For Generation Ace

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Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav

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Notice

On the occasion of 'Holi' festival, Absolute India office will remain closed on 18th and 19th March. Next issue will be published on 21st March. Happy Holi.

Editor

BARC RESUMES RATINGS FOR TV CHANNELS

Mumbai: Nearly 17 months after the mega TRP manipulation scam erupted in Mumbai, the Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) of India has resumed the ratings for individual news channels, an official said here on Thursday.

The BARC released data for Week 10 for the current year (2022) on Thursday as per its new 'Augmented Data Reporting Standards for News & Special Interest Genres' after conducting a nationwide consultative process with all the stakeholders. As per the revised approved standards, audience estimates for these genres will only be released every week based on a four-week rolling average, said the official. The BARC said that a level playing field has been ensured for all channels within the ecosystem with a single YUMI login access to the audience estimates.

AT SECOND CONGRESS G23 MEET, REBEL CAMP WANTS CHANGE IN STATUS QUO, SPLIT RULED OUT

DON'T HAVE FAITH IN 'RAGA'

Sources said it had to be impressed upon the Gandhis that things have to change. The G23 also reiterated the fact that it did not want a split in the party, sources added. Only a few members of the G23 met at senior leader Ghulam Nabi Azad's residence. Hooda and former minister Kapil Sibal were spotted arriving at Azad's home. Earlier, the G23 had said it "did not have faith" in Rahul Gandhi, while staying firm in its demand for a change in leadership.

STATEMENT OF G 23

- *"WE BELIEVE THAT THE ONLY WAY FORWARD IS FOR THE CONGRESS TO ADOPT THE MODEL OF COLLECTIVE AND INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP AND DECISION MAKING AT ALL LEVELS."*
- *"IN ORDER TO OPPOSE THE BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY [BJP], IT IS NECESSARY TO STRENGTHEN THE CONGRESS PARTY. WE DEMAND THE CONGRESS PARTY TO INITIATE DIALOGUE WITH OTHER LIKE-MINDED FORCES TO CREATE A PLATFORM TO PAVE THE WAY FOR A CREDIBLE ALTERNATIVE FOR 2024 AND THE NEXT STEPS IN THIS REGARD WILL BE ANNOUNCED SOON."*

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The group of 23 leaders of the Congress met again on Thursday evening, making it the second meeting in the last 24 hours. After the meeting, the G23 stressed on the fact that it did not want a split in the party, but said it had to be impressed upon the Gandhis that "things have to change".

> "We don't have faith in Rahul Gandhi... New leadership should come in. We want betterment of Congress. Other leaders will join us soon."
>
> *Shankar Singh Vaghela, Congress Leader*

The meeting comes after Rahul Gandhi reached out to the party's "rebel" group through former Haryana CM Bhupinder Singh Hooda, who is a member. According to sources, senior members of the group will reach out to "likeminded" Congress leaders across the country and attempt to build up support.

After a meeting on Wednesday, which was held to deliberate on the party's poll debacle in five states, the G23 had said the only way forward for the Congress was to adopt a model of "collective and inclusive leadership and decision making".

Shankar Singh Vaghela, a G23 member who was present at Wednesday's meeting, called for a revamp in the organisational structure, and said the group did not have faith in Rahul Gandhi.

Earlier, Rahul met Hooda and sources privy to the happenings in the G23 faction said the two-time CM conveyed to the Congress scion that they were not in favour of splitting the party.The G23 leaders have long demanded an organisational overhaul and change in the party's leadership. A joint statement by G23 read, "We the following members of the Congress Party met to deliberate on the demoralising outcome of the recent results of the assembly elections and the constant exodus of both our workers and leaders."

"Was offered Pegasus Spyware for Rs 25 crores, rejected it": Mamata

Team Absolute | Kolkata

Mamata Banerjee today said her government had turned down an offer to buy Israeli spyware Pegasus a few years ago. The use of the spyware to snoop on political rivals is "not acceptable", the Bengal Chief Minister told reporters. "They came to our police department to sell their machines. They demanded Rs 25 crore for it, five years back. It came to me, I said no we don't want to buy such machines," Mamata Banerjee said. "If it was for anti-national activities and for security, it could have been a different thing. But it is used for political reasons, it's used against officials and judges, which is not acceptable," she added. A political cataclysm followed allegations that the Pegasus spyware - sold only to governments - was allegedly used to target opposition leaders, journalists and others in India. In 2019, a media consortium, including The Wire, revealed that 300 phones from India were on the list of potential targets on the leaked database of NSO, which supplies the Pegasus spyware. It is not established, however, that all the phones were hacked. Her Pegasus claims come days after a BJP leader, Anirban Ganguly, alleged that Mamata Banerjee had been using the spyware since she came to power in 2016.

TDP GOVERNMENT ALSO REJECTED PEGASUS

Amaravati: *Telugu Desam Party (TDP) General Secretary Nara Lokesh on Thursday revealed that the his party's previous government in Andhra Pradesh had rejected the offer of Pegasus to sell its spyware to the state. Lokesh, who was Information Technology Minister in the TDP cabinet headed by his father N. Chandrababu Naidu, clarified that the TDP government did not purchase any spyware. "Yes, Pegasus offered to sell its spyware to the AP government as well but we rejected it," he told reporters. He was reacting to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's purported claim that the Chandrababu Naidu government purchased the Pegasus Spyware. "She was misinformed. If we had resorted to such things, Jagan Mohan Reddy would not have come to power in 2019," he said.*

A graduate of four-year UG program may take admission in PhD

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Soon a graduate of new four-year UG program will be able to take admission in PHD. University Grants Commission (UGC) will issue the notification of the new rules for PhD Admission along with the syllabus for the studies to be completed in four years under graduation program.

The UGC is also restructuring the syllabus framework within short intervals. Some teacher and teachers' bodies are against this restructuring.

Professor Mithuraaj Dhusiya, Member, Academic Council,

University of Delhi said, "It clearly shows that both MoE and UGC and consequently universities are ill prepared to implement NEP from the academic year 2022-23. Reduction of number of credit hours in the range of 120-132 for 3 years and 160-176 for four years will not only devalue degrees but also lead to massive erosion of workload and teaching jobs".Reportedly students will be studying 'common courses' from humanities, social sciences, mathematics and vocational education for first 3 semesters and then decide what major, minor they want to choose, professor Dhusiya said.

According to him, "this methodology is a big waste and will ensure that students will not get sufficient time to pursue their area of specialization. On top of that, if they are allowed to pursue PhD straight after 4 years of undergraduate course, it will lead to the devaluation of the PhD degree itself."

44,167 FAMILIES REGISTERED AS MIGRANTS WITH J&K GOVERNMENT

New Delhi: As the Kashmir Files reignites the horrors of the genocide of the Kashmiri Pandits, information has surfaced that 44,167 families are registered as migrants with the J&K government.

In an RTI reply, the Home Ministry said that a separate Security Related Expenditure (SRE) scheme in J&K namely SRE Relief and Rehabilitation was introduced in 1989-90 which includes financial assistance in the form of administrative, socio-economic, health, security related assistance to Kashmiri migrants including Kashmiri Pandits.

The scheme includes relief to migrants from Kashmir and Jammu settled in J&K and Delhi in the form of cash or kind.

It also includes expenditure towards providing employment to Kashmiri migrants from time to time under special packages.

It also includes financing rehabilitation activities related to migrants like construction of transit accommodations, housing facilities, scholarship, providing employment, waiving of interest loans, assistance to farmers.

In addition, cash assistance of Rs 3,250 per month with a ceiling of Rs 13,000 per month per family, and 9 kg rice, 2 kg atta and 1 kg of sugar per family is also being given to Kashmiri migrants.

Also, construction of 6,000 transit accommodations for 6,000 Kashmiri migrant employees in Kashmir Valley was approved in 2015.

21 dead as Russian shelling hits school, cultural centre in Ukraine

BIDEN CALLS PUTIN 'WAR CRIMINAL'

Washington: *For the first time since Moscow waged its war on Kiev on February 24, US President Joe Biden called his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin a "war criminal" as the latter is "inflicting appalling devastation and horror on Ukraine". When the reporter asked the President is he was ready to call Putin a "war criminal", Biden responded by saying: "Did you ask me whether I would tell ....? Oh, I think he is a war criminal."*

KYIV | Agencies

At least 21 people were killed and 25 were injured on Thursday when Russian forces shelled a town in eastern Ukraine, local prosecutors said.

Artillery fire early Thursday hit a school and a cultural centre in the town of Merefa outside the city of Kharkiv, regional prosecutors said in a Facebook post. Of the wounded, 10 people are in serious condition, they said.

A photo accompanying the prosecutors' statement showed a building of several storeys that was destroyed in the middle with windows blown out and emergency workers combing through the wreckage.

Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city and some 30 kilometres (18 miles) north of Merefa, has been the scene of intense Russian air strikes in recent weeks and has been severely damaged.

PUTIN 'WAR CRIMINAL' IS 'INADMISSIBLE': KREMLIN

Moscow: *Moscow considers "inadmissible and unforgivable" the words of US President Joe Biden, who called Russia President Vladimir Putin a "war criminal", said Dmitry Peskov, Kremlin Press Secretary. Peskov also said that hundreds of thousands of people around the world have been killed by US bombs. The words of Biden, who called Putin a "war criminal", are "absolutely inadmissible, unacceptable, unforgivable", said Peskov, RT reported.*

KAROLINA BIELAWSKA IS MISS WORLD 2021

- *KAROLINA IS CURRENTLY PURSUING HER MASTER'S IN MANAGEMENT AND HOPES TO GET A PHD TOO, ACCORDING TO THE MISS WORLD ORGANISATION.*
- *SHREE SAINI, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS FROM PUNJAB'S LUDHIANA, BUT MOVED TO WASHINGTON, DC WITH HER FAMILY WHEN SHE WAS FIVE. DESPITE BEING INVOLVED IN A FATAL ACCIDENT THAT RESULTED IN FACIAL BURNS, SHREE DID NOT GIVE UP AND RETURNED STRONGER.*

N. Lothungbeni Humtsoe | New Delhi

Karolina Bielawska of Poland has been crowned Miss World 2021, which was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The 70th edition of the event was held in San Juan, Puerto Rico at the Coca-Cola Music Hall. While Karolina is the winner, Indian-American Shree Saini of the US is the first runner-up, and Olivia Yace of Côte d'Ivoire is the second.

Introducing the winners, Miss World organisation tweeted: "Our newly crowned Miss World Karolina Bielawska from Poland with 1st Runner Up Shree Saini from US 2nd Runner up Olivia Yace from Côte d'Ivoire."Toni-Ann Singh, Miss World 2020, also graced the event by performing a special number 'The Prayer' to show her support for Ukraine in the midst of its conflict with Russia.

"Our current Miss World Toni-Ann Singh performs 'The Prayer' as we light candles around the world to stand with Ukraine. There wasn't a dry eye in the house #mwcandlesforukraine." tweeted from Miss World's handle.

CLIMATE CHANGE TO BE PART OF SCHOOL CURRICULUM

New Delhi: The concept of climate change has been incorporated in the curriculum and in the textbooks developed by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). This curriculum is a part for the subjects like Social Sciences and Geography for classes 7 and 11. Topics on climate change have also been incorporated in the NCERT's Science Textbooks for classes 8 and 9 and Biology Textbook for class 12.

Minister of State for Education, Annpurna Devi said, "NCERT has been organizing in-service teachers' capacity building programmes in Geography as well as in Social Sciences where teachers are sensitized over the issues related to climate change."

Heat Wave warning in 9 Madhya Pradesh districts, Yellow alert issued

The heat wave condition is likely to prevail at few places in Narmadapuram, Ratlam, Shajapur, Khargone, Dhar, Khandwa, Damoh, Chhattarpur and Rajgarh districts, for the next two days. The maximum (day) temperature touched 39 degrees Celsius, 4 degrees above normal, while the minimum (night) temperature hovered at 18 degrees Celsius, which was normal, in Bhopal, the official said.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Thursday issued a yellow alert warning of heat wave conditions in nine districts of Madhya Pradesh for the next two days.

Severe heat wave conditions prevailed in Narmadapuram, with mercury rising to 43 degrees Celsius, the highest maximum temperature in Madhya Pradesh, on Thursday, senior meteorologist PK Saha of IMD Bhopal said.

Similar conditions were witnessed in Rajgarh, Dhar, Ratlam and Khargone districts during the day, he said.

The maximum and minimum temperatures were 38.4 degrees Celsius, three above normal, and 22.6 degrees Celsius, five above normal, respectively in Indore, Saha said.

The maximum and minimum temperatures were at 37.9 degrees Celsius and 20.8 degrees Celsius respectively in Jabalpur, while in Gwalior, they were at 37 degrees Celsius and 17.9 degrees Celsius respectively, he added.

Citing the cause for the weather condition, Saha said that the dry westerly winds from neighbouring Rajasthan were blowing into the central state.

DELHI CIVIC POLLS: AAP MOVES SC FOR FREE, FAIR, TIMELY ELECTIONS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi's ruling Aam Aadmi Party has moved the Supreme Court challenging the State Election Commission's (SEC) decision to postpone the municipal elections without any reasonable ground.

The plea contended that the decision has been taken solely on the basis of unofficial communication by the Central government. "The brazen influence of the Government of India over the State Election Commission and its flagrant meddling with the conduct of municipal elections forms the subject matter of this writ petition," said the plea.

The plea sought a direction to the SEC to conduct the municipal elections in Delhi, according to the initially conceived schedule, before the expiry of the tenure of the Municipal Corporations of Delhi, in May 2022, in a free and fair manner.

The petition contended that the SEC, on March 9, issued a press note for holding the polls in April.

"However, precisely half an hour later, by way of a press note, it conveyed that it had received some communication from the Lt. Governor of Delhi, conveying that the Government of India was intending to pass a legislation to merge the trifurcated Municipal Corporations of Delhi. In light of this communication, the press conference to declare the election schedule was indefinitely postponed; the municipal elections consequently being deferred," said the plea. The plea added that no formal state communication has been issued to this effect yet. Even in the ongoing Budget Session, no agenda has been declared regarding the tabling of a Bill to this effect, it added.

"As no subsequent formal notification, agenda or communication regarding the merger of the Corporations has come from the state, it clearly showed the delaying tactics to hamper the free and fair conduct of elections beyond the constitutionally mandated period of five years, as per Article 243U of the Constitution," it said.

The plea questioned whether the SEC can be influenced by an unofficial communication sent by the Centre to defer municipal elections, which the poll body was prepared to conduct."The timing of this communication, right before the declaration of the schedule also leaves much to be desired. The conduct of the government makes evident its attempt to interfere with the free and fair conduct of elections. Instead of stopping the government from doing so and protecting its independence, the respondent commission has given in and deferred the elections", added the plea.

The plea contended that the sole influence of the government in deferring the municipal elections is a clear infringement of the independence of the State Election Commission and an evident obstruction to the impartial conduct of elections.

"Issue a writ of mandamus, directing Respondent Commission to expeditiously conduct the municipal elections in Delhi as per their initial proposal, in a free and fair manner," said the plea.

Dry colours more harmful than liquid ones: Experts

Team Absolute | New Delhi

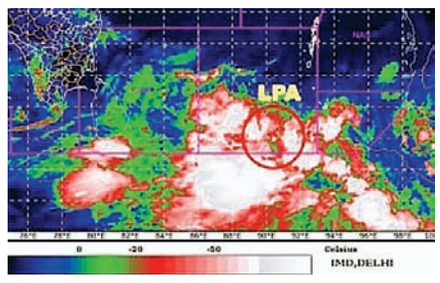
On the eve of Holi, doctors here have warned that dry colours may cause more harm to the eye as compared to liquid colours.

According to Shantanu Mukherji, a senior consultant with the Sharp Sight Eye Hospitals, "Synthetic colours contain harmful agents like industrial dyes and alkalis, which are incredibly toxic for the human skin, especially the eyes. Their use can also cause symptoms like irritation, redness, allergies and even permanent loss of vision in case of severe chemical injury to the eye."

"The other thing that causes eye problems is poor hygiene. If one tries to remove colour by rubbing the eye with dirty fingers, it may expose one to the risk of infective conjunctivitis," he added. Talking about skin problems after Holi, dermatologist Amit Bangia advised applying oil on exposed skin before playing Holi. "Use colours made from natural ingredients as much as possible like rose petal, marigold flowers, turmeric, beet root etc. Remove colour with mild face wash and moisturise the skin after cleaning the color," he said. Bangia also said that the festival of Holi involves close proximity in large gatherings, which is a perfect recipe for the spread of Covid. Children who are not vaccinated and the elderly who are susceptible to complications should avoid playing Holi, he added.

Cyclone Asani: Suspension of fishing from March 19-22 at A&N Islands advised

Team Absolute | New Delhi



The Andaman and Nicobar Islands will bear the maximum impact due to a low pressure area (LPA) in the southeast of Bay of Bengal, which is likely to intensify into a cyclonic storm by March 21.

The system is likely to be a well-marked low pressure area by March 19 morning over southeast Bay of Bengal and adjoining south Andaman Sea and turn into a depression by the morning of March 20 to ultimately become a cyclonic storm - now identified as Asani - on March 21. The system will initially move east-north-eastwards till March 19, then move northwards along and off Andaman and Nicobar Islands till March 20, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. Then it will move north-north-eastwards and reach near Bangladesh-north Myanmar coasts around the morning of March 22. This is the first time that the IMD has introduced the pre-genesis track and intensity forecast experimentally at the stage of LPA over southeast Bay of Bengal. The IMD said it is the first centre to initiate pre-genesis forecast worldwide. According to climatology of cyclones in March based on data from 1891-2020, a cyclone at this time is not a rare phenomenon. There have been eight cyclonic disturbances in March (two in Arabian Sea and six in Bay of Bengal) earlier. Of this, six dissipated over sea, one crossed over to Tamil Nadu coast as a cyclonic storm in 1926 and the other towards Sri Lanka in 1907, the IMD data said.

Free LPG cylinders twice a year but not on Holi, Diwali

Lucknow | Agencies

The distribution of free LPG cylinders under the Centre's flagship Ujjwala Scheme will not carry any religious connotation of being distributed only on popular festivals of the Hindu community, such as Holi and Diwali.

The UP government has, instead, decided to fix two duration bands, January to March and October to December, when the sop will be given to over 1.65 crore beneficiaries in the state.

The development came amid the state government's plan to extend the scheme entailing free ration distribution to nearly 15 crore econmically weak people after March. Additional Commissioner, Food and Civil Supplies Department, Anil Kumar Dubey, said that the free gas cylinder distribution scheme is not related to any festival of a particular community or religion.

"Executing the scheme over a stipulated period will ensure its effective implementation and a wider outreach," Dubey told reporters.

He also confirmed that the free ration scheme is being actively considered for being extended after March.

Free distribution of gas cylinders during Holi and Diwali was one of the key poll promises, the BJP had made in the recently concluded UP elections.

NO PATIENT IN DELHI'S DEDICATED COVID HOSPITAL FOR FIRST TIME SINCE MARCH 2020

New Delhi: For the first time since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, Delhi's dedicated Covid Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Hospital does not have even a single patient of coronavirus, it was announced on Thursday.

All the Covid-19 patients have been discharged from the hospital and no new patient has been admitted, Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain said.

"All the COVID patients of third wave have been successfully treated & discharged from LNJP Hospital.

"For the first time since March 2020, zero patients of COVID-19 are admitted in the hospital.

"Salute to the entire medical fraternity for their dedicated service," he said in a tweet.

Meanwhile, the national capital continues to report downward trends in fresh Covid cases, at 148 new infections and one death in last 24 hours. The active cases in the city stand at 610.

5 yr jail term to ex-PNB manager in loan fraud case

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A Special CBI Court in Uttrakhand has awarded jail terms to seven persons including an ex-Punjab National Bank manager in connection with a loan fraud case of Rs 1.34 crore.

The court awarded five years jail term to Ashok Bhardwaj, the then Branch Manager, PNBank, Manglaur Branch and also imposed a fine of Rs four lakh on him for committing the offence.

It awarded three years jail term to Sudha Pandit, Sushil Kumar Sharma, Mukesh Kumar Sharma, Nishant Kumar Sharma, Roshan Ali and Vipin Kumar Verma. The court also imposed different penalties on all of them.

The CBI registered a case in 2006 against Bhardwaj and other accused on the allegations of causing loss to the tune of Rs 1.34 crore to the bank in the matter of releasing loan for establishing Small Scale Unit under KVIC Scheme of Govt of India to five firms, CC Limit to two firms and regular loan to one firm.

It was further alleged that Public Servant in conspiracy with the borrowers of different non-existent firms had cheated the Bank and the loans were sanctioned on different dates and at different point of time to different borrowers. The quotations and bills of the suppliers were allegedly forged. It was also alleged that the properties kept as collateral securities were already sold.

RAPE ACCUSED OPENS FIRE AT COPS IN DELHI, HELD

New Delhi: A rape accused on Thursday opened fire at the police party in Outer North Delhi's Khera Prahladpur road after he was asked to surrender. The police launched a counter attack in which he suffered a gun wound in his left leg's knee and was caught. Brijendra Kumar Yadav, DCP, Outer North Delhi, said that the accused was identified as Mohammed Akhtar. A pistol, empty cartridges and a stolen cell phone was recovered from him. A senior police official said that the victim went missing on March 9 at around 7 p.m. Her family told the police that she was playing outside the house when she went missing. The police lodged an FIR for kidnapping and started a probe. A day after the incident, on March 10, the girl was brought to her home by a neighbour who said that he found her nearby. The medical examination which was done the same day found nothing adverse and no sexual assault was mentioned in the medical report. "Girl's statement under 164 CrPC were recorded before magistrate the same day and nothing related to sexual assault was stated in her statement. Parents also agreed," said the police.On March 12, the girl started having some medical problems and was taken to a hospital, which upon examination said the girl's hymen was torn indicating sexual assault. The police then added sections of sexual assault and other relevant sections of POCSO.

Punjab CM announces launch of phone number to expose corrupt

Chandigarh | Agencies

A day after taking oath of office, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Thursday announced to launch a mobile phone number on March 23, the martyrdom day of Shaheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh, exclusively for the public to upload videos of officials demanding bribe for day-to-day work or indulging in malpractices.

Exhorting the top brass of civil and police administration to discharge duties as a public servant in the letter and spirit, thus respecting the massive mandate got by the AAP in the recently concluded assembly polls, the Chief Minister said the people who have given "us an opportunity to serve the state are the real rulers in the democracy having the power to make the leaders to rule or show them the door". Taking a cue from the performance of Indian cricket team, Mann said, "Matches are won or lost but it is the team spirit which matters". Therefore, he urged the officers to display team spirit immaculately to make Punjab as the frontrunner state. He further said, "Our prime concern should be to make our state as real Punjab not London, California or Paris". Furthermore, the Chief Minister said his government would not indulge in political vendetta and asked the entire administration to discharge their duties fearlessly without any political pressure, unlike earlier regimes, with utmost dedication, sincerity and honesty to cherish the aspirations of the Punjabis who have voted to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) to power with unprecedented verdict.

INDIA RELEASES ITS ARCTIC POLICY

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Joining an elite group of countries working on various aspects of Arctic, India on Thursday released its Arctic policy "India and the Arctic: building a partnership for sustainable development".

"India's Arctic policy would play an essential role in preparing the country for a future where humankind's biggest challenges, such as climate change, can be addressed through collective will and effort. India's Arctic policy shall be implemented through an action plan, and an effective governance and review mechanism involving the interaministerial Empowered Arctic Policy Group," Union Science and Technology and Earth Sciences Minister Jitendra Singh said while releasing the Policy document.

Implementing India's Arctic policy will involve multiple stakeholders, including academia, the research community, business, and industry, he said. India's engagement with the Arctic dates back to a century when the Svalbard Treaty was signed in February 1920 in Paris. India is already undertaking several scientific studies and research in the Arctic region.

"Indian researchers are monitoring Arctic glaciers for their mass balance and comparing them with glaciers in the Himalayan region. India has also been actively involved in studies related to the Arctic oceanography, atmosphere, pollution and microbiology," Singh said. Over 25 institutes and universities in India are currently involved in Arctic research and about a 100 peer-reviewed papers have been published on Arctic issues since 2007, a release from Ministry of Earth Sciences said. In 2014 and 2016, India's first multi-sensor moored observatory in Kongsfjorden and the northernmost atmospheric laboratory in Gruvebadet, Ny Alesund, were launched in the Arctic region. Until 2022, India has successfully conducted 13 expeditions to the Arctic, the release added.

THE STATE HAS TO BE MADE AN IDEAL STATE IN LAW AND ORDER: CM

- CHIEF MINISTER REVIEWS LAW AND ORDER
- VERIFICATION OF TENANTS MUST BE MANDATORILY DONE
- CAMPAIGN WILL BE LAUNCHED TO IDENTIFY ILLEGAL MIGRANTS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that any kind of communal tension and violence will not be tolerated in the state. The police should remain in constant touch with the general public through peace committees while activating and strengthening their intelligence system. Meetings of peace committees should be organised at the police station and district level as well as at the mohalla level. A campaign will be launched to identify illegal migrants from other countries in the state. Chouhan directed to take special precautions and keep an eye on social media for upcoming festivals including Holi and said that misleading information coming on social media should be refuted immediately.

Chief Minister was taking a meeting with senior officers at his residence office today regarding the law and order situation. Chief Secretary Iqbal Singh Bains, Additional Chief Secretary Home Rajesh Rajoura, Director General of Police Sudhir Saxena and other senior officers were present in the meeting.

Chouhan said that women, children, dalits, poor and everyone should feel safe, such a system is necessary. Maintaining law and order is the top priority of the state government. Prompt action has been taken in the crimes against women and children in the state. The state has to be made a model state in law and order.

Chief Minister Chouhan said that effective action should be continued in all the districts to control the mafia, goons, dacoits and naxalites. Chouhan received detailed information regarding four suspected terrorists caught from Aishbagh area of Bhopal. Chouhan directed for a detailed investigation on all aspects of this case. Chief Minister Chouhan said that before keeping the tenants, the landlords must compulsorily get them checked and verified.

To say save water on Holi is 'cultural terrorism': Sarang

- SARANG WENT ON TO ADD THAT THE MESSAGE OF SAVING WATER ON HOLI IS AIMED AT DISTANCING YOUTH FROM HINDU FESTIVALS CONNECTED TO THE CULTURE AND TRADITION.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Medical Education Minister Vishwas Sarang on Thursday said the message to save water on Holi was "cultural terrorism" and an attack on Hindu festivals.

While speaking to media, he said people should take a pledge to save water but spreading this particular message "only" during the festival of Holi is not good.

He asked, "How much water do we use during Holi? Save water throughout the year. Why does such a message revolve around our festivals only?"

Sarang went on to add that the message of saving water on Holi is aimed at distancing youth from Hindu festivals connected to the culture and tradition.

"This is an attack on our upcoming generation. Cultural terrorism is being spread in this country? Sarang alleged, without elaborating on it. People come out with the message to save water on Holi, but waste gallons of water to clean their cars, he said. "These people in the name of environment are attacking our Hindu festivals," the minister claimed.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan also urged the public to use cowdung instead of wood for 'Holika Dahan.'

"Instead of cutting trees and using wood during the Holi celebration, people should celebrate Holi by burning the Cowdung cast for 'Holika Dahan'. This will help in saving the environment," he said.

This year, 'Holika Dahan' is being observed on Thursday, and 'Dhulivandan' - during which people apply colours to each other - will be celebrated on Friday.

CM Chouhan plants Karanj and Gulmohar saplings

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted saplings of Karanj and Gulmohar in Smart Udyan. Members of Gaukasht Promotion and Environment Protection Committee, Arun Chaudhary, Hemant Ajmera and Pandurang Namdev also planted saplings. Shruti Singh, who was active in the campaign of cleanliness and saving wood in Bhopal, also participated in the plantation.For the last three years, the Gaukasht Promotion and Environment Protection Committee has been providing Gaukasht to the general public for Holika Dahan through 45 to 50 centers in the city. This helps reduce the use of wood in holika dahan and forests are saved. In the last four years, about 55 thousand cremations were conducted by the committee in the five main cremation grounds of the city with Gaukasht, due to which about one lakh sixty five thousand quintals of wood were saved. The committee is making people aware about holy cow and environmental protection. The committee is also continuously planting saplings for environmental protection. The Karanj sapling planted today is considered important in Ayurvedic medicine. Karanj is also used for religious purposes. Gulmohar is considered one of the most beautiful trees in the world. Big bunches of flowers blooming make the Gulmohar tree all the more attractive. In summer, Gulmohar trees are laden with flowers instead of leaves. It is also rich in medicinal properties.

URBAN DEVELOPMENT MINISTER CALLS ON UNION URBAN MINISTER

Requested To Extend the Duration of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) till 2024

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Urban Development and Housing Minister Shri Bhupendra Singh met Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Singh Puri in New Delhi on Thursday. Singh requested to extend the duration of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) till March 2024. Puri said that better implementation of urban development schemes is being done in Madhya Pradesh under the leadership of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan.

Singh told Puri that special interest is being taken by the beneficiaries in the BLC component of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban). He said that in February 2022, proposals of 67 thousand 286 beneficiaries are under consideration by the Centre for approval. In the month of March also 40 thousand beneficiaries have applied for housing under BLC component, whose proposals are also being sent to the Government of India. Singh requested Puri for acceptance of the proposals. Puri directed the officers to approve the pending proposals of Madhya Pradesh at the earliest.

Urban Development and Housing Minister urged to give guidance on the basis of Ganga Action Plan or other experiences to keep all the rivers and water bodies of the state 100 percent free from pollution. Puri directed the officers to send a team to Madhya Pradesh to provide technical guidance in this regard.

Singh suggested setting up of a forum (class learning platform) to share the experiences of urban development of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat among themselves. While agreeing to the suggestion, Puri directed the concerned officers to take immediate action.

The Urban Development and Housing Minister also informed that with the continuous cooperation of the Central Government under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban), the state has got the second position in the implementation of the scheme. At present, 6 lakh 28 thousand houses have been approved under BLC component. So far 8 lakh 68 thousand houses have been approved including all the components. The Urban Development Minister said that the meeting was cordial and positive.

CM Presented Cheque of Rs 11 Lakh to MP Academys Sushri Kaveri

- Chief Minister Chouhan handed over a cheque to Kaveri in the auditorium at his residence office and said that "Keep playing-keep winning, the state government is with you at every step." The government will extend all possible cooperation.

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan presented a cheque of Rs 11 lakh to Kaveri Dhimar, who won seven gold medals while representing Madhya Pradesh in the 31st National Senior Canoe Sprint Championship. Chief Minister Chouhan handed over a cheque to Kaveri in the auditorium at his residence office and said that "Keep playing-keep winning, the state government is with you at every step." The government will extend all possible cooperation. Champion Kaveri who excelled in the National Championship will participate in the Asian Championships to be held in Thailand from March 24 to 27, 2022. It is noteworthy that a budding talent of Madhya Pradesh water sports academy Kaveri, a resident of village Mandi in Sehore district, had won 7 gold medals in the competition held in Himachal Pradesh's Bilaspur from 24 to 27 October 2021. Chouhan had announced an award of Rs 11 lakh for Kaveri for this achievement.

CENT PERCENT HOUSEHOLDS WILL GET WATER FROM TAP BY 2024: BHARGAVA

Bhopal: Public Works Minister Gopal Bhargava has said that the Jal Jeevan Mission has set a target to provide tap water to the entire rural population of the state by 2024. The tasks of the mission will be completed within the stipulated time frame. For this, full cooperation of local public representatives should be taken. Bhargava said this in the meeting of the Group of Ministers held in Mantralaya.Under Jal Jeevan Mission, water supply schemes costing more than Rs 30 thousand 668 crore have been approved so far for providing drinking water to the rural population. These include single village tap-water, cluster water-supply retrofitting schemes. Effective implementation of the mission in the state has proved to be very beneficial for the rural families. The set target of providing water to cent percent rural households through tap connection is to be fulfilled by the year 2024, so that every family settled in the village can be provided water from the tap at home. From the mission till date, water from tap has been provided to cent percent families of 4126 villages of the state by Public Health Engineering Department and Jal Nigam.

Special screening of 'The Kashmir Files' organised for MP cabinet ministers in Bhopal

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Amid the ongoing controversy over director Vivek Anihotri's 'The Kashmir Files', the Madhya Pradesh cabinet ministers, including chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan watched the movie on Wednesday night.

A special screening of the film was organised for the cabinet ministers at Lakeview Residency hotel. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan was accompanied with his wife Sadhna Singh during the show.

Chouhan said, "I have come here to watch 'The Kashmir Files'. This movie tells the story atrocities against Hindu in Kashmir. Several Hindu people were forced to leave the their homes and families and it all happened in India and after Independence. I would urge everyone in the state to watch the film."

Meanwhile, the Chief Minister also congratulated director Vivek Agnihotri for "showing courage to make film on such serious subject."

Targeting the Opposition Congress, Chouhan said, "Those not watching this movie, they are trying get away with fact."

The state government has made the film tax free in the state and have urged theatre owners not to hike the ticket price for the movie.

The state Home Ministry has also announced to provide special leave for cops to watch 'The Kashmir Files' with their families.

Helmed by Anupam Kher and Mithun Chraworthy, the film highlights the atrocities against Kashmir Pandits in 1990s when they were "killed, prescribed and forced" to leave their homes overnight.

Celebrate the festival of colors together: CM

- Forget differences and celebrate the festival with gaiety
- Make efforts to build Atmanirbhar Madhya Pradesh
- Chouhan appeals to use gau-Kashth in Holika Dahan

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has extended greetings and good wishes to the citizens of the state on the occasion of Holi, Rangpanchami and Bhagoria. Chief Minister Shri Chouhan said that these festivals are festivals of love, enthusiasm and brotherhood. Everyone is preparing to celebrate these festivals of colors with enthusiasm. We could not celebrate the festival for the last 2 years due to Covid pandemic. Now Covid is under control. The whole state is filled with joy and enthusiasm. Chouhan said that the fragrance of mango bags has spread throughout the state. Colorful views are visible from the Palash trees. Wheat harvesting is going on. This year may also witness record production.

In his message Chief Minister Chouhan mentioned the relief given to farmers and other sections on a large scale. Chief Minister Shri Chouhan said that about Rs. 1.75 lakh crore has been deposited in the accounts of farmers including Rs. 7618 crore of crop insurance, food grain procurement, Pradhan Mantri Samman Nidhi and other relief funds. Referring to the grant given, he said that the state government decided to give relief to the farmers and pay their interest after the previous government did not fulfil the promise of waiving the loan of Rs two lakhs of the farmers. Electricity bills of the Corona period have been postponed. Farmers and consumers will not be allowed to bear the burden of these bills. Dearness allowance has also been given to the employees. Children are going to school now. Offline exams are also being held.

Chouhan said that all sections will celebrate the festival with gaiety and enthusiasm. People will forget all their differences and celebrate. Chouhan has appealed to maintain decency while celebrating the festival. He said that trees should not be cut anywhere. Gau-kashth should be used instead of wood. Chouhan told that he himself will participate in the programme of Holika Dahan using gau-kashth.Chouhan said that cleanliness survey is in progress. All citizens must keep their village and city clean. This is our responsibility. The pride day of the cities and villages should also be celebrated. Every person must contribute something for his village and city.Chouhan urged citizens to support Prime Minister Modi's resolve to build Atmanirbhar Bharat. He said that Atmanirbhar Madhya Pradesh would also be built with the contribution of all citizens.

Governor Greets People of the State on Holi

Bhopal: Governor Mangubhai Patel has extended heartiest greetings and good wishes to the people of the state on the festival of colours Holi. Shri Patel said that we should all celebrate this festival of gaiety and zeal together with love and brotherhood.While congratulating, Governor Patel said that Holi, a unique and festival related to Indian folk culture, strengthens our sense of social harmony and national unity. He urged the people to celebrate this sacred festival with mutual harmony, not to do any such work which causes trouble to others. "Strengthen the glorious traditions of the festival with your feelings, emotions and conduct," he said.

MOLESTATION SHOCKER: 15 HELD SO FAR; PROBE ON: NCW

New Delhi: The National Commission for Women (NCW) informed on Wednesday that 15 people have been arrested so far in connection with the molestation of two tribal women at a village in Madhya Pradesh's Alirajpur district.

"Fifteen people have been arrested by the police. The case is under investigation," the NCW said. The shocking incident came to light on March 13 after a video surfaced on social media, showing two women, standing beside a vehicle on a busy road in Alirajpur, nearly 400 km away from Bhopal, being sexually assaulted by a group of men in broad daylight, while some others were seen capturing the incident on their mobile phones.

EDITOR'S SPECS

HOLI WITH VENGEANCE

This year, the Holi festival in Uttar Pradesh has got an undeniable saffron hue with the BJP returning to power with a stunning majority. The traditional 'phaag' and 'hori' folk songs have been given a political twist to rejoice the BJP's victory in the recently-held Assembly polls and the lyrics have also been tweaked to include Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. They have become a rage on social media. One such song says: "UP mein Yogi ka bhagwa phir lahraya hai, dekho Holi ka mausam aaya hai." Another one goes: "Sabke sath aur sabke vikas ne phir se kamal khilaya hai, ab phaag gaane ka mausam aaya hai." A composition by Pankaj Puri and R K, sung by singer Indal Nirala, has intricately woven the celebration rituals with Yogi and Modi in "Haath leke bhagwa wala rang ho. Holi khelo Yogi Modi sang ho; Masti wala thoda thoda bhang ho holi khelo Yogi Modi sang ho". Another song says: "Sab gundon ko uttar dena gundon ki hi boli mein keval bhagwa rang udana abki bari holi mein." Sung and written by Arjun Suryavanshi, the song goes: "Bhagwa rang mein rangi hai UP. Phir bhagwa lahrao rangon se bhar bhar ke pichkari ham toh aaj chalayenge.. aai hai Holi kesariya ham mil ke aaj manayenge." There are also other songs hailing Yogi, such as: "Bulldozer ki sarkar bani phir UP mein. Yogi ki jai jaikar hui phir UP mein." Sanjo Baghel, a folk singer who is a Yogi fan and BJP supporter, said: "Life is good under the BJP rule. Yogi has managed the law-and-order challenge effectively and I wanted to extend my tributes to him through my songs."

HOLI SPREADS COLOURS OF JOY IN BRAJ MANDAL TO DISPEL COVID GLOOM

Brij Khandelwal

It's festive mood in Sri Krishna land. Ahead of Holi on March 18, temples in Braj mandal have begun to celebrate Holi in a big way, after two years of the Covid-19 pandemic despair. The election results too have buoyed the spirits of the Braj Mandal 'Huriyaras' after a clean sweep by BJP candidates in nine assembly seats in Agra and five in Mathura.

In Vrindavan, hundreds of widows in shelter homes, carrying forward the social revolutionary spirit, defied the age-old restrictive norms, played Holi with gusto at the historic Gopinath Temple on Tuesday. Fighting the Covid-19 gloom, the widows this time gathered at Vrindavan's famous Temple to celebrate Holi with full gaiety.

Till a few years ago, this was simply unthinkable, but breaking the barriers, eminent social reformer and founder of Sulabh International, Bindeshwar Pathak initiated efforts to mobilise widows of Vrindavan to celebrate Holi.

A resident said, "Vrindavan's Holi celebrations in recent years have become memorable occasions for the thousands of widows who till in recent past used to face humiliation."

The life which was such a dreary drag for most widows, changed for the better at the intervention of the Supreme Court some years ago, when Sulabh was asked to provide support and care to this hapless segment of the society.

Since early morning on Tuesday large numbers of widows living in various shelter homes started gathering at the Gopinath Mandir where they threw heaps of rose and gainda flower petals on the people assembled there.

The Holi celebrations began with much fanfare amid song and dance performances. The widows who wear only white sarees smeared colours and threw gulal on one another to celebrate the festival, breaking away from years of social stigma attached to women who had lost their husbands.

Large amount of "gulal" (dry colour powder) of different colours were arranged by the organisers. Widows who mostly hail from West Bengal splashed colour powers and threw flower petals on each other. They danced and chanted Krinsha bhajans and Holi songs. Widows also shared sweets with each other and enjoyed food.

"Their participation in Holi symbolises a break from tradition which forbids a widow from wearing coloured saree, among many other things," said Bindeshwar Pathak, mentor of Sulabh Movement in a statement.

This special celebration is set to add a new colour to the Holi festivities in 'Braj', popular among both Indian and foreign tourists.

While expressing joy, Gaurvani Dasi termed this celebration as "Holi of Hope" for thousands of widows living in Vrindavan and Varanasi. Chabi Maa and Vimla Dasi expressed great pleasure in celebrating Holi with other mothers. The US based Celebrity Master Chef Vikas Khanna also supported the Holi celebrations.

Bollywood swallowed up pop: Remo Fernandes

Sukant Deepak

For someone whose introduction to rock music was at the age of seven, when a cousin brought the album 'Rock Around the Clock' from abroad, Goa and Portuguese-based singer and musician Remo Fernandes admits that unlike many of sensations that disappeared in a year or two from public memory, he has somehow remained in people's consciousness.

"I do not even try and analyse the how and why of it, of course, I remain eternally grateful. Maybe it is to do with the fact that I have stayed true to my art and rooted in my beliefs, and the audience can sense a truth in my songs. Remember, I was not doing disco just because it was fashionable or ghazals for the reason that they were in trend," he tells correspondent.

Talk to him about how the vibrant pop scene of the 80s and 90s in India suddenly crashed, and Fernandes, who brought an Indian element to his music with sitar/guitar and taught himself to play the Indian flute, says it happened when Bollywood decided to borrow talent from pop culture.

"And the pop world happily relaunched itself. There a re so many pop and rock singers whose songs you'll find in films but t hat doesn't mean they become music directors -- and it's here I think that spelt the death of the pop scene as everyone went into the Hindi film industry. Bollywood is like a huge monster capturing art forms and letting them out as films," says the musician whose work is a fusion of many different cultures and styles

Never inclined to work in Bollywood, Fernandes says that the one song he did, just fell into his lap. "I never shifted to Bollywood. Frankly, I did not even attend the premiere of 'Jalwa'. It was never really my thing. For me, it has always been about writing my own songs and in the language, I know. Of course, it is a handicap not knowing Hindi to reach out to the masses."

Fernandes, who was at the recently-concluded Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF) for 'Remo: The Autobiography of Remo Fernandes', which encompass his school days in Goa, times spent in an architecture college in Mumbai, hitchhiking in Europe and Africa, and anecdotes as a professional musician; says that he has always enjoyed reading autobiographies. "But that is not the reason why I wrote mine. I felt that I had som e interesting stories to tell. I started writing about the Goa I grew up in because I read books that were written about the olden times there and none of them rang true to me except one. Many famous Goans did not want to be known from that state as they felt embarrassed. And then, suddenly when Goa became fashionable, everyone wanted to be known as hailing from there. I was born there and I thought that if I do not write about it, who will?"

Lamenting that the Goa he grew up in does not exist anymore, he says: "It is heartbreaking. The changes are not for the better. It is tough to look at how nature has been systematically crushed. The place I grew up in didn't know the existence of iron grills on windows. And now there is a rape or a murder almost every day there. That is the reason that I spend half my year in Portugal and the other half in Goa."Though not planning to write another book anytime soon, he adds: "I am not a professional writer, but if a subject touches me deeply, then maybe..."

international

IN A FIRST, INDIAN CARGO EXPORTED TO UZBEKISTAN VIA PAKISTAN

Islamabad | Agencies

In a first, Pakistan has allowed a private Indian trader to export commercial goods to Uzbekistan as part of the trade activity between New Delhi, Islamabad, Kabul and Tashkent.

According to details, at least 140 tonnes of cargo, mostly Indian sugar, crossed over into Pakistan and travelled to Afghanistan through the Torkham border. The shipment was sent ahead towards Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent on Wednesday.

Maulana Zaheer, spokesperson of Afghanistan's Ministry of Industry and Commerce, said that a special ceremony was organised to facilitate the transit of Indian goods in Kabul.

"The shipment arrived in Kabul a day earlier from Pakistan via Torkham border crossing. The ministry organized a ceremony to facilitate the transit of Indian goods,

"This is a major step towards turning Afghanistan into a key trade link between Central and South Asia," he added.

The cargo had originated from Mumbai and had travelled through the Karachi seaport earlier this month, where the Uzbek importer received it.

The cargo was then loaded into trucks from Karachi and sent towards the Torkham border into Afghanistan after which it would travel to Uzbekistan."This was done as under the recently inked bilateral transit trade agreement between Pakistan and Uzbekistan," said a Pakistani official.The agreement was signed during the recent visit of Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, during which, several bilateral trade agreements were mutually agreed and materialized."The Uzbekistan-bound Indian commercial consignment was a privately arranged activity under the agreement and had no government involvement from any of the four countries," stated the Pakistani official. "It will not become a regular activity, and Uzbekistan will be able to import goods from anywhere through Pakistani seaports."

The official also revealed that the Taliban-led government in Afghanistan is bound to facilitate trade activity and Uzbekistan also has the right to access Pakistani ports for international trade, having the same right that is facilitated for Afghanistan.

Pakistan has allowed Afghanistan to use its ports and air routes to carry out its trade activities from other countries.This facilitation is provided as part of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA), which allows Afghan traders to export their goods to India via Pakistan's land, air and sea routes.

However, the Afghan traders can only import through Pakistan's seaports because of the tense relations between the two countries.

Pak confident to get positive nod during 7th review of IMF

Islamabad | Agencies

Pakistan government is confident that its progress in terms of economic reforms and strategies will help it get a positive nod from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) during its 7th review.

The IMF mission had raised reservations over the budget allocation in the Prime Minister's Relief Package on various commodities, including petrol, diesel, electricity prices and tax amnesty for industrial sector during the last review. However, this time, Pakistan Finance Minister Shaukat Tareen is confident that all concerns have been explained in detail and would not cause any further discrepancies. "Now the IMF team will come back with final assessment on Friday for holding virtual talks," said

Tarin. "The pending 7th review of the IMF was almost done because there was no difference of opinion on macroeconomic figures till December 2021," he added.

While Tarin seems confident that the IMF review will go smoothly, other government sources say it may be difficult to strike a staff level agreement with the IMF, especially when political instability in the country is looming over the ruling government led by Prime Minister Imran Khan.

"Political crisis in the country is looming over the ongoing staff-level review talks and a decision on the next loan tranche is likely after an outcome on the no-confidence move due later this month," said an official.

The other challenge for the Pakistani authorities with the IMF will be to convince them and justify Islamabad's breach of commitment of raising petroleum levy by Rs 4 per month.Pakistani officials are hopeful that the IMF would look into this matter and review it with leniency, keeping in view the unprecedented rise in global crude oil prices. Pakistan has so far detailed to the IMF that the amnesty package is not only a relief package, but is more of an industrial package, entailing five-year tax holidays on projects with investment by Pakistani expatriates in Pakistan.

US GOVT PAYS $127MN TO SETTLE 2018 PARKLAND SCHOOL SHOOTING CIVIL CASES

Washington: The US Department of Justice (DOJ) said that it had settled the 40 civil cases that arose following the 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida, for $127.5 million.

"The settlement does not amount to an admission of fault by the US," Xinhua news agency quoted the DOJ as saying in a statement

"The parties have been in litigation since late 2018, when the survivors of the shooting, and the families of 16 people killed, sued the government for damages," it added.

The families of 16 victims, as well as several survivors, sued the US government after learning that the Federal Bureau of Investigation had received a tip about the shooter five weeks before the shooting.

On February 14, 2018, armed with a rifle, Nikolas Cruz walked into Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School and opened fire with his semi-automatic weapon, killing 17 and injuring 17 others. This was the deadliest high school shooting in US history.

In October 2021, Cruz, a former student who had been expelled from the school in 2017 for documented disturbing and violent behaviour, pleaded guilty to 17 counts of premeditated first-degree murder and 17 counts of attempted first-degree murder. The case was handled by the DOJ's Civil Division and the US Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida.

TALIBAN FORMS COMMISSION TO HELP MIGRANTS RETURN HOME

- The Taliban-led government in Afghanistan on Thursday said it has formed a commission to help the people who left the country after the fall of Kabul in August 2021, to return to their homeland.

Kabul | Agencies

The Taliban-led government in Afghanistan on Thursday said it has formed a commission to help the people who left the country after the fall of Kabul in August 2021, to return to their homeland.

"The Commission of Liaison and Repatriation of Afghan Personalities has been formed under the supervision of Sheikh Shahabuddin Delawar, the acting minister of mines and petroleum, to help Afghans return to their motherland,"

Xinhua news agency quoted the government as saying in a statement.

The formation of the commission came after a cabinet meeting was held, the statement said.

The six-member commission will liaise with Afghans who have left the country so that they can return to their homeland and live in peace instead of staying abroad, it said.Many Afghan security forces and civil servants left Afghanistan following the takeover by the Taliban in August last year.

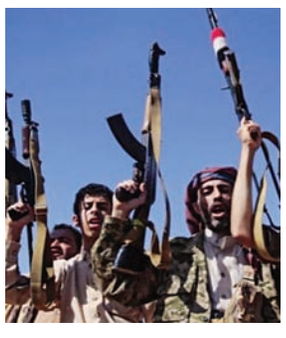
In recent months, Sultan Massoud Daqiq, a leading expert on international development, Abdul Salam Rahimi, state minister for peace of the former Afghan government, several pilots of the Afghan airforce and a female mayor have returned to the country.

Earlier this month, Deputy Prime MinisterMullah Abdul Ghani Baradar called on Afghan investors to return to the country.

HOUTHI MILITIA SAYS READY FOR PEACE TALKS WITH SAUDI-LED COALITION

- Yemen's Houthi militia announced that they are ready to negotiate with the Saudi-led coalition in an effort to end the country's seven-year civil war.

Sanaa | Agencies



Yemen's Houthi militia announced that they are ready to negotiate with the Saudi-led coalition in an effort to end the country's seven-year civil war.

The Houthis said they "welcome dialogue with the coalition countries in any neutral country" which did not join the war in Yemen, Xinhua news agency quoted the militia-run al-Masirah TV as saying in a report.

The Houthi militia did not provide further details.

Yemen has been mired in a civil war since the Houthi militia overran much of the country militarily and seized all northern provinces, including Sanaa, in 2014.

Saudi Arabia has been leading an Arab military coalition that intervened in Yemen in 2015 to support the government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi after the Houthis forced him into exile.

Due to the conflict, Yemen remains one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world to date.

MAHARASHTRA ISSUES GUIDELINES FOR HOLI

No Large Gatherings, Following Covid Norms & Simple Celebration Advised

The government said Dhulivandan and Rangpanchami should be celebrated in a simple manner to ensure the coronavirus infection does not spread.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra government on Thursday issued guidelines for Holi, saying people should celebrate the festival of colours without congregating on a large scale, and observe COVID-appropriate behaviour as the disease is still prevalent. This year, 'Holika Dahan' is being observed on Thursday, and 'Dhulivandan' and 'Rangpanchami' - during which people apply colours to each other - will be celebrated on March 18 and 22, respectively. Holi/Shimga is celebrated on a big scale throughout Maharashtra. The festival should possibly be celebrated without crowding and by observing COVID-appropriate behaviour given the coronavirus situation, the state Home department said in a circular. The government said Dhulivandan and Rangpanchami should be celebrated in a simple manner to ensure the coronavirus infection does not spread. The government also asked people against taking 'palkhi' (palanquin) processions to households during the festival.

Local administration should (instead) arrange for darshan (of palkhi) at the local temple, the government said. The local administration should also ensure effective observance of the COVID-appropriate behaviour. Since the last two years, all festivals in the state are being celebrated in a low-key manner in the wake of the pandemic. Of late, aharashtra has seen a dip in COVID-19 cases. It reported 237 fresh infections and two deaths on Wednesday, as per official figures.

Rs 66 lakh cash recovered from premises of Rahul Kanal, says IT dpt

The Income Tax Department on Thursday said that it has recovered Rs 66 lakh cash from various premises of Rahul Kanal, close aide of Shiv Sena leader and Maharashtra Cabinet Minister of Tourism and Environment, Aaditya Thackeray.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Income Tax Department on Thursday said that it has recovered Rs 66 lakh cash from various premises of Rahul Kanal, close aide of Shiv Sena leader and Maharashtra Cabinet Minister of Tourism and Environment, Aaditya Thackeray.

The cash was seized during the searches carried out by the I-T department at 26 different locations belonging to few persons including a cable operator and Rahul Kanal.

The search operations were carried out on 26 premises spread over Mumbai, Pune, Sangli and Ratnagiri.

The IT department didn't name the person regarding the sale and purchase of the land but said that a parcel of land at Dapoli was purchased by a prominent politician of Maharashtra in 2017 for a consideration of Rs 1 crore but it was got registered in 2019. This land was subsequently sold to one of the persons in 2020 for a consideration of Rs 1.10 crore. It said that in between, a resort was built on the same land from 2017 to 2020. By the time the parcel of land was registered in the name of the said politician, substantial construction of the resort was completed. It transpires that the relevant facts about the construction of the resort were not intimated to the Registration authorities and accordingly, the stamp duty was paid only for the registration of land on both the occasions i.e. in 2019 and in 2020. Evidence found during the search has revealed that the construction of the resort started in 2017 and more than Rs 6 crore was spent in cash. Cost of construction of the same has not been accounted for either by the person searched or by the politician in their books of account.Search in the case of the State Government official has revealed that he, his family members and relatives have amassed huge wealth in the form of properties at prime locations at Pune, Sangli and Baramati, over a period of ten years.

The family owns one bungalow and one farm house in Pune, one lavish farm house in Tasgaon, two bungalows in Sangli, two commercial complexes having Tanishq and Carat lane showrooms, five flats in different locations of Pune, one flat in Navi Mumbai, vacant plots in Sangli, Baramati, Pune and more than 100 acres of agricultural land acquired during the past seven years. Detailed examination of sources of acquisition of the properties and the amounts spent on the lavish interiors of shops and bungalows is under progress. The family owns many businesses including showrooms of electronic products, Tanishq showrooms, civil construction business, real estate and pipe manufacturing business. It is found that the construction business, being run by the relatives of the employee, received many contracts from the state government. Search operation has also unearthed evidences of inflated contract expenses through bogus purchase and bogus sub-contracts aggregating to Rs 27 crore. Evidence regarding unaccounted cash receipt of Rs 2 crore in sale of land at Baramati has also been detected. Further investigation with regard to the tax evasion in construction business, is under progress.

Maharashtra govt is imposing restrictions on Hindu festivals, alleges BJP MLA citing Holi guidelines

BJP MLA Ram Kadam asked why the Shiv Sena-lead coalition was so afraid of sanctioning unconditional permission for a Hindu festival.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA Ram Kadam has slammed the Maha Vikas Aghadi government for "imposing restrictions" on celebrating the Holi festival in Maharashtra.

Ram Kadam said: "Why is the MVA resorting to such extreme steps when it comes to Hindu festivals? The government has imposed restrictions on Holi celebrations."

The Maharashtra Government on Wednesday issued strict guidelines for Holi which mandated that celebrations should end by 10 pm and banned the use of loudspeakers.

The BJP MLA asked why the Shiv Sena-lead coalition was so afraid of sanctioning unconditional permission for a Hindu festival.

"In the land of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, we should be proud of our culture and festivals. We will celebrate the festivals with renewed enthusiasm and joy," Kadam said.

Taking a dig at Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray without naming him, Kadam said: "You must be scared. But we are not. We will go ahead and celebrate Holi.

A senior NCP minister, meanwhile, said: "Nobody is against any festival. The state government has urged people to exercise caution while celebrating in wake of Covid-19 pandemic. The BJP is taking up non-issues. It has this habit of communalising every issue."

Holi, one of the most vibrant and colourful festivals celebrated in India, marks the blooming of spring after a long winter season. This year, the festival of Holi falls on March 18, while Chhoti Holi or Holika Dahan will be celebrated on March 17.

On the eve of the festival, large bonfires are lit all over the country to symbolise the moment good triumphed over evil. People perform rituals and throw dry leaves, wood and twigs into the fire.

FOUR HELD FOR ALLEGEDLY EXTORTING RS 10 LAKH IN RAIGAD

According to the police, the accused allegedly visited a company at Dolvi near Wadkhal by posing as government officials and carried a forged document with an official letterhead.

Raigad | Agencies

Four persons have been arrested for allegedly attempting to extort Rs 10 lakh from a company by posing as government officials in Maharashtra's Raigad district, police said on Thursday.

The police on Wednesday registered a case under section 387 (extortion) and other relevant provisions of the IPC against Mumbai resident Ganesh Pol, Jeevan Mahapure of Kolhapur, Mahendra Bansode of Panvel and Murlidhar Patil of Alibaug, an official said.

According to the police, the accused allegedly visited a company at Dolvi near Wadkhal by posing as government officials and carried a forged document with an official letterhead.the firm's activities at a local creek and allegedly demanded Rs 10 lakh to settle the matter. The men also threatened to kill him, he said. The police were alerted and the accused were nabbed from the company premises, the official said, adding that further probe is underway.

Amid record demand, MSEDCL supplies 23,605 MW of power

MSEDCL supplied the highest demand of 23,286 MW on February 19, 23,075 on February 8 and on February 12, a record of 23,163 MW was made based on the demand.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Limited (MSEDCL) Tuesday provided a record high supply of 23,605 megawatts of power in the state, except in Mumbai, without any interruption amid a heatwave, officials have said. There was a historic demand for 27,212 MW of electricity in the state, including Mumbai, on the same day, they added. Before this, MSEDCL supplied the highest demand of 23,286 MW on February 19, 23,075 on February 8 and on February 12, a record of 23,163 MW was made based on the demand.

MSEDCL said in a statement there has been a high demand for electricity over the last month. The demand for electricity has also been increasing steadily amid the heatwave in the state for the last few days. At present, the demand for electricity is between 23,000 to 23,500 MW and due to the rising temperature, it is likely to reach 24,000 MW in the next few days.

Officials said to meet the rising demand, pre-monsoon maintenance and repair work have been expedited by MSEDCL to ensure there is no load shedding in any part of the state. MSEDCL on Tuesday received 6,578 MW from power generating companies with long term power purchase agreements with a total of 4,911 MW from NTPC and NPCIL and 4,722 MW from private projects like Adani Power, Ratan India, JSW, Sai Wardha, and Empo. At the same time, 4,688 MW of electricity was made available from new and renewable energy sources-2585 MW of solar energy, 603 MW of wind energy and 1500 MW from co-generation projects.

The remaining demand has been met by generating 1,612 MW from Koyna and other hydropower projects as well as by purchasing 722 MW from open consumer and railway power generation sources and 372 MW from the power exchange.

ACB SEIZES OVER RS 27 LAKH CASH FROM PWD OFFICIAL ACCUSED OF GRAFT

Aurangabad: The Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) has seized 855g gold and over Rs 27 lakh cash from an engineer of the public works department, who is booked in a bribery case, in Maharashtra's district, an official said on Thursday.

Sanjay Rajaram Patil (52), a section engineer of the PWD department, was caught by the ACB while accepting a bribe of Rs 40,000 from a contractor on March 12, the official said.

The ACB later raided Patil's house on the same day and seized Rs 1.63 lakh and 183 gm of gold, he said.During an operation on Wednesday, the ACB searched the accused official's bank locker and recovered 672 gm of gold and Rs 26 lakh in cash, the official said.

In all, the ACB has seized 855 gm of gold and over Rs 27 lakh cash from the accused official, ACB Superintendent for Aurangabad, Rahul Khade said, adding that the agency will investigate Patil's assets.Patil came under the ACB's radar after he allegedly demanded Rs 1.25 lakh from a contractor to sanction the latter's bills, following which he was caught while accepting Rs 40,000 from him.

Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana to break away from MVA govt: Shetti

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana (SSS) is seriously contemplating breaking away from the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) alliance in Maharashtra, said party president Raju Shetti who added that a formal decision would be taken at the SSS state conclave on April 5 in Kolhapur.

"A formal proposal (on breaking away from) the MVA alliance will be placed and discussed threadbare at the party's conclave on April 5 in Kolhapur," Shetti said."There is huge unrest within the SSS against the MVA government. A majority of the office-bearers and party workers think that we should discontinue our alliance with the MVA. But unless we complete the process and elicit views of every worker and official, I cannot announce the decision," he added. Shetti cited the MVA government's alleged apathy towards farmers and agriculture sector for breaking ties.

"There has been no political will to accomplish the promises made for upliftment of farmers when the MVA government was formed two years ago," he said. On February 14, Shetti wrote to Sharad Pawar, president of the Nationalist Congress Party, another MVA ally, and Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, listing his demands for farmers' welfare. However, they elicited no response and that has hurt him and his party workers, he alleged. "Several lakh farmers were facing hardship as their power connection was disconnected due to non-payment of electricity bills. In its attempt to achieve 100 per cent electricity bill recovery, the government gave blanket permission to officials to ruthlessly disconnect farmers' power connection," he said. Shetti alleged that when the state government constituted sugar price control committee, it did not give representation to farmers and as a result. the powers were vested with members of sugar mills members. He also criticised the MVA government of favouring sugar mills in the issue of fair remuneration price (FRP) to sugarcane farmers.

Maharashtra to opt out of PMFBY

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Maharashtra is the latest state to threaten to withdraw from the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bhima Yogna (PMFBY) if changes to it are not carried out.

Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, during his budget speech last Friday, said the state would withdraw from the scheme if the changes suggested by it were not taken into consideration. "Gujarat and some other states have already opted out of the Prime Minister's crop insurance scheme. The Mahavikas Aghadi government has requested the Hon. Prime Minister for modification in the scheme. If it is not accepted, then I would like to make it clear that we will consider other options to compensate farmers," he said. As extensive usage of technology is used to settle the claims of farmers within a stipulated time period, farmers are required to fill loss reports online which are validated by insurance companies before the compensation amount is paid directly in their accounts.

Prior to 2020, the scheme was mandatory for farmers who availed institutional finance, but that was changed and made voluntary for all farmers. Since the beginning, farm leaders across the state have criticised the scheme for various reasons. One of the main arguments against it is that it helps insurance companies more than the farmers. Farm leaders claim insurance companies have made windfall gains at the behest of the public exchequer and farmers.On their part, the compa nies point out the nature of the insurance allows for payment only when there is a loss. Also, over the last few years, they have said their payouts have been more than the premium collected, making the scheme non-viable for them. Last year, the state's agriculture commissioner Dheeraj Kumar had officially lodged complaints against a particular insurance company for its failure to pay farmers on time. This was in regard to the compensation for crop loss of kharif 2020, which was delayed inordinately. Kumar, in his letter, said the company in question had given the lowest payout of the last few seasons, while the premium collected was the highest. His letter also pointed out that insurance companies had hoodwinked farmers by not establishing taluka-level offices or call centres, and also failed to educate farmers on the correct methodology for reporting claims.

The insurance companies were also blamed for not conducting enough crop cutting experiments (CCE), which measure the total loss experienced by the farmers. Interestingly, Gujarat is a BJP-ruled state, while in Bihar, the party is in power along with the JD(U). Changes the Maharashtra government proposed During his meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray had sought implementation of the Beed model. However, the Centre has not given its nod for the same till date.The state has also sought more accountability from insurance companies. Farm leaders have asked for necessary infrastructure to be set up while implementing the scheme, and the usage of technology to help eradicate human interference.

Haffkine

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

TENDER NOTICE

Date : 15/03/2022.

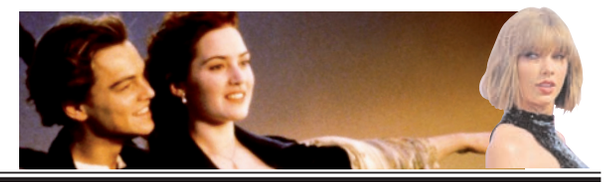
Managing Director, (Procurement Cell), Haffkine Bio Pharmaceutical Corporation Ltd., Mumbai invites tenders in two envelope systems from eligible bidders for following items for various Health Institutions in Maharashtra.

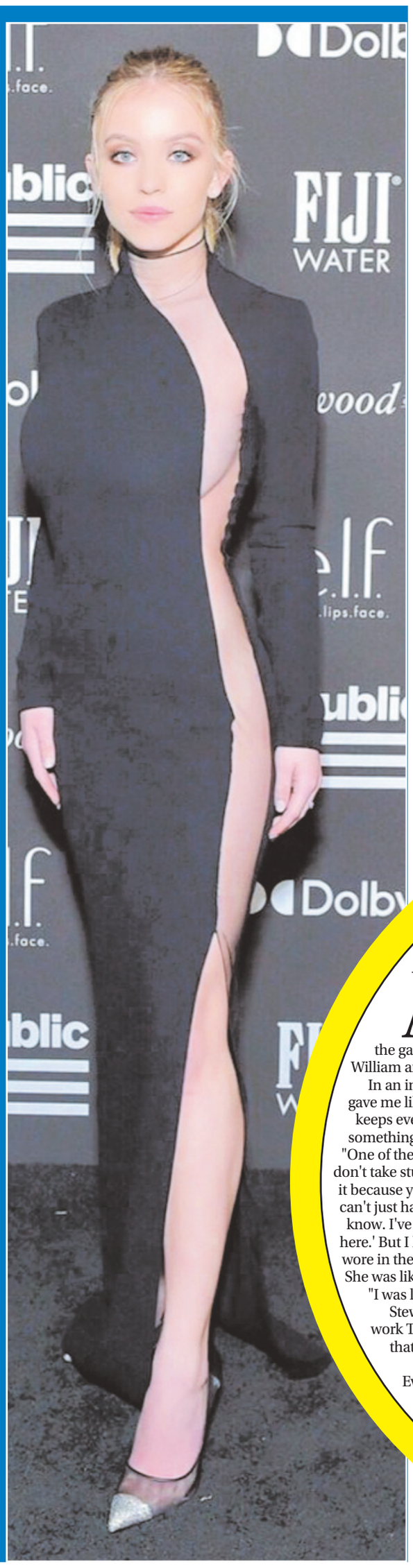
Sr. No.	Tender No.	Name of Description	Date of Pre Bid Meeting	Period of Sale and Preparation of bid & bid submission	Bid Opening
1)	RT-4050	Purchase of Instrument & Equipment	25.03.2022 upto 11:00 a.m.	From 17.03.2022 10.00 am to 01.04.2022 up to 14:00 hrs.	03.04.2022 at 14:00 hrs.

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

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

ROC-2021-22/No – 5/C 5235





SYDNEY SWEENEY JOINS DAKOTA JOHNSON IN 'MADAME WEB'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Sydney Sweeney of 'Euphoria' and 'White Lotus' fame, has joined 'Madame Web', a comic book tentpole set in Sony's Universe of Marvel Characters.

Sweeney's role has not been announced, reports 'Variety'.

As previously reported, Dakota Johnson has been cast as the title character. In the comics, Madame Web is a paralysed, elderly woman with myasthenia gravis, a chronic autoimmune disorder requiring her to connect to a life support system resembling a spider web.

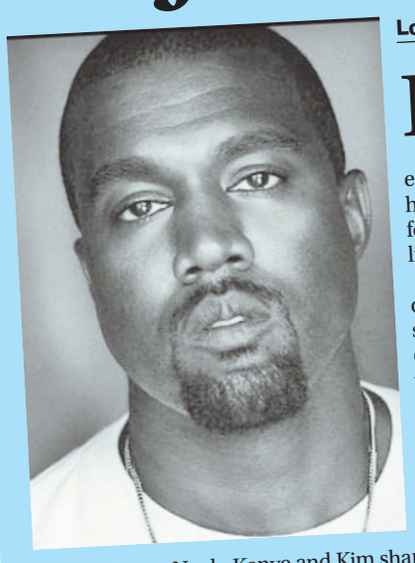
S.J. Clarkson, known for her work on the darker Marvel series 'Jessica Jones' and 'The Defenders', which moved from Netflix to Disney Plus, has been hired to direct 'Madame Web'.

Matt Sazama and Burk Sharpless, the duo behind Jared Leto's upcoming vampire chiller 'Morbius', will write the screenplay.

Plot details have been kept under wraps. In the comics, Madame Web is introduced as a blind clairvoyant mutant whose abilities prove to be greatly beneficial to Spider-Man and his fellow arachnid allies, like Spider-Woman. Given her condition, though, she's never battled villains herself.

'Madame Web', Sony's first modern comic book adaptation to feature a female in the headlining role, is one of the several Spider-Man related spinoffs in development.

Kanye West suspended from Instagram



Los Angeles | Agencies

Rapper Kanye West, who has officially changed his name to Ye, has reportedly been banned from posting any Instagram posts for 24 hours following his latest outbursts on the photo-sharing site.

According to mirrror.co.uk., the 44-year-rapper, has fired several shots at estranged wife and reality star Kim Kardashian and her new partner Pete Davidson on the platform in recent weeks and took aim at the likes of Trevor Noah on Wednesday.

A spokesperson for Meta, who owns the outlet, told TMZ that the 'Gold Digger' singer had violated Instagram's policies on hate speech, harassment and bullying with his latest outbursts.

As a result, he has reportedly been suspended from his account for 24 hours, during which time he won't be able to post, comment or send direct messages.

His latest attacks saw him repeatedly throw racial slurs towards Trevor Noah. Kanye and Kim share kids North, Saint, Psalm and Chicago, and the singer wrote on Instagram : "Im really concerned that SKETE (his nickname for Pete) will get my kids mom hooked on drugs He's in rehab every 2 months." He wrote that alongside a screenshot of a fan comment, which read: "The way Skete used Kim's marital status too address Kanye was a sneak diss towards her & she didn't even catch it."

KRISTEN STEWART NOW OWNS PRINCESS DIANA'S WARDROBE!

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Kristen Stewart was gifted all of the clothes she got to wear as Princess Diana for 'Spencer' by costume designer Jacqueline Durran. When shooting had wrapped, Stewart was allowed to keep all of the clothes which were recreations of the garments worn in real-life by Diana, the ex-wife of Prince Charles and mother to Prince William and Prince Harry who died in August 1997 at the age of 36.

In an interview with Slant, Stewart revealed: "Jacqueline gave me like all of the clothes. Is it Robert De Niro who keeps everything he's ever touched in a movie or something like that? Or maybe it's Jack Nicholson. "One of the big shots always does that. I usually also don't take stuff because you think you're going to want it because you're so attached to it then, but then you can't just have this weird little treasure box of I don't know. I've usually been like, 'I'm going to leave this here.' But I have almost every piece of wardrobe that I wore in the movie because she wanted to give it to me. She was like, 'These belong to you. I don't need them.'" "I was like, 'That's wild.' So I have all of my stuff."

Stewart has nothing but praise for Jacqueline's work The 'Twilight Saga' star said: "She creates clothes that aren't costumes, even though they tell their own story. They have such unbelievable integrity. Everything's real. Every pocket's real. The way she tells her story with the clothing as well isn't something she ever articulates.

GABRIELLE UNION BLASTS DISNEY FOR HANDLING OF 'DON'T SAY GAY' BILL

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Gabrielle Union has levied criticism towards the Walt Disney Company over its widely derided decision to take a soft stance regarding the new anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation in Florida.

The actress, who stars alongside Zach Braff in the studio's upcoming Disney Plus reimagining of 'Cheaper by the Dozen', voiced her dismay regarding the situation on the red carpet for the streaming release, reports Variety.

"Somebody asked me, 'Are you disappointed?' I'm disappointed when my order isn't right at In-N-Out. I don't even think that's a word that you could use for something like this, where children's lives are literally hanging in the balance," Union told Variety at the premiere.

"We need to own that if you truly are taking stands against hate and oppression, you should not fund hate and oppression. Period. The damage is done."

The Walt Disney Company and CEO Bob Chapek have been embroiled in controversy over the past weeks for the corporation's initial decision to take a soft stance on new legislation in Florida, popularly dubbed the 'Don't Say Gay' bill, which would limit discussions regarding gender identity and sexual orientation in educational environments.

The bill was passed by the Florida's House of Representatives on February 24 and the state Senate in early March.

On top of that, Variety learned that Chapek had received a letter from LGBTQIA+ employees at Disney requesting that company take a public stance condemning the bill.

'THE ADAM PROJECT': REYNOLDS AND SCOBELL'S ON-SCREEN CHEMISTRY KEEPS YOU HOOKED

FILM REVIEW

TROY RIBEIRO

Director: Shawn Levy
Cast: Ryan Reynolds, Walker Scobell, Mark Ruffalo, Jennifer Garner, Catherine Keener, Zoe Saldana, Alex Mallari Jr.
Rating: ***1/2

At some point in our lives, we wish that we could change something about the past or get a glimpse of our future while this is practically impossible in real life, the options are plenty in time-travel sci-fi films, where characters cross time and space using parallel universes, advanced technology, or simply unexplainable magic. There are infinite possibilities that make this genre interesting and appealing.

In this case, it is 2050, and time-travelling fighter pilot Adam Reed (Ryan Reynolds) turns rogue in his universe and crash lands on Earth in the backyard of his house in 2022, where he teams up with his 12-year-old self (portrayed by Walker Scobell) on a mission to save the future, this sounds implausible but the way the film is executed, it is impossible not to get sucked into the narrative and root for Adam.

The 12-year-old Adam is endearing. After the loss of his father, Louis Reed (Mark Ruffalo), who was a scientist working on a project that could alter the future, Adam who was small in stature but tactless and blunt, was often bullied by his classmates which resulted in him fighting his oppressors and being suspended from school.

Being fascinated with how his life will turn out in the future, he exploits all its possibilities with delicious abandon, deriving considerable humour from the situations they are in. They bond like friends, with the older Adam guiding, the young Adam on how to deal with bullies. It is only after some time that older Adam reveals how he met his wife and his motive for time travel.

Apart from having all the tropes of the sci-fi time-travel genre, the story is packed with emotions where the two brothers vie for their father's attention. The film has its heart in the right place and touches on subjects of loss and reconnection. The quirky one-liners further make the film amusing and appealing. One of them is Ellie complaining, "Babies grow up to be teens and assassins of happiness," it certainly generates a chuckle.

Adding to the pleasure is the performance of the energetic and affable Walker Scobell. He definitely is the novelty factor that keeps you glued to the screen. He appears charming and intelligent in every frame.

Similarly, Ryan Reynolds has his appeal, and his on-screen chemistry with Scobell is amazing. The duo is also aptly supported by other A-listers like Mark Ruffalo, Jennifer Garner, Zoe Saldana, Catherine Keener, and Alex Mallari Jr. They have their moments of on-screen glory.

The film has action-packed sequences that are astutely choreographed and engaging. But there are moments in the third act that could be a little tedious to absorb with all the heavy soundtrack accompanying the action.

Despite being mounted with ace production values, the spacecrafts and the weapons are hardly impressive. Nevertheless, it would be virtually impossible not to enjoy the film, in some way or another.

ZOE SALDANA CRIED AFTER WATCHING 20 MINUTES OF 'AVATAR 2'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Zoe Saldana has a message for moviegoers ahead of the release of 'Avatar 2' this December: "It's definitely a leap from the first 'Avatar', so you have to brace yourself for it. It's going to be an adventure you won't forget."

James Cameron has spent well over a decade developing the sequel to his record-breaking 'Avatar', which will once again star Saldana and Sam Worthington, reports Variety.

"I can get choked up just talking about it," Saldana told reporter Kevin McCarthy about the 'Avatar' sequel.

"I was able to see just 20 minutes of the second installment, right before the year ended, last year. And I was speechless. I was moved to tears."

Not much is known about 'Avatar 2' other than it revolves around the children of Worthington and Saldana's characters from the original film.

The movie will also explore the underwater worlds of Pandora, which is part of the reason it took so long to get made, as Cameron had to advance technology in order to record motion capture underwater.

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY

Renate Reinsve

ALL ENGLAND BADMINTON

SAINA, SINDHU, SRIKANTH, LAKSHYA ADVANCE TO SECOND ROUND

Birmingham | Agencies

Top Indian shuttlers -- PV Sindhu, Saina Nehwal, Lakshya Sen and Kidambi Srikanth advanced to the second round of the 2022 All-England Open Badminton Championships after winning their respective first-round matches, here on late Wednesday night.

Sindhu, the world No 7, defeated Chinese world No 17 Wang Zhi Yi 21-18, 21-13 in her first-round match of the BWF Super 1000 tournament.

Two-time Olympic medallists began the match strongly and raced to a handy lead after the early exchanges. Wang Zhi Yi tried to pull the game back but Sindhu's early momentum proved to be the difference. In the second game, the India ace continued to dominate her Chinese opponent and went up 9-0 in quick time. She went on to seal the match in 42 minutes.

Sindhu, the sixth seed in the tournament, will now face the winner of the match between Japan's Sayaka Takahashi and Supanida Katethong of Thailand in the second round.

Meanwhile, Saina Nehwal ranked world No 25, defeated world No 51 Beatriz Corrales of Spain 21-17, 21-19 in straight games.

Corrales had replaced Saina Nehwal's initial opponent, Pornpawee Chochuwong of Thailand. The world No 10 Thai shuttler pulled out from the tournament at the last minute. Nehwal will be up against world No. 2 Akane Yamaguchi of Japan in the second round.

In men's singles, HS Prannoy lost to German Open champion Kunlavut Vitidsarn 21-15 24-22 while former world championships bronze medallist B Sai Praneeth went down to Tokyo Olympics champion Viktor Axelsen 20-22, 11-21, an olympics.com report said.

Another top Indian shuttler Lakshya Sen, who won silver at the German Open last week, defeated compatriot Sourabh Verma 21-17, 21-7 in his opening match of the England Open. Kidambi Srikanth, ranked world No 12 beat Thai world No 21 Kantaphon Wangcharoen 21-18, 21-14 while Parupalli Kashyap lost 11-21, 18-21 to world No 5 Anthony Sinisuka Ginting.

In women's doubles, Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand stunned India Open champions Benyapa Aimsaard and Nuntakarn Aimsaard 17-21, 22-20, 21-14. However, Ashwini Ponnappa and N Sikki Reddy lost to Japan's Rin Iwanaga and Kie Nakanishi 9-21, 13-21 and made an early exit. Top Indian men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, ranked world No 8, beat Scotland's Alexander Dunn and Adam Hall 21-17, 21-19. The Indians saved four-game points against the world No. 36 pair in the second game to move into the next round.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Chelsea come from behind to beat Lille, reach quarters

Villeneuve-d'Arc (France) | Agencies

César Azpilicueta and Christian Pulisic were on target as holders Chelsea recovered from a goal deficit to beat French club Lille 2-1 and eased into the quarter-finals of the UEFA Champions League.

Chelsea came from behind to wrap up a 4-1 aggregate win and completed the quarter-final lineup for the event, joining Villarreal, Atletico Madrid, Bayern Munich, Benfica, Liverpool, Manchester City and Real Madrid in progressing through their round of 16 ties. The last-eight in the event include three clubs each from Spain and England and one each from Germany and Portugal.

But for a long period on Wednesday night, it looked like England would have only two clubs remaining in the Champions League as Chelsea went behind.

The scoreline may look comfortable but it was not so easy as Chelsea had their credentials checked in northern France, especially after Burak Yilmaz fired Lille ahead from the penalty spot in the 38th minute.

But Chelsea were soon rocking as they levelled the score and went on to script victory.

The draw for the quarter-finals and semi-finals will be made on Friday.

'LUCKY' VILLARREAL STUN JUVENTUS

Turin: *Spanish club Villarreal rode on some help from the woodwork and a brilliant performance by their goal-keeper Gerónimo Rulli to stun former winner Juventus 3-0 and march into the Champions League quarter-finals for only the third time ever. In a match played on Wednesday night, Villarreal were forced to sit deep for extended periods before unleashing a stunning three-goal counter-punch in the closing 12 minutes at the Juventus Stadium here.To many experts, the 3-0 defeat would look a bit harsh on Juventus, especially considering the Bianconeri were arguably the better team for more than 75 minutes and had plenty of chances to take the lead. Villarreal, however, were rewarded for a rock-solid defence that stood firm even when forced deep for extended periods.*

Pakistan hold Australia to draw in 2nd Test

Karachi | Agencies

Australia captain Pat Cummins has blamed the five catches dropped by his team in Pakistan's second innings ahead of his questionable tactics for allowing Pakistan to escape with a draw in the second Test.

While many experts are questioning Cummin's tactics -- the decision not to enforce follow-up and extended batting on the third day among them, the skipper said things would have been different if they had taken the catches. This is the fifth time in the last 19 Tests that Australia have been unable to bowl out their opponents on the final day, which denied them victory.

Pakistan batters Babar Azam, Abdullah Shafique and Mohammad Rizwan survived a record 172 overs in their second innings to pull off an extraordinary draw against Australia in the second Test here on Wednesday. Skipper Babar Azam struck a magnificent 196, Shafique contributed a fighting 96 and Rizwan scored an unbeaten match-saving century (104) to seal a draw that keeps the series level going into next week's decider in Lahore as the Benaud-Qadir trophy is still up for grabs. All three of them were lucky as the butter-fingered Australian gave them a life early in their respective knocks. The third and final Test will be played from March 21-25 at Lahore.

India to host Netherlands Women's Hockey team on April 8-9

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Hockey India will host the defending Champions and World no.1 Netherlands Women's Hockey Team for the double-header FIH Pro League matches on April 8-9 to be played at the Kalinga Hockey Stadium, Bhubaneswar in Odisha.

Indian Women and the Netherlands were originally scheduled to play on February 19 -20, however the matches had to be postponed following the visiting team's concern over negative intercontinental travel advice received from KNHB (Royal Dutch Hockey Association) Medical Committee and the NOC medical staff.

Welcoming the Netherlands Women's Hockey Team's decision to travel to India for the matches now scheduled on April 8-9, Hockey India President Gyanendro Ningombam said, "As hosts, we are happy to welcome the Dutch National Women's Team to participate in the FIH Pro League matches here in India in April. No doubt, there is a lot of excitement among the Indian team players as they will be playing the World No.1 squad at home for the first time."

The Netherlands have thus far played four matches in the FIH Hockey Pro League 2021-2022. They beat Belgium 2-0 and 3-1 in October and November last year followed by back-to-back 1-0 and 2-2 (3-2 SO) wins against Spain in February this year. Hosts India, on the other hand, have played six matches. They beat China 7-1 and 2-1 in Muscat followed by a 2-1 win and a 3-4 loss against Spain in February 2022. They recently beat Germany 1-1 (3-0 SO) after the visitors gained an extra point having won the shootout 1-1 (2-1 SO) in the first match.

WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

Kapp leads South Africa to a nervy two-wicket win over New Zealand

Hamilton | Agencies

Marizanne Kapp held her nerve with the bat as South Africa claimed a two-wicket win over New Zealand in their ICC Women's Cricket World Cup clash at Seddon Park on Thursday. With this victory, South Africa remained unbeaten at the World Cup, with four wins from as many matches while New Zealand faced their third loss in five matches.

This was also South Africa's first win over New Zealand in a Women's Cricket World Cup and are now on par with Australia in terms of eight points but are second-placed due to the net run rate. It was also the third time South Africa won in a tight last-over finish in the ongoing tournament. After restricting the hosts to 228 all out in 47.5 overs, South Africa looked like they would cruise to the target, thanks to fifties from opener Laura Wolvaardt (67) and captain Sune Luus (51), who added 88 for the third wicket. Kapp, with 2/44, along 'ith Khaka's 3/31 and Shabnim Ismail picking 3/27 were instrumental in keeping New Zealand to 228 all out' The trio's bowling efforts, especially in the last ten overs, were good enough to overshadow home skipper Sophie Devine's excellent 93.

Devine's 101-ball innings included 12 fours and one massive six, as her partnerships of 81 with Amelia Kerr (42) and 80 with Maddy Green (30) formed the backbone of the New Zealand innings. But Devine's dismissal in the 41st over led to a late collapse, with the tournament hosts losing their final six wickets for just 30 runs to be all out inside 48 overs.

Despite losing the services of another pacer Masabata Klass to a shoulder injury and Ismail's foot causing her discomfort, South Africa ensured that New Zealand never got the finishing flourish they aimed for, which proved to be decisive in the end for a nail-biting win.

Brief scores :

New Zealand 228 all out in 47.5 overs (Sophie Devine 93, Amelia Kerr 42; Shabnim Ismail 3/27, Ayabonga Khaka 3/31) lost to South Africa 229/8 in 49.3 overs (Laura Wolvaardt 67, Sune Luus 51; Amelia Kerr 3/50, Frankie Mackay 2/49) by two wickets.

Raspreet Sidhu's Delhi Divas beat Ludhiana Queens, claim 3BL Round 5 title

Chandigarh | Agencies

Delhi Divas, led by seasoned India player Raspreet Sidhu, clinched the Round Five title in 3BL Women's League, beating Ludhiana Queens 19-11 in the final.

Sidhu was named Most Valuable Player (MVP) for the third time. The third season of 3BL -- the 3x3 pro basketball league supported by the Basketball Federation of India (BFI) and international basketball federation (FIBA) -- is being played at the Hotel Wyndham here from March 8-21. Top national and international men's and women's 3X3 basketball players are participating in the event.

Inspired by the leadership and all-round brilliance of their captain Raspreet Sidhu, who is an experienced Indian national team player, Delhi Divas outlasted Ludhiana Queens to win in dominating fashion.

A decisive moment in the game came with the scores tied at 6-6, when Queens entered into foul trouble, having conceded six team fouls within the first 3.5 minutes of the game.

WILL GIVE OURSELVES EVERY CHANCE TO BEAT INDIA ON SATURDAY: MCGRATH

Auckland: Australia all-rounder Tahlia McGrath on Thursday insisted that her side will prepare very hard to give themselves every chance to defeat India in the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup at Eden Park on Saturday.

Australia have lived up to their pre-tournament favourites billing, sitting on top of the table with four wins in as many matches in the mega event. India, on the other hand, have blown hot and cold in the tournament, winning two and losing as many matches. "We had a fair bit of success against them in the recent India series (at home in September-October last year). But, it's a new location, a new tournament, so anything can happen and they're a world-class side. We will do our homework on them, do big training tomorrow and give ourselves every chance to beat them on Saturday," McGrath was quoted as saying by cricket.com.au. McGrath is aware that India, after facing a four-wicket loss to England on Wednesday, will try to bounce back hard against Australia.

Nadal beats big-serving Opelka, to meet Kyrgios in quarter-finals at Indian Wells

Indian Wells (USA) | Agencies

Rafael Nadal survived a bombardment of big serves by Reilly Opelka at the BNP Paribas Open as he extended his perfect start to the ATP Tour season to 18-0.

With his back against the wall, the Spaniard blunted 6 feet 11 inch Opelka's big-hitting game with heavy topspin as he demonstrated an abundance of agility and patience, overcoming the American 7-6(3), 7-6(5) to book his place in the quarter-finals of the ATP Masters event.

Nadal, who is enjoying a career-best start to a year, stood deep behind the baseline on Opelka's serve, which enabled him to put returns back into court with ferocious depth and power, according to a report on the ATP Tour website.

The 35-year-old soaked up Opelka's brand of big-serve tennis and rallied from a break down in the second set to eventually advance after two hours and 11 minutes. The World No. 4 is the highest-ranked player left in the draw at the ATP Masters 1000 event and is aiming to capture his fourth tour-level title of a remarkable 2022 season this week.

DHONI REVEALS REASON BEHIND HIS ICONIC 'NUMBER 7' JERSEY

New Delhi: Chennai Super Kings captain MS Dhoni has revealed that "Number 7" is very close to his heart because he was born on the 7th of July and it is the reason behind his iconic jersey number, ruling out any superstitious angle to it.

Dhoni has been using '7' as his shirt number right from his international debut and the legend of the number has grown over the years. Speaking to fans during a virtual interaction held by India Cements, the parent group of the owners of Chennai Super Kings, the former India skipper opened up about the reason behind him choosing No 7.

"A lot of people initially thought that seven is a lucky number for me. Initially it was for a very simple reason, I was born on the seventh of July. Seventh day of the seventh month.That was the reason rather than getting into what number is a good number. I said I'll choose my date of birth," said Dhoni. "... and then people kept asking me. So, I kept adding to that answer. 7/7 and then again, the year is 81. 8-1 is 7. It was a very neutral number. What people kept telling me, I absorbed it. When other people ask me, I give the answer accordingly. Seven is a neutral number, it doesn't go against you. So, I added that also in my answer. I am not very superstitious about it but it's one number that is close to my heart. So, I've kept it with me," he added. CSK have been training in Surat over the last week in the lead up to IPL 2022 and the skipper Dhoni is very happy with the facilities that are on offer at the venue.

MANUSHI CHHILLAR
LOVE THE WHOLE COMMUNITY FEELING THAT WE HAVE WITH HOLI

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Debutante Manushi Chhillar talked about what she likes about the festival of colours -- Holi. She says she loves the whole community feeling that comes with the festival.

Manushi says, "My initial memories of Holi are from childhood when we used to live in Bangalore. I still remember having a small pink pichkari (pink used to be my colour), going around with my friends, being very excited about Holi and playing with my pichkari and my water gun."

She loves how Holi brings people together as a community.

Manushi says, "Like any other festival, I love the whole community feeling that we have with Holi. I think the one special thing about Holi is also the fact that all your friends come to play and we would have groups and there would literally be gang wars with water guns, that was really fun."

She adds, "I think Holi is a very playful festival and it's a lot of fun so playing with your friends is what I absolutely love about the festival and of course Gujiya. I used to really love eating Gujiya (I have a sweet tooth). So, these used to be my favorite parts about Holi."

Priya Ahuja Rajda: I had stopped playing Holi long back since I disdained wastage of water

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The festival of colours, Holi is celebrated across the country with great zeal and enthusiasm. It is celebrated in different ways with uniqueness.

In an exclusive interview with Absolute India News, actress Priya Ahuja Rajda who is known for her stint as Rita reporter in Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah revealed why this Holi is special for her. When asked about how the actress will celebrate the festival this year she said, "I am excited this time since my son is grown up and he is aware about what colours are. In our vicinity there are arrangements of dry holi ensuring no wastage of water and playing with organic colours. Because this is something owing to which I had stopped playing Holi long back. A beautiful play area has been set up for kids where fun activities are organised so I am excited to play this kind of Kid's holi this time'. Sharing her fond holi memory actress said, "My dad had worked in railways so we had big bunglows allotted by railway personnel where we had big water tanks of cement. So we kids around there used to drench each other in water."

Talking about her favorite food Priya said, "Gujia is what reminds me of Holi, so yeah I always have it on Holi. I feel the festival is incomplete without some mouth-watering Gujiyas." Sharing some easy tips for hair and skincare during Holi celebrations Priya advised to apply oil and sunscreen before moving out to play Holi. She also urged people to take care of pets and animals around while playing holi. She said, "Play safe holi and my biggest request is that do take care of yourself. Take care of pets and animals around you. Don't put colors or throw water balloons on them since it's not meant for them as it can be harmful for them."

Shama Sikander's FAIRYTALE WEDDING

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Setting goals for all destination weddings, the ceremony held in Goa looked no less than an international fairytale destination wedding.

Shama Sikander and James Milliron tied the knot in Goa on March 14 and it was the most beautiful pastel themed affair. Shama says reminiscing about her big day, "This is the day a girl always dreams about and I'm so grateful to have mine exactly the way I wanted. It was truly a fairytale and so dreamy and absolutely full of pure love. We managed to pull it off well with the support of amazing team members working with us and my lovely friends. They say it takes a moment to fall in love and that's how it went down when I met James in 2013. It was just so easy and hence it was meant to be. I'm looking forward to a life full of love, growth and true partnership ahead."

The Maaya actress looked exquisite in an offshoulder mermaid princess gown with a tulle net trail following her as she walked down the aisle.

Weddings are the most beautiful days and weddings in white take the beauty to a whole different level. Shama Sikander's immaculate wedding touched our hearts and left us dewy eyed.

JALSA: VIDYA BALAN-SHEFALI SHAH CRIME THRILLER PROMISES NAIL-BITING EXPERIENCE

FILM REVIEW

AAKRUTI BAGLA

Cast: Vidya Balan, Shefali Shah, Rohini Hattangadi, Manav Kaul, Mohammed Iqbal Khan, Surya Kasibhatla, and Shafeen Patel.
Streaming date: 18 March 2022 on Amazon Prime
Director: Suresh Triveni
Duration: 129 minutes
Ratings: 4/5

Maya Menon (Vidya Balan), a renowned journalist is trapped in the web of deceit, lies and the quest to find the truth after she hits an 18-year-old girl is hit by her car. The girl named Aaliya Mohammed turns out to be her maid Rukhsana (Shefali Shah's) daughter.

While Shefali Shah plays the mother of the victim who refuses to give up on her daughter, Vidya plays a journalist who is looking into the story.

But, can anyone be trusted here?

The film keeps you at the edge of the seat with a fair blend of suspense, excitement and engrossing performances by the cast. Vidya Balan and Shefali Shah are two of the finest actresses in our industry. Imagine the two powerhouses coming together for a movie, wouldn't it be filled with a lot of thrill? It is interesting to see director Suresh Triveni give Vidya Balan a complete change of image in his sophomore feature film. While she was a blithe singing housewife in Tumhari Sulu, in Jalsa Vidya is a different entity.

Vidya as a steely nerved and determined journalist proves yet again that she can pull off any role with grace delivering a phenomenal performance.

Talking about Shefali Shah, after seeing her in dominant roles in Humans and Delhi Crime, it might take a while to feel comfortable with the idea of Shefali playing a househelp. But by the end of the film you will find yourself rooting for her as she makes an impact as a brave mother Rukshana, who is in no mood to judge her daughter for being out late at night. After watching Rukhsana in Jalsa, every girl in Indian society will for sure yearn for a mother like her. There is a third pivotal female character in Jalsa, played by Vidhatri Bandi, who is determined to unearth the layers of corruption that divide the bitter truth from numbing wealth.

Since the female leads occupy the centre stage, it doesn't leave much room to shine for actors Mohammed Iqbal Khan and Manav Kaul. The child essaying the role of Vidya Balan's disabled child Ayush puts out a fine performance and his bitter-sweet moments with Rukhsana and his Nani(Rohini Hattangadi) are some of the memorable parts of the film.

Talking about the technical aspects, Camera work of the film is great and the screenplay is fantastic.

With a runtime of 2hr 2 min, the film plunges into the plot about a hit-and-run case without beating around the bush. The pace slows down a bit during the second half, but does not cease to leave an impact through fiery dialogues and powerful moments.

Apart from shedding light on the perks of being privileged, the film also sensitively touches upon subtexts like gender inequality and corruption in legal system.

Final Verdict: Vidya Balan-Shefali Shah Crime Thriller Promises Nail-Biting Experience

Shubhaavi Choksey: Holi and Diwali are my most favourite festivals

Aakruti Bagla | Mumbai

Shubhaavi Choksey is one of the most respected and senior-most actresses in the television industry. She is best known for her role as Meera in Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi, Rishika in Kahaani Ghar Ghar Kii, and Mohini Basu in Kasautii Zindagii Kay.

The festival of colours, Holi is celebrated with great pomp and show all over the country. In an exclusive interview with Absolute India News, the actress shared her plans and urged her fans to play safely.

While speaking to Absolute India News, Shubhaavi dished out details about how she is going to celebrate Holi this year. She said, "I am super excited for the festival since Holi and Diwali are the most crazy occasion for me. I have too many memories associated with this festival since I've had a lot of fun. I remember playing with permanent colours like pink and silver colours which left an indelible mark on my face and hands". She also recounted her favourite memory of celebrating the festival with family. She shared, "So it was my first holi after marriage and my brother-in-law played really bad holi with stuff like tomatoes, eggs and many other things. He called me and we were three of us sitting under a pipe and he pretended to apply shampoo on my head. That was really sweet of him until I knew there was sabja(sweet basil seeds) in it. And later it took so much time to take that out since it got stuck in my head. That was really crazy and fun."

Talking about her favourite food item to gorge on holi she quipped, "I love Thandai but without bhang(chuckles). I also love Fafda-Jalebis and all types of sweets."

Advising people to celebrate the festival of colours safely Shubhaavi said, "If possible avoid playing with permanent colours and prefer using herbal colours. Because our immunity has gone down and the whole weather and climate has changed all over the world. It has given so many skin issues to people so just be a little more careful this time and have fun."

On the work front, the actress is currently seen playing a pivotal role in the show Bade Achhe Lagte Hain 2.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY

Ishita Raj

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