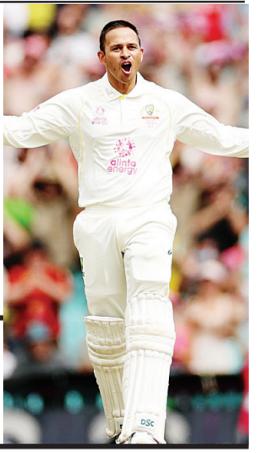


absolute india

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Seven-phase polls in five states from Feb 10-Mar 7, counting on Mar 10

POLL BATTLE BEGINS

Uttar Pradesh will go to polls on February 10, 14, 20, 23 and March 3 and 7; Punjab, Goa and Uttarakhand would vote on February 14; while Manipur will vote in two phases on February 27 and March 3.

Up to January 15, no physical rallies road-shows, padyatras, or vehicle rallies will be allowed keeping in view the pandemic situation. All parties have been advised to conduct campaigns in virtual mode.

Invoking Aarticle 171 (1), Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra said that the Assembly tenure has to end in five years and, therefore, elections are necessary.

State	Counting Date	No. of voters	First-time voters
Goa	February 14	40	26.2%
Manipur	February 27 and March 3	60	36.0%
Punjab	February 14	117	70.1%
Uttarakhand	February 14	70	42.0%
Uttar Pradesh	February 10, 14, 20, 23 and March 3 and 7	403	241.8%

been increased by one hour in all the states. The final electoral rolls were published on January 5. There are a total of 18.34 crore voters, including service voters. Of these,

8.55 crore are women. The preparations have been going on for at least six months with EC teams visiting poll-bound states.

Here is how seven-phase polls to five states will pan out

- Team Absolute | New Delhi**
- The Assembly elections in five states -- Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur -- would be held in seven phases with voting from February 10 to March 7 with 690 seats up for grabs. The counting of votes will take place on March 10.
- Elections would be held for 403 Assembly seats in Uttar Pradesh, 117 in Punjab, 70 in Uttarakhand, 40 in Goa and 60 seats in Manipur.
 - Uttar Pradesh would go to polls on February 10, 14, 20, 23 and March 3 and 7; Punjab, Goa and Uttarakhand would vote on February 14.
 - For Uttar Pradesh, the dates for issue of notification are January 14, 21, 25, 27 and February 1, 4 and 10 for the seven phases, respectively. The last date for filing of nominations for the corresponding phases are January 21, 28 and February 1, 3, 8, 11 and 17.
 - For Uttarakhand, Punjab and Goa, it is a single-day voting while for Manipur it is two-phased.
 - For Uttarakhand, the notification will be issued on January 21 and the last date for filing nominations is January 28. For Punjab, the notification will be issued on January 21 and the last date for filing nominations is January 28.
 - For Goa, the notification will be issued on January 21 and the last date for filing nominations is January 28.
 - For Manipur, the dates for issue of notification for the two phases are February 1 and 4, while the last dates for filing nominations are February 8 and 11.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Spanned over seven phases, the elections to five states Assemblies -- Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Goa, Punjab and Manipur -- would be held from February 10 to March 7, and the counting of votes will take place on March 10, the Election Commission of India announced on Saturday. The elections would be held following full Covid protocols.

As per the Covid protocols for conducting elections, all elections officials will be double vaccinated, will be given a booster dose and will also be treated as frontline workers. Booths would be fully sanitised and there will be adequate gloves, sanitizers etc for the polling staff.

More than 15 crore people in the five poll-bound states have received the first dose of the vaccine, while nine crore people have received both the shots. Polling time has

RANSOMWARE ATTACK SHUTS THOUSANDS OF SCHOOL WEBSITES GLOBALLY

A COMPANY SPOKESPERSON TOLD TECHCRUNCH THAT 5,000 OF ITS TOTAL 8,000 GLOBAL CUSTOMERS -- INCLUDING SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN KANSAS CITY, ILLINOIS AND MISSOURI -- ARE AFFECTED BY THE INCIDENT.

ONE REDDIT USER SAID THE INCIDENT ALSO PREVENTED SOME SCHOOLS FROM SENDING EMAIL NOTIFICATIONS ABOUT SCHOOL CLOSURES DUE TO COVID-19 OUTBREAKS.



SAN FRANCISCO | Agencies

In a serious ransomware attack, hackers have hit an education technology company, Finalsite, shutting down thousands of school websites and nearly 5,000 alone in the US.

Finalsite provides school districts with website design, hosting and content management solutions.

In a statement, the company said that they continue to restore more websites and core functionality every hour. "We remain committed

to restoration, as quickly and safely as possible. Our team is actively monitoring performance and security across our infrastructure, and we will continue to work through the night and weekend until every site is back online," the company said on Friday.

Earlier this week, at least 8,000 schools globally, hosted by Finalsite, discovered that they were no longer accessible or displayed errors.

"Our team identified the presence of ransomware on certain systems in our environment," the company said.

"We immediately took steps to secure our systems and to contain the activity. We quickly launched an investigation into the event with the assistance of third-party forensic specialists, and began proactively taking certain systems offline," it added.

"Our team continues to make progress restoring functionality to websites," said the company.

Google Doodle celebrates 80th birth anniversary of Stephen Hawking

SAN FRANCISCO | Agencies

On his 80th birth anniversary on Saturday, Google has paid tribute to late physicist Stephen Hawking with a Doodle.

The two and a half minute-long animated video includes narration in the physicist's own computer-generated voice outlining his work and painting a message of hope for the future.

According to Engadget, the tech giant worked with his family to create a video Doodle that gives us a condensed version of his life.

Moreover, Google used Hawking's famous computer-generated voice to narrate his work and experiences from the time he graduated.

Hawking was born in 1942 in Oxford, England and has always been fascinated with the universe. He was diagnosed



with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), a neurodegenerative disease, when he was 21.

In the years after that, he lost his mobility and his ability to speak, but he was able to communicate through a computer using a voice created in the 1980s by MIT engineer Dennis Klatt.

In the Doodle, users will hear Hawking's voice talk

MAKERS OF 'VIKRANT RONA' REFUSE RS 100 CR OTT RELEASE OFFER

The makers of Kicha Sudeepa starrer 'Vikrant Rona' have decided on a theatrical release. The producers have apparently refused a Rs 100 crore offer for OTT release of their movie.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

With the Omicron scare making theatrical screenings a risky business proposition, several movie-makers are opting for OTT release instead.

Vikrant Rona, a pan world 3D film, has been one of the most anticipated films in the country. From its title launch on The Burj Khalifa in Dubai, to getting Jacqueline Fernandez on board and even announcing a release in over 50 countries 'Vikrant Rona' has been making all the moves.

According to sources, the team had recently organised a private screening for one of the biggest

OTT giants. The visuals of the film are said to be matching Hollywood standards, with a genre that is never explored before in the Indian Film Industry. Praising Kichcha Sudeepa's performance as one of the best performances in this decade, the source said the OTT major has offered upto 100 crore for a direct release of Vikrant Rona on their platform. But the team has apparently said no to the offer.

During one of the media interactions, producer Jack Manjunath said: "Yes, it is true that the offer was made, but Vikrant Rona is a big screen experience. The visuals that I have seen personally is something that the families and kids will enjoy on the big screen."

'Vikrant Rona' starring Kichcha Sudeepa, Jacqueline Fernandez, Nirup Bhandari and Neetha Ashok, is presented by Zee studios, produced by Jack Manjunath under his production Shalini Artss, co-produced by Alankar Pandian is directed by Anup Bhandari is slated to hit the screens worldwide on February 24.

Shimla gets season's first snowfall, cheers tourists

The majestic Dhauladhar ranges in the Kangra valley was covered in a fresh blanket of snow.

SHIMLA | Agencies

After much delay, the Himachal Pradesh capital on Saturday received the season's first snowfall, cheering the tourists who enjoyed the icy landscape.

Places near Shimla like Kufri and Narkanda have also been experiencing snowfall, turning the tourist destinations more picturesque.

As news of the snowfall spread, hordes of tourists will flock this weekend to Shimla, known for the imperial grandeur of its buildings that were once institutions of power when the town served as the summer capital of British India.

Shimla, which saw a low of 0.2 degree Celsius, recorded 14.6 cm



snowfall. Kufri and Mashobra also recorded snowfall.

The snowy landscape in Shimla would remain for one-two days, the Met Department official told reporter. Reports said most of the areas in the apple belt of Jubbal and Kharapathar in Shimla district also experienced plentiful snow. Manali, which experienced rain, experienced a low of 2.4 degrees Celsius, while it was 6.4 degrees in Dharamsala and 0.2 degree in Dalhousie.

Fresh registration not needed for booster dose: Centre

New Delhi: The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has said that there is no need for new registration for beneficiaries of precautionary Covid-19 vaccine dose.

"Those who have taken two doses of Covid-19 vaccine can directly take an appointment or walk-in to any vaccination centre", said the ministry. The scheduled for the precautionary dose from the ministry is expected on Saturday. The online appointment facility will also start by this evening. The vaccination with on site appointment will start from January 10, it said. Vaccination process of third precautionary dose for health workers, frontline workers and vulnerable senior citizens is scheduled to start nationwide from January 10. However, the precautionary or the third dose for the healthcare workers, frontline workers and those above 60 with comorbidities will be the same vaccines as was given to them previously.



VAR to make India debut at AFC Women's Asian Cup

At the AFC Women's Asian Cup, six dedicated video match officials will have access to seven different live camera feeds to inspect every action on the field.

There are four categories of decisions that VAR can review - Goal/no goal, Penalty/no penalty, Direct red card, and Mistaken identity in awarding a red or yellow card.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Video Assistant Referee (VAR), football's video review system, will be making its debut in India from the quarter-finals stage of the AFC Women's Asian Cup India 2022, starting from January 20. The Continental competition will be played at three venues in Mumbai, Navi Mumbai and Pune and will see the VAR making its tournament debut from January 30 onwards.

The technology will be used till the final on February 6 across the two venues for the knockout stages -- DY Patil Stadium, Navi Mumbai and the Shree Shiv Chhatrapati Sports Complex in Balewadi, Pune.

Preparations for installation and setup of the technology have already begun in the respective venues. Apart from the stadiums on match-days, the referees' training sites will be equipped with a similar VAR setup and simulators will also be made available to the referees in their hotel, the local organising committee informed on Saturday. The AFC is working towards ensuring the highest standards of refereeing at the tournament with multiple technical tests being performed at the stadiums and training sites before the VAR is officially introduced in the country, it said.

The VAR match official and the on-field referee will work in tandem to make the aforementioned category of decisions wherein either the VAR or the on-field referee can initiate a review. Upon review, the VAR can recommend the on-field referee to overturn their decision in case a clear and obvious error has been spotted.

Alternatively, the on-field referee may choose to conduct an On-Field Review (OFR) by halting the game and reviewing footage from the screen which will be installed in the Referee Review Area behind the fourth official's bench, just outside the touchline of the playing pitch. At all times, the on-field referee can ignore the advice from the VAR.



BENGAL MAY IMPOSE TOTAL LOCKDOWN AMID COVID SURGE

KOLKATA | Agencies

With more than 73,000 new Covid-19 registered in the last seven days, speculations are rife that West Bengal, which has already announced formation of micro-containment zones, might impose a full lockdown curb the unprecedented spike.

On Friday, the state recorded 18,213 new cases, close to the highest single-day spike registered on May 14, 2021 (20,836).

Experts are of the opinion that if the transmission chain is not broken immediately then the number of daily cases might break the record within a couple of days.

What is more alarming for the state is the astronomical rise of cases in the last 10 days. On January 4, the number of fresh was 9,073 which then doubled within a span of two days.



On January 1 the number was just 4,512 but in the next seven days, the cumulative figure touched 73,412 causing real concern for the state administration.

In an effort to curb the steep rise of the virus, the state government has

already announced a series of measures bringing back the micro-containment zone mechanism to restrict people from high infectious zones to get into the mainstream areas.

Not only in Kolkata and its adjacent areas, but the local administration has imposed partial lockdown in several other areas.

The local administration of South 24 Parganas, Howrah, Hooghly, Jalpaiguri, Nadia and North 24 parganas have announced a total lockdown three days a week.

According to senior officials of the state government, the administration is not waiving out the possibility of a total lockdown in the state.

MP LOGS 1,572 NEW COVID CASES, ACTIVE TALLY GROWS 5K

Bhopal:

Madhya Pradesh reported 1,572 new Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours, out of which, 618 were registered in Indore and 347 in Bhopal, according to the daily health bulletin issued by the state government on Saturday. Covid infections have reached to 26 out of 52 districts of the state, of which, Indore and the capital city have been reporting the maximum number of cases. Other districts where daily cases were reported above 50 are - Gwalior (111), Jabalpur (96), Ujjain (65), Vidisha (39), Sagar (36) and Ratlam (24), while the daily cases in other districts remained below 20.

With this, the total active cases in the state have crossed 5,000 (5038), while 166 Covid infected people were reported to have recovered in the last 24 hours. There was no Covid related death in Madhya Pradesh in the last 24 hours, whereas a total 10,536 people have lost lives since the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020.



ED Joint director takes VRS, likely to contest on BJP ticket

Atul krishan | New Delhi

The VRS request of Joint Director of Enforcement Directorate (ED), Rajeshwar Singh, has been accepted by the department. Singh is now likely to contest upcoming UP Assembly elections.

In August last year, Singh, who was posted in Lucknow, had applied for the VRS. Six months after his request, the concerned department took cognisance of the matter and allowed his move.

There are possibilities that he might contest election from Shahibabad.

As of now Singh has not made any official statement regarding his joining BJP and about his VRS. So far he is keeping mum on the matter.

During his long tenure in ED, he probed most sensitive cases i.e 2G spectrum allocation case. He was also given case of alleged irregularities in 2010 Common Wealth Games. PMLA cases lodged against former Union finance minister P. Chidambaram, his son Karti Chidambaram, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and former Jharkhand chief minister Madhu Koda



were also probed by him.

In 2018, Singh got into controversy after he received a suspicious call from Dubai. This call was detected by the intelligence agencies who informed the apex court regarding this. Karnail Singh, the then ED director had said that he (Rajeshwar Singh) was a responsible official.

Singh is holding a B.Tech degree and did his PhD in

police, human rights and social justice subject. He became 1996 batch PPS official of UP and was a UP Police official. In 2009 he joined the ED. He was permanently absorbed into the ED cadre in 2015. Abha Singh, his sister who is a practicing lawyer in Mumbai has lauded his likely move saying country needed him. Rajeshwar Singh is married to IPS Luxmi Singh.

DELHI GOVT RELAXES WEEKEND CURFEW ON PRAKASH PARAB

New Delhi: The Delhi Government has announced to give relaxation on the occasion of Prakash Parab of Guru Govind Singh to be held on January 9. The government has allowed devotees to visit the Gurdwaras on the occasion of Prakash Parab with strict compliance of Covid guidelines and the Covid appropriate behaviour. The national capital Delhi has gone into weekend curfew starting on Friday to 5 a.m. on Monday to check the sharp increase in coronavirus cases. The daily Covid caseload has crossed the 20,000 mark in the city.

BJP gets Mayor, Deputy elected in Municipal Corporation Chandigarh

Chandigarh | Agencies

Despite getting the maximum 14 councillors elected to the 36-member House of Municipal Corporation Chandigarh, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which contested the polls for the first time, on Saturday failed to get its Mayor and his Deputy installed in the House. The BJP, with the support of 13 councillors and its sitting MP Kirron Kher, got its candidate Sarbjit Kaur elected as Mayor, with Anup Gupta as her Deputy.

A total of 28 votes were polled as the Congress and Shiromani Akali Dal abstained from voting.

The BJP got 14 votes, the AAP 13 while one vote was declared invalid.

Gupta won through a draw



of lots after votes were tied 14:14 between him and AAP's Ram Chander Yadav.

Later, AAP leader Jarnail Singh accused the BJP of murdering democracy in the mayoral election.

He said that in the corporation elections, the residents of the city had voted the maximum number of 14 seats for

AAP.

AAP's victory in the Mayor election was certain, but the BJP deliberately cancelled a vote of AAP by insulting the verdict of the public and declared its Mayor forcibly, he told the media.

He said the elections for Mayor showed that there was a clandestine understanding between the BJP and the Congress to defeat the AAP.

After winning 12 seats in the elections, the BJP inducted a councillor from the Congress.

"Somehow BJP's vote figures reached 14 by including one vote of from an MP and it equalled AAP's 14 votes. But the BJP, by flouting all the rules and regulations, got its candidate appointed as the Mayor," Singh added.

LANDSLIDES BLOCK JAMMU-SRINAGAR NATIONAL HIGHWAY

JAMMU | Agencies

Landslides triggered by incessant rain on Saturday blocked the Jammu-Srinagar highway, leaving 3,000 vehicles stranded, according to traffic department officials.

The officials said over 1,000 vehicles were cleared from Srinagar to Jammu on Friday after which landslides and shooting stones at multiple places in Ramban district again blocked the highway.

"It is heavily raining in Udhampur and Ramban districts along the Jammu-Srinagar highway. For the safety of the travellers, no traffic is being allowed this time.

"All vehicles stranded on the highway are parked at safe places," a department official said.

Reports also said snowfall is continuing in Patnitop and



Banished areas of the highway. The highway is strategically very important because supplies

of all essential commodities to the landlocked Kashmir Valley are routed through this key route.

Closure of the highway often lead to hoarding and black marketing in the valley.

7 HELD FOR PRINTING FAKE CURRENCY NOTES IN GHAZIABAD

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Ghaziabad police said on Friday that they have arrested seven persons involved in printing fake Indian currency notes (FICN), who already have printed a counterfeit cash having a face value of Rs 15-16 lakhs.

The police have seized fake currency notes having face value of Rs 6.59 lakh, which includes all denominations of notes ranging from Rs 100 to Rs 2000.

The seven accused have been identified as Aman, Alam, Rahbar, Furkan, Azaad, Md Yunus and Sonu, all residents of Ghaziabad.

Assistant Superintendent of Police Akash Patel said that they had received a tip-off about a gang involved in printing the counterfeit currency somewhere in the city.

Based on the information, a team was constituted and a raid was conducted



at a specified place.

"Three people were apprehended from the spot and on their revelations, we raided the place of Md Yunus, where the whole nexus was unearthed," Patel said.

The mastermind of the whole gang was found as Azaad, who introduced the idea of printing fake cur-

rency notes to Md Yunus and Sonu and they began the printing.

The rest of the three people Aman, Alam, and Furkan used to supply the fake currency and give it to several shops in the city. The cops found out that the gang became active in May, 2021 and since then they have printed Rs 15-17 lakh, of which Rs 11-12

lakh have entered the market.

"The accused were producing refined quality currencies, which made it difficult for consumers to identify the difference between a fake and a real one," Patel said.

The police have denied any international connection of the gang, however, have said that probe is still on.

Earlier, on December 23, the Special Cell of Delhi Police had busted an international syndicate that was involved in circulating FICN and two people involved in the racket were arrested.

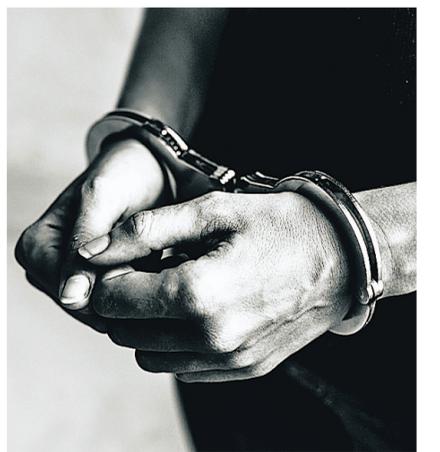
Notably, counterfeiting of currency notes is an offence under the Indian Penal Code.

Further, production, smuggling or circulation of high-quality fake Indian paper currency, coin or any other material has been made a terrorist act under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.

Gurugram: Three held for stealing, trafficking newborn babies

Gurugram | Agencies

The Gurugram Police have arrested two women and a man with the help of a taxi driver, who were involved in stealing and trafficking newborn children. Two newborn girls were also recovered from their possession, who were stolen from Delhi and were about to be sold for Rs 3 lakh in Alwar, Rajasthan. The arrested persons have been identified as Surinder Kaur (45) from Alwar, Neha, a resident of Rohini, Delhi, and Harjinder Singh (32) from Alwar. During interrogation, the trio disclosed that they, along with their companions, used to steal newborn babies from different places and sell them to earn quick money. They were involved in this illegal trade since 2014.



Four held for 6 factory workers' death after inhaling toxic fumes in Surat

Gandhinagar | Agencies

The Surat police have arrested four persons for the alleged illegal discharge of chemical waste due to which six workers died from inhaling toxic fumes. They have been arrested under various charges, including culpable homicide.

Twenty two others were hospitalised on January 6 after they inhaled toxic fumes leaked from the chemical tanker parked near a factory in Gujarat's Surat district.

The Surat police crime branch arrested four persons, including two transporters, a bank employee and a garage owner, the police said.

The arrests were carried out with the help of Vadodara and Bharuch police.

According to the police, the chemical waste being illegally dumped was supplied



by one Ashish Gupta, a transporter and a partner in a firm. He provided the hazardous chemical for disposal to one Jaipratap Tomar and

another person identified as Yadav. Tomar works in the loan department of a bank while Yadav runs a garage, the police official said.

ALIGARH COUPLE MAKES WORLD'S LARGEST LOCK, TO BE DEDICATED TO RAM TEMPLE

Vivek Tripathi | Aligarh

A well-known locksmith in Uttar Pradesh's Aligarh district along with his wife has made the world's largest lock. This lock, which opens only with a 30 kg key, will be dedicated by the couple to the Ram temple being constructed in Ayodhya. The picture of Lord Ram has been engraved on this lock which costs Rs two lakh.

Sixty five-year-old Satyaprakash Sharma, a locksmith and a resident of Aligarh's Jwalapuri area, told IANS that it has taken him nearly six months to make this lock which weighs nearly 400 kg and is ten feet in length. The lock's width is four and a half feet, he added.

Satyaprakash will finish brass work in the lock before giving it to the Ram temple in Ayodhya. Earlier, he had made a lock weighing 300 kg, which has attracted eyeballs in the whole country.

He said that many changes will be made in this lock before sending it to Ayodhya. The box, lever and hood of the lock will be made of brass. A steel scrap seat will be installed on the lock to prevent it from rust, for this purpose he needs more money so he is asking people for monetary help so that his dream becomes a reality.



Wife Rukmani Sharma told correspondent that the inspiration for making this lock came to her husband from his own house.

Rukmani says that her husband has earned a lot of appreciation in the locksmith business. Now it is upto the current generation to take this business to new heights.

To carve out an identity for Aligarh, the

world's largest lock has been prepared. This lock comprising a thickness of six inches is made of iron for which two keys have been prepared.

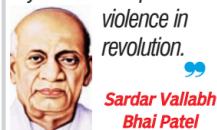
"Government support is needed to promote this art. I have been working on this lock by taking money on interest."

He said that this lock should be kept in the museum of the Ram temple.

Locksmith Satyaprakash said that he wants to make a tableau of a bigger lock than the current lock in New Delhi on the upcoming Republic Day parade. He wants that his lock-making skills should be included in the Republic Day parade and wants to display a lock measuring a height of 15 feet, width 8 feet along with a thickness of 20 inches. For making a lock with these measurements, he also wrote letters to the Central and state governments. He has also met the Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister in this regard and is waiting for his reply and wants to get this unique feat recorded in the Guinness Book of World Records.

Satyaprakash's wife Rukmani Sharma has also helped him in making this lock. She too talked about the benefits of this art. She says that a temple of Lord Ram is being built in Ayodhya so it would be a fitting tribute to present this lock as a gift to Lord Ram.

“One can take the path of revolution but the revolution should not give a shock to the society. There is no place for violence in revolution.”



Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel

REAL GDP TO GROW AT AROUND 9.5% IN FY22: SBI ECOWRAP

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India's real GDP is expected to grow at around 9.5 per cent in 2021-22 on a year-on-year (YoY), an SBI Ecowrap report said on Saturday.

The report comes a day after the National Statistical Office (NSO) released the First Advance Estimates of National Income for financial year 2021-22.

Accordingly, the estimates had said that India's economy is expected to clock a growth of 9.2 per cent in terms of real GDP for FY22. The NSO data had indicated that Real GDP or 'GDP at Constant Prices' (2011-12) in the year 2021-22 rose to Rs 147.54 lakh crore from Rs 135.13 lakh crore, the 'Provisional Estimate of GDP' for the year 2020-21.

The Ecowrap report said: "We believe that NSO's estimate is on the conservative side, as the calculated GDP growth for H2FY22 for construction comes at (-) 0.9 per cent. Services is at a mere 2 per cent for H2FY22. "We still believe that real GDP will grow at



around 9.5 per cent in FY22. Meanwhile, this estimate however has a shelf-life of only two months and is only used as an input for budget arithmetic." Besides, the report said that the NSO will release the first revised estimate of FY19, FY20 and FY21 on 31 Jan '21.

"We believe that for FY22 the figures would be revised again in February '21 and May '21." As per the report, going forward, even if the

rising Covid infections could impact mobility, yet economic activity is not expected to get affected much. "Cases have been rising significantly in India as well as across the globe. However, studies so far reveal that the current Omicron variant is less severe than the Delta variant. Data also substantiates this fact," the report said.

"While number of new cases increased from 1.3 crore in October '21 to almost double to 2.5 crore in December '21 the number of

deaths remained constant (just 2,200 more deaths occurred in Dec as compared to Oct)."

In addition, the report said that taking into account the revised GDP figures, "even if we consider the additional spending announced by the government in early Dec '21 fiscal deficit of the government still comes at Rs 15.88 lakh crore or 6.8 per cent of the GDP".

"For FY23, the fiscal consolidation should remain limited to 30-40 bps from the current fiscal."

BUSINESS VOLUME DOWN 45% DUE TO THIRD WAVE: CAIT

"The main reason for this decline is the panic among the people due to the third wave of Corona. Reluctant mood of traders to come to the distribution centres from neighbouring cities, money crunch, large sums of money getting stuck in credit and imposition of various Covid restrictions without consulting the traders are some of the factors that have hit the businesses," the CAIT

Team Absolute | New Delhi



Increase in Covid cases along with imposition of various restrictions by different states have had an adverse impact on business and economic activities across the country, the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) said on Saturday. According to the CAIT, the situation has led "business of various verticals of goods" to go down by an average of 45 per cent in the last 10 days. The Confederation also urged the Central government and the chief ministers to take all possible steps to prevent further Covid spread.

Besides, it cited the "double whammy" of lower intra-regional trade due to the restrictions and subdued local buyers' sentiments.

The CAIT also expects a major business decline during the wedding season.

'Removal of Sikhs from Army': Origin of 'morphed' video traced to Pak



Ujwal Jalali | New Delhi

Delhi Police have traced the origin of a morphed video to Pakistan in which it was allegedly claimed that the Cabinet Committee meeting on security gave a call for the removal of all Sikh soldiers serving in the Indian Army.

After the video surfaced on social media, it was fact-checked by the Intelligence Fusion and Strategic Operations (IFSO) unit of Delhi Police, which found that the video was morphed and a voice over was superimposed, in which the alleged persons tried to show that the meeting was against the Sikh community.

DCP (Cyber Crime) K.P.S. Malhotra had earlier informed that in reality, the video was shot on the day when a high-level committee was briefing Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the demise of Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat.

Time and again it has been noted that the origin of the anti-India content, spread through different social media platforms, comes from across the border in Pakistan.

During the primarily technical investigation, it was noticed that there were various accounts, which had tweeted the same video with the same content and same hashtag.

"All the accounts were created between October 2021 and December 2021. The technical analysis has revealed that these accounts were being operated from a single browser (developed by multilogin.com)," sources said.

Multilogin provides Mimic browser and stealth-fox browser, which have features of multi sessions and private sessions.

Following the preliminary probe, around 46 accounts on Twitter that were being operated from Pakistan have been blocked.

Rupee expected to weaken on inflation, infection woes

Rohit Vaid | Mumbai

Likely surge in bond yields along with rising Covid cases are expected to weaken the Indian rupee during the upcoming week. Besides, persistently high energy costs could subdue the rupee bulls.

However, re-commencement of FII inflows will arrest any major fall in rupee's value vis-a-vis the US dollar. Last week, rupee was rangebound to close at 74.31 to a USD. In that period, inflows from Reliance's US dollar bond issuance kept rupee tethered near 74.30 despite the surge in dollar index and higher crude oil prices.

"Next week, surging bond yields, fears of higher covid19 infections, high energy costs



and RBI's intervention could spoil the party of rupee bulls," said Devarsh Vakil, Deputy Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities. "We expect the rupee to trade between 74.20 to 74.90 next week with a weakening bias." The Central Statistics Office (CSO) is slated to release the macro-economic data points of IIP and CPI on January 12.

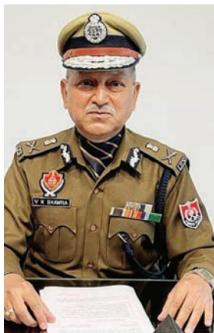
Punjab gets third DGP in three months

CHANDIGARH | Agencies

A 1987-batch IPS officer, Viresh Kumar Bhawra, on Saturday assumed the charge of Director General of Police (DGP) in Punjab, replacing Siddharth Chattopadhyaya.

Bhawra is the third DGP in just three months of the Congress government led by Charanjit Channi. Chattopadhyaya replaced senior IPS officer Iqbal Preet Singh Sahota.

The order issued by the state reads: "On the consideration of the panel received from the Union Public Service Commission, the Governor of Punjab is pleased to appoint Shri Viresh Kumar Bhawra, IPS as Director General of



Police, Punjab (Head of Police Force). After assuming charge, the newly appointed DGP said with the state Assembly elections round the corner, Punjab Police will ensure smooth conduct of elections.

Allah gave birth to Surya: JDU leader

Patna: The

Muslim face of Janta Dal (United) in Uttar Pradesh polls and Bihar MLC Gulam Rasool Balyawi on Saturday triggered a controversy by refusing to perform 'Surya Namaskar' saying Allah has "given birth" to the Sun.

"In Islam, we worship only Allah. The followers of Allah and Islam cannot worship any other God that Allah has created. We worship the one who gives birth and not who are born," Balyawi said. He further said that 'Surya Namaskar' is meant to worship the Sun which a follower of Islam would never do. The JD(U) leader's remark follows the BJP's announcement to observe January 12 as 'Surya Namaskar' day.



21 TOURISTS STRANDED IN CARS FREEZE TO DEATH IN PAK HILL STATION

Team Absolute | New Delhi

At least 21 people died of cold after they were stranded in their cars during the snowstorm in Murree in Pakistan on Friday night, according to Pakistan Interior Minister Sheikh Rasheed, Samaa TV reported.

The hill station was crowded after tourists headed there to witness snowfall. On Friday night, the government imposed a ban on the entry of tourists to Murree and Galiyat region.

On Saturday, the minister revealed that so far, 23,000 cars have been brought back, while an operation is underway to rescue 1,000 more cars trapped in the snow. Heavy machinery has been called in to clear the roads as well. According to reports, this week, nearly 140,000 vehicles



entered Murree. Meanwhile, hundreds of people spent Friday night on the roads. Local residents have been out

on the streets distributing warm clothes, blankets, and food to stranded tourists, the report said. The deaths took

place because roads were blocked and people were stuck in their cars for hours. They couldn't reach their hotels.

SWISS ARMY BANS WHATSAPP USE OVER SECURITY CONCERNS



London/New Delhi: Citing privacy concerns, the Swiss army has banned the use of Meta-owned WhatsApp among other popular messaging services by army personnel.

The army staff has been asked to use encrypted Swiss messaging app 'Threema' instead, reports www.swissinfo. Apart from WhatsApp, the Swiss army has also banned the use of Signal and Telegram.

According to reports, the primary concern appears to be the "ability of authorities in Washington to access data stored by companies that fall under US jurisdiction, as described in the US CLOUD Act". "The CLOUD Act obliges service providers under US jurisdiction to comply with search warrants, regardless of where servers are located," according to reports. WhatsApp is the most popular messenger application among 16- to 64-year-olds in Switzerland, according to local surveys. Such concerns over the use of foreign mobile applications by army officials have been raised in India too as they might compromise security. The Indian Army has now launched a contemporary messaging application called 'ASIGMA' (Army Secure IndiGeneous Messaging Application).

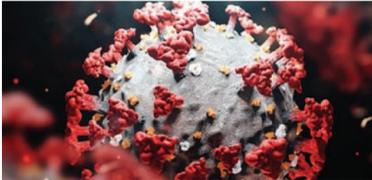
Omicron can be more lethal for children than Delta, says Experts

Vivek Singh Chauhan | New Delhi

Amid the rise of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus, health experts on Saturday warned that this variant may lead children to witness more problems as compared to the Delta variant.

According to experts, the Omicron variant can be more lethal for children as this variant primarily affects the upper respiratory tract and children have higher respiratory rates than adults making them more susceptible to agents in the air.

The experts said that the symptoms of Omicron in kids are majorly similar



OVER 2K KIDS INFECTED IN 1 WEEK IN B'LURU, 375 CASES REPORTED DAILY

Bengaluru: As many as 2,628 cases of Covid among children were reported in Bengaluru in the past one week, as per the statistics released by the Karnataka health department. On an average 375 children contract the infection everyday, it added. Between January 1 and 7, the virus hit as many as 2,628 children aged below 19 years. Among these, 571 are below nine years and 2,057 are within 19 years. Among the 2,628 children, 1,311 are female. First three days after the new year about 100 to 150 cases were reported within this age group. Since January 3, the number has gone up and is crossing 300 daily.

"Children's respiratory tract is smaller than adults and this new variant is majorly affecting upper respiratory tract among infected patients. Hence it can be said that there are possible chances of children witnessing more problems, which may be of concern but not lethal than adults."

Animesh Arya, Senior Consultant in Respiratory Medicine, New Delhi

to adults like sore throat, mild fever, fatigue, etc. According to data from the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an average of 672 children were admitted to hospitals every day with Covid-19 during the last week ending Sunday -- the highest such number of the pandemic.

Meanwhile, a study by the CDC said that kids who were infected with Covid-19 had a higher risk of developing new cases of diabetes after their infection.

Over 2 crore teens inoculated with first dose

New Delhi: More than 2 crore teens have been inoculated with the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine, since the beginning of vaccination drive for children aged between 15 to 18 years on January 3. According to the CoWIN portal, as of now, a total of 2,17,42,837 teens have been vaccinated and the numbers are increasing every minute.

As per the CoWIN portal, as many as 2,37,67,488 youngsters of 15 to 18 age group have registered for the vaccines so far. Out of total, over two crore have received their first dose of the vaccines within the first week of its beginning.

Global food prices up 28.1% in 2021: FAO



GENEVA | Agencies

Although global food prices decreased slightly in December 2021 month-on-month, they were much higher throughout last year than in 2020, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Abdolreza Abbassian, senior economist of the UN agency, told a press briefing here on Friday that in 2021, the FAO Food Price Index was 28.1 per cent higher than in 2020, reports xinhua news agency.

Global cereal prices were at their highest level since 2012, on average 27.2 per cent above 2020 prices, he said.

According to Abbassian, in 2021, vegetable oil prices

increased by 65.8 per cent over 2020; sugar prices soared to their highest level since 2016; meat prices were 12.7 per cent above 2020 prices; and dairy prices were 16.9 per cent higher than in 2020. Biggest gainers were maize, up 44.1 per cent, and wheat, gaining 31.3 per cent. One of the world's other key staple foods, rice, lost 4 per cent. The Vegetable Oil Price Index declined 3.3 per cent in December, due to lower global import demand, that may be linked to concerns over the impact of rising Covid-19 cases, which have led to delays in the supply chain.

For the year as a whole, the Oil Index reached an all-time high, increasing 65.8 per cent compared with 2020.



SPECIAL COVER OF THE DEPARTMENT OF POSTS WILL POPULARIZE SPECIAL PRODUCTS OF DISTRICTS: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the 'One District One Product' scheme is a scheme launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi with an ambitious goal. The Department of Posts has also come forward as an important partner in promoting this and giving impetus to the campaign to provide employment to the villagers. Chouhan on Saturday released 6 special covers in Mantralaya prepared by Madhya Pradesh Postal Circle and congratulated the Postal Circle while appreciating their efforts.

Prepared for the purpose of promoting special products of different districts of Madhya Pradesh, these special covers include famous wooden toys from Budhni of Sehore district, teak wood products of Betul district, bamboos from Harda, stones of Katni, carpets of Sidhi and cover focused on the product of Jeera Shankar rice of Seoni.

Chouhan said that during the Corona period, PM Modi gave the mantra of Atma-nirbhar Bharat. In its implementation, a roadmap was prepared for Atma-nirbhar Madhya Pradesh. The 'One District - One Product' scheme has been given impetus by identifying the popular products of different districts, which is capable of providing employment to thousands of citizens. Similarly, the Zardozi art of



Bhopal is also popular. Chouhan said that from the covers that have been issued today, the matter of local products will reach the people. These products will become a topic of discussion, their better marketing and export work will be possible. Such special covers will also be issued on the products of other districts of the state.

Chouhan said that the Department of Indian Post has done important work by issuing a special cover on tribal heroes. The history of the postal department is 150 years old. On the Amrit Mahotsav of Independence, it is necessary to remember such great personalities, who did the work of giving us life, be it Jannayak Tantiya Mama,

Ganesh Prasad Varni or Harivishnu Kamath, all of them made efforts for freedom. Chouhan also praised the campaign of the postal department to link girls with savings schemes. Chief Minister said that if there is a daughter, there is tomorrow. Our daughters are getting the benefit of savings schemes. This is an important step in the direction of girl child and women empowerment. Chouhan said that Madhya Pradesh Postal Circle has opened accounts of 5 lakh 68 thousand Sukanyas (girls) under Sukanya Samridhhi Abhiyan in the year 2021 from April to December, for this I congratulate the circle. Madhya Pradesh is at the top in the implementation of this

scheme. A total of 20 lakh 50 thousand accounts have been started in Madhya Pradesh Postal Circle under the scheme in the state. There is increasing public awareness regarding savings and insurance schemes. Sukanya Samridhhi Yojana is proving useful in fulfilling the 'Beti Bachao -Beti Padhao' resolve of PM Modi too.

Chief Post Master General of Madhya Pradesh Circle, Jitendra Gupta informed that 2 crore 30 lakh accounts are operated in various post offices of the state under savings schemes. Circle will also run a special campaign through investment in Public Provident Fund Scheme (PPF) for future life protection of children. Sumangal Jeevan Abhiyan has been started from last October 4. PM Care Fund for Children has also been started by the Modi for the children who have been without guardians due to the difficult circumstances of Covid-19. In coordination with the Women and Child Development Department of the State Government, efforts are being made to open accounts of such children, who are without guardians and are below 18 years of age. The postal department has got the responsibility of opening their accounts jointly with the district chief. General Manager Finance HGS Dhakad of Department of Posts and senior officials of the State Government were present on the occasion.

Jawed Habib spitting issue: Karni Sena protests in Indore, BJP MLA calls for boycott in Bhopal

Activists of Rashtriya Rajput Karni Sena on Saturday protested in Indore in Madhya Pradesh in front of outlets bearing the name of celebrity hairstylist Jawed Habib, who is in the midst of a controversy for spitting on the hair of a woman while conducting a grooming workshop in neighbouring Uttar Pradesh.

them. Its district president Rishiraj Singh Sisodia told reporters Habib had insulted women by his act and promised to not let salons linked to him operate in Indore, which would ensure such people are hit financially.

The signboards bearing the name of Habib will be pulled down and destroyed and the administration can take "whatever action it wants against us", Sisodia said.

Tukoganj police station in charge Kamlesh Sharma said no salon was vandalized during these protests.

Meanwhile, Amit Dantre, who runs a Jawed Habib branded salon under Tukoganj police station limits, said he was hurt by what the hairstylist had done and had decided to voluntarily give up branding rights to restart his establishment under a new name.

Rameshwar Sharma, the BJP MLA from Bhopal's Huzur Assembly seat, dur-

ing the day, addressed a gathering in Bairagarh and asked people to boycott the salons run in the name of Habib.

"How are people behaving? They spit in food and even on women's hairs. Hindus should spit on those who believe in the culture of spitting. No one should go to outlets of those who spit. Instead, you should spit there," Sharma said in his address. A video had gone viral on social media of Habib spitting on the hair of a woman during a workshop in Muzaffarnagar in UP in January 3.

It was his way of demonstrating to participants that saliva was a substitute in case water was scarce during a grooming session.

Habib, after the woman filed a complaint, was booked under Section 355 (assault or criminal force with intent to dishonour person) of Indian Penal Code and Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897.

Team Absolute | Bhopal/Indore

The protesters, who also took out a motor-cycle rally and gathered at outlets in Vjay Nagar and Tukoganj, threatened to ransack

25 BSF personnel among 618 Covid-19 cases found in Indore district in one day

The CMHO said that the infected BSF personnel have been isolated in a Covid-19 care centre and their health is fine

Team Absolute | Bhopal

At least 25 personnel of the Border Security Force (BSF) were among the 618 new coronavirus cases reported in Indore district of Madhya Pradesh in the last 24 hours,

an official said on Saturday.

"During the last 24 hours, 618 new patients of Covid-19 including 25 BSF personnel were found in Indore. They are asymptomatic," said Chief Medical and Health Officer (CMHO) Dr BS Saitya.

The CMHO said that the infected BSF personnel have been isolated in a Covid-19 care centre and their health is fine. Saitya further said that this care centre can accommodate 1,200 Covid-19 patients while hospitals in the city have a capacity of

10,000 beds.

He added that most of the patients are recovering without hospitalisation. According to the health department, 1,56,151 Covid-19 cases have been reported in the worst-hit Indore district since March 24, 2020.

Of them, 1,397 have died during treatment. Covid-19 cases are rising steadily in Madhya Pradesh. On Friday, the state recorded 1,319 new cases, taking the cumulative tally to 7,97,715, as per health officials.

Omkareshwar Will Become A Place of Global Importance with the Statue of Oneness: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that the project of setting up a 108-feet multi-metal statue of Acharya Shankar, museum and International Vedanta Sansthan in Omkareshwar will work to connect Madhya Pradesh with the whole world. In fact, this is not the work of a state, it is an ambitious project to be completed with the blessings of the country's leading acharyas and saints outside the boundaries of Madhya Pradesh. The idea behind the construction of the Statue of Oneness is that by eliminating the sense of difference of opinion, animosity and ill will, it will make people aware of the importance of Advaita Vedanta. This place will emerge as an important site for the purpose of making one aware of the entire philosophy of life of Acharya Shankar,



the expressions of his Advaita Vedanta, character building of the coming generation, environmental protection, Mathamnaya tradition, socio-cultural change, world-welfare and development of the spirit of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one

family). Chief Minister Shri Chouhan said that "Victory of Dharma, destruction of unrighteousness, harmony among living beings, welfare of the world" is our main objective. Continuous review of the works related to this project will also be done.

Chouhan was addressing the second meeting of the Board of Trustees of Acharya Shankar Sanskritik Ekta Nyas at Mantralaya on Saturday.

Chouhan said that the installation of the statue of Shankaracharya in Omkareshwar is not only the work of installation of the statue, but it is a project of how to bring practical Vedanta in life. Let this world become one family, there is also this feeling behind it. The Madhya Pradesh government will seriously implement the suggestions given by the members of the trust. According to the suggestions received, work will be done expeditiously to finalize the entire action plan.

MULTI MODAL LOGISTIC PARKS SHOULD BE SET UP WITHIN TIME-LIMIT: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that work should be ensured in time-limit for setting up of Multi-Modal Logistics Park. Efforts should also be made to set up warehouses in mandis expeditiously. Private individuals and firms should also be brought forward for this. Chouhan was reviewing the Department of Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection at Mantralaya on Saturday.

Chouhan said that the storage capacity of food grains should be increased in the state. Also, the off-loading from the godowns should be ensured in time-limit. Work out a policy for filling and emptying the warehouse. Godowns should be maintained and protected through PPP mode. Chief Minister Shri Chouhan directed to install solar panels on the roof-tops of godowns. He said that renewable energy production should be promoted.

Chouhan said that the caps of Markfed should be maintained



responsibly. He instructed to procure paddy, moong and other crops in a good way. Chief Minister Shri Chouhan said that every grain of the farmers of the state should be purchased. Those who engage in irregularities should not be spared. Substandard paddy production

should be discouraged. Produce good quality crops. The procurement of Kranti paddy of Datia district was also reviewed.

Chouhan said that a model should be prepared for the purchase of crops in the state. Every effort should be made to purchase honestly.

Transparent system should be promoted. Chief Minister directed to write a letter to the Center for the stock of surplus wheat in the state. He directed to speed up the work of milling of paddy and to prepare an action plan to increase the paddy milling capacity. Chouhan issued instructions for distribution of double fortified salt in tribal development blocks and to increase the distribution in other development blocks. He directed to distribute fortified flour in PDS as a pilot project. Chief Minister said that the ranking should be increased in One Nation-One Ration Card. There should be no problem in distribution of ration. Work should be accelerated in Ration Aapke Gram scheme. Fair price shops should be strengthened.

Chouhan said that food grains should be distributed only after celebrating Anna Utsav. Complaints of CM Helpline should not be pending. Keeping doing the work of distribution of eligibility slips by running a campaign.

CM PLANTED GULAR AND ALMOND SAPLINGS



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted Gular and almond saplings in Smart Garden today. Along with Chouhan, officials of Gau-kashtha

Sanvardhan evam Paryavaran Sanrakshan Samiti also planted saplings.

Chouhan appreciated the efforts being made by the Samiti for environmental protection in Bhopal's

Vishram Ghats for the last four years using Gau-kashtha instead of wood. The office bearers of the committee include Vijay Agarwal, Pramod Chugh, Ajay Dubey and Mamtesh Sharma.

Rain with thunderstorm to continue in parts of MP: IMD

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Heavy showers with hail-storm are likely to continue in several regions, especially in western part of Madhya Pradesh on Saturday, the India Meteorological Department's (IMD) regional office here said.

The unseasonal rain has been attributed to the shift of the anti cyclone towards the eastern side with the movement of the duo systems, which is known as the Western Disturbance and the Induced Cyclonic Circulation towards the east. The department has issued 'yellow' alert for districts such as Rewa, Ashok Nagar, Sheopur, Gwalior, Nivari, Tikamgarh and Sidhi. The department has also issued 'orange' alert for districts such as Morena, Datia, Bhand, Chhatrapur, Panna, Satna, while some other districts - Neemuch, Guna, Vidisha, Sagar, Damoh and Katni likely to receive light showers in the next 24 hours. As per the IMD, the highest rainfall in the last 24 hours (till 8 a.m. on



Saturday) was recorded in Sagar (36.2 mm), followed by Nowgaon (31.8 mm), Raisen (27.8 mm), Ujjain (17.0 mm), Khajuraho (16.8 mm), Raisen (27.8 mm), Ujjain (17.0 mm), Khajuraho (16.8 mm), Tikamgarh (15.0 mm), Bhopal (14.0 mm), Shajapur (12.4 mm), Indore (12.0 mm), Guna (8.6 mm), Gwalior (7.8 mm), Ratlam (6.0 mm), Kharagone (5.2 mm), Damoh (3.0 mm), Dhar (1.2 mm) and Satna (0.2 mm). Ved Prakash, a weather scientist in IMD-Bhopal, told IANS that change in climate and increasing number of cyclones are bringing rainfall in Madhya Pradesh. Unseasonal rain occurred during the period of November-

December, but during January-February, it was not unseasonal, he said.

He further added, there had been very rare instances of rain during November-December in Madhya Pradesh, but the state has been witnessing rain continue for the last three years.

"Rain in Madhya Pradesh during the period of November-December was rare and it used to be witnessed once in 20-25 years, but for the last three years it has continued and it has happened due to climate change. Increasing number of cyclones every year can also be attributed to unseasonal rain in Madhya Pradesh," Prakash said.

MPHC stays CWC move to shift children from Christian orphanage

The High Court not only stayed the shifting of 44 orphan kids from Saint Francis Orphanage in Sagar but also sought a report from the district Child Welfare Committee on why it was being done in this cold weather amid spiking Covid cases

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Jabalpur bench of the Madhya Pradesh High Court has stayed an order of the state-run Child Welfare Committee (CWC) for shifting orphan children from an orphanage run by a Christian missionary in the Sagar district.

The Sagar CWC's move came after the licence of the Saint Francis Orphanage was not renewed by the district administration over allegations that beef was being served to the kids in the orphanage run by the Sagar Diocese of the Catholic community. Some members of the right-wing Hindu groups had also alleged conversion of tribal kids in the charitable orphanage and demanded an FIR against the institution.

The High Court not only stayed the shifting of 44 orphan children but also sought a report from the Sagar CWC on why they were being

shifted in this cold weather amid spiking Covid-19 cases.

Justice Nandita Dubey passed the order on January 6 on a petition filed by the Saint Francis Orphanage after the district administration authorities shifted three kids from the orphanage over non-renewal of its licence. Taking serious cognisance of the shifting of the orphan children, Justice Dubey ordered, "I deem it proper to direct the authorities not to shift the children right now. The order dated 29.12.2021 is stayed."

The court stated, "They (CWC) are also to submit in their report what was the condition of the orphanage where presently the children are staying and what is the condition or availability of space where they are trying to shift all these 44 children. Let this report be presented before this Court within a period of two weeks." The Saint Francis Orphanage moved the court after the CWC issued a notice on

December 29 to the Christian orphanage notifying it that the five-member CWC committee had decided to shift 3 of the 44 children in the age group of 2-6 years to Matryachaya Shishu Grah at Gulab Colony in Sagar district.

The petitioner's counsel Amit Mishra said, "The orphanage was registered in 2015 under Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act and it has to be renewed every five years. The orphanage was to be renewed on 18 September 2021 and three months prior to that, on 15 June 2021, the director of the orphanage applied for renewal but instead of renewing its registration, the relevant authorities kept the matter pending and now issued the notice to shift the children claiming that the orphanage is not registered." The orphanage is part of St Francis Sevadharm, a century-old Christian charitable institution that runs several shelter homes

and schools for tribal kids and physically and mentally challenged children through seven institutions spread over a vast complex in Sagar.

Father Sinto Verghese, director of St Francis Sevadharm, said that on January 6 several CWC teams suddenly arrived at around 1 pm and tried to shift the children. "Children were then writing their exams and as soon as they finished writing at 1:30 pm, these authorities began to move them out, despite the children protesting and refusing to go," he said. According to Father Verghese, the CWC officials were informed that the High Court had stayed the shifting of kids but they demanded to see the court's order. The officials meanwhile kept trying to persuade the children for their shifting but they did not agree, he said, adding that "finally at 5:30 pm when the court order was uploaded, they were given a copy and they left."



NIGHT CURFEW RETURNS IN MAHA, SCHOOL CLOSURE EXTENDED TILL FEB 15

Quaid Najmi | Mumbai

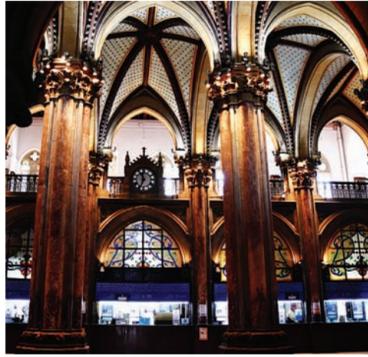
Maharashtra Covid-19 cases remained above 40,000 mark but its variant Omicron infections shot above the 1,000 mark, as the state entered into an era of night curfew, besides extending closure of all schools till February 15, health officials said here on Saturday.

The state reported a slight spike in Covid-19 infections and 'suspect cases' whose samples have been sent for genome sequencing touched 900 for the day.

The state Covid-19 count shot up - from 40,925 on Friday to 41,434 cases on Saturday - and fatalities dropped from 20 a day earlier to 13 on Saturday, while the mortality rate fell from 2.07 per cent to 2.05 per cent.

After recording zero Omicron infections on Friday, the number suddenly shot up to 133 of the variant on Saturday, with tally crossing the 1K mark to touch 1,009, with Mumbai remaining at the top of the list.

Worried by the spread, the state government announced curfew-style measures akin to the first wave in 2020 - ban on groups of five or more per-



sons during daytime from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m., total ban on all public movements from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m., barring essential services, starting from midnight of Sunday-Monday.

Entry will be strictly regulated and enforced in government offices and only 50 per cent atten-

dance with staggered working hours will be allowed. Gathering for marriages, and other social functions further scaled down to 50 only, only 20 mourners for funerals, 50 per cent intake in restaurants, cinemas and malls, and the shutting of all schools extended from Jan 31 to Feb 15, barring for critical academics for board students in Class X and Class XII. Swimming pools, gyms, spas, saloons will be shut, barber shops to serve only 50 per cent capacity, besides a host of other restrictions as the third wave has settled in. Of the 133 new Omicron infections, 129 are from Pune district, 2 from Palghar and one each from Ahmednagar and Mumbai. Mumbai accounts for the bulk of Omicron cases, 566, followed by 286 in Pune, 63 in Thane, 30 in Nagpur, 18 in Raigad, 10 in Kolhapur, 8 in Satara, 6 each in Palghar and Osmanabad, 3 each in Amravati and Nanded, 2 each in Aurangabad, Buldhana, Ahmednagar and Sangli, and 1 each in Akola and Latur. Mumbai, Pune and Thane remain at the top with the highest number of 'active cases' currently in the state, with the afflictions shooting up from 141,492 a day before to 173,238, with the recovery rate improving from 95.08 per cent a day earlier to 95.37 per cent.

New Year jolt as MGL again hikes CNG-PNG gas prices

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Sparking concerns in the New Year, the Mahanagar Gas Ltd (MGL) will hike the prices of CNG and PNG with effect from midnight tonight, again in barely three weeks, an official said here on Saturday.

The basic price of CNG is increased by Rs 2.50/kg and domestic PNG by Rs 1.50/SCM for the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), coming after a steep hike effected on Dec. 17/18, last year. Accordingly, the revised all-inclusive prices of CNG that fuels vehicles will go up from Rs 63.50/kg to Rs 66.00/kg, and the home use PNG shall shoot up from Rs 38/SCM to Rs 39.50/SCM, said an MGL spokesperson.

Justifying the fresh hike, the MGL said in order to meet the shortfall in domestic gas allocation, it is sourcing additional market priced natural gas to cater to the increasing requirement of CNG and Domestic PNG segments. On account of substantial increase in market priced natural gas price, MGL's input gas cost has also increased substantially, and the fresh hike for consumers is expected to partly offset its costs. The latest revision comes after December 17/18 - when the MGL increased the rates of CNG by Rs 2.00/kg and PNG by Rs 1.50/SCM - hitting hard the 1.60



million PNG consumers and over 800,000 CNG customers using gas-powered vehicles. Incidentally, the MGL had increased the CNG-PNG prices twice in October ahead of the festival season, followed by November and again in December. However, the MGL has assured that despite the fresh hikes, the CNG offers

Swara Bhasker slams trolls wishing her death

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Swara Bhasker, who tested Covid positive on Friday, has clapped back at trolls, who have wished her "death." Swara on Friday shared on Twitter that she has been isolated and is in quarantine. She even shared her symptoms.

She wrote: "Hello Covid! Just got my RT-PCR test result and have tested positive. Been isolating & in quarantine. Symptoms include fever, a splitting



headache and loss of taste. Double vaccinated so hope this passes soon. SO grateful for family & to be at home. Stay safe everyone." The actress later shared a screen-

shot of her name trending on Twitter, where several users wrote 'Rest In Hell' with a picture of Swara.

Clapping back at her haters, Swara wrote: "And to my dear Nafraati Chintus and trolls praying for my demise.. doston apni bhaavnaein kaaboo mein rakho.. mujhey kuch ho gaya toh aapki rozi roti chhin jaeegi.. ghar kaisey chalega (Friends keep your feelings in control) 1/2 If something happens to me, how would you run your household?"

Palghar: Heavy water leakage has been detected from the Mahim-Kelve dam in Palghar district, causing danger to a few villages situated downstream, officials said here on Saturday. As a precaution, the district administration has started evacuating the local villagers and deployed teams of NDRF and SDRF to tackle any eventuality in case the dam bursts. The Disaster Management Unit under-secretary K. Suryakrishnamurthy has requested for another NDRF team from Pune. The Mahim-Kelve dam is located around 100 km from Mumbai, at an elevation near the Janjaroli village. Other villages below the



dam have been put on high alert. The Palghar Irrigation Department executive engineer has ordered round-the-clock monitoring of the dam condition and directed for all necessary measures for the safety of the villagers falling in its path and also shift them to safer locations. The small dam stores water from monsoon rains, and is a popular picnic spot for people from Mumbai, Pune and south Gujarat, with the surrounding forests a favourite with bird-watchers for the large number of species seen here.

Maha Env Minister reviews air, water pollution around thermal plants

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Taking stock of the air and water pollution caused due to two thermal plants near Nagpur, Maharashtra Environment Minister Aaditya Thackeray has called for interventions from government agencies for pollution abatement.

Following the rising number of complaints from local residents on rampant air and water pollution in the villages surrounding the 2,400 MW Koradi and 1,340 MW Khaparkheda thermal power plants on the outskirts of Nagpur, Thackeray asked the state bodies, Maharashtra State Power Generation Company (MAHAGENCO), Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB) as well as researchers from the Centre for Sustainable Development (CFSD), Nagpur and Manthan Adhyayan Kendra, Pune to deliberate on and identify measures for pollution control.

The decision was taken during a virtual meeting held on Thursday evening when both CFSD and Manthan made a presentation explaining the issue in detail. The two organisations along with Asar, an



advocacy group, had brought out on November 18, 2021, a report titled 'Polluted Power: How Koradi And Khaparkheda Thermal Power Stations Are Impacting The Environment', a release said.

It had called for an immediate halt to the discharge of pollutants from

the power plants and ash ponds and demanded a clean-up. Manthan coordinator, Shripad Dharmadhikary, who presented the study findings, thanked Thackeray for recognising the issue being faced by the local community and promising swift action. "We eagerly await the resolu-

tion of the problem and stand ready to assist the government in mitigating and alleviating the pollution burden."

"I will be holding a detailed follow-up meeting with Energy Minister Nitin Raut, MAHAGENCO as well as MPCB to draw up a proposed plan of action," said Thackeray.

DEATH THREATS

BJP's Shelar writes to Maharashtra Home Minister, party seeks probe

Leader of Opposition in the state Assembly Devendra Fadnavis said, "When a sitting MLA receives such abusive calls threatening to cause harm to him and his family it is indeed a very serious matter."

Team Absolute | Mumbai

BJP MLA Ashish Shelar on Saturday wrote to Maharashtra Home Minister Dilip Walse Patil complaining against the death threats he has been receiving from an unknown caller over the past two days.

In the letter, Shelar wrote, "Some unknown person has been issuing threats to kill me and my entire family. He has been hurling abuses," adding that the stranger was repeatedly calling them even during odd hours. The BJP leader also shared two telephone numbers from which the calls were made. Shelar had written to the Mumbai Police Commissioner in this regard on Friday. Describing the development as a cause of concern, BJP leaders in the state have sought a probe into the matter. Leader of Opposition in the state Assembly Devendra Fadnavis said, "When a sitting MLA receives such abusive calls threatening to cause harm to him and his family it is indeed a very serious matter. The Home Ministry must look into it and book



the culprits." Speaking on the possible motive behind such calls, he said, "All this will become clear in the investigation. But Shelar has been at the forefront in exposing the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government's corruption. He has especially been vocal on the corruption in the Shiv Sena-ruled BMC and its mega projects." BJP insiders were quick to point out that this was not the first time Shelar has received such threats. In 2020, the police had tracked down a caller from Mumbra who had issued him threats.

INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE HONORED WITH WOCKHARDT FOUNDATION SHINING STAR AWARD

Mumbai: On January 7, 2022, 7 influential people were honored with the Wockhardt Foundation Shining Star Award in an online ceremony.

This month Paramjit Dahiya (DCP), Rohit Rao (Joint Chairman and Group Chief CSR Officer, Kotak Mahindra Bank), Sandeep Juneja (Senior Professor School of Technology and Computer Science, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research), Sanyogita Atre (Chairperson and Managing Director), S G18 Group), Dr. Sonia Rawat (Director, Department of Preventive Health and Welfare, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital New Delhi), Actor Zayed Khan and Model Madhura Naik were awarded. Dr. Huz (Huzaiifa Khorakiwala), CEO of the Wockhardt Foundation, says that the selected individuals were rewarded through an intensive research process and the award is appropriate for their status, achievements and contribution to society. This award is given to those persons who have worked effectively in social upliftment, who have excelled in their field of motivational activity and have made a distinguished contribution to the society. Such award winners are recognized and felicitated by one of our research team.

The attendance of all winners is recorded in an online meeting on Zoom. The award ceremony takes place on the 7th of every month at 7 pm with 7 awardees. The ceremony lasts for about 30 minutes.



WOMAN KILLS HUSBAND WITH DAUGHTER'S HELP IN KALYAN

According to neighbours, on the issue of their daughter's broken marriage, a 45-year-old woman, along with her 26-year-old daughter, allegedly killed Prakash Borse.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

In yet another shocking incident, a woman, along with her daughter, allegedly killed her 55-year-old husband with a mortar and pestle in Maharashtra's Kalyan. Reportedly, the incident took place on Thursday night after 08:00 pm, when a constable attached to Kurla police station returned home after finishing his duty.

According to the report, the deceased has been identified as Prakash Borse. Based on the initial probe, the family was having fights on a daily basis as the deceased's daughter was married but didn't want to stay with her husband and demanded divorce. The unfortunate incident came to light on Thursday when the deceased constable initiated the talk again about the daughter's marriage and an altercation broke out between them. Prakash Borse asked his daughter to go back to her in-laws' home.

The victim's wife (Jyoti) and daughter (Bhagyashree Pawar), were cooking



dinner and he tried to convince her to go back to her in-laws' house. reacting to this, Borse's wife took an iron mortar and pestle and hit his head several times. The neighbours told police officials that the daughter also started hitting her father and made him unconscious.

The accused and the neighbours took Borse to the hospital but the doctors declared him brought dead. A

case has been filed in this matter against the deceased's wife and daughter under section 302 of the Indian Penal Code. Both the accused were arrested by the Kolsewadi police. While commenting on the arrests made, Police inspector Kisan Gavali said, "According to neighbours, their arguments on their daughter's marriage had been intense for the past few weeks."

COVID-19 cases rising, but hospitalization, oxygen demand low: Tope

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Those having cough, fever etc, including children, must get themselves tested. Senior citizens with comorbidities and frontline health staff must go for the precautionary vaccine dose, the drive for which will begin on January 10," the minister said.

Despite a rise in COVID-19 cases in Maharashtra, the need for hospitalization and oxygen support was low, state health minister Rajesh Tope said in Jalna on Saturday. He said the state task force and health department had given their assessment of the COVID-19 situation to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray who will decide on the extent of restrictions etc.

He added that 41,000 cases were detected on Friday in the state, though there was no addition to the Omicron tally. "Those having cough, fever etc, including children, must get themselves tested. Senior citizens with comorbidities and frontline health staff must go for the precau-



tionary vaccine dose, the drive for which will begin on January 10," the minister said.

Meanwhile, as many as 68 Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) employees working out of its Bandra-Kurla Complex (BKC) office here have contracted coronavirus infection, an official of the central agency said on Saturday. In another development, Mumbai Mayor Kishori Pednekar visited BKC Covid-19 Centre to take the stock of the situation and said that people should take precautions rather than fearing.



JULIA GARNER TO STAR IN THRILLER 'APARTMENT 7A'

'Ozark' star and Emmy winner Julia Garner has signed on to star in the upcoming thriller 'Apartment 7A' by Paramount Players, according to sources.

Los Angeles | Agencies

John Krasinski and Allyson Seeger are producing via Sunday Night along with Michael Bay, Andrew Form and Brad Fuller via their Platinum Dunes, reports deadline.com. Natalie Erika James is attached to direct and co-wrote the latest script with Christian White based off a draft by Skylar James. Alexa Ginsburg is overseeing the project for Sunday Night. Alex Ginno is overseeing for Platinum Dunes. Plot details are being kept under wraps, but it is being described as a psychological thriller. Best known for her breakout role as Ruth Langmore on 'Ozark', which earned her two Emmys, Garner is following that up with the Netflix limited series 'Inventing Anna'. Garner will play infamous Anna Delvey, who conned New York socialites out of their money. The series was created by Shonda Rhimes, who also penned the pilot. The new season of 'Ozark' premieres on January 21, with 'Inventing Anna' bowing on February 11, reports deadline.com. On the film side, Garner recently garnered critical praise and an Independent Spirit Award nomination for her performance in Kitty Green's feature film 'The Assistant'.



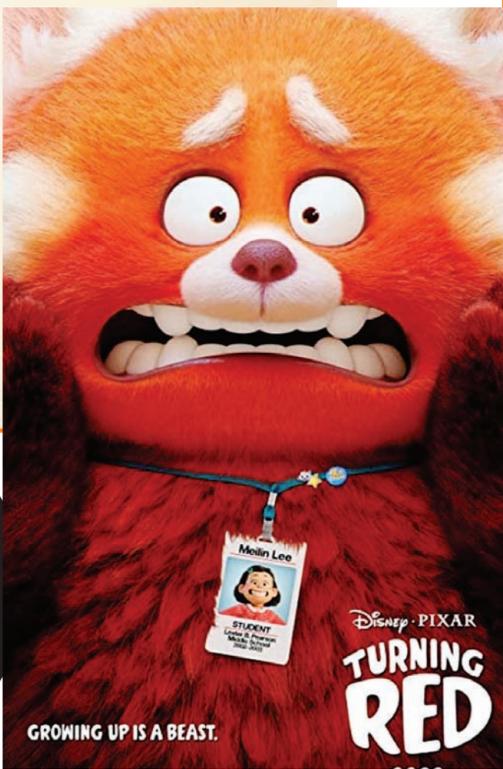
BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH, DEV PATEL, BEN KINGSLEY SIGNED FOR ROALD DAHL ADAPTATION

Los Angeles | Agencies

Filmmaker Wes Anderson has been roped in to direct an adaptation of Roald Dahl's 'The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar', starring Benedict Cumberbatch, for Netflix. According to sources, Ralph Fiennes, Dev Patel and Ben Kingsley have joined the cast, with production expected to start this month in London, reports variety.com. First published in 1977, 'The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Six More' is a collection of seven short stories crafted by British author Dahl for older children. Cumberbatch will play Henry Sugar, the protagonist of the titular story, which poses the question: "If you could see with your eyes closed would you use your power for good or for personal gain?" The new movie marks Anderson's second outing with

Dahl's classic works after the filmmaker crafted 'The Fantastic Mr. Fox' into a stop-motion film in 2009 and co-wrote the screenplay with Noah Baumbach. The best animated feature Oscar nominee also boasted an A-list voice cast, including George Clooney, Meryl Streep, Jason Schwartzman, Willem Dafoe, Michael Gambon and Bill Murray. Cumberbatch is also no stranger to bringing iconic pieces of literature to life, having earned an Emmy award for his portrayal of Sherlock Holmes and voicing Smaug in 'The Hobbit' trilogy, the Grinch and Shere Khan in 'Mowgli: Legend of the Jungle'. Most recently, Cumberbatch has garnered Oscar buzz for his leading performance as Phil Burbank in Jane Campion's adaptation of the acclaimed novel 'The Power of the Dog'.

'TURNING RED' TO HAVE A DIRECT DIGITAL RELEASE IN MARCH



Los Angeles | Agencies

Pixar's upcoming film 'Turning Red' is skipping theatres and will have a direct digital debut exclusively on Disney Plus on March 11. The news was announced by Disney and it will be free for subscribers. The family-friendly animated film follows 'Soul' and 'Luca' as fellow Pixar releases that went straight to the streaming platform during the Covid-19 pandemic. The 'Toy Story' spinoff 'Lightyear', starring Chris Evans, is still slated to

release in theatres on June 17, reports variety.com. Disney Plus subscribers around the world enthusiastically embraced Pixar's Academy Award-winning 'Soul' and the critically-acclaimed 'Luca' when they premiered exclusively on the service, and we look forward to bringing them Pixar's next incredible feature film 'Turning Red', said Kareem Daniel, chairman of Disney Media and Entertainment Distribution, in a statement. "Given the delayed box office recovery, particularly for family films, flexibility remains at the core of our distribu-

tion decisions as we prioritise delivering the unparalleled content of The Walt Disney Company to audiences around the world." 'Turning Red' follows Mei Lee (voiced by Rosalie Chiang), a confident, dorky 13-year-old who turns into a giant red panda when she gets overly excited, which is incredibly easy to do as an excitable youngster. The voice cast includes Sandra Oh, Maitreyi Ramakrishnan, Ava Morse, Hyein Park, Orion Lee, Wang Ching Ho, Tristan Allerick Chen and Addie Chandler.

Cate Blanchett to star in Pedro Almodovar's maiden English feature

Los Angeles | Agencies

Oscar-winning actress Cate Blanchett will be starring in Spanish filmmaker Pedro Almodovar's maiden English-language feature film, 'A Manual for Cleaning Women'. The film is an adaptation of Lucia Berlin's short story collection of the same name, which includes 43 stories about women in multiple types of demanding jobs, reports variety.com. It was confirmed to Variety exclusively that the project is in the early stages of development, with Blanchett's production company Dirty Films producing the feature for New Republic Pictures, in association with El Deseo. Andrew Upton and Coco Francini are producing alongside Blanchett for Dirty Films. Brian Oliver and Bradley Fischer are producing for New Republic Pictures alongside Almodovar. Blanchett is a revered actress who has won two Academy Awards, for 'The Aviator' in supporting actress and 'Blue Jasmine' in lead actress. She's in the awards conversation again this year for delivering two powerhouse performances in Guillermo del Toro's 'Nightmare Alley' from Searchlight Pictures and Adam McKay's 'Don't Look Up' from Netflix, with other projects on the horizon. In addition to 'Manual', she currently has three additional films that are expected to be released in 2022 - Todd Field's 'TAR', Guillermo del Toro and Mark Gustafson's 'Pinocchio' and Eli Roth's 'Borderland'. Almodovar spoke with Variety for our 'Up Next' series in December about the project, saying he was writing the script in Spanish before translating it to English.



Korean series 'The Silent Sea' tops non-English shows on Netflix



South Korean sci-fi horror series 'The Silent Sea' was the most-viewed non-English TV show over the week from December 27 to January 2 on Netflix, the global video streaming service said. The drama, according to Yonhap News Agency, topped Netflix's official weekly chart for non-English TV programmes with 47.8 million hours of viewing for the week, vastly outnumbering 'The Queen of Flow: Season 2' with 29.5 million hours and 'Money Heist: Part 5' with 26.3 million hours. 'The Silent Sea' is ranked No. 10, just behind the Akshay Kumar-starrer

'Sooryavanshi', on Netflix in India. The Raveena Tandon-led series 'Aranyak' and the Malayalam superhero movie 'Minnal Murali' are in the top two positions. 'Squid Game' and 'Money Heist' are at No. 6 and 7 in India. For 'The Silent Sea', the week in review marked a remarkable increase in viewership, as it had placed third with 22.2 million hours in the previous week. The eight-part series premiered on December 24. It is the third Korean-language series to have topped the Netflix chart for non-English TV shows, following the global sensation 'Squid Game' released in September and Yeon Sang-ho's fantasy horror 'Hellbound' in November.

CLIMATE CHANGE SATIRE 'DON'T LOOK UP' SETS NETFLIX VIEWERSHIP RECORD

Adam McKay's climate change satire 'Don't Look Up' is right up there on top of Netflix's global viewership chart for December 27-January 2, clocking 152.29 million hours globally during the week.

Los Angeles | Agencies

Figures released by Netflix, and reported by 'Deadline', show that a time when apocalyptic films are breaking world records, the Leonardo DiCaprio-Jennifer Lawrence-starrer is the streamer's third-most-watched film of all time (in just its first 28 days), behind only the Sandra Bullock-helmed 'Bird Box' and Dwayne Johnson-Ryan Reynolds-Gal Gadot crime caper 'Red Notice'.

It has also become the film that has attracted the most viewing hours for a movie in a single week in Netflix's history. Just on Wednesday, director McKay tweeted that he was "straight up flabbergasted" by the viewing numbers the film was receiving. Netflix doesn't release day-to-day data, but 'Don't Look Up', according to 'Deadline', is likely to be encroaching upon 'Bird Box' territory and could soon take the all-time record away from 'Red Notice'.



ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY

India Reynolds





QUALIFYING FOR WC WILL BE A KEY OBJECTIVE FOR INDIAN TEAM AT ASIA CUP, SAYS COACH SCHOPMAN

Bengaluru | Agencies

Indian women hockey team chief coach Janneke Schopman has said that qualifying for the World Cup will be the key objective for her side at the upcoming Asia Cup, scheduled to be held in Muscat, Oman from January 21 to 28.

India will enter Asia Cup as defending champions and the winner of the event will qualify for the World Cup, which will be held in the Netherlands and Spain from July 1 to 17 this year.

The quadrennial competition will also set the stage as the first major competition for the Indian eves in the new year and the Indian coach wants to see where her team is at the moment.

"First of all, our key objective will be to qualify for the World Cup. That is most important because that is where the best teams in the world come together to compete. I am also very keen to see the level where we are at the moment and whether we can execute the style of play that I envision for the team," Schopman said in a Hockey India release.

"I am not looking to measure my team against our opponents in the competition, but instead against my own expectations of how I want my team to play. I am eager to see how the team will perform in Oman as it will be really challenging," she added.

Speaking about her team's preparation for the Asia Cup, the 44-year old Schopman said, "Currently we are working on defining our style of play as the Indian women's team. That means a lot of movement on



and off the ball and people joining in the attack as we want to play fast and attacking hockey. We want to make use of our skills and speed to good effect."

"At the same time, we want to be a sturdy defensive unit and take pride in competing in our 1v1 duels. I am happy with what I am seeing because the better we defend in training, the more necessary it becomes to attack

better, and that really accelerates the progress of the team," she added.

Being defending champions in the Asia Cup, the Indian team will have added pressure but the coach has very different expectations from the team.

"Having been a player myself, I understand that there are certain situations when you are just expected to win. However, my expectations

from the team are quite different. Each player has a job to do on the field and I am more concerned with how the players execute their own jobs and responsibilities out on the field," Schopman said.

"I am more concerned with the performance than the results, and if we are able to keep performing how we want then I am sure that the results will follow," she concluded.

Ashes, 4th Test

Khawaja slams another century as Australia take control

Sydney | Agencies

Australian batter Usman Khawaja etched his name in the record books, scoring an unbeaten century (101 not out) in the second innings as well as he put the hosts firmly in command in the fourth Ashes Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Saturday.

Thanks to Khawaja's second century in the fourth Test, Australia declared early on 265/6 in 68.5 overs, giving England a 388-run target to win. At stumps on Day 4, England were 30 for no loss.

The day again belonged to 35-year-old Khawaja as he joined just five other Australian batters to score twin tons in a single Ashes Test. Hitting 10 fours and two sixes with a mix of touch and occasional force in his 138-ball essay, Khawaja made runs through an array of shots all around the wicket.

Bereft of ideas in response, England's plans against him brought little success, with a number of sweeps and reverse sweeps adding to a host of drives through the cover region, as well as his trademark pull shot.

Coming in at 68/3, Khawaja at first provided a mix of stability and proactivity, after the hosts made a slight stumble earlier in the day, trying to accelerate.



David Warner (3) and Marnus Labuschagne (29) both fell to Mark Wood (2/65) who was the pick of the quick

bowlers, with the under-pressure Marcus Harris unable to convert his start of 27 into a bigger score.

Briefscores:

Australia 416/8 decl and 265/6 decl (Usman Khawaja 101 not out; Cameron Green 74; Jack Leach 4/84) vs England 294 and 30 for no loss in 11 overs.

World Esports Cup: Top Indian teams seal berths in global finals

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Top Indian teams, Arrow Esports, Chemin Esports, Total Gaming and Orangutan Elite have secured their berths in the Global Finals of the World Esports Cup and are all set to clash against the best teams from Pakistan and Nepal.

The championship which went live on November 25, 2021, is in its last leg with the grand finale of the mega event starting from January 10-14, 2022. The Indian teams qualified from the Indian leg of the grand finale of the inaugural edition of South East Asia's tri-nation esports tournament, World Esports Cup (WEC '21), which came to a fitting end recently. In the India finals, which saw high-voltage competition between India's top esports teams as Arrow Esports, Chemin Esports, Total Gaming, and Orangutan Elite managed to make the final cut and earn themselves an opportunity to represent the country at the global stage. Team SoloMid (TSM FTX), Blackflag Army, Aura Gaming, Stone Crushers, Desi gamers, TG Tycoon, Helping Gamers, and UG Empire who posted a strong



competition and despite impressing everyone couldn't manage to secure a place for the final showdown.

"We've got some of the most recognized free fire teams from across India, Pakistan, and Nepal through the tournament and it's heartening to see that the best and the most skilled ones will be taking on each other," said Vishwalok Nath, Director, World Esports Cup.

"With Indian and Pakistan clashes along with the teams from Nepal on the card, we promise an edge-of-the-seat thriller as you watch the glob-

al finals. I congratulate each team who made it to the grand finale and I wish each of them the best of luck for the final showdown. I personally look forward to the epic clash of India vs Pakistan in this last leg." Nath was quoted as saying in a release. The Teams representing Pakistan and Nepal, that will be clashing with the Indian champs are for the title of WEC'21 are: From Pakistan: Team Hotshot, The Guardians, Five mutants, and Legend Style ES From Nepal: 2b Gamer, Tonde Gamer, Dada Gang, and KM Brotherhood.

ATP CUP: AUGER-ALIASIME, SHAPOVALOV GUIDE CANADA INTO FINAL

Sydney | Agencies

Felix Auger-Aliassime and Denis Shapovalov guided Canada to its maiden ATP Cup final, defeating world No. 2 Daniil Medvedev and Roman Safiullin 4-6, 7-5, 10-7 to complete their country's 2-1 win against Russia here on Saturday.

Canada will meet two-time finalists Spain in Sunday's final clash. The Canadians lost their first four matches of the competition, putting their hopes of qualifying for the knockout rounds in trouble. If the United States had beaten Great Britain in the Match Tie-break of their deciding doubles on January 6, Canada would have been eliminated before playing their third match.

But Auger-Aliassime and Shapovalov have taken full advantage of the opportunities in Sydney. Their excitement showed after Shapovalov hit a winning backhand volley on match point. The two leapt into each other's arms to celebrate.

"Felix did an amazing job. I had a little bit of a slow start, had trouble returning, but we did a good job to fight," Shapovalov told atptour.com.

"Felix played unbelievable in the game to break and then in the (Match) Tie-break as well, just making them play so much. It was awesome. We kept fighting. We have great team chemistry, team spirit, so it helped us a lot."

Despite some baseline errors in his singles match, which carried into the doubles, Auger-Aliassime carved a



stunning backhand drop volley at 6/5 in the Match Tie-Break. The world No. 11 double-faulted on his first match point at 9/6 and missed his first serve at 9/7, but they battled through after one hour and 38 minutes.

Shapovalov got the tie off to a good start for Canada when he got past Safiullin in a two-hour, 39-minute thriller at No. 2 singles. Medvedev then levelled the tie with a victory against Auger-Aliassime at

No. 1 singles. "I had to try and stay positive. Of course it was tough, especially (because) that second set went the way it went in singles," Auger-Aliassime said. "Denis helped me and the team to push myself. We had a tough start in the doubles, so to be able to come back in this way, it's really a team effort."

"That's what the ATP Cup is about. You can still win after being 1-all and losing a tough singles. It's really about the team effort and

we're happy to be through. We're really thrilled for the whole team."

Auger-Aliassime and Shapovalov are 1-1 on the week as a team, including a deciding doubles victory against doubles standouts Jamie Murray and Joe Salisbury in group play.

Medvedev and Safiullin had been 3-0 in doubles this week. Russia went 3-0 as a team in Group B action, but fell just a few points short of returning to the final.

COVID-19: WOMEN CRICKETERS WARNED TO BE EXTRA VIGILANT AHEAD OF WORLD CUP

Sydney | Agencies

Australian women's cricket team chief selector Shawn Flegler has warned the players competing in the Ashes to be extra vigilant as they might not be allowed to enter New Zealand for the ICC Women's World Cup in March if they test positive for COVID-19 during the series.

The Australian women's team will play a multi-format series involving a Test, three T20Is and an equal number of ODIs against their England counterparts. The series commences on January 20 with the first T20I at the Adelaide Oval. The Test will be played at the Manuka Oval in Canberra from January 27. It will be followed by three ODIs, beginning in Canberra on February 3 and concluding in Melbourne on February 8. With the ICC Women's World Cup in New Zealand scheduled from March 4, Flegler said Cricket Australia (CA) is apprehensive that players might contract COVID-19 despite the biosecurity protocols in place for the women's Ashes. The Australian Ashes squad will be announced next week and the players will then have to comply with pre-series biosecurity protocols before going into camp in Adelaide on January 17, according to cricket.com.au. "They will take part in the multi-format series against England before leaving for a 10-day quarantine period in New Zealand ahead of the World Cup," said the portal.

New Zealand Health (NZH) and the International Cricket Council (ICC) have clarified that late additions to Australia's World Cup squad of 17 will not be allowed under current regulations.

"It's going to be tough," said chief selector Shawn Flegler when asked if players testing COVID-19 positive just before the scheduled flight to New Zealand will be allowed to travel at a later



date. "Our plans are still that we'll go as a group straight after the Ashes. If things do change and we can get players over later, then we'll look to do that."

"But at the moment, it's one group leaving and doing quarantine together. So that's why we're trying to put protocols in place to minimise any issues with COVID (during the Ashes). But as we've seen over the last few weeks with the BBL and other competitions, it can be very difficult. We're trying to minimise that and control it as much as we can, but I think we've got to expect that something may happen," added Flegler. With stringent travel protocols in place, it raises the prospect of key players missing the global event if they con-

tract the virus in early February and are forced to isolate. It would mean they'll miss the only chance to fly to New Zealand with their teammates.

"The way that we're looking at it is we have to be prepared that there'll be players who will miss games. The strength that we do have is we've got a number of players that could come in and take the place of someone who does have COVID. We need to keep in mind England as well. Their focus is on the Ashes but also on defending the World Cup title."

"If we do have to tighten things down towards the back end of the series (to minimise risk ahead of the World Cup), we will look to do that."

Dakar Rally: Harith Noah continues impressive run, placed 28th after Day 7

Riyadh | Agencies

Going into the rest day on Saturday, TVS Racing Factory rider Harith Noah nurtured his injured shoulder and is eager to take on the challenge ahead in the Dakar Rally Moto section from Sunday.

"It was very rocky and bumpy on Friday and did not help my injured shoulder. Thankfully, a part of the route which was dangerous, was canceled. And I am using the Rest day for my recovery and hoping to be back in full flow tomorrow. The target is to finish and I am taking it to stage by stage," said the lone crusader from India at Dakar 2022, considered the world's toughest rally.

The 5-time Indian National champion from Bengaluru, Harith Noah survived dangerous terrain and a couple of crashes to be placed 28th in the Overall ranking after seven grueling days of racing. He fell in the first stage finishing 36th among 145 riders and went on to improve his rank to 31st after Stage 4 and 30th after Stage 5. He continued his



progress admirably on Friday, despite a painful shoulder, and finished a creditable 28th in the overall ranking.

The bike and quad special was halted at the first neutralization area after 101 km on Friday. The deterioration of the tracks due to the passage of the cars and trucks in the previous stage in the

reverse direction, combined with recent heavy rain means that the route is impassable. The classification for Stage 6 was established at the 101 km mark.

Noah's teammate at Sherco I'VS Factory team Lorenzo Santolino is in Overall 6th position after Stage 6 while Rui Goncalves is placed 32nd.



RINEY ARYAA: BECOMING AN ACTOR ISN'T AS EASY AS MANY PEOPLE THINK

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Riney Aryaa, who was seen in the long-running mythological TV series 'Vighnaharta Ganesh', feels acting is not similar to a regular office job. Riney says: "Being an actor is not like a typical office job. Actors don't have to show up for work every day at the same time and aren't given tasks like a regular employee is. That's not to say that actors don't have work to do. An actor is only truly working on set and preparing for it, and then it's all about creativity."

"Actors learn to unleash their inner expressiveness and approach life head-on, unlike the rest of the population that is expected to behave appropriately and put creativity on the backseat. Actors typically have to keep learning like students how to explore and express

their creativity."

Riney who started her showbiz journey as a model and later featured in shows like 'Suvreen Guggal: Topper Of The Year', 'Emotional Atyachaar' and 'Kulfi Kumar Bajewala' feels becoming an actor isn't as easy as people think.

She adds: "Becoming an actor isn't as easy as many people think it is. There are no official statistics or internships that show how many budding actors end up being famous or successful. In fact I have met many actors who are still struggling and are frequently hired for no more than a few commercials. A famous actor's life may be the goal, but very few actors make it to fame and fortune, that's not to say that new actors have no chance of becoming successful actors, it all just depends on luck and choices completely."



'Big Boss 15' SALMAN WARNS ABHIJIT HE'LL DRAG HIM OUT OF THE HOUSE BY HIS HAIR

'Big Boss 15'
Team Absolute | Mumbai

During the 'Weekend Ka Vaar' episode of 'Big Boss 15', host Salman Khan blasted Abhijit Bichukale for the abusive language he used for Pratik Sehajpal and Devoleena Bhattacharjee.

Salman said he will drag Abhijit by his hair and kick him out of the house in the mid-week.

Salman said: "Ye joh gandi gandi gaaliyaan di hai tumne, agar koi tumhari family ko deta toh kaise lagta...ye warning de raha hoon, midweek aake nikal ke jaaunga baal pakad ke. Tu bolega na ghar mein aake tereko maarke jaaunga." (The sort of

vile cuss words you have hurled at others, if someone had used for your family, how would you have felt? I am warning you, I will come in the midweek and kick you out of the house by dragging you by hair. If you dare to say a single word, I will come inside the house and thrash you."

Later, Abhijit was seen warning the makers that he will leave the house. "Let this show go to hell, don't even want to spit on such a show, open the door."

Salman also questioned Karan Kundrra for not supporting his girlfriend Tejaswi Prakash and always asking her to apologise in front of Umar Riaz. Tejaswi is seen crying in front of Salman.

'4 Sum' wins Best Film award, Divyenndu-starrer is No. 2 at JIFF

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Debutant director Neeraj Gwal's film '4 Sum', starring unheralded actors based out of Chhattisgarh, has been conferred the Best Film award at the Sridevi Indian Panorama section of the Jaipur International Film Festival (JIFF).

With a runtime of 96 minutes, the film narrates the story of four students who come from varied socio-economic backgrounds with different aspirations. Funded by the script lab of the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC), '4 Sum' delves into the scourge of drug addiction and its serious repercussions.

The story is set in Chhattisgarh, where 29-year-old Gwal, an amateur stage artiste, grew up in Bhalai and lives at present.

Divyenndu-starrer 'Mere Desh Ki Dharti', directed by Faraz Haider, bagged the award for Second Best Film. Its storyline is woven around how urban youth can become a definitive part of rural economics. The film's female lead is played by multi-lingual actress Anupriya Goenka.

Divyenndu, who is known for his stint as Munna



Bhaiyya in 'Mirzapur', shared his feelings in a statement released to the media. "This film is very special for me," he said. "I wish to dedicate it to the farmers of this country with all my heart. 'Mere Desh

Ki Dharti' is a film packed with emotions, fun and an extremely relevant message, so I hope everyone will really enjoy it." The film is scheduled for release in cinemas on February 11.

Helen remembers Shammi Kapoor on 'Sa Re Ga Ma Pa'

Enigmatic yesteryear actress and dancer Helen recalled late actor Shammi Kapoor on the singing reality show 'Sa Re Ga Ma Pa'. As Helen is appearing as a special guest, each contestant gave power-packed performances on her famous dance numbers.

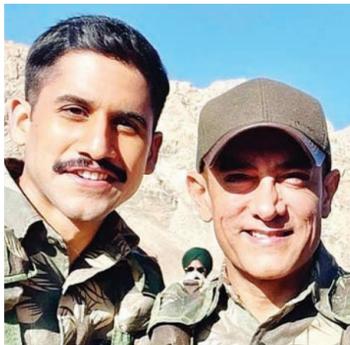
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While each of them have given their best it was Vraj and Rajashri's dance moves on the song 'O Haseena Zulfonwali Jane Jahan' from the film 'Teesri Manzil', that took Helen down memory lane.

Feeling nostalgic after witnessing Vraj and Rajashri's performance, Helen said: "Such a beautiful performance! I just went down memory lane, and it reminded me of

Shammi Ji today. Shammi Ji, are you listening?. If he would have been here, he would have been so happy after seeing your performance."

She recalled working with the late actor and continued: "We both have worked in a lot of films together but let me tell you, he was a prankster, he used to make us all laugh on set. We have done rehearsals for this song around 8 to 10 times, and Shammi Ji had his style. He never used to do any rehearsals."



WILL AAMIR KHAN & NAGA CHAITANYA'S JODI IN 'LAAL SINGH CHADDHA' BECOME FAMOUS

Mumbai: Filmmaker Advait Chandan and writer Atul Kulkarni added more scenes of Aamir Khan & Naga Chaitanya in 'Laal Singh Chaddha'?

While the audience, especially fans of Aamir Khan are eagerly awaiting the release of 'Laal Singh Chaddha', the latest development regarding the movie will certainly build the anticipation and curiosity even more.

If sources are to be believed, after watching the first cut of the film, the makers have loved Aamir Khan and Naga Chaitanya's on screen Jodi and their performances to the extent that they have decided to incorporate more scenes of the actors in the movie.

A source informs, "After watching the first rush of the film, especially the scenes featuring Aamir and Naga, the makers were taken by surprise with the way they have turned out to be. Unanimously, filmmaker Advait Chandan and writer Atul Kulkarni feel Aamir and Naga's on-screen chemistry is one of the biggest USPs of the film and so they mutually decided to incorporate more scenes of the actors that would benefit the film making it all the more interesting." Now, that sounds really interesting! If sources from the sets are to be believed, Aamir-Naga's Jodi could be as famous as Aamir-Salman Khan Jodi from the comedy classic 'Andaaz Apna Apna'. Building the anticipation even further, Aamir sporting a sardar look with a turban revealed last year was also loved by one and all. 'Laal Singh Chaddha' stars Aamir Khan and Kareena Kapoor Khan and has been directed by Advait Chandan with music by Pritam and lyrics by Amitabh Bhattacharya. The film is presented by Viacom18 Studios.

Shot in over 100 locations across India, the love story spans different time periods of the journey of the protagonists.

'Laal Singh Chaddha' is produced by Aamir Khan, Kiran Rao and Viacom18 Studios and will release on April 14 Baisakhi 2022 in theatres worldwide.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Charlie Chauhan



Vidhut Jammwal channels his inner Jeetendra to wish lady love Nandita Mahtani

Bollywood action star Vidhut Jammwal had a unique way of wishing his lady love Nandita Mahtani on her birthday on social media.

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Vidhut took to Instagram, where he used a face mapping application to put his and Nandita's face into veteran stars Jeetendra and Babita's birthday song 'Baar baar yeh din aaye'.

He captioned it: Happy Birthday to Nanditaaaaaaaa! @nanditamahatani #CountryBoyStyle#bollywood

#bollywoodsongs."

It was in 2021, when Vidhut proposed to his girlfriend Nandita in front of the Taj Mahal. On the work front, the actor is busy shooting for 'Khuda Haafiz Chapter II - Agni Pariksha'.

The first instalment 'Khuda Haafiz' of the franchise, starring Vidhut Jammwal and Shivaleeka Oberoi, turned out to be a hit in 2020.