Sunday Special

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Australia in firm control with a lead of 282 runs against England ...

WHO urges nations to scale-up measures, vax to limit Omicron spread

CARE TO CURE

- *From what we know so far, Omicron appears to spread faster than the Delta variant which has been attributed to the surge in cases across the world in the last several months, the Regional Director said.*
- *Emerging data from South Africa also suggests increased risk of re-infection with Omicron, there is still limited data on the clinical severity associated with Omicron.*
- *As studies are underway, further information to fully understand the clinical picture of those infected with Omicron is expected in the coming weeks.*

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The World Health Organization (WHO) on Saturday urged countries in the South-East Asia Region to urgently scale-up public health and social measures as well as vaccinations to curtail further spread of the new Covid-19 variant Omicron.

According to the global health body, the hyper mutant variant has spread to 77 countries so far.

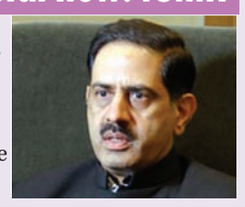
While reports show that Omicron is showing less severe disease, Singh said it "should not be dismissed as mild". "Even if it does cause less severe disease, the sheer number of cases could once again overwhelm health systems. Hence, health care capacity including ICU beds, oxygen availability, adequate health care staff and surge capacity need to be reviewed and strengthened at all levels," she noted.

Preliminary data suggests that vaccines may likely have reduced effectiveness against infections by the Omicron variant. Yet, acevaccines are an important tool in our fight against the pandemic, as they have shown in the case of the Delta variant.However, vaccines alone will not get any country out of this pandemic."We must scale up vaccination and at the same time implement public health and social measures, which have proven critical to limiting transmission of Covid-19 and reducing deaths," the Regional Director said.These include wearing masks, keeping distance, opening windows, cleaning hands and coughing and sneezing safely.

"Continue to take all precautions even after taking vaccine doses," Singh said.

> "Countries can, and must, prevent the spread of Omicron with the proven health and social measures. Our focus must continue to be to protect the least protected and those at high risk."
>
> **Dr Poonam Singh, Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia Region**

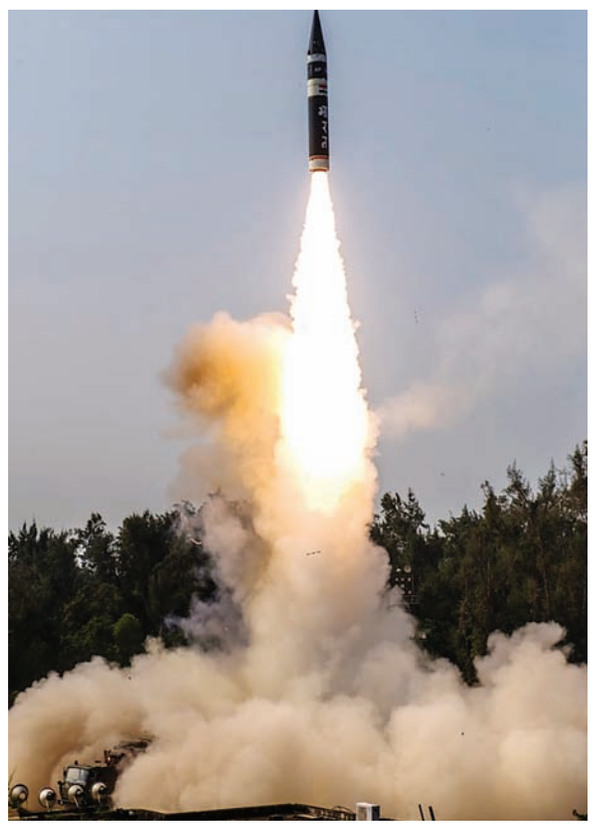
No scientific data to suggest Covid pills will be useful now: ICMR



New Delhi: The scientific data on anti-viral Covid pills still does not support that these medicines will be useful at the moment as it has been found that they need to be given earlier even before the diagnosis of the disease, Indian Council of Medical Research Director General Balram Bhargava said on Friday. In a briefing on the present situation of Covid and new variant Omicron in the country, he said that it is very important to have low-intensity festivities and avoid non-essential travel and mass gatherings.

India successfully test fires nuclear capable ballistic missile

INDIA SUCCESSFULLY TEST FIRED NEW GENERATION NUCLEAR CAPABLE BALLISTIC MISSILE 'AGNI P' ON SATURDAY, THE DEFENCE MINISTRY SAID.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

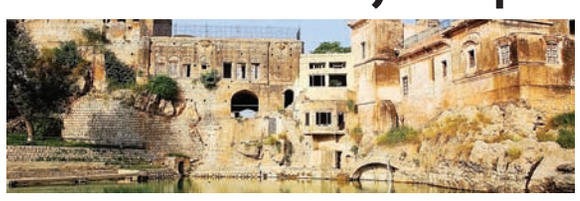
The ministry said that Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully tested the new generation nuclear capable ballistic missile 'Agni P' from Dr APJ Abdul Kalam island off the coast of Odisha at 11.06 a.m.

The 'Agni P' is a two-stage canisterised solid propellant ballistic missile with dual redundant navigation and guidance system. This second flight-test has proven the reliable performance of all the advanced technologies integrated into the system.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh congratulated DRDO for the successful flight test and expressed his happiness for the excellent performance of the system.

> "Various telemetry, radar, electro-optical stations and down range ships positioned along the eastern coast tracked and monitored the missile trajectory and parameters. The missile followed text book trajectory meeting all mission objectives with high level of accuracy."
>
> **The Defence Ministry**

Hindu pilgrims in Pakistan to visit Katas Raj Temple



Team Absolute | New Delhi

A delegation of 87 Indian Hindu pilgrims has arrived in Pakistan to participate in the religious rites at the historic Katas Raj Temple near Chakwal on Sunday, The Express Tribune reported.

Syed Faraz Abbas, Deputy Secretary of the Evacuee Waqf Property Board, welcomed the Hindu yatris upon their arrival at the Wagah border crossing in Lahore on Friday.The temple is considered to be the oldest and holiest place of the Hindu religion in Pakistan.There is also a sacred pond which the Hindus associate with Lord Shiva.Members of Hindu community of Pakistan will also visit the temple on Sunday.Speaking on the occasion, Abbas said that all the arrangements, including security, accommodation and transport of the yatrees had been finalised.

He added that relevant officials of the Evacuee Waqf Property Board would also accompany the Indian pilgrims, the report said.

The Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi had issued visas to 112 Indian Hindu pilgrims from December 17 to 23.

The pilgrims would return via Wagah border on December 23.

GLOBAL METAVERSE MARKET EXPECTED TO CROSS $6 BN IN 2021

- Social media giant Facebook has said it will spend more than $10 billion to build out its vision for Metaverse.
- Facebook has also announced to hire 10,000 people to help the social network build the Metaverse.
- According to the company, the next computing platform has the potential to help unlock access to new creative, social and economic opportunities.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The market for transactions in the Metaverse is expected to reach $6.1 billion this year, as tech giants like Meta (formerly Facebook) aim big on the VR/AR-based technology to bring deeper immersive experiences to billions in the future.

The global Metaverse market is forecast to hit nearly $42 billion globally by 2026, according to research firm Strategy Analytics.

"The Metaverse will feel like a hybrid of today's online social experiences, sometimes expanded into three dimensions or projected into the physical world. It will let you share immersive experiences with other people even when you can't be together -- and do things together you couldn't do in the physical world," according to Meta.

Meta has also announced new tools to help people build for the Metaverse, including Presence Platform, which will enable new mixed reality experiences on Quest 2, and a $150-million investment in immersive learning to train the next generation of creators.

The term Metaverse was coined by Neal Stephenson in a science fiction novel almost 30 years ago.

In recent years, Metaverse has come to represent a utopian convergence of digital experiences fuelled by Moore's Law - an aspiration to enable rich, real-time, globally-interconnected virtual- and augmented-reality environments that will enable billions of people to work, play, collaborate and socialise in entirely new ways.

According to leading chip-maker Intel, building Metaverse -- at scale and accessible by billions of humans in real time -- will require a 1,000-times increase in computational efficiency from what we have today.

Rare mammal Takin spotted in Arunachal Pradesh forests

In joy for the Forest Department, Takin (or gnu goat) - one of the rarest mammals - was caught by a trap camera above 3,500 metres in Arunanchal Pradesh's East Kameng district in Arunachal Pradesh. It is first photo/image of Takin from East Kameng district, DFO Seppa, Vikas Swami said.

ITANAGAR | Agencies

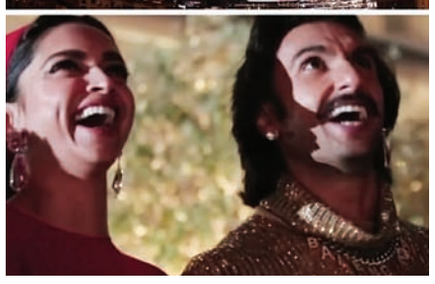
The Takin is adapted to its mountainous environment in Asia. Due to overhunting and the destruction of its natural resources, it is listed as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.

"We got a camera trap image in November. Seppa Forest Division had installed cameras above altitude 3500 metre as a part of Snow Leopard Survey programme with help of WWF-India (knowledge partner)," Swami said. Exact number of individuals is not known to us, the Forest official said, adding: "But it's the largest mammal which is very rare to sight in wild."

Much of the ownership of the land rests with the local communities in the state and effectively a very small area falls under Forest Department. Several pockets have community driven conservation programmes while several have seen widespread hunting, both for sustenance and game.

'83' TRAILER LIGHTS UP BURJ KHALIFA

Team Absolute | Mumbai



Bollywood sensations Ranveer Singh and Deepika Padukone along with cricket legends Kapil Dev, Sunil Gavaskar and Mohinder Amarnath, who were present in Dubai for the final leg of promotions for the upcoming sports epic '83', were overjoyed to see glimpses of the film projected onto the iconic Burj Khalifa.

The video is going viral on social media and cricket fans are eagerly waiting for the movie to be released.

The film's director Kabir Khan and his wife Mini Mathur were also present at the venue. '83' is a sports drama based on India's memorable cricket World Cup victory in 1983 and stars Ranveer as Kapil Dev, also known as the 'Haryana Hurricane'. Deepika has been cast in the role of Romi Dev, Kapil's wife.

The movie had its screening at the recently-concluded Red Sea International Film Festival, post which the film's team reached Dubai where they saw the trailer lighting up the world's tallest building.Ranveer shared the video on his Instagram as he wrote in the caption, "The champions on the tallest building of the world! @burjkhalifa 83 RELEASING IN CINEMAS ON 24TH DEC, 2021, in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam. Also in 3D. #ThisIs83 (sic)."

Gavaskar, Kapil and Amarnath have shared the dressing room for a long time. Away from commentary duties since the end of the India-New Zealand Test series, Gavaskar is on a rest from the game and is enjoying his time with his former teammates.

All the greats of India's famous World Cup win are currently busy promoting the much-awaited movie through different platforms.

AFC WOMEN'S ASIAN CUP INDIA 2022 INSPIRE YOUNG GIRLS: AIFF

New Delhi: All India Football Federation (AIFF) general secretary Kushal Das on Saturday said that the upcoming AFC Women's Asian Cup India 2022 will galvanise the masses, spread awareness about the women's game in the country and inspire young girls to take up the sport.

Come the New Year, the Indian Senior Women's National Team will have a new look in the form of a new jersey.

The 'Blue Tigresses' have been inspiring a generation while breaking down the barriers to move forward and now will be setting the trend wearing the new stripes in the AFC Women's Asian Cup India 2022 from January onwards. Kushal Das said, "We are confident that the AFC Women's Asian Cup India 2022 will galvanise the masses, spread awareness about the women's game in India and inspire young girls in the country to take up the sport, and pursue their dreams."

After student discovers Chola period coins

CHENNAI | Agencies

The Tamil Nadu archeology department in association with the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) will be intensifying the mining process in Ramanathapuram district after a Class 12 student of a government school identified three Chola period coins.

The student identified three coins as belonging to the Chola period after her father, who is a farmer unearthed the coins, while ploughing in his field. uneeswari, the Class 12 student of Suresh Sudha Azhagan Memorial Government Higher secondary school of Thirupullani, while speaking to reporter, said, "We have a strong heritage club in our school and teachers tell us to identify ancient coins, potteries as also inscriptions on these coins and potteries to gauge out the period of these coins as there was a rich civilization in this part of the world during the period of Raja Raja Cholan and the Chola dynasty that had extended up to Sri Lanka and Vietnam."

V. Rajaguru, the secretary of the heritage club of the school, told reporter, "Coins were issued during the period of Rajaraja Chola 1 to Kolathunga Chola 1, and the Eelam coins in copper were called Eela Karunkasu or black coins." He said that gold, silver, and copper coins were issued during these periods." He said that the student identified the coins as belonging to those issued by the great Chola king Raja Raja Chola after the conquest of Sri Lanka in war and it belongs to the 11th and 12th century CE.

TN TO EXCAVATE IN AMANATHAPURAM

Taking a cue from the Class 12 student identifying copper coins of the Chola period, the Tamil Nadu state archeology department in association with the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) is planning more excavations in the area. It may be noted that the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archeology (TNSDA) in association with the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) has been doing excavations at Keeladi, Konthagai, and Agaram in Sivaganga district of Tamil Nadu. Excavations were also carried out in Adichanallur, Sivagalai, and Korkai in Thoothukudi district and also some other places in South Tamil Nadu, and the findings by Muneeswari has led to thinking from the TNSDA and ASI to start digging at amanathapuram district also to get some rich inputs on the past during the Chola dynasty period.

DAY AHEAD OF PM VISIT, GOA MINISTER ALLEGES CORRUPTION IN HERITAGE FORT PROJECT

PANAJI | Agencies

Goa BJP's Ports Minister Michael Lobo on Saturday alleged corruption in the restoration and the handing over of a historic fort to a private agency, a day ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the coastal state on Sunday.

Lobo said while he welcomes Modi to Goa, he said that corruption was involved in the fort project, which is scheduled to be inaugurated at the hands of the Prime Minister on December 19, the 60th anniversary of the state's Liberation from Portuguese rule.

"This has historic importance. This history and monument should not be given in anybody's hands. The keys to the fort should not be given in someone else's custody. I have said I am not a party to this decision in the cabinet. The CM agreed that this fort will not be outsourced and given in somebody else's hands," Lobo told reporters, a day ahead of Modi's visit.

The Aguada fort was originally built in the 17th century by the Portuguese colonists, to serve as a coastal sentinel to guard against the roving Dutch and Maratha navies and as a water-refilling station for passing ships, before it was subsequently put to use as a high security prison by the colonial administration.

After the liberation of Goa, the facility also served as a central jail, until a more modern prison facility was built at Colvale village in North Goa. Part of the prison complex was leased out to a five star hotel group decades ago.

The government has now resolved to handover the renovated fort to a private agency for maintenance to run its business operation.

According to a government statement, the re-development of Aguada Fort Jail Museum as a Heritage Tourism destination has been carried out under the Central government's Swadesh Darshan Scheme at a cost of over Rs 28 crore.

A museum inside the fort precincts will highlight the contributions and sacrifices made by the prominent freedom fighters who fought for the liberation of Goa and will be befitting tribute to them, the statement also said."I am charging that there is corruption involved. I am charging. This is my official statement. They want to give it away for Rs 1.20 crore a year. The entry charges will be taken by Drishti and they will give the government Rs 1.20 crore. By maintaining the fort, the government can earn the same money in a month. I can show the calculation," Lobo claims.

INDIA REPORTS 7,145 NEW COVID CASES, 289 DEATHS

New Delhi: In the last 24 hours, India registered 7,145 new Covid-19 cases and 289 deaths, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said on Saturday. With the new fatalities, the nationwide death toll has increased to 4,77,158. The recovery of 8,706 patients in the last 24 hours has increased the cumulative tally to 3,41,71,471. Consequently, India's recovery rate stands at 98.38 per cent, the highest since March 2020. India's active caseload is 84,565, the lowest in 569 days. Active cases account for 0.24 per cent of the country's total positive cases, which is the lowest since March 2020. Also in the same period, a total of 12,45,402 tests were conducted across the country, increasing the total to 66.28 crore. Meanwhile, the weekly positivity rate at 0.62 per cent has remained less than 1 per cent for the last 34 days now. The daily positivity rate at 0.57 per cent has also remained below 2 per cent for last 75 days and less than 3 per cent for 110 consecutive days now. With the administration of 62,06,244 vaccine doses in the last 24 hours, India's Covid inoculation coverage has reached 136.66 crore as of Saturday morning. This has been achieved through 1,43,67,288 sessions. More than 17.21 crore balance and unutilised Covid vaccine doses are still available with the states and UTs, according to the Ministry.

Sajad Lone slams NC over 'U-turn' on delimitation commission

Team Absolute | Srinagar

Reminding Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (NC) of its own statement wherein they asserted that participation in the delimitation commission would tantamount to accepting the events of August 5, Peoples Conference President Sajad Gani Lone on Saturday asked the party to explain how it was endorsement to abrogation of the Article 370 then and not now.

In a tweet, J&K Peoples Conference put out a statement made earlier by the NC that participation in proceedings of delimitation commission would be tantamount to accepting August 5 decisions and it is unwilling to do so."Please at least have the courtesy to show even some pretence and explain how it was tantamount to endorsement then and not now. Digital world. Digital proof. 'Chit bhi meri patt bhi meri' won't work. Era of Multiple speeches in Srinagar and Delhi and in multiple places is over," Lone tweeted.In another tweet, the party asked NC what compelled it to participate in proceedings of delimitation commission."These are the utterances of Dr Farooq Abdullah. What changed between then and now for the NC to now participate. Is it not tantamount to endorsing August 5 decisions now?

There is a limit on monopoly on morality. Please at least have the courtesy to show even some pretence and explain how it was tantamount to endorsement then and how it is not tantamount to endorsement now," the party tweeted.

The NC had earlier boycotted proceedings of the panel, saying it is the product of Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act, 2019 which it had challenged in the Supreme Court.

Odisha to include entrepreneurship in school curriculum

Team Absolute | Bhubaneswar

The Odisha government has proposed to include entrepreneurship in school curriculum. Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik said this while inaugurating O-hub, a flagship initiative of the government to support startup formation and subsequent scale-up, here on Saturday.

The State has proposed in the new draft startup policy 2021 to reach out to the young minds in school by adding entrepreneurship as a part of the school curriculum, he said.

The Chief Minister said that start-up movement in Odisha is growing every day and Startup Odisha has been a catalyst to this movement, driving them by energy, enterprise & innovation. He further said that the narrative of Odisha is changing & progressing towards a new world of ideas, innovations & a budding entrepreneurial community.

O-hub, the state supported incubation hub, is located in the Special Economic Zone, Patia Bhubaneswar & offers 1,50,000 square feet area with state-of-the art facility, plug-n-play infrastructure to support startup activities within the state. This initiative would provide a platform for innovators and entrepreneurs to develop products or services, establish formal businesses and interact with stakeholders of the ecosystem.

Inaugurating this world class incubation centre, Patnaik said that O-Hub will be the first point to identify the best in the industry for co-creation & development of business with their new ideas and it will be a conglomerate for business houses & innovation. He said that now the innovators, mentors, corporate partners, ecosystem enablers & facilitators -- all of them will work under one roof.

Startups being the agents of economic freedom, ideas and innovation, the CM added that O-hub will facilitate 200 startups every year in diverse sectors like healthcare, renewable energy, ICT, artificial intelligence, machine learning, augmented reality/virtual reality, internet of things, handlooms and handicrafts, agritech and many more.

Expressing happiness over creation of more than 1200 startups so far under Odisha Startup Policy 2016 that have generated 10,000 employments in the state, Patnaik expressed confidence that the state will achieve the goal of 5,000 startups by 2025.

O-hub will be a propellant to foster a spirit of entrepreneurship by providing end-to-end assistance to a startup during their journey, he added.

BENGAL GUV SEEKS FINANCIAL DETAILS OF 'MAA CANTEEN,' MAMATA'S PET PROJECT

Team Absolute | Kolkata

A day before the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) elections, West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar got embroiled in a fresh controversy after he sought details of the financial involvement in Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's pet project -- 'Maa Canteen' -- for which the state government allocated Rs 100 crore to provide food at subsidised rates to the poor, particularly during the lockdown.

In a letter to the Principal Secretary of the state's finance department, the Governor sought the details of the financial involvement in the 'Maa Canteen' project.Taking to his official Twitter handle, Dhankhar said: "Noticing unconstitutional diversion of funds for #MAA Scheme @MamataOfficial till March 31, 2021, WB Governor has sought from Finance Secretary source and amount spent in #MAA till March 31, 2021. Another revelation @DrAmitMitra. His Silence in #BGBS Report Card indicates there is all to hide."

In his letter written to the state finance department, the governor wrote: "On February 5, 2021, Amit Mitra as then minister in-charge, finance department, made a budget statement for the year 2021-2022 which was tabled by the Hon'ble Chief Minister in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly.

"SI No. 18 in the budget statement is thus: 'Common kitchen under 'Maa' scheme (cooked food). In addition, to ensure that poor people get two square meals a day, a new scheme called 'Maa' will be launched under which common kitchen will be opened at different places from where cooked food at nominal price will be served, I propose to allocate Rs 100 crore for the next financial year.'

"It emanates firmly from the aforesaid that the common kitchen under 'Maa' scheme was by way of a new scheme and allocation of Rs 100 crore for the next financial year was proposed. Thus, this new scheme was to be operationalised for the period from April 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022 with an annual allocation of Rs 100 crore. This appropriation was similarly affected in terms of constitutional prescriptions."

The Governor further wrote: "It has been represented, as also gathered from public domain, that the Hon'ble Chief Minister launched the 'Maa' canteens for providing subsidised cooked meals to the poor and the destitute at a nominal cost of Rs 5 in mid-February, 2021.

"It is, thus, apparent that for about a month-and-a-half prior to April 1, 2021, the scheme was functional and during this period there was no legitimate allocation to this effect."According to the Governor, Article 204 (3) says: "Subject to the provisions of Articles 205 and 206, no money shall be withdrawn from the consolidated fund of the state except under appropriation made by law passed in accordance with the provisions of this article."

The Governor then sought information on the following:

1) The amount spent on the scheme 'Maa' during FY ending 31.3.20212) The source of funding of the same, and the authority sanctioning such fund "Information to this effect may be sought from the Principal Secretary, Finance Department, at the earliest, not later than a week from today," Dhankhar said.

Kerala govt moves SC against HC order cancelling job to late MLA's son

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM | Agencies

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has moved Supreme Court against High Court's order cancelling a government job given to the son of late CPI-M MLA K.K. Ramachandran Nair. The High Court earlier this month said that a "legislator is not a government servant" and cancelled the appointment.

The government petition says the High Court got it wrong as the state government did this according to the rules and procedures and hence approached the apex court.

Nair, a first time legislator after being elected from the Chenganoor Assembly constituency in the 2016 Assembly polls, passed away in 2018 due to health issues.

Vijayan, in a surprise decision, decided to appoint Nair's son R. Prasanth as an assistant engineer in the Public Works Department, which led to a huge criticism from several quarters.

However, a petitioner from Palakkad, Ashok Kumar filed a plea in this regard at the High Court and a division bench chaired by Chief Justice S. Manikumar ruled that an "MLA is not a government servant" as they have an elected term of only five years, and hence a government job under dying in harness mode is not applicable and cancelled the appointment.

Incidentally, this legal battle comes at a time when a petition is before the Lokayukta after Vijayan sanctioned a substantial sum of money from the Chief Minister's Distress Relief Fund to clear off the debts of Nair.

'Muttahida Hindustan' goal of Sufi sect of Muslims

BAREILLY | Agencies

The All India Tanzeem Ulama-e-Islam, a prominent face of the Barelvi movement, said on Saturday that it has launched a 'Muttahida Hindustan' or 'One India' movement in the subcontinent, and will take it across the globe.

Speaking at an event, Maulana Shahbuddin Razvi, national general secretary of All India Tanzeem Ulama-e-Islam, said that they want India of old time like the way it was in 1658 AD. He was endorsed by other prominent Muslim persons on the dias.

The Muslim body, which claims to be the prominent organisation of the Barelvi sect, is also working on social reforms of the community and trying to eradicate social evils from the Muslim society.

The organisation's general secretary, Maulana Shahabuddin Razvi, told IANS, "India should attain Muttahida Hindustan (Akhand Bharat) status with the merger of

Pakistan, Afghanistan, Burma, Tibet, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, as it was in 1658 AD. And the organisation has initiated a movement at global level for this."

He said if Germany can unite, why not the Indian subcontinent, especially given the common culture that exists in the region.

"It will make India a strong country and we are trying to motivate people on this," he said.

The Tanzeem agenda is similar to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) as its chief Mohan Bhagwat had on November 26 said that the country had witnessed a major stumble at the time of Partition which cannot be forgotten, and thus will not be repeated again.

Bhagwat has been advocating 'Akhand Bharat' at various events. 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 had said that a conspiracy was hatched for the Partition of India, which continues even today. Partition reportedly took place for peace, but even after that, there were riots in the country, he had said.The Tanzeem is also working to eradicate social evils and has issued strong statements against dowry and spending of lavish money in weddings.

It has appealed to the Muslims to vote in elections after thinking properly. It also said that as per Islamic law, the female heir should get her share in property.

The Tanzeem believes that only Sufism is the response to terrorism, and it can only be defeated by promoting the Sufi culture and practice.

India cannot depend on others for defence technologies amid security challenges: Rajnath

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India cannot depend on other countries for defence technologies due to its stature, its geographical location as well as the security challenges it faces, said Defence Minister Rajnath Singh underscoring the importance of achieving 'Aatmanirbharta' (Self Reliant India) in defence.

Addressing the 94th Annual General Meeting of Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), on the theme 'India Beyond 75' in New Delhi, Singh voiced the government's vision to make India a global defence manufacturing hub in the coming times, stressing that the focus is to modernise the Armed forces and create a strong and 'Aatmanirbhar' defence industry which can help in safeguarding the country from conventional and non-conventional, present and future security threats.

He said: "For the security of India and its people, it is necessary that we develop our defence capacity and capability that even the most powerful country in the world has to think a thousand times before planning anything that endangers our interests. Our government's aim is not to attack anyone, but prepare our Armed Forces to be ready at all times to give a befitting reply to the country's enemies."

Without naming China and Pakistan, the minister highlighted the threats from both the neighbouring countries. Singh

said that, on one side, there is one country born out of the partition and is worried seeing the progress of India, while on the other, there is a nation which keeps on creating new plans.

He highlighted the recent visits of Defence Ministers of US, Russia and France, and said: "countries across the world have friendly relations with us and we have told them that we wish to manufacture defence equipment in India as national security is our top priority."

He also mentioned about the recent agreement with Russia, worth more than Rs 5,000 crore, to manufacture over six lakh AK-203 rifles in Amethi, inviting every country to 'Make in India, Make for India and Make for the world'.

Singh listed out measures taken by the government to promote foreign investment, including increasing the FDI limit to 74 per cent through automatic route and 100 per cent through government route under certain circumstances.

He said foreign investment will help create an ecosystem of defence manufacturing in the country and achieve 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat', envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He also spoke about the initiatives taken by the Government to reduce dependency on imports, such as notifying two positive indigenisation lists of over 200 items.

"The items in aPositive List' will cross the 1,000-mark in this decade. This is our vision of aIndia Beyond 75'," he said.

Saying that the defence sector has been able to overcome the challenges posed by Covid-19 due to policy reforms brought out by the government, the Raksha Mantri exhorted the private sector to take advantage of the policies and contribute towards nation building.

He said, the decision to corporatise Ordnance Factory Board was taken in order to provide fair competition between public and private entities in the defence sector and bring efficiency in government companies.

He appreciated the industry for working with the Government to achieve self-reliance.

He made special mention of the order of 10 lakh Multi-Mode Hand Grenades given to Economic Explosives Limited following Transfer of Technology from Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO); the first batch of which has already been handed over to the Indian Army.

For Generation Ace

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"The power to question is the basis of all human progress."

Indira Gandhi

IT raids SP leaders:

'SOON ED AND CBI WILL ALSO COME:' AKHILESH YADAV

The Samajwadi Party chief said that the IT raids point out that the BJP's fear of defeat has been increasing

LUCKNOW | Agencies

The Income Tax (I-T) department conducted raids on the premises of several persons associated with the Samajwadi Party (SP) in different cities across UP on Saturday morning.

Premises of Rahul Bhasin and Neetu Yadav alias Gajendra Singh Yadav in Lucknow, Manoj Yadav in Agra and Mainpuri, and Rajeev Rai in Mau were raided by the I-T sleuths. The I-T searches were also conducted in Mainpuri, the parliamentary constituency of SP patriarch Mulayam Singh Yadav. All the premises raided said are said to be the financers of Samajwadi Party.

A team of 12 I-T sleuths from Varanasi reached the residence of Rajiv Rai, secretary and spokesman of Samajwadi Party, in Sahadatpur, Mau, on Saturday morning. As per the sources, a group of educational institutions in Karnataka owned by Rajiv Rai, had been under I-T scanner for quite some time.

Moreover, raids were also conducted on the premises of Neetu Yadav, who was SP chief Akhilesh Yadav's OSD, when the Samajwadi Party was in power. Neetu Yadav is said to be a small time electrician who allegedly amassed properties during SP regime and now owns two huge bungalows in posh Gomtinagar area of Lucknow.Searches were also conducted on premises of RCL group owner Manoj Yadav in Mainpuri and Agra.IT department sources said that after UP, another team was sent to Haryana as the leader has links there as well. "We conducted raids in several places in Haryana. He has links in Haryana too. Their premises were raided," said the source.Reportedly, the IT officials have recovered incriminating documents in the raid.The people connected to shell companies, reportedly related to SP leader, were questioned by the IT officials.While the raids in UP were conducted this morning, the raids in Harayan were conducted in the noon. Further probe in the matter is on. Rai said, "This is IT department. I've no criminal background or black money. I help people and government didn't like it. This is a result of that. If you do anything, they'll make a video, register an FIR, you'll fight a case unnecessarily. There is no use let the procedure complete." Meanwhile, reacting to I-T raids on his close aides, SP chief Akhilesh Yadav who had been taking out the seventh leg of his Viajy Rath Yatra in Raebareli on Saturday, attacked the BJP accusing it of misusing agencies on the lines of Congress.Yadav questioned its timing and called it the "fear of defeat in the BJP". He claimed that the saffron party had used the I-T department, a central agency, to terrorise its rivals. "The income tax raids were being conducted at the behest of the ruling party," he said.

Addressing a press conference in Raebareli, Yadav said: "I-T has already arrived, soon ED and CBI will also come to UP. But this is not going to stop the march of Samajwadi Party. Rajeev Rai is our leader. Why are the raids being done now and not earlier? Now, the IT department will contest polls."

"From journalists to farmers to Azam Khan, everyone who has raised a voice against atrocities, will be targeted. The BJP is now following the way shown by Congress by misusing central agencies," said Akhilesh. He added that such raids show the frustration of the BJP.

Yadav further said the ruling party had followed the similar things in Bengal elections and people taught them a lesson. "Here too people know why such raids are being done now. The BJP's time is over now, people are going to elect the Samajwadi Party government in the next elections," added Yadav.

Similarly, Income Tax department is also conducting searches at the residences of Jainendra Yadav, reportedly a close aide of Akhilesh Yadav, in Lucknow and RCL Group promoter Manoj Yadav.

Omicron variant spread to 89 countries, cases doubling in 3 days: WHO

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The hyper mutated Omicron variant of Covid-19 has now spread to about 89 countries, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Saturday.

Omicron is a highly divergent variant with a high number of mutations, including 26-32 in the spike protein, some of which are concerning and may be associated with immune escape potential and higher transmissibility. "As of December 16, 2021, the Omicron variant has been identified in 89 countries across all six WHO regions," the WHO said in its latest update. It added that there is "consistent evidence" Omicron will soon outpace Delta where community transmission occurs.

It is because "Omicron is spreading significantly faster than the Delta variant in countries with documented community transmission, with a doubling time between 1.5-3 days", WHO said.

The WHO also noted it is uncertain whether the observed rapid growth rate can be attributed to immune evasion, intrinsic increased transmissibility or a combination of both. Moreover, on severity of Omicron, the UN health body stated that the data is "still limited".

However, hospitalisations in the UK and South Africa due to the variant continue to rise, and given rapidly increasing case counts, it is possible that many healthcare systems may become quickly overwhelmed.

Preliminary data suggest that there is a reduction in neutralising titres against Omicron in those who have received a primary vaccination series or in those who have had prior SARS-CoV-2 infection, which may suggest a level of immune evasion. "There is still limited available data, and no peer-reviewed evidence, on vaccine efficacy or effectiveness to date for Omicron," the WHO said.Meanwhile, preliminary findings from South Africa, the US and the UK and even China on Covid vaccines such as Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson and Johnson, AstraZeneca as well as Sinovac have shown vaccine ineffectiveness with two doses. However, a booster dose has shown to be much effective.

Drone along India-Pakistan border shot down

CHANDIGARH | Agencies

The Border Security Force (BSF) on Saturday said a drone along the India-Pakistan border has been shot down in Punjab's Ferozepur area.

"The Chinese-made drone was detected and downed on Friday around 11.10 p.m. near the Wan border post in the Ferozepur sector," the BSF said in a tweet.

The black colour flying object was shot at a distance of about 300 metres from the international border and 150 metres from the border fence, it said.

Police investigations indicate that several Pakistan-based terrorist groups are engaged in smuggling weapons into India.

The recent recoveries have exposed that these outfits had managed to acquire the capacity to deliver various types of terrorist and communication hardware over drones, said a police official.

The state government has expressed concern over the movement of large sized drones from across the Indo-Pak border to the Union Home Ministry.It was pointed out that acquisition of such capacity and skills by Jihadi and pro-Khalistani terrorist outfits in deployment of drones had serious implications for national security, especially for security of vital installations, security of public meetings and events and highly threatened protectees.

Punjab shares a 553 km barbed-wire fenced international border with Pakistan which is under the vigil of nearly 135 BSF battalions. The drug network also operates along the Afghanistan-Pakistan-India route.

'This is my home,' Rahul Gandhi in Amethi for 2nd time after 2019 loss

AMETHI | Agencies

Amid rousing welcome by party workers, senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi after a long time on Saturday reached Amethi, where he was defeated in the 2019 general elections, and participated in a march of Pratigya Yatra along with his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. Rahul Gandhi said, this is his home, and no one can force him to go out of here.

"A few days ago Priyanka came to me and told me to come to Lucknow. I told her that I want to go to my home -- Amethi first before going to Lucknow. No one can separate me from Amethi," Rahul Gandhi said. He said he first fought elections in 2004 from here. He told people that it is they who taught politics to him. "Therefore, I have come here to express my gratitude," Rahul Gandhi said. "Two biggest issues the country facing today are -- unemployment and inflation. Neither the Chief Minister nor the Prime Minister has any answer to this," Rahul Gandhi said."A few days ago, you must have seen the Prime Minister was taking a dip in Ganga. But the Prime Minister will not tell the country why jobs are scant. Why are the youth of our country not getting employment?" Rahul Gandhi further said.He said, he has come here to explain to the people that the youth are the future of the country. "I am telling you what PM Modi will not tell you. It is the small businessmen, middle class shopkeepers who give employment in this country, but PM Modi has handed over the country to his two-three capitalist friends. You see, he brought three farm laws. After a year, the Prime Minister apologized and said that he made a mistake and all three laws were withdrawn," Rahul Gandhi said. Later, in a tweet, Rahul Gandhi said: "The streets of Amethi are the same, but there is anger in the eyes of people against the government. There is still a place for me in the hearts. We are still one, against injustice!"

TN launches free treatment for road accident victims for first 48 hours

CHENNAI | Agencies

Saturday launched the 'Innuyir Kaappom' scheme with an aim to save accident victims during the golden hour.

Under the scheme, the state government will bear the medical treatment expenses of road accident victims during the first 48 hours of the accident.

The scheme that offers 81 recognised life saving procedures worth up to Rs 1 lakh will cover victims of road accidents in Tamil Nadu.

The road accident victims can be from Tamil Nadu or from other places, including foreign countries, but the accidents should have happened in the state.

The scheme is being implemented in 609 hospitals - both government and private. In case the road accident victim continues to be unstable after 48 hours, anyone of the following action could be taken: * If the victim is covered under the Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme (CMCHIS), then treatment in the same hospital can be continued. * If the road accident victim is not covered under the above scheme or any other insurance scheme, then after stabilisation of his/her health condition, the person will be admitted to a government hospital and treated free of cost. * In case the accident victim is not willing to go to a government hospital and is willing to pay for hospitalisation from his/her own pocket or has a health insurance cover, he/she can continue treatment at the same hospital or be shifted to a hospital of his/her choice.

Farmer leader floats political outfit, to contest Punjab polls

Chandigarh: Chaduni on Saturday floated his political outfit and announced to contest the forthcoming Assembly polls in Punjab.

Chaduni, a member of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha, told the media here that the Sanyukt Sangharsh Party would try to contest the polls on all 117 seats.

Saying that the aim of the party is to bring "good people" on the front, Chaduni, who is the Bharatiya Kisan Union chief in Haryana, said the party would be secular and work for the welfare of all sections of society.

But he categorically denied himself contesting the poll.

Forces to remain at LAC, complete disengagement yet to take place: IAF chief

HYDERABAD | Agencies

Indian Air Force Chief Air Chief Marshal V.R. Chaudhari said on Saturday that complete disengagement at the Line of Actual Control with China has not taken place so the force continues to remain deployed at forward locations.

Speaking during Combined Graduation Parade at Air Force Academy Hyderabad, Air Chief Marshal Chaudhari said that the stand-off with China is still there and disengagement has taken place in certain areas, only in Ladakh.

He said that Indian Air Force is prepared to take on any challenge at the borders.

India and China are engaged around 20 months of stand-off at the LAC.

Air Chief Marshal Chaudhari said, "The IAF is on the cusp of transformation into a highly potent Air Force with new inductions like Rafale, Apache, Chinook and a wide variety of SAGW systems."

The IAF chief also said that the induction of Rafale aircraft will be completed by February 2022. He said that out of 36 aircraft, 32 have been delivered. Out of the remaining four, three will arrive on time in February, he said.

Over military chopper crash, the IAF chief said that a Court of Inquiry is on. General Bipin Rawat, his wife Madhulika Rawat and 12 armed forces personnel were killed in the chopper crash at Coonoor in Tamil Nadu on December 8. General Rawat was on his way to Wellington for a lecture. Addressing the young officers, he said that as they graduate and move into an environment that is challenging and technology intensive, the IAF looks upon young and dynamic officers like you to carry forward the rich legacy of professional attitude, aptitude and temperament shown by the predecessors. "To be a good officer, you must have an overall appreciation of the nuances of all branches of IAF. Therefore, the ability to understand working of all branches - be it flying, technical, logistics, accounts or administration, will complement your basic professional knowledge and help you in becoming a thorough professional," he said.

He also stated that as officers, they must develop an understanding of this complex and dynamic world through the study of military history, geo-politics and international affairs.

"This can be possible only if you inculcate good reading habits, in the early years of your service career. The IAF will give you ample opportunities to perform, excel and nurture your professional competence, if you have the will and the fortitude," he said.

About hardships ahead, the IAF Chief explained them that as a military officer they are bound to face certain hardships in their career. "Never allow these hardships and constraints to affect you mentally and physically. There is an old adage, 'when the going gets tough, the tough gets going' - this should be the motto of your career and you should remain physically, emotionally and mentally fit to meet and accept any challenge in life," he added.He questioned them what does the IAF expect from them as officers and commanders?

He replied to it saying: "We expect exceptional professionalism and unquestioned integrity. We expect you to maintain the highest standards of personal conduct and moral values that would reflect the dignity and pride of being in the profession of arms. We expect you to be fair, consistent and selfless while at work, to have compassion and understanding, to have the courage and of course to live up to the values that have been ingrained in you during your training period."

MODI COINS NEW SLOGAN, SAYS UP+YOGI, 'BAHUT HAI UPYOGI'

Shahjahanpur: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday coined a new slogan "UP plus Yogi -- bahut hai upyogi -- U.P.Y.O.G.I." (Uttar Pradesh plus Yogi Adityanath is very useful), ahead of the 2022 Assembly polls in the hindi heartland. Laying the foundation stone for the state's longest 594 km long Ganga Expressway by pressing remote, the Prime Minister said when the whole of UP grows together, the country also progresses.

The Expressway will pass through Meerut, Hapur, Bulandshahr, Amroha, Sambhal, Budaun, Shahjahanpur, Hardoi, Unnao, Rae Bareli, Pratapgarh and Prayagraj.

Focus of the double engine government is the development of the state, he asserted. "With the mantra of Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas and Sabka Prayas, we are making sincere efforts for the development of UP," he added. A 3.5 km long air strip for assisting emergency take off and landing of Air Force planes will also be constructed on the Expressway in Shahjahanpur. An industrial corridor is also proposed to be built along the Expressway. The Expressway will also give a fillip to multiple sectors including industrial development, trade, agriculture, tourism etc. It will provide a big boost to the socio-economic development of the region.

Attacking the opposition parties, Modi said few parties have problem with work at the heritage sites and development of the country."These people have a problem with the construction of a grand dham of Baba Vishwanath in Kashi, construction of a grand temple of Lord Ram in Ayodhya, cleanliness campaign of Ganga ji. These people questioned the Army's action against the terrorists and vaccine against the coronavirus made by Indian scientists," the Prime Minister said.He recalled the abysmal law and order situation in the state during previous governments and said that it has changed for the better in recent times.

BMC ANNOUNCES NEW GUIDELINES AMID RISING OMICRON CASES

THE MUMBAI CIVIC BODY ALSO WARNED OF STRICT ACTION AGAINST OFFENDERS. BMC COMMISSIONER IQBAL CHAHAL HAS APPEALED PEOPLE TO AVOID GATHERINGS ON CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Due to a rise in the cases of coronavirus due to the highly transmissible Omicron variant, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Saturday urged people to avoid crowding and follow Covid-19 guidelines.

The Mumbai civic body also warned of strict action against offenders. BMC commissioner Iqbal Chahal has appealed people to avoid gatherings on Christmas and New Year.

In a revised guideline, the BMC has said that squads will be deployed at ward level to take action against violators. It also reiterated adhering to Covid-19 rules during weddings and other ceremonies.

The city civic body has appealed people to adhere to rules in hotels, restaurants, cinemas, and shopping malls. In its revised guidelines, the BMC said that in closed spaces, people upto 50% capacity allowed while in open spaces, people upto 25% capacity allowed. If a gathering with over 1,000 people is planned, prior permission of Local Disaster Management Authority is must.

"Use a mask properly, get fully vaccinated. A new variant of the COVID-19 virus called Omicron is spreading rapidly around the world, putting a strain on the health system. Despite repeated appeals by the government and administration to prevent a probable third wave, it has been observed that guidelines are not being followed properly in most places, especially in wedding functions and other ceremonies," Chahal said."Those violating COVID-19 rules will be dealt with severely by civic ward level teams as well as the police," the BMC chief said, adding that the outbreak situation in the metropolis was under control at present due to the cooperation of citizens as well as the excellent management and speed of the vaccination drive.The spread of Omicron had once again forced several nations to impose lockdown and other prohibitory measures, and the Union and state governments were continuously asking people to be vigilant to prevent a similar situation in India, he said.

In a veiled reference to Bollywood parties amid reports that some actors had contracted the virus, Chahal said celebrities and eminent personalities who have an influence on society, must act accordingly and be aware of issues.

The BMC chief said guidelines issued by the Maharashtra government on November 27 as well as Mumbai police notifications warning of action against violators under IPC and Epidemic Diseases Act must be followed strictly by people.

"In the near future, the risk of COVID-19 virus spread may increase if ceremonies and functions are held on the occasion of Christmas and New Year. There is need to curb the growing crowd at weddings and other ceremonies. Moreover, hotels, restaurants and other public establishments have also found to be flouting Covid-19 norms," he said, and asked all stakeholders to adhere to guidelines strictly.Chahal asked citizens to get both doses of the coronavirus vaccine as quickly as possible, warning that action will be taken if staff functioning at public places or establishments as well as attendees at events, ceremonies are found to be not fully vaccinated as it is must.

Is Modi scared or ashamed to utter Indira Gandhi's name, asks Shiv Sena

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a sharp attack, the Shiv Sena on Saturday pointedly asked whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi is "scared or ashamed" of uttering the late PM Indira Gandhi's name during the recent 50 years celebrations of the liberation of Bangladesh.

The Sena also took note that President R. N. Kovind visited Dhaka for the victory celebrations but did not even mention the name of Bangladesh's creator, Indira Gandhi there.

"By ignoring Indira in such a manner you can write neither the history of India nor the world. But who will explain this to such narrow-minded rulers of our country. Its an insult to woman-power," the Sena asked in a stinging edit in the party newspapers, 'Saamana' and 'Dopahar Ka Saamana'.

The Sena said its 50 years since the Bangladesh War of 1971 was won by India, and the sacrifices of our brave soldiers was remembered, but Modi "did not show the courtesy" of even making a mention of Indira Gandhi on December 16.

"If Indira Gandhi had not shown guts, Pakistan would never have been taught a lesson of a lifetime. She divided Pakistan into two pieces and effectively avenged the Partition of India in 1947," the edit said.

Even the then leader of Jan Sangh, and later the PM Atal Behari Vajpayee hailed Indira Gandhi as a 'Durga' and the entire world saluted the bravery of Hindustan.

"After Bangladesh, she emerged as a powerful world leader, with a clear warning that if you look at India with crooked eyes, we shall break you into pieces. When she achieved the feat, the current ruler in New Delhi may have been kids in bed," the Sena said lavishing praises on Indira Gandhi's prowess.

Taking another swipe at Modi, the Sena said a ruler can build temples or buildings and clean up a river, "but cannot dismember Pakistan to create a Bangladesh" which only Indira Gandhi had the courage to do.

"Instead of indulging in 'surgical strikes', Indira Gandhi ordered a direct attack by the Indian Army to teach Pakistan a lesson. Even the Indian Airforce and Indian Navy were used, Karachi Port was destroyed," the Sena added.

Finally 90,000 Pakistani soldiers surrendered before India on December 16, 1971, and it was only Indira Gandhi who was the 'power' behind that victory, and nobody could ever attempt a pathetic defeat of Pakistan since then, hence forgetting her is akin to ignoring Mother India.

On the other hand, the Kargil War (1999) took place on Indian soil and to drive out the Pakistani infiltrators, 1,500 of our soldiers were sacrificed in their motherland, "yet we celebrate it as 'Vijay Divasa'," the Sena pointed out.

"Today, the Chinese Army has entered Ladakh and we are unable to push them back, while in 1971, the entire world was stunned by the valour displayed by a Hindu woman who made even the US retreat when it came to help Pakistan."

"The 1971 War bestowed the 'real identity of India' to the world. It was pettiness on the part of the current leaders not to acknowledge the courage of Indira Gandhi. You may have ideological differences with the Congress, but showing hatred towards leaders who built the country is not the sign of a 'true Hindustani'," the Sena said.

"The edits showed how the BJP sought votes in elections by beating the drums of surgical strike, but now China has entered, Nepal, Afghanistan are also our adversaries and the country is surrounded by guns on all four borders.

At such a time, it's the memory of Indira Gandhi's historic victory in the 1971 Bangladesh War that will always serve to inspire," the Sena said.

Maharashtra Govt provides 1 time upper age relaxation for state govt job candidates

Maharashtra government has decided to provide one-time age relaxation for candidates who would be appearing for state government jobs. The decision has been taken keeping in mind the COVID-19 situation during which no exam could be conducted. Details here.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra government would be providing one time upper age limitation for candidates who would be sitting for government jobs. The one-time upper age relaxation would be provided by the government considering the ongoing pandemic because of which recruitment exams could not be conducted. With recruitment exams not being held during the period, several candidates crossed the upper age limit. Thus, a one-time opportunity has been provided to candidates. The decision with regards to the same was taken by the General Administrative Department, Maharashtra. The announcement for the same was made by the official Twitter handle of CMO Maharashtra.

It says, "Chief Minister Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray has given relief to the candidates who have crossed the maximum age limit by appearing for competitive examinations as a one-time special issue as examinations for government service could not be held during the Corona period. The ruling in this regard has been taken by the General Administration Department today."

The announcement made by the government would come as a relief for man candidates. Candidates should further note that the upper age limit relaxations would be applicable for those government job advertisements that would be released till December 31. 2021. Candidates are advised to go through the detailed official notifications released for each post and check necessary details such as age limit, education qualification, and other positions before applying for the posts.

Owing to the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic, no job advertisement was released for state government jobs. A government resolution relating to the relaxation of the upper age limit has already been issued by the government. As per PTI inputs, " The GR stated that candidates who have exceeded the age limit to appear for competitive exams for recruitment in government jobs between March 1, 2020, and December 17, 2021, can apply for vacancies in

Omicron concerns, FII outflows to pull Rupee lower; Likely RBI moves to stem volatility

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Concerns over the new Omicron Covid-19 variant, as well as continued foreign fund outflows will keep Indian rupee subdued during the upcoming week, experts have opined.

Besides, high YoY trade deficit along with new US tapering measures will hamper any appreciation move.

However, the downside will be capped by lower oil prices along with probable RBI interventions.

"On the positive side, falling crude oil prices around $73 per barrel levels and accommodative monetory policy should provide some respite," said Sajal Gupta, Head, Forex and Rates at Edelweiss Securities.

"Historically, some intervention shall be looked upon for any trend reversal in rupee."

The RBI is known to enter the markets via intermediaries to either sell or buy US dollars to keep the rupee in a stable orbit.

"We expect the pair to trade between 75.50 to 76.50 next week with a lower bias for the pair."

Last week, the rupee closed at 76.09 to a USD weakening significantly on a weekly basis.

The Indian rupee has stabilised in the last two sesions this week after hitting lowest level of 20 months.

"Rupee lost ground against dollar precipitiusly in early part of the week amid risk averse sentiments, policy divergence, foreign fund outflows and higher trade deficit numbers. The RBI's policy divergence with Fed weighed on local currency along with higher imports," said Devarsh Vakil, Deputy Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

"Trading volumes are set to decline as forex markets head into the Christmas break. Spot USDINR expected to consolidate between 76.50 to 75.70 before heading higher towards 77."

So far, the foreign institutions have sold over $4 billion worth of equities in this qurter.

Gaurang Somaiya, Forex & Bullion Analyst, Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said: "Next week, on the domestic front no major economic data are expected to be released but FIIs who have been on the sell side if take a pause on the selling could restrict sharp depreciation of the rupee."From the US, except core PCE index no other data is expected to release but now that the Federal Reserve has started to increase its bond tapering program market participants could continue to be positive on the greenback. We expect the USDINR (Spot) to quote in the range of 75.70 and 76.50."

Enraged monkeys kill 250 dogs to take 'revenge' after puppy kills baby monkey

A troop of monkeys has allegedly killed around 250 dogs to take "revenge" after a puppy killed a baby monkey in Majalgaon in the Beed district of Maharashtra.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In a bizarre incident reported from Maharashtra, a group of enraged monkeys has allegedly killed around 250 dogs to take "revenge." The incident was reported from Majalgaon in the Beed district of the state.

The monkeys have been on a rampage of killing puppies since last month. They dragged the canines to the top of buildings and trees, and then dropped them.

The residents of the village contacted the forest department about the incident and requested them to catch the monkeys in the area. The forest department officials came one day but left after they failed to catch even a single monkey, News 18 reported. The puppy of Sitaram Naibal, a resident of the village, was also taken away by a monkey about a fortnight ago, Lokmat reported. As the puppy started screaming, Naibal was able to rescue his pet. Naibal broke his leg to save the dog and is currently undergoing treatment.

According to the villagers, the monkeys are taking revenge. It all began when some dogs killed a baby monkey after which the monkeys started killing the dogs in the area in the horrific manner, villagers said.The locals say that there are hardly any dogs left in the village but the monkeys have not stopped. The primates have started targetting school-going children, according to the report. The attacks have created panic among the residents of the village. In September, another similar incident of a monkey doing something unexpected was reported from Karnataka. A monkey in the neighbourhood of Kottigehara village of Chikkamagalur district travelled 22 kilometres to take 'revenge' from the villagers. The monkey had started to roam in the school premises after which villagers alerted the forest department. It took a group of more than 30 people to trap the monkey after three hours. The monkey was released in Balur forest, around 22 kilometres away from the village.

But the monkey jumped into a truck that was passing by a road near the forest and somehow managed to reach the village in less than a week. The monkey was caught for the second time and released deep inside the forest.

Maha detects 8 more Omicron cases, tally shoots up to 40

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Spelling fresh concerns, Maharashtra recorded 8 new cases of the Covid-19 variant Omicron, taking the state's tally to 40 now, health officials said here on Friday.

The new cases - all males, fully vaccinated, in the age group of 29-45 - comprise six from Pune, and one each in Mumbai and Thane.

Of the new cases, four had travelled to Dubai, one to the US and one to Nigeria, while two are the close contacts of the Dubai returnees who were tested positive in the first week of December.

While seven are asymptomatic, one has exhibited mild symptoms and two are hospitalised, with efforts on toAtrack the contacts of all the infectees.Intensive surveillance of passengers arriving at the three international airports - Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur - is currently underway since December 1.

A total of 16,617 travellers have landed here from the "high risk" countries of which 45 have tested positive and 16 from other countries, with all their reports sent for genomic sequencing to confirm if they are afflicted by Omicron, said the officials.

Besides, 525 samples from field surveys conducted since November 1 have been sent for genomic sequencing with the results of 79 awaited, said Health Department officials.

Of the Omicron spread in the state, Mumbai accounts for 14 cases, 18 in Pune, two each in Thane and Osmanabad, and one each in Nagpur, Palghar, Latur and Buldhana.

Meeting held on Jal Jeevan Mission and Ken-Betwa Link Project

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION WILL BE ENCOURAGED IN JAL JEEVAN MISSION: CHIEF MINISTER

- Anganwadi and schools should be provided tap connection on priority
- Ensure third party appraisal of projects by technically skilled and competent groups: Union Minister of State for Jal Shakti and Food Processing, Industries Prahlad Patel

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that public participation would be encouraged by organizing Jal Sammelan in Jal Jeevan Mission. A campaign will be launched with the aim of developing a sense of responsibility among the people for depositing water charges in villages. In the mission, every effort will be made to implement canal irrigation for irrigation in Panna, Damoh area. There should be no hurry to accomplish the goal. Where there is a certified source of ground water, the system of water supply should be ensured in the mission. The ground water level in Bundelkhand region is receding fast. There is a need to focus more on group schemes in this area. Chouhan was addressing a meeting organized on Jal Jeevan Mission and Ken Betwa link at Mantralaya in the presence of Union Minister of State for Jal Shakti and Food Processing, Industries Prahlad Patel, Union Minister of State for Jal Shakti and Tribal Affairs Vishweshwar Tudu and State's Minister of State for Public Health Engineering Brijendra Singh Yadav. Water Resources Minister Tulsi Silawat took part virtually in the meeting. Chouhan said that under Jal Jeevan Mission, tap connections should be made available to Anganwadis and schools on priority basis. For the purpose of providing water from tap, if the pipeline is weak, then the connection of the scheme should not be made with those pipelines. A whole new pipeline should be laid in place of the old weak pipelines. With this, the benefits of the new scheme will be available equally to all the people of the settlement. Chouhan informed that no work was done in the Jal Jeevan Mission during the previous government. After that, the work of Jal Jeevan Mission has been affected as a result of dealing with the challenge of Corona. Despite these circumstances, the progress of Jal Jeevan Mission in the state is satisfactory.

Patel said that third party evaluation of all projects must be done. The task of evaluation should be entrusted to technically skilled and competent groups and individuals. Planning and implementing the Jal Jeevan Mission with the beneficiaries will lead to success in providing irrigation facility in maximum area and drinking water facility in more settlements. The innovations taking place in Malwa and Nimar region in this regard should be followed in other parts of the state also.

It was informed in the meeting that 8.11 lakh hectares of annual irrigation facility will be available to Madhya Pradesh under Ken-Betwa link project. In Ken-Cachar area of the state, 18 tehsils and 1376 villages will get irrigation and drinking water facility. In Betwa-Cachar area, 10 tehsils and 673 villages will get irrigation and drinking water facility. Under the Jal Jeevan Mission, tap water has been provided to 26 lakh 88 thousand families since May-2020 under the group Nal-Jal Yojana. Drinking water testing laboratories of all districts are NABL certified to provide quality water.

Panchayat Election:

ELECTION PROCESS WILL CONTINUE EXCEPT FOR POSTS RESERVED FOR OBC

Bhopal: Commissioner State Election Commission Basant Pratap Singh has informed that in compliance with the order passed by the Supreme Court, under the programme issued by the Madhya Pradesh State Election Commission for the general election of three-tier panchayats for the year 2021-22, the election process for the posts of Panch, Sarpanch, Janpad Panchayat and Zilla Panchayat members reserved for the Other Backward Classes has been postponed. As per the decision of the Supreme Court, the process of election to other posts will continue as per the schedule announced by the State Election Commission.

Singh has said that today a meeting of officers was organised to consider the decision of the Supreme Court. In the meeting, the decision given by the Supreme Court in the past in K Krishnamurthy and Vikas Kishan Rao Gawali case was also studied. Singh said that he is writing a letter to the state government to inform the commission within a week about the re-notification of the posts reserved for the OBCs as per the decision of the Supreme Court, so that elections are held at these places as soon as possible. He said that the state government has the right to take action regarding reservation.

Singh has said that the District Election Officers have been directed to keep the nomination papers submitted till December 17, 2021 by the OBC candidates for the posts reserved for them. It is noteworthy that 155 posts of District Panchayat members, 1273 of Janpad Panchayat members, 4058 of Sarpanch and 64 thousand 353 posts of Panch are reserved for Other Backward Classes in the state.

In the meeting, Secretary State Election Commission BS Jamod, OSD Durg Vijay Singh and other officers were present.

CM Chouhan honoured with "India Today State of the States Conclave-2021" Award

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan was presented the "Most Improved Big State in Agriculture" award on behalf of India Today Group at the "India Today State of the States Conclave-2021" by Senior Associate Editor of India Today Madhya Pradesh-Chhattisgarh Rahul Noronha at the residence office today.

It is noteworthy that every year the states are rewarded in two categories in the agriculture sector by India Today. These categories are Overall Best and Most Improved State in Agriculture. Madhya Pradesh has been given this award for its efforts towards adopting latest technologies for increasing income from agriculture and making mandi (market) facilities accessible and reachable to the farmers.

Madhya Pradesh has received this award for the fourth time in a row in the Most Improved Big State in Agriculture. It is worth mentioning that for increasing agricultural production in Madhya Pradesh, along with various incentive schemes, procurement of agricultural produce has been ensured at the minimum support price. Besides, special efforts are being made on value addition while working towards increasing the income of the farmers from agriculture. The services of experts have been taken in order to provide necessary advice for value addition in respect of seven major crops. The procurement process has also been simplified in the state through the app. Grants are being made available to the farmers in the state for the latest tools of agriculture.

CM offered garland on the birth anniversary of Guru Ghasidas

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan paid homage to Guru Ghasidas on his birth anniversary. Chouhan offered floral tributes by garlanding his portrait in the auditorium at his residence office. Guru Ghasidas is considered the founder of Satnam Panth. Since childhood, he was opposed to animal sacrifice and other evil practices prevalent in the society. Guru Ghasidas made an incomparable contribution in providing a new direction to the society.

Guru Ghasidas was born on December 18, 1756 in Giraud village in Raipur district, which is now in the state of Chhattisgarh. Ghasidas ji had an unwavering faith in truth. Guru Ghasidas has lakhs of followers. The seven teachings of Ghasidas ji are revered as the seven principles of the Satnam Panth. Guru ji infused self-confidence and power to fight injustice among the helpless people of the society. He believed that every person in the society has socially equal status. Do not make distinction between human beings, religion of all human beings is one are his teachings. Guru Ghasidas passed away in 1850.

CM CONGRATULATES ON SUCCESSFUL TEST OF AGNI-P

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has congratulated the scientists, officers and employees of DRDO on the successful flight test of Agni-P, a new generation advanced missile of Agni series equipped with latest technology.

It is noteworthy that the Agni-P missile has the ability to hit its target from one to two kilometers. It is also capable of carrying nuclear bombs. Chouhan has tweeted- "This is an important step towards self-reliance in the indigenous defence capability sector. This test has increased India's military might."

CM planted saplings of Shami, Bel Patra and Khejri in Smart Garden

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted saplings of Shami, Belpatra and Khejri in Smart Garden today. Representatives of Shaheed Amrita Devi Vishnoi Environmental Protection Organisation also planted saplings. Shaheed Amrita Devi Vishnoi Environmental Protection Organisation and All India Bishnoi Mahasabha plant saplings every year all over India. The organisation is active in Harda, Gadarwara, Jabalpur, Khategaon of Madhya Pradesh. It is noteworthy that in the year 1730, 363 Bishnois including Amrita Devi Bishnoi were martyred in Khejadli district Jodhpur Rajasthan for saving the green trees of Khejri.

Chouhan honoured the President of All India Vishnoi Mahasabha, Devendra Vishnoi of Rajasthan by presenting a shawl. Chouhan plants trees daily with the organisations engaged in the activities of tree plantation and environment protection.The Shami planted today is considered very beneficial from the point of view of Ayurveda. Also, the use of Samidhas (wood) of Shami tree in yagyas is considered auspicious. Belpatra is also called Bilva tree. Research has found information about its various medicinal properties. Bel leaves are also offered to Lord Shiva with reverence. The wood of Khejri is strong, which is used for making furniture. The plough is made from its root. Vegetable is made from its pods, which is called 'Sangri.'

Students should play an important role in nation building: Governor

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Governor Mangubhai Patel has said that students have an important role in nation building. It is the responsibility of the professors to inculcate service and values in students and try to make them ideal students and citizens. Governor Patel said that education play an important role in making ideal citizens. Science, technology, employment as well as moral values have been included in the new education policy. University should discharge social responsibilities along with education.

Patel was addressing the first convocation of Pt. Shambhunath Shukla University at Shahdol. He said that the students studying in universities should follow the path of truth, follow dharma, get quality education and use their knowledge in study and research. Students should make their village, state and country proud, they must not do any such work which would bring bad name to their motherland. Governor said that after the award of medals to meritorious students in the university, their social responsibility and their responsibility towards the nation has increased further. He said that I do not only hope but also believe that the students passing out from this university will earn money and use their knowledge in the interest of society. Patel said that the Sickle Cell disease in tribal areas is a challenge for everyone. He said that universities should play an important role in creating awareness about Sickle Cell disease and its control. He said that university professors should also participate in creating awareness about this disease. All universities should adopt 5 villages each and make people aware of Sickle Cell disease and make continuous efforts to prevent the disease. This is a hereditary disease and everyone needs to work together to eradicate it. He said that the diagnosis of Sickle Cell should be done on a large scale, so that everyone is aware about the disease and its eradication can also be possible. In-charge of Shahdol district and Backward Classes and Minorities Welfare (Independent Charge), Minister of State for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi Nomadic, Tribal Welfare, Panchayat and Rural Development, Ramkhelawan Patel said that Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has done everything for the tribal zone Shahdol division, in this the establishment of universities, medical colleges and engineering colleges is prominent. He said that citizens will have to make efforts at every level for an Atmanirbhar Madhya Pradesh. Minister Patel also congratulated the students on getting gold medals in the convocation.Patel asked the students to name the President, Prime Minister and the Father of the Nation, to which the students replied. Governor said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given the slogan 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas.' He said that it was great to be here. Here 300 girls are getting education in 5 hostels together. With everyone's cooperation, the country is moving on the path of progress. When PM Modi was the Chief Minister of Gujarat, he gave the slogan of 'Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao.' He inaugurated the grand corridor of Baba Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi, in which thousands of people can walk together.

BJP announces 36-member election management panel

Team Absolute | Bhopal

State BJP on Friday held its first meeting related to the panchayat polls which was headed by chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, attended by party national joint organisational general secretary Shiv Prakash, state BJP president , BJP national secretary Om Prakash Dhurve, state party organisational general secretary Suhas Bhagat and co-organisational general secretary Hitanand Sharma.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, VD Shara said, "We called a meeting for the rural panchayat elections.

Rural local body elections are not contested on symbols but in our democracy with the panchayati raj system working in the grassroots, these polls are considered extremely important." Sharma argued that in the panchayat polls, those persons are elected who work for local development. "A large number of women contest the elections and every section including the SC/ST, OBCs have a major role in the elections. Every section must also have their representation electing those who work dedicatedly for their villages," the state BJP chief said. "As a party BJP works till the grassroots so we have prominent presence in the villages. We want that our good workers should get elected and we will give strength to play their role in the development of the rural areas," he said.On Friday, state BJP also announced its Panchayat committee with 36 members. "We believe that in the panchayati raj system, BJP will play a prominent role. So we constituted a management committee for the upcoming polls," VD Sharma added. The committee includes several ministers, including Kamal Patel, Mahendra Singh Sisodia, Govind Singh Rajput, Arvind Bhadoria. There are also former ministers Harishankar Khatik, Rampal Singh, Rajendra Shukla, Sanjay Pathak, Lalita Yadav and Paras Jain.

न्यायालय अपर जिला दण्डाधिकारी पवन जैन जिला इन्दौर

क्रमांक/1150/अकरी–4/2021 इन्दौर दिनांक 08 दिसंबर 2021

प्रेषिती

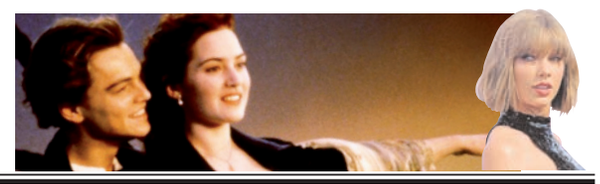
(1) गणेश माली पिता श्री पिता मंगीलाल माली

(2) श्रीमती सीमा मनसुरिया

(3) बाबूलाल मनसुरिया पता प्रकोष्ठ नं. 303 थर्ड फ्लोर शांति ऐवेन्यु–3 प्लाट नंबर 339 श्री कृष्णा ऐवेन्यु कालोनी ग्राम लिम्बोदी इंदौर अन्य पता–फ्लेट नंबर 97 जाल इन्क्लेव मिडराइज अपार्टमेंट सिल्वर स्प्रींग इंदौर विषय प्रतिभूतिकरण एवं वित्तीय आस्तियों का पुर्नगठन एवं प्रतिभूतिहित प्रवर्तन अधिनियम 2002 के तहत बकाया रकम बसूली हेतु प्रस्तुत प्रकरण में उपस्थित बाबद सूचना आवेदक वित्तिय संस्थान प्राधिकृत अधिकारी डी.सी. बी. लिमिटेड पता 305 के के बाफना आर्केड जंजीर वाला चौराहा इंदौर द्वारा निवेदन किया गया है कि आपके द्वारा बकाया ऋण एवं ब्याज नही चुकाने के कारण वित्तीय अस्तियों का प्रतिभूतिकरण एवं पुनर्गठन और प्रतिभूति हित प्रवर्तन अधिनियम 2002 के अतर्गत प्रतिभूति के रूप में रखी गई सम्पत्ति का कब्जा दिलाया जावे। उक्त मामले में आपको सूचित किया जाता है कि मामले की सुनवाई दिनांक 21.12.2021 को दोपहर 3.00 बजे (प्रशासनिक संकुल के कक्ष क्रमांक–109) पर होगी। इस संबंध में आप अपना जबाब व सम्पूर्ण दस्तावेजी सहित नियत दिनांक को उपस्थित रहे। अनुपस्थिति की दिशा में प्रकरण में एक पक्षीय कार्यवाही की जावेगी।

पवन जैन
अपर कलेक्टर जिला इंदौर

The fifth edition of 'Ghoom Re Ghoomar' was celebrated with great fanfare by young women enthusiasts at Bhojpur Club Bhopal on Saturday, 18th December, 2021.



'The door is closed and she isn't going back'

Sarah Jayne Dunn 'turns down the chance to return to Hollyoaks' after she was sacked over her racy OnlyFans account

London | Agencies

Sarah Jayne Dunn has reportedly turned down the opportunity to return to Hollyoaks after she was sacked from the soap over her OnlyFans account, reports dailymail.co.uk.

According to reports, the actress, 40, has turned her back on the show, despite bosses leaving the door open for her after not killing off her character of 25 years, Mandy Richardson.

Speaking to The Sun, a source said the former soap star has no desire to return, after walking away from the show after being given an ultimatum over the X-rated site.

They said: 'Now Sarah has had some breathing space following the row she has decided she definitely doesn't want to go back.

'Her OnlyFans account is massive and she is in the top one percent of worldwide creators on the platform. Sarah's fans are loving it and so is she. 'The door is closed as far as she is concerned and she will not be going back.'The mum-of-three explained her decision to join the 18+ site as: 'I'm simply moving my racier images to another platform.'This is a decision I've thought long and hard about.

'Rust' investigators obtain warrant to search Alec Baldwin's phone

Los Angeles | Agencies

The Santa Fe Sheriff's Office obtained a warrant to search Hollywood star Alec Baldwin's mobile phone, as they continue to investigate the fatal shooting on the New Mexico set of Western movie 'Rust'.

In an affidavit attached to the warrant, Detective Alexandria Hancock said investigators are seeking evidence that may help complete a full investigation.

Hancock stated that she had asked Baldwin and his attorney to voluntarily turn over the phone, and she was told to get a warrant, reports variety.com.

Investigators are piecing together the events that led up to the shooting of cinematographer Halyna utchins on October 21.

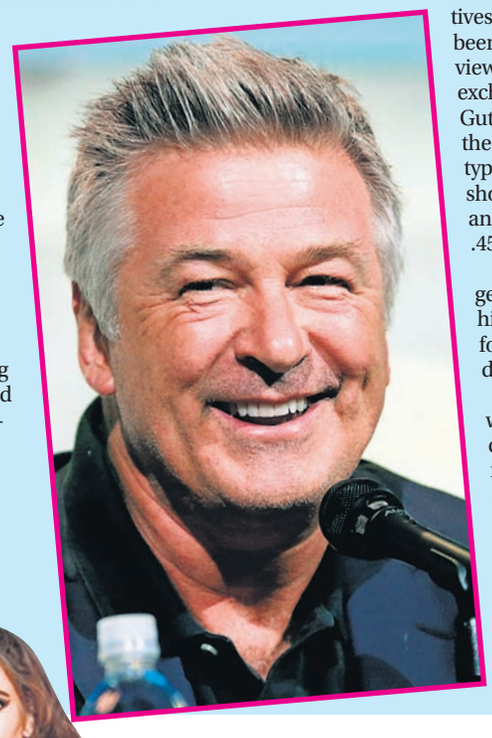
In the affidavit, Hancock said she had conducted a brief search of Hutchin's phone, and found conversations about the production dating back to July 14.

The affidavit includes details of Baldwin's initial interview with Sheriff's detectives, which had not previously been made public.In the interview, Baldwin stated that he had exchanged emails with Hannah Gutierrez Reed, the armorer on the production, about what type of gun to use. She had showed him various options, and he had selected the Colt .45 he was to use in the film.

"He said he requested a bigger gun, and she also showed him different styles of knives for the production," the affidavit states.

"Alec was shown a Colt with a brown handle, and a cherry handle, and he ultimately chose the one with the brown handle."

Two weeks ago, in an interview with ABC's George Stephanopoulos, Baldwin said he had been told "it's highly unlikely that I would be charged with anything criminally."



Alejandro Brugues to adapt and direct 'The Devil Takes You Home'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Cuban filmmaker Alejandro Brugues, who is known for 'The Last Will' and 'Testament of Charles Abernathy', is all set to direct and adapt the Gabino Iglesias novel 'The Devil Takes You Home'.

The rights to the novel were secured by Sony in a competitive situation and the project is currently in its early stages with Alex Rosario serving as the executive producer on the project at Sony, reports Deadline.

Iglesias' novel is a thriller, which follows the story of Mario who unwillingly becomes a hitman to cover his family's bills and his daughter's medical tab. Things take a turn for the worse when he is presented with a tempting offer that will either pull him out of poverty forever or put a bullet in the back of his skull.

Iglesias is a writer, journalist, professor, and literary critic, who has critically-acclaimed and award-winning novels such as 'Zero Saints' and 'Coyote Songs' to his credit. The novels racked up nominations for the Bram Stoker Award, the Locus Award and the Wonderland Book Award. 'Coyote Songs' clinched the Wonderland Book Award.

Brugues' feature directing credits include the segment 'The Thing in the Woods', 'Juan of the Dead' and 'Personal Belongings'.

Two month's romance

London | Agencies

Megan Barton-Hanson has split from James Lock - just two months after the pair went public with their new romance.

The former Love Island star, 27, and TOWIE bad boy, 35, ended their brief relationship a week after returning from a Christmas city break in New York, where they struggled to get on.

A source told MailOnline that Megan and James have argued on several occasions throughout their romance, including at last month's Gay Times Honours after making their first red carpet appearance together, reports dailymail.co.uk.

Megan Barton-Hanson and James Lock SPLIT after two-month romance - weeks after the Love Island star admitted she fell for the TOWIE bad boy due to his 'intelligence'

An insider said: 'Megan's relationship with James hasn't worked despite her being hopeful after he surprised during the early days of them dating.

'As time has gone on, they have argued more and the holiday they shared together in New York last week didn't go at all to plan. 'James spent Thursday night partying with friends and well and truly enjoying his single status again.'

'The Hitman's Wife's Bodyguard': Salma Hayek keeps you pining for more

FILM REVIEW

BY TROY RIBEIRO

(Streaming on Lionsgate Play)

Direction: Patrick Hughes

Cast: Ryan Reynolds, Samuel L. Jackson, Salma Hayek, Antonio Banderas, Morgan Freeman, Richard E. Grant, Frank Grillo, Caroline Goodall, Rebecca Front.

Duration: 112 minutes

Ratings: * (three stars)**

This innocuously fun film that is moderately violent, vulgar, and amusing is a sequel to 2017's 'The Hitman's Bodyguard'. It is not a great film, but surely, it is a good entertainer.

The film begins with Michael Bryce (Ryan Reynolds) still brooding over losing his triple-A status from the international bodyguard review board. Michael, who is undergoing therapy, takes his therapist's advice seriously of putting his guns away for a while and taking a restful sabbatical.

All out of the blue, while he is holidaying at a resort in Italy, Sonia Kincaid (Salma Hayek), the eponymous wife, who is desperate to have a baby, lands at the resort with guns literally blazing with a plan to kidnap Michael so that he could assist her with rescuing her husband, "The Hitman" Darius Kincaid (Samuel L. Jackson) who has been kidnapped.

Despite being successful in her mission of kidnapping Michael and reuniting with her husband, her baby-making plan is hijacked by Interpol Agent Bobby O'Neill (Frank Grillo). Bobby forces the trio to track down a device possessed by Aristotle (Antonio Banderas), a criminal who intends to destroy Europe as revenge for sanctions on the Greek economy.

This film is Salma Hayek's canvas, and it is only her character that has any depth or maximum screen time. She is loud and boisterous and plays her character to perfection, her character balances on a double-edged sword. She is brash, yet considerate and loving. At one point, she is unapologetic as a con artiste or about her sexuality but yet passionate about starting a family despite all odds.

She does not hesitate to prioritise her desires, a trait that irritates Bryce yet is generous and giving. She cares about Bryce but shows it in her peculiar way. Every time she is on screen, kicking butt, cussing, or abusing, it leaves you wanting more.

Apart from Sonia, the other female characters that pop up include a mercenary, an Interpol agent, the therapist, and a translator, but rarely do they share the same screen space and they are just all obligatory.

Ryan Reynolds is a great actor with fabulous comic timings, and he keeps you in splits with this stupid dumb-wit act every time. The extra added twist of having Morgan Freeman as Bryce's dad adds a solid punch to the father-son bond they share.

Samuel L. Jackson has a charm of his own, and he shares odd but fabulous chemistry with Salma Hayek.

Antonio Banderas is wasted in a minuscule role as Aristotle Papdopolous.

Mounted with brilliant production values and shot across various cities of the world the film boasts of well-choreographed action sequences that include vehicular stunts and car chases, breathless fisticuffs, and fights on yachts, but unfortunately, they all appear like oft-seen generic action sequences.

Overall, 'The Hitman's Wife's Bodyguard' is a well-meaning and enjoyable film.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY

Maya Jama

ASHES, 2ND TEST

AUSTRALIA IN FIRM CONTROL WITH A LEAD OF 282 RUNS AGAINST ENGLAND

Adelaide | Agencies

Brief scores

Australia 473/9 dec in 150.4 overs and 54/1 in 17 overs (Marcus Harris 21 not out) lead England 236 all out in 84.1 overs (Dawid Malan 80, Joe Root 62, Mitchell Starc 4/37, Nathan Lyon 3/58) by 282 runs.

Australia bounced back from a wicketless first session to the end of day three of the second Ashes Test in firm control at the Adelaide Oval. After the bowlers skittled out England for 236, Australia refused to enforce the follow-on and batted to be 45/1 in 17 overs at stumps, leading by 282 runs.

After not enforcing the follow-on, David Warner and Marcus Harris were tasked with seeing off the tricky period. The duo had managed to do so but with three overs left for stumps, confusion between the left-handed openers resulted in Warner being run out for 13. Harris and nightwatchman Michael Neser ensured that Australia didn't lose any other wicket. The day largely belonged to Australia's experienced bowlers, Mitchell Starc and Nathan Lyon. The duo shared seven wickets between themselves as the tourists lost the last eight batsmen for 86 runs to be bundled out for 236, especially post a 138-run between Joe Root and Dawid Malan, which had briefly raised England's hopes of making a comeback in the match before an unsurprising batting slide resurfaced. Resuming from 17/2, Malan brought up his ninth Test half-century with a pull to backward square-leg for a single against Neser. Root and Malan then brought up their second 100-run partnership for the third wicket in the Ashes. It was the eleventh-century stand for England in Test cricket this year, nine of which have involved Root. The England captain then reached his 52nd Test half-century with a glanced four through fine leg.

After England went on dinner break with no loss of wickets and 123 runs in the session, Australia began the second session strongly as Lyon and Cameron Green delivered six straight maidens. Green, who troubled Joe Root with two cracking deliveries, broke the 138-run stand, off 237 balls, as the England captain poked outside the off-stump, only for the ball to take a healthy edge to first slip. Root's dismissal dashed hopes of him getting his first Test century in Australia and triggered an English wobble. Malan tried to cut Starc for the second time in successive balls but the edge flew straight to Steve Smith at first slip. Ollie Pope survived an lbw call on DRS against Lyon but two balls later, he advanced and flicked straight to Marnus Labuschagne at short leg off Lyon.

Opener KL Rahul named vice-captain for Test series against South Africa

Johannesburg | Agencies

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announced on Saturday that the national selectors have named opener KL Rahul as the vice-captain of the team for the three-match Test series against South Africa.

Rahul's appointment to the post comes after Rohit Sharma, promoted to be Virat Kohli's deputy, was ruled out of the series due to a left hamstring injury sustained in a practice session in Mumbai. Sharma had earlier replaced Ajinkya Rahane as the vice-captain in Tests.

"The All-India Senior selection committee has named KL Rahul as vice-captain for the upcoming 3-match Test series against South Africa. KL Rahul replaces Rohit Sharma as vice-captain, who was ruled out of the Test series owing to a hamstring injury," said a release from BCCI.

The 29-year-old Rahul, who debuted in Test cricket in 2014, has played 40 matches so far and scored 2321 runs at an average of 35.16 with six centuries and 12 half-centuries against his name. The move also means that Rahul, one of the few all-format players in the current Indian team set-up, is being looked at as a long-term leader in the future.

Rahul had captained Punjab Kings in IPL 2020 and 2021 and is highly tipped to take a similar role if the Lucknow franchise picks him via the draft ahead of IPL 2022 auctions.

India have commenced their practice sessions in South Africa. The three-match Test series will start from December 26 to 30 in Centurion, followed by the second match in Johannesburg from January 3 to 7, and ends with the third and final Test in Cape Town from January 11 to 15. India are yet to win a Test series in South Africa.

India's Test squad: *Virat Kohli (Captain), KL Rahul (vice-captain), Mayank Agarwal, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Priyank Panchal, Shreyas Iyer, Hanuma Vihari, Rishabh Pant (wicket-keeper), Wriddhiman Saha (wicket-keeper), Ravichandran Ashwin, Jayant Yadav, Ishant Sharma, Mohammed Shami, Umesh Yadav, Jasprit Bumrah, Shardul Thakur and Mohammed Siraj*

Bayern ease past struggling Wolfsburg in Bundesliga

Berlin | Agencies

Reigning champions Bayern Munich secured their fifth straight win in the Bundesliga after beating harmless 'Wolves' 4-0 at the curtain raiser of the 17th round here.

The German record champions started perfectly on home soil late on Friday evening as Wolfsburg's goalkeeper Koen Casteels parried Serge Gnabry's 25-metre hammer into the path of Thomas Muller, who made no mistake to tap home his 134th goal in his 400th Bundesliga appearance from very close in the seventh minute.

Wolfsburg should have restored parity with the next attack, but Bayern's goalkeeper Manuel Neuer denied Wout Weghorst the equaliser following a one-on-one, Xinhua reports. Bayern remained a menace and squandered several chances to double their advantage as Robert Lewandowski pulled a rebound over the goal before Jamal Musiala missed from promising position.

Wolfsburg created another presentable chance before the half time, but Weghorst couldn't control a dangerous square pass with only Neuer to beat.

After the restart, Bayern remained in control and made it two in the 57th minute when Muller chipped the ball to Dayot Upamecano, who headed home from five meters.

The German giants sealed the deal only two minutes later as Leroy Sane had all time and space to curl the ball from the edge of the box into the far post corner.

Wolfsburg couldn't put up resistance whereas Bayern kept it bowling and rounded off the win with the 4-0 through Robert Lewandowski, whose 43rd goal in 2021 sets a new Bundesliga record.

GAMBHIR SIGNS UP AS MENTOR FOR LUCKNOW IPL FRANCHISE

Lucknow | Agencies

Former India opener and two-time IPL-winning captain Gautam Gambhir has signed up with the Lucknow franchise as their mentor. Gambhir's appointment is the second major announcement after Andy Flower was appointed as the head coach on Friday by the Sanjiv Goenka-owned RPSG Group.

The Kolkata-based group, who previously ran the Rising Pune Supergiant team in 2016 and 2017 IPLs, had bought the rights of Lucknow franchise for a whopping Rs 7,090 crore in October. Goenka welcomed Gambhir into the yet-to-be named Lucknow team.

"Gautam has an impeccable career record. I respect his cricketing mind and look forward to working with him."

"It's a privilege to be in the contest again. Thanks Dr. Goenka for incl me in #LucknowIPLTeam as its mentor. The fire to win still burns bright inside me, the desire to leave a winner's legacy still kicks me. I won't be contesting for a dressing room but for the spirit & soul of UP," wrote Gambhir on Twitter, confirming his association with the Lucknow team.

The 40-year-old Gambhir played 58 Tests, 147 ODIs and 37 T20Is for India and was a member of the 2007 Men's T20 World Cup and 2011 Men's Cricket World Cup-winning teams. Gambhir featured in the IPL since its inception in 2008 till 2018 in which he represented the Delhi Daredevils (now Capitals) and Kolkata Knight Riders in 154 matches, scoring 4217 runs at an average of 31.01, including 36 half-centuries.

After retiring from the game, Gambhir has been serving as the Member of Parliament from the East Delhi constituency for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) since 2019 apart from being a commentator and expert.

BCCI CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER ABHIJIT SALVI RESIGNS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

BCCI's chief medical officer Abhijit Salvi has resigned due to personal reasons, says a report. Abhijit moved out after the New Zealand Test series which finished on December 7 in Mumbai.

As per an ESPNCricinfo report, he is believed to have stepped down for personal reasons. The BCCI is yet to make Salvi's exit public.

Salvi was in charge of BCCI's age-verification, anti-doping, and medical wing. He had also overseen medical arrangements for two editions of IPL and the T20 World Cup in the UAE where India was the host.

"The timing of Salvi's departure is significant, considering the BCCI is scheduled to conduct the Under-16 national championships, otherwise known as the Vijay Merchant Trophy, from January 9, 2022," the report said.

"He was in charge of the age verification process, put in place by BCCI to uproot age fraud, a malaise that former Indian captain and current men's head coach Rahul Dravid said was 'toxic' and equivalent to 'fixing'."

Salvi, who joined the BCCI in 2012, was the one-person medical arm of the board - leading the medical and anti-doping wings.

A postage stamp for Serbian poster boy Novak Djokovic

Belgrade | Agencies

World No.1 tennis player Novak Djokovic has got a huge recognition from his country, Serbia, which has recognised his achievement by issuing a postage stamp -- for mailing letters both nationally and internationally --, which is a first for any athlete from the country.

Djokovic, who has so far won 20 majors, made history recently by securing the year-end No. 1 ATP ranking for a record seventh time, breaking the tie with American legend Pete Sampras.

He has also won three majors this year -- Australian Open, French Open and Wimbledon -- though he missed out on the US Open title after losing to Russian Daniil Medvedev in the final.

"(It is) an honour to receive my very own Serbian stamp. Thank you to my generous country for this rare gift! I'm humbled!!" Djokovic tweeted on Friday. "Excited to share we'll partner with the Serbian National Postal Service on Novak Djokovic Foundation projects for every child to have the opportunity to attend preschool.

"Gratitude for everyone that brought this together. Now Jelena Djokovic and I will take some stamps home for the kids to write to Santa," added the world No. 1, who has not yet announced whether he would fly to Melbourne to defend his Australian Open title next year although his name figures in the draw list along with Spaniard Rafael Nadal.

Does England have a plan for the second Ashes Test: Ponting

Adelaide | Agencies

Former Australian captain Ricky Ponting has flayed England skipper Joe Root for not coming into the second Ashes Test with a plan other than to just bowl short and wait for Steve Smith and Co. to commit errors.

Day 2 of the pink-ball Test saw the host batsmen frustrate England pace-bowling stalwarts James Anderson and Chris Broad, with Chris Woakes too receiving some rough treatment. Australia finally declared their innings at 473 for 9, and then reduced England to 17/2.

However, England, led by fighting unbeaten 39 and 27 by Dawid Malan and skipper Joe Root respectively in the first session on Day 3, had reached 79/2 to reduce the deficit to 394 runs.

Ponting, who is also the coach of Indian Premier League (IPL) side Delhi Capitals, said on Saturday that, "Apart from the short-ball plan Stokes executed (on the first day), England didn't seem to have much of a plan after that. It was run in and bowl back-of-a-length and wait for the Aussies to make mistakes."

"Well, when you're bowling to two of the top three batsmen in the world, they're not going to make mistakes. You've got to find a way to get them out and change things up." Ponting told cricket.com.au on Saturday. England tried to unsettle the Australian top order with either back-of-a-length or extremely short deliveries, which was counter-productive as opener David Warner (95), Marnus Labuschagne (103), stand-in skipper Steve Smith (93) and Alex Carey (51) played the balls on merit to take the hosts to a strong position.

Players in Ashes, BBL banned from signing autographs, interacting with fans

Adelaide | Agencies

With the Australian cricket team narrowly escaping a Covid-19 scare, Cricket Australia (CA) has reportedly asked its players to maintain social distancing with fans when the third and fourth Ashes Tests take place at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) and the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG) respectively.

According to a report in theage.com.au on Saturday, "level-four protocols" have been put in place by CA in Melbourne and Sydney for the next two Tests, which will prevent the rival team players from eating indoors or attending bars.

Australian cricketers, keen on returning home after end of day's play in the two Tests, have been told to take regular Covid-19 tests and not visit salons for haircuts.

"Test and Big Bash (League) cricketers will be banned from signing autographs in NSW and Victoria as Cricket Australia ramps up its Covid-19 protocols in hopes of avoiding another incident like the one that saw Pat Cummins forced to miss the second Test in Adelaide," the reports said.

Australian skipper Cummins was ruled out of the ongoing Adelaide Test due to being deemed a close contact of a Covid-19 positive person while dining with fellow New South Wales and Adelaide Strikers fast bowler Harry Conway at Little Hunter Steakhouse on the eve of the Test.

He later self-drove to the airport from where he took a chartered flight -- with him being the only occupant other than the pilots -- to Sydney to self-isolate at his residence.

However, much to the CA selection panel's relief, it was revealed on Saturday that Cummins had continued to test negative for the virus and he would be available for the Boxing Day Test at the MCG beginning on December 26.

NEHA KAKKAR'S 'DIL KO KARAAR AAYA' CROSSES 101 MILLION VIEWS

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The reprised version of 'Dil Ko Karaar Aaya' sung by Neha Kakkar, has clocked 101 million views on YouTube. For Neha, it felt like her own composition as she was quite involved emotionally during the rendition.

Elated with the milestone response, the singer said, "I think that I got to own the reprised version of 'Dil Ko Karaar Aaya' because I sang it in a way I would if I had composed it. This song has a special fan following and it warms my heart to hear it being requested by my fans. Rajat Nagpal (composer) has given me a gem of a song and I'm grateful."

The reprised version of the song was released under Desi Music Factory, the label which has been changing the undercurrents of the Indian independent music scene.

Anshul Garg, Founder at Desi Music Factory said, "The thrill about having Neha Kakkar reimagine a song is that she can add an entirely new spin to it. It's incredible that no matter how she interprets the song, listeners connect to it. Just as much credit goes to Rajat Nagpal for showing us love through his composition."

Vinay Pathak: OTT enables us to watch stories that earlier used to remain unreleased

Team Absolute | Mumbai

As one of the poster boys of indie cinema with films like 'Bheja Fry', 'Khosla Ka Ghosla', 'Mixed Doubles', 'Dasvidaniya', 'Gour Hari Dastaan' and web series Special Ops', Vinay Pathak is a prominent name in the business.

As his latest film '420 IPC' is released on OTT, the actor explains how the new medium empowered filmmakers to release some of the good work that earlier used to remain unreleased.

Vinay told IANS: "I think OTT platforms have given the power to storytellers to showcase some stories that earlier used to remain unreleased as film. We all know how expensive it is to release a film in the theatre and not every single film caters to a mass audience, but every story has its audience.

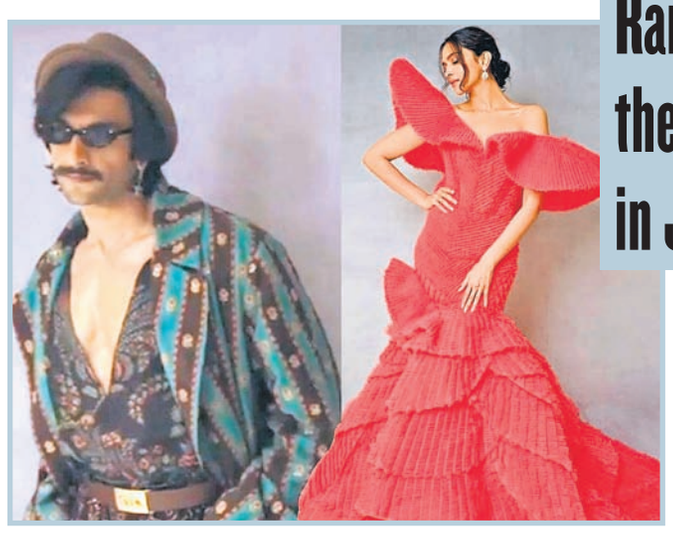
"Since last two years way some of the web films that we watched and they are really really good stories, now we know how many of such works that earlier never got a chance to see the light of day, will be viewed by a large audience. I have seen different phases of indie cinema, we are evolving and OTT is that evolved space that is enabling us to tell stories fearlessly."

In the film, Vinay plays a charter accountant who gets caught up in a Rs 1,200 crore scam as part of CBI investigation and his world goes upside down.

Directed by Manish Gupta, the film also features Ranvir Shorey, Gul Panag, Rohan Vinod Mehra and Arif Zakaria.

Asked what was so unique about the script and Vinay said, "It was such an eye-opening engrossing story. For me, it was quite an indulging process to get into the mind of Bansi Keswani. It was a very well-written script and shows how there are so many layers involved in such scams where even an intelligent person can also get trapped. But this story has more to offer that of course I cannot reveal."

'420 IPC' is streaming on ZEE5.



Ranveer, Deepika lift their fashion quotient in Jeddah, Dubai

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood actor Ranveer Singh, who is known for making theatrical fashion statements, was his usual flamboyant self during the screening of his upcoming movie '83' at the just-concluded Red Sea Film Festival in Jeddah, and later during a stopover in Dubai, and he shared his sartorial statements in a video he posted on his Instagram.The video starts off with the couple coming out of the Jeddah airport exuding the retro vibe. It then showcases the behind-the-scenes action at a photoshoot with Ranveer, before panning on to the couple in a packed auditorium for the film's screening, with the audience cheering them on.

Ranveer sported a wide range of outfits reflecting different moods and shades, from leopard prints to glam rock fashion of the early 1970s and blingy disco outfits. Deepika also sizzled in a red ruffle gown, The couple were later joined by the '83' director Kabir Khan and his wife Mini Mathur.

For Ranveer, the visit to Dubai turned out to be quite an experience, for his image as the character he portrays in the film, living cricket legend Kapil Dev at the 1983 World Cup, was blown up and shown on the iconic Burj Khalifa. The film is all set to release theatrically worldwide on December 23.

Raashii Khanna, Disha Patani join the cast of 'Yodha'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Raashii Khanna and Disha Patani have come aboard for Dharma Productions' much-awaited film 'Yodha', which also stars Siddharth Malhotra.

Dharma Productions shared two pictures welcoming the two actresses. They captioned the pictures, "Our two female leads of #Yodha are coming to hijack your hearts - welcoming Disha Patani & Raashii Khanna to the family! See you in cinemas on 11th November, 2022!"

Karan Johar too took to his Instagram and welcomed the actresses, as he wrote, "The phenomenal and exceptionally talented female leads of #Yodha are here! Welcoming the fierce, the gorgeous and ever charming Disha Patani to the family. Along with Raashii Khanna, who brings her spark and innocence to the role like no other! Yodha hits theatres near you on 11th November, 2022."

The film, which is being helmed by debutant director duo Sagar Ambre and Pushkar Ojha, and produced by Dharma Productions and Shashank Khaitan's Mentor Disciple Films, went on floors last month and is all set to release theatrically on November 11, 2022.

'420 IPC': An intriguing, unglamourous, slow-burn drama

FILM REVIEW

BY TROY RIBEIRO

(Streaming on ZEE5)

Direction: Manish Gupta

Cast: Vinay Pathak, Ranvir Shorey, Gul Panag, Rohan Vinod Mehra, Arif Zakaria.

Duration: 99 minutes

Ratings: * (three stars)**

For the uninitiated, IPC 420 literally means Section 420 of the Indian Penal Code, which deals with offences relating to cheating and dishonesty.

Director Manish Gupta's, '420 IPC', is an intriguing, unglamourous, slow-burner dealing with the white-collar, economic crime of cheating.

Set in Mumbai, 2015, the narrative unravels the story of Bansi Keswani (Vinay Pathak) a Chartered Accountant by profession who has influential clients. While his clients are well-to-do, Mr Keswani on his personal turf is drowned in debts. When his client, the Deputy Director of MMRDA (Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority) is arrested by CBI in a Rs 1,200 crore scam, Keswani is interrogated, and his house raided. After a thorough investigation, Keswani is cleared of any wrongdoings.

But immediately after this, builder Neeraj Sinha, another client of Keswani, accuses him of stealing and forging 3 blank cheques of Rs 50 lakh each. This time Keswani is arrested and put into judicial custody, and his life is turned upside down.

Being low on funds, he appoints Birbal Choudhary (Rohan Vinod Mehra) a bright but inexperienced lawyer to fight his case. How Birbal gathers evidence to combat the public prosecutor Savak Jamshedji (Ranvir Shorey) to prove Keswani's innocence against theft, forgery, and attempted bank fraud forms the crux of this story.

Mounted as a genuine, working-class film, Manish Gupta's script and screenplay is more than serviceable, no doubt. It has all the elements of investigation, courtroom drama, and legal jargon. It makes you curious about what will happen next but lacks plot twists, tension, and excitement, despite a twisting story of secrets and influence.

Vinay Pathak sleepwalks through his character as the staid, poker-faced Keswani. So does Gul Panag, who plays his wife Pooja.

Ranvir Shorey makes an effort to be different, and he largely succeeds in portraying Savak Jamshedji with elan.

Rohan Vinod Mehra is bright, charming, and sincere as Birbal. He has a decent screen presence, but since the character has no must of histrionics to display, he fails to make an impact.

The film boasts fine production qualities, and overall, it will appeal to those keen on legal tangles.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY

Malaika Arora

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