you sir (Speaker) to decide if DM and SSP have higher ranks or a cabinet minister? Due to these officers, security personnel deployed at the gate of Vidhan Sabha are insulting the elected representatives," Jivesh Kumar, a minister under the BJP quota in the Nitish Kumar government, said.



"We need immediate suspension of these two officers. I would not participate in Vidhan Sabha proceedings until action is taken against them," Kumar said.

J&K POLICE BUST TERROR MODULE, ARRESTS 3 TRF ASSOCIATES

SRINAGAR | Agencies

Jammu and Kashmir Police in North Kashmir's Baramulla district busted a terrorist module of proscribed terror outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba -- The Resistance Front (LeT-TRF) by arresting three terrorist associates involved in Palhallan Grenade attack, officials said on Thursday.

"Police along with 29RR and SSB 2nd Bn established a joint MVCP/naka at Wussan Pattan and intercepted three suspicious individuals who tried to flee from the spot after watching the joint naka party," police said.

"They were tactfully apprehended by the alert party and were identified as Asif Ahmad Reshi, son of Nissar Ahmad Reshi, Mehrjudin Dar, son of Sonaullah Dar and Faisal Habib Lone, son of Habibullah Lone, all residents of Gund Jehangir, Hajin, District Bandipora."

Police said during the course of investigation and technical leads revealed that the arrested trio were working as terror associates of proscribed terror outfit LeT (TRF) and involved in a recent grenade attack at Palhallan on Nov 17, 2021. "On their disclosure, two grenades were recovered from their possession," police said. "Investigations also



revealed that the arrested trio were given instructions by the terrorists across the border and the aim behind the attacks was to create an atmosphere of

fear and chaos and to draw reaction against Kashmiri Youth outside the Union Territory. Further investigation into the case is going on."

27 school students test Covid-19 positive in TN's Dharapuram

As many as 27 school students of a private school in Dharapuram in Tamil Nadu's Tiruppur district have tested Covid-19 positive, the Tamil Nadu Health Department said on Thursday.

CHENNAI | Agencies

State Health Department officials said that 374 swab samples were tested and 27 tested positive.

The school decided to conduct swab tests on students after two Class 10 students from the school were admitted in hospital with Covid-like symptoms and subsequently, were admitted to Government hospital, Dharapuram with Covid-19.

School authorities said that except for the two students who tested positive, the remaining 25 students were asymptomatic and were sent for home isolation.

The private school, according to the Health Department, will be closed for one week for disinfection.

The department also said that it will routinely monitor both govern-



ment and private schools on whether they are adhering to the Standard Operating Procedures on Covid-19. Tamil Nadu Education Department officials said that they

have been conducting awareness programmes for parents regarding vaccination and safety protocols.

Indian Army to don new combat uniform next year

Team Absolute | New Delhi

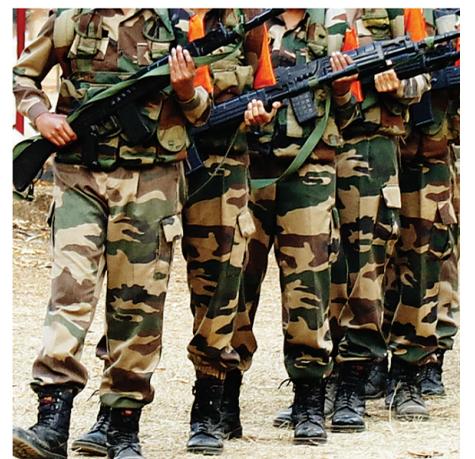
The Indian Army will have a new combat uniform for its personnel aimed to provide more comfort and sustainability, sources said. The new combat dress would be unveiled during the Army Day Parade on January 15 next year.

For the first time in its history, the Army Day parade will witness uniform and weapons of different era, dating back to even pre-Independence times.

The troops will also march sporting the new uniform during the Republic Day parade next year.

The new uniform will be of digital pattern like the troopers of the US Army use. "The camouflage of the changed uniform is better than its previous one," said a senior Indian Army official.

The Army has always objected to other paramilitary forces wearing combat dresses of similar pattern.



"Many a times we had flagged it," said the official. Interestingly, the soldiers will not have to tuck-in the dress. In the new uniform, the belt will be under the dress. The official said that it has

been designed keeping the comfort levels in mind. So far the Army contingents at the Army Day parade and the Republic Day parade have marched sporting dresses as per the different regiments.



MAHARASHTRA ANNOUNCES NEW COVID NORMS, SAYS NO TO CENTRE MISSIVE

Earlier Wednesday, Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan wrote to Maharashtra Additional Chief Secretary Dr Pradeep Kumar Vyas that four specific guidelines passed by the state for international travelers are "in divergence with the SoPs and guidelines issued" by the Ministry.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In the latest tussle between the Centre and Maharashtra over Covid norms, the Union Health Ministry Wednesday conveyed to the state government that its revised guidelines for international travellers, following the emergence of the Omicron variant, are "in divergence" with Central norms, and urged it to "align" them for "uniform implementation."

However, Maharashtra Chief Secretary Debashish Chakraborty said that the state will not "amend or revise" its guidelines for now. Later, official sources indicated that there "might be some changes" Thursday with revisions to some restrictions. "Under the Disaster Management



Act and Epidemic Diseases Act, the state government holds the power to put in additional conditions to prevent the spread of the virus. So the state, acting in accordance with its authority, has decided not to mend or revise the current guidelines issued for international passengers," he said.

According to Chakraborty, the Centre's communication is "an advisory, not a compulsion." "There are basic requirements that need to be observed, which we are following. In future, if any changes need to be made, considering the local situation

and convenience of international passengers, we will consider them," he said. Earlier Wednesday, Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan wrote to Maharashtra Additional Chief Secretary Dr Pradeep Kumar Vyas that four specific guidelines passed by the state for international travelers are "in divergence with the SoPs and guidelines issued" by the Ministry. "I would, therefore, urge you to align the orders issued by the state with the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health...so that uniform implementation of the guidelines

may be ensured across all states. I would also advise that such modified orders of the state government are given wide publicity to obviate any inconvenience to travellers," Bhushan wrote. Maharashtra has also mandated institutional quarantine of seven days for all passengers coming from "at-risk countries", which is not part of the Centre's latest guidelines.

This is not the first time that the Centre and Maharashtra have differed over issues linked to Covid, particularly after Maharashtra flagged the issue of vaccine shortage and lack of adequate medical oxygen supply several times. Apart from all countries in Europe, including the UK, there are 10 other nations currently listed as "at-risk" by the Health Ministry: South Africa, Brazil, Botswana, China, Mauritius, New Zealand, Zimbabwe, Singapore, Hong Kong and Israel.

Additionally, for travellers from countries other than those at risk, a sub-section - currently two per cent of the total flight passengers - will have to undergo post-arrival random testing at airports on arrival. A senior officer from Maharashtra's Covid task force said that since "the virus has already spread to over 10 countries, we can't restrict the screening to countries at risk", and that "an RT-PCR for all travellers will ensure better safety."

POST-SURGERY, MAHA CM DISCHARGED FROM HOSPITAL AFTER 22 DAYS



Mumbai: After undergoing a spinal surgery 20 days ago, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray was discharged from the Sir HN Reliance Foundation Hospital, here on Thursday, officials said.

The CM's condition is described as fit and fine, but he has been advised to continue work from home for a few days. Thackeray was admitted to the HNRFH on November 10 and was successfully operated upon on November 12 for solving problems pertaining to the cervical spine, besides a minor procedure for removing a blood clot later. Thereafter, he was assigned for physiotherapy sessions which are expected to continue for some more weeks and he may not attend office till then. However, the CM has been attending to important files, holding online meetings with cabinet colleagues or officials and chaired a couple of cabinet meetings, including those pertaining to the Covid-19 variant Omicron threats, during his hospitalisation.

76 returnees from high-risk countries to be traced, tracked, tested

Kalyan-Dombivli Municipal Corporation (KDMC) has tasked health officials with tracing, tracking and testing all of them, and also looking at their history of Covid-19 tests and vaccination



the list to our health posts, who will take necessary steps," said Dr Pratibha Panpatil, the KDMC's epidemic officer.

"Once these returnees are traced, RT-PCR tests will be done on them and their close contacts by our health staff," said Panpatil. In another development, RT-PCR and antigen tests done at the residential building of a 32-year-old Dombivli-based returnee from South Africa who had tested Covid positive, have all turned out to be negative, Panpatil said. "We conducted 23 RT-PCR and 14 antigen tests at the building, and all are negative. His nine family members and relatives are also negative," said Panpatil. Genome-sequencing results of the returnee from South Africa is awaited. Health officials are also waiting for the RT-PCR test report of a 50-year-old Dombivli resident who had flown with the infected returnee.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Kalyan-Dombivli Municipal Corporation (KDMC) in Maharashtra has received a list of 76 persons who returned to the city last month from countries such as South Africa and Nigeria that have reported multiple cases of the Omicron variant of Covid-19.

Health officials have been tasked with tracing, tracking and testing all of them, and also looking at their history of Covid-19 tests and vaccination. "On Wednesday evening, we received a list of 76 travellers from the state government who returned to Kalyan-Dombivli from countries that are hit by the Omicron variant of the coronavirus. We have forwarded

Now, Covid victims' kin can apply online for ex-gratia from Maharashtra to Bengal: Shelar

The applicants can login with the help of their mobile numbers. Then they will have to fill up the details of the deceased patients along with their Aadhaar number. There is also an option to upload death certificates and hospital details.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

After a delay of nearly three months, the state government on Wednesday launched a website where the kin of Covid-19 deceased patients can apply for an ex-gratia of Rs 50,000.

In the first week of October, the Union government directed all the states to provide relief from their State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF). As per the directive of the Supreme Court, the



states have to provide the compensation amount within 30 days of their application. Now, following the directives, the state government launched a website-mahacovid19relief.in - where the kin can apply for the ex-gratia amount. The applicants can login with the help of their mobile numbers. Then they will have to fill up the details of the deceased patients along with their Aadhaar number. There is also an option to upload death certificates and hospital details. "The centralised website is directly linked with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) data. So, with the Aadhaar card number, we will get all

the details of the deceased person. This will help to maintain transparency and make the process faster," said Aseem Gupta, Principal Secretary, relief and rehabilitation department.

The families without positive RT-PCR, RAT results and Covid death certificates would also get the ex gratia if the deceased died within 30 days of being clinically diagnosed with Covid-19 in a hospital. The names of the approved applications will be made available on the website within seven days.

Maharashtra has recorded 1.4 lakh fatalities which would require a fund of Rs 700 crore to provide ex-gratia to these kin.

The BJP leader said he wanted to know the real reason behind West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's visit to the state.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Attributing ulterior motives to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's visit to Maharashtra, BJP leader Ashish Shelar has said she is trying to divert investments away from the state. During her visit, the TMC chief held discussions with political leaders and explored investment opportunities to strengthen the economy in her state. "It is evident that Mamata Banerjee is trying to take investments away from Maharashtra to West Bengal, but what is more surprising is the silence of the ruling Shiv Sena and NCP," Shelar said.

Banerjee met NCP chief Sharad Pawar and since Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray is unwell and recovering in hospital, she met Shiv Sena leaders Aditya Thackeray and Sanjay Raut.

"The government of Maharashtra



must officially declare the details of the meeting convened between West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee and minister Aditya Thackeray, who met her on behalf of Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray. There seems to be some kind of a conspiracy. Is the Shiv Sena facilitating the migration of businesses to West Bengal," Shelar sought to know. On behalf of the chief minister, Minister for Protocol Aditya Thackeray had called on Banerjee after her arrival in Mumbai.

"Every time the Thackerays meet a political leader, the reason they give is

that they have family ties. The question is how does it concern Maharashtra... What family connections do you have with Mamata didi, who supports Bangladeshis," the BJP leader asked, adding that though his party is not against industries operating across states, Banerjee has come to "woo industries in Maharashtra to Bengal". "The question is, why is the ruling Shiv Sena facilitating the TMC chief to take away the state's businesses to West Bengal? Why is the Sena proactive in helping Maharashtra's businesses migrate to

Bengal? Why are we depriving Maharashtra of employment opportunities?" Shelar asked. "The Shiv Sena wants Maharashtra's youths to sell vada pav. They don't want them to grow and provide better job avenues."

Continuing his tirade, Shelar said, "Recently, there was a crackdown on Bangladeshi infiltrators in Bhiwandi. We hope the Sena has not assured Banerjee that it will stop taking action against Bangladeshis."

"Taking a dig at the TMC leader's words 'Jai Maratha, Jai Bangla', Shelar said, "We accept Jai Hindu Rashtra. But is it acceptable to Mamata didi. In that case, will Shiv Sena accept Jai Hindu Rashtra?"

"The people of Bengal are terrified by the violence in their state.

Now these two (Mamata and Uddhav) are trying to work together to destabilise both Bengal and Maharashtra," he went on to say.

Pointing at how the TMC had insulted the Tatas and pushed its factory out of the state, he said, "Strangely, Shiv Sena is according a warm reception to those who insulted the Tatas, who are highly revered in the business fraternity. What right do you have to come and teach us Maharashtra dharma," he said.

Maharashtra: Congress livid as Didi writes UPA's epitaph

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Relegated to the political pavement as West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee stormed Mumbai in her 2-day-long high-profile trip which ended on Thursday, the Maharashtra Congress unilaterally slammed her for her "RIP"-ping comments spelling doom for the UPA.

Banerjee met leaders of two of the 3 ruling allies - Nationalist Congress Party President Sharad Pawar and Shiv Sena's MP Sanjay Raut and Tourism Minister Aditya Thackeray, met civil society members, some industrialists, film personalities, but obviously she had no love lost for the state Congress.

The visiting leader's shocker came during her brief media interaction, when she virtually blurted out - "What UPA? There's no UPA now..." stunning the Congress and momentarily even the NCP supremo Pawar seemed dazed but kept his legendary cool.

An enraged Congress top brass hit back, though diplomatically - to avoid antagonising the Sena-NCP leaders or even remotely appear siding with the BJP - and harked on the grand old party's contributions, the Gandhis' leadership while blaming Banerjee's "personal ambitions and ego" and painting the BJP as the real villain.

"The BJP is a threat to the Constitution and Democracy. Congress President Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi are constantly challenging the dictatorial attitude of the BJP," said State Congress President Nana Patole.



The Congress Legislature Party Leader Balasaheb Thorat dismissively said, "no individual party can fight the BJP if that party only thinks of its own political gains and personal ambitions" and the Congress remains the sole viable option before the country.

AICC Secretary Sanjay Dutt said, "if there is one party which has been fighting fascist forces and standing up for the people of India, it's the Congress", and others are now posturing only to grab the 'chair' (power).

"If any other party leader makes any baseless, sarcastic or malafide comments about Rahul Gandhi, we will give a befitting reply and show them the mirror of their past stance and statements," hissed Dutt.

State PWD Minister Ashok Chavan hit back at Banerjee saying the "Congress and its leadership needs no certification for its commitment to Democracy and Constitution, or its tireless struggle against the BJP's policies". "Since before Independence, Congress has been fighting for the commoners, the rights of the people... The (BJP) central government is using the 'divide-and-rule' policy on the opposition parties. In such a scenario,

it becomes the responsibility of all non-BJP parties not to indulge in politics that supports this policy of the Centre," said Chavan sharply.

Patole pointed out how Rahul Gandhi has stood firm against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP, on the land acquisition law and the three black agriculture laws, the BJP's divisive policies, inflation, unemployment, etc.

"The country is more important than personal ambitions or egos... A political party restricted to one state cannot provide an alternative to the BJP. Given the gravity of the situation, all like-minded parties must come together in the national interest," urge Patole, adding only Congress is the viable option to the BJP.

Thorat cautioned that criticising Rahul Gandhi would only help the BJP which he has fearlessly challenged, plus the Congress and the entire Gandhi family has borne the oppression of the BJP, but they were not cowed down. Some political commentators have claimed that despite the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) venturing into uncharted territories where it is barely known or has any base, ultimately they will need Congress support to form the government as it happened during the tenures of the former prime minister H.D. Deve Gowda or I.K. Gujral.

Besides Congress, even the Opposition BJP leaders attacked Didi, questioning her 'private' meeting with Shiv Sena leaders and asked whether Maharashtra would go the West Bengal way.

Haffkine
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 (Procurement Cell)
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 E-mail- procurementcell@vaccinehaffkine.com
 Acharya Donde Marg, Parel, Mumbai 400 012 (INDIA)

TENDER NOTICE

Date : 01/12/2021.

Managing Director, (Procurement Cell), Haffkine Bio Pharmaceutical Corporation Ltd., Mumbai invites tenders in two envelope systems from eligible bidders for following items for various Health Institutions in Maharashtra.

Sr. No.	Tender No.	Name of Description	Date of Pre Bid Meeting	Period of Sale and Preparation of bid & bid submission	Bid Opening
1)	RT-2719	Purchase of Instrument & Equipment	13.12.2021 upto 11:00 a.m.	From 03.12.2021 10.00 am to 23.12.2021 up to 14:00 hrs.	24.12.2021 at 14:00 hrs.

For detailed information, the interested bidders may visit the website <https://mahatenders.gov.in>
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 Email - eproc.support@maharashtra.gov.in

(Dr. Sunil Pundge)
 Manager Equipment,
 Haffkine Bio Pharmaceutical Corporation
 (Procurement Cell), Mumbai Ltd.,

ROC-2021-22/No.-5/C 2981



EDITOR'S SPECS

Now, Muslim sect pitch for Akhand Bharat movement

Muslim organisation All India Tanzeem Ulama-e-Islam which claims to be the prominent organisation of the Bareilvi sect of Muslims, has said that it will start a movement for Akhand Bharat (Undivided India), which means India should be again geographically as it was in the pre-independence era. The organisation's general secretary Maulana Shahabuddin Razvi, who is based in Bareilly while the organisation is headquartered in Delhi, said that "It's our intention that India should attain Akhand Bharat status with merger of Pakistan and Bangladesh as it was before partition." He said that when Germany can unite why not India, which has the same culture as Pakistan and Bangladesh. We should move forward, it will make India a strong country. India was partitioned in 1947 when Pakistan came into existence and in 1971 Bangladesh was liberated from Pakistan, forming three separate nations. When asked if he associates himself with the RSS, which has propagated the Akhand Bharat theory, he said, "We are with a good cause, whichever organisation does it," but claimed he has no idea if the RSS is running any such movement. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat had on November 26 said that the country had witnessed a major stumble at the time of partition and it cannot be forgotten, and thus will not be repeated again. Bhagwat also advocated for 'Akhand Bharat' (united India) at the event. He termed the partition as an unforgettable event and asserted that the pain of division will only end when the partition would be revoked. Bhagwat said that a conspiracy was hatched for the partition of India, which continues even today. Partition took place for peace but even after that, there were riots in the country, he asserted.

PARLIAMENTARY INDECENT CONDUCT SHOULD BE ACTIONABLE

Lalit Garg

The antagonistic atmosphere in which the winter session of Parliament has started cannot be appreciated and conducive for democracy in any way. The suspension of 12 MPs in the Rajya Sabha for indecent conduct, violence and misbehaviour in the last monsoon session of Parliament is a meaningful and commendable step in the direction of conserving the deteriorating credibility of democracy. The way the opposition parties are defending this suspension, they are not only doing their own harm but are also weakening the democracy. With the kind of hollow arguments the opposition parties are making in defense of the suspended MPs, the deceptiveness with which they are trying to justify the wrong, they have also started advocating for indecency. This episode has also raised the question that why does the action on discipline; violence and anarchy seem so bitter in the Parliament, which disciplines the country and binds it to the rules? Why is the Parliament, which is the place of making rules and regulations for running the country, constantly being disrupted? It is worth mentioning that the Rajya Sabha has informed through a notice that on the last day of the Monsoon Session, twelve MPs from various parties not only created a ruckus but also deliberately tried to incite violence against the security personnel. In the Rajya Sabha, there was a riot which was also done by climbing on the tables in front of the chair of the Chairman. After this, according to Rule 256 in this session, this action was taken against the MPs concerned. Parliament debates are the basis of democracy. But the kind of obstacles that are being created in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha continuously for some time and the business of the House is not being conducted smoothly, it is not only posing a challenge to the dignity and utility of the Parliament, but also its far-reaching impact is coming out in the form of weakening of democratic traditions. Presently India is the largest democratic country in the world. Democracy is a living system, in which everyone has equal freedom to walk in dignity, decency according to their beliefs, but if the ideals of democracy are forgotten by the people sitting at the top of power and politics, then democracy becomes at its lowest level. It is also a clear fact that even after the evidence of this objectionable and indecent conduct that



brought down the dignity of Parliament in the monsoon session is available; the opposition is trying to prove that it was their right to do so on behalf of the suspended MPs. This is nothing but theft and piracy. This question of the opposition is also false and misleading to the people of the country. Why is action being taken now regarding the matter of the last session? The opposition, which has termed the current suspension as wrong, is deliberately hiding the fact that it was the last day of the monsoon session when the Rajya Sabha witnessed indecent conduct. Does the opposition want to say that a special session would have been called to suspend the riotous MPs or would the same be extended? It is certain that even if such a thing had been done, the opposition parties would have been creating ruckus in the same way as they are doing now. Those who are at the top in political and public life define the ideals and give instructions to follow that path. But when such persons come out from the margins of democratic values due to difference of words and deeds themselves, then they should cry or laugh. The one who could not sit up is more authentic today in that he has the vision to see right as right and wrong as wrong. But the question is, how and when will the consciousness of protecting democracy arise in the advisor of democracy? The entire opposition, which has questioned the suspension of 12 MPs, is now talking of boycotting the entire winter session. If the government also sticks to its insistence and situations arise for the House to remain

disrupted or run unilaterally, then it can be estimated how much democracy will be left in the functioning of Parliament! After all, how will the people's representatives who repeatedly disrupt the Parliament keep democracy alive? Whereas the day-to-day expenditure on the working of the House sits a lot and ultimately its burden falls on the general public. But more importantly, where there should be adequate discussion and debate between the MPs and public representatives of all parties in the Parliament on every issue, the continuous creation of situations like ruckus, disputes, obstruction, is a matter of serious concern. Democratic values are the top of the head in the political field and their abuses are becoming synonymous with tragedy and irony. Whether there is a tendency to target opponents for political purposes or to obstruct the work of the ruling governments by unfair and undemocratic means - it has become common now; everywhere the governments taking oath of the constitution are seen misusing Articles. If it goes, the opposition parties create obstruction in the proceedings of the House, make abusive and indecent displays. What an ironic situation is being created that the courts have to take cognizance of these tragic incidents or are forced to take action like suspension. This is the philosophy of public opinion and the mandate of public opinion is that the elected representatives, irrespective of the party, should give preference to the feelings and values of democracy. Until this

happens, the form of democracy in the true sense will not be formed and dissatisfaction will prevail at one level or the other. Today in a democracy, the freedom of speech is being used in abusing and exaggerated accusations; the freedom of writing is being used by one's revelations, personal sniping and rain of accusations. Freedom of thought and conduct has pushed the people's representatives away from their democratic values, their culture, civilization and moral values. The vicious circle of pain, sorrow and worry is that most of the leaders and public representatives are neither aware nor even cared about this situation. The sanctity and vibrancy of the temple of democracy lies in taking the people along with them in such a way that the rule of the people is for the people, in which there is no need of misuse of laws while in power nor breaking the laws while in opposition. It is necessary that in the field of politics, when we are the people's face, then the badge of democratic values should be on our head. There is nothing more disgraceful than this that the opposition members first do indecent acts in the House and then try to justify it. This is an attitude that brings down the dignity of Parliament. It should be opposed. Wherever there is anarchy, action must be taken against it - whether it is inside or outside Parliament. It is good that the Rajya Sabha Chairman rejected the opposition's unreasonable demand for reinstatement of suspended MPs. How democracy will be strong and organized in the country when the leaders do not have even the usual practice of operating democracy and giving it vibrancy. Politics can happen in a decent manner and governments can also work in civilized-sensitive ways. Protest and its limits are clear in the Constitution. Then why democratic values and constitution are being violated not once but again and again by the people's representatives. There is a need that leaders of various political parties including ministers, MPs, MLAs should get training in democracy. If necessary space is created for consideration, debate and dissent, it will be in the interest of not only the democratic dignity of the House, but also of the wider public.

Writer, Journalist, Columnist

international

S KOREA ASKS US TO SUPPORT SEOUL'S PUSH TO DECLARE FORMAL END TO KOREAN WAR

Seoul | Agencies

South Korean President Moon Jae-in met US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin on Thursday and asked for Washington's support for Seoul's efforts to declare a formal end to the 1950-53 Korean War.

The push for an end-of-war declaration is aimed at bringing North Korea back to dialogue and handing over the mood for dialogue with the North to South Korea's next government, Moon said, according to presidential spokesperson Park Kyung-mee. Moon asked the US to "pay continued attention to and support" South Korea's push for an end-of-war declaration, saying that close coordination between Seoul and Washington is the most important factor to bring peace on the Korean Peninsula, Park said in a statement.



Austin expressed his respect for Moon's efforts to improve inter-Korean relations, Yonhap news agency reported. The US defence chief noted that Washington is com-

mitted to engaging in diplomatic efforts with North Korea, Park said. The Korean War, in which South Korea and a US-led UN Command fought against invading North

Korean forces backed by China, ended in an armistice, not a peace treaty. The Moon Jae-in administration believes an end-of-war declaration will help revive stalled peace talks with North Korea. Austin was on a three-day visit to South Korea for annual security talks with Defence Minister Suh Wook. Earlier in the day, Suh and Austin discussed a range of issues in the face of North Korea's threats, with Austin saying the North's missile and weapons programmes are "increasingly destabilising for regional security." At the same time, Austin highlighted the allies' commitment to a "diplomatic approach" to North Korea. During the security talks, Suh and Austin agreed on a new guidance that marks a manifestation of the allies' resolve to harness their combined military capabilities to respond to various wartime scenarios.

Turkey's finance minister resigns amid currency crisis

Ankara | Agencies

Turkey's Finance and Treasury Minister Lutfi Elvan has resigned amid a sharp plunge of the Turkish lira, according to a presidential decree issued in the Turkish official gazette on Thursday.

Elvan asked to be relieved of his duties, said the official gazette. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has appointed Nureddin Nebati as the new finance minister. Nebati was the deputy of Elvan, who had served as finance minister since November 2020, Xinhua news agency reported.

Erdogan has several times indirectly criticised Elvan for opposing the



lower interest rate policy. The Turkish president insists on low interest rates despite the depreciating Turkish lira and rising inflation.

"No offence to our friends that we walked together in this struggle; I can't be together with those who defend high interest rates,"

Erdogan said on November 17.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Turkish Central Bank intervened in foreign exchange markets after the lira plunged to a new record low against the US dollar. The lira fell just below 14 against the dollar after Erdogan said that he hopes interest rates would continue to fall until Turkey's next election in 2023.

The Turkish president said on Wednesday that the volatility was temporary and was a result of economic policy.

The Turkish lira has lost more than 40 per cent of its value this year against the dollar, while annual inflation hit almost 20 per cent in October.

THREAT OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE GROWING ACROSS US

London | Agencies

In a year that began with a deadly insurrection at the US Capitol, American lawmakers have seen a sharp rise in the number of threats against them, and fears are mounting that such a trend will continue, The Guardian said in a recent report. After Republican congressman Paul Gosar shared an altered anime video that depicts him killing Democratic congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and attacking US President Joe Biden weeks ago, all but three Republican members voted against censuring him and stripping him of his committee assignments, the report said.

"The Gosar incident served as the latest data point in an alarming trend in American politics," it said, noting that

Republicans' muted response to Gosar's behaviour has intensified fears about the possibility of more political violence in the US in the months to come, Xinhua news agency reported. That cycle is already playing out in the halls of Congress, it said, citing an earlier report this year by the US Capitol Police (USCP) which saw a 107 per cent increase in threats against members of Congress compared with 2020. The USCP chief Tom Manger was quoted as saying that he "expects the total number of threats against members to surpass 9,000 this year," compared with 3,939 such threats in 2017. Some of those threats have been on vivid display lately, with 13 House Republicans who voted in support of the bipartisan infrastructure bill in early November receiving threatening messages, it noted.

US Supreme Court appears to be siding with new limits on abortion rights

Washington | Agencies

The conservative majority in the US Supreme Court said that they would uphold a law in the state of Mississippi barring abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy, a decision directly contradicting the high court's landmark ruling in favour of abortion rights that has existed for nearly a half-century. After two hours of oral arguments on Wednesday, all of the Supreme Court's six conservative justices indicated they would uphold the Mississippi law, but they seemed divided over whether the Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision in 1973, which established the constitutional right to abortion and prohibited states from banning abortion before fetal viability - or 23 to 24 weeks - should be overruled.

Chief Justice John Roberts expressed the willingness to adopt an intermediate approach that doesn't necessarily toss Roe. "That may be what they're asking for," Roberts said, referring to Mississippi's call to overturn Roe, "but the thing at issue before us today is 15 weeks." Samuel

Alito, another conservative justice, appeared less interested in a less sweeping ruling, saying "the only real options we have" are to reaffirm Roe or to overrule it, Xinhua news agency reported. Justice Brett Kavanaugh, a conservative appointed by former President Donald Trump, questioned why the Supreme Court should weigh in on the highly controversial matter.

"Why should this court be the arbiter rather than Congress, the state legislatures, state supreme courts, the people, being able to resolve this?" Kavanaugh said. "And there'll be different answers in Mississippi than New York, different answers in Alabama than California."

For those on the other side of the ideological spectrum, upholding Mississippi's 15-week abortion ban would tarnish the reputation of the Supreme Court. "Will this institution survive the stench that this creates in the public perception that the Constitution and its reading are just political acts?" liberal Justice Sonia Sotomayor asked Mississippi's solicitor general, whose main argument

was that Roe and the high court's 1992 ruling in Planned Parenthood v. Casey that reaffirmed Roe were wrongly decided and should be overturned. "I don't see how it is possible," Sotomayor said.

Given the conservatives' 6-3 majority in the Supreme Court, the fact that the court agreed to consider a state law banning abortion long before fetal viability seemed to be an indication that it intended to scale back precedents favouring women's abortion rights if not outright scrap them.

The Supreme Court's final decision in the Mississippi case is not expected until late June or early July. After the conclusion of the oral arguments, President Joe Biden declined to say if he was concerned about the fate of Roe, for which he reiterated his support.

"First of all, I haven't - I didn't see any of the debate today, the presentation today," Biden told reporters at the White House. "And I support Roe v. Wade, I think it's a rational position to take, and I continue to support it."

ZAMBIA URGES ELIMINATION OF INEQUALITIES TO END AIDS



Lusaka: Zambia called for eliminating inequalities to curb the spread of HIV infections while marking this year's World AIDS Day with the theme of "End Inequalities, End AIDS, End Pandemic."

Noting the southern African nation recorded 51,000 new HIV infections in 2020, Minister of Health Sylvia Masebo expressed concern on Wednesday over the current AIDS situation in her country.

Masebo said it is necessary to re-examine some of the policies concerning the fight against HIV in order to ensure their effectiveness and stop HIV-related stigma and discrimination, Xinhua news agency reported.

Stressing that uprooting inequalities in the fight against HIV requires concerted efforts from all stakeholders, she said, "The Ministry of Health is calling on community leaders and all citizens to rally together to confront the inequalities that drive AIDS and to reach people who are currently not receiving essential HIV services."

Tharcisse Barhuta, Zambia country director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, said the theme of the World AIDS Day calls for global solidarity and shared responsibility in fighting HIV and AIDS.



'NO MASK, NO MOVEMENT,' STATE GOVT STEPS UP VIGIL AMID OMICRON SCARE

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh government has launched a campaign 'no mask, no movement' to encourage people to wear masks and to comply with all measures to combat the Covid-19 pandemic amid emerging new threat in the form of a new variant of the coronavirus.

As part of the government's new initiative, the state police will ask the people to wear masks while they are out on the streets, said state Home Minister Narottam Mishra on Thursday.

The steps are being taken in view of increasing threat of a new variant of the coronavirus, Omicron. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, has decided to make sure that people are not seen without masks on the streets. After the second wave subsided, people have stopped wearing masks not only in smaller cities, but also in the state capital Bhopal.



Trains, buses, autos and other modes of public transport in any part of the state can be seen where people are travelling without wearing mask with authorities turning a blind eye.

After two cases of the new variant were detected in Karnataka, the Madhya Pradesh government decided to encourage people to wear masks with its campaign 'No Mask, No Movement.'

As per the official data, as many as 12 new Covid cases were reported in the last 24 hours in the state, while a total of 128 active cases are

there at present. The recovery rate is 98.6 per cent and the infection rate is 0.2 per cent. A total 57,362 samples were tested for Covid19 on Wednesday.

Amid the scare of the new variant, Omicron, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan called an emergency meeting to discuss Covid-19 situation and directed all district officials to ensure sufficient supply of oxygen plants, concentrators, ventilators and further increase the number of testing across the state.

Public service, people welfare and country's upliftment are paramount: Chief Minister

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that public service is our promise, welfare of the people and upliftment of the country is paramount for us. New schools are being opened in Madhya Pradesh to provide good education, so that children will get better and modern education. Devaranya Yojana has been made in Madhya Pradesh for Ayurvedic medicines. Chouhan was addressing a series of lectures organised on the Golden Jubilee year of Acharya Ram Sharma organised at Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya Shantikunj, Haridwar on Thursday.

Chouhan said that I am always worried about daughters. I adopted daughters, brought them up and got them married. When I became the Chief Minister, Ladli Laxmi Yojana was started. Today, I am happy that there have been 41 lakh ladlis in Madhya Pradesh. The happy results of this scheme are that there has been equality in the sex ratio of sons and daughters in Madhya Pradesh. Daughters are no longer a burden but a blessing. Along with this, a new



Anand Department has been created in Madhya Pradesh. A big institute of Advaita Vedanta will be built in Omkareshwar.

Chouhan, in his address on the topic of life philosophy of Param Pujya Guru Dev in the university campus, said that when the Sun of civilization had not risen in the western countries, then the hymns of the Vedas were being composed here. We

are citizens of such ancient and great nation as there were universities like Takshila and Nalanda. I am proud to say that this is the land where it was said "Ekam Sad Vipra Bahudha Vadanti." We have never imposed our ideology. We come from that eternal tradition where thousands of years ago it was said "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (The whole world is a family). This land talks about world

welfare. Salutations to this land, salutations to the sages here.

Chouhan said that Gurudev was a freedom fighter, revolutionary, social reformer, scholar and intellectual, he went to jail several times during the freedom struggle. Gurudev wanted that the nation should be rebuilt after independence. When the people are fine, then the country will be built. Gurudev started the process of individual formation in the form of Gayatri Parivar. Today in the form of a huge banyan tree, it is playing its important role in the new building of the country along with the preservation of Indian culture and tradition.

Chouhan said that I had never thought that I would work in the field of politics, but also knew that if I have rights, I will be able to provide more service. When I started the march against injustice, there were two people, when the journey was over, seven and a half thousand people gathered with me. Always kept in mind the inspiration of Gurudev and the values received from him. Every moment of life has to be used to change the lives of people.

GOVERNOR PATEL TO INAUGURATE 3-DAY FREE MEDICAL CAMP

► CAMP WILL BE HELD IN MEMORY OF LATE KAILASH PRASOON SARANG
► RENOWNED DOCTORS OF THE COUNTRY WILL PROVIDE SERVICES

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Medical Education Minister Vishwas Kailash Sarang informed that Governor Mangubhai Patel will inaugurate a 3-day free mega medical camp on December 3 at 12:30 pm. The camp will be held from December 3 to 5 at Ektapuri Ground, Semra, Ashoka Garden, Bhopal from 9 am to 4:30 pm. Vidhan Sabha Speaker Girish Gautam will preside over

the inauguration ceremony of the camp to be held in the memory of Kailash Prasoon Sarang. Eminent specialty and super specialty medical experts of the country will give free consultation in the camp.

All medical facilities will be free of cost for the patients coming to the camp. After free medical consultation, examination and medicines, the treatment and operation of the patient will be done free of cost by Kailash Prasoon Sarang Foundation. 40 eminent doctors and surgeons of the country will provide free medical consultation in the camp.

A house-to-house survey has been conducted in Bhopal city by Caprus Foundation for the camp. Pre-registration for the camp can be done on toll free number 0755-3502111 and

WhatsApp number 9981222321. The registration process is in progress. A large number of patients are expected to register in the camp. The camp site is being prepared in a vast campus of four acres. In this, 30 registration counters for registration of patients, 100 chambers for consultation of doctors, specialist examination rooms and test sample collection counters have been set up.

Complete set up of pathology tests including 3 portable X-ray machines, 6 sonography machines, 3 cardiac echo machines, ear examination audiometry machines, 10 ECG machines, 2 PFT machines for lung examination, all eye testing machines, BMD Machines for bone testing are being installed for the patients at the camp site. The blood test report will be

given to the patients at the camp site in 2 hours with the help of modern machines of pathology testing. All the services will be completely IT and software technology based to provide quick services to the patients in the camp. The data of all the patients registered in the camp is being compiled through software and a health card with a unique ID and barcode is being given.

Keeping in view the extensive medical and research experience of the eminent medical experts of the country visiting the camp, continuous medical activities have been organized every day at the camp site for sharing of medical knowledge with the Department of Medical Education. Stalls of National Health Programme and public-friendly health schemes are also being set up in the camp.

Bhind SP transfer shows Amazon influence on MP govt: CAIT

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) has said that once again the clout of foreign funded e-commerce companies particularly Amazon on the Government became visible on Wednesday when the Madhya Pradesh Government transferred Bhind SP Manoj Kumar Singh within 18 days of busting of sale of marijuana (Ganja) racket which was conducted through Amazon e-commerce portal and the Bhind SP dared to make Amazon officials as accused. "It speaks as to how foreign funded companies like Amazon are controlling the administrative system of various State Governments which is giving them full liberty in violating the laws & rules and

still they are continuing their mal-practices in e-commerce", said CAIT in a statement while expressing deep anguish and resentment of traders on transfer of the said police official. CAIT national president BC Bhartiya & Secretary General Praveen Khandelwal while alleging pressure & influence of Amazon behind the transfer said that sudden transfer speaks the fact that SP Singh was about to take some big action against Amazon and instead of supporting him, the system transferred him.

They recall the earlier statements of MP Home Minister Narottam Mishra who warned Amazon either to cooperate with the investigation else Amazon officials would be brought by force to face the

investigation. "It is surprising that the said transfer strongly contradicts the said statement of MP Home Minister. We seek a categorical statement from MP CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan and MP Home Minister Narottam Mishra on this most condemnable act of transfer", CAIT said. Bhartiya and Khandelwal said that for the first time in the Country section 38 of NDPS Act and also for the first time Amazon has been named as accused and it was apparent that as the other accused were taken into custody why Amazon officials were not arrested. It requires a thorough investigation. SP Singh joined Bhind SP only a year before and therefore it can't be termed as a routine transfer.

Not a single eligible beneficiary will be deprived of the benefits of government schemes: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that taking an important step in the direction of good governance in the state, "Aapki Sarkar-Aapke Saath" campaign is being run to provide benefits of all the beneficiary oriented schemes of the government to all the eligible beneficiaries. The campaign will continue without break till 26 January 2022. Through the campaign not a single eligible beneficiary would be deprived of the benefits of the government scheme. Chouhan said that the State Government is committed for public welfare and Suraj. In the campaign, applications of all eligible beneficiaries will be received by organising camps village panchayat wise in rural areas and ward wise in urban areas in every district. Chief Minister Chouhan himself will also regularly review the "Aapki Sarkar-Aapke Saath" campaign at the government level. The campaign in the district will be headed by the District



Collector. Under the direction of Collector, Chief Executive Officer, District Panchayat will prepare roster for rural areas Village Panchayat wise and Commissioner, Municipal Corporation, Chief Municipal Officer, Chief Executive Officer, Municipal Council, Gram Panchayat or ward wise by organising camps in urban areas. A copy of the prescribed roster will be sent to the General Administration Department. This roster will also be recorded in the MIS module specially designed for the campaign on the CM Helpline. A nodal officer will be appointed for each camp in the district. While preparing for the camp, the eligible beneficiaries in all the gram panchayats and wards will be marked beforehand and applications will be received and they will be checked. In

the examination and identification of eligible beneficiaries, such beneficiaries, who have been deprived of the benefits of the scheme in the past due to any reason, the newly eligible beneficiaries in CM helpline and public hearings, those who did not get the benefit of beneficiary oriented schemes will be included. The final disposal of all the applications received in each camp will be done compulsorily and the eligible beneficiaries will be provided benefits on the spot. All local public representatives will be invited to the camp in the campaign. Benefit will be distributed to the eligible beneficiaries through local public representatives at the camp site itself. Wide publicity will be given to the date, time and location of the camps as per the roster. Such applications, which are not resolved during the camp due to some unavoidable reasons, will be redressed within 10 to 15 days by holding the camp again at the same place and benefiting the eligible beneficiaries.

Mercury dips, light showers with thunderstorm in MP for next 2 days

■ Light to moderate rain with lightning and thunderstorms is predicted for the next two days (December 2 and 3) in several parts of Madhya Pradesh, including the capital city Bhopal, said regional weather department on Thursday.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

As per the weather department, many districts in western parts of the state, including Indore, witnessed light showers on Wednesday and it is expected to cover more divisions such as - Bundelkhand, Mahakaulash, Vindhyanchal and Bhopal by Thursday and Friday.

Data provided by the regional (Bhopal) weather department, till 8.30 a.m. on Thursday, the highest rainfall in the last 24 hours was recorded at 37 mm in Barwani district, followed by 35 mm in Dhar district. Other districts such as Shajapur, Ratlam, Devas, Mandasaur etc witnessed drizzle with thunderstorms.

For December 2 and 3, the weather



department has predicted light thundershower in districts such as - Sehore, Rajgarh, Agar, Neemuch, Mandasaur, Ratlam, Alirajpur, Jhabua, Badwani, Dhar, Khargone, Indore, Devas, Shajapur, Guna, Ashok Nagar Shivpuri, Sheopur, and Hosangabad.

While, some districts - Bhopal, Raisen, Morena, Gwalior, Bhind, Khandwa, Burhanpur, Datia, Vidisha, Harda, Betul, Sagar, Tikamgarh, Nivari and Chhatrapur are predicted to

receive light rain on Thursday.

The fresh rainfall in the winter is being received due to western disturbances (WD), a phenomenon whose arrival in winter is associated with snow and rain in the Himalayas and parts of northwest India. They typically originate as low-pressure systems over the Mediterranean Sea, and the high-altitude westerly winds push them towards India. On the way, WDs gather moisture from various sources,

including the Mediterranean, Caspian, and sometimes even the Arabian Sea, according to a senior official in the weather department in Bhopal. Meanwhile, the mercury started dipping in pockets of the state. The maximum temperature in Bhopal is likely to be at 23 degree Celsius, 3 notches below normal on Friday. While the minimum temperature is expected at 16.2 degree Celsius, 4 notches below normal.

Foreign media, local NGOs make a mela of gas disaster!

Zafar Alam Khan | Bhopal
www.absoluteindianews.com

Like every year, once again the herds of international media and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have flooded Bhopal, in the name of covering the 37th anniversary of the world's worst industrial disaster.

Thirty-nine-year-old Rahman Khan (name changed), resident of a gas-affected colony of the city, amazingly asks why every year these foreigners come to see the Union Carbide plant.

"I don't know why every year so many foreigners visit the Union Carbide plant that killed thousands of us. What do they get out of it, they come, talk to us, click photographs, make videos and go away," Khan added.

There are many others who expressed almost similar views. The sufferers' views seem having substance as it is true that nothing much has been done by the international community for the gas victims. Damn or curse it, it is only the Government of India and the Madhya Pradesh Government that has done, whatever little, for the victims till now.

Come December and the great gas-fair-cum-tourism starts in Bhopal - the city that witnessed the worst manmade disaster of all times. The international media and the NGOs flock the Madhya Pradesh Capital just in search of another story besides exploring the scenic beauty of the city while the local



organizations proclaiming sympathy with the victims of the disaster start parading the suffering victims before the national and international media and visiting NGOs like circus animals.

The international media houses that hardly give any heed towards the plight of the Bhopal gas victims except for quoting the disaster as reference for their stories over such incidents, do not forget to depute their representatives to visit

the city for covering the event. Yes, for them it is nothing more than event, as the visiting media and NGOs do not have any concern for the victims. They are only interested to register their presence as evidence by shooting videos and clicking pictures with the victims for reasons best known to them.

Javed Baig, a social activist and gas victim, said the role of the local organisations also seems doubtful as for whole of the year they remain silent and if at all they do something that is issuing statements criticizing the State and Central Governments. But these organisations become active once the international media and NGOs visit the city and start raising the plight of the victims by organising programmes such as street and corner plays, besides exhibiting sufferers before the international community like animals are exhibited in the circus, he added. Baig further said that these organisations, most of which remain active only in media statements, start behaving as if the State and Central Governments have done nothing for the victims and whatever little has been done till now is only due to their efforts. Though somehow this is the harsh truth that the Governments have not only failed to deliver justice to the victims but have also not done any good to the sufferers even after 37 years of the tragedy. But this also does not mean that the tragic incident be made an occasion of fair as this only hurts the feelings of those who lost their near and dear ones, he added.



DAKOTA JOHNSON SAYS 'NO ONE ACTS NORMALLY BECAUSE OF COVID-19'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Dakota Johnson says her professional life has been transformed by the ongoing health crisis. Johnson, who is best known for starring in the 'Fifty Shades' film franchise, said: "The thing is, people are not behaving normally. If you go to a party, you f***** rage."

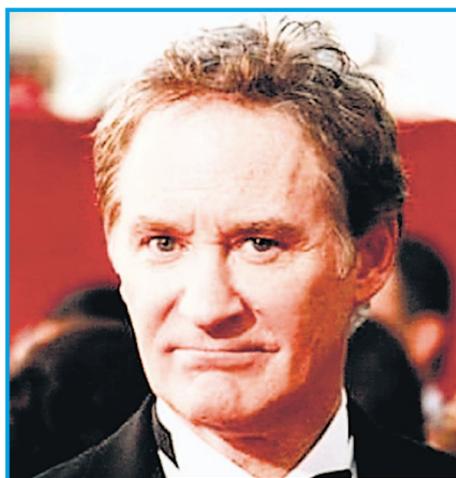
Johnson currently has a number of projects in the works, including her directorial film debut.

The movie will take place on a mythical island, but the actress won't give away too many other details for the time being, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

She told Town and Country magazine: "We talked about someone else directing, but then I was dreaming about it, having ideas all the time. It's in my bones, this story. I'm like, 'Is this too soon?' But it's happening. I'm gonna do it."

Johnson previously co-directed Coldplay's 'Cry Cry Cry' music video, which featured her boyfriend Chris Martin. Her dad, Don Johnson, recently said he would be "happy" if his daughter married the music star.

Don said: "I don't think much further than about the next seven or eight seconds. But listen, if she's happy, I will be happy, and he's a lovely guy. And if she decides to get married, I would imagine that there would be grandchildren not too far out for that. I'd be pretty excited about that part."



Cate Blanchett, Kevin Kline to star in thriller series 'Disclaimer'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood stars Cate Blanchett and Kevin Kline will be starring in a thriller series titled 'Disclaimer' from film director Alfonso CuarAn.

The show is based on the novel of the same name by Renee Knight. Blanchett stars as Catherine Ravenscroft, a successful and respected television documentary journalist whose work has been built on revealing the concealed transgressions of long-respected

institutions, reports

variety.com. When an intriguing novel written by a widower (Kline) appears on her bedside table, she is horrified to realise she is a key character in a story that she had hoped was long buried in the past.

CuarAn is writing the adaptation and will also direct and executive produce under his Esperanto Filmoj banner along with Gabriela Rodriguez.

Blanchett will executive produce in addition to starring.

CuarAn's most recent feature was the critically-acclaimed film 'Roma',

on which he served as writer, director, producer, editor, and cinematographer. The film won three Oscars: best foreign language film and best director and cinematography for CuarAn. He has been nominated for six Oscars throughout his career, winning three -- his two for 'Roma' and best director for 'Gravity', which he also co-wrote and produced.

CuarAn is currently under an overall deal at Apple, with 'Disclaimer' being the first project ordered to series under the deal.

'Disclaimer' will mark the first regular live-action television role of

'IT'LL BE OKAY'

Shawn Mendes releases breakup track following Camila Cabello split

Los Angeles | Agencies

Award-winning singer Shawn Mendes treated fans to a new emotional breakup ballad titled 'It'll be okay'. The soft, piano-backed melancholic track sees the Canadian star talking about the end of a turbulent relationship. Prior to the release, Mendes teased the song on Tuesday, reports aceshowbiz.com.

He took to his Instagram account to share a 12-second snippet of the melody. "It'll be okay, tomorrow 12/1 7pm EST," he wrote in the caption.

Fans were beyond excited over the new single. "I know this is gonna hurt so bad," one fan wrote. While another said: "Heartbreak era."

The breakup song arrived just two weeks after Mendes and singer Camila Cabello announced their split after dating for two years.

In a joint statement shared on their respective Instagram accounts, the former couple said: "Hey guys, we've decided to end our romantic relationship but our love for one another as humans is stronger than ever."

The 'Senorita' collaborators then assured fans that they will continue to be best friends despite calling it quits. "We started our relationship as best friends and will continue to be best friends. We so appreciate your support from the beginning and moving forward," the statement read.



Alec Baldwin says he didn't fire gun on 'Rust' set

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood's veteran star Alec Baldwin says he "didn't pull the trigger" of the gun that fatally wounded cinematographer Halyna Hutchins on the sets of 'Rust'. The star made the claim in his first sit-down interview since the incident in October, reports abc.com. "I would never point a gun at anyone and pull a trigger at them. Never," he told George Stephanopoulos of ABC News. The interview was recorded on Tuesday, and is due to be broadcast in the US on Thursday evening. Mr Stephanopoulos described their 80-minute discussion as "raw" and "intense".

The journalist described Baldwin, 63, as "devastated" yet "very candid" and "forthcoming", while previewing the interview on Wednesday's Good Morning America. "I've done thousands of interviews in the last 20 years at ABC. This was the most intense I've ever experienced."

Baldwin is best-known for his performances in films like 'Glengarry Glen Ross' and 'The Hunt For Red October', as well as his impersonation of Donald Trump on US sketch show 'Saturday Night Live'. The interview marks the first time Baldwin has spoken about the incident on camera, except for a brief interview he gave to TMZ in October, in a bid to stop the paparazzi from following him and his family.



BEN AFFLECK ON HOW RECONCILIATION WITH JLO CAME TO BE A 'GREAT STORY'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Ben Affleck is letting fans write their own versions of how he and singer-actress Jennifer Lopez got back together. Talking about how his reconciliation with his ex-fiancee came to be, the actor keeps his lips sealed, but teased that it's "a great story."

"One of the harder lessons that I have learned is that it's not wise to share everything with the world," Ben said in an interview with Wall Street Journal when asked about his romance with J. Lo, reports aceshowbiz.com.



He added: "I just don't want to be talking about my personal relationship in the newspaper."

When pressed on how it restarted, the 49-year-old shared: "I can say that it's definitely beautiful to me."

He goes on detailing where his life is at now: "One of the things I really value across all facets of my life now is that it was handled in a way that reflected that. My life now reflects not just the person that I want to be, but the person that I really feel like I am - which is not perfect, but somebody who tries very hard and cares very much about being honest and authentic and accountable."

Kourtney Kardashian annoyed by fans who keep asking if she's pregnant

Los Angeles | Agencies

Reality TV personality Kourtney Kardashian seemingly gets annoyed by her fans who keep asking her if she's pregnant.

Taking to her social media account, the 'Keeping Up with the Kardashians' alum shut down the swirling rumours, reports aceshowbiz.com.

Kourtney posted a racy photograph of herself swimming in a pool in a purple bikini with Travis Barker.

In the picture, the mother-of-three could be seen packing on some PDA with her fiance. "Life with you," she simply captioned her post.

In the comment section, one of her fans left a comment that read: "Not to be that girl but is that a preg belly."

The message led a frustrated Kourtney to clap back: "Are we really gonna do this every time I post a photo?"

Prior to this, it's reported that Kourtney, who shares 10-year-old Mason, 7-year-old Penelope and 5-year-old Reign with her former partner Scott Disick, would "love nothing more than to have a baby together" with Barker.

It's also said that the soon-to-be-married couple, who got engaged at the Rosewood Miramar in Montecito, California on October 19, was hoping to be "expecting" by next year.



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Cobie Smulders



INDIA VS NEW ZEALAND, 2ND TEST

ITF WORLD TENNIS TOUR C'SHIP

BOTH TEAMS FACE TOUGH CALLS AS RAIN THREAT LOOMS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Shreyas Iyer's scintillating batting debut in the first Test against New Zealand in Kanpur has landed the Indian team management in a catch-22 situation as they have to decide whom to drop and how to rearrange the batting order to accommodate skipper Virat Kohli, who is returning for the second Test after being rested for the three T20s and the first Test. With the first Test ending in a draw the fate of the two-match series depends on Mumbai Test and whichever team wins at the Wankhede will bag the honours. And to do that both teams need to take some tough decisions, especially India who have major concerns to tackle. Among the questions confronting Kohli and chief coach Rahul Dravid is whom to drop from the playing XI to accommodate the skipper. The middle order barring Iyer did not contribute much to the score in both the Innings in Kanpur and though Kohli's return improves the batting, the poor form of Cheteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane remains a concern. With Iyer in top form and quite confident after his brilliant batting in Kanpur, Kohli and Dravid can't do a direct swap between him and the skipper. Kohli is a shoo-in into the playing XI consider-



Brief scores

India (from): Virat Kohli (captain), Shubman Gill, Mayank Agarwal, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Shreyas Iyer, Suryakumar Yadav, Wriddhiman Saha (wk), KS Bharat (wk), Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Ishant Sharma, Mohammed Siraj, Umesh Yadav, and Prasidh Krishna.
New Zealand (from): Kane Williamson (captain), Tom Latham, Will Young, Kane Williamson, Ross Taylor, Henry Nicholls, Tom Blundell (wk), Kyle Jamieson, Tim Southee, Neil Wagner, Ajaz Patel, Will Somerville, Rachin Ravindra, Daryl Mitchell, and Mitchell Santner.

ing he had scored a brilliant 235 against England in the last Test played at Wankhede in 2016. Though a lot has changed since then and Kohli is going through a lean patch having struggled to reach the three-figure mark for a considerable amount of time by his lofty standards, he is still India's best batsman and the most successful captain. The team management now has

to decide whether they go for the current form and include Iyer in the playing XI along with Kohli and drop either Pujara or Rahane. They did get some good news as wicketkeeper Wriddhiman Saha has recovered the neck spasm that prevented him from keeping wickets midway through the Kanpur Test. And that is one decision less for Kohli and Dravid. The weather

is likely to play a role in the match at least on the opening day as the Met department has predicted rain. It had rained the entire day Wednesday and overnight and though there was some respite for the groundsmen as it did not rain the entire day on Thursday, New Zealand had to cancel their practice sessions at the Wankhede due to the wet conditions caused by rain throughout Wednesday and overnight. The Indians had a session at MCA's indoor facility at the Bandra Kurla Complex. Though the team is on a high considering the way they held on to draw the first Test, their middle-order has not worked as well as they would have hoped. Skipper Kane Williamson and Gary Sneed will also have to take a call whether to drop a spinner and bring in an extra pacer. Senior bowler Tim Southee said they will have to take a call in the next 24 hours on this. "Those are the decisions Kane and Gary will have to make in the next 24 hours. They will try and get a look at the wicket in the afternoon and make a decision considering the rain and the weather around," said Southee during a virtual press conference on Thursday. Just like India, New Zealand too have a good record at the Wankhede stadium. Last time they played a Test here in November 1988 and won it.

Akanksha beats Sathwika to reach quarters

Bengaluru | Agencies

Akanksha Nitture registered an upset victory over her experienced rival Sathwika Sama to reach the quarter-finals of the 15K KSLTA ITF World Tennis Tour Women's Championship at the KSLTA, here on Thursday.

The 18-year-old Akanksha, who went through two tough qualifying rounds before making it to the main draw, beat eighth seed Sama 6-4, 2-6, 6-2 in a clash that lasted a little more than two hours. In a power-packed match, Akanksha did start off shakily losing her serve with two double faults and Sama took advantage in the next game to go 2-0 up. However, Akanksha returned the favour by winning the next two games and the pattern followed for the next couple of games as well to hand a 4-2 lead to Sama.

Meanwhile, the other seeds remaining in the fray crossed the last 16 hurdle without much ado with top seed Rutuja Bhosale quelling the challenge of wild card entrant Reshma



Murari in straight sets 6-3, 6-3 while third seed Sowjanya Bavisetty outplayed Soha Sadiq 6-2, 6-2.

Pranjala Yadapalli, seeded fourth, brushed past another wild card

Yubarani Banerjee 6-3, 6-3 to make it to the last-eight stage along with sixth seed Vaidehi Chaudhari, who beat another qualifier Sai Samhitha Chamarthi 6-3, 6-2.

Snooker Nationals: Favourites Advani, Mehta, Ameer Kamani make shock exits

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Firm favourites Pankaj Advani and Aditya Mehta, both representing Petroleum Sports Promotion Board (PSPB) made an early exit, losing their respective matches in the last 16 round of the Men's 6-Red snooker event of the National Billiards & Snooker Championship 2021 here on Thursday.

The 36-year-old Advani, the World 6-Red champion and defending champion, went down to an inspired teammate Dhvaj Haria, who was in tremendous form to carve out a 5-2 win. In the other encounter, which was also a contest between PSPB players the 39-year-old Brijesh Damani prevailed over 36-year-old Aditya Mehta by a similar 5-2 scoreline. The left-handed Haria started in rousing fashion constructing breaks of 60 and 52 in the opening two frames and quickly raced to a 4-0 lead. India's most decorated cueist Advani, winner of 24 world titles, showed signs of fighting back as he stemmed the rot by compiling a 56-point break to take the fifth and also pocketed the sixth frame to



bridge the gap. But, the tall Haria dashed Advani's hopes by comfortably winning the seventh to wrap up the contest with the frame scores reading 60-05, 52-07, 45-06, 38-28, 04-60, 00-47, and 49-11 in his favour.

Meanwhile, local challenger and defending champion Ameer Kamani of Madhya Pradesh made a shock exit, losing to Karnataka's Varshaa Sanjeev 4-3 in seven nerve-wracking frames in the Ladies 6-Red snooker quarter-finals.

Bhutia, Anju Bobby George added to Mission Olympics Cell

Team Absolute | New Delhi

New Delhi: Eyeing a splendid performance at 2024 Paris Olympics, the Sports Ministry on Thursday doubled the number of former athletes as core members in the revamped Mission Olympic Cell (MOC), making the body more athlete-centric. MOC drives India's Olympics preparation through Target Olympics Podium Scheme (TOPS), an initiative of the ministry. Sports Minister Anurag Thakur said the decision was driven by the experience gained in the last Olympic cycle. The new MOC will now include former India football captain Bhaichung Bhutia, World Athletics Championships long jump



medallist Anju Bobby George, former India hockey captain Sardara

Singh, rifle shooting legend Anjali Bhagwat, former hockey captain and

CEO Olympic Gold Quest Viren Rasquinha, table tennis star Monalisa Mehta and badminton ace Trupti Murgunde. Meanwhile, Olympian sailor and sports science specialist Malav Shroff will continue to be in the MOC. Athletics Federation of India (AFI) president Adile Sumeriwala and CEO TOPS Cmdr Pushpendra Garg are other former players in the MOC.

MOC is a body set up by the Sports Authority of India (SAI) to select athletes for financial assistance under the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS). The MOC also focuses on the selection, exclusion, and retention of athletes, coaches, training institutes that can receive TOPS assistance.

AC Milan bounce back by dominating Shevchenko's Genoa in Serie A

Rome | Agencies

AC Milan bounced back from two consecutive Serie A defeats by beating Genoa 3-0 away with a Zlatan Ibrahimovic's free-kick and a Junior Messias's brace. It was a special game for Genoa's head coach Andriy Shevchenko on Wednesday evening, as the Ukrainian faced his old club for the first time after he took the Grifone job.

Milan was dealt a blow in the opening minutes, as Simon Kjaer picked up an injury and made way for Mattia Gabbia, but it took the lead in the 10th minute as Ibrahimovic curled a free-kick into the net, leaving goalkeeper Salvatore Sirigu stranded. The Rossoneri doubled the lead before the break when Rade Krunic's attempt was blocked, and the ball fell for Messias to score a looping header, Xinhua reports. Messias's brace on the hour mark helped Milan seal the win when Theo



Hernandez sprinted down the left and squared for Brahim Diaz, who laid it off for the Brazilian to finish with a low strike. With the win, AC Milan ranks second with 35 points, one point behind Napoli who fumbled a 2-0 lead and was held by Sassuolo 2-2 on Wednesday. Elsewhere,

Lautaro Martinez took the centre stage in Inter Milan's 2-0 victory over Spezia, as the Argentine scored one and set up another, surging the Nerazzurri to register its third consecutive Serie A win. Also on Wednesday, Roma suffered a 1-0 setback away to Bologna.

Chelsea beat Watford, Man City, Liverpool win away in Premier League

London | Agencies

Champions League winner Chelsea squeezed past Watford 2-1 to maintain their slender lead at the top of the Premier League on Wednesday night. Close rivals Manchester City, the defending champions, and Liverpool too won their respective matches to remain on the heels of the Blues after the mid-week fixtures.

The game was halted for half an hour in the first half for a medical emergency and Watford later confirmed a fan was in a stable condition after suffering a cardiac arrest while in the stands. According to reports, the players agreed to resume play only once they were



sure the situation had taken a positive turn. The supporter was stabilised before being taken to the hospital, with medics from both clubs contributing to his treatment. Meanwhile, things went smoothly for defending champions Manchester City. Ruben Dias scored a goal with a left-foot shot to open

the scoring for City away to Aston Villa in the 27th minute and Bernardo Silva made it 2-0 shortly before halftime. At Goodison Park, Liverpool got off to a flying start in their 4-1 derby win away to Everton with Jordan Henderson and Mohamed Salah putting them 2-0 up within 19 minutes, with

Henderson netting a first-time finish and Salah curing the ball past Everton keeper Jordan Pickford.

With the latest win, Chelsea moved to 33 points from 14 matches with City at 32 and Liverpool a further point behind. Burnley continue to collect points and extended their unbeaten run to five games with another solid defensive display to earn a 0-0 draw away to Wolves, although they remain in the bottom three. Southampton and Leicester City shared four goals with Southampton twice taking the lead through Jan Bednarek and Che Adams only to be pegged back by Jonny Evans and James Maddison.

WTA SUSPENDS ALL TOURNAMENTS IN CHINA

New Delhi: The Women's Tennis Association (WTA) has announced immediate suspension of all women's tournaments in China amid concern over Chinese tennis star Peng Shuai, the BBC reported. Peng, 35, disappeared from public view for three weeks after accusing a top Chinese official of sexual assault. WTA chief Steve Simon said that he has "serious doubts" that Peng was "free, safe and not subject to intimidation." "In good conscience, I don't see how I can ask our athletes to compete there," he said, the report added. In response, China said it "opposes the politicisation of sports." News of the WTA suspending tournaments in China has been removed from the internet in the country, although the WTA's account on Chinese social media site Weibo is still available, the report said. The WTA has repeatedly called for a full investigation into Peng's claims.

BWF World Tour Finals: Bad day for India as Chirag-Satwik pull out, Srikanth loses

Bali | Agencies

It has been a forgettable day so far for the Indians at the BWF World Tour Finals as top doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty pulled out of the tournament, while Kidambi Srikanth lost the Group B game in the men's singles event here on Thursday in Bali, Indonesia. The Indian pair had to leave the match midway as Satwiksairaj complained of knee pain during the match against Marcus Fernaldi Gideon and Kevin Sanjaya Sukamuljo. Badminton Federation of India tweeted about Indian Men's doubles pair's pullout from the tournament. "MD pair @Shettychirag04 & @satwiksairaj have decided to pull out of the ongoing #BWFWorldTourFinals2021 due to an injury. Comeback stronger



champs," BAI Media tweeted. Satwiksairaj and Chirag had become the first Indian men's doubles pair to qualify for the prestigious season-ending tournament, but the injury to Satwiksairaj marred the Indian pair's chances. On Wednesday, in the men's doubles,

Denmark's Kim Astrup and Anders Skaarup Rasmussen thrashed Satwiksairaj and Chirag by 21-16, 21-5 in 40 minutes. The BWF World Tour Finals is the season-ending tournament where the top-eight players/pairs in the season's rankings are granted entry. The players/pairs are divided into two groups of four each. Each player/pair will play every other player/pair in their group in a round-robin format, with the top-two in each group progressing to the semi-finals. In another match, Indian shuttler, Srikanth lost his second Group B game against Thailand's Kunlavut Vitidsarn. Vitidsarn defeated the Indian shuttler 21-18, 21-7 to seal the game in just 46 minutes. On Wednesday, Srikanth had defeated France's Toma Junior Popov 21-14, 21-16 in his opening Group B game.

INDIA WOMEN LOSE 1-2 AGAINST VENEZUELA

Manaus (Brazil): The Indian women's football team suffered a 1-2 loss against Venezuela in their final game of the Torneo Internacional de Futebol Feminino at the Arena da Amazonia, here on Thursday. Forward Dangmei Grace put India in front with a first-half header but Venezuela came out all guns blazing in the second session and goals from Mariana Speckmaier and Barbara Olivieri helped them claim victory. Venezuela started the brighter of the two sides and tested India goalkeeper Aditi Chauhan from distance a number of times in the opening 15 minutes through shots from Kimberlyn Campos and Barbara Olivieri. Ten minutes from the end, Olivieri received the ball on the right with loads of space to run into and she finished coolly past Chauhan to give Venezuela the win.



'KBC' COMPLETES 1,000 EPISODES

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Legendary actor Amitabh Bachchan talks about his journey on 'Kaun Banega Crorepati' as the show completes a thousand episodes on December 3. He says: "This year the show completes 1,000 episodes, and I couldn't be happier. I believe this is the most generous show and it continues to give to the contestants, audiences and to all of us associated with it - be it 'Gyaan', 'Dhan' or 'Sammaan' (Knowledge, wealth, respect). Each season of KBC has been a learning for me and to be with the team, the contestants who come from different parts of our country and to interact with them is a joy. I hope that this show continues to create history just like it has, in every way."

On the Friday special episode, Shweta Bachchan Nanda and Navya Naveli Nanda will be on the hotseat.

Furthermore, Siddhartha Basu, who is the consultant for 'KBC 13', shares about the show and Amitabh as the host. The show has seen 1,588 participants on the hotseat and has given 25 'Crorepatis'.

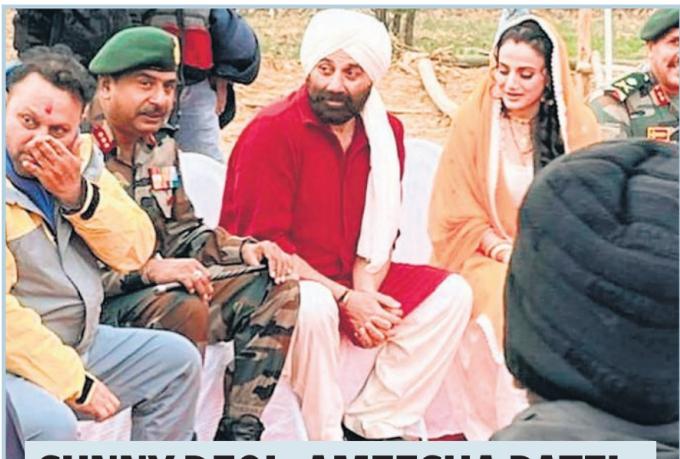
He says: "It's rare enough to be part of a knowledge show that made television history, holding a nation in its thrall, but rarer still to be associated with it throughout its run, 21 years on. With Amitabh Bachchan driving the show with unique flair and empathy, it remains one that not only engages both hearts and minds, but one that touches lives." The Friday special episode will air on December 3 on Sony Entertainment Television.



ADARSH GOURAV GRATEFUL TO PRIYANKA, ANUPAM KHER, IRRFAN FOR PAVING THE WAY TO HOLLYWOOD

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Indian breakout star Adarsh Gourav, who has made a mark on the international scene, feels grateful that earlier Indian talents paved the way for actors like him today. Commenting on how the modern world has changed the dynamics of talent acquisition across the globe, Adarsh said, "The world is a smaller place today. Lines are blurring and thresholds are being crossed as more and more actors indulge themselves in international projects." The actor expresses his gratitude towards talents from India who brought recognition to the homegrown talents, he said, "Speaking about India, mainstream actors like Priyanka Chopra, Deepika Padukone, Irrfan Khan and Anupam Kher, to name a few, have been seen in Hollywood projects recently. This collaboration between the East and the West is opening us actors to newer audiences globally." "It is definitely an exciting time for me to sift through ideas and land collaborations that help me harness my talent as an actor. I am grateful for this opportunity every single day," he concludes. Adarsh is working on Scott Z. Burns climate change anthology drama series titled 'Extrapolations', where he will be seen sharing the screen with Meryl Streep, David Schwimmer, and Kit Harington. 'Extrapolations' explores the stories of how changes to the planet will impact love, family and work both on a personal level and at a larger human level. While the production remains tightlipped about the details around the project, the news about Anupriya being a part of the project has already caught fans' attention. In addition, the actress also has the new season of 'Asur' in her kitty.



SUNNY DEOL, AMEESHA PATEL START FILMING 'GADAR 2'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Sunny Deol and Ameesha Patel from 'Gadar: Ek Prem Katha' have reunited for the film's sequel, 20 years after the blockbuster. The two will be reprising their roles in the film which has flagged off its shooting schedule. The pictures from the film's 'muhurat' have gone viral.

Ameesha took to her Instagram to share an image from the film's set, she captioned the picture, "Gadar 2. Muhurat shot. The General was kind enough to grace the occasion (sic)."

In the image, Sunny can be seen sporting a turban and red kurta, while Ameesha has donned an orange Patiala suit. Pictures from

the 'muhurat' shot show that the styling is in line with where the first film ended. It'll be interesting to see how the story progresses.

Sunny Deol too shared an image on his Instagram, he wrote, "We started filming of Gadar 2. Will post Tara Singh soon (sic)."

Earlier, Sunny had shared the film's motion poster as he captioned it, "After two decades the wait is finally over! On the auspicious day of Dusshera, presenting to you the motion poster of Gadar 2. The Katha Continues."

Anil Sharma is directing the sequel under the Zee Studios production. The film is scheduled for a 2022 release.

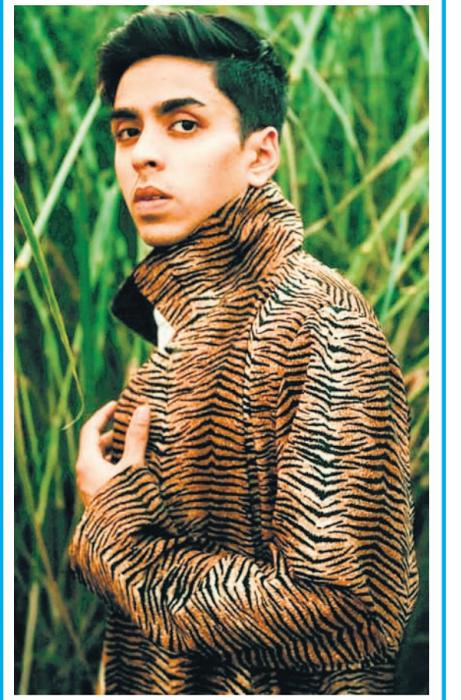
Pitch Perfect: 'Mehram' song from 'Jersey' lights a fire

Team Absolute | Mumbai

'Mehram', the first song from Shahid Kapoor's much awaited cricket drama 'Jersey', has been released and it promises a power-packed album ahead. The song portrays Shahid's character battling the odds and rising from a cricketer for the love of his son. The song, sung by Sachet Tandon and composed by Sachet-Parampara, acts as a perfect fuel to the inner spark that drives a person to chase dreams. The lyrics have been penned by Shailender Singh Sodhi, popularly known as Shellee.

Speaking about the song, Sachet said, "We have made 'Mehram' with all our love and passion. It's a song that you listen to when you're having a bad day but still have your go-getter spirit fuelled with adrenaline. We hope you enjoy the song as much as we loved making it for you!"

Excited about the launch of 'Mehram', producer Aman Gill said, "We all have days when we want to keep going regardless of the curveballs being thrown at us. 'Mehram' is an adrenaline-pumping anthem that will get you back up on the horse and make you chase your dreams. We have already received a great response to the song, as it was there in our trailer and thanks to Shahid singing a few lines from the song. And now, here's the full song! We hope you enjoy it!"



Secret codes for guests attending Vicky-Katrina wedding

Team Absolute | Jaipur

Guests attending the much-hyped wedding between Bollywood stars Vicky Kaushal and Katrina Kaif at the Six Senses Fort Barwara located in Sawai Madhopur district in Rajasthan on December 9 shall be given secret codes to keep the marriage ceremony completely confidential, sources said on Wednesday.

The guests will be allowed entry into the wedding venue on the basis of the secret codes provided to them.

The identity of the special guests attending the wedding will be kept confidential, hence the hotel has allotted codes instead of names to all the guests. The guests will be provided different services, such as room service, security etc., based on these codes.

According to sources, the SOPs laid down for the grand wedding ceremony include, non-disclosure of wedding attendance, no photography, no sharing of pictures and location on social media etc. Also, the guests shouldn't have any contact with the outside world till they leave the venue, the sources said.

Meanwhile, preparations for the much-hyped marriage have begun at the lavish hotel in Sawai



Madhopur district. An event management company has been entrusted with the responsibility of making all the necessary arrangements for the big day.

Accordingly, special suites have been booked for the bride and the groom at the hotel. While Vicky will put up at the Raja Mansingh suite, Katrina will be staying at the Rani Padmavati suite, both most expensive suites in the hotel. The tariff for the suites is Rs 7 lakh each for one night.

Both the suites have private swimming pools and gradens attached to them, while the windows open to a grand view of the Aravali hills.

Katrina and Vicky, along with

their family members, are expected to check-in on December 6, and depart on December 11.

The wedding preparations have been entrusted to six different vendors, who will arrange flowers, decoration, security, transportation, food and jungle safaris.

For security arrangements, 100 bouncers will come from Jaipur on December 5. Rajasthan police personnel will also be deployed for the security of the VIP guests.

The 'Sangeet' ceremony will be held on December 7, followed by the 'Mehendi' ceremony the next day.

A special reception will be held after the wedding ceremony on December 10.



Athiya Shetty, KL Rahul make maiden red carpet appearance

Team Absolute | Mumbai

It was in November when actress Athiya Shetty and star cricketer KL Rahul made their relationship official with a loved up post. One month later, the lovebirds made their first red carpet appearance during the screening of the upcoming film 'Tadap'.

Before going in for the screening, Athiya and Rahul stopped to pose for the camera. The cricketer looked dapper in a beige suit paired with a black T-shirt while the actress chose for an all-black look. The stood closely as they posed for the shutterbugs. The two then joined the cast of 'Tadap' --

Tara Sutaria and Athiya's brother Ahan to pose for the paparazzi.

'Tadap' is Ahan Shetty's debut and also stars Tara Sutaria, Kumud Mishra and Saurabh Shukla. It follows the story of a guy hopelessly in love, who turns vindictive along the course of the film after being abandoned.

The film, presented by Fox Star Studios, produced by Sajid Nadiadwala, co-produced by Fox Star Studios and directed by Milan Luthria, is scheduled to release on December 3.

Speaking about her work, Athiya was last seen on screen in 'Motichoor Chaknachoor' with Nawazuddin Siddiqui.



Tara Sutaria