

# absolute india

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## CDS BIPIN RAWAT, WIFE AMONG 13 KILLED IN CHOPPER CRASH IN TN

# GOODBYE GENERAL

**▶ GENERAL RAWAT, 63, TOOK CHARGE AS INDIA'S FIRST CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF ON JANUARY 1, 2020. THE POSITION WAS CREATED TO INTEGRATE THE THREE SERVICES -- ARMY, NAVY AND AIR FORCE. THE CDS IS MANDATED TO FACILITATE INTEGRATION, ENSURE BEST ECONOMIC USE OF RESOURCES ALLOCATED TO THE ARMED FORCES AND BRING UNIFORMITY IN THE PROCUREMENT PROCEDURE.**

**▶ LATER, HE WAS ALSO APPOINTED AS THE HEAD OF THE NEWLY-CREATED DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AFFAIRS.**

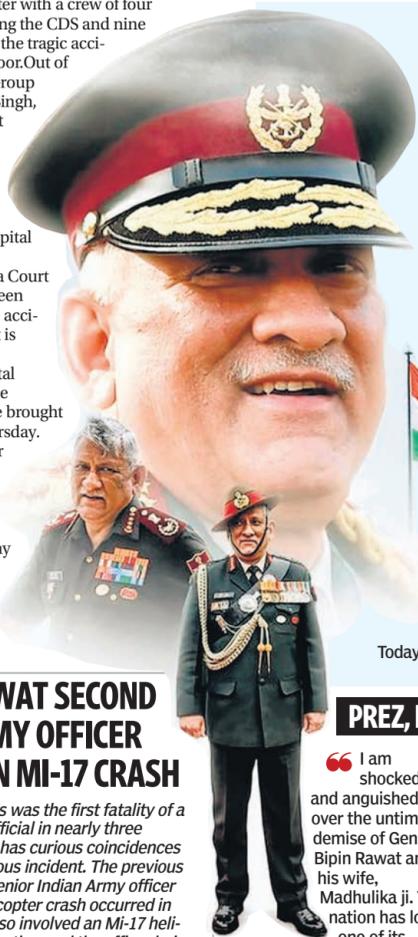
**▶ SINGH, ALONG WITH HIS WIFE AND SEVEN STAFF, BOARDED A FLIGHT AT DELHI FOR THE SULLUR IAF BASE NEAR COIMBATORE AT 8:47. THEY LANDED IN SULLUR AT 11:34 AM. FROM THERE, THEY BOARDED THE MI17V5 HELICOPTER AT 11:48. AT 12:22 PM, THE AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL (ATC) LOST CONTACT WITH THE CHOPPER, WHICH CRASHED IN A FOREST AREA AROUND 7 KM FROM COONOOR.**

**▶ MADHULIKA RAWAT, BRIGADIER L.S. LIDDER, LIEUTENANT COLONEL HARJINDER SINGH, NAIK GURSEWAK SINGH, NAIK JITENDER KUMAR, NAIK VIVEK KUMAR, NAIK B. SAI TEJA AND HAVALDAR SATPAL WERE TRAVELLING ALONG WITH GENERAL RAWAT. APART FROM THEM, TWO PILOTS, A GROUP CAPTAIN AND A GUNNER WERE ONBOARD THE ILL-FATED CHOPPER.**

Mi17V5 helicopter with a crew of four members carrying the CDS and nine others met with the tragic accident near Coonoor. Out of the 14 people, Group Captain Varun Singh, Directing Staff at the Defence Services Staff College, is currently undergoing treatment at the Military Hospital in Wellington.

The IAF said a Court of Inquiry has been ordered into the accident. The report is expected in one month. The mortal remains of all the deceased will be brought to Delhi on Thursday.

On December 17, 2016, the government had appointed him as the 27th Chief of the Army Staff. He took charge on December 31, 2016, after the retirement of



### HEARD A LOUD SOUND, HELICOPTER WAS IN FLAMES, SAYS EYEWITNESS



**Chennai:** A man who lives near the site where an Indian Air Force (IAF) helicopter carrying CDS Gen Bipin Rawat among 14 others crashed on Wednesday, said he saw 12 bodies scattered near the site of the accident. Ravi, who lives near the crash site at Coonoor in Tamil Nadu, told reporter: "I heard a loud sound and found the helicopter in flames and coming down. I rushed to the spot with a few local residents and found 12 charred bodies... we rescued two persons but they were struggling for life. An ambulance took them to the Army hospital, Wellington." Sukumaran, a local journalist, told reporter: "The weather condition for the past one week was very bad and it was full of mist. Today, the condition of the weather was very bad... It was only 87 km from Sullur airforce base to the Defence station, Wellington."

### GEN RAWAT SECOND TOP ARMY OFFICER TO DIE IN MI-17 CRASH

**New Delhi:** This was the first fatality of a top defence official in nearly three decades - and has curious coincidences with the previous incident. The previous incident of a senior Indian Army officer dying in a helicopter crash occurred in 1993 - and it also involved an Mi-17 helicopter, bad weather and the officer being accompanied by his wife. Eastern Command chief, Lt Gen Jameel Mahmood, died in a helicopter crash in May 1993, while on a visit to Sikkim. His wife, Military Assistant Col M.N. Ahmed, Lt Lakshman Tyagi, orderly Naik G. Thyagarajan, his personal bodyguard Havildar S. Vasudevan, and the IAF crew were also killed.

bravest sons. His four decades of selfless service to the motherland was marked by exceptional gallantry and heroism. My condolences to his family.

Ram Nath Kovind, President

### GEN RAWAT WAS A VISIONARY: ARMY CHIEF

"I am deeply anguished by the helicopter crash in Tamil Nadu in which we have lost Gen Bipin Rawat, his wife and other personnel of the armed forces. They served India with utmost diligence. My thoughts are with the bereaved families."

Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

### PREZ, PM CONDOLE DEMISE OF GEN RAWAT, OTHERS

"General Bipin Rawat, India's first Chief of Defence Staff, was a visionary who initiated far-reaching reforms in the military's higher defence organisation."

General MM Naravane, Indian Army Chief

## Air crashes claimed many prominent personalities in the past



**Team Absolute | New Delhi**

Several senior military officials were feared dead after an Indian Air Force helicopter crashed in Tamil Nadu's Coonoor on Wednesday afternoon with Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat, his wife and 12 others onboard.

The latest incident brings to our mind several prominent personalities who have perished in air crashes in the past. One of the first instances was freedom fighter Subhas Chandra Bose in 1945 in Taiwan, although there has been some controversy over his death. Another air accident was the crash of a helicopter in which Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy was onboard.

The chopper of YSR crashed in a forest while flying in a Bell 430 to Chittoor district in Andhra Pradesh. His body was traced 27 hours after the helicopter went missing in 2009.

Sanjay Gandhi, the younger son of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, was killed in 1980 when a glider he was flying crashed after taking off from the Safdarjung airport in Delhi.

Senior Congress leader, Madhavrao Scindia was killed in a Cessna aircraft crash in 2001 while travelling to Kanpur to address a rally. Lok Sabha Speaker and Telugu Desam leader G.M.C. Balayogi also died in a chopper crash in 2002 in Andhra Pradesh. O.P. Jindal, Haryana's then power minister and a leading industrialist, and state agriculture minister Surendra Singh were killed when their chopper developed a technical snag and went down near Saharanpur in 2005.

Punjab Governor Surendra Nath and nine members of his family were killed when the government's Super-King aircraft crashed into high mountains in bad weather in 1994 in Himachal Pradesh. Nath was then also the acting Governor of Himachal.

Five days after the helicopter that he was using went missing, Arunachal Chief Minister Dorjee Khandu was found dead near the China border in 2011.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India's Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), General Bipin Rawat, his wife Madhulika Rawat, and 11 others died in a military chopper crash near Coonoor in Tamil Nadu on Wednesday. "With deep regret, it has now been ascertained that General Bipin Rawat, Mrs Madhulika Rawat and 11 other persons onboard have died in the unfortunate incident," the Indian Air Force said in a statement. Gen Rawat was on a visit to the Defence Services Staff College at Wellington in Nilgiri Hills to address the faculty and student officers of the staff course. Around noon on Wednesday, an IAF

### 'RED IS COLOUR OF CHANGE', AKHILESH HITS BACK AT MODI

**New Delhi:** Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday hit back at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Lal Topi" comment, saying that the colour of the cap has reached Delhi and hence the panic has engulfed the BJP's rank and file. Akhilesh Yadav spoke to correspondent on several issues, including the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls due early next year.

Over a cap colour he said, "Red colour symbolises revolution, a change. This is also the colour of emotions. BJP does not understand sentiments. Red colour is the most vibrant colour and warns the party in power to be careful. The people of Uttar Pradesh want a change. The brightness of Lal Topi has reached Delhi, so the language of the BJP has also changed as they are panicky. Changes are bound to happen in the state. The BJP will be wiped out from the state."

## SKM to hold crucial meet today on ending year-long protest

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Various farmer organisations under the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) are likely to make a major announcement on their year-long agitation after a meeting on Wednesday. The SKM is also likely to meet union ministers.

Farmers have demanded withdrawal of the cases registered against them. They said, they will announce end of the protest after government fulfils all their demands.

The Union government has asked farm leaders to get back on the proposal which said, the farmers end the agitation first and then withdrawal of cases will be considered.

After repealing all three farm laws, the SKM has put forth several other demands before the union government, of which most of them have been accepted. The government wants farmers to end the protest before the assembly elections in Punjab next year. This is the reason the Union Home Ministry sent a draft

▶ Sources say that as soon as a clarification is received on the proposal related to several critical demands sent by the union government, the farmers will end the protest.

▶ A five-member committee of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) held an emergency meeting on Wednesday morning before the crucial meeting at 2 p.m.

▶ It is expected that before making a major announcement, the SKM will hold consultations with other farmer groups on ending the year-long agitation.

proposal to the SKM on Tuesday.

Farmers have been demanding apart from repeal of farm laws, compensation to all who died during the agitation, legal guarantee on minimum support price and withdrawal of cases against all farmers.

### 3 TERRORISTS KILLED IN J&K ENCOUNTER REFUSED TO SURRENDER

**Srinagar:** Three terrorists killed in an encounter at with police and security forces in Jammu and Kashmir's Shopian district on Wednesday had refused to surrender, the police said. Police said that acting on specific input regarding the presence of terrorists in village Check Cholan area of Shopian, a joint cordon and search operation was launched by the Police, Army's 34 RR and 178Bn of the CRPF.

They have been identified as Amir Hussain Ganie, resident of Check Cholan Shopian, Rayees Ahmed Mir, resident of Kapran Shopian and Haseeb Ahmad Dar, resident of Khudwani Kulgam. Incriminating materials, arms and ammunition including one AK-74 rifle and two pistols were also recovered from their possession. All the recovered materials have been taken into case records for further investigation.



## RBI KEEPS LENDING RATES INTACT, REMAINS ACCOMMODATIVE

# RESERVE BANK OF INDIA

Team Absolute | Mumbai

To support a durable as well as lasting economic recovery amid concerns over the Omicron variant of coronavirus, the Reserve Bank of India on Wednesday retained its key lending rates along with the growth-oriented accommodative stance during the penultimate monetary policy review of FY22. The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of India's central bank voted to maintain the repo rate, or short-term lending rate, for commercial banks at 4 per cent. Repo Rate (RR) is the rate at which the RBI lends money to commercial banks or financial institutions against government securities. The reverse repo rate was also kept unchanged at 3.35 per cent, and the marginal standing facility (MSF) rate and the 'Bank Rate' at 4.25 per cent. It was widely expected that MPC would hold rates along with the accommodative stance. In a virtual address after the MPC's bi-monthly meet, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said that economic recovery disrupted by the second wave of the pandemic is gaining traction. However, this recovery is still not strong enough to be self-sustaining and durable, thereby, supportive policy measures such as accommodative stance are required, he added. With the RBI retaining India's FY22 GDP growth projection at 9.5 per cent, Das pointed out that GDP is expected to grow at 6.6 per cent in Q3, 6 per cent in Q4, 17.2 per cent in Q1FY23, and at 7.8 per cent for Q2FY23.

# Water quality in lower stretches of Ganga alarming

**▶ DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (DST)- WATER TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVE HAS SUPPORTED THE GROUP TO UNDERTAKE THIS KEY STUDY PUBLISHED IN THE JOURNAL 'ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH COMMUNICATIONS' RECENTLY.**

**▶ THEIR STUDY HAS SHOWN THAT WQI VALUES OF THIS STRETCH OF THE RIVER WAS BETWEEN 14-52 AND WAS CONTINUOUSLY DETERIORATING IRRESPECTIVE OF THE SEASON OF SAMPLING. THEY HAVE ALSO IDENTIFIED THE POINT SOURCE ALONG WITH TYPE OF POLLUTANTS, IN PARTICULAR FORMS OF NITROGEN WITH EFFECT ON BIOTA ALONG THE 50 KM STRETCH THAT REQUIRED IMMEDIATE INTERVENTION FOR EFFECTIVE RIVER BASIN MANAGEMENT.**

**▶ THE FINDINGS FROM THIS STUDY WILL BE PIVOTAL FOR LONG-TERM ECOLOGICAL HEALTH MONITORING OF THE LOWER STRETCH OF RIVER GANGA, ALONG WITH THE INTEGRATION OF SENSORS AND AUTOMATION, THE STATEMENT ADDED.**

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Water quality in the lower stretches of the river Ganga was found to be alarming by a team of scientists, who developed the much-needed baseline of Water Quality Index (WQI) of the place.

They reported a continuous deterioration of water quality.

Rapid human pressure and anthropogenic activities have resulted in release of untreated municipal and industrial sewage along with other forms of pollutants in the River Ganga. "In particular, the lower stretches of the River Ganga, close to the megapolis Kolkata, are heavily influenced by anthropogenic factors, mainly due to intense population pressure on both sides of the river banks. As a result, there has been a marked increase in



discharge of untreated municipal and industrial sewage in the lower stretch of the Ganges with consequences for many unique and biodiversity ecosystems

such as the Sundarbans mangrove and endangered charismatic species such as the Gangetic Dolphin," a statement from the Ministry of Science & Technology said quoting the study.

The team led by Professor Punyasloke Bhadury from the Integrative Taxonomy and Microbial Ecology Research Group (ITMERG) at IISER, Kolkata monitored nine sites encompassing 59 stations along the 50 km stretch of the lower stretches of the River Ganga over two years to understand the dynamics of key environmental variables, including forms of dissolved nitrogen along with biological proxies to assess the state of health of Ganga. The scientists have come up with the WQI of the place, a key metrics that helps understand the health and ecological consequences for the lower stretch of River Ganga, the statement said.



# NUMBER OF OMICRON SUSPECTS MOUNTS TO 37 IN DELHI, 28 TEST POSITIVE FOR COVID

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A total of 37 Omicron variant suspects have been admitted to Delhi government-run Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan hospital in the capital city so far.

However, of the total, 28 persons have tested positive for Covid-19.

Delhi Health Minister Satyendra Jain said on Tuesday that all passengers coming from Omicron affected regions are being tested at the airport. "So far, 37 people have been admitted to LNJP, out of which 28 have tested Corona positive", said Jain.

He informed that all the 28 samples have been sent for the genome sequencing. Of the lot, Seventeen reports are out of which only one tested positive for Omicron variant, rest are only Covid positive but Omicron negative, informed minister Jain.

On the Covid situation in Delhi, he said that 50 to 60 cases are being reported daily. However, the positivity rate continues to be around 0.1 per cent. "If the positivity rate rises to 0.5 per cent, we will implement the graded response programme in the city," he added.

Jain also made an appeal to the



Centre to accept the protesting RDA doctors' demand to run the health services smoothly amid Omicron scare in the city. He said, "We are fully prepared to fight the third Covid surge if it comes. No scarcity of beds, oxygen and medicine will be felt, but I will appeal to all the people to wear mask which is only the biggest tool we have to fight the pandemic. We can prevent the third Covid wave by following the Covid appropriate behaviour, he added.

## JAIPUR LOGS 25 OUT OF RAJASTHAN'S 40 NEW COVID CASES

Jaipur: A total of 25 new Covid cases have been registered in Jaipur in the last 24 hours - the highest in the last five months, and taking the total tally of active cases to 119. Out of these, 11 patients have contacted Omicron variant and the others are suspected patients. In fact, five school students are amongst the new 25 cases. In the last eight days, 92 corona patients have tested positive in Jaipur out of which 9 are Omicron positive. Rajasthan, on Wednesday, registered 40 new cases and the total active cases have increased to 236. Alwar and Hanumangar reported four each, Jodhpur, Udaipur, and Ajmer two each, and Bikaner one.

# Icy winds lash plains in J&K, Ladakh



Srinagar | Agencies

Cold wave continued across Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh on Wednesday as icy winds from snow-clad mountains lashed the plains in the two union territories.

An official of the Meteorological Department (MeT) said the minimum temperature remained notches below freezing point in the valley and the Ladakh region on Wednesday.

"Srinagar had minus 0.4, Pahalgam minus 3.4 and Gulmarg minus 6.0 as the minimum temperature on Wednesday."

"Drass town of Ladakh had minus 14.5, Leh minus 8.7 and Kargil minus 6.8 as the night's lowest temperature."

"Jammu city and Katra, both had 8.7, Batote 3.9, Banihal 2.6 and Bhaderwah 2.5 as the minimum temperature," the MeT official said, adding that the cold wave conditions are likely to increase in the coming days due to clear night sky.

# TSRTC offers free lifetime bus travel for two girls born onboard

Hyderabad | Agencies

In a unique gesture, Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TSRTC) has announced free bus travel for life to two girls born on its buses recently.

The state-owned transport body announced free lifetime passes to the two babies as their birthday gift.

While the first girl was born on November 30, near Peddakothapally village in a bus belonging to Nagarkurnool depot, another woman gave birth to her daughter on board on December 7 near Siddipet. The bus belongs to the Asifabad depot.

These two women unexpectedly went into labour



onboard to their respective destinations and the TSRTC crew members and fellow passengers helped the women deliver their babies.

Later, the TSRTC crew coordinated with officials of the Health Department and rushed the mothers and newborns to the nearby government hospitals in 108

ambulances for further treatment. They are said to be doing well. Appreciating the quick response and support of the TSRTC crew and passengers, TSRTC Vice Chairman and Managing Director V. C. Sajjanar said he was pleased to offer newborns free lifetime passes for their travel on TSRTC buses.

# Lok Sabha begins discussion on climate change

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Lok Sabha on Wednesday took up the discussion on climate change under Rule 193. Speaker On Birla said this is an important subject for all human beings, and it is a matter of great pride that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has advocated conservation of the climate on all international forums.

Initiating the debate, DMK's Kanimozhi cited the excessive flooding in recent weeks in south India and how Chennai was badly affected again, as she stressed that the government needs to act on climate change mitigation and adaptation.

BJP's Sanjay Jaiswal said that Prime Minister Modi has initiated a series of steps in this direction soon after he took over in 2014 and equally voiced his concerns on all international forums. Even in the Glasgow summit, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson had widely praised him a lot for his pro-active role played for climate change, he added. However, Leader of Congress Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury said that the time has come when we need to think globally but act locally. India has the lowest rate of emission at five percent only compared to other countries of the world, but climate change was "the most under-reported failure of the Modi government". "The



assault on climate began as soon as Modi government took over in 2014," he added. Trinamool

Congress' Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar said that this is an important issue for all human beings.

# MAN ENDS LIFE AFTER KILLING WIFE, 2 CHILDREN IN K'TAKA

DAKSHINA KANNADA | Agencies

In a disturbing incident, a man on Wednesday ended his life after killing his wife and two children, leaving a death note which said he is doing this to prevent his family from getting converted to another religion.

The incident took place in Mangaluru of Dakshina Kannada district of Karnataka. The deceased are identified as Nagesh Sheriguppi, 30, his wife Vijayalakshmi, 26, daughter Sapna, 8, and son Samarth, 4. According to police, Nagesh had mixed poison in fried rice and they died after consuming it. He allegedly hanged himself at his residence. Mangaluru Police

Commissioner N. Shashikumar said on Wednesday that the deceased lady Vijayalakshmi worked at the residence of one Noor Jahan and had close connection with her. In the death note, Nagesh has mentioned that Noor Jahan was trying to convert Vijayalakshmi. The neighbours have stated that Nagesh asked Vijayalakshmi not to work there and stay back at home and assaulted her for the same reason. The relatives of the family have not come forward to lodge a complaint. The police have taken suo moto case for abetment of suicide, he explained. The police sources said that a lady has been taken into custody for questioning in connection with the case.

# Delhi riots: Court frames attempt to murder charges against man who waved gun at cop

Team Absolute | New Delhi

A Delhi Court has framed charges of rioting and attempt to murder against Shahrukh Pathan, who was seen in a viral video aiming a gun at a police constable during the riots in Delhi in February 2020.

His illegal firearm, a 7.65 mm pistol along with two live rounds was recovered and several shots had been fired by him, according to police.

Pathan is currently lodged in Tihar Jail after he was arrested on March 3 last year.

Additional Sessions Judge Amitabh Rawat said in Tuesday's order that accused Shahrukh Pathan has raised his pistol—not sideways but straight—aiming at the Head



Constable (HC) Deepak Dahiya who is taller than him but the direction of the pistol was aimed at the cop's head and even the point at which the trigger is pulled, the aim is straight towards Dahiya. "Usually after firing or pulling of the trigger, there is

a jerk and the hands and the pistol is raised up because of the jerk. Thus, even the video shows firing by accused Shahrukh Pathan from the pistol in daylight with an aim to kill HC Deepak Dahiya. This is enough for framing the charge against the accused Shahrukh Pathan under Section 307 IPC," the order read.

It further stated that though, no injury is caused in the present case to Dahiya, that does not mean that Section 307 IPC is not made out as injury on the part of the body of the victim is a relevant factor but it depends on the facts of the case and in the present case, injury is not material at all. The court held that it is quite apparent that

accused Shahrukh Pathan led a group of rioters who formed an unlawful assembly at 66 Foota Road on February 24 last year at about 2.00 PM and fully armed with deadly weapons, committed rioting, attempt on the life of HC Deepak Dahiya, obstructed a public servant in discharge of his public functions and assaulted or used criminal force on a public servant to deter the public servant from discharge of his duty.

The judge charged Pathan under sections 147 (punishment for rioting), 148 (rioting armed with a deadly weapon), 186 (obstructing public servant in discharge of duty), and 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) of the IPC.

# Sonia accuses Centre of being 'insensitive' towards farmers

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Wednesday accused the Centre of being "insensitive" towards the farmers, adding that the farm laws were repealed in an "undemocratic" manner.

While addressing the Congress Parliamentary party meeting, she paid homage to the 700 farmers who lost their lives during their protest against the farm laws. Rahul Gandhi was also present at the meeting.

Extending unconditional support to farmers demand of legally guaranteed MSP, she called upon the party members to honour the farmers who died during

the protest. Notably, the Congress has been demanding appropriate compensation to the families of victim farmers. Party MP Rahul Gandhi recently placed a list of the dead farmer protesters in the Lok Sabha. The Modi government is also being accused of selling the country's assets to recover its economic losses. Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge said that MPs were suspended for the entire Winter session for an act which took place in the Monsoon session. If the Centre does not revoke the suspension, the Opposition will resort to a hunger strike.

# Delhi homes record poor indoor air quality: Study

Team Absolute | New Delhi

New Delhi: Delhi's citizens long for clean air but do they call for it? A new two-year research at the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago (EPIC India) has indicated that demand for air pollution information and defensive technologies may be low among India's national capital residents.

Researchers observed that even when offered a free trial of indoor air quality monitor to track pollution levels inside their homes, the take-up rates were low.

The study found indoor PM2.5 levels for low-income and high-income households in Delhi were very high during the wintertime, with mean concentrations of 23 and 29 times the WHO safe limit of 10 µg/m, respectively.

Findings suggested that high-income households were 13 times more likely to



own air purifiers than low-income households. Still,

the indoor air pollution levels in those homes were only

10 per cent lower than those living in disadvantaged settings.

"In Delhi, the bottom line is -- whether someone is rich or poor, no one gets to breathe clean air," says Kenneth Lee, the lead author of the study.

"It's a complex vicious cycle. When you do not know about the pollution levels inside your homes, you do not worry about it, and hence you are less likely to take corrective actions. Only with increased awareness, demand for clean air may gain momentum."

The experiment found that in homes with access to real-time indoor air pollution data, about an 8.6 per cent decline in indoor PM2.5 concentrations was recorded, and modest changes in inexpensive defensive practices and ventilation behaviours were observed.

The researchers point out that the study that surveyed

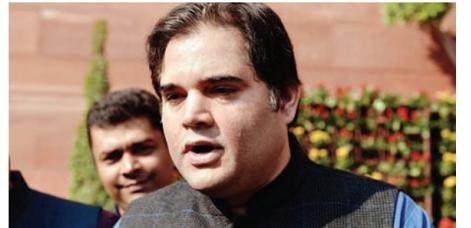
thousands of Delhi households between 2018 and 2020 across varying socio-economic strata, on average, found the indoor PM2.5 levels to be substantially higher than the corresponding value reported by the nearest government monitor.

Also, the study noted that indoor PM2.5 levels tend to spike in the mornings and evenings when households were most likely to be cooking. Lee adds: "It's critical to address the information gaps related to indoor air pollution urgently. High-frequency accurate PM2.5 information communicated through either government monitor or by indoor air quality monitors is the first step but only when it is complemented with an increase in literacy around health consequences of air pollution and of adopting various defensive actions more available."

# Support small shopkeepers in neighbourhood: Varun Gandhi

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Questioning the government's economic policy, BJP MP Varun Gandhi on Wednesday said that mismanagement has forced a large number of small producers and shopkeepers to close their businesses. Varun Gandhi, the BJP Lok Sabha member from Pilibhit, appealed to people to support small shopkeepers in the neighbourhood by purchasing from them instead of Amazon and Walmart. Sharing a news report on Twitter, Gandhi said that at the time of global recession they (small producers and shopkeepers) were the ones who took care of the country's economy. "Due to corruption, inflation and economic policy mismanagement, a large number of small producers and



shopkeepers are forced to close their businesses. Support them by doing shopping from small shopkeepers in your neighbourhood instead of Amazon, Walmart. At the time of global recession they were the ones who took care of the country's economy," Varun Gandhi said. Varun Gandhi is regularly questioning his own government on several issues from farmers' protest to the Lakhimpur incident and now over irregularities in

UPTET on December 5. Criticising, Sharing a video of police action against candidates holding a candle-light march over alleged irregularities in the 2019 UP Teachers' Sharing a video of police action holding a march Test (UPTET) 2021, he lamented that no one is ready to demand. In October, Varun Gandhi and his mother Maneka Gandhi were dropped from BJP's national executive committee - the party's top-decision making body.



Chopper crash:

MP LOSES DAUGHTER AND SON-IN-LAW

► GENERAL RAWAT'S BETTER HALF MADHULIKA RAWAT, WHO DIED WITH HER HUSBAND IN WEDNESDAY'S HELICOPTER CRASH, HAILED FROM THE ERSTWHILE ROYAL FAMILY OF SOHAGPUR RIYASAT IN SHAHDOL DISTRICT OF MP



Zafar Alam Khan | Bhopal  
www.absoluteindianews.com

The country's highest ranked military officer Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat had an inseparable bond with Madhya Pradesh.

General Rawat's better half Madhulika Rawat, who died with her husband in Wednesday's helicopter crash, hailed from the erstwhile royal family of Sohagpur Riyasat in Shahdol district of MP. They were married in 1985. Madhulika's father Kunwar Mridendra Singh was not only the Riyasatdar of Sohagpur Riyasat in

Shadol district, but was also the Congress MLA from the district in 1967 and 1972.

General Rawat's brother-in-law Yashvardhan Singh was in Bhopal with his shooter daughter, who was featuring in a national level shooting competition, when he got a call from the Army, asking him to reach Delhi urgently.

"I haven't got authentic info about the tragic helicopter crash as even General Rawat's ADC was in the same copter, but the Army has asked us to reach Delhi urgently. The signals sug-

gest that something very serious has happened. I and my wife are flying to Delhi from Bhopal, while my mother will be reaching Jabalpur from Shahdol to fly to Delhi," Singh said before the news was confirmed.

Singh recounted that recently his family in Shahdol had talked to General Rawat and wife Madhulika over the phone and the couple had promised to visit there in the new year. Madhulika, who was an alumna of Gwalior's prestigious Scindia Kanya Vidyalaya, had last visited Sohagpur in 2012.

Vaccination must to protect against third wave of corona: Chief Minister

- State government is working at two levels to protect against the third wave
- CM Chouhan holds talks with media representatives in Smart Udyan



Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that vaccination is the most important step in facing the possible third wave of Corona. Today, a big campaign for vaccination is going on in the state. The second dose of Corona vaccination has been given to 71 percent of the eligible population of the state, 94 percent of the population has been given the first dose. All the remaining eligible persons will have to come forward for vaccina-

tion. It is the responsibility of every person to motivate his acquaintances and family members for vaccination. Chouhan was discussing with media representatives after planting saplings in Smart Udyan.

Chief Minister said that awareness campaign has been launched in the state to apply masks, maintain social distancing and avoid

unnecessary crowds. Chouhan said that all arrangements in hospitals like oxygen plants, oxygen lines, oxygen beds etc. have been tested by through mock drills. Other arrangements like equipment, medicines, ventilators, concentrators, Covid care centers etc. are being kept ready. All in-charge ministers are personally visiting

and overseeing the arrangements of the hospitals in the districts of their respective charge. We are making sure that we are fully prepared to face the third wave of Corona infection.

Chouhan said that the state government is working at two levels. The first attempt is to ensure that the infection does not spread. Efforts are on to make necessary arrangements, take precautions, and follow the Corona guideline with the cooperation of the public. Crisis Management Groups have become active in the state. The Panchayat, Block and District Crisis Management Groups will stand with the administration. The state government is trying to improve all the arrangements. It is our endeavour to ensure that there is no wave at all and if at all there is some impact, the state government should be in a position to tackle it.

CM inspected the vaccination centre

- Chouhan interacted with citizens and advised them to get the vaccine
- Both doses of the vaccine are necessary, the mega campaign will also run on 16 and 22 December

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that all citizens can get protection from Corona by getting both doses of the vaccine. Chouhan was inspecting the vaccination work in the Government Naval Shah High School campus located at Airport Road in Lalghati area of Bhopal on Wednesday during the Vaccination Maha Abhiyan. Chouhan also saw the arrangements for the vaccination centre being run in the school. Chief Minister interacted with the citizens who came to get vaccinated and informed them about the importance of vaccination. He also addressed the people present there. Collector Bhopal Avinash Lavania was present. Chouhan also interacted with Sangeeta Sahi, a resident of Data Colony, who had come to get the second dose of the vaccine and also posed for a picture together on her request.

Chouhan said that we all know that once again there is a stir in the world due to new variant of Corona. The possibility of a third wave is being told.



In the second wave, all of us have suffered many hardships, so the people of the state are requested to make all such efforts that the third wave do not come. Get both doses of the vaccine, so that there is no risk. Chief Minister said that vaccination is the only way for protection from any variant of corona. We all have to be prepared to face the third wave. This requires the use of face coverings or masks, social distancing and avoidance of crowds. Face mask is an effective remedy, it gives 90 percent protection. Scientists have also accepted this. Along with these precautions, the benefits of vaccination have to be taken. The Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made the vaccine available to the citizens free of cost. If both doses of the vaccine are taken, the risk of infection is minimized. Chouhan said

that as a result of public awareness in Madhya Pradesh, 94 percent people have taken the first dose and 71 percent people have got both doses. Entire eligible population has to get both doses. Those who have not got the second dose and if the infection spreads, they put themselves as well as neighbours and other people in danger. Therefore, those people who have not got the second dose, they should get it compulsorily. There will be very few people who have not even had the first dose. They should also get the first dose administered on priority. In Madhya Pradesh, after 8th December, on 16th and 22nd December also, vaccination will be done at various centres under the Vaccination Maha Abhiyan. Encourage each individual as well as everyone else to get the vaccine to better combat the infection. Chief Minister Chouhan said that none of us want that there should be any lockdown again, life should stop or business should come to a standstill, human life should be in danger. For this, every person should be sure to get both doses of the vaccine. Chouhan said that the state is ready to face any crisis. All necessary arrangements are being ensured in hospitals along with necessary beds, oxygen plants, concentrators and ventilators. All the arrangements in the hospitals are being looked after by the members of the Council of Ministers, members of the Crisis Management Committees, officials of voluntary organisations and the local administration in the districts.

Recovery will be done from those who damage public and private property: Narottam Mishra

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Government is preparing to take strict action against those who damage public and private property in Madhya Pradesh. Home, Law-Legislative and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Narottam Mishra has told that the state government is going to bring a new law. The draft of the law has been prepared. After the law is implemented, recovery will be made from those who cause damage to public and private property.

Mishra has informed that the legal draft prepared to compensate for the damage caused to property by miscreants will be brought before the next Cabinet meeting for approval. After the approval of the cabinet, it will be laid on the table of the assembly. After being passed



by the Vidhan Sabha, the Prevention of Damage to Public and Private Property and Recovery of Damage Bill, 2021 will come into force in the state. Mishra said that provision has also been made for the formation of Claims Tribunal in the prepared draft. This tribunal will determine the recovery of damage caused to properties by miscreants and the damage done during disturbance in normal

life. The amount fixed by the tribunal will be recovered from the agitators/protesters who cause damage. Mishra said that in this bill, the damage caused by acts like communal riots, strike, bandh, demonstration, march, procession, blocking of road traffic or any such damage caused by a person or group of persons, will be determined by the Claims Tribunal. The Tribunal shall have all the powers of a civil court. Apart from recovery of amount, criminal case can be registered separately.

Mishra said that in case of damage to public property, a petition would be submitted by the District Magistrate or the government officer in charge of that property and in case of private property, the petition would be submitted by the owner of the property.

I-T raids at Sagar Group premises in Bhopal, Indore

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Income Tax (I-T) department on Wednesday conducted raids at several locations of Sagar Group in Bhopal and Indore.

Sagar Group is a giant real estate group, which also runs educational institutions and factories in Madhya Pradesh.

I-T officials reached Sagar Group owner Sanjeev Agrawal's office in Bhopal's MP Nagar area and a heavy police force was deployed outside. Raids are being conducted at over a half dozen premises in Bhopal and Indore for an alleged tax evasion, sources in the I-T department told IANS. The entry gates of Agrawal's residence and office have been closed since early morning. The group has been involved in real estate business for around two decades in different parts of the state and for the last few years it has also established schools and universities such as Sagar Public School and Sage University both



located in Bhopal. Apart from these, the group also runs two factories in Raissen district.

Sanjeev Agrawal, owner of the Sagar Group has often been seen sharing stages with big politicians from both the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress in Madhya Pradesh. Earlier in 2011, the Income Tax department had conducted raids on the office premises, construction sites and residences of the top officials of the Group in Bhopal for alleged tax evasion. Searches were conducted at ten locations of the Sagar Group across the state capital.

CM EXPRESSED GRIEF OVER THE DEATH OF KRISHNA CHOUHAN

Bhopal: Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has expressed grief over the untimely demise of service-oriented youth of Sehore district, Krishna Chouhan. Chief Minister Chouhan said that Krishna was an enthusiastic and energetic social worker of the Budhni area. Seeing anyone in trouble, he was ready to help him. Chief Minister has paid tributes by remembering the service works of Late Krishna Chouhan. The Chief Minister has prayed to God to grant peace to the departed soul and strength to his family members to bear the loss.

Chouhan chairs NVDA review meeting: Ensure third party evaluation of Narmada Valley projects: CM

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that third party evaluation of all the projects run under Narmada Valley Development Authority must be done. Work should be done by fixing the date line of all the projects to be completed by the year 2023. Also, make sure to start the work from now on the 17 projects which are to be started in 2023. It is necessary to educate and make farmers aware about irrigation with sprinkler and drip irrigation. With this, irrigation will be possible in more area than the water received by the state from Narmada Valley.

Chouhan was addressing the review meeting of Narmada Valley Development Authority in Mantralaya on Wednesday. Chief Secretary Iqbal Singh Bains, Additional Chief Secretary and Vice President Narmada Valley Development Authority ICP Kesari,



Additional Chief Secretary Finance Manoj Govil and other officers were present.

Chouhan said that elaborate security arrangements should be ensured during the work of Sleemanabad channel of Bargi diversion project. Temporary displacement at the time of work should be done only after taking public into confidence and ensuring certain arrangements. The Chief Minister said that with the completion of the projects, irrigation facilities are being made available to the farmers. He directed that

farmers' conferences should be organized with the aim of creating awareness among farmers and developing their sense of duty for charging irrigation charges.

Chouhan said that a special group should be formed to encourage sprinkler and drip irrigation with the aim of irrigating maximum area with the water allotted to the state. He specifically asked to motivate the farmers to adopt drip irrigation and sprinkler in Malwa and Nimar region. It was informed that out of the projects to be completed in this financial year, Bhurlai, Kodwar and Punasa expansion projects of Khandwa district have been completed. Chhegaonmakan in Khandwa, Alirajpur in Alirajpur district and Bistan project of Khargone will be completed by the end of December. Irrigation facility will be available in 98 thousand 115 hectare area from these 6 projects built at a total cost of Rs 1835 crore.

CM Chouhan planted saplings with Dream Bhopal Green Bhopal Foundation

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan planted saplings of Karanj and Gulmohar in Smart Garden today. Sparsh Dwivedi and Sushri Deepa Soni of Dream Bhopal Green Bhopal Social and Environment Welfare Foundation were present during the plantation. Chouhan is also encouraging community participation in environmental protection activities by planting saplings every day as part of his resolve.

Foundation aims to make Bhopal the greenest and cleanest capital of India. To achieve this objective, more than 14 thousand saplings have been planted by the organisation in the last 2 years, which play an important role in keeping the environment clean. The organisation has also planted more than 6 thousand trees for the mini forest near the airport with the help of the Municipal Corporation. The organisation is also the Swachhata Brand Ambassador of Municipal



Corporation Bhopal for the last two years.

The organisation worked with the district disaster management team during the Corona period, in which food packets were provided to more than 15 thousand migrant labourers and needy persons and ration to 2 thousand families. The organisation has also cooperated with the District Crisis Management Committee in providing plasma and blood at the earliest.

A sapling was presented to Chief Minister Chouhan by Deepa Soni on behalf of the organization. The Karanj plant planted today is considered important in Ayurvedic medicine. Karanj plant is also used in religious works. Gulmohar is one of the most beautiful trees in the world. Flowers blooming in large clusters between the leaves give a distinct attraction to the tree. In summer Gulmohar trees are laden with flowers instead of leaves. It is also rich in medicinal properties.

MP govt to introduce new guidelines for film shooting soon

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh government has prepared a new set of guidelines for films and web-series shooting in the state, which is likely to be come into effect from January 2022.

Sources said that under the new guidelines, the film makers or the production houses will have to take prior permission from the state government, at the same time they would need to take permission from the district administration before the start of shooting at a particular location.

"New guidelines have been framed taking into account various factors, including religious sentiments, more opportunity to local artists etc and it would be announced soon after getting approval from the home department," said an official in tourism department on Wednesday. The new guide-

lines have been prepared by the tourism department of the state government. "As the subject (film shooting) involves state's multiple departments - tourism, home and revenue, it would be implemented soon after getting consent from all departments," an official privy to the development told IANS.

State Home Minister Narottam Mishra had told the media on Tuesday that new guidelines will come into effect soon in Madhya Pradesh. "Production houses will have to take prior permission of district collector of the respective location before shooting begins," Mishra said on Tuesday. The need of new set of guidelines for films and webseries shooting arose in October this year after Bollywood director Prakash Jha's popular webseries - 'Ashram 3' starring actor Bobby Deol, landed in a controversy in Bhopal. A group of right-wing - Bajrang Dal had

then vandalised the set and had attacked its crew members and director Prakash Jha.

Right-wing workers had raised objection to the title of the webseries - Ashram, saying it hurts the sentiments of the Hindu community. However, the shooting continued in Bhopal and in other adjoining areas after Jha agreed to change its title. Then, Mishra had said that the government will prepare a new set of guidelines for films shooting in Madhya Pradesh. However, the right-wing workers protested again on Monday against the same during the opening ceremony of Khajuraho International Film Festival (KIFF).

State Tourism and Revenue Minister Govind Singh Rajput, who participated in KIFF on Tuesday said that the Madhya Pradesh government will provide subsidy to only those films in which 70 per cent artists are from the state.



EDITOR'S SPECS

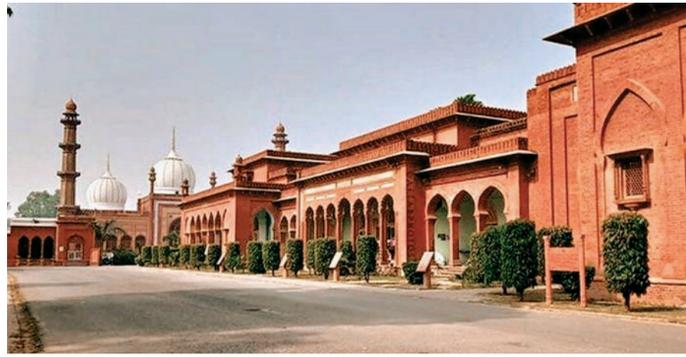
**NIRA MAY GET CONCRETE PLATFORM**

The Ministry of Jal Shakti is likely to make official announcements of National Interlinking of Rivers Authority (NIRA) and Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) for the Ken Betwa interlinking project. The sub-committee for restructuring of the National Water Development Agency (NWDA) had last year suggested the formation of a NIRA like set up. After all, NWDA is an agency and with restructuring, an 'Authority' with powers is envisaged. The NWDA would be subsumed in NIRA. We have moved the cabinet note from our side," confirmed a senior official of the Ministry of Jal Shakti. NIRA would be an overarching body, autonomous in functions for planning and would act as the nodal body for the projects related to interlinking of rivers across the country. Implementation of the interlinking of rivers projects is happening with funding at the ratio of 90:10 (Centre: State). NIRA would be responsible for looking after and procuring finance from central and state governments, multi-lateral financial institutions such as World Bank, ADB, JICA, BRICS bank etc. As announced earlier, there would be a special purpose vehicle (SPV) for each of the interlinking projects. When asked if the SPV would be announced even before the project gets all the statutory clearances, the official said, "We are parallelly working on it too." Mired in controversy for years, the Ken Betwa interlinking of rivers has still not received three major clearances. The environmental clearance was challenged and is pending at the National Green Tribunal (NGT). The stage II (final) Forest Clearance and subsequent state approval, in this case from the Madhya Pradesh government, is pending.

# IS IT THE TIME FOR INTROSPECTION FOR MUSLIMS?

Vinod Kumar Shukla

Dissenting voices and demand for reform in certain Islamic practices are global phenomena but such voices emanating from within the community are certainly new in India that are gaining ground now. India, which has over 10,000-year-old civilizational history, has been critically evaluating, evolving and reforming its society. But Muslims with their 73 sects denied any reform rather opposed them with Shah Bano case being the most important one opposed by the community. But now people belonging to the Islamic faith too are resorting to the same path of correcting such practices that don't suit the changing time. If they are not allowed to do so, they are keeping themselves away from the faith as such obviously silently due to fear of being decimated. Testimony to the fact is a Pew Research Centre survey released earlier this year that says 6 per cent of Indian Muslims described themselves as not believing in God, more than any other religious community. A trip down over three decades in the history, the voice of Arif Mohammad Khan was throttled if not silenced when he took up the case of alimony to Shah Bano by resigning from Rajiv Gandhi government in 1986. But he gave courage to many in the community to raise their voices in the days to come. And with the passage of time several voices like Arif M Khan emerged from the community and they are fearlessly campaigning for reforms. A woman activist Zakia Soman was constantly fighting against Triple Talaq and Halala till the government passed a law against it. Another activist Shayara Bano had filed a Writ Petition in the Supreme Court asking it to hold three practices - talaq-e-biddat, polygamy, nikah-halala - unconstitutional as they violate Articles 14, 15, 21, 25 of the Constitution. Social activist Amber Zaidi has campaigned against Triple Talaq and toured across the country to awaken Muslim women against Triple Talaq, Halala, UCC and Population Control among Muslims. She has filed cases on the necessity of Uniform Civil Code and Population Law in the country in the Delhi High Court and Supreme Court, respectively. She has become a voice of reform in the Islamic practices from within the community facing the ire of radicals. She is abused, threatened and harassed by no-changers in the community. Lucknow-based



Shaista Amber has formed All India Muslim Women Personal Law Board challenging the dominance of male in the matters related to the community. But there is a section of people that openly challenges radicals who, for them, misguide people of the community against anything being Indian and talk about cultural identity of Muslims with India rather than by identifying them with invaders like rulers during Delhi Sultanat or Mughals. People like Lucknow-based Syed Rizwan Ahmed, UK-based Arif Aazakia, Pakistan-based Hasan Nisar, Arzoo Kazmi and Tarek Fateh question the behaviour of Muslims of Indian subcontinent. Taslima Nasreen was so vocal against radicalism in the community she belongs to that she had to flee Bangladesh and had to take asylum first in Europe and then in India. But despite all the threat, intimidation and abuses, she did not compromise on her conviction. All these people are fighting for change at the peril of being killed. Actually, many leaders in the past too questioned radical Islamic practices and questioned its practices being all-encompassing. The concept of brotherhood of Islam is not universal as per Dr B R Ambedkar: "The brotherhood of Islam is not the universal brotherhood of man. It is brotherhood of Muslims for Muslims only. There is a fraternity, but its benefit is confined to those within that corporation. For those who are outside the corporation, there is nothing but contempt and enmity." This is clear from the fact that all the 73 sects of Islam are at loggerheads with each other so much so that Ahmadias are no more Muslims and Shias are Kafirs for

other sects. The kind of cold response they received from the community in India shaken their faith when Shia mosques were bombed in Afghanistan on every Friday but none from the community come out against these attacks. On the contrary, there were nationwide protests against attacks in Palestine. Allegedly the un-accommodative nature of the community is driving many away from the community and ex-Muslim movement is gradually becoming a mass movement due to various behavioural issues. The growing tribe of ex-Muslims in India who are shy of coming out in public but articulate their anxieties and concerns through social media platforms, including Facebook, YouTube, Reddit and Instagram. In India, it has a historical perspective as the community wants to behave like the medieval ruling class in the country but plays the card of being poor and victimhood in juxtaposition. They claim that Muslim rulers built Red Forts, Taj Mahal, Qutub Minar and many other such monuments but wants Sacchar Commission report to be implemented including unconstitutionality demand for religious reservation and Sharia laws. Recently All India Muslim Personal Law Board has gone to the extent of demanding blasphemy law while opposing UCC in India. The fairer tribe of the community has been at the receiving end maximum due to archaic practice in the community from which they want respite in some cases and freedom from certain others. Taslima Nasreen was forced out of Kolkata and attacked in Hyderabad by radi-

cal elements. The most interesting thing is that people try to justify their act by quoting the constitution. Disenchantment is such that daughter of Indonesia's founding father and first president Sukmawati Sukarnoputri converted from Islam to Hinduism on October 26, 2021 with her followers. Another such disenchanting person was Syed Waseem Rizvi, former Shia Waqf Board chief, who was taking up issues of Ram Temple by filing petition in SC that Mir Baqi was Shia, so only Shia can make any claim over disputed structure in Ayodhya, he demanded that around a dozen Hindu temples demolished to replace with mosques should be handed over to Hindus, he was speaking against terrorism and wrote a book on Mohammad Saheb. He claims that his life is under threat for speaking the truth but he is not ready to take things lying down. But when he did not find any answer, he converted to Hinduism who was already rejected from Islam as he says. Waseem Rizvi became Jitendra Narayan Singh Tyagi on December 6, 2021. But unlike the past when people were not ready to speak against wrong or humiliating practices, they are now accepting it with mass support. The practice of Meharum was also done away with by the Central government with such an ease which clearly indicates people accepting these reforms. But what is really driving people away from the faith is threat, violent behaviour and radicalism. There is also a feeling among Muslims that despite Hindus literally pampering them for long, they remained rude to them and did not miss any opportunity to hurt sentiments of people in general and humiliate them. So, the action taken by Jitendra Tyagi is the manifestation of cumulative anger against such behaviour from ages. There are innumerable such people waiting for this to happen as people have been asking Jitendra Tyagi, how to convert? Let's see how the Muslim community responds to such things as people are not ready to listen Muslim scholar on their face value with their stereotype.

(The author is freelance journalist, based at Delhi. The views expressed are personal.)

## international

### 'TRAFFIC LIGHT' SHINES AS SCHOLZ SET TO TAKE OVER AS GERMAN CHANCELLOR



Berlin | Agencies Germany has got a new leader after a decade and a half with SPD leader Olaf Scholz on Wednesday getting confirmed as the new Chancellor, bringing to an end to the Angela Merkel era. Scholz, 63, who will

helm the three-party "traffic light" coalition - so named due to the colours of the constituent parties - SPD (red), Free Democrats (yellow), and the Greens - received 395 votes to 303 in the Bundestag and was subsequently given a standing ovation, the BBC reported. He was then formally

appointed as the ninth Federal Chancellor by President Frank-Walter Steinmeier. The elevation of Scholz, who was Vice Chancellor in the Merkel dispensation, brings curtains down on Merkel's 31-year political career. His 16-strong to include as many women as men.

### S KOREA'S TOP DIPLOMAT TO ATTEND G-7 MINISTERIAL TALKS IN BRITAIN

Seoul: South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong will visit Britain this weekend to attend a meeting of foreign and development ministers from the Group of Seven (G-7) industrialised countries, his ministry said on Wednesday.



The two-day session to open in Liverpool on Saturday is meant for discussions on a range of global issues, including ways for fair access to Covid-19 vaccines and cooperation on global supply chains as well as economy and security in the Indo-Pacific region and gender equality, according to the ministry. Although South Korea is not a member of the G-7, it has been invited as a guest along with Australia, India, South Africa and members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Britain holds the rotating presidency of the G-7 sessions this year, Yonhap news agency reported. He plans to have bilateral talks with some of his counterparts from other major countries on the sidelines of the gathering. Drawing keen attention is whether he will meet bilaterally with Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi, who took office last month, amid protracted stand-offs between the neighboring nations over shared history, especially Japan's brutal colonisation of

### Palestine hails opposition to Israeli settlement project in East Jerusalem

Ramallah | Agencies

Palestine hailed the international community's opposition to the reconstruction of 9,000 units in Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem. The position of the international community "is a practical step in the right direction," Palestinian Foreign Ministry said in a press statement, adding that "more steps are needed to achieve the goal of stopping the Israeli settlements."

The statement called on the international community "to exert more efforts to prepare the atmosphere for launching a real peace process in the Middle East based on international peace references and UN resolutions," Xinhua news agency reported. It also urged the US to take "practical steps," mainly reopening the American consulate to run the Palestinians affairs in East Jerusalem.



On Tuesday, Israeli media reported that the planning and construction committee in the Israeli municipality of Jerusalem postponed a project to build more than 9,000 new housing units on the lands of the (Atarot/Qalandia) Airport. The reports said that the postponement came after the planning committee requested a survey to determine the plan's environmental impact, a process likely to take months or longer. It added that the plan presented last month outraged the administration of US

President Joe Biden, and was originally opposed by other countries that support the two-state solution. The Palestinian foreign ministry warned against "Israel's misleading campaigns regarding its settlement projects in general, especially since the committee postponed the approval of the settlement project and did not cancel it." Israel occupied the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which are claimed by the Palestinians, in the 1967 Middle East war and has controlled them ever since. According to Israeli and Palestinian estimates, about 650,000 Israeli settlers live in 164 settlements and 124 outposts in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Israel's settlement expansion has been the thorniest issue in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and one of the major reasons behind the stalemate in the peace negotiations between the two sides since 2014.

### IRANIAN OFFICIAL SLAMS NEW US SANCTIONS AMID NUCLEAR TALKS

Tehran: An Iranian official slammed fresh sanctions imposed by the US on Iranian governmental agencies and officials. "Even amid #ViennaTalks, the US cannot stop imposing sanctions against Iran," Saeed Khatibzadeh, spokesperson for Iran's Foreign Ministry, wrote on his personal Twitter account on Tuesday night, reported Xinhua news agency. Earlier on Tuesday, the US Treasury Department announced it was freezing assets and banning US nationals from engaging in business with agencies and individuals from several countries, on grounds of alleged "repression and undermining of democracy." Among those sanctioned by Washington are the special units of Iran's police, including its counter-terrorism force, two state prisons, and a number of officials and military commanders. In his reaction, the foreign ministry spokesman wrote that the US "fails to understand that 'maximum failure' and a diplomatic breakthrough are mutually exclusive." The new sanctions, Khatibzadeh added, will not strengthen Washington's negotiating position in the process of reviving the 2015 nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The Vienna talks, which restarted on November 29 to revive JCPOA after a months-long hiatus, are scheduled to continue on Thursday.

### Palestinian PM says Algeria's grant to help allviate financial crisis

Ramallah | Agencies

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Ishtaye has said that Algeria's grant of \$100 million to support the Palestinian Authority's budget will help ease the financial crisis it is going through. In a press statement sent to Xinhua, Ishtaye on Tuesday said that Algeria's support will alleviate the financial crisis that the Palestinian treasury suffers from Israel's illegal withholding of the tax revenue dues and the sharp decline in international donations. He expressed his gratitude to Algeria's President, government, and people for providing financial support and granting scholarships to Palestinian students in Algerian univer-



sities. "We are confident that the Palestinian cause will be a top priority for the upcoming Arab summit in Algeria,

which is keen on Palestine and its unity," said Ishtaye. Ishtaye called on the Arab countries to provide financial and political support, which the Palestinian people and the authority need to overcome the current difficult situation. At a joint press conference with visiting Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Monday, Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune said that Algeria decided to grant Palestine a financial contribution of \$100 million. Tebboune said that Algeria will soon host an inclusive meeting for all Palestinian factions. The Palestinian factions expressed their welcome to Tebboune's initiative for achieving internal Palestinian unity and ending the political and geographical division.

### COUPLE SENTENCED TO 30-YR PRISON FOR STARVING DAUGHTER TO DEATH

Seoul: An appellate court on Wednesday upheld a lower court's 30-year prison sentences for a couple in their 20s convicted of abusing and starving their 8-year-old daughter to death.

The third-year elementary school child died at their home in Incheon, west of Seoul, in early March after suffering nearly three years of maltreatment and violence by her biological mother and stepfather, 28 and 27 years old, respectively.

The case became known after the couple called for emergency help, saying their child was not breathing, Yonhap news agency reported. Rescuers dispatched to the scene found the child dead with many bruises on her body. Her weight was only 13 kg, nearly 10 kg less than those of her peers. Investigations revealed that the couple subjected her to severe physical punishment on 35 occasions since early 2018 for reasons like lies or eating food secretly. Since August last year, the child had been given only bowls of rice without any side dishes, or sometimes nothing to eat or drink the whole day. Two days ahead of her death, the child was given a cold shower and left in an unheated bathroom naked for two hours because "she urinated with her clothes on," according to the investigations.

The stepfather saw the girl fainting there but turned a blind eye. "It's hard to say there were justifiable purposes for education in their behavior, nor were the methods appropriate," the court said. The couple had insisted in the previous ruling they did not "deliberately" kill the child. The couple got married in 2017. The mother had the girl and another boy from her previous marriage.



10 NEW OMICRON CASES REPORTED, SEVERAL OTHERS SUSPECTED

Another 65 swab samples have been sent for genome sequencing, Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope said.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

At least 10 people were found positive for the new Omicron variant in Maharashtra on Wednesday, said Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope.



reported in Maharashtra today. About 65 swabs have been sent for genome sequencing, their reports awaited.

Navy secures entire Indian Ocean Region: President Kovind

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Paying tributes to the Indian Navy, President Ram Nath Kovind on Wednesday said it is now looked upon by the country's maritime neighbours as "a preferred security partner in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)".



Vessel Squadron", here, in the presence of Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari and Chief of Naval Staff Admiral R Hari Kumar. The President said that the timing of this honour could not have been more befitting as the nation is celebrating "Swarnim Vijay Varsha", and served as a testimony to the exceptional services rendered to the nation by the past and present officers and sailors of this squadron in its five-decades long journey.

Python saw the sinking of Pakistan naval ships on the western seaboard and the Indian Navy managed to strike a lethal blow to the enemy power. Similarly, on 8th December, 50 years ago, the killer Squadron ships set ablaze the Karachi harbour, crippling the enemy morale, enforced a blockade on Karachi and achieved total sea control, though these ships were acquired primarily for shore defence, but became the most potent offensive strike force.

The much decorated and honoured Killer Squadron evolved over the years with the induction of the Veer and Prabal class of ships, the latter being built in India.

"I look at this commitment of the Indian Navy as a tribute to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj who is regarded by many historians as the founder of India's battle-ready naval force in the 17th century," said President Kovind.

The Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces also noted how the Indian Navy has rendered assistance to people during humanitarian crises or natural calamities within the country and beyond, like the repatriation of Indians during the Covid-19 pandemic from different countries or the rescue operations during the week-long havoc wreaked by Cyclone Taukte in May 2021.

WOMEN'S COMMISSION SEEKS REPORT ON BJP LEADER'S REMARK ABOUT MUMBAI MAYOR

Maharashtra state commission for women's chairperson said "insulting" comments made about women by responsible public representatives "will not be tolerated".



taken a "serious" note of the comment and asked the Mumbai police chief to submit a factual report in this connection, Ms Chakankar tweeted on Monday night. In her letter to the police commissioner, Ms Chakankar claimed, "Shelar's comment 'the Mumbai Mayor visited (those injured in the blast) after 72 hours of the incident, where were you (the mayor) sleeping for these many hours?' is being broadcast in the news media." "So, a factual report should be submitted in this connection as per section 12(2) and 12(3) of the Commission for Women Act, 1993," she said. Three members of a family died after a gas cylinder exploded in their home in a chawl in Worli area of central Mumbai.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Maharashtra State Commission for Women has asked the Mumbai police commissioner to submit a factual report about an alleged objectionable remark passed by BJP leader Ashish Shelar about mayor Kishori Pednekar in connection with the recent cylinder blast in Worli. Taking to Twitter, the Commission's chairperson Rupali Chakankar said "insulting" comments made about women by responsible public representatives "will not be tolerated". The Commission has, therefore,

Recovering economy not immune to global spillovers: RBI gov

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Reserve Bank's Governor Shaktikanta Das on Wednesday said that India's economy is on the path of recovery. In a virtual address post the monetary policy meet, RBI Governor Das said that the Indian economy is relatively well-positioned on the path of recovery. "But it cannot be immune to global spillovers or to possible surges of infections from new mutations including the Omicron variant." Hence, fortifying our macroeconomic fundamentals, making our financial markets and institutions resilient and sound, and putting in place credible and consistent policies will assume the highest priority in these uncertain times," he said. Globally, he said economies are opening up and activity levels are reaching pre-pandemic levels.



"At the same time, the recurrence of Covid-19 waves in many parts of the world including the appearance of the Omicron variant, stubborn inflation and headwinds from continuing supply bottlenecks cast a shadow on the outlook." "Given the evolving growth-inflation dynamics across countries, monetary policy is also reaching an inflection point, keeping financial markets dgy. Besides, Das said that given the slack in the economy and the ongoing catching-up of activity, especially of private consumption, which is still below its pre-pandemic levels, continued policy support is warranted for a durable and broad-based recovery. On Wednesday, the MPC of the central bank voted to maintain the repo rate, or short-term lending rate, for commercial banks at 4 per cent.

The reverse repo rate was also kept at 3.35 per cent, and the standing facility (MSF) rate and the 'Bank Rate' at 4.25 per cent.

RS 35 CR RACKET OF FAKE INPUT TAX CREDIT BUSTED IN MUMBAI

Mumbai: Continuing its drive against tax evasion, the CGST Mumbai Central Commissionerate has busted a racket of generating fake Input Tax Credit (ITC) notes worth Rs 35 crore and nabbed the kingpin of the scam, an official said here on Wednesday.

The CGST said that as per investigations, the accused has generated the fake ITCs and passed them to more than 15 companies in and around Mumbai.

The accused -- who has been remanded to judicial custody for 14 days -- was receiving the fake ITC and passing it in the downward supply chain without any actual receipt or supply of goods.

The latest case is part of the series detected by the CGST sleuths Mumbai in the past three months with several arrears.

Till date, the CGST special campaigns have helped unearth more than 50 networks of tax evaders and confirmed tax evasion of a staggering Rs 3,000 crore.

Of this amount Rs 400 crore has been recovered and the CGST has nabbed around 24 persons so far as part of the special drive, said the official. As part of the ongoing cleansing drive, the CGST plans to carry out intensive data mining and data analytics along with specific intelligence from various sources to nab the culprits engaged in tax evasion through such fraudulent means, and causing loss to the nation.

Post bail formalities, Sudha Bharadwaj to walk out of jail soon

Team Absolute | Mumbai

After the Supreme Court rejected the NIA's plea against the Bombay High Court's December 1 verdict granting default bail to lawyer-activist Sudha Bharadwaj, the route was clear for her release from the prison as soon as the bail formalities are completed.

A Special NIA Court said on Wednesday that Bharadwaj, who was granted default bail last week in the Koregaon Bhima-Elgar Parishad case, can be released from jail on furnishing the surety of Rs 50,000.

The Special Court also allowed her to submit a cash surety, paving the way for her release either later today or tomorrow from the Byculla Women's Jail, after spending over three years in custody.

As per the high court directions, Special NIA Judge D. E Kothalikar also set the



terms and conditions for the bail, including that she must reside in Mumbai, not to leave the city without the court's permission.

Her plea to travel to Chhattisgarh, or Delhi was rejected by the court which also barred her talking to the media about the case, attend proceedings of the trial and ensure it is not delayed due to her absence. Bharadwaj was arrested by Pune Police

on August 28, 2018 in connection with the Koregaon Bhima-Elgar Parishad cases and slapped with charges of the stringent UAPA. Later, the NIA took over the case probe in January 2020.

The investigators claimed in the chargesheet that documents found from some of the co-accused and other evidence established her links with Naxal activities and the banned CPI (Maoist).

Maharashtra govt planning police housing schemes: Shinde

Shinde, along with state Housing Minister Jitendra Awhad, handed two-wheelers and four-wheelers to the Thane Police at a function on Tuesday

Awhad, handed two-wheelers and four-wheelers to the Thane Police at a function on Tuesday, which he said will improve the policing efficiency against crime.

These vehicles were funded by the Thane district Planning Funds. "The state government is devising various schemes in collaboration with CIDCO for providing housing and quarters for police personnel. Their housing issues need to be addressed even after they retire from service," the Urban Development and PWD Minister said.

Shinde said more police stations will come up in Thane. On this occasion, the kin of the policemen who lost their lives due to COVID-19 was awarded the letters of appointment in the police force.

Thane | Agencies

The Maharashtra government, along with CIDCO, is planning various schemes for building houses and residential quarters for police personnel, state minister Eknath Shinde said while underlining the need to address the housing problems faced by policemen even after they retire from service.

Shinde, along with state Housing Minister Jitendra

'Maharashtra govt should not test the patience of farmers': BJP BJP MLC Padalkar makes an appeal to farmers to get compensation from the government.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

BJP leader Gopichand Padalkar has launched a scathing attack on the Maharashtra Government for 'repeatedly ignoring' plight of farmers from the state. "Delay in the first monsoon, delayed the sowing season, storm damaged kharif crop, the soybean stalks were carried away due to the wet drought, those whose crops were harvested, rotted in the water.



said, "The entire kharif season of the farmers was wasted. The money reserved by the farmers was used for

the rabbi. It seems that the government of the incumbents has decided to ruin everything. "Recovering exorbitant electricity bills, when they need electricity at the time of harvesting and threshing, cutting off electricity connection. The government is behaving like Nizams," Padalkar said.

"There are many errors and irregularities in giving electricity bills to those who do not have pumps. Also, sending two to four years backdated bills." Numerous farmers have come forward with evidence to expose the mismanagement of electricity. This government should not test the patience of farmers," Padalkar said.

Padalkar has also made an appeal to the farmers. He says, "You should do the Panchnama of the loss due to disconnection of electricity during the harvest season, hand it over to the Tehsildar in your area and get the acknowledgment."

Daughter of BJP leader Harshvardhan Patil to marry Bal Thackeray's grandson

Ankita Patil, daughter of BJP leader Harshvardhan Patil, is all set to marry late Bal Thackeray's grandson Nihar at a hotel in Mumbai on December 28.



Indian Sugar Mills Association. Her father, Harshvardhan Patil, quit the Indian National Congress in 2019 after a long association with the party and then joined the BJP. Nihar Thackeray is the grandson of Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray and the son of late Bindumadhav Thackeray who died in an accident in 1996. Nephew of Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, Nihar works as an advocate in Mumbai. On Tuesday, BJP leader Harshvardhan Patil personally invited Raj Thackeray, leader of Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, for the wedding.

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Ankita Patil, daughter of BJP leader and former Maharashtra cabinet minister Harshvardhan Patil, is all set to marry late Bal Thackeray's grandson Nihar in the presence of a select few at a hotel in Mumbai on December 28. Ankita Patil is currently a member of the Pune Zilla Parishad from the Congress party and also holds the post of director of the

OVER 650 OBC SEATS AT STAKE: MAHARASHTRA GOVT LIKELY TO SUGGEST POSTPONING OF CIVIC POLLS

The demand for postponing the polls has been made by parties like the Congress and the NCP, after the Supreme Court stayed OBC reservation in Maharashtra local body elections..

Pune | Agencies

The Maharashtra cabinet in all likelihood will suggest postponing of elections to 23 municipal corporations in the state during its weekly meeting on Wednesday, said sources. Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, who underwent a surgery last month, is likely to preside over the meeting.

The demand for postponing the polls has been made by parties like the Congress and the NCP, after the Supreme Court stayed OBC reservation in Maharashtra local body elections. "Our party has already conveyed to the state government that polls for all municipal corporations be stayed till there is a finality to the OBC quota issue," state Congress spokesperson Gopal Tiwari said. "The state cabinet may suggest to the State Election Commission (SEC) to postpone

civic elections that are slated to be held next year," he added. On Tuesday, the SEC stayed elections in seats reserved under the OBC quota. The elections to 344 of the 1,802 nagar panchayat seats and 23 of the 105 seats in Bhandara and Gondial Zilla Parishads, which were to go to the polls on December 21, have been stayed. Maharashtra has 27 municipal corporations. Of these, as many as 23 municipal corporations with over 650 OBC seats were slated to go to the polls next year. The process of holding the elections has already been started by the SEC. The civic bodies are also in the process of sub-



mitting the draft ward limitation plan to the SEC. The SEC has already announced that each ward will elect three corporators. Following the Supreme Court order, NCP leader and state Health Minister Rajesh Tope in a letter to the Maharashtra government said, "Till there is a final decision on the OBC quota, all civic elections in the state should be stayed." The health

Patil said, "Not holding elections to OBC seats and conducting the polls for other seats will be inappropriate. Instead, all elections should be stayed till the OBC quota issue is resolved."

Senior NCP leader Chagga Bhujujal, who is a minister in the Maha Vikas Aghadi government, said: "The OBCs comprise 54 per cent of the state population. Not having their representatives in local self-government bodies will be an injustice." The Congress suggested that till there is a final outcome to the OBC quota issue in the Supreme Court, all political parties should provide 27 per cent reservation on their own during ticket distribution. "The BJP is playing politics over the issue. Instead of further rubbing salt into the wounds of the OBC community, it should reserve 27 per cent seats for the OBCs while preparing its candidate list and allow them to contest from general wards. All parties should follow a similar pattern and it will ensure justice to the OBC community," Tiwari said. NCP MP Supriya Sule said, "The Centre has in its possession the empirical data required for OBC reservation. If a discussion is held in Parliament on this issue, we can get some sort of solution. The government can also come up with ordinances for Maratha, OBC and Dhanger

minister added that "If we go as per the previously declared election schedule and reservation, it will not be right. Democracy will be in peril. Therefore, a new election schedule should be announced." Echoing similar sentiments, state BJP chief Chandrakant



# Monica Barbaro to star in 'At Midnight'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Actress Monica Barbaro has been cast opposite Mexican star Diego Boneta as the female-lead in the film 'At Midnight', one of Paramount Plus' banner upcoming Latin American originals. Set to start production shortly for a 2022 release on Paramount Plus, the romantic comedy turns on two people who have made the "safe" choice not to fall in love -- until fate throws them together.

In 'At Midnight', Barbaro will play Jessica, an on-the-rise gorgeous movie star suffering an unreliable celebrity boyfriend; Boneta portrays Alejandro, whose predictable life is proceeding according to his well-thought-out plan, reports variety.com.

'At Midnight' looks set to be a Spanish/English-language movie, Boneta speaking in Spanish and Barbaro in English.

'Dating & New York' director Jonah Feingold is set to direct from a screenplay based on an original idea by Giovanni Porta and written by Porta, Maria Hinojos, and Feingold.

Boneta's production company Three Amigos is producing along with Automatik, Teorema and COLOURSCMX. Full production details were announced in October.

Barbaro will take a star turn as Phoenix, the only female fighter pilot, in the long-anticipated 'Top Gun: Maverick', one of the Paramount Pictures biggest plays for 2022 which will come to Paramount Plus 45 days after its theatrical premiere on May 27.

Breaking out playing a contestant on 2016's Season 2 of 'Unreal', Barbaro starred in 2017's 'Chicago Justice' and 2018's 'The Good Cop'.



# Rebel Wilson's management was opposed to weight loss plan

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Rebel Wilson has said that her management team were opposed to her losing weight because she had been so successful playing the "funny fat girl".

Wilson told 'BBC Breakfast': "I got a lot of pushback from my own team actually, here in Hollywood, when I said OK, I'm going to do this year of health, I feel like I'm really gonna physically transform and change my life."

"And they were like why? Why would you wanna do that? Because I was earning millions of dollars being the funny fat girl and being that person."

The actress used food as a way of "numbing emotions" and as a defense mechanism to hide her insecurity of not being a "natural performer", reports femalefirst.co.uk.

She said: "I knew deep down inside that some of the emotional eating behaviours I was doing was not healthy. Like I did not need a tub of ice cream every night. That was not, that was me kind of numbing emotions using food, which wasn't the healthiest thing."

"I think it was dealing with not being a natural performer, and having to perform every day. And that pressure and internal stress to be able to perform like that."

# SYLVESTER STALLONE SET TO STAR IN DRAMA SERIES 'KANSAS CITY'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Sylvester Stallone is moving into scripted television as he is set to star in the drama series 'Kansas City'.

The actor, whose film 'Rocky' won the Oscar for Best Picture in 1977, is in negotiations to star in and will be the executive producer of 'Kansas City', a series from Taylor Sheridan and Terence Winter for Paramount+, reports deadline.com.

It marks Stallone's first major lead television series, having guest starred on a number of classic shows such as 'Police Story' and 'Kojak' back in the 1970s and more recently in series such as 'This is Us'.

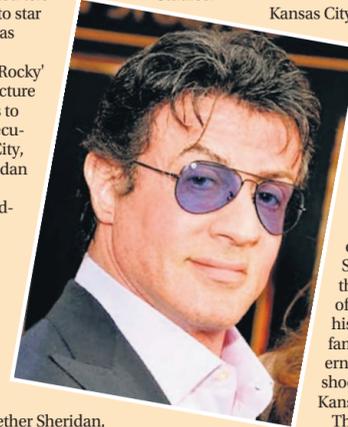
'Kansas City' brings together Sheridan, who is fast becoming one of the most significant television creators in the business with series such as 'Yellowstone', 'Mayor of Kingstown', '1883' and 'Winter', 'The Sopranos' writer and 'Boardwalk Empire' creator.

The series will be produced by 101 Studios, the company behind Sheridan's universe of series and MTV Entertainment Studios.

Kansas City follows a New York City

Italian mobster, played by Stallone, forced to relocate to the most unlikely of places -- Kansas City, Missouri. Set in present day, legendary mobster Sal is faced with the startling task of reestablishing his Italian mafia family to the modernised, straight-shooting town of Kansas City.

There, Sal encounters surprising and unsuspecting characters who follow him along his unconventional path to power.



# Ed Sheeran 'nearly killed' Sir Elton John

London | Agencies

Grammy winning-singer Ed Sheeran "almost killed" legendary English singer-songwriter Elton John while shooting their festive music video after he kicked a "big metal bell" and it came close to hitting his friend on the head.

Speaking to Apple Music's Zane Lowe about the track, Sheeran said: "We just shot a Christmas music video. Oh, mate. I almost killed him with a bell."

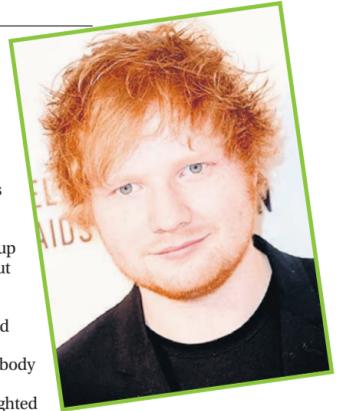
"On the video, there's footage of... I'm dressed up as sort of sexy Santa Claus and I kick a present, but the present had a big metal bell on top of it. I showed him the footage of it today, because we slowed it down and the bell flew past his head and would've cracked him in the head."

"Oh my God, the horror that went through my body when it was flying through the air."

Despite the incident, the 'Perfect' singer is delighted with the video.

He added: "But, man, the music video is wild. We've parodied all the great British music videos that came at Christmas."

Sheeran said he'd never expected to record a Christmas single at this stage of his career, but it "made sense" to team up with his friend and mentor.



# Chris Hemsworth trolls brother Liam

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood star Chris Hemsworth recently took to his Instagram account to playfully troll his younger brother and actor Liam Hemsworth.

The 'Thor' star shared a few black-and-white photos of him and 'The Hunger Games' actor grasping each other's hands and baring their biceps.

In the caption, the 38-year-old star first said: "Always great interacting with my fans." "Met this young lad recently, reminded me of my younger self. Not in looks, but just a real go getter attitude. He insisted on the resemblance and I assured him no one else has this look," the husband of Elsa Pataky added. "Was great to meet you Leon good luck in the future."

@liamhemsworth."

Many have since reacted to Hemsworth's comical post.

"Caption killed me ahaha," one fan commented, with another individual jokingly writing, "Notice he's copied your beard." A third then chimed in, "Well you and this Leon really look alike. I am afraid you might be brothers." Someone else, meanwhile, joined in the fun by noting, "Leon is a great Bloke too, not sure who does the better Australian accent though."

Aside from poking fun at his brother, Hemsworth also enjoyed making fun of his friends. When celebrating Chris Evans' 40th birthday back in June, the 'Extraction' leading man shared a tribute on Instagram by sharing a photo of him and 'Guardians of the Galaxy' star Chris Pratt.

# 'Money Heist', 'Power of the Dog' top Netflix global rankings

Los Angeles | Agencies

For nearly 190 million total viewing hours last week, Netflix audiences were singing 'Bella Ciao' after the fifth and final instalment of the Spanish drama series 'La Casa de Papel' popularly known as 'Money Heist' dropped December 3.

In just two days, 'Money Heist' took the top spot in Netflix's English language shows, rising to No. 1 on Netflix's Global top 10 list with far more total viewing hours than the week's top English-language show, 'Lost in Space', which logged 47.38 million hours for Season 3 during the week of November 29, reports variety.com.

'Money Heist', the twisty story of a bank robbery, features standout performances from Ursula Corbero, Alvaro Morte, Itziar Ituno, Pedro Alonso and Najwa Nimri, among other international talent.

Other non-English shows that have proven their staying power in Netflix's Global Top 10 include Korean dramas 'Squid Game' (21.2 million hours) and 'Hometown Cha-Cha-Cha' (11.56 million) which have held their ground on non-English language TV Top 10 list for 12 weeks and 14 weeks, respectively. A new addition to non-English Top 10 this week was the goofy anime series, 'Jajo's Bizzare Adventure: Stone Ocean', which landed at Number 8 in its first week with 13.98 million hours viewed.



Maddie Ziegler



## INDIA ANNOUNCE 18-MAN SQUAD FOR S AFRICA TESTS, ROHIT NAMED ODI CAPTAIN

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The Indian cricket team on Wednesday announced their 18-member squad for the upcoming 3-match Test series against South Africa starting from December 26.

The Test series will form a part of the new cycle of the ICC World Test Championship.

While Virat Kohli will lead the team, Rohit Sharma has been named as the new vice-captain of the Test team. However, under-pressure Ajinkya Rahane retained his place in the squad.

Meanwhile, the Chetan Sharma-led selection committee also announced Rohit Sharma will lead India's ODI & T20I teams going forward.

"The All-India Senior Selection Committee also decided to name Mr Rohit Sharma as the Captain of the ODI & T20I teams going forward," the BCCI said in a statement.

The statement also mentioned that Ravindra Jadeja, Shubman Gill, Axar Patel, Rahul Chahar were not available for selection due to



injuries and are currently undergoing rehabilitation.

India's Test squad: Virat Kohli (Captain), Rohit Sharma (vice-captain), KL Rahul, Mayank Agarwal, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Shreyas Iyer, Hanuma Vihari, Rishabh Pant (wk), Wriddhiman Saha (wk), R Ashwin, Jayant Yadav, Ishant Sharma, Mohd. Shami, Umesh Yadav, Jasprit Bumrah, Shardul Thakur, Md. Siraj.

Standby Players: Navdeep Saini, Saurabh Kumar, Deepak Chahar, Arzan Nagwaswala.

### Rohit Sharma to take over as full-time limited-overs skipper of India

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Wednesday announced that Rohit Sharma will take over from Virat Kohli as the captain of India's ODI team as well. Rohit was appointed as full-time T20I skipper after Kohli decided to step down from the role after India's T20 World Cup campaign. "The All-India Senior Selection Committee also decided to name Mr Rohit Sharma as the Captain of the ODI & T20I teams going forward," the BCCI said in a statement after announcing India's Test squad for the South Africa tour. Virat Kohli, who took over as India's limited-overs captain from MS Dhoni in 2017, led the team in 95 ODIs, winning 65 of them with a win percentage of 68. Kohli led India in the Champions Trophy and the 2019 World Cup but India lost in the final to Pakistan in the former tournament and were eliminated in the semi-final of the 50-over event.



## Women's Asian Champions Trophy Hockey

### India player tests Covid-positive, match vs Korea cancelled

Donghae | Agencies

A member of the Indian women's hockey team competing in the Women's Asian Champions Trophy 2021 here has tested Covid-19 positive, the Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) said on Wednesday.

AHF informed that due to the positive case, the match against South Korea, scheduled later on Wednesday, has been cancelled.

"The Asian Hockey Federation regrets to inform that a positive COVID test result has been received from yesterday's routine testing for a member of Team India. Today's match between Korea and India is therefore not taking place. Further information will be provided soon," said AHF on twitter.

However, the AHF did not shed light on whether the Indian team will pull out of the tournament or will play the remaining league games.

Earlier, India's match against Malaysia was cancelled as a Malaysian player,



Nurul Faezah Shafiqah Khalim, tested positive for COVID-19 on arrival in the country. After the impressive outing in the Olympics, the Indian women's team is play-

ing in its first tournament, but Covid-related issues are taking a toll on the event. There is speculation that the AHF might call off the tournament.

## Afghanistan to host Netherlands in three-match ODI series in Qatar

Kabul | Agencies

Afghanistan will host the Netherlands for a three-match ODI series in Qatar in January 2022, the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) confirmed on Wednesday.

The three ODIs will be a part of the ICC Cricket World Cup Super League (CWCSL), which counts towards qualification for the 2023 Men's cricket World Cup.

Afghanistan played three CWCSL matches earlier this year, against Ireland, sweeping the series. They currently have 30 points and sit at No 11 in the standings.

The Netherlands so far have 25 points from four games, after their away series against South Africa was called off late in November due to concerns surrounding the emergence of the Omicron variant of



Covid-19.

Notably, the top eight teams in the CWCSL will qualify automatically for the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023, with the remaining five teams taking part in a qualifying campaign.

The three matches will be held on January 21, 23 and 25 at the Asian Town Cricket Stadium in Doha, Qatar.

## DJOKOVIC'S NAME FIGURES IN MAIN DRAW ENTRY LIST FOR AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Melbourne: World No. 1 tennis player Novak Djokovic's name figures in the main draw entry list for the 2022 Australian Open, which commences here on January 17, though it is still not known whether the Serbian has taken the Covid-19 vaccine, a pre-requisite for competing in next year's first major.

Defending Australian Open champion Djokovic is among 104 male players on the entry list, released by Tennis Australia on Wednesday.

In a sign that he has perhaps got vaccinated, Djokovic has committed to playing in the ATP Cup in Sydney, a lead-up tournament. However, a Herald Sun report suggested on Wednesday that the Serbian could get medical exemption to compete in Melbourne.

But the Victorian government categorically denied Djokovic had been exempted, saying that unvaccinated players will not play at the Australian Open.

## Agarwal and Ashwin make big progress in ICC Rankings

Dubai | Agencies

Indian cricketers Mayank Agarwal and Ravichandran Ashwin made big progress in the updated ICC Rankings released on Wednesday.

While Agarwal is now ranked 11th in the Test batting rankings, Ashwin has retained his second place in the bowlers rankings and has moved a place to number three in all-rounders rankings. Apart from the duo, New Zealand's Mumbai-born spinner Ajaz Patel has made big gains after becoming just the third bowler to pick 10 wickets in a Test innings.

Agarwal's 'Player of the Match' efforts of 150 and 62



in the second Test against New Zealand at Mumbai has helped him gain 30 spots and reach 11th position in the latest weekly update to the men's rankings which is carried out on Wednesdays and includes all matches

ending on Tuesdays. He is now just one spot below a career-best 10th position that he first attained in November 2019. Ashwin, who was adjudged 'Player of the Series' for picking 14 wickets in two Tests against New

Zealand, has retained his second place in the rankings led by Australia captain Pat Cummins. Other players to move up in the rankings after the Mumbai Test are India opener Shubman Gill (up 21 places to 45th), fast bowler Mohammad Siraj (up four places to 41st) and New Zealand batter Daryl Mitchell (up 26 places to 78th). All-rounder Holder has gained one spot to reach 14th among bowlers in Wednesday's update, after Galle Test that Sri Lanka won by 164 runs to complete a 2-0 series victory. His captain Kraigg Brathwaite (up 10 places to 39th) and Nkrumah Bonner (up 17 places to 42nd) are the batters to move up for the West Indies.

## UEFA Champions League

### REAL MADRID SEAL GROUP LEADERSHIP AS ATLETICO BOOK PLACE IN LAST-16

Madrid | Agencies

Real Madrid beat Inter Milan 2-0, while Atletico Madrid's win in Portugal, coupled with Liverpool's triumph in Milan allowed Atletico to qualify for the knockout stage of the Champions League.

#### Leipzig clinch 2-1 win over Manchester City

Berlin: Leipzig sealed the third place in Group A and booked its berth for the Europa League after goals from Dominik Szoboszlai and Andre Silva helped the 'Red Bulls' edge Manchester City 2-1 in the final round of the Champions League's group stage. Both sides staged well-positioned defences from the kick-off hence goal-scoring opportunities were at a premium in the opening period on Tuesday night. The hosts showed a clinical chance conversion at the other end of the green, as Laimer's perfectly-timed through ball was sent to Szoboszlai, who rounded goalkeeper Zackary Steffen before finishing the job into the empty goal with 24 minutes played, Xinhua reports. Leipzig almost doubled its advantage two minutes later, but Steffen was on guard and defused Emil Forsberg's dangerous effort from 12 meters. The visitors pushed forward despite their numerical disadvantage, but Leipzig's defence stood firm and secured all three points on home soil. With the result, Manchester City top Group A with 12 points whereas Leipzig finish on the third spot to continue in the Europa League.



Real Madrid led at the break against Inter through a Toni Kroos goal, after the German midfielder smashed the ball home from outside of the penalty area on Tuesday night. Rodrigo also hit the post for the home side, who had Luka Jovic in attack for the injured

Karim Benzema, but Real Madrid didn't have things their own way as Inter managed 13 shots in the first half. That is the highest number of shots a Champions League rival has managed in the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium since the 2003/4 season, although only one

was on target. Nicolo Barella complicated Inter's task in the 64th minute when he was sent off for an incident in which he appeared to punch Real Madrid defender Eder Militao in the leg and Marco Asensio assured Real Madrid's win with a precise shot following a pass from Dani Carvajal in the 79th minute.

Atletico Madrid endured a nervy night in Portugal before booking their place in the last 16 with a 3-1 win away to Porto, Xinhua reports. Jan Oblak made some important saves to keep Atletico in the game in the first half, before a major error from his opposite number Diogo Costa gifted Antoine Griezmann the opening goal of the game in the 55th minute.

#### DORTMUND CRUSH BESIKTAS 5-0

A brace each by Marco Reus and Erling Haaland smoothed the way for Borussia Dortmund's 5-0 victory over Besiktas at the last round of Champions League's group stage on Tuesday. The "BVB" took the reins from the starting whistle and pressed Besiktas on the back foot.

With the result, third-placed Borussia Dortmund will continue to play in the Europa League meanwhile Besiktas end its Champions League season on fourth place in Group C.

## Usain Bolt's wish comes true, gets invited for T20 League



The fastest man on earth, Usain Bolt, is eyeing a career in cricket and is keen to play in the T20 Leagues like Jamaican superstars such as Chris Gayle and Andre Russell.

Tapping into Bolt's ambition to play T20 cricket, the Jamaican legend has been approached by Power Sportz, India's first live digital Sports channel, to be part of a T20 League likely to be hosted at a venue in the Middle East soon. While Ms Kanthi D Suresh, the Founder and Editor-in-Chief of Power Sportz -- who are the rights

holders of the League --, was not available to confirm the venue, it is learnt that it could be held in the Gulf, which has emerged as a popular cricketing destination of late. An eight-time Olympic gold medalist and 11-time world champion, "Lightning Bolt" holds the current world record of 9:58 seconds in 100 metres, which he achieved at the IAAF 2009 World Championships in Berlin. And, while he might have retired from the track, the sprinter has on several occasions expressed the desire to show his "cricketing skills".

## Serena Williams pulls out of Australian Open

Melbourne | Agencies

Former World number one Serena Williams has pulled out of the Australian Open 2022 following advice from the medical team on Wednesday.

Serena, a seven-time winner of the Australian Open, revealed that she was not fit to compete at the first Grand Slam of the upcoming season.

Serena was a semifinalist in 2021, defeating Aryna Sabalenka and Simona Halep before falling to eventual champion Naomi Osaka. A left knee injury sidelined her until the clay season this year. The 23-time Grand Slam winner reached the fourth



round of Roland Garros but has not competed since an ankle injury forced her to retire six games into her first-round Wimbledon clash with Aliaksandra Sasnovich. She is currently ranked World No. 41. On Tuesday, former US Open champion Bianca Andreescu explained her decision to quit the Australian Open on Twitter.

## Ashes, 1st Test

### Rain ends play early after Cummins leads Australia in skittling out England for 147

Brisbane | Agencies

Australia captain Pat Cummins made a cracking start to his captaincy stint with a five-wicket haul as the hosts skittled out England for just 147 on day one of first Ashes Test at The Gabba here on Wednesday.

At tea, Australia were the happier side of the two, with all paces ending with wickets against their name.

But with rain coming immediately after England were bowled out meant that the final session never happened and stumps had to be called early. The umpires inspected the pitch but eventually called off the day's play as bad light and wet outfield came on the equation.

On a green pitch and overcast sky at The Gabba, Australia made inroads in the first session after England opted to bat first. Starc struck with the very first delivery of the

Ashes, clean bowling Rory Burns around his legs. The first-ball duck was also the sixth duck recorded by Burns in Test cricket this year. Josh Hazlewood caused more misery on England, drawing edges off bats of Dawid Malan and Joe Root to be pounced by Carey and David Warner at first slip, respectively to reduce England to 11/3. That soon became 29/4 as Ben Stokes, playing his first competitive cricket match since



from 59/4 at lunch, Cummins struck in the very first over as Hameed nicked to Steve Smith at second slip. Jos Buttler hit some exquisite boundaries to lead the attempt of a fightback with Ollie Pope, sharing a 52-run stand for the sixth wicket. But it didn't last

long as Mitchell Starc cramped Buttler for room, forcing him to nick behind to keeper Alex Carey. Three overs later, Pope departed, top-edging the hook to a running fine leg, giving Cameron Green his first Test wicket. From there, Cummins took over to take out England's tail quickly and grabbed his sixth five-wicket haul in Test cricket. Cummins has now become the first Australian captain to take a five-wicket haul in an Ashes Test since Richie Benaud in 1962. He also became the first captain to take a five-wicket haul in an Ashes Test since Bob Willis did so in 1982/83. His 5/38 is also his first fiver against England in a dreamy start to life as the captain in the longest format of the game.

#### Brief scores

England 147 all out in 50.1 overs (Jos Buttler 39, Ollie Pope 35, Pat Cummins 5/38, Mitchell Starc 2/35) vs Australia.



## I HAVE MY OWN WAY TO DO A CHARACTER:

### NUSHRRATT BHARUCCHA

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Chhorii star Nushrratt Bharuccha, has been garnering praises for her performance in the film, from all across. The actress went out of her comfort zone with the film, and stunned us with her new avatar as an actress. Speaking about her process of approaching the character, "With each movie, I always try and discover a new approach or method to do the character, to know the character or to turn into the character. This is because, I never went to an acting school, or took any other form of formal training. - I have always learnt on the job and found my own way to do a character."

Speaking about her character Sakshi, Nushrratt says, "Sakshi was a very layered character. She was vulnerable, soft, impressionable, forgiving and yet strong and fearless. A survivor. A fighter. Getting her emotional quotient right as a fiercely protective mother was also very important."

"I'm eternally grateful to Vishal sir for seeing Sakshi in me, and entrusting me with the character." Says a grateful Nushrratt.

Unanimously lauded as her career's finest performance, Chhorii ushers in a new era for the actress as audiences were introduced to Nushrratt 2.0. There's much more in store from the actress as she turns the page with content-driven films like Janhit Mein Jaari, which she headlines, Ram Setu, Hurdang and several exciting developments in the pipeline.



India's first 'off-roader' multilingual film 'Muddy' to release on Friday

Team Absolute | Kochi

Billed as the country's first 4X4 mud race film, 'Muddy' will be released in six languages on Friday and in 1,500 screens in the country and abroad.

It will be released in 6 languages including Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Hindi and English.

Pragabhal, the director of the film said that mud race was selected as the theme of the film, as he wanted to give a unique experience to the audience.

"The choreography design for 'Muddy' was the biggest challenge as there were no other films to refer and hence it took five years of research to start the film," said the director.

He went on to add that the screenplay was written giving importance to the characters. "After completing the screenplay, it was decided to go for new faces. Then they were given training in mud racing for two years. National-level real-life mud racers too have become part of the film," said Pragabhal. Cinematographer K.G.

Rathish said that 'Muddy' was a big challenge for him. "It was very difficult to shoot at the location for more than three hours and it was a great experience for me. Several films in different languages have been released in India in sports and other segments. But a full-time 4X4 mud race film is for the first time in India. This is also the first film to be released in six languages including English," said Rathish.

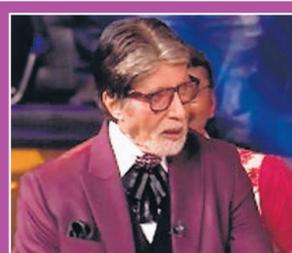
Incidentally, this is the first Malayalam film for 'KGF' music director Ravi Basur.

## Siddhant Chaturvedi working on a tight schedule

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Siddhant Chaturvedi is working on multiple films, the action flick 'Yudhra' and Shakun Batra's next. The actor is currently working on a jam-packed schedule with no breathers.

A source close to the actor reveals, "Siddhant is currently working on 2 films simultaneously. He is dubbing for Shakun's film, whilst shooting for Yudhra. Siddhant has wrapped the first schedule of Yudhra, and he is on the verge of wrapping the other one as well. With a few brand commitments to fulfill in between these shoots Siddhant doesn't really have a breather till the end of the year." The untitled film directed by Shakun Batra also stars Deepika Padukone and Ananya Panday along with Siddhant in the lead, which is an interesting trio to look forward to. With her kitty full of big-budget films, Siddhant will be seen in Yudhra opposite Malavika Mohanan, Kho Gaye hum Kahan opposite Ananya Panday, and Adarsh Gaurav.



'KBC 13': BIG B LEFT IN SPLITS AFTER HILARIOUS CHAT WITH CAST OF 'TMKOC'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

The latest promo of 'Kaun Banega Crorepati 13' shows host Amitabh Bachchan welcoming the entire cast of 'Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah' along with producer and creator Asit Kumarr Modi.

Big B says: "You all are 21 people." Dilip Joshi replies: "Two people can sit here and rest will sit in a row here on the floors." The host replies: "Hey bhagwan" (Oh God).

Another hilarious moment comes when Big B says it's time for a break and Dilip quickly goes and returns back with 'fafda' and 'dhokla'. They also perform the garba and Amitabh Bachchan is seen

joining them.

'Jethalal' and 'Babita' (Munmun Dutta) will be performing together and entertain the audience with their dance performance.

Meanwhile, Shyam Pathak is seen sitting on the hotseat and talking about the show completing the milestone of 3,000 episodes and discussing his marriage. He says: "My marriage got cancelled, whenever it was about to happen and it has created a world record."

He later on tells about those points that make him an appropriate person for settling down with. Like he has a 2-BHK flat, he can make the dough and he can do 'jhaadu-poncha' also. Amitabh was in splits after this hilarious conversation.



## Vir Das to play young wealthy Indian man in 'Country Eastern'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Comedian Vir Das is set to star in a new series titled 'Country Eastern', which tells the story of a young and wealthy man from India who moves to Memphis, Tennessee in the US to restart his life and pursue his passion of becoming a country music singer.

The only issue is that he doesn't have the knack for it.

Talking about the series, Vir said, "It's an exciting brand new project that is in the works and I'm happy to announce that the series is now being developed. The writing of the series is currently on. I'm excited to be collabo-

rating with such immensely talented names, each of whom have an envious body of work. It's a unique comedy and I'm looking forward to filming the series soon".

Vir is set to co-write and executive produce the show with Sam Laybourne, with the latter also being the showrunner. In addition, Reg Tigerman, Andy Samberg, Jorma Taccone, Akiva Schaffer and Ali Bell of Party Over Here will also serve as executive producers for the show which CBS Studios and Fox Entertainment will produce.

Apart from this, Vir will soon be seen in 'The Bubble' being directed by Judd Apatow.

## Joker: Kunal Jaisingh explains his keenness to do comic roles

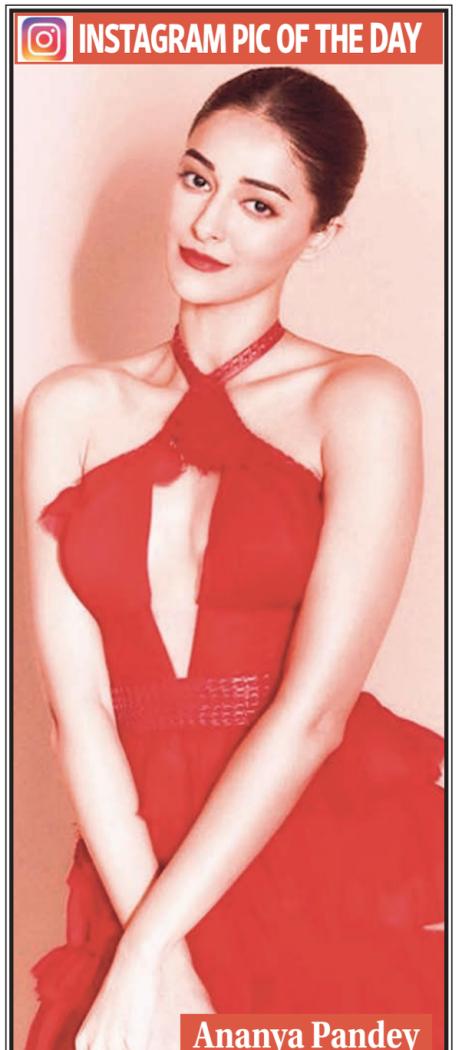
Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Kunal Jaisingh is keen on doing comic roles after playing romantic roles in previous shows. In fact, he is even making his own videos to show his comic side.

He says: "As I'm very much passionate about acting, I wanted to treat my social media family and make their winters fun. Hence I started sharing my funny acts. Fortunately I'm getting positive feedback. And I would definitely like to show my comic time on screen too."

Kunal is known for playing romantic roles and was last seen in a grey shade in the show 'Kyun Utthe Dil Chhod Aaye'. The actor feels humour and laughter are necessary in life.

He adds: "A healthy sense of humour can help us to deal with tough times. Humour might seem like a soothing balm or a light diversion. But humour is much more powerful than something that can simply calm us down. Apart from that they are beneficial for our health. They keep us mentally and physically strong."



Ananya Pandey