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Class 12 Exams: SC quashes CBSE policy to consider marks scored in later test, Directs

FOR "BETTER OF TWO" OPTION

The Supreme Court on Friday struck down a condition specified in a clause in the CBSE's evaluation policy of June last year which stated that marks obtained in the later examination will be considered as final for assessing Class 12 students. A bench of Justices said the CBSE shall provide an option to the candidate to accept the better of the two marks obtained in the subject for final declaration of his or her results for the last academic year.

As per a press statement of CBSE, 34,317 regular students had appeared in the offline examinations for the purpose of improvement of their marks, it said. On June 17 last year, the top court had approved the assessment schemes of the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE) and the CBSE, which had adopted the 30:30:40 formula for evaluation of marks for students of 12th standard based on results of Class 10, 11 and 12 respectively.

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The apex court, which was hearing a plea filed by some students who had appeared in the CBSE exams last year for improving their marks in Class 12, noted that a grievance has been made about the provision in clause 28 of the June 17, 2021 policy which stated that "....as per this policy, marks scored in later examination will be considered final". By submitting details, you are registering on Careers360

"As a result, we have no hesitation in striking down the condition specified in clause 28 that as per the policy, marks scored in later examination will be considered final," the bench said.The top court noted that the petitioners have the grievance that this condition has been inserted in departure of the earlier schemes where the better of the two marks obtained by a candidate in a subject was to be considered for final declaration of results.

It observed that the CBSE has not given any justification for such a departure. Last year, the CBSE class 12 board examination was cancelled due to the pandemic. The bench, which disposed of the plea, said the policy was required to be adopted because of the challenging situation faced by the students and this itself justifies making a provision which is more favourable to the students.

NEET-PG counselling allowed with 27% OBC and 10% EWS quota

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday cleared the decks for post-graduate medical counselling and admissions, including the Other Backward Classes (OBC) and economically weaker sections (EWS) reservations for the current academic year, 2021-22. The bench upheld the constitutional validity of 27 per cent reservation for OBC and 10 per cent EWS for the NEET-UG and NEET-PG. However, the top court added that it would decide on the rationale of criteria of Rs 8 lakh income for EWS category in March this year. A bench comprising Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and A.S. Bopanna said: "We are in a situation, where in the national interest the counselling has to begin."As many as 15 per cent seats in MBBS and 50 per cent seats in MS and MD courses are filled through all-India Quota from the candidates selected through the NEET.

GATE admit cards not released, exams likely to be postponed

New Delhi: The Graduate Aptitude Test in Engineering (GATE) admit cards, which were scheduled to be released on Friday, were postponed and the examination dates have been marked as tentative on the website, signalling that it can be delayed. Earlier, GATE 2022 examinations were scheduled to be held on February 5, 6, 12 and 13, as per the official website. The admit cards for GATE 2022 were scheduled to be issued on January 4, which was later extended till January 7. Now, the site has put the admit card download on hold and no new date has been mentioned. After qualifying the GATE examination, a candidate becomes eligible for recruitment in Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs).

India may see 10 lakh Covid cases a day by Jan-end

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As the Omicron-triggered third Covid wave enters a key phase, a new projection by researchers at the Indian Institute of Science and Indian Statistical Institute (IISc-ISI) claims that the country is likely to witness over 10 lakh Covid cases a day at January-end/beginning of February when the third wave meets its peak.

The Omicron 'Projections January-March 2022 IISc-ISI Model' by Professor Siva Athreya, Professor Rajesh Sundaresan and the team from the Centre for Networked Intelligence at IISc-ISI in Bengaluru predicts that the third Covid wave may peak in January-end and early-February, with daily cases touching 10 lakh.

The peak of the third wave will vary for different states and the Covid-19 curve for India could start flattening by March-beginning.

The model offers data on three levels of susceptibility -- 30 per cent, 60 per cent and 100 per cent.Under the 30 percent susceptibility criteria, India could see 3 lakhs cases per day, 6 lakh cases per day under 60 per cent susceptibility, and 10 lakh cases at 100 per cent susceptibility.

Maharashtra could be the worst-hit, likely to experience over 175,000 daily cases at its peak (at 100 percent susceptibility).

Delhi is likely to see almost 70,000 daily cases by the end of January, according to the IISc-ISI model.Last month, researchers from IIT Kanpur (IIT-K) also predicted that a third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic may peak in India by February 3.

INT'L TRAVELLERS TO GO FOR 7-DAY HOME QUARANTINE ON ARRIVAL IN INDIA

New Delhi: Travellers coming from specified countries at risk will have to undergo home quarantine for 7 days and shall undertake an RT-PCR test on the 8th day of arrival in India, as per the guidelines. These travellers will have to submit samples for the post-arrival Covid-19 test at the point of arrival (self-paid). Such travellers will be required to wait for their test results at the arrival airport before leaving or taking a connecting flight. If they tested negative, they will follow home quarantine for 7 days and shall undertake another RT-PCR test on the 8th day of arrival in India.

The travellers shall also be required to upload results of repeat RT-PCR test for Covid-19 done on the 8th day on the Air Suvidha portal. If negative, they will further self-monitor their health for the next 7 days. However, if such travellers are tested positive, their samples should be further sent for genomic testing at the INSACOG laboratory network, as per the new guidelines.

Virtual inauguration of Kolkata cancer institute turns controversial

KOLKATA | Agencies

The virtual inauguration ceremony of the Chittaranjan National Cancer Institute (CNCI) campus in Kolkata's Rajarhat area through video conferencing where both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee were present turned controversial after Banerjee complained to Modi against Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar on the open forum.

The chief minister was referring to an issue where Dhankhar had sought details from Chief Secretary H K Diwedi about the mechanism, modalities and the precise selection process to be followed for this recruitment of senior consultants/consultants published by the Department of Personnel & Administrative Reforms.

The chief minister also asked the Prime Minister to increase the medical seats in the state and urged the Centre to sanction more IAS and IPS officers for the state.

No immediate plan to implement Uniform Civil Code: Centre

New Delhi: The Centre, in an affidavit, has told the Delhi High Court that it would examine a detailed report of the 21st Law Commission which undertook detailed research on the Uniform Civil Code after receiving several representations from various stakeholders. As and when the report of Law Commission is received, the Government would examine the same in consultation with the various stakeholders involved in the matter, the Centre added.

There were no commissions in the matter after the 21st Law Commission in 2018 as the Centre did not reconstitute one.

In its submission, the Centre said that in view of the importance of the subject matter and sensitivity involved, it is required that an in-depth study of the provisions of various personal laws governing different communities be conducted.

WEEKEND LOCKDOWN: DELHI POLICE ANSWER QUERIES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi Police took to social media to answer various queries of the people regarding the weekend lockdown that is set to kick-in from Friday night.To curb further spread of Covid-19, the national capital will remain under a stringent curfew from 10 p.m. Friday to 5 a.m. Monday.People posted several questions on Delhi Police's official Twitter handle regarding the night curfew. Though the police responded to few of them, many queries went unanswered.

Responding to one of the questions posed by a Twitter user, the Delhi Police said that industries with on-site labour will run as usual, following all Covid appropriate behaviour.The police further requested the residents of the national capital to adhere to the weekend curfew guidelines and follow all the Covid protocols.

Maha daily Covid cases cross 40K, no Omicron case reported

Mumbai: Maharashtras single-day Covid-19 caseload shot above the 40,000-mark on Friday though no new case of the Omicron variant was reported for the day, taking the states overall Covid tally past the 68 lakh-mark, health officials said. For the 11th consecutive day, the state reported a massive spike in Covid-19 infections and suspect cases whose samples have been sent for genome sequencing.The state's Covid-19 count shot up from 36,265 on Thursday to 40,925 on Friday, while fatalities increased from 13 a day earlier to 20 now with a mortality rate of at 2.07 per cent.After recording 79 Omicron infections on Thursday, the state logged no fresh cases of the variant on Friday, as its tally stood at 876, with Mumbai leading the list.

India, China 14th round military talks likely next week

New Delhi: India and China military delegates are likely to hold talks on January 12 to deliberate over ways to de-escalate the border dispute between the two nations.It would be the 14th round of India and China Corps Commander level military talks focusing on disengagement in the remaining friction areas like Depsang, Hot Springs and others.The talks are happening when China has implemented new border laws from January 1 and has also started construction of a bridge on Pangong Lake in Eastern Ladakh to which India has objected.

On Thursday, India had strongly objected to China's illegal construction of a bridge on a part of the Pangong Lake and had stated that the government is monitoring the situation.

POSTERS BAN ENTRY OF NON-HINDUS TO VARANASI GHATS

Varanasi: Posters banning the entry of non-Hindus to the Varanasai ghats along the Ganga appeared on the walls of buildings, which were reportedly pasted by activists of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal.

The city convenor of Bajrang Dal, Nikhil Tripathi 'Rudra' said that through these posters, a 'clear' message has been given to those who treat the ghat as 'picnic spots'.

"We are warning to them to stay away from the ghats of Ganga, as it is not a picnic spot but a symbol of 'Sanatan' culture," he said.The VHP city secretary, Rajan Gupta, said that those who have no respect for Sanatan dharma should not come to the ghats and temples."We will welcome them if they show respect to Sanatan dharma," he said. The poster adds that "it is not a request but a warning". A large number of foreign tourists come to Varanasi and spend hours at the ghats, interacting with local people. Right-wing activists had earlier objected to smoking by these tourists. The activists had also staged demonstrations and recited the Hanuman Chalisa in front of a church in Chandmari area on New Year's Eve.

India's COVID deaths figure maybe six to seven times higher than officially reported: study

Two government data sources found that, when compared to pre-pandemic periods, all-cause mortality or death from any cause - was 27 percent higher in 0.2 million health facilities and 26 percent higher in civil registration deaths in 10 states. Both increases occurred mostly in 2021, the researchers said.

An international team of researchers led by Prabhat Jha, a professor at the University of Toronto in Canada, found that COVID-19 constituted 29 percent of deaths from June 2020 to July 2021, corresponding to 3.2 million (32 lakh) deaths, of which 2.7 million (27 lakh) occurred in April-July 2021.

A sub-survey of 57,000 adults showed similar increases in mortality with COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 deaths peaking similarly, they said.

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About 3.2 million people could have died from COVID in India by September last year, six to seven times higher than reported officially, according to a study based on one independent and two government data sources.

The research, published in the journal Science on 6 January, 2022, used an independent nationally representative survey of 137,289 adults in all states and union territories interviewed from March 2020 to July 2021.

The analyses find that India's cumulative COVID deaths by September 2021 were six to seven times higher than reported officially, the authors of the study said.

The researchers noted that India's reported COVID-19 death totals are widely believed to be under-reported because of factors like incomplete certification of COVID deaths and misattribution to chronic diseases.The first study is mortality reported in a nationally representative telephone survey conducted by CVoter, an independent, private polling agency.

In addition, the researchers studied the Government of India's administrative data on national facility-based deaths and civil registration system [CRS] deaths in 10 states. As of 1 January, 2022, India has reported over 35 million cases of SARS-CoV-2, second only to the US, while its official cumulative Covid death count stands at 0.48 million (4.8 lakh).In order to better estimate India's COVID deaths, alternative approaches to model-based estimates are needed, the authors said.

CALCUTTA HC ALLOWS GANGASAGAR MELA WITH COVID RESTRICTIONS

Kolkata: After much deliberation, the Calcutta High Court on Friday allowed the state government to organise the Gangasagar Mela amid the fresh surge in Covid-19 cases. However, the court has imposed certain restrictions and asked the state government to act upon it immediately.The division bench comprising Chief Justices Prakash Srivastava and Kesang Doma Bhutia in their order asked the state government to issue a notification declaring Gangasagar Island as a "notified area" within 24 hours from the pronouncement of the judgment. The court order also asked the West Bengal Home Secretary to ensure that restrictions imposed by the state government are implemented without any lapse in Gangasagar Island during the Mela period.

PM SECURITY BREACH: SC DIRECTS PUNJAB HC REGISTRAR GENERAL TO PRESERVE ALL RECORDS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday directed the registrar general of Punjab and Haryana High Court to secure and preserve all records in connection with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Punjab, and also asked the state and Central committees to refrain from conducting inquiries till Monday, when it will take up the matter again. A bench headed by Chief Justice N.V. Ramana and comprising Justices Surya Kant and Hima Kohli said: "We direct Punjab, police authorities, SPG, central and state agencies to cooperate and provide necessary assistance to seal the entire record." The bench added the registrar general of Punjab and Haryana High Court will secure and preserve all records in connection with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Punjab.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the Centre, submitted that some NIA officer should assist the

court's officer in collecting and securing the evidence, which includes wireless messages in connection with PM's movement in the state. Mehta added that the court officer may find it difficult to pin down on sources, from which information is required. Mehta termed the incident "rarest of the rare issue".

The Supreme Court on Thursday agreed to examine a plea raising the issue of alleged breach of security to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Punjab. Senior advocate Maninder Singh mentioned the plea in the top court. The plea filed by Delhi-based Lawyer's Voice alleged the state government and the police were complicit in jeopardising the security of the holder of the high constitutional office in the country. "The security lapse, as per reliable reports in the print and the electronic media, and as per the Press Information Bureau report of Central government, was clearly intentional and raises a serious question as to national security and the role played by the present political dispensation in the State of Punjab", said the plea.

The plea sought an independent probe into the PM's security breach in Punjab. The plea sought a direction to the District Judge Bathinda to collect, preserve and present all material pertaining to the movement and deployment of Punjab Police in connection with the visit of the Prime Minister, fix responsibility of the DGP and the Chief Secretary, Punjab.

The petition claimed it sought to highlight the said incident and raise an important question as if the Prime Minister of the country can face such a situation, then the fundamental rights of citizens which has been guaranteed to them under Article 19(1) (d), 19(1) (g), and 21 of the Constitution, are in serious jeopardy in Punjab and beyond.

PM greets citizens on 150 crore vaccination 'milestone'

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday congratulated citizens on crossing the "milestone" of over 150 crore Covid-19 vaccinations across the country.

He said that India is "grateful" to all those who have been working to make the vaccination drive a success.

In a series of tweets, the Prime Minister said: "A remarkable day on the vaccination front!
Congratulations to our fellow citizens on crossing the 150 crore milestone. Our vaccination drive has ensured that many lives are saved. At the same time, let us also keep following all COVID-19 related protocols." "India is grateful to all those who have been working to make our vaccination drive a success. We thank our doctors, scientists, innovators, and the health care workers who are vaccinating the people. I urge all those eligible to get their shots. Together, let's fight COVID-19." India is currently facing the third wave of the infection with the Omicron variant making things harder for common citizens. On January 3, India started vaccination for children 15 years and above.

JAGANNATH TEMPLE TO REMAIN CLOSED FOR DEVOTEES FROM JAN 10

Bhubaneswar: With the steep rise in Covid-19 cases in Odisha, the Jagannath temple in Puri will remain closed for devotees from January 10 (Monday) to January 31, it was decided on Friday.
This decision was taken at the Chatisa Nijog meeting held virtually under the chairmanship of Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) chief administrator Krishan Kumar this evening. After taking opinions from all stakeholders, it was decided to close down the temple for the devotees as thousands of the people from various states including hotspots are coming to the temple, Puri Collector Samarth Verma said.
However, the daily rituals at the temple will be continued as per tradition by the servitors, he said. This decision was taken by the Chatisa Nijog after some servitors and temple administration staff have tested Covid positive in past few days, sources said. The temple will effectively remain open for only on Saturday as on Sunday it remains closed for sanitisation of its premises.

SC clears the deck for appointment of 3K sub-inspectors of police in UP

Team Absolute | New Delhi

In relief for over 3,000 candidates, who in 2019 cracked the entrance exam for Sub-Inspector in Uttar Pradesh, but could not join due to pending litigation, the Supreme Court on Friday cleared decks for their appointment. In an 81-page judgment, a bench headed by Justice U.U. Lalit said: "The decisions made by expert bodies, including the Public Services Commissions, should not be lightly interfered with, unless instances of arbitrary and mala fide exercise of power are made out." In 2016, the UP Police Recruitment and Promotion Board had issued an advertisement for the recruitment of over 3,000 sub-inspectors, platoon commanders (PAC) and fire officers based on an online written examination.

According to the rule, each candidate had not only to score 50 per cent

in each of the sections, but also required to score at least 50 per cent after the normalisation. The top court allowed the state government to appoint the candidates, as per the result, declared in 2019, which was earlier quashed by Allahabad High Court on a clutch of petitions claiming that the board adopted the wrong process. The petitioners had alleged that call letters were issued to those candidates who had not obtained more than 50 per cent raw marks but secured more than 50 per cent normalised score.

The Uttar Pradesh government moved the top court challenging the high court order. The top court set aside the high court order and directed the state government to implement the result declared in 2019. "We have, therefore, no hesitation in accepting the challenge raised on behalf of the state and allowing these appeals and setting aside the judgment and order passed by the High Court presently under challenge. The results declared by the Board on 28th February 2019 shall now be given effect as early as possible," it said.

ELECTION COMMISSION WITHDRAWS APPOINTMENT OF SONU SOOD AS PUNJAB ICON

Chandigarh: The Election Commission has withdrawn the appointment of actor Sonu Sood as a state icon for Punjab, state Chief Electoral Officer S. Karuna Raju said on Friday.
He said the EC has withdrawn his appointment on January 4, but gave no details.
Sood, who belongs to Punjab, was appointed as the state icon by the EC in November last year.
The decision to honour him came after he earned laurels for helping migrant workers reaching hometowns amid the coronavirus pandemic.

3 TERRORISTS KILLED, ARMY OFFICER INJURED IN KASHMIR ENCOUNTER

Srinagar | Agencies

Three terrorists were killed and one army officer was injured in an encounter with security forces at Zolwa Kralpora Chadoora in central Kashmir's Budgam district, officials said on Friday.

The police said that based on specific inputs regarding the presence of terrorists in Zolwa Chadoora village area of Budgam, a joint cordon and search operation was launched on Thursday evening by the police and the army. During the search operation, the terrorists fired indiscriminately upon the joint search party, which was retaliated leading to an encounter. Later on, the CRPF also joined the operation.

"The joint team first evacuated all the civilians trapped around the encounter site to safer places. Besides, to avoid any collateral damage due to darkness, the operation was suspended during night hours and in the wee hours it resumed again, resulting in the

elimination of three terrorists linked with proscribed terror outfit Jaish-e-Mohammed. During the encounter, one army officer received minor splinter injury," the police said. One of the killed terrorists has been identified as Waseem Mir, a resident of Nowgam Srinagar, who was active since December 2020. "As per reliable sources and documents recovered, the other two killed terrorists appear to be foreign militants. Further identifications are being ascertained," the police said. "As per police records, the slain terrorist, Waseem, was a categorised militant and part of a group involved in several terror crime cases, including attacks on security forces and civilian atrocities. Several terror crime cases were registered against him. "Waseem was involved in the killing of Inspector Parvaiz Ahmad in June last year. He was also involved in the grenade attack on a CRPF bunker near Aali Masjid Chowk at Eidgah Srinagar in which one civilian and one police personnel were injured. He was also involved in brainwashing and motivating the youth of Central Kashmir to join terror folds," the police said. Incriminating materials, arms and ammunition, including three AK-56 rifles, were recovered from the site of the encounter. All the recovered materials have been taken into case records for further investigation.

Red alert for Kashmir, heavy to very heavy snowfall likely

Srinagar | Agencies

Changing its alert from "orange" to "red", the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Friday evening forecast heavy to very heavy snowfall in J&K with possibility of avalanches in vulnerable areas.

A statement issued by the IMD office said: "Weather warming for J&K for January 7: Currently it is snowing at most places of Kashmir and hilly areas of Jammu and rain at a few places of Jammu region.

"Forecast: Expect further increase in rain/snow intensity as the day progresses with main intensity of heavy to very heavy rain/Snow during 7th (night) and 8th.

"Gradual improvement from 9th morning onwards in J&K."

It also warned that the present weather may affect

surface transport on January 7 and 8 and air transportation on 8th."

The IMD also warned of avalanche/landslide in vulnerable spots. "People are once again requested NOT to venture in avalanche-prone areas (Our data shows that most avalanches triggered during intense heavy snowfall). Follow traffic advisory seriously. Maintain proper ventilation of your rooms."

Reports from hill stations of Gulmarg, Pahalgam, and Sonamarg said heavy snowfall has already started there while moderate snowfall has started in Srinagar city.

Major lapse of national security at borders: Rahul

Team Absolute | New Delhi

After reports of construction of a bridge at Pangong Tso lake by the Chinese forces emanated, the Congress has questioned the government about the status at the borders.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday in a tweet said, "What has been happening at our borders is a major lapse of national security. Will the PM ever talk about it?"

The government and the Congress are at loggerheads on the security breach of the Prime Minister, but Rahul questioned the PM on his 'silence' over the border issue.

As per reports a few days back, a new satellite image came into light which showed bridge construction on both the sides of pangong lake in eastern Ladakh sector.

This area is on the Chinese side, about 40 km away from LAC (Line of Actual Control) . As per the military experts this bridge will ensure Chinese army PLA's swift movement in the area.

Headmistress stripping girl for carrying mobile: Education dept initiates action

Mandya, (Karnataka) | Agencies

Deputy Director for Public Instruction Javare Gowda who conducted an inquiry into the case of a headmistress punishing a girl student making her strip before classmates in her office chamber and then assaulting her with a stick for carrying a cellphone to school, recommended her suspension on Friday.

The incident took place in the Government High School in Gananguru village in Srirangapattana taluk of Mandya district last week. The girl, studying in the 8th standard was allegedly beaten ruthlessly with a stick and asked to strip before her classmates. Headmistress Snehalatha V forced her to remain in that state without clothes for hours.

Javare Gowda said that he had recommended to the Commissioner of the Education Department that the headmistress be suspended for her cruel and indecent behaviour with a school student. Earlier, the Tehsildar and the School Development Management Committee (SDMC) had also recommended disciplinary action against the headmistress, he informed. "Even I had visited the school on an earlier occasion and warned the headmistress about such behaviour. But since she has continued with it, it has become inevitable to initiate action," he said. Complaints have been filed by the student as well as her parents, he added.

The girl had said that the headmistress was furious after she came to know that she had brought a mobile to class. During lunch hour, the teacher asked the students whether they have brought mobiles to class and to give them to her. The headmistress also warned the girls that if they don't give the mobiles themselves, she would get them stripped and ask the boys to check them.

Later, the headmistress had sent all the boys outside the class and started hitting the victim. The girl said that the headmistress stripped her before her classmates and she was made to sit on the ground.

The girl said that even when she pleaded that she was feeling cold and wanted to drink water, the headmistress did not relent. Finally she was let go in the evening.

Nitin Gadkari's Strong Message Against Haridwar Hate Assembly

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari has said the recent hate speeches -- as happened at religious conclaves in Haridwar and Delhi -- should be "negated and given no importance". In such cases, the law should be allowed to take its course, he told to News channel in an exclusive interview.

Only five people have been named so far in the Haridwar hate speech case, where calls to arms against Muslims and genocide were issued openly.

"In my view, Swami Vivekananda said it all at the religious conclave in Chicago -- that our religion is based on tolerance, simplicity, inclusiveness... Our kings never broke anyone's place of worship. We are not expansionists. We want the good of everyone -- of the world, of every living creature. This is our heritage and our viewpoint," Gadkari said.

"So anyone who goes against it is not our viewpoint. It should be negated and given no importance," he added.Asked whether action should be taken in such cases, where efforts are made to create rift and communal tension, he said the law should take its course.

"We should remain tolerant, respectful towards all religions, should not hurt anyone's sentiments and take everyone forward," he added, invoking Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Sabka Saath" slogan.

Asked about his views on the Bulli Bai app, used to 'auction' Muslim women, he said "Actions of some individuals should not be taken as a reflection of a society. The law will take its

NHRC CONCERNED OVER MUMBAI SLUM DWELLERS LIVING CONDITIONS

New Delhi | Mumbai

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has expressed concerns over the living conditions of slum dwellers in Mumbai and issued notices to the Maharashtra government and the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs seeking their responses. Maharashtra responded, through its Chief Secretary, that several efforts have been made and schemes formulated to provide dwelling units to the slum dwellers for Economically Weaker Sections with the State and Central assistance under Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojna (Urban), PMAY (U). Shortage of funds has been cited as a constraint, NHRC said in a statement on Friday.

The Centre on its part responded that out of 2.24 lakh houses in

Maharashtra, 2 lakh were sanctioned for Mumbai alone, out of which 58,225 have been grounded. The Commission has sought a response from the Secretary, Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to give a comprehensive report.

He has been given four weeks' time, the Commission added.

The Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs in its communication dated December 3, 2021, submitted that the Land and Colonization are State subjects. The Centre is augmenting the efforts of the State to meet the housing needs of economically weaker sections in urban areas through Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojna-Urban (PMAY-U).

Earlier in June last year, while dealing with a plea filed by human rights activist Adv Radhakanta Tripathy, the NHRC had sought response from the secretaries of various central ministries including Home, Health and Housing, and Urban Poverty Alleviation, over the plight of millions of homeless people and children during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Millions of homeless people, including lakhs of children on the street have been suffering immensely for a long time due to the virus and subsequent lockdown measures, the activist's plea contended.

NCSC panel summons Mumbai police Commissioner in Wankhede case

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) has asked Mumbai Commissioner of Police Hemant Nagrale to appear in-person before Chairman Vijay Sampla on January 31 regarding the Narcotics Control Bureau's (NCB) Zonal Director Sameer Wankhede harassment case.

It also asked the petitioner to remain present in the commission on the day of the hearing. While issuing written summons to the police Commissioner, NCSC Director Kaushal Kumar on Thursday said: "Chairman Vijay Sampla has fixed a meeting with you, in person, on January 31 at 11 am in his chamber at Loknayak Bhawan, New Delhi. "Accordingly, you are to appear in person, along with an updated action taken report and all relevant documents, including the relevant files, case diaries, to facilitate the hearing." The NCSC further recommended the state government not to take final decision in the matter till the investigation is pending with it. "No final decision in the matter is to be taken by the state government till the pendency of the investigation of the case in the commission. This is as per commission's Rules of Procedure clause 7.2," the NCSC director said in an official letter. Wankhede, NCB's Mumbai Zonal Director, has been in the limelight in connection with the Aryan Khan case and was recently accused by Maharashtra minister Nawab Malik of faking his caste certificate. The NCSC is, however, examining the complaint of Wankhede that he was being implicated in a false case. Wankhede had written to the commission alleging harassment following "disclosures" made by NCP minister Malik. The minister had alleged that Wankhede was a Muslim and had secured a job claiming to be from the Scheduled Caste. Malik had alleged that Wankhede's father's name was Dawood and not Dyandev. Wankhede has denied all allegations.

Public holiday not fundamental right, time to reduce them: Bombay High Court

Team Absolute | Mumbai

According to report, the Bombay High Court has held that nobody can claim public holidays as fundamental right and they are a matter of government policy.

A Divison Bench of Justices Gautam Patel and Madhav Jamdar rejected a petition to declare August 2 as a public holiday as it marks the liberation or Independence Day of Dadar & Nagar Haveli. The court observed, "There is no legally enforceable right that can be said to have been infringed. Nobody has a fundamental right to a public holiday. As it is, we have far too many public holidays in this country. Perhaps the time has come to reduce, not increase, the number of public holidays."

The petitioner argued that August 2 was given the public holiday status from 1954 to 2020 before it was discontinued on July 29, 2021. The petition also compared August 2 to August 15 and questioned that if August 15 could be public holiday for being the national Independence Day, why not August 2.

Mumbai Mayor slams BJP Leader's remark Thackeray's Wife

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Mumbai Mayor Kishori Pednekar on Thursday reacted to Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Jiten Gajaria's alleged tweet on Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's wife Rashmi Thackeray and said that the BJP is passing derogatory comments on the daughter-in-law of Shiv Sena founder Balasaheb Thackeray who helped BJP become a big name in politics.

She added that Ms Gajaraia is a turncoat who is now passing derogatory comments on Maharashtra women. "Who is Jiten Gajaraia? He has jumped from Nationalist Congress Party to Bharatiya Janata Party like a kangaroo and today he is passing such derogatory comments about women of Maharashtra, about Rashmi Bhabhi," Pednekar told media. "What

could be the reason for dragging Rashmi Bhabhi, whom we know as Balasaheb Thackeray's daughter-in-law, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's wife and Aditya Thackeray's mother," she added. "Balasaheb Thackeray himself raised BJP party by holding its hand and made it big in politics. And today they are saying abusive words against his daughter-in-law only. Where did they get so much pride from? I challenge that whatever it is, if this Gajaria comes in front of us, the Mahila Aghadi of Shiv Sena will see him," she stated. Earlier on Thursday, social media convenor of Bharatiya Janata Party in Maharashtra Jiten Gajaria was summoned for questioning by Mumbai Police Crime Branch's Cyber Cell on Thursday for his alleged tweet on Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's wife Rashmi Thackeray. Jiten Gajaria was seen present at BKC Cyber Police Station to record his statement after being summoned by police over his tweets. Reportedly, Mr Gajaria had on January 4, posted a photo of Rashmi Thackeray with the caption "Marathi Rabri Devi". After the uproar, Jiten Gajaria deleted the Twitter post.

SECURITY BEEFED UP AROUND RSS INSTALLATIONS IN NAGPUR

Nagpur: Police in Maharashtra's Nagpur have registered an offence under unlawful activities and ordered a probe following intelligence inputs that a terror organisation has carried out reconnaissance of the RSS headquarters very recently.

Commissioner of Police, Amitesh Kumar said the RSS headquarters in Mahal in eastern part of city and Smuriti Bhawan in Reshimbagh in south-eastern part of Nagpur are constantly been provided with full-fledged security. All vehicles and persons around the installations are checked throughout round the clock. Three alleged terrorists from Jaish-e-Mohammad were gunned down by security forces when they tried to attack the RSS headquarters in the pre-dawn hours on June 1, 2006.

Murder convict Dies In Attack By Inmates In Kolhapur Jail: Officials

Team Absolute | Pune

A 49-year-old murder convict lodged in a jail in Maharashtra's Kolhapur district died allegedly after he was assaulted by other inmates, officials said on Friday.

The victim, who was serving a life sentence, became violent and harmed a fellow inmate which triggered the assault on him on Thursday evening, they said. The incident took place at Kalamba jail in Kolhapur, around 230km from Pune, when inmates were watching television in a section of the prison.

According to the jail authorities, the deceased, Nishikant Kamble, was on medication for a mental ailment. "On Thursday, when inmates were watching television in one of the sections of the jail, Kamble allegedly attacked a fellow inmate with a tile after they had a verbal spat. The other inmates intervened and restrained Kamble," said Chandramani Indulkar, jail superintendent.

"A group of inmates took Kamble aside. However, when he tried to attack them also and became violent, the other inmates pinned him to the ground and kicked and punched him," he said.

The official said no jail personnel was present when the incident took place.

"After Kamble was found unconscious, jail staffers presumed he could be suffering from chest pain and blood pressure, and took him to hospital where he died during treatment at around 10.45 pm," Indulkar said.

Kamble was awarded life imprisonment for murdering his friend in 2003 in Kolhapur, he added.

Airtel not to issue equity in lieu of spectrum charges, AGR

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Telecom major Bharti Airtel on Friday said that it will not avail the option of converting interest on deferred spectrum as well as AGR dues into equity.

According to a regulatory filing, the company has informed the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) regarding its decision. "We wish to inform you that the company has confirmed to DoT that it will not avail the option of conversion of the interest on deferred spectrum and AGR dues into equity," the telecom major said in a filing.

The DoT had given a 90-day window to the telecom operators to decide if they want to opt for converting the interest amount pertaining to the moratorium period into equity.

AD-MAN, ACTOR, ACTIVIST GERSON DA CUNHA PASSES AWAY

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Gerson da Cunha, the legendary advertising professional, actor and activist passed away here, a family friend said. He was 92.

After graduating in BSc from University of Bombay, da Cunha became a journalist working with the PTI news agency before diverting to advertising.

In his long career spanning 25 years, he worked with Hindustan Unilever and later headed the Lintas ad agency, among the biggest in the media industry in those days and he launched the famed 'Dalda' brand ads, a household name at one point. Simultaneously, he

worked on theatre and Bollywood films like "Electric Moon", "Cotton Mary", "Asoka", "Water", and others, and subsequently, post-retirement took to the social field.

He was associated with UNICEF, worked with it in the US and South America, and after returning to India, was involved with NGOs like the AGNI, Mumbai First, and helped the Mumbaikars affected by the 1992-1993 communal riots.

Over the years, da Cunha also served as an advisor to the Central Health and Tourism ministries for their public projects, besides other private, semi-government and social institutions in different capacities.

Cotton import duty cut may help Pak-China, spur Indian farmers' suicides: Maha panel

Quaid Najmi | Mumbai

In a dark warning, a Maharashtra government appointed panel has warned that any move by the Centre to slash or withdraw import duty on cotton could benefit Pakistan-China and prove detrimental to the Indian agro-economy by spurring farmland suicides. The Vasantrao Naik Sheti Swavalamban Mission (VNSSM) President Kishore Tiwari has sent a memorandum to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the issue, requesting that before taking any decision to revoke import duty on cotton, the plight of the Indian cotton farmers should be borne in mind. The VNSSM chief's grouse stems from the recent lobbying by the Southern India Mills Association (SIMA) and the powerful textile-garment industry bigwigs who are trying to influence the Centre to slash or withdraw the import duty on cotton and cotton waste. Tiwari - accorded a MoS status - said that in this year's Union Budget, the government had announced a 11 per cent duty specifically to protect the interests of the Indian cotton farmers, spread largely in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. "Now, compared with the MSP on cotton at around Rs 6,000/quintal, the current market rate is in the range of Rs 8,000-11,000/quintal which has brought some relief to the peasantry reeling under the pandemic since the past two years," said Tiwari. However, the cotton and textile-garment industries keen to import cheaper cotton from Pakistan-China and dump it in the Indian markets, which will again plummet the prices below Rs 4000/quintal, not only spelling doom for the local farmers but also fueling a fresh crisis in the farmlands, he explained. "We have requested the PM not to succumb to the pressures by the SIMA, the textile-garment industries and other vested interests by reducing or removing the cotton import duty at this critical stage... In order to ensure justice to Indian farmers, the VNSSM demands that the import duty be further hiked to 18 per cent to make it on par with the global markets," a grim Tiwari told correspondent. He referred to the recent meetings of SIMA and textile-garment industries' representatives with some Central ministers and officials, where they claimed that their imports account for only 4 or 5 per cent of superior quality cotton required by the industry that is not available here, or they have to pay a premium on it. Tiwari countered these contentions saying for 2021-2022 cotton has kicked off with a comfortable opening stock of 75-lakh bales and an estimated production of over 360-lakh bales with positive prices at the start of the season due to the unprecedented volatility in international cotton prices."Any move to remove or slash import duties will not only directly benefit the economies of both Pakistan and China, but prove extremely disastrous to Indian farmers who could be left with no other options but to kill themselves," cautioned Tiwari. While the cotton and garment industries have already approached Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Commerce & Textiles Minister Piyush Goyal and other top officials for relief, other sections are also busy building up indirect pressures by agitations like a strike on January 17-18.

Haffkine

HAFFKINE BIO PHARMACEUTICAL CORPORATION LIMITED
(Procurement Cell)
Tel No. 022-24100478
E-mail- procurementcell@vaccinehaffkine.com
Acharya Donde Marg, Parel, Mumbai 400 012 (INDIA)

TENDER NOTICE

Date : 07/01/2022.

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

Sr. No.	Tender No.	Name of Description	Date of Pre Bid Meeting	Period of Sale and Preparation of bid & bid submission	Bid Opening
1)	RT-4347, RT-4346, RT-4341, RT-4349	Purchase of Instrument & Equipment	13.01.2022 upto 11:00 a.m.	From 10.01.2022 10.00 am to 15.01.2022 up to 14:00 hrs.	17.01.2022 at 14:00 hrs.
2)	RT-4348	Purchase of Instrument & Equipment	13.01.2022 upto 11:00 a.m.	From 10.01.2022 10.00 am to 18.01.2022 up to 11:00 hrs.	18.01.2022 at 16:30 hrs.
3)	RT-2430, RT-2841	Purchase of Instrument & Equipment	18.01.2022 upto 11:00 a.m.	From 10.01.2022 10.00 am to 25.01.2022 up to 14:00 hrs.	27.01.2022 at 14:00 hrs.

For detailed information, the interested bidders may visit the website https://mahatenders.gov.in
For e-tendering help/ information, please contact.
Website: - https://mahatenders.gov.in
Contact No.1800-233-7315,91-7878107985, +91-7878107986,+ 91-7878007972 and +91-7878007973
Email -- eproc.support@maharashtra.gov.in

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

ROC- 2021-22 / No. 5/ C-3596

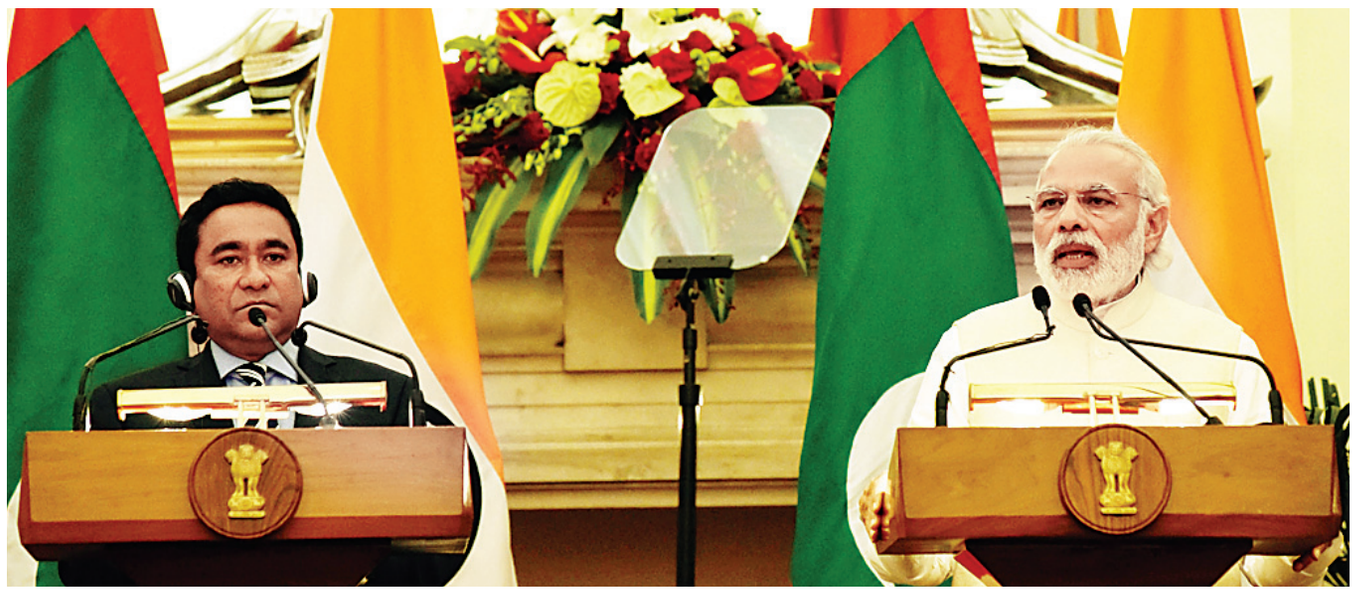
EDITOR'S SPECS

Carelessness is dangerous

As the third wave of Covid grips India, a survey reveals shocking levels of carelessness and nonchalance by Indians. The snap poll had a sample size of 1,942. To a question if people were generally wearing masks and taking precautions, only 21.8 per cent of the respondents agreed that people were indeed wearing masks and taking precautions. In sharp contrast, 41.5 per cent said wearing of masks and other precautions were being followed "only sometimes" while another 33.8 per cent said they were mostly not being followed. In effect, 3 out of every four Indian are still not taking the basic preventive steps against Corona despite repeated warnings, exhortations and threats by the government, scientists and doctors. This is happening at a time when there is virtual unanimity that the third wave of Covid led this time by the super spreading Omicron variant has already arrived in India and is heading rapidly towards a peak. A recent study by IIT Kanpur suggests that the peak of the third wave would be reached anytime between the first and second week of February this year. It has also been established unequivocally that the Omicron variant breaches through the defences of people who have already taken two doses of the vaccine. There has been a massive increase in the number of infections in major metro cities, particularly Mumbai and Delhi. Authorities, hospitals and doctors will find it difficult to manage yet another surge unless ordinary Indian citizens realise the true gravity of the situation and come out of the comfort zone of thinking that the Omicron variant is very mild. It could mutate into something far more deadly without any warning, as it happened with the Delta variant during the second wave.

Strained Indo-Maldives relations

Asad Mirza



A lot has happened in the bilateral relations between India and Maldives during the last 10 years. The relations which were once described as one of the most vibrant and dynamic, have turned into one in which India has been painted as a villain. Though the genesis started 10 years back, yet it gathered further momentum during the last three years particularly, resulting in 'India Out campaign on the social media.

The movement got a boost when the Maldives Supreme Court overruled former President Abdulla Yameen's conviction in a money-laundering and embezzlement case in November 2021. The development allowed him to make a return to politics.

A political campaign

Ties between India and the Maldives had hit a low during the tenure of Yameen, who was considered to be pro-China rather than pro-India. Yameen's half-brother, former president and currently Maldives Reform Movement party leader (MRM) Mamoon Abdul Ghayum, is among those who have opposed the campaign, even in 2013 when Yameen became the President.

India-Maldives bilateral relations deteriorated during the Peoples Party of Maldives' (PPM) five-year rule beginning in 2013, then led by Yameen and the anti-India sentiment was apparent even back then, observers say. Paradoxically though the Yameen government and its predecessor, the Waheed government, were considered "anti-India", and though the Yameen government's tilt in favour of China was clear, yet it had also openly discussed an 'India-First' policy for the Maldives.

Other political parties in the Maldives too have opposed the anti-India campaign, saying the former president is irresponsibly inciting hatred among the people towards India.

The PPM brushing aside the charges against it, in its defence says that the current Ibrahim Solih government has opted at times to keep the relationship, particularly that under the defence sector under wraps from where the criticism basically stems from.

The Adhaalath Party, a coalition partner of President Solih, in a statement condemned efforts to "incite hatred in the people's hearts towards neighbouring and global partners", and expressed concern at the "reckless acts led by former president Yameen to incite hatred towards neighbouring India amongst the civilians".

The Jumhooree Party, another coalition partner of the Solih government, also said in a statement that it doesn't support any activities, which compromise the independence and sovereignty of the Maldives, and the Jumhooree Party does not believe that there is any legal ground to decide the existence of any Indian military presence in the country.

Out-India campaign

There are specific issues, which have fuelled the anti-India sentiments and rhetoric on the social media during the last three years. The first is the long-standing controversy over the two Advanced Light Helicopters (ALF) that were given by India to the Maldives in 2010 and in 2015, both of which were used for ocean search-and-rescue operations, maritime weather surveillance and for airlifting patients between islands.

These helicopters were meant to be deployed for humanitarian purposes only, but some in the anti-India constituency, particularly Yameen's party PPM, tried to portray that by gifting these helicopters, India was creating military presence in the country because they were military choppers.

Secondly, the two countries signed bilateral agreements according to which Indian officers were to train the Maldives National Defence Force, under whose command these helicopters operate.

Thirdly, after the Solih government came to power, in 2019, local Maldivian media speculated that the UTF Harbour Project agreement signed between India and the Maldives in 2016, during the Yameen government, would be turned into an Indian naval base. Under the project India was to develop and maintain a coastguard harbour and dockyard at Uthuru Thilafalhu, a strategically located atoll near the capital Malé, and develop road connectivity to Male and decongest the Male harbour.

Back then, Maldivian chief of defence forces, Major-General Abdulla Shamaal had said that while the Indian government had indicated that it would provide grant assistance for this project, there were no plans of any Indian naval base in the country. Fourthly, in 2016, an Action Plan between India and the Maldives was signed for 'defence cooperation' to enhance "shared strategic and security interests of the two countries in the Indian Ocean region".

In 2016 when anti-India sentiments were at their peak and the bilateral relations were at their worst against the perceived military presence of Indian forces in Maldives, the Yameen government had asked India to take back these helicopters and refused to extend the term of the agreement that would extend their stay and use in the country.

Observers say that one of the main reasons behind the 'India Out' campaign was rooted in this controversy surrounding the ALF choppers and India's reported refusal to take them back. During the Yameen-era, India had looked on in concern as the Maldives began to develop stronger ties with China and its Belt and Road Initiative.

By 2018 when Ibrahim Mohamed Solih assumed office, he immediately renegotiated these agreements, extending the stay and use of these choppers in the country. The Solih government's visibly warm relations with India have only served to fuel anti-India sentiment in the country.

However, among the many grievances in social media posts by prominent members of 'India Out' campaign, a recurring complaint is the lack of transparency in agreements being signed between the Solih government and India.

It is a fact that that much of the criticism levelled by the Maldivian opposition and the 'India Out' campaign wouldn't have arisen had these bilateral agreements been publicly discussed in the Maldivian Parliament. But the ruling government and the defence ministry describing these agreements as confidential has led to agitation in political circles that percolated down to ordinary Maldivian nationals and has taken the form of a wave of criticism, inflammatory rhetoric and unverified allegations, especially on social media platforms.

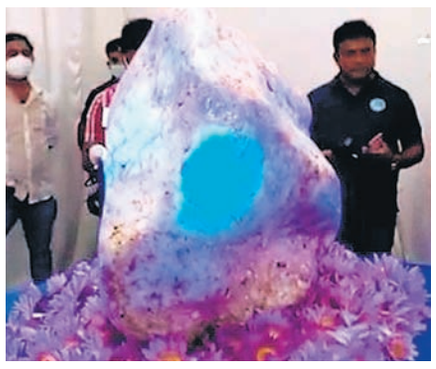
Fundamentally, the issue is not so complex though it involves bilateral relations, geopolitical and economic interests for both countries. However, both the governments have acted in a mature manner in this regard. Both of them are aware of the increasing defence importance of Maldives in the Indian Ocean, due to the increased US interest in the Indo-Pacific and Maldives' strategic position. In addition to the Maldivian need to have India on its side to guard its defence and commercial interests.

(Asad Mirza is a political commentator based in New Delhi)

international

DUBAI FIRM OFFERS $100MN FOR WORLD'S LARGEST SAPPHIRE FOUND IN SRI LANKAN

Colombo | Agencies



The Sri Lankan government announced that it was in talks with a Dubai-based company which has offered $100 million for the world's largest natural corundum blue sapphire named the "Queen of Asia", which was found in the island nation.

State Minister of Gem and Jewellery Related Industries Lohan Ratwatte was quoted in the local Daily Mirror as saying that there has been no final decision taken by the government on the company's offer to sell the "Queen of Asia", but talks were ongoing between the company and the stone owner on its sale for a high price, reports Xinhua news agency.

Discussions were also underway on whether to auction the corundum blue sapphire at an even higher price, Ratwatte said.

The owner of the stone recently said that one of the French gem scientists had valued the corundum sapphire at more than $200 million. Officials last month said the stone had also attracted interest from potential buyers in China and the US.

The single crystal blue sapphire, which weighs around 310 kg, was unveiled in December 2021 about three months after it was found from a private land in Ratnapura, which is known as the "city of gems".

The sapphire is presently stored in a laboratory owned by Sri Lanka's National Gem and Jewelry Authority.

HEAVY SNOWFALL KILLS 11, INJURES 23 ACROSS AFGHANISTAN

Kabul: Heavy snow, that started falling across Afghanistan earlier this week triggering avalanches and floods, have so far claimed the lives of 11 people, while injuring 23 others, the media reported.

Citing officials of the Taliban-led Afghan government, Bakhtar News Agency said that 90 per cent of the country's territory witnessed snow or rainfall that led to financial loss besides the deaths and injuries, reports Khaama Press.

The casualties have been reported in Helmand, Nimroz, Farah, Nangarhar, Kandahar, Jawzjan, Takhar and Kabul.

Officials of the Ministry of Disaster Management said that they have rescued several people who were stranded due to the floods. The recent heavy snow and rainfall have also clogged several highways and flights to Kabul International Airport have also been disrupted.

N.Korean nuke, missile programs pose ongoing threat: Blinken

Washington | Agencies

North Korea's nuclear and missile programs pose an ongoing threat to the region and the international community, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

Blinken made the remarks on Thursday during annual security consultative talks with his Japanese counterpart, Yoshimasa Hayashi, that also involved US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Japanese Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi, reports Yonhap News Agency. "Meanwhile, the DPRK's unlawful nuclear, missile programs pose an ongoing threat. And we saw that again this week with the most recent launch," Blinken said on Thursday, referring to North Korea's test launch of a self-claimed hypersonic missile on Wednesday.

DPRK stands for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the North's official name.

Blinken noted threats facing the allies included what he called China's "provocative actions" in the region and Russia's military build-up along the Ukraine border.

"So, to address these evolving threats, our alliance must not only strengthen the tools we have but also develop new ones," he told the virtual meeting. "And I think that's really the focus of the discussions that are about to happen." On his part, Austin reiterated challenges posed by North Korea and others in the Indo-Pacific region.

"We're meeting against the backdrop of increased tensions and challenges to the free and stable and secure Indo-Pacific region that we both seek -- challenges posed by North Korea's nuclear ambitions and by the coercive and aggressive behaviour of the People's Republic of China. "So together we are taking bold steps to improve our alliances, bolster our readiness and strengthen what I call integrated deterrence," he added.

This week's missile test marked North Korea's first missile launch since October 2021. Pyongyang has claimed to have successfully test launched its first hypersonic missile last September.

GLOBAL COVID CASELOAD TOPS 300 MN

Washington: Amid an ongoing resurgence across the world, the global coronavirus caseload has surpassed the grim milestone of 300 million, while the deaths have surged to more than 5.47 million and vaccinations to over 9.33 billion, according to Johns Hopkins University.

In its latest update on Friday morning, the University's Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) revealed that the current global caseload and the death toll stood at 300,095,481 and 5,472,039, respectively, while the total number of vaccine doses administered has increased to 9,336,622,344. The US continues to be the worst-hit country with the world's highest number of cases and deaths at 58,487,665 and 833,987, according to the CSSE.

The second worst hit country in terms of cases is India (35,109,286 infections and 482,876 deaths), followed by Brazil (22,328,252 infections and 619,654 deaths).

The other countries with over 5 million cases are the UK (14,100,303), France (11,288,704), Russia (10,420,863), Turkey (9,789,244), Germany (7,399,015), Italy (6,975,465), Spain (6,922,466), Iran (6,203,046), Argentina (6,025,303) and Colombia (5,242,672), the CSSE figures showed.

The nations with a death toll of over 100,000 are Russia (307,488), Mexico (299,842), Peru (202,904), the UK (149,993), Indonesia (144,116), Italy (138,474), Iran (131,802), Colombia (130,191), France (126,001), Argentina (117,386), Germany (113,446) and Ukraine (103,225).

DOZENS OF ATTACKERS 'ELIMINATED' IN KAZAKHSTAN UNREST

Nur-Sultan | Agencies

Dozens of attackers have been "eliminated" after they attempted to storm administrative buildings and the police department of the Kazakh city of Almaty amid the ongoing unrest across the country, a media report said.

In its report on Thursday, Russia's TASS news agency also said that total of 12 law enforcement officers have been killed and 353 others injured in the clashes with the rioters in Almaty.

The "anti-terrorist" special operation continues in the city and police urged residents and visitors to refrain from leaving home for their own safety, Xinhua news agency quoted the TASS report citing Kazakhstan's Khabar-24 TV channel as saying.

Over 1,000 people were injured across Kazakhstan with almost 400 of them hospitalised as a result of the violent protests over the past days, said the report.

Meanwhile, the Interior Ministry has claimed that 2,298 protesters have also been detained.

The protests sparked by dissatisfaction over surging fuel prices escalated on Wednesday, with protesters storming the main government building in Almaty, setting police vehicles on fire, and attacking the regional branch of the ruling Nur Otan party.

The mounting unrest prompted the Kazakh government to seek help from the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which has decided to deploy peacekeeping forces to the country.

The CSTO comprises Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Tajikistan and Armenia. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has blamed foreign-trained "terrorists" for the unrest, without giving evidence.

He has also fired his cabinet aimed at curbing the demonstrations, including his predecessor, Nursultan Nazarbayev, who had held a national security role since stepping down as President.

Peru reports first 'flurona' death

Lima | Agencies

Peru's Health Ministry has reported the country's first fatal case of "flurona" (a simultaneous infection of flu and Covid-19), involving an 87-year-old patient with comorbidities who was not vaccinated against the coronavirus. The deceased was one of three cases of flurona detected in northern Peru's Amazonas region, Xinhua news agency reported, citing Cesar Munayco, a researcher at the ministry's National Center for Epidemiology, Prevention and Control of Diseases. The other two cases included a minor and a 40-year-old person who was fully vaccinated against Covid-19, said Munayco. Those infected presented symptoms such as cough, sore throat and general malaise, Munayco said, urging the public to get vaccinated against COVID-19 and influenza because that "reduces the risk of dying."

"It is important to take this into account, because we currently have a major outbreak of H3N2 influenza in the country's jungle, such as (the regions of) Loreto, San Martin, Amazonas and Ucayali," Munayco warned.

Peru announced its third wave of Covid-19 cases on Tuesday, accelerated by the arrival in December of the Omicron variant, which has already led to 309 confirmed cases in this South American nation.

MP receives rainfall, govt to assess crop damage due to hailstorm

RAIN OF CALAMITY

Light to moderate rainfall at most places in Bhopal, Gwalior, Chambal and Sagar divisions, in some cities of Indore and Ujjain divisions and at isolated places in Rewa, Jabalpur and Hoshangabad divisions. Narsinghpur recorded the lowest minimum temperature at 10 degrees Celsius.

Commuters suffered due to water logging in colonies and Main roads in the Capital city

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Several parts of Madhya Pradesh have received moderate to heavy rainfall with thunderstorms and lightning over the past couple of days owing to the formation of a western disturbance caused by an upper cyclone.

The rain was received in many districts since Thursday morning with a heavy shower in the capital city Bhopal early on Friday.

As per the India Meteorological Department (IMD), Bhopal recorded 40 mm precipitation over the last 24 hours, Tikamgarh received 37 mm rainfall, Naugaon recorded 31.2 mm, Gwalior 27.8 mm, Sagar 20 mm, Raisen 16.2 mm, Indore 11.4 mm, Guna 7.8 mm.

Rain and hailstorm damaged crops in several districts in the state and the government has directed the district administrations to assess the crop damage.

"Excessive rain and hailstorm have damaged crops of farmers in several districts and instructions have been given to the revenue officials to assess the damage caused to the crops of farmers, said Home Minister Narottam Mishra on Friday.

> "Such weather is likely to prevail over large parts of the state for the next two days as an induced cyclonic circulation was lying over southeast Rajasthan on the Madhya Pradesh border. The induced cyclonic circulation is bringing in moisture causing rain in parts of Madhya Pradesh."
>
> ***G.K. Mishra, Senior meteorologist, Bhopal***

Orange Alert Issued

The IMD has issued an orange alert for some cities along with the Gwalior and Chambal divisions and a yellow alert for districts such as Rewa, Sagar, Indore and Ujjain. The forecast suggested that showers are expected in Bhopal, Sagar, Rewa, Jabalpur, Shahdol, Gwalior and Chambal divisions in the next 24 hours.

Pace of vaccination for 15 to 18 year olds continues

So far more than 19 lakh vaccine doses have been administered

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A special campaign which began in the state from January 3, to protect adolescents in the 15 -18 age group from Corona infection is going on. So far, the first dose of the vaccine has been administered to more than 19 lakh children. Madhya Pradesh has set a record in the country by vaccinating 7 and a half lakh children on the first day of the campaign.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that saving the people of the state from Corona infection is the top priority of the state government. We have come close to the set target in the vaccination of citizens in the age group of 18 to 60 years due to the efforts of all. So far 5 crore 46 lakh 92 thousand 758 have been given the first dose of vaccine and 5 crore 5 lakh 5 thousand 995 both doses of vaccine have been administered. With the speed with which the vaccination work is being done in the state, soon we will be able to vaccinate the target group.

Chief Minister Chouhan said that in the campaign started by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to vaccinate children of 15 to 18 years, work is being done with full alertness in Madhya Pradesh also. Along with the Health Department, the School Education Department is playing an important role in vaccinating 48 lakh children of the target group. Chief Minister Chouhan said that the peoples-participation model of Madhya Pradesh has a significant contribution in the protection being given to children through vaccine. Chief Minister Chouhan has told the members of district, block, ward and panchayat level Crisis Management Groups that all of us have to work together to achieve the goal of vaccination to defeat Corona. Children should be vaccinated on a war footing.

Chief Minister Chouhan said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, more than 150 crore Corona vaccines have been administered in the country. All of us together have to face the third wave of Corona under the leadership of the Prime Minister. Vaccination is a major way to control Corona infection. MPs, MLAs, social workers, religious leaders, Jan-Abhiyan Parishad, health workers, Lions Club, Rotary Club, etc. and all organizations engaged in social, religious and public interest work, etc., have to be involved in the work of vaccination and prevention of Corona infection. Don't let this deter you from doing your best to ensure 100 percent vaccination of all children in the age group of 15 to 18 years now. Vaccination is the biggest protection.

Vyapam scam: CBI Court sentences six to 5 yrs jail

Team Absolute | New Delhi/ Bhopal

A special Central Bureau of Investigation court has sentenced six people - two candidates, impersonators, and middlemen each - to five years rigorous imprisonment in a 12-year-old case related to pre-medical test examination conducted by Madhya Pradesh's Vyapam.

The six convicted are identified as impersonators Mohd. Imran, and Rajesh Prasad, candidates Deepak Prajapati, and Jetendra Kumar Rajput, and middlemen Suresh Kumar Patel and Vedratan.The agency had registered the case against the accused on the allegations of impersonation in Pre Medical Test (PMT-2010) at Govt. PG College, Guna (Madhya Pradesh) which was conducted by Vyapam. It was alleged that at this examination centre, photographs of two candidates, namely Prajapati and Rajput, didn't match with the examinees, who were taking the said examination on the roll numbers of these two candidates. The invigilators handed them over to the flying squad. "The said impersonators were identified as Mohd Imran and Rajesh Prasad were found to be impersonating the candidates Rajput and Prajapati, respectively," the CBI said.

The Centre Superintendent, Govt. PG College, Guna lodged a complaint with the Police Station, Cantt after which the state police had arraigned four persons during the investigation. After taking over the investigation from the state police, the CBI had traced Rajput, who was absconding since the registration of the case. "The evidence against the accused was strengthened. The expert opinion on thumb impressions and handwriting of the accused including Prasad, and Prajapati were collected," the agency said, adding, after investigation, they filed a charge sheet in June 2016 against 5 accused and a supplementary charge sheet against another accused in May 2017.

'No mask no fuel' at petrol pumps in MP, state logs 1,320 new Covid cases

Team Absolute | Bhopa

The daily Covid-19 cases are increasing rapidly in Madhya Pradesh, but the government on Friday said that it has no plan to impose more restrictions or a lockdown in the state as of now.

State Home Minister Narottam Mishra told mediapersons that the number of Covid-19 cases are increasing multiple times more than in the last two waves of the infection. However, the circumstances of the third wave of Covid-19 are slightly different from the first and the second waves. Most people infected with the Omicron variant are recovering rapidly. Observing that many people are still not wearing masks despite a 'Roko Toko' campaign being launched, the state government has asked petrol pumps not to give fuel to people without masks.

"Petrol and diesel will not be given to the drivers who do not wear masks. With this, a strict fine will be charged for not wearing a mask," Mishra, who is also the state government spokesperson, said, adding that "there is no idea of imposing lockdown or curfew in the state as of now, nor is any such proposal under consideration with the state home department".

As per official data, the state registered 1,320 new Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours, pushing the total active cases in Madhya Pradesh to 3,780, according to the government's statement on Friday.The daily Covid positivity rate was 1.94 per cent whereas the recovery rate was reported at 97.90 per cent. The home minister informed that 13 police personnel have been found infected with Covid-19, with the majority of them from Gwalior district.

BJP STAGED SILENT PROTEST OVER LAPSE IN PM'S SECURITY

Team Absolute | Bhopa

There is a lot of anger in the BJP over the lapse in the security of Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to Punjab, and in Madhya Pradesh, BJP staged a silent dharna in front of the statue of Mahatma Gandhi, calling the security breach a conspiracy by the Congress's Punjab government. . In Bhopal, BJP delegation submitted a memorandum to Governor Mangubhai Patel. On the call of BJP, silent dharna was held in front of Gandhi statue in the entire state including the capital Bhopal. Along with the party leaders, social organizations and intellectuals also took part in the dharna and condemned the Punjab government. BJP State President Vishnu Dutt Sharma took part in the silent dharna organized at Rajwada Chowk in Jhabua.

BJP state president Sharma said that under the constitutional system, the state government is responsible for the security of the state where the President or the Prime Minister visits. It is unfortunate that the manner in which the Punjab Government has played with the life of the Prime Minister and neglected his security is condemnable.

He said that the absence of the Chief of Police during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Punjab and the Chief Minister not picking up the phone after this incident was not a common incident. Under the international conspiracies, the Punjab government conspired against the Prime Minister at the behest of Congress National President Sonia Gandhi.

In Bhopal, a silent dharna was held in front of the Gandhi statue located at the Kushabhau Convention Center in the old assembly. After the dharna, the BJP delegation reached the Raj Bhavan and submitted a memorandum to Governor Mangubhai Patel. In this memorandum, strict action has been demanded against the culprits for lapse in security.

Similarly, silent dharna was held in other parts of the state in which senior party functionaries and ministers of Shivraj government took part.

CM CHOUHAN CONDOLES DEATH OF PRO'S MOTHER

Bhopal : Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has condoled the death of. Nirmal Kapoor, mother of Sandeep Kapoor, Public Relations Officer posted in Chief Minister's Press Cell and Deputy Commissioner of Police Head Quarter Bhopal Vineet Kapoor. Chief Minister has prayed to God to grant peace to the departed soul and strength to the bereaved family to bear this loss.

VIT-Bhopal suspends 'Bulli Bai' accused for 'bringing disrepute to institution'

Team Absolute | Bhopa

Niraj Bishnoi, the alleged creator and main conspirator of the derogatory 'Bulli Bai' app, who was arrested by the Delhi Police from Assam, has been suspended from his college here.

Bishnoi, a second year B.Tech student at Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT), was suspended by the college management hours after the news of his arrest broke out.

"Niraj Bishnoi, studying B.Tech since September 2022 via online, has been arrested by Delhi police in connection with his alleged involvement in 'Bulli Bai' app case. Accordingly, he (Bishnoi) is suspended with immediate effect from the University until further notice, in view of bringing disrepute to the University and defaming the name of the institute," a notice issued by the Vice Chancellor of VIT, said.

Bishnoi was, allegedly, targeting Muslim women by uploading their doctored photographs, without their consent, and was arrested from Jorhat in Assam by Delhi Police on Thursday.The 20-year-old, who is now in police remand in Delhi, had also created the 'Bulli Bai' Twitter handle. As per Delhi Police, after creating the content, he forwarded the Twitter handle to others in his network to share it.

न्यायालय अपर जिला दण्डाधिकारी जिला इन्दौर (म.प्र.)

(आर.एस. मण्डलोई) प्रकरण क्रमांक /072/बी–121/2020–21

क्रमांक/672/अ.क.री/2021 इन्दौर दिनांक 22/12/2021

प्रति

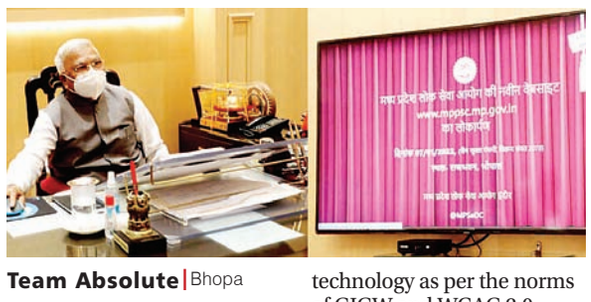
(1) श्री भरत अगस्थी पिता श्री राधेश्याम अगस्थी

(2) श्रीमती प्रेमलता अगस्थी पति श्री भरत अगस्थी पता–पटवारी हल्का नंबर 36 सर्वे नबर 201 ग्राम लसूडिया मोरी इंदौर अन्य पता–7/11 विजय नगर इंदौर

प्रार्थी डी.सी.बी. बैंक लि. द्वारा प्राधिकृत अधिकारी 1–श्री भरत अगस्थी पिता श्री राधेश्याम अगस्थी 2–श्रीमती प्रेमलता अगस्थी पति श्री भरत अगस्थी पता–पटवारी हल्का नंबर 36 सर्वे नंबर 201 ग्राम लसूडिया मोरी इंदौर अन्य पता–7/11 विजय नगर इंदौर द्वारा निवेदन किया कि आपके द्वारा निवेदन किया कि आपके द्वारा बंधक संपत्ति प्लॉट नंबर 309 ई.डब्ल्यू.एस. सेक्टर ई–पाईप स्लाईस नं. 04 स्कीम नंबर 78 अरण्य नगर जिला इंदौर पर बकाया ऋण राशि का चुकाता नहीं किया गया और न ही प्रतिभूति संपत्ति का कब्जा ही सौंपा गया है। अतः वित्तीय अस्तियों का प्रतिभूतिकरण एवं पुर्नगठन और प्रतिभूतहित प्रवर्तन अधिनियम की धारा 14 में प्रतिभूति के रूप में रखी संपत्ति का कब्जा दिलाया जावे। उक्त प्रकरण इस न्यायालय में विचाराधीन है। प्रकरण की सुनवाई न्यायालय अपर कलेक्टर जिला इन्दौर (कक्ष क्रमांक जी–11) में दिनांक 11.01.2022 को दोपहर 3:00 बजे होगी। आप प्रकरण के संबंध में समस्त दस्तावेज व साक्ष्य सहित उपस्थित रहें। आपकी अनुपस्थिति की दशा में प्रकरण में एम पक्षीय कार्यवाही की जावेगी।

अपर जिला दण्डाधिकारी जिला इन्दौर

Governor Patel Launches New Website of Public Service



Team Absolute | Bhopa

Governor Mangubhai Patel launched the newly developed website of Madhya Pradesh Public Service Commission at Raj Bhavan. The website is developed with advanced technology as per the norms of GIGW and WCAG 2.0. Based on this user friendly interface system, candidates will be able to get information easily. All the details and information related to the commission will be available to the candidates on the new website.

Governor Patel congratulated all the functionaries, officers and employees of the Commission on the occasion of the launch of the new website. He appreciated the innovations being made in the direction of transparency and prompt functioning as per the dignity of the Commission. He expressed the hope that through the new website, the participant will get proper information easily and quickly. The transparent functioning of the Commission will be strengthened further.

CHIEF MINISTER CHOUHAN PLANTED A COCONUT PLANT

Bhopal : Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted a coconut plant in the residence premises today. Chief Minister Chouhan is continuously planting saplings in order to resolve to plant saplings every day. Coconut is a perennial and cotyledonous plant. Its stem is long and branchless. At the upper end of the main stem is a crown of elongated leaves. These trees are found on the banks of the sea. Coconut is considered auspicious and auspicious in Indian civilization. Therefore it is used in worship and auspicious works. It is also very useful for health. Coconut water contains a good amount of electrolytes, which removes fatigue and weakness. Coconut is rich in potassium.

CLEOPATRA WILL BE 'SEXY AND SMART': GAL GADOT

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Gal Gadot will play the ruler of ancient Egypt in a new movie that will be produced by her 'Wonder Woman' Director Patty Jenkins and give fans a teaser of what to expect from her take on the character.

Speaking to InStyle magazine, Gadot said, "I can't reveal a lot but I can tell you that we're going to celebrate the Cleopatra story. We're going to show not just how sexy and appealing she was, but how strategic and smart, and how much impact she had and still has on the world we're living in today."The historical figure has been portrayed on the big screen a number of times -- most notably by Elizabeth Taylor in the 1963 movie 'Cleopatra' -- but Gadot says that Kari Skogland's project will be different from those that have come before, reports femalefirst.co.uk.She said, "I've watched all the Cleopatra movies throughout history but I feel like we're telling the story the world needs to hear now."The casting of the Israeli actress caused a backlash when it was announced, as people argued that an Arab or African star should have taken on the part.Gadot hit back at the critics by insisting that Cleopatra -- whose race has been subject to debate among historians -- was actually from Macedonia but the right Macedonian actress "wasn't there".The 'Red Notice' star said, "First of all, if you want to be true to the facts, then Cleopatra was Macedonian.""We were looking for a Macedonian actress that could fit Cleopatra. She wasn't there. And I was very passionate about Cleopatra.""I have friends from across the globe whether they're Muslims, Christian, Catholic, atheist, Buddhist or Jewish, of course 'People are people'. And with me, I want to celebrate the legacy of Cleopatra and honour this amazing historic icon that I admire so much."

VANESSA HUDGENS, ROSARIO DAWSON TO ANNOUNCE SAG AWARDS NOMINATIONS ON INSTAGRAM

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actresses Vanessa Hudgens, Rosario Dawson will be announcing the nominations for the 28th Annual Screen Actors Guild Awards on Wednesday, January 12 through its Instagram Live account.

The announcement will start off with an introduction by SAG-AFTRA president Fran Drescher through the SAG Awards' Instagram Stories function, reports variety.com.

SAG Awards committee members Jason George and Elizabeth McLaughlin will then reveal nominations for the outstanding action performances by television and film ensembles aka the stunt awards before Dawson and Hudgens take over at around 10 a.m. ET.

After the nominations, final voting opens on Wednesday, January 19, and closes at noon on February 25. This is the second year that the SAG Awards nominations have been announced on Instagram Live. Last year began on a humorous note as 'Emily in Paris' star Lily Collins and 'Snowpiercer' star Daveed Diggs figured out how to connect with each other on the social media app, reports variety.com.

"The SAG Awards aims to utilise the innovation of social media channels to create an authentic connection with their audience by reimagining the nominations announcement as a seamless, virtual experience for both nominees and fans," the awards show said in revealing the Instagram Live plan.

The 28th Annual Screen Actors Guild Awards will be simulcast live on networks TNT and TBS on Sunday, February 27. After being based at Los Angeles' Shrine Auditorium and Expo Hall since 1997, this year's event is moving to Santa Monica's Barker Hangar.

JONATHAN NOLAN TO DIRECT 'FALLOUT' SERIES

Los Angeles | Agencies

Television series 'Fallout' will be directed by Jonathan Nolan, brother of award-winning filmmaker Christopher Nolan.

Variety has confirmed that Geneva Robertson-Dworet and Graham Wagner are now attached to serve as co-show runners on the video game adaptation.

Nolan and Lisa Joy were previously announced as executive producers on the project under the Kilter Films banner, reports variety.com.

Robertson-Dworet is best known for her work on the screenplays for the 2018 'Tomb Raider' film starring Alicia Vikander and for the 2019 Marvel film 'Captain Marvel'. Wagner's past credits include 'Silicon Valley', 'Portlandiaa' 'Baskets', and 'The Office'.The 'Fallout' Amazon series was first announced as being in the works in

'SCREAM' RED CARPET PREMIERE CANCELLED OVER OMICRON OUTBREAK

The red carpet premiere for the fifth installment of the slasher film 'Scream' will not be having its red carpet premiere in Sydney over the Omicron outbreak.

Los Angeles | Agencies

Given the tidal wave of the Omicron Covid-19 variant, the event originally scheduled for January 11 will not proceed, a note to invited guests said on Thursday, reports variety.co.uk.

The premiere was expected to convene horror icons Neve Campbell, Courteney Cox and David Arquette with their supporting cast and filmmaker collective Radio Silence in Los Angeles.

Press- and radio-promoted screenings, as well as the wide theatrical release of the fifth title in the hit series created by Wes Craven, will still proceed on the big screen as planned.'Scream' returns to the traumatised community of Woodsboro 25 years after a series of grisly murders inspired four sequels (and entered the ghostface-masked killer into the genre hall of fame).Campbell, Cox and Arquette all reprise their original roles, alongside newcomers Melissa Barrera, Kyle Gallner, Mason Gooding, Mikey Madison, Dylan Minnette, Jenna Ortega, Jack Quaid, Marley Shelton, Jasmin Savoy Brown and Sonia Ammar.

Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillett, aka Radio Silence, are directing. Campbell spoke openly about her hesitance to return for a new film, but a letter from the directors sealed the deal.

AGEING IN THE PUBLIC EYE IS EXTREMELY STRESSFUL: KRISTIN DAVIS

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Kristin Davis has insisted she has no problem getting older and embracing the changes that age brings, but finds it particularly tough to age while being a public figure, because she's constantly compared to her younger self.

She said: "It can be extremely stressful to be aging and to be compared to your much, much, much younger self.

"If I was from a regular life, I would feel fine; I would feel great! I'm healthy, I'm strong, I've got this little three-year-old son, and I carry him around and it's all good - but, no, I'm on television, where every bit of my physical being is analysed.

"That part was always very stressful and difficult for me, because, as much as I can look back on my life and think, 'Oh, I looked great then', you never think that at the time. I guess no one does."Davis has recently found herself at the centre of ageist commentary along with her 'Sex and the City' co-stars Sarah Jessica Parker and Cynthia Nixon following the reprisal of their roles in the spin-off series, 'And Just Like That', reports female-first.co.uk.

The actress said paparazzi are constantly angling for unflattering shots of the trio during long days on set, and although she tries to ignore the comments she receives, she still has "bad days".

Rooney Mara to play Audrey Hepburn in biopic

Actress Rooney Mara will be seen playing the iconic star Audrey Hephburn in an upcoming biopic, which is in the works at Apple.

Los Angeles | Agencies

Oscar-nominated "Call Me by Your Name" director Luca Guadagnino will be helming the project, with Mara producing and 'The Giver' co-writer Michael Mitnick penning the script, reports variety.com.Though plot details are being kept under wraps, Hepburn is an acting legend celebrated for her performances in classics like 'Breakfast at Tiffany's', 'My Fair Lady', 'Wait Until Dark', 'Charade' and 'Sabrina'.

During her four-decade career, Hepburn achieved EGOT status, winning Emmy, Oscar, Tony and Grammy awards, the last of which she received posthumously.

Mara has won the Cannes Film Festival Award for Best Actress and received a nomination for the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress. She is known for her works in films such as 'The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo', 'Lion', 'A Ghost Story' and 'Nightmare Alley' among many others.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY

Paula Patton

ICC INTRODUCES IN-MATCH PENALTIES FOR SLOW OVER-RATES, OPTIONAL DRINKS BREAK IN T20IS

Dubai | Agencies

The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Friday introduced in-match penalties for slow-over rates across men's and women's T20 International matches. It also said that optional drinks break in the midpoint of an innings will be a part of the updated playing conditions.

The first men's match to be played under the new playing conditions will be the one-off tie between the West Indies and Ireland at the Sabina Park in Jamaica on January 16 while the first T20I of the three-match series between South Africa and the West Indies in Centurion on January 18 will be the first women's match played under the new playing conditions. The in-match penalty for slow over rate means the fielding side will be penalised for it.

"The over rate regulations are captured in clause 13.8 of the playing conditions, which stipulate that a fielding side must be in position to bowl the first ball of the final over of the innings by the scheduled or rescheduled time for the end of the innings," said the ICC in a statement. "If they are not in such a position, one fewer fielder will be permitted outside of the 30-yard circle for the remaining overs of the innings. The in-match penalties are in addition to the sanctions for slow over rate outlined in Article 2.22 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel," added the ICC. The global cricket governing body said the in-match penalty for slow-over rates was included after seeing its efficacy in the Hundred competition in England in 2021. "The change was recommended by the ICC Cricket Committee, which regularly discusses ways to improve the pace of play in all formats, after considering reports on the effectiveness of a similar regulation that was included in the playing conditions for the Hundred competition conducted by the ECB." "In another change, an optional drinks break of two minutes and thirty seconds may be taken at the mid-point of each innings subject to agreement between Members at the start of each series," concluded the ICC.

Milan register opening win in 2022, conquer nine-man Roma

Rome | Agencies

AC Milan got its 2022 campaign off to a good start, as it dominated Roma 3-1 at San Siro. A slew of concurrent affairs had stripped AC Milan to bare-bones as it missed nearly 10 players due to COVID-19, injuries and Africa Cup of Nations duty, but it had Zlatan Ibrahimovic back into action. The home side took a dream start just minutes into the game as Tammy Abraham had a handball in the box, Olivier Giroud turned up to convert it on Thursday night.

Milan doubled its lead in the 17th minute, Giroud was involved again as the French hitman intercepted Roger Ibanez's wayward pass to hit the post before Junior Messias followed to pounce on the rebound.

With the win, AC Milan still sits second, one point off city-rivals Inter Milan whose Thursday's game against Bologna was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Also on Thursday, Juventus shared the spoils at 1-1 with Napoli, Dries Mertens gave the Partenopei a 1-0 lead, but Federico Chiesa's deflected strike helped the Bianconeri avoid a home defeat.

Elsewhere, Lazio fought back from 2-0 down to settle for a 3-3 tie against Empoli, Cagliari won Sampdoria 2-1 away, Hellas Verona beat Spezia 2-1, Sassuolo drew with Genoa 1-1.

'DJOKOVIC CAN PLAY IN FRENCH OPEN EVEN IF UNVACCINATED'

Paris | Agencies

World No. 1 tennis player Novak Djokovic will be allowed to play in the French Open even if he is not vaccinated against Covid-19, France's sports minister Roxane Maracineanu said on Friday.

France does not bar unvaccinated people from entering its territory but imposes tougher restrictions than on those who have had the shot.

Sports minister Maracineanu said International Tennis Federation (ITF) protocols at major events meant an unvaccinated player would be entitled to enter France and participate in Roland Garros, which begins in May.

"Djokovic would not follow the same organisational arrangements as those who are vaccinated," Maracineanu told FranceInfo radio. "But he will nonetheless be able to compete [at Roland Garros] because the protocols, the health bubble, allows it."

Australia's decision to revoke a visa Djokovic had been granted based on a medical exemption ahead of the Australian Open in Melbourne has stirred furore and it has the potential of turning into a diplomatic crisis between Australia and Serbia.

ASHES, 4TH TEST

BAIRSTOW SLAMS CENTURY BUT ENGLAND STILL IN TROUBLE

Sydney| Agencies

An unbeaten century by Jonny Bairstow (103 off 140 balls) on another rain-interrupted day saw England post 258/7 on Day 3 of the fourth Ashes Test, even as Australia strengthened their advantage with the ball, with Pat Cummins and Scott Boland taking two wickets apiece at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Friday. Middle-order batter Bairstow, playing his second Ashes game in the five-Test series, brought up the tourists' maiden century of the series, though will have work to do on Saturday, batting with the tail to close the 158-run first-innings deficit. Australia had scored 416/8 declared in the first innings. Despite a delayed start, Australia came out firing with pacer Mitchell Starc bowling Haseeb Hameed (6) in just the fifth over of the first session. Opener Zak Crawley and Dawid Malan survived the rest of the opening spell shared between Cummins and Starc, but they couldn't deal with what came next. In his second over of the innings, the hero of the Boxing Day Test, Scott Boland gave the Sydney crowd plenty to cheer about when he pegged Crawley's off stump, dismissing the England opener for 18. Three overs later, the Australian quick continued his remarkable form in his debut Ashes series, removing captain Joe Root for a duck. Root failed to manage Boland's delivery outside off stump, edging the ball to second slip for an impressive catch from Steve Smith. With the lunch break in sight, things went from bad to worse for the visitors. Australia all-rounder Cameron Green claimed the scalp of Malan (3), who flicked the ball off his hip to Usman Khawaja at leg slip. Green's delivery was the last of the first session as England headed into lunch 36/4 with all the work to do. After 10 overs without scoring a run, including the loss of three wickets, England began their fightback with Ben Stokes and Jonny Bairstow at the crease. It seemed to be Stokes' lucky day as Cummins dropped the all-rounder on nine and he was fortunate not to walk three overs later. Green steamed in to Stokes, clipping his off stump but only for the bails to remain intact. Australia's misfortune proved costly as the England duo brought up a 50-run partnership before Stokes notched up his 25th Test half-century off 70 balls. Stokes fell to Nathan Lyon lbw on 66 with the off-spinner firing into the stumps from around the wicket. New batter Jos Buttler suffered a nasty blow to his thumb from Cummins and fell two overs later to the Australian captain for a duck.

Bairstow found a valuable partner in Mark Wood, who hit three sixes and two fours in an entertaining evening knock. Those three sixes were hit off the bowling of Cummins, though it was the home captain who had the last laugh, with Wood edging onto his helmet and into the hands of Nathan Lyon. Bairstow moved into the nineties, and was accompanied by the resolute Jack Leach (4 not out). He became the first English player to reach triple figures in the series, slashing over the top of the slip cordon for a boundary.

Brief scores

Australia 416/8 declared vs England 258/7 in 70 overs (Jonny Bairstow 103 not out, Ben Stokes 66, Mark Wood 39; Pat Cummins 2/68, Scott Boland 2/25).

ISL 2021-22: Confident Chennaiyin target win against FC Goa

Bambolim (Goa) | Agencies

Chennaiyin FC will look to build on the winning momentum and break into the top four when they take on FC Goa in the 2021-22 Hero Indian Super League at the Athletic Stadium, here on Saturday.

Chennaiyin FC's head coach Bozidar Bandovic said a win against Jamshedpur FC in their last game has instilled confidence in his side, coming after back-to-back losses.

"The players showed good character and ability to change things even after two defeats and that's important for me. Even some of the stronger teams don't make a comeback after conceding losses. I want my team to be stable," Bandovic said during the team's pre-match press conference on Friday.

For the Chennaiyin, defender Sajid Dhot emerged as the standout performer against Jamshedpur and he was also adjudged Hero of the Match for his impressive show on his CFC debut.

"Sajid was training with the team for a long time and was impressive during that period. He did well against JFC and helped the team [win]. But now he needs to try and repeat the same performance in the upcoming matches," he added.

Defender Jerry Lalrinzuala, who was also present at the press conference, credited the team's success to the head coach. Jerry further said that there's been good communication going on in the defence which is helping the team to perform better.

Bandovic further confirmed the availability of Nerijus Valskis for Saturday's match. The addition of the Lithuanian striker will strengthen CFC's goal-scoring ability as well as overall attack.

Talking about the challenges against Goa, the 52-year-old coach said, "They have very good players in their midfield. They are very dangerous when they have a ball. We need to be very tight defensively and put pressure on them."

Currently positioned sixth, with 14 points, CFC have secured four wins and two draws from their nine games so far. With the season entering its second half, a win against FC Goa will take them into the top four on the points table. Bandovic, however, feels the race for a play-offs spot will go on till the last game of the season with the presence of strong teams and believes in focusing on one game at a time.

SPAIN BEAT POLAND TO REACH ATP CUP FINAL

Sydney| Agencies

Roberto Bautista Agut clinched Spains place in the ATP Cup championship match on Friday with a thrilling 7-6(6), 2-6, 7-6(5) victory against Poland's Hubert Hurkacz. Russia and Canada will meet on Saturday to earn the other spot in the final.

The 33-year-old Bautista has been flawless this edition, winning all four of his matches at No. 1 singles to lead the way for the two-time finalists. Hurkacz was desperate to keep his country's hopes alive and he played tremendous tennis, saving five match points with gutsy shot-making. But Bautista was relentless, eventually emerging victorious after a high-quality two hours and 44 minutes. Hurkacz, a 2021 Nitto ATP Finals competitor, delivered 24 aces to just one for his opponent. He also showed great courage in rushing the net under pressure. But Bautista was a wall on the biggest points. His elation showed after clinching the victory, with a look of great relief on his face.

Boland likely to continue in 5th Test as Hazlewood all but ruled out

Sydney| Agencies

Australian pace bowler Scott Boland's fairy-tale run in the Ashes could continue into the fifth Test at Hobart with head coach Justin Langer conceding on Friday that Josh Hazlewood had still not recovered completely from the side strain he suffered during the opening Test at The Gabba (Brisbane). The 32-year-old Boland made a dream debut in the Boxing Day Test at the MCG, claiming six second-innings England wickets for just seven runs as Australia humbled the tourists by an innings and 14 runs to take an unassailable 3-0 lead in the series. While Hazlewood has been all but ruled out of the final Ashes Test, Boland's competition for the Hobart game would be with Jhye Richardson and Michael Neser. But with Boland giving another commanding bowling performance on Friday, dismissing Joe Root for a duck and opener Zak Crawley for 18 to return figures of 2/25 from 12 overs, the Indigenous player looks set to play his third consecutive Ashes game. Meanwhile, there was an injury scare to Boland after a fall and he was taken for scans. But Cricket Australia (CA) later tweeted that the pace bowler was fit to take the field on Saturday, the fourth day of the SCG Test.

DISAPPOINTED AT NOT BEING A PART OF WORLD CUP SQUAD: PUNAM RAUT

India right-handed batter Punam Raut said she was 'extremely disappointed' on being left out of the 15-member squad for the ICC Women's World Cup 2022 to be in New Zealand from March 3 to April 4. The squad announced for the mega event will also feature in a five-match ODI series against New Zealand starting from February 11.

Team Absolute| Mumbai

On Thursday, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announced India's squad for the marquee event but there were no places for Punam along with her Mumbai team-mate Jemimah Rodrigues and pace all-rounder Shikha Pandey. The trio was not even named in the three reserve players' list.

"Having been considered amongst the experienced batsmen and a consistent run-scorer for India, I'm extremely disappointed at not being a part of the World Cup squad. In 2021, I averaged 73.75, scoring 295 runs, which included a hundred and two half-centuries in the six ODI games that I played," wrote Poonam in her statement on Twitter.

Punam had been a member of India's ODI squads in the tours to England and Australia apart from the home series against South Africa. The 32-year-old was the team's highest run-scorer during the ODI series against South Africa, scoring 263 runs in five innings at an average of 87.67, including an unbeaten 104.

VAANI KAPOOR: NEVER CHOSEN FILMS THINKING I'LL WIN AWARDS FOR THEM

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Vaani Kapoor, who will be next seen in 'Shamshera', says she never chooses films thinking that she would win awards for them, but picks them from her heart.

Vaani says: "I have never chosen films thinking I will win awards for them. I have always chosen projects from my heart and that's why I'm fortunate that I have films like 'Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui' in my filmography.

"It is rare to find a project that can consume you, make you dissolve yourself on screen to become someone like Maanvi. Maanvi is an idea and an ideal for the world and I'm blessed that I got to play this character with all my heart and soul."She said that if people have loved my performance it's because the character was written so "beautifully and with so much dignity."

The actress added: "If I were to win awards, I would dedicate them to the transgender community in India because we wanted to speak about inclusivity. If the film wins or my performance wins, it will show people that mainstream media is embracing this thought of much-needed change.

"Mainstream media has the power to change societies, make it evolve, and become better. But again, we didn't make the film keeping awards in mind. It was made from the purest place in Abhishek Kapoor's heart. He wanted us to open our minds."

She added: "We made the film to seed a thought about changing oneself, one's beliefs and ideas about how society is and how society should be for the future generations."

APARSHAKTI KHURRANA TO PLAY LEAD IN ATUL SABHARWAL'S 'BERLIN'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Bollywood actor Aparshakti Khurrana will start 2022 with Atul Sabharwal's next film, 'Berlin', a gritting suspense thriller where he will star as the lead.

This will be the actor's second outing in the genre after 'Dokha Round D Corner', and the film will go on floors this month and will be shot across Delhi, Agra and Bhopal, the key cities in the Hindi belt.

Aparshakti said: "I can't wait to get on the sets for this one."2021 for me has been full of surprises, with starting my journey of playing the lead role on a positive note, I also got the opportunity to explore different, more serious genres - which is something I have wanted to do since day one, and who better than Atul Sabharwal could have helped me get there?"

Heaping praises on his director, Aparshakti recollects Atul's past projects.

"I have followed Atul Sir's work very closely and I can undoubtedly vouch for his craft, especially when it comes to storytelling in this tricky genre. I still remember how mind-blowing and ahead of its time 'My Wife's Murder' was.

"Totally loved 'Powder' starring Pankaj Tripathi and his last work of 'Class of 83' shows how fine he is with his craft. He beautifully captures the nuances required for this genre and I am more than excited to have him helm this project for me," he concluded.

SHOOTING FOR 'ATRANGI RE' WAS A HEARTWARMING EXPERIENCE: ASHISH VERMA

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Ashish Verma, who was recently seen in Aanand L Rai's 'Atrangi Re', has called the film's shoot a memorable experience given how they made their way around the pandemic.

It also allowed him to explore his potential as an actor in the company of bigwigs like Aanand L. Rai and Dhanush.

Recollecting his experience, Ashish said: "The shooting for 'Atrangi Re' is one of the most heartwarming experiences I've had; we were in and out of Covid-19, we resumed when shooting was allowed.

"The film gave me ample space to perform, plus working with Aanand Sir and Dhanush, one of the finest we have, was a big big tick mark in the bucket list."

His another project, the Vyapam scam-based series, 'The Whistleblower' has also been receiving positive response. He said: "I am really happy with all the love coming my way through reviews, the audiences, and I only have gratitude for it. It was a solid ensemble with many characters. The collaboration with the solid cast and crew of like minded people was super fun."

While the actor is truly grateful for all the love he is receiving, he is onto his untitled next and has been shooting for the same in Jaipur.

The film in question is being helmed by Homi Adajania under Maddock Films production.

Shweta Tripathi: I am a bit of a fiery person myself

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Shweta Tripathi has always portrayed strong characters such as Golu Gupta in 'Mirzapur' and Sandhya in 'Haraamkhor' to name a few. She says she resonates with such roles because she is a bit of a fiery person herself.

With 'Yeh Kaali Kaali Ankhein', she brings forth softer and warmer character tour screens.Shweta, while talking about her past characters and the challenges of playing a romantic role in 'Yeh Kaali Kaali Ankhein', said: "I'm someone who has played a lot of strong characters in the past, and I can resonate with them as well because I am a bit of a fiery person.

"But I think the biggest difference between Shikha's life and mine is that there is a lot of pain in hers and embodying that pain while not having felt it, was a huge challenge.

Shweta said she has done action in the past but "this kind of action is very different.

"I find myself crying while running through gunshots and blasts. I am used to not being afraid. So even if it's using a gun, I would not be scared, I would pick it up and shoot it, as opposed to here."

'KAUN BANEGI SHIKHARWATI': PERFECT CASTING SAVES THIS SERIES

FILM REVIEW

TROY RIBEIRO

(Streaming on Zee5); Duration

Averaging 40 minutes per episode

Directors: Gauravv K. Chawla, Ananya Banerjee

Cast: Naseeruddin Shah, Raghubir Yadav, Soha Ali Khan, Lara Dutta, Anya Singh, Kritika Kamra, Cyrus Sahukar, Varun Thakur

Ratings: **1/2

Set in the royal land of Rajasthan, 'Kaun Banegi Shikharwati' is a hackneyed ten-episode dramedy where a father attempts to reunite his four estranged daughters to save the legacy they hold.

Naseeruddin Shah plays Raja Mrityunjay, the erstwhile King of Shikharwati, who is bogged down with empty coffers and a huge debt to the Indian Government - in terms of property tax in arrears. To save himself from the situation he is in, with the help of his close confidant Mishraji, he feigns a strange illness and calls his four estranged daughters; Devyani, Gayatri, Kamini, and Uma to his palace with the assurance that he would decide an heir after the four of them compete in a competition.

The rules of the competition are simple. There would be nine rounds in the competition, and each round would be a task which the princesses would have to perform. In the end, the winner of the competition would be appointed the next "King". That is how the plot kicks in and thus begins the predictable misadventures of the quirky princesses who do their darndest to win.

Each episode is astutely crafted with art that seems insubstantial and meandering on the surface and thus may repulse some. But by the tenth episode, after you have had the patience of sitting through the earlier nine, you'd get hooked to find the series end on a meaningful and heart-warming note.

As for the characters; Naseeruddin Shah as the idiosyncratic Raja with his fuzzy tuft looking as cosily rumpled as an unmade bed, making it clear that Raja Mritunjay is not a heartless, mean man and that he has the welfare of his daughters and his estate at heart, Lara Dutta as Devyani his oldest daughter with marital issues, Soha Ali Khan as his considerate second daughter Gayatri who is a single mom to her two children, Kritika Kamra as his third unmarried daughter Kamini who is obsessed over her social media follower count and Anya Singh as Uma his allergy-prone, gamer daughter, Cyrus Sahukar as Devyani's husband Harsh Neotia, Raghubir Yadav as Mishraji, and the rest of the ilk, all appear stereotypical and oft-seen.Similarly, spare for a handful of inspired scenes, the rest of the series appear cliched and unoriginal.

In lesser hands, 'Kaun Banegi Shikharwati' could have been indigestible pablum, but its pitch-perfect cast won't let you soon forget the poignant bonding of the series. There is a natural performative quality to the actors' embodiment of their characters. They all seem to be living their parts effortlessly and are impressive in their marked roles, with them going big at all times with smirks, sighs, smiles, and tears.Overall, mounted with ace production values, the series appears staged with damaged individuals in search of - connection and unity, who wind up tidy to a cheesy fault.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY

Kate Sharma

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