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RAIL, ROAD TRAFFIC HIT AS STUDENTS CALL FOR BIHAR BANDH FOR BREAD & BUTTER

As Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw considered two demands of the students, the teachers of coaching centres are appealing to students to stay calm during the bandh. The railways has cancelled several trains bound to Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai and some passenger trains and intercity express trains amid the ongoing protests.

- ▶ THE STUDENTS HAVE BEEN HITTING THE STREETS EVER SINCE RESULTS OF ENTRANCE TESTS FOR THE NON TECHNICAL POPULAR CATEGORY WERE DECLARED BY THE RAILWAY RECRUITMENT BOARD.
- ▶ THEY HAVE BEEN LIVID THAT THE RRB WAS FAR FROM COMPLETING SELECTION PROCESS FOR 30,000 VACANCIES NEARLY THREE YEARS AFTER ADVERTISING THE POSTS. MOREOVER, THERE HAVE BEEN GOOF-UPS LIKE CANDIDATES "WITH MORE THAN ONE ROLL NUMBER".
- ▶ INTRODUCING AN EXTRA SCREENING TEST FOR GROUP D HAS ALSO BEEN RESENTED BY THE CANDIDATES WHO SAY THE JOBS ARE NOT OF A HIGHLY SKILLED NATURE AND HENCE A COMPLEX SELECTION PROCESS WAS UNNECESSARY.
- ▶ THE RAILWAY BOARD RECENTLY PUT ON HOLD THE SELECTION PROCESS AND SET UP A HIGH POWERED COMMITTEE, INVITING SUGGESTIONS FROM THE AGGRIEVED STUDENTS.



Team Absolute | Patna
The Bihar Bandh called by the students in protest against "irregularities" in the Railway Recruitment Board (RRB) exams affected normal life on Friday as a large number of students and political party workers blocked rail and road traffic at several places.

The bandh is being supported by several ruling and opposition political parties, including VIP, HAM which are in power in the state. Besides, RJD, LJP (R), JAP, AIMIM and Congress parties are extending complete support to the agitating students.

In Jahanabad, students blocked busy NH 83 in the morning hours. They burnt tyres on the road thus disrupting the traffic movement.

The day went off peacefully barring skirmishes between policemen and bandh supporters at many

PMO CALLS MEETING OF RAIL OFFICIALS

New Delhi: Amid a rising number of protests against Railway Recruitment Board's recent test for Non Technical Popular Categories Exam (RRB NTPC), the Prime Minister's Office has called a meeting with officials from Railways on Friday to review the process of the examination. In the meeting, called in the evening, the PMO officials are likely to discuss the hiring process followed by Railways to fill the positions. The PMO specially wants to focus on the recruitment process followed in 2004, sources said.

places. There was no incident of full blown violence and rail traffic, which had been hit during recent stirs, was spared on the day.

Several student groups blocked Ashok Rajpath and Bhikhana Pahadi road in Patna as well. These localities are known for a large number of coaching institutes, Patna university campus, several hostels and lodges where students

reside and prepare for competitive examinations. Last Sunday, a clash took place between Patna police and students in Bhikhana Pahari over RRB-NTPC irregularities.

Khan Sir, who is booked under relevant IPC sections for provoking the students, said: "The railway ministry has met the demand of students. Hence, students should not take laws in their hands and protest violently. The teachers of the

'COPS BARGED INTO HOSTELS, LODGE AND BEAT UP STUDENTS' IN PRAYAGRAJ

Lucknow: On Tuesday, a group of aspirants protesting against alleged anomalies in the result of non-technical popular category (NTPC) exam conducted by RRB for the past two days were lath-charged by the Prayagraj police. Some students were said to be injured and they had been hospitalised. A video of the incident had surfaced on social media. The police had entered the lodges and hostels by breaking the doors. A large number of students have already left for their homes or moved elsewhere due to alleged police high-handedness. The Prayagraj police, however, denied any lathcharge.

coaching centres are not with the bandh. Stay focused on study." In view of the protests, Bihar police have been deployed at all sensitive zones, including Rajendra

Nagar terminal, Patna junction, Danapur, Arrah, Buxar, Sasaram, Bhabhua road, Lakhisarai, Jamui, Samastipur, Muzaffarpur to prevent untoward incidents.

India-Philippines ink \$374 mn Brahmos missiles deal

India joins the elite club of missile exporters on Friday with the Philippines signing a \$374.96 million deal for procuring BrahMos shore based anti-ship variant supersonic cruise missiles.



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Philippines signed a pact with BrahMos Aerospace Pvt Ltd for the supply of three batteries of 290 kilometers range BrahMos missile system for its naval force. The Philippines Navy is ramping up its naval prowess to counter China's belligerent behaviour in the South China Sea. The country has territorial disputes with Beijing in the region as China claims sovereignty over the sea that has a huge source of hydrocarbons. The first ever contract to export BrahMos missiles, which India has developed jointly with Russia, will pave the way for more such deals.

BrahMos Aerospace is the Joint Venture between India's DRDO and Russia's NPOM. The shore based anti-ship system of the

Brahmos is a deadly conventional weapon that flies almost three times the speed of sound. Earlier this month, the Brahmos had sent the proposal to the Philippines government, which after deliberations was accepted by them.

The Philippines Department of National Defence had informed the BrahMos Aerospace about the decision through a Notice of Award.

Besides, other Southeast Asian countries, which have evinced interest in BrahMos supersonic missile system, include Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia.

Sources in the government stated that the deliberations with Thailand are in preliminary stage, with Vietnam at an advanced stage while with Indonesia, its naval team had visited India to discuss if missiles could be fitted on the Indonesian warships.

Can't lay down yardstick to determine adequacy of representation: SC

“We are of the opinion that no yardstick can be laid down by this Court for determining the adequacy of representation of SCs and STs in promotional posts for the purpose of providing reservation. Data collected to determine inadequacy of representation needs to be reviewed periodically. The period for review should be reasonable and is left to the Government to set out.”

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday laid down a criteria for determining the inadequacy of representation of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) would result in

curtailing the discretion given to the state governments.

Attorney General K.K. Venugopal's stand that court has to lay down the yardstick for measuring adequacy of representation did not yield a favourable result, as the court said that the Jarnail Singh (2018) judgment had found it befitting for states to have the liberty to evaluate the representation of SCs and STs in public employment.

Justice Rao, who authored the judgment on behalf of the bench, said laying down criteria for determining the inadequacy of representation would result in curtailing the discretion given to the state governments. "In addition, the prevailing local conditions, which may require to be factored in, might not be uniform," he said. The bench noted that in M. Nagaraj (2006) judgment, the top court made it clear that the validity of law made by the state governments providing reservation in promotions should be decided on a case-to-case basis for the purpose of establishing whether the



inadequacy of representation is supported by quantifiable data. The bench emphasised that before providing for reservation in promotions to a cadre, the state is obligated to collect quantifiable data regarding inadequacy of representation of SCs and STs. The Central government had asked the apex court to lay down a definite and decisive ground for it and the states to implement reservation in promotions to SCs and STs in government jobs. Several states had moved the apex court, as many high courts had struck down the provisions providing reservation in promotion along with an application seeking clarification in the Jarnail Singh case. The top court has scheduled the matter for further hearing on February 24.

DCGI PERMITS BHARAT BIOTECH TO CONDUCT TRIALS FOR INTRANASAL BOOSTER DOSE

New Delhi: In a major development on Friday, the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) allowed Hyderabad-based vaccine manufacturer Bharat Biotech to conduct clinical trials for its intranasal Covid booster dose in India.

The clinical trials will be conducted at nine different sites, including AIIMS Delhi.

The vaccine manufacturer had proposed the booster dose for those who have been already been inoculated with Covishield and Covaxin vaccines.

Bharat Biotech plans to conduct clinical trials on both who have taken Covishield or Covaxin vaccine shots. As per sources, the trials will be conducted on half individuals who have received Covishield and another half who have been administered Covaxin.

PIL in SC seeks stay on 'Why I Killed Gandhi' online release

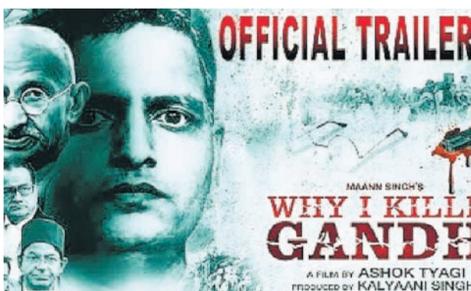
Team Absolute | New Delhi

A petition has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking a stay on the film "Why I Killed Gandhi", which is set to release on various OTT platforms on January 30, the anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination.

Seeking removal of all contents of the controversial film from all online platforms, petitioner Sikandar Behl, through advocate Anuj Bhandari, also sought the prohibition of any exhibition or publication of the film or any of its contents in any manner whatsoever on any OTT platform or social media.

If the release and exhibition of the said movie is not stopped, it would

In the movie's two minutes twenty seconds' long trailer, an attempt has



irreparably tarnish the image of the Father of the Nation and would cause public unrest, hatred and disharmony, the plea read. It also stressed the need for content regulation of OTT platforms.

been made to blame Mahatma Gandhi for the partition of India and atrocities against Hindus in Pakistan, and thereby an attempt has been made to justify the killing of Mahatma, it said.

LETHAL 'NEOCOV' ONLY 1 MUTATION AWAY FROM INFECTING HUMANS: WUHAN SCIENTISTS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Wuhan is back in the news as a team of scientists there have warned of a lethal variant called 'NeoCov' that requires only one mutation to infiltrate human cells and carries the combination of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus (MERS)-CoV mortality rate (where one in every three infected persons may die) and the current SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus high transmission rate. According to the scientists from Wuhan University in China, NeoCov can penetrate human cells

in the same way as the SARS-CoV-2 virus. "It is only one mutation away from becoming dangerous for humans," researchers said in a paper posted on preprint website bioRxiv which has not been peer-reviewed yet. NeoCov has been discovered among bats in South Africa and has only been known to spread among these animals to date. The MERS-CoV and several bat coronaviruses employ 'DPP4' as their functional receptors. The Delta strain is regarded as the most contagious form of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus to date.

IIT JODHPUR TEAM DEVELOPS COVID DIAGNOSIS TECHNIQUE USING CHEST X-RAY

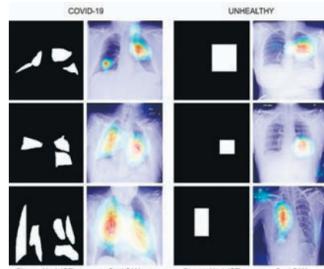
- The experiment was performed with more than 2,500 chest X-Ray images and achieved about 96.80 per cent sensitivity.
- The AI algorithm not only predicts whether a person has Covid-19 pneumonia, but it is also capable of identifying the infected regions in the lungs, thus making them explainable.
- The new technique can visually showcase the region which is infected. It interprets only from the lung region.
- The AI solution used in this research is explainable from both algorithmic and medical points of view.

Team Absolute | Jodhpur

Researchers at the Indian Institutes of Technology Jodhpur (IIT-J) have developed an Artificial Intelligence (AI) based chest X-Ray technique for Covid-19A screening. The team proposed a deep learning-based algorithm called COMIT-Net, which learns the abnormalities present in the chest X-Ray images to differentiate between a Covid affected lung and a non-Covid affected lung.

The team has detailed the technique in a research paper published in the journal Pattern Recognition (Volume 122).

With the increasing number of Covid-19 cases across various waves around the globe, countries have faced challenges with limited availability of testing kits and processing cen-



tres in remote areas. This has been the key motivation for researchers to find alternate methods of testing which are reliable, easily accessible, and faster.

Recently, Scottish researchers also developed an AI-based X-Ray technique that can likely replace the currently used PCR tests for detecting Covid infections.

The technology developed by the experts at the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) was found capable of accurately diagnosing Covid-19 in just a few minutes -- far more quickly than a PCR test, which typically takes around 2 hours -- and with 98 per cent accuracy. "Covid-19 symptoms are not visible in X-rays during the early stages of infection, so it is important to note that the technology cannot fully replace PCR tests," said Naeem Ramzan from the UWS.

"However, it can still play an important role in curtailing the viruses spread, especially when PCR tests are not readily available," Ramzan added.



AKHILESH YADAV ALLEGES CHOPPER DELAY FROM DELHI TO UP WAS "CONSPIRACY"

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Akhilesh Yadav, who has emerged as a key challenger in Uttar Pradesh, this afternoon alleged that his helicopter was briefly stopped from flying from Delhi to UP's Muzaffarnagar - he called it "losing BJP's conspiracy". Nearly half an hour after accusing the ruling party of halting his chopper, he posted a cheeky tweet - "We are ready to take the flight to victory".

"My helicopter has been halted in Delhi without any reason. It is not being allowed to fly to Muzaffarnagar (in UP). But a BJP leader was just allowed to fly from here. This is losing BJP's conspiracy - a proof of their frustration," the former UP Chief Minister tweeted in Hindi at around 2:30 pm.

He also shared a photo of him standing in front of the helicopter. "Public knows it all," he added in an attack on the rival party.

The BJP is yet to react to the claims. The allegation comes just days ahead of the start of the seven-phased UP elections (on February 10).

About 30 minutes later came an update with a swipe. "The misuse of power is a trait of people who are losing. This day would be registered in the history of Samajwadi's struggle.



We are ready to take the flight to victory," Yadav tweeted.

Shortly after, Rashtriya Lok Dal's Jayant Chaudhary, a Jat leader, was seen welcoming Yadav to Muzaffarnagar. At a joint presser, the allies slammed the BJP government over farm laws that were withdrawn after year-long protests.

At a joint presser, the allies slammed the BJP government over

farm laws that were recently withdrawn after massive protests.

"Our party has promised free electricity, a minimum support price, irrigation facilities, and payments of sugarcane dues. We will distribute laptops again. I want to remind BJP...read your manifesto again...all promises are just jumbas. When it feels cornered it diverts to other issues. But this is a land of brother-

hood that has always rejected negativity," the Samajwadi Party chief said.

Uttar Pradesh has been witnessing a season of crossovers and political attacks ahead of the February-March elections.

As Akhilesh Yadav tries to return to power, the BJP is also using all its might to return the state for a second term. The state, however, has been voting for a change since 2007.

After seven years, Maha NCC wins PM's Banner at R-Day Camp

Team Absolute | Mumbai

After a gap of seven years, the Maharashtra Directorate of National Cadet Corps (NCC) won the prestigious Prime Ministers Banner at the just-concluded Republic Day Camp (RDC), officials said here on Friday.

Cadets from 17 NCC Directorates across states took part in the month-long RDC this year, in which Maharashtra bagged the PM's Banner for the first time since 2014.

The state had sent a contingent of 57 cadets, both girls and boys, from various districts for the RDC 2022.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi presented the PM Banner to Major General Y.P. Khanduri, Additional Director-General, NCC Directorate Maharashtra, with Senior Under Officer Siddhesh Jadhav as the Banner Bearer and Cadet Captain Nikita Khot as the Trophy Bearer. "Your efforts and resolve and the fulfilment of those resolutions will be the achievement and success of India," said Modi, noting the young profile of the



cadets, mostly born in the current century. Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray complimented the Maharashtra NCC Directorate for the honour and said the "state's flag has fluttered again in Delhi".

In his address, Modi added that no power in the world can stop the country whose youth start moving ahead with the thinking of nation first, and India's success in the playfield and the startup ecosystem clearly exemplify this. The PM also elaborated on the measures taken to open the doors of the defence establishments for girls, and said that the presence of a large number of female cadets is a symbol of

the 'changing attitude of the nation'. "The country needs your contribution and there are ample opportunities for that," Modi said.

The month-long RDC comprised various competitions like drill, marching on Rajpath, guard of honour to PM, PM's rally line layout, flag area briefing and cultural events in which the Maharashtra contingent performed consistently well.

Brig R.K. Gaikwad, Commander, NCC Group Pune, complimented the contingent that was led by Lt. Col. Anirudh Singh, along with Maj. Arusha Shete and SO Manoj Phirange for the superior performance at the RDC.

"Taken Out Of Context": Actor Shweta Tiwari Apologises For Remark On God

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Actor Shweta Tiwari has apologised after she came under fire for her remark with an alleged reference to god during an event in Madhya Pradesh. "It has never been my intention to hurt anyone, with my words or actions," she said.

"Mere bra ki size bhagwan le rahe hai (God is taking the measurements for my bra)," Ms Tiwari had said, as an apparent joke, referring to Saurabh Jain, one of her costars in a new web series "Show Stopper". A video of the statement went viral on social media. Mr Jain, who played the role of Lord Krishna in the popular TV show "Mahabharata", will be seen in the role of a bra fitter in the upcoming series.

The TV star, best known for her role in shows "Kasauti Zindagi Kay" and "Parvarish", said her statement was "misconstrued". "It has come to my notice that a certain statement of mine referring to a colleague's previous role has been taken out of context and has been misconstrued. When



put in context, one will understand that the statement in reference to 'Bhagwan' was in context with Sourabh Raj Jain's popular role of a deity. People associate character names to actors and hence, I used that as an example during my conversation with media. However, it has been completely misconstrued which is saddening to see," Ms Tiwari said in her apology note. Calling herself a "staunch believer of Bhagwan myself", the actor insisted, "there is no way that I would intentionally or unintentionally say or do any such thing that would hurt sentiments by and large."

Yediyurappa's granddaughter left her 9-month-old baby in other room before ending life

BENGALURU | Agencies

Dr Soundarya (30), the granddaughter of former Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa, had left her nine-month-old baby in the other room of the flat before committing suicide on Friday.

Meanwhile, High Ground police have lodged a case of unnatural death following the complaint by her husband Dr Neeraj. The police are awaiting the statements from the family of Soundarya on ascertaining what made her take the extreme step.

According to sources, Dr Soundarya conducted naming ceremony of her baby three months ago. Police sources say that there are very less chances of family dispute and reason for the suicide is yet to be ascertained. The maid and statements collected so far in the apartment said that couple lived happily.



Dr Soundarya worked at the Bowring hospital as an Assistant Professor and she was a practicing doctor. Her husband Dr Neeraj, a Radiologist worked at the M.S. Ramaiah hospital.

Neeraj is son of elder brother of Zilla Panchayat member Mariswamy. Dr Sathish, one of the doctors who conducted autopsy of the body, stat-

ed that there is a mark in the neck and no other mark has been found in the body. A team of three doctors conducted the post-mortem report of which has been generated and submitted to the tehsildar, he stated. The body has been handed over to the family after the autopsy.

Soundarya, the daughter of Yediyurappa's daughter Padmavathi,

got married to Dr Neeraj in 2018 and the couple studied in the same medical college in the city, sources said.

The incident has come to light at 10.30 a.m. when maid came to wake her up for breakfast. When she didn't open the door of her room, the maid informed her husband Dr Neeraj and others. The apartment staff arrived and saw her body hanging from the balcony and informed police. Though she was rushed to hospital immediately, the doctors declared her dead at arrival. The couple stayed in the apartment since two-and-a-half years. Dr Neeraj had left the house at 8 a.m. this morning.

B.S. Yediyurappa and family members have reached Abbiger residence of Dr. Neeraj. According to family sources, the final rites will be carried out in the farm house of her husband Dr. Neeraj. High Ground police are investigating the case.

V Anantha Nageswaran named new Chief Economic Advisor

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Central government on Friday appointed V Anantha Nageswaran as the Chief Economic Advisor.

Prior to this, Nageswaran has worked as a writer, author, teacher and consultant.

He has taught at several business schools and institutes of management in India and in Singapore and has published extensively. He was also a part-time member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister of India from 2019 to 2021.

He was the Dean of the IFMR Graduate School of Business and a distinguished Visiting Professor of Economics at Krea University. He holds a Post-Graduate Diploma in Management from the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, and a doctoral degree from the University of



Massachusetts in Amherst. Nageswaran passed out with a Post-Graduate Diploma in Management from the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad in 1985.

He obtained a doctoral degree in Finance from the University of Massachusetts in 1994 for his work on the empirical behaviour of exchange rates.

SBI GETS REQUISITE APPROVALS FOR SETTING UP 'BAD BANK'

Mumbai: The approvals required for setting up National Asset Reconstruction Company (NARCL) and India Debt Resolution Company (IDRCL), including from the RBI, have now been received, lending major SBI said on Friday. Accordingly, both the companies are ready to commence their business.

In her Budget speech last year, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced the setting up of a 'bad bank', including an asset reconstruction company and asset management company, to take over the existing stressed debt of banks. Notably, a total of 38 accounts aggregating Rs 82,845 crore have been identified for transfer to NARCL. However, the transfer will happen in a phased manner. "Under Phase I, about 15 accounts, aggregating Rs 50,335 crore, are expected to be transferred in the current financial year, i.e., on or before March 31, 2022," SBI said in a statement. Besides, SBI said that IDRCL is expected to bring in superior resolution techniques, preserve the value, show-case brown field assets and attract domestic as well as foreign investors and alternate investment funds, among others. According to the statement, both the companies have their respective boards in place, consisting of seasoned professionals from the market.

4 soldiers injured in explosion during training in J&K's Rajouri

JAMMU | Agencies

Four soldiers were injured in an explosion during a training session near the line of control (LoC) in J&K's Rajouri district on Friday, defence officials said.

Defence sources said the four soldiers including a Havaldar were injured in an explosion that took place during the training session of a regiment in Kalsian area near the LoC in Nowshera sector of Rajouri. "A routine training session was going on in the area when an explosion, which is likely to have



been caused by a hand grenade, took place.

"Four soldiers were injured in this explosion. They were shifted to a nearby medical facility from where 3 of them have been referred to Rajouri Army

Hospital while one injured has been referred to Udhampur Army Hospital," a source said. Senior officers of the army rushed to the spot soon after the incident and the matter is being probed, the source said.

Delhi HC stays probe order into 9 Sahara group companies

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court has stayed an order issued by the Centre against nine Sahara Group of Companies, in which the government asked the investigating officials to submit a probe report of the companies.

"... We hereby stay the operation, implementation and execution of the orders dated October 31, 2018, and October 27, 2020, passed by the respondents as well as subsequent actions and proceedings initiated pursuant thereto, including coercive proceedings and look-out notices, qua the petitioners herein, till the next date of hearing," the bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh said in an order dated December 13, 2021.

As per the October 31, 2018 order passed by Registrar of Companies (ROC), Mumbai, investigation was directed into the affairs of three Companies -- Sahara Q Shop Unique Products Range Limited, Sahara Q Gold Mart Limited, and Sahara Housing Investment Corporation Limited. Six more Companies -- Aamby Valley



Limited, Qing Amby City Developers Corporation Ltd., Sahara India Commercial Corporation Limited, Sahara Prime City Ltd., Sahara India Financial Corporation Limited, Sahara India Real Estate Corporation Limited were also ordered to be probed. The Sahara argued that there is no reason that has been assigned in the government order as to why it was considered necessary that an investigation be made against the companies.

EC announces two-phase biennial election for 36 MLC seats in UP

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Election Commission on Friday announced biennial election for 36 constituencies of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Council in two phases, on March 3 and 7.

The term of 36 sitting members of the state legislature's upper house from 35 local authorities' constituencies is going to expire on March 7.

According to the EC, the notification for the first phase will be issued on February 4, the last date of making nominations will be February 11, scrutiny of nominations will be on February 14, and the last date of the withdrawal of candidature will be on February 16.

For the second phase, the notification will be issued on February 10, last date of making nominations will be February 17, scrutiny of nominations will be on February 18, and last date for withdrawal of candidatures will be February 21.

The counting of the votes will be held on March 12 as the poll process has to be completed by March 15. The Model Code of



Conduct for the election will come into force with immediate effect in the concerned constituency. The poll panel also asked the UP Chief Secretary to depute a senior officer to ensure that the extant instructions regarding Covid containment measures are complied with while making arrangements for conducting the election.

During the first phase, the local authorities of Moradabad-Bijnor, Rampur-Bareilly,

Budaun, Pilibhit-Shahjahanpur, Hardoi, Kheri, Sitapur, Lucknow-Unnao, Rae-Bareilly, Pratapgarh, Sultanpur, Barabanki, Bahraich, Azamgarh-Mau, Ghazipur, Jaunpur, Varanasi and Mirzapur-Sonbhadra will elect one candidate from each constituency.

In the second phase, the local authorities of Gonda, Faizabad, Basti-Siddharth Nagar, Gorakhpur-Maharajanj, Deoria and Ballia will be going for polls.

K'TAKA: TEACHER SUSPENDED FOR LETTING STUDENTS PERFORM NAMAZ IN SCHOOL

KOLAR (KARNATAKA) | Agencies

The Education Department in Karnataka has suspended a teacher on charges of letting students perform namaz inside the school premises in Kolar district, sources said on Friday.

S.M. Umadevi, in-charge head mistress of the Balecheggappa Kannada Model Higher Primary School in Someshwarapalya, has been suspended by the Department of Public Instruction.

"It is the duty of the teachers of government schools to inculcate a sense of national integration. Religious tolerance, practices and traditions must be there. However, by allowing students to perform namaz in one of the classrooms instils a divisive mindset," the suspension order stated.

The order added that the act of the teacher highlights dereliction of duty, and negligence on her part.

This would have a negative impact on learning and will hinder the overall progress of the educational institution, it added.

It further stated that this conduct of the teacher does not suit the dignity of a government worker, and is against the Karnataka Civil Conduct Rules 1966, Section 3 (i) (ii) and (iii). Hence, the decision has been made to initiate action against the teacher, it said. Umadevi has been suspended until further orders pending an inquiry. She has also been asked not to leave the district headquarters without permission.

The video of about 20 students performing namaz inside a classroom has gone viral on social media.



SC REVOKES 12 BJP MLAS' SUSPENSION: MVA CAUTIOUS, OPPOSITION EXULTS

Covid 'under control,' ready to tackle further spread of Omicron: Maharashtra govt tells HC

Responding to PILs alleging improper pandemic management, the state government's counsel said 90% of the state's population has received at least one dose of the Covid vaccine.

Hours after the Supreme Court quashed the suspension of 12 Opposition legislators from the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly for one year, the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi government reacted cautiously while the Bharatiya Janata Party members were jubilant on Friday.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

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that matter the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha can also suspend MPs, it is well within their powers," said Sena MP and chief spokesperson Sanjay Raut. Senior ministers - NCP state President Jayant Patil and national spokesperson Navab Malik - said that now it is an issue of the "jurisdictions of the court and the legislative bodies, concerning legislatures across and the country and the Parliament".

right. Decisions are taken as per the law and the Constitution. The suspended MLAs and their party (BJP) need to self-introspect," he said. It may be recalled that on July 5, 2021, during the Monsoon Session of the state Assembly, 12 BJP MLAs were suspended for "misbehaving" and using "abusive language" vis-a-vis the then Presiding Officer Bhaskar Jadhav during a discussion on OBC quotas in the House.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra government, while responding to PILs alleging improper pandemic management, told the Bombay High Court on Friday that the Covid-19 situation in the state is "fully under control" and "the government is geared to meet any eventuality arising out of further spread of Omicron variant."

fast" which requires it to be controlled by the authorities and said that it would take stock of the situation during the next hearing. The state and civic authorities made the submissions before a division bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice Makarand S Karnik, which has been hearing PILs by city-based lawyer Sneha Marjadi and others alleging improper management of Covid-19 in Maharashtra.

testing with the help of ICMR-approved home testing kits and till January 26, a total 1,36,168 such tests were carried out, out of which 4,583 were detected positive. Sakhare added that 1.71 lakh persons have received a booster dose till January 25 in Mumbai, while the positivity rate has reduced to 5.25% and the trend is declining further.

Wine is not liquor. Sanjay Raut defends Maharashtra govt's decision on wine sale at supermarkets

Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut said the Maharashtra government's decision to allow sale of wine at supermarkets and walk-in shops would double the farmers' income.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut on Friday said that the Maharashtra government's decision to allow the sale of wine at supermarkets and walk-in shops in the state would double the farmers' income.

nothing for farmers," Raut said. On Thursday, the Maharashtra Cabinet passed a proposal to allow the sale of wine at supermarkets and walk-in shops, saying it would give a boost to fruit-based wineries which provide additional income to farmers.

educational institutes will not be permitted to sell wine. The sale of wine will also not be allowed in districts where liquor prohibition is in force. However, the BJP has slammed the decision and alleged that the state government is promoting consumption of liquor.

SC decision striking down suspension of 12 BJP MLAs historic: Fadnavis

Calling the Maharashtra Assembly presiding officer Bhaskar Jadhav's decision to suspend 12 BJP MLAs a conspiracy in July last year, leader of opposition Devendra Fadnavis on Friday said that the Maha Vikas Aghadi government should stop acting in an unconstitutional manner, in wake of the Supreme Court's decision on Friday striking down the suspension.

Panaji | Agencies

Calling the Maharashtra Assembly presiding officer Bhaskar Jadhav's decision to suspend 12 BJP MLAs a conspiracy in July last year, leader of opposition Devendra Fadnavis on Friday said that the Maha Vikas Aghadi government should stop acting in an unconstitutional manner, in wake of the Supreme Court's decision on Friday striking down the suspension.



is the party's election in-charge for the February 14 Goa polls. The former Chief Minister also said that the responsibility should now be fixed to ascertain as to who masterminded the expulsion of the MLAs, adding that such a decision could not be taken without sanction from the top leadership of the MVA government, including the Chief Minister.

conspiracy, who were those who told the house wrong stories, who were those who victimised these MLAs, needs to be found out. And those who did this, should unconditionally apologise to the residents of these 12 constituencies," Fadnavis said.

Earlier on Friday, the apex Court struck down the suspension of 12 MLAs by the presiding officer Bhaskar Jadhav, over protests related to Other Backward Class reservation-related issues.

Social Media To The Rescue: Maharashtra Village Gets New Bridge, Tap Water

There is a small river source for water but it's reportedly polluted, forcing people to cover long distances for access to clean water.



Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra Environment Minister Aaditya Thackeray on Friday inaugurated a bridge in Shendripada, a remote tribal village in Nashik, where people used a makeshift bamboo bridge and went through a deadly ordeal for access to clean water.

know of the place from social media and that the government will also provide tap water to every household in the area within three months.

authorities to solve the problem. We have built a bridge here and within the next 3 months, we will provide tap water to every household here. Our focus is on solving people's problems," Thackeray said.

tion of the bridge, shared by the minister on Twitter, show women carrying metal pots of water on their heads crossing a stream by walking on a makeshift bridge made of a single pole of bamboo. The new bridge is a solid iron and steel structure that will make the journey safer.

Decision to allow wine sale in supermarkets smacks of a 'deal' Fadnavis

Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnavis on Friday said that the Maha Vikas Aghadi government's decision on Thursday to allow sale of liquor in supermarkets smacked of a "deal", adding that efforts were afoot to convert Maharashtra to Madhya-Rashtra (liquor state).

Panaji | Agencies

Maharashtra Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnavis on Friday said that the Maha Vikas Aghadi government's decision on Thursday to allow sale of liquor in supermarkets smacked of a "deal", adding that efforts were afoot to convert Maharashtra to Madhya-Rashtra (liquor state).

the decision, which he said was taken for "economic reasons." "I want to ask, in whose interest was this decision taken?... This is not a decision made in the interest of farmers. Some new people have started liquor factories or liquor agencies. You find out who they are. And the decision has been taken for the benefit of such people," Fadnavis told a press conference in Panaji.

for this decision. This is an economic decision. We condemn this government's dream of converting Maharashtra into a liquor state," Fadnavis also said, adding that the BJP would oppose the decision. Asked to comment on a similar decision taken by the Madhya Pradesh government, Fadnavis said: "I do not live in Madhya Pradesh. I live in Maharashtra. In Maharashtra, there was an effort to take such a decision eight years ago. We had opposed it at the time. Anna Hazare had also protested and the government was forced to take back the decision.

Covid-19: No mandatory face masks in Maharashtra?

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The State government's Covid-19 Task Force will study the possibility of cancelling mandatory face masks in the State and submit the report to the government. The State Cabinet meeting held on Thursday discussed the possibility of cancelling mandatory masks. Some of the cabinet members said that many countries including England have scrapped rules that made masks compulsory.



the Task Force. He insisted that the government will have to achieve the target of 100 per cent vaccination in the State. The vaccination process has slowed down in the last few months, according to State Health Minister Rajesh Tope. Maharashtra has 2,87,397 active Covid-19 cases as of January 27.

However, the daily caseload which was about 40,000 cases daily few days ago has reduced to about 25,000 cases this week. The number of discharged patients (36,708) was more than the number of cases detected on Thursday. The number of cases is also declining in Mumbai and other regions.

Maharashtra DGP and Mumbai Police Commissioner clash over transfer of 187 cops

Hearings in the case related to the transfer of 187 police officers by DGP of Maharashtra Sanjay Pandey at the Maharashtra Administrative Tribunal (MAT) have brought to light the disharmony between DGP Pandey and Mumbai Police Commissioner Hemant Nagrale.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Hearings in the case related to the transfer of 187 police officers by DGP of Maharashtra Sanjay Pandey at the Maharashtra Administrative Tribunal (MAT) have brought to light the disharmony between DGP Pandey and Mumbai Police Commissioner Hemant Nagrale.



Maharashtra, the MAT bench observed that there appears disharmony between DGP and Commissioner and this is not the forum for that. MAT bench during a hearing held on January 24 also asked Pandey to file an affidavit to explain why the transfer of 187 police personnel from Mumbai police was ordered by him and why Commissioner of Police Nagrale was not consulted on it.

shortage of staff and so the concerned officers will be relieved only when substitutes are provided or during regular transfers by month of April. The PEB (Police Establishment Board) meeting minutes where the transfers were decided were submitted with MAT and showed that Nagrale and the Additional Chief Secretary had not signed them. Sources said that Mumbai police mentioned that the administrative difficulties due to these transfers were not taken into account by PEB.



EDITOR'S SPECS

Lakhimpur Kheri, Pilibhit spell trouble for BJP

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Uttar Pradesh faces its biggest challenge in the Terai region in the Assembly elections, due to a combination of factors. The biggest troubled spot in this region is Lakhimpur Kheri, which goes to polls in the fourth phase on February 23. Lakhimpur Kheri is now best known for the October 3 incident in which four farmers and a journalist were mowed down by a SUV, allegedly owned by Union minister Ajay Misra Teni's son, Ashish Misra, following a farmers' protest. Three BJP workers were killed in retaliatory violence. Ashish Misra is in jail and Ajay Misra Teni remains comfortable in his ministerial position though he has been asked to remain away from the public eye. The SIT that probed the incident has said that it was 'pre-planned'. A strong sense of unease is palpable among the voters and local BJP leaders are acutely aware of the ground situation. The party suffered another jolt when its sitting MLA from Dhaurhara, Bala Prasad Awasthi, joined the Samajwadi Party. In the neighbouring Pilibhit, the situation is no better. The local BJP MP, Varun Gandhi, has been rather vocal in criticising his own party over the farmers' issues. Gandhi enjoys considerable support from the Sikh community -- his mother Maneka Gandhi is a Sikh -- and his posture during the farmers' agitation as well as the Lakhimpur Kheri incident in which he demanded the minister's arrest, has added to the BJP's troubles here. The BJP has retaliated by dropping Varun Gandhi and Maneka Gandhi from the national executive and now the list of star campaigners. Sensing trouble, the BJP has also changed two of its four candidates. Top BJP leaders have not yet started campaigning in the region and party sources were evasive about their programme.

BUDGET 2022: EXPERTS EXHORT CENTRE TO REGULATE CRYPTO TRADES

Even as Union Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman is set to present the annual Budget on February 1, experts have called for regulation of cryptocurrencies and exhorted the government to treat them as capital assets with a "reasonable" tax regime.

While the sector has grown exponentially over the last few years in India with buying, selling of the digital currencies and altcoins and establishing cryptocurrency exchanges being legal, the government is yet to bring in a law that regulates the sector. The government was expected to introduce a Bill titled "The Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill, 2021" to regulate cryptocurrencies in the Winter session of the Parliament but did not do so. It is now expected to be tabled in the Parliament during the Budget session that starts on January 1 and ends on April 8.

Pratik Gauri, CEO, and Founder, 5ire said the government has a responsibility to protect people from investments that are sensationalized, and while risk-taking is every investor's right, a measured hand where investment and holding par-



ties responsible go hand-in-hand. "Laissez-faire has never worked in populations where every rupee is hard-earned and we are a nation of hard-earners. Even in terms of governance, the Indian government is looking long and hard at accountability. So, taxation and regulation of investment falls under its purview and I think, thus far the government has done a remarkable job of balancing the need to encourage investment for innovation and the restriction on gaining from wild speculation," he said. He added that all gains from cryptocurrencies are

taxed heavily across the globe and that asking to pay a fair share of taxes on the gains in crypto markets is just part of the puzzle. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while virtually addressing a summit of the World Economic Forum on January 17, had called for a synchronized global action to regulate cryptocurrencies. The Reserve Bank of India has publicly favored a ban on private cryptocurrencies. The crypto assets in India are currently estimated at around Rs 45,000 crore with about 15 million investors. The risk in the widespread adoption of cryp-

to is that poor AML and fraud practices are heavily present in the crypto-exchange market. The reasons are multifold: Enhanced Due Diligence (EDD) is not required on crypto exchanges or ATMs at this time.

Raj Kapoor, Founder - India Blockchain Alliance and Chief Growth Officer at Chainsense LTD, said an alignment with the FATF framework would also provide crypto for a clearer framework on performing AML compliance, and to prepare to use this to inform your risk assessment and procedures.

The Customer Due Diligence (CDD) scanner to detect customer identification, especially for scanning high-risk customers would then be in place as well. Ravi S. Raghavan, Partner, Tax and Private Client Group at Majmudar & Partners says cryptos should be treated as capital assets and reasonable tax regime such as a levy of 18 per cent GST on fee collected by exchanges for enabling buying and selling cryptos; and Investor profits to be either taxed as - short term capital gains (for cryptos held for less than 36 months) at 30 per cent; or long term capital gains tax (for cryptos held for more than 36

months) at 20 per cent that is similar to trading and investment in securities. "Reporting procedures in income tax returns and whether tax withholdings are applicable (beyond prescribed thresholds) should be explained in the form of an FAQ by the Central Board of Direct Taxes in due course to avoid any tax litigation," he said.

He added that crypto trading should be considered by the government as speculative transactions and no losses arising from crypto sales be allowed to be carried forward and set off against other business profits or salary income of the concerned taxpayer.

Regulating cryptocurrencies by bringing it under the IT Act will make it a part of the investment choices and while most investors do not have a problem with taxation, they seek clarity and consistency of taxes. "Anything that is banned never goes away, it just goes underground and the govt misses out on the tax revenues. Also regulating it would ensure that all loopholes are plugged and people don't feel the need to evade taxes," Kunal Verma director and creative head of Yunometa Pte limited said.

META WINDING UP ITS AMBITIOUS CRYPTOCURRENCY PROJECT: REPORT

Facing regulatory hurdles, Meta (formerly Facebook) is reportedly winding up its ambitious yet controversial cryptocurrency project that its CEO Mark Zuckerberg once defended in front of the US Congress.

Originally launched as Libra and later renamed as the Diem Association, the cryptocurrency initiative "is weighing a sale of its assets as a way to return capital to its investor members," Fortune reported on Tuesday, citing people familiar with the matter.

Diem is reportedly in discussions with investment bankers about "how best to sell its intellectual property and find a new home for the engineers who developed the technology". The association apparently made an arrangement with Silvergate Capital Corp to issue Diem digital token, but "resistance from



the US Federal Reserve dealt the effort a final blow". The Diem Association as well as Meta didn't immediately respond to the report.

Facing regulatory backlash, the Libra Association in December 2020 decided to

change its name to Diem Association in a bid to reinforce its organisational independence.

The Diem Association (Diem means day in Latin) also had

its subsidiary called Diem Networks to serve as the payment system operator. Facebook and 20 partner organisations formally joined the digital currency project during a meeting in Geneva in October 2019. In a move to win regulators' hearts, the association had announced that its cryptocurrency will offer stable coins backed by just one nation's currency, meaning some coins offered would serve as the equivalent value of a dollar or a Euro. However, several heavyweights pulled out of the Libra project, like PayPal, Mastercard, Visa, Mercado Pago, eBay, Stripe and Booking Holdings and Vodafone over privacy concerns.

international

N.KOREA CONFIRMS TEST-FIRING OF LONG-RANGE CRUISE, SURFACE-TO-SURFACE MISSILES

Seoul | Agencies

North Korea on Friday confirmed this week's two rounds of weapons tests involving long-range cruise missiles and surface-to-surface tactical guided missiles, and vowed to "keep developing powerful warheads". On Thursday, South Korea's military said the North fired what appeared to be two short-range ballistic missiles toward the East Sea, marking its sixth such launch this month, Yonhap news agency reported. The latest "saber-rattling" came just two days after Pyongyang launched two apparent cruise missiles from an inland area.

"The Academy of Defense Science of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea conducted the test-fire for updating long-range cruise missile system and the test-fire for confirming the power of conventional warhead for surface-to-surface tactical guided missile on Tuesday and Thursday respectively," the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said, referring to the North by its official name. Leader Kim Jong-un did not attend the latest firings. Kim instead



was at a munitions factory "producing a major weapons system," accompanied by his influential sister, Kim Yo-jong, and a senior party official, Jo Yong-won. "He highly appreciated the factory effecting collective innovation and leaping progress in producing major weapons to implement the Party's decisions," the KCNA said in a separate report. Officials at the factory cherished "the unwavering will" of the North Korean leader "who smashes with his bold

pluck the challenges of the U.S. imperialists and their vassal forces that try to violate in every direction our Republic's right to self-defense." The KCNA did not provide further details regarding when the visit was made, but the North's state media usually reports on Kim's activities a day later. It's the first time in years for the North's state media to report on Kim's visit to a munitions factory. Kim inspected machine plants that are known as the North's major

weapons production sites in June 2019, months after his failed summit with then U.S. President Donald Trump. The North's state media released photos of Kim's visit to the plant but blurred the faces of officials there apparently due to security reasons. Tuesday's cruise missiles flew for 9,137 seconds and hit the target island 1,800 km away, according to the KCNA. When the North conducted its last known cruise missile test in September last year, the projectiles traveled 1,500 km for 7,580 seconds. "The practical combat performance of the long-range cruise missile system would hold a reliable share in boosting the war deterrence of the country," the KCNA said. The subsequent test of what appeared to be its variant of Russia's Iskander, or KN-23, on Thursday was aimed at "confirming the power of conventional warhead" for the surface-to-surface tactical guided missile, the state media said. According to the South Korean military, the latest missiles, launched from near the eastern coastal city of Hamhung, flew about 190 km at a top altitude of 20 km at a five-minute interval.

Gujarati family that froze to death on Canada-US border identified

Toronto | Agencies

The four members of a Gujarati family, who froze to death in minus 35 degrees temperatures on January 19 near the Canadian town of Emerson while trying to cross illegally into the US, have been officially identified after autopsies. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), which discovered the bodies on the Canadian side of the border, identified the four as Jagdishkumar Patel, 39, his wife Vaishaliben Patel, 37, daughter Vihangi Patel, 11 and son Dharmik Patel, 3. The family belonged to Dinguacha village in Kalol taluka of Gandhinagar district. Jagdish Patel reportedly paid Rs 70 lakhs to human smugglers to help him cross into the US from Canada.

The RCMP said: "The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner of Manitoba has confirmed



that the cause of death was due to exposure." It added that the family landed in Toronto from India on January 12. They travelled to the town of Emerson on the Canada-US border in Manitoba on, or about about

January 18. Since no vehicles were found abandoned near the spot where the four bodies were found on the Canadian side of the border, the RCMP said someone drove them to the border and then left.

GLOBAL COVID CASELOAD TOPS 365.6 MN

Washington: Amid an ongoing resurgence across the world, the global coronavirus caseload has topped 365.6 million, while the deaths have surged to more than 5.63 million and vaccinations to over 9.89 billion, according to Johns Hopkins University. In its latest update on Friday morning, the University's Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) revealed that the current global caseload and the death toll stood at 365,609,893 and 5,635,890, respectively, while the total number of vaccine doses administered has increased to 9,892,070,039. The US continues to be the worst-hit country with the world's highest number of cases and deaths at 73,401,269 and 878,335, according to the CSSE. The second worst hit country in terms of cases is India (40,371,500 infections and 491,700 deaths), followed by Brazil (24,789,795 infections and 625,390 deaths). The other countries with over 5 million cases are France (18,241,439), the UK (16,357,684), Turkey (11,250,107), Russia (11,217,423), Italy (10,539,601), Spain (9,660,208), Germany (9,335,854), Argentina (8,207,752), Iran (6,293,695) and Colombia (5,816,462), the CSSE figures showed. The nations with a death toll of over 100,000 are Russia (322,135), Mexico (303,776), Peru (204,769), the UK (155,559), Italy (145,159), Indonesia (144,261), Colombia (133,292), Iran (132,333), France (131,007), Argentina (120,352), Germany (117,377), Ukraine (106,373) and Poland (104,636).

Major power outage hits Jordan amid heavy snow

Amman | Agencies

A major power outage hit many cities in Jordan after heavy snow blanketed many parts of the country.

The Jordan Electric Power Company said in a statement that falling trees and branches led to power outages on Thursday in 20 main locations affiliated with the company across the country, reports Xinhua news agency.

It added that deep snow restricted its services to major locations, adding that there were around 1,300 employees and 400 service machineries were working to restore the power supply disrupted by the snow.

The polar depression currently gripping Jordan has passed its peak, but its effects are expected to last until Friday.



The Jordan Meteorological Department (JMD) on Thursday said that the Ras Munif area in Ajloun in the north saw 34 cm of snow,

while in the Sports City region in the national capital of Amman, it amounted to 22 cm. The JMD said that the snowfall would continue

until afternoon hours in the northern and central highlands, but in the southern region, it would last until Friday morning.

4 EARTHQUAKES HIT SPAIN WITHIN AN HOUR

Madrid: Spain's northwestern region of Galicia was hit by four earthquakes within an hour, said the country's National Geographic Institute (IGN).

According to the IGN, the first one occurred at 2.57 p.m. on Thursday and measured 3.7 on the Richter scale, followed by a 4.6-magnitude quake at 3.44 p.m. local time, which was felt by residents along the coast and in such cities as Pontevedra and Vigo, reports Xinhua news agency. Then two more lighter tremors measuring 1.9 and 2.5 on the Richter scale took place in the next 13 minutes. The epicentre of the quakes with a depth of around 3 km was located off the west coast of the region, in the Atlantic Ocean, said the IGN.

Emergency services have reported dozens of calls from local residents, but so far there has been no immediate reports of casualties or severe property damage. Earthquakes are common in southern and southeastern Spain, but are rarely felt in Galicia. The worst earthquake recorded in Spain in recent years was a 5.1-magnitude one hitting the city of Lorca in the southeastern region of Murcia in May 2011, killing nine.





SCHOOLS CAN OPEN AFTER JANUARY 31, CORONA WILL BE REVIEWED FIRST: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The government can open schools in Madhya Pradesh after January 31. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said on Friday that the schools are currently closed due to Corona, we will review it before 31st January. If the cases of corona start decreasing, then arrangements will be made to reopen the school and start offline studies again, but we will take a decision keeping in view the health and safety of the children.

CM Chouhan had reached Piplyakalan in Rajgarh district on Friday. During this, while addressing the public meeting, he clarified the situation regarding the opening of the school.

Notably, Home Minister Narottam Mishra and School Education Minister Indar Singh Parmar had come face to face on the matter of opening of schools a day ago. This statement of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has come after the confrontation of these ministers.

On Thursday, just a day before the opening of the school in MP, there was a situation of confrontation between the two ministers of CM Shivraj. Education Minister Indar Singh Parmar said that the cases of corona are increasing. In the current situation, it is not easy to open the school from February 1. MP Board exams can also be extended further. Minister Parmar



had said that he will review in the first week of February. Only after that a decision will be taken on opening and closing the school. This will be decided in view of the effect of Corona. At the same time, Mishra had said that Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan would take the decision to open the school.

On the instructions of CM Shivraj in Madhya Pradesh, schools from class 1 to class 12 are closed since January 15. Schools have been closed till 31 January on the instructions of the CM. Online education of children is going on. But as this date approaches, children and parents are confused

whether schools will reopen or not.

There is a steady decline in the number of corona positive cases in Madhya Pradesh. On January 21, where 11 thousand 274 cases came in a day. After that this figure is decreasing. On January 27, there was a decrease of 3 thousand 511. On January 27, 7 thousand 763 cases came.

In 24 hours, 1857 new cases have come in Bhopal, 1498 in Indore, 650 in Jabalpur and 282 in Gwalior. One death has also been reported in Jabalpur. The report of Minister Omprakash Saklecha has also come positive. He has given this information by tweeting.

CM PAYS TRIBUTE TO LALA LAJPAT RAI



Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan paid homage to freedom fighter Lala Lajpat Rai on his anniversary. Chouhan paid floral tributes by garlanding his portrait in the auditorium at his residence office. The prominent freedom fighter of the country, Lala Lajpat Rai is also known as Punjab Kesari. Lala Lajpat Rai was born on January 28, 1865 in Moga district of Punjab. Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal are known by the name of Lal-Bal-Pal. Lala Lajpat Rai along with Swami Dayanand Saraswati popularized Arya Samaj. His loyalty and patriotism for the country will always be immortal.

Chouhan has said in his tweet that "Patriotism can always be built on the firm rock of justice and truth. - Lala Lajpat Rai. Heartfelt Tributes to the great revolutionary Lala Lajpat Rai, popularly known as 'Punjab Kesari', on his birth anniversary.

PMAY Is Not Only a Campaign to Build Houses but to Change the Lives of the Poor: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) is not just a campaign to build houses, but it is a campaign to change the lives of the poor. This is a wonderful programme, the fair for the welfare of the poor is going on. Everyone has the right to live a better life and smile. I too will not rest until your life changes. Chouhan while thanking Prime Minister Narendra Modi on behalf of the people of the state said that every family of the state would be provided a pucca roof. This government's top priority is those who are the poorest and at the bottom. We are with these brothers and sisters till the houses are built. It is our endeavour that their house should be built within the given time limit. Chouhan appealed to all the public representatives including all the MPs and ministerial colleagues that whenever they go on a tour in rural areas, they must necessarily obtain physical information about the housing scheme.

Chouhan was transferring the first instalment amount of Rs.875 crore to the accounts of three lakh 50



thousand beneficiaries for the new houses sanctioned under PMAY (Gramin) with a single click. Chief Minister also interacted virtually with various beneficiaries and gave housing approval letters to five beneficiaries as a symbol.

Chouhan said that the instalment money released under the scheme is for the house. Therefore, the beneficiary should invest this money only in the house. Sarpanch, Sachiv, Rozgar Sahayak should ensure that the work of housing construction is completed within the time limit. Supervision and monitoring of schemes should be ensured in an effective manner. The beneficiaries should not face any inconvenience in getting the

construction material. The state government has so far provided housing to 35 lakh people. The dream of the house of the families who have been left now will also be fulfilled soon. Corruption and dilly dallying in the implementation of government schemes will not be tolerated. Chouhan said in a dialogue with the beneficiaries that in the implementation of the scheme it should be ensured that the beneficiaries face no delay in receiving the instalments. The officials should also ensure that the construction materials are available to the beneficiaries at reasonable rates. Strict action will be taken on receipt of complaints of corruption in the implementation of the scheme.

CM proposes celebrating birthday of villages

▶ IF ALL GOES AS PER PLAN, EVERY VILLAGE IN MADHYA PRADESH WILL HAVE A UNIQUE IDENTIFICATION AND ITS BIRTHDAY CELEBRATED EVERY YEAR.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

If all goes as per plan, every village in Madhya Pradesh will have a unique identification and its birthday celebrated every year. As per the plan, the elected representatives of villages (panch and sarpanch) and the villagers will decide a particular day to celebrate the birthday. The panchayats will decide a particular date, with its unique identification, coinciding it with any ritual, traditional, or historical value of their villages. The gram-panchayat will hold a meeting with residents of village and prepare a comprehensive plan for the celebration. All the people who belong to a particular village but are living in other districts, states, or countries will be invited for the event.

A proposal for this unique programme has been made by Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Friday. Chouhan has made an appeal to all village panchayats in the state to start the process. And, if the announcement is brought into the reality, probably it would be a first-of-its-kind of initiative in the country.



While making an announcement, Chouhan also talked about the purpose behind this unique proposal. It would not only give villages their unique identification but people living far from villages will be able to reconnect with their birth places, he said.

"People living far from their villages, who have expertise in different sectors will gather under one roof and contribute in setting the path of development of their village. I am sure each person, he/she may be at any position will be ready to contribute to his/her village. Also, they can remain connected with their birth places," Chouhan added. How the gram-panchayat can fix a particular date for village's birthday celebration, Chouhan gave an example of his own village- Jait, which is in Sehore district. "I, along with the people, have decided to celebrate birthday of my village on Naramada Jayanti as Jait village is located on the bank of the river Naramada," he added.

NO RESPITE FROM BONE-CHILLING COLD IN MP BEFORE FEB 2: IMD

There seems to be no respite from the severe cold wave in Madhya Pradesh as the situation will continue till February 2, and the areas witnessing bone-chilling cold are likely to see a rise in temperature gradually after one week, India Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted.

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There seems to be no respite from the severe cold wave in Madhya Pradesh as the situation will continue till February 2, and the areas witnessing bone-chilling cold are likely to see a rise in temperature gradually after one week, India Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted.

For the last four days, several parts of the state have been under severe cold with wind speed of 12-15 km. Even the clear sunlight for a few hours in the afternoon failed to give any respite from the bone-chilling cold.

According to IMD's report, hill station Pachmarhi was almost freezing at 1.0 degree Celsius and the minimum temperature in Khajuraho was recorded at 5.0 degree Celsius in the last 24 hours.

Districts such as Bhopal, Betul, Khandwa, Raisen, Ratlam, Khargone, Guna, Gwalior, Hosangabad, Rajgarh, Ujjain, Chhindwara, Jabalpur, Mandla, Rewa, Sagar, Umaria and some more have been under severe cold wave. The capital city Bhopal



shivered with minimum temperature at 5.0 degree Celsius, 7 degree below normal, while minimum temperature in Indore in the last 24 hours was at 6.4 degree Celsius, 4.4 degree below normal. Ujjain's minimum temperature was at 4.0 degree Celsius, 5.4 degree below normal. During the same period, Raisen recorded the lowest temperature at 3.0 degree Celsius,

followed by Nowgong at 3.7 degree Celsius and Umariya at 3.8 degree Celsius. The minimum temperature in Rewa was 4.4 degree Celsius, 4.6 degree below normal.

The MeT Department has issued a severe cold wave warning for Indore division along with Ujjain, Datia, Tikamgarh, Betul, Damod and Balaghat districts.

GD Mishra, a senior meteorologist in Bhopal, talking to IANS said, "Heavy and hailstorms due to the Western Disturbance are resulting in severe cold wave in many parts of Madhya Pradesh. Dry winds with 12-15 kmph speed are resulting in the bone-chilling cold. It is expected that temperature will rise gradually after February 2.

CM Planted Saptarni and Ficus Saplings



Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted Saptarni and ficus saplings along with Water Resources Minister Tulsi Ram Silawat in Smart Garden on Friday. Ashish Patel, Syed Nawab and Khushi Kanojia of Annashesh Welfare Society accompanied the Chief Minister Chouhan during plantation.

Annashesh Welfare Society has been working for the last two years for food and children. Work is also being done by the organisation in the field of tree plantation and cleanliness for environmental protection. Centres are being run by the organisation in Rewa and Bhopal. Work is being done in Rewa regarding education and food. In Ekta Nagar Basti behind Career College in Bhopal, the institution members teach children on Saturdays and Sundays. Guide them and celebrate festivals with them. Children are made aware of their rights and what is right or wrong for them. The organisation also provides educational material to the children, so that they can get help in studies. Chouhan plants a sapling every day in fulfillment of his resolve. Saptarni planted today is an evergreen medicinal tree, which has great importance in Ayurveda.

Ficus has special importance in the decoration of lawns and gardens. This plant has the ability to clean the air. It keeps the house cool. Ficus releases copious amounts of oxygen. Being an evergreen plant, it also has a long life.

"Adopt an Anganwadi" Campaign

So Far About 63 Thousand 768 Participants Have Registered

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In order to strengthen the anganwadi centres in the state, "Adopt an Anganwadi" campaign is being run with the aim of increasing the participation of the community. So far, about 63 thousand 768 participants have registered in the campaign. After contacting 28 thousand 746 participants, the Women and Child Development Department has obtained consent for necessary cooperation in the concerned anganwadi centres.

To adopt an anganwadi centre under "Adopt an Anganwadi" campaign, people's representatives, government employees, social workers, social organisations, non-government organisations, industrial organisations and other organisations can cooperate in activities like anganwadi

operation, nutrition improvement and infrastructure etc.. Anganwadi centre will be adapted for one year. The concerned person will be able to contact the anganwadi centre online or offline. For adoption of anganwadi centres under "Adopt an Anganwadi" campaign, land for anganwadi building and premises, construction of anganwadi buildings and rooms, improve-

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, in his message to the people of the state on Republic Day, had also appealed to the people of the state to adopt Anganwadi centres for systematic distribution of nutritious food and to remove malnutrition. He said that to keep the children healthy, if people's participation is added in the activities conducted in the Anganwadi centres, then the results will be better

ment of already constructed buildings, white-washing and painting, construction of boundary wall of already built buildings, installation of hand pump in the centre, accessible toilets for children, supply of outdoor and indoor sports materials, providing uniforms to children, supply of necessary materials such as fans, clocks, furniture, utensils etc. can be done in the operation of the centre. Along with this, public representatives can provide necessary financial help or nutritional material to children for nutritional improvement, necessary support for sending very low birth weight children to nutritional rehabilitation centres and financial assistance to their family as per the requirement. Any person can register by giving a missed call on mobile number 8989622333 to cooperate in the "Adopt an Anganwadi" campaign.

HCB CHAIRMAN MADE A COURTESY CALL ON GOVERNOR



Bhopal: Chairman of Madhya Pradesh Housing Construction (HCB) and Infrastructure Board Ashutosh Tiwari made a courtesy call on Governor Mangubhai Patel at Raj Bhavan on Friday. Tiwari met Governor Patel and informed about the future plans of the Housing Board.

Madhya Pradesh to get 2 more tiger reserves

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Here's some good news for those 'wild' at heart. The Centre has given in-principle approval to develop Madhav National Park in Shivpuri district as a tiger reserve.

And chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has asked officers to consider notification of Ratapani as a tiger reserve, if locals are willing. When these two sites are notified, Madhya Pradesh will become the state with the maximum number of tiger reserves. There are six tiger reserves and 10 national parks as of today. Civil aviation minister Jyotiraditya Scindia had met environment minister Bhupender Yadav a few months ago and submitted a proposal for reintroduction of tigers in Madhav National Park. "Madhav National Park has sustained a tiger population for over 200 years. This area used to be

the Reserve Park of the erstwhile Gwalior royal family and boasted of a robust tiger population," Scindia had written in his proposal. Yadav wrote to Scindia on Monday to inform him of the nod. "The officers have expressed their willingness to develop Madhav National Park as a tiger reserve, besides starting a tiger safari. While MP government's proposal for a tiger safari in Madhav is under consideration with the Central Zoo Authority, a proposal for the tiger reserve is still expected from the state," Yadav wrote in his letter. "Within the next five



years, a tiger reserve will be developed on 1,600 sqkm area of Madhav National Park. Initially, the tiger safari is to be set up on 100 hectare within a year. The estimated cost of infrastructure for the safari is around Rs 20 crore," said a forest officer. After Scindia's first meeting, Yadav had directed officials to take prompt action for resettlement of tigers in Madhav. According to forest department census, there were four tigers in 1980 and only one each in 1981 and 1987. The next time a

tiger was spotted in Madhav was on February 26, 1996. In the early 1990s, tigers were introduced in a restricted enclosure inside the park and a safari with 10-15 tigers was created. The population increased over the years. "Due to negligence, however, this safari was closed down and the tigers had to be relocated. In 1999, the MP government decided to find ways to improve the habitat of Madhav National Park and make it suitable for wild tigers," Scindia told the MoEF minister in his proposal. "The possibility of dispersing tigers from neighbouring protected areas settling down in Madhav National Park seemed to be the best possible solution. A survey was carried out by Wildlife Protection Society of India in 1999 on this, and in 2005, the MP government constituted a high level committee to review the proposal for reintroduction of tigers in Madhav National Park," he adds.



'ANT-MAN' STAR EVANGELINE LILLY PROTESTS VACCINE MANDATES

Los Angeles | Agencies

Marvel's 'Ant-Man' franchise star Evangeline Lilly took to Instagram, revealing that she was at a Washington DC rally in "support of bodily sovereignty," and protesting Covid vaccine mandates. "I believe nobody should ever be forced to inject their body with anything, against their will, under threat of: violent attack, arrest or detention without trial, loss of employment, homelessness, starvation, loss of education, alienation from loved ones, excommunication from society under any threat whatsoever," wrote the actress.

"This is not the way. This is not safe. This is not healthy. This is not love. I understand the world is in fear, but I don't believe that answering fear with force will fix our problems," she added.

In fact, nearly every medical body of any merit says there is nothing to fear from Covid vaccines. Most strongly encourage them including the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Centre for Disease Control, reports deadline.com.

Lilly added: "I was pro choice before Covid and I am still pro choice today." Lilly is the second Marvel actress to have expressed reservations against vaccines.

In 2020, Black Panther star Letitia Wright shared an anti-vax video on social media, then temporarily deactivated her Twitter and Instagram accounts before apologising and saying she didn't mean to hurt anyone. Also in 2020, Lilly wrote on Instagram that she would not social distance.

Lilly plays Hope van Dyne in the 'Ant-Man' franchise. 'Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania' has wrapped and will be seen in theaters on July 28, 2023.



NETFLIX MUST FACE 'QUEEN'S GAMBIT' LAWSUIT FROM RUSSIAN CHESS GREAT, SAYS JUDGE

Los Angeles | Agencies

A judge on Thursday refused to dismiss a lawsuit filed by a Georgian chess master who alleged that she was defamed in an episode of the Netflix series 'The Queen's Gambit'. Nona Gaprindashvili, who rose to prominence as a chess player in the Soviet Union in the 1960s, sued Netflix in federal court in September. She took issue with a line in the series in which a character stated "falsely" that Gaprindashvili had "never faced men", reports variety.com.

Gaprindashvili argued that the line was "grossly sexist and belittling," noting that she had in fact faced 59 male competitors by 1968, the year in which the series was set.

Netflix sought to have the suit dismissed, arguing that the show is a work of fiction, and that the First Amendment gives show creators broad artistic license.

But in a ruling on Thursday, U.S. District Judge Virginia A. Phillips disagreed, finding that Gaprindashvili had made a plausible argument that she was defamed. Phillips also held that works of fiction are not immune from defamation suits if they disparage real people.

"Netflix does not cite, and the Court is not aware, of any cases precluding defamation claims for the portrayal of real persons in otherwise fictional works," Phillips wrote.

"The fact that the Series was a fictional work does not insulate Netflix from liability for defamation if all the elements of defamation are otherwise present."

"The Queen's Gambit" is based on a 1983 novel by Walter Tevis, and follows a fictional American character, Beth Harmon, who becomes an international chess champion in the 1960s. In the final episode, set in Moscow, Harmon defeats a male competitor. A chess announcer explains that her opponent underestimated her: "Elizabeth Harmon's not

Ryan Reynolds to have street named after him

Ottawa | Agencies

Hollywood star Ryan Reynolds, who hails from the Canadian city of Vancouver, is to be nationally recognised with the opening of 'Ryan Reynolds Way', which is located in the east end of Ottawa. Jim Watson, Mayor of Ottawa, tweeted: "It's clear that Ottawa has a special place in Ryan's heart - and in his honour, I'll be bringing forward a motion later today to have a street named after him. Ryan Reynolds Way will be located in a new subdivision in the east end. Look forward to seeing it open soon!" The 'Deadpool' star responded to the news by calling it an "incredible honour" and joked that in return he would rename one of his children Ottawa, reports femalefirst.co.uk. In a tweet, he said: "This is an incredible honour and a deal is a deal, Mr Mayor I've changed my daughter's name to Ottawa." The recognition comes after Ryan and his actress wife Blake Lively had several made donations to causes across Canada including the Ottawa food bank.



Kevin Macdonald to direct 'The Iceman' starring Joseph Fiennes

Los Angeles | Agencies

BIFA and Oscar winner Kevin Macdonald will helm 'The Iceman', which will star Joseph Fiennes as the larger-than-life extreme athlete Wim Hof. The pic reunites producer Debbie Gray, who is producing alongside Fiennes, with sales agent Cornerstone Films following their recent collaboration Good Luck to You, Leo Grande, deadline.com. The two companies are also partners in The Reset Collective, the Australian production and distribution company that launched 2020.

Kevin Macdonald said: "Wim is someone who has suffered a terrible trauma - the loss of his wife - and finds an entirely new way to deal with the depression that comes with that experience." Jeff Pope has written a brilliant script - full of humour and humanity and emotions. In it, we are introduced to the Dutch suburbs - a world of crazy stunts, a broken family, a love affair and an epiphany. This is a film about resilience, second chances and the amazing ability of the human body and mind to heal. "The Iceman" will start shooting in November 2022. Hof, a widower working as a postman and struggling to support his four children, turned to the cold to find peace and strength. Soon, his radical techniques drew worldwide attention.



'THE ICE AGE ADVENTURES OF BUCK WILD': ONLY DIEHARD FANS WILL LOVE RELIVING ANTICS OF THEIR FAVOURITE CHARACTERS

FILM REVIEW

TROY RIBEIRO

(Streaming on Disney+ Hotstar)

Direction: John C. Donkin.

Voice Cast: Simon Pegg, Justina Machado, Utkarsh Ambudkar, Aaron Harris, Sean Elias-Reyes, Jake Green, Dominique Jennings, Skyler Stone and Vincent Tong.

Duration: 81 minutes.

Ratings: *** (three stars)

'The Ice Age Adventures of Buck Wild' is the sixth film of its franchise, and like its earlier editions, it is a cute and simple animation film that acknowledges family loyalty and belonging.

Narrated from the mammoth Ellie's point of view, voiced by Dominique Jennings, who bookends the narrative through a fresco inside the cave to say: "Everything changes and change is scary, but it is the way of the world. It helps us to grow and be who we are."

Thereafter, the narrative is about how Ellie's adopted, thrill-seeking, but goofy possum brothers Crash (Vincent Tong) and Eddie (Aaron Harris) set out to become independent and find a place of their own in the wide-open world.

Their action is provoked by Manny (Sean Elias-Reyes), the gloomy mammoth and Ellie's love interest, who tells them off for being too carefree and irresponsible, unlike the rest of their so-called family.



Soon, the possum brothers find themselves trapped in the Lost World, a massive cave inhabited by dinosaurs who co-exist with giant spiders and enormous carnivorous plants.

The dinosaurs pursue them and as they escape, a crazy and funny chase ensues. How Buck Wild (Simon Pegg), the one-eyed, swashbuckling, adventurous weasel, rescues them from the dinosaurs, and especially from Orson (Utkarsh Ambudkar), their large-headed leader, forms the crux of the narrative.

There is a certain visual appeal to the film. The characters are cute and colourful. Each one of them is distinct and attractive. The animation and the setting are painstakingly created and are picture-perfect.

Apart from the characters mentioned above, there is the silly, sibilant sloth Sid (Jake Green), the grumpy sabre-toothed tiger Diego (Skyler Stone), Buck's estranged friend Zee (Justina Machado), and a whole lot of minor characters who make the Ice Age Universe appealing.

The voices of the ace star cast match per-

fectly with that of the characters and the soundtrack further elevates the viewing experience. Humour comes in the form of conversational banter and physical comedy.

Unfortunately, the script by Jim Hecht, William Schiffrin and Ray De Laurentis, though packed with worthwhile messages, and some good laughs, offers nothing novel or stimulating. It caters to an audience in their pre-school years, but diehard fans will love reliving the antics of their favourite characters.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Amelia Gray Hamlin





ECB MAY CALL BACK ITS PLAYERS FROM IPL DUE TO SERIES AGAINST NEW ZEALAND

London | Agencies

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) may decide to pull out its players from the latter part of the Indian Premier League (IPL) for the team's preparation for the three-Test series against New Zealand, scheduled to commence at Lord's on June 2.

Some of the leading England Test cricketers, including pace bowler Mark Wood and middle-order batter Jonny Bairstow, are among the 22 players from the county to have registered for the 10-franchise IPL mega auction next month.

While the IPL schedule hasn't been announced, it is likely to be held between March 27 and the last week of May, giving absolutely no time for the England Test cricketers to prepare for the home series



against the Blackcaps.

If England cricketers play the full duration of the IPL, it would most likely make them unavailable for the Lord's Test as they would have no preparation whatsoever in red-ball cricket before taking on the reigning World Test champions.

A report in Cricbuzz said on

Friday that while "no formal communication" has yet been given to England's players or the IPL teams about their availability, it is understood that "several franchises have been given an indication that they should plan to lose England players likely to be involved against the Blackcaps before the conclusion of

the IPL."

Besides Bairstow and Wood, several other Test cricketers, including Dawid Malan, Ollie Pope, Craig Overton, Sam Billings and Dan Lawrence, could also be in the ECB's scheme of things as they were part of the recently concluded Ashes in Australia. Jos Buttler, who was also Down Under for the five-Test series, has been retained by Rajasthan Royals. England Test skipper Joe Root, all-rounder Ben Stokes and Chris Woakes have ruled themselves out of IPL.

A clear picture will emerge after next month's auction, depending upon how many England cricketers get picked. But in all likelihood, the ECB would like the players selected for the Tests to play at least one County Championship match (May 19 onwards) before the series against the Kiwis.

Ranji Trophy to take place in two phases this season

The Ranji Trophy comprises 38 teams from all over the country and was scheduled to start on January 13 this year until the BCCI postponed it indefinitely on January 4.

The 2020/21 season of the premier first-class competition was cancelled for the first time in the 85-year history of the prestigious tournament due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Jay Shah, the secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), on Friday said that the Ranji Trophy will be held this season in two phases. Shah

added that the first phase will have all league matches while the second phase will see the knockouts being held in June. "The Board has decided to conduct the Ranji Trophy this season in two phases. In the first phase, we plan to complete all matches of the league stage while the knockouts will be held in June. My team is working closely to mitigate any kind of health risk caused by the pandemic, while at the same time ensuring a highly competitive red-ball cricket contest," Shah was quoted as saying by The Hindu. "Ranji Trophy is our most prestigious domestic competition, which has been providing Indian Cricket with an enviable talent pool every year. It is absolutely important that



we take all necessary steps to safeguard the interest of this premier event," added Shah. Earlier, the BCCI had been forced to postpone the 2021/22 season of the Ranji Trophy along with Col CK Nayudu Trophy and Senior Women's T20 League indefinitely due to the third wave of COVID-19 in the country mainly caused by the Omicron variant of the virus.

WOMEN'S ASHES TEST

Knight's unbeaten ton helps England stand tall on Day 2

Canberra | Agencies

England captain Heather Knight's magnificent effort of 127 not out has helped England stand tall on day two of women's Ashes Test at the Manuka Oval on Friday. At stumps, England are 235/8 in 87 overs, trailing by 102 runs with left-arm spinner Sophie Ecclestone giving Heather company at the crease with 27 not out and the ninth-wicket partnership yielding 66 runs.

Heather's long ranger effort also helped the tourists avoid the follow-on after Australia declared at 337/9. Australia pacer Darcie Brown bagged her first Test wicket when her outswinger tempt-

ed Lauren Winfield-Hill to drive away from her body and edge to second slip.

Heather did what Joe Root couldn't do in the men's Ashes: get a century. It was the first time a male or female England captain had scored a Test century in Australia since Charlotte Edwards did so at Sydney in 2010/11. Heather and Sophie then held on for an unbroken partnership for the ninth wicket till stumps came.

Earlier, Australia, resuming from 327/7 on day two, batted for just 28 minutes, yielding 10 runs and two wickets. Annabel Sutherland and Jess Jonassen were bowled and caught behind respectively by Katherine to claim her

third Test five-wicket haul, finishing with 5/60 as Australia declared at 337/9.

Australia could have got England out cheaply but Heather's rearguard efforts and Sophie remaining defiant meant that the hosts will have to work hard on day two to force a draw or even an unlikely victory.

Brief scores:

Australia 337/7 declared in 104.1 overs (Meg Lanning 93, Rachael Haynes 86; Katherine Brunt 5/60, Nat Sciver 3/41) lead England 235/8 in 87 overs (Heather Knight 127 not out; Sophie Ecclestone 27 not out; Ellyse Perry 2/35, Annabel Sutherland 2/52) by 102 runs.

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

MLADENOVIC WINS SECOND MIXED DOUBLES CROWN

Melbourne | Agencies

France's Kristina Mladenovic and Croatia's Ivan Dodig were on Friday crowned the Australian Open 2022 mixed doubles champions, defeating Australian wild cards Jaimee Fourlis and Jason Kubler 6-3, 6-4 at the Melbourne Park here.

This is the second time in her career that the 28-year-old Mladenovic has emerged the Australian Open mixed doubles champion, with the previous title coming in 2014. The win for the former top-10 player is her first mixed major crown in eight years, her third overall and second in Australia. She and Canada's Daniel Nestor reached consecutive finals in Australia in 2014 and 2015, winning the former, and the duo also won Wimbledon in 2013. Mladenovic now boasts eight total Grand Slam titles across women's and



mixed doubles. Mladenovic and Dodig cruised in the 78-minute final, which was a far cry from their previous games, which were keenly fought. The duo was stretched to a match tiebreak in three of the four matches in the earlier rounds, and rallied from a set down to defeat No.2 seeds Zhang Shuai of China and John Peers of Australia in the semifinals, 1-6, 7-5, 10-2. Fourlis and Kubler were the third wildcard team to reach the mixed doubles championship in Melbourne in the past four years.

NADAL ONE WIN AWAY FROM RECORD 21ST GRAND SLAM

Melbourne:

Spanish stalwart Rafael Nadal was on the verge of Grand Slam history on Friday, making it the Australian Open final by defeating Italian Matteo Berrettini 6-3, 6-2, 3-6, 6-3 at Melbourne Park here. The 35-year-old, who captured his 500th hardcourt win of career, is just one match win away from clinching his singles Grand Slam title No. 21, which will make him the greatest major champion in history. Nadal, who won his last and only Australian Open title in 2009, is currently tied with Swiss ace Roger Federer and Serbian world No. 1 Novak Djokovic on 20 Grand Slams each.



MEDVEDEV SOARS INTO FINAL, SETS NADAL SHOWDOWN

Melbourne:

Showcasing his champion mentality, World No 2 Daniil Medvedev stepped up and delivered under pressure once again, beating fourth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas to reach the 2022 Australian Open men's singles final, here on Friday. The second seed demonstrated a mixture of quality and grit at Rod Laver Arena, overcoming Tsitsipas 7-6(5), 4-6, 6-4, 6-1 in a high-quality match to set up a final showdown against Rafael Nadal. By reaching his fourth Grand Slam final, Medvedev has equalled Marat Safin's record for most major final appearances by a Russian man. Medvedev will also become the first player to follow his maiden major trophy with his second at the next Grand Slam event if he beats Nadal on Sunday.



BBL 2021-22

Perth Scorchers thrash Sydney Sixers to clinch record fourth title

Melbourne | Agencies

A stunning fightback from Laurie Evans and skipper Ashton Turner with the bat followed by a clinical show with the ball helped Perth Scorchers thrash Sydney Sixers by 79 runs in the final and won the 2021-22 Big Bash League title, here on Friday.

With this win, Perth Scorchers became the first team to lift the BBL Trophy for the fourth time in the competition's 11-season history. They earlier had won titles in seasons 3, 4 and 6 of BBL.

At 4-25, Scorchers were in deep trouble and Evans (76 not out off 41) and Turner (54 off 35) helped them recover from the collapse as they put on 104 runs for the fifth wicket to help their side to 171 for 6. In reply, Daniel Hughes top-scored for the Sixers with 42 but it was not enough.



Brief scores

Perth Scorchers 171/6 in 20 overs (Laurie Evans 76 not out, Ashton Turner 54; Nathan Lyon 2-24, Steve O'Keefe 2-43) beat Sydney Sixers 92 in 16.2 overs (Daniel Hughes 42; Andrew Tye 3-15, Jhye Richardson 2-20) by 79 runs.

Torres strikes late as Ecuador hold Brazil in drama-filled WC qualifier

Quito (Ecuador) | Agencies

Goalkeeper Alisson Becker had two red cards overturned as Brazil drew 1-1 with Ecuador in a controversial World Cup qualifier here. Real Madrid midfielder Casemiro gave the visitors the lead at Rodrigo Paz Delgado stadium by bundling home from close range following a corner.

Ecuador were reduced to 10 men on Thursday night shortly after when goalkeeper Alexander Dominguez was dismissed for catching Matheus Cunha with a boot to the head. Brazil defender Emerson was then sent off for a second rash tackle.

It looked as if Brazil would be forced to play the last hour with just nine players when Colombian referee Wilmar Roldan penalised Alisson



with a red card for a high boot that struck Enner Valencia in the face. The result leaves Ecuador third in the 10-team South American group with 24 points from 15 matches while leaders Brazil remain undefeated with 36 points from 14 games. The top four teams will earn an automatic spot at this year's World Cup in Qatar while the fifth-ranked side will progress to an intercontinental playoff.

Meanwhile in Asuncion, Paraguay, Luis Suarez scored a superb second-half goal as Uruguay kept their World Cup qualification hopes alive with a 1-0 victory away to Paraguay. The 35-year-old struck in the 50th minute by running on to Diego Godin's long pass and firing a first-time shot into the far corner.

The result leaves Uruguay fourth in the 10-team South American zone with 19 points from 15 matches. Uruguay are ninth with 13 points.

T20 World Cup Qualifier A to begin with Oman v Nepal clash in Muscat



Muscat | Agencies

Hosts Oman will take on Nepal in the opening game of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup Qualifier A, which will get underway here on February 18. The tournament is one of two global qualifiers that together form the final stages

of the qualification process for the Men's T20 World Cup 2022 to be held in Australia.

A total of 20 matches will be played in the tournament that comprises eight teams -- Oman, Bahrain, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Nepal, Philippines, and UAE. Ireland and Oman had qualified for this tournament after being

eliminated in the first round of the T20 World Cup 2021 held in UAE, while Nepal and the UAE booked their slots via their rankings in the ICC Men's T20I Team rankings. The other participating teams qualified through regional qualifying tournaments held through the course of last year.

The teams in Qualifier A are divided into two groups of four. Each team will play all the other teams once in its group, followed by position classification matches. The two teams that reach the final will advance to the T20 World Cup 2022 in Australia.

Group A of the qualifier features Canada, Nepal, Oman, and Philippines, while Group B features Bahrain, Germany, Ireland, and UAE.

The ICC Men's T20 World Cup Qualifier B will be held from July 11-17 in Harare and will feature Hong Kong, Jersey, Netherlands, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Uganda, USA, along with hosts Zimbabwe.

U-19 CWC Afghanistan defeat Sri Lanka, join England in semifinals



Antigua | Agencies

A superb performance with the ball aided by crisp fielding helped Afghanistan shock Sri Lanka by just four runs in a low-scoring match and secure a place in the Under-19 ICC Cricket World Cup semifinal at the Coolidge Cricket Ground, here on Friday (IST). Afghanistan have become the second team after England to book a place in the Super League last-four of the tournament.



Despite only setting a target of 135 after being bundled out in 47.1 overs, Suliman Safi's side stood up to the challenge of defending a meagre total, bowling out Sri Lanka for just 130 with four overs to spare. Sri Lanka captain Dunith Wellalage's composed late spell at the crease (34 off 61 balls) raised hopes of a win, but it was not meant to be as Afghanistan edged the low-scoring thriller to reach the final four, matching their achievement from the 2018 tournament in New

Zealand. They will now face England in the first Super League semifinal at the Sir Viv Richards Cricket Ground on February 1.

Brief scores

Afghanistan 134 in 47.1 overs (Abdul Hadi 37, Noor Ahmad 30; Vinuja Ranpula 5/10) beat Sri Lanka 130 in 46 overs (Dunith Wellalage 34; Bilal Sami 2/33) by 4 runs.



Acting is all about reacting :Fatima Shaikh

Team Absolute | Mumbai

"D"angal" actress Fatima Sana Shaikh, feels that a lot of acting is defined by how an actor reacts to their co-actor. She maintains that actors feed off each other's energy to sketch a good performance. Elaborating on her stance, she said: "I believe, acting is a lot of reacting. It's always good to have good performers opposite you so that you can feed off their energies."

The actress recently worked in a TVC with Sidharth Malhotra. They instantly clicked and their camaraderie seems to have translated into their work as well, going by her statement on her experience of working with the actor.

"It has been a blast working with Sidharth for the ad. We gelled so well on the sets, it didn't feel like it was the first time we were working together."

About their upcoming projects, Fatima Sana Shaikh will be next seen in "SamBahadur" while Sidharth Malhotra will be next seen in "Mission Majnu".



Team Absolute | Mumbai

ARJUN KAPOOR HAS A BUSY 2022

Bollywood actor Arjun Kapoor's lineup for 2022 looks quite diverse and interesting. He will not only be seen showcasing his muscles in the entertainer 'Ek Villain 2' but will also flaunt his acting mettle in 'Kutney' and 'The Ladykiller'. The 36-year-old actor is happy that he is in a position to explore both spectrums of Hindi films. He said: "The fact that I can now, on one hand, have hardcore films like 'Ek Villain 2' and, on the other, also have projects like 'The Ladykiller' and 'Kutney' means that filmmakers and producers believe that I can straddle both spectrums of films today. "This is what I'm cherishing the most because, for the longest time, I want-

ed to explore the diverse spectrum of genres and finally I'm getting the opportunity to do so." Arjun reveals that he wanted to prove to filmmakers that he can deliver a solid performance if given an opportunity and it came in the form of 'Sandeep Aur Pinky Faraar'.

He said: "I think what has bolstered the confidence of master storytellers is my performance in 'Sandeep Aur Pinky Faraar' because I went out of my comfort zone and delivered. I wanted to prove to everyone that people can punt on me to do off-centre entertainers."

Allu Arjun savours the views of Dubai's skyline

Team Absolute | Hyderabad

Buoyed by the pan-India success of 'Pushpa', superstar Allu Arjun is happily holidaying in Dubai. Allu Arjun has taken to Instagram to share a shot of himself standing next to the AURA pool in the city of Dubai, a world-renowned tourist destination. The location offers a spectacular view of the city's skyline, where the 'Ala Vaikunthapurramuloo' actor is seen enjoying the picturesque. It seems like Allu Arjun has planned the vacation to cool his heels before he begins the script reading sessions for 'Pushpa: The Rule', which is the sequel to the blockbuster pan-India movie 'Pushpa: The Rise'. Allu Arjun will soon join Sukumar and his team to discuss the upcoming schedules to start shooting for the next part of 'Pushpa'. Meanwhile, Sukumar has been busy working on the pre-production works related to the movie. It is reported that 'Pushpa: The Rule' will go on the floors in March. As for 'Pushpa: The Rise', it has netted nearly Rs 100 crore in Hindi. Even after its Hindi version started streaming on Amazon Prime, the Sukumar directorial has collected good figures at the theaters, thereby proving that the film is a real success. Rashmika Mandanna, Rao Ramesh, Ajay Gosh, Sunil, and Anasuya Bharadwaj were seen in significant roles in the smuggling-related story.



SHILPA EXCITED ABOUT UNCOVERING HIDDEN TALENT ACROSS INDIA

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Shilpa Shetty, who is currently seen judging 'India's Got Talent', is happy about uncovering hidden talent across the country with the help of the reality show.

Speaking about the premiere weekend, Shilpa said: "I am excited about uncovering the plethora of hidden talent that India's nooks and crannies have in store for us."

She added: "It's heartening to also see that the audience is enjoying this season of 'India's Got Talent'. Kirronji, Badshah, Manoj and I are having a great time shooting for the show."

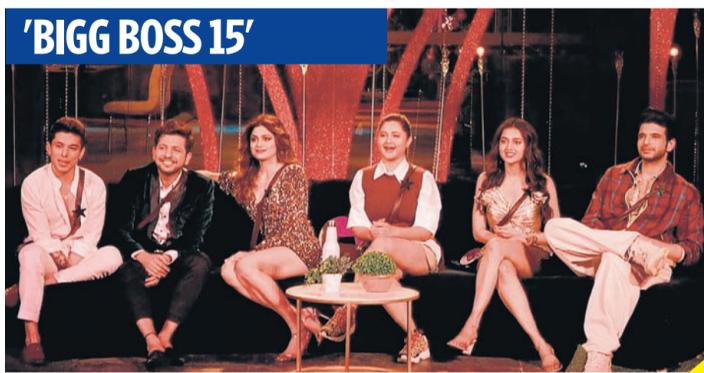
This is the fourth time that Shilpa is seen judging a reality show. Previously, she has judged shows like 'Zara Nachke Dikha', 'Nach Baliye' and 'Super Dancer'.

'India's Got Talent' Season 9 airs on Sony TV.

On the film front, Shilpa, who is currently seen as a judge on 'India's Got Talent', will be seen in the film 'Nikamma'. Directed by Sabbir Khan, the film also stars Abhimanyu Dassani and Shirley Setia.



'BIGG BOSS 15'



Finalists get emotional after watching recap of their journey

Team Absolute | Mumbai

'Bigg Boss 15' finalists Karan Kundrra, Prateik Sahajpal, Tejasswi Prakash, Shamita Shetty, Rashami Desai and Nishant Bhatt will be seen getting overwhelmed as they watch their entire journey in the controversial reality show.

Every contender is shown a video montage of their own highlights from this season, which has captured all their highs and lows in this house.

Tears start rolling down their cheeks as they watch their journey unfold in front of their eyes.

Tejasswi, who is all teared up, says "I am going to miss this so much. Thank you 'Bigg Boss.'"

But their tears soon go away as the house gives them some super-fun activities to make this a night to remember.

Amidst this, the hosts of 'Hunarbaaz - Desh Ki Shaan' Bharti Singh and Haash Limbachiya along with Siddharth Dey join the contestants to give them a glimpse of their 'hunar' (talent).

As the contestants flamboyantly show off their dance

moves and even perform skits, Bharti and Haash promptly grab chance to tickle everyone with laughter by pulling their legs.

When Rashmi performs to the song 'Deewani Mastani', Bharti says: "Yeh khakhi-nikkar mein Mastani pehli baar dekhi yaar (first time seeing Mastani in a pant and shirt)."

Bharti also pretends to be Karan's Punjabi mother and Tejasswi's mother-in-law and comments on her dress.

The grand finale of the Colors show will be held in two parts on Saturday and Sunday.

Tigmanshu is a director with a grip on acting: Richa Chandha

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Richa Chadha, who is awaiting the release of her upcoming crime suspense-thriller show, 'The Great Indian Murder', feels that a director who has a profound understanding of the craft of acting is a blessing and is easy to work with.

The actress said this in reference to her 'Gangs of Wasseypur' co-actor Tigmanshu Dhulia, who has directed in 'The Great Indian Murder'.

Richa says, "Working with a director who understands the craft of acting is truly a blessing. Working with Tishoo bhai (Tigmanshu Dhulia) on 'The Great Indian Murder' has been super smooth. I was always on my toes. This is a tough part because it's very straight-up, unlike some of the other roles I have played."

She feels glad that as a director, he always encouraged her during the course of filming, "but we actors felt comfortable enough to improvise, because the director encouraged us. I have to say that the entire experience of having him on the director's chair has been very smooth and fruitful for me and I look forward to collaborating with him very soon; be it as an actor or as a director."

'The Great Indian Murder' which also stars Pratik Gandhi, with Raghubir Yadav and Ashutosh Rana, is a based on the novel 'Six Suspects' by author Vikas Swarup, and will be available for streaming from February 4 on Disney+ Hotstar.



INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Chahatt Khanna